



RECONSTRUCTING RUSSIA

U. S. Policy in
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Russia,

1917-1922

LEO J. BACINO

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Introduction

The American intervention in Siberia during the Russian Revolution and civil war left no lasting effects on the region, other than a legacy of bitterness and mistrust for future Soviet-American relations. But seventy years of Soviet-American rivalry has obscured the fact that, during the Russian Revolution and civil war, Siberia had been a focal point in the United States's struggle against the rival powers to recast the international economic and political order. This forgotten dimension of the American intervention in Russia represented a sophisticated foreign assistance program. It now deserves careful reevaluation in view of the important lessons it can provide for contemporary American policymakers who are struggling to devise effective policies for post-Soviet Russia.

In 1918, the decisive year of the calamitous world war, American statesmen were deeply concerned that the Russian Empire would be divided into German and Japanese spheres of influence. The origins of World War I itself lay in the rivalry over spheres of influence in semidependent developing regions, such as China, Eastern Europe, and the Middle East. The collapse of the Provisional Government in Russia at the end of 1917 intensified this rivalry among the remaining powers by transforming the Russian Empire itself into an arena in this global struggle between imperial systems. During the extraordinary years 1918 and 1919, when a political vacuum existed in the empire, Germany, Japan, Britain, and France all pursued policies in Russia that were aimed at establishing spheres of influence of one form or another. If these powers had been allowed to dismember the Russian Empire, this would have given added impetus to their ongoing struggle to divide the remaining developing regions. This possibility alone required the United States to become actively involved in Siberia as part of its larger effort to promote the Open Door.

In contrast to this framework of great-power rivalry, American statesmen viewed bolshevism as an epiphenomenal, a symptom of the czarist regime's pervasive social and economic malaise that the war had unleashed. Indeed, during 1918 much of the Wilson administration's antagonism toward the Bolsheviks arose from the practical consideration that this revolutionary regime served as a pawn in the larger systemic conflict among the Great Powers.

At the threshold of a new historical epoch, American statesmen also perceived tremendous opportunities for Russian-American relations. The Wilson administration had greeted the March Revolution of 1917 in Russia as an event that could have a great impact on the postwar international order. With the establishment of the Provisional Government, the administration was encouraged that Russia would now begin to evolve a constitutional form of government. As a corollary to this social and political process, major American corporate groups believed a post-czarist Russia would welcome American investment as an alternative to the politically based pattern of European investment during the czarist years. In this event, Russia would be disposed to participate in the international economy on terms consistent with Open Door principles: a world system that operated under rules that guaranteed equality of opportunity for trade and investment—in direct contrast to the existing system of preferential spheres of influence.

Against this background, American statesmen attached great significance to Siberia. They believed that this vast developing region, with its relatively egalitarian social structure, would rapidly begin the transition toward a postczarist civil society. As this social and economic transformation gathered momentum in Siberia, it would, in turn, provide a tremendous outlet for American investment and thereby help solidify an Open Door system. In order for the United States to unlock the full potential of this unique region offered for economic expansion, the Wilson administration first had to overcome the challenges posed by the combined ambitions of the rival powers, as well as the new phenomenon of revolutionary socialism. Yet Siberia's unparalleled significance as an economic frontier and the distinct interest the United States exhibited toward it only made the interpower struggle for hegemony in the region more intense. In this crucible of war and revolution, American efforts to provide Siberia with economic assistance should accordingly be viewed as a distinctly Wilsonian experiment in foreign assistance policy. Unlike post-World War II foreign assistance programs, American policy in Siberia not only had to contend with anticapitalist revolutionary movements but also with the ambitions of formidable rival powers. Therefore, during the formative stages of Soviet-American relations, the counterrevolutionary tendencies inherent in Wilson's approach to Siberia were still subordinated to the progressive historical role American Open Door diplomacy played in its struggle against the more exploitative forms of imperialism practiced by the other powers.

This study examines the United States's effort to promote social and economic reconstruction in Siberia between 1917 and 1922. It will demonstrate that this endeavor constituted a major political initiative at a pivotal juncture in the nation's evolution toward global preeminence in the twentieth century. This policy simultaneously represented the primary response of American statesmen to events in revolutionary Russia and an important new dimension in their larger struggle to achieve structural transformation of the international political economy. The term "reconstruction" is used here to define the nature of American policy because it was consistently used by American statesmen themselves when expressing their purposes in Russia. More important, this term embodies the developmental impulses that motivated American policy. It conveys the American policymakers' recognition that Siberia's long-term development would ultimately hinge on fostering a stable civil society; efforts to gain immediate economic advantages in Russia would only hinder this goal. They clearly regarded their assistance policy in Siberia as a prelude to an ambitious developmental program that would reintegrate the former czarist empire and border regions like Manchuria into a global economy managed by the United States according to the rules of the Open Door.

Since American policymakers thought their initiatives in Siberia would have far-reaching implications for American prosperity and for the stability of the emerging international system, the failure of these efforts in no way diminishes their significance. The inability of the United States to incorporate the region on an Open Door basis and the eventual withdrawal of the Soviet Union from the world market undoubtedly contributed to the formation of closed economic blocs during the interwar period. The development of regional economic blocs in turn disrupted international trade and investment, which contributed to the depression and to the tensions between the powers that resulted in World War II.¹

The Wilson administration's assistance policy focused on two complementary initiatives: the restoration of operations on the Trans-Siberian railway and the provision of commercial assistance to the Siberian population via the region's prominent peasant cooperative societies. These forms of assistance were geared toward reestablishing predictable and stable market relations along the continent-sized area traversed by the Trans-Siberian railway system. American policymakers were merely acting on the recognition that a more secure environment would provide an impetus for social and economic reconstruction in this region where czarist authority had been relatively weak and could be replaced by institutions more representative of the region's society.

