

BUILDING AN INFORMAL TRANSNATIONAL INFORMATION NETWORK ON THE USSR FROM PARIS: AN OUTSIDE PERSPECTIVE ON SOVIET LIFE IN 1923–1939

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The article presents findings on the informal network exchanging and disseminating information about socioeconomic and political trends in the USSR in 1923–1939. This network, formed through interactions between the workers of the American Young Men’s Christian Association (YMCA) and Soviet émigrés in Paris, was supported by American and British academics, public figures, and religious actors. Their goal was to improve public information and raise awareness of repressions in the USSR. The central argument is that this network emerged spontaneously to meet the demand from religious and public actors for regular, objective, and reliable information amid polarized Western views on Soviet experiment in building socialism and communism in the 1920s–1930s. It primarily distributed translations into English of Soviet press articles, official documents, laws, propaganda, and literature. Personal accounts from émigrés or travelers to the USSR were taken into account, but rarely cited in the disseminated materials. An exception highlighted is the 1932–1933 famine, which was omitted from the official Soviet documentation and press. The article reconstructs the information network through the individuals’ professional and personal connections, examining covered topics, methods of information presentation, key communication channels, and obstacles. It briefly discusses the spontaneous involvement of the network’s workers in attempts to influence political and diplomatic decisions, including the restoration of diplomatic and trade relations with the USSR by the British government in 1929 and the US administration in 1933.

Keywords: Information Networks; International Organizations; Transnationalism; American YMCA; Exiles; Émigrés; Gray Literature; Soviet Union and the West

When social, economic, and political processes are governed by authoritarian and totalitarian powers, obtaining accurate information is difficult. The availability of precise and complete statistics may be hindered. Freedom of expression and the ability to critically assess inner processes are constrained by state violence and authoritarian arbitrariness. While the insecurity associated with on-territory stays increases, evaluating trends and establishing individual facts become problematic. Another challenge is avoiding manipulation and emotional impact during information collection, assessment, and reporting. How not to engage in, and avoid being accused of, propaganda? Is it possible to disseminate information in an unbiased way without promoting a point of view or political cause?

In our time of big data and internet control, the conditions and limitations of surveys are an important area of inquiry. These issues were equally significant a century ago, before the advent of the internet, although web technologies have since introduced new challenges by providing opponents and resisters to repressive policies, as well as government authorities, with new methods for faster and broader collection and dissemination of information, offering also new avenues for surveillance, propaganda, and disinformation. If one looks back a century, historical studies on Western contacts with the USSR during the 1920s–1930s reveal various factors that limited inquiries and hindered impartiality.¹ Discussions of utopian inclinations of Western intellectuals, travelers' preestablished agenda, or economic and ideological factors (the Great Depression, the rise of fascism) gained nuance through archival investigations of interactions between external observers and Soviet hosts, including patronage relations, implicit rules like the "code of friendship," or control of visa granting.

When conducting investigation in archives, informal information networks present both interest and difficulties for study. With my methodological framework to be developed below, it is important to first clarify my understanding of "informal information networks" within the historical context prior to the internet period. My understanding refers to the pathways or means through which information was communicated and distributed by individuals and groups operating through private contacts and personal efforts, utilizing paper correspondence or in-person conversations, without official declaration, approval, or support from any governmental, non-governmental, or intergovernmental body. This does not exclude the possibility that the individuals involved in these networks were staff members of some organization. They might have sought to minimize their public exposure due to concerns about the organization's public image or individuals' safety, especially when working in relation to authoritarian or totalitarian regimes. Given this context, identifying and studying

¹ Research on these issues began before the opening of formerly classified archives of the Soviet institutions like the All-Union Society for Cultural Ties Abroad (VOKS), the Comintern's Agit-prop Department, or the foreign-tourist agency Intourist. Early studies include, e.g., Margulies (1968) and Kupferman (1979). Since the 1990s, archival investigations have been conducted on the travelers to the USSR, Soviet cultural diplomacy, interactions between observers and Soviet hosts, and relationships among political decision-makers, diplomats, and the Soviets (e.g., Cœuré 1999; Mazuy 2002; David-Fox 2012; Gouarné 2013; Fayet 2014; Poettinger 2017; Udy 2017).

such information networks require delving into numerous archival collections from individuals and entities, potentially spanning different countries, if they operated transnationally. Such investigations offer deeper insights into individuals' motivations and how their motivations, as well as their expressions in real actions, may be shaped by personal experiences and contacts, independent of institutional logics and duties.

This article is based on findings from archives about a small Paris-based group that established an informal information network concerning the USSR in the 1920s–1930s with assistance from New York, Chicago, and London. The Paris group comprised individuals involved in the interaction between exiles and émigrés from the former Russian Empire and the staff members of the American Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA, or Y), known as "secretaries" within the YMCA bureaucracy, who were responsible for developing Y's activities, briefly presented below, both in the United States and globally. While scholarly attention has been devoted to this interaction (Arjakovsky 2000; Ivanova 2006; Miller 2013), the specific issue under consideration in this article has been overlooked. The debate about the information in the Y secretaries' activities related to the Soviet politics revolves around espionage (Miller 2016). My archival findings suggest that the matter exceeds this query.

The concept of transnational advocacy networks (Keck and Sikkink 1998) and the attribution of knowledge agency to international organizations (Littoz-Monnet 2017) were beneficial for problem posing in this research, although adapting contemporary concepts to historical studies requires careful handling. Indeed, the problem of historians' terminology, as exemplified by Marc Bloch (1928), who pointed out the disparate terminologies used by different national historical communities, was further developed in historiography, particularly in Reinhart Koselleck's (1997) theoretical framework of *Begriffsgeschichte* (history of concepts). This framework, which underscores the relationship between language and the social world, suggests that the emergence of new concepts and the ongoing transformation of their meanings can offer insights into social change. This perspective urges researchers to carefully consider the contexts in which concepts emerge, are used, evolve, and are transmitted (Werner 2012). Historians may find relevance between their investigative approaches and concepts proposed by researchers in other fields and disciplines, although these concepts were not in use during the historical period under study. In such cases, insights into the different terminological sublevels involved in historians' interpretations—the language of actors, the language of historians, or the language of scholars from other domains—are crucial for explaining the investigative approach.

The individuals who developed the information network discussed in this article were unfamiliar with the term "transnational advocacy network." However, they promoted Christianity-centered ideals and aimed to inform, also shaping opinions and politics (a form of advocacy). Some materials they distributed demonstrated the Soviet regime's repressiveness toward ideological and political opponents, lifting the curtain on catastrophic consequences such as, for example, the 1932–1933 famine. Their activity led to the formation of a network (to use a concept imported from so-

ciology) constructed transnationally. “Transnational” refers to contacts and activities that cross national borders through private initiatives, distinct from the relationships between state entities established through official representatives and agents.

Originating from evangelical Protestantism in the mid-1800s, the YMCA became a global organization promoting holistic development (Winsor 1922). The Y secretaries conducted diverse activities (educational, athletic, religious, social, humanitarian) connecting with individuals from varied backgrounds. Some Y secretaries worked with refugees, émigrés, and exiles from the Soviet Union. Their involvement in the informal information service about the Soviet experiment resulted from the contacts established during their work within the YMCA’s transnational network. This case study also invites continuous reflection on the boundaries of transnationalism (Green 2019). My hypothesis is that the information service operated independently of the YMCA as an organization and of any state agency, driven solely by individual will and energies within economic and political constraints.

This article begins by outlining my archival path. While political influence on professional history writing remains significant today, digital technologies have also enabled the rapid spread of historical mis- and disinformation (Yaremchuk 2019; Gudonis and Jones 2021). Therefore, presenting the progression from identifying archival traces to verifying hypotheses holds significance. Concurrently, I identify key individuals and their motivations, trace the evolution of information work through changing methods of communication and interpretation, and present key features in the construction of the information network through individual interactions. Efforts to maintain informational rather than propagandistic content are discussed across contexts. Due to this article’s scope, not all aspects of Soviet realities addressed in the material disseminated by the Paris group can be covered. I focus on some key themes related to Soviet realities as presented by the Paris group and provide contextual insights into this information activity.

TRACING AN INFORMATION NETWORK WITHIN THE ARCHIVES: DOCUMENTARY TRAIL, ASSUMPTIONS, THEIR TESTING

“With this I am sending translations nos. 550–584 inclusive.”²

Copies of such succinctly worded letters, stored within the fragmented archives at the bookstore Les Éditeurs Réunis in Paris, intrigued me. The bookstore, founded in 1932, sold publications from Russian publishers, including YMCA-Press. The same archives offered some typed translations from the Soviet press of the 1920s–1930s (see figures 1 and 2), seemingly dispatched by Avgusta Pereshneva (1897–1964), a YMCA-Press employee, to clients. The entire undertaking was unclear. Who were the translators? What were their motivations?

² Éd. Réunis, letter from [Pereshneva] to Colton, October 20, 1928. For abbreviations of archival collections in the footnotes, please refer to the list of archives at the end of the article.

During my research at Columbia University, I came across an archival box with translations strongly resembling those I had found in Paris. According to the title page, these materials were from the Russian Religious News Service (RRNS), located at 347 Madison Avenue, New York,³ which was also the address for the YMCA headquarters. The papers of Paul Anderson (1884–1985), a Y secretary and director of YMCA-Press, provided insights. His correspondence with Ethan Colton (1872–after 1953), who supervised the YMCA work in Europe from New York, revealed that in 1924 Colton was coordinating the purchase and English translation of Soviet newspapers *Pravda* and *Izvestiia*. The translation service appeared then as a new venture. It “worked quite ideally”⁴ but was expensive. Solutions were sought in Berlin, Paris, and Geneva, where Colton’s colleagues worked with Russian-speaking émigrés. However, priority was on relatively up-to-date information. Colton stated that it was preferable for translations to be dispatched to New York within a week of their completion. Who paid for the translations remained undisclosed.

What was the rationale behind the Soviet press translation service in 1924? Retrospectively, one may consider that the explanation lies within the diplomatic context. Friendship and trade agreements signed by the Soviets since 1920 with the Baltic states, Finland, Afghanistan, Iran, Turkey, Germany, and others were followed, in 1924, by declarations of recognition *de jure* from countries including the UK, Italy, Austria, and France. In the United States, the continued nonrecognition of Soviet Russia was explained in 1920 with reference to the Bolsheviks’ commitment to world revolution and the Communist International, seen as operating against American institutions (Patenaude 2002:36; Saul 2006:14). Additional considerations were raised, such as the Soviet government’s failure to acknowledge the Provisional Government’s debt and the seizure of American properties during the nationalization campaign. This shaped American policy toward the USSR until 1933. Nonetheless, diplomatic, business, technological, and cultural interactions continued. There were also divergent accounts of the Soviet experiment and varying perspectives on recognition, relations, and contacts with the Soviets (McFadden 1993; Saul 2006; Fogle-song 2007; David-Fox 2012). RRNS focused initially on “religious news.”⁵ The Bolsheviks viewed religion as an ideological tool used to control the exploited masses (Pospelovsky 1987). From 1918 onward, Soviet policies included atheistic propaganda, as well as arrests, confinement in concentration camps, and killings of clergy and adherents of different religions (Pospelovsky 1988; Courtois et al. 1997; Pettinaroli 2015). My initial presumption was that the RRNS founders had aimed to highlight these topics in order to strengthen the nonrecognition stance. This was a conjecture, subject to further archival investigation.

³ RBML, RRNST, b. 1.

⁴ UIA, Anderson papers, b. 8, letter from Colton to Anderson, March 26, 1925.

⁵ UIA, Anderson papers, b. 8, letter from Colton to Anderson and the finance controller for the YMCA S. E. Hening, December 2, 1924; letter from Colton to Anderson, March 26, 1925.

Colton's papers⁶ provided no concrete details. Definitely, these were papers of an individual who had collected materials on the USSR: press translations, Soviet propaganda posters, reports, articles, and others. They were notably used to write *The XYZ of Communism* (Colton 1931). The book analyses concepts of class war and the dictatorship of the proletariat, presenting unsightly aspects of the Soviet economic and social realities. In the foreword, Colton expresses gratitude to anonymous collaborators who collected and translated Soviet documents and press. I saw in this expression of gratitude an explicit reference to RRNS. However, Colton's archival papers lacked insight into the RRNS instigators, funding, and goals.

