

Imagining Russia, Informing America: Samuel N. Harper, U.S. Public Opinion,  
and the Russian Revolution, 1916-1921

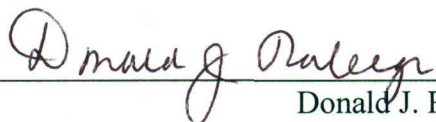
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*To Sue Sue and Gaha*

## **Table of Contents**

<b>Acknowledgements</b>	4
<b>Introduction</b>	8
<b>Chapter 1:</b> “There is plenty of room in Russia.” Harper and the American Public on the Eve of Russia’s Year of Revolution	17
<b>Chapter 2:</b> From “a bloodless revolution in a day” to “whole-hoggers.” Harper Interprets Russia’s Year of Revolution	41
<b>Chapter 3:</b> “Bolshevism as a Doctrine is Immoral.” Harper and the Genesis of Soviet-American Incompatibility	69
<b>Conclusion</b>	114
<b>References</b>	122
<b>Appendixes</b>	127

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Of course, all errors in style, substance, or interpretation that remain in this thesis are my own.

*“To wish was to hope, and to hope was to expect”*  
-Jane Austen, *Sense and Sensibility*<sup>1</sup>

*“The fruit of empty hopes is more bitter than the saddest truth.”*  
-Angel Wagenstein, *Isaac’s Torah*<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Jane Austen, *Sense and Sensibility* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2014), 21.

<sup>2</sup> Angel Wagenstein, *Isaac’s Torah: Concerning the Life of Isaac Jacob Blumenfeld through Two World Wars, Three Concentration Camps, and Five Motherlands: A Novel* (New York: Handsel Books, 2008), 235.

## Introduction

On Thursday, January 21, 1943, students, faculty, family, and community members gathered in the University of Chicago's Bond Chapel for Samuel Northrup Harper's funeral. Three days before, Harper, one of the United States's most authoritative and respected Russian experts, had died of a cerebral hemorrhage in his Woodlawn Avenue home in Chicago.<sup>3</sup>

Born in Morgan Park, Chicago, on April 9, 1882, Harper was the son of William Rainey Harper, a founder of the University of Chicago and its first president. After finishing high school, Harper enrolled at the university and completed his bachelor's degree in 1902. That fall, his father, who had visited Russia a number of times to recruit lecturers to speak at the University of Chicago, decided that young Samuel should study French and Russian at *l'Ecole des Langues Orientales Vivantes* in Paris, since possibilities for learning the latter in the United States were virtually nonexistent at the time. Obeying his father's wishes, Harper went to Paris and worked diligently to learn Russian, a language that, in the western imagination, was considered "oriental" and, therefore, dissimilar to western European tongues.<sup>4</sup>

After studying French and Russian for two years, he moved to Russia to enroll as a non-degree student at Moscow University. Here, Harper encountered Russians of various political positions and, soon, moved into an apartment with several radical Russian students from the university. His first exposure to Russian socialism, Harper recalled, took place when his roommates chastised him for having "incorrect" views on Russian politics. While walking to the American Embassy in St. Petersburg on January 22, 1905, to meet members of a visiting American delegation, Harper noticed a gathering of workers converging on the tsar's Winter

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<sup>3</sup> "Samuel Harper, U. of C. Expert on Russia, Dies," *Chicago Tribune*, January 19, 1943, 12.

<sup>4</sup> Paul A. Goble "Samuel N. Harper and the Study of Russia: His Career and Collection," *Cahiers du monde russe et soviétique* 14 (4) (October-December 1973): 608-10.



Palace, and stopped to observe. Soon, he heard shots being fired and saw several workers fall to the ground. Moving in closer to observe the incident, Harper found himself surrounded by protestors and a policeman chased him out of Palace Square. Afterward, he ran to the U.S. Embassy and informed the ambassador of what had just taken place.<sup>5</sup> Little did he know at the moment that he had witnessed the opening shots of the Revolution of 1905, which forced the tsar to concede a legislative body, the Duma. Harper had already experienced a key event in revolutionary Russia's transformation, but the Revolution of 1905 would be only the first of many such happenings that he would attempt to understand.

After a brief respite in Chicago in 1906, he returned to Russia to observe the Duma in action and became close friends with many of its members, including Pavel (Paul) Miliukov, the leader of the Constitutional Democratic party who Harper's father had invited to lecture at the University of Chicago in 1903.<sup>6</sup> This period of observation led him to write a book on the Duma and began months of extensive fieldwork on local government in Russia that culminated in a handful of articles dealing with Russian political institutions, and a textbook for intermediate Russian-language students.<sup>7</sup> During 1908-9, Harper received a faculty fellowship at Columbia University, where he taught Russian history and studied political science, a skill that he hoped

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid, 610.

<sup>6</sup> Goble, "Samuel N. Harper and the Study of Russia," 609.

<sup>7</sup> For Harper's book on the Duma, see *The New Electoral Law for the Russian Duma* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1908). For Harper's description of his life and work on Russia before 1916, including his fieldwork, see *The Russia I Believe In: The Memoirs of Samuel N. Harper, 1902-1941* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1945), 1-80. Harper's major scholarly works prior to 1916 include a widely used adaptation and English translation of a textbook for intermediate students of Russian, *Russian Reader: Accented Texts, Grammatical and Explanatory Notes* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1908); "The Budget Rights of the Russian Duma," *Journal of Political Economy* 16 (3) (March 1908): 152-56; and "Exceptional Measures in Russia," *Russian Review* 1 (1912): 92-105. For the most complete list of Harper's scholarly works and writings to date, see Ronald Thompson's unpublished 1944 bibliography "Harper on Russia: The Writings of Samuel N. Harper, University of Chicago (1882-1943)" available in Box 59, Folder 6, Samuel N. Harper Papers, Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago. Though the bibliography is lengthy, archivists at the University of Chicago's Special Collections archive claim that it is not complete.

would make him more marketable when seeking future academic positions.<sup>8</sup> Gaining respect for his knowledge of Russia, Harper took a job in England at the University of Liverpool's Russian studies department, where he taught from 1911 to 1913 and served as a founding editorial board member of the *Russian Review*, first published in 1911.<sup>9</sup> Harper now had teaching experience on his résumé, a fact that allowed him to return to the University of Chicago in 1914 as an assistant professor of Russian language and institutions. He taught there until his death in 1943.

Soon after Harper assumed this post, Russia underwent myriad political, social, and economic transformations brought about by the Russian Revolution, an event that historian Alexander Rabinowitch calls the most important of the twentieth century.<sup>10</sup> Locked in World War I, Americans anxiously observed Russia, but knew remarkably little about the country and the revolution it was experiencing.

And in stepped Harper, who simultaneously morphed into what observers at the time called the United States's "foremost authority on Russia."<sup>11</sup> Widely respected as informed and authoritative, Harper and his take on Russian politics carried much weight and, thus, he commented profusely on Russian events. In addition to teaching classes at the University of Chicago, he maintained an active lecture circuit in which he spoke on Russia to a wide array of organizations, including small-town dinner clubs, churches, business organizations, high schools, colleges and universities, public audiences in downtown Chicago, and academic conferences. Moreover, he regularly wrote newspaper articles in which he deciphered Russian political events

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<sup>8</sup> Harper, *The Russia I Believe In*, 61.

<sup>9</sup> Harper wrote that the journal was designed primarily for "government officers, members of [British] Parliament, universities, libraries, and editors of leading periodicals." For Harper's description of his duties associated with the *Russian Review*, see *The Russia I Believe In*, 74-75.

<sup>10</sup> Alexander Rabinowitch, *The Bolsheviks in Power: The First Year of Bolshevik Rule in Petrograd* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007), ix.

<sup>11</sup> "Harper Will Tell of the New Russia: Expert to Speak to National Geographic Society Here Friday," *Washington Post*, March 27, 1917, 14.

for readers. Finally, Harper served a stint as an assistant in the U.S. Department of State's Russian Bureau from 1919 until 1921, making him one of remarkably few American specialists on Russia to inform the United States government on politics in the country, a trend that would continue for over two decades.<sup>12</sup> In short, nearly any American who followed Russian developments between World War I and World War II probably would have been acquainted with Harper's name and opinion, since his voice resonated through numerous strata of American society.

In this thesis, I zoom in on Harper and his understanding of Russian politics between 1916 and 1921, six years of dramatic transformation in Russia and in Harper's views on it. In 1916, Russia was a member of the Allies in WWI and trade between it and the United States nearly tripled from its 1915 levels.<sup>13</sup> In February 1917, Petrograd bread riots instigated by angry, hungry women led to the overthrow of the tsar, whom a Duma Committee quickly replaced with a Provisional Government. A second revolution that October overthrew the Provisional Government and brought the Bolsheviks, a radical Marxist party, to power. "The Bolsheviks," as Harper referred to them, withdrew Russia from WWI and embraced an unprecedented political course for the country that called for international socialist revolution, denounced capitalism, and held workers and working class values supreme. How did Harper react to these events? Given that his voice carried intellectual clout and engaged a wide audience, how did Harper depict Russia's rapid political transformation to Americans? How and in which ways did his views set

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<sup>12</sup> David C. Engerman, *Know Your Enemy: The Rise and Fall of America's Soviet Experts* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 1. Engerman notes that in 1946, the beginning of the Cold War, the United States government employed only about two dozen Soviet experts. By 1948, this number had grown to thirty-eight.

<sup>13</sup> American exports to Russia increased from \$169,993,904 in 1915 to \$470,508,254 in 1916. See chapter 1 and appendix B.

the tone for subsequent interactions between Russia and the United States? These questions hold central importance in this study.

At the time of his death, every obituary stressed Harper's substantial and defining contribution to American understandings of Russia. A writer for the *Chicago Tribune* unequivocally stated that "in the last quarter century he achieved prominence as one of the foremost American authorities on the life and language of the soviet people."<sup>14</sup> The *New York Times* explained that Harper had spend over a quarter century studying Russian history and politics and, in doing so, made a major contribution to American perceptions of the country.<sup>15</sup> Bernard Pares, a British colleague and the founder of Russian studies in Great Britain, praised Harper's work and wrote that American knowledge of Russia was far larger because of him.<sup>16</sup> Walter Lichtenstein, one of Harper's close friends and a professor at Northwestern University, praised Harper's expertise and regretted that his "thorough knowledge of Russian affairs" had died with him. Harper's death represented a "notable loss to American scholars," he noted.<sup>17</sup>

Yet historians studying American perceptions of revolutionary Russia today would hardly come away with this impression, primarily because almost all of the relevant historiography has treated Harper as little more than a peripheral figure in forming them. Many works depict his as merely another voice among the cacophony of opinions circulating during the period, despite the central importance that contemporaries assigned to his views.<sup>18</sup> Notably, a recent book dealing

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<sup>14</sup> "Samuel Harper, U. of C. Expert on Russia, Dies," *Chicago Tribune*, January 19, 1943, 12.

<sup>15</sup> "Prof. S.N. Harper of Chicago U. Dies," *New York Times*, January 19, 1943, 19.

<sup>16</sup> Bernard Pares, "Professor Samuel Northrup Harper," *The Slavonic and East European Review*, *American Series* 2 (1) (1943): 289-92.

<sup>17</sup> Walter Lichtenstein, "Samuel Northrup Harper," *The American Political Science Review* 37 (2) (April 1943): 324-25.

