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CHAPTER I



THE IMMEDIATE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND



THE seizure of power in Petrograd by the Bolsheviki on November 7-8, 1917 constitutes the formal point of departure for this narrative. But it was, of course, only the final phase of a revolutionary process which had begun with the collapse of the Tsarist system several months earlier. Before we proceed to examine the course of Soviet-American relations, it will be useful to glance briefly at the American reaction to the earlier phases of this revolutionary process.

The events that marked the fall of Tsardom in March 1917 (usually referred to, by virtue of the difference in calendar,¹ as the February Revolution) constituted one of the most amazing, least foreseen, and to this day least understood of the great political changes of history. To attempt to describe these events would surpass the purposes of this study. But there are certain features of the February Revolution worth noting here.

First of all, it was not a contrived revolution. No one planned it. No one organized it. Even the Bolsheviki, who for years had dreamed of such a day and had conceived of themselves as professionals in the art of producing revolutions, were taken wholly by surprise. The February Revolution was simply the sudden, crashing breakdown of an old dynastic-imperial system, caught between the stresses of a major modern war, for which it was inadequate, and the inertia of an imperial court that had lost its orderliness of

¹ For purposes of this study, the Gregorian calendar will be used throughout. The Julian calendar was retained in Russia until February 14, 1918. The difference between the two calendars was one of thirteen days, the Gregorian calendar being ahead of the Julian by that interval. Thus dates cited here for the period up to February 14, 1918 will often be mentioned in Russian sources as thirteen days earlier.

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procedure, its feel for events, its contact with the people, and even the respect of the ruling bureaucracy.

A great many Russians had dreamed—like the Bolsheviki—of revolution in one form or another and to one degree or another, and had chafed under what seemed to them the interminable delay in its arrival; but from the standpoint of the ideals to which most of these people aspired, the February Revolution may be said to have come, if not prematurely, then at a most inopportune time. For one thing, the country was endeavoring to conduct a major war, involving extensive mobilization of manpower and a great strain on the entire economic and administrative system. This was an involvement which, as the Bolsheviki were later to learn to their sorrow, would not be easily liquidated and which could not fail to add to the burden of any new regime assuming power at that time. But beyond that, there was no adequate unity among the various political groups available to share in, or compete for, the inheritance of the Tsar's power. There was not, as among them, even that modicum of consensus on the terms of political competition that would have been necessary to make possible any orderly transition to some stable form of representative government. The Russian political society that had simmered under the crust of Tsarist power and had yearned for its disappearance or moderation was actually riven, itself, by tragic and scarcely reconcilable divisions. The events of the abortive revolution of 1905, and more recently the stresses of the First World War, had carried the Russian socialists to a point where their hatred and distrust of the "bourgeois" parties was extreme. Their very attachment to their country had been weakened in favor of concepts of political obligation based on class rather than on nation. The non-socialist elements, on the other hand, tended to view the socialist leaders as irresponsible demagogues, little short of traitorous. The situation was further complicated by separatist tendencies in many parts of the Russian Empire—tendencies inflamed by the unhappiness of the time and now greatly stimulated by the disappearance of the dynastic center that had been at least the symbol, and the only symbol, of political unity.

So long as the structure of Tsarist power held together, the latent antagonisms among these divergent elements were in part concealed and disguised by their common hope for a change; but, once

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Tsardom was gone, there was nothing to keep the manifold antagonisms from coming out into the open, greatly accentuated by the unexpected competition for the succession into which the various elements suddenly found themselves thrust.

The situation was rendered peculiarly complicated by the fact that in the period immediately following the collapse of Tsardom neither of the two major camps of political contenders was in a position to get along, for the moment, without the other. The non-socialist parties included within their following the overwhelming portion of the political and administrative experience available in the country. They alone could muster the knowledge, the insights, and the international connections requisite to the immediate establishment of a new governmental system on the ruins of the old one. It was natural that they should take the initiative—as they did—in setting up the framework of a provisional government; and it was natural, in the circumstances, that this government should draw its legitimacy from the last Tsarist *duma*, or parliament, a body primarily non-socialist in its composition.

But it was the socialists, united in the various *ad hoc* “soviets of workers’ and peasants’ deputies,” and outstandingly in the Petrograd Soviet, who commanded the confidence of the mass of industrial workers in the large cities and of the politically conscious portions of the rank and file of the armed forces. The importance of both these latter elements had been greatly heightened, from the standpoint of the struggle for political power, by the fact that the old Tsarist police force had been shattered in the process of the February Revolution, leaving the maintenance of order in the urban areas largely at the mercy of the soldier and worker elements—the only elements having disciplined young manpower and, usually, arms.