Some leads emerged from Paul Anderson's enthusiastic remarks about Samuel Harper (1882–1943), a professor of Russian language and institutions at the University of Chicago. Anderson wrote excitedly to his Y colleagues that Harper was "making it his business to read and translate everything coming from Russia" and was "as well informed . . . as anyone in the States."⁷ Indeed, since 1904 Harper embarked on investigative journeys to Russia. During 1918–1921, Harper was an assistant at the Russian Bureau of the State Department, collecting and interpreting information (Harper 1945:91–95, 124–132; McFadden 1993:37–39). Harper and Anderson had in-person discussions about the difficulty of maintaining objectivity about Soviet Russia. They discussed the study of the Soviet press and the impact of "a great deal of loose information written by casual observers in Russia" on the general public.⁸ This lay the groundwork for suppositions outlined below.

In 1922 Harper left the State Department, but maintained contact with former colleagues, positioning himself as an "expert" in relation to policymakers (Harper 1945:131). Could he not act so that his duties were directed to the information network managed by Ethan Colton? Harper's memoirs never confirmed this; yet, he stated that he consciously avoided naming those at risk due to anti-Soviet implications (196). When reflecting on his 1926 trip to the USSR (the first one since 1917), Harper mentions that he would choose two people to inform in case of danger. One of them was Paul Anderson, who, according to Harper, was "in a position to verify any suspicion and to get word out to Poole" (143). D. C. Poole (1885–1952) was the former US Consul General in Moscow who joined the restructured (in 1922) Division of East European Affairs (formerly the Russian Bureau) of the State Department. All of this might indirectly suggest interactions between Harper, Colton, Anderson, and some officials regarding the Soviet press translation.

Another potential lead was the Chicago businessman Charles Crane (1858–1939). He contributed to the development of Slavic studies in the US, particularly by securing Harper's faculty position and funding scholars' work (Saul 2012:52–61). Crane was familiar with the YMCA leader John Mott (1865–1955). Both were members

⁶ HILA, Colton papers.

⁷ UIA, Anderson papers, b. 6, letter from Anderson to the Y secretary R. M. Story, January 5, 1921; letter from Anderson to the Y secretary A. C. Harte, March 17, 1924.

⁸ UIA, Anderson papers, b. 6, letter from Anderson to Harte, March 17, 1924; letter from Anderson to Harper, April 7, 1924.

of the special diplomatic mission headed by former Secretary of State Elihu Root (1845–1937), sent to Russia in June 1917 to assess the Provisional Government's stability and Russia's material, financial, and military needs in World War I (Saul 2001:107). During 1918–1919, Harper, Mott, and Colton discussed Russia's internal and military situation and information accuracy via correspondence and face-to-face meetings.⁹ Crane supported concerns about Soviet religious oppression and publicly spoke out for nonrecognition (Saul 2006:13). All of this leads to hypothesizing that RRNS resulted from their connections.

However, John Mott's and Charles Crane's papers lacked evidence for these hypotheses. Mott's correspondence provided me with no information about the foundation of RRNS.¹⁰ He sent Colton's *The XYZ of Communism* to certain individuals, claiming to "vouch personally for the trustworthiness of sources."¹¹ Anderson's report for 1937, kept within Mott's archives, mentions some achievements in the "study of Soviet Russia."¹² So, Mott knew about Anderson's involvement in the information activity on the USSR. Was he instrumental in its foundation? My request for access to the Crane family papers, held at Columbia University, received no response from the rights holder. Another archival collection related to Charles Crane, held also at Columbia University, had no access restrictions, but it was smaller and revealed an unexpected preservation method, prompting questions about the original content's completeness: the letters had been retyped; there were no original copies. A single letter from Colton, from 1924, concerned some friends in Moscow.¹³

At that stage, I pinned all my hopes on Samuel Harper's papers. The review of his correspondence did not fully support my hypotheses, but it did shed light on RRNS.

PARALLEL INFORMATION CHANNELS AND BEGINNING OF THE SOVIET PRESS TRANSLATION SERVICE IN 1923

Samuel Harper's correspondence during 1923–1924 reveals multiple interconnections with people from various fields: officials from the State Department's East Eu-

⁹ KFYA, YMCA Russian work, b. 21, f. 9, letter from Harper to Mott, November 19, 1918, with thoughts on chances of the US government recognizing the Soviets, Bolshevik-German relations, and possible withdrawal of the American troops from Russia; letter from Colton to Mott, November 25, 1918, with comments on Harper's previous letter.

¹⁰ See YDL, Mott papers. Correspondence with Colton provides occasional mentions RRNS translations, but no information on RRNS itself (b. 16, ff. 294, 295, letters from Colton to Mott, May 10, 1924, and March 10, 1933). Correspondence with Harper (b. 38, f. 695) relates to the situation in Russia in 1917–1922. Correspondence with Anderson (b. 2, ff. 29, 30) covers his work with émigrés in Paris (church issues, fundraising). He sent Mott some translations of Soviet documents, including articles of the 1936 Constitution on guaranteed freedoms (b. 2, f. 30, Anderson's letter to Mott, October 21, 1936), but with no information on the start or operation of RRNS.

¹¹ YDL, Mott papers, b. 40, f. 731, letter from Mott to H. L. Henriod (from the World Student Christian Federation, WSCF), March 18, 1931.

¹² YDL, Mott papers, b. 2, f. 30, Paul B. Anderson, Report for 1937 Russian Service in Europe, July 28, 1938.

¹³ RBML, Crane papers, b. 3, letter from Colton to Crane, April 10, 1924.

ropean Division, Charles Crane's office, émigrés from the former Russian Empire, YMCA secretaries, university colleagues, and editors of periodicals like the Methodist *Central Christian Advocate* or the *Christian Science Monitor*. They discussed "anti- and pro-Bolo disputes,"¹⁴ exchanged materials, and tried to shape opinions by giving public conferences and writing articles. These efforts seemed parallel and complementary.

Harper, no longer officially involved with the State Department, lacked regular access to official files. He was receiving materials that could be disclosed under an "informal understanding," when his former colleagues from the State Department sought clarifications, or when he failed to find materials himself (Harper 1945:131).¹⁵ He attempted to proceed through American bookstores, though not always successfully.¹⁶ In some letters, he inquired with Colton about Colton's translation service and press channels.¹⁷ This suggested that he was not an RRNS instigator. Sporadic collaboration occurred. Harper recommended translators and articles to Colton and offered advice, such as emphasizing the need for nearly literal translations.¹⁸ Colton provided Harper with newspapers, translations, and personal letters received from colleagues and friends.¹⁹ Harper connected Colton with the State Department. Colton's 1923 report on Soviet religious situation underwent discussions with officials.²⁰ Names were provided for further dispatching the report. However, hasty conclusions should be avoided. Although sporadic exchanges were possible, I currently have no evidence to support continuous, regular collaboration between Colton's RRNS and officials.²¹ After Harper's resignation, Soviet materials were acquired and analyzed by the US office in Riga with partial supplies through Helsinki.²² While ex-

¹⁴ UCL, Harper papers, b. 11, f. 16, letter from the former ambassador of the Provisional Government to the US, Boris Bakhmeteff, to Harper, June 4, 1924.

¹⁵ See multiple letters between Harper and the State Department's workers Poole, Jane Bassett, and Evan E. Young, between 1922 and 1924, in UCL, Harper papers, bb. 10 and 11.

¹⁶ UCL, Harper papers, b. 11, f. 2, letter from Chernoff (bookshop Trude, New York) to Harper, December 20, 1923. Chernoff reported on interruptions in the supply of the Soviet books and newspapers. Harper suspected that Chernoff was simply not efficient.

¹⁷ UCL, Harper papers, b. 11, f. 2, letter from Harper to Colton, December 14, 1923; letter from Colton to Harper, December 17, 1923.

¹⁸ UCL, Harper papers, b. 11, f. 6, letter from Harper to the Y secretary C. V. Hibbard, January 12, 1924.

¹⁹ UCL, Harper papers, b. 11, f. 7, letters from Colton to Harper, January 23 and 29, 1924, accompanying private letters from a representative of the Methodist Church "with longest experience in Russia," and several issues of *Pravda* and *Izvestiia*.

²⁰ UCL, Harper papers, b. 11, f. 3, letter from Bassett to Harper, December 15, 1923; letter from Colton to Harper, December 22, 1923.

²¹ Colton prepared other reports, e. g. HILA, Colton papers, b. 1, Colton's private report on the Russian religious situation, January 1925. It remains unclear whether he forwarded them all to the State Department.

²² UCL, Harper papers, b. 10, f. 6, Department of State, Division of Russian Affairs, Draft memo re Riga service, September 28, 1922.

pert assistance could be desirable for specific issues, an ongoing collaboration with external nongovernmental entities was not essential.

The mystery was ultimately resolved with the discovery of a copy of a February 1923 letter from the Federal Council of Churches of Christ in America (FCCC) among Harper's correspondence. FCCC established a committee on religious conditions in the USSR. Ethan Colton, a committee member, acted "as channel."²³ Colton showed no intention of influencing big politics. At least, he wrote so to Harper: "About recognition, I find myself rather indifferent. I do not think much will result from it, . . . I could not oppose it or recommend it. . . . It has looked to me for some time like a gamble."²⁴ The word "result" pertained to discussions on the "impulses to recovery"²⁵ in the Soviet state. The 1921–1922 famine tragedy made Bolshevik policymakers to accept Western help. They also agreed to release all American prisoners and accepted the insistence of the American Relief Administration to choose its personnel and to have control over distributions (Patenaude 2002:39–40; Saul 2006:54–55). This could be seen as a change in the Bolsheviks' attitude toward the West. The Soviet New Economic Policy (1921) was perceived by many as the end of the experiment in socialism and communism and the abandonment of violent practices (Harper 1945:133; Patenaude 2002:37). Some believed recognition would kill the recovery impulses; others deemed it beneficial.

An FCCC committee was established in response to reports on a new wave of persecutions (McCullagh 1924). Patriarch Tikhon of Moscow was deposed by the Living Church, which was founded by Russian Orthodox clergy to reform the Church but soon fell under the manipulation of Soviet secret services. Catholic priests, including high-ranking figures, faced arrests and killings. Konstanty Budkiewicz (1867–1923), vicar general to the arrested Archbishop Cieplak (1857–1926), was sentenced to death. These events are now examined based on archives and published sources (Gousseff 1993; Pettinaroli 2015:318–322). Harper's assertion that it should be "easy to prove that the Soviet government not only permitted, but pushed and helped the anti-Christian demonstrations"²⁶ indicated that at the time, however, there was a need to both "prove" the reality of these repressive trends and comprehend their extent. The FCCC's quest for "as much reliable information as possible"²⁷ suggests a prevalent uncertainty surrounding publicly available information. For information dissemination, RRNS mainly used open sources, notably Soviet periodicals and official documents. In today's digital age marked by information relativism and eroding

²³ UCL, Harper papers, b. 10, f. 16, letter from the FCCC secretary Thomas Burgess to the Y secretary C. V. Hibbard, with copies to Mott, Colton, and W. W. Banton, February 23, 1923; letter from Harper to Colton, February 21, 1923; f. 17, letter from Colton to Harper, March 10, 1923; f. 18, letter from Harper to Poole, March 17, 1923.

²⁴ UCL, Harper papers, b. 12, f. 3, letter from Colton to Harper, January 26, 1925.

²⁵ UCL, Harper papers, b. 10, f. 20, letter from Harper to Colton, April 10, 1923. Harper cites Herbert Hoover, head of the American Relief Administration.

²⁶ UCL, Harper papers, b. 10, f. 18, letter from Harper to Poole, March 17, 1923.

²⁷ UCL, Harper papers, b. 10, f. 16, letter from Burgess to Hibbard, with copies to Mott, Colton, Banton, February 23, 1923.

trust in media (Colon 2021:273–288), this might seem limiting. Yet, this choice stems from difficulties in defining “impartial” and “accurate” information in polarized debates about the Soviets, as discussed below.