In its initial stages, the American assistance policy attempted to commence the reconstruction process in Siberia by nurturing the recovery of Russian civil society, or by encouraging what Wilson called “self-government.” Wilson’s conception of self-government sheds valuable light on his approach to the whole Russian question because it denotes a level of socioeconomic development rather than a specific form of government.

In Wilson’s view, self-government existed where there were political, institutional, or legal structures founded on the consent of the governed and that provided essential guarantees for personal and property rights. In other words, Wilson used the term “self-government” to characterize what amounted to a constitutional order: a civil society founded on voluntary associational activities and mediated by an institutional structure and a rule of law that accommodated individual liberty to public power.

Wilson attributed great significance to these self-governing social and political capacities because they were essential building blocks of the new international order he hoped to construct from the remains of the shattered system of European empires. As an alternative to the prewar system of international relations founded on a tenuous balance of power among rival empires, Wilson envisioned a rational system based on cooperation between powers, particularly with regard to the relations in developing regions. This type of system, which N. Gordon Levin has appropriately defined as liberal-internationalist, would operate within a framework of international law guaranteed by American economic and naval power.

While this study deliberately subordinates the anti-Bolshevik facets of the United States’s Russian policy, it fully acknowledges that American policymakers were staunchly anti-Bolshevik. Since American policymakers considered bolshevism the product of pervasive instability, they believed that economic assistance would constitute the only effective antidote to the problem. In other words, the reconstruction program embodied the truly coherent, or class-conscious, response of American policymakers to revolutionary events in Russia. Furthermore, a successful American-sponsored assistance program in Siberia would also serve as the most effective means for influencing events in European Russia.

While the Bolshevik regime survived, contrary to the expectations of most American policymakers, this in no way lessens the efficacy of American expectations or of policies rooted in these assumptions. After all, the Bolsheviks themselves were doubtful of their future when it became clear that revolutions would not erupt in the advanced Western industrial countries.

Because the American policymaking establishment considered the Bolshevik Revolution a temporary phase in the revolutionary cycle, more attention must be paid to their concern that the Bolshevik regime would become a pawn in the broader systemic conflict among the powers. Indeed, Germany, Japan, and Britain all attempted to use revolutionary instability to further their designs on the Russian Empire. Therefore, although American reconstruction efforts in Siberia were implicitly aimed at combating bolshevism, a comprehensive assessment of these initiatives must take into account their role in the intense interimperialist struggle for control of the region. By viewing the American assistance policy as part of this broader imperial rivalry, this study provides a wider perspective on the debate over the American response to revolutionary events in the Russian Empire.

In the critical years of 1918 and 1919, the thorny issue of military intervention in Siberia limited Wilson’s ability to undertake any substantial program of economic assistance in the region. Nevertheless, this study will demonstrate that Wilson’s controversial decision to undertake a military intervention on behalf of the stranded Czecho-Slovak Corps in the summer of 1918 was essentially an attempt to reconcile Allied pressure for a military intervention with his primary goal of providing economic assistance to Siberia.

During the trying months between January and September 1918, Wilson repeatedly rejected Allied appeals for an effort to restore the eastern front. Wilson only accepted the efficacy of an intervention in Siberia when he learned that a consensus of anti-Bolshevik political representatives, especially the representatives of the peasant and worker cooperatives, would welcome an American-led intervention to bolster popular resistance against Germany. These sentiments convinced Wilson that the political-conscious segments of Russian society favored an Allied intervention in defense of Russian national sovereignty, if it did not threaten Russian territorial integrity. The attitude of the cooperative societies particularly influenced Wilson's decision to intervene, because these organizations were truly organized regional institutions that represented the material and social aspirations of a considerable segment of the Siberian population. After Wilson reached this decision, he steadfastly insisted that any Allied military operations in Siberia should be limited to providing logistical support for the Czechs and Slovaks, who, in turn, would provide security for the Trans-Siberian Railroad.

But the rival aspirations of Britain, France, and Japan in Siberia undermined American efforts to assist the reconstruction of civil society in the region during 1918 and 1919. By the end of 1918, Bolshevik forces triumphed over the conservative regime of Alexandr Kolchak. Kolchak had acceded to power in November 1918 with the support of British military officials. His regime was doomed by its exclusive reliance on military means to defeat bolshevism and by its unwillingness to develop support among the population. If the Kolchak regime's repressive practices were not sufficient hindrance to constructive policy in Siberia, Japan used its large military expedition to frustrate the work of the American railroad advisers and to impede the shipment of American goods west along the railroad. This study will demonstrate that the debate within the Wilson administration over recognition of the Kolchak regime was primarily motivated by its broader desire to finance economic assistance for Siberia.

The United States abandoned its assistance efforts in Siberia after the Bolshevik victory at the end of 1919. Even then, the Republican Harding administration persuaded the American railroad advisers to remain on the Chinese Eastern Railway, the Manchurian section of the Trans-Siberian system, for another three years until the end of 1922. The continued presence of American railway advisers on the fringe of the Trans-Siberian system demonstrates the importance American policymakers attributed to this transportation artery. While enormous obstacles stood in the path of these advisers' work from the time of their arrival on the Trans-Siberian railway in June 1917 until they left in October 1922, both the Wilson and Harding administrations never wavered in their belief that the stakes involved warranted a continued American presence on the system.

To fully appreciate the implications of the American commitment on the Trans-Siberian Railroad, it is necessary to view the venture in the broader context of American Open Door diplomacy in the Far East. Striking parallels existed between the direction of American policy on the Trans-Siberian system from 1917 to 1922 and major American initiatives in Manchuria a decade earlier. From 1905 until his death in 1909, E. H. Harriman, the American railroad magnate and financier, alternatively attempted to purchase partial control of the South Manchurian Railway from Japan or the Chinese Eastern Railway from Russia as part of his ambition to own a worldwide railroad network. To strengthen his bargaining position, Harriman even undertook negotiations with Chinese officials to build a line parallel to the South Manchurian Railway.