Thus it was the non-socialist parties alone who were able to provide the essential forms of the new provisional governmental power—a fact which the socialist groups, themselves not yet ready for the assumption of governmental responsibility, were fully prepared to recognize. Yet the substance of domestic power, in the sense of ultimate control over the behavior of the armed forces and ultimate domination of the city streets, rested with the socialist elements, who had their own independent organ of legislative and executive power in the form of the Petrograd Soviet and the other city soviets amenable to their influence. The Petrograd Soviet, while almost wholly socialist,

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was at the outset not yet Bolshevik-dominated (the Bolsheviks were still only a minority among the parties there represented), but it constituted an independent force, not really subject to the authority of the government; and many of its members held feelings of deep bitterness and suspicion toward the entire non-socialist sector of Russian society, including most of the members of the Provisional Government.

In this way there came about that dangerous duality of political authority—the so-called *dvovlastye*²—which characterized the months immediately following the fall of Tsardom. The Provisional Government was permitted to function as the titular repository of state power and the external exponent of Russian interests. But internally its authority depended in many respects on the support of the Petrograd Soviet, which it could not control, which was prepared to support it only “insofar as” it served socialist purposes, and which stubbornly refused to be lured into accepting any formal responsibility commensurate with its real power. Between these two parallel governments there was no ordered relationship, no intimacy, no consensus—only distrust, hostility, and an uneasy jockeying for position.

This situation had two major implications from the standpoint of the United States. First, it meant that the chances for political stability in the new regime were small indeed. Plainly, such a state of affairs could not endure for long. The fall of Tsardom had been only the prelude to the real struggle for power. Particularly ominous was the fact that the attachment to the principles of parliamentary government was weak or non-existent in large sections of the Russian public. The common people had little conception of what political freedom meant. Many socialists were not sure that the “bourgeois” elements ought to have any share at all in the political life of the state. The monarchists were sure that the “internationalist” socialists ought not to have any such share at all. Only in limited “bourgeois-liberal” circles, soon to be left isolated and helpless by the rapid drift of power to the left, was there any real conception of parliamentary democracy in the western sense.

²In general the transliteration table used in this volume is that now used by the United States government. In cases where the insertion of the *y* before the *e* seemed essential to indicate pronunciation, it has been used. Family names and places have been rendered in this transliteration except where there is another version commonly in use in western literature.

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Secondly, this situation meant that the prospects for Russia's continued participation in the war were very poor. The attempt to continue the war effort would have taxed the resources of even a unified and firmly entrenched regime. To suppose that such an effort could be carried out by a government lacking real authority over the troops, acting through an officers' corps which had lost face with the rank and file—this in face of the fact that the mass of the soldiers were war-weary and largely indifferent to the issues of the war, and in face of the further fact that a considerable portion of the socialists, to whom the soldiers looked for leadership, were already committed to the view that the war was an imperialist one, serving no useful purpose—to suppose this was to be optimistic indeed.

Yet the fact is that neither of these realities was widely noted in the United States; it is, indeed, not an exaggeration to say that the policy of the United States government toward the Russian Provisional Government was founded largely on ignorance of both of them and on the hope that just the opposite would be the case: that Russia would evolve rapidly, that is, in the direction of democratic stability, and that she would continue to prosecute vigorously, as a loyal and enthusiastic member of the western coalition, the war against Germany. In these misunderstandings will be found the roots not only of much of the ineffectiveness of American policy toward the Provisional Government but also of the difficulty experienced by many Americans at a later date in adjusting to the realities of Soviet power.

The misunderstandings were in no way unnatural. There was nothing in the traditional American political philosophy to make Americans aware of such virtues as the Tsarist system may have had or to cause them to doubt that the removal of this system would be followed by rapid progress in the direction of parliamentary democracy. It had never occurred to most Americans that the political principles by which they themselves lived might have been historically conditioned and might not enjoy universal validity. Interest in Russia among the American public had been confined largely to a sympathetic following of the struggle against autocracy. It had centered in two main groups. One was composed of what might be called the native-born American liberals, men whose sympathies had been captured by the sufferings of the Russian oppositionists of an earlier date. A number of American figures, including the elder George Kennan,³ Samuel Clemens, and William Lloyd Garrison, had come

³ A first cousin twice removed from the author of this study.

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together in the early Nineties to set up a private organization called "The Friends of Russian Freedom," the purpose of which was to bring aid to the victims of Tsarist oppressions. This organization had endured up to the time of the Revolution. Such of the original members as were still living when the Revolution came were older people. Their impressions of the Russian revolutionary movement, based largely on observations made by Kennan in the 1860's and 1880's, related to the pre-Marxist phase of the struggle. In the period just before the Revolution, their sympathy and aid were addressed mainly to the Social-Revolutionaries who, comprising a socialist but not Marxist party, appeared to them as the spiritual heirs to the earlier populist tendencies in the Russian revolutionary movement. They had little idea of the implications of the latter-day Marxist domination of Russian revolutionary thought.