HOW TO GET TRUSTWORTHY INFORMATION ABOUT SOVIET LIFE IN THE 1920S–1930S?

The following comment from State Department employee Jane Bassett, who remained in continuous contact with Harper after his resignation from the State Department, is revealing. Among the extensive Soviet files she kept, “both Bolos and anti-Bolos” could “find sustenance for their theories.”²⁸ Incidentally, what constitutes “reliable information”? In theory, it is easy to distinguish between beliefs—subjective assessments rooted in emotions or opinions—and facts or testimonies based on objective justification and lived experience. In practice, assessing the credibility of an “observation” or “testimony” is not obvious. Some may inevitably argue that these stem from individual, hence subjective, experience, situational understandings, or personal values.

Different people traveled to the USSR during the 1920s–1930s for different purposes: journalists or, as they were known, reporters, engineers intended to work with Soviet factories, humanitarian and religious workers, trade unionists, members of communist parties, writers, and university workers (Harper 1945:230–237; Mazuy 2002; Patenaude 2002; Saul 2006:212–238; Foglesong 2007:64–76; David-Fox 2012; Cabanes 2014:189–247; Poettinger 2017). Upon returning, they engaged in debates, promotion, or criticism of the Soviet experiment through public conferences, roundtable discussions, personal conversations, and publications. Opinions depended on political commitment, preestablished judgments, and idealism about the myth of a classless socialist society. Opinions could shift due to personal experiences, which might also be linked to reliance on Soviet host institutions: the All-Union Society for Cultural Ties Abroad (VOKS) (established in 1925), International Association of Friends of the USSR (1927), and travel agency Intourist (1929). Individuals might disregard what contradicted their beliefs, focusing on what aligned with their commitments and convincing themselves of questionable ideas. In our digital age, deliberate exposure to information according to individual preferences, as observed by sociologists since the 1940s (e.g., Lazarsfeld et al. 1944), is discussed within the problem of personalized information consumption via preferred online networks and algorithm-generated “filter bubbles” (Colon 2021:324–326). Examinations of the allure surrounding the Soviet experiment among Western communists and intellectual circles in the 1920s–1930s also reveal the phenomenon of selective information approach. Self-persuasion, “blindness,” and self-censorship enabled individuals to overlook, rationalize, or embellish the flaws of the Soviet system.

The multiagency international system of Soviet propaganda emerged in the early 1920s and matured in 1923–1926. It was addressing different groups. The Comintern’s Agitprop focused on left-wing movements, while VOKS on the “bourgeois” intelligen-

²⁸ UCL, Harper papers, b. 13, f. 16, letter from Bassett to Harper, January 26, 1928.

tsia. The scope of propaganda operations expanded through “masked” or front organizations, such as International Red Aid (MOPR), and societies for studies and friendship. While organizing systematic propaganda to promote closer contacts with the USSR, they formed a highly competitive market (Fayet 2014:207). This emerged together with the vocal support for the Soviets from the Western left-wing press, like the *New Leader* of the British Independent Labour Party (Udy 2017:267–268), and from known figures, including writers Romain Rolland, George Bernard Show, Henri Barbusse, and others.

The overview above reveals a landscape of contrasting opinions. Navigating this terrain was not easy for someone like Paul Anderson’s New York colleague, who admitted in 1933 to feeling “so ignorant about Russian affairs” that he was entirely dependent upon others, who were more experienced.²⁹ However, credibility dilemmas about information on Soviet life in the 1920s–1930s emerged for regular inquirers too.

Some commentators, particularly reporters and scholars, as revealed below, argued that writing about the Soviets required on-site immersion. They claimed that firsthand experience granted information supremacy. This matter even sparked a rivalry between Samuel Harper, who made several trips to the USSR between 1926 and 1936,³⁰ and Bernard Pares (1867–1949) who got his first visa only in 1935 (Pares 1948:323–325). Harper expressed doubts about Pares’s opinions concerning the USSR, because “Pares has found it impossible . . . to visit Soviet Russia since the Revolution.”³¹ Pares claimed that he kept the closest watch on the Soviet shifting policies through his friends in and outside Russia, travelers, and written sources (1948:323). We will see that Pares contributed to the outgrowth of RRNS.

A paper from Pares’s archives, apparently written by a critical observer in 1930, examines credibility in accounts of those who journeyed in the USSR.³² Needless to say, the author criticized those who were “biased from the very beginning in favour of the workers’ paradise,” lacked “the slightest knowledge of the language,” and were guided by “competent and charming guides.” Fluency in Russian added credibility, but concerns about expertise remained. The author insisted that a comprehensive and objective perspective could be possible only by engaging with diverse social and professional groups across regions. This involved evaluating individual character, position, and living conditions. Promptly recording conversations was indispensable to prevent forgetting or distorting ideas. Let us add the need to successfully remove the records from Soviet territory. Notably, some observers, such as the French writer Marc Chadourne (1895–1975), asserted that a country like Soviet Russia fundamentally resisted objective understanding (Mazuy 2002:117). This perspective seems, however, to follow stereotypes about Russia’s distinctive nature and the belief, rooted in Slavophile myths, that it is beyond the grasp of reason (Jurgenson and Pieralli 2019:57).

²⁹ UIA, Anderson papers, b. 11, letter from Frank V. Slack to Anderson, December 18, 1933.

³⁰ For his personal account, see Harper 1945.

³¹ UCL, Harper papers, b. 15, f. 12, letter from Harper to the professor of political science Kenneth Kolegrove, October 7, 1930.

³² SSEESL, Pares papers, b. PAR/7/4, f. 3, Soviet Russia in 1930: The Communist Minority, Their Aims, Methods and Achievements. The document is unsigned.

Public discourse from travelers to the USSR, particularly those deemed “experts,” drew distinct attention, provoking suspicion. Thus, a curious incident involving Harper occurred after his 1926 trip. He was publicly known as anti-Soviet.³³ Prolonged debates sparked between Harper and Preston Kumler (1878–1928), from the State Department, after Harper’s public talk. When discussing trade unions “under a proletarian dictatorship,” Harper publicly asserted their greater significance and “in a sense more official” status compared to those under a parliamentary government. This lacked explanation that, he appeared to say, “would require many citations.” Harper’s public declaration was interpreted by Kumler as being “under the spell of Bolsheviks.” “What in the world has happened to you?” inquired Kumler passionately of Harper, adding: “A few months in Russia have done funny things to a good many people.”³⁴ The issue was that Harper told another official from the State Department that he was bearing in mind the scrutiny of Soviet reviewers while preparing articles.³⁵ This raised concern. The Soviet visa granting was a form of control over attitude and words (Mazuy 2002:91). Harper experienced the dependence of research on politics. He viewed access to raw data essential for scholars and traveled to the USSR every two years, initially organizing his trips independently but increasingly relying on Soviet institutions. Though he initially opposed recognizing the Bolshevik government, he gradually developed collaborative contacts with Soviet representatives in the United States, eventually adopting a pro-Soviet stance (McFadden 1993:38; Saul 2006:367). A similar shift occurred with Otto Hoetzsch (1876–1946) of the University of Berlin (David-Fox 2012:66), with whom Harper visited Ukraine in 1932, during the famine. Regarding this trip, Harper later noted feeling “somewhat under obligations to be polite” because, for the first time, he had received a diplomatic *laissez-passer*.³⁶

Thus, referring to witnesses, experts, or activists risked accusations of offering biased or false information, whether deliberately or not. Citing firsthand accounts could also pose security threats. RRNS had access to various firsthand sources, such as report on Soviet students in Berlin drafted by an YMCA émigré worker F. T. Pianoff, accounts from recent émigrés, such as the sister of theologian N. Arsen’ev (1888–1977) (she experienced Bolshevik prisons), or private talks arranged by Paul Anderson with Western visitors to the USSR.³⁷ Yet, personal accounts, even anonymized, were infrequent in the materials publicly disseminated

³³ UCL, Harper papers, b. 13, f. 6, list of speakers on Russia in a public discussion organized by the Foreign Policy Association in New York in October 1927, with Harper labeled as “anti-Soviet.”

³⁴ UCL, Harper papers, b. 12, f. 34, letter from Kumler to Harper, April 23, 1927.

³⁵ UCL, Harper papers, b. 13, f. 14, letter from Kumler to Harper, January 9, 1928; f. 16, letter from Robert T. Kelley to Harper, January 27, 1928. Kelley explained that it was customary practice to share letters on Soviet matters with colleagues working in this field.

³⁶ HILA, Colton papers, b. 7, Harper’s report on his third visit to Soviet Russia (August 8–October 5, 1932), October 13, 1932.

³⁷ HILA, Colton papers, b. 7, letter from Pianoff to Colton, December 17, 1926; LPL, Lang papers, vol. 75, l. 113, letter from Arsen’ev to Cosmo Lang, Archbishop of Canterbury, April 17, 1934; Éd. Réunion, letters from Anderson to T. F. Milbank (Paris), to W. O. Lewis (American Baptist Mission, Paris), and to G. K. Smith, (Horace Mann School, New York), September 3, 4, and 5, 1935.

by RRNS (see examples below). The primary content consisted of the translations from Soviet official documents, press, and publications. This enabled validation of sourced authenticity.

The press scrutiny became a major tool for controlling information since World War I (Cœuré 1994). Samuel Harper and the US Riga office were scrutinizing the press. A special diplomatic service of the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs analyzed the Soviet press until 1925, when it yielded to a short-lived Russian Documentation Centre (Cœuré 1999:75). At times, ensuring current Soviet press translations was a demanding task. Official channels might be effective. The US Riga office was dispatching newspapers to Washington rather promptly.³⁸ Difficulties emerged for private undertakings. In 1923–1925, the New York bookshops faced important delays in receiving Soviet newspapers.³⁹ Similar problems affected the Paris group.⁴⁰ They suspected French authorities of suppressing their sales. In 1926 translations were regularly dispatched from Paris to New York, but their shipping could extend to ten months. The group sought “the most economical route short of freight.”⁴¹

Another challenge involved diversifying news beyond the major newspapers to include less-known periodicals, particularly from outside the capitals. At the end of 1922, the US Riga office mainly supplied Washington with key Moscow and Petrograd newspapers, occasionally sending some provincial *Izvestiia*. The possibility of getting Kiev *Izvestiia* was discussed if there would be no additional trouble or cost.⁴² RRNS gradually expanded press coverage by subscribing to magazines and newspapers on various topics, including youth (e.g., *Krasnoe studenchestvo*, *Komsomol'skii aktivist*), women's issues (*Rabotnitsa i krest'ianka*), labor (*Molot*, *Rabochii put'*), rural life (*Kolkhoznye rebiata*), education (*Narodnyi uchitel'*), culture (*Revoliutsiia i kul'tura*), and religion versus atheism (*Bezbozhnik u stanka*, *Antireligioznik*), trying also to expand geographical scope (*Ukrainskii pravoslavnyi blagovestnik*, *Tambovskaia pravda*, *Volzhskaia kommuna*, *Zabaikal'skii rabochii*).⁴³ How did RRNS present information? Did it convey any message? While a thorough analysis is not possible, the following outlines are relevant.

³⁸ UCL, Harper papers, b. 10, f. 6, Department of State, Division of Russian Affairs, Draft memo re Riga service, September 28, 1922. Deadlines are not mentioned. The process was slower when translation was made in Riga.

³⁹ UCL, Harper papers, b. 10, f. 20, and b. 11, f. 9, letters from Chernoff to Harper, April 7, 1923, and March 4, 1924.

⁴⁰ UCL, Harper papers, b. 11, f. 12, letter from Anderson to Harper, April 7, 1924; b. 12, f. 17, letter from Maud E. Murray, secretary to Colton, to Harper, March 10, 1926.

⁴¹ UCL, Harper papers, b. 12, f. 17, letter from Murray to Harper, March 10, 1926; f. 31, letter from Colton to Harper, February 21, 1927, informing that the files of *Izvestiia* accumulated in Paris since June 1926 were ready for sending to New York.