<sup>18</sup> For works that treat Harper in this way, see Clarence Manning, *A History of Slavic Studies in the United States* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1957); Peter G. Filene, *Americans and the Soviet Experiment, 1917-1933* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967); George T. Blakey, *Historians on the Homefront: American Propagandists for the Great War* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press,

with western visitors to Russia and the Soviet Union in the two decades preceding WWII provides no mention of Harper.<sup>19</sup>

Indeed, only one study, a 1974 dissertation by John Charles Chalberg, focuses solely on Harper.<sup>20</sup> Chalberg's unpublished work, an intellectual history, examines the development of Harper's thinking and places his shifting outlook between 1905 and 1943 in the context of other elites who simultaneously attempted to understand political change in Russia.<sup>21</sup> Yet Chalberg gives almost no attention to how Harper's biases shaped American public opinion of Russia. By selecting Harper's intellectual evolution as his sole object of study, Chalberg missed a valuable opportunity to comment on the extent to which Harper's views set the tone for subsequent–Cold War–popular opinion on Russia. Other studies have followed a similar trend. Many concentrate on “high politics” and their role in American reactions to the Russian Revolution, highlighting figures such as Woodrow Wilson and his administration.<sup>22</sup> Still others underscore the crucial role that philosophical trends common among intellectuals in the early twentieth century played in their depictions of revolutionary Russia.<sup>23</sup> Even Christopher Lasch's well-known 1962 book *The*

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1970); Robert F. Byrnes, *A History of Russian and East European Studies in the United States: Selected Essays* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1994); David S. Foglesong, *America's Secret War Against Bolshevism: U.S. Intervention in the Russian Civil War, 1917-1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995); Norman Saul, *War and Revolution: The United States and Russia, 1917-1921* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2001); David C. Engerman, *Modernization from the Other Shore: American Intellectuals and the Romance of Russian Development* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003); Ibid, *Know Your Enemy*.

<sup>19</sup> See Michael David-Fox, *Showcasing the Great Experiment: Cultural Diplomacy and Western Visitors to the Soviet Union, 1921-1941* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).

<sup>20</sup> Two articles have also dealt with Harper, but both focus almost exclusively on his biography and the contents of his archive, instead of analyzing him as an influential public figure. See Goble, “Samuel N. Harper and the Study of Russia,” *Cahiers du monde russe et soviétique* 14 (4) (October-December 1973): 608-20; and John B. Poster, “A Warmth of Soul: Samuel Northrup Harper and the Russians, 1904-43,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 14 (2) (1979): 235-51.

<sup>21</sup> John Charles Chalberg, “Samuel Harper and Russia Under the Tsars and Soviets, 1905-1943,” PhD dissertation, University of Minnesota, 1974.

<sup>22</sup> See, for example, Donald E. David and Eugene P. Trani, *The First Cold War: The Legacy of Woodrow Wilson in U.S.-Soviet Relations* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2002).

<sup>23</sup> See Engerman, *Modernization from the Other Shore*

*American Liberals and the Russian Revolution*, a “study of ideas more than men and movements,” explains only the event’s divisive effect on liberals in the United States, not its implications for public opinion. As a result, we know little about how influential narratives of the Russian Revolution shaped American public discourse on Russia.

Fortunately, Harper left behind voluminous materials that speak to the intimate details of his perception of Russian development and his life. His four decades-long opus of letters, reports, lectures, newspaper clippings, photographs, and other materials are today housed in the University of Chicago’s Special Collections archive. At the time of his death, Harper was writing his memoirs, but died before he finished. Published posthumously by his brother in 1945 just as the Cold War began, *The Russia I Believe In* gives an account of Harper’s experience and addresses his evolving perception of Russia. I draw heavily from both of these sources, particularly the Harper archive. However, unlike the handful of other studies that analyze or mention Harper, I emphasize his comments in public venues, including speeches to civil organizations and, in particular, newspaper articles. I do so in order to trace Harper’s voice as it radiated outward to the American public, not merely as it developed internally.

I intervene on three levels. First, I add to knowledge on Samuel Harper, a figure whose importance in shaping American understandings of revolutionary Russia has been woefully understudied. This thesis, however, is more than an intellectual biography of one man since it uses Harper as a prism through which to examine the origins of American popular opinion toward Soviet Russia. Second, I identify and historicize Harper’s subjectivities and place them in conversation with members of the public and public opinion, treating them as shapers of widespread views of Russia, not mere intellectual musings. Here, I portray Harper as an influential filter through which facts on Russian politics often passed before reaching the

American populace. Doing so illuminates the highly politicized sieve through which the public received information about Russia. Finally, I seek to fill a gap in scholarly understanding on the “Russian Revolution’s impact on world history,” or how revolutionary Russia’s political evolution affected communities beyond its borders, a hole in the literature that historian Donald J. Raleigh has recently pointed out.<sup>24</sup> To do so, I address the channels through which Harper received his information about Russia and conclude by suggesting the profound implications for international relations and the Cold War that Harper’s interpretation would have over the proceeding decades.

I argue that, between 1916 and 1921, Harper’s authoritative and influential understanding of Russian politics, and the ways in which he promulgated it to the American public, constructed a binary both in his own mind and in popular opinion that pitted Soviet Russia and the United States against one another. Imagining Russia’s political evolution in terms of his own ideological biases and encouraging the American public to do the same, Harper created a set of political and economic expectations for Russia that, ultimately, it never achieved. In chapter 1, I focus on Harper and the American public in 1916, the final months of Tsar Nicholas II’s reign, and reveal an ongoing dialog between Harper and the American business community that fostered a positive and hopeful, yet false, set of political and economic expectations for Russia by touting emerging business opportunities in the country. In chapter 2, I examine Harper and his take on Russia throughout 1917, a year that brought two revolutions to the country, and trace the rise and fall of his optimism on Russia’s political future by analyzing the copious statements he made about the country’s situation to a wide swath of the public. Here, I argue that he judged the events of that year against an unrealistic, liberally oriented metric and show that doing so caused him to draw a

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<sup>24</sup> Donald J. Raleigh, “The Russian Revolution after All These 100 Years,” *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 16 (4) (2015): 791-92.

clear line between the February and October Revolutions, praising the former and condemning the latter. Finally, in chapter 3, I scrutinize and historicize Harper's take on the first four years of Bolshevik power and the Russian civil war and show how he promoted a view of Bolshevism as the polar opposite of American democracy and capitalism. By tracing his often vehement efforts to urge Americans to adopt this opinion, I show the implications of the chasm between Harper's expectations for Russia and the on-the-ground reality of Bolshevik power, especially in terms of American recognition of the Soviet Union, and an overall negative relationship with socialism and Bolshevism.

In short, this thesis represents a study of a man whose historically and politically particular subjectivities set the tone for American views of Russia for decades to come. One's individual subjectivity and biases play a pivotal role in defining a person and his or her worldview. Harper's found their way into most corners of America and, thus, played an essential role in shaping the national psyche's imagination of Soviet Russia.



## **Chapter 1:**

### **“There is plenty of room in Russia:” Harper and the American Public on the Eve of Russia’s Year of Revolution**

In a lecture on late tsarist Russia’s economy that he gave to his University of Chicago Russian history class, Samuel Harper analyzed the *longue dur e* of the country’s economic development, underscoring the importance of its upsurge after the Revolution of 1905. “It was during the last decade—since 1905—that the economic development of [Russia] was progressing very rapidly – bringing better conditions to many,” he told his students.<sup>25</sup> Given his role in interpreting Russia for Americans during the period about which he spoke, Harper played a major part in shaping the country’s understanding of Russian economic and political developments during the last year preceding the February Revolution of 1917.

In this chapter I use the period from January 1916 to February 1917, the final thirteen months of Nicholas II’s rule, as a prism through which I examine the American public and Harper’s perception of emerging opportunities for American trade, sales, and investment in Russia. During this year, elements of the American business class looked forward to when their companies could profit from economic interaction with Russia after WWI. Widely hailed as the country’s foremost expert on all things Russian, Harper used the respect he commanded to convince those interested in doing business in Russia that the country moved steadily toward an economic and political system that would welcome them doing so. I argue that by presenting the business community and the American public with his authoritative, yet subjective, understanding of Russia, Harper helped construct and further entrench a set of economic and political expectations for Russia that situated the country on a rapidly developing path toward a liberal economic system that both welcomed American trade and provided vast, untapped

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<sup>25</sup> Lecture Notes, Box 32, Folder 46, Harper Papers.

markets for American goods. This view, and its implicit assumptions about the liberal nature of Russia's political development, would color Harper's and American's ways of understanding Russia during its year of revolution, the first years of Bolshevik rule, and for decades beyond.

## **The American Press Reports Economic Opportunity in Russia**

In 1916 and early 1917 war raged in Europe. Even though America had not officially sided with the Allies, the war impacted its economy, the world's largest at the time. Immersed in conflict, European nations, divided between the Allies and Central powers, retreated from what political economist Jeffrey A. Frieden calls the "world economy" and placed most of their economic effort into war production. The result, a financial vacuum, left America, a wealthy nation that had historically been little engaged in large-scale international trade, to be one of the world's foremost providers of capital, markets, and technology. Between late 1914 and early 1917, American exports more than doubled and the country's trade surplus grew to five times larger than before WWI.<sup>26</sup> For America, 1916 was a time of great economic growth, particularly in international trade.

News of economic opportunities in Russia, a member of the Allied powers, found its way into the headlines of both major and minor American newspapers. A vast country, Russia attracted attention because of its large, underutilized markets and abundant natural resources. For example, a survey of articles in the *Wall Street Journal*, the publication of the American business community, and other American newspapers, both local and national and not intended exclusively for the business community, reveals that, on the eve of the February Revolution, the American press buzzed with stories of Russian economic development and the exciting

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<sup>26</sup> Jeffrey A. Frieden, *Global Capitalism: Its Fall and Rise in the Twentieth Century* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2006), 130-31.

opportunities that awaited American businessmen who were savvy enough to claim a stake in the emerging market.<sup>27</sup>

One such article excitedly noted that Russia was “the largest single buying population in the world—equal to that of Great Britain, France, Germany, and Austria-Hungary combined.” Its author stressed that “the tremendously increasing purchasing power of the huge population” would ensure that Russia needed “an increasing amount of manufactured goods” since it could not “supply itself, from its home industries.”<sup>28</sup> The front page of the *Wall Street Journal* announced that the Russian government placed an order from American manufacturing firms for 10,000 railroad cars, which employees of the Pressed Steel Car Company, a Pittsburgh firm, sailed to the eastern Russian port of Vladivostok to fill. The piece noted that “Russia is understood to be very well satisfied with the work done by the company. The salesman having made good on the initial order is certain to have a good chance of taking repeated orders.”<sup>29</sup>

Word of economic opportunity in Russia also found its way into a wide geographic array of local newspapers and gave the same message to small business owners and farmers that it did to Wall Street executives. For example, an article in the *Grand Forks Herald* of Grand Forks, North Dakota, exclaimed that “more and more American businessmen appear to be investigating commercial possibilities in Russia.” These businessmen were beginning to blaze a path between

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<sup>27</sup> For a small sampling of the many articles describing American economic opportunities related to Russia, see the *Wall Street Journal*, “Russia’s Opportunity After the Conflict,” March 15, 1916, 8; “West Sees a Good Market in Russia,” March 24, 1916, 7; “Russia Inquiring for 1,000 Large Locomotives,” June 3, 1916, 7; “Investment in Russia,” June 16, 1916, 1; “Russia Increasing Its Inquiries for Cars,” June 13, 1916, 1; “Russia Wonderfully Awakened by the War,” July 20, 1916, 7; “Machinery for Russia,” July 29, 1916, 5; “McRoberts Impressed with Russia’s Vast Resources,” August 1, 1916, 1; “Russia in Market With Big Copper Order,” September 7, 1916, 1; “Russia in Market for 5,000 Tons of Copper,” September 8, 1916, 7; “Leather Sale to Russia for \$8,500,000,” October 25, 1916, 2; “Russia Will Buy More Engines Here,” December 4, 1916, 1; “Russia Presses Work on Grain Elevator System,” January 13, 1917, 5; “Russia’s Resources Great,” January 17, 1917, 7.

<sup>28</sup> “America’s Tremendous Opportunity in Russia,” *Wall Street Journal*, June 1, 1916, 3.

<sup>29</sup> “Russia Wants 10,000 86-100 Pound Box Cars,” *Wall Street Journal*, January 26, 1916, 1.

their country and Russia, since Americans were “continually streaming in from Petrograd and Moscow with their pockets filled with contracts or the proceeds of sales.” Opportunities for businessmen were already beginning to blossom in Russia; even more, “all American businessmen returning from that country” were “enthusiastic over the possibilities there.”<sup>30</sup> Opportunity aplenty existed for the foreseeable future claimed the local press, which underscored stories of Americans returning from Russia with tales of the marvelous expansion of the country’s economic capacity.

