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CRITICISMS

about Y. M. C. A. War Work
and

ANSWERS

JOHN R. MOTT

Dear Jim

*This is not
the original pamphlet
I talked to you about,
but its almost similar*

Yours

STATEMENT BY DR. JOHN R. MOTT
General Secretary, National War Work Council, Y. M. C. A.

(December 20th, 1918)

So much criticism of Y. M. C. A. methods has been heard in the last few weeks, that I have decided that the one thing to do in fairness to the millions that have subscribed to its funds, and in justice to the Association itself, is to discuss frankly the criticisms which have been raised. We have caused an investigation to be made and we are giving to the newspapers of the country our conclusions. It may be that there will be further criticism. It is our judgment that this should be frankly and fearlessly faced. If we were to evade criticism, we would be false to our trust. As we recognize whatever of truth it contains, we will be able to profit by it and to amend our methods in such a manner as to give the maximum of service. There is another aspect. Much of the criticism is utterly unfounded, but only by challenging such criticism can the public have a clear conception of the facts in the case.

It is the history of every great effort that mistakes are made and no one, no matter how exalted his person or how unimpeachable his integrity, can escape. There are hardly any departments of the United States Government that have not been criticized for their course during the war. Other important organizations have passed through a similar experience. So with the Y. M. C. A. There is no phase of its work that has been left untouched by critics. Much of the adverse comment is due to misconception or to partial knowledge.

The criticisms most frequently heard are dealt with in the following questions and answers:

QUESTION NO. 1

Is it true that the Y. M. C. A. has failed to keep in touch with the wounded and ill? In this connection it is charged by wounded and ill men that they saw no Y. M. C. A. workers from the time they entered the hospital.

In order to prevent any duplication of effort overseas, an agreement was reached between the American Red Cross and the Y. M. C. A. This provided that the American Red Cross should concern itself primarily with the care of the wounded and the ill; the Y. M. C. A., and kindred organizations, with the well. It is perfectly possible that a wounded or ill man might see no Y. M. C. A. worker from the time he entered the hospital until he left. This might lead to the supposition that the Y. M. C. A. was cold and unfeeling, where, as a matter of fact, it was simply living up to an agreement. At the invitation of the Red Cross, for some hospitals overseas, the Y. M. C. A. still provides its activities for the patients.

QUESTION NO. 2

Is it true that the Y. M. C. A. has been profiting by the operation of the canteen overseas?

It is not true that the Y. M. C. A. has been profiting by the operation of the canteen overseas. In the terms of Bulletin No. 33 from General Pershing's headquarters, it was provided that if there were any profit derived from the canteen, the Y. M. C. A. would use it exclusively for the benefit of the men

of the army. The discrepancy between the Quartermaster's prices and Y. M. C. A. prices was investigated by the War Department. The following telegram from Third Assistant Secretary of War F. P. Keppel is self-explanatory:

"Matter of prices asked by Young Men's Christian Association for its articles sold in canteen overseas already investigated by War Department and condition being remedied. Young Men's Christian Association originally asked by General Pershing to run canteen for army on cost basis. To do this had to reckon in price fixing such overhead charges as transportation charges and marine insurance so that prices were much higher than in this country. Young Men's Christian Association made no profit but lost thousands of dollars. Arrangements now made will enable them to obtain supplies from sources that will reduce overhead charges and keep prices down."

Raymond B. Fosdick, Chairman of the Commission on Training Camp Activities of the War Department, upon returning from an investigation of auxiliary agencies in Europe, was quoted by the New York Times as saying:

"I should like to take this opportunity to remove a misapprehension about the Y. M. C. A. which has gained considerable ground not only with our fellows abroad, but with the people back home, and that is that the Y. M. C. A. is making money out of the canteens which it is operating for the forces. At General Pershing's request I went into this matter thoroughly and the report is absolutely without foundation. I mention this matter only because the widespread rumor is most unfair to an organization which is doing heroic service."

QUESTION NO. 3

Is it true that the Y. M. C. A. furnishes free nothing more than writing paper to men overseas?

It is not true that the Y. M. C. A. furnishes nothing more than writing paper to men overseas. It has been the policy of the Y. M. C. A. to give free service and not primarily free supplies. This policy has from the beginning commanded the approval of the Army authorities. Nevertheless, during the month of September of this year, the Y. M. C. A. distributed to soldiers overseas \$75,000 worth of supplies. This is in addition to \$150,000 excess of cost over selling price on supplies sold during the same month, the last month of which we have received a report. Besides giving away vast quantities of supplies in front line work, the Y. M. C. A. provided between July and November to the army overseas \$829,000 worth of athletic supplies, not to mention hundreds of thousands of dollars worth of magazines and educational supplies.

QUESTION NO. 4

Is it true that gift tobacco was sold at Y. M. C. A. canteens overseas?

