



## ABSTRACT

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**REPORTING FROM THE FRONTLINES  
OF THE FIRST COLD WAR: AMERICAN  
DIPLOMATIC DESPACHES ABOUT THE  
INTERNAL CONDITIONS IN THE SOVIET  
UNION, 1917-1933**

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Following the Bolshevik Revolution in November of 1917, the United States ended diplomatic relations with Russia, and refused to recognize the Soviet regime until 1933 when President Franklin Roosevelt reversed this policy. Given Russia's vast size and importance on the world stage, Washington closely monitored the internal developments in that country during the non-recognition period. This dissertation is study of the American diplomatic despatches about the political, economic and social conditions in the USSR in its formative years. In addition to examining the despatches as a valuable record of the Soviet past, the dissertation also explores the ways in which the despatches shaped the early American attitudes toward the first Communist state and influenced the official policy. The American diplomats, stationed in revolutionary Russia and later, in the territories of friendlier nations surrounding the Soviet state, prepared regular reports addressing various aspects of

life in the USSR. Following the evacuation of the American diplomatic personnel from Russia toward the end of the Civil War, the Western visitors to Russia, migrants, and Soviet publications became primary sources of knowledge about the Soviet internal affairs. Under the guidance of the Eastern European Affairs Division at the U.S. State Department, the Americans managed to compile great volumes of information about the Soviet state and society. In observing the chronological order, this dissertation focuses on issues of particular significance and intensity such as diplomatic observers' treatment of political violence, repression and economic hardships that engulfed tumultuous periods of the Revolution, Civil War, New Economic Policy and Collectivization. The dissertation also examines the American recognition of the Soviet state in the context of the diplomatic despatches about the Soviet internal conditions.



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AMERICAN DIPLOMATIC DESPATCHES ABOUT THE INTERNAL  
CONDITIONS IN THE SOVIET UNION, 1917-1933.

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*To the memory of my grandfather.*

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## Introduction

The United States of America broke off diplomatic relations with Russia immediately after the Bolsheviks seized power in November of 1917. Having denounced the Soviet regime as illegitimate, Washington withheld recognition for sixteen years until 1933, when the government of President Franklin Roosevelt reversed the policy course. This dissertation explores the diplomatic despatches of the monitors who supplied policymakers in Washington with vital information about the Soviet internal conditions during the non-recognition period. Issued from various diplomatic stations in and around Russia, the diplomatic despatches played an important role in determining the early attitudes among American officials toward the Soviet government and influenced the policy of non-recognition. In the form of observer reports, interviews, analyses, memorandums, and translated Soviet publications, the American diplomats composed despatches that sought to depict the political, economic and social aspects of life in the Soviet Union. As such, these despatches not only furnished policy makers with information on the conditions inside Russia under the new government, but they also comprise a valuable record of the Soviet past.

Given the persistent ideological hostility between Washington and Moscow, what, in fact, constituted the “First Cold War”<sup>1</sup> was the period during which the

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<sup>1</sup> The term “First Cold War” belongs to Donald E. Davis and Eugene P. Trani whose book *The First Cold War: The Legacy of Woodrow Wilson in U.S.-Soviet Relations* (Columbia, MI: University of Missouri, 2002) addresses the early hostility between the American and Bolshevik governments. As for the historical narratives on the antagonism between the U.S. and Soviet Russia in the first sixteen years of the latter’s existence, the literature is vast. To cite just a few, one could point out Georg Schild, *Between Ideology and Realpolitik: Woodrow Wilson and the Russian Revolution, 1917-1921* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1995), Betty Unterberger, *America’s Siberian Adventure, 1918-*

Americans managed to obtain a great deal of knowledge about the Soviet regime. By 1920's, the East European Division of the U.S. State Department contained the largest repository of information on the Soviet Union. The charismatic chief of this division, Robert F. Kelley, known as "Mr. Eastern Europe" among colleagues due to his superb knowledge of the Russian history, was keen on streamlining the information-gathering by diplomats and ensured that the despatches met the expected criteria for quality. Such oversight had become especially necessary after the American diplomats departed Russia in 1919 and the number of reliable sources on the ground diminished. In 1922, the United States upgraded the consulate in the Latvian capital Riga to the embassy status, and established a section within the embassy that focused on the Soviet Union. Situated 100 miles to the south-west of Petrograd, Riga provided a unique advantage to the American diplomats to observe the political processes in Russia. Staffed by the officers who had close experience with Soviet Russia, from 1922 until 1933, the Russian Section played a pivotal role in acquisition of information and its analysis. Authors Natalie Grant, Claudia Breuer, and Loy Henderson have produced narratives that specifically address the functions of the legation in Riga which served as a primary listening post for the United States.<sup>2</sup>

While a notable portion of the despatches utilized in this dissertation hail from the

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*1920: A Study of National Policy* (Durham, NC: Duke University, 1956), John Richman, *The United States and the Soviet Union: The Decision to Recognize* (Raleigh, NC: Camberleigh and Hall, 1980). Two previous works that dealt with the topic of U.S.-Soviet tensions in the time frame of my focus were Melvin Goodman's "The Diplomacy of Non-Recognition: Soviet American Relations, 1917-1933" (PhD diss., Indiana University, 1972) and David Singer's "The United States Confronts the Soviet Union: The Rise and Fall of the Policy of Non-Recognition" (PhD diss., Loyola University, 1973).

<sup>2</sup> See Natalie Grant, "The Russian Section: A Window on the Soviet Union," *Diplomatic History* 2 (1978), Claudia Breuer, *Die 'Russische Section' in Riga* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag Stuttgart, 1995), George W. Baer ed., *A Question of Trust: The Origins U.S. -Soviet Diplomatic Relations - The Memoirs of Loy W. Henderson* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1986).

Latvian capital, the American consulates in other countries, particularly those in Sweden, Germany, Poland, Finland, China, and Turkey richly contributed to the knowledge about the conditions in the Soviet Union. Yet much of these latter documents have rarely been incorporated into the small body of academic publications that utilized the U.S. diplomatic despatches. In this dissertation I have sought to remedy that shortcoming.

Certainly, the diplomatic despatches were not the only source of information about the USSR. But given their official status, these were the documents that reached the tables of the policy makers in Washington and influenced their attitudes. Such documents could include a memo from the U.S. ambassador in Russia when Americans were still there in the immediate post-revolution period, a report from a low-ranking consul at a provincial Chinese city, or even an article in an obscure Swedish newspaper. It could be the minutiae of a conversation with a farmer or a simple technician who worked at a Soviet factory. This dissertation is the story of those who shared their personal accounts of Russia. It is about writers, doctors, engineers and unskilled workers who went to the USSR for various reasons and came back with their accounts about the Soviet realities. It is also the story of high to low-level diplomats who labored under sometimes intense circumstances to obtain information. The American diplomats were trained and sent to the region to survey Russia and record its present. During the revolution and the ensuing civil war, the Americans were on the ground and experienced the events as they unfolded before their eyes. Later, they watched Soviet Russia from the immediate neighborhood through the eyes of those traveling in and out of the USSR. Naturally, the observers'

views were affected by the prejudices that predated their arrival to Russia, and their narratives, regardless of any efforts to retain objectivity, were limited in scope. The characters of this dissertation were the products of their time and circumstances. After all, there was only so much that one person could visualize or experience at a time. But altogether these despatches comprise an informative collage of narratives with a specific historical value.

As late as the middle of the twentieth century, for most Westerners, in the words of Winston Churchill, Russia remained “a riddle wrapped in a mystery inside an enigma.” However, the literature pertaining to the Western visitors’ perception of Russia had been rich for some time. From early 1500s, when the English merchants first came into contact with Russians until early 20-th century, travelers’ accounts were crucial in providing some picture of the realities. In that sense, one could view this dissertation as addressing series of mini-reports by the contemporaries of Richard Chancellor, Sir Jerome Horsey, Friedrich von Herbertstein – Western diplomats in the old Russian Empire whose accounts of that country not only made an indelible impact on the way Russia came to be perceived by Westerners, but also added to historical knowledge about Russia’s past. Authors Anthony Cross and Marshall Poe, in particular, have produced valuable narratives which emphasize the historical significance of the, so to say, earliest diplomatic despatches.<sup>3</sup> As Tsarist Russia entered the modern age, such visits by Western men became more numerous, among which the best known is the voyage by French nobleman Astolphe de Custine whose perceptions of the Russian society, some American diplomatic observers would

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<sup>3</sup> See Anthony Cross, *Russia Under Western Eyes, 1517-1825* (London: Elek Books, 1971), and Marshall Poe, *A People Born to Slavery: Russia in Early Modern European Ethnography, 1476-1748* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2000).

argue, were relevant to their own experiences. “Like Custine, we Americans in Moscow felt ourselves in a profoundly different civilization. His observations, as fresh as yesterday, despite their age of a century, served to bring the Soviet Union into perspective better than any of our previous readings, studies and observations,” remarked Walter Bedell Smith, who had an opportunity to serve as an American ambassador in Stalin’s USSR.<sup>4</sup>

Given its pariah status, the Soviet Union increasingly became reclusive in contrast to the late Tsarist Russia, where, beginning from the reforms by Alexander II until the downfall of Nicholas I, there existed greater exchange of visitors and ideas with the West. The Bolsheviks’ unconcealed hostility to the bourgeois West and their proclaimed desire to spread Communist revolution throughout the world was a strong repellent in the already fragile ties with the West. Less than a year after the Bolshevik takeover, a great majority of Western diplomats had withdrawn from the Soviet territories. Those who remained behind or resumed work were isolated and their actions constantly monitored by the Soviet security apparatus. On the other hand, Russia’s revolutionary character fueled attraction of great many Western leftists who visualized the Soviet Union as the symbol of socialism’s impending victory over an unjust capitalist order. As such, the Soviet Union, guided by a government agency whose specific purpose was to present a desired image of the Communist motherland for the rest of the world, drew visitors who were eager to see socialism in progress, and also those, who for different motives, chose to participate in the construction of a new society. American historians Sylvia Margulies, David Cauter and Paul Hollander

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<sup>4</sup> Walter B. Smith in Introduction to *The Journals of the Marquis de Custine: Journey for Our Time* (New York: Pellegrini & Cudahy, 1951), 7.



have shed much light into the motives and visions of those who went to the Soviet Union in search of hope and returned with misleading accounts of the Soviet realities.<sup>5</sup> In the years since the collapse of the USSR, various narratives addressing the early Soviet experiences of British diplomats, German travelers and French intellectuals have been produced which, similar to this dissertation, were more oriented to depict the existing socio-political conditions in the country than the ideological proclivities of the observers.

While I frequently rely on traveler accounts -- the transcripts of which constituted the bulk of the American diplomatic despatches during the period of non-recognition -- this research focuses on the body of the diplomatic despatches as a whole. In addition to the accounts provided by American and other Western travelers to the USSR, the U.S. diplomats situated in the adjacent countries, particularly in Latvia, obtained newspapers, magazines, and other forms of printed literature which were diligently translated and forwarded to Washington alongside analytical reports. Renowned diplomats of the future such as George F. Kennan and Loy Henderson had responsibilities which involved far more than simply filtering through the raw information that came out of the USSR, but to discern the underlying political and economic trends and interpret the events in a way that would be of practical use to policy makers in Washington. As the Americans found out early on, the Soviet publications could not be trusted for their veracity. But they could be trusted to give indications of the policies pursued by the Soviet leadership.

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<sup>5</sup> See Sylvia Margulies, *Pilgrimage to Russia, The Soviet Union and the Treatment of Foreigners, 1924-1937* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin, 1968), David Cauter, *The Fellow Travelers: Intellectual Friends of Communism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), and Paul Hollander, *Political Pilgrims: Western Intellectuals in Search of the Good Society* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1998).

The essential purpose of this research is to reconstruct the internal conditions in the Soviet Union through the accounts of those who had the ability to observe, compare and, of course, speak out about their impressions – mostly, the foreigners. Hundreds of diplomatic despatches examined in the course of this research describe Soviet conditions with remarkable insight. In the aftermath of the Soviet collapse and the opening of the archives, a substantial body of evidence with regard to the events of the past has surfaced. From the terrible experiences of the Civil War to the famine of collectivization, there is a greater degree of consensus on issues today that were previously the subjects of sometimes heated academic debate. So, more often, information in these despatches confirm some of what is widely known about the Soviet past – persecution, chronic shortages, and famine. An overwhelming number of the examined despatches contain negative verdicts on the Soviet practices and policies. As despatch after despatch testifies, Communism in practice had disastrous economic consequences for the welfare of the population. Liquidation of private property and accumulation of most means of production in the hands of the state almost immediately led to unprecedented famines and destruction of millions of lives. Although the Soviet government’s commitment to Communist principles were somewhat eased during the New Economic Policy, this dissertation finds that at no point did the Soviet leaders lose sight of the objectives of the Bolshevik revolution. Hence the worsening economic conditions throughout mid 1920’s which reached their climax during the deadly campaign of collectivization – ironically, the year in which the United States chose to recognize the Soviet government.

In using the term ‘First Cold War’, I have sought to highlight the political roots of the hostility between the United States and the Soviet Union. Many despatches reemphasize the primacy of Communist ideology in the behavior and policies of Soviet leaders whose allegiance to reengineering human society and undermining non-Communist governments abroad did not waver. The documents examined in the course of this research demonstrate that the communist government such as the one which existed in the Soviet Union, barring extraordinary circumstances, such as the rise of expansionist Nazi Germany, could not have been friends with the United States, at least, not in the long-term. The sixteen years of non-recognition was not accidental or due to stubborn ideological hostility of American leaders, but a deliberate response to the global threat that was the USSR. The American policy makers and recognition opponents in the State Department identified the internal policies of the Soviet government and its proclamations as precursors to the Kremlin’s actions in the international venue and took this position quite seriously. The decision to recognize the Soviet Union by the FDR administration, in effect, disregarded this correlation between domestic actions and international policies, thus coming at the height of the government-initiated famine that killed millions in Ukraine and North Caucasus. In doing so, the American government hoped to accentuate mutual interests over the ideological differences which ultimately proved too resilient.

Above all, these despatches retell the tragic story of the Soviet peoples through a collage of American narratives. For that reason, the dissertation is organized around major events in Soviet history in chronological order. These events

are reflected in the chapters that address the October Revolution, Civil War, New Economic Policy, Stalin's rise to power, Collectivization, and Recognition. In choosing to follow the chronological order, I have attempted to trace the quality of American observation from one point to another, and the change over time. But this is not just a story of the Soviet Union as the Americans saw it, it is also the story of the Soviet Union that was. It is difficult to overestimate the effect of the political upheaval which tore apart the centuries-old social fabric of the society and sought to build an entirely new one based on Marxist ideology. Deeply opposed to Western liberal values, the Bolsheviks were creating a model for the rest of the world to follow. Lenin's proletarian dictatorship promised to build a society where persons would contribute according to their abilities and receive according to their needs. Instead, the inhabitants of the former Russian empire were subjected to calamities unparalleled even by the poor standards of the country's tsarist past. In revisiting the despatches about the Soviet internal affairs, this dissertation sheds light onto horrendous costs that characterized the formative years of the Soviet power.

## Chapter 1: The Rupture: Bolsheviks Seize Power

On November 7, 1917, at five o'clock in the evening, a despatch went out from the U.S. embassy in Petrograd to Washington. In that message, the American Ambassador David Francis informed his superiors at the State Department about the meeting between the embassy secretary Sheldon Whitehouse and *aide de camp* of Alexander Kerensky, the head of the Provisional Government. Kerensky's advisor had just told Whitehouse that the prime minister was on his way to Luga in order to mobilize loyal forces to the government against the Bolsheviks. He acknowledged that Bolsheviks had the virtual control of the city, but reassured his American counterpart that "the whole affair [was] to be liquidated within five days."<sup>6</sup> An hour later, the American embassy issued a second despatch. In it, Francis definitively confirmed that the Bolsheviks controlled "everything" in Petrograd. Expressing his concern about the fates of the Provisional Government's ministers, the American ambassador noted that an incendiary speech had been made by Lenin who "spoke of peace, violently attacked the Bourgeoisie and advocated division of property." According to him, "many newspapers, perhaps all, had been suppressed."<sup>7</sup> What was not mentioned in the despatches, however, was that on the same day, Prime Minister Kerensky had left Petrograd in an American diplomatic car, the automobile of the U.S. assistant military attaché, Captain E. Francis Riggs. Although the whole incident had been accidental, owing to the chance that Kerensky's adjutant Boris Knirsha happened to come across the American's car first instead of that by Italian or

<sup>6</sup> David R. Francis, U.S. Ambassador in Russia, to Robert Lansing, U.S. State Secretary, November 7, 1917, RG 59, File #861.00/632.

<sup>7</sup> Francis to Lansing, November 7, 1917, RG 59, File #861.00/634.

British diplomats, the event was symbolical of the United States' attachment to Russia's first liberal government in history and Washington's ensuing aversion toward the Bolshevik regime.

By the nightfall of November 7, the only important government structure not yet controlled by the Bolshevik forces was the Winter Palace, the seat of the Provisional Government. Early in that morning the Bolshevik forces had made an attempt to capture the building. Having encountered fierce resistance from the junker guards defending the palace, they had retreated. However, that did not prevent Vladimir Lenin, the leader of the Bolshevik Party, from making a declaration from his political headquarters in Smolny to the effect that the Provisional Government had been deposed. At 9 o'clock in the evening, the gunmen under Lenin's command stood poised to fulfill the declaration. As the cruiser Aurora, sitting nearby in the Neva river, began bombarding the Winter Palace, the numerically superior Bolsheviks stormed the building. After several hours of fighting, the defenders of the Provisional Government were told by the ministers to abandon the effort and lay down the arms. The victorious Bolsheviks immediately arrested all the ministers and took them to the Peter and Paul fortress.

On November 8, Washington received a frantic message from the U.S. embassy in Stockholm, Sweden. According to Ambassador Ira Morris, all telegrams coming out of Petrograd were being issued by the Bolsheviks and nothing had been heard from the Americans in the city. "In the view of the fact that Embassies there may not be in telegraphic communication with their governments," Morris conveyed to the State Department, "I shall try to keep you advised of Russian situation as far as

possible.”<sup>8</sup> From this point on, most of the despatches regarding the situation immediately after the Bolshevik takeover were to come from the U.S. embassy in Sweden. In purely geographical terms, as one of the closest location to the Russian capital, the Stockholm bureau assumed the duties to inform the American government about the rapid developments in revolutionary Russia.

Angered and frustrated by the prospect of Bolshevik power, U.S. Ambassador David Francis kept trying to communicate with Washington. However, his first full despatch to arrive in Washington was on November 17 -- ten days after the Bolshevik takeover. Until then, the American envoy had to rely on couriers and haphazard telegraphic lines between Petrograd and Stockholm. The disruption in telegraph communication and closure of nearly all non-Bolshevik newspapers significantly obstructed the view of unfolding events. It is evident from the despatches that for about a month following the Bolshevik seizure of power, nobody had a clear idea about the political realities in Russia. In the haze and confusion of the power vacuum following the collapse of the Provisional Government, much of the information was based on personal eyewitness stories which were inevitably limited in range and perspective.

In the immediate days following November 7, diplomatic despatches made little reference to Bolshevik newspapers which were rightly assumed to be airing little other than propaganda. While censorship had been prevalent in pre-revolutionary Russia, the Bolshevik seizure of power marked a decisive departure from the previous practices both in scope and intentions. One of the first acts of the Provisional

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<sup>8</sup> Ira Nelson Morris, U.S. Ambassador in Sweden, to Robert Lansing, November 8, 1917, RG 59, File #861.00/629.

Government had been to abolish the Central Administration for Press Affairs, which in effect abolished censorship.<sup>9</sup> The only requirement from directors of the publication was to register their product with the government. In contrast, on the very first night of their incumbency, the Bolsheviks moved to “close down eight bourgeois newspapers, and also adopted a special resolution about the press which called for temporary shutdown of all bourgeois newspapers.”<sup>10</sup> Two days later, on November 9, Sovnarkom (The Council of People’s Commissars) issued a decree on the press that read: “It is common knowledge that the bourgeois press is one of the most powerful weapons in the hands of the bourgeoisie... it is no less dangerous at this moment than bombs or machine guns...”<sup>11</sup> First, applied mostly in regard to non-Marxist publications, these restrictive measures soon extended to every print outlet that was deemed disloyal to the Bolshevik Party.

While disappointed by the transpiring events around him, the deposition of the Provisional Government did not take the American ambassador by surprise. Having monitored precarious state of the Provisional Government throughout its short tenure, Francis had gained some prior knowledge about radical adversaries faced by Prime Minister Kerensky. As a representative of a government allied with Russia at war against Germany, Francis resented Lenin and his followers from the start. The Bolshevik agitation for separate peace with the Germans seriously undermined the Allied efforts to win the Great War. The fact that the Bolshevik leader had spent

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<sup>9</sup> Peter Kenez, *The Birth of the Propaganda State: Soviet Methods of Mass Mobilization, 1917-1929* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

<sup>10</sup> Mikhail V. Zelenov, *Apparat TsK RKP(b)-VKP(b), tsenzura i istoricheskaja nauka v 1920-e gody* (Nizhni Novgorod: Nizhpoligraph, 2000), 62.

<sup>11</sup> Arlen V. Blium, *Za kulisami “Ministerstva Pravdy”: Tainaia istoriia sovestskoi tsenzury, 1917-1929* (St. Petersburg: Akademicheskii Proekt, 1994), 35.



much of his exile in the territories controlled by Wilhelm Kaiser and had been facilitated by the German government to come to Russia strengthened Francis' suspicions about Vladimir Lenin being a German agent. At the same time, Francis was mindful that just as the Germans were using Lenin to achieve their ends, the Bolshevik leader saw Wilhelm Kaiser as a useful partner in his goal to advance his own radical ideas. "While I have no doubt that Lenin was a German agent from the beginning," the ambassador would later write in his memoir, "I believe and so wired the Department [of State] that his real purpose was promotion of worldwide social revolution."<sup>12</sup> Indeed, shortly after the November coup, Francis wrote to State Secretary Robert Lansing: "I don't know if they are German agents or not.... I think Lenin and Trotsky are reckless adventurers and playing bluff game."<sup>13</sup> Clearly, it was the Bolshevik outlook of society and its universal ideas about the world that most revolted the ambassador and his superiors at the State Department.

On the other end, in Washington, the U.S. Secretary of State Robert Lansing, having received his first cable from the Associated Press, jotted down in his diary: "The Bolsheviks have overthrown the government."<sup>14</sup> In the absence of relevant regional bureaux or divisions which streamlined the information between the embassies and the foreign policy chief (the Division of Russian Affairs was not established until August of 1919), Lansing had few options other than awaiting a cable from the envoys in Russia or a handful media outlets.<sup>15</sup> With his conservative

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<sup>12</sup> David R. Francis, *Russia from the American Embassy: April, 1916 - November, 1918* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1921), 226.

<sup>13</sup> Francis to Lansing, December 9, 1917, RG 59, File #861.00/786.

<sup>14</sup> G.H. Sevostianov, *Moskva-Vashington: Na puti k priznaniu, 1918-1933* (Moscow: Nauka, 2004), 9.

<sup>15</sup> As late as 1920's, only "about seven hundred people worked in Department's divisions in Washington" -- a far cry from the complexities of the modern State Department with numerous divisions and sections which altogether employ more than ten thousand individuals. See Robert H.

political outlook, Lansing generally agreed with Francis' assessment of the situation. Often described as the "leading warrior against Bolshevism," Lansing relied on Francis' counsel in reaching his conclusions about the Soviets.<sup>16</sup> In his view, the Bolshevik's proclaimed desire to spread revolution throughout the world and their plan to turn the nascent Soviet state into a launch pad represented grave danger to world peace. The Bolsheviks' increasing enthusiasm for resorting to violence fueled Lansing's suspicions about the nature of the regime. Most of all, having invested political capital in the success of the Provisional Government, the Secretary of State was severely disappointed at the Bolsheviks' opportunism in overthrowing the first democratic government in Russian history.

While President Woodrow Wilson shared Lansing's apprehensions about Bolsheviks, there were two main problems with regard to communication between the commander in chief and his foreign policy apparatus. First, Wilson was too busy focusing on the Western European front to pay sufficient attention to the matters unfolding in Petrograd.<sup>17</sup> While Lansing made efforts to maintain communication with the American diplomats in Moscow, according William Allison, President "seldom asked for, and rarely read, embassy reports."<sup>18</sup> Secondly, instead of his diplomats, Wilson frequently deferred to personal envoys and friends when making

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Ferrell, *The American Secretaries of State and Their Diplomacy* (New York, Cooper Square Publishers Inc., 1963), Vol. XI, 26.

<sup>16</sup> Norman Saul, *Friends or Foes?: The United States and Soviet Russia, 1921-1941* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2006), 6.

<sup>17</sup> "He was much more concerned with the war on the Western front and with such matters as the Allied demand for 100 American division, the efforts of the Allies to amalgamate American soldiers into Allied units and the possibility of new Allied fronts in Italy and Macedonia," observed Eugene Trani in "Woodrow Wilson and the Decision to Intervene in Russia: A Reconsideration," *The Journal of Modern History* (Sep., 1976), 442.

<sup>18</sup> William Allison, *American Diplomats in Russia: Case Studies in Orphan Diplomacy, 1916-1919* (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger, 1997), 5.

decisions in such matters. His close relationship with individuals such as Colonel Edward House, John Spargo and George Creel had more influence on Wilson's understanding of Soviet Russia than Robert Lansing or David Francis.<sup>19</sup> In the case of American socialist leader John Spargo, his attitude toward Bolsheviks did not greatly differ from that of Robert Lansing. Convinced that the path to socialism lay in gradual reforms rather than revolution, Spargo went as far as describing [Bolshevik Russia] as "the greatest problem now confronting the American people." According to Ronald Radosh, "Spargo urged Lansing to give vigorous support to anti-Bolshevik forces within Russia; the overthrow of Bolsheviks if necessary."<sup>20</sup> But such incidents of coalescence did not alleviate the structural problems in President Wilson's handling of the Russian policy.

Generally, Wilson's own attitude toward Bolsheviks was not as hostile or palpable as that of his State Secretary. According to historian Eugene Trani, who does not hide his displeasure with the "hard-liners" at the State Department, "Lansing greatly feared Bolshevism and was far more alarmed than Wilson about its possible implications."<sup>21</sup> This difference of attitudes was at times reflected in conflicts such as the one which arose between George Creel, head of the U.S. Committee on Public Information (created by Woodrow Wilson for propaganda purposes during the war) and Robert Lansing. Having dispatched journalists Arthur Bullard and Edgar Sisson

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<sup>19</sup> Author Claude E. Fike blamed this reality on the ineffectiveness of David Francis: "Thus there emerges the picture of Wilson and House making Russian policy based largely on information from unofficial sources while the official sources were rendered ineffectual by Ambassador Francis' lack of vision and initiative and by various personal factors which left the state department largely by-passed," yet quickly adding that "Wilson later came to regret some of these decisions." Claude E. Fike, "The Influence of the Creel Committee and the American Red Cross on Russian-American Relations, 1917-19," *The Journal of Modern History* (June, 1959), 100.

<sup>20</sup> Ronald Radosh, "John Spargo and Wilson's Russia Policy, 1920," *The Journal of American History*, (December, 1965), 553.

<sup>21</sup> Eugene Trani, "Woodrow Wilson and the Decision to Intervene in Russia: A Reconsideration," 449.

as the representatives of the committee in revolutionary Russia, Creel systematically interfered with the activities of Lansing's subordinates in that country. Creel's instruction to his envoys "to have a free hand, using [their] own judgment" irritated the Secretary and hurt the latter's confidence in the President.<sup>22</sup> By relying on personal representatives and his own academic prowess, Wilson ignored the diplomats to the point that he "completely alienated himself from his State Department."<sup>23</sup> On the other hand, the president's inability and unwillingness to consolidate the decision-making in one set of hands led to a bit of chaos in which very few felt authorized enough to determine the course of policy with regard to the Soviet government. In Trani's view, ultimately, Wilson "allowed the State Department to handle operations concerning Soviet Russia, proof by itself that Wilson assigned low priority to that country." The paradoxical effect of Wilson's indifference to both State Department and Russia was that "Lansing and the State Department emerged as decisive American forces" in shaping the actual policy toward the Bolshevik government.<sup>24</sup> Subsequently, Lansing's confidant on Russian matters, David Francis, enjoyed greater degree of freedom in his actions, and perhaps influenced the policies in a way he could not have otherwise.

A native son of the American Midwest, Francis first established his career by opening a grain company together with his brother in St. Louis, Missouri. With his business booming and married to the daughter of a wealthy railroad magnate, shortly afterwards, Francis began to work his way through more prestigious layers of the

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<sup>22</sup> Claude E. Fike, "The Influence of the Creel Committee and the American Red Cross on Russian-American Relations, 1917-19," 95.

<sup>23</sup> William Allison, *American Diplomats in Russia*, 5.

<sup>24</sup> Eugene Trani, "Woodrow Wilson and the Decision to Intervene in Russia: A Reconsideration," 452.

society. By 1883, Francis became the president of St. Louis Merchants Exchange. Soon, Francis was to be elected mayor of St. Louis, and consequently, the governor of the state of Missouri. Francis' political as well as monetary capital allowed him to mingle with leading politicians at a national level. In fact, Francis owed his diplomatic career to such connections when in 1916 president Woodrow Wilson turned to his benefactor from Missouri to fill the vacant post of ambassador in Russia. As some historians have pointed out -- George F. Kennan being the more prominent among such voices -- Ambassador Francis may have lacked the qualifications to assess the situation in this extremely distinct land where he found himself, but as his record shows, the ambassador was sufficiently equipped with background in business and politics to appreciate what did and did not serve the interests of his country. In the words of historian James Libbey, "of all the political misfits which the United States willed upon the Russian people as American ambassador, Francis stood higher than most as a man eminently qualified for the post in 1916."<sup>25</sup> For the rest of the duration of his stay in the beleaguered country, Francis did his utmost to salvage what he considered to be in the best interests of both America and Russia. In his recognition of the Bolshevik capacity to overthrow the Provisional Government, a day before Lenin's followers seized power, Francis even had gone as far as requesting American troop deployment to serve as a stabilizing force.

As many of the despatches coming from Petrograd suggest, Francis was convinced that with their destructive ideology and practices, the Bolsheviks were doomed to failure. In his view, it was only a matter of time before this group of

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<sup>25</sup> James K. Libbey, *Alexander Gumberg and Soviet-American Relations, 1917-1933* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1977), 2.

zealots so alien to the Russian social order were stripped from power. With barely two percent of the population comprised of workers, the idea of a proletarian revolution seemed absurd. One did not have to be a Russian expert to ascertain the disastrous prospects of a Marxist experiment in a society that had arguably missed the industrial revolution. Indeed, the Bolsheviks' attempt to put a secular-utopian Western ideology into practice in a deeply religious and patently backward country struck Ambassador Francis as illogical. This line of thought was not only characteristic of Francis, but most Western diplomats who lived in and observed Russia.

According to Michael Hughes, who studied the experience of British diplomats in Russia during the times of great change, “the Bolshevik leadership was still a surprisingly unknown quantity to the British officials at the time of the November Revolution.” While the British Ambassador in Petrograd George Buchanan did not maintain close contacts with his American counterpart, his understanding and interpretation of the events were similar to those of Francis in many regards. “The Bolshevik regime was viewed as a threat both to Britain’s national interests and to the values of civil society.”<sup>26</sup> Unlike Francis, Sir George Buchanan was a career diplomat who meticulously observed diplomatic etiquettes and had a deeper academic background in Russian history and politics. In terms of belief and character, Buchanan was said to represent “all that the best of England stood for – honor, frankness, a deeply understanding sympathy,”<sup>27</sup> and above all, a soul committed to liberal political order. Ambassador Buchanan was disappointed by

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<sup>26</sup> Michael Hughes, *Inside the Enigma: British Officials in Russia, 1900-1939* (London: Hambledon Press, 1997), 122.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

the gains of radical leftists whose dictatorial agenda and behavior threatened hopes for liberal Russia. But like Francis, in the immediate days following the Bolshevik coup, “his concern about the political situation was ameliorated by his belief that insurgents would not be able to hold on to power for any significant length of time.... A few hours before the Bolshevik seizure of power began, Buchanan had told the [British] Foreign Office that even if it were successful, the new government could ‘not be of long duration and would before long provoke counter-revolution,’ a view that was shared by most foreign diplomats in Russia.”<sup>28</sup>

There was no doubt in the minds of American diplomats residing in Russia that the Bolshevik phenomenon was wholly ephemeral owing its existence to the anarchy, hunger and social upheavals associated with the war and fall of the centuries-old dynasty. That a regime founded upon such radical and quixotic ideals could not survive too long raised little doubt. The signs of this impression was evident in a despatch after despatch being sent to Washington from American envoys throughout Russia and neighboring countries which self-assuredly spoke of the Bolsheviks’ imminent demise. In his despatches, the American ambassador to Sweden, Ira Morris reported of the advances being made by the Kerensky forces against Bolsheviks.<sup>29</sup> While admitting that most of these reports had not been confirmed, it is noteworthy that nearly all such despatches exuded positive tone in regard to the developments in and around Petrograd. Peppered with triumphant statements such as “Bolsheviks defeated in Gatchina,” “the new government nearly ended,” “Bolsheviks badly beaten near Tsarskoe Selo,” the despatches seemed to

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 117.

<sup>29</sup> Morris to Robert Lansing, November 9-17, 1917, RG 59, Files #861.00/643, 651 and 658.

reinforce the predetermined view that the Reds were going to lose. American consul in Batum, F. Willoughby Smith, unwilling to call Bolsheviks by their proper title, announced that “Caucasus population and army refuse to unite with Maximalist movement” yet at the same time expressing his doubt about the former’s ability to hold out “much more than five days without financial aid.”<sup>30</sup> Similar anti-Bolshevik sentiments were being expressed by the American Consul in Kiev who reported about the armed preparations to oppose the Bolsheviks.

More often, though, observers confused their own wishes with the realities on the ground. The actual outlook, while not quite as rosy for the Bolsheviks, was more bleak for the opposition, particularly the forces led by Alexander Kerensky. Trying to regain momentum, Kerensky regrouped in Gatchina, planning for an attack on Bolshevik-controlled Tsarskoe Selo. But having lost power, Kerensky’s lack of credibility spawned distrust and open insubordination among the generals who had initially professed loyalty to the Provisional Government. In his memoir, Kerensky attributed many of the failures at Gatchina and in previous instances, to chance and betrayal. Yet his own account of the events makes it clear that the Bolshevik tide was simply too strong for the Provisional Government to overcome. The popular support upon which Kerensky had relied in the initial stages of his power had almost completely evaporated, in his mind, giving way to the “misleading activities of agents-provocateurs and traitors.”<sup>31</sup> By November 13, Kerensky was far from the position of vying for power. Instead he was desperate trying to save his own life from those whom Kerensky correctly suspected were prepared to hand him over to

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<sup>30</sup> F. Willoughby Smith, U.S. Consul in Batum, to Lansing, November 09, 1917, RG 59, File #861.00/639.

<sup>31</sup> Alexander F. Kerensky, *The Catastrophe* (New York: D. Appleton & Co., 1927), 353.



the Bolsheviks at any time. Kerensky's own description of the situation aptly summarizes the impending doom: "The rats are desperately deserting the sinking ship. There is not a soul in my rooms, only yesterday filled to capacity. There is only gravelike silence and calm. We are alone."<sup>32</sup> Shortly after these feelings were recorded, Gatchina fell to the Bolsheviks. Kerensky barely managed to escape.

Given the Bolsheviks' inability to take immediate and firm control of a country stretching eight times zone, it is natural that the diplomatic representatives doubted the ability of the Reds to subdue their opponents. Having abolished the tsarist army, and relying upon a small force of Latvian regiments, sailors and untrained workers, in many foreign observers' eyes, the Bolsheviks stood little chance against adversaries whose ranks contained well-known politicians, affluent social leaders and more importantly, experienced generals. Yet with their declarations for peace and justice, the Bolshevik slogans seemed to resonate with various segments of a society too exhausted to carry on as before. The war had inflicted severe miseries upon an already destitute populace. In the despatches preceding the Bolshevik coup, it is evident that food shortages had given rise to a charged political atmosphere in which most opponents of the existing order could find fertile ground for agitation.<sup>33</sup> These food shortages did not just affect the civilians; they were acutely felt in the military which was supposed to hold out against Russia's external enemies. Under such conditions it is understandable that ordinary Russians

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 363.

<sup>33</sup> Herbert Sidney Gott of YMCA in Russia to Post Wheeler, U.S. Charge d'Affaires in Tokyo, October 17, 1917, RG 59, File #861.00/692. Based on "close study of the Russian society and the daily life," Gott reported of weariness and complete misunderstanding of America's intentions" in Russia which he likened to a sick man surrounded by elder brothers in Europe who kept demanding more of the impossible and a younger brother America which in the capacity of a doctor struggled to help. Gott had ended his report on Russia with a gloomy prediction that "unless U.S. takes certain action something dramatic will happen."

felt little desire to stand up either for the Kerensky government which pledged to continue the disastrous war or against determined Bolsheviks who appeared quite willing to use all necessary means to retain power.

While the junker resistance in Moscow and elsewhere encountered violent response, the Bolshevik takeover of Petrograd had proceeded with comparatively little violence and destruction. It is clear from the despatches that the armed Bolsheviks took particular caution not to harm foreigners. Throughout the dangerous period following the revolution, American representatives in Petrograd and Moscow constantly noted that they did not feel to be targeted by the Bolsheviks. Nor did the Bolsheviks seek to needlessly antagonize the neutral populace. Their immediate objective after the revolution was to consolidate their gains in the vortex of the Russian statehood and exclusively focus attention on those defined as immediate enemies. To that end, the Bolsheviks were somewhat successful. A despatch on November 19, reported that while there was fighting in Moscow, Petrograd was quiet, theaters were open and trains were running.<sup>34</sup> Yet in the same despatch it was also noted that popular demonstrations were held in the city demanding freedom of press and denouncing the Bolshevik regime as more tyrannical than that of Tsar Nicholas II.

Amid the chaos which ensued the fall of the Provisional Government, initial reports almost ubiquitously understated the Bolshevik strength. Not until November 18 did ambassador Morris for the first time admit that the Bolshevik power was strong and that Lenin's followers were not being defeated in the engagements with

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<sup>34</sup> Morris to Robert Lansing, November 19, 1917, RG 59, File #861.00/682.

Cossacks or other anti-Bolshevik elements.<sup>35</sup> There is little information in these despatches about the make-up of the forces loyal to Kerensky government, other than the junkers. As for the regular army rank and file, in one despatch an American observer noted that during their battle against Bolsheviks, Kerensky's men were surprised to see that the Reds were headed by veteran army officers. The most ironic aspect of this phenomenon was the rationale of the army officers who felt that Kerensky government was departing from the time-honored traditions of the Russian armed forces. "These officers stated that Kerensky's destruction of all army discipline forced them to oppose him," reported an observer.<sup>36</sup> Many others could have been influenced by the genuine content of the Bolshevik message which promised an end to centuries old caste system and the grueling war in which most Russians felt being used as pawns by Britain, France, and possibly the United States. One delegation reported that the entire army was now on the side of the new regime "knowing that should Kerensky regain power, Bourgeoisie rule and continuation of war would ensue." It is clear that by 1917, the Russian society had exhausted its capacity to fight against external enemies. In the months ahead, it would become apparent that along with the will to stand up to the German invaders, most Russians had forfeited their ability to oppose the Bolsheviks' gradual usurpation of power.

Beginning with December of 1917, a sense began to take hold that the Bolshevik power was there to stay and needed to be reckoned with. Soon enough it became evident that the Bolshevik declarations about "peace, justice and bread" did not translate into immediate alleviation of the ongoing suffering. Tired of war and

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<sup>35</sup> Morris to Robert Lansing, November 18, 1917, RG 59, File #861.00/670.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

hunger, some may have taken a chance on the Bolsheviks. But nearly a month after the Provisional Government had been deposed, life had not changed for the better. In fact, as despatches from Petrograd and Moscow indicate “food was becoming scarcer daily, bread ration lowered to three quarters pound for two days.”<sup>37</sup> The dire situation gave way to hunger demonstrations which were promptly suppressed by the Bolsheviks. By all accounts, the food shortages had become more intolerable than at any time before the Bolshevik takeover. To be fair, much of the hardship stemmed from the anarchy and lawlessness that reigned in the streets of Petrograd and Moscow. Yet with their avowed antipathy to all political traditions including laws and regulations coupled with the inclination to rule by decree, the Bolsheviks only helped deepen the crisis – which in turn, alienated many.<sup>38</sup> Increasingly, the Bolsheviks began to resort to terror methods and other forms of violence in dealing with those who dissented with the regime. As the smoke of November 7 began to clear up, foreign observers, too, began to formulate exact ideas about the nature of the emerging regime. “Having overthrown the Provisional Government by armed revolt, lacking a majority support,” wrote American Consul in Moscow Maddin Summers, “they can only hold the power by sheer terror:”

“Their first act of power was to imprison the former ministers all of whom were sincere democrats. The second was to confiscate all hostile newspapers, not only the few monarchical newspapers but also the constitutional democratic and even the moderate socialist newspapers.

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<sup>37</sup> Maddin Summers, U.S. Consul in Moscow, to Francis, December 17, RG 59, File #861.00/619.

<sup>38</sup> In their drive to tear down the old order, Bolsheviks rejected the mere notion of law well until early 1920's. “This purely destructive phase of the Revolution, carried out in fulfillment of Marx's injunction not merely to take over but “smash” the old order,” observed historian Richard Pipes, “found expression in decrees but it was accomplished mainly by spontaneous anarchism of the population, which the Bolsheviks did their utmost to encourage.” Richard Pipes, *A Concise History of the Russian Revolution* (New York: Vintage Books, 1995), 151-52.

This assault on the liberty of the press was especially serious at the time of general election. They have complete control of posts and telegraphs and are using this power to falsify popular opinion.”<sup>39</sup>

Next to the ambassador in Petrograd, Consul General Maddin Summers played a pivotal role in formulating initial images about the Bolshevik regime in the American minds. Summers’ political ideology was similar to that of Francis. Given his conservative outlook on the limitations of human nature and classic liberal inclinations, Summers despised Bolsheviks. Lenin’s scheme of social engineering was anathema to a person who found it difficult to digest even the February revolution. “There are so many varied phases of the Russian character and race which one has to consider before we can say what will be the end... We must remember that those taking part now in this revolution are not by any means the mass of the Russian people,” Summers had written in reference to those who had toppled the Tsar.<sup>40</sup> With the Provisional Government in shambles and radical leftists now at the helm of power, in the mind of Summers, Russia’s prospects seemed catastrophic.

In addition to his solid background in diplomatic services, the Consul’s marriage to Natalia Gorainova, a daughter of a Russian aristocrat, enabled him to develop contacts deep within the high Russian society. Through these contacts Summers gained a perspective to the events that was often unavailable to those for whom Russia always remained a foreign land of foreign peoples. Furthermore, during the days of Bolshevik takeover the Moscow in which Maddin Summers stayed experienced lot more violence and bloodshed without the varnish of intellectual

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<sup>39</sup> Maddin Summers to Francis, November 28, 1917 RG 59, File #861.00/740.

<sup>40</sup> William Allison, *American Diplomats in Russia*, 79.

appeal upon which Bolshevik leaders heavily relied in cosmopolitan Petrograd. “In general,” George F. Kennan writes, “The revolutionary pathos that characterized the November events in Petrograd – the fierce intellectual fervor, the sincere internationalism, the almost good-natured humanity – was absent, or much less evident in Moscow, where events bore more the nature of a brutal outburst of social bitterness and where Bolshevik element, reinforced by ordinary prisoners liberated from jails appeared rather as semi-criminal rabble rousers than as daring intellectual idealists.”<sup>41</sup> Against the evolving axis of Americans in Russia who soon began to advocate closer relations with the Bolshevik regime, Maddin Summers comprised an important column of opposition until his death in May of 1918.

In the weeks following the Bolshevik seizure of power, U.S. Ambassador David Francis refrained from any action that could be interpreted as a sign of recognition. Having turned down the Bolshevik detachment which was sent by the Soviet government to protect the embassy perimeters, Francis conveyed the official position of his government which held that the Provisional Government possessed sole authority over Russian territories. Even though in a matter of months it became quite evident that the Provisional Government controlled next to nothing, this line of policy was officially maintained for nearly five years until 1922 when Russian Ambassador Boris A. Bakhmetev formally discharged himself of the duties conferred upon by the Kerensky administration. The implications of the non-recognition policy also affected America’s relations vis-à-vis Finland and numerous other former Russian colonies that declared independence from the Russian Empire for some time.

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<sup>41</sup> George F. Kennan, *Soviet-American Relations 1917-1920: Russia Leaves the War* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1956), 44.

America's adherence to "One Russia under the Provisional Government" policy did not, however, prevent individual contacts between American personnel in Russia and the top Soviet officials.

On December 1, 1917 chief of the American military mission in Russia, Brigadier General William J. Judson, became the first American official to meet with the Bolshevik leader Leon Trotsky, the Soviet Foreign Affairs Commissar. Most analysts believe, the American was motivated to initiate contact with the Bolsheviks out of fear that a total absence of ties would lead to Russia's irreversible departure from the alliance at war. With the Germans poised for offensive on the Eastern front, the Allied officials feared that the Bolsheviks would simply surrender. Upon his meeting with Trotsky in which the two men cordially discussed various issues relating to Russia's duties as an ally, Judson concluded: "My interview was very satisfactory but I recognize that there may be an aftermath of great personal embarrassment if Trotsky makes a speech and misquotes or misrepresents me."<sup>42</sup> Later that day, Trotsky gave a fiery speech before a Bolshevik audience in which he mocked the capitalists who had come to convince him of "imperialist America's platonic sympathy for the Russian nation."<sup>43</sup> The exact effect of this speech on further of U.S.-Bolshevik contacts is difficult to gauge. It certainly could not have helped to dissuade the American government from its decision to shun those in Soviet government viewed as reckless adventurers leading Russia and possibly the world to the edge of precipice. In fact, as soon as the Department of State found out about the meeting, General Judson was reprimanded and explicitly barred from further contact

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<sup>42</sup> Neil V. Salzman, ed., *Russia in War and Revolution: General William V. Judson's Accounts from Petrograd, 1917-1918* (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 1998), 158.

<sup>43</sup> Francis to Lansing, December 1, 1917 RG 59, File #861.00/758

with Soviet officials. Secretary Lansing's vision of Bolshevism as "the most hideous and monstrous thing conceived by human mind"<sup>44</sup> apparently did not match with the realist outlook of General Judson and few other Americans who believed that effective coordination with the Bolshevik leadership could serve the Allied interests.

There are indications that this important encounter may have been authorized by Ambassador Francis himself. The feeling of isolation, uselessness and concern for safety, so evident in the despatches, could have prompted the ambassador to try opening up some channels of communication with the people in charge of Russia, or whatever was left of it by then. However, mostly consistent in his disdain for the Bolsheviks, Ambassador Francis never became as excited about the prospects of U.S.- Bolshevik relations as General Judson did.

General Judson's activities in Russia were further complicated by the fact that as a chief of the military mission and the military attaché at the embassy, he reported to two different superiors. In the latter position he was subordinate to Ambassador Francis, yet as a chief of independent military mission, he reported directly to the War Department. Though never an insubordinate diplomat, General Judson strongly differed in his views of the Russian situation from both of his supervisors. As a military affairs expert, Judson's primary interest was the state of the Russian army and the fate of the war in general. To that end, Judson had a difficult time grappling with stern refusal of his government to engage with the Bolsheviks. In his communication with the ambassador and the War Department he insisted that some form of contact should be maintained with the Bolsheviks – at least in order to

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<sup>44</sup> David W. McFadden, *Alternative Paths: Soviets and Americans, 1917-1920* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 54.



provide them with basic means to withstand the German onslaught. In order to facilitate such a rapport between the American diplomatic representatives he stated that the latter should at least “observe all reasonable policy regulation which those make who are in control of the city [Petrograd].”<sup>45</sup> In his determination to see Germany defeated, Judson’s concern was purely of military nature. At the same time he was well aware that not everyone within the embassy, and certainly not within the State Department viewed matters from the same prism. In his December 3, 1917 memorandum to Ambassador Francis he “respectfully asked” that orders be given which would enable him “to see important cables passing between Washington and the Embassy.” “If I can conveniently see the Embassy cables to which I refer above,” he wrote, “I can certainly better advise the Department of our Government with which I correspond.”<sup>46</sup>

General Judson was no novice when it came to the Russian or international affairs in general. A graduate of the United States Military Academy at the West Point, Judson first began his career as an engineer at the Army Corps of Engineers. Following the Spanish-American War, the U.S. forces had taken control of Puerto-Rico. Placed in charge of numerous public works projects, Judson gained valuable experience in dealing with foreign cultures and learned to operate on different cultural milieus. While his success created future opportunities for representation of his country in other, more important duties in Manchuria and St. Petersburg during the Russo-Japanese War in 1905, Judson had left his post in Puerto Rico with deep skepticism of expansionist and imperialist policies. Yet, Judson always retained a

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<sup>45</sup> Neil V. Salzman, *Russia in War and Revolution* 160.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid*, 160.

realist outlook “fully convinced of the necessity of every major state in the international arena to maintain its military and build and alliance network unmistakably capable of self-defense”<sup>47</sup> – an outlook which was further reinforced by his observations of combat operations taking place between the major powers at the time. Compounded with this experience was his close interaction with the Russians and the foundation of a life-time interest in Russia’s political, economic and social realities. To be sure, Judson admired Russia and rooted for its success. But he had no illusion about the potential of a nation with such tortuous past to easily overcome the obstacles to creating a liberal society in the mirror image of his homeland. On June 12, 1917, when Judson returned to the Russian capital as a member of the Root Mission – whose primary task was to express strong support for the Provisional Government – he was equally excited about the possibilities for Russia’s rejuvenation. But having stayed there as the American representative, he came to believe in the need to make the best of a very difficult situation. “The great trouble with Russia today,” he wrote in September of 1917, “is the lack of discipline everywhere; on the railroads, in the factories and at the mines as well as in the Army.”<sup>48</sup> Convinced that the fate of the Russian army would determine the fate of the war itself, Judson was not happy with the way in which the Provisional Government managed the military affairs. When the Bolsheviks seized power, however, in Judson’s view, everything seemed perilously close to the end. Unlike some of his colleagues who saw the Provisional Government as betrayed by German implanted diversionists, a thorough observer of the deteriorating state of the Russian

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid, 5.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid, 77.

army took it as inevitability. “The Bolshevik government will last 6 months before it falls under economic and transportation al burden,” he wrote. Unless the Allies opened a discourse with the Lenin government, they might lose the chance to serve their own national interests. Furthermore, Judson portrayed the Bolsheviks as “the only element to be at all hostile to Central Powers, as [their] leader would not compromise. Very many Russians would welcome Germans to preserve their private interests,” he continued “and end socialistic regime.”<sup>49</sup> The general’s distinct enthusiasm to deal with the Bolshevik government did not sit well with his superiors whose sentiments about the regime were uniformly negative. Exactly a month after his meeting with Leon Trotsky, on a New Year’s day, Judson was recalled from his duties.

In his eagerness to interact with the Soviets, Judson, however, was not alone. The American Red Cross chief in Petrograd, Raymond Robins, soon began to pick up where General Judson had left and opened contacts with the Bolshevik leaders. Like Judson, Robins had not been a particular fan of the Bolsheviks prior to the revolution. In his starting capacity as the deputy chief of the Red Cross, shortly after his arrival to Petrograd in August, Raymond Robins prepared a report titled “Some Observations on the Present Conditions in Russia,” in which he praised the February Revolution that did away with the old autocratic order and assailed the Bolshevik Party for its destructive influence to the cause of the Allies and democratic prospects of Russia. In Robins’ eyes, however, the greatest danger to the revolution emanated not from the radicals who pledged to take the Revolution a step further, but the tsarist sympathizers who wished to take Russia back to the old days. As he walked through

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<sup>49</sup> Judson to Morris, January 29, 1918, RG 59, File #861.00/1030.

the former corridors of tsarist power, mingling with the officials of the Kerensky administration, Robins was jubilant to witness the rise of representative government.<sup>50</sup> But he feared that amid hunger, chaos and destruction of the war, the Russian liberal order would not last. In a way, he was right.

Robins' first reaction to the Bolshevik revolution conveys a sense that the Red Cross Representative was not saddened by the fall of the embattled government of Kerensky. To the contrary, unlike most other American representatives in Russia who saw Bolsheviks as traitors to their own motherland and violent demagogues, Raymond Robins' impressions written in his diary on the day of the Bolshevik coup exude excitement and inspiration:

“The boys and the soldiers of the Red Guard. A great day in Russia and the world. The All-Russian Soviet Meets. I can hear shooting in the Nevsky [street] as I write at 10:26 pm. War and civil war and the Commune. What an hour, o my father. Amen. Help America and Russia and the Free peoples of the earth.”<sup>51</sup>

If Robins harbored any guesses, much less hopes, about the possibilities for Kerensky's comeback, they all ended on November 8, during his visit to examine the tense standoff in the environs of Petrograd between the remaining forces loyal to the Kerensky government and the Reds. At Gatchina, astounded Robins watched as 5,000 Kerensky soldiers switched sides and went over to the Soviets.

Three days later, Robins, along with his interpreter Alexander Gumberg whose brother was a prominent Bolshevik, entered the Bolshevik headquarters in

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<sup>50</sup> Neil V. Salzman, *Reform and Revolution: The Life and Times of Raymond Robins* (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 1991), 189.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 203.

Smolny for a meeting with Leon Trotsky. As soon as the guard recognized the Red Cross representative known for denunciatory speeches about Bolsheviks, he began to yell “counter-revolutionist, counter-revolutionist.” But Robins was quick to reassure him about his true intentions: “I know a corpse when I see one,” Robins then went on, “the thing to do with a corpse is to bury it and not sit up with it. Tell the Commissioner that I believe the Kerensky government is dead and I believe he has got all the power there is in Russia today.” Raymond Robins’ actions during and in the months following the events of November 7 fit a certain pattern for which the Red Cross Mission came to be known. Already under William Boyce Thompson whom Robins had come to replace, the American Red Cross had not been particularly helpful to the efforts of the U.S. embassy to isolate Bolsheviks. In one of his despatches, Ambassador Francis acknowledged that Thompson had “closer relations with the Bolsheviks than with the Embassy.”<sup>52</sup> However, that did not prevent the embassy staff from maintaining cordial, if not strong ties to the Mission, especially after the Bolshevik takeover restricted the American’s range of communication within Russia. Perhaps aware of Robins’ colorful background as a political activist for social justice back in the United States, David Francis recognized the mercurial nature of the man and his behavior.

Raymond Robins was a Christian of strong convictions and his religious beliefs shaped his views of the world in which he always felt the need to stand up for the weak and dispossessed. He might have well become an influential figure within the U.S. government had he not invested his political capital with the Progressive Party – a breakaway Republican fraction under Theodore Roosevelt which failed to

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<sup>52</sup> Francis to Lansing, December 9, 1917, RG 59, File #861.00/786.

dismantle the two-party system's grip over American political landscape. Then again, Robins showed little indication that he was in it exclusively for the personal gain. Here was a man who was driven by an ideal to change the world around him, and whoever at the time appeared or promised to do so became Robins' hero. With "Land, Peace and Bread" as the prime Bolshevik slogan, it is not surprising that Lenin's followers did not at all induce the sense of aversion in Robins as they did in others. What was surprising is the fact that given Marxists' ardent atheism and denunciation of religion as "the opium of the masses," Robins still found a way to accommodate his outlook with theirs.

Robins' ever growing contacts within the Bolshevik administration gave him a substantial leverage and standing on the arena where the embassy increasingly found itself isolated and uninfluential. Gone were the days when the American ambassador could walk into the prime minister's office anytime he wished. Now, for every little administrative matter, the embassy had to rely on a character who did not shy away from displaying sympathy for the Bolshevik government. Even though, the ambassador was often informed about the minutiae of Robins' contacts with Bolsheviks, given his inability to fully act in the capacity of a plenipotentiary envoy of his nation to Russia, Francis could not have been enamored with this state of affairs. On December 24, Francis openly and for the first time expressed his disgust and despair with the whole situation.<sup>53</sup> Having hoped for the swift demise of the Bolshevik power, Francis was frustrated by the ordinary Russians' inability to effect such a change. With reports about newspaper suppression, severe food shortages and workers on strike, it is not certain that by the end of December the Bolshevik prestige

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<sup>53</sup> Francis to Lansing, December 24, 1917, RG 59, File #861.00/864.

remained at a previously high level. However, in terms of sheer power and the ability to control the populace, there was no doubt that Bolsheviks were in an increasingly superior position at the location where it most mattered – the center.<sup>54</sup>

The Bolsheviks' seizure of main attributes of power in November did not mean that they immediately gained total power, much less, legitimacy. Often overlooked in this regard are the elections to the Constituent Assembly held on November 12-14, five days after the fall of the Kerensky government, in which Bolsheviks managed to garner just 24 percent of the popular support while leaving agrarian-oriented Socialist Revolutionaries and other non-Marxist parties in majority. Even though the assembly failed to exercise power in any meaningful way, for Bolshevik leader Vladimir Lenin, the lack of support from three quarters of the population was an ominous sign that his revolution faced great danger. With the living standards deteriorating in the months of November and December,<sup>55</sup> it became more evident that in the case of new elections, the Bolsheviks would have trouble to even relying on the previous 24 percent of the general support. From early on, Lenin recognized that he had to make a choice between observing the bourgeois etiquette of parliamentary politics and establishing the dictatorship of the proletariat. Knowing that he could afford to take his chances with the second yet more dangerous course of action, Lenin did not hesitate. Anyone demanding that all powers be given to the Constituent Assembly was declared counter-revolutionist. Taking things a step further, Lenin outlawed the Constitutional-Democratic Party and ordered the arrest of

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<sup>54</sup> Denouncing the Bolshevik suppression of press and the seizure of all banks in Petrograd, U.S. Consul in Moscow Maddin Summers suggested American support to be given to the anti-Bolshevik forces taking shape in distant corners of Russia such as Rostov on Don, and perhaps even moving the embassy to one such location. Summers to Francis, December 24, 1917, RG 59, File #861.00/894.

<sup>55</sup> Francis to Lansing, December 29, 1917, RG 59, File #861.00/868.

its leaders as “the enemies of the people.” However, the most decisive action was taken on January 5, on the opening day of the Constituent Assembly, when Lenin and his followers derailed the opposition’s final attempt to wrest some authority from the Bolsheviks. Hoping that their majority in the assembly and the support of the public gathered outside the hall alone would be sufficient to pressure Lenin into some sort of concession, the Socialist-Revolutionaries refused the offer by some units of the Petrograd garrison to display armed might during the gathering. This step proved to be an error in judgment. The Bolsheviks, encouraged by the absence of armed opponent in the streets, opened fire upon the SR supporters who marched toward the Tauride Palace, killing seven or eight persons.<sup>56</sup> The panicked crowd dispersed. By the evening of that day, Bolsheviks filled the assembly hall and began intimidating and harassing non-Bolshevik members of the assembly. For the SRs, the battle was lost. A few days later, the Bolsheviks opened a counter-assembly, “The Third Congress of the Soviets” which assumed all the powers that had belonged to the Constituent Assembly. Hence, the last representative election in the Russian history resulted in still-birth.<sup>57</sup> Lenin’s own verdict best illustrated the reality of the matter when he asserted: “The dissolution of the Constituent Assembly by the Soviet Government means a complete and frank liquidation of the idea of democracy by the idea of dictatorship. It will serve as a good lesson.”<sup>58</sup>

As historian Richard Pipes has noted, the Bolshevik dispersal of the Constitutional Assembly was a watershed, and it indeed taught the Bolsheviks several

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<sup>56</sup> George Leggett, *The Cheka: Lenin’s Political Police* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981), 44.

<sup>57</sup> For an extensive account of the immediate political developments following the October Revolution see, John L.H. Keep, *The Russian Revolution: A Study on Mass Mobilization* (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 1976).

<sup>58</sup> George Leggett, *The Cheka*, 45.



important lessons to be ubiquitously applied in the future. “They learned that in areas under their control they need fear of no organized armed resistance: their rivals, though supported by three-fourths of the population, were disunited, leaderless, and above all, unwilling to stand up and fight. This experience accustomed Bolsheviks to resort to violence as a matter of course whenever they ran into defiance and to ‘solve’ problems by physically liquidating those who caused them.”<sup>59</sup> According to historian James Libbey, by dispersing the Constitutional Assembly, “the Bolsheviks obstructed the one and only attempt to fashion a constitution by representatives of all sectors of Russia’s society.... Thereafter the Allied powers considered the Soviet government to be led by usurpers and this view seriously impeded the normalization of diplomatic channels between Russia and the rest of the world.”<sup>60</sup> This assessment corresponds with the spirit of the despatches issued in the month of January and thereafter which particularly stand out for their content detailing the brutality and arbitrary violence dispensed by the Bolsheviks.

On January 20, an embassy official, attending a funeral for a teenager girl killed in Petrograd streets, brought in, what Ambassador Francis reports to be an “astounding intelligence.” According to the courier, the former Minister of Agriculture A.I. Shinigarev and the Comptroller of Provisional Government F.F. Kokoshkin, while “on release from prison for health reasons,” had been shot to death by the Red Guards in their beds at the Marie Hospital.<sup>61</sup> In a later despatch, Francis narrated having sent another official to the hospital to verify the story. The doctors confirmed that men dressed as Red Guards and sailors killed the former ministers

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<sup>59</sup> Richard Pipes, *A Concise History of the Russian Revolution*, 165.

<sup>60</sup> James K. Libbey, *Alexander Gumberg and Soviet-American Relations, 1917-1933*, 37.

<sup>61</sup> Francis to Lansing, January 20, 1918, RG 59, File #861.00/992.

with Shinigarev shot twice in his sleep and Kokoshkin shot six times while awake. In a Parisian publication *Combat*, the French investigator further elaborated his conversation with the doctor who remembered what Shinigarev had told him just as they were brought in from the Peter and Paul Fortress. “I have a presentiment that I will be killed tonight,” said Shinigarev, “While we were being transferred here we heard the Red Guards discussing among themselves the best way of getting rid of us.”<sup>62</sup> Situated just four blocks from the embassy compound, the assassinations were deeply disturbing to the American personnel. In the same despatch, reporting the story, Ambassador Francis requested additional guards for protection. The Americans no longer felt safe.

The killings were not limited just to high profile opponents of the Bolshevik regime. Two days later, Maddin Summers reported from Moscow about a “peaceful demonstration in favor of the Provisional Government.” The Bolsheviks responded to the demonstration by killing nearly fifty protesters. Conveying that the city was in terror and all newspapers remained suppressed, Summers reported that Bolsheviks were “openly resorting to oppression.”<sup>63</sup> Meanwhile food conditions, according to despatches coming from Petrograd, remained grave – in fact so grave that the starving Red Guard soldiers raided hotel *France* and “took all the food.”<sup>64</sup> With only a quarter pound of bread allotted daily to the inhabitants of the city, the embassy reported “factory workers, especially women organizing, passing resolutions against the Soviet, which [was] the natural result of food scarcity.” By February 8, 1918,

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<sup>62</sup> Edgar Sisson, *One Hundred Red Days: A Personal Chronicle of the Bolshevik Revolution* (Westport, Connecticut: Hyperion Press, 1931), 249.

<sup>63</sup> Summers to Francis, January 22, 1918, RG 59, File #861.00/1000.

<sup>64</sup> Francis to Lansing, January 25, 1918, RG 59, File #861.00/1016.

nearly 400,000 workers walked out of their jobs in protest to the dire living conditions, and, by large measure, the Bolshevik policies.<sup>65</sup> The government immediately threatened with the use of iron hand. The Soviet government would brook no dissent that jeopardized its extremely fragile hold on power. It is noteworthy that in the despatches sent by American diplomats, the prime opponents of the Bolshevik regime are often described as workers and city folks – the supposedly core base of the Bolshevik movement.

In fact, as George Leggett has demonstrated in his substantial volume on the history of the Soviet secret police, *Cheka*, the original motive behind the formation of this notorious institution was the suppression of strikes – at the time the most common form of public protest against government actions.<sup>66</sup> The term “sabotage” figured prominently in the charges against their opponents by the Bolshevik authorities who from early on labeled participants of such actions as “the enemies of the people.” The very first clause of the decree on the formation of the predecessor to the infamous KGB, Cheka (the Russia abbreviation for Extraordinary Commission for Combating Counter-Revolution and Sabotage), determined that the main function of the agency should be “to suppress and liquidate all attempts and acts of counter-revolution and sabotage throughout Russia from whatever quarter.”<sup>67</sup> Rather, Leggett insists that by “concentrating on Lenin’s call for ‘exceptional measures to combat counter-revolutionaries and saboteurs,” frequently overlooked is the “the fact that Lenin, in his note, was concerned solely with state employees’ strike.”<sup>68</sup> Although, in

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<sup>65</sup> Francis to Lansing, February 8, 1918, RG 59, File #861.00/1073.

<sup>66</sup> George Leggett, *The Cheka*, 15.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

Leggett's judgment "nothing could have been further from his intention, *at that time* (italics original), than the introduction of a political police system," it is obvious that for a person who, as historian readily admits, "had no patience with opposition, whether written or spoken" the assault against strikers was a part of a larger pattern of oppression. It is difficult to see how the author of the dictum "Who is not with us is against us" could have intended to build anything *other than* a police state.

On January 23, 1918, to mark their victory over all bourgeois rivals, the Third All-Russia Soviet held its opening session at the Tauride Palace. The symbolic value of the place and the occasion was not missed on Edgar Sisson, an American sent by President Woodrow Wilson to carry out the recommendations of the Root Mission who arrived in Russia on November 25, 1917: "Here the Constituent Assembly had died. Here was proper seat for the display of new-risen dominion,"<sup>69</sup> he wrote. For Sisson, "the most disagreeable feature of the day" was the speeches by "two Americans and one foreigner of considerable residence in America" who brought greetings of the United States to the congress. They were Albert Rhys Williams, John Reed and Boris Reinstein, the latter being a Russian immigrant who "had been in the United States long enough to learn the English language." In a speech published in *Izvestia* newspaper, Albert Williams pointed out to the handpicked representatives of the Soviet power stating, "this form of parliamentarism will also be adopted by us when the American proletariat will resolve upon a revolutionary fight and will wage war against its bourgeoisie." Williams' fellow Bolshevik sympathizer Jack Reed ended his speech exclaiming "Long Live the Soviets!" As the coverage given to their presence in the Soviet congress indicates, the participation of the Americans was

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<sup>69</sup> Edgar Sisson, *One Hundred Red Days*, 257.

much appreciated by the Bolshevik leadership so eager to show its own people that *their* revolution was indeed a good idea and that it was about to spread throughout the world.

However, Ambassador Francis was not at all pleased with the Americans' behavior at the Tauride Palace. On the day of the speech a despatch went out to Washington detailing the content of the speeches by Albert Williams and Jack Reed. Incensed with Williams' proclamation that the American workers were too conservative and that they should follow the Russian model, Francis advised that all these individuals be arrested upon their return to the United States.<sup>70</sup> It is likely that having witnessed the impotence of the Provisional Government on the face of handful Bolshevik agitators, Francis was not willing to take any chances on the radicals. Increasingly intolerant of radicalist dissent against a republican form government, Francis was lamentful that in time Kerensky had not executed the likes of Lenin and Trotsky. Nor was Francis alone in experiencing these sentiments. As far back as July of 1917, when the first Bolshevik attempt at gaining power was defeated, British ambassador had "contacted the Foreign Minister to ask that the government should take advantage of the situation to crush Bolsheviks once and for all."<sup>71</sup> When that did not happen, the British became furious to the point of nearly severing ties with the Kerensky government. Long afterwards another British diplomat in Russia, Alfred Knox, would write a memoir in which he lamented that the Russian prime minister "had all the theatrical qualities of Napoleon but none of his ruthlessness."<sup>72</sup> Now, seeing the deadly measures employed by the Bolsheviks against their own opponents

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<sup>70</sup> Francis to Lansing, January 24, 1918, RG 59, File #861.00/1007.