In this respect, the older liberals differed particularly from the other group of Americans, or American residents, interested in Russia. These were the newly immigrated Jews—consisting chiefly of people who had removed to this country since the 1880's in order to escape racial discrimination or political persecution, or both. In large proportion they were people affected by the Marxian doctrines that had made so profound an impression on the Jews of the Russian "pale." They were predominantly Social-Democrats, rather than Social-Revolutionaries. They differed from the American liberals in that their conception of the opposition movement in Russia was oriented toward social revolution in the sense of the shift of power to a given social class, rather than toward general political liberty in the American sense. They shared with the others only the intense desire that Tsarist absolutism should be swept away. Between them, these two groups pretty well dominated the formation of American opinion with respect to Russian matters.⁴

These circumstances would in themselves have been enough to assure an eager and unquestioning welcome of the fall of Tsardom in almost all shades of American opinion. But to them was added the close coincidence of the first Russian Revolution with America's entry into the First World War. From the standpoint of the needs of American statesmanship at that particular time, the Russian Revolu-

⁴ Strangely enough, the non-Marxist Russian liberals, the Constitutional Democrats, seem to have enjoyed little sympathy or support in the United States, except in a few business and charitable circles. We have here, perhaps, another manifestation of that curious law which so often makes Americans, inveterately conservative at home, the partisans of radical change everywhere else.

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tion, as generally viewed and understood in the United States, could not have come more opportunely. President Wilson, it will be recalled, was then just approaching the end of the long agony of decision involved in the determination of America's relationship to the European war. In the first weeks of 1917 the tide of events had run relentlessly in the direction of America's entry into the war on the Entente side. The German declaration of unrestricted submarine warfare, on February 1, 1917, had in fact deprived American statesmanship of the last area of maneuver, and had virtually sealed the issue. After that, it was only a question of time.

But there was still the question of the interpretation to be given officially to this tremendous departure in American policy. Technically speaking, the immediate impulse to our entry into the war lay in violations of our neutrality. But the defense of neutral rights was a confused and uninspiring issue, legalistic, involved, understood by very few. It was an issue, furthermore, on which our grievances against our future allies were only slightly less serious than our grievances against the Germans. Not only was this too narrow and technical a cause in which to lead a great people into battle, but many doubted that it was really the cause at all. There was a general consciousness among American statesmen, on the eve of the fateful step, of a need to find for this departure a loftier and more inspiring rationale than the mere defense of neutral rights, one closer to the solemnity with which Americans experienced that stirring moment, and one more directly related to the needs and ideals of men everywhere—not just to the people of the United States.

Into this questioning, the first Russian Revolution, occurring only three weeks before our entry into the war, entered with important effect because it appeared to alter the ideological composition of the coalition with which we were about to ally ourselves. At the Cabinet meeting of March 20, 1917, where it was unanimously decided to ask Congress for a declaration of war, Secretary of State Lansing (according to his own account written on the heels of the event ⁵) argued for the step on the grounds that

. . . the revolution in Russia, which appeared to be successful, had removed the one objection to affirming that the European war was a war between

⁵ I am indebted to Professor Edward H. Buehrig of Indiana University for drawing to my attention this account by Lansing (in the Robert Lansing mss, Private Memoranda, Library of Congress) of the proceedings of the historic Cabinet meeting of March 20.

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Democracy and Absolutism; that the only hope of a permanent peace between all nations depended upon the establishment of democratic institutions throughout the world; . . .

The moment seemed particularly propitious, Lansing added, because

. . . action by us . . . would have a great moral influence in Russia, . . . would encourage the democratic movement in Germany, . . . would put new spirit in the Allies. . . .

Wilson was at first hesitant in accepting this thesis that the Russian Revolution gave grounds for presenting America's war effort as a crusade for democracy. "The President said," Lansing's account continued,

that he did not see how he could speak of a war for Democracy or of Russia's revolution in addressing Congress. I replied that I did not perceive any objection but in any event I was sure that he could do so indirectly by attacking the character of the autocratic government of Germany as manifested by its deeds of inhumanity, by its broken promises, and by its plots and conspiracies against this country.

To this the President only answered "Possibly."

Whether the President was impressed with the idea of a general indictment of the German Government I do not know. . . .