⁴² UCL, Harper papers, b. 10, f. 6, Department of State, Division of Russian Affairs, Draft memo re Riga service, September 28, 1922.

⁴³ Examples are in UIA, Anderson papers, b. 6, Anderson's memorandum on RPTS, July 13, 1928; b. 11, folder “YMCA. Paris Headquarters. Russian Work January 1935,” document labeled II/9.

ADVOCACY FOR CHRISTIANITY OR IMPARTIAL INFORMATION?

Translations⁴⁴ were typewritten and numbered, providing key references, such as periodical title, number, date, article title, and optionally its author. The translators maintained anonymity and abstained from providing comments or illustrations. Occasional underlining was the sole visual emphasis tool. While this simple and devoid-of-commentary approach seemingly intended to demonstrate objectivity, translators could supposedly influence readers by selecting excerpts.

In the 1920s RRNS depicted the religious issues as a central theme within the Soviet political project. Translations highlighted the enforced elimination of religious sentiment as central to building the “New Soviet person” (*novyi sovetskii chelovek*). Many translations presented the forceful transformation of religious architectural heritage and behavioral norms toward religion: destruction and repurposing of churches, creation of atheism museums, political education and anti-religious propaganda in schools, or hindrances to priests’ participation in funerals. Translations exposed that Soviet official discourse portrayed religion as a capitalist tool for instilling obedience among the masses. Readers learned about attacks against free enterprise, private property, and prosperous peasants (*kulaks*) through the perspective of religious struggle. It was demonstrated that adherents of the Russian Church and groups like Baptists, Molokans, or Seventh-Day Adventists faced suppression. This seems to champion Christianity as a value-based entity, regardless of doctrine. This also suggests an intention to highlight that all faiths were subject to persecution, thus countering claims that the Russian Church was solely targeted as a corrupted institution of tsarist rule. Francis McCullagh, a journalist for the *New York Herald* who attended the trial of Catholics of Petrograd (the abovementioned Cieplak’s trial in 1923), stated that some Orthodox priests were murdered because their Church was the Church of the tsars and not the Church of Christ (McCullagh 1924:ix–x).⁴⁵ The British ambassador to the USSR Esmond Ovey (1879–1963) implied in his reports that the Russian Church partly deserved persecution due to “great ignorance and corruption” (Udy 2017:242).

However, it seems that readers might form differing opinions about the USSR from translations. They might interpret Soviet realities mentioned in the translations distributed by RRNS in a positive or negative light, especially if they did not receive translations continuously. Disruptions in receiving translations could affect their understanding of the interpretive perspective adopted by those involved in RRNS. Additionally, readers’ opinions may be influenced by their preexisting views on the USSR, which could have been already shaped by prior personal contacts and by articles and books they had read. For example, reading translated excerpts from an article about older communists criticizing “youthful zeal” against religion might lead a

⁴⁴ The following brief analysis is based on the translations kept in RBML, RRNST, and UCL, Harper papers, boxes 70–72.

⁴⁵ Examining the Holy See’s policy toward Russia, Laura Pettinaroli (2015:772) noted that McCullagh asked for “corrections” the Apostolic Nuncio Monsignor Laurent Lauri in Warsaw, who proofread his book manuscript.

reader to conclude that violence against religion was driven by radicalism in certain groups rather than by the Soviet government's policy. A reader might become even more convinced of this idea since in a different translation the translator underlined the words of Anatoly Lunacharsky, the People's Commissar for Education, conveying that the Soviet government prioritized education over religion, yet upheld citizens' right to adhere to faith or atheism. Some might see this statement as misleading and false. Others might think that the policy of eradicating religion had been abandoned. Concurrently, certain excerpts implied that lack of faith led to deteriorating morals and posed risks to lives. For example, press articles detailing mutual support within religious communities in the USSR were contrasted with the story of a young woman who, after an unplanned pregnancy and without any aid from communist comrades, tragically ended her life. Yet, a reader favorably disposed toward the USSR might easily perceive the author's dismay in an article about a prostitution area near a Dnipropetrovsk workers' club, concluding that it conflicted with "communist morality." Likewise, while acts of young communists joining religious communities, as reported in translated Soviet press articles, might suggest disenchantment with communism, this interpretation becomes debatable in translations that focused on instances where children from religious families joined the Komsomol.

The following analysis will reveal why translations enabled to understand the Soviet realities differently. A clear demarcation between propaganda and unbiased information was not easy to uphold. The Paris group was trying to substantiate its objectivity.

STRIKING THE BALANCE IN THE 1930S: INFORMATION SERVICE, NOT PROPAGANDA?

The RRNS team, based in Paris, was led by Paul Anderson and his Y colleague Edgar MacNaughten (1882–1933). RRNS publications mentioned only a few responsible individuals (see figure 3) and never the YMCA as an organization. In reports to New York, Anderson referred to the "study of Soviet Russia" to justify using occasionally for this activity YMCA funds.⁴⁶ However, RRNS was driven solely by individual commitment and "personal satisfaction," as Anderson described his feeling about this activity. The use of YMCA funds for RRNS was endorsed by Ethan Colton and probably approved by John Mott,⁴⁷ but likely without broader discussion among YMCA officials. The team was composed of the émigrés from the bodies receiving the Y's financial,

⁴⁶ UIA, Anderson papers, b. 6, Supplement to Anderson's 1932 Report on YMCA Russian work in Europe; Anderson's financial program for Russian work in Europe, Exhibit I, August 19, 1933.

⁴⁷ UIA, Anderson papers, b. 11, letter from Anderson to Mott, August 18, 1933.

conceptual, or administrative support, namely the Russian Student Christian Movement (RSCM) and the St. Sergius Orthodox Institute.⁴⁸

Over time, alongside typed disjointed translations, bulletins were produced as a more customary public communication method. Since October 1927, Lev Zander (1893–1964) was editing *Religious News Sheet*;⁴⁹ Ivan Lagovskii (1889–1941), Kirill Shevich (1903–1987), and Paul Anderson issued in 1930 *Information Bulletin on Religion and Morality in the USSR* (see figure 4).⁵⁰ The Russian Clergy and Church Aid Fund (RCCAF) of London enabled an outgrowth of information work.

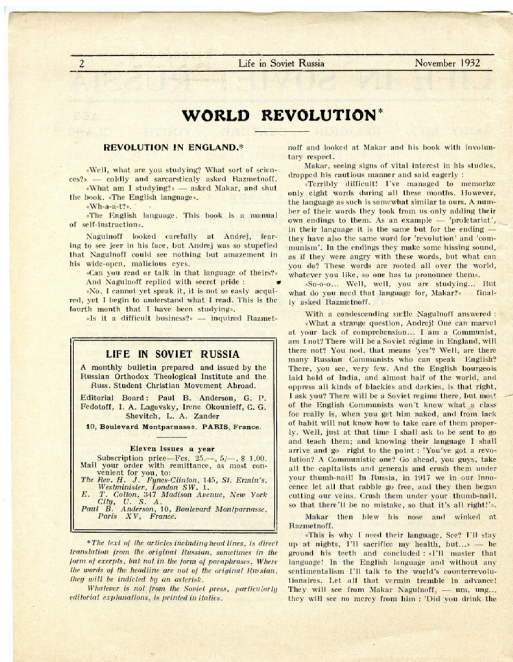


Figure 3. The bulletin *Life in Soviet Russia*, no. 7, November 1932, p. 2. © Private archives, Les Éditeurs Réunis, Paris; printed with permission.

⁴⁸ The following people were selecting the Soviet materials for translation: the historian Georgii Fedotov (1886–1951), the jurist Georgii Arsen'ev (1890–1970), the theologian Ivan Lagovskii (1889–1941), the RSCM member Kirill Shevich (Archimandrite Sergii in the future) (1903–1987), and the history student Sergei Zen'kovskii (1907–1990), a nephew of the RSCM president Vasilii Zen'kovskii (1881–1962), the RSCM member and secretary to Anderson Irina Okuneva (1905–?). The articles were translated by Aleksandra Shidlovskaiia (1869/1872–1937) and proofread by Stella MacNaughten, the wife of Edgar MacNaughten. See UIA, Anderson papers, b. 6, Anderson's memorandum on RPTS, July 13, 1928; b. 11, letter from Anderson to Pares, July 14, 1934; letter from Okuneva to Anderson, October 16, 1934.

⁴⁹ UIA, Anderson papers, b. 20, no. 1, October 1927; no. 2, December 1927; no. 3, May 1928.

⁵⁰ LPL, Lang papers, vol. 73, ll. 361–369, no. 1, March 29, 1930; vol. 74, ll. 57–64, no. 2, June 2, 1930; ll. 137–150, no. 3, July 18, 1930.

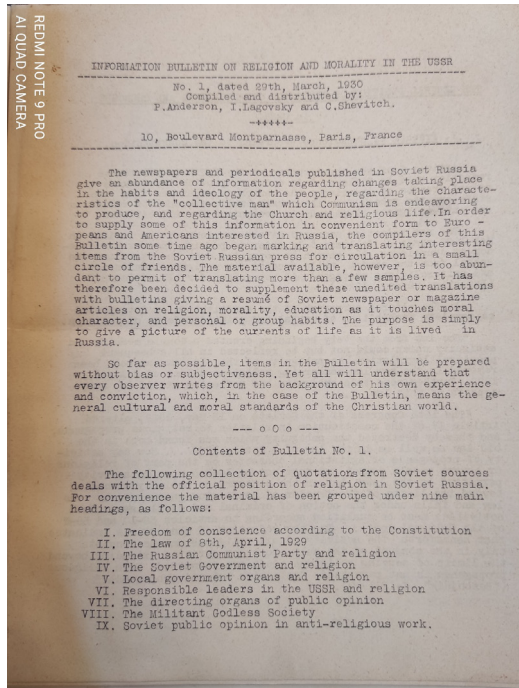


Figure 4. The *Information Bulletin on Religion and Morality in the USSR*, no. 1, March 29, 1930, compiled by P. Anderson, I. Lagovskii, and K. Shevich. © Lambeth Palace Library, Church of England Record Centre, London.

Founded in 1923 to aid victims of Soviet religious persecution and to counter atheistic ideologies, RCCAF provided funding to the RSCM and the St. Sergius Institute.⁵¹ In 1930 RCCAF established modest yet steady financial support for its information activity. This responded to escalated religious persecution in the USSR due to 1929 laws banning public activities for believers, limiting churches to religious services, while forbidding social activities. This occurred alongside forced agricultural collectivization. In 1929 Labour Party took office in the UK, embracing pro-Soviet policy to restore trade and diplomatic relations breached under the Conservatives in 1927. While Labour persistently refused to halt the trade with the Soviets and condemned the Gulag slave labor that generated timber imported into Britain in the early 1930s, the British Christian Protest Movement highlighted religious repression in the USSR to rally public mobilization (Udy 2017:251–264, 305–422).

⁵¹ LPL, Lang papers, vol. 73, l. 19, letter from the RSCM members to Cosmo Lang, Archbishop of Canterbury, with gratitude for support; UIA, Anderson papers, b. 10, letter from Rev. H. J. Fynes-Clinton, RCCAF honorary secretary, to Anderson, November 7, 1932, confirming the subsidies, £1,000 to the Institute and £750 to the RSCM; CFR OC, f. 230/1, ll. 49–51, letter from W. Tudor Pole, RCCAF honorary treasurer and secretary, to Rev. Alan Don, secretary to Cosmo Lang, February 27, 1936, recalling the story of RCCAF.

Bernard Pares, director of the London School of Slavonic and East European Studies, was the RCCAF honorary treasurer. He emerges as a pivotal figure in backing the Paris information activity.⁵² In 1930 RCCAF introduced to the Archbishop of Canterbury, Cosmo Lang (1864–1945), a member of the RSCM, Nikolai Klepinin (1899–1941), appointed as editor of the Information Service on Religious Conditions in Soviet Russia paid by RCCAF.⁵³ Henceforth, Klepinin's information sheets were regularly dispatched to the office of Canon J. A. Douglas, the Secretary of Foreign Affairs of the Church of England.⁵⁴

In 1927–1928 Klepinin studied sociology at Harvard University with a Rockefeller Foundation scholarship secured through the Y secretaries, who also connected him with Samuel Harper.⁵⁵ Klepinin proposed to establish a center analyzing the Soviet socioeconomic conditions through the press.⁵⁶ Harper showed no enthusiasm in reaction. Such an enterprise would require many people to work on particular topics, whereas some work was being done, including by the Paris group.⁵⁷ Klepinin was already its member.