It is true that in a few cases gift tobacco was sold by mistake at Y. M. C. A. canteens, and the circumstances are these. The New York Sun, the Chicago Tribune, and possibly other parties shipped tobacco to France in care of the Quartermaster, with the intention of having it distributed free to soldiers. Some portions of this tobacco, because cases were not properly marked, were sold to the Y. M. C. A. by the Quartermaster and retailed in certain Y. M. C. A. canteens to soldiers at the price paid the Quartermaster. Later, when soldiers came to open these parcels, they found in them evidence that they had been intended for free distribution. In every case where these were returned to the Y. M. C. A., it furnished free an equivalent amount of tobacco from its own supplies. The New York Sun states that they have investigated several stories of this kind and found the facts to be as stated above. The Quartermaster concerned has also investigated the matter and fully exonerates the Y. M. C. A. Mr. Sloane, the Chairman of the National War Work Council of the Y. M. C. A., who has recently returned from overseas, was told while there by the Chief of Staff, S. O. S., that the Y. M. C. A. was not to blame in this matter and that the Quartermaster himself had sold to the soldiers

these same packages of tobacco intended for free distribution, being entirely ignorant of the fact that they had been sent over for free distribution.

The History of an Incident in Which the Y. M. C. A. Sold Gift Tobacco

On Oct. 14th W. E. Stewart, Acting Divisional Secretary, purchased Piedmont cigarettes "16" from the Third Division Sales Commissary. On opening these it was found that each carton contained a postcard addressed by some individual or firm in the States indicating that the particular carton was a gift for the person to whom addressed and apparently intended for free distribution. The cases containing these cigarettes bore no marks to indicate the nature of the contents. Mr. Stewart reported the matter to the Third Division Sales Commissary and to the Y. M. C. A. of the Fifth Region. In response to this report Mr. Stewart received the following letter:

SALES COMMISSARY UNIT NO. 4

A. P. O. 740 A. E. F.

23 Oct., '18.

From: C. C., Sales Commissary Unit No. 4 A. P. O. 740 A. E. F.

To: Y. M. C. A., 3rd Division, A. P. O. 740, A. E. F.

Subject: Gift Cigarettes.

1. Through an error of the Supply Depot at Gievres, this commissary received several cases of Piedmont cigarettes, each carton of which contained a return post card stating that these cigarettes were a gift from "The New York Sun Tobacco Fund."

2. These cigarettes were sold you in case lots before this was discovered, there being no marks on the cases to indicate that this was gift tobacco. This matter has been taken up by this commissary with the Supply Depot at Gievres, and in all probability these cigarettes will be replaced.

(Signed) C. P. HAFFLEY,

1st Lt., Q. M. C. U. S. A.,

Quartermaster.

QUESTION NO. 5

Is it true that ministers of religion in the service of the Y. M. C. A. overseas refused to attend to the material wants of soldiers until these soldiers had answered questions as to their spiritual attitude or condition?

I personally have never heard of such a case. Moreover, I have made diligent inquiry of my associates and of others who have inspected the Y. M. C. A. work overseas and they can recall no case of this kind which has been brought to their attention. I would add that the management of our organization stand ready to recall any one of its workers of whom it might be proved that he had followed such a course.

QUESTION NO. 6

Is it true that the typical attitude of the Y. M. C. A. workers has been that of holier-than-thou persons?

This question is of special interest because we have recently been taken to task for the very opposite of what is implied in this question. The charge has been earnestly pressed by not a few that the Y. M. C. A. has been untrue to its religious tradition and has not sufficiently set forth the claims of religion upon the soldiers. When an organization is criticized with equal strength by critics holding conflicting and directly opposing views, one comes to the conclusion that after all it must be holding a fairly straight course between extremes.

QUESTION NO. 7

Is it true that some of the overseas secretaries have been brusque and even impatient in their dealings with the soldiers?

Considering the fact that many Y. M. C. A. workers continued at their posts for eighteen hours at a stretch, sometimes without meals, it would be but natural that a few might have lost their self-control and have manifested a wrong disposition; but we are glad to believe, in the light of the great mass of testimony, that this has not been the characteristic attitude of the vast majority of the workers. I have heard the complaint made by a few soldiers that certain of the Y. M. C. A. workers have been prone to pay more attention to the officers than to the enlisted men and that they have at times treated men who have come into the canteens in an unsympathetic and inhospitable manner. Wherever our supervisory secretaries have learned of these complaints, they have acted promptly and, to my knowledge, where the charges have been substantiated have reprimanded the workers concerned and in a few cases where this has not been sufficient the workers were recalled and sent home.

QUESTION NO. 8

Is it true that the Y. M. C. A. has given so little thought to its selection of men for overseas service that it has sent men utterly unfit for the tasks they were called upon to perform and also that it has sent men whose only conception of their mission was that of a junket?