It is interesting to note that it was Lansing and not the President who first advanced the interpretation of America's war effort as a crusade for democracy and against absolutism, and connected this interpretation with the Russian Revolution. The reasons for the President's initial reserve with regard to this concept are not clear. They probably did not rest in any lack of gratification over the Russian Revolution or doubt as to its democratic quality. More likely they reflected uncertainty whether such an interpretation of America's action was strictly accurate and also, perhaps, a lack of conviction as to the plausibility with which certain of our other future allies could be fitted into the democratic category. However this may be, Lansing's argument was not lost on the President. The view he put forward not only found reflection in the message calling for a declaration of war, but soon became the essence of the official interpretation of the purpose of America's war effort.

It is thus possible to say that while America's entry into World War I was in no wise occasioned by the Russian Revolution, this event did

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indeed affect the interpretation placed upon the war by the American government and public. In particular, it made it possible to construct for the American war effort an ideological rationale which, had the Russian Revolution not occurred, would have been relatively unconvincing and difficult to maintain. This was, at the time, a most welcome possibility; and one can easily understand how strong was the temptation to take advantage of it. But it implied a commitment on the part of the United States government to precisely those assumptions concerning the Russian situation which, as we have just seen, were least likely to be fulfilled: namely, that Russian political life would advance at once toward a stable parliamentary system and that Russia would continue to wage war as a member of the Allied coalition.



It was on this view of the Russian Revolution that American policy toward the Russian Provisional Government was founded; and the subsequent actions of the United States government were strictly consistent with this outlook.

The first of these actions was the prompt and enthusiastic recognition of the new regime. Here the initiative was taken by the American Ambassador at Petrograd, Mr. David R. Francis. We shall have a closer glance at Mr. Francis presently. Suffice it to note here that his relations with the Tsarist regime had been remote, unsatisfactory, and frustrating. He had found himself overshadowed, in his relation to Russian court circles, by his French and British colleagues, who were more experienced, better connected, more at home in the world of dynastic diplomacy and aristocratic social forms. Since its establishment a century earlier, the United States diplomatic mission in the Russian capital had, in fact, been generally in an inferior position as a result of the ideological disparity between the two systems and the disinclination of American envoys to attempt to rival the ponderous and expensive elegance of the great Petrograd salons.

To Francis the events that transpired between March 12-18, 1917, presaging—as they appeared to do—an area of democratic liberalism and constitutionalism, bade fair to change this entire setting. Not only was he deeply moved by the genuine idealism of the February Revolution, but wholly new vistas seemed to open up for Russian-American relations in this amazing series of events. An American Ambassador

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would now, for the first time since John Quincy Adams set foot ashore in Petrograd in 1809, be dealing with a political entity which had cut its ties to the institution of monarchy and was setting out along the same path of democratic government that the United States itself had taken. For such an entity, in contrast to its predecessor, the American example would surely be important, American achievements something to be studied and imitated, American help something to be coveted. Was it unreasonable to suppose that in the relations with such a country it would be the American Ambassador, rather than the British or the French, who would have the most to offer and the most to say? ⁶

Accordingly, in reporting to Washington the completion of the February Revolution, Francis requested authority to recognize the Provisional Government immediately, arguing that it was "desirable from every viewpoint" that the United States be the first to accord such recognition. "This revolution," he wrote,

is the practical realization of that principle of government which we have championed and advocated. I mean government by consent of the governed. Our recognition will have a stupendous moral effect especially if given first.⁷

Washington responded favorably to this request, with the result that Francis beat the British and French ambassadors to the punch by some four hours, an achievement which gave him intense and lasting satisfaction.

When, a fortnight later, America entered the war, the official utterances of the statesmen in Washington reflected faithfully the outlook on the Russian Revolution noted above. In his message to Congress of April 2, calling for a declaration of war, the President drew

⁶ In a letter written many years later to an American scholar (November 20, 1948, to Charles D. DeYoung), Mr. DeWitt C. Poole, one of the best American observers in Russia at that time, said: "Francis did not speak Russian and his contacts were not wide, but he was sufficiently aware of the plight of the Russian people to welcome jubilantly the overthrow of the Tsar and the coming to power of the Provisional Government . . . with the members of the Provisional Government Francis had a bridge of understanding, and with them in power over a period of years Francis might have gone down as a pretty successful ambassador. . . ." (Poole MSS, State Historical Society of Wisconsin, Madison.)

⁷ *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States, 1918, Russia*, Vol. 1, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, 1931, p. 6; from Telegram 1107, Francis to Secretary of State, March 18, 1917, 8 p.m.

This series of government publications, the individual volumes of which appeared at varying dates, will hereafter be referred to simply as *Foreign Relations*.