Harriman's proposals received strong diplomatic backing from the State Department during the Taft administration. In 1909, Secretary of State Philander Knox attempted to revive Harriman's plan when he proposed his "neutralization" scheme, whereby the powers would jointly finance Chinese redemption of all the Manchurian railroads. All of these initiatives failed because of Japanese opposition and because Britain and France ultimately refused to support these proposals over the

objections of their respective Far Eastern allies, Japan and Russia. The continuity between the Harriman-Knox proposals and American policy toward the Trans-Siberian system between 1917 and 1922 became apparent in 1920 when the U.S. government officially supported inclusion of the Chinese Eastern Railway within the jurisdiction of the Second China Consortium Banking Group.

American assistance policy in Siberia also foreshadowed future foreign assistance programs. In early 1919, the Wilson administration negotiated an agreement with Britain, France, and Japan for supervision of the Trans-Siberian railway; this cooperative framework resembled, in basic respect, contemporary multilateral developmental agencies such as the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. Subsequently, Wilson wanted to obtain a large congressional appropriation, similar to the Marshall Plan, for a large-scale program to assist Siberia's reconstruction. This plan, which was shelved during the treaty fight, demonstrates Wilson's recognition that the U.S. government must assume a major responsibility for promoting global stabilization and long-term economic expansion.

From one angle, the limited funding given the American assistance efforts in Siberia may seem to call into question the degree of commitment to the reconstruction of Siberia. But the American political system's lack of experience with large foreign assistance programs posed a formidable obstacle for American statesmen who recognized the potential significance of Siberia. In view of the political constraints, the Wilson administration stood no chance of justifying any large expenditure for the doubtful prospect of assisting a region suffering from widespread turmoil. Nevertheless, Wilson remained determined to obtain a large appropriation for Siberia from Congress in the summer of 1919, just as his political fortunes were waning.

Realist critics might respond that this study merely demonstrates the futility of American attempts to escape from the balance of power, which they view as the main source of international stability. But these writers overemphasize the causal role of the balance of power that has always served as a means of furthering other ends. Prior to World War II, American foreign policy challenged the balance of power because it was a serious impediment to tangible American interests. The existence of treaty arrangements, like the Anglo-Japanese alliance in the Far East, helped these powers preserve their spheres of influence from American encroachment. It was only when World War II brought about the complete collapse of the system based on spheres of influence that the United States could establish multilateral institutions to supervise international development. Therefore, in many respects the Wilson administration's Siberian policy represented a "test run" for the accomplishments of the midcentury.

The first chapter in this volume provides a brief assessment of American views on the political and economic future of Russia and particularly of Siberia. This chapter demonstrates how Siberia's unique position within the Russian Empire made it a particularly attractive area for the prospective extension of American influence. American statesmen had a special affinity for Siberia because of its frontier characteristic, which lent itself to superficial analogies with the American frontier of the nineteenth century. The region's rich natural resources, its relatively egalitarian social structure and the weakness of czarist institutions appeared to make it fertile ground for rapid economic development after the Revolution of March 1917.

The American reconstruction program for Russia consisted of three phases. [Chapter 2](#) examines the first phase of this process, which spanned the period of April through November 1917, when the United States furnished the Provisional Government with assistance to its railways. American strategy to open the Russian "door" was based on establishing American managerial and technical influence on the Trans-Siberian and European Russian Railroads during World War I. The United States offered the Russian Provisional Government a body of prominent railroad engineers, the Advisory Commission of Railway Experts, in order to improve operations on the Trans-Siberian

Railroad after April 1917. This commission was placed under the chairmanship of John F. Stevens, the most prestigious railroad engineer in the United States. Stevens would be the pivotal figure in the American reconstruction program until the end of 1922.

In the year between the Bolshevik Revolution and the Armistice in November 1918, the threat of German economic domination of Russia preoccupied American policymakers. American statesmen believed the Bolsheviks' seizure of power was merely a temporary phase in the revolutionary cycle; consequently, they feared this regime would merely pave the way for Germany's aims in Russia as the population sought liberation from revolutionary extremism. Chapters 3 through 6 cover the year 1918, during which the Wilson administration strove to defeat Germany's efforts to consolidate its economic position in the Russian Empire following the Brest-Litovsk Treaty of March 1918, which gave Germany extensive economic privileges. In this context, American economic assistance to Siberia during 1918 served two purposes: it played an immediate strategic role in the war effort against Germany and it attempted to provide the commercial assistance necessary to begin the reconstruction process. The inter-Allied Goods Exchange Trading Company (Tovaro-Obmien), the Russian Bureau of the War Trade Board, and the plan for a temporary ruble currency in Siberia were all conceived to further these dual objectives. The Wilson administration even hoped the Czech and Slovak Corps could play a role in this process as an Allied police force along the Trans-Siberian railway system. This force, which was originally slated for transportation to the western front, consisted of former Austro-Hungarian prisoners of war who were reorganized in Russia on behalf of the Allied cause.

Chapters 7 and 8 examine American efforts to restore effective operations along the Trans-Siberian railway and to strengthen its links to the international market. Any chance for promoting reconstruction in Siberia, and eventually in European Russia, now rested squarely on the fate of the Siberian railway system. Chapter 7 shows 1919 to be the critical year for Wilson's reconstruction program. After the conclusion of an inter-Allied railroad agreement in February 1919, the formulation of a comprehensive assistance program for Russia became a priority for the Wilson administration. By August, events in the Far East and political conditions at home undermined this nascent program. The defeat of anti-Bolshevik leader Admiral Kolchak, Japan's hostility to Stevens's efforts to stabilize the railroads, and domestic opposition to Wilson's Russian policy blocked any hope of implementing a government-financed reconstruction program for the region.