<sup>71</sup> Michael Hughes, *Inside the Enigma*, 106.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 107.

to effective ends, like his British counterparts, Francis, too, was convinced that a certain measure of decisiveness was required in confronting the agents of demagoguery and disorder. A year long experience in Russia extinguished even the many eyewitness liberals' innocence about the dangers of freedom and impunity. A man hailing from the tranquil and prosperous bosom of the American Midwest was among the first.

That the American diplomats had little sympathy for the Bolsheviks was never in doubt. However, the continuation of the war and its mutation in several directions were sowing confusion all across the political spectrum. Irrationalism and paradox of Russia's realities did not bypass those observing the country from within. Initially, when Lenin and his armed followers overthrew the Provisional Government, not without reason many believed that the Bolshevik leader had been sent as a German spy. Now that the Bolsheviks themselves constituted the Russian government, the matters had become more complicated. Was Lenin willing to surrender everything to the Germans and protect his government? Possibly. But given the simmering rancor to the idea, giving up Russian lands to the Germans would not have proceeded without serious repercussions. On the other hand, the Germans were proving to be an uncooperative partner, if they ever were one. Since its first day in power the Soviet government had sued for peace – an honorable one to the minimum degree – which the Germans refused to accept. Throughout the months of November, December and January, Bolshevik representative Trotsky conducted tireless negotiations with the Germans in an effort to reach a deal. But the Germans seemingly aware that, the Russians lacked capacity to withstand German assault saw little reason in negotiating.

Instead they simply demanded as much land as they could control. When the Bolsheviks, fearing that such significant concession would result in toppling of their government, refused, the German military command informed the Russians that the combat operations would resume on February 17, 1918.

The German army's proximity to Petrograd and Moscow gave rise to the rumors that these cities could fall any day. Under such circumstances, the American embassy decided to leave the capital. Their choice of location was a railroad town 300 miles east of Petrograd, named Vologda. The Americans calculated that if the Germans captured the Russian capital, the embassy personnel would have enough time to evacuate either to Vladivostok or Archangel. When asked about the rationale behind the choice of location Ambassador Francis himself admitted that he knew nothing about the city "except that it is the junction of Trans-Siberian Railway and the Moscow – Archangel Railway and that it is 350 miles farther away from the Germans."<sup>73</sup> Still, by choosing to remain in Russia, at the same time, the Americans wanted to reassure the Russian public that they would not abandon them entirely.<sup>74</sup> On February 27, alongside his personal secretaries Earl M. Johnson and Philip Jordan, the American ambassador departed for Vologda. By the time the American delegation reached their destination, the news came that Russia had capitulated to Germany.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> David R. Francis, *Russia from the American Embassy*, 234.

<sup>74</sup> "Having discretionary authority to leave Petrograd the natural thing, perhaps for me to do was to have gone with the other missions and stopped in Norway or Sweden for orders from Washington, but I did not like to abandon the Russian people, for whom I felt deep sympathy and whom I had assured repeatedly of America's unselfish interest in their welfare," wrote Francis. *Ibid.*, 235

<sup>75</sup> William Allison, *American Diplomats in Russia*, 34.

The terms of the Brest-Litovsk Treaty were harsh. Overnight, the Russians lost more than a quarter of their empire. For the first time in nearly two centuries, at least officially, the Russians no longer governed Poland, Finland, Ukraine, the Baltics and South Caucasus. In addition to territorial losses, the German imposed humiliating conditions upon Russia which included demobilization of the army. “No Russian government,” historian Pipes has observed, “had ever surrendered so much land or granted a foreign power such privileges.”<sup>76</sup> Western observers on the ground were astounded by the Bolsheviks’ complete detachment from the sense of motherland. British Ambassador George Buchanan went as far as writing a letter to his superiors in which he deemed it impossible to “force an exhausted nation to fight against its will.”<sup>77</sup> His other counterparts were even harsher in their assessments of Russians’ patriotism. Many Westerners, as Michael Hughes conveys, saw the roots of Russian indifference in the nature of tsarist regime that “had acted as a focus for disparate ethnic and social groups whose members had almost nothing in common with one another other than the fact that they were subjects of a single ruler.”<sup>78</sup> In his memoir, Alexander Kerensky echoed this reasoning by describing the mindset of Lenin and the Russian people in general:

“Nowhere in Europe, except in Russia, is it possible to find such type of political leader, one so utterly devoid of any political feeling of country. Under Czarism the people were accustomed to regard the state itself as hostile. The monopoly on all outer expressions of patriotism arrogated to

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<sup>76</sup> Richard Pipes, *A Concise History of the Russian Revolution*, 175.

<sup>77</sup> Michael Hughes, *Inside the Enigma*, 119.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 88.



itself by absolutism perverted in the people the very feeling of patriotism.”<sup>79</sup>

Having extensively studied the relationship between the state and people in Russia, Richard Pipes traces the origins of political attitudes among Russians to the absolutist nature of the tsarist regime “which brutally punished any attempts by its subjects to interfere with politics” often acting as a remote force which collected taxes and drafted soldiers without giving its citizens “virtually nothing in return.” Consequently, he argues, Russia evolved not so much as a society but as an “agglomeration of tens of thousands of separate rural settlements.”<sup>80</sup> Unlike Western diplomats who at the time were appalled at the speed with which one political order was replaced by another, committed to ideals radically alien to the Russian people’s interests -- Pipes finds little surprise in the actions of the Bolshevik regime which in most other countries would be characterized as treason.

The Soviet government’s actions predictably backfired. The Bolsheviks became vilified both on the domestic and international venues.<sup>81</sup> The inertia of the disappointment could have well ended the government. As Ambassador Francis’ despatches in the weeks following the surrender indicate, an overriding sense emerged that the Bolshevik government was about to fall. Since the early days of the revolution, for the second time, fortunes of the Bolshevik government seemed near peril. But just as they had done so on November 7, in a way, the Germans once

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<sup>79</sup> Alexander F. Kerensky, *The Catastrophe*, 228.

<sup>80</sup> Richard Pipes, “Flight From Freedom: What Russians Think and Want,” *Foreign Affairs*, May/June 2004, 10.

<sup>81</sup> In Francis’ calculation, prior to the signing of the treaty the Russian army numbered about 12 million men. After the agreement, “it melted away like snow before a summer’s sun” thus enabling the Germans to move more than 100 division from their Eastern front to France. See David Francis, *Russia from the American Embassy*, 225.

against came to the Bolsheviks' aid. By refusing to halt their advance into the heart of Russia, the German armies continued occupying more land in Southern Russia. The German commanders claimed that the terms of Brest-Litovsk treaty did not apply to these territories since in reality they were not under the Bolshevik control. This brazen act of aggression brought great alarm to the allies who decided to elevate their cooperation with the Bolshevik leadership in hopes of averting further German gains. So, here was a paradoxical situation: On the one hand, the allies refused to recognize the Bolshevik government which they labeled as treasonous and detrimental to the allied cause; on the other, they felt they had no choice but engage with the only authority in Russia that could place checks on the German advance. "The only power which can offer any resistance to the German advance is the Soviet government," wrote David Francis to Summers in Moscow, "When my house is on fire I don't ask the quality of the water used to extinguish the flame."<sup>82</sup>

A pivotal figure in the reemerging frenzy of cooperation with the Bolsheviks was Raymond Robins. Having taken upon himself the role of mediating between the Allied representatives in Russia and the Bolshevik leadership, Robins had long struggled to reach rapprochement between the estranged parties. Like Judson before him, Robins was convinced that without the Bolshevik support, the Allied cause against Germany was doomed, and somehow an accord had to be reached. The Americans' unwillingness to recognize the Bolshevik regime upon some abstract moral and ideological grounds seemed nonsensical to him. Robins believed that much of the rancor and resentment toward Bolsheviks emanated from the mutual

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<sup>82</sup> Francis to Summers, March 10, 1918, David R. Francis Collection, B 32-56, Missouri Historical Society Archives and Collections Center, St. Louis, Missouri.

misunderstanding for which the greater blame rested with his own countrymen. Robins shared these views with the newly appointed British ambassador Bruce Lockhart who admittedly had little respect for David Francis' intellectual capacities and shared the "dissident" conviction that a deal could be struck with the Bolsheviks. Having served in Russia for five years between 1912-1917, until he was briefly sent to London by Ambassador Buchanan, Lockhart was chosen by British leaders as a point man for opening new channels to the Russian government. As Hughes recounts, "Lockhart certainly possessed many of the talents required for developing 'unofficial relations' with the Bolsheviks, not least of which was a boundless self-confidence that on occasions proved rather tiresome to senior officials in London,"<sup>83</sup> and one could add, ultimately futile. Between Lockhart and his pro-Soviet American friend Raymond Robins, "the two enjoyed unprecedented access to the Bolshevik leaders during March and April of 1918. They had no difficulty getting appointments with Trotsky and Lenin, and they literally could walk in to see Foreign Commissar Chicherin and his key staff members Karakhan and Radek. They were even allowed to sit on certain meetings of the Bolshevik Central Executive Committee and other supposedly private Bolshevik discussions."<sup>84</sup> Inasmuch Francis was irked by such level of intimacy between Robins and the Bolsheviks, he was inclined to utilize the opportunity of having access to the ruling circles of Soviet Russia. Furthermore, aware that his success depended on the confidence of the ambassador, Robins took great care to keep Francis informed of most of his activities and make him feel not only included, but in charge of the discussions.

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<sup>83</sup> Michael Hughes, *Inside the Enigma*, 128.

<sup>84</sup> David W. McFadden, *Alternative Paths*, 115.

Throughout March and April, Robins and Lockhart did their utmost to promote military and economic rapprochement between the Bolsheviks and the Allies. In the aftermath of the German violation of the Brest-Litovsk agreement, at first this was an easier task. But soon enough, Ambassador Francis realized that any military assistance given to the Bolsheviks was more likely to be used against emerging domestic opposition than the German armies. Hateful of the Bolsheviks, Francis may have shared the grasp of facts on the ground with Robins, but he certainly did not share the latter's convictions. Francis had long ago begun to suspect that Lenin's Russia posed equal, if not greater danger to the world peace and the security of his own nation than Kaiser's Germany. The last thing the American ambassador wanted to see was the potential use of Allied weapons against Bolsheviks' domestic enemies.

Particularly resentful of Robins' pro-Soviet activities was Consul Maddin Summers. With the move of the Soviet government from Petrograd to Moscow, the lack of mutual decorum between the two men -- which had first originated from the ideological differences about the nature of the Bolshevik regime -- escalated into an open personal conflict. Referring to Robins' activities in Moscow, in March of 1918, Summers wrote to Francis, "I can assure you that any interference in any way here with my work will result in serious consequences."<sup>85</sup> Suspecting that Robins was in fact a Bolshevik agent, Summers was not willing to extend the similar level of discretion and authority to Robins as Ambassador Francis did. Summers made it clear to his superiors in Washington that Robins had to put an end to his unofficial activities as the American representative in Moscow and leave Russia at once. Even

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<sup>85</sup> Summers to Francis, March 25, 1918, David R. Francis Collection, B32-56.

President Wilson found it “very annoying to have this man Robins, in whom I have no confidence whatever acting as political adviser in Russia and sending his advice to private individuals.” At the same time, Wilson wished to retain some channel of communication with the Bolsheviks at least “until things clear[ed] up a bit in that unhappy country.”<sup>86</sup> Raymond Robin’s free-lancing, however, continued to deepen the frustration within the American diplomatic corps in the Soviet capital. His almost open embrace of Bolsheviks and lack of regard for the local diplomats gave way to erroneous impressions as to who was really in charge of the American decision-making process. In the course of the heated exchange related to this matter in May, Maddin Summers suffered a heart attack and died. Soon afterwards, like his protégé general Judson, Robins, too, was recalled.

Raymond Robins’ departure from the scene sounded the death knell of whatever relationship was left between the American and Bolshevik authorities. By removing Robins from Russia, the American government had made a definitive statement about its own views of the Bolshevik regime. The leadership in Washington was not eager to waste time persuading Lenin of the advantages of staying in the Allied camp. Even before Robins’ recall, Ambassador Francis had already decided that America’s capacity to convince Bolsheviks to fight against Germany had reached its limit. Deeply skeptical of the Bolshevik motives, Francis was becoming more convinced that the Bolsheviks were not a part of the solution, but the problem itself. In his mind, the optimal course of action would be to launch an intervention by the Allied forces which could accomplish two tasks simultaneously. First, they could help secure the military munitions and food storages from falling

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<sup>86</sup> Eugene Trani, “Woodrow Wilson and the Decision to Intervene in Russia: A Reconsideration,” 451.

into German hands; secondly, and perhaps more importantly, Francis saw the intervention as the swiftest way to topple Lenin's government and help the establishment of a friendly and desirably, a democratic government similar to the Provisional Government in spirit, if not in character. Unbeknownst to the ambassador himself, Washington, alongside the British, had already decided on landing limited number of marine regiments on the Russian soil. On the horizon loomed foreign intervention and a bitter civil war between the Bolsheviks and their motley opponents.

## Chapter 2: Civil War and Foreign Intervention

By mid-April of 1918, the Bolsheviks solidified their power in central Russia. Having captured and maintained the control of Petrograd and Moscow, they enjoyed unique political advantage over both domestic and foreign rivals. In a country where for centuries the power was generously dispensed yet jealously guarded by the center, Vladimir Lenin understood the significance of the possession of the capital city. During the harrowing years of the civil war and foreign intervention, Bolsheviks managed to efficiently utilize all the physical and moral resources rendered to them by this possession. With millions of people dead from violence, starvation and cold, at the end, the Reds overcame great challenges to stand victorious over their enemies. A number of the American observers, brave enough to stay at their posts, were there to record the Bolsheviks' path to victory.

Despite the arrival of spring, conditions in Bolshevik Russia continued to deteriorate. The devastations resulting from the war, disruption in local infrastructure and socio-political order contributed a great deal to such state of affairs. However, few measures were being taken by the new leaders to alleviate the existing hardship. Still in its fragile stages, retaining power was the top priority for the Bolsheviks who at any moment expected the rise of a counter-revolution. "Besides official Soviet gazette only 3 papers remain: namely, *Rannoe Utro*, rather unreliable and without politics, *Anarkhia*, the organ of the radicals, and *Pravda*, the unofficial Soviet organ," wrote the American consul, conveying the austere press conditions in Moscow.<sup>87</sup> For descendents of Thomas Jefferson who famously expressed his preference for

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<sup>87</sup> Summers to Francis, April 9, 1918, RG 59, File #861.00/1593.

newspapers without government over a government without newspapers, the Bolshevik rule appeared diametrically opposed to the American ideals of government. “At the head of the Russian people’s Government stands the council (soviet) of the people’s commissars elected by no one and controlled by no one, absolutely unlimited and who have nominally the whole power in the land,” visiting engineer Vladimir Petrovich Shubersky told the American minister in Norway. “Every attempt to protest is crushed by force... The country is ruled by all sorts of district committees - committees not recognized or confirmed by anyone... These people are taken mostly from the dregs of society, from the worst remnants of public organization, from the lowest officials, youths and servants.”<sup>88</sup> The Soviet method of rule revolted most Americans on the ground who, despite even great political differences among themselves, could agree on basic attributes of representative government. The Bolshevik government displayed few such signs, if any.

Nonetheless, the immediate American interest in Russia was not so much about seeing a democratic and prosperous Russia reflecting the mirror image of the United States in the old world, but a Russia that would stand up to the Germans and help the Allied effort. To that end, the signals from the Bolsheviks leadership were not clear. While the Bolsheviks had committed the treacherous act of signing the Brest-Litovsk treaty, they still remained the only factor that prevented the German armies from taking over entire Russia. “The most vital force which stands in the way of German domination of Russia today is the Soviet organization. Anything done to weaken or destroy this organization will prove disastrous,” wrote Major Thomas D.

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<sup>88</sup> Vladimir Petrovich Shubersky, an engineer, to U.S. Consul in Oslo, April 10, 1918, RG 59, File #861.00/1731.



Thacher of the American Red Cross in Russia.<sup>89</sup> In a letter advocating a more lenient attitude toward the Soviet government, a military analyst, Captain W.B. Webster, enumerated several reasons for his proposal among which were the statements that the Soviet government had unmasked true German intentions by signing the Brest-Litovsk treaty later ignored by the Germans. According to Webster, the Bolshevik authorities had actually dispatched radicals to Germany to foment revolution, and also deepened the socialist sentiment among the peasants so that to make it impossible for the Germans to eventually take over the country.<sup>90</sup> Yet on the other hand, the worsening conditions under the Bolshevik rule made even their anti-German stance a liability. “Bolsheviks are the only elements likely to be at all hostile to Central Powers,” wrote General Judson days before leaving Russia. He then explained: “Very many Russians would welcome the Germans to preserve private interests and end socialistic regime.”<sup>91</sup> The fact that the Bolsheviks were not German agents further complicated the situation, because it left open a possibility for an alliance between increasingly anti-Bolshevik forces and the Germans. Nevertheless, Russian patriotism dictated that assistance in the struggle against Bolshevism should be sought first and foremost from the Allies who after all refused to recognize the Bolshevik government.

Frustrated by their inability to overthrow the Bolsheviks, various political forces saw salvation in the foreign bayonets that could in all likelihood rid Russia of the red menace. In frequent instances, the urging for the Allied intervention was

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<sup>89</sup> Major Thomas D. Thacher of the American Red Cross to U.S. Embassy in Great Britain, April 11, 1918, RG 59, File #861.00/1689.

<sup>90</sup> Captain W.B. Webster to Lansing, April 13, 1918, RG 59, File #861.00/1746.

<sup>91</sup> Morris to Lansing, January 29, 1918, RG 59, File #861.00/1030.

accompanied by the idea that failure to act could lead to geo-political catastrophe. The anti-Bolshevik groups did not hesitate to convey that the Allied credibility in Russia was at stake. “Faith in the Allies has completely disappeared,” reported an American diplomat from Russia, “Cadets and intellectuals are angry because the allies did not interfere.”<sup>92</sup> In his conversation with the U.S. ambassador in Sweden, a Russian observer named Herman Bernstein made it clear that “the times has arrived when the only hope of saving the Russian situation or the Allies is intervention by the Allies...If the Allied intervention is not undertaken, the Russians will be left without any recourse, since the Bolsheviks must, at any cost, be removed, but to accept and welcome the Germans.”<sup>93</sup> Such development could not have affected the disposition of the Allies who viewed Russia as a pivotal factor in the war. After his conversation with Count Frasso, a prominent member of the Italian Chamber of Deputies, who recently arrived to Stockholm from Petrograd, Ambassador Morris wrote that Petrograd and the vicinity were entirely demoralized and anarchy reigned everywhere. According to Frasso, very small percentage of the Russians sympathized with Bolsheviks, and that “only help for the present situation would be some strong factor such as the entry of foreign troops.”<sup>94</sup> With conditions growing worse day by day, the Swedish press reported about the rise of pro-German sentiments among the segments of the population eager to get rid of the Bolsheviks.<sup>95</sup> Ambassador Francis himself reported that patriotic Russians had begun switching to the German side in order to save Russia from Bolsheviks. But some such as those in the Central Cadet

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<sup>92</sup> Francis to Lansing, February 11, 1918, RG 59, File #861.00/1086.

<sup>93</sup> Morris to Lansing, May 20, 1918, RG 59, File #861.00/1884.

<sup>94</sup> Morris to Lansing, May 13, 1918, RG 59, File #861.00/1777-78.

<sup>95</sup> Morris to Lansing, May 13, 1918, RG 59, File #861.00/1785.

Committee held out hope for the Allied intervention, by issuing statements urging Russia to remain faithful to its allies.<sup>96</sup> In a kaleidoscope of changing political realities of Russia, there was a good reason to believe that today's friends could turn into one's enemies as a result of inaction or delay. Also strong was the factor of resentment for the Bolsheviks among the American personnel in Russia. On May 2, 1918, David Francis for the first time openly recommended that his government militarily intervene in Russia.<sup>97</sup> In the ambassador's view, given the abject conditions in the country and the Bolsheviks' utter inability to put up serious resistance, such an intervention would be opportune.

In the meanwhile, the Bolsheviks' self-fulfilled prophecy of counter-revolution was coming to fruition. Toward the end of April, in the peripheries where the Bolshevik control had been most tenuous, forces alternative to the Bolshevik authority had begun to emerge. The rise of a vehement opposition especially in the rural areas was aided by disillusionment of the peasants who from the very beginning associated themselves more the agrarian-oriented Social Revolutionaries than with the worker-oriented Bolsheviks. The Bolshevik land policies which involved arbitrary requisitioning and refusal to place the land at the exclusive disposal of the peasant infuriated a great number of people. Since the dispersal of the Constituent Assembly, it had become apparent that Russia's liberals, with their deep-seated aversion toward violence, were no match for the Bolsheviks. Hence, in the anti-Bolshevik movement that started gaining ground in Eastern, Southern and Western areas of Russia, it was the military generals who took the front stage. In denotation

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<sup>96</sup> Francis to Lansing, May 18, 1918, RG 59, File #861.00/1831.

<sup>97</sup> Francis to Lansing, May 2, 1918, RG 59, File #861.00/1766.

of the white color which represented royal emblem of the Bourbons during the French Revolution, these anti-Bolshevik forces, despite significant variations among themselves, came to be labeled as 'Whites'.

Beginning in May of 1918, a series of despatches reporting about the political and military developments in the areas of Siberia, North Caucasus and Ukraine began to pour in. Greater attention in these despatches was given to the developments in Siberia since this front constituted the most significant against the Bolsheviks. On May 3, 1918, Charles Moser, the American consul in Harbin, reported an advance made by the forces of General Grigori Semyonov across the Onan river. According to the consul, "supported by Japanese and British money," Semyonov's advance "aroused much enthusiasm" among the local populace.<sup>98</sup> Within ten days, Semyonov's forces advanced 100 miles into Siberia and cleared East Siberia. "Bolsheviks melt before organized resistance," exclaimed Southard Warner from Harbin.<sup>99</sup> In one of the first successful battles against the Bolshevik troops since the defeat of the Kerensky forces near Gatchina, the operation conducted by Semyonov was being keenly monitored by Western observers. In his despatches, Warner expressed belief that Semyonov's movement was in no respect monarchical and that in fact monarchists' support hurt Semyonov's popularity to the east of Baikal. Recounting the observations of Major Borrow who had just returned from Siberia, U.S. Ambassador in the Chinese capital, Paul S. Reinsch, excitedly reported about the successes of Semyonov. According to Borrow "soldiers who were initially sympathetic to Bolsheviks had now been absorbed into more conservative and land-

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<sup>98</sup> Charles Moser, U.S. Consul in Harbin, China, to Lansing, May 3, 1918, RG 59, File #861.00/1740.

<sup>99</sup> Southard P. Warner to Lansing, May 9, 1918 RG 59, File #861.00/1762.

holding population of Siberia.” He stressed to his superiors that conditions in Siberia were essentially different from European Russia in that farmers there held large tracts of land, the city population was well to do and subversive theories found unfavorable soil. Perhaps caught up in the mood of the times in which an American-led intervention was increasingly seen as a cure to Bolshevism, the ambassador’s interlocutor Major Borrow even compared the Siberian landscape to America. “Farming conditions are similar,” he said, and “people are trusting America fully.”<sup>100</sup>

The events on the ground corroborated the reports that Bolshevik popularity in the countryside was marginal. In areas such as Irkutsk, commercial attaché Huntington reported that the Bolsheviks had very little power and had to rely upon Lettish and Hungarian troops in order to sustain themselves. The government, he observed, was “now failing due to economic disaster and anarchism.” Peasants refused to bring grain and meat to the market because it was requisitioned by the Bolsheviks at inadequate prices. “Every class in Siberia except small minority of Bolsheviks,” Huntington wrote, “desires friendly intervention and construction aid of an outside power.” According to him, the local population was negatively predisposed toward the Japanese, but was willing to accept them if no one else came forward. “Universal request,” however he added, “is for the Allied intervention with American participation which they feel [to] guarantee the motives.”<sup>101</sup>

On June 4, 1918, for the first time since having moved to Vologda in February, Ambassador Francis returned to Petrograd. The purpose of the visit was to gauge the Bolshevik attitude toward possible Allied intervention, but mostly, to

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<sup>100</sup> Paul S. Reinsch, U.S. Ambassador in China, to Lansing, May 10, 1918, RG 59, File #861.00/1773.

<sup>101</sup> Dewitt Clinton Poole, U.S. Consul in Moscow, to Francis, May 22, 1918, RG 59, File #861.00/1869.

examine the situation in a city which had once been his residence. His first act as an ambassador was to replace the Norwegian colors flying atop the building with the American flag. What Francis found in Petrograd was heart-breaking. “Petrograd is dead.., famine stricken babies dying hundred a week,” he observed.<sup>102</sup> Struck by the malnourished looks of the people in the streets, Francis noted that food had become exorbitantly expensive and daily ratios were extremely low. He spoke with a hospital manager who reported about hundred bodies brought in with their faces mutilated to destroy the identity. In Francis’ estimate, “everyone, including the uneducated hated the tyranny of Lenin.” All patriotic people says they will supplant present Government by one dominated by Germany if the Allies do not immediately, intervene, noted the ambassador. Upon returning to Vologda, Francis wrote: “I am convinced more thoroughly that the Soviet government is only a shell.... The city [Petrograd] has no police, no visible disturbance and no robberies because valuable have all been removed or sold.... I spoke with so many people representing all classes and did not find one favoring present Government and regret to say that every one favored monarchy.” Among such people, according to Francis, there were former Bolshevik sympathizers who now saw Lenin’s forces as having “irreparably injured democracy in Russia for a generation or until masses are educated and caused pendulum to swing violently in opposite direction.”<sup>103</sup>

The Soviet leadership could not have been unaware about the sentiments of its starving citizens. In a despatch from Moscow on June 8, Dewitt Clinton Poole, who had just replaced deceased Maddin Summers as the American Consul, reported about

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<sup>102</sup> Francis to Lansing, June 5, 1918, RG 59, File #861.00/1959.

<sup>103</sup> Francis to Lansing, June 9, 1918, RG 59, File #861.00/2096.

Lenin asking his supporters to hold out for two more months. In the third session of the central executive committee, the Bolshevik leader gave a speech saying that there was plenty of food in the country, but it was being hoarded by the rich villagers.

Adding his own insight to this information, Poole wrote:

“This is an exaggeration for political purposes. The rich villager hardly exists in reality. A great many peasants have some grain, a few have none at all. The attempt to distinguish rich and poor, identifying the former with the small bourgeoisie is intended to conceal fact which the food crisis is making daily more apparent.”<sup>104</sup>

Amid the desperate circumstances in Bolshevik Russia, most observers retained their belief that Bolshevism was a spent force. “Approaching collapse [should be] attributed more to inherent weakness of Soviet government and to general dissatisfaction than to strength of any organized opposition thereto,” observed the American diplomat.<sup>105</sup> In the next despatch, Poole reported the food situation becoming more acute. “The weather is favorable and it offsets a bit the effect of low-acreage planting,” he elaborated “but once Siberian grain stores run out, situation will worsen.”<sup>106</sup>

For the next year or so, Poole’s actions as an American representative in Russia would matter a great deal in defining the relations with the Bolshevik regime. Having arrived in Russia barely two months before the Bolshevik Revolution, Poole had met the challenges of the task with ardor. Despite his rudimentary Russian, it had not taken long before Poole digested the Russian realities and made use of his

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<sup>104</sup> Poole to Francis, June 8, 1918, RG 59, File #861.00/2070.

<sup>105</sup> Poole to Francis, June 11, 1918, RG 59, File #861.00/2017.

<sup>106</sup> Poole to Francis, July 13, 1918, RG 59, File #861.00/2356.

knowledge in the service of his country. On a mission to South Russia ordered by Consul Maddin Summers, under difficult circumstances, Poole observed the situation on the ground for several weeks and returned with an elaborate report containing policy recommendations. During his tenure as a diplomat, Poole's social skills won him the friendship of American expatriates from various segments of the political spectrum. With his easygoing character and sense of respect for those around him, Poole almost immediately won the confidence of ambassador Francis. Unlike his predecessor, Poole also established a degree of decorum with Bolshevik authorities, at least until the days when the Bolshevik actions no longer made such relationship possible.

As the shock of the Bolshevik revolution began to fade, the public discontent with the Bolshevik rule was evident in the ease with which the territories controlled by Reds fell to their adversaries. The summer of 1918 comprised the formative period for the anti-Bolshevik governments in Omsk, Kuban and Rostov, not to mention the non-Russian parts of the former empire. Shortly after the October Revolution, Russia lost Finland, Poland and Baltic provinces. In Ukraine, nationalist leader Simon Petliura had made significant gains against Bolshevik armies. By May of 1918, three independent republics -- Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia -- emerged in South Caucasus. The region of Central Asia had been abandoned to the local emirs with powerful influence over the devout Muslim population. The Bolshevik leadership at the time recognized its inability to actively try bringing them under control. In these difficult times, the Bolshevik Russians were aided by the American policy-makers who adamantly refused to extend recognition to the new states



emerging from the ashes of the tsarist empire. Strictly adhering to “one Russia” policy, for a notable period, the Americans rejected the idea of splintering Russia. For the most part, the Americans were concerned raising suspicions among nationalist Russians toward their motives. Yet at the same time, the despatches reveal the dearth of knowledge that prevailed in the diplomatic minds regarding the imperial nature of the Russian state. With the exception of the Finns and Poles, it appears that many American observers had difficulty grasping the underlying cause of anti-Bolshevik movements in the peripheral provinces. Notwithstanding some notes about Armenians and “Moslem Tartars” disputing over some territories, most American diplomats in Russia had little knowledge about the non-Russians of this vast land. Upheavals in Russia brought with them a number of phenomena that was difficult to digest for observers from the United States.

One unique element remains the intervention and activities of the Czecho-Slovak regiment which became an important player in the Russian civil war. Nearly forty five thousand Czecho-Slovak soldiers of the Austrian army who had previously defected to the Russian side in order fight against the Austrians for the independence of their homeland, became stranded in Ukraine in the aftermath of the treaty at Brest-Litovsk. In obeisance of the orders received from the Czech National Council, the regiment began circumnavigating across Russia, Pacific and Atlantic oceans back to Europe. On the way to the Pacific, the Czechs were embroiled in a conflict with Bolshevik forces which, given the weak state of the involved parties’ militaries, turned them into a major player in the battle for Russia.<sup>107</sup> After several engagements

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<sup>107</sup> Frederick Lewis Schuman, *American Policy Toward Russia Since 1917* (New York: International Publishers, 1928), 92.

with the Red guards, the Bolshevik leadership concluded that the Czechs were unwelcome in their country. “The Soviet government despises the Czechs,” the Americans reported from Moscow with schadenfreude, adding “all observers agree that the Czechs are splendid.”<sup>108</sup> In the eyes of those who wish to see an end to Bolshevism, indeed splendid they were. “Throughout central Siberia,” reported Ernest L. Harris, the American consul general at Irkutsk, to David Francis in Vologda, “counter Bolshevik movement is intensifying.” In his view, “the Czechs’ presence had been very encouraging.”<sup>109</sup> Despite their stated neutrality in the war, the Czechs’ evident predisposition against the Bolsheviks had made it possible for the Whites to gain control of Russian cities of Tomsk, Taiga, NovoNikolaievsk, Kiansk, Kansk, Nizhnyudinsk and Omsk. While Bolsheviks managed to prevail against General Semyonov on the Chinese border, across eastern Russia, the situation was beginning to look dire. Having intimidated Bolsheviks into retreat from several important strongholds, including the Trans-Siberian railroad, the Czechs gave a much needed momentum to the anti-Bolshevik movement in the region.

By the summer of 1918, there was an increasing pressure on the Allies from all sides to intervene in Russia. America’s European allies, Ambassador Francis, and even the Russian diaspora living in the United States strongly advocated an American action Russia. There were a great number of influential people such as Colonel Henry W. Anderson of the American Red Cross in Romania who believed intervention in Russia was “desirable and urgently necessary.”<sup>110</sup> Even the British diplomats did not hesitate to tell their American allies that desperate conditions have

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<sup>108</sup> Poole to Lansing, July 10, 1918, RG 59, File #861.00/2018.

<sup>109</sup> Ernest L. Harris, U.S. Consul in Siberia, to Francis, July 14, 1918, RG 59, File #861.00/2021.

<sup>110</sup> Poole to Lansing, June 13, 1918, RG 59, File #861.00/2082.

made it such that “the Russian people [were] demanding intervention of whatever kind it may be.” It was not just about the Russians. “If we leave the Czechs to their fate and fail to intervene”, the British went on, “we shall suffer a blow to our image in Russia from which it will take years for us to recover,” concluded the British ambassador.<sup>111</sup> Of course, not everyone argued for the American intervention. Among those who opposed the idea of intervention, aside from radicals and socialists, there were some observers who did not see merit in military action. U.S. military attaché Major Drysdale believed that the United States could assist anti-Bolshevik forces by economic and other peaceful means without necessarily resorting to arms. He believed that “forces of democratic development could not be permanently obstructed.”<sup>112</sup> With greater elaboration spoke Vice Consul Felix Cole at Archangel. In late May, he sent a lengthy letter to the U.S. State Department conveying his misgiving about the idea of intervention. Citing improper preparations, unrealistic expectations and ill-defined objectives, Felix Cole predicted that a small expeditionary mission could ultimately snowball into a bitter long war requiring ever larger number of troops. “Intervention in the north Russia will mean that we must feed the entire north of Russia containing from 500,000 to 1,500,000 population,” he added.<sup>113</sup> Cole understood that the Wilson administration had neither the will nor capacity for such an undertaking. For the administration officials who were focused on prosecuting a war on the European front, Russia seemed like a secondary matter which nevertheless vied for their scarce time and resources. “We have been literally

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<sup>111</sup> Rufus Daniel Rufus Isaacs, British Ambassador in the U.S., to President Woodrow Wilson, June 20, 1918, RG 59, File #861.00/2164.

<sup>112</sup> Poole to Lansing, May 20, 1918, RG 59, File #861.00/1870.

<sup>113</sup> George F. Kennan, *Soviet-American Relations, 1917-1920: The Decision to Intervene* (New York: Atheneum, 1967), 363.

beset,” War Secretary Howard Baker complained in early July, “with the Russian questions in its various forms... Each one’s solution is dictated by the occurrences which he saw in the little corner of Russia in which he happened to be stationed.”<sup>114</sup>

After much vacillation and haggling with its allies in Europe and Japan, with great reluctance, in early August of 1918, President Wilson did eventually order a small number of American troops into Archangel and Siberia. Historical evidence suggests that Wilson appreciated the gravity of the first American soldier setting foot on the Russian soil. According to Betty Unterberger, at least initially, “Wilson could see nothing ‘wise or practicable’ in the scheme.”<sup>115</sup> But as the war intensified, “Wilson was overwhelmed with appeals for intervention from his Allies, from the Supreme War Council and from Ferdinand Foch, Generalissimo of the Allied Armies.”<sup>116</sup> There is little indication that the despatches from Russia itself or concern for the spread of Bolshevism played a significant role in the president’s decision. Rather, Wilson appeared sensitive to a potential conflict with America’s European allies who insisted that the Russian ports which contained valuable military hardware -- given by the Allies to the Russian government prior to the Bolshevik seizure of power -- be secured. Also, a part of the mission involved assisting the supposedly stranded Czecho-Slovak regiments in leaving the Russian territory.

Hence, in mid-August when 27-th and 31-st Infantry regiments landed in Vladivostok, the objectives of the mission were anything but clear. Upon his arrival to the shore on September 1, the Commander of American Expeditionary forces in

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<sup>114</sup> Ibid., 382.

<sup>115</sup> Betty Miller Unterberger, “President Wilson and the Decision to Send American Troops to Siberia,” *The Pacific Historical Review*, Feb, 1955, 65.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid., 66.

Siberia General William S. Graves was surprised to find that no customs official or port authority was there to greet him to handle the arrangements.<sup>117</sup> But it could have been worse. In fact, by the time the Americans arrived in Vladivostok, the Japanese and British troops had cleared the area from the Bolsheviks, and in the ensuing period, they were to destroy the remaining Bolshevik detachments in Amur Valley which stretched from Khabarovsk to Blagovestchensk. Three days after General Graves' arrival to Vladivostok, 339-th American Infantry of about 4,700 men landed in Archangel. The instructions of the commander of these forces, colonel Stewart, were simple: follow the orders of the British commander of Allied forces Major-General F.C. Poole. Ambassador Francis who had ardently advocated the American intervention for the past several months should have been elated. However, greeting the arriving American soldiers at the Archangel port, the ambassador's mood was dampened by certain concerns. First, the regiments were nowhere large enough to overthrow the Bolsheviks. Secondly, overthrowing the Bolsheviks did not seem to be the main target of the deployment. For the next several months, Francis would do his utmost to try steer the rudderless American regiment in the direction which he thought would have been the most optimum outcome both for the Russians and his own countrymen.

As stated earlier, the Americans' arrival in Russia was accompanied by a near total chaos in that country. Despite the desperate circumstances which this intervention entailed, however, the landing resembled more a triumphant march through Paris in 1944, than the D-Day at Normandy. Reporting from Vladivostok, U.S. Consul John K. Caldwell recalled the event: "The American troops paraded

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<sup>117</sup> George F. Kennan, *Soviet-American Relations, 1917-1920*, 414.

yesterday and were well-received by the crowd as had been the French.” Then reflecting on the complexities that surrounded the relationship between various Allied powers with the Russians, he added: “But the British and the Japanese were received in silence. British were at disadvantage,” Caldwell explained, “because they were the first ones to show up, so nobody realized the significance, but silence for Japanese followed cheers for the French.” Caldwell further elaborated, “It is evident that Russians still feel much hostility toward Japanese which latter are sure to increase by many small but irritating actions such as sentries preventing people from walking on pavement before the Japanese staff headquarters.”<sup>118</sup> Even though the Allies acted in the capacity of liberators from Bolshevik tyranny, the friction between the locals and the true powers who were alien in culture, language and attitudes was unavoidable. While the comparatively positive attitude toward the representatives of the New World lingered until the latter’s departure, similar courtesy was not extended to the British, the French and certainly, the Japanese. “They resent foreign domination,” wrote Ambassador Francis conveying his observations of ordinary Russians’ disposition to soldiers milling about in foreign uniforms. However, neither the inhabitants of the Bolshevik-free territories, nor the American envoy lost sight of the fact that “if Allied troops were not here [in Archangel], Bolsheviks would drive into the Arctic Ocean all new Government officials and supporters not caught and shot.”<sup>119</sup>

With the multiplying successes of the White forces on the eastern and southern fronts followed by the foreign intervention, toward the end of August, the

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<sup>118</sup> John K. Caldwell, U.S. Consul in Vladivostok, to Lansing, August 20, 1918, RG 59, File #861.00/2534.

<sup>119</sup> Francis to Lansing, September 4, 1918, RG 59, File #861.00/2620.

Bolshevik morale began to sink. Almost completely surrounded by hostile forces, few but the most determined within the Bolshevik leadership felt that obstacles to retaining power could be overcome. Such state of affairs gave way to various kinds of rumors. The managing director of the Nobel Oil Company of Swedish nationality, returning from Russia on August 13, 1918, reported that all Bolshevik leaders had left Petrograd and Moscow. Three days prior, the property of the Nobel company in Petrograd was to be nationalized, but no one showed up from the government, leading the manager to speculate that the Bolshevik system had virtually collapsed.<sup>120</sup> Someone had even suggested that Lenin was living in Kronstadt on a battleship, whereas Leon Trotsky stayed in the Emperor's yacht. The Bolsheviks' increasing sense of alarm became further reflected in the arrests of numerous British and French citizens on charges of spying. Consul Poole reported about his meeting with Foreign Commissar Georgi Chicherin and his deputy Leo Karahan in which the American representative made it clear that he was not going to be intimidated by such actions. "If something happens, you will be held personally responsible for your actions," Poole warned the Bolshevik ministers. Nor was Poole assured by the Bolshevik leader who told him that the consul had nothing to fear. In a handwritten note at the end of the typed message Poole felt it necessary to add that the Bolsheviks were becoming "more and more desperate and that no reliance was to be placed on their assurances."<sup>121</sup>

On August 30, 1918, as Vladimir Lenin made an exit from the Mickelson Factory where he had given a speech condemning imperialist interference with

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<sup>120</sup> Morris to Lansing, August 24, 1918, RG 59, File #861.00/2557.

<sup>121</sup> Poole to Lansing, August 8, 1918, RG 59, File #861.00/2672.

Russia's revolution, a Social Revolutionary activist named Fannie Kaplan shot him thrice. The assassination attempt, which Lenin evidently survived, came on the heels of several high-profile killings of Bolshevik leaders, including Moisei S. Uritsky, the head of the Petrograd Cheka. The Socialist Revolutionaries could not forgive Lenin for dispersing the Constituent Assembly, signing the Brest-Litovsk treaty and above all, the repression.

The Bolshevik response that ensued was overwhelming. On September 2, 1918, Cheka issued an order which, judging by its contents, defied basic principles of judicial reciprocity. It indiscriminately commanded "immediate execution" of former tsarist security officials and anyone with a gun in his possession, including those already in prison on such charges. Without any judicial procedure, the order instructed imprisonment of "all well-known mensheviks, right SRs" as well as "representatives of the bourgeoisie, landlords, factory owners, traders, and all counter-revolutionary officers" and to place them in concentration camps under heavy work regimentation. Perhaps more surprising aspect of the order was the provision ordering Cheka to detain the members of the bourgeoisie as hostages, thereby turning the Soviet government into a hostage-taker of the citizens, by its own admission. "In case of any attempt to organize, stage uprising, attack the guards – immediately to be shot," stated the second article of the eight-item order.<sup>122</sup>

In addition to its opponents, whether real or perceived, on the domestic venue, among those targeted by the Soviet government were also several allied diplomats including the British envoy Bruce Lockhart who was suspected of aiding anti-

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<sup>122</sup> A.I. Kokurin and N.V. Petrov, eds., *GULAG 1918 – 1960, Dokumenty* (Moscow: Materik, 2000), 14-15.



Bolshevik elements. With the remaining Allied officials huddled up in the building of the American embassy out of fear for their own lives, Consul Poole wrote a letter to the White House in which he stated that the situation in Moscow had become desperate. “A veritable slaughter is going on,” Poole went on, “I think neutral and Allied Powers alike should take action in the name of humanity not so much on account of the Allied citizens who are in danger here as to shield the untold number of Russian innocents who are being sacrificed by the Bolshevik barbarity. Since Uritsky’s death 7000 people have been arrested in Petrograd alone, and on the Bolsheviks’ own statement, 500 of these have already been shot. One of the bloodiest pages in history is being written.”<sup>123</sup> Coming from a person who had observed the Russian affairs for the past several years, this level of alarm was noteworthy. After all, the execution of the Tsar Nicholas along with his wife and children nearly a month ago in Yekaterinburg, had barely registered in the communication between the diplomats. “Apparently, Czar and his family [have been] executed,” was the text of a short message in which Consul John Van A. MacMurray briefly confirmed the findings of the Czech and White forces after the liberation of the city from Bolsheviks.<sup>124</sup> Fearing that freed Tsar might rally and lead the increasing monarchist factions, Lenin had Nicholas II and his dynastic line terminated. Nearly half a year after the Bolsheviks had taken power, the culture of death had become so widespread in Russia, that the violent demise of a man who for over 20 years ruled Russia with

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<sup>123</sup> Poole to Wilson, September 18, 1918, RG 59, File #861.00/2743.

<sup>124</sup> John Van A. MacMurray, U.S. Consul in Pekin to Lansing, August 31, 1918, RG 59, File #861.00/2616

near-absolute authority did not draw much curiosity among those monitoring the events in that country.<sup>125</sup>

In displaying merciless attitude toward their rivals, many Bolsheviks believed to be following in the footsteps of the French revolutionaries, whom Karl Marx had once praised for the courage “to meet the cowardly rage of the counter-revolution with revolutionary passion, the *terreur blanche* with the *terreur rouge*.”<sup>126</sup> Often referred as the Red Terror by historians, this bloody period in the Russian history thus cannot be properly understood without appreciating the sense with which Bolsheviks looked at historical precedents for guidance. According to George Leggett, “in applying terror, the Bolsheviks were very conscious of the traditions of the French revolutionary history.”<sup>127</sup> Red Terror was not a mere reaction to the violence by their opponents; it stemmed from deeply-rooted attitudes which prevailed among Bolsheviks with regard to the notion of violence. For the Bolsheviks, violence was not even a necessity, a last resort to salvage one’s objectives, but a method which drew them closer to their revered idols in France who over a century ago had visited terrible atrocities upon the representatives of the *ancien regime*. Only several weeks after taking power, Trotsky had warned: “In not more than a month’s time terror will assume very violent forms, after the example of the Great French Revolution, the guillotine, and not merely the gaol, will be ready for our enemies.”<sup>128</sup> As early as 1905, Lenin described Bolsheviks as the Jacobins of the Social Democratic

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<sup>125</sup> As late as December of 1918, intermittent despatches appeared speculating Tsar’s and his family’ fate. See RG 59, Files #861.00/2739 & 3405.

<sup>126</sup> See E. H. Carr, *The Bolshevik Revolution 1917-23*, Vol. I, (New York: W.W. Norton Company, 1978), 155.

<sup>127</sup> George Leggett, *The Cheka*, 54.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, 54.

movement, and likewise, advocated “similar use of terror to settle accounts with the aristocracy.” However, unlike the Jacobins, the Bolsheviks’ more frequent targets were the fellow dissidents against the old establishment and the disenfranchised populace at large. It is noteworthy that those who assassinated Uritsky or tried to kill Lenin were not monarchists, but social revolutionaries. As such, the Bolshevik atrocities were more than simply an account-settling with the enemies; it constituted an attempt to establish total control over the society by all means available. In that sense, the vast scope and brutality of the persecution defies even the historical standards of the country which suffered for centuries under tsarist despotism and its secret police agencies. According to Ronald Hingley, the historian of Russian secret police, “The Red Terror sets the Cheka apart from all preceding Russian political forces since it was responsible for far more political arrests and executions in some five years of activity than had occurred during the entire sway of Okhrana, the Third Section and all their predecessors put together.”<sup>129</sup> One of the most significant authorities on the history of the Cheka, George Leggett estimated that the total number of the victims of Cheka, “over the four year period December 1917 – February 1922, may have been in the region of 280,000, of whom perhaps half perished through execution and half in the suppression of insurrection.”<sup>130</sup> These numbers demonstrate the terrifying extent to which Lenin would go in order to compensate “for the paucity of popular support on which to base a dictatorship

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<sup>129</sup> Ronald Hingley, *The Russian Secret Police: Muscovite, Imperial Russian and Soviet Political Security Operations* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1970), 126.

<sup>130</sup> George Leggett, *The Cheka*, 467.

professedly operated by the proletariat, but progressively involving the regimentation of an entire people.”<sup>131</sup>

On September 10, 1918, the Norwegian Minister at Helsingfors informed his superiors in Christiania that he had reliable information that Petrograd was “burning in twelve different places, and that people were being shot indiscriminately in the streets.”<sup>132</sup> U.S. Consul General in Christiania Marion Letcher wrote from Moscow stating that massacre of Russian citizens by the Bolshevik government continued. According to him, “shootings in Moscow numbered 150 daily, and that more than one thousand people had been shot in retaliation for attempt on Lenin.” Numerous Allied diplomats in Moscow had also been jailed. Deprived of his staff and isolated, Poole suddenly found himself alone faced with the palpable danger of arrest or worse. Infuriated at the Bolsheviks’ total disregard for humanitarian values and basic diplomatic etiquettes, consul Poole issued a protest to Chicherin in which he pointed out that “the Bolshevik cause now tottered on the verge of complete moral bankruptcy.”<sup>133</sup> While the city itself remained quiet, Letcher reported on September 14, the revolution supported a veritable reign of terror with many and baseless shootings every day.”<sup>134</sup> In Poole’s view, “among the Bolsheviks, saner elements were giving way to the violent and completely irresponsible.” On September 14, facing mortal threat, with the assistance of two Norwegian diplomats, the American consul left Petrograd for the Finnish border. After an emotionally draining

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<sup>131</sup> Ibid., xxxv.

<sup>132</sup> Hans F. Schoenfeld, U.S. Consul in Finland, to Lansing, September 10, 1918, RG 59, File #861.00/2657.

<sup>133</sup> Marion Letcher, U.S. Consul General in Norway, to Lansing, September 24, 1918, RG 59, File #861.00/2790.

<sup>134</sup> Letcher to Lansing, September 14, 1918, RG 59, File #861.00/2711.

experience at the border passage, the American envoy was relieved to find himself surrounded by the Finnish guards in the non-Bolshevik territory. It was later told that ten minutes after he had crossed the border, orders had arrived from the Kremlin for Poole's arrest.<sup>135</sup>

The growing terror in Russia's center is also reflective from the series of despatches coming from governments as far away as Peru. In the despatches sent by the governments of numerous countries friendly to the United States, ranging from Cuba to Persia, "the destruction of life and liberty in Russia" was condemned in strongest terms.<sup>136</sup> In one of these messages there was a suggestion to place "reward on Lenin's and Trotsky's heads as international murderers." The harshness of the terror prompted Netherlands' Minister in Russia to call for opening a second major front in the Great War, this one against the Bolsheviks. "The danger is now so great that I feel it my duty to call the attention of the British and all other Governments to the fact that if an end is not put to Bolshevism in Russia at once," he wrote, "the civilization of the world will be threatened... I consider that the immediate suppression of Bolshevism is the greatest issue now before the world, not even excluding the war which is still raging, and unless as above stated Bolshevism is nipped in the bud immediately, it is bound to spread in one form or another over Europe and the whole world ..."<sup>137</sup>

In late September, the Swedish press reported that during the discussion at the Central Committee, recovered Lenin expressed a desire to return to the revolution's

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<sup>135</sup> George F. Kennan, *Soviet-American Relations, 1917-1920: The Decision to Intervene*, 467.

<sup>136</sup> Despatches from Peru, Venezuela, Dominican Republic, Honduras, Cuba, October 1, 1918, RG 59, Files #861.00/2832-2849.

<sup>137</sup> John William Davis, U.S. Ambassador in Great Britain, to Lansing, October 4, 1918, RG 59, File #861.00/2884.

good methods. If that was the case, then it could be presumed that Lenin was responding to the barrage of foreign outcry and condemnation. Yet an October missive sent by Poole's agent in Petrograd tells a different story. "Bolsheviks are convinced that their defiance of "imperialistic" powers are successful," noted the unnamed agent, "Bourgeois are totally terrorized, cannot do anything. The British and French are harassed. Threats won't do. We must bargain with Bolsheviks. Food situation is going from bad to worse with no relief in sight."<sup>138</sup> Indeed, as Ambassador Francis had observed, the Bolshevik power seemed to multiply in ratio to the terror they exercised against their rivals and the discontent from starving populace at large. Having wrecked the economy and the livelihoods of a great majority of the people, the Bolsheviks vested little hope in winning the hearts and minds of their subjects.

The impressions of an American agricultural expert and a visiting professor Thomas Anderson are informative in this regard. With no particular axe to grind against the Bolsheviks, Anderson coolly related how the first acts of nationalization by the Bolsheviks were received well by the population, since for the first time the land now belonged to them. But a lack of operational procedure for common ownership, the Bolshevik attempts to set prices at minimum and requisitioning of grain quickly led to hostile reactions from the peasants. As for the nationalization of industries, Anderson noted that "efficiency decreased 40 percent, and production cost went up 500 to 1000 percent." Consequently, most workers lost their jobs. According to Anderson, having lost their employment, the workers were mobilized into army for 600 roubles a month. "This was the only way to assure one's existence

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<sup>138</sup> Morris to Lansing, October 7, 1918, RG 59, File #861.00/2911.

during the upcoming winter,” the American explained the rationale behind many workers joining the Red Army. In his view, most Russians did not take interest in politics, and were ignorant. However, “no more than 10 percent of the population supports the Bolsheviks,” Anderson stated with unusual confidence, and that “most would welcome Allied intervention under the American lead” in order “to stop the anarchy and slaughter that are now going on.”<sup>139</sup>

Thomas Anderson’s account of the situation in Russia was corroborated by many Western and Russian persons who had just returned from that country. In a despatch that contained interviews with Evgeni Savitch of the Second Russian Insurance Company, a Frenchman named Valla, and two Americans representing the International Harvester Company, all interlocutors conveyed that Bolsheviks had little popular support. The Bolshevik army, Savitch reported, had at first consisted of Lettish regiments “who were outcasts in their own society” only to be reinforced by Chinese laborers who had been brought into Russia in 1915-16. “They are kept loyal to Bolsheviks,” Savitch contended, “by being paid huge sums of money. They can loot and rob without ever facing a prospect of punishment.” In a place where the wages were about 900 Roubles a month, a simple lunch of soup, chopped meat and potatoes cost 60 roubles.” The only people who could afford even those amenities, according to Savitch, were sailors, and Red guards, since nobody else had money. “At the present time,” he continued, “many people are actually dying of starvation in Petrograd and Moscow.” The two American observers repeated Savitch’s assertions about the extreme lack of food and fuel in Russia. According to them, many people would die from cold alone during the upcoming winter. “The men are convinced that

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<sup>139</sup> Professor Thomas Anderson to Lansing, November 1, 1918, RG 59, File #861.00/3153.

the next few months will see a still greater exodus of workmen and inhabitants of the cities to the country and it is quite possible that both Moscow and Petrograd will become dead cities,” wrote the author of the despatch interviewing the Americans.<sup>140</sup> In a letter sent from Petrograd to Stockholm, an inhabitant of the city stated that as high as the prices were it was still difficult to obtain anything.<sup>141</sup> “All trade [is] gradually being nationalized and as soon as any business is nationalized the food stores and their articles are taken by Red Guards and sold at fantastic prices. While people are starving the Red Guards and Bolshevik authorities are living in plenty,” the letter concluded. In another despatch from Stockholm, the Russian manager of Northern Tourist Bureau named Mr. Wist was quoted saying that “Bolshevik were gaining numbers not because people liked them, because it was the only way to secure food.” People, he told, were literally starved into submission. “The one prayer of the soldiers, the sailors, and the civil population including the Bolshevik officials is that the Allies will immediately appear and commence operations against them,” wrote Mr. Wist. “The minute this is done there would be an absolute wholesale desertion from the Bolsheviks.”<sup>142</sup>

While the conditions in the parts of Russia controlled by non-Bolshevik forces were difficult, the despatches did not suggest similar levels of destitution and hunger. Describing the state of white soldiers, Ernest Harris, the U.S. Vice-Consul in Omsk wrote: “It is without money. The soldiers are without sufficient clothes and are badly and irregularly paid.”<sup>143</sup> Still, he noted that the Siberian government appeared to be

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<sup>140</sup> Morris to Lansing, October 19, 1918, RG 59, File #861.00/3188.

<sup>141</sup> Morris to Lansing, December 3, 1918, RG 59, File #861.00/3339.

<sup>142</sup> Morris to Lansing, December 10, 1918, RG 59, File #861.00/3400.

<sup>143</sup> Harris to Lansing, December 9, 1918, RG 59, File #861.00/3369.



gradually improving its affairs. In Stockholm, the American Charge d'Affaires Sheldon Whitehouse spoke with General Boris Badjanoff, the chief of the Ukrainian delegation in Scandinavia. "There is a great abundance of grain in the Ukraine and at every place white bread, butter, sugar and real coffee can be obtained," general Badjanoff told Whitehouse. Even though most factories did not operate at full capacity, the Ukrainian general expressed his confidence that things were on the right track. "A friend made 25, 000 roubles in 1917, but in 1918 his profit was 250,000," he divulged. Even though the prices for goods remained expensive, he assured Whitehouse that there was no starvation in nationalist-held Ukraine.<sup>144</sup>

With the setting of winter, the warring parties in Russia's civil war reached a stalemate. For the Bolsheviks, success was defined by the mere fact that they still controlled large portions of the country, and following the intensification of Red Terror, they had little to fear in terms of internal dissent. The same, however, could not be said about the Whites. Unlike Bolsheviks who were united behind a singular objective and under one leadership, the Whites represented a rainbow of political factions and military leaders. Consul Harris reported that outside Bolshevik Russia, there existed seven governments. He noted wryly that the Russians of Archangel, Omsk, Yekaterinburg, Hobchangu, Ovsok, Vladivostok, Harbin, Samara differed between each other when not severely oppressed by the Tsar or Bolsheviks.<sup>145</sup> Following several unsuccessful attempts to organize civil government in Siberia, Admiral Aleksandr Kolchak was given the authority of a dictator in order to efficiently counter the Bolshevik moves. However, General Semyonov refused to

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<sup>144</sup> Sheldon Whitehouse, U.S. Charge d'Affaires in Stockholm, to Lansing November 4, 1918, RG 59, File #861.00/3366.

<sup>145</sup> Harris to Lansing, September 27, 1918, RG 59, File #861.00/2791.

recognize Kolchak's authority as a dictator and declared himself one in the city of Chita.<sup>146</sup> Even greater was the friction between White forces in North Caucasus and Kuban. Reporting from the Don region, American consul in Batum, F. Willoughby Smith, recognized the importance of bringing about "such a union between the parties as to enable them to work out a common program and prevent personal interests or ambitions from seriously interfering therewith." "This lack of union and individual intrigues and ambitions have led to the failure of every effort heretofore made to establish a Government in Russia unless the Bolshevik Soviet can be called one," stated Smith.<sup>147</sup>

In contrast to Bolsheviks, the Whites lacked a clear political platform, if any at all. As historian of the Civil War Peter Kenez has observed, the latter "consisted of army officers, men who had felt basically at home in tsarist Russia, who disliked politics, and who envisaged only military solutions to problems. They had no vision of a future Russia, yet they deeply felt that Bolshevik rule would bring only evil to their country."<sup>148</sup> In response to the suggestion by one of his advisors that some political program should be instituted for their new government, Kolchak was reported to have replied: "No, leave this alone. Work only for the army. Don't you understand that no matter what fine laws you write, if we lose, they will all the same shoot us?"<sup>149</sup> According to Kenez, The Reds' superb organizational skills were not just limited to raising a large army and effectively prosecuting the war against an

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<sup>146</sup> In doing so, General Semyonov was said to have relied on the Japanese support. See November 22, 1918, RG 59, File #861.00/3261.

<sup>147</sup> Smith to Francis, September 11, 1918, RG 59, File #861.00/2666.

<sup>148</sup> Peter Kenez, *The Defeat of the Whites: Civil War in South Russia, 1919-1920* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977), xiii.

<sup>149</sup> Richard Pipes, *A Concise History of the Russian Revolution*, 236.

array of enemies, but they also carried out aggressive propaganda campaign which attracted large number of recruits willing to fight for a cause. “The Bolshevik leadership believed in the possibility of remaking society and man and was committed to a puritanical outlook,” writes Kenez. “The Whites, on the other hand, regarded the Civil War not as a heroic period in which the foundations of a better society was being laid, but as a nightmare which they had to survive as well as they could.”<sup>150</sup>

This lack of political vision gave way to misunderstanding and suspicions among the populace about the motives of the White leaders. “What is worse,” Ernest Harris complained from Siberia, “is that the [Kolchak] Government has not been able to combat social-revolutionists and Bolshevik propaganda which is undermining the discipline of the soldiers on the front.”<sup>151</sup> Furthermore the ardent nationalism of certain White generals made it impossible for them to join forces with non-Russian entities who were equally eager to see the Bolsheviks gone. Many of General Anton Denikin’s proclamations lamented the break-up of the mighty Russian Empire and the loss of natural resources in the territories inhabited by Poles, Ukrainians and Caucasian nations. In fact, much of the time, Ukrainian nationalists spent their efforts trying to defend against invading forces of Denikin.<sup>152</sup> Under such circumstances, former non-Russian subjects of the empire sometimes saw the Reds as the lesser of the two evils.

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<sup>150</sup> Peter Kenez, *Civil War in South Russia*, 24.

<sup>151</sup> Reinsch to Lansing, December 9, 1918, RG 59, File #861.00/3369 & 3370.

<sup>152</sup> Based on press publications from Kiev, the U.S. legation in Sweden reported about Ukrainian leader Petliura trying to “maneuver between the Allies and Bolsheviks” while defending mostly against Denikin’s 120,000 strong army. Morris to Lansing, January 2, 1919, RG 59, File #861.00/3567.

With the advent of Armistice on November 11, 1918, the entire prism through which the Americans regarded the Russian affairs changed. The Great War which had been a catalyst for revolutionary turmoil in Russia was now over. And with it, the *raison d'etre* of the Allied intervention – which was to secure military storage sites from falling in to German hands – had vanished. However, shortly before the war ended, certain events had already transpired which perhaps bore omen for the relationship between the United States and the Soviet state in the near future. Ever since the arrival of the American soldiers in Russia, Ambassador David Francis tried to assume some degree of control over the military force. Even though formally the American military was placed under the British commander, as the senior political representative of the most powerful Allied state, the U.S. ambassador enjoyed great authority in terms of directing the army's actions on the ground. Almost helpless and stranded until recently in the center of Bololand (as the Americans came to refer to the areas controlled by Bolshevik forces), Francis now found himself a player in the game with some control over what seemed to be the only element that mattered in Russia – firepower. Having moved to Archangel shortly before the arrival of the American forces in August, the ambassador was determined to make use of this valuable asset for the objective he had set forth. Nearly a year past the Bolshevik takeover, Francis despised everything about the Bolsheviks and felt it to be critical to eliminate this movement once and for all. “My conclusion is that the only way to end this disgrace to civilization,” Francis wrote, “is for the Allies immediately to take Petrograd and Moscow by sending sufficient troops therefore to Murmansk and Archangel without delay.” The seriousness of Francis' tone is evident in that fact that

he made a detailed suggestion with regard to the number of the troops that would be sufficient to handle the task. “Fifty thousand would serve, but hundred thousand would be ample. [Consul] Poole says we could take Petrograd with ten thousand, but could not hold it.”<sup>153</sup> The ambassador realized that the size of the expeditionary force was not sufficient for the task of removing Bolsheviks from power. Francis believed that Bolsheviks gained strength by terrorizing, and the fact that Allies had so few troops on the ground, unwilling to take the fight to the Reds, threatened to render the mission utterly meaningless. “The Russians correctly reason that if no additional Allied troops come,” he stated, “the Allies will be driven from northern Russia and all Russians will be exterminated by the Bolsheviks.”<sup>154</sup>

Encouraged by the advances of the White forces centered in Omsk, Francis believed that the Allies should try to link up with the anti-Bolshevik forces in Siberia and perhaps form a united front against Bolsheviks. Francis’ solution was simple: America should enter the war on the side of the Whites and with common effort, destroy the Bolshevik enemy. The trouble was, Francis superiors at the State Department and the White House did not share neither his objectives, nor his solutions.<sup>155</sup> Even though, the Americans in Archangel had already engaged in battles with Bolsheviks in several instances, U.S. State Secretary Robert Lansing made it clear that America did not consider itself in a state of war with Bolshevik Russia. As such, no more American troops were to be sent to North Russia.

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<sup>153</sup> Francis to Lansing, October 10, 1918, RG 59, File #861.00/2932.

<sup>154</sup> About a month later, another American representative in Denmark, Grant Smith recommended the invasion of Petrograd. In his conversation with the Danish Secretary of Foreign Affairs, the latter had expressed his belief that “[Soviets’] system of terrorism would collapse the moment a properly organized force appeared with provisions, as the hatred of the Bolsheviks was so widespread among the people.” Smith to Lansing. November 23, 1918, RG 59, File #861.00/ 3267.

<sup>155</sup> William Allison, *American Diplomats in Russia*, 43.

By this time, the ambassador faced yet another, personal health problem. Severe pain emanating from his enlarged prostate effectively incapacitated him. While Francis wished to stay and continue the fight, he was forced to evacuate from the country where no medical care was available to treat this sort of problem. On November 7, four days before the Great War ended, aboard the ship *Olympia*, he departed Archangel for England. Even though Francis quickly recovered once in Britain, this would be the last time the ambassador who had served his country with honor and perseverance ever saw Russia again.

With Ambassador Francis' departure from the scene, the American -- and overall, the Allied -- mission lost one of its key proponents in the fight against Bolshevism. The remaining U.S. representatives on the ground, such as DC Poole who had now returned to Archangel to take Ambassador Francis' place as a charge d'affaires, understood that such a withdrawal would only contribute to Bolshevik victory in the Civil War. But staying in Russia had its costs. Stranded in North Russia with no instructions to either advance or retreat, most American soldiers had difficulty understanding the point of their mission in this remote part of the world. In his memoir, *Fighting the Bolsheviks*, Private First Class Donald E. Carey who served in the expedition to Archangel, captured the sentiments of a soldier caught up in these strange circumstances:

“My first night on front line duty was weird and fanciful. That I, a Michigan lad, reared amid the conveniences of an ordinary American home should be standing in the shadows of a cluster of pines beside a large river sparkling with moonlight, listening to Red propaganda in this

godforsaken country on such a hellish mission as war, far exceeded my wildest dreams.”<sup>156</sup>

What emerges from the diaries of this young man is the unusual and perhaps even curious ambivalence toward the enemy who was to be confronted only depending on the circumstances. Private Carey narrated the story of a Bolshevik propagandist who would occasionally show up at their camp and try to brainwash the bemused American soldiers about the ideals of his revolution.

The fact that American government did not declare a war on Bolshevik Russia, however, did not mean there were no casualties resulting from frequent skirmishes that took place between opposing sides. To be sure, the Americans fought against the Bolsheviks and numerous soldiers died on both sides as a result.

According to a despatch issued by Poole, on January 3, with the goal of putting an end to the Bolshevik incursion which “inflicted desultory casualties” on the Allied troops, the Americans conducted a military operation.<sup>157</sup> With only 7 Americans dead and 30 wounded, the operation was hailed as a partial success. As the Bolsheviks kept up the pressure, however, the morale began tumbling both among soldiers and in Washington. When the death toll from American soldiers in Russia reached 132, the politicians in the United States, such as Democratic Senator Robert LaFollette, began questioning the grounds for sacrificing American lives.<sup>158</sup> Then there was the leftist anti-war camp which generally opposed American intervention

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<sup>156</sup> Neil G. Carey, ed. *Fighting the Bolsheviks: The Russian War memoir of Private First Class Donald E. Carey, US Army, 1918-1919* (Novato, CA: Presidio Press, 1997), 84.

<sup>157</sup> Dewitt Clinton Poole, U.S. Charge d’Affaires in Archangel, to Lansing, January 3, 1919, RG 59, File #861.00/3575.

<sup>158</sup> Neil G. Carey, *Fighting the Bolsheviks*, 124.

abroad, and especially, as one petition from Detroit characterized, to “overthrow a government established by the people with force of bayonets.”<sup>159</sup> In Archangel itself, soldiers saw little point in defending a barren piece of tundra both for and against the people whom they simply did not understand. “How I wished I was out of Russia so I could see my people, read, study and learn and amount to something. I’m tired of rotten food, irregular life, vile companions and conditions, and of hearing Wilson and England damned,” wrote private Carey.<sup>160</sup>

What made things particularly unworthwhile and frustrating was the soldiers’ knowledge of their government’s ultimate intentions to bring them home. Shortly following the Armistice, there was a consensus within the Wilson administration that the American troops should be withdrawn. The problem was that Russia’s arctic ports froze between the months of November and May. Logistically, the seaborne evacuation of the regiments could not take place until late Spring. Stranded in North Russia until the foreseeable future, strong friction developed between the American and British soldiers in the area. “A volume might be written on ‘British-American Discord in Russia,’ wrote Carey – “The ‘limeys,’ as they were contemptuously called – when not designated by some foul names -- were anathema to most of our troops.” Acting as allies for the first time in history, “the snobbish self-assurance and patronizing air of English soldiers, even in colonial times, never met favorably with Americans.”<sup>161</sup> Many Americans believed that they had been put up to this fight by the British whose king, unlike President Wilson, openly pursued a policy designed to

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<sup>159</sup> Under the leadership of Soviet sympathizer Albert Rhys Williams, 4000 citizens signed a petition demanding “immediate withdrawal” of American troops from Russia. Walter Nelson to Lansing, February 20, 1919, RG 59, File #861.00/3921.