Much of this discourse, on both the national and local levels, argued that if Americans invested and sold in Russia, the transaction would be mutually beneficial. Americans could meet war-torn Russia’s “abnormal demands” for “tools, hardware, machinery, agricultural implements, etc.” by selling their goods in the country. In doing so, American men of business would not only reap handsome profits, but would find their Russian counterparts to be “friendly towards [Americans], kind hearted and generally fair and honorable in their business dealings.”<sup>31</sup> Americans would thus help the Russians industrialize their country, while profiting from doing so.

## The Business Community Responds

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<sup>30</sup> “Chances for U.S. Business: Russia Should Offer Immense Opportunity After the War,” *Grand Forks Herald*, January 1, 1917, 6. For other examples of similar articles appearing in local newspapers, see “Nicholas Riabouchinsky,” *The Idaho Recorder*, February 4, 1916, 4; *El Paso Herald*, April 15, 1916, 18; *The Garden Island*, April 18, 1916, 8; “Russian Orders for U.S. Autos Total in Millions,” *Aberdeen Herald*, September 8, 1916, 4; “Russia Richer in Spite of War, Will Offer Great Market to United States,” *Mexico Missouri Message*, September 14, 1916, 3; “Increased Freight Business,” *The Daily Ardmoreite*, October 13, 1916, 3; “Coming Russia,” *Nashville Tennessean and the Nashville American*, December 3, 1916, B8; “American Business Man in Russia,” *Webster City Freeman*, December 19, 1916, 2; *Ocala Evening Star*, December 29, 1916, 2; “Russia Offers Business Field,” *Ogden Standard*, January 3, 1917, 6.

<sup>31</sup> “Russians Will Need Hardware After the War: American Firms Likely to Get First Change at Big Business,” *Bridgeport Daily Farmer*, April 5, 1916, 4.

In response to this news, intellectuals and business leaders with technical knowledge of the Russian economy called attention to the difficulty of doing business with the country by highlighting potential problems with tasks, such as “obtaining credit ratings from individual [Russian] firms” or being able to communicate effectively and efficiently with Russian businessmen.<sup>32</sup> To remedy these issues, they called for and formed various bureaus and organizations aimed at facilitating trade between the United States and Russia and giving American business professionals tools to market their products or invest in Russia. Nicholas Goldweiser, a professor at the University of Wisconsin and an advocate of increased trade between the two countries, emphasized the importance of the “importation into Russia of American manufactured goods, American technical skill and American enterprise.” Goldweiser urged the creation of a bureau responsible for promoting this exchange and a department that would deal with legal issues arising when businessmen performed transactions in or with the Russian empire.<sup>33</sup>

The business community understood the necessity of these institutions and responded with practical tools and advice that would ease American business’s entrance into the Russian market. Consider, for instance, the Guaranty Trust Company, a New York banking and trust service, which advertised that “the volume of export business from the United States to Russia” was “arousing among our bankers and manufacturers a spirit of very thoughtful interest as to the possibility of maintaining these relations.” To aid this interest, the company offered a manual that contained “information concerning the Russian empire, its finances, agriculture, industries and commerce, with particular reference to the progress made by the Russian people during the

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Goldweiser to Harper, January 28, 1916, Box 3, Folder 2, Harper Papers.

[preceding] decade.”<sup>34</sup> The company assembled the manual with the explicit goal of giving businessmen an easily readable set of instructions on how to negotiate with Russian businessmen as well as a general overview of the types of products that Russians would be most likely to demand.

In January 1916, leaders of major American corporations including U.S. Steel, Westinghouse, International Harvester, and Chase National Bank formed the American-Russian Chamber of Commerce, which opened its first branch in New York City under the leadership of Charles Boynton and E. Chapell Porter. This institution dedicated itself to fostering “a closer union in industry” between Russia and the United States and to creating “bonds of mutual sympathy and friendship between the two great nations.”<sup>35</sup> To do so, its founders lobbied the American and Russian governments to lift trade restrictions.<sup>36</sup> Porter traveled to Russia on the organization’s behalf to gather information on Russian industry.<sup>37</sup> Moreover, the Chamber provided services to American businessmen including a translation department, expositions on economic possibilities for Americans in Russia, and even a handbook for Russian businessmen explaining the structure of America’s industrial sector.<sup>38</sup> Much like the Guaranty Trust manual, it explained that “Russia will make large purchases of goods in this country,” while noting that the country had “enormous undeveloped resources” that would aid in its economic transformation in the coming years.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> “American Opportunities in Russia,” *Baltimore Sun*, June 28, 1916, 13.

<sup>35</sup> Bulletin of the American-Russian Chamber of Commerce, 1916, Box 3, Folder 4, Harper Papers.

<sup>36</sup> Norman Saul, *War and Revolution: The United States and Russia, 1917-1921* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2001), 16.

<sup>37</sup> Porter to Harper, January 13, 1917, Box 3, Folder 10, Harper Papers; “E.C. Porter Goes to Russia to Work Out Plans for Greater Commerce with Muscovite Empire,” *American Artisan and Hardware Record*, December 23, 1916, 26.

<sup>38</sup> Box 3, Folder 4, Harper Papers. On services the organization provided, see James K. Libbey, “The American-Russian Chamber of Commerce,” *Diplomatic History* 9 (3) (1985), 234-35.

<sup>39</sup> “Commercial Russia,” *Wall Street Journal*, June 17, 1916, 7.

A prominent group of Moscow businessmen founded the organization's Russian counterpart, the Russian-American Chamber of Commerce, in 1914. Like its American equivalent, the chamber set out to open Russia to American trade and investment, and vice versa.<sup>40</sup> Its leader, Nikolai Guchkov, the former mayor of Moscow, hailed from a prominent Moscow business dynasty composed of wealthy, politically active industrialists with close connections to the moderate-right Octobrist party in the Duma.<sup>41</sup> In April 1916, just before leaving the United States to return to Petrograd, the organization's Vice President Alexander Behr told the press that he planned to "lay before [the] Russian government and business-interests facts concerning the position of [the United States] and the assistance it can furnish Russia in its future development."<sup>42</sup> Thus both Behr and Porter, and the institutions they represented, strove for a common goal.

Not surprisingly, these types of associations and the availability of technical aid to businessmen led to a surge of confidence on economic prospects in Russia within the business community. Many took concrete steps to trade with Russia. For example, in late 1916, Seattle boasted that its newly renovated Port Warden had exceeded the amount of foreign trade conducted through San Francisco's port. A major reason for the increase, claimed the *Seattle Star*, was Frank Waterhouse, the owner of a shipping fleet docked in the harbor, who decided to grow his convoy "AMAZINGLY," by adding some eight or nine vessels to the twenty-two he

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<sup>40</sup> Libbey, "The American-Russian Chamber of Commerce," 233-34.

<sup>41</sup> W. Bruce Lincoln, *In War's Dark Shadow: The Russians Before the Great War* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1983), 86. On the Octobrist party, see Lincoln, *In War's Dark Shadow*, 333-35. The Octobrists, a moderate right party formed in the wake of the Revolution of 1905, garnered much of its membership from the *zemstovs*. The party was one of few represented in the Duma that received the tsar's official support and sanction. On the Guchkovs and their dynastic family business' history, see Jo Ann Ruckman, *The Moscow Business Elite: A Social and Cultural Portrait of Two Generations, 1840-1905* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1984), 123, 160, 167. The Octobrist party's leader, Aleksandr Guchkov, was Nikolai Guchkov's brother. For family trees showing the Guchkovs' extensive intermarriage with other elite Moscow families see Ruckman, *The Moscow Business Elite*, 212-19.

<sup>42</sup> "Newspaper Specials," *Wall Street Journal*, April 21, 1916, 2.

already used to move goods from the American northwest to Europe and, in particular, Vladivostok. The reason for Waterhouse's decision was that Vladivostok had ordered \$3,186,617 worth of goods during the previous summer, and the Russian government bought \$22 million worth of steel from American firms, both of which would ship to eastern Russia through Seattle using Waterhouse's fleet.<sup>43</sup> Not deterred by his inability to move freight across the Atlantic, a zone fraught with German U-boats targeting vessels attempting to bring supplies to the Allies, Waterhouse was so confident that trade with Russia would be simple and highly profitable that he opted for the less perilous Pacific route and felt justified in purchasing additional ships to do so. Indeed, across the United States men like him made similar preparations to trade with Russia since they believed they could depend on institutions such as the American-Russian Chamber of Commerce and the Guaranty Trust Company to assist them in the venture, but also because they saw a rise in demand for their products in Russia. Indeed, total American exports to Russia increased from \$169,993,904 during 1915 to \$470,508,254 during 1916, an almost four fold or 290 percent leap.<sup>44</sup>

Business tycoons' confidence also surged due to news of a corresponding expansion of trade infrastructure in Russia. Shipping companies received news that Russian authorities had dredged new ship spaces in Vladivostok harbor in order to accommodate the "largely increasing volume of ocean traffic" sailing into the port and that the city featured new, enlarged warehouses

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<sup>43</sup> "Seattle Wins Right to Title of Pacific Coast's First Port," *Seattle Star*, September 9, 1916, 24. Adjusted for inflation and changes in buying power, \$3,186,617 equals approximately \$70.9 million in today's dollar, while \$22 million equals approximately \$489 million in today's dollar.

<sup>44</sup> For 1915 data, see *Foreign Commerce and Navigation of the United States for the Calendar Year 1919*, Department of Commerce, Bureau of Foreign and Domestic Commerce (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1920), xii-xiii. For 1916 data, see *Foreign Commerce and Navigation of the United States for the Calendar Year 1920*, Department of Commerce, Bureau of Foreign and Domestic Commerce (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1921), x-xi. Adjusted for inflation and changes in buying power \$169,993,904 equals approximately \$4.13 billion in today's dollar, while \$470,508,254 equals approximately \$11.4 billion.



well connected to the rest of Russia by railroads.<sup>45</sup> The *Seattle Star* noted that “with the extending of railroads in Russia, [Seattle’s] port will undoubtedly be called upon to deliver a greater portion of goods to [Russia] than ever before.”<sup>46</sup> A representative of Dow Jones and Company, an American financial information firm, spoke with Russian Commercial Attaché C.J. Medzikhovsky and, in response to the conversation, wrote that the development of shipping infrastructure in Archangelsk, a northwestern Russian city on the White Sea, had “created facilities for shipping to and from Russia that ensures its prosperity in later years.” To match the augmentation of shipping facilities in Archangelsk, the Russian government also engaged in “railroad construction in northern Russia . . . on an enormous scale.”<sup>47</sup>

The press insisted that Russia was undergoing a profound and rapid economic and even social renaissance, prompting some to compare the emerging economic opportunities to “something akin to the old call of the west” in mid-nineteenth century America. Russians worked day and night with “feverish haste” to expand railroads in their country, and were said to staff factories stretching between Moscow and Petrograd that were “Running Night and Day” to produce “munitions of war, clothing and the varied necessities of the empire’s multimillions.”<sup>48</sup>

Moreover, American travelers to the country brought back word that Russia’s involvement in WWI improved the conditions of its peasant masses, since military training was teaching them to be “unwilling to go back to their old methods of life,” which included using “only pieces of bark for shoes” and being generally “unkempt [and] ignorant with regard to every phase of better living.” These changes in peasants’ expectations would, in turn, make the

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<sup>45</sup> “Harbor and Waterway Improvement Work in Russia,” *International Marine Engineering*, October 12, 1916, 436.

<sup>46</sup> “Seattle Wins Right to Title of Pacific Coast’s First Port,” *Seattle Star*, September 9, 1916, 24.

<sup>47</sup> “Russia’s Development Around Archangel,” *Wall Street Journal*, July 8, 1916, 8.