After the Allies withdrew from Siberia, the United States retained John Stevens in Manchuria to manage the Chinese Eastern Railway, the last major segment of the Trans-Siberian railway system. Chapter 8 surveys the intersection of the Siberian program with Chinese issues from 1920 through 1922. To prevent Japan from closing the eastern approach to Siberia, the United States sought inclusion of the Russian-controlled Chinese Eastern Railway within the jurisdiction of the new Chinese Consortium. This chapter adds a new dimension to our understanding of America's Far Eastern policy by demonstrating the integral role Siberia once played in American calculations.

No existing study has recognized the scope or significance of the Wilson administration's policy initiatives in Russia. For decades, the political and intellectual climate created by the American-Soviet bipolar rivalry has led too many scholars to view Wilson's response to the Russian Revolution simply as a prelude to the Cold War. In his two-volume study *Soviet-American Relations, 1917-1922*, George F. Kennan, statesman, historian and a realist critic of Wilsonian foreign policy, eschewed any efforts at a broad appraisal of Wilson's Russian policy in favor of a narrative approach that emphasizes that the complexity of international relations militated against the efficacy of universal worldviews such as bolshevism or Wilsonianism. In his *American-Russian Relations, 1781-1947*, William A. Williams focused on the anti-Bolshevik motives of the Wilsonians. The single best source

on the ideological basis of Wilsonian foreign policy is the work of N. Gordon Levin, who argues persuasively in his study *Woodrow Wilson and World Politics: America's Response to War and Revolution* that Wilson attempted to foster an environment favorable to the development of liberal constitutional institutions in the Russian Empire in opposition to both revolutionary socialism and militaristic imperialism.

The best introduction to the question of American involvement in Siberia is John A. White's study, *The Siberian Intervention*. Relying almost exclusively on published sources, this excellent study suggests several important points about the political economy of American policy in Siberia. White argues that it was the pressure exerted on Russia by Germany and Japan that gave purpose to the Allied and American intervention in Russia. Betty M. Unterberger's *America's Siberian Intervention, 1918–1920* provides a solid background on the subject of America's intervention in Siberia. She emphasizes that the Wilson administration undertook a limited intervention on behalf of the Czecho-Slovak Corps to maintain Russian sovereignty and to preserve the Open Door in Siberia and northern Manchuria against Japanese aggression. Her essay "Woodrow Wilson and the Russian Revolution," published in Arthur S. Link's *Woodrow Wilson and a Revolutionary World, 1913–1921* provides a fine overview of Wilsonian policy.

Linda Killen's path-breaking study *The Russian Bureau: A Case Study in Wilsonian Diplomacy* is the first monograph to address the issue of American economic assistance to Siberia. This valuable study surveys American commercial assistance efforts in 1918 and 1919 and questions the consistency between Wilson's high-sounding rhetoric regarding his expectations for Russia's liberal-democratic potential and his reluctance to commit funds for a program of economic assistance.

Recent historiography on the American intervention in the Russian Revolution has polarized around exaggerated positions. David McFadden's *Alternative Paths: Soviets and Americans, 1917–1920* overstates the potential for a Soviet-American rapprochement and expanded trade with Soviet-controlled regions during this period; and Christine White's *British and American Commercial Relations with Soviet Russia, 1918–1924* also overestimates the significance of American trade expansion with the Soviet Union in the 1920s.² Alternately, David Foglesong's *America's Secret War Against Bolshevism: U.S. Intervention in the Russian Civil War, 1917–1920* emphasizes what he considers to be the counterrevolutionary nature of the Wilson administration's policy toward Russia. By ignoring the significance and complexity of the interpower rivalry in Russia and the sophistication of the Wilson administration's assistance policy, Foglesong mistakes the distinctly progressive character of Wilson's policy for a series of covert operations against the Bolsheviks.

My use of primary sources demonstrates that American foreign policy is conceived and managed by a policymaking "establishment" composed of government officials and strategic representatives of the private sector. This "establishment" is fundamentally oriented toward promoting the stable expansion of the corporate political economy. This does not imply that U.S. foreign policy is a servant of specific interests, nor does it condemn foreign investment as necessarily harmful to developing countries. It merely recognizes the predominance of corporate capitalism and the leadership of both government officials and private individuals who assumed this system was the prime agent of progress.

The primary sources for this study are Record Group (RG) 59: The General Records of the Department of State; the manuscripts of the central figures in the Wilson administration; and RG 4: The Records of the Advisory Commission of Railway Experts to Russia, the Russian Railway Service Corps, and the Inter-Allied Railway Committee. RG 59 continues to be an indispensable resource for examining American foreign relations; this vast body of material can still yield new insights into the policymaking process. This study has also made extensive use of the papers of Woodrow Wilson.

Robert Lansing, Frank Polk, Breckinridge Long, Edward M. House, Gordon Auchincloss, Roland Morris, Charles Evans Hughes, Vance McCormick, and British representative Sir William Wiseman. The records of the American Railway Experts in Russia have proved extremely valuable in revealing the connections between the engineers' technical and operational work on behalf of the Trans-Siberian railway and America's broader economic and political goals in the region. Samuel Harper's papers contain valuable correspondence with officials in the Russian division of the State Department. Finally, the papers of Cyrus McCormick Jr. have memoranda regarding American economic assistance efforts in 1918.

Records of Russian Bureau of the War Trade Board, RG 182; the country files of the Treasury Department, RG 39; the Bureau of Foreign and Domestic Commerce, RG 151; and the Commerce Department, RG 40; were all used in order to examine the complex range of problems American policymakers confronted and the sophisticated methods Wilsonian policy devised to solve those problems.



The Open Door, Wilsonianism, and the New Frontier in Siberia

The March Revolution of 1917 abruptly transformed the American view of the Russian Empire. In less than a fortnight, centuries of autocratic rule bolstered by a privileged bureaucracy collapsed and opened a space for progressive social forces to assert themselves. American statesmen believed the liberal character of this revolution would foster close political and economic ties between Russia and the United States in the future.