<sup>160</sup> Neil G. Carey, *Fighting the Bolsheviks*, 143.

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid.*, 166.



remove Bolsheviks from power. After all, British statesman Winston Churchill had been particularly adamant in this regard. When it seemed that the Allies might abandon Russia to the mercy of Bolsheviks, he asserted: “It is a delusion to suppose that all this year we have been fighting the battles of the anti-Bolshevik Russians. On the contrary, they have been fighting ours and this truth will become painfully apparent from the moment that they are exterminated and the Bolsheviks are supreme over the whole vast territories of the Russian Empire.”<sup>162</sup>

According to historian Markku Ruotsila, conservatives such as Churchill recognized the inherent dangers in the victory of the Communist ideology insofar as it would have “certain definitive consequences [in the West] which could not be prevented once the fundamentals of economic and social interaction began to be tampered with.” “For conservatives, it was necessary to destroy the temporary centre from which the false yet alluring ideas of pure democracy and collectivist state were being transmitted and it was necessary to destroy each of their several manifestation in Western societies.” Whereas many Western liberals saw Bolshevism as a political reaction rooted in the economic social flaws of existing society” conservatives believed that “Bolshevism, and by extension, collectivism as a whole, fundamentally was not about temporal, material conditions at all.” Instead, Ruotsila wrote, “conservatives understood that socialism and Bolshevism were offering a secular form of religion” which sought to supplant the fundamental beliefs upon which sustained liberal socio-political orders in Great Britain and the United States. In contrasting attitudes among Churchill-type conservatives and liberals in the Anglo-American world toward the Soviet regime, historian Markku Ruotsila concluded that

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<sup>162</sup> Richard Pipes, *A Concise History of the Russian Revolution*, 251.

“conservatives correctly claimed that Bolshevism may well have been a social and economic phenomenon and a reaction to something pre-existent but that it was also an actual forces based movement in control of many of the significant resources of the Russian Empire.” Thus, “given the supposed nature of Bolshevism, conservatives thought that to remain inactive would be to certainly lose the fight.”<sup>163</sup>

The dangers posed by the Bolshevik triumph in Russia to the eventual security of the American republic were also well understood by the emissaries of the United States. “Bolshevism is an actual menace to civilization; it must be met and crushed,” wrote American consul in Omsk Ernest Harris. “Bolshevism is no longer a Russian problem but one which endangers all humanity. First-hand personal experiences with Bolshevism in Russia and Siberia during almost two years leads me to make this statement.”<sup>164</sup>

In many ways, Harris’ views resonated with those of David Francis, Maddin Summers and D.C. Poole who had observed the rise of Bolshevism firsthand: “I am inclined to think that the American people do not fully realize what Bolshevism signifies,” he reported with alarm. “For fifteen months it has held European Russia in a state of terror... Bolshevism is a greater danger than the militarism, [which] at least stood for law and order while Bolshevism stands only for destruction of life and property. Bolshevism constitutes a real world danger and should be literally stamped out.” Reporting on the atrocities committed by Bolsheviks in the Baltic region, the American military attaché in Denmark, too, deemed necessary to comment that Bolshevism was “nothing more or less than suppression of a large majority of the

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<sup>163</sup> Markku Ruotsila, *British and American Anticommunism before the Cold War* (London: Frank Cass, 2001), 106-108.

<sup>164</sup> Harris to Lansing, January 19, 1919, RG 59, File #861.00/3666.

people by a very small and exceedingly shameless minority, which is made up of a few foreign idealists and – for the greater part – of criminals.” Thus, the attaché continued, “it is the complete opposite of Democracy and also of Aristocracy – for it’s the most extreme form of ochlocracy ever known to history.”<sup>165</sup> The unwillingness of the American leadership to invest decisively in the destruction of Bolshevism, in Ernest Harris’ mind, only bolstered the Bolsheviks’ argument before the beleaguered Russian populace that the Allies were in Russia merely for the protection of their own geo-political interests – hence, they refused to advance an inch forward from the posts they had initially occupied inside Russia. “The occupation of Murmansk and Archangel without further advance into the country has been unfortunate,” wrote Harris, because “it has lent color to the Bolshevik charge that intervention is selfishly inspired, seaports alone being taken and with a view of permanent occupation. This argument, which is very Russian, is enabling the Bolsheviks,” he concluded.<sup>166</sup>

The fog of the Civil War thickened during the winter months of 1919. Haphazard advances of the Whites aided by Britain and the United States and the impossibly harsh conditions kept a glimmer of hope that the tide against Bolshevism could be turned. A motley of British, French and Italian visitors returning from Moscow informed that in terms of insecurity to life and freedom, the situation was extraordinarily harsh. According to them, everyone in the city starved except the Red Guards and the Bolshevik leadership. Even the amount of money was reduced, due to the shortage of paper. The Western workers for the Society of Friends of War

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<sup>165</sup> Norman Hapgood, U.S. Minister in Denmark, to Lansing, June 18, 1919, RG 59, File #861.00/4813.

<sup>166</sup> Harris to Peace Mission, January 22, 1919, RG 59, File #861.00/3682.

Victims' Relief Committee who escaped from Moscow reported the pricelist for food items which strikes one not as much for the exorbitance of the prices as for the content of the menu which, among other strange items, included dog meat.<sup>167</sup> In their views, as the American diplomats in Stockholm who interviewed the visitors reported, "the Russian peasants wanted neither Bolshevik, nor the Bourgeoisie, but a conservative-socialist government." Perhaps this seemingly complex and in some ways, contradictory desire accounts for the failure of the Whites to gain support in the popular opinion. "The Russian leaders realize a fundamental antagonism between democracy and Bolshevism. One favors one class rule over everyone else.., others believe in democracy... This difference cannot be adjusted by agreement; force is alone adequate, and the special circumstances of the Russian Revolution have been such that the champions of democracy must seek support abroad."<sup>168</sup>

The anti-Bolsheviks' inability to garner sufficient support of the public as well as the latter's boundless tolerance for the Bolshevik oppression was frustrating to many observers who sought various explanations for this phenomenon. Reporting from Vladivostok, Consul John Caldwell blamed the lack of allegiance to anti-Bolshevism on the failures of the Kolchak government. He strongly criticized the actions and deeds of the reactionary classes ostensibly representing the White administration. In Caldwell's estimate, the latter's interference in *zemstvos*, cooperatives and labor unions did much to sow seeds of suspicion among peasants who were weary of the return to bad old days. Furthermore the drastic measures employed by Kolchak's emissaries to mobilize inhabitants in the fight against

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<sup>167</sup> Morris to Lansing, February 2, 1919, RG 59, File #861.00/3869.

<sup>168</sup> Harris to Peace Mission, January 27, 1919, RG 59, File #861.00/3729.

Bolsheviks alienated many people. To remedy these shortcomings, Caldwell recommended the adoption of “liberal attitude to gain the confidence of lower classes and treat existing organizations with respect.”<sup>169</sup>

While the despatches contain few references to the instances of White Terror, it is clear that many American representatives were not thrilled with the actions of their allies on the ground. Even though retaliatory in form, wholesale executions of their opponents and accused Bolshevik sympathizers was a source of great discomfort to the Americans who essentially rooted for the White victory. In a conversation with the former consul in Norway, U.S. envoy to Denmark Norman Hapgood even suggested that “the only way to stop White Terror would be to attach many allied troops to Kolchak and Denikin.”<sup>170</sup> As Peter Kenez observes, the Whites resented the Bolsheviks to such degree that they rarely considered or accepted the idea that individuals could join the Party for reasons other than their attachment to the ideology. They ruthlessly treated all Bolsheviks alike. In Kenez’ view, “the short sighted White policy of immediately executing Communist captives greatly benefited the Red side in the Civil War.”<sup>171</sup>

In the opinion of some American observers, the Whites’ inability to rally the Russian population also stemmed from the problems caused by the mentality of average Russians. In an elaborate report detailing the political situation in war-time Russia, Edwin Cherrington, the Vice Consul in Omsk, considered various aspects of the Russian society. Like many of his colleagues, he had no doubt that essentially, Bolshevism was about a struggle “between decent people and peasants and a handful

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<sup>169</sup> Caldwell to Morris, April 18, 1919, RG 59, File #861.00/4331.

<sup>170</sup> See August 19, 1919, RG 59, File #861.00/5073.

<sup>171</sup> Peter Kenez, *Civil War in South Russia*, 3-4.

of gangsters seeking to impose their ideals on a society by sheer force.” Labeling Bolshevism as a social disease or perversion and likening its followers to a child who destroys his own house out of sheer adventurism, nevertheless, Cherrington did not believe that such ideals could have ever found receptive audience in America.

“Bolshevism could never happen in America. Americans are much more individualistic,” he noted. Citing the Russians’ long history under despotism and tyranny, he compared the Russian people at large to a great tiger kept in captivity since its birth. “It desires freedom,” Cherrington acknowledged, “but knows not where it is going when the bars are let down nor the perils which beset the path of the inexperienced.” In a country ruled by fear for so long, the vice-consul remarked, most Russians lacked a sense of civic obligation and a spirit of initiative taken for granted in America. Long dominated by its almighty rulers, in the aftermath of the tsarist collapse, “with all its superstition the Church has been one of the few lights burning in this land of intellectual darkness,” wrote Cherrington. “As much as we would like to do so, we cannot judge the Russian people by our own high standards. It is difficult to speculate on the future of a country where 75 percent or more of the people do not read nor write...”<sup>172</sup>

Rejecting the widespread charges that Bolshevism was the doing of the Jews, therefore unreflective of Russian traits, Cherrington observed that the Jews were “as a class more energetic and more capable than Russians.” “Having always been discriminated against, the Jews have been nursing their grievances for generations,” he added, but “the Russian Jews are not all Bolsheviks. In fact, many of them have

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<sup>172</sup> Edwin Cherrington, U.S. Vice Consul in Omsk, to Lansing, July 14, 1919, RG 59, File #861.00/4860.

suffered much under Lenin's regime." Cherrington's views in part resonate with the analysis of Oleg Budnitsky who refers to historical evidence to debunk the exaggerated and much abused equation of Bolsheviks with Jews. While certain high-profile figures of the Bolshevik Revolution, such as Trotsky (Bronstein), Kamenev (Rosenfeld) and Zinoviev (Aronov) were of Jewish origins, this factor in no way contributed to the welfare or advancement of the Russian Jews per se. Speaking at a Jewish rally, on June 9, 1917, scholar Semyon Dubnov referred to those characters Russian pseudonyms as reflective of the shame they felt of their Jewish identity. "They have no roots within our people," he stated.<sup>173</sup> Dubnov did not keep silent once the Bolsheviks seized power and watched with great consternation the early stages of the Red Terror: "They will talk about this loudly and in all stratas of the Russian society jewophobia will deepen.... They will not forgive.... The basis for anti-Semitism is ready."<sup>174</sup> The overthrow of the tsarist regime indeed resulted in the improvement in the political status of the Jews in terms of basic political rights. "The Russian revolution," writes Oleg Budnitsky, "brought the Jews the decree of March 22 regarding the equalization of rights. It also gave birth to unforeseen explosion of anti-Semitism and innumerable calamities, mostly affecting those who had nothing to do with politics."<sup>175</sup>

In Edward Cherrington's view, Russia's discordant multi-national character was no less responsible for the plethora of ills that befell this land. "The world has estimated Russia more by her vast domain than by her state of advancement. We knew "the Russian Empire" and its gilt-edged veneer of Western civilization. When

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<sup>173</sup> Oleg Budnitsky, ed., *Evrei i Russkaia Revoliutsiia* (Moscow: Gesharim, 1999), 11.

<sup>174</sup> Ibid., 18.

<sup>175</sup> Ibid., 17.

it fell we find a great conglomeration of peoples, twenty different races more Asiatic than European enveloped in ignorance and superstition, hundreds of years behind the Western world, groping in the night for something to cling to, an easy prey to demagogue and adventurer.”<sup>176</sup>

With its distinct focus on the Russian national character, Cherrington’s report revealed some genuine sentiments among American observers of Russia who ordinarily refrained from expressing them in official settings. But as David Engerman has demonstrated in *Modernization from the Other Shore*, “notions of national character so deeply rooted in the Foreign Service’s corps of Russia experts shaped the diplomats’ analysis of political trends.”<sup>177</sup> According to Engerman, at least in the initial stages of the Soviet state construction, “Slavic capacity for suffering” was a notion that affected the interpretations of nearly all diplomats who came to contact with Russia. In its disregard for human life, liberty and dignity, many American diplomats recognized what they saw as the quintessential character of the Russian society where irrationalism, despotism and violence merged into a formidable triune. In their eyes, as Engerman put it, “under the patina of Soviet modernity lay eternal Russianness.”<sup>178</sup> Perhaps more than any other feature of the Soviet realities, the understanding of the Russian character therefore figured prominently into the methodology by which diplomatic observers assessed Russia. “Scratch a Soviet, and You’ll Find a Russian” had become an adage among those who searched for some measure of predictability in Soviet behavior. According to

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<sup>176</sup> Cherrington to Lansing, July 14, 1919, RG 59, File #861.00/4860.

<sup>177</sup> David Engerman, *Modernization from the Other Shore* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), 258.

<sup>178</sup> *Ibid.*, 260.



Engerman, even instructors at the Foreign Service School warned young American diplomats about the strong inertia of the traditions that emanated from psychology and “physiography of the habitat of the Russian people.”<sup>179</sup>

In denouncing what they saw as depraved nature of the Russian *muzhik*, perhaps unknowingly, these diplomats followed in the footsteps of early Western observers such as Astolphe de Custine who almost exclusively focused on the Russian national traits in an attempt to explain Russia to their countrymen. A Frenchman who went Russia in 1839, to seek affirmation of his conservative views, Marquis de Custine returned with a conviction that Russians were an entirely different lot whose values radically differed from those present even in revolutionary France. He was struck by the tyrant worship that the Russians seemed to have elevated to the status of a religion. “Nothing can discredit authority with a people for whom obedience has become a condition of life,” he observed, “Some peoples have worshipped light; the Russians worship eclipse.”<sup>180</sup> It was tragically ironic that the Russian leftists, including Vladimir Lenin, who despised Russia’s slavish past, by their actions appeared to have further intensified the bondage of their people.

In *The Slave Soul of Russia*, psychologist Daniel Rancour-Lafferier refers to Custine’s assertion to explain the historical quandary of Russian despotism: “Tomorrow in an insurrection, in the midst of massacre, by the light of a conflagration, the cry of freedom may spread to the frontiers of Siberia; a blind and cruel people may murder their masters, may revolt against obscure tyrants, and dye the waters of Volga with blood; but they will not be any more free; barbarism is in

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<sup>179</sup> Ibid., 245.

<sup>180</sup> Astolphe de Custine, *The Journals of the Marquis de Custine: Journey for Our Time* (New York: Pellegrini & Cudahy, 1951), 70.

itself a yoke.”<sup>181</sup> Rancour-Lafferrier identifies “moral masochism” as the focus of the Russian culture, and sees its elements in various aspects of the Russian culture, particularly, its folklore and literature. According to psychohistorian, this great capacity for suffering is closely intertwined with the masochistic desire to suffer – perhaps as a means to gain outside sympathy and meaning to one’s existence. The much-talked-about Russian soul’s (*russkaia dusha*) reverence for the folklore hero Ivan the Fool, its submission to *sud’ba* (fate) and idolization of the collective are certain characteristics which the American psychohistorian points out as indicative of the childish self-destructiveness observed by Edward Cherrington. Just as Daniel Rancour-Lefferrier does, the American diplomat would have heartily agreed with Russian publicist Nikolai Berdiayev: “There is a hunger for self-destruction in the Russian soul, there is a danger of intoxication with ruin.”<sup>182</sup>

The idea that Bolshevism, despite its claim to universality, was a phenomenon isolated to the Russian people alone was comforting in some sense to certain observers. Reporting on Bolshevik agitation in Western Europe, an American diplomat in the Copenhagen noted that Germans would not buy into Bolshevik slogans because “they are more intelligent.”<sup>183</sup> Even within Russia itself, it occurred to the foreign observers that extreme atheism of the Bolsheviks precluded the support of millions of Muslim inhabitants of the Russian Empire. An American representative in Siberia quoted Sadry Maksondoff, the President of Mohammedans Council stating that “Muslims consider Bolshevism a social plague and menace to the

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<sup>181</sup> Ibid., 59.

<sup>182</sup> Daniel Rancour-Lafferriere, *The Slave Soul of Russia: Moral Masochism and the Cult of Suffering* (New York: New York University Press, 1995), 247.

<sup>183</sup> Hapgood to Lansing, December 18, 1919, RG 59, File #861.00/3639.

whole world unless checked. The Mohammedans of Russian Siberia have fought the Bolsheviks for months and organized an army to protect the provinces they inhabit.”<sup>184</sup> The contrast between the fertile Russian soil for Bolshevism and the Estonians is even more evident in the report prepared by Charles Nagel of the Russian Bureau of the U.S. Legation in Tallinn. Describing the ardent opposition of the Estonians to the Bolshevik invaders, Nagel observed that it was “no easy matter to introduce socialism in a country by force of arms, against the will of the people, such people as Estonians so unanimously standing ground for liberty against the invasion of the Bolsheviks.” “The Estonian people are democratic by nature and great individualists,” he wrote, and the democratic form of the Estonian government clearly reflected such inclinations. Recounting the success achieved by this tiny nation against numerically superior Bolsheviks, Nagel commented: “It is simply marvelous and to be admired. What is the explanation of it? First, the great patriotism, enthusiasm, intrepidity, and courage of the Estonian army; second the Estonian population that gave everything to victory. When a detachment of 50 was sent against Bolsheviks, it increased to 500 arriving at the front...”<sup>185</sup>

The Bolsheviks’ inexplicable successes inside Russia, despite numerous allegations about atrocities committed by them, was exasperating for the opponents of Bolshevism. If indeed “only five percent of the people” supported this movement as it was often alleged, then why for so long the Bolsheviks managed to hold on to power and in some cases expand it? Vouched by many for his integrity, professor David Aronson who visited Bolshevik Russia in July of 1919, ascribed the Bolshevik

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<sup>184</sup> Morris to Lansing, March 26, 1919, RG 59, File #861.00/4163.

<sup>185</sup> Charles Nagel, U.S. diplomat in Estonia, to Division of Near Eastern Affairs, April 26, 1919, RG 59, File #861.00/4365.

success to relentless political persecution. “Political murders number one hundred a day,” he wrote.<sup>186</sup> Not a single factory, except the few making ammunition, was functioning. The Bolsheviks, according to Aronson, spread their ideas through the power of bayonet and desperation that was induced by abject destitution. After all, in areas where the peasants were able to feed themselves, Bolshevism had very little appeal. Yet there were others who, not unlike Edwin Cherrington, explained the dire state of Russia to the political ignorance of the peasant population. “Peasants take very little interest in politics,” wrote S. Pinkney Tuck in his report from Kurgan and Petropavlovsk.<sup>187</sup> The lack of interest in the political future of the country, combined with the absence of any sort of association except those formed under military warlords, much of the Russia’s atomized population had no capacity to resist an organized group of people determined to impose their vision upon Russia, be they Reds or Whites.

Then there were the Western leftists who implicitly sympathized with the Bolshevik ideals, and tried to portray the Bolshevik power as the genuine manifestation of the will of the Russian people. In its efforts to counter the barbarous image of the Bolsheviks in Europe, Swedish daily *Politiken* sometimes attempted to present its own account of realities in Russia. In reference to the report by English parliamentarian and military officer Lieutenant Colonel Cecil L’Estrange Malone on his impressions in Russia, *Politiken* presented what it deemed to be the balanced picture of Russia. “It must, of course be admitted that life in Soviet Russia is not a life of Paradise,” stated the author of the article. According to Malone, food

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<sup>186</sup> David Aronson to Lansing, July 29, 1919, RG 59, File #861.00/4949.

<sup>187</sup> S. Pinkney Tuck to Lansing, July 29, 1919, RG 59, File #861.00/4955.

conditions were bad and the war had contributed a great deal to break down the infrastructure. According to him, 1100 had been put in prison on charges of speculation. As for the political terror, Malone asserted that “there was a fierce political persecution against political opponents.” He recalled that in the first part of the September alone 67 counter-revolutionists had been executed. But Malone was quick to justify the execution by stating that these 67 individuals had belonged to a monarchist group which threw a bomb at a Soviet meeting whereby injuring 9 people. Malone went on to state that “the intellectual life on the contrary [was] rather lively.” According to him, cultural life flourished in Russia due to the opening of theaters and cheap tickets. “The collection of art nearly doubled” since the revolutionaries “took the property from former capitalists who hid them in their houses.” As for the role of religion in Bolshevik society, Malone observed that “the Church [was] separated from the State and the churches [had] been handed over to the religious communions and no obstacles [were being] made for the exercise of religion.”<sup>188</sup>

“The idea of Bolshevism cannot be rooted out,” exclaimed another editorial of Swedish daily *Politiken*. “Allies have no consistent policy in regard to Russia,” wrote well known lawyer and author Karl Johanessen. “They support Kolchak who is a dictator and a butcher,” he continued, “Kolchak can take power, but he cannot hold it.” “If the Bolsheviks,” observed the editors of *Manchester Guardian* “have not made Bolshevism possible, in any case, they have made any denial of it impossible.” Some European leftists saw strong resemblance between the Bolshevik struggle against Whites and foreign interventionists and the French revolutionaries in late 18-th century who had supposedly fought to keep the flames of liberty unextinguished.

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<sup>188</sup> See despatch by Morris to Lansing, December 4, 1919, RG 59, File #861.00/6149.

“During the French Revolution whole Europe turned in fight against the new ideas. They lost then. The ideas are in the long run stronger than the bayonets, said even Napoleon,” Johanessen remarked. As Marxists, to such people, the idea of parliamentary democracy was outmoded at best, or worse, served the capitalist interests. “A policy which only counts with parliaments and abandons the idea of soviets, is at present time idiotic,” Johanessen blasted the Allied powers’ refusal to grant recognition to the Bolsheviks on the premise that the latter lacked popular legitimacy.<sup>189</sup>

Unable to reach finality in the Civil War and weary of the Bolshevik resilience, by early 1919, the Anglo-American alliance sought to negotiate some sort of arrangement between the Bolsheviks and the Whites. To head the secret mission to Bolshevik Russia, President Woodrow Wilson chose William C. Bullitt, an amateur diplomat involved in the affairs of the Great War. There was also another, perhaps more important reason behind designation of Bullitt. A liberal idealist, who despised the old world empires such as France and Britain no less than the Tsar, William Bullitt had strong connections with the Western communists who now enjoyed rare access to Lenin’s government. From the early days of the Bolshevik takeover, Bullitt had been a vociferous advocate of Soviet recognition and a critic of the U.S. Ambassador in Russia David Francis whom Bullitt considered incompetent and unable to understand the true nature of the Bolshevik movement. “It is obvious that no words could so effectively stamp the President’s address with uncompromising liberalism as would the act of recognizing the Bolsheviks,” he wrote

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<sup>189</sup> See despatch by Morris to Lansing, June 11, 1919, RG 59, File #861.00/4816.

in a memorandum to the White House shortly after the President's Fourteen Points speech.<sup>190</sup>

On February 22, 1919, William Bullitt departed England aboard a commercial ship sailing to Norway. In Christiania and Stockholm, the U.S. Ambassador Ira Morris helped to put Bullitt's party in touch with Swedish communists in order to facilitate the American envoy's trip to Russia. On March 8, with much ebullience and great expectations Bullitt arrived in "cold, hungry and half-populated Petrograd" for his meetings with Lenin and other Soviet leaders. From what later became clear, Bullitt had partially met his expectations by agreeing with Lenin on a certain set of proposals which included vague Soviet promises to observe ceasefire and maintain the frontlines of the Civil War as they then stood. However, the Bolsheviks' willingness to accede to such terms most stemmed from their weakness and the prospect of successful White counter-rally. Consequently, the Whites rejected these terms and the whole mission ultimately proved futile. As far as Bullitt was concerned, the Bolsheviks were merely trying to defend against the hostile world around them. During his brief stay in catastrophe-stricken Petrograd, Bullitt had little to comment on his impressions, except that the treatment had received from the Bolsheviks was courteous.<sup>191</sup> Upon his return to the United States, Bullitt told the Committee on Foreign Relations that "the reports of frightful conditions in Petrograd had been ridiculously exaggerated."<sup>192</sup> Yet in a later report, Bullitt would confirm that "every man, woman and child in Moscow and Petrograd was suffering from slow

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<sup>190</sup> Michael Cassella Blackburn, *The Donkey, the Carrot and the Club: William C. Bullitt and Soviet-American Relations, 1917-1948* (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger, 2004), 23.

<sup>191</sup> William C. Bullitt to President Wilson, March 22, 1919 RG 59, File #861.00/4127.

<sup>192</sup> Michael Cassella Blackburn, *William C. Bullitt and Soviet-American Relations, 1917-1948*, 45.

starvation,” and that “typhoid, typhus and small pox” had reached epidemic levels. Bullitt added that the Bolsheviks organized the entire remnants of the industry around the needs of the Red Army.

The Bolsheviks’ appreciation for the role of military in the success of their revolution was reflective from the measures by which they built up that institution. According to the press report prepared by Lieutenant J.L. Davidson based on newspapers published in Russia (almost every one of which reflected the views of the governing Bolshevik Party), on the face of rising danger from the Whites, on February 23, 1919, -- the day that would later enter the Soviet calendar as an official holiday -- Leon Trotsky made certain proposals at the at the Fifth All-Russian Congress of Soviets which were accepted. Among the measures to be taken were the introduction of “obligatory military service, strong centralized government, utilization of science and art of war as it worked out in world war, employment of military specialists and finally, iron discipline and unconditional submission to single will.”

<sup>193</sup> These were perilous times for the Soviet authority. Nearly from all directions they had been surrounded by forces now poised to attack the Soviet seat of power.

The spring of 1919 saw the beginning of successive White attacks that severely jeopardized the Bolshevik hold on power. Admiral Kolchak’s forces, attacking from the East toward the Volga region made impressive gains. The demoralized Bolshevik forces in the area, as earlier predicted by some Western observers, began to melt before the organized assault. Unfortunately Kolchak’s army was neither sufficiently organized, nor did the Admiral coordinated his actions with the other White generals such as Denikin, Wrangel and Yudenitch, controlling

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<sup>193</sup> J.L. Davidson, U.S. representative in Chita, to Lansing, April 9, 1919 RG 59, File #861.00/4503.



Southern, Crimean and North-Western fronts respectively. The Bolshevik leadership, upon its discovery of this fact, quickly moved the bulk its forces against Kolchak, and soon, the armies of the Siberian government were on the run. In Omsk, General Graves reported the evacuation of the Siberian government and the imminence of Kolchak's fall.<sup>194</sup> According to the American diplomat in Vladivostok David Macgowan, around the same time the White administration in Vladivostok declared that elections would be held by the end of the year to the assembly.<sup>195</sup> General Semyonov's representative, in his conversation with Graves, noted about the plans to form a representative government "consisting of Buryats, Cossacks, and the Zemstvos."<sup>196</sup> However, it was too late for the elections. The Siberian army was in total disarray. In a domino effect, the White-held cities were falling one after another. By winter of that year, isolated in Irkutsk and abandoned by his officers, Kolchak fell prisoner to the Bolsheviks. Without much of a trial or interrogation, Bolsheviks unceremoniously executed him.

Just as Kolchak fell back on the face of advancing Bolshevik forces, Denikin's army came into motion. Having failed to link up his forces with those of Kolchak, Denikin now single-handedly attempted to defeat the Bolsheviks. To be sure, in conjunction with General Pyotr Wrangel, Denikin scored major victories which by July placed him in position to plan for the conquest of Moscow. But here again, his unwillingness to heed the advice of the brilliant military ally Wrangel proved fatal. Having listened to Wrangel's military operation plan, Denikin suspected that the former wanted to take the glory from the battlefield for himself. "I

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<sup>194</sup> General Graves to War Department, November 11, 1919 RG 59, File #861.00/5631.

<sup>195</sup> David Macgowan, U.S. Consul in Vladivostok, November 20, 1919 RG 59, File #861.00/5713.

<sup>196</sup> General Graves to War Department, December 19, 1919 RG 59, File #861.00/5993.

see! You want to be the first to set foot in Moscow,” he at one point growled at Wrangel.<sup>197</sup> Denikin, of course, never captured Moscow. And only months later, the general’s army would meet the fate that befell Kolchak’s troops.

The Whites’ shortcomings did not end with the lack of organization or good faith in each other’s actions. One of the essential factors which contributed to the Bolshevik victory was the latter’s unmatched ability to play one enemy against the other. In the crucial months when the Bolsheviks’ fate hang on a thread, the Whites could have decisively benefited from winning the support of the non-Russian elements of the tsarist empire for their cause. However, through their imperialist rhetoric and unwillingness to recognize a proper political space for non-Russian entities which comprised more than half of the former Russian Empire, the Whites alienated many. The French military attaché, writing from Japan, had the following to say about the ineptitude of the Whites when it came to the nationality issues: “At bottom, especially on the matter of nationalities, the Admiral and the Omsk government have retained old-fashioned ideas. It is to be feared that they have not learned much. They sulk with the Poles. They hate the Letts. They almost accuse the Versailles Conference of dismembering Russia as well as Germany.”<sup>198</sup>

Among these non-Russian forces, the Poles in particular constituted a pivotal player in the Civil War. With a strong army at his disposal, Polish commander Joseph Pilsudsky was highly antagonistic toward the Reds. Moreover, the Polish leadership was under pressure from British Foreign Office to join forces with Kolchak and other White generals in an effort to defeat the Red menace.

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<sup>197</sup> Richard Pipes, *A Concise History of the Russian Revolution*, 256.

<sup>198</sup> Roland S. Morris, U.S. Ambassador in Japan, to Lansing, May 1, 1919 RG 59, File #861.00/5640.

Nevertheless Pilsudsky, who had served jail time in Russia during his youth and had extensive knowledge of the Russian society and history, calculated that as destructive as the Bolshevik actions were, in crippling Russia, they had enabled the emergence of an independent Poland. From this perspective, it made sense to support the fraction that would most weaken Poland's arch nemesis. Hence, in the summer of 1919, when Denikin seemed close to victory, the Poles delivered a decisive blow to the White fortunes by signing a truce with the Bolsheviks, and assuring them that no action would be taken so long as the Red Army was battling Denikin.<sup>199</sup> Yet, in the meanwhile, Denikin appeared to be more concerned with defeating the Ukrainian nationalists than the Bolsheviks who had now reconsolidated their forces to crush both of them alike.<sup>200</sup>

Upon defeating Denikin in the Don region, the Bolsheviks lost no time in moving toward South Caucasus. The possession over the oil fields near the Western shores of the Caspian Sea was as essential to Lenin as they had been to the imperial rulers of Russia.<sup>201</sup> In April of 1920, the national republics of Azerbaijan and Armenia which had now existed for two years quickly fell before the advancing 11-th Red Army. Temporarily unable to defeat the Georgians, from there, the Soviet armies marched toward the newly opened Polish front to remedy the defeat of the 12-th Army in the hands of Pilsudsky. Though having failed to establish Red Poland, here, too, the Bolsheviks were successful. Within a few months, the last holdouts in Crimea under General Wrangel and Georgia would succumb to the burgeoning Red

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<sup>199</sup> See despatch from U.S. Embassy in Germany with regard to a report from *Golos Rossii* (Voice of Russia) radio program in June 27, 1919 RG 59, File #861.00/4762.

<sup>200</sup> See June 27, 1919 RG 59, File #861.00/5538.

<sup>201</sup> Hayford Peiron, U.S. diplomat in France, February 23, 1920 RG 59, File #861.00/6469.

armies. The anti-climactic defeat of the anti-Bolshevik forces in November of 1920 was marked by General Wrangel being forced to fly French flags over his ships in the Black Sea, in order to protect from the Reds the evacuating masses of White supporters en route to Constantinople.<sup>202</sup> The Bolsheviks were happy to oblige.

Kolchak's defeat also had a demoralizing impact on the Allied sponsors of the Whites, particularly the British who had invested more heavily in the war than the Americans. Upon hearing about Bolshevik conquest of Chelyabinsk, British Foreign Secretary Lord Curzon noted: "A lost cause."<sup>203</sup> The cause was indeed lost, especially, with the Allies now proceeding through with their plan of evacuation from Russia. With little fanfare, yet much to the relief of exhausted soldiers, in August of 1919, the Allied military abandoned the front line being held against the Bolsheviks, and boarded the ships heading for Britain. On September 14, 1919, as if a commander of a sinking ship, the last American representative in Archangel, Felix Cole closed down the consulate. Before leaving Archangel, Cole had ensured that ships previously loaded with food supplies for American soldiers and the local populace turned around. So intense was his hatred for the Bolsheviks, who he correctly presumed would be taking over the area.

Since the times when America sent its first ambassador John Adams to Russia, the relationship between the two countries now stood at its lowest point. Having already removed their presence from Bolshevik areas of Russia, the defeat of the Whites left little choice for the Americans but to evacuate most of their personnel from that country. With the exception of the consulate in Vladivostok, every single

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<sup>202</sup> Evan E. Young, U.S. Consul General in Turkey, to Lansing, November 17, 1920 RG 59, File #861.00/7711.

<sup>203</sup> Richard Pipes, *A Concise History of the Russian Revolution*, 255.

American diplomatic mission inside Soviet Russia was shut down. Following the diplomatic evacuation, in August of 1920, President Wilson's newly appointed Secretary of State Bainbridge Colby issued an important note which was to govern the U.S.-Russian relations until 1933. In it, Colby stated that it was "not possible for the Government of the United States to recognize the current rulers of Russia as a government with which the relations common to friendly governments can be maintained." Expressing his hopes that the Russian people would "soon find a way to set up a government representing their free will and purpose," Colby made it clear that America would have nothing to do with the dictatorial Bolshevik regime.<sup>204</sup> Given the Americans' absence from Russian territory, with this note, even the quasi-official ties that existed between the two governments were now broken. For the next thirteen years, the American statesmen and diplomats would go to great lengths to shun the Soviet regime and its representatives abroad. As for the internal developments in this important part of the world, the American officials were forced to follow the events there from diplomatic posts in friendly nations bordering Bolshevik Russia. Now, they would have to master the unfamiliar art of observing the rising Soviet power from outside.

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<sup>204</sup> Bainbridge Colby, "No Recognition of the Soviets" in Benson L. Grayson ed., *The American Images of Russia – 1917-1977* (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., 1978), 54-60.

## Chapter 3: Consolidation of Power and the Beginning of New Economic Policy

As the Civil War came to an end, the Bolshevik leadership faced the gloomy prospect of governing a nation in ruins. The Reds' triumphant performance in a difficult war had greatly boosted the morale of the leadership and solidified confidence in the infallibility of their cause. However, the decisive test for the Bolsheviks resided in their ability to demonstrate the feasibility of Marxist-Leninist ideology in practice. To that end, Russia under the Bolsheviks was so far an abject failure, or to be precise, a disaster zone. Millions of Russians had died as a result of internal violence, starvation and cold. Millions more had fled their homeland in search of a decent life abroad.<sup>205</sup> Internationally, Soviet Russia was a pariah. By 1920, the United States, alongside other Western nations, came to wash its hands off the entire Russian affair. In *Friends or Foes*, Norman E. Saul identifies the non-recognition of Soviet Russia by the United States as predicated upon "great American disappointment in regard to the failure to secure an American path for the Russian future. Instead it found Russia moving in an opposite direction seemingly in direct conflict with the American conception of society and the world..."<sup>206</sup> The country wrecked by ceaseless violence, persecution and famine was of less urgent interest to the policymakers in Washington who became resigned to the inescapable realities of Russia. The

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<sup>205</sup> Describing the depopulation of Moscow alone, Timothy Colton writes: "From a crest of 2,044,000 in May of 1917, Moscow's population hemorrhaged to 1,716,000 in April, 1918, 1,316,000 in September 1919 and 1,027,000 in August 1920 – in spite of the continuing arrival of refugees and the expansion of central bureaucracy." Petrograd fared worse. Timothy J. Colton, *Moscow: Governing the Socialist Metropolis* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), 124.

<sup>206</sup> Norman Saul, *Friends or Foes?: The United States and Soviet Russia, 1921-1941*, 2.

increasingly isolationist trend in the United States now governed by a Republican administration further assured ideological hostility against Bolshevik Russia for years to come. “The most sensible course of action,” as Peter Filene described the overall sentiment among the Americans, “was simply patient attendance upon the Communists’ defeat at the hands of the Russian people or by their own incompetence.”<sup>207</sup> But this course also meant that Bolsheviks no longer had to fear foreign intervention, and could thus focus their efforts on strengthening the new regime’s hold over the vast territories of the former Russian empire.

The Bolshevik reconquest of much of the territories of the former Russian Empire had forced the Americans to withdraw their diplomatic personnel from the remaining consulates in that country. With the exception of Vladivostok which remained under the Japanese control, there were no American diplomats in Russia to send official despatches about the situation there. Instead, Washington came to increasingly rely on diplomatic stations located in the countries neighboring Soviet Russia. At least logistically, this made sense. The American legations in Stockholm, Helsingfors, Viborg, Riga, Warsaw, Constantinople and Harbin had for some time been important sources of information on Russia. During the three years since the Bolshevik takeover in 1917, disruptions in channels of communication emanating from Soviet Russia served to augment the role and workload of the diplomats with regard to providing accounts of important events taking place in that country. Among these stations, Viborg and Riga stood out in particular for their voluminous reports dating from 1920s. With the shift of the power base to the Kremlin and radical

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<sup>207</sup> Peter G. Filene, *Americans and the Soviet Experiment, 1917-1933* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1967), 69.

centralization pursued by Lenin, the processes in the Bolshevik capital began to acquire special significance for Western observers. Now that the Bolsheviks were in firm control of Russia, the once rebellious provinces lost their share of attention to the center. And the offices closest to the capital, began to serve as major hubs of knowledge about Soviet affairs.

Among experts of Russia, there were some expectations that once the Bolsheviks defeated their opponents on the battlefield, the former would have to reckon with the horrid situation for which its ideological policies were at least partially responsible. But given the extreme militarization of the Bolshevik regime, the immediate fulfillment of such expectations was out of reach. The end of the Soviet-Polish War heralded the start of a new era which saw an end to major combat operations by Soviet forces, and the government's fear of peril diminished. Nevertheless, in terms of actions designed to remedy the almost impossible living conditions in Bolshevik Russia, very little was apparent. Dismissing the rosy predictions about supposedly new developments in Russia, John Campbell White, Charge d'Affaires of the U.S. embassy in Poland wrote that although "recent reports indicate decided change in Bolshevik homeland," he had received "no evidence that the Bolshevik government is showing any great capacity for constructive work or civilized existence than in the past."<sup>208</sup> In fact, an overwhelming number of despatches depicting actual conditions in the country were glum. A German prisoner of war returning from Russia reported of extreme hardship and widespread malnutrition with his personal experience at a repatriation camp which interestingly

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<sup>208</sup> John C. White, U.S. Charge d'Affaires in Poland, to Colby, May 20, 1920, RG 59, File #861.00/6933.



housed 1500 Germans sympathetic to the Bolshevik cause. Daily ration, wrote the prisoner, consisted of substitute coffee and 150 grams of bread which was later increased to 300 grams. The prisoners were fed small amounts of “soup consisting of frost-bitten carrots and potato peels” three times a day. There was very little to economic life outside the camp since all the shops were closed.” Although much of the private enterprise was banished under Bolsheviks, basic conditions of survival, both for the people and the regime, dictated that the government allow a certain space for commodity exchange which took place certain area of the city. However, even this make-shift bazaar was sometimes too much for the Bolsheviks to tolerate. The German POW penned:

“The whole buying and selling takes place on the market. Very often it happens that the market is surrounded by a chain of soldiers and that all people that have bought or sold something are arrested and interned for 3 months in one of the concentration camps and forced to work.... The streets look somewhat strange since business life does not exist anymore. The faces of people are bloated as a consequence of the hunger. A fresh healthy face causes a sensation and all passers by stare at it. The mortality is very great. Death caused by starvation on the street is not seldom. Single graves do not exist anymore. The corpses are thrown into common graves and if one is full, it is covered up and another one dug.”<sup>209</sup>

In the Ukrainian town of Vinitza captured from the Bolsheviks by advancing Polish soldiers, the native population was reported to have great sympathy for those who liberated them from “terrorists”. “Even though Lenin abolished death penalty,” related one despatch, “on the line of front the executions were ordered. Many persons

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<sup>209</sup> Ellis L. Dresel, U.S. Charge d’Affaires in Germany, to Colby, May 7, 1920, RG 59, File #861.00/7004.

were beaten, shot and often buried alive.”<sup>210</sup> One could certainly suspect that the anti-Bolshevik Poles were not always impartial when it came to the portrayal of their enemies. However, not only is there consistency to the depiction of Bolshevik actions by their military opponents on multiple fronts, but such reports are also corroborated by those very far from the frontlines. Confirming that a decree had been issued abolishing the death penalty, the German POW nonetheless informed that such rulings had little effect on the Bolshevik actions on the ground. The commissars were free to hang anyone they believed to be the enemy. “The hangmen are mostly Chinese,” he reported. “They receive 30 roubles for each head. There is much bitterness against the Chinese among the Russian population...”<sup>211</sup> Unfortunately, the problem of executions was not confined to the “Chinese hangmen” alone. Lide Rotfilder, a refugee from Archangel told her American interviewer in Riga that when the Bolsheviks took over the city following the Allied evacuation “they immediately began wholesale executions” all of which were “summary and without trial.” According to her, the population of Archangel which once stood at 90 thousand was now reduced to 30 thousand people *including* the large Bolshevik armies that had arrived.<sup>212</sup>

The arbitrariness of the Bolshevik rule did not even bypass its most committed sympathizers. An American diplomat in the Estonian capital Tallinn had the chance to interview Jacob H. Rubin of Milwaukee, a Bolshevik proponent traveling all the way to Russia to participate in the construction of his dream society. The diplomat

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<sup>210</sup> Hugh Gibson, U.S. Ambassador in Poland, to Colby, June 4, 1920, RG 59, File #861.00/7030.

<sup>211</sup> Ellis L. Dresel, U.S. Charge d’Affaires in Germany, to Colby, May 7, 1920, RG 59, File #861.00/7004.

<sup>212</sup> John P. Hurley, U.S. Consul in Riga, to Colby, November 12, 1920, RG 59, File #861.00/7888.

noted how Rubin was arrested several times and expressed confidence that “he had now been cured of whatever Bolshevik propensities he may have had.” In this interview, Jacob Rubin informed the American official that “raids were made every night and persons shot for no greater offense than changing Nikolai roubles.” Convinced that the Soviet regime was “honeycombed with hypocrites,” Rubin reported that there were “many strikes, constant arrests and shootings and epidemics of typhus, news of which were suppressed.”<sup>213</sup> Reporting about her experience in Bolshevik Archangel, Mrs. Rotfilder conveyed that everything was being confiscated from the population. “While there is absence of meat and sugar, bread is heavily rationed,” she observed. “Of course, the starving population is aware that the commissars have practically everything they need.”<sup>214</sup> An English Reverend, Frank W. North, the leader of a group of French and British refugees from Russia, speaking to the reporter from the *Times* newspaper, was more direct in his verdict on Bolshevism: “Bolsheviks have destroyed the country. They have proved time and time again that they have no sense of honor, that they are unreliable and treacherous, and that they cannot keep a promise. They do not know the meaning of truth.” His conclusion was simple: “Bolshevism must die.”<sup>215</sup>

The negative image of the Soviet regime was exacerbated by the sense that the new Soviet elite, while proclaiming itself to be the champion of the downtrodden, exhibited callous disregard for the welfare of the masses. Reports about the Soviet government’s special attention to the needs of the Red Army and Cheka personnel

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<sup>213</sup> Charles H. Albrecht, U.S. Consul in Tallinn, to Colby, October 30, 1920, RG 59, File #861.00/7827.

<sup>214</sup> Hurley to Colby, November 12, 1920, RG 59, File #861.00/7888.

<sup>215</sup> John W. Davis, U.S. Ambassador in Great Britain, to Colby, May 24, 1920, RG 59, File #861.00/7036.

served to solidify its image as a junta with little connection to the interests of most ordinary Russians. At the time when average Russian citizens received 300 grams of bread when they were lucky, the portions of the Red Army men constituted 600 grams a day -- twice more.<sup>216</sup> That the Soviet army personnel received the best available nutrition, salary and clothing from the government was a fact in abundant evidence to anyone who traveled to Russia of 1920-21. Individuals such as Reverend F.W. North were convinced that “the change will begin to take place when there will remain nothing more to steal, in order to provide food for the Red Army,” and therefore, the West should withhold all aid from Russia.<sup>217</sup> Even Soviet newspapers, on a rare occasion, admitted that “the crimes committed by some members who enjoy great privileges due to their position exceed all limits and this appears to be dangerous disease which is deeply rooted among Communists.” However, such excesses, Commissar Bistriansky explained in *Pravda*, pertained only to those who were not politically educated and did not care for the Party.<sup>218</sup>

Diaries by Mrs. Wilfred Sheridan published in several series in the *Times*, and passed on to Washington by the American Commissioner in London Norman Davis were instructive in this regard. Invited to Russia by the Bolshevik envoy to London, Lev Kamenev, the first cousin of Winston Churchill went to Petrograd as a bust sculptor for Communist leaders. Speaking somewhat fondly of her first encounters with Vladimir Lenin and other Bolshevik leaders, Mrs. Sheridan related an account of a banquet given to the honor of departing Chinese delegates by the Soviet foreign

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<sup>216</sup> Ellis L. Dresel, U.S. Charge d’Affaires in Germany, to Colby, May 7, 1920, RG 59, File #861.00/7004.

<sup>217</sup> Davis to Colby, May 24, 1920, RG 59, File #861.00/7036.

<sup>218</sup> Robert W. Imbrie, U.S. Consul in Viborg, to Colby, November 24, 1920, RG 59, File #861.00/7738.

minister. Having initially found Russia hunger-stricken and ravaged, Mrs. Sheridan was shocked by her experience at this dinner ceremony. “The dishes as they appeared, were like things we have seen in dreams.... I ate so many excellent hors d’oeuvres, thinking I was never going to eat again and that nothing else was coming, that I had little room for anything else.” Struck by the irony of the setting, Sheridan added: “Our manservant at the table must have just felt he was back in the old pre-Revolution days and serving his master’s friends.” Sheridan’s depiction of the conditions outside the banquet hall were less flattering: “Everything is rationed in Petrograd – conditions are horrific. Sukharevsky market is allowed only once a week, but operates all day long. Occasionally the Government raids it which means that it is encircled and everybody is arrested, buyer and seller alike, for buying and selling is called speculation and in big cases is punishable by death.” Amused Sheridan reported the story of Trotsky’s wife being arrested in one such raid where the latter ended up spending the night in jail because she was unable to get a hold of her husband. Curiously, Trotsky did not seem to have noticed. Despite the risks involved, it appears that of all places, Mrs. Sheridan found the market to be one of the very few venues in which she saw people “really human and excited.” “My impression was of people who were enjoying the very fact of being able to buy and sell,” she wrote. Later when she asked Litvinov’s reaction to such markets, the Soviet minister coolly responded: “Some day we will suppress it, when we have sufficient things to distribute to the people.”<sup>219</sup>

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<sup>219</sup> Norman H. Davies, U.S. Commissioner in Great Britain, to Colby, December 6, 1920, RG 59, File #861.00/7881.

Despite their attachment to an ideology which rejected market as a remnant of the old order, in reality, the Bolsheviks had begun to yield to market forces as early as 1918. They did so not out of realization of their past mistakes or errors of the ideology, but due to circumstances which necessitated some measure of compromise. According to Julie Hessler, who traced the social history of Soviet trade from 1917 until 1953, “policy makers came to recognize that the eradication strategy had its limits.”<sup>220</sup> Again, in Hessler’s view, by no means, this recognition meant capitulation in the face of necessity, but a strategic maneuvering which ultimately tried to reconstruct the market on a socialist basis. In her book, Julie Hessler pointed out the difficulties faced by the Bolshevik leadership in identifying the boundaries of private enterprise and the feasibility of economic freedoms. According to her, this dilemma prevailed for several decades – thus allowing certain space for market interaction without explicitly endorsing it or guaranteeing its participants any measure of real security. Hessler referred to Moscow based diarist Got’e’s observation as an accurate description of the uncertain Bolshevik attitudes: “Bolsheviks did not want to trade, represented after 1918 by the open air-markets, but neither did they want a Sukharevka to spring up in every corner and crossing.” Hessler also agreed with historian Marguerite Harrison when the latter observed that, “the policy of the government with regard to the regulation of private trade was so vacillating that no one knew exactly what was legal and what was not.”<sup>221</sup>

Such vacillation may have left a breathing room for exceptionally skillful and lucky individuals, but the society at large suffered under severe economic conditions.

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<sup>220</sup> Julie Hessler, *A Social History of Soviet Trade: Trade Policy, Retail Practices and Consumption, 1917-1953* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 33.

<sup>221</sup> *Ibid.*, 34

As many starving Russians saw it, the Bolshevik compromises had not gone far enough. According to historian Paul Avrich, this period was perhaps even more dangerous for the Soviet leadership, since “the traditional centers of Bolshevik support, were in a depleted and weakened condition and themselves gripped by profound unrest.”<sup>222</sup> Armed rebellions and peasant uprisings erupted all over the territories of Soviet Russia only to be brutally suppressed by overwhelming number of Cheka and Red Army troops. Meanwhile, workers in major city factories went on strike demanding food. A despatch dating to March 4, 1921 issued in the American Consulate in Viborg was typical in its description of one day’s events in Petrograd. On February 24, Trubochny factory workmen in Vasilostrov stopped work, and with their wives and children marched to Laferm tobacco factory. They raised placards denouncing communism and called for free trade. Then the troops loyal to government, consisting of the Chinese men, were brought in, and the rally was dispersed with bloodshed. Communist authorities responded by patrolling streets and putting up propaganda posters. Even under such repressive circumstances the remnants of leftist political opposition came to life. “The Menshevik and SR organizations in Petrograd, though decimated by arrests and hounded by the police, managed to distribute a number of proclamations among the working class population,” demanding “liberation of all arrested socialists and nonparty workingmen, abolition of martial law, freedom of speech, press and assembly for all those who labor.”<sup>223</sup>

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<sup>222</sup> Paul Avrich, *Kronstadt 1921* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970), 14

<sup>223</sup> *Ibid.*, 43.

Meanwhile across Petrograd, in the Kotlin Island, situated in the Gulf of Finland, discontent with the Bolshevik regime had reached its peak. Unlike other parts of Bolshevik Russia, the island was garrisoned by a recalcitrant regiment of sailors at the Kronstadt naval base whose defiance of authority long predated the Revolution. According to Avrich, “under the influence of the extreme Left, which throughout the year held ideological sway over Kotlin Island’s tempestuous population, Kronstadt set itself up as a revolutionary commune on the model of Paris Commune of 1871.”<sup>224</sup> The denunciations of the Soviet regime were spearheaded by sailors who until several months ago were “the torchbearers of revolutionary militancy.”<sup>225</sup> They had contributed 40,000 armed men to the Civil War fighting against the Whites, and were the ones who dispersed the Constituent Assembly on the fateful day of January 15, 1918. But fed up with catastrophic conditions on the ground and the increasing encroachments on their liberty, they revolted. On February 28, 1921, on board the battleship *Petropavlovsk* stationed at the Kronstadt naval base the sailor crews passed a resolution challenging nearly every aspect of the Soviet rule. Among the demands laid before the Bolshevik government were the immediate new elections to the Soviet; freedom of speech and of the press for workers and peasants, for the Anarchists, and the Left Socialist parties; the right of assembly and freedom for trade union and peasant organizations, the liberation of all political prisoners of the Socialist parties, and the granting of the peasants of freedom of action on their own soil.<sup>226</sup> Although a rebellion from the discontented masses against the Soviet

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<sup>224</sup> Ibid., 57.

<sup>225</sup> Ibid., 62.

<sup>226</sup> Harold B. Quarton, U.S. Consul in Viborg, to Charles Evans Hughes, U.S. Secretary of State, March 4, 1921, RG 59, File #861.00/8242.



authority was not a novel phenomenon, coming from the sailors who had been the core supporters of the Soviet power, the event was a rude awakening for the Kremlin. The very people who once fired the opening salvo of the Bolshevik Revolution from the cruiser *Aurora* had now joined the long list of Bolshevik enemies. Nor would they be treated any differently.

The events in Kronstadt, while conforming to the usual script by which the Soviet authority repressed dissent, was not without consequences in terms of the lost support for the Soviet cause among far leftists who watched the actions of the Lenin government in horror. A particularly valuable eyewitness to the events, in that regard, was Alexander Berkman, “one of the busiest, bravest and best members of the international anarchist movement for more than half a century.”<sup>227</sup> Born to a middle-class Jewish family in Lithuania, young Alexander had emigrated to the United States in his teens. His serious involvement in the anarchist movement and openly professed devotion to the Bolshevik cause ultimately resulted in his deportation from the United States, after which he came to the Soviet Union, to participate in the fruition of his dreams. He was among the very first to be deported for their subversive activities in America. However, like many of his fellow deportees, including well-known American anarchist Emma Goldman and writer Bertrand Russell, Berkman soon came to regret his allegiance to the Bolsheviks. His disillusionment is best reflected in the *Bolshevik Myth*, a diary which he published in the United States seven years later, in 1925. Identified as “one of the most valuable sources of primary material on the early development of the system of repression

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<sup>227</sup> Alexander Berkman, *The Bolshevik Myth: (Diary 1920-1922) including the “anti-climax”* (Winchester, MA: Pluto, 1989), vii.

which was established by the Communist regime under Lenin and Trotsky long before it was extended and intensified under Stalin,”<sup>228</sup> Berkman identified his experience in Kronstadt as the breaking point in his attachment to the Soviet regime. His denunciation of the Soviet actions in Kronstadt also served to detach a sizeable portion of the international anarchist movement from the Bolshevik-led Third International.

Perhaps due to its geographical proximity, nearly all despatches addressing the Kronstadt uprising came from the American consulate in Viborg, and perhaps for the same reason, there is abundance of information about the dynamics of the rebellion. Initial reports about the uprising date to March 1, 1921, when the courier of the legation reported mass disorders in Petrograd. “There is such an increase of famine that the people are attacking the shops and endeavoring forcibly to take the necessities of life, which the government authorities find it impossible to issue in a systematic and satisfactory way.”<sup>229</sup> False alarms regarding the imminent collapse of the Soviet regime had become so frequent that few people seemed to notice the gravity of the situation. By March 2, reports began streaming about the mass revolts spreading to the areas surrounding the Kronstadt naval base. According to the latest information, the workers had attacked the Derjabinisky prison and liberated the prisoners there. However, during the course of attack, nearly 200 workers had been killed. It was also reported that Petrograd was declared in a state of siege, prompting the arrival of heavy machine gunners into the city from Karelian Isthmus, who

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<sup>228</sup> Ibid., xv.

<sup>229</sup> Quarton to Hughes, March 1, 1921, RG 59, File #861.00/8223.

according to the despatcher “are generally used to put down uprisings.”<sup>230</sup> In the city itself, Soviet authorities launched an arrest campaign targeting anyone suspected of sympathizing with the rebels in Kronstadt. Almost overnight, 450 workers were arrested. Heavy curfews were imposed.<sup>231</sup> In a decree published in daily *Krasnaya Zvezda* (Red Star), the Soviet authorities forbade all types of associations in open or closed quarters. Violators of these rules would be subject to “most extreme punishments prescribed in a state of war.”<sup>232</sup>

While Moscow and Petrograd remained under the Bolshevik control, in Kronstadt, the Soviet power in effect ceased to exist. A general assembly was called on March 1 attended by 16 thousand people to elect the Kronstadt Provisional Revolutionary Committee. The next day, the sailors moved to take control of the key installations without meeting much resistance. Under the slogan “All the Power to the Soviets, and Not to the Political Parties”, the Kronstadt rebels made it clear that the present Bolshevik leaders usurped power and betrayed the original ideals of the socialist revolution. In a copy of *Kronstadt Izvestiia* obtained by American diplomats in Viborg, a rebel author noted that “three years domination by Communists have been worse than 300 years under the yoke of the Tsar.”<sup>233</sup> In the minds of Kronstadt rebels, the working class had revolted against the Communists and “the third revolution had come.” To be sure, contrary to the claims of the Soviet authorities linking Kronstadt rebels to forces ranging from White Guards to the French intelligence, the sailors saw themselves as a part of the revolutionary heritage.

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<sup>230</sup> Quarton to Hughes, March 2, 1921, RG 59, File #861.00/8235.

<sup>231</sup> Quarton to Hughes, March 4, 1921, RG 59, File #861.00/8241.

<sup>232</sup> Quarton to Hughes, March 3, 1921, RG 59, File #861.00/8237.

<sup>233</sup> Quarton to Hughes, March 9, 1921, RG 59, File #861.00/8298.

Perhaps it was this element that made them all the more dangerous in the eyes of Lenin and his surroundings. Paul Avrich maintains that “the sailors did not appeal for the overthrow of the Soviet government; nor did they advocate a restoration of the Constituent Assembly..., but the resolution’s open declaration -- that the “present soviets do not express the will of the workers and peasants” – represented a clear challenge to the Bolshevik monopoly of power.”<sup>234</sup> In this struggle the sailors were led by an elected committee senior clerk of Petropavlovsk Stepan Petrichenko and former tsarist general A.N. Kozlovsky who commanded the armed rebels.

In the immediate term, the Soviet government’s greatest priority was to ensure that they would not lose the seat of power. The fall of either Petrograd or Moscow would have likely spelled an end of the Bolshevik regime. The assessments of the General Staff of nearby Finland, obtained by American observers, confirmed this line of thought. The Finnish believed that the Bolsheviks would not allow the forces in Kronstadt to link up with Petrograd. “If rebellious workmen and other elements succeed in uniting with Kronstadt, their success is likely,” concluded the Finns.<sup>235</sup> Therefore, Petrograd and Moscow, had to be protected at all costs. After all, this strategy had proved highly effective during the Civil War in which the control of the center allowed Bolsheviks to crush their opponents one after another. The Bolsheviks became strongly determined to ensure that the rebels in Kronstadt remained isolated and were unable to gain foothold outside the tiny Kotlin Island, both militarily and ideologically. To that effect, by March 3, the Red Army surrounded the area disallowing anyone from leaving toward inner parts of Soviet Russia.

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<sup>234</sup> Paul Avrich, *Kronstadt 1921*, 75.

<sup>235</sup> Quarton to Hughes, March 5, 1921, RG 59, File #861.00/8248.

Aside from the well-tested method of mass arrests and executions, the Bolshevik authorities found that change in tone and several concessions to the general populace could contribute to lessening the zeal against the regime. “Recent posters and decrees torn by our couriers from walls of Petrgorad about March first show that communists are on the defensive,” reported the American Consul in Viborg, Harold Quarton, on March 5, 1921. According to the informants in Petrograd, public appeals began with the consoling phrase “dear comrades”, and some contained statements on behalf of the Petrgorad Soviet begging “more intelligent workers to explain the situation to the more ignorant.” “The use of words “dear” and “begs” is unusual by Soviet authority and point out the necessity of present time,” Quarton added.<sup>236</sup> The March 6 issue of the *Krasnaya Zvezda* published the text of the speech delivered by Vladimir Lenin in which the Bolshevik leader called upon workers not to be discouraged because they have to suffer hardships. Lenin compared the state of Russian workers to those in Vienna who, he said, “even had to suffer from hunger.” He admitted before the crowd that “it was a mistake not to collect and store food and fuel for these dark days.”<sup>237</sup>

Sudden shift in tone was not confined to verbal gestures alone. Faced with imminent collapse, the Soviet government distributed one pound of meat and one and a quarter pound butter to the workmen, which according to the despatch, “made quite a hole in Petrograd’s dwindling food supply.”<sup>238</sup> A new proclamation signed by Zinoviev and Kalinin contained seven measures which included importation of coal from abroad, provision for non-party representation in the Soviet, allowing city

<sup>236</sup> Quarton to Hughes, March 5, 1921, RG 59, File #861.00/8252.

<sup>237</sup> Quarton to Hughes, March 6, 1921, RG 59, File #861.00/8257.

<sup>238</sup> Quarton to Hughes, March 4, 1921, RG 59, File #861.00/8241.

vegetable gardens to be maintained by local inhabitants, dismissal of country workers from Petrograd factories on account of short rations, and the replacement of wanton requisition with a definite quota system for the peasants.” In a brazen stroke of irony, the Bolshevik government concluded the proclamation warning that “hunger will only increase by revolution.”<sup>239</sup>

Despite unabated suppressions in Petrograd and Moscow, the increasing sense of the Soviet impotence gave way to an air of anarchy in the streets. The government’s inability to immediately suppress the revolt in Kronstadt emanated from the acute crisis that gripped the already exhausted society at all levels. The crisis also affected the very structures of the Bolshevik government. In a despatch issued from Viborg on March 5, it was told that 35 thousand troops of the regular army had refused to obey the orders of their superiors. “In Petrograd,” the despatch read, “a new Jewish organization has sprung up trying to prevent pogroms. Jews believe they must protect themselves for at least two weeks before any strong government can be established.”<sup>240</sup> This had also to do with the strong anti-Jewish sentiments expressed by the rebels who mostly blamed Trotsky and Zinoviev -- both ethnic Jews -- for the calamities facing the country. Many American observers, according to another despatch issued from Riga, believed that “unrest and uprisings would continue until the present government falls and anarchy prevails.”<sup>241</sup>

Consul of Fourth Class in Viborg, Ralph Wilner wrote an analytical report in which he attributed many of the ills befalling the Russian people to the form of Soviet government – something that, in his view, was a “cross between autocracy and

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<sup>239</sup> Quarton to Hughes, March 5, 1921, RG 59, File #861.00/8252.

<sup>240</sup> Quarton to Hughes, March 5, 1921, RG 59, File #861.00/8253.

<sup>241</sup> Hurley to Hughes, March 8, 1921, RG 59, File #861.00/8280.

anarchy.” Wilner, who had spent three years in Bolshevik Russia since its inception in 1917 until 1920, went on: “There is a marked evidence of autocracy in the policies and actions of the handful Bolshevik leaders on one hand, and on the other, Russia is without laws such as we understand them, and the ever changing Bolshevik decrees become obsolete almost as soon as they are issued.... Having attracted some thousands hooligans and some weakminded Russian adherents, the adventurers are ruling over Russia by the bayonet – the only support of the Soviet government today. Although there is a portrait of Karl Marx on every street crossing, and his dogmas of brotherhood and equality are being preached throughout the land, these virtues are never practiced by the dictators. The handful usurpers of power are excellent agitators and propagandists, and having for material to work with the dark, unpatriotic and indifferent Russian masses, have turned them to their own good use and profit, and have thus been able to retain the power.... The Bolshevik leaders admit that they cannot explain what keeps them in power when the civic population, the soldier, yet the workman himself is against them.” According to Wilner, if there was a genuine vote, the Bolsheviks would be quickly ousted, “but right here is the Bolsheviks’ little secret in that they have never allowed popular voting.”<sup>242</sup>

In the early days of March, the Soviet secret police Cheka redoubled its efforts to maintain a semblance of order in areas nearby the rebellious island. However, without extinguishing the fire of Kronstadt, the control over the situation was gradually slipping away from the Bolsheviks’ hands.<sup>243</sup> With all remaining rations and material incentive allocated to the punitive battalions at the disposal of the

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<sup>242</sup> Ralph Wilner, U.S. Consul in Viborg, to Hughes, March 9, 1921, RG 59, File #861.00/8288.

<sup>243</sup> Quarton to Hughes, March 11, 1921, RG 59, File #861.00/8309.

government, Leon Trotsky sent a final warning to the rebels of Kronstadt: “I order all those who have raised a hand against the Socialist Fatherland, immediately to lay down their weapons... Only those who surrender unconditionally will be able to count on the clemency of the Soviet Republic.”<sup>244</sup> Trotsky’s warning fell on deaf ears. Confident that they can hold out against Bolshevik attacks, and in any case left with a choice between certain and possible deaths, the Kronstadt rebels would not submit. In fact, they were busy exposing the Soviet authorities by pasting up the copies of Petrograd newspapers in the town square “to show falsehood and deceptions practiced by Bolsheviks.”<sup>245</sup>

On March 7, the Red Army began the bombardment of Kronstadt. A long-time anarchist and Bolshevik sympathizer, Alexander Berkman, who happened to be in the Petrograd at the time wrote: “Distant rumbling reaches my ears as I cross the Nevsky. It sounds again, stronger and nearer, as if rolling toward me. All at once I realize the artillery is being fired. It is 6 p.m. Kronstadt has been attacked!”<sup>246</sup> For nearly ten days, Kronstadt held out against impossible odds. However, when it came, the fall of the city was anti-climactic. As thousands of troops began storming the naval base from all directions, Kronstadt’s defense collapsed, and the defenders began to run away in panic. In an interview with American diplomat Edmond Stratton in Viborg, the Chief of Kronstadt’s General Staff, Boris Arkaninov, vividly recalled the night of March 16 when the final assault began:

“When we saw the Chinese and Bashkirs coming at us, we knew we had the sympathy of the red army with us.... Fifty thousand men dressed in

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<sup>244</sup> Leon Trotsky, state radio message to the Kronstadt sailors, March 6, 1921.

<sup>245</sup> Quarton to Hughes, March 15, 1921, RG 59, File #861.00/8329.

<sup>246</sup> Alexander Berkman, *The Bolshevik Myth*, 303.



white crawled across the ice toward Kronstadt. We had only six thousand men. Our icebreaker Yermak was stuck in Petrgrad. Otherwise, we'd have cut the ice circle around us, and they could not have done anything. They rushed us. The bitterest fight lasted from 4 am until 11 am. But the city was breached and the staff had no choice but to leave.... To stay meant death by the Chinese who never take prisoners.”<sup>247</sup>

American diplomats in Viborg woke up the next day to find out that the Bolsheviks had successfully put down yet another revolt. The Bolshevik victory was evident from the number of refugees which began to pour into Finland. According to a despatch on March 18, 4000 refugees arrived in Finland, among them the representatives of the provisional revolutionary government.<sup>248</sup> “No complete explanation is given as to why Kronstadt fell so fast,” wrote Quarton that same day, “Even the best informed people and newspapers in Finland were greatly astonished at sudden fall of Kronstdadt.” Although the rebels were outnumbered nearly six times, some observers suspected that treachery had played a large role in determining the outcome of the Bolshevik attack. According to Quarton, “General Kozlovsky, who headed the artillery brigade of the rebels, and his staff of 30 people arrived in Findland so early” – when in fact “other towers were still shooting in defense.”<sup>249</sup> Despite the means which allowed for closer observation of the events in Kronstadt, it is apparent, however, that Kronstadt rebels were not only isolated from Russia, but also from the outside world. Their powers had been exaggerated by Western observers who believed a mere spark was sufficient to turn Russia into a sea of fire

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<sup>247</sup> Quarton to Hughes, April 9, 1921, RG 59, File #861.00/8470.

<sup>248</sup> Quarton to Hughes, March 18, 1921, RG 59, File #861.00/8358.

<sup>249</sup> Quarton to Hughes, March 18, 1921, RG 59, File #861.00/8372.

for the Bolsheviks. And it could have been, as Avrich pointed out, had the rebels launched an immediate offensive on the mainland thus rallying the discontented Red Army soldiers and masses to their standard. Instead, the rebels chose to dig in and fight a defensive war against a regime that had just finished defeating far stronger opponents in the Civil War. If anything, the failure in Kronstadt may have further solidified the popular image of the Bolshevik leadership as invincible.