<sup>48</sup> “Say a New Russia Will Follow War: Travelers Tell of Wonderful Developments in the Mighty Empire,” *Washington Evening Star*, August 27, 1916, 4.

more than 25 million of them enlisted in the Russian army ready to “throw their power into industrial energy in field or factory” once the war ended.<sup>49</sup> This emphasis on the industriousness of the country’s people and the rapid construction of railroads across its vast territory left the impression that, since Russia was industrializing even during wartime, its demand for capital goods such as heavy machinery, steel, and the like would only increase in the near future due to continuing industrialization.

In short, the press painted a reassuring and propitious portrait of the country during the last months of Nicholas II’s rule, and the business community responded. Yet the truncated view of Russia that America received was a selective one, since it emphasized only those elements of Russian economics, politics, and history necessary to explain American opportunities for investment and sales within the country. Though optimistic rhetoric on this topic was abundant, academic knowledge of the country’s development, political climate, culture, and history was not.

## **Harper and Slavic Studies on the Eve of Revolution**

On the eve of the Russian revolutions of 1917, Slavic and Russian studies remained in their infancy in the United States. Before and during WWI formal academic courses on Russian literature, politics, and history were scarce and peripheral in the American intellectual, social, and cultural realms.<sup>50</sup> The field had neither the personnel nor the intellectual infrastructure within academia and the wider world to produce significant scholarly inquiry into the peoples, cultures, and history of Russia.

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Horace G. Lunt, “On the History of Slavic Studies in the United States.” *Slavic Review* 46 (2) (1987): 294-301.

Knowledge of the region tended to be spotty and shallow, resting in a mere handful of scholars.<sup>51</sup> In 1916, Robert Kerner, a professor of history at the University of Missouri, proposed founding the first American peer-reviewed journal focusing on the Slavic world.<sup>52</sup> Though such a journal of Russian politics and history, the *Russian Review*, existed in England at the time, no such American equivalent did.<sup>53</sup> Moreover, so-called “Russian experts” were scarce, elevating men such as George Noyes of the University of California at Berkeley and Leo Weiner of Harvard, both of whom had only scant knowledge of Russia, to leading positions in the field. Often a single individual taught all of a given university’s Russian studies courses, including Russian language, literature, and history.<sup>54</sup> Few graduate students pursued doctoral work in the field. Before WWII American universities that offered graduate work in Slavic studies granted a total of forty-three PhDs in all disciplines and geographic regions in the field, most of which were conferred after 1917 when Russian émigrés fleeing civil war in their homeland staffed Russian studies departments in select American universities.<sup>55</sup>

Given the nature of Russian Studies in the U.S. at the start of WWI, Harper was genuinely unique, even among America’s handful of Slavic experts, since he was the first American to dedicate an entire academic career solely to the study of Russian politics and

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<sup>51</sup> Engerman, *Know Your Enemy*, 13.

<sup>52</sup> Kerner to Harper, 1916, Box 3, Folder 2, Harper Papers. Kerner later taught at the University of California at Berkeley and helped found a peer-reviewed scholarly journal of the Slavic world, the *Slavic Review*. Today the publication is a prominent journal in the Russian and Slavic Studies fields.

<sup>53</sup> The quarterly *Russian Review* was founded and edited at the University of Liverpool’s School of Russian Studies beginning in 1911. For a brief description of its background and sources of funding, see Harper, *The Russia I Believe In*, 74-75.

<sup>54</sup> J.A. Posin, “Russian Studies in American Colleges,” *Russian Review* 7 (2) (1948): 62.

<sup>55</sup> Oleg A. Maslenikov, “Slavic Studies in America: 1939-1946,” *The Slavonic and East European Review* 25 (65) (1947): 529. On Russian émigrés teaching in American universities, see Clarence Manning, *A History of Slavic Studies in the United States* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1957), 49. Manning writes that many such émigrés, including M. Rostovtzev, A.A Vasiliev, and George Vernadsky were Mensheviks who fled Russia during the Russian civil war.

history.<sup>56</sup> Another first in the nascent field, Harper offered courses to graduate students pursuing academic or diplomatic careers focused on Russia.<sup>57</sup> His extensive in-country experience in Russia set him apart from other scholars and, thus, his knowledge of the country was in demand.

More important for Harper's credibility in the public's eye was a perception, perpetuated in mass circulation periodicals that published his writings, that he was the nation's "foremost authority on Russia."<sup>58</sup> Take, for instance, the fact that commentators wrote that Harper had "first hand information in regard to Russian conditions," and therefore rare and sought after knowledge.<sup>59</sup> An article in the ladies section of the *Chicago Tribune* commented that even though Harper's lecture to a group of Chicago aristocrats and their wives on "Russia during wartime" was "the most impersonal lecture one ever went to," the professor's knowledge of the subject was so thorough that some observers believed he "must have been hovering over Russia among the cherubim in a rosy cloud" due to his extraordinary knowledge of the country and its people. The article's author claimed that "nobody could possibly be as wise as Prof. Samuel Harper" on Russia, since he had visited the country ten times and had "been on Russian soil for several months past and was just home."<sup>60</sup> Thus despite whether or not Harper's analysis of Russia was accurate, his status as a public intellectual and a "Russian expert" did much to convince the public that it was.

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<sup>56</sup> Paul A. Goble "Samuel N. Harper and the Study of Russia: His Career and Collection," *Cahiers du monde russe et soviétique* 14 (4) (October-December 1973): 608.

<sup>57</sup> Maslenikov, "Slavic Studies in America," 529.

<sup>58</sup> See "Harper Will Tell of the New Russia," *Washington Post*, March 27, 1917, Box 3, Folder 12, Harper Papers for Harper's personal clipping of the article. Often, Harper archived clippings of newspaper articles that he wrote or that quoted him. Yet due to his cryptic or nonexistent citations on each article, determining the newspaper in which the piece was originally published or the page on which it appeared is often difficult. In these cases, I have opted to refer to the name, date, and archival location of Harper's personal copy. For examples of newspapers making these types of introductions within the time-span of this chapter, see, for example, "Room for American Men of Business in Russia," *Evening Herald*, December 18, 1916, 3.

<sup>59</sup> Service Bulletin of the American-Russian Chamber of Commerce, 1916, Box 61, Folder 6, Harper Papers.

<sup>60</sup> "Samuel Harper Talks on Russia," *Chicago Tribune*, February 10, 1916, 15.

## Harper and American Business

This perception of Harper, combined with his ties to business associations, led him to weigh in on and, therefore, heavily influence the conversation surrounding expectations for American trade in Russia during and after WWI. He did so by both maintaining regular correspondence with business figures, to whom he gave advice on economic conditions in Russia, and with trade and business organizations that sought to foster economic ties with the country. Harper also communicated with the public and a broader audience of businessmen and entrepreneurs through articles he published in newspapers, magazines, and trade journals. He appears to have purposefully worked to keep both of these segments of the country informed on the progress of Russian affairs, viewing it as his primary contribution to public knowledge of Russia during WWI.<sup>61</sup>

Harper officially affiliated himself with various organizations whose goals were to foster economic ties between Russia and the United States. For example, he was one of the top forty ranking members of the American-Russian Chamber of Commerce.<sup>62</sup> Similarly, the editorial board of a journal of similar aims published by the International Manufacturer Sales Company, the *Russian-American Journal of Commerce*, frequently solicited Harper to write articles for the publication, claiming that it supported his positions on economic relations between the two countries. The organization even invited him to be its secretary in 1916, though he declined the position.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Chalberg, "Samuel Harper and Russia," 58.

<sup>62</sup> American-Russian Chamber of Commerce Pamphlet, 1916, Box 3, Folder 4, Harper Papers.

<sup>63</sup> Box 3, Folder 3, 1916, Harper Papers.

Harper developed extensive personal contacts in the business world. One of the most important of them was with Henry Ford, which Gaston Plaintiff, one of the company's top executives and a close confidant of Ford, mediated. Plaintiff noted that Ford hoped "to form a Russian company and open plants over there [in Russia] for low priced automobiles and traction machine[s]." Wanting to aid the company, he sought the advice of a "man understanding [Russian] conditions, language, etc." For this reason, Plaintiff argued, Harper would be a "great asset to the company."<sup>64</sup> Plaintiff assured Harper that he "had a long talk with Mr. Ford regarding you personally, and have explained to him your experience in Russia . . . and he is very much interested." Days later Harper and Ford scheduled a hunting trip in Michigan, during which they discussed "conditions in Russia" and their relevance to the company's prospects for opening factories and selling its products there.<sup>65</sup>

Harper also maintained contact with small business owners. For example, he corrected and translated several sets of Russian industrial blueprints for a small business owner in Chicago.<sup>66</sup> He attended the first meeting of the International Manufacturer Sales Company, which met on January 16, 1916, in Chicago.<sup>67</sup> The twenty-five companies represented at the meeting included JI Case Plow Works, American Steam Gage and Valve Company, New York Rubber Company, American Hoist and Derrick Company, and numerous other manufacturing

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<sup>64</sup> Plaintiff to Harper, October 3, 1916, Box 3, Folder 6, Harper Papers.

<sup>65</sup> Plaintiff to Harper, October 11, 1916, Box 3, Folder 6, Harper Papers.

<sup>66</sup> Carroll to Harper, January 5, 1917, Box 3, Folder 10, Harper Papers.

<sup>67</sup> Alexander Postnikov and Xenophon Kalamatiano founded this organization in 1915 for the purpose of expanding trade between Russia and the United States. Both were "knowledgeable and experienced businessmen of Russian background who were resident in America with good connections in both countries." The organization also published the *Russian-American Journal of Commerce*. See Saul, *War and Revolution*, 16-17.

enterprises, most of which dealt in either heavy machinery manufacturing or other durable goods.<sup>68</sup>

Individual salesmen from large corporations likewise communicated with Harper, seeking his advice on several topics, one of which was how to acquire a working knowledge of Russian in order to sell their company's products in the country. Frederick Dellnatt, a plant manager for the Case Threshing Machine Company, wrote to Harper that he was willing to travel from his Wisconsin home to Chicago to discuss how he could learn more Russian.<sup>69</sup> The owner of a Chicago construction company noted that he had been "hammering" away at the basics of the Russian language for several weeks, all to no avail. To better his speaking and reading skills in the foreign tongue, he planned on signing up for a "down town class [in Chicago] in Russian."<sup>70</sup>

The class to which he referred was one of many that Harper and the University of Chicago set up in downtown Chicago in 1916 to accommodate businessmen's and salesmen's growing demand for learning the language. The University of Chicago's chancellor's office understood the needs of men such as Frederick Dellnatt and responded in a tangible way: "There is a pressing and growing demand for Americans who know Russian" reads a memorandum from the office. "This demand" it claims "has been reported to the University of Chicago from many institutions, corporations and firms." In order to accommodate it, the university proposed "to offer the Russian [course]work at a place and time convenient to downtown businessmen and workers." These classes were open only to non-undergraduates over the age of twenty-one who had obtained the dean's permission to register as "unclassified" students.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Box 3, Folder 2, Harper Papers.

<sup>69</sup> Dellnatt to Harper, January 29, 1916, Box 3, Folder 2, Harper Papers.

<sup>70</sup> Morava to Harper, December 27, 1916, Box 3, Folder 8, Harper Papers.

<sup>71</sup> Box 3, Folder 8, Harper Papers.

As the university's sole authority on Russia, Harper oversaw and conducted these classes. In doing so, he stepped into a major undertaking, especially considering the number of students who enrolled in them—Chicago's branch of the International Harvester Corporation alone signed up several dozen of its employees and salesmen.<sup>72</sup> Yet, these courses, which attempted to give businessmen a working knowledge of "one of the most difficult of the modern languages," met only four hours per week over the course of twelve weeks, hardly enough time to give someone with no knowledge of the language any ability to communicate in it, particularly since Harper made no "attempt . . . to introduce conversation" at this level.<sup>73</sup> Even so, by teaching Russian in this way, Harper implicitly fostered the assumption that the language skills he taught would be sufficient to communicate with Russians for business purposes. Furthermore, these courses and the knowledge he claimed they gave students assumed that technical skills, such as language, were the most difficult prerequisites to overcome for doing business in Russia—not its political system or culture.