The interest American statesmen and businessmen took toward Russia after the outbreak of World War I was rooted in the fundamental secular trend in the development of American capitalism. Since the depression of the 1890s, American statesmen and business leaders recognized that American industrial development had reached a crossroad. Foreign investment outlets were needed to absorb profitably the capital surpluses generated by industrial capitalism since the 1870s. The overinvestment of capital in the domestic economy caused the severe industrial cycles and the labor unrest that marked this thirty-year period. This crisis underlay the United States's staunch advocacy of the "Open Door" policy as its primary foreign policy objective by the late 1890s. Equal opportunity for trade and investment in developing regions would facilitate stable expansion of the capitalist system and reduce the sources of tension between the rival industrial powers.

Beginning in the 1890s, American statesmen believed the Chinese Empire offered the best prospects for American investment because of its huge population and rich natural resources. China was the only major developing region that had not yet been incorporated into the colonial empire of another power. Conditions in China, however, were not conducive to foreign investment. China's social and economic backwardness increased risk and discouraged investors. Much of the economy was based on subsistence or compartmentalized into regions that inhibited the penetration of market forces. The Chinese monarchy's rapid deterioration increasingly paralyzed its extensive government apparatus at the end of the nineteenth century, a process that encouraged the powers to erode China's territorial sovereignty through the establishment of spheres of influence after 1895. By the outbreak of World War I, China had still not become the viable investment outlet that American capitalists had hoped for.¹

Prior to the March Revolution in Russia, a syndicate of investment banks led by the National City Bank had begun to exhibit confidence in Russia's future when they floated a series of loans to the czarist government worth \$86 million. From Petrograd, Commerce Department attaché Henry L. Baker thought that these loans could become the opening wedge for the large-scale involvement of American capital in Russia's postwar development. At the time he reported that "it is anticipated that in connection with the great loan of \$260,000,000 to the Russian Government now being negotiated by

an American syndicate, headed by the National City Bank of New York, and also in connection with the ~~Great International Corporation~~ lately projected by National City Bank interests, there will be great impetus created for American investment projects in Russia.”

The American International Corporation was formed in late 1915 by a group of large American corporations, led by the National City Bank, to take advantage of the withdrawal of European capital from developing regions. Its purpose was to obtain concessions for developmental projects and finance them in the United States. The emergence of American financial preeminence was not overlooked in Russia where Baker noted: “There seems an unusual tendency ... to be favorable to the idea of American firms participating in the development of this country, as it is realized that owing to the great calls on other foreign countries engaged in the present war for capital and financing the war that the only country now left in a position to give material assistance to Russia with the development of its internal resources is the United States.”²

But it was the March Revolution in Russia that breathed new life into American conceptions of the Open Door. American businessmen and statesmen believed that Russia’s adoption of liberal democracy after March 1917 had set Russia on a path of development that was complementary to that of the United States.

The American-Russian Chamber of Commerce, which had been recognized as an official organ by the czarist government, expressed the high expectations American capitalists attached to the development of outlets in postwar Russia. The chamber’s vision of how relations between America and Russia would develop deserves close examination, since its members included numerous representatives of large corporations that hoped to participate in the development of Russia.

In September 1917 the chamber’s president, Charles H. Boynton, compared Russia’s position to that of the United States at the end of the Civil War. Like America during its era of Reconstruction, Russia would need large amounts of foreign capital to pay its foreign debt and to develop its manufacturing potential. Initially, the expansion of Russia’s domestic manufacturing industry through the help of protective tariffs and foreign capital, would stimulate exports and relieve the burden of Russia’s large foreign debt.³

Boynton emphasized that the United States’s historical experience placed it in a better position than any other nation to assist Russia’s development. America had the necessary capital, the proper technology, and the organizing ability Russia needed to develop its industries. Yet beyond these complementary economic factors, Boynton stressed that many prominent Russians favored American capital because they considered it “untainted by political designs” unlike the “German exploitation of their economic life prior to the war.” Before the war European powers like France and Germany had intensively exploited specific sectors of the Russian economy to advance their own political and economic objectives to the detriment of Russia’s national development. In contrast Boynton believed the Russians would welcome American capital and expertise because “what she needs is the great extensive development such as we have had in this country because Russia is a great huge nation which requires a similar treatment to that of our own.” Indeed, notwithstanding the various differences in cultures and climatic conditions between the two countries, Boynton did “not consider it too optimistic to assume that Russia’s development during the next fifty years will be parallel to that of the United States during the last fifty years.”⁴

Consistent with this assumption that Russia’s development would resemble that of the United States, Boynton did not envision a neocolonial relationship between the two countries, even though Russia would furnish a large export market for American goods in the short run. Rather, American exports would hasten the process of reconstruction in Russia during the immediate postwar period. Because Russia’s own manufacturing was in its infancy, Boynton suggested that American firms th

were interested in that market should “have in mind that for a short time after the War, say two or three years, there will be a splendid opportunity for the sale of all kinds of American merchandise.” He qualified this observation with the reminder that “the far-seeing business man will be laying his plans today for co-operating with Russian capital in the organization of factories in Russia for the production of standard American products which will meet the needs of the Russian market.”⁵ The recognition by the chamber in 1917 that Russia would require American exports to help reestablish domestic production helps explain why in the summer of 1918 the Wilson administration adopted a commercial assistance program to begin the process of reconstruction in Russia. At that time the chamber would help the administration to collect data from the private sector regarding the availability of goods for Siberia.