The measures taken by the Bolshevik government against its vanquished opponents in Kronstadt followed the familiar pattern: exodus of native inhabitants, followed by mass executions and arrests on charges of treason and counter-revolution of those who stayed behind. Before the Bolsheviks entered the base, nearly eight thousand inhabitants fled for Finland. Immediate care to the refugees was given by the American Red Cross which facilitated large shipments of food and clothes from Viborg to the border town of Terijoke.<sup>250</sup> “Who knew that these revolutionists would find refuge in Finland from the hands of their own fellow Bolsheviks, hunted by Chinese hordes of Trotsky,” noted American observer in the makeshift refugee camp Edmond Stratton, struck by irony of the panorama before him.<sup>251</sup> Those who chose to stay behind were even less fortunate. “All males of Kronstadt are subject to suspicion and arrest,” reported American observers: “The city is under thorough Bolshevik control. The Soviet troops act like Mongols against their own people.”<sup>252</sup> An eyewitness to the assault on Kronstadt, Alexander Berkman penned, “Thousands of sailors and workers lie dead in its [Kronstadt’s] streets. Summary execution of

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<sup>250</sup> Ibid.

<sup>251</sup> Quarton to Hughes, April 9, 1921, RG 59, File #861.00/8470.

<sup>252</sup> Quarton to Hughes, March 17, 1921, RG 59, File #861.00/8377.

prisoners and hostages continues.”<sup>253</sup> “Although many were promised reprieves if they surrendered,” reported another eyewitness, “some were put in handcuffs and marched through streets to impress workmen of futility of revolt.”<sup>254</sup>

With thousands more under police custody, the Soviet government initiated the construction of the first concentration camps to receive the rebels of Kronstadt – later to become notorious by its acronyms -- GULAG. Nearly seventeen years later, Leon Trotsky, exiled and soon to be assassinated by his Bolshevik comrades had the following to say about the short-lived saga:

“The truth of the matter is that I personally did not participate in the least in the suppression of the Kronstadt rebellion, nor in the repressions following the suppression... But I am ready to recognize that civil war is no school of humanism. Idealists and pacifists always accused the revolution of "excesses". But the main point is that "excesses" flow from the very nature of the revolution which in itself is but an "excess" of history.”<sup>255</sup>

Quelling the rebellion in Kronstadt was a major victory for the Bolshevik government over a restless society which it had sought to pacify ever since taking power. To understand its significance, one must consider that this rebellion marked the last serious effort among indigenious citizens to topple the Communist government -- until the collapse of the Soviet Union in late 1980's. Nevertheless, the underlying cause which lent itself to the uprising remained. The American observers in Viborg attributed the reasons for the revolt to severe shortages in basic necessities. “Food

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<sup>253</sup> Alexander Berkman, *The Bolshevik Myth*, 303.

<sup>254</sup> Quarton to Hughes, April 20, 1921, RG 59, File #861.00/8528.

<sup>255</sup> Leon Trotsky, “More on the Suppression of Kronstadt,” *The New Internationalist* (August, 1938), 250.

situation will worsen in late Spring,” they predicted, “because productive grain norm which is 10 million poods for Petrograd was 5 million in March and will be come 3.5 million in April.”<sup>256</sup> Despite Soviet claims which labeled Kronstadt rebels as tsarist sympathizers, consul Quarton believed that the uprising was mostly due to economic and social conditions and would likely be repeated in other parts of Soviet Russia.

Four days after the end of Kronstadt uprising, on March 21, 1921, the Communist Party gathered for its Tenth Congress in which a decree was issued "On the Replacement of Foodstuff and Natural Resource Assessment by a Natural Tax." Incomprehensibly titled, the tenet of the bill was to fix the specified amount of any surplus agricultural product to be taken by the government, and allow peasants to keep the remaining surplus for use as capital or to trade for industrial goods. In conjunction with additional decrees that came to be known as the New Economic Policy (NEP), this measure replaced the principles of War Communism upon which the Soviet authorities had hetherto based their policies. No longer would the Bolshevik commissar, at least on paper, have the freedom to take away as much of the peasant's property as he wished. With a small element of free trade -- or capitalism, as some opponents of the measure argued -- injected into the otherwise barren economic landscape of Russia, suddenly the peasants were given an actual incentive to plow their fields and raise cattle. A mere ability to take the product of one's labor to the market without facing deadly retribution by the government was seen as a blessing by many peasants. But the relief did not come overnight. After all, having retained full control over substantial segments of the economy such as industry and banking, the Communist regime did not change in essence. As far as the

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<sup>256</sup> Quarton to Hughes, April 18, 1921, RG 59, File #861.00/8504.

Soviet authorities were concerned, the NEP was a necessary evil in combatting the disastrous realities of Russia which persistently threatened the government's durability. To demonstrate their unswerving commitment to Communist ideals, in one typical instance, the Soviet authorities turned 471 bourgeois families out of their residencies in Moscow, confiscating the majority of their belongings.<sup>257</sup>

Dissatisfaction among impoverished peasants remained particularly strong. For one, given the equally disastrous state of the city, peasants had few counterparts with whom they could trade, and even less commodity by which to carry out such trade. American diplomat John Hurley described conditions in rural Russia stating that "peasants show little enthusiasm over the new system of "free exchange of goods" since they see no prospect of obtaining what they require from the towns."<sup>258</sup> According to reports flooding the American legation in Viborg, uprisings in Archangel, Vyatki and other places in the South were in progress.<sup>259</sup> Attempts to shift blame to the ineptitude of local authorities did not fly. In the correspondence between Soviet officials intercepted by the American mission in Berlin, a commissar named Sinyavski reported about the "tough situation" affecting central and southern parts of Russia: "In 1918 we fought for railroad lines, communication posts, [but] now it's the opposite. The struggle is going on in villages at great distance from railroads. The discontent caused by requisitions has called forth a popular sentiment that is hostile to all government officials and their measures." According to Sinyavsky, Bolshevik officials were being regularly murdered and the general disobedience had reached the level at which even military intervention did not appear

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<sup>257</sup> Hurley to Hughes, April 21, 1921, RG 59, File #861.00/8616.

<sup>258</sup> Ibid.

<sup>259</sup> Quarton to Hughes, April 19, 1921, RG 59, File #861.00/8511.

to bear fruits. Pointing out the increasing popularity of a general named Antonov heading over six thousand-member militia, Sinyavsky advised “immediate reinforcement of troops in Voronezh, Saratov, Tambov and Pensa.”<sup>260</sup>

The Bolshevik attempts to alleviate popular discontent on the political front were negligible. In an effort to placate the politically active strata of the urban society, they organized a conference to which they invited workers representing what Bolsheviks classified as the major elements of the spectrum. According to April 15, 1921 issue of *Pravda*, the primary “media organ” of the Soviet government, among the attendants were 764 non-party, 144 communists, 3 mensheviks, 1 anarchist and 35 miscellaneous. If true, this would be the first instance in a very long time when Communists recognized political space for any faction other than themselves. Furthermore, the conferences seem to have taken place in a contentious atmosphere allowing some workers to challenge the officials in the government. “Bolsheviks seem surprised that workmen dare to complain,” penned Consul Quarton; “They apparently think they [workmen] ought to go on half starving and freezing.”<sup>261</sup> A despatch dating to April 27 mentioned “recent elections to the Moscow Soviet” in which 1137 out of 1399 elected representatives were Communists. According to Quarton, in reality this was not a great Communist victory, since “the whole thing was rigged like it was last year.”<sup>262</sup>

More revealing were the contradiction-filled statements made by Louise Bryant, the wife of a well-known Bolshevik sympathizer John Reed whose love for

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<sup>260</sup> Ellis L. Dresel, U.S. Charge d’Affaires to Germany, to Hughes, Intelligence Report, March 31, 1921, RG 59, File #861.00/8494.

<sup>261</sup> Quarton to Hughes, April 25, 1921, RG 59, File #861.00/8536.

<sup>262</sup> Quarton to Hughes, April 27, 1921, RG 59, File #861.00/8543-44.

the Bolshevik cause upon death in 1920 had earned him a spot in the Kremlin cemetery reserved for revolutionary dignitaries. On the way back to the United States due to her illness, Bryant met with the American representatives in Riga for an interview. During the conversation, Bryant expressed confidence that “the present movement to the right will continue and Russia will get better.” After praising the character of Bolshevik leaders whose company she enjoyed frequently, she added that there was “absolutely no anti-American feeling in Russia.” Citing the prospect of total anarchy in the case of Bolshevik government’s fall, Bryant believed that the United States should “open up trade relations with Russia.” Downplaying the negative impressions of Bolshevik policies in the sphere of religion, Bryant stated that “the head of the church seemed quite content with existing conditions and said that the church had needed shaking up,” even though the Russian clergy grew much incensed at the motto placed on the facades of churches, which reads, “Religion is the opium of the people.” Only at the end did she submit that “the food and health conditions were bad,” and that “a tremendous number of people had died.”<sup>263</sup>

Melville A. Chater of the Near East Relief, traveling to the Georgian city of Batum, recently taken under the Bolshevik control, reported a similar experience. His first impression of the city was that “the streets were deserted.” According to Chater, “the population lived on a pound of sour black bread a day with tea to wash it down.” In a place where average monthly salary was 25,000 roubles, Chater was shocked to discover that half a duck cost 18,000 roubles. “One can see why the Georgians didn’t do much shopping,” he observed. Although there existed a committee of local

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<sup>263</sup> Evan E. Young, U.S. Commissioner in Riga, Latvia, to Hughes, May 6, 1921, RG 59, File #861.00/8672.

Georgians, in Chater's opinion, the actual government consisted of the Cheka which had complete control over the situation.<sup>264</sup> In yet another report published in Riga's daily *Segodnya* on June 23, 1921, the author relayed the story of a person who "had recently been allowed into Russia because of his Bolshevik sympathies, for the purposes of distributing food to scientists and literary men." The unnamed traveller reported being stopped in the street by "perfect strangers who looked him up and down and asked him questions, just as if he had dropped from another planet where men lived like human beings. He saw Kotljarevski, a member of the Academy, who came like a beggar with faltering footsteps, to receive his modest share of the supplies – without a short, clad in rags. Bloch was sick with scurvy. Benoise, the painter, was dreaming of 'a piece of chocolate'. But these are all men of talent, men of science of whom Gorky and others are 'taking care'. But what will be the fate of common mortals?" inquired the author.<sup>265</sup> On certain occasions, one did not even have to cross the border to witness the devastation wrought by Communists upon Russia. The photos taken by the U.S. Army Major George Anneman on a visit to the Russo-Finnish border arranged by the American Consulate in Viborg showed "the ruins on the Russian side of border at Rajajoki." These photos constituted a striking contrast to the picture of the Communist envoy Maxim Litvinov's car which, in the words of the photographer, "resembled those by the Russian dignitaries during the Tsar's regime."<sup>266</sup>

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<sup>264</sup> William Bristol, U.S. Charge d'Affaires in Istanbul, Turkey, to Hughes, May 3, 1921, RG 59, File #861.00/8573.

<sup>265</sup> Young to Hughes, June 27, 1921, RG 59, File #861.00/8838.

<sup>266</sup> Quarton to Hughes, June 8, 1921, RG 59, File #861.00/8847.



As bad as the conditions were in Soviet Russia, they were about to get much worse. The initiation of the New Economic Policy, contrary to the expectations, did not result in immediate relief. Given the abject state of Russia's industry, agriculture, and overall, the entire economic infrastructure, nothing short of a miracle could have averted starvation that was about to hit the Soviet countryside. And in Lenin's Russia, miracles did not happen. In July of 1921 a severe famine struck the central Volga region. While the living conditions were not much better in other parts of Soviet Russia, especially Ukraine, starvation in Volga was particularly acute. The desire by the Communist leadership to conceal the realities in the region was impossible, if not counter-productive, insofar as the number of affected people measured not in thousands but millions. As the magnitude of starvation became more evident, the Soviet government acknowledged the famine in June 26 issue of *Pravda*. The Soviets' admission of the food crisis was corroborated by a few sympathizers who traveled to that country. Upon his return from Russia, a Swedish Communist named Frederick Strom gave an interview to *Svenska Dagbladet* newspaper in which he stated: "The total crop failure in the entire Volga district is a fact which cannot be argued against and one awaits with great foreboding the results of same. In the rest of Russia, the crop is only half of the normal and in the Ukraine over half of the normal production..."<sup>267</sup> Despite Mr. Strom's strange confidence in the Soviet authorities ability to "succeed in neutralizing this crop failure," it never came. In fact, by the time the news of the crop failure had broken out, thousands of people had already perished to hunger. Finally, a few weeks later, Russian writer Maxim Gorky came

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<sup>267</sup> Dominic I. Murphy, U.S. Consul General in Stockholm, Sweden, to Hughes, July 23, 1921, RG 59, File #861.00/8928.

out with a desperate plea for help addressed to the Americans and Europeans. “I ask all honest European and American people for prompt aid to the Russian people. Give bread and medicine.”<sup>268</sup>

It did not take long before the Americans, the only nation capable of such assistance at the time, sprung into action. Beginning in August, the American Relief Administration (ARA) headed by a business tycoon Herbert Hoover, launched an unprecedented campaign of relief which in the end saved more than ten million Russians from death by starvation. In his impressive volume detailing the experience of Volga famine and the incredible story of the American aid effort, historian Bertrand Patenaude has traced the three crucial years during which the impossible was made possible. According to Patenaude, the Volga famine “was no simple act of nature.” Violent requisitions during the Civil War, fatally flawed economic theory of War Communism, and Bolshevik callousness were primary reasons that exacerbated the drought of 1921 to the level of mass starvation. But the more striking aspect of the *Big Show in Bololand* was the story of 250 Americans, charged by a man who had nothing but visceral antipathy for Bolshevism, essentially trying to save the people from their own government, and their ultimate success in this endeavor.

Not many people could imagine how a handful Americans would manage the consequences of a disaster that covered a territory half the size of the United States. In a confidential interview with the State Department officials, Russian scientists Nikolai Vavilov and Arthur Jaczenski who were visiting the United States at the

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<sup>268</sup> Bertrand M. Patenaude, *The Big Show in Bololand: The American Relief Expedition in Soviet Russia in the Famine of 1921* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), 27.

invitation of the American Agricultural Society, predicted a failure for such efforts. First, they claimed, “ARA won’t be able to get down to famine areas, because of breakdown in transportation.” Furthermore, “the Russians cooperating with the Committee [ARA] will be very irresponsible, due to the utter demoralization of the people. Consequently, an immense staff of Americans will be needed in Russia to administer relief.” In fact, the very purpose of allowing Vavilov and Jaszenski to travel to the United States stemmed from the desperation that engulfed the Kremlin, which otherwise did not let individuals leave the country at their wish. The scientists told that it took them fifteen applications to obtain an exit visa, before the Cheka finally approved their travel plans. Just in case, however, their families were “placed under ‘house arrest’ to prevent them from making any public utterances abroad against Soviet regime and to insure their prompt return to Russia within four months.”<sup>269</sup> Judging from the interview with other native visitors from Russia, it is apparent that such hostage-holding was a standard practice by the Soviet government which often correctly presumed that those allowed to go abroad would not return otherwise.<sup>270</sup> Visiting in Riga, Victor E. Gartz, who is described as a well-educated intellectual, “could not delay his departure by a single day since his mother, wife and children were hostages there.” Struck by the contrast with life in Riga, Gartz told his interviewers that most days he was unable to receive even his allotted portion of half a pound of bread: “For two years, I have not received meat, eggs, milk, butter or any

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<sup>269</sup> Interview at the State Department in Washington DC, August 17, 1921, RG 59, File #861.00/8949.

<sup>270</sup> Soviet authorities were extremely sensitive to the departure of scholars abroad, fearing defection followed by denunciation of the Soviet regime. In certain cases, the decisions to issue exit visas were made at the very top, including Vladimir Lenin himself. See “Chapter 1: Prohibit Travel” in Katerina Clark and Evgeny Dobrenko, eds., *Soviet Culture and Power: A History in Documents, 1917-1953* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 7-22.

fats. I havn't received any clothing or shoes.... We have nothing,"<sup>271</sup> Gartz's statements were corroborated by professors Vavilov and Jaczenski who informed the Americans that "the population of Russia had been reduced by many millions as many having perished through the terror as by starvation" and that there were "no industrial or educated classes left on Soviet territory with the exception of a small group in Petrograd."<sup>272</sup>

Judging from the signals that continued streaming from Soviet Russia, it was not just Volga that needed relief but the entire country. By the time the first American aid workers began to arrive in Russia in September, 1921, the conditions had grown worse. As John Ellingston, an ARA supervisor later observed in Moscow, "The ARA Russian operation was in the strictest sense of the word a campaign, and like the English at Gallipoli the Administration had to begin firing the moment it landed."<sup>273</sup> The presence of American relief workers in Russia provided the U.S. government with a vital outlet of information about the country that was otherwise closed to outside observation. For the first time since the American ambassador fled Petrograd in February of 1918, the government regained access to observers of American nationality within the Russian territory. Since in accordance with the agreement between the ARA and the Soviet government the relief workers enjoyed complete independence and freedom in their operations so long as they were confined to the realms of famine relief, it was believed that the American employees would not be as susceptible to pressure as those who operated in Russia without a mandate. Indeed, next to official representation which entailed diplomatic immunity and other

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<sup>271</sup> Young to Hughes, October 17, 1921, RG 59, File #861.00/9052.

<sup>272</sup> Interview at the State Department in Washington DC, August 17, 1921, RG 59, File #861.00/8949.

<sup>273</sup> Bertrand M. Patenaude, *The Big Show in Bololand*, 5.

forms of protection, this was an optimum alternative by which the American could establish an outpost of information in Soviet Russia. Given Herbert Hoover's credentials as an ardent anti-Bolshevik and strong ties to the Republican administration, the reliability of his employess was not in question.

Headed by a veteran relief worker named Philip Carroll, the ARA mission entered Russia from Riga in early September. Before going into Russia, Carroll and his staff had received preliminary briefing in the Latvian capital which at the time, according to Patenaude, was "a primary source of sensastionalistic stories about the horrors of Bolshevism in Red Russia."<sup>274</sup> Once in Russia, the Americans instantly recognized that they were in a realm the reality of which the descriptions could not possibly capture. To be sure, on their first few days in Russia they did not encounter anyone dying from starvation before their eyes. But that was about to change soon. However, even before that, a walk through the streets of Moscow drove a senior ARA officer Will Shafroth to conclude that "Moscow was the most depressing city in the world."<sup>275</sup> The downtrodden looks of its people and dilapidated quarters of the city left a strong impression on the Americans who thought they were visiting a part of Europe. Even the "sensationalist stories" from Riga had not prepared ARA staff members for the experience they were about to undergo in Russia. Assessing the social structure visible to a foreign eye, Shafroth wrote: "There is no middle class left, there are no bourgeois left. There are only commissars and the people."<sup>276</sup>

The first despatch from Riga pertaining to the ARA mission in Russia dates to September 12, when Brown gave a brief report about the first impressions in Russia

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<sup>274</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>275</sup> Ibid., 16.

<sup>276</sup> Ibid., 17.

and the work done thus far: “Cargoes of food stuff have already arrived for the ARA. The Americans have already begun feeding the children. They intend to open 100 dining rooms capable of feeding 100 kids at a time. According to Brown, each meal would consist of rice pudding made with milk, white roll, cocoa and vermicelli pudding.”<sup>277</sup> By Russian standards, this was a royal diet, not just the kind of diet to save little children. As Patenaude demonstrated in his book, in many cases, adults envied the kids who received nourishment far better than they could imagine. Two months later, “a trustworthy source” from Petrograd conveyed about the displeasure of the local population with the newly opened American dining rooms because mothers were not admitted to these restaurants and therefore 3-4 years old children have to get their food themselves.<sup>278</sup> Both in terms of logistics and organization, the first several months were undoubtedly the harshest. Often, the circumstances forced Americans to make decisions they would not have fathomed back at home. In a conversation with the visiting commanding officer of the USS Childs in Novosossisk the district manager of ARA, John Foy recalled stories “impossible to describe.” To the great astonishment of the officer, Foy confirmed the rumor that “they had to pick and choose even among children as to the ones that would be saved and the ones that would be allowed to die,” since, “there was not enough food for all.”<sup>279</sup>

The impact of the famine upon the already exhausted population cannot be overstated. Many anti-Bolsheviks in the West calculated that the worse the situation became in the country, the better would be the chances for the dissolution of the Communist government. But that was not the case. Individuals such as Herbert

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<sup>277</sup> Young to Hughes, August 16, 1921, RG 59 File #861.00/9006.

<sup>278</sup> Quarton to Hughes, November 4, 1921, RG 59, File #861.00/9126.

<sup>279</sup> Bristol to Hughes, March 15, 1921, RG 59, File #861.00/9372.

Hoover, too, considered the famine a strong indication of the criminal nature of the Bolshevik regime and utter bankruptcy of its ideas. Hoover's reaction to the calamity, nevertheless, was quite the opposite. "Whatever their ideology, they must be fed," the great American humanitarian famously declared. In describing the American reaction to the Russian famine, Norman E. Saul writes that "the United States really had no choice but to offer aid after the Soviet appeal to the West."<sup>280</sup> and refers to a close Hoover associate Philip Norton to note that "an economic agenda underlay much of American policy toward Russia."<sup>281</sup> True, in sending massive American aid to Russia, Hoover sought to practically demonstrate the superiority of the American capitalist system over Bolshevism. In his own words, Herbert Hoover viewed the ARA relief efforts as "an opportunity to point out to the Russian people themselves that their economic system is hopeless."<sup>282</sup> However, to altogether attribute perhaps the greatest famine relief operation in the history of mankind to inevitability or ulterior motives would be unfair to the man who on his own initiative ultimately saved ten million Russian lives. As far as Hoover was concerned, defeating the Bolshevik regime was synonymous with saving Russian lives. He saw no contradiction between the two. He was convinced that "charitable aid will only be a drop in the bucket"<sup>283</sup> and will fail to change the tragic realities of Russia predicated upon the Bolshevik economic philosophy. Even as such, there is no indication that Hoover saw a direct linkage between the famine and an immediate revolt against the government. Perhaps it was because Hoover understood certain things about a

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<sup>280</sup> Norman Saul, *Friends or Foes?*, 49.

<sup>281</sup> *Ibid.*, 51.

<sup>282</sup> *Ibid.*, 53.

<sup>283</sup> *Ibid.*, 53.

famine. American emissary in Poland Hugh Gibson, in his lengthy analysis of the situation in Russia, once observed that a famine would not produce a revolution.

“People who have never lacked food cannot understand this basic reality.”<sup>284</sup>

More chilling elaboration of Gibson’s point is illustrated through the eyewitness account of a certain Kas Volianski about the Volga refugees, intercepted by Americans legation in Riga. “Three years of constant undernourishment, pillage, progressive disintegration and civil war have made out of this population a mass of wretched egoists, who can calmly look on when others are dying of hunger. The heartlessness of the population can be observed in all regions that are little more amply provided with foodstuffs.” The scene in which Voliansky described retransportation of refugees back to Volga where “the Americans have prepared for bread, meat, and all those things that even non starved population is not dreaming of, much less these starved wretches” would sound familiar to anyone knowledgeable of Holocaust: “The droves of starving people crowded into the cold and filthy cars without a grumble, just like some cattle. They were to be taken back to the region that they had only left before. In their face one could read, well, to tell the truth, there was nothing to be read in them, they were like masks without expression, only with the stamp of dull suffering upon them. They were no longer the faces of human beings.... The suffering, the hunger, and three years of training to live only for the present moment, had deprived these people of the ability to react on anything else than their own momentary animal instincts.” It would have been a mistake to expect such people to organize behind some sort of ideal against regular, well-fed forces of the Soviet government. Even for Voliansky who admittedly had seen hunger,

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<sup>284</sup> Hugh Gibson, U.S. Ambassador in Poland, to Hughes, February 9, 1921, RG 59, File #861.00/9335.



undernourishment, and debility in the German punitive camps, the experience was surreal. “In every person there [German camps] – no matter how enfeebled physically, lived a free soul, in their eyes one could see all sorts of emotions, except submissiveness. But here [in famine refugee camps] there was nothing but vacant wandering glances, sluggish movements, absence of volition, or in other words, absolute hopelessness, apathy and inertia.”<sup>285</sup>

While there was little doubt in the minds of both the starving masses and foreign observers that the Soviet government was largely responsible for the famine, some also blamed the Russian people for having allowed the situation to reach such level of desperation. “The present famine situation in the Volga districts is the direct result of the Bolshevik policy of appropriating grain, leaving only enough to last until next harvest. Then the drought came and hence the famine,” wrote Fred Keyes, an American recently released from Soviet Russia. But much of the blame, according to him, lay with the peasants a great number of whom were ignorant. In Keyes’ mind, this was not a problem confined to the callousness of the Bolshevik regime alone, but had deeper roots in Russian traditions which were doggedly conservative and immune to positive change. “The Russian mujiks are lazy and dishonest. They sit around, smoke and drink and watch their women do all the work. Their house consists of one room and they sleep on the pech [stove]. They don’t want to change their old ways. Even the richest man who had four houses etc, slept on the floor with this family.”

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<sup>285</sup> Gibson to Hughes, November 19, 1921, Office of European Affairs, USSR Section General Records, File #861.00/Special Reports on Russia, 1911-1932, Box 5.

Keyes added that 75 percent of the peasants were sick of Bolshevism and when asked, responded saying: “Give us back the old regime.”<sup>286</sup>

Keyes was not alone in his ideas about the peculiar nature of the Russian society which allowed for realities difficult for a Western mind to grasp. “Surprise is often expressed by people who have never been to Russia, and know nothing of the Slav temperament” wrote in his voluminous memoir Edward Harris, now a Consul General to Singapore, “that five percent of the population should dominate the ninety-five percent, and this probably represents a true estimate of the ratio between the number of Bolsheviks and those who are opposed to them. This is one of the most difficult questions to answer... to convey with conviction to others a true picture which will visualize and explain the cause and continuation of Bolshevik power is something which is almost impossible.” What further infuriated Harris was the lingering popularity of Bolshevik ideals throughout the world and the fact that “people in other countries who have far surpassed Russia in culture, should turn to the most ignorant race of all for advice and guidance in seeking a solution for the great social problems which confront the world.”<sup>287</sup>

The entrance of the ARA in the Russian scene was not an altogether pleasant phenomenon for the Soviet authorities. The fact that an organization led by a renowned anti-Bolshevik and a capitalist magnate was feeding millions of Russians signified the utter impotence, or perhaps even bankruptcy of the Communist ideals. But in the minds of Bolshevik leaders, the humiliation came with a silver lining. The logistics of the famine relief efforts required close interaction between ARA staff

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<sup>286</sup> Young to Hughes, March 21, 1921, RG 59 File #861.00/9390.

<sup>287</sup> Edward Harris, U.S. Consul General in Singapore, to Hughes, in his book “Allies in Siberia”, August 29, 1921, RG 59 File #861.00/9050.

members and Soviet officials. The Soviet administrators were responsible for a whole range of tasks which included transportation of food, appropriation of space for dining rooms, organization of lists of individuals to be included in meal plans and numerous other vital functions. Implicit in this interaction was de facto recognition of the Soviet authority. Soviet historians Nikolai V. Sivachev and Nikolai N. Yakovlev, touching on ARA famine relief in a book published in 1979, noted that despite occasional spars with the Soviet officials, “on the whole, the Americans realized they were dealing with an established authority.” The authors also added that by April of 1922, James Goodrich, a former governor of Indiana informed Herbert Hoover from Russia that ‘at this moment there is no hope of a counterrevolution or of any sudden change in the government.’”<sup>288</sup>

The permission given to ARA to operate inside the USSR with unprecedented autonomy was a matter of expedience for the government which saw greater risk in millions of its citizens perishing in a famine than in allowing capitalists to salvage the situation. But it was also indicative of the trends within Soviet leadership to reach *modus vivendi* with the non-Communist world. Historian of Soviet foreign policy, Jon Jacobson, argues that “geopolitical estimates and even diplomatic considerations influenced what manner of revolution the Soviet leadership promoted in Europe and Asia.”<sup>289</sup> By the end of the Civil War, it had become apparent that no Communist revolution would be taking place in Europe. As the only Communist state on the world stage, it was essential for the Soviet government to modify the contours of its

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<sup>288</sup> Nikolai V. Sivachev and Nikolai N. Yakovlev, *Russia and the United States* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 70.

<sup>289</sup> Jon Jacobson, *When the Soviet Union Entered World Politics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 7.

international behavior and in this instance, lessen the degree of revolutionary militancy in relation to the West. Jacobson draws attention to the two prominent figures in Soviet foreign policy establishment, Georgii Chicherin and Maxim Litvinov, who, despite disagreements among themselves on important issues, were the products of Western education. While “Chicherin was raised in an aristocratic and pietistic family in which he and his sister were required by their parents to say grace in English at each meal,” Maxim Litvinov spent ten years of his life in England before returning to Russia at the time of the Bolshevik Revolution.<sup>290</sup> In Jacobson’s view, Chicherin’s stronger attachment to promoting worldwide revolution by sowing conflict among capitalist states than Litvinov who favored more constructive engagement did not immediately result in one viewpoint’s victory over another. Under the guidance of the Party’s upper echelons, hence, “in the years after 1922, Chicherin and Litvinov negotiated post-revolutionary Russia's entrance into world politics without in turn recognizing the legitimacy of the capitalist world system or agreeing to pay any of the debts of previous Russian regimes.”<sup>291</sup> The engagement with ARA was, in a sense, part of this strategy.

A subtle shift in attitude about the durability of the Soviet government was also beginning to take hold within the American foreign policy establishment. According to diplomat Loy Henderson, who specialized in Russia at the time, most State Department experts with background in Russian affairs were enamored by the “grandeur of the Russian empire,” and had trouble accepting the disappearance of a mighty country that was once an ally in the Great War. “It was only natural that

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<sup>290</sup> Ibid., 104.

<sup>291</sup> Ibid., 105.

members of the State Department whose interests had been centered on Russia should have been influenced, to an extent at least, by their experiences and associations in that country,” remarked Henderson, “that they should have tended to look at Eastern Europe from the point of view of St. Petersburg or Moscow, and they should have little sympathy for the nationalistic aspirations or comparatively small ethnic groups who seemed to prefer devoting their energies to the setting up of their own governments to the attempting to restore this imagination-capturing empire on a more democratic basis.”<sup>292</sup> For several years following the collapse of the tsarist regime, the Americans had continued to adhere to the principle of the territorial integrity which they felt was fair application in regard to one of Europe’s mightiest nations. In the note which came to define America’s relations with Soviet Russia for well over a decade, the U.S. Secretary of State Brainbridge Colby justified his country’s refusal to recognize former Russian colonies by stating that until the question of Bolshevik governance was resolved, “no final decision should or can be made without consent of Russia” on matters of vital importance, “especially those concerning its sovereignty over the territory of the former Russian Empire.”<sup>293</sup> Under the circumstances dictating revision of outmoded attitudes and strong insistence of the U.S. commissioner in Baltic states, Evan E. Young, however, the years of 1921 and 1922, saw an important adjustment in the American actions on the northwestern borders of Russia. In 1922, after nearly five years of silence on the matter, the United States moved to recognize the Baltic states of Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia. Even in the memorandum of recognition of the Baltic State, the American officials felt the

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<sup>292</sup> George W. Baer ed., *The Memoirs of Loy W. Henderson* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1986), 150-151.

<sup>293</sup> Benson, L. Grayson, ed. *The American Image of Russia, 1917-1977*, 56.

need the add a clause stating that “the United States has consistently maintained that the disturbed conditions of Russian affairs may not be made occasion for the alienations of Russian territory, and this principle is not deemed to be impinged by the recognition at this time of the Governments of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania which have been set up and maintained by an indigenous population.”<sup>294</sup>

For the United States, much of the interaction with the small breakway states of the Russia Empire was considered in the context of the relations with Soviet Russia. Shortly after the establishment of American legations in the independent Baltic State, the United States designated the legation in Riga as a center of information-gathering about the Soviet state. In addition to the embassy which carried out its usual diplomatic functions intended for U.S.-Latvian relations, a substantial office was established which came to be known as the Russian Section. Numerous experts and diplomats dealing with Russia were assigned to the section with aim of consolidating the information-gathering efforts. “The purpose of the Department in assigning to Riga Consul H.B. Quarton and Vice Consul E.L. Packer and other additional personnel,” wrote Secretary Charles Hughes to the American Commissioner in Riga, “is to make our office the Department’s principal source of information relating to conditions and the progress of events in Soviet Russia.”<sup>295</sup> To be sure, even before March of 1922, when the Russian Section became organized, Riga had already been serving as one of the primary sources of information on the Soviet Union since the last American envoys withdrew from mainland Russia in 1918. As the briefing of ARA officials in Riga indicates, the Latvian city had already

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<sup>294</sup> Alfred Bilmans, comp., *Latvian-American Relations: Documents* (Washington DC, Latvian Legation, 1944), 124.

<sup>295</sup> Hughes to Young, April 10, 1921, RG 59 File #861.00/9400.

earned the reputation “as the West’s primary ‘listening post’ into that forbidden land.”<sup>296</sup> But not just a listening post -- according to Natalie Grant, Riga, especially, was at the time “an outpost of Western civilization” in this beleaguered part of the world.<sup>297</sup> In terms of its cultural heritage, political identity and economic ideals, republican Latvia (and also Lithuania and Estonia) had much more in common with the West than its eastern neighbor which had forcibly coveted the land and its people for the past several centuries. The eventual natural partnership between the Baltic states and America was obvious to many in Washington, especially given the need to monitor the activities of the Bolshevik menace to the east.

Centered in Riga, the new information-gathering effort was designed to secure the professionalism and efficiency of the service. For nearly four years, America’s information about Russia was being received from various representations in foreign nations bordering Russia – which created the impression that Washington lacked a consistent and long-term policy toward that country. In a memorandum written in March 1921, Arthur Bullard, the chief of the Russian Division at the State Department in 1919-1921, had requested the Secretary of State to remedy the situation. “At present,” he wrote, “the Russian division is receiving reports on Russian conditions from many points along Russian border, but with the exception of Consul Quarton at Viborg, Finland, these reports are prepared, incidentally, by officers of the Department, consular, and diplomatic, who are overburdened with their principal work.” Beside lacking the proper insight, Bullard added, such representatives could “only occasionally spare time to prepare a report on Russia.”

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<sup>296</sup> Bertrand M. Patenaude, *The Big Show in Bololand*, 8.

<sup>297</sup> Natalie Grant, “The Russian Section: A Window on the Soviet Union,” *Diplomatic History* 2 (1978), 108.

Judging by the superb qualities of Harold Quarton, he suggested opening a listening post in Finland. While adamantly opposed to the recognition of the Soviets, Arthur Bullard advocated to plan for the day when the Soviet government would be no longer. “We must train Russia observers,” Bullard wrote, who would constitute the frontal forces in the government’s “concerted effort to understand Russia.” This trained observer “should be made to feel that he was being prepared for the moment when it will be possible to re-establish relations with Russia.” For Bullard, in 1921, America’s seemingly indifferent stand in regard to Russia was a mistake and he believed that as a major power, the United States simply could not afford to ignore the happenings in that country.<sup>298</sup> By then, slowly, yet consistently, the United States government had proceeded to fulfill Bullard’s recommendations.

According to Katherine A.S. Siegel, during this period the State Department closely followed developments in Russia. “Dewitt Clinton Poole, who headed the Division of Russian Affairs at State, recorded that in 1922, ‘the Department received an average of three and one half despatches and one cablegram per day relating to thje Russian situation,’ much of it originating in Riga, Latvia.<sup>299</sup> While the the State Department “was particularly interested in the progress of Soviet international trade,” the appointment of Charles Evans Hughes as the State Secretary by President Warren G. Harding ensured the continuation of the anti-recognition policy. A Republican nominee during the presidential elections in 1916, Hughes had lost to Woodrow Wilson by a narrow margin. His strong political credentials and well-developed

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<sup>298</sup> Arthur Bullard to Hughes, March 11, 1921, GR59 General Records of State Dept. Office of E. European Affairs, USSR Section, General Records, 1911-1940, Box 5.

<sup>299</sup> Katherine A.S. Siegel, *Loans and Legitimacy: The Evolution of Soviet-American Relations, 1919-1933* (Lexington, University Press of Kentucky, 1996), 51.



outlook into world affairs “made him one of the ‘most distinguished’ State Department chiefs.” Given his anti-Bolshevik views, coupled with the presence of another powerful statesman Herbert Hoover in the cabinet, little change was expected in the political relations between Washington and Moscow. Furthermore, under Hughes’ leadership, the influence of the State Department in the decision-making process, as well as its capabilities to monitor the political developments in Soviet Russia grew.

In 1922, the Division of Russian Affairs was folded into the Division of Eastern European Affairs which assumed responsibilities for dealing with other new states in what once used to be Russian Empire, yet continued to focus primarily on the Soviet regime. Evan E. Young, the commissioner in the Baltic states, was invited to serve as the chief of the division. Once in Washington, Young tapped his close acquaintances from Latvia to work for him, among whom Robert F. Kelley and Loy Henderson would later become the most prominent and influential in the State Department. A junior consul, just back from his post in Ireland, Henderson recalled bumping into Young during his visit to the State Department. The chief of the small division located on the third floor of the building asked him if he “would be willing to take a desk in his office,” since Young needed a “junior officer who had some acquaintance with Eastern Europe.”<sup>300</sup> Henderson accepted the offer and soon met with a handful of experts among whom 31-years-old assistant chief of the political division of the department, Robert Kelley, left particular impression on him. “It was unusual for an officer so junior to be appointed to such a responsible position. I found that an exception had been made partly because Young, under whom Kelley had

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<sup>300</sup> George W. Baer ed., *The Memoirs of Loy W. Henderson*, 118.

worked in Riga, had insisted that the latter be his first assistant, and partly because during the year that Kelley had served in the division he had displayed both marked ability and stamina.”<sup>301</sup> Led by former Riga appointees, the Division of Eastern European affairs elevated the status of the U.S. legation in Latvia by improving the mission’s observational capacities with regard to Soviet Russia.

According to Loy Henderson, who would later become a chief secretary of the legation, the Russian Section “was staffed with officers who had served in Russia, most of whom could speak and read Russian.” Outside the Soviet Union, the section possessed the largest repository of Soviet books, pamphlets, newspapers and other periodicals. By mid-1920’s the legation subscribed to more than 50 newspapers and magazines which usually arrived in Riga within 36 hours of their publication. While the Russian Section heavily relied on official Soviet publications, there were also the diplomats of friendly countries, newspaper reporters, businessmen and technicians, who in the words of Henderson, came to Riga “for a breath of fresh air,” and “had no hesitation in discussing privately with members of the legation their experiences in the Soviet Union and in giving their views on the developments and trends in that country.” “Since in those days, the United States had no intelligence service other than that of armed forces, the legation also arranged to obtain information from the secret services of several friendly countries.” In fact, the quality of the information obtained by the Riga Legation often surpassed those of the countries which maintained embassies inside the USSR due to “the limited space allotted to them by the Soviet

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<sup>301</sup> Ibid., 123.

government for living, and working quarters, the lack of other facilities, and the manner in which they were spied upon and quarantined.”<sup>302</sup>

The opening of the Russian Section in Riga took place on the heels of the ARA mission which took off in the fall of 1921. The sudden presence of Americans unaccountable to and fully independent of Soviet authorities increased the access to information about even the most intimate aspects of Russia’s internal affairs.

However, as Natalie Grant noted in her seminal article “The Russian Section, A Window on the Soviet Union,” “The ARA reports were not always comprehensive and few ARA officers had a sufficiently fluent knowledge of Russian to communicate directly with the people and were thus forced to depend on local interpreters.”<sup>303</sup>

Nearly all major figures associated with ARA were essentially relief workers and very little experience or even interest in policy-making. The information they furnished was of significant value in terms of providing an accurate picture of the living conditions in Soviet Russia. But they could not always be counted on to provide reliable information about the political processes which were often more complicated than the visibly drab realities of Russia. After all, Communism was a novel phenomenon, and, without considerable prior experience, very few Westerners understood the philosophy and the general ways in which the Soviet government functioned.

For such purposes, Washington relied on the newly assembled team consisting of individuals who could be identified as veterans of Russian, and in particular, Soviet politics. The newly appointed chief of the Russian Section David B. Macgowan, who

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<sup>302</sup> Ibid., 162-63.

<sup>303</sup> Natalie Grant, “The Russian Section: A Window on the Soviet Union,” 108.

did not arrive in his post until November of 1922, had most recently completed his duties as one of the last American diplomats in the Russian territory. Having last served as a U.S. Consul in the yet non-Bolshevik city of Vladivostok, Macgowan possessed a treasure of experience in the Russian landscape. The Tennessee native started out his career as a journalist reporting from Petrograd for three years. In 1915, Macgowan was hired by the State Department to serve as a vice-consul in Moscow. As such, Macgowan was one of the handful Americans who actually witnessed the Bolshevik Revolution on the ground. Unlike many of his colleagues who departed Russia shortly after the evacuation from Petrograd, he remained in the far eastern corner of Russia and continued providing despatches on conditions in non-Bolshevik areas of the country. During his tenure as a consul in Vladivostok, Macgowan had performed admirably steering American interests in the region through the difficult period of intervention, the Japanese invasion and Bolshevik encroachments. Another prominent member of the Riga team, Earl Packer also served in Russia during the tumultuous period of the revolution. Having served as a clerk at the American mission in Petrograd from 1916 until January of 1918, Packer was then promoted to the post of an assistant military attaché in the U.S. embassy in Russia. As the American mission in Russia wrapped up its activities toward the end of the Civil War, he returned to Washington to take a foreign service exam, and became a drafting officer as the assistant chief at the Division of Russian Affairs. In 1922, when the Russian Section was instituted, the superiors decided to send Packer to Riga in the capacity of Vice-Consul.

The Russian Section, as Natalie Grant put it, “occupied a position seldom encountered in the American Foreign Service,” insofar as “the government with which it was concerned was out of reach”, and “no direct contact could be maintained with the officials of this government.”<sup>304</sup> The primary duties of its officers included preparing reports based on the Soviet press, interviews with the knowledgeable parties and various other activities that helped to enhance knowledge of the events in Russia. Particular emphasis was placed on summarizing the reports coming from the state-owned newspapers that dealt with internal Soviet politics. In the instructions sent to the founders of the Section, the State Department requested them to “regularly obtain newspapers ..., have them read and translations prepared of such portions as you believe will be of special value and interest to the Department.” Washington seemed to be most interested in “translations of what may be considered basic documents, i.e. decrees and official announcements of the Soviet authorities, statements by leaders such as Lenin, Trotsky, Zinoviev, Rakovsky, etc., and editorials by Steklov and Radek.”<sup>305</sup> It was expected that the members of the Riga staff, seasoned in the revolutionary politics of Russia, would be well suited to follow the not-so-dull dynamics of the Kremlin, especially considering the frequency of reports about Vladimir Lenin’s deteriorating health. In addition to politics, the Russian Section was also charged with informing Washington about the economic, judicial and religious aspects of the Soviet life. It was up to the diplomats in Riga to determine what information was worthy of attention, and under the circumstances,

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<sup>304</sup> Ibid., 111.

<sup>305</sup> Hughes to Young, April 10, 1921, RG 59 File #861.00/9400.

this often meant compiling a wide range of subjects which in totality helped to convey some sense of the overall realities of Russia.

In the meanwhile, the realities of Russia appeared to be shifting in a less gloomy direction. Amid the deadly famine in the Volga, the measures adopted in the aftermath of the Kronstadt uprising had begun to produce some results in the barren economic landscape of the Communist state. According to a confidential memorandum sent to the American representation in Finland, despite acute fuel shortages and near-total breakdown in transportation, the embryonic revival of private enterprise had at least alleviated the situation for a certain strata of people in the central cities. “The new economic policy has already begun to restore some of the former conditions of life at Petrograd and Moscow,” stated the report. “The remnants of the Intelligentsia are beginning to be seen again in the streets though seldom in the cafes and restaurants. The number of business advertisements appearing in Russian newspapers are also an indication of the new conditions.” The repairs carried out at the Semenovskiy race course by the government appeared to be designed to lure in the emerging class of people with financial means. The situation in Moscow comprised a stark contrast with the countryside where the famine and typhus epidemic continued to rage. Among those who had fled to Moscow to escape death and disease in other regions, at least one hundred humans died every day from typhus and malnutrition.<sup>306</sup> According to historian of Moscow, Timothy J. Colton, “from its 1920 low of 1 million, Moscow gained a half-million residents by 1923,” and by 1926, the two-third of Muscovites had been born somewhere else. Much of this growth – 85 percent

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<sup>306</sup> Young to Hughes, December 12, 1921, RG 59 File #861.00/9255-56.

from 1921-1926 – “stemmed not from fertility but from in-migration, which was lubricated by the annulment of most administrative restrictions on mobility.”<sup>307</sup>

Another reliable source in Petrgorad reported increase in foodstuffs at the local markets. “People having plenty of money can get everything,” the informer stated, but the prices were prohibitively expensive. “A salary of 1 million rubles is insufficient for people to live on,” informed the source, and therefore “most of the people were engaged in extra work” which the Soviet authorities ubiquitously labeled as “speculation.” The new creed became well-spread among the inhabitants: “He who does not speculate cannot eat” instead of the Bolshevik one: “Who does not work must not eat.”<sup>308</sup> This type of optimism was partially corroborated by some officials of ARA in Russia. According to Cyril Quinn, the second executive assistant to the ARA chief of operations, the moral of the people in Russia had improved. Most Russians felt that the worst had gone by. There was a marked change in the outward appearance of the cities; the improvements induced by private trade were evident everywhere. Quinn attributed much of the improvement to the government’s new tax plan which limited the collection of taxes to once a year. “In theory, the economic situation is hopeless without outside help,” Quinn noted, “but in Russia one gets the sense that things will somehow work out.” At the very least, he was certain that the Soviet government was not going to fall.<sup>309</sup>

Many outside observers interpreted the Soviet measures toward market as a necessary retreat from an otherwise suicidal policy course. Identified as the State Capitalism by the observers in Riga, however, the contours of the NEP were still

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<sup>307</sup> Timothy J. Colton, *Moscow: Governing the Socialist Metropolis*, 159.

<sup>308</sup> Quarton to Hughes, January 25, 1922, RG 59 File #861.00/9287.

<sup>309</sup> Young to Hughes, October 10, 1922, RG 59 File #861.00/9712.

unclear. The head of New York Chamber of Commerce Irving T. Bush who traveled to Soviet Russia in June of 1922 noted that the situation was getting somewhat better, though nowhere near normal. His assessment of the condition of the peasants concluded that their industry was slowly reviving; however, the Bolsheviks were not being particularly helpful in facilitating the necessary conditions for economic growth. Having met with Lenin, Trotsky, Chicherin and other Soviet leaders, Bush remained opposed to the recognition of the Soviet regime.<sup>310</sup> An American citizen traveling to Odessa around the same time observed that “the broad streets were clean and the pavements were in good order” A few people strolling about the streets looked well-dressed and well-fed, if not exactly prosperous. The American noticed no traffic in the city, except an occasional government automobile that whizzed by. “Shops looked well from outside, given the items on the window. But once you enter it, the shelves are bare, it turns out everything in the store is placed on the windows to see,” he told the American interlocutor in Istanbul, “but he sellers assured me they can get whatever I want, if I gave them enough time.” The visitor then went to the ARA headquarters in the locality here he met with the American officials in charge of relief operations. After a stroll in Cadillac through the deserted streets of Odessa, he was taken by Hodgson to see the dining rooms. “There were hundreds of children lined up in a courtyard going in to get their ration of bread and cocoa. They all looked healthy and well-fed.” As he watched the Russian kids receiving nourishment, Hodgson told him that “when the ARA had first come into Odessa there were hundreds and thousands of children literally dying of starvation, many of them

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<sup>310</sup> Charles L. Kagey, Chief of U.S. Mission in Finland, to Hughes, June 14, 1923, RG 59 File #861.00/9958.



so weak that they were unable to go to the feeding stations.” But coupled with ARA’s efforts, good crops had improved the situation.<sup>311</sup>

Eager to capitalize on the meager effects of the NEP and easing of famine, the Soviet hosted several high profile American representatives whose mission was designed to gauge the improvements in the state of the Soviet economy. Among such visitors were the U.S. Senators Edwin F. Ladd of North Dakota and William H. King of Utah. Accompanied with their own interpreters, the senators traveled through the Urals, Crimea and Armenia. Speaking to the American envoy in Stockholm Robert Bliss on the way back from Russia in Stockholm, Senator Ladd brimmed with excitement about the results of his visit. Claiming that he had not experienced government interference with the program of the visit, Edwin Ladd spoke of the expansion of religious freedom and freedom of trade. Senator Ladd judged religious freedom by the number of people who attended the church when he visited them, but “doubted that many had religious feelings, since children grew up in a revolutionary era.” Noting the material improvement, Senator Ladd observed that Russia had “touched the bottom and was slowly mounting the upward grade.” However, he also admitted that much of his trip was confined to the private car and hotel room rather than meeting with average Russians.<sup>312</sup> His associate Senator King was not as impressed. While not discounting possibilities for some trade between the two countries, senator from Utah referred to his Communist hosts as “international scoundrels.” Once back in Washington, Senator King told Robert F. Kelley that he “avoided the commissars the whole time he was there, while his colleagues flattered

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<sup>311</sup> Bristol to Hughes, June 7, 1923, RG 59 File #861.00/9959.

<sup>312</sup> Robert Woods Bliss, American Minister in Sweden, to Hughes, October 9, 1923, RG 59 File #861.00/10057.

officials and were flattered in return.” The Utah senator came out against “any type of recognition.”<sup>313</sup>

Despite minor signs of improvement in limited areas of the country owing to the partial retreat from the ideals of War Communism, living conditions for the overwhelming majority of the citizens remained dreadful. According to Russian professor who came to Tallinn along with his wife, “foreigners arriving in Russian towns only saw the main streets and the conditions of life led by officials, and got no idea of the real situation.” Many of the people, they said, were on the verge of starvation. “The general attitude of the poorer classes is that of waiting for something to end their misery,” the man told the American representative in Estonia. It has taken two years for the couple to obtain permission for this visit and four months to get the necessary passports and documents. In the end, they were forced to leave behind their 17 and 18 years-old daughters as a collateral to ensure that they would return to the Soviet Union.<sup>314</sup>

The Russian peasants continued to suffer under harsh circumstances due to the past Soviet practices, ongoing heavy taxation and government control. A professor from the Siberian university informed ARA representatives the livestock in the region was drastically reduced since the previous year the government had demanded livestock as a form of tax payment. According to him even though they were the growers of food, the situation seemed to be better in the cities than in the countryside. As for the high Soviet officials, “all kinds of talks, conferences and schemes” led to

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<sup>313</sup> Robert F. Kelley, Assistant Chief of East European Division of State Department, to Hughes, October 26, 1923, RG 59 File #861.00/10060.

<sup>314</sup> Young to Hughes, March 2, 1923, RG 59 File #861.00/9853.

nothing since “they were all evading the main issues.”<sup>315</sup> In a report passed on to the American representative in Denmark by Baron Meyendorf, a member of the old aristocracy, the Russian peasant was described as someone utterly opposed to centralized rule saying that “every kind of government is disastrous for the mujik,” and reminisced about the rule of the Tsar. The Soviet taxation system repelled many even though most peasants avoided talking politics. While the red army and the peasants got along well there was palpable resentment toward the GPU, which the report described as ‘gendarmerie’. The Soviet gendarmeries, unlike those in other Western countries were more potent, as they possessed “the power of life and death over all persons who are offensive to the Government.” The report identified Jews as one of the few stratas able to take advantage of the small economic freedoms granted by the Soviet regime, and were on good terms with the peasantry who relied on their services:

“There are few Jews in northern Russia. These all occupy themselves with trade. Some of them are tailors, and many act as boot-leggers and money-changers. In the above mentioned districts, the farmers are on good terms with the Jews and make use of their service in all cases of necessity. Some observers report that only the Jews are able to trade at all and to furnish peasantry with the necessities of life such as salt, metals and glass.”<sup>316</sup>

On his way back from Russia in December of 1923, F.A. McKenzie of *Chicago Daily News* met with the U.S. Consul in Harbin whom he informed of the sharp contrast

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<sup>315</sup> Dewitt C. Poole, U.S. General Consul in Berlin, to Hughes, February 2, 1923, RG 59 File #861.00/9851.

<sup>316</sup> John D. Prince, U.S. Minister in Denmark, to Hughes, October 3, 1923, RG 59 File #861.00/10049.

between the outward signs of improvement in the cities and the conditions in the regions. In Siberia, the situation was no better than during the worst periods of the Civil War. As he arrived in the villages, “it became evident that conditions in Siberia are much worse than they were in 1920.” The peasants’ livestock was severely depleted and they complained bitterly.<sup>317</sup> The Latvian Minister in Moscow also observed that the peasant support for the Soviet government was almost nil, and the grain production was quite low. Given the circumstances the minister believed that the Soviet government had no choice but to continue pushing NEP in full force. Still, however, the Soviet government’s refusal to abandon its enmity toward private enterprise threatened long-term provisions for better life and business. According to McKenzie of *Chicago Daily News* the Soviets showed inclination to invite American businessmen into the country, but “the tendency of the Bolo authorities was to take over any enterprise that promised development on a large scale.” Validating McKenzie’s apprehension about Bolshevik practices, Mr. Robbins of White Star Line stated that his company in Moscow was facing operational difficulties due to strict government interference. “Under present conditions it is impossible to operate a business,” Robbins complained.<sup>318</sup>

Naturalized American citizen, A.A. Wishnevsky spoke with the staff member of the U.S. Consulate in Riga in June of 1923 after resigning from the chairmanship of a soap-producing factory in Kazan, “due to intolerable conditions under which he was compelled to work.” He said that the local Communist party cell was constantly interfering with the work of the factory and slowing down the pace. His assistant was

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<sup>317</sup> Kelley to Hughes, January 12, 1924, RG 59 File #861.00/10243.

<sup>318</sup> Ibid.

a former janitor who lacked basic understanding of business or industry, but his Communist Party membership had entitled him to the supervisory position. Wishnevsky complained about parallel authority where most of his decisions, even though confined strictly to economic realm, would have to be approved by the Party officer who knew next to nothing about the functioning of the factory. The suffocating political control over ordinary workers did not stop at the confines of the factory. “Whenever Communist authorities want to stage a demonstration,” said Wishnevsky, “they simply give orders to the union officials to assemble their men at particular place and time. If someone doesn’t show up, they take away his union card, and after that he cannot obtain employment.” Once, on May 1, they ordered Wishnevsky to show at the annual labor day demononstrations. Instead, he went hunting. An immediate trial for Wishnevsky followed uin which he was roundly denounced by his colleagues and was severely reprimanded. But due to his American citizenship and the fact that he was not a Communist Party member, Wishnevsky was left alone. In a similar report compiled from Vladivostok where the Soviet authorities were said to have spent 30,000 dollars on the May day festivities.<sup>319</sup> “When one considers the misery and suffering existing among practically all classes of Russians in the city and province such an expenditure can only be characterized as criminal waste,” noted A.W. Kliefitch of the Division of Eastern European Affairs on the side of the despatch. To the great revulsion of the American, a photo from the parade

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<sup>319</sup> S. Pinkney Tuck, U.S. Consul in Vladivostok, to Hughes, May 23, 1923, RG 59 File #861.00/9931.

taken from a local newspaper copy showed the Bible and the crown chained by Soviet soliders.<sup>320</sup>

Symbols of old Russia were not the only ones to be shackled by the Soviet authorities. Ever paranoid of the presence of many enemies both within and abroad the country, the Soviet prisons were full of dissenting citizens, including even the foreigners who failed to remove in time the presumption of guilt toward themselves. A former member of the Latvian embassy who served a prison term in the Soviet Union under the espionage charges reported numerous Western persons jailed on similar suspicions.<sup>321</sup> Among the imprisoned foreigners Poles and Baltic nationans who had come to do business in Russia comprised the majority. In one frighteningly hillarious instance, according to Riga's daily *Segodnya*, an American Communist who was sent by Communist Party of USA to attend a gathering by Communist International underwent an unforgettable experience at the hands of Soviet security forces. En route to Moscow, he made acquaintance with two fellow travelers who spoke English. When the American asked for directions to the Communist International, the men prankfully pointed him to Lubianka, the headquarters of the State Political Administration, the GPU. The unsuspecting American walked into the building and was promptly arrested. After several weeks of incessant pleading by the American, the authorities agreed to review his case. Following the investigations, he was released. As the Soviet police removed

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<sup>320</sup> Frederick W.B. Coleman, U.S. Minister in Latvia, to Hughes, October 12, 1923, RG 59 File #861.00/10067.

<sup>321</sup> Coleman to Hughes, January 7, 1924, RG 59 File #861.00/10209.

handcuffs from him, the examining magistrate mollified the hapless prisoner: “Don’t worry – that is the way we deal with all foreigners whom we think suspicious.”<sup>322</sup>

1923 was the year during which largely thanks to efforts by the American Relief Administration, the terrible famine afflicting much of Soviet Russia abated. It was perhaps an irony of fate that Herbert Hoover, in trying to demonstrate the non-viability of Bolshevism, had given the Soviet regime a new lease on life, thus actually helping it to preserve its otherwise ruined legitimacy in the eyes of the people.

Certainly, the measures by the Soviet government, designed to lift stifling government control over the economy also played a role. There appeared to be realization that without some compromise on the question of trade, the Soviet government would implode under the weight of severe economic problems.

According to German Foreign Secretary Richard von Kuhlman, toward the end of his life, Soviet founder Vladimir Lenin confided in his doctor and von Kuhlmann’s personal friend named Bumke about his concerns for the future of the Communist ideology. As von Kuhlmann related the story to the American consul in Berlin, “Lenin had told him [Bumke] that he had become entirely convinced that Communism was a failure as a practical system and that the Bolsheviks must necessarily adapt their system to meet realities. He added, however, that he regretted nothing that he had done in doing away with the old order of things in Russia.”<sup>323</sup>

There are other signs that, as a highly intelligent person, Lenin did acknowledge the drastic consequences of his ideology for the welfare of the people. Nonetheless, as a revolutionary man for whom the noble end justified the means, the Soviet leader’s

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<sup>322</sup> *Segodnya*, Riga, December 11, 1923.

<sup>323</sup> Rudolph E. Schoenfield, U.S. Consul in Cologne, Germany, to Hughes, August 31, 1924, RG 59 File #861.00/10782.

compunction did not reach the point at which he would revisit his ideological principles, let alone, take an action that would soften the deadly grip of his Party over the country.

Though an ever-inspiring leader of the Soviet phenomenon, by the end of 1922, Vladimir Lenin had gradually begun to withdraw from public life due to deteriorating health. In fact, he had never fully recovered from the assassination attempt that left a few bullets lodged in his body. In the last few months of his life, Lenin's debilitating condition touched off a power struggle within the ruling Politburo. Lenin's collective method of leadership gave the struggle a particularly ferocious character as various politicians grouped and regrouped around various leading Communists. Yet the same collective leadership also made it possible so that when on January 21, 1924, the father of the Bolshevik Revolution drew his last breath, there was little doubt that the Soviet state would live on.



## Chapter 4: Era of Soviet Normalcy

Vladimir Lenin's death in January of 1924, contrary to some expectations, did not mark the beginning of a new era in the Soviet Union. Some time before his death, Lenin had been incapacitated by serious illness which curtailed his physical ability to govern the country. Given Joseph Stalin's rising stature in the Party and his strong-arm tactics toward Lenin's immediate surrounding, even the revolutionary leader's political capacity to effect change was often limited.<sup>324</sup> The definitive departure of the founder of the Soviet state predictably gave way to furious battles for succession in power. Nonetheless, with persistent attacks on private property, quashing of political dissent and refusal to renounce revolutionary claims abroad, the Soviet regime retained its essential features. As the American diplomatic despatches from the region illustrate, even at the height of the New Economic Policy which tolerated minor degree of freedom in commodity exchange, those capable of feeding themselves – or *Nepmen*, as the Soviet lingo pejoratively labeled them – risked arbitrary arrest, exile or execution.

While the reports from the representations in China, Turkey, Finland and Germany significantly contributed to Washington's knowledge about the Soviet affairs, much of the information-gathering task was formally bestowed upon the Russian Section created within the U.S. Legation in the capital of Latvia and still in its embryonic stages. Writing from Riga, Ambassador Frederick W.B. Coleman

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<sup>324</sup> Having infiltrated Lenin's secretarial staff, Joseph Stalin closely monitored the correspondence of the bed-ridden leader, and at one point, insulted Lenin's wife Nadezhda Krupskaya with profanity for her insubordination. The founder of the Soviet state later responded only by asking Stalin to apologize for his action. See Richard Pipes, *Russia under the Bolshevik Regime* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1993), 476-478.

enumerated three main sources of their information: the Soviet press, “the observations of substantial, in some cases responsible men that had lived in the Soviet Union a more or less prolonged period and had given studious attention” to the happenings in the USSR, and a special class of observers (agents) whose reports had been scanned at the Riga legation for a number of years. “It’s not believed that all of these sources is the whole truth, and nothing but the truth,” stated Coleman, but examined in relation to one another, they provided a fairly accurate picture of Soviet realities: “Taken by and large, these sources report substantially the same state of things. These facts, filtering through the minds of the Legation staff, and of others similarly situated yield substantially similar conclusions. These conclusions are inevitable; they may be described as objective, not subjective.” And the objective conclusion about the Soviet Union consisted of several main points which the observers in Riga conveyed to their superiors in Washington. Their analysis contended that the Soviet power was too entrenched to be overthrown; that with all the talk about tolerance for free trade, “Communist principles had been modified, not eradicated”, and that the NEP had not halted the downward slide in economy which would likely lead to yet another catastrophe unless a radical alteration of course took place on the part of the Soviet leadership.<sup>325</sup> In the absence of serious political developments such as civil strife or rebellion, the focus of the despatches hence shifted to analyzing domestic economic conditions. As the more easily observable phenomenon, in the era of NEP, everyday conditions – *byt* as the Russians – called it became an important tool in gauging the success or failure of the Soviet government.

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<sup>325</sup> Frederick W.B. Coleman to Hughes, January 12, 1925, RG 59, File #861.00/10631.

Large segments of the Bolshevik establishment never warmed up to the idea of private property and free trade. In 1921, when Lenin initially resorted to the NEP he had done so grudgingly and many around him saw the step as a necessary retreat for the sake of a greater ideal – retaining power. “We felt as though the Revolution had been betrayed, and it was time to quit the Party.... If money was reappearing, wouldn’t rich people reappear, too? Weren’t we on the slippery slope that led back to capitalism?” wondered aloud a young Bolshevik Alexander Barmine.<sup>326</sup> In a reassuring response to those who resisted against the “retreat” *Pravda* editorial announced the necessity “to realize that under current conditions, the strengthening and development of the revolution [were] only possible this way.”<sup>327</sup> But Lenin never lost sight of the possible implications of allowing the bourgeoisie to creep back into Soviet landscape. “Free trade, even its at first not linked to the White Guards as Kronstadt was, nevertheless leads inevitably to White Guardism, the triumph of capital and its full restoration,” he asserted at the Tenth Party Congress in March of 1921.<sup>328</sup>

Among historians of the Soviet Union, NEP once remained at the center of a debate on whether there existed a possibility for an alternative course of development for the socialist state. American historian Stephen Cohen has vociferously defended the viability of alternative course by emphasizing the ideas of Nikolai Bukharin and other Soviet leaders who advocated a more lenient approach toward private

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<sup>326</sup> Alan M. Ball, *Russia’s Last Capitalists: The Nepmen, 1921-1929* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1987), 16.

<sup>327</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

<sup>328</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.

enterprise.<sup>329</sup> More recently, Evgeni Gimpelson, a Russian historian, has suggested that during the NEP, the Soviet system did indeed move toward liberalization and away from terror. However, in Gimpelson's view, the democratic alternative did not come to fruition, because it was blocked by "a ruling party beholden to ideological dogmas on 'building socialism' and 'dictatorship of the proletariat.'"<sup>330</sup> For this, rather than the conscious policy by Lenin, he blames the evolution of the Soviet administrative apparatus which formulated its *modus operandi* during volatile times of the Civil War where extreme centralization and dictatorialization effectively served the survival of the Soviet regime. A younger historian P.V. Panov goes even further by dismissing the democratizing influence of the NEP as hype unsupported by evidence. He shows that Lenin took special care to ensure that the NEP would not affect "the bases of the existing political establishment" by instituting policies that crippled any chances for the genuine market economy to develop.<sup>331</sup> The result was that "factually during the years of NEP the monopolization [of the national economy] did not weaken, but expanded."<sup>332</sup> Moreover, according to Julie Hessler, "the NEP laid the foundation for the future development of the socialist economy by combining a massive state presence with market mechanism and institutions."<sup>333</sup> While the Soviet authorities occasionally yielded in the struggle against private entrepreneurs, Hessler points out that "punishments, purges, mobilization of Communists, and

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<sup>329</sup> See Stephen Cohen, *Bukharin and the Bolshevik Revolution: A Political Biography, 1888-1938* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973) and *Rethinking the Soviet Experience: Politics and History since 1917* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985).

<sup>330</sup> E.G. Gimpelson, *Stanovlenie i evoliutsia sovetского gosudarstvennogo apparata upravlenia, 1917-1930* (Moscow, 2003), 207.

<sup>331</sup> A.N. Sakharov, ed., *NEP: Zavershaiushaia stadia: sootnoshenii ekonomiki i politiki* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 1999), 40.

<sup>332</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>333</sup> Julie Hessler, *A Social History of Soviet Trade*, 7.

political and occupational training became the standard techniques for counteracting the antisocialist tendencies inherent in commercial activity.”<sup>334</sup> As Timothy J. Colton put it, “the official response vacillated between repression and grudging indulgence, with repression winning out in 1923-1924 and liberality getting a second wind after that.” In this regard, Colton believes, “the boisterous Sukharevski market was a barometer: closed in 1920 and reopened in April, 1922, its was closed a second time at the end of 1924, and opened again in 1925, only to be shut for good in 1930, and its stalls burned.”<sup>335</sup>

As the despatches indicate, hostility of the Soviet regime toward the NEP and its beneficiaries was evident throughout, and its severity did not fully abate during the period, but which, given the intensity of the ones that either preceded and succeeded it, could be called the Soviet-style normalcy. In comparison with the era of War Communism, indeed, some visitors saw improvement in the overall conditions, and their interpretation of the actions of the Soviet government occasionally differed from those of the majority. “I was impressed with the recovery of Moscow between 1921-23,” wrote an ex-parliamentarian from Ontario, Canada, Colonel H.J. Mackis. According to him, more than 2,000 stores, “carrying splendid stocks”, were operating in the city, and they were not controlled by the state, as formerly. “This communistic doctrine is quickly passing, and the political administration is under the control of sincere, hard workers – men who do not hesitate to eliminate any communistic doctrines when it is not applicable to the present-day needs of Russia..., but they will

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<sup>334</sup> Ibid., 100.

<sup>335</sup> Timothy J. Colton, *Moscow: Governing the Socialist Metropolis*, 171-172.

not allow the country to be exploited for big profit by the traders and others.”<sup>336</sup> Mackis’ sentiments were corroborated by an agent of the Russian Section in the Soviet Union, referred as IS2, who reported of slow progress. According to IS2, the living conditions had improved since 1923, and the rates of pay had gone up to the pre-war levels.<sup>337</sup> The commercial attaché of the United States in Constantinople, Mark L. Bristol, delivered a letter written by a Columbia University-educated Turkish journalist, intercepted from the Turkish diplomatic pouch leaving Moscow, which sounded positive notes about the direction of the Soviet economy. “Indeed, the thing that strike foreigners coming to Russia is the lack of communism,” journalist penned. “Communism was tried and failed.” According to the unnamed Turkish journalist, the great masses of people remained destitute and practically hungry, while the new grown up bourgeois spent money and lived “as though every day was the last day of the world.” Pointing out the material luxuries offered to those who could afford it, the journalist declared: “There is no difference between life in Moscow and in any other big city of Europe, except as far as poverty is concerned.”<sup>338</sup>

Even seasoned observers such as Walter Lyman Brown, the European director of the American Relief Administration, had become convinced that “the application of Communist principle to the economic life has proved a complete failure.” In a conversation with the chairman of the Department of Near Eastern Affairs, Brown conveyed his impression about “the general trend to the right and toward conservatism” in the Soviet Union. However, he noted, “the progress in this direction

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<sup>336</sup> William Phillips, Chief of U.S. Mission in Canada, to Hughes, September 15, 1924, RG 59, File #861.00/10488.