Harper also met the general and business publics' demands for information on economic opportunities in Russia through articles and opinion pieces in trade journals, newspapers, and magazines. In these writings, he argued that enormous economic opportunity for American goods and capital in Russia would endure after the war, since Russia's political system was becoming more democratic and western, and because the country remained in the early stages of economic development. For example, Harper emphasized that Russia was a "comparatively . . . underdeveloped country" and that, for this reason, "a huge demand for manufactured goods" in Russia would only grow in the years to come, meaning that "for years vast quantities of

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<sup>72</sup> Hubbard to Harper, December 27, 1916, Box 3, Folder 8, Harper Papers.

<sup>73</sup> Morava to Harper, December 27, 1916, Box 3, Folder 8, Harper Papers.



manufactured products will have to be imported.”<sup>74</sup> Yet the demand that would “last for a long time” lay in Russia’s need for “complicated machinery.”<sup>75</sup> In an article in the bulletin of the American-Russian Chamber of Commerce, Harper wrote that “it should be realized that there is plenty of room in Russia.” By this, he showed that not only was “official Russia” and its government willing and ready to see American economic activity in the country, but that the “Russian business public” was also “keen . . . for more developed and direct trade relations between the two countries.”<sup>76</sup> The fact that Russians were “fair and honorable in their business dealings” would only make transactions more facile.<sup>77</sup>

Since much of Harper’s argument on the demand for American goods and investment in Russia rested on the assumption that the country was underdeveloped and backward, dissecting his understanding of these tropes and how they corresponded to economic and political reality in Russia at the time is critical. On the eve of Russia’s involvement in WWI, the country had the world’s fifth largest economy, surpassed only by that of the United States, the United Kingdom, France, and Germany. Between 1885 and 1913, Russia’s economy grew at a rate of 3.25 percent per year, a rate that only countries such as Canada, the United States, Japan, and Australia exceeded. A wealthy, yet fragmented, business elite headed by families including the Guchkovs, Raibushinskis, and Momontovs began to form in Moscow as early as the 1840s and its offspring, whose wealth came primarily from textile manufacturing, dominated the Russian economic scene in the last decades of the nineteenth century.<sup>78</sup> Between 1905 and 1914 Russia developed a

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<sup>74</sup> “Room for American Men of Business in Russia,” *Evening Herald*, December 18, 1916, 3; “Opportunity Aplenty in Russia for American Business Man,” *Brooklyn Citizen*, December 18, 1916, Box 3, Folder 8, Harper Papers.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.* For a similar statement see “Room for American Men of Business in Russia,” *Evening Herald*, December 18, 1916, 3, in which Harper refers to this type of machinery as “complex machinery.”

<sup>76</sup> Service Bulletin of the American-Russian Chamber of Commerce, Box 61, Folder 6, Harper Papers.

<sup>77</sup> “Russia Will Need Hardware After the War,” *Bridgeport Evening Farmer*, April 5, 1917, 4.

<sup>78</sup> Ruckman, *The Moscow Business Elite*, 49-72, 109-210.

thriving advertising industry that promoted an impressively wide array of consumer goods to a broad swath of its populace and, in many ways, mirrored the west's emphasis on consumption.<sup>79</sup> In the late 1890s, Russian oil production exceeded that of the United States, since it produced 35 percent of the world's oil supply and threatened to overtake Standard Oil's near universal monopoly of the market.<sup>80</sup> Yet, even though Russia's economy ranked among the largest in the world, grain and agricultural products made up a significant percentage of its output, while industrial goods comprised a relatively small portion.<sup>81</sup> Unlike many western countries, Russian utilized a system of state capitalism, in which the government pushed industrialization and formulated the country's economic policy with little to no input from Russian business circles.<sup>82</sup>

Though there were some appreciable differences in the American and Russian economies, portraying the latter as underdeveloped or backward carried with it a highly specific set of connotations; namely an implicit comparison between American and European economies and the Russian economy, which failed to live up to western standards. In a sense, the backwardness trope also indicated that Harper thought Russia should be developing toward a liberal, constitutional system. Not content with Russian state capitalism, he portrayed the country as underdeveloped to justify his belief that only American investment would modernize it. Perhaps most importantly, the notion of Russian backwardness made clear that the country's

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<sup>79</sup> Sally West, *I Shop in Moscow: Advertising and the Creation of Consumer Culture in Late Tsarist Russia* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2011).

<sup>80</sup> Ron Chernow, *Titan: The Life of John D. Rockefeller Sr.*, (New York: Random House, 1998), 430-31.

<sup>81</sup> Henning Hillman and Brandy L. Aven, "Fragmented Networks and Entrepreneurship in Late Imperial Russia," *American Journal of Sociology* 117 (2) (September 2011): 489-90. For a description of the tsarist economy, see Peter Gatrell, *The Tsarist Economy, 1850-1917* (London: B.T. Batsford, 1986).

<sup>82</sup> Boris Ananich, "The Russian Economy and Banking System," in *The Cambridge History of Russia Volume 2: Imperial Russia, 1689-1917*, ed. Dominic Lieven (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 421. On the temptation to identify the Russian economy as backwards, see Gatrell, *The Tsarist Economy*, 231-34; Alexander Gerschenkron "Economic Backwardness in Historical Perspective," in *Economic Backwardness in Historical Perspective: A Book of Essays*, ed. Alexander Gerschenkron (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1962), 5-30.

economy did not have the capacity to manufacture complex goods requiring expensive capital and a highly skilled workforce. An underdeveloped Russian economy was not so much one that needed to expand or diversify, but one that presented special opportunities to American businessmen who could supply those needs in which it lagged.

According to Harper, Russia's demand for "complex machinery" was so pressing, in fact, that it led Russians to "want Americans to establish factories in Russia." Doing so, he argued, would enable the country to have the manufactured goods that it needed in order to survive the war and rebuild from it. The relationship worked because Russians implicitly trusted the government of the United States, he argued. American capital was "especially welcome," claimed Harper, "because Russia believes that such capital does not come as the advance political agenda of a foreign government."<sup>83</sup> Here referring to a fear that Germans owned the empire's key means of production, Harper portrayed Russia as fearing that German influence over its industrial sector would harm future economic development. Indeed Germany and its banks did play a significant role in the Russian banking system and economy, since the country depended heavily on Berlin and Vienna for capital at this time.<sup>84</sup> Nonetheless, historian Peter Gatrell argues that tsarist Russia's economy was not a "semi-colony" of western European nations collectively, or of Germany specifically, as Harper seemed to believe it was.<sup>85</sup> Moscow, Russia's business capital, saw remarkably little foreign investment, almost all of which concentrated in the hands of a few wealthy businessmen.<sup>86</sup> Even so, Harper argued that the United States alone had a special role in aiding Russia economically by providing reliable, no-

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<sup>83</sup> "Room for American Men of Business in Russia," *Evening Herald*, December 18, 1916, 3.

<sup>84</sup> Ananich, "The Russian Economy and Banking System," 419.

<sup>85</sup> Gatrell, *The Tsarist Economy*, 227.

<sup>86</sup> Ruckman, *The Moscow Business Elite*, 21.

strings-attached investment. He maintained that Russia was no longer willing to endure German domination of its industry, thereby bolstering prospects for American investment.

Yet Harper's claims did not fully correspond with Russian reality. Historian Eric Lohr has argued that immediately before and during WWI, a movement to make the Russian economy "less cosmopolitan, more national, more Russian" gained steam. This campaign targeted German owned businesses and domestically produced German goods and sought to marginalize or eliminate other foreign investment in the empire. A series of riots in Moscow in May 1915 ransacked all businesses bearing foreign names. Suspicious that the Singer Sewing Machine Company engaged in espionage by gathering local economic data to formulate sales strategies, Russian authorities accused the company of being run by Germans, plotting against the tsar, and soon closed Singer offices across the empire. These actions prompted J.P. Morgan, a large American investor in Russia, to threaten to withdraw his investment and lobby the American government not to extend credit to Russia.<sup>87</sup> Thus Harper's claim that the country was eager for foreign investment, even if only from Americans, presented a selective interpretation of the Russian political situation to the American public.

For all the untapped potential that Harper saw for American business in Russia, he made clear that firms and corporations needed to be careful to send their best representatives to Russia. Since the country was "no place for second-raters or cast-offs," he warned that any American corporate representative who traveled there planning to give bribes to procure orders from the government would be sorely disappointed, since Russians would consider any American who did

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<sup>87</sup> Eric Lohr, *Nationalizing the Russian Empire: The Campaign Against Enemy Aliens during World War I* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), 27, 31-36, 79-81.

so a “chump.”<sup>88</sup> By insisting that firms cautiously select who they sent to Russia, Harper recommended that they lay the foundations of solid business relationships with Russians since their interactions would continue far beyond 1916.

To bring Russia to life for Americans and lend credence to the advice he gave to businessmen, Harper vividly recounted first-hand experiences from his travels in provincial Russia. Consider an article he published in the *Christian Science Monitor*, which gave readers an account of the improvements in public life he believed were underway in the country. In it, Harper claimed that the *zemstvo* system, a network of provincial self-government agencies entitled to manage and legislate on local needs such as health and education, had invigorated the country’s provinces and brought infrastructure to its vast peasant countryside.<sup>89</sup> To make his point, he described a 1915 trip he and an American friend took from Moscow to the “more real Russia.” “As we drove out from Moscow we came to a chaussee road,” wrote Harper. This road, which allowed the pair’s horse-drawn carriage to travel smoothly through the countryside, was a “‘Zemstvo road’ constructed and maintained by a local provincial council of the district.” As Harper traveled deeper into the heart of Russia with his friend, who had initiated the trip in the hopes of seeing the *zemstvos*’ rural improvements firsthand, the two began to notice several peasant schools flung over a fifty-mile stretch of road. Part of “the network of primary schools which the *Zemstva* have gradually developed,” they eventually gave way to a *zemstvo* hospital,

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<sup>88</sup> “Room for American Men of Business in Russia,” *Evening Herald*, December 18, 1916, 3; “Opportunity Aplenty in Russia for American Business Man,” *Brooklyn Citizen*, December 18, 1916, Box 3, Folder 8, Harper Papers.

<sup>89</sup> On the *zemstvo* system, see Janet M. Hartley, “Provincial and Local Government,” in *The Cambridge History of Russia* Volume 2: *Imperial Russia, 1689-1917*, ed. Dominic Lieven (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 450-67.

where the two stopped for lunch. After their meal, Harper and his companion watched as their carriage driver took them past a “model farm run by the agricultural experts of the Zemstvo.”<sup>90</sup>

After their trip, Harper felt that he had succeeded in demonstrating to his friend that the “benevolent functions” of Russia’s system of local self-government uplifted “the broader masses of the people, both materially and morally.”<sup>91</sup> Given his other writings on economic opportunity in Russia, it is hardly surprising that Harper commented favorably on a system of self-government that would both make the country more civically developed and democratic, while building infrastructure capable of supporting a high volume of trade and development. For him, the two went hand in hand.

## **The Implications of Harper’s Interpretation**

Harper’s vision for Russia turned on an optimistic outlook that envisioned it developing into a liberal, constitutional order, hopefully without bloodshed.<sup>92</sup> His framework for understanding the country in 1916 endured for decades, shaping historical writing on the Russian Revolution. Historians of the 1960s revisited Russia’s political and economic development between 1905 and 1917 in order to assess the tsarist regime’s viability. Referred to in contemporary historiographical parlance as optimists, those who argued that the state could have evolved into a constitutional monarchy if war had not broken out emphasized many of the same facts that Harper did, including the development of infrastructure, economic expansion within the Russian empire, and improvements in the lot of the peasant.<sup>93</sup> Yet, this view, which Cold

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<sup>90</sup> “Zemstvo Union Does Manifold Work in Russia,” *Christian Science Monitor*, October 31, 1916, 2. See appendix C.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>92</sup> Chalberg, “Samuel Harper and Russia,” 58.