In the long run, American business had a greater stake in helping Russia develop its own manufacturing potential. Beyond the export of goods Boynton thought that in many cases, “it will be more advisable for American firms to interest themselves in the actual manufacture of their products in Russia through cooperation with Russian capital, the sale of their manufacturing rights, or the establishment of their own plants in the Russian field.” Moreover, Russia’s development was also expected to play an important role in maintaining American prosperity since “both from the standpoint of a market for American merchandise and for American equipment machinery, and as a field for the investment of American capital in manufacturing enterprises, Russia will undoubtedly present perhaps our most favorable foreign opportunity at the termination of the War.”⁶ This contention was supported by no less an authority on the American economy than Herbert Hoover, who attached great importance to the Russian market as an outlet for American capital and as a guarantee of continued American prosperity. As late as December 1921 Hoover still asserted to Secretary of State Charles Evans Hughes that “the hope of our commerce lies in the establishment of American firms abroad, distributing American goods under American direction and, above all, in the installation of American technology in Russian industries.”⁷

Like most American observers in 1917, Boynton assumed that radicalism in Russia was an inevitable but transitory phase of the revolutionary process. It was important that American businessmen not be discouraged by these revolutionary vicissitudes because “the pendulum of political forces will continue to swing, sometimes violently, but it is certain to come to rest at a point of equilibrium where all Russia will join in a government of stability, of integrity and providing individual opportunity and freedom for its citizens.”⁸ For this reason Americans must not become involved in the “temporary political upheaval” because their attention should be fixed on the “Russia of the future.” Thus, the public’s attitude toward Russia would be best informed by American diplomatic corps, consular service, and business representatives “whose judgments are best adapted to a clear conception and proper deductions from its passing events.” This sound “American opinion on Russia” would always lead one to the overriding conclusion that even several years of social and political instability would not diminish Russia’s tremendous economic potential.⁹

Woodrow Wilson was also dedicated to the objective of establishing the Open Door as a precondition for maintaining America’s economic prosperity. Yet, in Wilson’s system of values, an Open Door political economy served a higher moral purpose as well. Wilson believed capitalist social and economic relations and republican institutions were inseparably linked historically, together constituting the basis for political democracy, individual liberty, and economic development.¹⁰ For this reason, Wilson understood that economic policy would always play a critical role in shaping a nation’s civic qualities. This concern for a society’s moral characteristics was the unifying theme in all of Wilson’s political writings and speeches throughout his public career in academia and later in politics.¹¹ Wilson’s commitment to encourage liberalism and democratic institutions abroad not only reflected American national interest, but also the moral principles embodied in his political economy.

Through the instruments of the Open Door and the League of Nations he was endeavoring to construct a modern international commonwealth in which individual liberty, civic responsibility, and economic development were harmonized by constitutional-democratic institutions at both the national and international levels.

These ambitions inspired Wilson's enthusiasm for the March Revolution in Russia. Wilson regarded the March Revolution as an important step toward the construction of a new international political order based on liberal-democratic principles. In his request to Congress for a declaration of war against Germany on April 2, 1917, Wilson stressed that America would be joined by the new Russia as "a fit partner for a League of Honour," that now consisted solely of democratic nations. Wilson's optimism about the prospects for the March Revolution was based on the belief that the Russian people had always been essentially democratic in character. The population's democratic impulses had been shackled by the czarist autocracy, which Wilson thought had never truly been Russian "in origin, character or purpose." He asserted that "Russia was known by those who knew her 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 instincts, their habitual attitude toward life."¹²

Wilson's overestimation of Russia's natural democratic qualities should be traced to the intellectual influence of his longtime friend and intellectual confidant Frederick Jackson Turner. In his influential essay, "The Significance of the Frontier in American History," Turner argued that American democracy had been revitalized throughout the nineteenth century by the influence of the western frontier. Frontier conditions fostered such liberal virtues as personal independence and industriousness among the settlers as they struggled to subdue nature in an environment unfettered by any preexisting social divisions. These virtues, in turn, were imparted into the democratic political institutions that emerged from this egalitarian social base. Once liberal-democratic political institutions were established, the liberal character of the society would persist through subsequent stages of economic development. Turner concluded his essay by speculating that America's inherent liberalism could serve as a guide for other peoples.¹³

Wilson's enthusiasm for the March Revolution appears less naive when the Siberian frontier is taken into account. Contemporary observers predicted that Siberia would play a role in promoting Russia's cultural development that was analogous to the American frontier in the nineteenth century. This new frontier would foster liberal-democratic qualities among the settlers and constitute the foundation for a long-term community of interests between Russia and the United States. The pervasive influence of Turner's thesis on the American policymaking establishment is exhibited by a confidential memorandum produced for the members of the United States's delegation to the Washington Naval Conference in late 1921. In this review of Siberia's settlement, the anonymous author credited "the natural movement of the Russian people eastward ... led by the pioneer" as the motive force behind Siberia's integration with Russia. The author then portrayed Russian colonization of Siberia in terms that virtually restated Turner when he asserted: "After the explorer came the settler. Consolidation of Government followed. As a result the barren wild country, unoccupied save for a few scattered half savage Asiatic tribes, was transformed into a vigorous Russian commonwealth, adapted to the institutions and culture of the white man."¹⁴

The influence of John Locke's Natural Law is particularly apparent in the author's comment: "The advance was a natural movement of exploration and colonization by the Russian people themselves and was not a policy of annexation initiated or executed by the Government."¹⁵ Slavic peasants were legitimately exercising their natural right to appropriate and exploit underdeveloped resources. Finally, the author presumed an historical parallel between America and Russia in declaring:

politically Russian, northern Asia must be considered as a country sharing in the institutions and social organization of Europe and America. Notwithstanding the fact that, preceding the revolution, Russia was under a form of government denominated as autocratic, the genius of the people revealed in its culture and exemplified in local life was, like that of other western people, essentially democratic. In the case of Siberia this was even more marked by reason of a population largely drawn from the more independent and enterprising elements of the Russian people and further hardened in the struggle with primitive nature and the trials of frontier life.

Generally speaking the exploration and settlement of Siberia bears a striking resemblance to the opening of the American West and is in fact almost a duplicate of this romantic achievement.

This fundamentally Turnerian outlook, together with prospects for close economic ties between the two continental empires in the postwar period, was the basis for Wilson's confidence in the future of liberal democracy in Russia.