<sup>337</sup> Coleman to Hughes, September 24, 1924, RG 59, File #861.00/10514.

<sup>338</sup> Bristol to Frank B. Kellogg, U.S. State Secretary, May 6, 1925, RG 59, File #861.00/10727.

is not steady and the movement is frequently halted and checked.” Having worked with Herbert Hoover in pre-revolutionary Russia, Brown even related the statement he had heard from the emissary of the British embassy who expressed certainty that “in 20 years Russia would become a strongly capitalistic country.” Despite these tendencies, he nevertheless advised against recognition of the Soviet Union, until the Communist International was thrown overboard and the Soviet regime formally abandoned the course of fomenting revolution abroad.<sup>339</sup>

Indeed, certain measures *not taken* by the Soviet government in regard to tradesmen contributed to relative improvement in economic conditions. For one, by 1925, the great majority of the Soviet population had ceased to starve. For the first time since the Bolshevik takeover, there was a glimpse of economic activity in the streets of Moscow and Leningrad, spurred by the government’s hesitation to stamp out free commodity exchange among the citizens. Timothy J. Colton, observes that “even with the spate of closures, Moscow consumers could take their pick of 4, 977 private shops and 606 cooperatives in May 1924, and of 5,600 market stalls, 24,000 self-employed buggy drivers and unaccounted street hawkers.”<sup>340</sup> According to Colton, once a broken city, Moscow was rapidly reurbanizing under the even marginally liberalized economic circumstances. The Latvian Minister to Moscow, Charles Ozols, reporting to his American counterparts in Riga, spoke of “noticeable evidences of the revival of private trade.” Ozols noted that the banks were lending money, to a limited extent, even to private enterprises. However, Ozols added that “the so-called New NEP is not the result of any new law or decree but merely a

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<sup>339</sup> Evan Young, Chief of the Department of Near Eastern Affairs at the State Department, to Hughes, June 3, 1925, RG 59, File #861.00/10749.

<sup>340</sup> Timothy J. Colton, *Moscow: Governing the Socialist Metropolis*, 155.

lessening of the repressive measures directed against the application of the ‘old’ NEP.” Many peasants continued to think that their conditions were no any better. In Ozols’ view, the only difference was that there was now a greater degree of freedom of speech than formerly and that therefore, the people were more open in their criticism of conditions. “Up to two years ago,” Ozols conveyed, “the average individual was very guarded, virtually to the point of silence, in his complaints and the peasants were passive in the face of repressions.”<sup>341</sup> Given the intense power struggle that was brewing in the corridors of the Kremlin, there was widespread sentiment that the Cheka had somewhat loosened its grip over the society. “The theories are breaking down everywhere,” wrote four conservative delegates of the British parliament visiting Soviet Russia, “and Communists have to allow more freedom.” In their view, “thus economic conditions in Russia are no doubt considerably improving – not owing to, but despite, the system of government.”<sup>342</sup>

According to the diplomatic despatches, however, for significant portions of the population, including the urban *Nepmen* who evidently benefited from the government’s lax attitude toward free trade, life was still full of unexpected miseries. The despatch sent from the American legation in Riga to Washington in February of 1924 addressed the latest order given by the head of Cheka (now renamed GPU - State Political Directorate in 1922), Felix Dzerzhinsky, regarding the expulsion of “the scum of the NEP” from Moscow. According the decree, 300 thousand people would be removed from their houses so that “quarters to be made available for

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<sup>341</sup> Coleman to Hughes, April 27, 1925, RG 59, File #861.00/10724.

<sup>342</sup> Alanson B. Houghton, U.S. Ambassador in Great Britain, to Kellogg, June 8, 1925, RG 59, File #861.00/10905.



workmen and Party or State employees.”<sup>343</sup> “Fight against private trade is being conducted as viciously as ever,” read another despatch, “and [there is] no decrease in number of so called economic arrests.”<sup>344</sup> While passing through Riga on his way home, the secretary of the Swedish embassy in Moscow, Mr. Lund, in his conversation with the American observers, spoke of “decided swing to the left” and the suppression of the NEP. According to him, “the GPU exercised a general control over economic matters.”<sup>345</sup>

The Soviet newspapers, the copies of which were obtained by the American diplomats in Riga, were filled with attacks against kulaks who were said to be attempting to undermine the Soviet system.<sup>346</sup> Having vanquished the tsarist aristocracy, in the NEP, the Soviet authorities found a new source of the public enemy – a scapegoat on whom all the ills of the society could be blamed. Demonization of the kulaks as murderers and counter-revolutionaries thus became a common feature in the Soviet public discourse.

“At a time when Russia can be saved only by a vigorous and courageous constructive policy,” wrote G.C. Dixon of *Melbourne Herald Tribune* in a report entitled *Truth about Russia*, “the Soviet leaders are becoming more and more fanatical in their adherence to theories and barren formulae...” Narrating his experience from the border entrance point in Sino-Russian border through Moscow, the Australian journalist was struck by the zeal with which the government had crushed the vitality of the Russian society. “Everywhere in Chita I saw signs of poverty and decay. All

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<sup>343</sup> Coleman to Hughes, February 4, 1924, RG 59, File #861.00/10251.

<sup>344</sup> Coleman to Hughes, June 13, 1924, RG 59, File #861.00/10376.

<sup>345</sup> Coleman to Hughes, September 2, 1924, RG 59, File #861.00/10491.

<sup>346</sup> Coleman to Hughes, January 2, 1925, RG 59, File #861.00/10616.

the larger shops have been nationalized; that is, confiscated by the Soviets, and businesses were obviously at standstill. In all of Chita there were two smoking chimneys.” As for his impressions about the Soviet capital, Dixon penned: “The cleanliness and orderliness of the streets, poverty revealing itself in poor clothes, dingy buildings and swarms of beggars and a general atmosphere, hard to define but depressingly real, of suspicion, suspense and gloom – these were the first things which impressed me on my arrival in Moscow.” The journalist was particularly struck the overwhelming police presence throughout Russia -- something he held responsible for much of the average Russian’s plight. “The Russian’s every step and every turn are directed by cast-iron regulations designed to reduce him to the level of an automatic and unquestioning machine.... Some people would resent this dragooning , but the long-suffering Russian walks just where he is told to walk, complies with all the innumerable regulations governing every activity and phase of life and passively, if not contentedly accepts the status of a mechanical unit.” Shocked by his observations, Dixon turned his criticism toward those in the West who rather saw rebirth of human freedom in the Soviet experiment. “Exactly how the delusion has spread that communism implies liberty and equality, I do not know, but a delusion it certainly is,” he wrote. “The communist does not believe in equality, denies certain categories of people even such elementary rights as the franchise and emphatically maintains that the majority must be terrorized into accepting the views and principles of the minority.”<sup>347</sup>

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<sup>347</sup> Maxwell Blake, U.S. Consul General in Melbourne, to Hughes, December 4, 1924, RG 59, File #861.00/10610.

As late as 1925, passengers who arrived at Tallinn from Petrograd reported hunger riots in their native city. While the Soviet Press did not confirm the outbreak of disturbances, an *Izvestia* report on March 15, stated that rye bread and flour shortage had been liquidated thanks to “the energetic measures of the domestic trade authorities.” According to the report, “fifteen car loads of rye and flour arrived, hence shortening the bread lines...” It appeared that the Soviet authorities were especially keen on maintaining order in the two largest cities of the union – the traditional seat of power in Russia. They appear to have made it a priority to “see to it that the populations of larger cities, particularly Moscow and Petrograd shall be fed.”<sup>348</sup>

America’s choice of Riga as a listening post to Russia had a great deal to do with the fact that authorities in Latvia, ever-mindful of the ominous presence of an eastern neighbor, facilitated a public discourse which took active interest in the developments inside the Soviet Union. American representatives frequently referred to the Latvian sources of information which included not only the emissaries of that country in Russia or experts who spoke the language, but also the newspapers which often carried detailed reports about Soviet conditions. *Rigasche Rundschau*, the local newspaper in Riga, regularly reporting on the developments inside the Soviet Union based on émigré sources, referred to a report in Belgium based *Odessa Izvestia* about disturbances in Kharkov between the local workers and the red troops. According to the report, hundreds of citizens attempted to plunder the wheat trains bound for export when the Soviet troops opened fire upon the crowd killing many. Among the dead

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<sup>348</sup> Coleman to Kellogg, March 17, 1925, RG 59, File #861.00/10673.

were also the soldiers of the Red Army and “some commissars.”<sup>349</sup> In another Soviet-related item in *Rigasche Rundschau*, an appeal was made by starving Russian intellectuals. According to the statement, by Soviet admission alone, 343,000 professionals have been driven away from their positions “for the sole reason that they could not provide a proletarian birth.” Adding that millions have already perished the statement concluded: “Something must be done, and the world’s conscience must be roused, before it is too late.”<sup>350</sup>

Naturally, Riga’s role as an information center – or a center of disinformation as Moscow perceived it – riled the Soviet regime. Likening the Rigans to latrine-cleaners who spread excrement all over the newspaper pages, G. Rylkin of *Izvestia*, denounced Riga as “the principal birthplace of all these rumors.” In a sharply worded and sarcastic diatribe characteristic of Soviet editorials, the *Izvestia* author declared:

“Riga means exasperated propaganda against the Soviet regime!.. Riga is the witness of unsurpassable human stupidity, dullness, blackmail and fraud! Riga means a pleasant pastime for the bourgeoisie! Riga is the daily bread of the white guard scribblers of the international swindlers and forgers!”<sup>351</sup>

But despatches depicting harsh Soviet realities did not just come from the Latvian capital. Situated near the Soviet-Chinese border, the town of Harbin was a major source of information to Washington about Soviet practices outside the main cities of Moscow and Petrograd. David Wolff, historical expert on this center point of the

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<sup>349</sup> Coleman to Kellogg, October 22, 1925, RG 59, File #861.00/10519.

<sup>350</sup> Coleman to Kellogg, October 16, 1925, RG 59, File #861.00/10536.

<sup>351</sup> Coleman to Kellogg, August 26, 1925, RG 59, File #861.00/10943.

Russian colonization effort in Chinese Manchuria, has written extensively on the importance of Harbin as Russia's gate to East Asia. While the city at least formally remained under the Chinese administration, Harbin owed its origins to the influx of ethnic Russians and Jews under whom "an unprepossessing fishing village with a population under 100 metamorphosed into an urban conglomerate with more than 100,000 inhabitants."<sup>352</sup> Beginning from 1890's, under the guidance of the reformist finance minister of the Tsar, Sergei Witte, numerous Russian workers, engineers and entrepreneurs arrived in the area for the construction of Chinese Eastern Railway. This railroad precinct also attracted a large number of Jews who, according to Wolff, realized that Harbin was "far enough away to escape persecution and institutionalized prejudice and yet remain in a Russian cultural environment."<sup>353</sup> Harbin evolved as a cosmopolitan Russian center without many restrictions of the tsarist regime. "Outside the empire," Wolff writes, "a free discussion of unorthodox approaches could be pursued unimpeded by the taboos of autocracy."<sup>354</sup> As such, "after 1917, émigré Harbin became the only Russian city outside the Soviet Union"<sup>355</sup> where free political discourse with regard to Russia's future continued, often with the participation of those who had just fled the Bolshevik dominion.

Given the stricter border control in the Western boundaries of the country, many Russians and foreign travelers chose the Siberian frontier as an exit point from the Soviet Union. As such, the American Consulate in Harbin gathered wealth of

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<sup>352</sup> David Wolff, "Russia Finds its Limits: Crossing Borders into Manchuria," in Stephen Kotkin and David Wolff, eds., *Rediscovering Russia in Asia: Siberia and the Russian Far East* (New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1995), 40.

<sup>353</sup> *Ibid.*, 46.

<sup>354</sup> *Ibid.*, 48.

<sup>355</sup> *Ibid.*, 40.

information from those who had just experienced life on the other side of the border. The picture painted by individuals who spoke to the American consul George Hanson substantiated those in Riga. According to G.M. Avdokia , a naturalized American who had just returned from the Soviet Union, “reign of terror existed in Russia.” She spoke of everyone being afraid of running afoul of the government’s secret police and the Soviet authorities’ efforts to close private shops. Having spent some time in Moscow, Avdokia reported about high prices. In his judgment, many people were not well-dressed because they feared arrest if they looked prosperous.<sup>356</sup> Another Russian merchant named A.V. Hayeff called rosy reports in the Soviet press about the development “mere windowdressing.” One could not do any business with the Soviet government “as the latter [was] determined to monopolize all trade and permit[ed] private individuals to engage in business only to a limited extent.” According to him, the Soviet government actively spied not only upon unsuspecting foreigners but also Russians and even on members of the Communist Party.”<sup>357</sup>

Consul George Hanson’s interview with M.C. Morris Jr. And Miss W.A. Carver of Society of Friends Mission resonated with much of what Avdokia and Hayeff reported on their experience in Soviet Russia. According to the couple who conducted missionary aid work in Samara, the conditions in hospitals and schools were horrific. “The doctors,” they claimed “have no supplies,” and “the teachers have not been paid in months.”<sup>358</sup> Shortly afterwards, assistant editor of *Peking and Tsiensin Times*, William V. Pepnell, on his way back to China, stopped in Harbin to

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<sup>356</sup> George C. Hanson, U.S. Consul in Harbin, China, to Hughes, September 22, 1924, RG 59, File #861.00/10521.

<sup>357</sup> Hanson to Hughes, April 29, 1924, RG 59, File #861.00/10350.

<sup>358</sup> Hanson to Hughes, July 8, 1924, RG 59, File #861.00/10436.

report on his visit to old Petrograd, now renamed Leningrad in honor of the founder of the Soviet state, which he described as ‘dilapidated’. In the hotel where he stayed there was no running water or towel, and the place was completely empty. In the Soviet-run city he saw the intersection of between “the luxury of the old and the shoddiness and poverty of the new.” Recounting his experience on the streets of Leningrad, he wrote: “Beggars are encountered everywhere, and sidle up to you and sigh out their distress in a sibilant, suppressed whisper which gives one the creeps.... The proletariat has brought all down to its own level. The gay faces, bright uniforms, and Parisian modes have gone.” When Pepnell’s tour guide showed him the spot where Emperor Paul had been killed, according to the American, “it was not the excesses of the Imperial tyrants whose violent lives and violent ends make Russian history unique in the last 100 years that troubled the imagination”, but “the ‘Terror’ during the Revolution.”<sup>359</sup>

Similar to Riga, Harbin also contained a large segment of Russian diaspora dispossessed by the Soviet regime. After their defeat in the Civil War, most White officers and sympathizers had crossed the border into China to escape Soviet retribution. In the haven provided by the Chinese authorities the emigres continued anti-Soviet activities by publishing fresh accounts of misery and destitution in the Bololand. In a conservative Russian weekly, called *Russkiy Golos* (Russian Voice), a Russian person who recently escaped the Soviet Union named A. Petrishev, still compared the food conditions in Soviet Russia to those of 1919.<sup>360</sup> In another article describing the Soviet methods of collecting taxes, *Ruski Golos* (Russian Voice) wrote

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<sup>359</sup> Hanson to Hughes, November 4, 1924, RG 59, File #861.00/10567.

<sup>360</sup> Hanson to Hughes, March 20, 1924, RG 59, File #861.00/10317.

about the unfortunate farmer who owned one lean cow and a horse. The Soviet authorities levied so high a tax that farmer “had to slaughter his cow in order to pay his tax, since he didn’t want to lose his horse.” Addressing the unreasonable attitude of the Soviet government toward private property, the author of the report described taxes as being “very high” and “not in proportion to incomes”, which in turn contributed to the destruction of the economy.<sup>361</sup> In an article titled *An Expensive Lesson*, a former Bolshevik sympathizer Tikhonenko, depicted as a former opponent of the Whites, spoke of abominable quality of life where one has to live under constant danger of arrest or execution. Upon entering Soviet Russia in March of 1923, the Soviet border guards searched him and took away 2000 roubles. As they prepared to shoot him for being a speculator, his family pled and his life was spared. “Let the communists who robbed me be damned, and I am cured of my pro-bolshevik disease,” he said. As for those who harbored certain sympathies for the Communist regime, his advice was: “Well, you go yourself and see how things are getting on there, and you’ll know what the communism is!”<sup>362</sup>

Recent historical research by Russian historians lend support to the reports that in mid 1920’s, the Soviet economy began slowing down as the government intensified the efforts to dictate the direction of the national economy. Already, beginning by 1925, the supposed high point of the Soviet economic liberalization, Gosplan (the State Planning Agency) was given orders to put together an action plan for the development of the national economy. According to economic historian Y. P. Bokarev, this measure signaled the beginning of an epoch of large-scale economic

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<sup>361</sup> Hanson to Hughes, March 26, 1924, RG 59, File #861.00/10318.

<sup>362</sup> Hanson to Hughes, August 2, 1924, RG 59, File #861.00/10448.



changes. “Private enterprise was squeezed. The number of patent distributions decreased. Rentals contracts were reviewed. The taxes on entrepreneurs increased.”<sup>363</sup> The Soviet government consistently sought to aggrandize its role in the economy, often accomplishing this at the expense of private entrepreneurs. The state enterprises were given special preferences with regard to loans and credits, whereas those operating on the private venue were shut off from the resources. Rather, the more successful were penalized by taxes that put enormous strain on their financial solvency and drove them to bankruptcy.

As hostile as the conditions for private enterprise remained in the Soviet Union, 1920’s saw the burgeoning of foreign, especially American businesses in that country. Although the United States government steadfastly refused to recognize the Soviet regime, by 1924, the endurance of the Soviet regime and its welcoming overtures toward several major foreign industries, brought about a new era in non-governmental Soviet-American interaction. The opening of AMTORG – a Soviet bureau of trade charged with soliciting American industrialists – in New York, coupled with the lobbying efforts by companies that sought to acquire profitable concessions on an uncompetitive economic venue led to the removal of certain restrictions on doing business with the Russians.<sup>364</sup> Among the major benefactors of this shift were tycoons such as Armand Hammer and Henry Ford who enjoyed monopolies in pencil and auto-manufacturing respectively. But such enterprises

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<sup>363</sup> A.N. Sakharov, ed., *NEP: Zaczvershaiushaia stadia: sootnoshenii ekonomiki i politiki*, 23.

<sup>364</sup> In *Ideology and Economics: US Relations with the Soviet Union, 1918-1933* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1974), Joan Hoff Wilson addresses the rise and fall of business interactions between American entrepreneurs and the Soviet government during the non-recognition years. Instead of the Soviet ideology and practices, Wilson emphasizes the role of the anti-Soviet prejudice in Washington’s political institutions as the primary obstacle to the successes of American business ventures in Soviet Russia.

comprised a small minority in the community of those who attempted to enter into business engagement with the Soviets.

Businessmen Fred Brenner and Jess Fishlowitz of New York who came to Russia for trading fur left utterly disappointed, and in conversation with the American consul in Harbin expressed strongest approval for the American policy of non-recognition. Complaining of the impossible conditions placed by the concessions bureau, the fur traders spoke of poor quality materials which they were forced to buy along with actual items they wanted. It seemed to them, in Soviet mindset “nobody was entitled to more than 5-7% profit share since they were capitalistic.” According to Brenner and Fishlowitz, it was not just the Americans, but also the British and Germans who faced problems in Russia, even though the latter had recognized the Soviet Union.<sup>365</sup> Another fur trader from Seattle, Samuel Wittenberg, who is described by his American diplomatic interlocutor as an “intelligent, fair minded and logical person,” reported losing \$200,000 while his other partners at Hudson Bay Company and Olaf Swensen lost several times that amount. As the causes of failure, he pointed out the taxation system and business control of the Soviet authorities and the incessant calls for “voluntary” contributions to Soviet causes: “Every month merchants are gathered to the main city hall to contribute something to city cause. Soviet officials give fiery speeches about a certain cause, and then they take an open vote by standing. Naturally, not to arouse suspicion, everyone gets up.” One time the authorities requested group which included the American to contribute to the cause of communists jailed in America. Wittenberg objected saying that this would constitute an act of treason against his own country. His statement was met with heckling and

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<sup>365</sup> Hanson to Hughes, April 24, 1924, RG 59, File #861.00/10346.

public denunciations. Dismissing the NEP as a poorly guised hoax before his American interlocutor, Wittenberg asserted that the Soviet government simply tricked businessmen. In the words of William Langdon who interviewed him, “Wittenberg described the “new economic policy” and concession to private enterprise of the Soviet government as merely “setting the bait better.” Not for a moment, in his opinion, did the Soviet citizens benefit much from the repressive economic policies of the Soviet authorities. Describing the economic state of the people as “abject poverty”, Wittenberg likened Soviet taxation policies to actual confiscation of property. “The economic life of the townspeople is thus at a very low ebb, involving little more than transactions necessary to keep body and soul together,” he told the American envoy.<sup>366</sup>

Although some businessmen received different treatment than the one accorded to the fur traders coming to Siberia, their conclusions did not diverge. M.D. Currie and J.L. Curtis of the International Banking Corporation reported to have been “warmly greeted” in Vladivostok by Soviet officials. However, the Soviet kindness did not prevent the bankers from observing the deserted state of the town which was “practically dead from a business standpoint.” The American visitors noticed “a little German-Russian store” which contained “very small stocks and business there was dull.” They seem to have been genuinely impressed by the excellent condition of the Egersheld port where there were several steamers including the American Shipping Board Vessel. “Russians were employed as stevedores on the wharves, but Chinese laborers did the actual stowing of cargo in the vessels,” observed Currie. “It is

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<sup>366</sup> William Langdon, U.S. Consul in Antung, China, to Hughes, January 26, 1925, RG 59, File #861.00/10658.

conceded that the Chinese were better workers than the Russians, and that Chinese labor was being used because foreign shippers of export cargo demanded that the Chinese be employed.” According to the American bankers, the worker strikes in Vladivostok were quickly suppressed by the “workers’ state”, because they were considered counter-revolutionary. “They were being given the choice of working or being shot,” the businessman explained and then concluded: “My informants told that at present it would be impossible to live or to do business at Vladivostok.”<sup>367</sup>

To their amazement, Currie and Curtis were later presented an article in *Krasnaya Znamya* (Red Flag) entitled “Amerika and Egersheld” which provided additional taste of Soviet experience. “Visitors come from abroad and carefully inspect every corner of our state construction in order to convince themselves that we are able to not only destroy, but also to build anew,” the article began. Having almost completely mischaracterized the impressions of the American guests, the newspaper went on to attribute the following quote to Currie: “My stay in Vladivostok has shown me the stupendous improvement of the port and of the city. The city has grown larger and more prosperous. The port has improved and has increased its work. Generally, Vladivostok makes an impression of a business town.” “Having personally inspected and ascertained the capacities of Vladivostok port,” the article concluded, “Mr. Currie said that he would now be able to frustrate the wrong understanding which prevails in American capitalist circles.”<sup>368</sup>

A businessman named V.F. Taylor returned from Russia in July of 1927 – the supposed high point of the NEP, convinced that “it was wicked and unpatriotic for

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<sup>367</sup> Hanson to Kellogg, January 22, 1926, RG 59, File #861.00/10863.

<sup>368</sup> Ibid.

Americans to extend any credit whatsoever to the Russians.” “The Cultural Relations Bureau (USSR Society for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries or VOKS, as known to many by its Russian abbreviation) make all the arrangements for you to visit various places, such as schools, factories, prisons, etc. and sees the stage is properly set before your arrival,” he wrote. “They show only their very best and expect you to believe the rest are like those you’ve seen.” Taylor’s observations were not just limited to the business atmosphere alone, but profoundly engaged in various aspects of the Soviet regime. Unlike many of his compatriots who were often ignorant of the Soviet Union’s multi-national character, Taylor saw the USSR as an empire. “The Bolsheviks went into the region of the Caucasus,” he wrote, “and by sheer force of arms captured that country and forced it to become a part of Russia and keep it a part of Russia by the same method.” While he noted some improvements in the spheres of art, music, the fight against illiteracy, in Taylor’s judgment, “with all their improvements, nowhere did the welfare conditions approach those in Capitalistic America.” Moreover, the American businessman did not believe that without the very aid of the capitalist countries such as England and France, Communism could survive long, especially given its vehement assaults on private property.<sup>369</sup>

Even those businesses which managed to set up an enterprise within Russia the sentiments regarding Soviet Russia were gloomy. Having spent a year in Russia as one of the representatives of the American Aluminum Company, Ivan Just plainly told his American interlocutor in the U.S. legation in Finland it was impossible to do

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<sup>369</sup> Robert F. Kelley, Chief of East European Division, to Kellogg, June 28, 1927, GR59, General Records of State Dept. Office of E. European Affairs, USSR Section, General Records, 1911-1940, Box 1.

business with the Russians under the Soviet government. “In their attempts to organize the company for active work,” the American diplomat reported to Washington based on his recollections, “they found nothing but legal difficulties, red tape, petty annoyance of various kinds and much business irregularity.” Ivan Just spoke of a particularly great source of annoyance which was the Soviet political representative in the Workman’s Union who created obstacles to the working environment by engaging in constant propaganda. The businessman also gave an account the extreme measures taken by the authorities in order “to keep up the Soviet regime.” Moreover, according to Just, the Soviet government was engaged in “heartless crusade against the intelligentsia”, and that the members of the group were persistently discriminated against. It seemed to him that the Communist leaders were bent on “stamping out the educated class and with it apparently all culture and decency.”<sup>370</sup>

The complaints regarding harsh economic environment in Russia did not come just from the Americans. In a letter addressed to the American consul in Harbin, George Hanson, the commissioner of Chinese maritime customs at Taheiho, Manchuria, R.F.C. Hedgeland, an Englishman, described the difficult business atmosphere in Russia. “Blagovestchensk, just the opposite town on the border used to be known for its previous prosperity,” he reported to Hanson. “The ships loading and unloading at its quays, warehouses full of merchandise, busy shops, comfortable hotels,” were etched in his memory. But “since Bolsheviks took over, the blight has fallen upon the town... A walk or drive through the streets brings one right up against

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<sup>370</sup> Alfred J. Pearson, U.S. Minister in Finland, to Kellogg, June 15, 1927, RG 59 File #861.00/11102.

all outward signs which visualize national poverty and individual suffering. The city is dead...” According to Hedgeland, the efforts to revive trade between China and Russia were futile because “private enterprise in Russia has been killed and the middleman eliminated.” “You very likely know that prior to 1917 some 80 million poods of cargo were carried by Russian vessels trading on the Amur,” he reminded Hanson. But “the estimates for 1923 is 17 million poods and that for 1924 10 million only,” which, to the Englishman, constituted “an ugly demonstration of the complete inefficiency of the State Socialism.”<sup>371</sup>

An official of Dresdner Bank, Herr Morus, spoke with the American consul in Germany providing impressions from his visit to the Soviet Union that were “decidedly unfavorable from every point of view – political, social, cultural and economic.” According to him, the whole political organization of the country rested on “the hopes and fears of several hundred thousands active member of the Communist Party” which made generous use of the Red Army and Cheka to retain power. Under dismal economic conditions “hundreds of thousands people with no regular means of livelihood lead a hand-to mouth existence by peddling, begging and stealing.” “Sexual immorality is the rule rather than exception,” he told Schurman. “Living conditions are intolerable. Families inhabit rooms rather than houses” In his view, the Russian government relied on the money coming from abroad. Yet even in that regard, the Soviets were failing since concessions were having “terrible experience” . “Practically none of them have worked,” he stated, “or are working satisfactorily. Capital investment in Russia has fallen to the low point consistent with the fact that no new capital is being created.” Morus went as far as suggesting “an

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<sup>371</sup> Hanson to Kellogg, April 18, 1925, RG 59, File #861.00/10707.

economic boycott of Russia” which he thought “would bring the Soviet regime to its knees in six months.”<sup>372</sup>

A few American businessmen did not share the assessment of their disappointed colleagues. Upon his visit to Russia in March of 1925, the president of the Newburger Cotton Company in Memphis, Tennessee, Joseph Newburger wrote a letter to the United States President Calvin Coolidge stating that “the situation in Russia is misunderstood” and that “the present government is on the verge of change.” By the latter, he did not mean a change of the regime, but that the Soviet government was inclined to adopt business-friendly posture. “A great many things have been said about Russia that are not true,” stated Newburger and went on to compare Soviet Russia to the tsarist period (which he had never experienced). According to him, “the present Government inherited a great many of the old conditions existing before the war.” His conclusion was that “a big business could be done upon a very safe basis if recognition of some character could be inaugurated.” “The oil, the coal, the iron and aluminum that lies fallow in the bosom of Russia,” he exhorted the American President “could be developed to the benefit of the whole world.”<sup>373</sup>

Ivy Lee, a publicity agent representing Bethlehem Steel Company, Penn Railway, Standard Oil Company, visited Russia in May of 1927, and expressed lukewarm attitude toward dealings with the Soviet Union. In a letter addressed to the chief of the Eastern European Division at the State Department, Robert F. Kelley,

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<sup>372</sup> Jacob Gould Schurman, U.S. Ambassador in Germany, to Kellogg, March 2, 1927, RG 59, File #861.00/11048.

<sup>373</sup> Joseph Newburger, President of the Newburger Cotton Company in Memphis, Tennessee, to U.S. President Calvin Coolidge, March 21, 1925, RG 59, File #861.00/10659.



while agreeing that non-recognition had been the right course so far, Lee suggested some informal contact to be established with Moscow. He noted with paradox that Russian attitudes toward the American government and businesses were markedly friendlier than those exhibited toward the representatives of the countries that had already recognized the Soviet regime, particularly Great Britain and Italy. Like certain other businessmen who briefly traveled to Russia and met with various high Soviet officials, Lee saw a great potential in America's interaction with Russia, if cultivated accordingly. However, in a handwritten commentary, etched at the edge of the report on Ivy Lee's views, Kelley chastised the American businessman for failing "to comprehend that it will be possible to establish a real basis for negotiations with the present regime in Russia only after certain fundamental changes have been affected in the international aims and practices of the Bolshevik regime and that until these changes have been consummated, a sound basis for intercourse cannot be arrived at by any amount of 'admonishing, reasoning, arguing.'" In Kelley's view, such contacts would serve to validate the Bolshevik belief that their principles could actually constitute a viable basis for international discourse.<sup>374</sup>

The views of William Danforth of the Ralston Purina Company about the Russian realities were more critical, though his conclusions resembled those of Ivy Lee. In an interview to a newspaper, Danforth spoke of negative rumors that hounded them in Riga about the Soviet Union and its dreaded Cheka. His apprehensions were partially validated by the difficulties that surrounded his travel to the USSR and the signs at the Petrograd railroad station upon entrance which read "Death to Capitalism!" However these fears were soon alleviated by the warm reception given

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<sup>374</sup> Kelley to Kellogg, March 2, 1927, RG 59, File #861.00/11048.

to Danforth and his staff by Madame Olga Kameneva – the head of the USSR Society for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries or VOKS, as known to many by its Russian abbreviation. The wife of Communist leader Lev Kamenev and sister of Leon Trotsky, Kameneva struck her guests as “nice, pleasant and helpful.” Yet, Danforth did not hold back in his criticism of living conditions in Moscow which he described as summation of “sickness, disease, degradation and immorality.” In his view, “the peasant did not seem to be attached to Communism, and refused to “give up his crops without ample compensation” The workman, on the other hand, was represented by the Communist Party, “the ruler of Russia with more power and less opposition than any Czar ever had.” Describing heartbreaking scenes of beggary in the streets. Danforth noted how he “would like to have talked to some of them... without some Communist listening to what we said.” Strangely, however, the American businessman’s conclusions ended on a positive note. “The net result of the Revolution has been good!” exclaimed Danforth. “Certainly I hold no brief for the Red Terror, the policy of force, insidious propaganda, state ownership and her avowed atheism. But the fact remains that they have broken the shackles of Czarism.” As if trying to reassure himself, Danforth went on: “Today ninety percent of these people are better off than they were ten years ago, so I repeat that so far the net result has been good.” Like numerous other Soviet sympathizers who rationalized the discrepancy between their observations and conclusion, Danforth warned against judging Russia by Western standards.<sup>375</sup>

It could well be that Danforth’s dissonant conclusion was based on his traveling to Russia as a part of the so-called Eddy mission. The head of the Asian

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<sup>375</sup> Coleman to Kellogg, December 30, 1926, RG 59, File #861.00/11011.

Department of the YMCA, identifying himself as a Christian socialist, Sherwood Eddy organized a trip to the Soviet Union in Summer of 1926 which included prominent members of the American society. Having returned from Soviet Russia full of praises three years before, the labor activist needed very little coaching from his Soviet hosts. “Nowhere have we been accorded greater kindness, courtesy and freedom of movement, or met more frank, fearless and honest men than in Soviet Russia,” Eddy had written in his book dedicated to the progress of the worldwide labor movement, *The New World of Labor*.<sup>376</sup> The purpose of the second mission was almost clear from the start – advocacy for quick recognition of the USSR by the United States. A devout Christian, when his faith collided with militant atheism of the regime which claimed to champion the rights of the downtrodden, Sherwood Eddy was generous with his understanding. In a *Pravda* issue obtained the U.S. legation in Riga, a report ran about the religious debate in Moscow with Sherwood Eddy’s participation. In the debate, Eddy was countered by a Bolshevik who tried to convince his ‘misguided’ opponent about the dangers of religion. The *Pravda* report presented Eddy as someone genuinely committed to his faith and someone who recognized a strong role in the society for religion and God. However, because he could not harmonize his political convictions with Karl Marx’s essential teachings about religion which held that religion was opium for masses, Sherwood Eddy was described as a “bad Communist.” “The commandment Love each other is the foulest of commandments,” retorted Eddy’s Soviet opponent, “as long as there are enemies, they ought to be hated.” In conclusion, according to the newspaper, “Sherwood Eddy declared that

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<sup>376</sup> Sherwood Eddy, *The New World of Labor* (New York: George H. Doran, 1923), 81.

such a freedom of speech as he had been granted in our [Soviet] country, there was not yet in America.”<sup>377</sup>

Long suspected of harboring pro-Soviet sentiments, the intentions of Sherwood’s mission were reflected in the statements of other members of the group such as U.S. District Attorney from St. Paul, Minnesota, Frederick Winston who spoke of his realization that the Soviet government was “the enduring government of all Russians,” and called upon the President to recognize the Soviet government. In his private letter to the head of the U.S. legation in Riga, Frederick W.B. Coleman, Winston wrote that his mission was given the liberty to choose its own interpreters and there was “absolutely no restriction” on their movement. “Life in Moscow is harsh and austere,” he admitted. Based on his observations, the people on the street were dressed poorly and exhibited “serious and sober” disposition. But they also seemed to be friendly toward the Americans. Despite all that poverty and destitution around him, Winston concluded that he had “never come into contact with a government that was so concerned with the welfare of the masses.” “Clearly, Russia is not ready for democracy,” he wrote, but “it seems to me that they are making a great experiment – testing out new concepts, political, economic, social and religious and I believe, in the long run the world would benefit from it.”<sup>378</sup> During his stay in Russia, Professor Solomon Kagan went further stating that much of the American press was filled with fables about the USSR. Despite disinformation, he announced that recently “the attitude of the American public opinion changed and that the best

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<sup>377</sup> Coleman to Kellogg, September 11, 1926, RG 59, File #861.00/10956.

<sup>378</sup> Kelley to Kellogg, September 14, 1926, GR59, General Records of State Dept. Office of E. European Affairs, USSR Section, General Records, 1911-1940, Box 1.

proof of this change was the fact that out 99 Senators 20 were in favor of rapprochement with Soviet Russia.”<sup>379</sup>

However, not every member of the Eddy mission proved so malleable. In his conversation with Robert F. Kelley, Chester Rowell expressed sympathy with America’s policy of non-recognition. Later, Kelley would report to the State Secretary about the conversation recalling that Rowell “referred with evident amusement to a prison shown to the so-called Eddy committee; he stated that condition were so idealistic in the prison as to make the whole thing ridiculous.”<sup>380</sup> Others, such as William Rosenwald, son of Sears, Roebuck & Co. Chairman Julius Rosenwald, were more vociferous. In an interview to the *Time* magazine, Rosenwald told the journalists: "Sherwood Eddy's mission to Russia of which I was a member was full of bunk!" “True we saw a lots of things ... operating. But it was a personally conducted tour under Soviet management. It was almost impossible for the mission to get into the real hearts of the people,” he informed. Rosenwald stated that upon the departure of the mission he stayed behind and became acquainted with the true *modus operandi* of the Soviet regime. His conclusion was that the Bolsheviks operated on the basis of terrorism and that this terror was “implanted deep in the people.”<sup>381</sup>

To be sure, the Soviet propaganda machine did its part to nourish such mindset among Westerners, especially the far-away Americans. Under the rubric of promoting good will between the two nations, the Soviet regime was particularly

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<sup>379</sup> Coleman to Kellogg, August 10, 1926, RG 59, File #861.00/10934.

<sup>380</sup> Kelley to Kellogg, September 14, 1926, GR59 General Records of State Dept. Office of E. European Affairs, USSR Section, General Records, 1911-1940, Box 1.

<sup>381</sup> “Traveler to Moscow,” *Time*, October 11, 1926.

keen on wooing individuals whom it correctly presumed to have some sway over the sentiments and attitudes of the American public. In *The Pilgrimage to Russia*, which traces Moscow's reception of foreigners for the purpose of enhancing Soviet image abroad, author Sylvia Margulies identifies such individuals as "opinion leaders." The Soviet Union, Margulies argues, "tried to adapt to its foreign propaganda system the principles of direct personal agitation used among its own population, by inviting and/or encouraging both individuals and groups to become personal witnesses to a positive image of the country and then to return home and act as opinion leaders... By playing host to many different types of people, the Soviet Union hoped to utilize opinion leaders throughout the structures of the Western society."<sup>382</sup> To carry out this gigantic task, the Soviet government had instituted the Society for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries (VOKS) which organized hundreds of individual and group voyages to the USSR – ordinarily involving leftist intellectuals of the West. Beginning from mid 1920-s the number and frequency of these trips rapidly increased, whereby, according to historians Liudmila Stern, the trip to the USSR acquired an air of sanctity. "For the unconverted, it was a quest for truth, 'a matter of intellectual integrity."<sup>383</sup> Historian Rachel Mazuy, in her aptly entitled book *Believing Rather than Seeing?* has recounted the stories of French writers and intellectuals who made pilgrimage to the socialist paradise – a pilgrimage which was rapidly becoming a chief requirement for one's induction into the esoteric circle of the intelligentsia, not just radicals. As such, trips by influential writers such as Henri

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<sup>382</sup> Sylvia Margulies, *Pilgrimage to Russia, The Soviet Union and the Treatment of Foreigners, 1924-1937* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin, 1968), 7.

<sup>383</sup> Liudmila Stern, *Western Intellectuals and the Soviet Union, 1920-40 From Red Square to the Left Bank* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 17.

Barbusse or André Malraux carried little significance in terms of discovering the truth about the Soviet Union.<sup>384</sup> In many cases, this was merely a ceremony in which the Soviet leadership was only too willing to oblige. It was not necessary that the Westerners involved in this project at the other end of the deal be Communists. Surprisingly, nor did VOKS require from its own employees and tour guides membership in the Communist Party. According to historian Michael David-Fox, “many VOKS guides were not communists: they were highly educated, frequently opinionated figures employed because of their strong knowledge of foreign languages and many of them were Jewish.”<sup>385</sup> The essential idea was to foster the reputation of the Soviet Union as any other “normal” country to be visited by tourists while at the same time retaining an image of a unique bastion of socialism building a distinct society. Liudmila Stern quotes German writer Johannes Becher to sum up the purpose of the endeavor: “These writers have to be governed in such a way that they don’t feel that there may be directives from Moscow ... they have to be influenced in such a way that they say what we want to hear.”<sup>386</sup>

In mid 1920’s, there was a rapid increase in the number of foreign visitors whom came to the Soviet Union. Having undergone a chaotic revolution, bloody civil war and a famine of 1921-23, Russia’s image as a pit of misery and deprivation was gradually being replaced by a new appearance thanks to serious efforts by Soviet authorities. In 1925, only 483 foreigners were received by VOKS, but this jumped to 1,200 in 1926; by 1929 and 1930 this number would increase to approximately 1,500

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<sup>384</sup> See Rachel Mazuy, *Croire plutôt que voir? Voyages en Russie Soviétique, 1919-1939* (Paris: Odile Jacob, 2002).

<sup>385</sup> Michael David-Fox, “The Fellow Travelers Revisited: The ‘Cultured West’ through Soviet Eyes,” *The Journal of Modern History* (June, 2003), 311.

<sup>386</sup> Liudmila Stern, *Western Intellectuals and the Soviet Union*, 5.

per year.<sup>387</sup> Altogether, during the two decades following the end of the Civil War, Russian historian A.V. Golubev estimates that 100 thousand foreigners – on average 5 thousand per year – visited the USSR, most of them carefully vetted in accordance with their ideological proclivities.<sup>388</sup> In Golubev’s view, these decades in fact constitute the “golden age” in the Soviet efforts to woo foreigners. “The techniques of hospitality,” as Golubev calls it, gained full strength in mid 1930’s” after the foundations of Soviet cultural diplomacy were carefully laid out throughout 1920’s. The term “cultural diplomacy” here entails “a massive complex of ideas, methods, institutions which comprised a propaganda mechanism previously unseen in history.”<sup>389</sup>

At the same time, Golubev is also keen to point out that attitudes and beliefs in the West also played a significant role in the adulation of the Soviet regime, especially among those disaffected by the shortcomings of American socio-economic system.<sup>390</sup> Hence, it was not just the Soviet side which brought golden age into fruition; there were many willing individuals on this side of the Atlantic who had begun sowing seeds of doubt about their countrymen’s views of the Bolshevik regime. A librarian from California, Harriett Eddy was actively involved in organizing trips to the Soviet Union under the aegis of the American Society for Cultural Relations beginning from mid-1920’s. The Society, founded in 1926, brought together an array of American intellectual and prominent public figures who

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<sup>387</sup> Michael David-Fox, “The Fellow Travelers Revisited,” 311-12.

<sup>388</sup> A.V. Golubev, *Vzgliad na zemliu obetovannuiu: iz istorii sovetskoi kul’turnoi diplomatii 1020-1930-kh godov* (Moscow: RAN, 2004), 77.

<sup>389</sup> *Ibid.*, 85.

<sup>390</sup> While discussing the unusually warm attitude by some Americans toward the Soviet regime in this period, Golubev cites American historian Stephen Cohen who observed that “Americans ordinarily found what they sought in the Soviet Union. Thus, Stalin’s terrorist regime in 1930’s had many more American fans whereas the far less repressive Brezhnev regime had practically none.” *Ibid.*, 167.



claimed to be interested in the Soviet Union and nurturing cultural interaction between the two countries. In reality, many individuals associated with the organization at least implicitly sympathized with the Soviet experiment as an optimum alternative to American capitalism. As such, they extensively collaborated with Kameneva's VOKS in its propaganda work designed to create false impressions of Soviet realities among foreign travelers. As was the case with Sherwood Eddy's mission, the trips organized by the group, too, eventually fell into disfavor in the United States when it was revealed that the members of the delegation were required to submit to a collective report on their impression of the Soviet Union which was ubiquitously positive. At one point, the president of the Northwestern University "canceled his place in the delegation before the departure charging that he was expected to write a report favorable to the Soviets upon his return."<sup>391</sup> Several others followed the suit.

Often these staged trips to the Soviet Union were accompanied by the explanation that most tourists' "aim was primarily enjoy themselves and satisfy their curiosity."<sup>392</sup> If so, however, they seem to have accomplished more than just satisfying the curiosity that pertains to visiting a foreign country. When the American Labor Delegation passed through Poland on the way back from Russia, the U.S. consul in Poland reported an incident where only James Maurer and Albert Coyle of the American Trade Union Delegation were authorized to speak as leaders of the expedition to the journalists. According the despatch prepared by the consul in Warsaw, "the party was favorably impressed by what it saw in Russia." On the

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<sup>391</sup> J.D. Parks, *Culture, Conflict, Coexistence: American-Soviet Cultural Relations, 1917-1918* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland, 1983), 27.

<sup>392</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

streets, visitors reported, there was ‘pep and joy.’ The improvement there was drastic, and the masses were given opportunity for pleasure and relaxation. All workers enjoyed free theater tickets daily, the use of libraries and museums and numerous other opportunities for relaxation which were not found in other countries. Maurer praised everything the group saw in Soviet Russia from hospitals to basic living conditions. The most astounding was the labor delegation leader’s account of a Soviet prison. “The prisons are not as good as they might wish,” he stated. “The reason for this is that the Soviet do not believe in prisons and will not waste money on them now because the need for prisons is bound to pass, therefore the expense for improvement would be a loss.” Equally amazing was the fact that the American academicians, professing to be the conscience of truth and liberty before the almighty powers of the state, quickly succumbed to the mere “rules of the trip” according to which only the leaders of the delegation had the authority to describe their experience in Soviet Russia. John Brophy excused himself for not speaking to the Associated Press “freely because of loyalty to the expedition.” So did Professors Chase, Douglas and Fitzpatrick. Instead, their leaders glowingly spoke of the reception given to the group by Chicherin and Stalin.<sup>393</sup>

While such visits usually accomplished their intended purpose by winning over “opinion leaders,” there were also cases when staged did not entirely go according to the plan. In an interview with the American consul in Finland, Francis Dwyer of San Francisco reported about his trip as a member of 35 member delegation organized by Jerome Davis of Columbia University, also an associate of the

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<sup>393</sup> John B. Stetson, Jr., U.S. Ambassador in Poland, to Frank B. Kellogg, August 30, 1926, RG 59, File #861.00/1155.

American Society for Cultural Relations during July-August of 1927. Unlike most members of the groups, Dwyer was filled with skepticism, especially when during their trip to a prison in Moscow, “a prisoner came up and handed a member of the group a bouquet of flowers from the prison garden and requested that it be given to Sacco and Vanzetti and that a telegram be sent demanding their release.” Soon afterwards Kameneva assured him that in the near future such jails would be phased out. Dwyer, however, told his American interlocutor that “he believed this incident was prompted by an official command.” He also narrated with utter disbelief the story of their trip to a rest home in Leningrad where “a very respectable meal was served, and an official apologized for poor fare, saying he had not received notice of the group’s intended visit until it was too late to prepare anything more than the menu the inmates customarily received.” Given the harsh living conditions in the rest of the country, the Soviet display of luxury struck Dwyer as disingenuous. “Life in Russia is devoid of any pleasure,” he concluded in his interview. “The common necessities such as coffee and butter can only be obtained at prohibitive prices or by fraud.”<sup>394</sup>

Accounts such as those given by Francis Dwyer are scarce in the record of diplomatic despatches. Among those who spoke candidly or at all to the American diplomatic representatives interested in information from the Soviet Union, there were very few Americans who traveled to the Soviet Union as a part of the group organized by American Society for Cultural Relations or VOKS. As such, the diplomatic despatches do not reflect the widespread phenomenon of the “fellow travelers” – a term initially coined by Leon Trotsky in reference to the Westerners who were not wholly committed to Communism but, though hesitantly, were willing

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<sup>394</sup> Pearson to Kellogg, November 3, 1927, RG 59, File #861.00/1190.

to tag along this great experiment, and ultimately, played a significant role in reshaping the American views of the Soviet Union.<sup>395</sup> Generally, individuals who praised the Soviet Union fell into three main categories: a) those with vested interests to portray everything through rose-colored glasses, i.e. communist sympathizers, leftist intellectuals, and businessmen; b) uninformed and misguided individuals who were led by VOKS -- the kind of people who believed Mrs. Kameneva when she explained that dilapidated conditions in prison were due to the fact that prisons were soon to be phased out of practice; a) a few such as economist John Maynard Keynes who had some positive things to say about the Soviet Union but they were almost always projected to the future instead of present realities. Such people rarely spoke a low-level American diplomatic officer charged with the task of interviewing visitors from Russia. They spoke to the press, lectured on public venues, and wrote lofty memoirs about their experiences in the USSR.

“The cream of the interwar cultural and intellectual elite, as well as thousands more rank and file experts, progressives, public figures and many others classified by their Soviet hosts as members of the intelligentsia, made a reverential pilgrimage to Soviet Russia,” wrote David-Fox, and came back with the reports that were full of praise and adulation for the Communist experiment.<sup>396</sup> Among the foremost representatives of this movement were Bernard Shaw, Andre Gidé, and Americans John Dewey, Upton Sinclair and Theodore Dreiser. “A Bolshevik as far as I can tell is nothing but a socialist who wants to do something about it,” asserted Bernard Shaw

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<sup>395</sup> David Cauter, *The Fellow Travelers: Intellectual Friends of Communism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), 1-2.

<sup>396</sup> Michael David-Fox, “The Fellow Travelers Revisited,” 300.

in 1919, long before he even stepped foot on the Soviet soil, “To the best of my knowledge I am a Bolshevik myself.”<sup>397</sup> Having attended the November festivities dedicated to the tenth year anniversary of the Bolshevik Revolution in 1927, American writer Dreiser came out of Russia with lots of positive sentiments toward the deeds of Stalin’s Kremlin. “As for the Communist system – as I saw it in Russia in 1927 and ’28 – I am for it – hide and proof... I saw its factories, its mines, its stores, its Kommissars, with at least ten of whom I discussed the entire problem.”<sup>398</sup> According to David-Fox, while Dreiser “pulled his punches and muted his criticism” of the Soviets, he was also “severely conflicted and in transition in regard to his views.”<sup>399</sup> At times he confronted and argued with his Soviet hosts on various aspects of his observation, at points even defending capitalism. Indeed having come closest to see his communitarian ideals fulfilled, in fact, Theodore Dreiser was one of the more modest among those who worshipped at the altar of Soviet Communism. “I have been over into the future, and it works,” declared Lincoln Steffens, a well-known American journalist from San Francisco.<sup>400</sup> “The spectacle of Russia has deeply moved me,” echoed writer Waldo Frank, “Every modern man must be moved by Russia as a man would be if he were faced with his own future.”<sup>401</sup>

The fellow travelers’ rosy accounts of the Soviet conditions infuriated the official observers of the Soviet Union in the American legation in Riga. In contrast to those who had been dined and wined by the Soviet authorities, the Riga staff was in

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<sup>397</sup> David Cate, *The Fellow Travelers: Intellectual Friends of Communism*, 121.

<sup>398</sup> *Ibid.*, 230-31.

<sup>399</sup> Michael David-Fox, “Triple Ambivalence, Theodore Dreiser’s Accusatory Pilgrimage, 1927-28” in Alexander Etkind and Pavel Lysakov, eds. *Kul’turniye issledovanie* [Cultural Studies] (St. Peterburg and Moscow: European University and Letnii sad, 2006), 290-319.

<sup>400</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>401</sup> Liudmila Stern, *Western Intellectuals and the Soviet Union*, 17.

constant correspondence with American businessmen and others who often left Soviet Russia with horror stories. “There is no mystery whatever about the Soviet Union,” wrote Ambassador Frederick Coleman in regard to the debates over the “truth” about the Soviet Union of 1920s, “and when communists state that representatives of foreign powers are misinformed, they speak from interested motives.” “They demand exclusive currency for Soviet government communiqués and the roseate statements foisted upon carefully selected visitors who are feted, coached, personally conducted to show places and loaded down with selected publications... It is the purpose of this theatrical art to create an illusion, and the illusion may be so complete that common sense is forgotten... It’s not that any foreign government is sufficiently informed about the Soviet Union; the Soviet government itself is insufficiently informed.”<sup>402</sup> Likewise, denouncing a recent report as “irrelevant” prepared by the British Labor Delegation to Soviet Russia and authored by A.A. Purcell of the Furnishing Trade Union, an editorial article in the British *Times* criticized the “wholly sympathetic” account of the six-week trip of the so-called “Investigation Commission” to Leningrad, Moscow, Baku, Tiflis, Kharkov and Rostov. Having found little objectionable about the state of Soviet affairs, yet without much evidence to support their optimism, the authors of the report had found the Soviet Union to be “a strong and stable state” The *Times* editorial blasted the Soviet sympathizers for their unwillingness to come to grips with the facts on the ground: “They constantly qualify predictions of a joyful future by putting them in the conditional,” the editorial referred to the British labor delegates. “They do not foretell that the result will in question will follow, but confine themselves to the speculation that it “should” follow. The caution

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<sup>402</sup> Coleman to Hughes, January 12, 1925, RG 59, File #861.00/10631.

is almost the only sign in the report that the delegates or their ‘advisory’ colleagues have the slightest apprehension of the difference between assertion and proof.”<sup>403</sup>

Some Americans’ positive impression of the USSR was not just the product of the Soviet propaganda machine. The idea of building a new society made such an appeal to many Westerners, especially the more idealistic intellectuals, that in the Soviet Union they strongly desired to see the image of an alternative development with greater social justice and none of the problems that plagued capitalist universe. “Why were intelligent individuals seized by the religious fervor of neophytes, refusing to tolerate any evidence which suggested that their picture of the Soviet Union might not be accurate,” asks Liudmila Stern. “How could they have blindly supported what is known to be a lie , a myth?”<sup>404</sup> For some idealists, almost none of the Soviet shortcomings could dissuade them from hoping for the Soviet success. For them, the Soviet Union represented an ideological asylum into which one could escape from all the injustices, imaginary or real, of the Western world. According to Neal Wood, who detailed the ideological motivations between British intellectuals and communism, “for many intellectuals Soviet Russia was the one hope of the future.”<sup>405</sup> It would be naïve to presume that Western intellectuals knew little or nothing about the realities of the USSR. That Russia was a catastrophe-stricken land under early Bolshevik rule had been no secret to anyone remotely familiar with the stories coming out of revolutionary Russia. Rather, they were willing to sacrifice for what they regarded as the grand experiment in the cause of social justice. As Wood

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<sup>403</sup> Houghton to Hughes, March 2, 1925, RG 59, File #861.00/10666.

<sup>404</sup> Liudmila Stern, *Western Intellectuals and the Soviet Union*, 2.

<sup>405</sup> Neal Wood, *Communism and British Intellectuals* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959), 42.

states, “in the perspective of history the significance of the vast economic programme of Soviet communism would take precedence over the somewhat questionable actions of the OGPU and the bureaucracy.”<sup>406</sup> While most ordinary citizens of the Soviet Union incurred this sacrifice through death by exhaustion in labor camps, for the intellectuals, the sacrifices entailed compromising one’s basic instincts about right and wrong at an individual level. The latter often identified the existing socio-economic disparities in the West as a potent justification for this act. As historian Paul Hollander observed about one of the root causes behind such phenomena in his ground-breaking volume about the Western intellectuals who were drawn to totalitarian regimes of the 20-th century, “the grass seems greener on the other side, in societies which legitimate themselves by high ideals and appeal to (and promise) community, brotherhood, wholeness, social justice, equality and selflessness; they offer some shared form of self-transcendence.”<sup>407</sup>

The backwardness of the Soviet landscape, if not its crushing repressiveness, was obvious to anyone from the moment he crossed the border. But that did not necessarily translate into denunciation of the Soviet regime; on the contrary, in a strange way, it helped to reinforce some visitors’ sympathetic beliefs about the Soviet Union. In his letter to Dewitt C. Poole, now working as an American consul in Germany, billionaire heir John Rothschild wrote about the severe contrast between Russia and the West. He believed that materially Russian living standards fell below those of any Western European country, let alone America. People, he wrote, were dressed poorly, and one could not see ““single decent shop-window” in the whole city

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<sup>406</sup> Ibid., 49.

<sup>407</sup> Paul Hollander, *Political Pilgrims: Western Intellectuals in Search of the Good Society*, 421.



of Moscow. Yet in a strange way, Russia made him “think of America.” “I felt the spirit of democracy. However, absolute the government may be, it seems that Russia now belongs to the man in the street.”<sup>408</sup>

The contrast between the content of John Rothschild’s observations about life in the Soviet Union and his conclusions were not untypical. In fact, there were several reports from Russia in which the author, while deriding the horrendous realities on the ground, reached at a distinctly positive opinion about the overall direction of the Soviet course. Nor did this stance necessarily relate to the observers’ pro-Communist inclinations. On the contrary, in many cases, the observers rationalized hardships in the Soviet Union by the shortcomings of the Russian character. They simply refused to judge Russia by what they called, their own high Western standards. It can be stated that this sort of implicit ethnocentrism was present in many accounts that stressed positive developments in the USSR, Soviet sympathizers and neutral individuals alike. The correspondent for *Frankfurter Zeitung*, Edgar Mesching, attending the commemorative celebrations of the Petrograd Academy of Sciences, wrote that the present system of Soviet governance actually worked to the advantage of the Russian peasant: “The Russian is naturally lazy. Before the war, peasants were somewhat pampered in the way of loans and advances of money; whereas the Bolsheviks have done nothing for them. As a result, they’ve been compelled to work harder.”<sup>409</sup> So, according to Mesching, while the living standards were extremely low and there was notable “level of discontent” against the Soviet government, the regime was in no way threatened. “The droshky, or horse cab

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<sup>408</sup> John Rothschild to Dewitt C. Poole, U.S. Consul in Berlin, Germany, March 1, 1927, GR59, State Dept. Office of E. European Affairs, USSR Section, General Records 1911-1940, Box 1.

<sup>409</sup> Coleman to Kellogg, September 28, 1925, RG 59, File #861.00/10792.

is most popular conveyance in Russia,” casually penned William Danforth about his impressions in the streets of Moscow, “and the horse is usually much smarter looking than the driver.” The peasants, he noted, did not seem attached to Communism, and displayed a “thick mind” when it came to giving up “his crops without ample compensation.”<sup>410</sup>

Occasionally, a visitor, while eager to burnish an image of irrational Russian, demonstrated remarkable lack of insight of his own. In a conversation with James Wilkinson, the American consul in Finland, a former American diplomat Henry Dickinson Lindsley, while opposing the recognition of Russia, repeated the official Soviet line that the situation in the country had drastically improved since the October Revolution. “But he recognized that not having been in Russia before the Revolution,” wrote Wilkinson to his superiors, “he had no real basis for comparison.” “The Russians are free,” Lindsley told his interlocutor. “They have liberties which it is hard for a person accustomed to European and American restrictions to understand.” As an example he cited his own experience on the street when a drunkard Gypsy, approached by the police, yelled back at the officers about Russia being a free country, after which the police left without doing anything. As far as Lindsley saw things, in Russia, there were only two unpardonable sins: spying and counter-revolution. “Punishment for such crimes were quicker and harsher than in the West,” he noted.<sup>411</sup>

James Wilkinson’s other interviewee, William A.H. Gantt, an American doctor studying the works of renowned biologist Ivan V. Pavlov, offered a more

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<sup>410</sup> Coleman to Kellogg, December 30, 1926, RG 59, File #861.00/11011.

<sup>411</sup> James Wilkinson, U.S. Consul in Helsingfors, Finland, to Kellogg, September 12, 1927, RG 59, File #861.00/11149.

unique explanation of the Russian flaws. “The great writers,” he told Wilkinson, “have attempted to account for the Russian temperament by studying the Russian mind and have thought they succeeded. But they have failed. Russian temperament is explained by the Russian stomach where not enough food is put to keep the Russian mind and the Russian body going... The listlessness, the fatalism, the lack of backbone of the Russian are attributable to the fact that for generation after generation he has starved his body. He eats black bread and drinks weak tea, and then sits around and wonders why he does not feel like doing anything.” Having spent three years in Russia, Doctor Gantt reached his conclusion based on medical examinations of many Russians. Undressed Russian person’s physical state, he described, resembled that of “starved animal”: “His body is sickly looking. There is no pink about his skin which is loose and moldy. His movements are slow and his feeble reflexes accurately indicate the character of that of which they are rebounds.” Such individuals, Gantt said, were physically incapable of staging rebellion against repressive government. In contrast, according to the American doctor, the soldiers of the Red Army were well-fed and displayed physically distinct healthy characteristics. “These troops look like men,” he told Wilkinson.<sup>412</sup>

Among Westerners who gave the Soviet experiment the benefit of the doubt there were some truly brilliant figures. The American diplomats sent clippings from the issue of *Manchester Guardian* newspaper in which Arthur Ransome, narrated economist Maynard Keynes’ thoughts about Soviet Russia after the latter visited the native country of his wife in 1925. In *Mr. Keynes Looks at Russia*, Keynes was said to abhor many Soviet political practices with all its intolerance and rigidity. Keynes

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<sup>412</sup> Wilkinson to Kellogg, January 30, 1928, RG 59, File #861.00/11235.

did not bow to the imposition of Marxist ideals on economy either: “How can I accept a doctrine which sets up as its Bible, above and beyond criticism, an obsolete economic textbook which I now to be not only scientifically erroneous but without interests or application for the modern world,” Keynes was quoted saying. Nevertheless Keynes was willing to cut sufficient slack for the Soviet authorities who, in his judgment, had “set up a system very low by our living standards, but evolved out of starvation and death, and much comfortable compared to that of the past.” While pointing out the two moods that enveloped foreign visitor to Russia – oppression and elation – Keynes chose to emphasize the promise of the latter, born out of the fervent desire to build a new kind of society. He felt that his “eyes were turned towards, and no longer away from the possibilities of things: that out of the cruelty and stupidity of Old Russia nothing could ever emerge, but that beneath the cruelty and stupidity of New Russia some speck of the Ideal may lie hid.”<sup>413</sup>

While sympathetic attitude toward the Soviet Union was mostly characteristic of the short-term visitors – mostly intellectuals and well-known figures who had been invited to the Soviet Union for propaganda purposes -- there were others, particularly among foreign correspondents working in Soviet Union, who sometimes came to at least ponder about the feasibility of the Soviet alternative. Among the most prominent of these journalists were Walter Duranty of the *New York Times* and Paul Scheffer of *Berliner Tageblatt* who regularly updated American diplomatic representatives about the developments in the Soviet Union. Their reports drew significant attention not only because they lived in the USSR for a prolonged period of time and had access to high Soviet officials, but their reach to wider masses

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<sup>413</sup> Houghton to Kellogg, October 29, 1925, RG 59, File #861.00/10808.

through weekly reports from otherwise isolated Soviet Russia gave them great influence in shaping the public opinion. In later years, after Paul Scheffer was expelled from the Soviet Union for his insubordination, no other newspaper correspondent played such a decisive role in influencing politics than Walter Duranty whose ties with Joseph Stalin's government and reporting from the Soviet Union remain a source of contentious debate. "Duranty was regarded as the dean of the Moscow press corps," wrote James Crowl in *Angels in Stalin's Paradise*, "because of his years of service, and for many Americans he was the most authoritative observer in Moscow." While George Bernard Shaw called him the king of reporters, his colleague Jimmy Abbe declared flatly: "his writings under a Moscow dateline have done more than anything else to influence American opinion in favor of the Soviet Union."<sup>414</sup>

In a letter written in 1927 to the American Ambassador in Germany, Jacob Gould Schurman, Duranty described himself as an Englishman with political views of "left-labor."<sup>415</sup> This admission, emanating from someone who at one point referred to Bolshevism as "a compound of force, terror and espionage, utterly ruthless in conception and execution" should have sounded strange.<sup>416</sup> Prior to his arrival to the Soviet Union, Duranty was known as perhaps the most vociferous opponent of the Soviet regime in the press corps. His reporting from the Soviet-Polish War helped to produce an image of the Soviets as a monstrous power bent on extinguishing the light of liberty all around. But much had changed since a young upstart who once worked

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<sup>414</sup> J.W. Crowl, *Angels in Stalin's Paradise* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1982), 5.

<sup>415</sup> Schurman to Kellogg, January 19, 1927, RG 59, File #861.00/11022.

<sup>416</sup> S. J. Taylor, *Stalin's Apologist: Walter Duranty – the New York Times' Man in Russia*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 95.

at the Paris bureau of the *New York Times* set his foot on the Soviet soil in 1921. “Luck broke my way,” is how Duranty described the most important phase of his career when the famine of 1921-23 provided an opportunity for him to visit the Soviet Union as a part of foreign journalist delegation. Soon, having earned the confidence of the Soviet officials who handled the foreign reporters, the Englishman convinced his superiors in New York to stay in Moscow and became a regular reporter on the Soviet Union.

A careful and reflective observer, Duranty’s reporting during the NEP era is not even disputed by his critics. “During this period, Duranty’s lucid and simplified explanation of economic problems was exemplary, and some of his best work in the Soviet Union was economic reporting,” writes S.J. Taylor in a book criticizing Pulitzer-Prize winning journalist’s misconduct during the famine of the latter period.<sup>417</sup> Not in vain described as one of the most brilliant journalists of his era, from early on, Walter Duranty adopted a rule for himself: “to believe nothing that I hear, little of what I read, and not all of what I see.” Duranty, unlike others who believed that the NEP spelled the end of Communism, likened the Soviet policy of limited liberalization to “the old Roman Saturnalia, when for three days each year slaves and underlings might usurp with impunity the pleasures and privileges of their masters.”<sup>418</sup> By the mid-1920’s, “Duranty believed that Socialism was here to stay” and that “ultimately Stalin would lead the way.”<sup>419</sup> In his conversation with American Ambassador in Germany Jacob Schurman in September of 1926, Duranty reported about the prices remaining very high and the fact that Russia was isolated

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<sup>417</sup> Ibid., 114.

<sup>418</sup> Ibid., 117.

<sup>419</sup> Ibid., 139.

and unable to produce anything.<sup>420</sup> “All this tends to produce a vicious cycle,” he told Schurman, “Without large grain exports, goods cannot be reduced in price; without reduction in the prices of goods, large exports of grain are impossible.” The only solution, Duranty believed, lay in obtaining credit from the United States. He then revealed that in a private conversation with him the Soviet foreign minister Maxim Litvinov had made it clear that “Russia was ready to meet all conditions laid down by the U.S. if she could do so without ‘losing face’ . Aside from his surprisingly warm ties with the high Soviet officials, Duranty’s prolonged stay in Moscow, seem to have instilled in him a degree of antipathy toward the opponents of the Soviet regime. In a later letter to Schurman, Duranty openly mocked the Russian émigré dissidents as the kind “arguing over beer bottles in the backroom of a Swiss pub.” “But when you’re supposed to be running one-sixth of the total surface of the globe,” he added, “it’s only common sense to stay on the job a bit more closely.”<sup>421</sup> Adhering to journalistic standards, Walter Duranty, of course, was too careful in his remarks to even sound sympathetic toward any side, especially the Soviet one. But as the time went on, there was a deafening lack of criticism directed toward Stalin’s visibly calamitous rule.

His critics have frequently pointed out Duranty’s not so hidden contempt for the average Russians as a decisive factor in his disregard for their agony. According to James Crowl, one of Walter Duranty’s early impressions of the Russian people was shaped by an execution scene in which he observed three Russians quietly puff on cigarettes and then lower their heads to take bullet from the pistol of an executioner

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<sup>420</sup> Schurman to Kellogg, September 20, 1926, RG 59, File #861.00/959.