<sup>93</sup> Arthur Mendel, “On Interpreting the Fate of Imperial Russia,” in *Russia Under the Last Tsar*, ed. T.G. Stavrou (Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 1968), 27.

War, anti-Soviet historiography reinforced, came under fire from historians Leopold Haimson and Theodore Von Laue, who paved the way for a younger cohort, the pessimists, who argue that the tsarist system and the society it oversaw had little or no longterm viability and that a revolution of some sort was likely. Writing during the global social turmoil of the 1960s and the Vietnam War, the pessimists' arguments found fertile soil, gained traction and, today, represent the dominant interpretation in the historiography of the Russian Revolution.<sup>94</sup> Harper's optimistic view, then, went virtually unchallenged for nearly five decades.

In practical terms, Harper's views fed into the public discourse on Russia and mingled with it to produce a set of expectations that seemed favorable to the American public at large and to the American business elite, who had a direct stake in Russia's economic and political future. Sudden increases in trade with the country during the war only served to confirm this idea. This situation would present an opportunity in which Russians and American business professionals could equally benefit. On the one hand, Russians would finally have access to the goods that their backward economy proved unable to produce and could, in turn, use them to rebuild their country after WWI. On the other hand, Americans would develop more trade infrastructure in their own country, all the while reaping profits from sales and investment in Russia. This dialog between Harper, the business world, and the American public made it highly reasonable for the average American citizen or business professional to look forward to a political and economic future for Russia that resembled that of the United States and other western liberal democracies of the time.

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<sup>94</sup> Christopher Read, "In Search of Liberal Tsarism: The Historiography of Autocratic Decline," *The Historical Journal* 45 (1) (2002): 195-210. For a typical example of the pessimists' views of the period, see Theodore von Laue, "The Chances for Liberal Constitutionalism," *Slavic Review* 24 (1) (1965): 34-46.

Harper's depiction of Russia left no room for social revolution. In keeping with these predictions, he published an article in the *Chicago Tribune* in which he argued that WWI brought rapid economic modernization and improved Russian peasants' living conditions. He concluded that "as for revolution, why, everywhere I heard people say 'we are working for the army.'"<sup>95</sup> After all, Russia was too busy democratizing, modernizing, and winning the war against Germany to contemplate a revolution.

## Conclusion

By interpreting Russia's future in this way, Harper steered the public conversation even farther toward conceptualizing Russia as a land of untapped economic potential than it already did. Operating in an environment in which news of economic opportunity in Russia was widespread, his trusted and authoritative take both reinforced and added to the predominant narrative. Moreover, by insisting on the presence of broader, less immediate political changes afoot in the country, Harper gave the impression that Russia would become a democratic nation-state uplifted by free trade—not home to a revolution that would overthrow the autocracy and set up a weak Provisional Government that a radical socialist party would come to power by displacing. In short, Harper helped to create a narrowly defined set of expectations for Russia that would be hard-pressed to account for the country's subsequent development. This blueprint, not necessarily the reality of Russian development, would color both Harper's, the business elite's, and the American public's understanding of the next chapter in Russia's history: the momentous revolutions of February and October 1917.

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<sup>95</sup> "No Separate Peace for Russia, Prof. Harper Says," *Chicago Tribune*, February 9, 1916, 3.



## Chapter 2: From “a bloodless revolution in a day” to “whole-hoggers:” Harper Interprets Russia’s Year of Revolution

The year 1917 brought two revolutions to Russia. The first, on February 22, toppled Nicholas II and the 304-year-old Romanov dynasty and replaced it with a Provisional Government.<sup>96</sup> This body, which initially comprised primarily Constitutional Democrats (Cadets) and Octobrists, liberal parties, was set to rule until an elected Constituent Assembly resolved the country’s political future. Yet on the same day a Duma committee formed the Provisional Government, compromising businessmen and members of the professional intelligentsia, a revolutionary body, the Petrograd Soviet, also emerged. One of many soviets, or councils, spread across Russia, it drew its membership from and represented workers, soldiers, and eventually peasants.<sup>97</sup> Backed resolutely by the country’s socialist parties, the body gave voice to the Russian masses’ political, social, and economic demands. As a result, the Petrograd Soviet boasted much power and popular legitimacy from the start. Contemporaries used the term *dvoevlastie* (dual power) to describe this potentially explosive situation in which the Provisional Government and the Petrograd Soviet shared power. During the year, moderate socialist parties within the Soviet, including the Socialist Revolutionaries, Russia’s most popular political party, and the moderate Social Democrats, the Mensheviks, formed a succession of coalition governments with the “bourgeois” Cadets. Only the Bolsheviks, a far-left socialist fringe party in early 1917, advocated a transfer of all governmental power to the soviets. But, as the Provisional Government continued fighting an unpopular war, the Bolshevik viewpoint gathered rising

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<sup>96</sup> Owing to Russia’s continued use of the Julian calendar instead of the Gregorian calendar, the dates of the beginning of bread riots in Petrograd differed between Russia and the United States. In the former, they began on February 22, while in the later, on March 8.

<sup>97</sup> I use the lowercase “soviet” to refer to the presence of multiple soviets as an idea or a widespread form of political organization, but opt for the capitalized “Soviet” to refer to a specific body, such as the Petrograd Soviet.

support until, by the fall of 1917, the slogan “All Power to the Soviets” transformed into an expression of the popular will that signaled the increasingly left, socialist orientation of Russian politics. As a result, on the night of October 25, Vladimir Lenin and the Bolsheviks overthrew the Provisional Government. When the Constituent Assembly convened in January 1918, the Bolsheviks shut the body down.<sup>98</sup>

Commenting on the situation, Harper noted that his “sympathies . . . were in the liberal camp,” thereby signaling his allegiance to the Cadets, Russia’s most liberal party.<sup>99</sup> As historian William G. Rosenberg has argued, the Cadets represented “basic European liberal traditions,” including an emphasis on civil liberties for all Russian citizens and a desire to see Russia develop along a laissez-faire, capitalist economic and political trajectory. Comprising mostly professionals and intellectuals, the Constitutional Democrats garnered far more support in cities than in rural areas. Structuring its foreign policy around liberal principles, the party’s platform stressed that Russia’s duty was to “uphold her foreign obligations, regardless of domestic strife” and, therefore, to “stand shoulder to shoulder” with the Allies by remaining in WWI until victory. In keeping with this commitment, the Cadet leadership underscored that it would engage in no social reform, would maintain stern military discipline, and would not cooperate with anarchists or antigovernment parties.<sup>100</sup>

The pressures of war and disagreements over Russia’s role as a member of the Allies, however, split the party into left and right factions. The former supported cooperation with

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<sup>98</sup> For a discussion of both revolutions, see Rex A. Wade, *The Russian Revolution, 1917* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005). On the Bolsheviks rise to power in Petrograd in 1917 and the increasing depth of popular support for their aims, see Alexander Rabinowitch, *The Bolsheviks Come to Power: The Revolution of 1917 in Petrograd* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2004). For Americans, the October Revolution took place on November 7-8 based on the differences in the Julian and Gregorian calendars.

<sup>99</sup> Harper, *The Russia I Believe In*, 87.

<sup>100</sup> William G. Rosenberg, *Liberals in the Russian Revolution: The Constitutional Democratic Party, 1917-1921* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974), 6, 15, 274, 74, 184.

moderate socialist parties and envisioned Russia eventually exiting the war without necessarily winning it. The right faction, on the other hand, represented a more conservative strain that advocated war until victory, civil rights, capitalism, and the importance of standing for national rather than class-based interests. The right wing rejected cooperation with socialist parties.<sup>101</sup>

Harper's long-time friend Paul Miliukov led the Cadet's right wing. Originally a professor of history at Moscow University, Miliukov had lectured on Russian history and politics at the University of Chicago in 1903, thus giving Harper and his family exposure to his ideas.<sup>102</sup> Soon after the February Revolution, Harper congratulated Miliukov on the large number of liberals in the Provisional Government, thereby indicating that he saw Miliukov's stance as representative of the entire party and of Russian liberalism more generally.<sup>103</sup> Owing to his personal relationship with Miliukov, Harper had a stake in seeing his close acquaintance's views succeed.<sup>104</sup> Yet, not by chance, his political preferences aligned with those of the right Cadets. Thus to see this group gain popular support among the Russian masses and traction in the Provisional Government was to see his own vision for Russia's future and the United States's geopolitical interests realized in a tangible way.

In this chapter I trace the rise and fall of Harper's optimism beginning in March 1917, when he told America that "the real Russia has finally triumphed" and that democracy had emerged, until the end of the year when, as a result of the October Revolution, he claimed that Bolshevik "extremism" destroyed "new Russia's" future by negating the February Revolution's liberal gains. In the interim, Harper's optimism crested, plateaued, and began to wane in

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<sup>101</sup> Wade, *The Russian Revolution*, 58-61.

<sup>102</sup> On Miliukov's lectures at the University of Chicago, see Melissa K. Stockdale, *Paul Miliukov and the Quest for a Liberal Russia, 1880-1918* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996), 108-9. On Harper and Miliukov's friendship, see Poster, "A Warmth of Soul," *Journal of Contemporary History* 14 (2) (1979): 239.

<sup>103</sup> Harper to Miliukov, April 12, 1917, Box 3, Folder 15, Harper Papers.

<sup>104</sup> Harper to Connor, April 12, 1917, Box 3, Folder 15, Harper Papers.

response to rapid political developments. Following the way in which he broadcasted his highly influential opinion to the public, I argue that Harper measured Russia's 1917 developments against the right Cadets' political vision.<sup>105</sup> Therefore I contend that this perspective transformed Harper from an excited optimist to a troubled, somewhat skeptical observer of Russia's year of revolution and led him to encourage the American public to adopt a similar stance.

According to historian Peter Filene, American public opinion almost unanimously supported the February Revolution, primarily because it overthrew the Russian autocracy.<sup>106</sup> This mass support had roots in American views of conflict during WWI, which saw the war as a battle between democracy and authoritarianism, and classified Nicholas II and his government as the latter.<sup>107</sup> Earlier commentators such as George Kennan, whose 1891 account *Siberia and the Exile System* condemned the Russian autocracy for its treatment of political opponents, had already depicted this stark contrast decades before WWI began.<sup>108</sup> In the late tsarist era, news of beaten, cold female political prisoners in Siberia circulated widely in American and western European newspapers, garnering sympathy for the prisoners, depicting the tsarist autocracy as ruthless and disrespectful of human life, and, therefore, drawing a line between authoritarian Russia and the United States.<sup>109</sup>

Consequently, Americans celebrated the autocracy's downfall. On March 25, 1917, fifteen hundred Americans gathered in New York's Manhattan Opera House to celebrate

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<sup>105</sup> In this chapter, I use the terms "Cadet perspective," "Cadet-oriented perspective," "right Cadet perspective," and "liberal perspective" interchangeably, just as Harper did, to represent Miliukov and the right Cadets' basic stance.

<sup>106</sup> Peter G. Filene, *Americans and the Soviet Experiment, 1917-1933* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967), 268.

<sup>107</sup> Harper, *The Russian I Believe In*, 98.

<sup>108</sup> See George Kennan, *Siberia and the Exile System* (New York: The Century Company, 1891). See also Lasch, *The American Liberals and the Russian Revolution*, 7-9.

<sup>109</sup> Choi Chatterjee, "Imperial Incarcerations: Ekaterina Breshko-Breshkovskaia, Vinayak Savarkar, and the Original Sins of Modernity," *Slavic Review* 74 (4) (2015): 851-56.

“Russian democracy.”<sup>110</sup> Former President Theodore Roosevelt asserted that he rejoiced “that Russia, the hereditary friend of the country, has ranged herself on the side of orderly liberty, of enlightened freedom . . . by free nations throughout the world.”<sup>111</sup> The Society of the Friends of Russian Freedom, an organization that opposed the tsarist autocracy, wrote that “the Russian Revolution [of February] has freed a people and a race and has made more secure the foundation of liberty for all men. It is an event whose magnitude can hardly be estimated.”<sup>112</sup> These optimistic understandings of Russian developments primed the American public for a new, democratic Russia.