Klepinin produced information following previously established principles with a slight change: translations were organized thematically. In explaining his work, he stated his intention to use documentary evidence (Soviet press) to refute the Soviet government's claims that anti-religious efforts were community-driven, volunteer initiatives rather than governmental policy.⁵⁸ The *Bulletin* compiled by Lagovskii, Shevich, and Anderson differed from simple translations. The editors incorporated their personal insights into the translated content. Notably, they described the Soviet government's attitude toward the Church as persecution and destruction.⁵⁹ These emphases held significance. There were declarations that the allegations of religious persecution in the USSR were "malicious inventions," as stated in a letter in the *Manchester Guardian*, in March 1930, signed by George Bernard Shaw, leading MPs, and trade union leaders (Udy 2017:271–272).

Since January 1932, Klepinin relinquished his work for RCCAF and distanced himself from the group coordinated by Anderson and MacNaughten.⁶⁰ They designed

⁵² UIA, Anderson papers, b. 10, letter from Anderson to Colton, April 18, 1932. See in the same folder the correspondence between Pares, Anderson, and MacNaughten regarding the information service from December 1931 to December 1932.

⁵³ LPL, Lang papers, vol. 73, ll. 135–136, letter from Pares to Lang, February 14, 1930; ll. 157–158, letter from Fynes-Clinton to Lang, February 21, 1930.

⁵⁴ LPL, Douglas papers, vol. 33, ll. 271–272, letter from Tudor Pole to Douglas, October 1, 1931; vol. 41 contains Klepinin's information sheets.

⁵⁵ UCL, Harper papers, b. 13, f. 24, letter from Colton to Harper, April 19, 1928.

⁵⁶ UCL, Harper papers, b. 13, f. 25, letter from Klepinin to Harper, April 27, 1928; memorandum prepared by Klepinin, [April 27, 1928].

⁵⁷ UCL, Harper papers, b. 13, f. 26, letter from Harper to Klepinin, May 4, 1928.

⁵⁸ LPL, Lang papers, vol. 73, ll. 214–222.

⁵⁹ LPL, Lang papers, vol. 74, ll. 137–150, no. 3, July 18, 1930, p. 27.

⁶⁰ UIA, Anderson papers, b. 10, letter from Anderson to Colton, March 2, 1932.

new periodicals: the monthly bulletin *Life in Soviet Russia* (1932) (see figure 5) and the pamphlet series (1933–1935) named likewise (see figure 6). RCCAF provided funding for purchasing press, translation, and printing.⁶¹ Klepinin joined another information center, funded by the French Protestant Hubert de Monbrison (1892–1981), which published the bulletin *Demain* (Tomorrow) (see figure 7) on religion in the USSR and atheistic activities worldwide in English and occasionally in French.⁶² *Demain* proclaimed an apolitical stance, but clearly embraced a militant commitment resembling an anti-communist ideology (Heale 1990; Caillat et al. 2009). *Demain's* theoretical articles highlighted the “Russian Godless offensive” and cited examples of “militant Godlessness” in the West.⁶³ The presentation was fear-inducing, conveying the danger of communist atheism, potentially inciting fears and anxieties. Some issues were visually impactful, featuring bold headings, lively faces of the militant atheists, and maps of Europe with black arrows illustrating the geographical expansion of atheism.

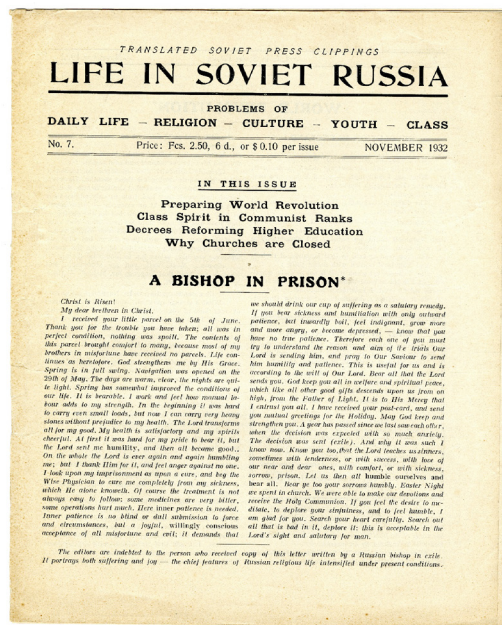


Figure 5. The bulletin *Life in Soviet Russia*, no. 7, November 1932. 27 cm x 22 cm. © Private archives, Les Éditeurs Réunis, Paris; printed with permission.

⁶¹ UIA, Anderson papers, b. 10, letter from Anderson to Colton, April 18, 1932.

⁶² Some early *Demain* information sheets and first *Demain* issues (nos. 12 and 13) prepared by Klepinin in January 1932 are in LPL, Douglas papers, vol. 41, ll. 374, 409, 470–473.

⁶³ UIA, Anderson papers, b. 25, *Anti-religion in USSR and International Atheism: Non-political Monthly Bulletin* published by the [center] *Demain*, no. 3, May 1932.

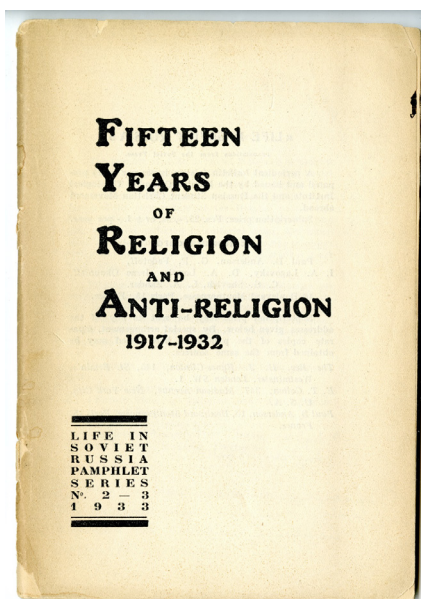


Figure 6. The pamphlet *Fifteen Years of Religion and Anti-religion 1917–1932*, nos. 2–3, series Life in Soviet Russia. 19cm x 13cm. © Private archives, Les Éditeurs Réunis, Paris; printed with permission.

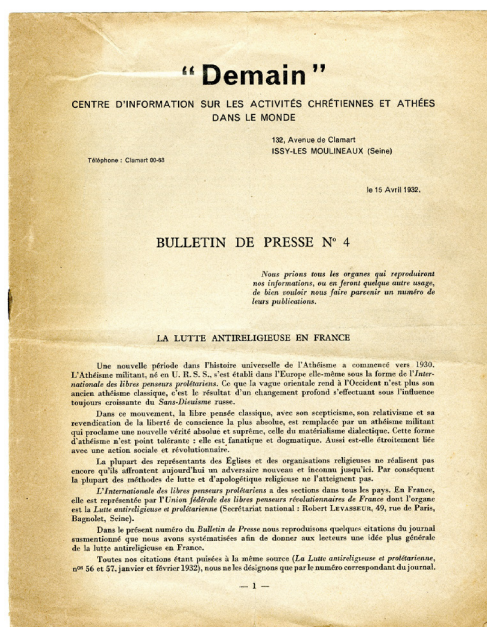


Figure 7. The bulletin *Demain*, no. 4, in French language, April 15, 1932. 31cm x 24cm. © Private archives, Les Éditeurs Réunis, Paris; printed with permission.

Anderson attributed *Demain's* militant stance to the ardent membership of Klepinin and his associates publishing this bulletin to "the political party."⁶⁴ According to family accounts (Arjakovsky-Klepinin 2005:84–85), Nikolai Klepinin became a member of the Federal Union of Revolutionary Freethinkers. This was an émigré political organization founded in the mid-1920s with input from the Soviet secret police and intelligence service, the Joint State Political Directorate (OGPU, then NKVD), as part of its counterrevolutionary operations in France. Klepinin was then involved in the assassination of Ignace Reiss (1899–1937), born Nathan Poreckij, a Soviet secret agent also known by many other pseudonyms, who began to denounce Joseph Stalin's policies and mass repressions. In 1937 Klepinin returned to the USSR; he was shot in 1941.

Compared to *Demain*, *Life in Soviet Russia* aimed to cover a broader range of topics: daily life, religion, culture, youth, class, army, and gender relations.⁶⁵ Editorials, thematic headings, and the editors' comments were designed to guide readers' understanding, though the main content consistently comprised translations of Soviet press articles. The section Humor in *Life* presented stories from the Soviet satirical magazine *Krokodil*. Some translations had mischievous titles. Thus, the title "Miron makes love"⁶⁶ introduced a passage from Fedor Gladkov's novel *Energy*, portraying a young communist's attempt to make love with his comrade Fenia. She refused, preferring to build a family with children rather than engage in casual sexual relations. However, *Demain's* presentation style appeared to be more captivating for a wider audience, sparking debates within RCCAF.⁶⁷ Suggestions emerged to reach out to people with limited or no knowledge of the USSR. This entailed a potential shift toward a more propagandistic style, disseminating information according to the readers' interest, potentially providing an easy reading of Soviet reality.

According to Pares, he resisted market-oriented approaches within RCCAF, emphasizing that his academic standing required the dissemination of information that could be considered as unquestionable, at least regarding its origin (Soviet press).⁶⁸ Anderson and Pares categorized *Demain* as propaganda and defined their own purpose as "establishing comprehension" of Soviet life, which they distinguished from propaganda.⁶⁹ The distinction wasn't unchallenged. The Paris group was also pursu-

⁶⁴ UIA, Anderson papers, b. 10, letter from Anderson to Fynes-Clinton, November 12, 1932.

⁶⁵ See also topics of the pamphlets "Life in Soviet Russia": no. 1 *Soviet Marriage Code*, nos. 2–3 *Fifteen Years of Religion and Anti-religion in Soviet Russia*, no. 4 *A Godless 1933*, no. 5 *Socialized Mind*, no. 6 *Training for the Godless Ministry*, no. 7 *The Godless Campaign in the Red Army*, no. 8 *Bread Cards and Food Parcels*, no. 9 *Character in Child and Man*, no. 10 *Russia's Religious Future*.

⁶⁶ UIA, Anderson papers, *Life in Soviet Russia*, no. 6, October 1932.

⁶⁷ UIA, Anderson papers, b. 10, letters from Fynes-Clinton, Tudor Pole, Fynes-Clinton, and Pares to Anderson, November 7, 21, and 30, 1932, and December 13, 1932, sharing some points from their internal discussions during RCCAF meetings.

⁶⁸ UIA, Anderson papers, b. 10, letter from Pares to Anderson, December 13, 1932.

⁶⁹ UIA, Anderson papers, b. 10, letters from Anderson to Pares, January 26, 1932, and November 25, 1932; Anderson's comparative analysis between the *Demain* and *Life in Soviet Russia*.

ing a task of “restoring Christian life and culture in Russia,” which might be perceived, at least by committed atheists, as religious propaganda. The Paris group’s materials conveyed a clear message that no power could destroy the Christian religion, which was inherently part of the Russian people’s identity.⁷⁰ For the Orthodox émigrés and their YMCA partners, it was undoubtedly a positive message, albeit laden with their own preconceived ideas. Nonetheless, Pares, Anderson, and MacNaughten displayed sincerity while stating the need to provide “an entire all-round view.”⁷¹ This involved translating extracts regardless of their favorable or unfavorable stance toward the Soviet realities. This elucidates why certain translations, as previously discussed, could be seen as favorable toward the USSR.