<sup>421</sup> Schurman to Kellogg, January 19, 1927, RG 59, File #861.00/11022.

whom together they could have easily overpowered and escaped. In Crowl's view, this incident marked "an impression of fatalism and indifference to death which remained with him and helps to explain how in later years he could view with such callousness the fate of suffering Russians."<sup>422</sup> In his reporting, Duranty was also said to have been heavily influenced by a German journalist Paul Scheffer. In a conversation with Schurman, Henry Wales of *Chicago Tribune*, complained about the negative aspects of this influence and remarked that both reporters "looked at development too minutely and overanalytically, losing sight of broad political and economic trends."<sup>423</sup> But reporters such as Duranty and Scheffer attributed their statements precisely to these complex trends which, in their minds, required a long-term thinking. "In Russia," declared Paul Scheffer, "government is being conducted on an idea and for the sake of an idea. Russia is the one country in the world in the eyes of whose rulers to-day is nothing, tomorrow everything. This is the source of the weakness and the strength which distinguishes this State from all other States."<sup>424</sup> As a reporter for a major German newspaper, Scheffer's depictions and ideas regarding the Soviet state were no small matter. And when Paul Scheffer of the world hesitated issuing a definitive statement about the developments in the Soviet Union and wondered aloud about the feasibility of the Soviet experiment, it is understandable why others might have felt driven toward conclusions that did not jibe with the observations on the ground.

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<sup>422</sup> J.W. Crowl, *Angels in Stalin's Paradise*, 15.

<sup>423</sup> Schurman to Kellogg, March 5, 1927, RG 59, File #861.00/11250.

<sup>424</sup> Paul Scheffer, *Seven Years in Soviet Russia, with a retrospect* (Westport, CT: Hyperion Press, 1932), 176.



It is also important to note that the foreign correspondents' ability to report truthful information was sharply restricted by the Soviet regime which used the issuance of visas as a leverage against journalists whose livelihoods and careers depended on their assignment in Russia. "For the Western reporters," Taylor writes, "there was ominous threat of losing their visas, which were granted to foreigners for a maximum period of six months at a time... In most cases, loss of the visa meant loss of the job."<sup>425</sup> Most journalists quickly learned to play by the rules. Others, however, eventually ran out of patience and the will to cooperate, and were quickly expelled from the Soviet Union. This is exactly what happened to Duranty's comrade Paul Scheffer in 1929 when he was refused a re-entry visa and ended up being reassigned to Washington.

Beginning from 1921, Paul Scheffer later wrote in his memoir, the Press Department of the Foreign Commissariat charged with censorship over correspondent despatches stepped up its activities. Under the directorship of Theodore Rothstein, the Press Department would use various methods to hamper the foreign correspondents' ability to report about the realities in the Soviet Union. "A favorite one was to shake the reporter's confidence in the accuracy of his information. Another was to delay official approval of a despatch till the reporter, pressed for time, would finally accept the wording proposed to him... Sometimes, to be sure, the red ink would be bluntly drawn through an unpleasant fact."<sup>426</sup> However, the most draconian yet effective option by which the Soviet leadership interfered with the foreign correspondents' freedom was by isolating them from the society at large.

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<sup>425</sup> S. J. Taylor, *Stalin's Apologist*, 198-99.

<sup>426</sup> Paul Scheffer, *Seven Years in Soviet Russia*, x.

According to Scheffer, after the diplomatic incident with England, “the GPU made thousands of arrests all over the Soviet Union, and the arrests especially affected people who had contacts, direct or indirect, with the English mission,” after which most Russians became convinced “that any contact whatsoever with foreigners was dangerous.” “In this direct isolation of foreign correspondents,” Scheffer wrote in 1932, “and in fact, of all foreigners, in Moscow is now complete.”<sup>427</sup> Under such circumstances, it is difficult to gauge the psychological impact of isolation on one’s views about Soviet realities and subsequently. After all, how could a reporter find out the truth without ever engaging in discourse with the people about whose country he was reporting?

The foreign correspondents were not the only ones affected by the ban on interaction between the Soviet citizenry and foreigners. The foreign diplomats became equally isolated in that regard. Swedish diplomat Lund once complained to his American interlocutor that Soviet security services had infiltrated many foreign missions including his own. According to him, the Soviet citizens who called at such missions were immediately arrested.<sup>428</sup> In December of 1927, the Latvian Consul-General in Leningrad reported about ordinary Russians being banned from visiting foreign missions. According to the Consul, from the moment Soviet citizens entered into any sort of contact with a member of a foreign legation, they became subject to persecution. “As a result,” the Latvian diplomat reported, “the Missions have been obliged completely to abandon invitations to Russians to their entertainments.”<sup>429</sup>

While the Soviet government still encouraged foreign visitors to travel to Russia, it

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<sup>427</sup> Ibid., xii.

<sup>428</sup> Coleman to Hughes, September 2, 1924, RG 59, File #861.00/10491.

<sup>429</sup> Coleman to Hughes, December 13, 1927, RG 59, File #861.00/11216.

moved to severely curtail genuine interaction between Western and Soviet citizens. With the borders long closed since the October Revolution, most Soviet citizens' experience of abroad came from the few foreigners who were present in their country. In the eyes of the Soviet authorities, such interactions posed double danger. For one, Bolshevik authorities always viewed information control as an essential tool in their fight to retain power, and as such, for instance, one of the first acts of the Bolshevik government had been the liquidation of all non-Bolshevik press. Yet equally important was to prevent circumstances which could negatively contribute to the Soviet image abroad. The American legation in Riga frequently relied on the reports supplied by the Latvian and other Western embassies in Moscow. By banning interaction between foreign nationals and its citizens, the Soviet authorities accomplished a great deal in preventing the Western nations from acquiring objective information about the Soviet realities.

The most effective weapon by which the Soviet accomplished this deed, as usual, was the omnipotent security agency – with a slightly modified title in 1923, OGPU. Its innocuous abbreviations which stood for the “Unified State Political Directorate” belied the true nature of an institution that struck terror into the hearts of millions across the Soviet Union. Having inherited the cruel practices of its predecessor, the agency was still commonly referred as Cheka. The significance of the role played by this institution which secured the Bolshevik victory against overwhelming odds and helped to preserve a regime bent on starving its citizens is difficult to overestimate. Cheka's dreadful presence did not escape the sight of even the most uninformed of the foreign visitors. George Seldes, the special correspondent

of *Chicago Tribune*, was so impressed by the power of this organization that he devoted an entire article explaining how “the terror has been branded on the souls of the Russian people.” While Cheka had ceased in mass murdering the opponents of the Soviet regime, it maintained its reign of terror, wrote Seldes: “Freedom does not exist in Russia on the account of Chekah [sic]. There is no democracy... Freedom, liberty, justice as we know it, democracy all the fundamental human rights for which the world has been fighting since time began, have been abolished in Russia in order that the communist experiment might be made. They have been kept abolished by Chekah.” According to Seldes, the Soviet authorities frequently invoked the articles 57 and 62 of the criminal code, which stood for counter-revolution, to get rid of the perceived dissenters. But it was not just the punitive aspects alone that drew Seldes’ attention, but the incredible power of control which the Cheka possessed over the Soviet society. “The Cheka rule is absolute,” he wrote. “No one is beyond suspicion with the possible exception of Lenin himself, and it is frequently boasted in Moscow that if Lenin asked the arrest of Trotsky it would follow without hesitation.” According to Seldes, Cheka controlled villages, elections, factories, political opposition, and watched over the Red Army. Among the subjects to draw intense scrutiny were the foreign travelers whose documents and correspondence was consistently monitored. At the time Seldes wrote about Cheka, he estimated the victims of the Soviet security agency to stand between 50,000 to 500,000 “with decided favor to the latter figure.” By 1924, he wrote, wanton executions, mass murders, wholesale searches were perhaps a thing of the past in Cheka history, being replaced by imprisonment in vile pens and exile to Siberia in much the czarist

fashion. “But the most important thing about Cheka today,” American journalist maintained, “is that by its never ceasing persecution it has smothered all liberty of expression, it has cowed the souls of the people, it has continued a reign of terror, which makes Bolshevism supreme and will not let any change or democratic movement come in to Soviet Russia.”<sup>430</sup>

A significant number of despatches sent to Washington featured some sort of reference to the OGPU as a force behind the enforcement of draconian and perhaps even quixotic policies of the Soviet state. While describing the construction of new building and the disappearance of hunger with the coming of NEP, Arthur Ruhl, the correspondent of the *New York Herald Tribune*, was clear about the absolute dictatorship exercised by the Communist Party and the terrible persecution against free speech and members of the bourgeoisie. “People are being exiled to Siberia and removed out of their homes,” he told the members of the Russian Section in Riga.<sup>431</sup> Captain E.E. Yarrow and Reverend Emmet Woollen who had recently come to Istanbul from Caucasus, spoke to the American diplomats there of the frequent tribunals and extensive authority of the Cheka. Even though the charges of counter-revolution were punishable by death, according to Yarrow and Woollen, “extreme measures were rare”, and they only remembered two fellows in Armenia executed for “interfering severely with the Soviet commercial organization.” However, in the despatch relaying the content of the conversation, the U.S. attaché Bristol noted that these Americans retained ties to that part of the world, and “neither therefore is

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<sup>430</sup> Evan E. Young, Chief of East European Affairs, referring to George Seldes, “The Chekah”, *Chicago Tribune*, January 11, 1924, to Hughes, February 8, 1924, RG 59, File #861.00/11688.

<sup>431</sup> Coleman to Kellogg, September 18, 1925, RG 59, File #861.00/10787.

unlikely to say anything which would embarrass the business or the friends he has left in Russia.”<sup>432</sup>

Otherwise, most individuals with no dependence on the good graces of the Soviet authorities, such as the conservative delegates of the British parliament visiting Soviet Russia, after spending few days there, concluded that the country was “an autocracy, pure and simple.” Having observed the situation on the ground, the delegates stated that they had every reason to believe wholesale arrests, imprisonments, deportations, even shootings for purely political offenses without any attempt at trial were still going on. They characterized “the atmosphere as so engendered to make life intolerable for those who have to live elsewhere.”<sup>433</sup> These accounts were handily corroborated by those who personally experienced the repression by the OGPU. “Imprisonment is resorted to upon slightest provocation,” wrote fur tradesman Samuel Wittenberg. While getting their documents checked on a ship bound for Vladivostok, Wittenberg described how one young Russian grumbled aloud about unending meanness of the authorities, “He was overheard, knocked down by the police and carried off to prison, the authorities not even troubling to take his effects from the ship into their custody – pending his release,” he wrote.<sup>434</sup> Some stories touching on constant police presence in USSR were on a less somber, perhaps even humorous note. *Melbourne Herald Evening* correspondent, C.G. Dixon was traveling on a train to Moscow from Siberia, when he noticed “a big man in uniform striding up and down the corridor.” “Suddenly he turned sideways, flung open the

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<sup>432</sup> Bristol to Kellogg, May 8, 1926, RG 59, File #861.00/10901.

<sup>433</sup> Houghton to Hughes, June 8, 1925, RG 59, File #861.00/10905.

<sup>434</sup> William Langdon, U.S. Consul in Antung, China, to Hughes, January 26, 1925, RG 59, File #861.00/10658.

door and sprang in,” described Dixon: “What he expected to find I do not know, but whatever it was, he was disappointed.”<sup>435</sup>

As repressive as the Soviet security apparatus remained, it exhibited relative laxity in its conduct during the period between 1924 and 1927. The most plausible explanation for this was the power struggle which ensued Lenin’s death in January of 1924. As various Bolshevnik leaders grouped and regrouped against one another in an attempt to take the stewardship of the Communist Party, the uncertain political control over the OGPU interfered with the latter’s functions as the foremost punitive agency of a police state. Writing about the unusual revival political courage among ordinary citizens at the height of the NEP, Aleksandr Petrishchev commented in émigré newspaper *Russki Golos*:

“GPU is in a strange status. They are supposed to arrest anyone talking bad about government official. But since Lenin’s death, government officials are cirticizing each other.... Today a spy has to obey Zinoviev, but maybe tomorrow he will have to obey Trotsky. If he satisfies one of them, the other might break his neck.... Everybody realizes that in spite of the fact that Lubyanka is Lubyanka, but still, its hands are not so long as to reach everything.”<sup>436</sup>

The power struggle between Joseph Stalin and Leon Trotsky was the subject of great many despatches prepared by the Russian Section of the U.S. legation in Riga. Unlike other representations, the Riga bureau’s explicitly stated function was to monitor the political and economic developments inside the USSR. As such, the

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<sup>435</sup> Maxwell Blake, U.S. Consul in Melbourne, to Hughes, December 4, 1924, RG 59, File #861.00/10610.

<sup>436</sup> Hanson to Hughes, March 20, 1924, RG 59, File #861.00/10317.

American delegates regularly received and forwarded translated reports from the Soviet Press which they felt reflected the direction of the political winds. Editorials in *Pravda* and *Izvestia* were the best indicators. For instance, the November 19, 1924, *Pravda* ran a feilleuton mocking Trotsky's newly published book, *The Lessons of October*. Having chosen to forward this article to his superiors in Washington, Charge d'Affaires in Riga John Wiley considered it to be an important sign of Trotsky's weakened position in the ruling apparatus.<sup>437</sup> In the following years, the despatches were replete with various accounts of the conflict between Trotsky and the Georgian secretary-general of the Party. They addressed Trotsky's fall from grace, his expulsion from the Politburo and finally, his unsuccessful alliance with Zinoviev and Kamenev in an effort to wrest power from Stalin. As such, these despatches comprise the most initial documents that pertained to the foundation of an inquiry named "Kremlinology" – the study of the inner-party struggle among Communist leaders.

Those who carefully followed the debates ascribed various interpretations to the power struggle in Moscow.<sup>438</sup> Some saw the conflict as ideologically driven, especially due to Trotsky's unabashedly leftist policies regarding the economic reforms. Others viewed it as a settling of scores between power-hungry individuals

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<sup>437</sup> John C. Wiley, U.S. Charge d'Affaires in Latvia, to Hughes, November 28, 1924, RG 59, File #861.00/10593.

<sup>438</sup> In August of 1927, at the height of the political attacks against him, Leon Trotsky was interviewed by 26 Americans regarding his views on the existing situation. Refusing to discuss any intra-party differences with the American "outsiders," Trotsky instead attacked the American notion of democracy. When asked about freedom of speech, the former commander of the Red Army delved into epistemological analysis of the word "freedom," eventually concluding that the Soviets had more press freedoms than Americans, because in his country the press was controlled by the proletariat, not the bourgeoisie. Still, a few days later, a *Pravda* editorial lambasted Trotsky's lack of enthusiasm in defending the Communist regime. See Coleman to Kellogg, August 30, 1927, RG 59, File #861.00/11143.



who had inherited the vast country with the promise of a gigantic experiment yet owed little accountability to the peoples that inhabited the land. Whatever the variables involved, by the end of 1927, it had become clear that Stalin had emerged victorious over his rivals in the the so-called Left Opposition. Stalin's success drove many outside observers to presume that the Soviet leader would now be free to pursue the liberalization of attitude toward the kulaks and continue the course of the NEP. After all, Trotsky and his cohort were heavily responsible for much of the hardships, violence, and famines that had characterized the initial years of the Soviet experiment. The idea of doing more of the same, which Trotsky, against all reason, fervently advocated, appealed to very few. But it could not be overlooked that the NEP had always been a bastard child of the Soviet experiment, and grudgingly tolerated until an opportune time arrived for its abandonment. If the Revolution -- carried out upon the ideal of establishing the dictatorship of the proletariat -- was to ever succeed, the NEP had to go. In that sense, the ideological commitment of the Soviet leaders to building Communism -- however they interpreted the idea --- could not be underestimated. "Despite the fact that he smashed the "Opposition for personal as well as "ideological" reasons," William Duranty wrote in a letter to Jacob Schurman, "Stalin stands pretty strongly for pure Communism" More importantly, Duranty further elaborated, Stalin was "very well organized and of course quite ruthless."<sup>439</sup>

In a conversation with the American Consul Leland Harrison in Stockholm, the returning Swedish Minister in the USSR conveyed that he was "greatly disappointed in the hope which he had so confidently held that Stalin would go to the

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<sup>439</sup> Schurman to Kellogg, February 29, 1929, RG 59, File #861.00/11247.

right after the elimination of Trotsky and his followers. Perhaps the wish had influenced his judgment. [But] his guess had been far off the mark. It had been another instance of the unexpected happening in Russia.” With the full-scale assault on the NEP now gathering steam, the deteriorating conditions in Soviet Union heralded the beginning of yet another unpredictable era. “The pressure upon private traders and capitalists is steadily becoming stronger,” told an “intelligent lady of German descent” to her American interlocutors in Riga: “Butter and eggs are hardly to be had. Shortage of bread-stuff universally expected.... There is grave fear of the return to food cards and other features of military communism.” According to her with the adoption of a “new economic policy” (as opposed to the New Economic Policy), the harvest of agricultural crops would yield disappointing results. “All private traders felt themselves to be menaced daily by the penalties imposed on violations of decrees and orders restricting and regulating economic operations, in fact admit daily infractions of such decrees and regulations” reported the two businessmen just arriving from Soviet Russia to Latvia. “Great apathy and depression prevail... Nobody expects anything good. Economic difficulties are becoming constantly more acute and practically everybody is absorbed by the petty cares of daily life and the maximal frictions of social contacts.”<sup>440</sup> “It was also true,” the returning Swedish diplomat from Russia had told the American minister in Stockholm Leland Harrison that Russians seemed to possess surprising powers of endurance and of recuperation: “They appeared to be able to exist on little or nothing. But Soviet economic policy was so fundamentally fallacious and was proving so disastrous, the policy of squeezing out the private traders and the kulaks, spreading

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<sup>440</sup> Coleman to Kellogg, March 2, 1928, RG 59, File #861.00/11251.

antagonism and discontent among the peasants, their uneconomic methods of production and the losses of their industries with the inevitable breakdown in their finances and their currency could only lead to a final failure.”<sup>441</sup> Exactly what amount of hardship and suffering this “final failure” would entail, few could imagine.

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<sup>441</sup> Leland Harrison, U.S. Minister in Sweden, to Kellogg, May 3, 1928, RG 59, File #861.00/11264.

## Chapter 5: Revolution Resumed

In the Fifteenth Party Congress held in December of 1927, the emerging leader of the Communist establishment, Joseph Stalin, outlined a five-year plan for the Soviet economy. The primary goal of this plan, the Soviet leader announced, would be “the transformation of small and scattered peasant plots into large consolidated farms based on the joint cultivation of land using new superior techniques.”<sup>442</sup> At the time, very few could have foretold the enormous consequences of this seemingly mundane objective. Five years later, with millions of peasants dead from starvation and repression at the hands of the state apparatus, the Soviet countryside lay completely transformed. Nearly one thousand years-old institution of peasantry in the territories controlled by the Soviet government succumbed to a campaign of violence and destruction unparalleled in history. Historian Adam Ulam described it the best when he wrote: “Within a few years they [the peasants] were forced to change their entire manner of life, forsake their immemorial customs and rights. It was not a civil war. It was, as a Soviet poet justly called it, a war against the nation waged by Stalin at the head of the Communist Party of the USSR, and from this war he emerged victorious.”<sup>443</sup> While various historians emphasize various motives behind the efforts to subordinate peasants by the Soviet government, there is a consensus that these measures resulted in great losses in human lives. The diplomatic despatches dating to this period also reflect a wealth of information about the extreme hardships caused by Stalin’s collectivization. However, there is a strong sense of continuity in the actions

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<sup>442</sup> Adam B. Ulam, *Stalin: The Man and His Era* (New York: The Viking Press, 1973), 291.

<sup>443</sup> *Ibid.*, 289.

of the Soviet government, which in the eyes of the Western observers, never truly warmed up to the notion of private property. Most observers convey how the conditions became significantly worse during these years; but there is hardly a genuine surprise at the actions of the Soviet authorities. Based on these despatches, it is rather difficult to sense a marked departure in the governance style of the Soviets, heading into collectivization.

One could not accurately assess the dynamics of information-gathering by American diplomats without acknowledging the role of the men at the U.S. State Department who had great influence over the Republican administration's attitude toward the Soviets. Later known as "Mr. Eastern Europe" within the State Department, Robert F. Kelley was one such man. In 1924, during the Congressional hearings on the question of Soviet recognition, then a junior officer, Kelley successfully stood his ground against the powerful proponents of the recognition, namely, Senator William Borah. When the Senate Foreign Relations Committee chairman pounced on Kelley questioning the State Department's opposition to recognition, Kelley carefully laid out the facts, at one point explaining to the Senator the difference between severance of diplomatic ties and withdrawal of recognition within the frames of the international law. According to Loy Henderson, "the evidence submitted and interpreted by Kelley before the Senate was so overwhelming that not only Senator Borah but many of the Americans sympathetic to the Soviet experiment and who had been criticizing our policies toward Soviet Russia found it difficult to deny the existence of organized ties between the so-called Soviet

government and the Communist International.”<sup>444</sup> Impressed by his erudition and commitment to work, in 1926, Secretary of State Frank B. Kellogg insisted that Kelley be promoted to the division chiefship.<sup>445</sup> Kelley would continue to serve in that post for the next eleven years.

As a chief of the division, Kelley was intent on reforming the information-gathering operations about Soviet Russia so that it “should be based upon facts and study, not emotions.”<sup>446</sup> His essential focus was on economic indicators which Kelley felt would be most reflective of the performance of the Soviet regime. For this purpose, Robert F. Kelley organized a professional Russian language program where the discerning observers of the future began to undergo training. Among these young apprentices were the renowned American diplomats and Russian-area experts such as George F. Kennan and Charles E. Bohlen, to whom at the time Kelley referred as ‘my boys’. “One of the difficulties in the Foreign Service in those days was,” Bohlen would later explain, “that an officer would spend two, or three, or even four years in one country and then be transferred to another without really having much opportunity to acquire a serious knowledge of certain countries’ customs, institutions and history.” Recalling his decision to choose precisely the Soviet Union as his field of expertise, Bohlen conveyed that he saw “the growing importance of the Soviet Union and realized that the United States would need experts to deal with the Communist state.”<sup>447</sup> One with a more immediate connection to the information-

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<sup>444</sup> George W. Baer ed., *The Memoirs of Loy W. Henderson*, 147.

<sup>445</sup> *Ibid.*, 123.

<sup>446</sup> Daniel Yergin, *Shattered Peace: The Origins of the Cold War and the National Security State* (Boston, Houghton Mufflin Company, 1977), 50.

<sup>447</sup> Charles E. Bohlen, *Witness to History, 1929-1969* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1973), 8.

gathering operations in Riga was George F. Kennan. Long before he came to rise to the post of a U.S. ambassador in the Soviet Union and a premier architect of American foreign policy course toward that country, Kennan worked as a junior diplomat preparing “basis of reference material and statistical data which would serve to counterbalance with reasonable adequacy the efforts of the Soviet authorities to distort or suppress even the most elementary data on the progress of the Soviet economy.”<sup>448</sup>

Despite his consistently negative attitude toward the Soviet regime and its philosophy, Robert F. Kelley’s vision for the American observation post in Riga was to turn it into a reliable center of information. The Russian Section in Riga, as Kelley saw it, never did or was meant to engage in anti-Soviet propaganda. “The Russian Section of the American legation in Riga,” Kennan wrote, “was a small research unit where, since there was no American representation in Russia itself, we received the major Soviet periodical and other publications, studied them, and reported as best we could to the United States government.”<sup>449</sup> Dismissing the Soviet efforts to portray the Section as a “sinister espionage center,” Kennan explained that, “the United States government had not yet advanced to that level of sophistication. We had no secret agents, and wanted none. Experience had convinced us that far more could be learned by careful scholarly analyses of information legitimately available concerning any nation than by the fanciest arrangements of clandestine intelligence.”<sup>450</sup>

Kennan’s statement may explain why the bulk of the reports prepared by the Russian Section involved summaries and analyses of various reports, articles and editorials

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<sup>448</sup> George F. Kennan, *Memoirs, 1925-1950* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1967), 48-49.

<sup>449</sup> *Ibid.*, 47.

<sup>450</sup> *Ibid.*, 48.

taken from the Soviet press. However, human contact and the efforts to obtain information from eyewitnesses were of equal importance.

Among those who helped to shape America's early perceptions of the Soviet Union was, of course, Loy W. Henderson. Born to the family of a Methodist minister in northwestern part of Arkansas in 1892, Henderson's path to the career in foreign service began accidentally owing to the United States' entrance into the First World War. Eager to serve his country, Henderson abandoned plans to attend law school in favor of representing the American interests in volatile Europe, particularly the German-Russian frontier. Thus unlike Kennan or Bohlen, Henderson's experience with the Bolsheviks nearly dated to the times of the October Revolution. While Henderson did not assume his duties at the U.S. legation in Riga until September of 1927, Henderson had been an eyewitness to the deadly turbulence that shook Russia and its immediate neighbors in the aftermath of the Great War in the capacity of an American Red Cross worker. As a close affiliate of Evan Young and Robert Kelley at the State Department, Henderson also believed that "the rulers in Moscow, although perhaps differing at times regarding the methods to be employed, were united in their determination to continue to promote chaos and revolution in the non-communist world."<sup>451</sup> Similar to his colleagues, Henderson's conclusions were based on a long record of facts regarding the actions and policies of the Soviet government. Having spent considerable amount of time in the State Department archives familiarizing himself with the Russian history and Soviet government, he arrived in Riga with significant background knowledge on Soviet affairs. Although, financially, the U.S. legations abroad fared better than most other foreign representations,

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<sup>451</sup> George W. Baer ed., *The Memoirs of Loy W. Henderson*, 165.



Henderson was keen on improving the quality of work at this important outpost. He “emphasized, in particular, the need of the Russian section for competent, well-educated translators and also for personnel capable of editing translation and checking for accuracy.”<sup>452</sup> As he immersed himself in the functions of the Russian Section, Henderson found a satisfying challenge in trying “to expose for the benefit of the State Department the exaggerated nature of Soviet claims of accomplishments.”<sup>453</sup>

The period from mid-1920s onward was marked by increasing isolation of the Soviet society and restrictions on the foreign observers’ ability to obtain information not only about but also within the USSR. While several American companies still remained inside the Soviet Union, and hundreds of American engineers and industrial experts continued to make contributions to the gigantic industrializing drive, the Soviet secret police systematically prevented attempts of interaction between the Westerners and the indigenous people. One of the more important sources of information about the Soviet internal affairs were the embassies of the friendly European countries in the USSR, whose representatives regularly briefed American diplomats in their respective national capitals. But given the lack of interaction with Soviet citizenry, even their sources were severely limited. Speaking to the American envoy John B. Stetson, Jr. in Warsaw, the Polish Foreign Minister Count Edward Raszynsky emphasized the difficulties faced by “an outsider to form individual contacts with Russians [in order] to gain knowledge.” “Restrictions are such that foreign diplomats can contact no one except the Soviet officials,” the minister told his

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<sup>452</sup> Ibid., 178.

<sup>453</sup> Ibid., 181.

American interlocutor, “native people are afraid to come anywhere near a foreigner.”<sup>454</sup> Separately, the head of the Latvian legation in Moscow, P.Z. Olins reported that their main sources of information about Soviet realities consisted of “Lettish colonists, foreign newspaper correspondents, diplomats from other foreign countries and the Soviet press.” Of these, the most trustworthy was the information supplied by the Latvian natives who, in desperate attempts to escape the Soviet Union, came into contact with the embassy staff. As for the latter categories, according to the Latvian diplomat, “foreign journalists in Soviet Russia , including American journalists, were not able, even through diplomatic or secret channels, to furnish their newspapers with plain, unvarnished accounts of conditions in the Soviet Union, since the publication of the real facts by any paper no matter from what source it purported to come, would make its Moscow correspondent *persona non grata* to the Soviets.” Because “foreign newspaper correspondents in Russia received large salaries and enjoyed a social position which they do not have elsewhere since in view of the limited society in Moscow they were treated virtually as members of the diplomatic corps” – a position which very few among them dared to jeopardize. Writing to his superiors at the State Department, the American diplomat corroborated Olins’ views by referring to two unnamed American journalists who, while passing through Riga some time ago, “admitted that they did not feel free to depict the worst phases of Soviet life.” As for the Soviet press which both the Americans and Latvian diplomats in Moscow continued to monitor, the latter deemed it “of very little value”

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<sup>454</sup> John B. Stetson, Jr., U.S. Minister in Poland, to Kellogg, February 2, 1929, RG 59 File #861.00/11342.

in that the Soviet statistics were “extremely unreliable and were only written to prove a thesis.”<sup>455</sup>

Writing for *Vosische Zeitung*, Wilm Stein aptly observed that “Soviet Russia was a country in which everything is kept secret – and where nothing could be kept secret.”<sup>456</sup> In that regard, the information from Soviet publications helped distill at the very least the government attitude and intentions. Yet once in a while there actually *was* information which could be useful for a discerning individual. As falsified as the numbers usually were, one could detect worrisome trends within the economy even from the Soviet publications. According to the report published Soviet magazine *Ekonomicheskaja Zhizn*’ (Economic Life), obtained by American diplomats in Riga, grain procurements for the year 1928-29 amounted to 9,549,000 tons as compared to 10,115,000 for the year 1927-28.<sup>457</sup> To a degree, one could identify a certain pattern to the information supplied by the Soviet authorities that would lead one to the explanation of the Soviet economic realities. Citing the Commissar of Foreign and Domestic Trade Sh. M. Dvolaitzky, *Ekonomicheskaja Zhizn*’ noted a “drastic decline of private trade and that the number of private trade enterprises which have ceased operation” standing at 102,000 throughout the entire Union. The commissar reported that in Moscow the number of private enterprises declined in the period June of 1926 to November of 1927, from 11,000 to 6,600 or by 40.5 percent. Dvolaitzky informed that the liquidation of the 4,500 private shops was only partially

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<sup>455</sup> Coleman to Henry Lewis Stimson, U.S. Secretary of State, February 15, 1930, RG 59 File #861.00/11419.

<sup>456</sup> Schurmann to Kellogg, February 13, 1929, RG 59 File #861.00/11346.

<sup>457</sup> Ivan Chernikov, editor of *Soviet Russia* bulletin, to Kellogg, January 18, 1929, RG 59 File #861.00/11410.

compensated by 343 new cooperative shops opened during that period.”<sup>458</sup> This much the Soviet government disclosed about the measures taken against private enterprise in the towns and villages. The rest – the saga of tragic proportions – was told by hundreds of foreign and indigenous persons who had the chance to record their stories in the diplomatic despatches.

Successive blows delivered by the Soviet authorities against private trade predictably resulted in the decrease of economic output at all levels. According to Russian historian Elena Osokina, by the second half of 1920s, forced industrialization had already caused economic imbalance insofar as the prices for industrial commodities superceded those for the agricultural goods. In Osokina’s view, “the price imbalance was one of the primary reasons behind the peasants’ refusal to give bread to the state.”<sup>459</sup> Already before the end of 1928, Russian émigré newspapers in nearby countries were filled with reports about unrest in Siberia and other parts of Russia due to “unwise economic policy of Soviets which had caused suffering among peasants.”<sup>460</sup> In his conversation with American diplomats in Riga, the Estonian representative conveyed that previously “peasants used to farm up to 200 hectares, but Soviet taxation system was such that now they farmed only 5-6 hectares.” According to him, the Soviet authorities were ignorant about the situation of the peasants and did not seem “to have formulated a clear policy.”<sup>461</sup> In a conversation with the American minister in Warsaw, the Polish consul in Tiflis S. Mostovsky

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<sup>458</sup> Coleman to Kellogg, April 5, 1928, RG 59 File #861.00/11587.

<sup>459</sup> Elena A. Osokina, *Ierarkhiia potreblenia: O zhizni liudei v usloviakh Stalinskogo snabzhenia, 1928-1935* (Moscow: Izdatelstvo, 1993), 9.

<sup>460</sup> Hanson, referring to the local issue of *Zarya*, to Kellogg, October 28, 1928, RG 59 File #861.00/11303.

<sup>461</sup> Coleman to Kellogg, October 18, 1928, RG 59 File #861.00/11298.

confirmed the account given by his Estonian counterpart. Citing the extremely poor crop situation, the Polish diplomat characterized the grain crisis of 1928 as a manifestation of the conflict between the Soviet authorities and the peasantry. “The peasants are reducing sowing and produce only as much as they need for themselves, but refuse to produce anything for the market,” he informed.<sup>462</sup> Faced with the Soviet government’s increased “control and repression,” the peasants’ resentment toward the Communist regime had grown beyond.

Soviet authorities were deeply alarmed by the crop failure of 1928. Rather than moving to address the grievances of the peasantry which objected to high taxation and draconian regulations, however, the dictatorship of the proletariat interpreted the peasant unwillingness to abide as a direct challenge to its revolutionary authority and a structural problem in need of a permanent resolution. The Communist establishment, then headed by Joseph Stalin, followed a traditional Soviet pattern of response to what appeared to be an organized form of dissent. According to Osokina, the Soviet leadership “not only modified the plans for the Five-Year Plan, but adopted it in its optimal version”<sup>463</sup> -- which essentially meant that the Kremlin was willing to fight its way through the solution, even if it meant confronting the significant portion of the population. The consequences of this response were not simply wholesale arrests and executions of the undesirable elements, but a reformulation of the policy whereby individual farming and rural market economy would be altogether liquidated. In that sense the drive to collectivize the Soviet village was not just a response to the recalcitrant peasant, but a

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<sup>462</sup> Stetson to Kellogg, November 9, 1928, RG 59 File #861.00/11307.

<sup>463</sup> Elena Osokina, *Ierarxiia potrebleniia: O zhizni liudei v usloviakh Stalinskogo snabzheniia, 1928-1935*, 9.

calculated step in the overall tendency to do away with every manifestation of economic power outside state control. The peasant response to the Soviet regulations may or may not have accelerated this trend. The fact is, under a regime supposedly constituted *by* the proletarians *for* the proletarians, the so-called peasant question always persisted. As far as his surroundings were concerned, Stalin's decision to at last solve this question was not a radical departure from the course of a revolutionary government which had openly avowed to abolish private property and build communism.

Initial indications of the worsening situation came from Western journalists based in Soviet Russia. Having learned to carefully maneuver through words when it came to depicting Soviet realities, even the habitually "easygoing" correspondents sounded the alarm. In a memo of the conversation with Paul Scheffer prepared by J.C. White of the American embassy in Germany, it was made clear that the Soviet Union was facing a serious economic crisis. Scheffer informed that the peasants were being taxed beyond endurance, impoverished and pushed into collective farms. "Evinced with utmost pessimism" which the recent show trials impressed on him, Scheffer displayed "profound emotion at the Soviet brutality." "Only with the help of America could Russia survive the inevitable crisis," Scheffer told Ambassador White. The German reporter yet added that he hoped the American help would not be forthcoming.<sup>464</sup> A week later, in a conversation with the American Consul in Berlin D.C. Poole, Scheffer reiterated his strong opposition to the American recognition of

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<sup>464</sup> John C. White, U.S. Ambassador in Germany, to Kellogg, December 3, 1928, RG 59 File #861.00/11312.

the Soviet Union and expressed hope that the diplomat would take note of his suggestions.<sup>465</sup>

Edward L. Deuss, the Moscow correspondent for the International and Universal News Service of America furnished similar information to his interlocutors in Riga on the way back to the United States. He stated that the living conditions were becoming more and more difficult every day and one could hardly obtain food in the Soviet Union any longer. “One has to stand in queues for everything if they have it;” Deuss enumerated “bread, eggs, butter, milk.” He also noted that the foreigners refused to allow their children to intermingle with the Russian children due to the extreme unsanitary conditions in which the latter lived. On the question of interaction with America, Deuss explained, the Soviets did not really want to trade but establish a self-sustaining industry. He pointed out the single auto producing factory AMO which needed American technological and corporate expertise, but added that “not much will come from the Soviet concession policy.” On the contrary, Deuss believed that the American recognition would undermine the existing trade since “the Soviets would then cease to court the United States, except to get credits, and then there would be falling of American trade just as it occurred when other countries recognized the Soviets.”

Edward Deuss shared his journalistic experience in the USSR along with five other regular Western reporters: Walter Duranty of *The New York Times*, William Reswick of Associated Press, Eugene Lyons of the United Press, W. Henry Chamberlain of *Christian Science Monitor* and Negley Fanson of *Chicago Daily News*. According to Deuss, by then, the Soviet had kicked out journalists named

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<sup>465</sup> Schurman to Kellogg, December 12, 1928, RG 59 File #861.00/11314.

Donald Day and Novinsky on the account of “sensational stories.” “They [Soviet authorities] have no problem,” Deuss conveyed, “as long as they [Western correspondents] don’t write “sensational stories.” Describing the strict censorship in the Soviet lands, Deuss informed that all foreign correspondents’ cables were being censored and had to be approved by the Press Division of the Commissariat of Foreign affairs and then sent to OGPU for final approval. In numerous occasions, the Soviet authorities forced the Western correspondents to make alterations to the text of their report. The information supplied by Deuss, in his American interview’s judgment formed a “striking contrast with the opinion recently expressed to the Legation by Walter Duranty. It was quite clear that Mr. Duranty had lost the proper perspective in viewing events in Soviet Russia .”<sup>466</sup>

In many ways, Duranty’s indiscretions were becoming more difficult to conceal especially since much of the information coming out of Soviet Russia did not appear to fit into the apologetic mold created by the Englishman in Moscow. In his statements given to the American diplomats outside the USSR, Walter Duranty did not share his colleagues’ pessimism about the situation. While he conceded that Stalin was a “prisoner of his own principles, narrow minded and lacking in mental elasticity,” Duranty blamed the campaign against the peasantry on the grain failures which “made it necessary for him [Stalin] to rely on fanatics.”<sup>467</sup> Earlier in 1929, Duranty stated that the Soviet government had ceased exporting grain and had taken a more liberal attitude toward private dealers – an assertion which he withdrew several months later in his conversation with Schurman in Berlin. “His optimism with regard

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<sup>466</sup> Coleman to Kellogg, January 10, 1929, RG 59 File #861.00/11326.

<sup>467</sup> Schurman to Kellogg, January 14, 1929, RG 59, File #861.00/11325.



to things Russian have become somewhat tempered as a result of contact with the outside world,” wrote Schurman. During yet another trip through Germany, “in a private conversation with a member of the staff he spoke on the food situation in Soviet Russia with pessimism.” According to Duranty, practically all food-stuffs were now being rationed. In his judgment, the hardship was not as much due to shortage as to the Soviet efforts to keep down speculation. “A good crop,” he told his interlocutors “would help”, before adding that Russia possibly faced “the worst winter since 1922.”<sup>468</sup>

Some of the journalists, who, unlike Duranty, did not depend on the good graces of the Communists, were more forthright. As a reporter for the British *Daily Telegraph* and renowned military correspondent during the World War I, sent to the Soviet Union on a temporary assignment, Ellis Ashmead-Bartlett ran a series of articles in January of 1929 one of which was plainly titled - *Doctrinaire Refusal to Yield to Economic Forces!* The reporter was struck by the climate of repression and fear that pervaded the Soviet society. Describing the harsh conditions of the peasants and the persecution of the private traders in the hands of an oppressive elite, Ashmead-Bartlett concluded that the Spartan life, imposed by the Soviet regime on its citizenry was bad for governance. “These fanatical theories are preventing the expansion and revival of Russia’s trade at the present time,” he wrote. The journalist was also struck by the extreme suppression of political dissent inside the USSR and the omnipresence of the OGPU which, according to him, “had a power of life and death over citizens.” “Whenever you are introduced to a new acquaintance,” Ashmead-Bartlett wrote, “someone is sure to whisper in your ear: ‘Be careful, he is

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<sup>468</sup> Schurman to Kellogg, September 27, 1929, RG 59, File #861.48/18 (Famine in Soviet Russia).

well-known to be an agent of the OGPU.”<sup>469</sup> It is no coincidence that most outside observers often compared the tumultuous years of Stalin’s collectivization to the period of War Communism during which the Bolshevik party under Lenin wantonly requisitioned grain, confiscated individual properties and stifled all manifestations of market. Having left Russia after 18 years of residence, the Belgian businessman named Charles Lambert told John Stetson in Warsaw:

“General conditions have become much worse during the last year. The conditions are very similar to that of military communism of the years 1919-1922. There is an acute shortage of food and fuel. Prices are extremely high in the market.”

While Lambert described the situation as essentially a conflict between the peasantry and the Soviet regime, he characterized the urban attitudes toward the government also as negative. “The village hates the city, identifying it with the Government, but the city itself is dissatisfied with the Soviet regime and criticizes it far more openly than ever before,” stated Lambert.<sup>470</sup> In Helsingfors, Consul James R. Wilkinson reported the same alarming news about Soviet Russia. Dr. W.A. Horsley Gantt, returning from Russia, told him about “acute famine in many parts of the country.” According to the doctor, “such common articles as fruit, coffee, tea, eggs, cured ham, butter, table delicacies etc. if at all available, were entirely beyond the reach on the account of their dearness of the ordinary person.” Foreigners and locals alike, Gantt said, were forced to follow complicated procedures and secret ways to obtain basic

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<sup>469</sup> Charles G. Dawes, U.S. Ambassador in Great Britain, January 29, 1929, RG 59, File #861.00/11332-33.

<sup>470</sup> Stetson to Kellogg, November 6, 1928, RG 59, File #861.5017/17.

commodities. “The quality of the bread is very bad. It is dark, moist and not of a good taste,” he wrote. “White bread is no longer seen anywhere.”<sup>471</sup>

From former capital of Russia itself, the Polish consul J. Webb Benton wrote: “On the whole, general conditions in Leningrad are beginning to resemble very much those of 1922-23.”<sup>472</sup> Speaking to Frederick Coleman in Riga, the chief of the Eastern Division of Foreign Ministry of Latvia, too, reported acute shortages throughout the Soviet Union of all prime necessities, especially of foodstuffs and articles of clothing. In order to protect workers and partymen, Mr. Students informed, “private commerce in towns had been almost completely annihilated and the retail trade had become concentrated in cooperative shops.” which were often empty due to shortages and breakdown in the system. According to him, all commodities, were being rationed. “As a general rule, the disenfranchised population in the cities has to depend for its supplies chiefly on the underground trade which continues to exist in spite of all persecution,” he said, “The prices charged there exceed many times the fixed prices in cooperatives.”<sup>473</sup>

Its inability to secure sufficient food supplies on the one hand and its determination to control essentially all means of production on the other led the Soviet government to resort to rationing. While food rationing is a practice which has also been utilized in capitalist powers such as the United States or Great Britain in wartime, the Soviets, under exceptionally peaceful conditions, took the practice to a whole different level. According to Elena Osokina, the first acts of bread rationing began in the cities of Ukraine – the breadbasket of the Soviet Union. “By the beginning of 1929 the

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<sup>471</sup> Wilkinson to Kellogg, January 28, 1929, RG 59, File #861.5017/40.

<sup>472</sup> Stetson to Kellogg, May 7, 1929, RG 59, File #861.5017/66.

<sup>473</sup> Coleman to Stimson, November 21, 1929, RG 59, File #861.48/27 (Famine in Soviet Russia).

rationing system was introduced to all cities of the USSR. Moscow's turn came last, in March of 1929.<sup>474</sup> At first, the rationing applied to the main staple of the Soviet diet – bread – which remained the only major source of calories sufficient enough to sustain humans. Soon thereafter the rationing spread to other products including sugar, meat, butter and tea. It is difficult to believe that by introducing rationing the Soviet government genuinely sought to alleviate the suffering its policies had brought upon the people. At the time when stores lacked fish in Murmansk, a port city lying next to a vast ocean, Soviet minister Anastas Mikoyan boasted about the export shipment of fish to Hamburg.<sup>475</sup> Worse, this was a government that continued to sell grain abroad at the time millions of its citizens starved.<sup>476</sup> It is more likely that by rationing products, the Kremlin sought to achieve three main objectives: channel scarce food to high-priority citizens whom it considered essential to its industrialization drive – mostly workers in vital industrial complexes, penalize or liquidate recalcitrant portions of the society, and at the same time put up an appearance of a government that was troubled by the effect of severe shortages on the people.

According to both eyewitnesses on the ground and recent evidence from the Soviet archives, aside from hypocrisy and falsehoods, the most common method by which the Soviet retained control was terror. Russian historian N.A. Ivnitski dates the intensification of punitive measures to January of 1930, when “dekulakization and

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<sup>474</sup> Elena Osokina, *Ierarkhia potrebleniia: o zhizni liudei v usloviakh Stalinskogo snabzheniia, 1928-1935*, 15.

<sup>475</sup> *Ibid.*, 25

<sup>476</sup> R.W. Davies and Stephen G. Wheatcroft, *The Years of Hunger: Soviet Agriculture, 1931-33* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 471. Also, see Robert Conquest, *The Harvest of Sorrow: Soviet Collectivization and the Terror – Famine* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 265.

repressions became the primary means of collectivization and turned into main methods by which the authorities increased the tempo of the campaign.”<sup>477</sup> The archival documents, utilized by Ivnitski, reveal direct orders from the Kremlin identifying the scope and nature the mission of the thousands of OGPU troops dispatched to agricultural regions. For instance, an order # 776 issued by the OGPU chief Henrich Yagoda to the local chiefs of the OGPU and the Red Army, requested that they provide the exact numbers for personnel and weaponry needed for the operations.<sup>478</sup> The targets of the mission were outlined in two categories: the first category of the enemies included “counter-revolutionary agents” to be liquidated; the second category consisted of kulaks and their families who were to be exiled to northern, unpopulated regions of the USSR, with confiscation of their properties.<sup>479</sup> According to the official numbers of the OGPU, between January 1 and April 15, 1930, alone, the total number of the arrested individuals constituted 140, 724.<sup>480</sup> More often, these arrests were carried out in accordance with the arbitrary quotas set by the government. For instance in Central Asia, the quota was set at 1300 kulaks, whereas in South Caucasus, that number was 1200.<sup>481</sup> By Stalin’s order on February 7, the OGPU was instructed to send operational reports (*svodki* – a Russian term for reports from the front) on its campaign in the villages.<sup>482</sup> Indeed, a war it was.

Initially, Stalin’s collectivization drive produced mass exodus of people from the Soviet Union. Those with the slightest opportunities to escape, did so. Most

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<sup>477</sup> N.A. Ivnitski, *Kollektivizatsiia i raskulachivanie (nachalo 30-kh godov)* (Moscow: Magistr, 1996), 101-102.

<sup>478</sup> Ibid., 109.

<sup>479</sup> Ibid., 111.

<sup>480</sup> Ibid., 115.

<sup>481</sup> Ibid., 126.

<sup>482</sup> Ibid., 114.

people in this category had some sort of ethnic or family ties to the outside world. In an emotional letter uncharacteristic of a diplomat, senior American envoy in Riga Frederick Coleman thus described the conditions of the German colonists, arriving from Soviet Russia after a long fight to escape:

“When the members of the first convoy arrived in Riga hardened railway men, policemen, and reporters mingled their tears with those of the emigrants... The sudden appearance of these people on the threshold of Western Europe, after a sojourn of more than a hundred years in the comparatively little known regions of the land of the Muscovites, has brought the people with whom they have come into contact to the realization that a tragedy is taking place in the Russian villages on a scale unprecedented in history... It is beginning to be understood that behind the screen of smug speeches delivered by Soviet leaders, there is a story of persecution and suffering which recalls some of the darkest pages of medieval history.”<sup>483</sup>

The American diplomats in Finland were reporting similar stories of migration by the Swedish colonists from Soviet Russia.<sup>484</sup>

Among the refugees, there were also those who escaped their historical homelands which now belonged under the Soviet jurisdiction. From Tehran, the U.S. Vice Consul Henry S. Villard reported about the mass migration of Azeri Turks in the Caucasus into the Azerbaijan province of Iran south of the Araxes river owing to scarcity of food. “Most of the refugees are attempting to cross the Araxes river into the Persian provinces of Azerbaijan, and in the last few weeks 1500 such persons are said to have gained Persian territory near the border town Hassan kala,” he wrote.

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<sup>483</sup> Coleman to Stimson, December 19, 1929, RG 59, File #861.5017/115.

<sup>484</sup> Hall to Stimson, November 22, 1928, RG 59, File #861.48/12 (Famine in Soviet Russia).

“Soviet patrols, however, are endeavoring to prevent such escape and it is a common rumor that all fleeing refugees are shot on sight.” According to Villard, the refugees formed a chain trying to cross the river in order not to drown. In the meanwhile, according to him, Soviet authorities had sent 400,000 troops to the border region in order to quell the acute unrest there.<sup>485</sup>

As far the Soviet government was concerned, the peasantry deserved its fate, for it had committed an unpardonable sin of blackmailing the authorities by withholding grain. The response from Stalin to Ukrainian poet M.A. Sholokhov who beseeched the Soviet leader to alleviate the suffering of starving peasants, is telling in this regard: “You see only one side of the story. The other side is that the peasant sabotage almost left the workers and the Red Army with no bread. The fact that sabotage was quiet and seemingly harmless does not change the fact that those grain-producers had been waging a “quiet war” against the Soviet government.”<sup>486</sup> The authorities identified the *kulak* -- term for a wealthy peasant -- as the implacable enemy of the collectivization, hence chief target of the OGPU’s wrath. While the punitive security forces constituted the primary tool of dealing with the peasantry, the Soviets also applied the principle of “divide and rule” to the countryside. According to Ronald Hingley, who studied the history of Russian secret police, by dividing peasants into arbitrary categories in supposed correspondence to their wealth, the authorities sought to turn citizens against one another thus easing the burden of the OGPU. As such, the term *kulak* was employed to create an illusion of opposing classes within the peasants. The tactic of collectivization was, accordingly, to incite

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<sup>485</sup> Henry S. Villard, U.S. Vice-Consul in Tehran, Iran, to Stimson, April 25, 1930, RG 59, File #861.00/11430.

<sup>486</sup> N.A. Ivnitski, *Kollektivizatsiia i raskulachivanie*, 221.

the poor and middle peasants against the kulaks.”<sup>487</sup> But who was a kulak? According to the Soviet government, kulak was a malicious class, an obsolete social strata which resisted the change for progress in order to maintain its superior socio-economic status in the society. As professor Malbone W. Graham told the American diplomats in France about his understanding of the term, “anyone employing the labor of another was a kulak; anyone who possessed more than 2 horses or 2 cows was a kulak; anyone maintaining any appreciable domestic industry was a kulak.”<sup>488</sup> In reality, however, as Hingley later explains, the definition of kulak varied depending on the government’s perception of him. “Any peasant, whatever his economic situation, could conveniently be labeled as a kulak if he was unwise enough to express opposition to authority. Thus the liquidation of the kulaks as a class, as decreed by Stalin on December 27, 1929, became a formula for persecuting the peasantry at large.”<sup>489</sup> Concurring with Hingley, historian Robert Conquest wrote in his seminal work on collectivization, *Harvest of Sorrow*, that “the use of the term kulak had been a distortion of the truth right from the beginning of the regime” insofar as “many kulaks even on the definitions of the late 20’s had already been ruined” and “others were hardly rich or exploitative.”<sup>490</sup> Conquest found the description of a Communist activist, sent to crush those resisting the confiscation of their land, to be the more realistic definition of the kulak:

“He has a sick wife, five children, not a crumb of bread in the house. And that’s what we call a kulak! The kids are in rags and tatters. They all look

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<sup>487</sup> Ronald Hingley, *The Russian Secret Police*, 144.

<sup>488</sup> Walter E. Edge, U.S. Ambassador in France, to Stimson, September 10, 1930, RG 59, File #861.00/11439.

<sup>489</sup> Ronald Hingley, *The Russian Secret Police*, 144-45.

<sup>490</sup> Robert Conquest, *The Harvest of Sorrow: Soviet Collectivization and the Terror – Famine*, 118.



like ghosts. I saw the pot in the oven – a few potatoes in water. That was their supper tonight.”<sup>491</sup>

The Soviet policies in the villages naturally produced strong resentment among peasants toward the authorities. Beginning from late 1929, this deep level of rancor frequently led to peasant uprisings throughout the regions. Polish consul in Leningrad reported about an unrest in the city and the riots in Novgorod and Pskov regions which were put down by the armed forces. Rumors swirled that General Mikhail Tukhachevsky, conqueror of Denikin, had objected to the use the regular Red Army formations against the populace – a move that had made him a target of charges of Bonapartism and disloyalty.<sup>492</sup> While the government retained and enhanced its capacity to inflict severe pain on the opponents of its policies, in the words of one observer, “the effect of terror was very different from what it was formerly, as the population had become accustomed to the GPU methods, which therefore, no longer produced the same moral effect.”<sup>493</sup> In the regions most affected by collectivization the resistance was substantial and violent. Austrian newspaper *Neues Wiener Tageblatt* reported peasants uprisings throughout Russia, Transcaucasus, Ukraine and Siberia. According to the report, peasants were stealing and buying weapons from soldiers. In the regions of Moscow, Saratov, Orlov, Riazan and Ukraine, a number of Soviet officials had been killed in retaliation to the peasant persecution.<sup>494</sup> In Paul Scheffer’s view, the resentment was so deep among

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<sup>491</sup> Ibid., 118.

<sup>492</sup> Stetson to Stimson, May 7, 1929, RG 59, File #861.5017/66.

<sup>493</sup> Stetson to Kellogg, November 6, 1928, RG 59, File #861.5017/17.

<sup>494</sup> Albert Henry Washburn, U.S. Minister in Austria, to Kellogg, January 24, 1929, RG 59, File #861.00/11334.

Ukrainians against Soviet authorities that had Poland invaded USSR, “the Ukrainian peasants would help them defeat the Red Army.”<sup>495</sup> (Scheffer’s prophecy was partly fulfilled when ten year later, Ukrainian peasants greeted the invading German troops with traditional ingredients of hospitality -- bread and salt).

The Polish consul in Minsk reported a litany of disturbances in Belarus. In Vitebsk, a band had been formed by M. Puchalsky who operated in districts of Kbylinca and Kruin and they “persecuted local communists and members of the Young Communist League.” When the OGPU tried to arrest eight members of the group, the population interfered and created difficulties for the secret police in carrying out the arrests. In the regions of Minsk, Wieliczka, Loshia and Orzscathe the locals murdered collective farm chairmen, secretaries of the rural kolkhozes, and Soviet press agents. In the Belorussian capital Minsk, during a quarrel between a Communist official and workmen, the crowd joined the latter and attacked the police detachment endeavoring to establish order.<sup>496</sup>

In the provinces where there was not ethnic attachment to the Russians, the resistance was stronger and nationalistic in character. “Moslem inhabitants of the Caucasus region appear to be among leaders of the new uprisings owing principally to scarcity of food and alleged religious persecution. The unrest is also said to be especially marked among members of the so-called wealthier peasant class, who are reported to be destroying their produce and livestock rather than subject them to communal distribution,” consul Villard reported based on rumors he heard in

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<sup>495</sup> Wiley to Kellogg, December 3, 1928, RG 59, File #861.00/11312.

<sup>496</sup> Stetson to Stimson, March 19, 1929, RG 59, File #861.00/11354.

Tabriz.<sup>497</sup> The rebellions in the Caucasus were also reflected in the notes by other diplomats in the southern region. According to the Polish consul in Tiflis, groups of insurgents throughout the North and South Caucasus fought back against Soviet armed detachments. In previous two months alone, the consul reported, 30 drivers from Tiflis had been killed in the fighting while transporting the Soviet troops. “The insurgents operate chiefly in Northern Caucasus, in the localities of Chechen and Dagestan, in Azerbaijan, in the districts of Zagatala, Ganja and Guba and in Southern Armenia,” the consul wrote. He added with interest that “in Armenia, the Turks, Kurds and Armenians are fighting under the banner of insurgents and under the command of former officers of the Tsarist Army, Russians and Armenians.”<sup>498</sup>

Despatches from the American mission in Romania also reported of a “serious uprising” in the Caucasus. According to the note, the peasants insurgents had taken the control of the Baku-Batum railway and the oil pipeline. There were rumors of Poland sending material aid to the anti-Soviet insurgents in the South. However, without an uprising in Ukraine, the diplomat noted, “the Caucasus revolt would not amount to anything.”<sup>499</sup> Historian Ivnitiski also confirms that in southern areas of the USSR, especially in North Caucasus and Azerbaijan, the OGPU and Red Army formations sustained hundreds of casualties in the battles against insurgents.<sup>500</sup>

Due to heavy control over information and the isolation of the regions of conflict, people in the cities had little knowledge of the clashes in the countryside. This lack of information also pertained to foreigners who resided in the major urban

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<sup>497</sup> Villard to Stimson, April 25, 1929, RG 59, File #861.00/11430.

<sup>498</sup> John N. Willys, U.S. Ambassador in Poland, November 8, 1929, RG 59, File #861.00/11443.

<sup>499</sup> Charles S. Wilson, U.S. Minister in Romania, August 9, 1929, RG 59, File #861.00/11379.

<sup>500</sup> N.A. Ivnitiski, *Kollektivizatsiia i raskulachivanie*, 157.

centers of the country. John Snate of Helsingfors, a substitute musician in Moscow, conveyed that he, had heard rumors about uprisings and that the government was using force to put them down. But having been isolated to the city he could not definitively confirm clashes. Judging by his own environment, Snate was not too optimistic about the perspective of these uprisings:

“The general impression among well-educated people is that conditions are likely still to become worse owing to the Russian character. The Russians are too passive. Most of the educated people are sure that the present regime will continue. The Russian people prefer not to take any action. I don’t think there will be any internal revolution. The people are too apathetic, exhausted and cowed into submission.”<sup>501</sup>

Snate’s interpretation of the Russian realities echoed Dr. Gnatt’s description which spoke of continuous “low murmurs of dissatisfaction.” “But this is about all,” he said. “The population is so cowed that it remains under control and just accepts the situation.”<sup>502</sup>

Many foreigners appeared in awe of the ability of the Soviet authorities to hold down the discontented citizenry. Having spent a notable period in the Soviet Union, the University of Pennsylvania scholar William White spoke with Jacob Schurman on his way out about the hardships that lay ahead for the resisting peasantry. “In two and half years that Mr. White was in Russia the strongest impression he received,” wrote Schurman “was the power of the Soviet state over the individual. While civilized countries had the power to arrest, fine, imprison, and even

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<sup>501</sup> Alexander R Magruder, U.S. Charge d’Affaires ad interim in Stockholm, Sweden, to Stimson, May 4, RG 59, File #861.5017/68.

<sup>502</sup> Wilkinson to Kellogg, January 28, 1929, RG 59, File #861.5017/40.

execute the individual, the power of the Soviet included the food, lodging, work and paternal rights over the children of the individual... In the rural district the recalcitrant peasants could be blacklisted and sold out. Any one aiding him thereafter was subject to the same penalty.”<sup>503</sup> Even those with more sympathetic disposition toward the Soviet Union, such as Maurice Hindus, representing the *World's Works and the Asia Magazine of New York* admitted that in Russia “everything is for the State,” and “nothing for the individuals.” Unlike most observers who would’ve compared Russia to Pharaoh’s Egypt, in that respect, Hindus found Russia comparable with the ancient Sparta. “The faces of the army soldiers, youth were all strained, hard and cruel.” Everyone, according to him, was learning how to shoot, except the bourgeoisie.<sup>504</sup>

If there was one class of people that showed little discontent toward Soviet form of rule – it was the members of the army and OGPU, who according to almost every observer, were well-fed and maintained by the authorities. During the tumultuous years of the collectivization, the loyalty of the secret police, if not the army, played a key role in salvaging a regime that essentially fought against its own citizenry. It was no coincidence that amid starvation and conflict, the Soviet government managed to erect a new building for the GPU in the Lubyanka square which displayed a fascinating design of secret entrances and other latest ingenuities of architecture.<sup>505</sup> The Communist Party may have been wrong in its socio-economic calculations, but in establishing a state of the art secret service agency, it had found,

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<sup>503</sup> Schurman to Stimson, November 26, 1929, RG 59, File #861.5017/110.

<sup>504</sup> Wilkinson to Kellogg, September 15, 1928, RG 59, File #861.00/11294.

<sup>505</sup> Harry E. Carlson, U.S. Consul in Tallinn, Estonia, referring to Estonian daily *Vaba Maa* (November 25, 1930), to Stimson, November 30, 1930, RG 59, File #861.00/11449.

so to say, a silver bullet to much of its problems. “No man, no problem,” Joseph Stalin is said to have once uttered. If so, then the OGPU was a crucial element of this dictum, or to be precise, its enforcer.

Since its inception in October of 1917, the vast punitive apparatus built by the Soviet government had already killed, imprisoned and exiled great number of people who in one way or another were perceived to be an obstacle to building communism. On June 4, 1918, the commander of the Red Army, Leon Trotsky “called for a group of unruly Czech war prisoners to be pacified, disarmed and placed in a *kontslager*: a concentration camp.”<sup>506</sup> A chain of islands in the White Sea, known as Solovetski, were soon designated for this purpose. In the words of Anne Applebaum, “Solovetski, the first Soviet camp to be planned and built with any expectation of permanence, developed on a genuine archipelago, spreading outward island by island, taking over the old churches and buildings of an ancient monastic community as it grew.”<sup>507</sup> As the first prison placed under the command of the OGPU, Solovetski also constituted the first camp of the notorious Gulag. According to Iurii Brodskii, the historian of Solovetski, since 16-th century the place had served as a small monastic prison for the Tsar’s personal enemies, yet for the most part it had been known as a quiet refuge for solitary monks.<sup>508</sup> On October 13, 1923, the chairman of Sovnarkom, Aleksei Rykov issued an order designating the islands as the “northern camps of special significance”: *Severnnye Lagery Osobogo Naznacheniya*, or SLON as it became commonly known. Unlike the tsarist period when the prisoners in the monasteries numbered in tens, the Solovetski camps contained thousands, almost

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<sup>506</sup> Anne Applebaum, *Gulag, A History* (New York: Doubleday, 2003), 8.

<sup>507</sup> Anne Applebaum, *Gulag*, 20.

<sup>508</sup> Iurii Brodskii, *Solovki: Davtsat’ let osobogo naznachenia* (Moscow: Rosspen, 2002), 13.

exponentially increasing by each passing year. In the eyes of the Soviet government, surrounded by water, this was a natural prison, where opponents of the regime would be isolated.

According to both Applebaum and Brodskii, the evolution of Solovetski from a regular prison into a massive concentration camp was predicated upon the increasing economic value of the enterprise. Well into 1925, the camps had operated in an environment where inmates, useless burdens that they had become to the system, were left at the mercy of sometimes sadistic wardens. But as the number of inmates rapidly changed, so did the thinking of the administration. By late 1920's, thanks to the initiative of a charismatic inmate and former nepman named Naftaly Frenkel, Solovetski acquired a brutally commercial character where prisoners were categorized based not upon their political affiliation, but by their level productivity. The introduction of the "you eat as you work system" had the benefit of sustaining physically fit prisoners whose only wish was a full stomach. But this system also meant that the weak would simply be left to die. As Applebaum put it, "in practice the system sorted out prisoners very rapidly into those who would survive, and those who would not. Fed relatively well, the strong prisoners grew stronger. Deprived of food, the weak prisoners grew weaker and eventually became ill or died."<sup>509</sup>

The increase in the economic functions of the SLON impressed the Soviet leadership to such extent that "Stalin even suggested giving medals to good workers."<sup>510</sup> "Like a management consultant taking over a failing company Frenkel 'rationalized' other aspects of camp life as well, slowly discarding everything that did

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<sup>509</sup> Anne Applebaum, *Gulag*, 36.

<sup>510</sup> Iurii Brodskii, *Solovki*, 14.

not contribute to the camps' economic productivity. All pretense of reeducation was rapidly dropped... The Solovetski museum and theater continued to exist but solely in order to impress visiting bigwigs.”<sup>511</sup> This emphasis on work was also reflective in the slogans that began popping up around the camps. According to Iurii Chirkov, a former inmate, at the entrance of the island's Kremlin a huge poster read: *Cherez Trud k Osvobozhdeniu!* (Through Work to Freedom).<sup>512</sup> For those unfamiliar with the history of concentration camps in the USSR, this slogan is ordinarily associated with the gates of the Nazi concentration camps where the phrase “Arbeit macht frei!” became etched onto memories.

Stalin's collectivization vastly increased the number of those who would experience the Soviet justice system firsthand. According to the historian of Gulag, Oleg Khlevniuk, “as a result of mass punitive actions and the transfer of inmates sentenced to three or more years to the jurisdiction of the OGPU, the network of corrective camps grew much farther than originally planned in 1929. The number of prisoners in Solovetski camp grew from 19, 876 to 57, 325 between 1 April, 1929 and 1 April, 1930.”<sup>513</sup> Even if the Soviet statistics were to be believed, the *Moscow Statistical Review*, obtained by the American legation in Riga, informed that from 1923 to 1929, in the RSFSR's overall prison population, excluding the autonomous republics, increased 180 percent from 65,849 to 118,888.<sup>514</sup> What made matters worse was that the Soviet prison system was not just about punishment, it was an elaborate mechanism which utilized humans as a source of labor for various projects

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<sup>511</sup> Anne Applebaum, *Gulag*, 37.

<sup>512</sup> Iurii Brodski, *Solovki*, 117.

<sup>513</sup> Oleg Khlevniuk, *The History of Gulag: From Collectivization to the Great Terror* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 22.

<sup>514</sup> Coleman to Stimson, January 21, 1930, RG 59, File #861.131/18.



which the Soviet leaders had deemed necessary to pursue in the cause of industrialization. This, in turn, meant that arresting an individual was one basic way to aggrandize the labor force in a country so desperate to “catch up” with the West. In March of 1928, the All-Russian Central Executive Committee and Soviet of People’s Commissars instructed the RSFSR Commissariat of Justice “to discontinue infliction of punishment in the form of imprisonment on short terms” and transfer everyone serving less than a year under a compulsory system of labor. In a manner reflective of Soviet understanding of governance and judicial system, Nikolai M. Ianson, the Commissar of Justice warned the judges to take these measures seriously, otherwise “they would be made to learn by personal experience what compulsory labor means.”<sup>515</sup>

In their zeal to assert power and ensure stability, the Soviet authorities waged war against enemies, real and imaginary alike. In a despatch sent by the Polish consulate in Kiev, the diplomat reported the emergence of new classes of enemies as the kulaks vanished from the scene. Among the new legion of prisoners were now soldiers, large percentage of teachers and cooperative employees. Decrying the overcrowded prison conditions and the food rations which were limited to 200 grams of bread daily, consul noted that “most are subject to punishment by administrative decrees without even a chance of defense before the court.” “Political prisoners are kept with the criminal ones,” he added. According to the diplomat, “death sentences were being executed every night in Kiev and other places.”<sup>516</sup>

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<sup>515</sup> Coleman to Stimson, January 29, 1930, RG 59, File #861.131/15.

<sup>516</sup> Willys to Stimson, February 10, 1930, RG 59, File #861.131/19.

The reports regarding the inhumane prison conditions and the heavy reliance on convict labor in Soviet Union were often corroborated by former prisoners themselves who managed to escape. In “Slavery of Convicts in the USSR” published in Estonian daily *Vaba Maa*, a Tartu merchant named Pärli extensively detailed his eight years of experience in the Soviet labor camp. Originally having been arrested on charges of espionage when he went to the Soviet Union as a member of the commission to “settle the question relating to peace,” Pärli had been sentenced to ten years in prison. According to Pärli, the convicts’ food ration hovered between 300-600 grams, whereas the working prisoners received 200 grams of slated beef or trout and 26 grams of sugar. “These rations of food are not adequate for the people who are doing heavy work,” he wrote, “The strength of these convicts diminish daily under this diet and at last many of them collapse while at work.” The prisoners worked all seven days of the week felling trees and building railways under extremely large quotas. “The slightest act of contradiction and disobedience is punished by execution and in cases where the guards tire of beating the malcontents until they die, they command the victims comrades to do so,” he wrote. Some prisoners, in order to avoid work, inflicted wounds on themselves by cutting open their abdomens, veins or cutting off fingers. In such cases they were forced to go back to work after minimal care. Describing the wretched conditions of the prisoners, Pärli stated that everyone was covered with bugs and lice. “Large numbers of bugs and lice make nightly attacks upon these crocodile skinned person,” he wrote, “thus depriving them of their only solace and recreation – sleep.” Many prisoners’ limbs or entire bodies froze, as the Soviet authorities did not furnish them with sufficient clothes to protect against

cold. Describing the average attire of the prisoner, Pärli wrote: “In these rags there are often large holes through which body parts of the uncovered human body is visible. The whole picture is ridiculous and nauseating.”<sup>517</sup>

In his next report, Pärli outlined four categories of prisons in the USSR: prisons, reformatories, concentration camps and agricultural colonies. The principal concentration camps were located in the northern part of the Soviet Union: Solovetski island in the White Sea, Wichersky Concentration Camp in Perm, Ust Sossolski in Vologda. Staffed by kulaks, “tens of thousands of people,” he wrote, “work here until death.” According to the imprisoned Estonian merchant, the Soviet authorities attached particular importance to the concentration camps, where “the convicts are practically being turned into slaves.” He wrote: “The main reasons for the establishment of concentration camps for prisoners is economic... Each log and plank of wood that is brought out of the concentration camps is the product of atrocious torture and suffering of the slave convicts... Hordes of raggy, hungry and ill human wretches fell trees for fuel and timber. They work without ceasing until they fall to the ground, dead.”<sup>518</sup>

A story told by an Ukrainian refugee who escaped the Solovetski Island prison camp after a 29 day journey over 1120 kilometers, upheld much of Pärli’s account. In his personal account published in Estonian newspaper *Paehvalet*, the Ukrainian narrated his harrowing experience since being arrested by GPU on charges of being a member of the Ukrainian nationalist anti-Soviet organization and sentenced to 10

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<sup>517</sup> Carlson, referring to the April 25 issue of *Vaba Maa*, to Stimson, May 7, 1931, RG 59, File #861.131/20.