## Harper and the February Revolution

Harper’s optimism crested in the days immediately following the February Revolution, an event that he welcomed because, as he argued, it set Russia on a path toward liberalism that the Provisional Government and, later, the Constituent Assembly would inevitably follow. He believed that the revolution was “clearly a success” since it overthrew Nicholas II.<sup>113</sup> Excited at the political ramifications of the tsar’s deposition, he spread his optimistic view in newspapers almost as soon as the event took place.<sup>114</sup>

The United States government clamored for Harper’s understanding of the Russian autocracy’s downfall and what type of political system he believed would fill the void it left. Days after the tsar abdicated, the Department of State asked Harper to telegraph his “views as to

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<sup>110</sup> Crane to Harper, March 23, 1917, Box 3, Folder 2, Harper Papers. See also “Root Predicts Fall of Central Rulers,” *New York Times*, March 26, 1917, 4.

<sup>111</sup> Quoted in Filene, *Americans and the Soviet Experiment*, 10.

<sup>112</sup> Newsletter of The Society of the Friends of Russian Freedom, Box 4, Folder 2, Harper Papers.

<sup>113</sup> Harper to Crane, March 1917, Box 3, Folder 11, Harper Papers.

<sup>114</sup> See, for example, “Dr. Harper Sees Help to Allies: Authority on Russia Discusses Revolution, Means Transformation from Autocracy,” *Brooklyn Citizen*, March 16, 1917, Box 3, Folder 12, Harper Papers.

the revolt at Petrograd and its significance.”<sup>115</sup> In his response, Harper focused on the revolution’s political nature and argued that it promoted democracy and stability. Underscoring that fact that, since the Revolution of 1905, the Duma promoted “public organizations to create conditions that would make it possible for Russia to bring into force all her strength,” he depicted the February Revolution as the logical outgrowth of the Duma’s twelve-year-long battle for democracy. He stressed that the event was a “political revolution and not [of] a social character,” correctly emphasizing that Russia’s new government did not seek to alter the social order, but merely reorganized the political system by overthrowing the tsar.<sup>116</sup> Harper sent the Department of State short biographies of the liberals in the Provisional Government to illustrate this change.<sup>117</sup>

Moreover, Harper contended that the event’s political character boded well for Russia’s continued participation in the war. Because the revolution lacked a social dimension, Harper argued that the Russian masses, including the large numbers of peasants and others serving in the army, supported the army. He concluded that the revolution meant “more effective prosecution of war and war until victory”—an end that both aligned with the right Cadets’ preferences and favored the United States and the Allies.<sup>118</sup>

Spreading his interpretation of the February Revolution in newspapers, Harper argued that the event resulted from an organic, evolutionary rise of Russian democracy. Here, he traced the revolution’s roots to 1861, when Tsar Alexander II freed Russia’s serfs and took the “first step toward freedom.” Harper also underscored that the Revolution of 1905 formed the basis for

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<sup>115</sup> Crane to Harper, March 25, 1917, Box 3, Folder 12, Harper Papers. For Harper’s description of this event, see Harper, *The Russian I Believe In*, 96.

<sup>116</sup> Telegram to State Department, March 15, 1917, Box 3, Folder 12, Harper Papers.

<sup>117</sup> Harper, *The Russian I Believe In*, 97.

<sup>118</sup> Telegram to State Department, March 15, 1917, Box 3, Folder 12, Harper Papers.

the February Revolution.<sup>119</sup> "Russia emerged from the eighteenth century into the modern period with two outstanding political institutions—the institution of democracy and the institution of serfdom," he wrote. He pointed out that various stages of "liberation," such as serf emancipation and the move for local government (*zemstvo*), constituted nineteenth-century Russian history's most important events and he characterized their result, the Duma, as "more representative than many of our western parliaments."<sup>120</sup> In his view, the February Revolution represented Russian history's zenith.

Harper also highlighted what he viewed as an inevitable confrontation between the constructive, democratic forces of the Duma and the destructive, antiquated tsarist autocracy, and claimed that this conflict gave birth to the February Revolution. For example, he explained that the event was "approved by all classes" since "the Russian nation . . . [was] back of the Duma in its action." The Duma clashed with the reactionary Russian tsar and, therefore, "could not cooperate with the existing government." Yet, unlike Nicholas II, its legitimacy came from the people. "There is not only a general, vague backing by the people" for the Duma, wrote Harper, "but a specific strong backing in the several organizations of the nation."<sup>121</sup>

Harper thus crafted a narrative that urged readers to revere the February Revolution. Explaining the tsarist government's interference with public organizations and the Duma, he wrote that "several times in the course of the last two years, the government has interfered with these organizations . . . charging that their real object was to get political power." But, claimed Harper, they sought to promote "a state of mutual confidence between the government and the country, so that the resources of the country could be mobilized in the most efficient manner."

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<sup>119</sup> "Regards Revolution in Russia Culmination of Long Work for Freedom," April 26, 1917, Box 4, Folder 2, Harper Papers.

<sup>120</sup> "Struggle of Russia: Over Half Century of Move for Free Government," April 29, 1917, Box 4, Folder 2, Harper Papers.

<sup>121</sup> "Prof. Harper Tells Causes of Revolution," *Chicago Tribune*, March 16, 1917, 5.

Using Russia's resources in this way benefitted the United States since the Duma aimed to "secure conditions that will make it possible for Russia to prosecute this war with all its resources and to eliminate all possibilities of a premature peace."<sup>122</sup> This revolution, he believed, ensured that Russia continued to make substantial contributions to the war effort, guaranteeing that the United States would not share an undue portion of wartime human and financial burdens.

Russia's new political status intrigued both the American business community and various civil organizations, and they reached out to Harper for information that he readily provided. Yet historian John Charles Chalberg argues that Harper cared little for and was slightly more than "disinterested" in economic matters in Russia during 1917.<sup>123</sup> The evidence, however, paints another picture, one that depicts Harper working actively in the business community, taking a keen interest in the Russian economy, and constantly reassuring American businessmen that the February Revolution gave birth to an even more business friendly Russia.

Individual businessmen often began correspondence with Harper to seek his advice on doing business with Russia. Many of their concerns revolved around whether or not the country's new government was sufficiently stable and friendly toward private business to warrant investors risking their capital there. Sal Stein explained to Harper that "the resources of the great Russian Empire are now at America's command. The American government is the only one in a position now to be Russia's creditor and Russia will prove to be a good debtor & client. Capitalists & investors should study the economic problems of Russia and study her from every angle."<sup>124</sup> Walter Hubbard of International Harvester invited Harper to speak to the company's executives, since his knowledge of Russia's political and economic climate was "directly

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<sup>122</sup> Ibid.

<sup>123</sup> Chalberg, "Samuel Harper and Russia," 114-15.

<sup>124</sup> Stein to Harper, April 14, 1917, Box 3, Folder 15, Harper Papers.



connected to the Harvester Company's business."<sup>125</sup> The Russian Information Bureau, an organization formed before the revolution to "furnish American interests with accurate and authoritative information in regard to financial, commercial and cultural conditions in Russia" facilitated an advisory relationship between Harper and leading business figures, including the Vice President of National City Bank and Charles M. Schwab, president of Bethlehem Steel Company and a manufacturing tycoon.<sup>126</sup> Only days after the tsar's fall, Marshall Beymer, the owner of a Wisconsin furniture company, asked Harper about "the probable outcome of the credit situation in Russia to-day" since he had "a little money invested in Russian credit and the inclination to put more into it."<sup>127</sup>

In his responses, Harper always insisted that businessmen and investors stood to gain from the February Revolution. Responding to Beymer, he wrote that "it is clear that the recent changes in Russia will mean greater internal economic development and greater opportunities for foreign capital and enterprises . . . and these developments will surely bring a more solid financial foundation in Russia."<sup>128</sup> Speaking to the Chicago's Business Men's Prosperity Club, Harper dubbed the February Revolution a "bloodless revolution in a day" that destroyed no business infrastructure.<sup>129</sup> Reassuring Cyrus McCormick, owner of the International Harvester Corporation, who worried over rumors of Russia's lack of credit and the decline of the ruble's value, Harper wrote that the liberals in charge of the Provisional Government made an "announcement of . . . credit put at the disposition of the new government," a statement that

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<sup>125</sup> Hubbard to Harper, April 18, 1917, Box 3, Folder 16, Harper Papers.

<sup>126</sup> Russian Information Bureau Memorandum, 1917, Box 4, Folder 6, Harper Papers; Russian Information Bureau to Harper, April 10, 1917, Box 3, Folder 14, Harper Papers.

<sup>127</sup> Beymer to Harper, March 17, 1917, Box 3, Folder 12, Harper Papers.

<sup>128</sup> Harper to Beymer, April 6, 1917, Box 3, Folder 14, Harper Papers.

<sup>129</sup> Business Men's Prosperity Club to Harper, May 1, 1917, Box 4, Folder 3, Harper Papers.

evidently revived McCormick's confidence.<sup>130</sup> He consoled Frederick W. Allen, an executive of Lee, Higginson and Company, a Boston based investment bank that conducted business with Russia, that the Provisional Government was "always . . . very sympathetic towards America, and thus have stated their readiness to cooperate with Americans, wishing to examine the many opportunities offered in Russia."<sup>131</sup>

Arguing that Russia was safe for investment, an inherently forward-looking, long-term venture that depends heavily on political and economic stability, Harper depicted the country as a peaceful, stable land ruled by wise, business-friendly leaders. In doing so, he fostered confidence among businessmen and created the expectation that investment in the summer of 1917 was a sound venture since the country's new government fostered free markets, welcomed foreign capital, and sought stability. Russia was not only friendly toward American businessmen who sought to sell there, but was now on such steady political and economic footing that it represented a safe repository for American investment.

In the spring of 1917, several social clubs and civil organizations asked Harper to inform them on recent changes in Russia. In his talks, Harper highlighted the February Revolution's legitimacy and argued that it positively impacted Russia and the Allies. For example, the After Dinner Club in Moline, Illinois, requested Harper's presence in May 1917 and printed a flyer that announced that his talk would be on "The Russian Revolution." Harper's words on its front cover quickly summarized his views on the event:

"The real Russia has finally triumphed.  
The aim of the revolution and its one justification was to win the war.  
It was purely political and not a social revolution.  
The revolution was the rounding out of a long process."<sup>132</sup>

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<sup>130</sup> Harper to Williams, May 17, 1917, Box 4, Folder 6, Harper Papers. Harper wrote that his response "helped [McCormick] a great deal."

<sup>131</sup> Harper to Allen, April 18, 1917, Box 3, Folder 16, Harper Papers.

<sup>132</sup> After Dinner Club Program, May 14, 1917, Box 4, Folder 5, Harper Papers.

Yet this line of reasoning did not come naturally to many Americans, Harper believed. He never doubted the Provisional Government's efficacy, but worried that pessimistic attitudes in the business community toward Russia's prospects would prevent investors from risking their capital in the country. In May 1917, at the height of his optimism, he complained to E C Porter, the head of the American-Russian Chamber of Commerce, that he found "most distressing pessimism with regard to the Russian situation" in Chicago business circles.<sup>133</sup> He lamented that there was "no indication in our press" that the development of Russian civil society and the February Revolution "would lead to the emergence of a new and . . . a better Russia."<sup>134</sup>

Driven by the assumption that democratic states operated on the basis of their citizenry's opinions, Harper waged a battle for public opinion. To do so, he traced the roots of the pessimistic attitudes he encountered and often blamed the yellow press for them. He claimed that "dramatic, sensational news" printed in ill informed or cynical American newspapers perpetuated doubt on Russia's future and gave investors cold feet when it came to doing business in the country.<sup>135</sup> He chided A S Postnikov, a Russian news reporter in New York, for making what he perceived to be dangerous statements about prospects for democracy in Russia and acknowledged "I can now understand why there is so much pessimism in our American business circles in regard to Russia . . . [because of] men like you, who are supposed to be in touch with Russia."<sup>136</sup> Harper complained to the Associated Press about its Russian correspondent Robert C. Long who expected "nothing but the gradual disintegration of Russia in 1917."<sup>137</sup> Harper refused to speak to a reporter from the *Chicago Tribune*, a publication that he claimed was guilty of these practices, and insisted to one reporter that even though Russia would "hold as a republic" since

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<sup>133</sup> Harper to Porter, May 10, 1917, Box 4, Folder 4, Harper Papers.