In view of the absence of democratic institutions in Russia's history, Wilson's conception of self-government requires examination, lest his optimism for Russia's incipient democracy be dismissed as completely implausible. Wilson was essentially concerned about encouraging civic liberty in Russian society, rather than with promoting democracy as a specific form of government. As he explained in his essay of 1900, "Democracy and Efficiency," Americans cherished democracy "for the emphasis it puts on character; for its tendency to exalt the purposes of the average man to some high level of endeavor; for its just principle of common assent in matters in which all are concerned; for its idea of duty and its sense of brotherhood." In other words, Wilson favored the democratic form of government because it was the most conducive environment for cultivating civic virtue in the whole population.¹⁷

But Wilson was quick to point out that "democracy is merely the most radical form of 'constitutional government,'" what he also called "representative government" or "self-government." He assumed that "constitutional government" could actually exist in a variety of forms. Constitutional government was distinguished by the existence of a covenant or fundamental law between government and the people, which was maintained by regular public consent; the covenant itself must guarantee individual liberty and delimit the authority and functions of government.¹⁸ These fundamental principles could be preserved in different forms of constitutional government. In "Democracy and Efficiency," Wilson contended that it was an unfortunate irony that America's vigorous democratic character and principles had actually hindered the development of its governmental institutions. At the threshold of a new age, Wilson regretted that America lacked the administrative ability necessary to assume the international responsibilities of a great power.

This evaluation of the American political culture suggests Wilson never supposed that American institutions could serve as a model of government for an infant democracy such as Russia.¹⁹ Rather, the enthusiasm Wilson expressed for Russian democracy in his war address reflected his assumption that, with the collapse of the absolutist government, Russia would finally be free to evolve its own unique brand of constitutional government. In the context of his worldview, Wilson's assertion that Russia was "democratic at heart" should be interpreted to mean that he believed Russian society was endowed with considerable, if rudimentary, civic qualities. Wilson was confident these attributes would constitute the basis for a genuinely representative government whose actual form would be suited to Russia's specific historical and cultural conditions.

This analysis also provides the key to understanding Wilson's approach to the Russian question after the Bolshevik Revolution in November 1917. Both Wilson's policy of nonintervention in Russia's domestic politics and the United States's efforts to furnish commercial assistance to Siberia were consistent with his dictum from "Democracy and Efficiency" that what America had to offer the



Recent developments in Russia lent credence to the historical comparisons American statesmen drew between Russia and the United States. Indeed, Donald Treadgold has devoted a whole study to the Siberian migration in which he argues that before World War I, the society that was developing in Siberia exhibited greater similarities with the nineteenth-century American frontier society than with its European Russian origins.²¹ By 1913, over 5 million people had migrated to Siberia from European Russia—most of these after 1890. Yet, between the emancipation of the serfs in 1861 and the early 1890s, the czarist regime never formulated an effective migration policy to either forbid or to assist migration. Prior to the 1840s, the government tried to colonize Siberia with exiles and compulsory colonists. Illegal voluntary migration, however, outnumbered these officially sponsored initiatives. Peasant colonists sought land and freedom from creditors, servitude, and government regulations.

During the 1820s, the governor-general of Siberia reported that it was senseless to prevent free migration to Siberia because it helped settle this underpopulated region and because it alleviated overpopulation in European Russia. In 1843, the government initiated a program whereby state peasants could leave overpopulated villages and be settled in Siberia with financial assistance from the state. Nevertheless, Treadgold emphasizes throughout his study that official sponsorship of migration failed to reduce the flow of illegal migration to Siberia, since peasants preferred to flee rather than subject themselves to the paternalism of the state.

After 1892, when the Trans-Siberian Railroad was begun, the government finally bowed to the inevitable and committed itself to a generously subsidized program of regulated resettlement. A large percentage of the migrants continued to avoid this official program. Between 1909 and 1913, from 30 to 47 percent of all migrants were still irregular. When Petr Stolypin became prime minister in 1906, he advocated a liberal approach to the question of migration. He reasoned that instead of attempting to regulate the migrants' destination, the government should let people choose their destination and then assist their endeavor.

Stolypin regarded the question of Siberian migration as especially important because he believed that the region's settlement would play a central role in the regeneration of the whole empire. The principal objective of his government was to dissolve the commune system and to replace it with individual peasant property. This process would stimulate Russia's economic development and enhance social stability, which was necessary if the monarchy was to survive in a constitutional form as Stolypin desired.

To facilitate the individualization of land tenure in European Russia, the surplus population had to be resettled in Siberia. Siberia was particularly suited to individualized land tenure. Virtually all of Siberia's land was legally owned by the state, rather than the commune, a factor that would expedite its transference into private holdings. Yet, independent of juridical issues, the sparsely settled Siberian frontier naturally tended to develop private landholding. Because of the region's abundance of land, the Siberian commune rarely evolved the authority to redistribute land. Instead, land tenure in Siberia was quickly evolving from some form of squatters' right at the consent of the commune to hereditary household tenure without any redistribution occurring.²²

Treadgold cites a good deal of evidence that shows that this natural migration to Siberia was producing a prosperous peasant class in that region. A survey commissioned by Stolypin and the Minister of Agriculture Aleksandr Krivoshein, published in 1911, revealed that, on average, a Siberian settler had more land, cattle, grain, and machinery than the average European Russian peasant.

Furthermore, Stolypin also figured that yields and productivity were significantly higher than European Russia and the income of a typical Siberian family was rising steadily.²³ Even the Soviet historian M. M. Stishov admitted that it was not unusual to find households with ten to twelve horses or cows in Siberian villages. Interestingly enough, he did not categorize these peasants as “Kulaks” but as a type of prosperous “middle peasant.”²⁴

Russian observers were taking note of Siberia’s prosperity and of the unique social structure that was developing there. As Treadgold explained, by the turn of the century Russians frequently referred to Siberia as being “democratic” in character because of its high degree of social and economic equality, although political connotations were not implied prior to the March Revolution. Stolypin, who was the strongest proponent of individualized peasant proprietorship, was himself ambivalent about the democratic tendencies that were taking root in Siberia. He even confided to a familiar journalist a fear that “the Democracy of Siberia will crush us.”²⁵ Treadgold did not interpret this concern as an indication that Stolypin expected the peasantry to demand universal suffrage in the near future, but rather, that Siberia’s democratic culture would undermine the value system of Imperial Russia over time.