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sharply the ideological issue between democracy and autocracy. He denied the possibility of any fruitful participation in international life by autocratic governments (“No autocratic government could be trusted to keep faith or observe its covenants”). He then turned, with obvious relief and pleasure, to the Russian situation, and went on to say:

Does not every American feel that assurance has been added to our hope for the future peace of the world by the wonderful and heartening things that have been happening within the last few weeks in Russia? Russia was known by those who knew it best to have been always in fact democratic at heart, in all the vital habits of her thought, in all the intimate relationships of her people that spoke their natural instinct, their habitual attitude towards life. The autocracy that crowned the summit of her political structure, long as it had stood and terrible as was the reality of its power, was not in fact Russian in origin, character, or purpose; and now it has been shaken off and the great, generous Russian people have been added in all their naïve majesty and might to the forces that are fighting for freedom in the world, for justice, and for peace. Here is a fit partner for a league of honour.⁸

This utterance was supplemented some days later by the wording of the Secretary’s telegram directing Francis to apprise the Russian government of America’s entry into the war. Francis was instructed to say

that the Government and people of the United States rejoice that the great Russian people have joined the powerful democracies who are struggling against autocracy . . .

and to express the hope and expectation of the United States government that

a Russia inspired by these great ideals will realize more than ever the duty which it owes to humanity and the necessity for preserving internal harmony in order that as a united and patriotic nation it may overcome the autocratic power which by force and intrigue menaces the democracy which the Russian people have proclaimed.⁹

These two passages set the tone for the approach the American government was to take toward the Provisional Government through-

⁸ *Foreign Relations, 1917*, Supplement 1, *The World War* (1931), p. 200.

⁹ *Foreign Relations, 1918, Russia*, Vol. 1, *op.cit.*, pp. 20–21; from Telegram 1299, April 6, 1917, 1 p.m., Secretary of State to Francis.

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out the entire period of its tenure: an approach made up of a somewhat wishful and hasty welcome of Russia into the community of democratic nations; an eager desire to assist the Russian people to pursue what were assumed to be common aims of military struggle; and a benevolent but never inordinate anxiety for the ability of the new Russian regime to preserve the "internal harmony" requisite to the fulfillment of its proper role in the new community of democratic nations.

In accordance with this attitude, everything possible was done to bring assistance and encouragement to the Provisional Government. One of the principal efforts in this direction was the extension of credit. As early as April 3, even prior to our entry into the war, Francis was authorized to offer American governmental credits to the new Russian regime. In pursuance of this offer, a series of credits totaling \$325 million were eventually extended at various times during the period of tenure of the Provisional Government.¹⁰ Against these credits \$187,729,750 was actually used. The amount of goods purchased and delivered to Russia before the November Revolution was of course not large in view of the shortness of time involved. The effect on Russia's contribution to the war was substantially nil.

In addition to this financial assistance, numbers of Americans were sent to Russia in 1917 in the belief that their presence there would be useful either in giving inspiration and encouragement to the Provisional Government or in helping it to cope with various technical problems thought to be associated with its war effort.

The first and most important step in this direction was the despatch of the Root Mission. Immediately after our entry into the war Washington conceived the idea of sending to Petrograd a special goodwill mission, which would welcome Russia into the democratic community and which would also manifest the American desire to be of assistance. The result was the decision, taken shortly after the middle of April, to despatch Mr. Elihu Root, distinguished Republican lawyer and elder statesman, former Secretary of State and Secretary of War, on just such a mission. He was to be accompanied by a number of other well-known American figures. The purpose of the mission, it was announced, was to manifest America's sym-

¹⁰ *Foreign Relations, 1918, Russia*, Vol. III (1932), Chapter 1, pp. 1-28. A further credit of \$125 million was established on November 1, 1917 but was overtaken by the Revolution before any public announcement could be made of it.

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pathy for the “adherence of Russia to the principle of democracy” and to confer with the Russian government about “the best ways and means to bring about effective cooperation between the two governments in the prosecution of the war.”¹¹

The reasons that led the President to select Root for this task are not entirely clear. A desire to demonstrate the bipartisanship of America’s feeling was presumably the leading consideration; but, as Root himself sourly observed, “he never would have appointed me if I had not been 73 years of age.”¹² Wilson was, as we shall see shortly, not happy in retrospect about the appointment, and there is no indication that he made it with any enthusiasm or conviction.