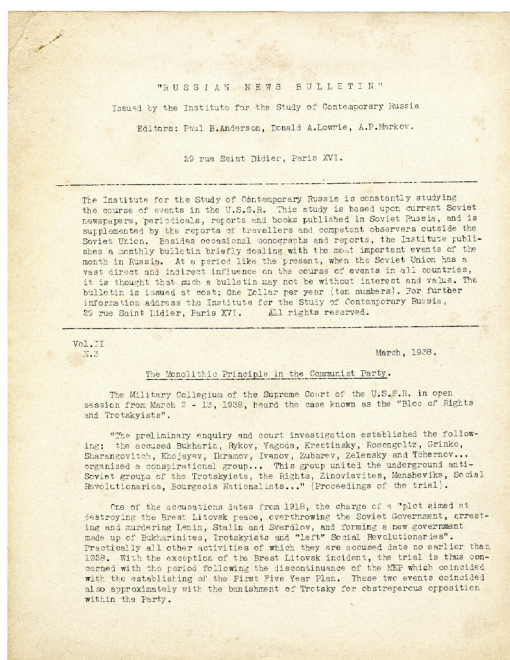


Figure 8. *Russian News Bulletin*, vol. 2, no. 3, March 1938. © Private archives, Les Éditeurs Réunis, Paris; printed with permission.

⁷⁰ This idea was underlined in the English translation of an anonymous letter attributed to an Orthodox priest and quoted in *Information Bulletin on Religion and Morality in the USSR*, no. 3, July 18, 1930, p. 9, compiled by Anderson, Lagovskii, and Shevich. The original text is as follows: “There is no power, physical or moral, which can destroy in our people the holy Christian religion, still less uproot from the heart of the man the idea of God.” LPL, Lang papers, vol. 74, l. 141. The same idea resurfaces in some information materials issued subsequently. See the 4th pamphlet of the series *Life in Soviet Russia* in Éd. Réunis, *A Godless 1933*, Paris, 1933, p. 3. The text is as follows: “The editors believe that a religious culture is of the very nature of the Russian people and, hence, will persist among them.”

⁷¹ UIA, Anderson papers, b. 10, letter from Pares to MacNaughten, January 7, 1932; letter from Anderson to Pares, January 26, 1932.

In 1936 the editorial team changed to consist of the YMCA secretaries Paul Anderson and Donald Lowrie (1889–1974) and the economist Aleksandr Markov (1885–1973). They identified themselves as the Society, and later, the Institute for the Study of Contemporary Russia, that published at least nineteen issues of these periodicals editing *Russian News Letter* (1936–1937) and *Russian News Bulletin* (1937–1939) (see figure 8) with volumes ranging from three to ten pages. The presentation of information was simple (headings and text), without illustrations, albeit completed by statistical tables. This was possibly due to constraints of the budget, which was occasionally supplemented by American funding.⁷² However, the presentation approach, together with the title “Institute,” might also aim to substantiate a “scholarly” orientation, rooted in evidence-based information. Due to article limitations, only succinct insights into topics and information method are provided below.

EXPANSION OF THEMATIC FOCAL POINTS IN THE PARIS GROUP'S MATERIALS FROM THE 1930S: SOVIET LIFE THROUGH THE ISSUES OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM, LIVING CONDITIONS, FAMINE, AND PURGES

In the 1930s, the Paris group's materials focused on broader societal and state themes. They covered a wide array of topics: religion, morality, child education, family, social attitudes, the army, collective farms, five-year plans, proletarian dictatorship ideology, role and structure of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU), and purges. The editors' primary aim seemed to have been to offer a reflective and critical approach by articulating trends in the CPSU policy and to unveil contradictions between ideology and realities. They significantly enlarged their interpretations and highlights, offering a kind of annotated analytical retelling of the Soviet press and some individual accounts with translated quotes.

Thus, they clearly highlighted the shift in legislation toward more restrictions on religion. The 1936 Constitution allowed freedom for religious cults and anti-religious propaganda (art. 124). They drew the readers' attention to the fact that it eliminated the right to propagate religion, which had been permitted in the 1925 Constitution alongside anti-religious propaganda.⁷³ The issue whether priests had the right to vote was handled cautiously. It was noted that Stalin avoided discussing clergy disfranchisement during the constitution's presentation. However, Mikhail Kalinin, then head of state, supported extending voting rights to “opponents” (priests or former kulaks), enabling their participation in social life.⁷⁴ Still, the editors warned readers not to trust these statements. The Soviet decree of December 12, 1930, listed over 30 categories of *lishentsy*, citizens stripped of civic

⁷² LPL, CFR OC, f. 230/4, l. 66, S. M. Dawkins, Minutes of the meeting of the RCCAF general council held . . . April 22, 1937, May 17, 1937. 2,000 copies of the Bulletin have been distributed among RCCAF subscribers; 1,000 copies printed in April 1937 were an “American special edition.”

⁷³ Éd. Réunis, *Russian News Letter*, August 10, 1936, p. 1.

⁷⁴ Éd. Réunis, *Russian News Letter*, December 24, 1936, p. 1; *Russian News Letter*, August 10, 1936, p. 1.

rights, including clergy, monks, and nuns. The April 1929 ban on religious organizations' social activity remained in effect.⁷⁵

The editors also questioned the idea that peasants voluntarily joined collective farms, citing external pressures: taxation, expropriation, exile (deportation), and other forms of deprivation of rights.⁷⁶ Assessing the 1937 Industrial Plan's impact on workers' conditions was recognized to be complicated due to missing published price indices and ruble value.⁷⁷ A comparative table, drawn from various Soviet publications, demonstrated a 19.5 percent production increase in the 1937 plan and the projected 5.6 percent wage increase, raising questions about persistently low worker productivity. Scrutinizing 1935 industrial wages, the editors found most to be below the norm, except heavy industry. Workers' constant mobility across sectors was observed. Drawing firm conclusions from this data was recognized as difficult. However, all these observations allowed the editors to suggest that the quality of living conditions was low.

Living conditions were discussed in relation to famines. The 1932–1933 famine was the case when the editors cited testimonies, including that of journalist Harry Lang (1888–1970) from the Yiddish-language *Jewish Daily Forward* (New York), who reported on the 1933 famine in Ukraine (today recognized as genocide by many countries). This personal account was referenced because the Soviet press never suggested "that people . . . are hungry."⁷⁸ Indeed, the Soviet authorities denied and silenced the 1932–1933 famine (Courtois et al. 1997:178). The editors stated that people were "hungry" and there was "famine," particularly in Ukraine and the Caucasus. This vocabulary was significant. Some outside observers avoided it and denied accounts of massive famine (Kupferman 1979:88; Peretz 1999; Snyder 2010:56; David-Fox 2012:99). The editors employed the issue of recurring famines to prompt inquiries regarding economic achievements of the Soviet state. It was also noted that famine might be "intentional," because the crops were "inadequate" even for collectivized farmers after "meeting the Government assessment in kind, and due to the chaotic conditions of national Plan, administration and transport."⁷⁹ This conveyed the idea that governmental management let to starving people to death.

Ultimately, based on official statistics, the editors highlighted a crisis in the Soviet political system. While the CPSU membership increased (2 million in 1937 from 240,000 in 1917), it remained a minority (1.8 million of 65.7 million workers and collective farmers in 1934).⁸⁰ Noticing local party organs accused of losing touch

⁷⁵ Éd. Réunion, *Russian News Letter*, August 10, 1936, p. 2.

⁷⁶ UIA, Anderson papers, b. 26, *Life in Soviet Russia: The Socialized Mind as Seen in a Soviet Collective Farm*. Pamphlet Series no. 5, 1933, pp. 10–11.

⁷⁷ Éd. Réunion, *Russian News Bulletin*, May 12, 1937.

⁷⁸ UIA, Anderson papers, b. 26, *Life in Soviet Russia: The Socialized Mind as Seen in a Soviet Collective Farm*. Pamphlet Series no. 5, 1933, p. 39.

⁷⁹ UIA, Anderson papers, b. 26, *Life in Soviet Russia: The Socialized Mind as Seen in a Soviet Collective Farm*. Pamphlet Series no. 5, 1933, pp. 41–42.

⁸⁰ Éd. Réunion, *Russian News Bulletin*, April 8, 1937. Statistics are from *Pravda*, March 13, 1937.

with the masses, the editors raised the hypothesis of the CPSU's detachment from the people. Purges within the CPSU, machine-tractor stations, factories, mines, the Union of the Militant Godless, and the army were mentioned.⁸¹ The purges within the CPSU received closer attention. The editors presented "errors" that had been reported during trials. They refrained from deliberating the validity of the accusations, yet noted the "hysterical" nature of the purges. It was observed that the search for "predators," "spies," or "Trotskyists" had been conducted by the Communist Party members themselves to display loyalty to superiors, particularly to Stalin—the only one un-touchable.

The Paris group's information efforts never became commercially profitable. Although the lack of substantial, continuous financial support for their non-revenue-generating information activities might have limited their geographical reach, they successfully established a transnational dissemination network, as will be presented in the next section. The subsequent reconstruction may not be exhaustive. Still, fragmented information from correspondence provides insights into the key aspects and difficulties in their efforts to expand the information network geographically.

REACHING OUT TO READERS: BUILDING A TRANSNATIONAL INFORMATION NETWORK IN THE 1920S–1930S

The correspondence between the Paris group, RCCAF (London), and Ethan Colton (New York) is marked by shared concerns: the acquisition of private subscribers. The end date of the funding provided by FCCC for RRNS remains unknown. In 1927 Colton stated that RRNS was functioning only with private subscriptions.⁸² In 1932 Lev Zander wrote to the Rev. Samuel McCrea Cavert (1888–1976), from FCCC, to draw his attention to the bulletin *Life in Soviet Russia*, asking to let him know if Cavert wanted to subscribe.⁸³ This suggests that FCCC was not aware of the evolution of the Paris group's information activity.

Gaining subscribers was a laborious task. Identifying and engaging individuals without web technologies available today was notably slower and longer. The search relied on personal connections through correspondence and in person.⁸⁴ Anderson's letters sent to various individuals in the United States in August 1930 evidence this time-consuming process.⁸⁵

⁸¹ Éd. Réunis, *Russian News Bulletin*, issues published in February 1938, March 1938, April 1938, May 1938.

⁸² UCL, Harper papers, b. 12, f. 31, letter from Colton to Harper, February 21, 1927.

⁸³ Éd. Réunis, letter from Zander to Cavert, July 12, 1932.

⁸⁴ UIA, Anderson papers, b. 9, letter from MacNaughten to Anderson, May 26, 1930; letter from Anderson to Tudor Pole, December 5, 1932. These letters show that *Life and Soviet Russia* has been sent to the contributors to the YMCA work, "to a certain list of YMCA," and personal friends.

⁸⁵ See copies of these letters in UIA, Anderson papers, b. 9, d. "Headquarters of YMCA in Paris—Correspondence August 1930."

The initial plan involved printing 1,000 copies of every issue of *Life in Soviet Russia* and 1,200 copies of every pamphlet in the series titled likewise. The bulk of the pamphlets (900 copies) was designated for the UK, with a minor quantity (200 copies) for the US, and a more limited quantity (100 copies) for France.⁸⁶ RCCAF resources were repeatedly described as “grave difficulties” and “black financial situation.”⁸⁷ This suggests that connections with high-ranking Anglican officials did not facilitate network construction. Nor was a business model planned in advance. Distribution expenses were initially overlooked. Dispatching the first 1,000 copies of *Life in Soviet Russia* to London triggered a diligent search for subscribers. By December 1932, there were only 53 subscribers in the UK.⁸⁸

Subscriptions might seem to be reasonably modest: 11 issues of *Life in Soviet Russia* were priced at \$1. However, experience continuously showed that customers appreciated receiving materials gratuitously and were unwilling to pay.⁸⁹ In 1927 Harper would accept *Religious News Bulletin* regularly if there was no charge, citing the abundance of publications on the USSR.⁹⁰ The London publishers approached in 1933 to publish pamphlets were hesitant for identical reasons.⁹¹ New publications, particularly in smaller formats, were hard to sell. The pamphlet *Fifteen Years of Religion and Anti-religion 1917–1932* (see figure 6) seems to be the only successful from a commercial outlook.⁹² Due to concerted efforts, RCCAF, by November 1933, hoped to sell around 500 copies of the new issue of *Life in Soviet Russia*.⁹³ RCCAF members disseminated publications through private channels.⁹⁴ Their correspondence reveals different obstacles in winning hearts and minds. For example, the USSR’s entry into

⁸⁶ UIA, Anderson papers, b. 10, letter from Anderson to Colton, April 18, 1932; letter from Anderson to Stanley Unwin, director of the London publishing company George Allen & Unwin Ltd., February 20, 1933.