<sup>518</sup> Carlson, referring to the April 29 issue of *Vaba Maa*, to Stimson, May 7, 1931, RG 59, File #861.131/21.

years of imprisonment. He considered himself extremely fortunate, since only few succeeded in running away. Most were caught and shot. According to him, the GPU guards “tortured escapees before other prisoners to make an example of them.” In this regard the administration of the camps was creative and “continuously invented new trick for torture.” The chief of the camp Saon, Voskov, the Ukrainian recalled, was a sadist “who didn’t just look on as his subordinates tortured people but shot prisoners himself, often for no reason, because he didn’t like their face.” Those who received packages began to be shot, so prisoners refused to accept packages thereafter. Most prisoners died of torture, others didn’t survive due to lack of food and hard labor. As the situation became more desperate prisoners frequently staged bloody uprising occasionally forcing the dismissal of camp chief. Despite draconian measures against those who tried to escape, however, people ran anyway, because many realized that life in the camp was a slow death. Recalling the origins of the Solovetski labor camp, the author wrote that it was first opened by Felix Dzerzhinsky in 1923, “the famous terrorist and the father of Cheka,” and “the first prisoners were sailors from Kronstadt.”<sup>519</sup>

An escaped Russian prisoner from Solovetski, in an interview with the American consul in Finland, James Wilkinson provided similar information. Dobrushin, as Wilkinson referred to the Russian, was the son of a well-to-do peasant, whose properties were confiscated and was thrown into prison in 1925. In his estimate, the convict population of the district stood at 145,000 – the highest so far given by an eyewitness. According to the escapee, the prison conditions were severe

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<sup>519</sup> Carlson, referring to the August 11 issue of *Paehvalet*, to Stimson, August 13, 1931, RG 59, File #861.131/26.

in terms of lack of food and clothes. Prisoners came from all over Russia. Some intellectuals, he said, were still left around, “with members of these classes having, for the most part, long since perished.” Amid unsympathetic and brutal doctors, many prisoners succumbed to scurvy and pneumonia which prevailed in the camps. As for the discipline, even a minor infraction was countered with summary execution by GPU. “When a death sentence is passed, the prisoners are invariably forced to dig their own grave,” Voloshin told his American interlocutor. The guards frequently resorted to torture with exposure to cold being the common form of coercion. Many prisoners simply starved or froze to death.<sup>520</sup>

An American named Herbert A. Brandt, who once worked for the ARA and returned to Riga after five years of imprisonment in Russia, gave resembling accounts regarding the use of cold as a routine measure of punishment. According to him, the charges of forced labor led the Soviet authorities to experiment with certain changes in the operation of certain prison camps. In the Komi camps, guarding and supervision over the prisoners was relinquished from the OGPU into the hands of selected prisoners. These men, Brandt related, were taken from among the criminal prisoners rather than the kulak element. “They were efficient guards, even more strict than the majority of the OGPU men since if dismissed they would return to manual labor,” he said: “The criminal guards were hard boiled. And they tortured the prisoners by making them stand in the cold in their underwear. Some of them froze to death while undergoing this punishment.” According to Brandt, criminals constituted merely one fourth of the prison population, with political dissidents,

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<sup>520</sup> Wilkinson to Stimson, November 23, 1929, RG 59, File #861.131/13.

economic counter-revolutionaries and kulaks comprising the remainder of the body.<sup>521</sup>

In *Red SLON in the White Sea*, Maiia Babicheva traces the origins of the memoir literature written by those who either escaped or served out their prison term in Solovetski to the year 1926, when S.A. Malsagov published the English translation of his book *An Island Hell* in London.<sup>522</sup> Written in a highly emotional tone, this book nevertheless provided valuable information on the Soviet concentration camps. Malsagov's feat was soon followed by his fellow escapee, Iurii Bessonov, whose memoirs, published in French and English, analyzed the culture of the concentration camps in the broader context of Soviet political system. What emerges from the various accounts about experience in SLON is that "each tale has its own unique qualities, each camp held different sorts of horrors for people of different characters."<sup>523</sup> As Applebaum stresses, while Soviet concentration camps shared many features with Nazi camps, the former were not death camps where a certain group of people, chosen based upon ethnicity, were placed with an explicit and predictable objective to be terminated. As numerous memoirs attest, though difficult, it was possible for individuals to serve out their term and ultimately survive the experience.

One particularly impressive case is that of Iurii Chirkov, a prominent Soviet academician, whose time at the Solovetski comprised the basis of intellectual growth. At the age fifteen, Chirkov was arrested and sent to Solovetski where he spent his

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<sup>521</sup> Coleman to Stimson, November 10, 1931, RG 59, File #861.5017/369.

<sup>522</sup> M.E. Babicheva, *V Belom more krasnyi SLON... Vospominania uznikov Solovetskogo lageria osobogo naznachenia i literatura o nem* (Moscow: Pashkov Dom, 2006), 13-14.

<sup>523</sup> Anna Applebaum, *Gulag*, xl

formative years surrounded by highly educated figures of the revolutionary period. In his memoir Chirkov recounts his love affair with books and his work at the Solovetski library under the guidance of imprisoned intellectuals some of whom had been personal acquaintances with Lenin before the Bolshevik takeover.<sup>524</sup>

“Paradoxically,” notes historian Brodskii, “the first inmates of the SLON were activists of the political parties which had allied with Bolsheviks in the struggle for power.”<sup>525</sup> These people were voracious readers and books were the most prized possession of those who left home for jail. In the foreign section of the local library, Chirkov recalled, there were books in 26 languages, left and brought by those who had faced the frequent misfortune of being arrested as “counter-revolutionary”.

Populated by the cream of the society, the Solovetski camps had a theatre, symphonic orchestra, poetry club and even a Gypsy ensemble led by the former artists of the Bolshoi theatre. If as the first commander of the camps, A.P. Nogtev, boasted with Solovetski having authority of its own - separate from the Soviets, then this prison-country had to have all of its attributes, including its own cultural element.<sup>526</sup>

According to Babicheva, the memoir-publication with regard to SLON underwent various stages, the last of which involved the writings of the Soviet citizens who could openly share experiences following the collapse of the USSR in 1991. Among the most descriptive accounts of the Solovetski is that of the renowned Russia scholar Dmitri Likhachev who shortly before his death produced a memoir dealing with his personal experience in the Soviet prison camps. In *Reflections on the*

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<sup>524</sup> Iurii Chirkov, *Solovki – A vse bylo tak* (Moscow: Politizdat, 1991).

<sup>525</sup> Iurii Brodskii, *Solovki*, 13.

<sup>526</sup> Anne Applebaum, *Gulag*, 22. In addition to allowing cultural activities, the authorities at the Solovetski camp used special currency and printed weekly newspapers and magazines in an effort to establish semblance of a community or a genuine reeducation camp rather than just a prison.

*Russian Soul*, Likhachev's story of pain and suffering differs from those of countless others only in details. Arrested in 1928 for associating with a harmless group of religious thinkers, Likhachev recalled his journey from the local NKVD jail cell to the Solovetski prison camp where death and disease reigned supreme. Likhachev was particularly struck by a group of teenagers – *vshivki* -- who had no clothes, no food rations and no legal status within the camp. "Everyone knew of their existence, but he authorities had simply crossed them off, giving them no soup, bread or porridge. They lived on charity. Or rather lived until they died. And then they were carried out dead, put in coffins and taken to the cemetery."<sup>527</sup> Adults did not fare any better. According to Likhachev, executions were common. The writer remembered one October day in which the authorities executed 300-400 individuals at once. In one instance of the procedure, "a tall, one-legged professor of ballistics named Pokrovsky started to hit the escort with his wooden leg. He was knocked to the ground and shot right there in the gateway. The rest went on without a word..."<sup>528</sup> Likhachev was deeply affected by Soviet writer Maxim Gorky's visit to the camp where he became acquainted with the conditions and by a very rare accident, spoke with a boy who revealed to him the actual account of the happenings. When he emerged from the barracks, Gorky had tears in his eyes. But the actual results of this trip were the physical liquidation of the "boy", increased repression at the camps, and a clean bill of health for Soviet prison practices by the writer himself.

In *See No Evil*, Dariusz Tolczyk examined the implications of Gorky's visit to Solovetski and places this trip in the context of a propaganda campaign that not only

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<sup>527</sup> Dmitri S. Likhachev, *Reflections on the Russian Soul: A Memoir* (Hungary: Central European Press, 2000), 91.

<sup>528</sup> *Ibid.*, 119.



sought to mislead the foreigners about Soviet realities, but the Soviet citizens themselves. The people were being trained to see and interpret realities in a way that served the cause of Communism. The use of literature, Tolczyk showed, was directed to negate the reality filled with extreme hardship and in its stead, feed people with illusions about a march toward radiant future. “Soviet reality in its ‘constant progress’ should have been near the stage when ‘all class antagonisms are abolished’ and ‘solidarity’, ‘love’, and ‘friendship’ form[ed] the basis of society. These [Soviet] writers made it look as though it did”<sup>529</sup>

The new Bolshevik literary ethics not only accepted, but enthusiastically applauded the suppression of present freedoms as a worthy sacrifice for the sake of imaginary freedom in the future. “In the process of fulfilling this grand historic destiny, [Bolsheviks] were ready not only to accept, but also to cause ‘necessary’ casualties among ‘little men’, the Chernyshevskian creatures, who yet failed to acknowledge the analogy between their own goals and history’s.”<sup>530</sup>

Although the rapid increase in prison population made the revelation of the facts about Soviet Union all but inevitable, the Communist government still cared a great deal about the information entering the outside world about its prison practices, and subsequently, it put up a genuine effort to curb or at least undermine the emerging perceptions abroad. In fact, according to Likhachev, Gorky’s mission, too, sought to counter the public opinion in the West and help resume the sales of lumber to the USA and Great Britain which had banned its import due to the reports that the

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<sup>529</sup> Dariusz Tolczyk, *See No Evil: Literary Cover-Ups and Discoveries of the Soviet Camp Experience*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 179.

<sup>530</sup> *Ibid.*, 56.

Soviet lumber was being produced by slave labor.<sup>531</sup> In that sense, the Soviet government exhibited great degree of sensitivity when it came to foreign criticism of its human rights record. On September 13, 1930, the chairman of Sovnarkom, Alexei Rykov, issued an order calling “to remove prisoners from all loading of foreign ships.”<sup>532</sup> Shortly after France joined the list of countries imposing ban on Soviet lumber products, the Kremlin propaganda master Karl Radek launched a press campaign to publicize human rights violations in capitalist countries. According to Oleg Khlevniuk, correspondence between Joseph Stalin and Viacheslav Molotov indicates that Soviet leader was personally involved in this campaign and urged his subordinates to respond vigorously to the charges of slave labor. Despite loud denials, however, “the participation of prisoners in lumbering for export remained a significant part of the Gulag economy.”<sup>533</sup>

Another powerful aspect of the Soviet efforts to deceive the outside world was carried out by luring in a certain stratum of Western intellectuals whose gullibility and idealism made them perfect foot-soldiers in the Soviet propaganda battle. On his way back from Soviet Russia, in an interview with the American consul in Vienna, Dr. G. A. Graham of Longbeach, California conveyed his impression about Russia, which he, at first admitted, was a dilapidated country. As for its prisons, Dr. Graham had the following to say:

“Inside the prison, prisoners were reading newspapers, smoking and walking about as they wished. They had no other guards except those which they elected among themselves. They get 74 rubles a month. They

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<sup>531</sup> “Gorki was required to calm public opinion. And he did... and sales of wood recommenced,” observed Dmitri Likhachev, *A Memoir*, 110.

<sup>532</sup> Oleg Khlevniuk, *The History of Gulag*, 29.

<sup>533</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

have their own cinema and newspaper. The food is better than for other peoples and the kitchens are clean... For murder they get 8 years of prison. At the end of 5 months their record is examined and they get a leave of 8-10 days to go home. In short, Dr. Graham concluded, “they are satisfied in the prison; they have their work, get their pay and have their liberty just as if they were outside of it.”<sup>534</sup>

The American diplomatic observers were sufficiently astute to recognize propaganda and disinformation when they saw it. Particularly, the staff in Riga, did not take occasionally discordant accounts such as the one furnished by Dr. Graham seriously and dismissed them outright. For genuine information, they often relied on eyewitnesses, or at the very least, critical individuals for whom Russia was more than just a once in a lifetime travel destination. And these sources almost ubiquitously displayed consistency and contained details that could not be provided by naïve tourists or fearful reporters. The depiction of the conditions in Solovetski Island, prepared by a Riga section staff member based on a “highly confidential source” corresponded with the other accounts provided by escapee and returning prisoners. This source, corroborating the account by Pärli, identified Fyodor Eichmanns as the head of the Solovetski Prison Camps, appointed to the position thanks to his services as a commander of the Bolshevik regiments in Siberia during the Civil War. According to the report, the prisoners were barely clad and slowly starving, while scurvy and typhus killed thousands each year. Minor infraction were punished with severe measures which frequently involved standing in cold during winter and with mosquitoes during summer. The mortality rate particularly increased during winter

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<sup>534</sup> Washburn to Stimson, November 1, 1931, RG 59, File #861.5017/363.

with 5-7 bodies taken to mortuary every day. Because of icy ground the bodies were not buried but placed “simply under piles of snow from which the wind blows over them; there protrude here and there limbs of the dead people.” In the spring when snow melted the bodies were then buried. “Prisoners are not allowed to go home until the work is finished. Self-cutters are denied medical help and are driven to work with bleeding fingers. Daily work lasts 16 hours.” The reporter then told the story of a chemist named Lendurd Eskuson who maintained interest in chemical reactions, simple liquid acids, experimenting and showing them to other prisoners. The officials soon became weary of scientist Eskuson. On a routine day, he was sent to work for timber cutting – when he excused himself for the reason of illness, the guards named Zhilko and Moskalenko beat him to death.<sup>535</sup>

Among the prisoner population which contained “cripples, blinds and mentally unsound people”, there was a particularly high number of religious clerks who were ordinarily respected by their prison mates. Russian Orthodox, Greek Catholic and Roman Catholic priests who populated the prison camps, were also the most functional representatives of the ‘community’. The same report described Orthodox bishop of Riazan Gleb as a street cleaner, Bishop Gennadius storekeeper, and Bishop Hilarion as working in fisherman’s artel. The presence of the religious clerics in the concentration camps were profusely corroborated by the reports from religious organizations worldwide which frequently claimed of the disappearance of their affiliate pastors and priests in the hands of the GPU. Both in despatches from the American envoys abroad and letters to the American president reflected a growing concern among the Western faithful for the fate of their Christian brethren the land of

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<sup>535</sup> Coleman to Stimson, March 18, 1929, RG 59, File #861.131/9.

Communism. Bringing attention to the deportation of Lutheran Bishop Malmgren to the Solovetski camps, the National Lutheran Council wrote to president Herbert Hoover stating that he was a “godly man of learning and consecration, who we know has been scrupulously careful about mixing into politics...”<sup>536</sup> But it would be erroneous to presume that mass arrests of bishops, pastors, priests, rabbis and mullahs had to do with the religious figures’ involvement in politics.

The drive toward collectivization was accompanied by severe repression against religion in its own right. The essence of Stalin’s Five-Year Plan was a concerted assault against the peasant tradition. A strong part of that tradition was also the religiosity of the peasant. If the old muzhik were to be destroyed, so would the church in which he worshipped. The Soviet ideological conviction in the social regimentation of man and confidence in their ability to create man anew was a significant part of this drive.<sup>537</sup> Even though, since its inception the Communist regime harbored particularly hostile attitude toward the “opium of the masses,” as Karl Marx once labeled religion, anti-religious activities of the Soviet government acquired a particularly vicious character with the ascent of collectivization. By late 1920s, the diplomatic despatches were awash with news from Soviet Russia regarding the Communists’ renewed and vigorous assaults against all forms of religious expression in public venues. The Fourteenth Congress of the Soviets of the RSFSR decreed on May 18, 1929 amended the Constitution to declare atheism the official creed to the RSFSR, thus depriving “the religious bodies of the freedom of religious

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<sup>536</sup> National Lutheran Council to U.S. President Herbert Hoover, February 7, 1930, RG 59, File #861.404/285.

<sup>537</sup> See Daniel Peris, *Storming the Heavens: The Soviet League of the Militant Godless* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998), 229.

propaganda and give anti-religious propaganda the sanction of the state.” To this end, the Soviets inaugurated the Union of Militant Atheists charged with confiscation of church bells and secularization of church premises. On August 27, 1929, the Union of People’s Commissars issued a resolution on the uninterrupted workweek, “which it was expressly stressed in the press, was expected to render difficult the observance of Sunday, Saturday and Friday by the Christians, Jews and the Mohammedans respectively.” According to the despatchers, Soviet newspaper *Pravda* announced the measure to be a severe blow to “religious obscurantism.”<sup>538</sup>

The despatches from Riga frequently referred to the wealth of editorials and reports from leading Soviet newspapers to inform Washington about the scope of the anti-religion campaign. The anti-religious hysteria whipped up in the Soviet press contained features very similar to the kinds of attacks that targeted the Soviet regime’s other actual and perceived enemies in the past: It was always about toilers and laborers insistently demanding that the Soviet government come to their aid and fend off the enemies of the revolution. The December 26, 1929, issue of *Izvestia* carried precisely one such report in which the laborers “insistently demand the closing of churches, synagogues and mosques, and the confiscation of church bells.” As to why laborers should be so keen on the confiscation of church bells remains unclear. What was clear, however, was that the Soviet authorities were genuinely committed to the destruction of a social phenomenon which even the most megalomaniacal tyrants in the mankind’s history did not dare to attempt. The organ of the Communist youth *Komsomol* featured an editorial entitled “Religion as a

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<sup>538</sup> Coleman to Stimson, January 15, 1930, RG 59, File #861.404/283.

Factor Retarding the Execution of the Five-Year Plan” in which the target was not just the religion but anyone who did not enthusiastically share the official position of the Party on this matter: “We assert that religion is a factor retarding the progress of the five-year plan. He who tries to deny this is sliding down into the bog of conciliation, he is practically an opportunist, retarding and frustrating the work of the Party and of the labor classes.” Quoting Lenin about the need for “more energetic struggle against religion,” the authors of the editorial appeared particularly resentful of the citizens’ continued attachment to celebrating the Christmas holiday. For this occasion, the Association of the Militant Godless approved several anti-Christmas slogans which read: “Christ’s Peace camouflages the counter-revolution of the kulaks!”

“The followers of priests and sectarians are the agents of the kulak and nepmen!”

“We are building a new world without priests, and without belief in God, on the basis of collective, genuinely Communistic labor!”<sup>539</sup>

The newspaper that drew particular attention of the American observers was *Bezbozhnik* (Godless) which regularly monitored the achievements of the Communist regime in the fight against religion. What made *Bezbozhnik* stand out were both its informative quality and penchant for the absurd. Where else could the reader find out about the opening of a club for national minorities in the former synagogue upon the demand of the “toiling Jews”? Report after report from *Bezbozhnik* conveyed the closures of churches, synagogues and mosques, as the houses of worship became turned into communist clubs, entertainment centers, electrical power stations, locksmiths, cottonseed warehouses or granaries. The American legation in Riga

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<sup>539</sup> Ibid.

based its report on “a good source” stating that by early 1930’s, 364 Orthodox churches, 38 monasteries, 59 synagogues, 38 mosques, 43 protestant meeting houses had been shut down.<sup>540</sup> The Soviets were not committed to physical destruction of religion alone, but to its total liquidation in the minds that were supposedly in the process of being cleansed from the baggage of the past. Thus anti-religious propaganda displayed itself through the cinematic art. Not long after the Soviet movie-makers had learned how to use the video-camera they were busy churning out movies that attacked all religion. By 1931, The Georgian State Motion Picture Industry released “The God of War,” the Uzbekkino had produced “From Under the Arches of the Mosque,” and Goskino authored “The Cross and the Mauser.”<sup>541</sup>

In his study of the Soviet League of Atheist Militants which sponsored the publication of *Bezbozhnik*, historian Daniel Peris focuses on various weaknesses and flaws of the organization which, in his judgment, ultimately failed to achieve its stated objectives. “Make no mistake: many millions who might have believed in God under a continuation of the Old Regime lost their faith in this period; other found faith in Stalin or Socialism, or in nothing at all,” he allows. “The League, however, played no substantial role in these developments.”<sup>542</sup> It is quite possible that the foreign observers’ frequent and unavoidable reliance on the written word could have obfuscated their ability to fully grasp the effectiveness of the organization or its newspaper vis-a vis the populace. Yet the same could be said about almost any Soviet bureaucracy. The dysfunctions of the state institutions often reflected the dysfunctions the quixotic Leninist ideology at work and the Soviet society at large. It

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<sup>540</sup> Ibid.

<sup>541</sup> Coleman to Stimson, January 8, 1930, RG 59, File #861.404/343.

<sup>542</sup> Daniel Peris, *Storming the Heavens*, 225.



is significant that in Peris' own judgment "the regime's anti-religious stance was not a mere formality. With only temporary respites, the Soviet regime attacked religion ruthlessly in the cities and later with even greater intensity in the countryside."<sup>543</sup>

To be sure, those who did not play along paid the price. As the Soviet authorities began running out of the old nemesis of the regime such as tsarist sympathizers, minority nationalists and bourgeois elements, the religious leaders comprised a significant category in the Soviet penal system that imprisoned tens of thousands of political prisoners (the Soviet government actually did not flinch from labeling them as such -- *politzakliuchenniye*). At times, as it was in the case of Catholic Archbishop of Latvian nationality Slosken, "Bishops representing foreign nations were released from prison in exchange for captured Communist spies." Initially arrested in Mogilev and then shipped to Solovetski, Slosken made living by catching fish before numerous letters and pressure from abroad resulted in his release.<sup>544</sup> But most, like the Lutheran pastor Albert Koch, did not fare as well. Sentenced to death by the Soviet court for counter-revolutionary activities, Koch's family of four children, mother and wife had been shipped to a labor camp in White Sea.<sup>545</sup> Speaking of persecution against Lutherans "unparalleled anywhere in the world", FWB Coleman noted the story of the Lettish Lutheran Congregation whose pastor and membership faced severe forms of harassment from the Soviet authorities. Both priests being considered as "social useless, even noxious," the pastor was not allowed to obtain housing in the city, nearby the church in which he served. Pastor Zalit was forced to reside in the suburbs from where with great difficulties he

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<sup>543</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>544</sup> Robert P. Skinner, U.S. Minister in Latvia, to Stimson, March 30, 1933, RG 59, File #861.404/350.

<sup>545</sup> Coleman to Stimson, March 24, 1930, RG 59, File #861.404/306.

commuted to the church while the membership of the parish had dwindled down to 60 individuals under the threat of imprisonment, dismissal from work or at the very least, becoming a social outcast.<sup>546</sup>

The Soviet campaign against religion may have echoed the trials faced by Christians under the early Roman empire. But the head of the Patriarchal Orthodox Church in Russia, or whatever was left of it, in an interview to *Izvestia* “virtually denied all claims of persecution stating that the religious people were better off now than before the Revolution.” As for the deportation of pastors and priests into concentration camps, Metropolitan Sergius ascribed this to the individual motives and cases which, according to one example which cited, involved not paying rent on time. “Millions of active members of our church, who are toilers, enjoy all rights, including suffrage, conferred upon them by the Constitution. Those church members support us materially and we are not in need of any aid, least of all interference from abroad,” the Russian religious leader stated.<sup>547</sup> The despatch sent out of Riga also addressed the response written by Russian Orthodox representatives abroad who denounced Metropolitan Sergius’ “lies and libel against the Church, which was plainly evident to himself and to all believers.” The point by point refutation of the patriarch’s claims were laid out in the Paris based *Poslednie Novosti*.<sup>548</sup>

Certain outside observers ascribed the relatively quiet destruction of Christianity in Russia to the innate nature of the Russian person who was never religious in the true sense. As early as the revolutionary period, the American

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<sup>546</sup> Coleman to Stimson, January 18, 1930, RG 59, File #861.404/284.

<sup>547</sup> Coleman, referring to February 19, 1930 issue of *Izvestia*, to Stimson, February 28, 1930, RG 59, File #861.404/299.

<sup>548</sup> Coleman to Stimson, June 15, 1930, RG 59, File #861.404/322.

Ambassador David Francis observed in astonishment how the droshki drivers who had previously halted whenever passing by a church and piously drawing a cross, easily abandoned the practice once the Bolsheviks took charge.<sup>549</sup> Also, interestingly, many of the reports addressing the persecution and struggle of the Christians in Soviet Russia concerned with the representatives of the Catholic and Protestant clergy, not the Orthodox who comprised the overwhelming portion of the population. Although the Orthodox church suffered the brunt of the Kremlin's concerted assault against religion, some Western observers brought the Russian Orthodox population's commitment to the Church into question. "The peasants never harbored much love for the Tsar whom they referred as *batyushka* (father) or the Church which erroneously came to define Russian peasant," argued Maurice Hindus: "He is a pagan through and through. His attendance at church is in answer to an emotional appeal. He knows nothing about the service, about religion, or the teachings of Christ." In Hindus' opinion, the Russian Church long ago ceased to be a vital force for it had sunk to such a condition of bigotry and illiteracy that it had "no real hold upon the hearts of the people except through emotionalism."<sup>550</sup> If that was the case, then the statements by the head of the Russian Patriarchal Church Sergius went some ways to substantiate the argument.

In the case of the Muslim population of the Soviet Union, which numbered in tens of millions, the campaign against religion often came upon stiffer resistance. Whereas in the atomized urban Russian cities, the sense of community was too fragile to hold up against pressure from the state, in rural Muslim villages and towns, the

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<sup>549</sup> David Francis, *Russia from the American Embassy*, 329.

<sup>550</sup> Hall to Stimson, September 15, 1928, RG 59, File #861.00/1296.

destruction of mosques frequently led to riots and violent retributions. In heavily Muslim populated Central Asia and Caucasus, the Soviet efforts to defang the community of the faithful ran into great difficulties. Reporting from Tabriz about the disturbances in the Soviet Caucasus, the American envoy Henry Villard attributed the uprising among the Muslim inhabitants of the Caucasus to *religious persecution*, alongside “scarcity of food.”<sup>551</sup> The Polish Consul General in Tiflis wrote of strong Turkish influence among the Muslim population of Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic. He described an incident in the Ajar village of Chulo where two Communist brothers entered a mosque and raped a worshipping woman there. In response the village inhabitants murdered the brothers and their mother and seized the control of the village. When Soviet authorities sent troops to quell the uprising, the people encountered with gunfire forcing the Reds to retreat to Batum. Later in conference of the local Communist Party, the Georgian communists would emphasize the importance of caution in dealing with the “fanatical people.”<sup>552</sup>

If the intention was the liquidate religious practice in public venue, the Communist leaders somewhat succeeded. But erasing faith from the hearts and memories of the Soviet citizenry required more profound effort – the upbringing of a new generation of Communists unbound by the traditions of their forefathers and godless, as the title of the well-known newspaper professed. Returning from an extensive visit to numerous Soviet cities, R. K. Bonnett of Washburn-Wilson Seed Company of Idaho reported about serious efforts by the Communist leadership to fill the young minds with propaganda and thus inducing xenophobia and deep hatred of

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<sup>551</sup> Villard to Stimson, April 25, 1930, RG 59, File #861.00/11430.

<sup>552</sup> Stetson to Stimson, June 4, 1929, RG 59, File #861.00/11364.

capitalism. Bonnett recalled a startling encounter with a Russian boy who asked him about American boy scouts and then added: “Kick American boy scouts in the belly for me.”<sup>553</sup> In a “Letter from Moscow” published in *Tallinnische Zeitung*, the author was among many foreign observers who noted that the youth has had been “brought up completely in the spirit of Communism; it does not know what is taking place beyond the borders of the Soviet Union.”<sup>554</sup>

In August of 1932, the recently appointed American minister in Latvia, Robert Skinner, conducted a survey among the members of the Russian Section requesting them to submit analytical response to the question “Are Russian happier now than before?” The answers were strikingly similar to each other in that almost every staff member emphasized the growing significance of the Communist youth and their potential to reshape Russia, though not necessarily in a positive way. Basing his own memorandum to Washington on the survey, Skinner noted: “All observers seem to be satisfied that the new generation born or matured since the revolution, which knows nothing and apparently cares nothing about the situation prior to the revolution, a generation unable to visit the outside world rejoices in the belief that Russia is a highly favored country destined to lead the world.” A young staffer of the section, George Kennan, recognized the power of the youth yet dismissed its capacity to leave a lasting legacy in the history of Russia and the world. “The romance of economic development has been known to inspire young people in other countries than Russia,” Kennan wrote. But according to him, that enthusiasm would eventually wane and fade away insofar as it lacked a “permanent foundation” and “any particular promise

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<sup>553</sup> John L. Bouchal, U.S. Consul in Helsingfors, Finland, to Stimson, July 25, 1933, RG 59, File #861.5017/164.

<sup>554</sup> Carlson to Stimson, April 14, 1932, RG 59, File #861.00/493.

for the future.” “Totally untrained to think for himself, unaccustomed to fighting his own mental battles and facing his own problems, guided neither by tradition, example, ideals, nor the personal responsibility which acts as a steadying influence in other countries,” Kennan conveyed, “the young Russian will probably be as helpless and miserable as a babe in the woods.”<sup>555</sup>

When it came to predicting Russia’s future or grasping its present, some of Kennan’s colleagues displayed less certainty. Despite mountains of information about the Soviet Union at their disposal which led Skinner to express doubt “whether any other government was in possession of a more complete, and on a whole reliable documentation on the subject,” even the hardened veterans of the Russian affairs had difficulty assessing the basic question of happiness in the USSR. Once having functioned as a leading diplomat in the American occupied Archangel, Felix Cole was puzzled by the contrast between extreme statements regarding the conditions in Russia and the people’s state of happiness. “I read the reports by American visitors avidly. They are both extreme... they either say what they went in thinking, or his statements are controlled by whether or not he wants to go back in again at an early or later date.” Cole believed that the peasants in Russia were better off from the end of the War Communism until the beginning of the Five Year Plan. In his judgment, it was wrong for foreign observers to assume that the ability of the Soviet regime to retain power stemmed from the people’s support for it. As for the all the talk about cultural revival under Communists, Cole did not consider “the existing reglamentation of all intellectual life in the Soviet Union to be conducive to the development of art, literature and music.” Cole’s fellow analyst William Gwynn

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<sup>555</sup> Robert P. Skinner, U.S. Minister in Latvia, to Stimson, August 19, 1932, RG 59, File #861.00/496.

seemed to concur: “Whether Russians are happy I don’t know. But I do know that I should not be happy under their rule of life. And I do know that most travelers, if not all, when they leave Russia do so with a distinct sense of relief.” Yet another analyst, Loy Henderson, pointing to the insufficient level of personal contact with the Russian populace, held his verdict observing that the Soviet experiment demanded “years of accomplishment before it could be judged.”<sup>556</sup>

Indeed the Soviet government’s contextualization of the deadly campaign against the peasantry within the frames of a struggle to build a new, better, more industrialized society, at least in the minds of some observers, mitigated the shocking reality of the measures taken by the Soviet government and in some ways, could have prevented the issuance of a definitive verdict on the ‘promises of Communism’. Like Henderson, many, while seeing and even recognizing the transpiring catastrophe, abstained from a conclusive judgment as if awaiting a particular date when the historical truth would be revealed in one cathartic instance. Louis Fisher, the Moscow correspondent of the left-liberal *Nation* magazine, in a conversation with the American diplomats in Riga, chided them for inability to get as good information as the Germans and spoke positively of the Soviet experiment.<sup>557</sup> According to him, the population increase was the big factor behind the industrial and agrarian policies of the Soviet state which in turn intensified its agricultural reforms in order to meet the demands of the growing population. Around the time millions of Soviet citizens starved, Fisher wrote that “a walk through Moscow streets would convince even the skeptic that living conditions have improved and that store stocks have been

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<sup>556</sup> Ibid.

<sup>557</sup> Coleman to Stimson, December 15, 1930, RG 59, File #861.5017/209.

replenished.”<sup>558</sup> Like Duranty, Fisher played an important role in shaping American public perception about the Soviet Union and did so to the benefit of the Communist regime. As a Moscow correspondent for a magazine with substantial readership among the intellectual elite, Louis Fisher wrote reports that almost ubiquitously placed the Soviet practices in a positive light. While his actions were often similar to those of Duranty, however his motives contained some measure of idealism regarding the just future which the Soviets claimed to be building. Born to a family of Jewish emigrants from Russia, Fisher experienced harsh childhood and like many of his peers disappointed by the calamitous effects of the First World War on the Western society, found ideological refuge in Marxism. It would take many years before Louis Fisher would come out with *mea culpa* and denounce the Soviet regime.<sup>559</sup> However, during collectivization, Fisher willingly contributed to the Soviet machinery of deception by denying the deadly realities around him.

As for Walter Duranty of the *New York Times*, his reports were upbeat as usual. “Things here are exciting,” he jovially wrote to the Jacob Schurman in Germany, “Stalin switched the whole works two or three days after I arrived and startled everyone – especially the younger tovarisches.... Anyways, things have loosened up in consequence and it looks as if the Spring sowing might go all right. I at least remain optimistic...”<sup>560</sup> Duranty’s optimism, if ever genuine, was misplaced. The sowing of 1930 did not “go all right.” Nor did the sowings of 1931 and 1932

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<sup>558</sup> James Crowl, *Angels in Stalin’s Paradise: Western Reporters in Soviet Russia, 1917 to 1937, A Case Study of Louis Fischer and Walter Duranty* (Washington DC: University Press of America, 1982), 122.

<sup>559</sup> For detailed account of Fisher’s account of his disillusionment with Communism, in addition to those of other intellectuals, see Richard Crossman ed., *The God That Failed* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001).

<sup>560</sup> Schurman to Stimson, March 26, 1930, RG 59, File #861.5017/141.



when at the latter year the famine in the Soviet countryside reached its peak. In fact, already by 1930, nearly every traveler to the Soviet Union who had no vested financial or other interests in dealings with the Soviet government reported the worsening of the conditions. M.M. Klemmer of Standard Electric Company, based on his observations in Moscow and Leningrad, spoke of serious shortages of food and the use of ration cards for nearly every basic necessity: “The reason for this”, he explained, “is in the policy of socialization by the Government, ruining the peasants’ farms and confiscating of what they call “the excess” of the grain in the country... The population is kept in a condition of half-hunger, receiving, the working people only on an average about 400-600 grams of bread and 100 grams of meat per day.”<sup>561</sup>

Edward Deuss of the International News Service, in a call to the American diplomat in Berlin, described the situation as “extremely bad – the worst that he has witnessed since his transfer to Russia in 1926.” Regardless of what the Soviets said, Deuss went on, “the production was at a low point and that finished goods had almost completely disappeared.” In Deuss’ view, the Five-Year Plan was a disastrous failure. According to him, “the number of people jailed in the last three years [was] fantastic, and that most people confessed to just about any charge in order to escape exile to Siberia.”<sup>562</sup> Even the usually soft-spoken Samuel Harper of the University of Chicago recalled his last trip to the Soviet Union in summer of 1930 as “the most exhausting and expensive trip I’ve had in fourteen times that I’ve visited Russia during the last 25 years.” While he thought that the conditions were not yet as bad as those during the Civil War, he acknowledged that many around him were “starting to

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<sup>561</sup> Carlson to Stimson, January 22, 1930, RG 59, File #861.00/415.

<sup>562</sup> Schurman to Stimson, January 14, 1931, RG 59, File #861.5017/214.

talk about it.” Unless the Soviet government took urgent measures to stop the wheat export, he warned, the whole Bolshevik edifice would implode over the starving populace. In one of the strongest statements he had yet made toward the address of the Soviet leadership, Harper concluded: “The next months may show more clearly whether the leader may not have put too heavy a strain on the country, in their stubborn, revolutionary zeal having passed the hour of midnight.”<sup>563</sup>

The Soviet authorities’ zealous campaign of grain requisition and collectivization intensified the famine in the agricultural regions of the country. However, if the focal point of the Soviet industrialization were the factories and the main beneficiaries were meant to be the workers, to some foreign observers, even there the Soviet authorities appeared to be grossly mishandling the affairs of the industrial infrastructure. In comparison to the situation in the Soviet countryside – from which by early 1930 the Soviet government essentially banned foreign visitors, the state of Soviet industry has been more thoroughly documented by the Americans who lived and worked in Russia. Thanks to the Soviet government’s eager campaign to duplicate the American level of productivity (a campaign known as *Amerikanizatsiya*), numerous American nationals worked in Soviet factories. They were the ones who came to the USSR under the aegis of the New York based Soviet American Trade Organization - Amtorg - whose primary task was to attract American industrial experts into the Soviet industry. Though with varying degree of contempt for the Soviet misrule and Communism in general, these Americans’ observations were very similar, and also, provide valuable insight into the Soviet way of life and work during the First Five Year Plan.

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<sup>563</sup> Coleman to Stimson, August 11, 1930, RG 59, File #861.5017/167-68.

Shortly after signing a contract with Amtorg in December of 1930 to help Soviet with engineering work, F. Moritz Mueller of the Upson Company arrived in Moscow in May of 1931. He was almost immediately appalled. “Their standards of life and actions were so different from ours that I felt as though I had landed on another planet where the laws of human behavior with which I was familiar did not apply. I must discard mine, and learn an entirely new set.... I soon learned to distrust everybody.” Mueller ascribed the deep mistrust in the Russian society to the Soviet government’s tyrannical style of governance. “I attribute this trait,” Mueller wrote, “to the close personal supervision of their lives by the government, through GPU. They’re constantly terrified by fear of arrest and imprisonment or death, on the charge of implication in counter-revolutionary activities.” By its very nature, the Soviet government always stifled individual initiative and promoted submissive workers whereby “the cream of brains was skimmed off and thrown away.” Nor it is that Mueller harbored particularly kind feelings for the ordinary Russians. “One of the elementary rules in pure and applied science is to experiment with only one variable at a time. The Russians, least competent by character and in experience to create anything new politically, industrially, or socially, are carrying on the most advanced experiments, in all three fields at once.” According to the American engineer, the Russian mind was “immature combined with Oriental mystery and shrewdness.” He quoted “one Russian cosmopolitan” who once observed: The Russians are children, but they are damned clever children.” At the end of his report, Mueller outlined five possibilities none of which bore a promise for the Russians’ future. The only positive outcome which Mueller could see, was the possibility of Georgia or Ukraine breaking

away from the USSR, since at least the Georgians were “intellectually superior to the average Russians and were thus represented in high position in the Soviet government.”<sup>564</sup>

Another Amtorg contractor, Ed L. Addleton of the Gisholt Machine Company, working for the Traktorstroy wrote back to his superiors: “The conditions I saw in Russia are so heartbreaking that I would gladly forget them if it were possible, for even in the worst days of the war conditions were better than they are in sections of Russia that I saw.” Conveying his depression and the extreme lack of food, Addleton wrote that he had lost ten pounds since his arrival in Russia a few weeks ago. Like F. Moritz Mueller, Addleton was certain that none of the Soviet projects including the one in which he was involved would succeed. “The moral is extremely low... It cannot go on like this,” he wrote.<sup>565</sup> Another engineer Octave Liner expressed deep regrets for coming to Russia called it a big mistake. As far as he was concerned, the Soviet system of governance was evil and the American should have no truck with it. R. B. Hosken of the Sullivan Machinery Company described the atmosphere at his workplace as one of terror. Especially following the Shakhty trials in which the Soviet leadership executed a number of engineers under the charges of espionage, Hosken’s coworkers, the very people with whom he had to cooperate in order to do his job, avoided contacts with him, because he was a foreigner. “They were obviously frightened with exposure to contact with foreigners such as ourselves. They never talked with us without witnesses being present and they were afraid to

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<sup>564</sup> Kelley to Stimson, December 24, 1930, GR 59, General Records of State Dept. Office of E. European Affairs, USSR Section, Report of Visitors to Russia, 1928-1930, Box 5.

<sup>565</sup> Kelley to Stimson, June 27, 1931, GR 59, General Records of State Dept. Office of E. European Affairs, USSR Section, Report of Visitors to Russia, 1931, Box 5.

make definitive statements on even the most trivial subjects.” After work, the foreigners felt as lepers in the Middle Ages for nobody dared to approach or converse with them.<sup>566</sup>

There was a consensus among American experts working in Russia that whatever the Soviet government was trying to accomplish, it was obstructing its own path by self-defeating measures. The situation in Russia, from an industrial point of view is hopeless, stated C.F. Smith and R.S. Grieves who worked as industrial advisers for the Stalingrad Tractor Company. Citing the shortage of raw materials, the Americans told their interlocutor in Riga that the factory function at a 25 % level capacity. In the opinion of the American engineers the root cause of the problem was the government’s destructive interference and counter-productive policies. They told of a contemporary joke where in response to criticism from the GPU about the factory work, workers responded saying that if factories possessed as many engineers as the GPU, they would get the job done. Fred R. Hess of Berwyn Illinois, who was employed in Kazakhstan building flour mills similarly appraised the desperate financial situation of the Soviet government. Hess used familiar terms to explain the Soviet realities to his American interlocutors: “Take any American firm and clear out of its offices all responsible educated, efficient, common-sense persons, and put in their places men who in the U.S. dig sewers; take your efficient persons, put detectives on their heels, give them an extreme inferiority and fear complex, put them as subordinates under the ‘wop’ directors, and you have a true picture of the Russian

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<sup>566</sup> Ibid.

factory and industrial administration. The psychology is purely oriental. All sorts of tricks and chicanery are necessary in this scheme of things.”<sup>567</sup>

Not all Americans employed at Soviet factories were fully candid about their experiences in the Communist country, and even gave some indication for the reasons of their inability to tell the whole story. Charles Harry of Oglebay Norton Company in Cleveland spoke of his work at the mines in Krivoi Rog, south of Moscow. While mentioning the full employment and excellent food in his location, Harry also noted that there wasn't much on which he could spend his 125 rubles. He added that the crops had been terrible in the countryside and that the “political control in Soviet Russia was very effective.” Harry's company's office was located near a police court. Every day he saw individuals being sentenced and sent somewhere as the families were being broken. He tried to get his Russian colleagues tell him what happened to which they would usually respond: Bad business! According to the American diplomat in Finland, shortly after speaking to him, Charles Harry returned to Russia, “but prior to his return he said if he were not returning to Russia he would feel freer to give a vivid description of conditions concerning everything including the plight of the Ukrainian farmers.”<sup>568</sup>

Others were either misled or simply lied. Frederick Bishop of the Universal Wendy returned from his five month stay in Soviet Russia with a glowing report about the “remarkable” achievements of the Communist government. Excitedly speaking of his conversations with various high Soviet officials, Bishop expressed confidence in Moscow's agricultural policies and even went further blaming the

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<sup>567</sup> Schurman to Stimson, April 13, 1931, RG 59, File #861.5017/239.

<sup>568</sup> Wilkinson to Stimson, May 25, 1931, RG 59, File #861.5017/265.

United States for needlessly complicating things. As for the Soviet people, in Bishop's judgment, "the beneficial effects to a country of the development of the heavy industries was not readily apparent to the masses." Anyone "with the ability to make and who have made extensive penetrating and unbiased studies within that country," Bishop believed, would recognize this reality. Based on his conversation with Kalinin, Bishop assured his American audience that the living standards in Russia were increasing day by day and the people had more *valiuta* (foreign currency). Indicative of his close contacts with top Soviet officials, the American engineer even employed Joseph Stalin's favored sentence starters: "It is a well-known fact that Russia practices self-criticism to a great extent than any other country in the world. The Russian papers give full publicity to all national shortcomings and failures with a view toward remedying situation." Bishop felt that "the present form of government is undoubtedly the best Russia has ever had though it would not fit into a country such as ours." He yet added that "the efficacy of national planning was now recognized by all."<sup>569</sup>

In a Soviet published newspaper, Abraham Geier, a Chicago tool and die maker who came alongside 25 Americans to work at the electric factory in the Soviet capital, Elektrozavod in 1931, was reported to have compared his impressions of he Soviet life with that under the tsarist regime. Having been jailed in old Russia for nearly three years, Geier found everything about Soviet Russia wonderful. "No more gendarmes, no more fear of officers or secret police. It is a free world!" he exclaimed. Instead he proceeded talking about the effects of the Great Depression in

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<sup>569</sup> Frederick Bishop to Kelley, November 13, 1931, GR 59, General Records of State Dept. Office of E. European Affairs, USSR Section, Report of Visitors to Russia, 1931, Box 5.

his native of Chicago and how the unemployed Americans envied the Geier group for heading to their Soviet promiseland where everyone was guaranteed work. On their way to Russia the Geier group passed through the Baltics where they were told about the starvation in Russia. Having just arrived at the railway station, Geier denounced these reports by stating: “Everybody seems warmly dressed – and there’s plenty of food. Stealing one’s clothes and danger of starvation? That just describes the situation on the other side of the Soviet Union.”<sup>570</sup>

For Americans who had lived in Russia for more than a week, the Soviet realities were entirely different. In a special memorandum prepared for Robert Kelly of the State Department, an American resident of Moscow wrote about the existence of “virtual famine of consumer goods in Russia.” “Nearly all American who stay in Russia for any length of time lose weight substantially,” the memo went on. Despite the privileges afforded to them as the citizens of an economically advanced and superior nation such as the United States, many Americans who resided in Russia for longer terms experienced great hardships.<sup>571</sup> Writing from Vladivostok, in Eleanore L. Pray noted the “terrible” quality of life. “We haven’t had white bread for over a year and half. The bread that was available tasted like anything except bread. Personally, I think we ate up the remains of everything that has been collected all over ex-Russia from forgotten corners – some in saw mills.” With the exception of vegetables and wines, she wrote, nothing was available in stores. “Everything possible is sent abroad without the slightest regard to hungry people in the country.”

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<sup>570</sup> Kelley to Stimson, October 17, 1931, GR 59, General Records of State Dept. Office of E. European Affairs, USSR Section, Report of Visitors to Russia, 1931, Box 5.

<sup>571</sup> Confidential memorandum for Robert F. Kelley, 1932, GR 59, General Records of State Dept. Office of E. European Affairs, USSR Section, Report of Visitors to Russia, 1932., Box 5.



According to her, the only kinds of food allowed for local stores were those which were too spoiled or unfit for export. Still, as an American, her bread and butter was assured, because she had a steady source of income from outside unlike the locals who had nobody to count on and starved. In the midst of all this shortage and hunger, Mrs. Pray noted with irony how the front pages of the Soviet newspapers carried stories of starvation in British India due to the heavy government taxation. All this while heavy government taxation had brought farming in the Soviet Union to bankruptcy whereby horses were being slaughtered for use in sausages, dubiously named Budyenny sausages (Budyenny was the commander of the Soviet cavalry forces during the revolutionary period). “What I have written is but a colorless picture of the actualities but unless one is here living among the people one can get no conception of them,” Pray concluded her letter.<sup>572</sup>

The Americans who experienced life in other remote corners of the Soviet Union reported similar levels of deprivation and want. J. Henry Moore of Lancaster, South Carolina, wrote of his experience in Tajikistan where the living conditions were, in his words, deplorable. “Unless one has seen the way people live it is hard to believe that conditions could be so bad. Russians in Moscow are the same way, but because of the presence of foreigners things look better.” The inhumane Soviet policies targeting the population had produced a deep level of mistrust toward the government. “The moral sense of the present government of USSR seems nil,” Moore wrote. As far as he was concerned, the Communist as it existed in Soviet

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<sup>572</sup> Eleanor L. Pray to J. K. Caldwell, Esq., June 16, 1930, GR 59, General Records of State Dept. Office of E. European Affairs, USSR Section, Report of Visitors to Russia, 1928-1930, Box 5.

Russia was the “greatest evil influence” in the world and had to be confronted as such.<sup>573</sup>

Another American, J. Samuel Berell of Tulsa, Oklahoma, who spent forty days in Turkestan concurred with J. Henry Moore’s view of Soviet Communism and its dangers for the West. Those who discount the possibility of Communism’s export into America, Berell warned, appear certain. “Yet less than fifteen years ago a person traveling in Russia, with its beautiful cities, its wonderful buildings, art galleries, factories, intelligentsia would have considered anyone a lunatic who predicted conditions as they actually are there today.” This state controlled and regulated every act and tried to control and direct every thought of each individual. Everything was being falsified about the outside world. In terms of political leadership, Berell wrote, Joseph Stalin was “the acknowledged, actual Dictator of the country with more autocratic authority than has ever been held by any monarch since the days of Genghiz Khan.” While the people starved, the Soviet army and security forces were well-fed and clothed. The vast security apparatus of the Soviet state had a crushing effect on the society. He added: “They are everywhere – see everything. The accused has no counsel – no trial – no witnesses in his behalf. Unless released, his fate is seldom known, whether it be jail, Siberia, or the firing squad. It is needless to add that people shiver at the very thought of the G.P.U.” In Turkestan itself, Berell wrote the people were divided into two categories: workers and non-workers – identification which mattered decisively when it came to allocation of food. The non-

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<sup>573</sup> J. Henry Moore to Kelley, February 11, 1931, GR 59, General Records of State Dept. Office of E. European Affairs, USSR Section, Report of Visitors to Russia, 1931, Box 5.

workers' rations of food in all varieties was significantly less than that of the workers whose numbers in a rural areas of Central Asia were small.<sup>574</sup>

By 1932, the conditions in the Soviet countryside had deteriorated to such extent that, there was a mass exodus of farmers and villagers into the city. As bad as the situation was in the cities, unlike villages, there were no scenes where people dropped dead in the streets due to starvation. In places such as Ukraine, North Caucasus and Kazakhstan, the assault against the village had made the choice of staying in the land of one's ancestors a matter of life and death. "The situation in the country districts is entirely different, reported anonymous author writing from Moscow in the Tallinn newspaper *Tallinnsche Zeitung*. "A steady flow of hungry people is under way towards Moscow. Coming mostly from the regions of Orel, Tula, Riazan, they say they are former 'kulaks' from whom everything has been taken and that they have come into the city in order not to starve in the country."<sup>575</sup> Professor Bruce Hopper who was in Moscow in July of 1932, reported the following: "In Ukraine, there is definite famine. Peasants come [to the cities] and sell old rags to buy a piece of bread. They will likely die after the food is finished."<sup>576</sup>

Due to this influx by starving "kulaks", the population of Moscow and other large cities were rapidly increasing, even though the cities clearly lacked any mechanism to cope with the situation. In response, the Soviet government instituted an internal passport system which basically banned villagers from leaving. Less than

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<sup>574</sup> J. Samuel Berell to Kelley, December 12, 1931, GR 59, General Records of State Dept. Office of E. European Affairs, USSR Section, Report of Visitors to Russia, 1931, Box 5.

<sup>575</sup> Carlson to Stimson, April 14, 1932, RG 59, File #861.00/493.

<sup>576</sup> Professor Bruce Hopper to Kelley, July 18, 1932, GR 59, General Records of State Dept. Office of E. European Affairs, USSR Section, Report of Visitors to Russia, 1932-33, Box 5.

hundred years after they had been emancipated by the order of Alexander II in 1861, the Russian peasants once again found themselves ensnared by the state. Though somewhat novel in outlook, the Communists' latest measure was the reenactment of an old policy by Tsar Ivan Grozny who in 1592 abolished the peasants' right to move and placed them in bondage to the land they did not own. Except, back then there was no OGPU rummaging through the peasants' homes and confiscating the very seeds and the cattle by which the peasants sustained themselves.

The Soviet ban on travel applied not only to the starving peasants attempting to escape, it also applied in reverse to those who wished to enter the famine zone, most particularly, to foreign travelers who wanted to observe the realities on the ground. The OGPU forces cordoned off the disaster zones to the outside observers. The only individuals with access to these areas were the Soviet government officials, be they party leaders, military officers or state media representatives, and most notably Walter Duranty, the correspondent of the New York Times. Unlike any other foreign journalist in the USSR, Walter Duranty enjoyed a very special status. He was the only journalist with a personal automobile in Moscow and had the longest tenure in the Soviet Union as a correspondent. In comparison to many of his colleagues, he appeared to have the confidence of the Soviet officials. And why not? After all, in his several years of reporting from the USSR, Duranty had hardly written anything negative about the Soviet practices. In most of his official conversations and newspaper reports, Duranty made a special effort to put a rational, if not a positive spin, to the actions of the Soviet government during collectivization. To be sure, the officials at the State Department and in the American embassies throughout the

region, almost everyone identified Duranty as someone with strong “pro-Soviet views.”

Even his excursion to the famished Soviet countryside did not end his streak of optimism in public. As Americans such as Hopper came to refer to Stalin’s USSR as Duranty’s Inferno, the *New York Times* reporter dismissed the avalanche of the reports about Soviet famine as a “mostly a bunk.” Duranty used nearly every expression in his literary arsenal, from “shortage” to “malnutrition” or “disease” to avoid the use of the word ‘famine’. During his trips to Rostov-on-Don, Duranty wrote stories headlined “Soviet is Winning the Faith of Peasants, “Members Enriched in Soviet Commune” and “Abundance Found in North Caucasus.”<sup>577</sup> Thus, at the height of the genocidal famine that ended millions of lives, thanks to the services of its correspondent in the USSR Walter Duranty, the largest newspaper in America failed to report the actual story and in fact, misled the public. In close company, however, Duranty was more honest about his findings. A year later at a dinner party by his colleagues at the New York Times, “Duranty described “picture of ghastly horror” in Ukraine , estimating that millions had died from the famine of the year before. “But Walter you don’t mean that literally, his colleague exclaimed. “Hell I don’t ... I’m being conservative ,” he replied and as if by a way of self-consolation, he added his famous truism: “But they’re only Russians.”<sup>578</sup> Yet, contrary to the expectations of many American observers of the Soviet Union, Walter Duranty’s star was just rising. And so was that of the Communist regime in its relations with the United States.

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<sup>577</sup> S. J. Taylor, *Stalin’s Apologist*, 219.

<sup>578</sup> *Ibid.*, 221-122.

## Chapter 6: End of the First Cold War: America Recognizes the Soviet Union

In 1933, the year of the American recognition of the world's only existing Communist state, the situation in the Soviet Union had not changed for the better; on the contrary, the acute famine in Ukraine and North Caucasus continued to claim hundreds of thousands of lives and the concentrations camps were being replenished with fresh reinforcements. What had changed, however, was the United States, hard-hit by the effects of the Great Depression. The collapse of the American financial markets in the Black October of 1929 did not only undermine public faith in President Herbert Hoover, known for his fierce opposition to Communism, it also undermined the Americans' belief in the ideals of *laissez-fair* capitalism and free market. With unemployment figures at record levels, by the time Franklin Delano Roosevelt swept into presidency, many in America had come to take interest in the statist endeavors carried out in the Soviet Union which appeared to guarantee employment and other government benefits for the citizens. The platform which won the presidency for FDR was a radical departure from the economic philosophy and the general worldview of his Republican predecessors. To be sure, FDR's New Deal – which dramatically enlarged the role of the state enterprises in the national economy – was the product of an era in which capitalism was out of fashion. Given the ascendant interest toward state socialism in the West, it is nevertheless remarkable how little influence did the actual conditions in the Soviet Union have on the new American leadership's approach toward the USSR. Under the Roosevelt administration, on the

face of considerable opposition from those who closely monitored the Soviet regime, Washington went to great lengths to accommodate Moscow and establish cordial relations. While certain bitterness between the two nations persisted at various levels for some time, the very first year of Roosevelt's presidency spelled the end of the first Cold War.

Incidentally, in contrast to previous years, the American knowledge about Soviet affairs dramatically increased in the year of recognition. This increase was due to two major factors: the Great Depression which forced thousands of *unskilled* American labor to go to the USSR in search of a better life, and paradoxically, the Soviet industrialization program which drew in *highly skilled* American experts. With regard to the former, the economic downturn had left many families desperate for work. The Communist propaganda seemed to have convinced some individuals to replace dashed illusions for the American dream with the Soviet one. Particularly vulnerable in this regard were the most recent immigrants, such as the Finnish-Americans, whose attachment to America was not yet as deep. The diplomatic despatches from Finland at this period are filled with the stories of those who came to the northern timberlands of the Soviet Union to lead a different life. And a different life it became.

Upon his escape from the Soviet Union in March of 1933, Finnish-American Eino Latvala was interviewed by the Central Detective Police in Helsingfors who passed on the content of the interrogation to the American legation in Finland. In the interview, Latvala regretfully spoke of the good life he left behind in America in search of what turned out to be a mirage. Having emigrated to the United States in

1914, Latvala had owned a car and enjoyed good living. But at the “instigation of a local Communist,” he decided to go to Soviet Russia. He worked at a Vilga forest camp as a chauffeur while his wife cooked at a local cafeteria. But the life was very hard “since there was a lack of the most necessary foodstuffs such as potatoes.” Without his wife, who provided the family with scraps from the kitchen of the cafeteria, Latvala stated, they would not have survived. While in the Soviet Union, his wife lost 170 pounds. Unlike his fellow Finns who had crossed the border illegally into the USSR and ended up working as slaves in the Soviet labor camps, Latvala’s family was lucky, because they still had their American passports which allowed them to leave the country as “conditions became intolerable.”<sup>579</sup>

Demonstrative of the similar trend was electrician Roini Elmer Skytte who was a second generation immigrant born to Finnish parents. When the Depression hit, his father was forced to sell the farm after which they both moved to the Soviet Union. He worked at the Matrosa station as an operator of electric generator producing current for lighting purposes, getting paid 180 rubles per month. He informed Finnish interrogators that 400 Americans worked alongside him in Karelia. Five months was all it took for Skytte to decide that he could no longer stay in that place. But in the course of those few months, he lost his 16-yr old daughter to scarlet fever and his wife developed scurvy due to extreme undernourishment. Describing things in Russia as “awry”, the engineer complained about the complete breakdown of the machinery and infrastructure. Echoing Eino Latvala, Skytte told the Finnish police about the story of about fifty Finns who had illegally crossed into the Soviet Union and were ordered “to do forestry work while being kept isolated.”

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<sup>579</sup> Bouchal to Cordell Hull, U.S. State Secretary, March 20, 1933, RG 59, File #861.5017/620.



As typical for returning immigrants – disappointed and destitute – Skytte’s return money had been sent from America.<sup>580</sup>

Carl Sjomán was another Finnish American, impoverished and awaiting for money from the United States to return, who came to the American legation in Helsingfors to renew his passport. Sjomán went to Russia with his mechanic father after they had both lost their jobs. Their first destination was the town of Kontuhopja in Karelia. There, Sjomán worked as a carpenter, getting paid 200 rubles in paper mill. The father and son lived in a barrack building with additional six persons per a single room. Main staples of diet were “black bread with sour taste, occasional macaroni, fish and horse meat.” At the time of his interview Sjomán’s father was still in Kontuhopja expecting the money to be sent by his son once the latter reached the United States. Sjomán also noted that that many Americans, though “happy in Russia,” were planning to leave by next spring.<sup>581</sup>

In addition to the Finnish police, the American legation itself conducted numerous interviews with returning Finnish-Americans who had called on the consulate for passport renewal and other travel related arrangements. One of the interviewees was Philip J. Endlich who had initially gone to Russia within a group of architects. After the contract expired, Endlich signed another agreement with the Soviet government and stayed there. During his stay in the USSR, Endlich worked in several places, notably at Sverdlovsk, but also had a chance to visit Moscow and Leningrad. He characterized the conditions throughout Soviet Russia as having “steadily grown worse.” “Long lines of people may be seen in all cities... Each

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<sup>580</sup> Bouchal to Hull, March 20, 1933, RG 59, File #861.5017/621.

<sup>581</sup> Bouchal to Hull, March 24, 1933, RG 59, File #861.5017/626.

person would be waiting for the small ration of food available,” he stated. According to Endlich, the inflation was a severe problem insofar as “what 2 years ago cost 5 rubles now cost 20 rubles.” “The conditions of the Russian people is really pitiful. They are starving,” he summed up. Unlike the Communist elite and foreigners who possessed special privileges and their own stores, the rest of the population quietly endured the hardships. Some, however, could not. Endlich witnessed as humans dropped dead from starvation on the streets without anyone showing much interest. “The Russians are utterly apathetic to the fate of others. They can see a man dying on the street and no one goes to his help. What they do think about is their own immediate needs for bread.”<sup>582</sup>

Not every returning American, however, had the perceptiveness or education of Endlich. Most of the people, especially those crossing back into Finland, lacked even basic education. “He had no schooling to speak of; he did not speak with any great intelligence regarding Russia and did not volunteer any information.” Thus characterized the American Consul John L. Bouchal his interlocutor Jacob Kauppi who spent about a year in the city of Petrozavodsk. “The informant worked in the mines in the United States but with the depression lost his job and was not able to secure another. He had been unemployed for about a year before he decided to go to Russia in 1931.” Like Latvala’s wife, his spouse also worked at the local cafeteria while Kauppi drove truck and did carpentry work. According to him, the food at the cafeteria was good, but noted that this was only because they were Americans. “Since these foreigners were asked to come there, they enjoyed privileges and obtained better food and lodging than the Russians,” he added. However, in terms of

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<sup>582</sup> Bouchal to Hull, March 22, 1933, RG 59, File #861.5017/624.

lodging, most American families lived in a single room with no running water. Kauppi spoke of constant “coming and going” of the Americans in northern Russia. In terms of providing information – meager and not wholly reliable – about the state of affairs in Soviet Russia the likes of Kauppi were few. Consul Bouchal noted that Kauppi “answered questions put to him but professed ignorance on all matters that did not concern him personally.”<sup>583</sup> Farmer Joonas Harju was yet another interlocutor included by Consul Bouchal in the category of unhelpful informants whose lack of superb judgment posed a challenge for the American diplomat in search of reliable information. Joonas went to Russia in May of 1931, and settled 10 kilometers away from Petrozavodsk. He worked at a dairy farm alongside other Finns. In Joonas’ judgment, the running of these farms was “not as smooth as in other countries, because the people who own their farms elsewhere know that what they do they do for their own good.” The state-appointed management was not very capable, thus eventually prompting him to leave. The American consul described the informant as “an old man from a rural section of Finland” and “accustomed to extremely simply mode of life.” “He did not appear intelligent at all,” Bouchal added.<sup>584</sup>

The diplomatic despatches addressing the conditions in the Soviet Union were received with great interest at the State Department in Washington, and were read with diligence. So much diligence that in a letter written by Robert Kelley to John Bouchal, the division chief chided the consul for the less than stellar quality of his interview summaries in comparison to those conducted by the Finnish police. In a

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<sup>583</sup> Bouchal to Hull, March 22, 1933, RG 59, File #861.5017/625.

<sup>584</sup> Bouchal to Hull, March 31, 1933, RG 59, File #861.5017/636.

terse note, Kelley pointed out grammatical errors and other inconsistencies which he thought should have been looked over before being sent to him. Kelley also seemed to be greatly concerned that the Soviets seemed to have found out about the interviews being conducted with returning Finnish-American immigrants, and had taken on to coaching them prior to their departure from the USSR. He informed Bouchal that those who deliberately leaked information from inside about the activities of the legation should be uncovered and punished for doing so.<sup>585</sup>

Helsingfors was not Kelley's only target for its shortcomings in reporting information about Soviet internal affairs. In March of 1933, Kelley sent a string of letters to nearly all major capitals of the countries surrounding the Soviet state, instructing them to provide information. In notices sent to Istanbul, Vienna, Stockholm and Berlin, Kelley emphasized the importance of conducting interviews with returning American visitors to Russia and submitting the content of those conversations.<sup>586</sup> Even the embassies in Paris, London and Prague, Kelley instructed, had an obligation to obtain information "from competent American observers" who had been to Soviet Russia. As passport renewal centers and stations where individuals obtained visas to come to the United States, the American embassies had the unique advantage to encounter people some of whom had just come out of Soviet Russia. These interviews had to be conducted in a confidential and meticulous manner according to certain guidelines. In a memorandum which Kelley coordinated with U.S. Undersecretary William Phillips, the East European Division came up with a standard list of questions that were to be asked from those who agreed to be

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<sup>585</sup> Kelley to Bouchal, March 27, 1933, RG 59, File #861.5017/631.

<sup>586</sup> Kelley to U.S. Legations, March 28, 1933, RG 59, File #861.5017/633.

interviewed. Specific questions ranging from progress of socialization of agriculture, militarization, living conditions and other aspects of Soviet society were designed to cover all major areas of American interest about the developments in the USSR. It was not important, nor expected that interlocutors would be able to answer all the items in the questionnaire. This was an attempt to allow interviewees the opportunity to express their views and knowledge about whichever aspects of life in the Soviet Union. Also, the aim of the effort was to ease the burden on those diplomatic staff members posted in stations further away from Soviet borders whose lack of knowledge about Russia often rendered them incapable of conducting such interviews.

Kelley's efforts yielded certain results. The American embassies' renewed interest toward visitors from the Soviet Union drew in numerous businessmen traveling out of Russia who volunteered valuable information about their personal and professional experiences in the USSR. Many of them, like Edward J. Terry who had been a chief consulting engineer in Chelyabinsk tractor plant, appeared at first too frightened or perhaps even shocked to talk about their experience. According to the American consul in Berlin, Raymond Geist, "very intelligent" and the kind of person who would not "exaggerate matters upon which he is reporting," Terry described the situation in Russia as "the most appalling human disaster that could possibly befall mankind." "The things which he has witnessed has rendered him a violent opponent of the communistic system," wrote Geist, "though it appears that he personally has had nothing done against him." In Terry's words, the Soviet government essentially turned its citizens into slaves forcing them to labor under the fear of starvation and

arrest. Under best circumstances, the Russian workers' diet consisted of black bread, cabbage soup and tea. His Russian co-worker who had once been in the United States and spent 3 months in an American prison told Terry that "in comparison to his present situation in Russia it was an enviable experience as he had had plenty to eat and decent quarters." The American engineer himself narrated a story when he discovered four wagons loaded with dead bodies being transported from prison. Summarizing the gist of the conversation, the American diplomat wrote, Terry was "violently opposed to recognition" on the ground that "it would compromise the good name of our nation to recognize a country which has adopted universal slavery." Further, he thought that the American slavery of 19-th century was a "paradise" in comparison to the one being practiced in the Soviet Union.<sup>587</sup>

Speaking to the staff members of the U.S. legation in Latvia, Archibald G. Hunter, a chief engineer in Kharkov Tractor Plant reported on his experience in the Soviet Union with great disappointment. He spoke of resentment among local Russians toward American professionals who received higher wages and unlike the rest of the population, did not starve. According to Hunter, every day 20 or 30 people showed up on his doorstep begging for food. He recognized some of them as workers from his factory. When mechanical engineer in Electrical Factory in Leningrad, Walter John Kowal showed up at the Riga legation, "he seemed frightened, uneasy, his attitude was one of humility and servility which [was] unusual in the average American."<sup>588</sup> He repeatedly asked for assurances that the contents of his conversation would not be passed along to GPU and inquired "when did the last time the

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<sup>587</sup> Raymond H. Geist, U.S. Consul in Berlin, Germany, to Hull, May 27, 1933, RG 59, File #861.5017/663.