Following this theme, Treadgold demonstrates that Russian writers characterized the Siberian population in terms that were strikingly reminiscent of Turner. For instance, Treadgold quotes a statement by government demographer N. V. Turchaninov in which the latter described the Siberian migrant as:

Representing, in the person of the settlers, the daring escapees from Russia proper, having moved here under harsh conditions sometimes even prior to the conquest of the region, and in the person of the recent settlers, the most energetic and enterprising representatives of their milieu—for on such migrants become firmly acclimatized and strike root in the new regions—the Siberian peasants indeed differ from the remaining mass of the Russian peasantry ... in their great steadfastness ... in the struggle with [nature] ... their greater mobility and readiness to accept every kind of innovation.²⁶

Treadgold cites substantial evidence that the Siberian frontier also stimulated self-sufficiency and initiative among the settlers, as well as a high degree of equality. *Aziatskaia Rossiia*, a two-volume series of books on Siberia, observed that the Siberian peasantry was receptive to the use of modern agricultural machinery and to the technical advice of agronomists.

In *Asiatskaia Rossiia* the settlers’ innovativeness was attributed to the network of cooperative societies that were developing rapidly in Siberia. This study emphasized that the Siberian settlers exhibited “an exceptional capacity for self-help by means of cooperatives, credit unions, and other types of unions and societies.”²⁷ American policymakers viewed the rapid expansion of the cooperative movement in Siberia after 1914 as a phenomenon of great import, a development that would foster democratic civic values in Russian society and economic ties with the United States.

The cooperative movement in Russia received its original impetus from the penetration of market forces in the 1890s as peasant producers began to suffer from sharp increases in the cost of rye bread and meat. Cooperation made swift progress after a limited constitutional government was inaugurated in 1905, even though the cooperative movement did not enjoy the status of a legal personality under the czarist government.

The severe disruptions caused by war stimulated an unprecedented expansion of cooperative societies of all varieties, as they were the only institutions capable of organizing supply and distribution in this poorly integrated empire of small producers. The membership of all consumer societies increased from less than 2 million in 1915 to 17 million in 1919. In Siberia alone the number

of consumer societies grew from 519 in 1914 to 8, 140 in 1918. By 1918 between one-fourth and one-third of the aggregate value of Siberia's entire retail trade was sold by local consumer cooperatives.²⁸

Russian cooperatives can be grouped into three general categories: consumer, credit, and agricultural, although functions increasingly overlapped as the societies multiplied rapidly during the war. The primary units of cooperation were the local societies that were formed voluntarily by the members. These local societies were combined into unions of cooperative societies at the district, provincial, and national levels to accumulate the financial resources and to derive the bargaining power to engage in efficient buying and selling. A few large cooperative unions, such as the Union of Siberian Creamery Associations, represented whole regions. Cooperative organizations were also established by labor organizations such as the prominent All Russian Railway Supply Union.

District and provincial cooperatives were centralized in two national organizations, the All Russian Union of Consumers' Societies, and the Narodny (Peoples) Bank. The Central Union of Consumers' Societies was the leading organization of Russian cooperation after its reorganization from the Moscow Union of Consumers' Societies in 1917. This central union linked the network of consumers' societies into a national federation by coordinating wholesale supply and marketing activities. More than three thousand individual societies owned shares in the Central Union by 1917. After 1917, the Central Union evolved beyond its original cooperative trading endeavors into a national institution with far flung interests, a state within a state."²⁹

As private trade collapsed during the war, the major cooperative organizations, particularly the Central Union and the Union of Siberian Creamery Associations, increasingly assumed the status of quasi-state institutions because the government had become dependent on them for supplying the army and cities with provisions. The Central Union's prominence in the nation's economy was reflected in the numerous commodity departments or divisions that were established to manage day-to-day commercial activities. Separate departments existed for grains, fats and oils, fish and groceries, dairy, ironware, textiles, haberdashery, footwear, raw materials, finances, legal affairs, and transportation. An Economic and Organization Department handled supervision, policy formulation, and planned methods of organization. Finally, the Central Union's manufacturing operations were expanded to meet the severe shortages of many basic consumer goods.³⁰

The Narodny (Peoples) Bank was founded in 1912 for the purpose of supplying funds to credit institutions and cooperative enterprises. Affiliated credit cooperatives, including the Central Union of Consumers' Societies, owned the bank's stock. The Narodny Bank maintained a paid up capital of 1 million rubles by 1918. During 1917 the bank had a turnover of 3 billion rubles. Like the Consumer Societies, the Narodny Bank achieved the status of a quasi-governmental institution when the Provisional Government made the State Bank's credit available to it.

American observers believed cooperative institutions played an equally important cultural role in nurturing democracy and self-improvement among the rural population.³¹ A wide range of educational activities were sponsored by cooperative institutions including schools, newspapers, lectures, conferences, children's playgrounds, social entertainments, amateur theatricals, concerts, choruses, and reading rooms. These nontrading activities were designed to encourage new social values such as self-reliance, thrift, cooperation, and the technical skills indispensable for economic progress. In fact, American observers viewed Russian cooperatives so favorably because their voluntary association principles were seen as a necessary appendage to private enterprise at this stage of national development. Eugene Kayden, a War Trade Board specialist, emphasized that individuals joined cooperatives for their "material benefit" and "social welfare" and "to participate directly in an order of economic exchange which has been described as irredeemably private and capitalistic. Cooperatives

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