⁸⁷ UIA, Anderson papers, b. 10, letters from Fynes-Clinton to Anderson, May 4, 1932, and November 30, 1932.

⁸⁸ UIA, Anderson papers, b. 10, letter from Anderson to Pares, April 12, 1932; letter from Fynes-Clinton to Anderson, November 30, 1932.

⁸⁹ UIA, Anderson papers, b. 10, letter from Anderson to Colton, April 18, 1932; b. 9, letter from Colton to Anderson, April 26, 1930.

⁹⁰ UCL, Harper papers, b. 13, f. 8, letter from Harper to Colton, November 11, 1927.

⁹¹ UIA, Anderson papers, b. 10, letter from Unwin to Anderson, February 21, 1933; b. 11, letter from Tudor Pole to Anderson, September 28, 1933.

⁹² UIA, Anderson papers, b. 10, letter from Tudor Pole to Anderson, May 5, 1933; letter from Anderson to Tudor Pole, May 6, 1933, confirming the right to reprint the pamphlet in 5,000 copies; b. 20, To Strengthen and Enrich the Russian Orthodox Church: Report on American Aid to the Russian Orthodox Theological Academy and Its Allied Interests in Paris, July 1, 1932–June 30, 1933, p. 6.

⁹³ UIA, Anderson papers, b. 11, letter from Tudor Pole to Anderson, November 8, 1933.

⁹⁴ UIA, Anderson papers, b. 10, letter from Anderson to Pares, March 25, 1932, requesting the address to which 1,000 copies of *Life in Soviet Russia* should be sent; letter from Anderson to Pares, October 21, 1932, notifying that 300 copies of *Life in Soviet Russia* would be sent to Fynes-Clinton, 100 copies to Tudor Pole, and 500 copies to the former secretary of the British Christian Protest Movement S. M. Dawkins.

the League of Nations in 1934 led to the perception of progress regarding labor camps, causing a significant decrease in subscriptions.⁹⁵ Projects aimed at further extending the British network, including Scotland,⁹⁶ were blocked due to concerns of the Anglican priests and politicians about the undesirable expansion of Orthodox influence.⁹⁷

An observation can be made regarding the role of the YMCA as an organization in implementing the information network. As mentioned earlier, the publications of RRNS never included reference to the YMCA. It also appears very likely that few individuals in positions of responsibility within the YMCA in the United States were aware of the information activities developed by the YMCA secretaries in collaboration with Soviet émigrés and exiles in Paris. However, the members of the professional Y community, comprised of secretaries working in different geographical regions, became the first recipients and, potentially, agents for further information dissemination. Y secretaries were using circulars to inform colleagues about their fieldwork. Anderson used at least once this communication method to inform his professional network about socioeconomic conditions and anti-religious policy in the USSR.⁹⁸ More importantly, he was personally dispatching the materials prepared by RRNS to his YMCA colleagues,⁹⁹ also asking them about publishers who might be interested in issuing commercial editions of the pamphlets in the countries where they were developing the YMCA activities.¹⁰⁰ The YMCA network facilitated reaching broader circles for the Paris group's materials, as the secretaries' work included organizing discussion groups on various topics, establishing reading rooms and libraries, and developing the YMCA's branches in educational institutions. Thus, Anderson encouraged Tudor Pole to get in touch with the British National Council of YMCA (London) in order to distribute *Life in Soviet Russia* through the YMCA's branches in the UK.¹⁰¹ Some secretaries, having previously worked for the YMCA, entered private enterprises and public institutions. Thus, an exchange of materials about the USSR occurred between An-

⁹⁵ LPL, CFR OC, f. 230/1, l. 22, letter from Tudor Pole to Rev. Alan Don, October 21, 1935.

⁹⁶ LPL, CFR OC, f. 230/1, l. 43, letter from Tudor Pole to Lang, February 25, 1936.

⁹⁷ LPL, CFR OC, f. 230/1, l. 68, confidential memorandum of Lord Charnwood (1864–1945), a Liberal politician, regarding the society of the Friends of the Russian Church, May 19, 1936.

⁹⁸ UIA, Anderson papers, b. 18, Paul B. Anderson, To Friends Interested in Modern Russia, September 30, 1931. He announced the decision to demolish the Church of the Redeemer in Moscow and summarized Stalin's speech of June 23, 1931, condemning *uravnilovka* (equalizing people regardless their productiveness).

⁹⁹ UIA, Anderson papers, b. 9, letters from Anderson to Dwight C. Drew, state secretary YMCA (Des Moines, Iowa), to Allan Campbell, general secretary YMCA (Ottumwa, Iowa), to E. A. Harris, general secretary YMCA (Storm Lake, Iowa), to Cyrus P. Barnum, general secretary, student YMCA, University of Minnesota, to S. R. Hankins, general secretary YMCA (Cedar Rapids, Iowa), August 12, 1930; b. 10, letters from Anderson to Colton, April 18, 1932, to Tracy Strong from the WSCF (Geneva, Switzerland), March 2, 1935.

¹⁰⁰ UIA, Anderson papers, b. 10, letters from Anderson to Erich Strange (Cassel-Wilhelmshöhe, Germany), April 22, 1933, and to Hugo Cedergren (Stockholm, Sweden), April 24, 1933.

¹⁰¹ UIA, Anderson papers, b. 11, letter from Anderson to Tudor Pole, November 14, 1933.

derson and Ernest Ropes (1877–1949), head of the Bureau of Foreign and Domestic Commerce of the Department of Commerce, a position he took after working with the Y in northern Russia and the Baltic countries in 1918–1919.¹⁰² Another former Y secretary, James Somerville, joined the commercial attaché at the US Embassy in London. He identified to his former Paris colleagues some persons interested in Soviet materials, including the journalist W. H. Chamberlin (1897–1969).¹⁰³ Articles and books (e.g., Colton 1931, 1932; Klepinin 1930, 1930–1931; Anderson 1944) based on RRNS were another means of disseminating information, which became incorporated into academic knowledge. In 1937 Anderson, Lowrie, and Markov also prepared the USSR chronicle (“Chronicle” 1937) for the *Slavonic and East European Review*, edited since 1922 by Bernard Pares and his coeditors.¹⁰⁴

The following channels of disseminating information were largely used primarily in the United States and, to a lesser extent, in France: institutions of higher and secondary education, libraries, and members of the clergy.¹⁰⁵ They were recipients and potential intermediaries, contributing to the extended distribution. The Episcopal parish of the Church of the Advent (Boston, Massachusetts) purchased several hundred copies of the pamphlets *Life in Soviet Russia* from RCCAF to reprint and disseminate them.¹⁰⁶

The Paris group was cautious when considering association with other groups disseminating information, advocating Christianity, and, alongside this, propagandizing against Soviet Communism. Anderson’s correspondence highlights two instances: the Entente Internationale Anticommuniste (EIA), founded in 1924 by Théodore Aubert (1878–1963), Genevan lawyer, and Georgii Lodyzhenskii (1888–1977), delegate of the former Russian Imperial Red Cross to various international

¹⁰² UIA, Anderson papers, b. 9, letter from Anderson to Ropes, March 11, 1929; letter from Ropes to Anderson, June 22, 1929.

¹⁰³ UIA, Anderson papers, b. 9, letter from Somerville to Anderson, September 26, 1930.

¹⁰⁴ The “Chronicle” 1937 is unsigned, but Anderson mentioned it in YDL, Mott papers, b. 2, f. 30, Anderson’s report for 1937 Russian Service in Europe, July 28, 1938, p. 7.

¹⁰⁵ UIA, Anderson papers, b. 9, letters sent by Anderson in August 1930 to Rev. D. Hagan, Community Church (Clinton, Iowa); R. H. Fitzgerald, State University of Iowa; professor H. A. Miller, Ohio State University; professor F. C. Caldwell, Ohio State University; Dean J. F. Findlay, University of Oklahoma; Rev. Harris Masterson, All Saints’ Chapel (Austin, Texas); R. W. Abernethy, The Hill School (Pottstown, Pennsylvania); Dean Charles W. Gilkey, University of Chicago; Dean James Yard, North-Western University; Bishop G. K. A. Bell, August 18, 1930; b. 10, letter from New York Public Library to Anderson requesting to be added to the mailing list for *Russian News Letter*, May 7, 1937; b. 11, L. Dumas and G. Lapierre, International Federation of Teachers Associations (Paris, France), to Anderson, June 7, 1933; letter from Miss A. Hubard, University of California, to Anderson, April 30, 1933; letter from Anderson to professor D. Adolf Keller, European Central Office for Inter-Church Aid (Geneva, Switzerland), November 24, 1933; letter from the Bibliothèque de documentation internationale contemporaine (BDIC, Vincennes, France) to Anderson, December 22, 1933; letter from D. H. Litchfield, University of Pennsylvania Library, to Anderson, April 9, 1934; letter from Anderson to Keller, February 11, 1935.

¹⁰⁶ UIA, Anderson papers, b. 10, letter from the Rev. Julian D. Hamlin, Rector of the Church of the Advent (Boston, Massachusetts), to MacNaughten, October 5, 1932.

organizations, and the Entente Fraternelle Internationale pour la Défense contre le Bolchévisme (EFIDB), referred to as the Movement for Interest in Religion in Russia, established in 1931 by F. J. Krop (1875–1945), pastor of the National Church in Rotterdam. EIA possessed a network of correspondents. They were gathering information about the Communist International and Bolshevism in general and were conducting anti-communist activities in their countries (Roulin 2010). According to Anderson's understanding, Krop's motive was to create in Europe an "intelligent attitude toward the religious situation in Russia and its inherent danger to Christianity in other countries."¹⁰⁷

Anderson had one-to-one meetings with Lodyzhenskii and Krop and exchanged materials with them.¹⁰⁸ Differences existed in communication approaches. The Paris group operated through private channels solely by disseminating written documentation. EIA adopted overt mass campaigns, exemplified by its 1933 itinerant exhibition. It included testimonies, depictions of ruined churches, reproductions of anti-religious militant magazines, namely satirical caricatures lampooning Christ, the pope, and believers (Roulin 2010:265). Anderson considered contributing materials to the exhibition and facilitating its tour in the US.¹⁰⁹ Nevertheless, he refrained from wholly trusting the information disseminated by EIA, because Lodyzhenskii recognized using third-party accounts without verification. Lev Zander from the Orthodox émigré community encouraged Anderson to convince RCCAF to support EIA. However, Anderson advised against aligning RCCAF with EIA.¹¹⁰ EIA professed Christian advocacy but was known for its strong political flavor. Its leaders openly used the word "propaganda" to describe their work. EIA have been often seen as a political pressure group (Roulin 2010:55–59, 97). I lack sources to assess the information practices of EFIDB (Krop's undertaking). Anderson declined Krop's invitation to represent EFIDB in the US. His methods also appeared to Anderson as propagandistic.¹¹¹

This discussion transcends a simple dichotomy between propaganda and unbiased information. Repeatedly, Anderson endeavored to distinguish between EIA or EFIDB and his own role in disseminating information about the USSR. He stated that his goal was to foster a nuanced understanding and to kindle a "Christian consciousness" by thoroughly exploring the USSR as a "problem" and a "lesson."¹¹² This involved assessing through a "Christian standard" individuals' character transformations influenced by the CPSU policies. The challenge arose from the inextricable link between religion and politics in the Soviet context, a constraint acknowledged by

¹⁰⁷ UIA, Anderson papers, b. 10, letter from Anderson to Colton, April 15, 1931.

¹⁰⁸ UIA, Anderson papers, b. 9, letter from Lodyzhenskii to Anderson, December 17, 1930; letter from Anderson to Lodyzhenskii, December 22, 1930; b. 10, letter from Anderson to Krop, April 18, 1932.

¹⁰⁹ UIA, Anderson papers, b. 11, letter from Anderson to Houston, February 11, 1935.