<sup>588</sup> A.E. Carleton to Hull, June 16, 1933, RG 59, File #861.5017/680.

Consulate check its premises for bugs.” A bit later, Kowal opened up to the American diplomats telling them of the dreadful methods by which the Soviet security services tried to turn him into a spy. As for the living conditions, in Soviet Russia, “his apartment of two rooms and one bath with no running water was considered first class.” With butter, meat, cabbage and other basic food commodities having disappeared, the Soviet people hungered, Kowal told his interlocutors.<sup>589</sup>

Similar nervousness in behavior was displayed by John Peterson, an American engineer working at Murmansk who came to Tallinn to renew his passport. Extremely reluctant to say anything to vice consul Latimer, Peterson “was in obvious fear of being watched; he expected people to be listening from behind closed doors.” It took several days before the engineer opened up to the legation staff member and spoke of his ordeal in Russia. Although under the contract he was obliged to return to Murmansk for several more months, Peterson stated that he would not be going back, “because he could not stand the nervous and physical strain of living under conditions such as those existing in Russia.” According to vice consul, Peterson’s “clothes were shabby and he looked a bit starved.” Peterson admitted that as a seaman, he had been used to bad food, but nothing could prepare him for conditions in Russia. The engineer said that he would stay a few more days in Estonia just to satiate his hunger and then began to weep. Most Americans, he related, “would not be able to stand the conditions there.”<sup>590</sup>

Some American professionals who engaged in close partnership with the Soviet government were usually tightlipped about their experiences and did not easily

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<sup>589</sup> A.E. Carleton, U.S. Consul in Riga, Latvia, to Hull, June 14, 1933, RG 59, File #861.5017/677.

<sup>590</sup> Harry E. Carlson, U.S. Consul in Tallinn, to Hull, March 28, 1933, RG 59, File #861.5017/638.

divulge information. One such person was the distinguished Canadian engineer John C. Calder who had constructed numerous automobile factories for the Ford company both in the United States and the Soviet Union, including the latest in Stalingrad. Considered as a leading advisor to the Moscow authorities in engineering, Calder had been “over practically all of the territory of the Soviet regime and that he probably had covered more of the territory of the Soviet regime than any other American or a foreigner in the employ of the Government or in the employ of American and foreign companies in the country.” He was, as expected, “cautious about his views.” However, after several encounters with American officials in Berlin, Calder revealed that he was “extremely pessimistic with regard to the general situation,” and in all times he had been in Russia, the things “had never been worse than now.” According to him, even the Soviet leaders “realized the seriousness of the situation.” He described conditions in Turkestan and Kazakhstan as “denuded of all animal life, even of birds, and that there was practically no sowing.” “Calder stated that food shortage was very great and had been for months, and that literally thousands of people were dying from lack of adequate nourishment.” According to the talented engineer, the Soviet industrial infrastructure was utterly dysfunctional insofar as the machinery was breaking down due to low worker moral and maintenance. Even more interesting was Calder’s verdict on the question of recognition. While avoiding a blunt response, “Mr. Calder seemed to be of the opinion that the situation in Russia was really such that he doubted whether it would be advisable for any country to consider resuming trade or diplomatic relations with it at this time.” As for the United States, given that there was no immediate remedy for the situation, “it would not



seem advisable in his opinion to take any action with respect to the opening of relations at this time.”<sup>591</sup>

Clarence W. Poy was a distinguished engineer in canning industry who, after having spent more than two years in the Urals and Central Asia, saw little economical advantage in recognizing Soviet Russia since the destitute Russians would “only be able to place orders in America on the basis of credit.” More interesting were Poy’s vivid reports about the appalling conditions in the provinces of the Soviet state. “Mr. Poy reported for the first time among Americans returning from Russia, that mass starvation is taking place,” interlocutor Jacob Massel reported: “In Tashkent, a city of 500,000 people are actually starving.” A land once plush with grazing sheep and fruit orchards, Uzbekistan had turned into a wretched site where people traveled along railroads looking for food. “The amount of food actually imported by the Russian government merely helps out a bit in Moscow,” but in the provinces which were less visible to foreigners, the food had become so scarce that “even communists had trouble in getting it.” “The people are desperate but in their weakened condition and in the process of starvation they seem to be calmly resigned to their inevitable death... It is most significant to note that starvation is starting in the most fruitful section of Russia.” According to the engineer, whatever fruits existed in the orchards were gathered and instead of being given to the people, they were canned and shipped for export. Moreover, huge quantities of fruits rotted due to inefficiency and lack of energetic manpower to harvest them. “He confirmed the reports that that horses are

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<sup>591</sup> George Messersmith, U.S. Consul in Berlin, Germany, to Hull, April 28, 1933, RG 59, File #861.5017/649.

starving, tractors are ruined and that the workers are dying from starvation,” wrote Massel in the report of his conversation.<sup>592</sup>

Returning from the hub of the Soviet oil industry in Baku, American engineer Charles Holland observed that the situation was “probably more serious there today than at any previous time.” Describing the bread situation as bad, Holland nevertheless noted that in terms of food supply and housing conditions, Baku fared better than any other Soviet city. Having encountered restriction in some countries, the Soviet food, designed for export, was coming back into the local markets. “He attributed this to the fact that the oil industries, being the principal source of revenue are fairly well taken care of and that relatively good conditions developed in and around these operations.”<sup>593</sup> Similarly, a few months earlier a newspaper correspondent, had confided the following about his experience in Baku to the U.S. envoy in Tehran Charles C. Hart: “Moscow regards no section as more important than Transcaucasus because, perhaps, without the well-nigh inexhaustible oil fields at Baku the Soviet might long ago have been on its knees to the rest of the world. Baku oil is the one commodity which has been readily exportable at all times, providing large sums of foreign currency so much needed.” With the population of a half million people, in Hart’s opinion, Baku was “the most extravagantly illuminated city in the world.” Still, “nowhere, as also in Batum and Baku, was there any place that looked inviting. Shop windows betrayed utter lack of interests in commercial life, this attitude being characteristic of the people toward every sort of community activity.” Hart noted that even though he saw some cattle along the way from Baku

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<sup>592</sup> Geist to Hull, April 6, 1933, RG 59, File #861.5017/641.

<sup>593</sup> Geist to Hull, May 18, 1933, RG 59, File #861.5017/664.

to Batum, there was no meat available for consumption. Endowed with a good sense of humor, Hart speculated that “all of the expert meat cutters in Russia may have been promoted to commissars under the Soviet regime.” “In all of my journey throughout Transcaucasia,” American journalist further penned, “I did not see one well-dressed woman or a man with the exception of government officials and army officers who sport the most extravagant attire.” Celebrating the arrival of 1933 in a dilapidated hotel, with “cheap food and 40% proof vodka,” Hart was told that “a funeral party could not have been more suppressed, more somber.” In his conversation with the Iranian Consul General in Baku, the journalist attributed the mood to “unshakeable fear” dominating the society. According to him, upon return to their homes, most people feared the arrival of Cheka and their imminent arrest.<sup>594</sup>

The conditions in the Russian-populated provinces were substantially worse. After interviewing Frank de Groff who was employed at the combine producing plant in Saratov, Leslie Gordon Mayer, American Vice-Consul in Latvia reported: “He states that in Saratov, a city of 200,000, the deaths from starvation are at the rate of about 100 per day and that there are not coffins to bury the dead, that trenches are dug in the cemetery and the corpses thrown into these as fast as the workmen can complete the digging. He claims to have seen piles of human bodies one upon the other lying in the open and awaiting burial. As a foreigner he is, of course, given privileges not enjoyed by the native population in the procuring of food, but even his rations and those of his wife and children have been reduced.”<sup>595</sup> Alvin Leonard Erickson, a former resident of Vladivostok and, consulting technical engineer for the

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<sup>594</sup> Charles C. Hart, U.S. Minister in Persia, to Stimson, February 6, 1933, RG 59, File #861.5017/127.

<sup>595</sup> A.E. Carleton to Hull, April 24, 1933, RG 59, File #861.5017/648.

Kamchatka salmon canning industry, told similar stories to the Vice Consul in Tokyo, C.A Hutchinson. “Food is even scarcer than it was six months ago at the time of previously reported conversations,” reported the vice consul Washington, “Deaths from actual starvation are frequent and the sight of men, women, and children collapsing on the streets of Vladivostok is said to be common.” Based on his personal observations, Erickson estimated that 150 people died every day in Vladivostok during the typhus epidemics and malnutrition. Overall, the conditions in Vladivostok, he said, were worse than at any time since the domestic disturbances in 1918-23.<sup>596</sup>

The native Russians’ accounts of the situation in 1933 corresponded with those of foreign observers. When Peter Shirokov, an American citizen of Russian descent showed up at the American consulate in Harbin, “he still appeared weakened and anemic.” As a locomotive engineer he stayed in Siberia for about a year surviving on bread and potatoes. According to him, “food shortages appeared to be as severe in European Russia as in Siberia.” Shirokov reported that during his entire stay in Russia, he had managed to eat meat only four times, and still, as a better paid expert he was far better off than most members of his crew who went on duty hungry and “without having or being able to obtain sufficient clothing to assure their comfort and to safeguard their health.” Inability to show up for work would often result in getting arrested by GPU. When the engineer finally decided to leave Russia, he himself was interviewed by the GPU guards before obtaining an exit visa (the Soviets were equally rigid on letting foreigners *leave* the country), “Shirokov was questioned

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<sup>596</sup> Arthur Garrels, U.S. Consul General in Tokyo, Japan, to Hull, August 17, 1933, RG 59, File #861.5017/701.

closely concerning the economic conditions in the U.S. and the officials seemed unwilling to believe his statements to the effect that living conditions were by no means so bad in the United States as they were in the USSR.”<sup>597</sup> In Vienna, the American officials were forwarded a letter by Countess Georgina Gyomorey Almasy which was originally written by the sister of her employee living in Skodllovsk, Russia. In that letter, written in German, the Russian begged her sister for help:

“As far back as I can think, however, we have never lived as badly as now. How one has to hunger here! My dear friends, I beg you to send us one dollar. You wrote back to us that it was not possible, that conditions were also bad with you. However, hunger perhaps has never pinched you as it has us... If the beloved God does not have mercy, we must die.”<sup>598</sup>

One dollar, the sister wrote, would be sufficient for them to buy a pound of flour and grits, and stave off death by hunger. Even if the sister couldn't help, the starving Russian implored, perhaps she could get in touch with “other people from America” who would lend a helping hand. “It is difficult to die from starvation,” the letter concluded.

Further to the West, in Ukraine, the famine was killing millions. In August of 1933, Whiting Williams, a great educator and economic investigator, arrived in Warsaw, after having visited Kiev, Kharkov and the Don basin. According to his American interlocutors, Williams was very much affected by what he had seen. He had just been to an area which was for the most part banned to the outside world. In order to hide the massive famine from outside observers, the Kremlin had gone so far

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<sup>597</sup> Hanson to Hull, May 18, 1933, RG 59, File #861.5017/662.

<sup>598</sup> Ernest L. Harris, U.S. Consul General in Vienna, Austria, to Hull, April 7, 1933, RG 59, File #861.5017/640.

as to bar foreign correspondents from leaving Moscow. A well-trusted figure, Williams confirmed the reports of famine in no uncertain terms. Williams' overwhelming description of the famine at one point prompted the interviewer to note that it was difficult to believe that his statements were not exaggerated. During the two weeks of his stay, Williams "saw laborers and peasants dying as a result of starvation." He saw "people dying in the streets," and "cried in particular at the instance of a baby girl whose death from starvation he himself observed." The most striking image in Williams' mind was the sight of peasants "falling from weakness occasioned by hunger, while they were working in the grain fields in the midst of food." In a grotesque contrast, "in vast areas of fields wheat was still standing shoocks" due to lack of manpower to harvest the crops. According to Williams, "Moscow had rushed in shock troops and young Communists to gather all this food," since most of Ukraine's farmers had not survived. Having seen many villages depopulated, Williams had "gained the idea not hundreds or thousands but millions of Russians [sic] have died from starvation and the diseased occasioned by the lack of food."<sup>599</sup>

The diplomatic despatches conveying the impressions, experiences and opinions of many Americans who represented different layers of the society revealed a widespread revulsion at life under the Soviet regime which frequently translated into opposition to the recognition of the USSR. To be sure, among the foremost opponents of such measure was the chairman of the Eastern European Division of the State Department, Robert Kelley, who took great interest in the reports coming out of

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<sup>599</sup> J. Klahr Huddle, U.S. Consul General in Warsaw, Poland, to Hull, August 23, 1933, RG 59, File #861.5017/706.

the Soviet Union and gave them substantial weight in his policy considerations vis-à-vis the USSR. From the very beginning, Kelley's views about recognition were predicated on the principles outlined in the 1920 declaration by the U.S. State Secretary Bainbridge Colby who held that "there cannot be any common ground upon which [the United States] can stand with a Power whose conceptions of international relations are so entirely alien to its own, so utterly repugnant to its moral sense."<sup>600</sup> Kelley believed that the Communist government of the USSR possessed inherently distinct qualities from most other governments, and this distinction prevailed in all aspects of its conduct. Unlike various proponents of the recognition, Kelley perhaps understood the correlation between what was taking place inside the USSR and the Soviet stance in the international arena, although he was adamant in not making it an issue when explaining his stance against recognition.<sup>601</sup> As early as 1924, Kelley had written an article entitled "The Political Organization of the Soviet Power" in which he characterized the governance of USSR as beholden to the "orders from the leaders of the Communist Party which has neither mandate nor responsibility other than self-imposed to the inhabitants of the vast country." In his judgment, "consideration of this fact [was] essential to a correct understanding of the foreign relations of the Soviet power."<sup>602</sup>

When Ivy Lee of the Bethlehem Steel Company returned from the Soviet Union in 1927, railing against restrictive effects of the non-recognition policy, Kelley

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<sup>600</sup> Benson L. Grayson, ed., *The American Image of Russia*, 59.

<sup>601</sup> Kelley went as far as telling the famous opponent of the recognition Congressman Hamilton Fish that "the domestic aims and policies of the Soviet government have nothing to do with American policies toward that government – including even recognition." See David Engerman, *Modernization from the Other Shore*, 251.

<sup>602</sup> Robert Kelley, "Political Organization of the Soviet Power," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* (July, 1924), 69.

came out with a strong commentary. According to Kelley, those such as Mr. Lee who advocated closer relations with the Soviets failed “to comprehend that that it will be possible to establish a real basis for negotiations with the present regime in Russia only after certain fundamental changes have been effected in the international aims and practices of the Bolshevik regime and that until these changes have been consummated, a sound basis for intercourse cannot be arrived at by any amount of ‘admonishing, reasoning, or arguing.’” Such recognition, he insisted, would only legitimize the “Bolshevik belief that their principle can constitute sound basis for international discourse.”<sup>603</sup>

With the passage of time, Kelley’s distaste for the Soviet regime did not diminish. Officially, Kelley listed four objections to the recognition of the Soviets. The first problem, he argued, was the stated goal of the Soviet government to foment revolution abroad. A government that proclaimed and actively sought to derail the political order of other sovereign nation could not be granted legitimacy. Secondly, by refusing to honor the financial obligations of its predecessor, the Soviets failed “to observe certain generally accepted principles governing the conduct of nations towards each other ... which the experience of mankind has demonstrated are vital to satisfactory development and maintenance of commerce and friendly intercourse between nations.”<sup>604</sup> Thirdly, Soviet monopoly over foreign trade and its official policy on private property, Kelley argued, made it extremely difficult to conduct meaningful trade with that country. Finally, the Soviet notions of justice were so radically distinct from the American values, which made future problems between the

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<sup>603</sup> Kelley to Kellogg, July 8, 1927, RG 59, File #861.00/11100.

<sup>604</sup> John Richman, *The United States and the Soviet Union: The Decision to Recognize* (Raleigh, NC: Camberleigh and Hall, 1980), 39.



countries almost inevitable. Kelley attempted to ensure that the Soviet government would not be able to exercise its brand of justice on the American citizens residing in Soviet Russia, as it had done so with the British subjects when several English engineers were arrested under the charges of economic espionage.

Robert Kelley took the Soviet statements calling for worldwide revolution at their face value and believed that the Communist ideology was central to the Soviet actions both at home and abroad. Kelley's conclusions were based on keen observation and incomparable knowledge of the Soviet affairs. Later in the year, when Soviet foreign minister Maxim Litvinov arrived in Washington to negotiate recognition, "he remarked that 'the division of Eastern European Affairs in the State Department had better records on the history of Soviet diplomacy than did the Soviet Foreign office itself.'" To be sure, "Kelley not only had a better library than the Soviets, he also took his library more seriously."<sup>605</sup> His expertise in Soviet affairs gave Kelley a stature within the U.S. State Department that was difficult to ignore even after Roosevelt had decided to recognize the Soviets. As author John Richman put it, Kelley's "serious and scholarly professional demeanor contributed much to his ability to continually reinforce governmental hostility toward the Soviet Union."<sup>606</sup>

The pressure against recognition did not just come from the State Department, but also the representatives of friendly nations who felt obligated to inform the American government of the consequences of recognition. Expressing the "liveliest hope" that the United States would not recognize the Soviet Union, the Director of the Press Section of the Latvian Foreign Office Dr. Bihlman, confided in the member

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<sup>605</sup> Ibid., 36-37.

<sup>606</sup> Ibid., 36.

of the American legation in Riga that “American recognition would be the end of us, of Europe.” He further predicted that if American recognition be extended, American trade would “suffer at once unless long credits should be granted, for Soviet trade is political and large order now given to the U.S. are partly intended to foster demand for recognition.”<sup>607</sup> In his telephone call to U.S. State Undersecretary William R. Castle, the Swedish foreign minister echoed similar sentiments. Sweden was a small nation compelled to recognize its giant neighbor, he stated. But what did the United States stand to gain from this step? If the increased trade was the objective, then the Swedish minister reported, the trade between Sweden and the USSR which maintained diplomatic relations was nil. Any talk of increase in trade peddled by Soviet sympathizers, according to the minister, was “fantastic inasmuch as trade was not a question of recognition in any way but merely of credits.”<sup>608</sup>

There were powerful groups within business as well as political circles who ardently pushed for recognition and believed that such a step by Washington would help increase their fortunes in the Soviet Union. Among the most influential lobbyists for recognition were companies as such General Electric, General Motors, Armand Hammer and others who were powerful players in America’s entrepreneurial landscape. In a typical letter addressed by the local representative of the General Motors Export Company in Russia, E.M. Van Voorhess, urged the need to recognize the unquestionable strength of the Soviet Union “both from a political and economic point of view.” “To an unprejudiced observer on the ground with opportunity to study the situation carefully, it is evident that in the interests of American trade the present

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<sup>607</sup> Coleman to Stimson, April 17, 1928, RG 59, File #861.01/1261.

<sup>608</sup> Castle to Stimson, October 31, 1932, RG 59, File #861.01/1828.

is the most propitious moment during the last fifteen years for the American recognition of the Soviet Union and the conclusion of some form,” Van Voorhess wrote.<sup>609</sup>

More prominent advocates of the recognition were those who had directly benefited from their involvement with the Soviet government. As a head of the Nitrogen Engineering Corporation, Frederick Pope had been given lucrative contracts inside the Soviet Union which earned him millions of dollars and a name recognition in Washington DC. Even before FDR’s victory in 1932 elections, Pope softly advocated rapprochement with Moscow. With a direct access to FDR he conveyed to the president from early on that Americans “ought to have an unofficial representative in Moscow” to at least deal with the problems of the burgeoning American expatriate community in the USSR.<sup>610</sup> Pope’s advocacy for the recognition found its way to newspaper headlines. In a major newspaper report shortly after the presidential elections, Pope rejected the criticism of the Soviet Union as a failing state where inhabitants starved. In sharp contrast to most other observational reports coming out of the Soviet Union, Pope wrote:

“Every time I went back there I found conditions better than before... The first five-year plan was a helpful stimulus to production and the second is intended, I believe, to increase the output of consumer goods... The people are quiet and hopeful, and the stability of the government appears to be independent of any single personality... If there is any shortage, it will spread out because this year’s crops are better.”<sup>611</sup>

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<sup>609</sup> E. M. Van Voorhess, local representative of the General Motors Export Company in Russia, to Hull, May 15, 1933, RG 59, File #861.01/1896.

<sup>610</sup> Kelley to Stimson, September 28, 1932, RG 59, File #861.01/1808.

<sup>611</sup> “Envoy Needed in Russia,” *New York Herald*, November 14, 1932.

J. B. Doan, the president of the American Tool Company wrote a letter to State Undersecretary William Castle in which he questioned the rationale behind the policy of non-recognition. Having conducted \$1 million worth of business through Amtorg, Doan suggested that the American policy hurt the American businessmen more than the Communist regime itself. Why would the U.S. government “not materially aid in securing businesses securing business by those who want to do business and who are able to grant the terms of payment,” he inquired. In Doan’s views, Russia was the greatest potential market next to Germany, and Washington obstinacy denied the Americans a fertile ground to conduct business.<sup>612</sup> Albert Creighton of Massachusetts echoed similar sentiments in meeting with James Grafton Rogers. Having enjoyed close relationship with the Amtorg’s New York office chairman Peter A. Bogdanov, Creighton was convinced that both America and the Soviet Union stood to gain a great deal by establishing diplomatic relationship with one another. He expressed the belief that by continuing to cut off Russia, the United States would facilitate conditions under which “the Russian would build up non-market habits,” as if the Soviets were ever inclined to pursue a different course.<sup>613</sup>

There was also a genuine sense in certain quarters of Washington that the Soviet thirst for recognition was so great that it would acquiesce to just about any demand to achieve such an end. Individuals such as Frederick Poole of the National City Bank favored recognition, because they believed this would allow the settlement of the accounts with the Soviet government on the obligations and debts which

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<sup>612</sup> J. B. Doan, President of the American Tool Company, to Castle, October 31, 1932, RG 59, File #861.01/1815.

<sup>613</sup> Rogers to Stimson, November 25, 1932, RG 59, File #861.01/1822.

Bolsheviks repudiated after coming to power.<sup>614</sup> Such groups saw recognition as an opportunity to hold the Soviet government accountable for the debts its owed to the companies that conducted business in Russia prior to the Revolution. Yet others seemed to hail from genuinely altruistic motives, insofar as they believed that America's refusal to recognize the Soviet Union further increased the suffering of the Soviet citizens. Quoting Hugh Cooper, an engineer who built water power hydro-electric plants in Russia, Francis Kellogg suggested that the U.S. should take leadership in improving the conditions of 160 million people who inhabited the Communist state.<sup>615</sup> Arnold Margolin, a former member of the Ukrainian delegation to the Paris Peace Conference, also saw a recognition as a humane approach to the Soviet problem. According to him, this way, "the American government could render most valuable services to the population of present-day Russia by advising the Soviet government in an informal, friendly way with regard to modification in their political regime." Even a mere promise of holding genuine elections and establishing Constituent Assembly would be a huge achievement in that regard. In Margolin's view, an important condition to the recognition would be the request that the Soviets "undertake obligation to let Soviet nationalities decide their own independence."<sup>616</sup>

On the political front there were several players who had long been pushing for normalizing relations with the Bolshevik regime. With the election of Democratic candidate to office, some of these individuals gained leverage to advance their views on American policy. One such person was William Bullitt, a one time envoy of

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<sup>614</sup> Kelley to Stimson, December 12, 1932, RG 59, File #861.01/1833.

<sup>615</sup> Francis Kellogg, Attorney at Law in St. Paul, MN, to Stimson November 18, 1932, RG 59, File #861.01/1841.

<sup>616</sup> Arnold Margolin to Hull, March 27, 1933, RG 59, File #861.01/1862.

Woodrow Wilson to conduct talks with Lenin's government at the height of the Civil War. Born to a wealthy family which afforded him an ability to travel and live almost wherever he pleased, Bullitt spent much of his time afterward, traveling the cities of Europe until the opportunity availed itself for him to present himself in the freshening political scene in Washington. As FDR's presidential campaign rolled forward, Bullitt communicated with his special contacts inside the Roosevelt team. In order, to impress the future president with his foreign policy credentials and knowledge of world affairs, Bullitt made several high profile trips around Europe -- which seemed to do the trick. Known for his distinct views on dealing with the Russians (in contrast to the State Department and most other Russian experts of the Republican administration) and eager to advance those views, Bullitt soon became a visible figure in the foreign policy think tank of the victorious Roosevelt team. A career that almost came to an abrupt end with a failed mission in 1919 appeared to have been given a new lease on life, and Bullitt would do anything in his power to utilize this opportunity.

Perhaps the most prominent figure in shaping a friendlier American attitude toward the Soviet Union on the domestic political spectrum was the Republican Senator William Borah. Throughout 1920's and early 30's the influential senator from Idaho chided the White House for what he viewed as a rigid attitude toward the Soviet power. Having acquired the post of Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Senator Borah questioned the motives behind non-recognition and viewed them as counter-productive. Often described as a "difficult" or perhaps even "destructive" statesman, the Republican Senator had passion for dissent, the

Secretaries of State rarely dared to cross him on significant issues.<sup>617</sup> According to Norman Saul, “Borah, an American working man’s symbolic progressive was by nature in favor of the underdogs and saw bolshevism as a big step forward over the old regime in Russia.”<sup>618</sup> In Senator’s mind, America’s decision to withhold recognition from a powerful nation such as Russia did not serve the cause of peace and created unnecessary tension throughout the world. In a speech made to the Senate in 1931, Senator Borah made it clear that “peace among nations” would be “indefinitely retarded so long as one sixth of the earth’s surface, occupied by the third largest population in the world, is estranged and afraid.”<sup>619</sup> But unlike some of his colleagues, who believed in the realist expediency of recognizing the Soviets, Senator Borah genuinely believed that the Soviet government reflected the legitimate desires of the Russian people and was, in fact, a good government. “The people of Russia are far better off under the present government than they have ever been in their history.”<sup>620</sup> At the height of the famine in Ukraine and other agricultural regions of the USSR, Senator Borah had the following to say about the conditions of the peasants in Soviet Russia: “There can be no doubt, Mr. President, that a new life, a new existence has been given to the peasant of Russia. There can be no doubt that he is a different human being with a different outlook. They [Soviet authorities] may inveigh and propagandize and falsify the facts, but the truth is, that the revolution has released the Russian people from the old, dead, hopeless past...” Turning his

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<sup>617</sup> While successive secretaries of state treated Borah with caution and respect, particularly Frank B. Kellogg “always made every effort to bring the cantankerous “Bill” Borah into his most important decisions.” Robert N. Ferrell, *The American Secretaries of State and Their Diplomacy*, 26-27.

<sup>618</sup> Norman E. Saul, *Friends or Foes?*, 35.

<sup>619</sup> Benson L. Grayson, ed., *The American Image of Russia*, 83.

<sup>620</sup> *Ibid.*, 84.

criticism against the failures of capitalism in America, Senator Borah concluded his speech: “I am, I confess, disturbed about the unsolved problems of capitalism, and I am almost equally disturbed over the fact that the time which we ought to devote to solving these questions and to bringing about conditions which would help to solve them, is devoted to attacking some other theory and agitating against some other government.”<sup>621</sup>

William Borah’s fiery speech was fueled by the hardships of the Great Depression which, at the time, seemed to bring the entire edifice of American capitalism into question, but it was also a message of defiance against the prevailing sentiments in the U.S. Congress. A prominent representative of the strong anti-Communist faction was a Republican representative from New York, Hamilton Fish III. Hailing from one of the prominent political families of the American North-East, the anti-Soviet Congressman was the grandson of Hamilton Fish Sr, the one time U.S. Secretary of State and a namesake of Alexander Hamilton. While serving as a chairman of the committee to host foreign dignitaries in New York City in 1917, Hamilton Fish had been among the first Americans to greet the representatives of the Provisional Government in the United States. Unlike Senator Borah and others, disillusioned by the crushing effects of the Great Depression, the Republican Congressman never believed the idea of the Communist Revolution as a progressive event in the history of the Russian people. On the contrary, he considered the Bolshevik takeover as a great catastrophe not only for Russia but for the entire world which failed to take the threat of Communist ideology seriously. As such, Representative Fish not only fought against the recognition, but the very idea of

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<sup>621</sup> Ibid., 86.



Communism. In 1930, he introduced House Resolution 180 and formed a committee devoted to monitoring Communist activities in the United States. For two years, until the election of Roosevelt, this committee was active in investigating those suspected of carrying out or abetting Communist propaganda inside the United States. An implacable enemy of the Soviet Union, Fish termed Communism as “the most important, the most vital, the most far-reaching, and the most dangerous issue in the world.”<sup>622</sup> In this fight, he was joined by various quarters of American civil society.

Nationwide organizations such as the National Civic Federation (NCF) and the American Federation Labor (AFL) staunchly opposed recognition. The NCF petition signed by more than five thousand individuals expressed belief that “recognition of Soviet Russia would be a repudiation of all that our national life has represented for a hundred and fifty years and of all the spiritual ideals for which modern civilization has striven for two thousand years... There must be no compromise between American democracy and Russian Bolshevism.” These organizations’ primary demands included explicit repudiation of the idea of worldwide revolution by the Communist state, compensation to the American nationals for confiscated property and the Soviet state’s need “to prove itself fit to associate with other nations.” The leader of the National Civic Foundation, Ralph Easley was particularly adamant on what he perceived as the dangerous Soviet incursions into the American landscape of ideas. In his judgment, America should have taken more active steps to curb the Communist influence, by shutting down newspapers such as the Daily Worker, which frequently glorified Soviet

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<sup>622</sup> Hamilton Fish, Jr., “The Menace of Communism,” *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, (July, 1931), 54.

“achievements” before the American public.<sup>623</sup> Other organizations opposing recognition of the Soviet state included the American Coalition of Patriotic, Civic and Fraternal Societies, National Society of the Daughters of the American Revolution, National Society of the Sons of the American Revolution, National Society United States Daughters of 1812.

At a local level, the Chamber of Commerce from Hamilton Fish’s native state of New York addressed a letter to the newly elected FDR calling him not to recognize the Soviet Union. The great argument of the proponents of the recognition was that such a step would enable the United States to further expand trade with the Soviets. But the facts, the Chamber of Commerce maintained, spoke otherwise: almost every other nation that had recognized the Soviet Union reaped no benefit from this gesture, nor would the United States. Even if expansion of trade came to fruition, the letter argued, American capitalists did not wish to become accomplices to the spread of Communism. “This is the considered, deliberate and virtually unanimous judgment of a large body of businessmen as eager for orders, if properly obtainable, as any merchants and manufacturers can be. They do not want them from anywhere at the cost of selling their birthright,” concluded the President of the Chamber James Brown.<sup>624</sup>

Another prominent businessman, Warren R. Roberts, Chairman of the Board of the Roberts and Schaefer Company expressed to Robert Kelley his readiness “at any time to submit confidential information” about his fellow entrepreneurs’ experiences in the Soviet Union. In the letters that followed his meeting and serious

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<sup>623</sup> National Civic Federation to President-elect FDR, November 11, 1932, RG 59, File #861.01/1890.

<sup>624</sup> New York Chamber of Commerce to President FDR, July 11, 1933, RG 59, File #861.01/1925.

discussion with Kelley about the Soviet Union, Roberts gave the names of several representatives of major American companies whom he directly contacted in order to solicit their reports about the conditions in the USSR. Roberts, no doubt, knew Kelley's attitude toward the Soviet Union and judging from the content of his correspondence, he shared the East European Division chief's apprehensions about the Communist state. "I am greatly interested in this matter which I consider of vital importance to our Government and our people. We must not allow our national officials to take action in this matter which would be prejudicial to our best interests. I am confident that they will act wisely in the matter if they follow advice of your Division based on facts which you can submit," he wrote.<sup>625</sup>

Such expressions of belief by American businessmen are noteworthy especially in light of the historical arguments which hold that the capitalists were at the forefront of the campaign to improve relations with the Soviet Union insofar as they had vested financial interests in such an outcome. The results of a survey conducted by the liberal American Foundation among 485 professionals also reveal a more complex picture. The responses to the question concerning the recognition broke down in the following order with the ratio between those who supported and those who opposed the measure: Businessmen – 75/56, Press – 65/17, Doctors – 33/20, Religious Leaders – 20/6, University Teachers (from the faculties of history, law, economics and politics) – 118/12.<sup>626</sup> Evidently, the businessmen, who according to most academic narratives addressing recognition played a vanguard role, displayed

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<sup>625</sup> Warren R. Roberts, Chairman of the Board of the Roberts and Schaefer Company, to Kelley, March 25, 1933, RG 59, File #861.5017/627.

<sup>626</sup> The American Foundation to William Phillips, Acting Secretary of State, May 23, 1933, RG 59, File #861.01/1913.

greater parity between proponents and opponents of recognition, than those in any other profession category, including the press, academicians and, perhaps most surprisingly, American religious leaders who could not have been unaware of the intense Soviet persecution of Christianity.

Equally vociferous in their opposition to recognizing the Soviet Union were the organizations and individuals representing the non-Russian peoples of the USSR. The United Ukrainian Organizations of the United States, an umbrella organization for a dozen of groups representing the Ukrainian immigrant community in the United States, appealed to FDR, expressing its strong and unequivocal opposition the recognition of the USSR. “During the past year several millions of inhabitants of Soviet Ukraine, the land of our ancestors, have died from starvation,” the appeal noted. “The existence of this terrible famine in Ukraine has been repeatedly proven by the leading European and American press... It is impossible to give the exact figures as to the total number of deaths from this great famine, principally because of the rigid censorship in Soviet Russia.” Drawing attention to the tragic plight of their countrymen back in the old country, the petition affirmed “the well authenticated reports of impartial American and European newspaper correspondents that during the past year several million inhabitants of Ukraine have died a terrible death from starvation and even cannibalism was discovered in several sections of the country; all of this in a land which is regarded as one of the most fertile in the world.”<sup>627</sup>

Similar sentiments were echoed in the letter to FDR by the Ukrainian National Council in Canada. “Crop failure is not the reason for this famine, but the brutal

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<sup>627</sup> The United Ukrainian Organizations of the United States to President FDR, November 1, 1933, RG 59, File #861.01/1989.

policy of the Moscow rulers who, needing grain for export to balance their budget, pitilessly take everything from the farmers, already proletarianized,” wrote the organization of the Ukrainian immigrants. Asking the president to launch an independent investigation and arrange international relief, the Council declared its preparedness to supply Roosevelt “with original documents and information giving details of the famine conditions.” For the Ukrainian expatriates in North America, the recognition of the USSR was nothing other than validation of the Communist leadership’s genocidal policies in their native lands.<sup>628</sup>

In general, the émigré communities throughout the West battled against plans for recognition. They criticized the proponents of recognition as either the tools of the Soviet regime or naives who lacked understanding of the realities inside the USSR. In an article entitled “Crusade on Roosevelt: Struggle for Recognition of the USSR”, the editorial staff of the *Vozrojdenie* (Revival) denounced individuals such as Albert Einstein, a member in the league “Friends of Russia”.<sup>629</sup> How could the United States prepare itself for rapprochement at the time the Soviet terror and persecution seemed to have reached apex. “Since the times of Ivan the Terrible Russia has not seen such terror...Is it possible that the world will still be silent? Is it possible that governments will still continue to make trade pacts with the Bolshevist murderers, strengthening the Soviet government and undermining their own countries?” inquired the Alexandra Tolstoy, the daughter of renowned Russian writer Leo Tolstoy.<sup>630</sup> In a similar tone, Russian-born Vladimir Mitkevich implored Washington not to recognize the Communist government: “The monster has hidden

<sup>628</sup> Ukrainian National Council to President FDR, October 2, 1933, RG 59, File #861.48/2452.

<sup>629</sup> “*Pokhod na Ruzvelta, borba za priznanie SSSR*,” *Vozrojdenie*, November 28, 1932.

<sup>630</sup> Alexandra Tolstoy, “Letter to the Editor,” *Chicago Tribune*, January 30, 1933.

itself behind newspaper lies. It, also, has hidden from the world the true picture of the excruciating torture of the Russian people on the cross.”<sup>631</sup>

The Paris-based newspaper *Dni* (Days) detailed an account of the Communist Party meeting in which Viacheslav Molotov had spoken of the need to draw lessons from the famine of 1921-23. “One need not be afraid,” he said, “of the mere word ‘famine’. The famine of 1921-23 disposed of the surplus population and thus consolidated the Soviet rule, while helping it to take the country well in hand and to acquire stability.” “What if we really have too much population, more than technical agriculture can provide for?” asked another Soviet minister Kosareff attending the meeting.<sup>632</sup> The February issue of *Dni* reported on the meeting of local émigrés organized by former head of the Provisional Government Alexander Kerensky. In that meeting Kerensky analyzed the results of the five-year plan which he characterized as “the sharp recrudescence of the struggle between the Soviet government and the peasantry.” According to Kerensky, “rural population was being deliberately exterminated to consolidate Stalin’s dictatorship,” and this went hand in hand with Nikolai Bukharin’s statement at the Politburo session to the effect that the Party had now entered a renewed phase of the Civil War. Kerensky saw parallels between the present behavior of the Soviet power and its actions during the war when the Communists agreed “to stop at nothing in exterminating the useless and antagonistic elements of the population.” For the Communists, “Russia is only a base

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<sup>631</sup> Vladimir Mitkevich to President FDR, November 6, 1933, RG 59, File #861.01/1991.

<sup>632</sup> *Dni*, May 21, 1933.

and the Russian people material,” proclaimed Kerensky, and the recognition of this government would not in any way help the cause of the Russian people.<sup>633</sup>

Yet others, putting aside the question of recognition, appealed to the American leaders for help to the Soviet Union’s starving population. In a letter addressed to the American Red Cross and President Roosevelt, United National Russian Organization asked them to approve aid to famine stricken regions of Russia. Noting that 40 percent of the Soviet population was suffering from acute starvation, the organization expressed hope that the American government would not stand idly by while millions of Russians perished. “We hardly need to add that we are firmly convinced that the tragic condition now prevailing in the USSR are the immediate and direct result of the insane political and economic policies pursued by the Stalin regime,” stated the letter.<sup>634</sup> Prominent Russian émigré Charles R. Kotcharovsky, in his letter to FDR, appealed to the same American spirit of generosity that once saved millions of Russian during the famine of 1921-23. “Only the USA can, both from moral and material point of view, save Russia for a second time from a dreadful disaster,” Kotcharovsky wrote. Moreover such aid, he argued, would help mollify popular resentment against foreign powers.<sup>635</sup> A copy of the letter addressed to Herbert Hoover did not elicit response.

Nor did the Soviet leader Joseph Stalin seem too eager to obtain foreign aid for his starving subjects. From the viewpoint of the Kremlin, the peasants had proven themselves to be the enemies of the Soviet power and their self-destructive

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<sup>633</sup> *Dni*, February 5, 1933.

<sup>634</sup> United National Russian Organization to president FDR, September 7, 1933, RG 59, File #861.48/2446.

<sup>635</sup> Charles Kotcharovsky to President FDR, August 25, 1933, RG 59, File #861.48/2442.

unwillingness to contribute to the industrialization of the country was the main cause of their demise. The course could not be changed. Moreover, by 1933, Stalin's position was too strong to be undermined by the death of a few million peasants in the isolated corners of the Soviet Union.

The Czech representative in Moscow, Josef Girska, in a conversation with U.S. diplomat in Prague, Charles Crane, observed that Stalin felt so secure in his leadership post that the proletarian dictatorship had in fact become Stalin's personal dictatorship. Having arisen from "the lowest class of people," according to Ukrainian-born Girska, Stalin was a man of "great energy, obstinacy and of an Asiatic mentality." "He not only hates capitalists; he is against European communists, considering them as halfhearted, with no back-bone and capable of all sorts of compromises," noted the Czech diplomat. In contrast to the population, he said, "the army is excellent, well-armed, well fed, well-dressed and well-provided with all the latest technical equipment." With the Red Army consisting of 650,000 men plus 150,000 GPU soldiers placed under Stalin's command, there was simply no chance of a coup by an organized group of opposition. Communists have existed for 15 years, he went on, and they know how to maintain government. Despite all his political success, however, the economic policies were headed in the wrong direction. The collectivization, Girska argued, attacked eighty five percent of the peasants. The Ukrainians and Don Cossacks suffered the most as a result, he told his American counterpart.<sup>636</sup>

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<sup>636</sup> Charles Crane, U.S. Consul in Prague, Czechoslovakia to Stimson, September 27, 1933, GR 59, General Records of State Dept. Office of E. European Affairs, USSR Section, Report of Visitors to Russia, 1932, Box 5.



The documents about the internal conditions in the USSR which the State Department had at its disposal gave credence to expressions pertaining to the desperate nature of the situation in Soviet Union. Throughout the American embassies and consulates in the vicinity of the Soviet Union, the information was pouring in about the worsening conditions in that country. In a conversation which Felix Cole and John A. Lehrs held with two members of the Latvian Legation in Moscow, the latter reported that most foreign diplomats stationed Moscow found the present famine to be worse than that of 1921-22. They estimated that seven to eight million humans had died due to the famine that prevailed throughout the Soviet Union, but was “most acute in the North Caucasus, Ukraine, Lower Volga and peasant populated areas.” In the words of Felix Cole, “asked whether in his opinion the Soviet Government would permit the organization of a foreign famine relief, similar to the one organized in 1921, [his] informant replied in the negative.”<sup>637</sup> It is likely that, Stalin, better than anyone, understood the implications of the foreign aid which would have meant that his collectivization policy was a failure. Above all, it would facilitate an uncontrolled influx of foreign volunteers into the country which he had worked so hard to isolate from the rest of the world. In this particular regard, 1930’s Russia was not the Russia that was a decade ago.

Having spent 17 months in the USSR as the Finnish Charge d’Affaires, Raphael Hakkarainen returned to his homeland in 1933 with views matching those of the Latvian diplomats. “Economic conditions have gone from bad to worse in the Soviet Union,” he informed his American interlocutor in Helsingfors, “The peasants have refused cooperation with the Soviet authorities and the drastic regulations laid

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<sup>637</sup> Skinner to Hull, October 4, 1933, RG 59, File #861.48/2450.

down for the farmers have resulted in acute shortage of food.” According to the American interviewer, Hakkarainen added that he did “not see what the U.S. could gain through an alteration of its long continued policy of non-recognition.” Russia cannot buy American products anyway, said the Finnish diplomat. The Soviet desired recognition from the U.S. in order to life up their prestige in the international. As for the United States, it had no need for the Soviet Union, the diplomat concluded.<sup>638</sup> Moreover the negative depictions of the Soviet Union did not just come from the representatives of the countries regarded as mostly hostile to the Soviet Union. In Athens, a Turkish diplomat who had served in Moscow during 1920’s told his American counterpart that “the present famine is as bad as the worst post-war years.” Coming from the representative of a nation which maintained strong relations with the Soviets, the Turk’s gloomy depiction of the Soviet conditions impressed the American consul.<sup>639</sup> The former ambassador of Kemal Atatürk to France went even further by stating that conditions in Russia were so terrible such that “only a leader was needed for revolt.”<sup>640</sup>

“The majority of the population would welcome invasion by a foreign power in that it would probably mean a change from present conditions. The Army is only loyal because it is distinctly better fed and better clothed than the rest of the population.” This was the opinion of an American who had just visited Russia in March of 1933. In a missive sent to Robert Kelley, the director of the Naval Intelligence Hayne Ellis described his interview as “hot off the griddle” but also

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<sup>638</sup> Wilkinson to Stimson, September 8, 1931, RG 59, File #861.00/478.

<sup>639</sup> Lincoln McVeigh, U.S. Minister in Greece, to Hull, October 14, RG 59, File #861.48/2451.

<sup>640</sup> Jesse Isidor Straus, U.S. Ambassador in France, to Hull, February 23, 1933, RG 59, File #861.01/1847.

wondered aloud whether his interlocutor had supplied anything particularly new. According to the unnamed American, the Soviet system was based purely on compulsion and there was no freedom of speech whatsoever. The Soviet collectivization policies in Ukraine had produced great tension in the region. Prior to collectivization, he stated, the peasants in lived well, but now they were left with nothing. Meat in the cities was scarce, since livestock had been killed during collectivization. During his stay in Soviet Union, the visitor claimed not to have seen “a single animal that was not sick.” All the food went to the army whereas the food for the general population was inedible. According to Ellis’ interlocutor Moscow’s streets were filled with beggars and the prices for drugs sand other basic necessities were exorbitantly high. The conditions which he described were nothing short of a breakdown of an economic system, if there was ever any.<sup>641</sup>

The efforts to conceal the truth about famine included consistent intimidation of foreign correspondents located in Moscow to whom it was made implicitly clear that reporting on the subject would be recognized as a hostile act against the Soviet government – a government that was in charge of issuing frequently required short-term visas without which a foreign reporter could not remain at his post or even job. Most correspondents often waited to leave the confines of Russia or meet a fellow American before they would confide about the true conditions inside the USSR. William Allen White, the publisher of *Emporia Gazette*, whose tour of the Soviet Union was arranged by Intourist, was surprised when a fellow American journalist told him that the country was indeed suffering from a great famine and from a

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<sup>641</sup> Hayne Ellis, Director of U.S. Naval Intelligence to Kelley, March 17, 1933, GR 59, General Records of State Dept. Office of E. European Affairs, USSR Section, Report of Visitors to Russia, 1932, Box 5.

widespread epidemic of typhoid. Williams recalled the conversation: “The first correspondent who wrote a story about the famine was very much afraid that after the publication of his story in the American newspapers he would be expelled from Russia. Subsequently the American correspondents in Russia entered into a gentleman’s agreement that all of them would write stories on the famine, so that if the Soviet government expels correspondents for writing famine stories, it will have to expel the whole corps of American correspondents.”<sup>642</sup> If so, then the renowned correspondent of the *New York Times* William Duranty was not among them. As one American journalist who after traveling to the Soviet Union confided in the U.S. envoy in Iran, Charles C. Hart, no man could remain long in Russia and write the truth for the outside world. “Go to Russia for a few days, then read Walter Duranty’s despatches from Moscow to the *New York Times*, and one is quickly convinced of one of two things,” he told Hart, “Walter Duranty has embraced wholeheartedly the philosophy of Russian communism or is one of those persons who likes his job so well that he will write nothing to impair his position.”<sup>643</sup>

However, Duranty’s ambitions went beyond the objective of retaining his job. Throughout his tenure in Moscow as the correspondent of the *New York Times*, he had carefully cultivated close relations with top Soviet leaders, and one could even say, had earned their confidence, as far as such confidence could be won in a country such as the Soviet Union. His rigid self-censorship on the topic of famine had earned significant political capital before the Soviet officials. Walter Duranty may not have been well-respected among the his colleagues of diplomatic observers of Soviet

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<sup>642</sup> Orsen Nielsen, Second Secretary of the U.S. Embassy in Poland, to Hull, August 30, 1933, RG 59, File #861.5017/704.

<sup>643</sup> Charles C. Hart, U.S. Minister in Persia, to Stimson, February 6, 1933, RG 59, File #861.5017/127.

Russia, but he greatly mattered to those who wished to normalize relations between Washington and the Kremlin. To this end, Duranty not only enjoyed the sympathies of Soviet dictator Joseph Stalin but also the new Democratic administration and the left-leaning intellectual elite which eagerly favored the recognition of the socialist USSR. Walter Duranty had met and discussed the Soviet affairs with Franklin Roosevelt when the latter was still a governor and, the reporter's impression was that the future president had "a broadminded interest and profound knowledge of Soviet affairs."<sup>644</sup> It was thus no coincidence that in November of 1933, Duranty came to accompany Soviet foreign commissar Maxim Litvinov to the United States for the talks on recognition. In America, the journalist was greeted with great jubilation by those who knew very little about the Soviet Union except through Duranty's powerful pen. Upon his return, the correspondent was given an exclusive audience with Joseph Stalin. The interview with the Soviet dictator was yet another chance for Duranty to bask in the glory of his unrivaled reputation as a journalist, but for Stalin, it was a way of thanking his distant but useful ally within the unfaithful corps of Western newspaper reporters. "I might say that you bet on our horse to win when others thought it had no chance – and I'm sure you have not lost by it," Stalin told Duranty.<sup>645</sup>

Just prior to the interview, the debate over recognition in the United States had reached the watershed as each side presented arguments before the president who had in fact made up his mind about normalizing ties with the Soviet Union. Among numerous opponents of the recognition, the one with utmost importance was the State

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<sup>644</sup> Michael Cassella-Blackburn, *The Donkey, the Carrot and the Club: William Bullitt and Soviet-American Relations, 1917-1948* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2004), 94.

<sup>645</sup> S. J. Taylor, *Stalin's Apologist*, 223.

Department and its pertinent divisions. As early as February of 1933, the chief of the U.S. Legation in Latvia, Robert Skinner, had sent a six page report outlining the views of his department on the “Recognition of Russia.” Skinner’s position was that the Soviets needed America far more than America needed them. Therefore it was imperative upon Washington to lay down its terms for recognition which at minimum included payment of the debt inherited from the Provisional Government and cessation of all propaganda activities against the United States. Overall, Skinner was cool toward the idea of unconditional recognition and saw significant obstacles that had to be settled before establishing diplomatic relations.<sup>646</sup> Skinner’s stand was backed by his superiors at the State Department, notably Robert Kelley, whose terms for recognizing the Soviet regime remained essentially unchanged since he had become the Chief of the East European Division. However, Kelley was not alone in his skepticism toward the idea of recognition. This position was also shared by the Division of Far East Affairs, which in a lengthy report examining the geopolitical implications of recognizing USSR vis a vis China and Japan, concluded that considerations against recognition outweighed those for it. The significance of the Far Eastern Division’s report resided in the fact that it debunked one of the most serious arguments in favor of recognition which held that recognizing the Soviet Union was an effective measure in countering the Japanese expansionism in East Asia. According to the report, such a step would push further militarization of Japan which would feel threatened by close interaction between Washington and Moscow. “Instead of dealing with 2 nations [China and Japan] that don’t share Western political moralities, we would be dealing with three – and the third might prove to be

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<sup>646</sup> Skinner to Stimson, February 24, 1933, RG 59, File #861.01/1849.

the most difficult of them all,” the report warned. Furthermore, the Division saw no economic benefits from establishing ties with a Communist regime that stifled free commerce and was destitute as a result of its own economic policies.<sup>647</sup>

Even the opposition from the most relevant departments of his government, however, did not prevent FDR from going through with his decision to recognize. As a newly elected president Roosevelt saw recognition of the USSR as the first major foreign policy step which for whatever reason he had been convinced he had to take. The recognition of the Soviet Union was also indicative of the way Roosevelt, who relied more on his personal friends and contacts, rather than expert administrators, made foreign policy decisions. Roosevelt often “bypassed his bureaucracies by establishing parallel organizations responsible only to the White House.”<sup>648</sup> Among such parallel influences were the chairman of the Farm Credit Association Henry Morgenthau and William Bullitt, who oversaw much of the process leading to recognition. In the course of the preceding months Bullitt took steps to outmaneuver the opponents of recognition within the government, and the arrival of Maxim Litvinov in Washington toward the end of 1933 was partly due to his efforts in the White House.

In May of 1933, FDR sent a letter to the world leaders inviting the government to “join the international arrangement to secure peace, prosperity and disarmament.” Among the addressees of the letter was the Soviet President Mikhail Kalinin (who was nominally considered to be the head of the Soviet state). This was

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<sup>647</sup> Stanley Hornbeck, Chief of the Division of Far Eastern Affairs to Hull, April 8, 1933, RG 59, File #861.01/1872.

<sup>648</sup> Mary E. Glantz, *FDR and the Soviet Union: The President's Battles over Foreign Policy* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2005), 87.

the first time that an American official, the President himself, had engaged in communication with the Soviet government.<sup>649</sup> Two months later, Roosevelt sent Bullitt as his envoy to the London Economic Conference and instructed him to meet with the head of the Soviet delegation Maxim Litvinov. Around the same time, Henry Morgenthau met with the Amtorg chairman in New York Boris Skvirskii to pass along a message from the President who assured the Soviet representative that he had “the whole Russian situation under consideration and the delay in no way is prejudicial.”<sup>650</sup>

Robert Kelley understood the implications of these developments and moved to make the most of the recognition talks. Despite the tensions between the two, Kelley managed to convince Bullitt in the importance of debts. In addition, the issues of religious freedoms for the Americans residing in the USSR and the Communist propaganda became top items on the negotiations agenda. After arriving in Washington on November 8, 1933, Maxim Litvinov spent the next eight days trying to fend off the demands by the unlikely team of Kelley and Bullitt who insisted that the Soviets comply with these terms. Despite intense pressure, Litvinov refused to budge on any single item. Maintaining that the Soviet laws and policies already conformed with those conditions placed forth by the Americans, Litvinov argued that these negotiations should take place *after* the recognition. He had not come to Washington to negotiate, Litvinov conveyed, but to receive the honors of recognition. Soviet foreign commissar went as far as turning down President Roosevelt’s request to join him at the latter’s Georgia retreat for a personal conversation. A long time

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<sup>649</sup> FDR to Mikhail Kalinin, May 16, 1933, RG 59, File #861.01/1900.

<sup>650</sup> Michael Cassella-Blackburn, *William Bullitt and Soviet-American Relations*, 96.



diplomat, Litvinov could not have picked up on the irony of haggling over the question of recognition once the Soviet foreign minister had already been received at the White House. In effect, the Americans had already recognized the Soviet Union before the official recognition on November 16, 1933, following the talks in which the Soviets ultimately accommodated the American demands in the vaguest terms possible. Interestingly, the terror-famine inside the USSR and other Soviet domestic practices, which the Americans had so meticulously monitored over the years, played no role whatsoever in these talks. The State Department, known for its cautious attitude toward recognition, focused its apprehensions on the legalistic aspects of bilateral discourse and mostly limited its involvement to logistical functions. The American leadership appeared certain that what the Soviet government did to its own people should have no effect upon the interaction between the two states.

On November 29, 1934, the newly appointed American Ambassador to the Soviet Union William Bullitt departed for the Soviet Union. He was met at the border by the Soviet officials who greeted him with utmost courtesy and accompanied him to the Soviet capital in a private luxury car. The Associated Press reported that “it was the first time in the history of the Soviet Government that any foreign ambassador had been met at the frontier or shown any attention whatsoever before arriving in Moscow.”<sup>651</sup> In the capital city, he was greeted with even greater fanfare and ushered to his lavishly decorated apartment residence. Bullitt almost immediately went on to visit the grave of his hero Jack Reed where he lay flowers. A few days later, Litvinov threw a sumptuous dinner party to Bullitt’s honor attended by supreme leadership of the Soviet regime. In the course of dinner party which Bullitt

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<sup>651</sup> *The New York Times*, December 11, 1933, 3.

characterized as a “superb banquet with food and wines of a quality that no one in America would dare to serve nowadays,” the American ambassador met with Joseph Stalin, Sergei Molotov and other members of the Soviet brass who heaped praise after praise upon Bullitt the Friend.<sup>652</sup> Over a dinner table clad with most luxurious food items and alcoholic beverages, Stalin said to Bullitt: “I want you to understand that if you want to see me at any time, day or night, you have only to let me know and I will see you at once.” When asked by Stalin if there was anything he wanted in the Soviet Union, Bullitt requested a fifteen acre ground in the city park for the embassy residence. Stalin granted Bullitt’s wish on the spot. As Bullitt reached out to shake hands with Stalin, the Soviet leader took the ambassador’s head in his two hands and planted a large kiss on his face. Overwhelmed by the unusually warm hospitality by the Soviet, Bullitt went home that night and wrote: “The men at the head of the Soviet Government today are really intelligent, sophisticated, vigorous human beings and they cannot be persuaded to waste their time with the ordinary conventional diplomatists. On the other hand, they are extremely eager to have contact with anyone who has first-rate intelligence and dimension as a human being.”<sup>653</sup> As far as Bullitt was concerned, he was one such human being. For the long-time sympathizer of the Communist regime, all of Bullitt’s beliefs about the Soviet Union and himself seemed to be validated in one memorable encounter in the Kremlin. Much seemed to have changed since the last American ambassador, David R. Francis, frequently disparaged for being unsuitable for his post, left Russia from the Bolshevik besieged city of Archangel on a stretcher. The first Cold War was effectively over.

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<sup>652</sup> FDR Library, Roosevelt Papers, PSF, Russia, Box 67, Letter, Bullitt to President FDR, January 1, 1934, 8.

<sup>653</sup> Ibid., 11.

## Conclusion

Altogether the despatches prepared by the American diplomats successfully conveyed the internal conditions in Soviet Russia which, from 1917 until 1933, were consistently poor, frequently reaching the point of humanitarian disaster. While the influence of these despatches on the official policies of Washington varied between successive administrations, for those involved in Soviet affairs, especially at the U.S. State Department, the documents constituted a primary and reliable source of information with regard to the situation in the USSR. By closely monitoring the Soviet press and interviewing a wide variety of individuals coming out of the country, the American diplomats were able to compile worthy volumes of information and pass them to Washington. Ultimately, based on this knowledge, influential figures within the foreign policy establishment developed their views of the Soviet state, even though not always did they succeed in convincing their superiors at the White House to share the similar outlook.

In this dissertation I have attempted to examine and understand the despatches from the standpoint of those at the receiving end of the information. The despatches came from a number of diplomatic stations in various locations, and as such, their perspectives were often limited in range. The authors of many of these despatches rarely witnessed the events directly, instead frequently relying upon sources which could not always be verified. Especially in the aftermath of the Civil War, when the American diplomats were forced to evacuate Bolshevik-occupied territories, the observers were left with little choice but to obtain knowledge through visitors, migrants and diplomats of friendly countries stationed in the Soviet capital. Certain

Western visitors' political allegiances, the refugees' inevitable anti-Soviet sentiments, and the isolation of foreign diplomats under the watchful eye of the OGPU constituted genuine obstacles to acquiring an accurate sense of Soviet realities. In numerous instances, providers of information did exaggerate their experiences. Nevertheless, the degree of subjectivity and bias in each individual report did not radically alter the overall picture of the Soviet internal conditions in the eyes of those who read these despatches in their entirety. Moreover, the overwhelming number of despatches spoke of the harsh political and economic atmosphere in the Soviet Union with such consistency and detail, that it would be impossible, if not erroneous, to overlook their validity as historical evidence.

As these despatches reveal, for the inhabitants of the Soviet state, the period between 1917 and 1933 was highly tumultuous. Almost from the onset of the Bolshevik power, political persecution, famine, and general human suffering became a norm of life in Russia. Judging by the sheer scale of its atrocities, there is no question that Communism was a significant departure even from the autocratic political tradition of Tsarist Russia. According to Nicholas Werth, writing in *Black Book of Communism*, "for the whole period of 1825-1917, the number of death sentences passed by the tsarist courts (including court-martials) 'relating to political matters' came to only 6,321," whereas in the course of two months alone in autumn of 1918, Bolsheviks executed between 10,000 and 15,000.<sup>654</sup> An eyewitness to the revolutionary turmoil, Dmitri Likhachev strongly believed that "the most merciless period of repression" began not in 1937-38, but as early beginning from 1918, "when

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<sup>654</sup> Nicolas Werth in Stephane Courtois et al., *The Black Book of Communism: Crimes, Terror and Repression* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1999), 78.

officers, members of the bourgeoisie, professors and especially the clergy and members of religious orders, together with Russian, Ukrainian and White Russian peasants were being shot in thousands, and that was all considered natural.”<sup>655</sup> In the West, some historians have long argued about the distinct nature of Communism as a totalitarian model which bore little resemblance to the autocracies of the past. Among them, Martin Malia has most vociferously demonstrated that while distinct from other authoritarian regimes, the Communists’ attachment to Marxist-Leninist vision of society with its implacable hostility toward private property, individual rights, and political pluralism placed the country under their rule on a path to famine, mass executions and the Gulag.<sup>656</sup>

While Communism remained the central target, the question of the Russian national character also dominated the discussion and analyses of foreign observers who tried to locate the social origins of what they saw as a patently evil system of governance. There was firm conviction by some, as expressed in numerous despatches, that the regime such as the one which existed in Russia could only exist in Russia. “On entering the country of the Russians, one sees at a glance that the social order as arranged by them can only serve only for their use. One must be Russian to live in Russia,”<sup>657</sup> Custine had observed a century ago – an observation that was also characteristic by those who used it to justify the Soviet tyranny. This is what the *New York Times* correspondent Walter Duranty believed he was doing when he rationalized the absence of remorse for the deaths of millions during the

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<sup>655</sup> Dmitri S. Likhachev, *Reflections on the Russian Soul*, xi.

<sup>656</sup> See Martin Malia, *The Soviet Tragedy: A History of Socialism in Russia, 1917-1991* (New York: Maxwell Macmillan International, 1994).

<sup>657</sup> Astolphe de Custine, *The Journals of the Marquis de Custine: Journey for Our Time*, 86.

collectivization, by uttering, “but they are only Russians.” For Duranty’s audience in America, Russia remained as mysterious as it had been for the Frenchmen for whom Custine produced his diaries. In their rudimentary knowledge, Russia had always been a place where human lives and dignity counted for little. It should be noted that the relations between pre-Bolshevik Russia and America, while courteous, were never too friendly insofar as the American political elite associated Russia with arbitrary rule, oppression and ethnic pogroms. “I am a great believer,” George Kennan asserted, “in the power of the soil over the human beings who live above it.”<sup>658</sup> It is noteworthy that long before young George Kennan assumed his post in Riga and commenced writing reports about internal conditions in the Soviet Union, another George F. Kennan, his great uncle, had authored series of reports from his journey, familiarizing the general American public about the tyranny that was Tsarist Russia.

Without doubt, the American attitude toward the Soviet regime had as much to do with the Americans and their belief structure as it did with the realities of Russia. Eminent scholars of the history of the American foreign policy, John Lewis Gaddis and Robert Kagan, have characterized the role of the United States on the international stage as unique and unprecedented.<sup>659</sup> They have argued that as the first and most powerful liberal democratic republic in the history of mankind, the American political philosophy sprung from deeply-seated belief which held “these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights.” As such, the bedrock of the American

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<sup>658</sup> David C. Engerman, *Modernization from the Other Shore*, 263

<sup>659</sup> See John Lewis Gaddis, *Surprise, Security, and the American Experience* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2004) and Robert Kagan, *Dangerous Nation* (New York: Knopf, 2006).

doctrine, regardless of even the sharpest differences between its political leaders, had been the implicit recognition that in the long run the American interests would be best served if the republican ideals espoused by the founding fathers prevailed throughout the world. The roots of this thesis can be found in Thomas Paine's earliest exhortation that "the cause of America is, in a great measure, the cause of all mankind." Interestingly, what made the Soviet Union (unlike old Russia) and the United States similar in one single regard was the universality of their aspirations, and this similarity was also the cause of an inevitable conflict between the two almost diametrically opposed ideologies. From the moment the Bolsheviks took control of the Winter Palace, the United States and the newborn Soviet state had become natural rivals.

At the height of the Second Cold War, a notable number of American scholars of Russia refused to give credence to the earlier reports, and often blamed America for the state of hostility with the Soviet Union.<sup>660</sup> Armed with the refrain that Soviet Russia needed to be understood in its own terms and through its own logic, these historians rationalized, deemphasized or outright dismissed the facts about the horrors of Soviet Communism that dated to its revolutionary origin.<sup>661</sup> A long time critic of the Soviet Union, historian Robert Conquest wrote in the aftermath of the Cold War: "It is, unfortunately, only too easy to show that many of the then intelligentsia in the United States, the United Kingdom and elsewhere were deceived into accepting and

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<sup>660</sup> William Appleman Williams', *American-Russian Relations, 1781-1947* (New York: Rinehart, 1952) was a seminal book that essentially blamed the United States for initiating the Cold War against the USSR. Williams became an intellectual mentor to a generation of scholars who often identified American imperialistic tendencies as the root cause of the problems facing the country and in some cases, the entire world.

<sup>661</sup> Frequently referred as 'revisionists', more prominent among such historians were Sheila Fitzpatrick, Jerry Hough, J. Arch Getty who downplayed the Soviet atrocities, instead guiding their readers to focus on countervailing social forces in the country.

supporting a huge fabric of lies. The Soviet Union despite its horrors, remained acceptable or even praiseworthy, until Khrushchev's secret speech of February 1956, and even after then with some.... The truth, though not provided by the Soviet authorities, was available in scores of hundreds of firsthand accounts."<sup>662</sup>

Indeed, a significant part of the failure of some intellectuals and their inability to identify the depravity of the Soviet system was in their unwillingness to scrutinize observer reports such as those reflected in the diplomatic despatches. Reading these despatches which were written in the formative years of the Soviet Union, one is struck by the similarity of the insights provided in 1920's and those written about the later period of Stalinist terror. In that sense, the observer reports put to question the idea of sharp discontinuity between the reigns of Vladimir Lenin and Joseph Stalin. The despatches make it evident that Stalin, while quite naturally endowed with specific characteristics of his own, was the product of a political system which from its inception attached little value to human life and had adopted a political-economic platform that was bound to and did lead to a great loss of human life through political persecution and periodic famines. Hostility toward market, severe intolerance for dissent, and the rule by fear were not just deeply ingrained in the policies of the Soviet leadership, they constituted the *raison d'etre* of the regime. Thus, characterizing Joseph Stalin as an aberration in the evolution of an otherwise reformable entity, as some historians have done, seriously underestimates the primacy of the Communist ideology in the functioning of the Soviet state.<sup>663</sup> In fact, much of

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<sup>662</sup> Robert Conquest, *The Dragons of Expectation: Reality and Delusion in the Course of History* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2005), 51.

<sup>663</sup> Historian Stephen Cohen has been one of the greatest proponents of the idea of the *USSR with human face*. In numerous books such as *Bukharin and the Bolshevik Revolution: A Political*



the First Cold War encompassed the years during which Stalin did not yet enjoy absolute power, but the Bolshevik practices had already produced millions of victims.

The partial opening of the archives in the former Soviet Union has brought much needed clarity to the debates about the Soviet past. This development has also accomplished an important task in that it has validated the American diplomatic despatches and observer reports which overwhelmingly and negatively reflect on the conditions in the USSR. Some scholars ordinarily hold foreign observer reports at a low esteem, and often dismiss them as amateurish or superficial analyses of otherwise deep socio-political and historical trends transpiring in the subject country. But as historian Marshall Poe has demonstrated in his groundbreaking narrative on European ethnography on Russia of 15-18<sup>th</sup> centuries, when dealing with despotic and reclusive societies, foreign observers are sometimes the only reliable source of information, and these sources can actually help to obtain an accurate picture of the reality.<sup>664</sup> The English merchants of 16-th century Russia were not trained in the loaded notions of epistemology, resistance, or agency, but they recognized tyranny when they saw it. Likewise, a great number of observers, including the diplomats, who dealt with the Soviet Union between 1917 and 1933, lacked an in-depth training in philosophy, political science, history or Russia itself. Their basic faculties of judgement, however, allowed them to experience and discern the intolerable quality of life under the Communist regime. Perhaps mindful of the intellectual snobbery of his

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*Biography, 1888-1938* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973), *Rethinking the Soviet Experience: Politics and History since 1917* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), *Failed Crusade : America and the Tragedy of Post-Communist Russia* (New York : Norton, 2000), Cohen has propounded the theory of alternative development for the Communist regime. As late as 2006, Stephen Cohen continued to lament the passing of the USSR, still advocating for the “roads not taken.” See “The Soviet Union: R.I. P?” *The Nation* (December 25, 2006).

<sup>664</sup> See Marshall Poe, *A People Born to Slavery: Russia in Early Modern European Ethnography, 1476-1748*.

colleagues in the art of humanities in contrast to the common man, George Orwell had penned: “To see what is in front of one’s nose needs a constant struggle.” Unfortunately, a considerable echelon of policy-makers and erudites lost in this struggle to the detriment of world peace, human freedom, and knowledge.

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