Worried by the fear that Root would be regarded by Russian liberals and socialists as a reactionary, the President tried to find someone to include in the mission who would counteract this impression. He turned (rather ironically, when one recalls the views of Russian socialists about the American Federation of Labor) to Samuel Gompers for advice. Gompers first recommended Mr. William English Walling, who wisely begged off.¹³ The choice finally settled on Mr. James Duncan, elderly vice-president of the American Federation of Labor, and Mr. Charles Edward Russell, journalist, author, and moderate-socialist by persuasion. Other members of the mission were Mr. Charles R. Crane, who will be mentioned further in another chapter; Mr. John R. Mott, of the Young Men’s Christian Association; Mr. Cyrus H. McCormick, of the International Harvester Company; and Mr. Samuel R. Bertron, New York banker. General Hugh L. Scott, only just retired from the position of Chief of Staff of the Army, was also made a member of the delegation.

Root and his party proceeded to Russia in May via Vladivostok, were transported across Siberia and European Russia in the ex-Tsar’s private train, and arrived on June 13 in Petrograd, where they endured nearly a month of formalities, dinners, speeches, and excursions before returning to the United States by the same route.

In addition to the Root Mission, an Advisory Commission of Railway Experts was sent under the leadership of a well-known American

¹¹ *Foreign Relations, 1918, Russia*, Vol. 1, *op.cit.*, pp. 110–111; from Telegram 1428, May 22, 1917, 5 p.m., Secretary of State to Francis.

¹² Philip C. Jessup, *Elihu Root*, Dodd, Mead & Co., New York, 1938, Vol. II, p. 358.

¹³ Mr. Walling’s widow kindly made available the President’s letters to her husband concerning the mission. It is characteristic of Wilson’s complicated feelings about the mission that he enthusiastically approved Walling’s reluctance to join it and treated him thereafter with highest respect.

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engineer, Mr. John F. Stevens. A number of private or semi-private American organizations likewise sent representatives or missions to Russia during the course of the summer. Of these the most prominent was the American Red Cross Commission, initially under Dr. Frank G. Billings.

It is difficult to discover any instance in which these missions had any appreciable favorable effect on the course of events in Russia during the period of the Provisional Government. The Red Cross Commission was neither needed nor particularly wanted by the Russian government, and the only influence it exerted on the situation was through the individual activities of certain of its members which, as will be seen shortly, had nothing to do with its Red Cross function. The Stevens Railway Mission, likewise the result of American—not Russian—initiative, was also not really wanted by the Russian government and was accepted only for the sake of the railway supplies which, it was hoped, would come with it. The Railway Mission spent its energies, in the summer of 1917, largely in talk and frustration, only to be overtaken by the November Revolution before it had any real chance to get down to business. (The valuable work that it was to accomplish at a later date will be discussed subsequently.)

As for the Root Mission, the most pretentious of all, its presence in the Russian capital seems to have had little effect other than to burden with a series of onerous social engagements the harried ministers of the Provisional Government, already involved in a life-and-death battle against the forces of disintegration that were soon to overtake Russia's brief experiment in republican government. Root himself, lacking not only knowledge of the Russian scene but also any deeper interest in it, was a poor choice for the task. He went without enthusiasm and did not enjoy the experience. While his public expressions were polite, his underlying attitude was smug and patronizing. "Please say to the President," he wired Lansing from Petrograd,

that we have found here an infant class in the art of being free containing one hundred and seventy million people and they need to be supplied with kindergarten material; they are sincere, kindly, good people but confused and dazed.¹⁴

One seeks in vain for any indication that Root's private observations and speeches in the Russian capital had any influence on Russian

¹⁴ *Foreign Relations, 1918, Russia*, Vol. 1, *op.cit.*, p. 122; from Telegram 8, June 17, 1917, Root to Secretary of State.

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political circles other than to drive home the thought that the degree of American support for the Provisional Government would depend strictly on the vigor of the latter's war effort.

Wilson's effort to give the Root Mission some sort of rapport with the Russian leftist parties by including Duncan and Russell in its membership was pathetically unsuccessful. It reflected a lack of appreciation on the President's part for the defiant bitterness of Russian radical opinion, its contempt for the moderate "reformist" philosophy of American labor, and especially its strong negative feelings toward the war. The thought that men like Duncan and Russell would have any natural intimacy with Russian socialists was indeed farfetched; and the choice became an object of derision not only for contemporaries but also for future Soviet historians.¹⁵ Only on one occasion does any member of the mission appear to have visited the Petrograd Soviet. This was Russell. His remarks on that occasion were not warmly received, and no intimacy of contact was achieved.