¹¹⁰ UIA, Anderson papers, b. 20, letter from Anderson to Tudor Pole, March 15, 1933.

¹¹¹ UIA, Anderson papers, b. 10, letter from Anderson to Colton, April 15, 1931.

¹¹² UIA, Anderson papers, b. 10, letter from Anderson to Colton, April 15, 1931; b. 11, letter from Anderson to G. Stetson, October 20, 1935.

Anderson. The intricacy lay, as he articulated, in the conviction of adherents of Marxist atheism, regardless of their profession or social standing, that religion was a tool of capitalism.¹¹³ Any attempt to separate religion from politics merely reinforced this perception, convincing them that religion was never a real factor in human lives. In this context, Christianity was increasingly returning to the position where religion must influence politics. Therefore, any information effort was prone to be characterized as propaganda, regardless of the information quality and the mode of its presentation. Incidentally, in his request to John Mott for 2,000 French francs (approximately \$108) to support studies of anti-religious literature and countermeasures, Anderson himself used the word “propaganda” to define this work.¹¹⁴

Indeed, no information was exempt from suspicions of being propaganda. This was vividly demonstrated by some British Labour leaders during parliamentary debates on religious persecutions in the USSR (Udy 2017:201, 227). The thesis, skillfully put forward by Lord Parmoor (1852–1941), the Labour leader, in the House of Lords in February 1930, was that “the whole truth . . . cannot be got from the statements which we see from day to day in the newspapers” (Udy 2017:230). This was the time when the Archbishop of Canterbury started receiving through RCCAF regular dispatches of Soviet press translations from Paris. On April 2, 1930, Lang gave a speech in the House of Lords.¹¹⁵ He reviewed the evidence received from different sources, including from Paris, arguing that this confirmed the Soviet oppression of all religious believers. Parmoor intervened again to challenge Lang’s arguments. He acknowledged that the archbishop was accurate in the sense that he gave information, but emphasized that this did not mean an accurate picture of reality (Udy 2017:289).

Notwithstanding, the matter of Soviet religious persecution became significant within the progressively developing constitutional crisis in the UK. The crisis was driven by various factors, including budgetary concerns, namely a perceived imbalance and the cabinet’s inability to agree on reducing unemployment benefits. It culminated in the formal resignation of the Labour government in August 1931. The Paris group contributed indirectly through its information effort, prompting the Archbishop of Canterbury to voice his concerns during parliamentary debates.

In contrast, an attempt to encourage American policymakers to use the issue of diplomatic recognition of the USSR in 1933 to secure an agreement to stop religious persecution yielded no result. Following discussions with businessman Charles Crane in Paris in October 1933, Paul Anderson attempted to send a detailed letter to President Franklin D. Roosevelt, who was engaged in negotiations with Maxim Litvinov,

¹¹³ UIA, Anderson papers, b. 11, letter from Anderson to S. F. Houston, Real Estate Trust Building (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania), February 11, 1935.

¹¹⁴ UIA, Anderson papers, b. 11, letter from Anderson to Mott, August 18, 1933.

¹¹⁵ Lang papers, vol. 74, l. 26, letter from Klepinin to Rev. M. G. Haigh, Cosmo Lang’s chaplain, April 3, 1930, suggesting some corrections to be made in the printed version of Lang’s speech; l. 27, letter from Pares to Lang, April 7, 1930, thanking Lang for his speech that Pares and Klepinin attended in person.

People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs, for USSR's recognition.¹¹⁶ Anderson highlighted religious persecution and limitations imposed on believers' rights with consequences for the socioeconomic status. He proposed "suggesting" to the Soviets the establishment of genuine religious freedom and the cessation of punitive measures against believers and clergy, all in an effort to "appease the Christian conscience of the American people." This attempt was dismissed by Anderson's superiors in New York as "inappropriate."¹¹⁷ Crane tried to proceed by sending cables to people in Roosevelt's inner circle,¹¹⁸ without success. The matter had already been definitively resolved by the US administration, driven by several factors. The ramifications of the 1929 Great Depression, the Japanese invasion and occupation of Manchuria in 1931, and the National Socialist Party in Germany with the ascendance of Adolf Hitler, this also being of concern to the Soviet government in early 1933, outweighed the issue of freedoms and repressions in the negotiations between Roosevelt's administration and the Soviet diplomat Litvinov.

CONCLUSION

The information work conducted by the Y secretaries and Soviet émigrés and exiles in Paris received logistical, methodological, and financial assistance from the Y secretary Ethan Colton (New York), the American scholar Samuel Harper (Chicago), and the Russian Clergy and Church Aid Fund, especially from its treasurer, the British scholar Bernard Pares (London). Their collaborative efforts led to the establishment of a transnational informal information network that was constructed through private channels across national borders. Although the available archives do not provide a comprehensive geographical overview of the network's reach, I was able to identify numerous recipients primarily located in the US and the UK. Dissemination also extended to France, albeit to a lesser extent. Some instances were identified in Switzerland, Germany, and Sweden. The recipients potentially acted as intermediaries, contributing to the network's broader reach. While those involved in building this network avoided formal affiliations of their information activity with the YMCA as an organization, the YMCA's professional community, spanning borders, seemed to have become one of the important channels of information dissemination, alongside institutions of higher and secondary education, libraries, and members of the clergy.

¹¹⁶ UIA, Anderson papers, b. 25, letter from [Anderson] to Franklin D. Roosevelt, October 24, 1933. This version is a four-page copy, incomplete and unsigned. The letter from Anderson's New York colleague Frank Slack, December 18, 1933 (UIA, Anderson papers, b. 11), reproduces ideas of this copy, mentioning that Anderson sent the original to the YMCA New York office asking to forward it to Roosevelt.

¹¹⁷ UIA, Anderson papers, b. 11, letter from Slack to Anderson, December 18, 1933.

¹¹⁸ RBML, Crane papers, b. 1, Crane's cable to Edward M. House, a diplomat from Roosevelt's inner circle, April 3, 1933, advising Roosevelt "go slow on recognition" due to desperate conditions in the USSR, including the destruction of religious literature, and because American engineers had been advised to leave the USSR to avoid being "scapegoats" for failures in the Five-Year Plan.

The original impetus for this information activity was provided by the Federal Council of Churches of Christ, which in 1923 established a committee on the religious situation in the USSR in response to alarming reports about new waves of persecution against priests and believers. This led to the creation of the Russian Religious News Service by the Y secretaries and émigrés, initially focusing on religious matters. The idea was to provide accurate, trustworthy, and unbiased information, which was a challenge in the context of highly polarized debates regarding the Soviet experiment. The Paris group also tried to shape opinions, notably by trying to persuade readers about the reality of repressions rooted in ideological and political foundations of the Soviet government. During the 1930s, the scope of topics covered by the Paris group expanded significantly to encompass a wide range of societal and state-related themes: religion, morality, child education, family, social attitudes, the army, collective farms, five-year plans, proletarian dictatorship ideology, political system, and purges.

Maintaining a clear boundary between propaganda and accurate, unbiased information was a significant challenge. While the Paris group discussed a lot the importance of informational accuracy and objectivity, they also promoted Christianity as a value-based entity independent of doctrine, reflecting and promoting thus their own shared ideals. Personal accounts of individuals who had visited the USSR or received recent news from there were taken into account. However, for public dissemination, translations of Soviet official documents, press, and publications were primarily used, including those that could be interpreted favorably toward the USSR. Personal accounts were cited when the Soviet officials and press remained silent on matters such as the 1932–1933 famine.

The Paris group's information work never translated into commercial profitability. The primary source of income was from private subscribers. The individuals involved in this work did not originally conceive it to influence politics. A distinct effort, undertaken by Paul Anderson in 1933 with the encouragement of businessman Charles Crane, aimed to convince American policymakers to utilize diplomatic recognition as leverage against the repressive policies of the Soviet authorities. However, this attempt was thwarted by Anderson's superiors in the YMCA, who declined to forward his letter addressed to President Roosevelt. By that time, the decision to officially recognize and reestablish diplomatic relations between the US and the USSR had already been made. On the British side, there was more achievement in terms of impact on politics. This was attributed to a broader mobilization organized by leaders of the Christian Protest Movement and the press in the UK in 1929–1931. Their aim was to amplify the discussion of religious persecutions in the USSR within the press and parliament. Although the Paris group initially did not intend to impact British debates, their regular dispatch of translations of Soviet documents and press to the office of the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Secretary of Foreign Affairs of the Church of England indirectly contributed to the parliamentary debates.

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France

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United Kingdom

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United States

Hoover Institution Library & Archives, Stanford University, Palo Alto, CA (HILA in fn.):

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University of Chicago Library, Hanna Holborn Gray Special Collections Research Center, Chicago, IL (UCL in fn.):

- Samuel Northrup Harper Papers 1891–1943 (Harper papers in fn.)

University of Illinois Archives, Russian and East European Center, Urbana-Champaign, IL (UIA in fn.):

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University of Minnesota Libraries, Kautz Family YMCA Archives, Minneapolis, MN (KFYA in fn.):

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Yale Divinity Library, New Haven, CT (YDL in fn.):

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СОЗДАНИЕ НЕФОРМАЛЬНОЙ ТРАНСНАЦИОНАЛЬНОЙ СЕТИ ИНФОРМАЦИИ ОБ СССР ИЗ ПАРИЖА: ВЗГЛЯД НА СОВЕТСКУЮ ЖИЗНЬ СО СТОРОНЫ (1923–1939 ГОДЫ)

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Работа в архивах в рамках данного исследования стала возможна благодаря французской стипендиальной программе «Aires culturelles» региона Иль-де-Франс, финансовой поддержке Центра русских, кавказских, восточноевропейских и центральноазиатских исследований и финансовой поддержке, выделенной из фондов финансируемого Европейским исследовательским советом в рамках программы «European Union's Horizon 2020» научного проекта «Off-Site» (договор о гранте 803208 «Off-Site»). Статья отражает исключительно взгляды автора. Спонсоры не несут ответственности за любое использование содержащейся в статье информации.

Статья представляет результаты изучения на основе архивов процесса формирования неформальной сети обмена и распространения информации о социально-экономических и политических тенденциях в СССР в 1923–1939 годы. Эта сеть сложилась в результате взаимодействия представителей американской организации «Христианский союз молодых людей» (Young Men's Christian Association, YMCA) с советскими эмигрантами и высланными в Париже при содействии представителей американского и британского академических сообществ, религиозных и общественных деятелей, стремившихся повысить качество публично доступной информации об СССР и степень осведомленности о репрессиях в попытке создать механизмы противодействия им. Главный аргумент состоит в том, что информационная сеть возникла спонтанно и являлась ответом на потребность религиозных и общественных деятелей в регулярной объективной и достоверной информации. В статье эта проблема вписана в контекст поляризации распространенных на Западе мнений о советском опыте построения социализма и коммунизма в 1920–1930-е годы. В работе рассматриваются проблемы достоверности и непредвзятости информации. Общественные и религиозные деятели, о которых идет речь в статье, распространяли прежде всего переводы на английский язык советских печатных источников, прессы, официальных документов, законов, материалов пропаганды и литературных произведений. Обращаясь параллельно к частным свидетельствам и наблюдениям, в том числе к свидетельствам новоприбывших эмигрантов или лиц, недавно совершивших поездку в СССР, члены этой неформальной информационной сети избегали открытого цитирования. Отмечено одно исключение – голод 1932–1933 годов, о котором нельзя было узнать из официальных источников. В статье восстанавлива-

ется процесс формирования сети обмена и распространения информации посредством частных профессиональных и дружеских контактов ее членов; рассматривается тематический спектр распространявшихся материалов, методы подачи информации, основные каналы ее распространения и препятствия к нему. Отмечены спонтанные попытки участвующих в распространении информации лиц воздействовать на политические и дипломатические решения, в частности на восстановление дипломатических и торговых связей с СССР британским лейбористским правительством в 1929 году и администрацией США в 1933 году.

Ключевые слова: информационные сети; международные организации; транснационализм; американская YMCA; высланные; эмигранты; серая литература; СССР; Запад