It is not true in any sense that the Y. M. C. A. has given little thought to its selection of men for overseas service. It must be remembered that when the Y. M. C. A. began erecting the structure upon which to build its great work, it faced the condition where the young and physically fit men would necessarily look to the Army and Navy. The Y. M. C. A. had only the choice of the physically unfit and the men beyond the draft age. It made the best possible selections from the available material. It erred in some instances. It was impossible for it to do otherwise. The men were needed at once. But where the Y. M. C. A. detected any error or mistakes of judgment, it recalled the men it had selected. One instance of this shows that a man never even set his foot in France. The decision to recall him was made before his transport had tied up at the pier. Every possible effort was made to prevent the enrolment of men whose only conception of their mission was that of a junket. In this connection it will be interesting to note that the Y. M. C. A. has already sent overseas over seven thousand men, of whom fully five thousand are still there at work. When this large number is borne in mind, it should not be surprising that here and there, under the trying experiences of the work, there should be found men who are disqualified. It is our fixed practice to recall all such cases.

QUESTION NO. 9

Were men chosen for Y. M. C. A. work who were of draft age and fit for army service?

During the first months of the War, some men who were physically fit but had not yet been called for service were sent to France. Within a few months most of these men had volunteered for military service. The comparatively small number who remained as late as August of the present calendar year (practically all divinity students and thereby exempted) were then notified that they must either enlist or leave the service of the Y. M. C. A.

QUESTION NO. 10

Is it true that the Y. M. C. A. has caused scores of men to be taken from gainful occupations and after promising them overseas service, turned them back without occupations?

It is true that the Y. M. C. A. called scores of men from gainful occupations and after promising overseas service, turned them back without occupations. So did the Government of the United States and other civilian organizations. And where the Y. M. C. A. has called scores, the army has called thousands to give up their gainful occupations. The Y. M. C. A. had expended its energy in bringing men to New York City to embark for overseas service when the War came to an end; and it was still expected by the Y. M. C. A. that those men who had been called from gainful occupations would serve the troops in France. The War Department indicated its strong preference that men should not be sent from this side but wherever possible should be taken from the Army overseas. It has recently announced that it will release officers and enlisted men who are especially qualified to assist in the educational program and other activities of the organization. This will mean that soldiers in France can enter Y. M. C. A. service immediately. Of course, it involves a large saving in transportation. It necessarily effects an embarrassment to those men who were ready for overseas service. But they are in exactly the same position as officers and enlisted men discharged because the period of emergency, or the need for their services, no longer exists. It is unfortunate, and the sympathy of the Y. M. C. A. goes out to these men; but they are just as much casualties of war as if they had been discharged from the enlisted Army. Their plight is one for which the Y. M. C. A. is in no way responsible, although it wishes to do all in its power to see that these men through no fault of their own are not put in a false or unfavorable light before their acquaintances.

WAR DEPARTMENT

Washington, December 23, 1918.

My Dear Dr. Mott:

The War Department is in thorough agreement with the plan being followed by the National War Work Council of the Young Men's Christian Association and other organizations in refraining from sending overseas any further workers except those who are now absolutely essential.

As soon as the armistice was signed the War Department felt that with the exception of a few highly trained experts, who were needed immediately to fill vacancies in specified positions, no additional men should be sent abroad, not even where men were already under appointment and waiting to sail.

These men, who had been recruited for overseas work and were at the last moment disappointed, are worthy of praise, not only for their willingness to undergo arduous service, but also for their quick readjustment of plans when the sudden ending of hostilities prevented the consummation of their cherished hopes.

The action of these organizations in withholding overseas recruits should be understood as in direct accord with the wishes of the War Department and should not be the occasion of criticism.

Cordially yours,
(Signed) NEWTON D. BAKER,
Secretary of War.

Dr. John R. Mott,
New York City.

QUESTION NO. 11

Is it true that the Y. M. C. A. workers overseas did not go to the front lines, but persistently dodged dangers?

Only today Mr. John Sherman Hoyt, the Vice-Chairman of the National War Work Council of the Y. M. C. A., who was with the troops in the

St. Mihiel drive and in the Argonne, stated to me that in the Argonne fight there were seven hundred Y. M. C. A. secretaries, fifty of whom were women canteen workers, attached to the different fighting units, with which they remained in the danger zone and frequently under shell fire during the entire offensive. The best answer to the question, however, is that since the Y. M. C. A. went overseas to serve the American Expeditionary Forces, nine of its workers have been killed by shell fire while on duty, twenty-nine were seriously gassed or wounded. In addition to this, thirty-one have died in the service, chiefly as a result of exposure and overwork. It is of interest to add that ten have been cited for bravery or decorated.

QUESTION NO. 12

What is the Y. M. C. A. going to do with the \$100,000,000 or more which constituted its pro rata share of the fund subscribed in the recent United War Work Campaign?

The National War Work Council held its meeting only yesterday for the purpose of revising its budget in the light of the requirements of the period of demobilization. This is to be submitted to the War Department within a few days, and an official statement will be issued covering this point to the entire satisfaction of the millions of generous and sacrificial givers of America.