It is not surprising that a mission so inauspiciously devised should have left a generally bad taste in everyone's mouth. Root himself subsequently complained:

Wilson didn't want to accomplish anything. It was a grand-stand play. He wanted to show his sympathy for the Russian Revolution. When we delivered his message and made our speeches, he was satisfied; that's all he wanted.¹⁶

The President looked back on the venture with equal lack of enthusiasm: "Mr. Root?" he said to a friend in late 1918. "I sent him to Russia at the head of an important mission, and its failure was largely due to Russian distrust of Mr. Root."¹⁷

Root's principal recommendations to the Secretary of State, when

¹⁵ In 1934 the Soviet historian I. I. Genkin ridiculed Wilson for sending "Russell (an extremely right-wing 'socialist' and an extreme partisan of the anti-German coalition), and . . . the vice-president of the A.F. of L.—a friend of Gompers—James Duncan. This was the most radical, the most 'left wing' sort of thing that the 'democrat' Wilson could dish up for the Provisional Government." (*Soedinennye Shtaty Ameriki i SSSR—Ikh Politicheskie i Ekonomicheskie Vzaimootnosheniya* [The United States of America and the U.S.S.R.—Political and Economic Relations between Them], State Social-Economic Publishing Co., Moscow-Leningrad, 1934, p. 20.)

Unless otherwise stated, translations of citations from foreign-language sources, in this work, are my own.

¹⁶ Jessup, Vol. II, *op.cit.*, p. 356.

¹⁷ George Creel, *Rebel at Large: Recollections of Fifty Crowded Years*, G. P. Putnam's Sons, New York, 1947, p. 253.

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he returned, were first for an extensive informational program to be carried out with a view to influencing Russian public opinion, and secondly for a program to strengthen the morale of the Russian army, mainly through the introduction of recreational activities under the guidance of the Young Men's Christian Association. Neither of these recommendations bore any practical fruit. The first and most obvious explanation for this is that events were moving too rapidly and time was too short; neither could be implemented before the Provisional Government fell. But even had both recommendations been acted upon with the greatest promptness, it is not likely that their effect would have been of any importance. The Root plan for strengthening the morale of the army reflected little understanding of the depth of demoralization already reached in the Russian armed forces and of the real reasons for it. Whatever increased informational activity might have conceivably been undertaken in Russia by our government before the November crisis would surely have been rendered ineffective by those factors that have affected so many subsequent American efforts in this field: unfamiliarity with the political feelings and impulses of other peoples, lack of trained personnel, a stubborn tendency to speak subjectively in the fulsome vocabulary of American idealism rather than in terms that might have practical meaning to peoples elsewhere.

In addition to the failure of these efforts to achieve positive results, it may be questioned whether the United States government, in company with the other western Allies, did not actually hasten and facilitate the failure of the Provisional Government by insisting that Russia should continue the war effort, and by making this demand the criterion of its support. In asking the leaders of the Provisional Government simultaneously to consolidate their political power and to revive and continue participation in the war, the Allies were asking the impossible. The two tasks were mutually exclusive. Even at the time of the Revolution, both population and armed forces were already strongly affected by war-weariness. The leaders of the Petrograd Soviet, who in far higher degree than the government itself commanded the confidence of the politically active elements in the armed forces, were deeply committed to the thesis that the war aims of the Entente were imperialistic and unworthy. Obviously, this attitude opened up in the sharpest way, for the rank and file, the question as to what they were fighting for. The Revolution, furthermore, was

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accompanied by a tremendous weakening of the discipline of the armed forces—a process which the socialist leaders were either disinclined or too timorous to control and which they attempted to euphonize under the phrase “democratization of the army.” Added to this, as the summer progressed, was the growing Bolshevik agitation for immediate land reform, an agitation which caused many of the peasant-soldiers to hope for an early redistribution of land in the villages. This anticipation served to decrease their interest in the military effort, to heighten their desire for peace on almost any terms, and to impel a great many of them—in increasing numbers as the months went on—to actual desertion.

After some initial disagreement between the Soviet and the Provisional Government over the question of war aims, the two were able to come together on a formula calling for a general “peace without annexations or indemnities” and favoring the early institution of negotiations with the other Entente powers to this end; but aiming, meanwhile, at a restoration of the fighting effectiveness of the armed forces and at least a nominal continuation of the war effort. Some members of the government and some of the more conservative leaders in the Soviet actually believed that such a program was feasible; and their optimism may have had much to do with encouraging a similar hope in the governments of the other Entente powers and in Washington. Actually, this hope was unreal. In view of the half-hearted attitude of the Petrograd Soviet toward the discipline of the armed forces, any thought of restoring fighting capacity, or even of halting the military disintegration, was a pipe dream. For the government to attempt, in these circumstances, to spur the semi-demoralized and land-hungry troops into a new war effort could only tend to force it into opposition to the rank and file, to expose its real lack of authority among the troops, and to play into the hands of the extreme, and wholly unscrupulous, Bolshevik agitation among the soldier masses. Such an effort was bound to widen the gap between government and Soviet, and to put the moderate members of the Soviet, in particular, in a precarious position.¹⁸

Thus the demand of the Allies, including the United States, that

¹⁸ This danger was clearly seen by some of the Russian conservatives, as well as by certain of the foreign observers. Note, for example, the statement by Milyukov, first Foreign Minister in the Provisional Government and later historian of the events of this period: “. . . the affirmative attitude of the revolutionary regime toward the continuation of the war served . . . as the cause of its weakening. . . . The effects of the war at the front and within Russia predisposed the popular masses in advance in favor of those who . . . proved the opponents of the February revo-

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Russia should renew and reinvigorate her war effort (bluntly expressed by Root in the formula "no fight, no loans") was actually in conflict with the other major aim of American policy toward the Provisional Government—namely, that the experiment in constitutional democratic government should proceed successfully.

Having once taken this attitude toward the Provisional Government, the United States government pursued it sternly to the bitter end. As the summer progressed and the situation of the Provisional Government became steadily more complicated and precarious, there were, to be sure, occasional warnings from American officials in Russia that the assumptions on which American policy rested were becoming increasingly questionable. These warnings, characteristically, came rather from the consular and military officials, who were in closer contact with the populace and the soldiery, than from the Embassy Chancery in Petrograd, whose dealings were with the Provisional Government. The Embassy officials could hardly be blamed for this. Root had borne in on them, from the lofty platform of his own prestige, that it was not their duty to question the professions or the political prospects of a regime the United States had decided to favor with its friendship and support. Nor was it easy, in that confused and unprecedented time, to perceive those political trends which are so easily identified by hindsight in the perspective of nearly forty years. The members of the Provisional Government were also partly to blame by reason of their understandable but nevertheless unfortunate reluctance to reveal to the Allied representatives in Petrograd the full measure of their real weakness. Thus the warning voices remained small and seemingly ineffectual.

Lansing, to be sure, took note of these sober voices, and followed with many misgivings the course of events in Russia. After talking with Root in August, upon the latter's return from Russia, Lansing expressed in a memorandum to the President his skepticism as to the staying power of the Provisional Government¹⁹ and deplored the

lution. The war in that sense prepared the people for the October Revolution." (P. Milyukov, *Rossiya na Perelomye* [Russia at the Crossroads], Imprimerie d' Art Voltaire, Paris, 1927, Vol. 1, p. 43.)

Similarly, in reporting the disturbances of the third and fourth of May in Petrograd, the American Consul there, Mr. North Winship, wrote: "This distrust of the allies and this feeling of being forced to continue a distasteful and irksome war which is being preached openly and [un]disguisedly by all the socialist organs and leaders, was the hidden cause of all the events of the 3d and 4th of May." (*Foreign Relations, 1918, Russia*, Vol. 1, *op.cit.*, p. 50, from Despatch 300, May 8, 1917.)

¹⁹ *War Memoirs of Robert Lansing, Secretary of State*, Bobbs-Merrill Co., New York, 1935; Memorandum of August 9, 1917, pp. 337-338.

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atmosphere of optimism which the Root Mission was radiating. The President surely shared some of his uneasiness.

But there was now little to do but continue on the course that had been laid down in March and April. Unpromising as the situation appeared in the last weeks of the regime of the Provisional Government, one could never be wholly sure that things would not in some way or other work themselves out. Surely, it was reasoned, the political prospects of the Provisional Government would not be aided by last-minute switches of American policy, indicating lack of confidence in its future and vacillation with regard to the desirability of further American support.

Thus the United States government, having committed itself to a fixed and narrow line of policy, one without alternatives, had no choice but to pursue this line unchangingly as the storm clouds gathered, concealing its growing misgivings until complete catastrophe swept away the assumptions underlying that policy and created, for all the world to see, a wholly new situation.

One of the disadvantages of this situation was that it involved the extension of various forms of aid to Russia long after they could play any real part in promoting the purposes for which the respective aid programs had been designed. But far more serious was the fact that this unhappy predicament made it impossible for the Washington leaders to take the public into their confidence and to stimulate the sort of public discussion that would have been necessary if people were to be prepared for the worst eventualities.

It was, therefore, a largely unprepared American public and a government partly forewarned but still in considerable bewilderment that were startled and almost stupefied to learn, in the middle of November 1917, that the reins of power in Russia had slipped from the hands of Premier Kerensky and had been seized by a band of radical fanatics of whom one knew only that they held the most inflammatory social views and were violently opposed to the continuation of Russia's war effort.

Before we turn to the details of this painful awakening, it would be well to glance at some of the personalities most prominently involved in the forthcoming encounter between a United States at war and a Russia deep in the throes of social revolution.

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