<sup>134</sup> Harper, *The Russia I Believe In*, 96.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid.

<sup>136</sup> Harper to Postnikoff, May 10, 1917, Box 4, Folder 4, Harper Papers.

<sup>137</sup> Harper, *The Russia I Believe In*, 107.

its situation “is becoming very good,” the paper took a “pessimistic view of the situation.”<sup>138</sup> He carped to the editor of the *New York Times* that its Petrograd correspondent was incompetent since he did not report the “constructive” side of the revolution, but focused on the “purely disruptive” portions of Russia’s political spectrum.<sup>139</sup> Yet, ironically, the major newspapers to whom he complained depicted Russia more realistically than Harper, America’s Russian expert, did.

With the benefit of hindsight, however, the fact that Long and others who Harper attacked gave a more accurate portrayal of Russia’s political situation seems obvious. This is due, in part, to the fact that most reporters did not have a personal stake in the revolution’s outcome, as Harper did. Yet the evidence indicates that Harper believed that those who espoused rival explanations were both incorrect and ignorant. The gap between these publications’ and Harper’s opinions shows how narrow the liberal, Cadet-oriented lens through which he viewed Russia actually was. Ill at ease with the idea that the country was in the middle of a political crisis, Harper understood Russia as he wanted it to be. His encounter with the press is but one manifestation of a desperate attempt to see Russia as something that it simply was not.

In an almost ritualized retelling, Harper united his disparate lines of reasoning into a cohesive whole in a speech he gave to the National Geographic Society in Washington D.C. on March 30, 1917. In it, he analyzed Russia’s “newest popular government,” dazzled the audience with color photographs of the Russian countryside, and projected headshots of the Provisional Government’s Cadets.<sup>140</sup> He emphasized that the revolution sought to ensure Russia’s continued

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<sup>138</sup> “Sam Harper Gets Peevish Again,” May 16, 1917, Box 4, Folder 6, Harper Papers.

<sup>139</sup> Harper to Editor of *New York Times*, May 19, 1917, Box 4, Folder 6, Harper Papers.

<sup>140</sup> *Washington Post*, “Harper Will Tell of the New Russia: Expert to Speak to National Geographic Society Here Friday,” March 27, 1917, 14. For an analysis of the speech, see “RUSSIA ADVANCE BY WAR: Prof. Harper’s Opinion, Reviewing the Recent Overthrow of the Czar,” *Washington Post*, March

involvement in WWI and told his audience that Russians urged the tsar's government for years to allow them to organize into civic institutions that supported Russia's involvement in the war: "Russian society came forward and insisted, first, that it be allowed to support the army by organizing all the resources of the country." But, in order to accomplish this, the Russian people "demanded a new spirit of government" that would ease restrictions on nongovernmental organizations. The masses did not demand a new type of government, "but simply that the government cooperate with the people, and act in such a way as to enjoy the confidence of the people." According to Harper's view, however, the reactionary tsarist autocracy "knew that if the people were allowed to come in and [organize to] win the war, then they could not be sent back to their private business after the war." The government harassed such organizations to prevent them from becoming "a permanent force in the running of the country." To remedy this problem, the Russian people fomented a revolution whose aims were "the establishment of a responsible government, a government that would enjoy the confidence of the people determined to win a national war." Depicting the February Revolution as a popularly inspired method to keep Russia in WWI, Harper stated that the event was "so logical, so inevitable" precisely because it supported the war effort and, therefore, the Allies.<sup>141</sup>

Harper also maintained that the Provisional Government was moderate. He claimed that the "most radical leaders in the new government" issued statements announcing that "even a workmen's movement would be treason to the comrades fighting in the trenches." So the February Revolution was "a war measure—to win the war . . . there was no sign of even a workmen movement." Unlike the party that would come to power in October, the Provisional Government made no radical claims and even its most extreme members fell within the

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31, 1917, 4. For the glass picture slides that Harper used during this talk, see Box 80, Harper Papers. See also appendix D.

<sup>141</sup> March 30, 1917, Box 32, Folder 44, Harper Papers.

mainstream of Harper's acceptable spectrum of political stances on workers' rights and the war. He believed that the Provisional Government, heavily influenced by the Cadets, correctly recognized that social reform stood beyond its purview.

During his speech, Harper did not miss the opportunity to acknowledge the business community and how the revolution would affect its interests. He pointed out that "one cannot conceal the fact that Russia is economically backward," due to centuries of failed tsarist policies. To prove his point, he showed pictures of rural communes and an *izba* (peasant hut) to demonstrate that prerevolutionary Russian peasants were unscrubbed and primitive.<sup>142</sup> Relating the February Revolution to peasants' consumption of technology and western goods, he argued that the event brought about a slow demise of peasant "backwardness" by transforming their economic habits:

"Somewhat primitive methods of agriculture are still in use, but they are gradually being eliminated. Zemstvo stores are making it possible for the peasants to buy modern agricultural implements, and the cooperative societies are helping. One no longer sees a peasant ploughing using hand-made, primitive plows. Almost every peasant now has a modern machine-made plow, and many peasants have "McCormicks" as they call them. Last year . . . word reached Russia that Ford was going to manufacture a cheap tractor [for sale in Russia]. Now one hears the name Ford frequently among the Russian peasants. . . . In earlier years, and not so very long ago, hand machinery was still in vogue."<sup>143</sup>

Harper thus signaled that the February Revolution had stepped up Russia's economic progress and, along with it, its populace's demand for manufactured goods. After all, if Russian peasants already plowed with a McCormick plow, what would prevent them prevent them from sewing with a Singer sewing machine or even buying a Ford tractor to plow their fields?

Harper's perspective reverberated far beyond the National Geographic Society chamber, finding its way into the press and influencing those who read it. After attending the talk, a

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<sup>142</sup> See appendix D.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid.

reporter for the *Washington Post* wrote that Harper had declared that “the Russian nation . . . insisted upon the right of all classes to organize for the efficiency of the nation and this they did contrary to the desires of certain members of the bureaucracy who were apprehensive, realizing the difficulty of disorganizing such forces later.” The writer concluded that the February Revolution’s aim was “the establishment of a responsible government . . . a new order of things.”<sup>144</sup>

### **Harper Awaits the February Revolution’s Promises**

Harper’s Cadet-oriented view of Russia faced a major practical and intellectual hurdle between May and November. The Russian populace’s increasing dissatisfaction with the Provisional Government’s ineffectiveness did not comport with the Cadet point of view, which held that the February Revolution removed the barrier between popular opinion and the long-guarded levers of government and replaced it with an effective, democratic body. Similar to his contemporaries, who grappled with the differences between their western worldviews and Russia’s political reality, Harper faced a conundrum.<sup>145</sup> On the one hand, he needed to defend the February Revolution’s virtue and inevitable success to the public yet, on the other, he wrestled with the fact that the Russian masses appeared increasingly apathetic to this new regime that prided itself on representing them. Thus his views did not change as much as they evolved due to an inflexible point of view that failed to capture Russian reality.

Harper’s effort to reconcile these mutually exclusive facts began when he claimed in public venues, including in letters to friends and colleagues, articles in newspapers, and

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<sup>144</sup> “RUSSIA ADVANCE BY WAR: Prof. Harper’s Opinion, Reviewing the Recent Overthrow of the Czar,” *Washington Post*, March 31, 1917, 4.

<sup>145</sup> On the “tension between Russian facts and American assumptions” about Russia, see Filene, *Americans and the Soviet Experiment*, 17-18.

communication with businessmen, that the Provisional Government remained viable. He wrote to Harold Williams, a New Zealand journalist who often reported on Russian affairs in American and British newspapers, that he was “very busy writing and lecturing and emphasizing the many guarantees of permanency behind the new government.”<sup>146</sup> He underscored that “there are many facts that seem to guarantee the permanency of the new order. I have been emphasizing that the men at the head of the most important departments [in the Provisional Government] are men of sound ideas and long experience in administrative matters.”<sup>147</sup> A newspaper article quoted Harper’s assurance that Russia’s situation was favorable as far as foreign, or even Russian interests, were concerned. Harper wrote that the Provisional Government regarded itself as “responsible to the дума.” The Duma, in turn, was “a body elected upon a basis of restricted voting that gives the preponderance of membership to the capitalist and conservative classes.” The governing arrangement in Russia, then, had only a “sprinkling of radicals,” and gave most of its legislative powers to those interested in developing the country along conservative, capitalistic, rather than socialistic, lines.<sup>148</sup>

Harper also argued that this “sprinkling of radicals” and the unrest they caused in Petrograd represented no major threat to the Provisional Government. Only weeks before, on April 3, Lenin arrived from self-imposed exile in Switzerland and delivered his famous April Theses, in which he criticized the Provisional Government’s continued support for WWI, which he dubbed a “predatory imperialist war” that stemmed from the Provisional Government’s “capitalist nature.” He called on the Bolshevik party and the masses to lend “no support for the Provisional Government,” and denounced the “imperialist” body for not setting a date to convene the Constituent Assembly. Instead of trusting the government, he claimed, Russia should

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<sup>146</sup> Harper to Williams, April 9, 1917, Box 3, Folder 14, Harper Papers.

<sup>147</sup> Harper to Allen, April 18, 1917, Box 3, Folder 16, Harper Papers.

<sup>148</sup> “Russ Chiefs Win Victory, Says Prof. Harper,” May 5, 1917, Box 4, Folder 3, Harper Papers.



conclude a separate peace with Germany, withdraw from the war, and immediately transfer all power to the soviets.<sup>149</sup> In response to the so-called April Crisis, a series of violent confrontations on the streets of Petrograd stemming from disputes between Miliukov and his Provisional Government and the Petrograd Soviet over whether or not Russia should continue to prosecute the war to a decisive victory against Germany, Harper blamed the “tumult” on “Lanin” who he branded a “Russian doctrinaire internationalist . . . an extreme pacifist.” Lenin, reasoned Harper, was “absent from Russia when the [February] revolution was brewing and when it broke . . . he is out of touch with the situation.” Harper “refused to be worried with regard to the radical minority, advocating extreme measures.”<sup>150</sup> Lenin was a member of a “small group of extremists, numbering not more than five percent of the Socialists in Russia,” who was completely out of touch with reality.<sup>151</sup>

In an effort to discredit Lenin and the Bolsheviks, Harper spread this interpretation of radicalism to government bureaucrats and the American public, likening the notion of Russia exiting the war with German “intrigue.” He told David F. Houston, the U.S. Secretary of Agriculture, that he “discounted from the very beginning [the] reported movement for a separate peace in Russia. I knew of the existence of a small radical group of extremists in Russia itself, which might take this line.” Referring here to the Bolsheviks, he admitted that the party wanted to conclude a separate peace with Germany, but blamed “German or German-inspired sources” for the “separate peace movement within Russia.”<sup>152</sup> Equating Germany with these rumors, whose realization would fly in the face of American war aims, Harper held foreign sources responsible for the separate peace idea, despite the fact that the Bolshevik party, whose idea it

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<sup>149</sup> Vladimir Ilych Lenin, *V.I. Lenin: Selected Works in Three Volumes*, Volume 2 (New York: International Publishers, 1967), 13-17.

<sup>150</sup> Harper to Jusserand, April 21, 1917, Box 4, Folder 1, Harper Papers.

<sup>151</sup> Harper to Crane, April 19, 1917, Box 3, Folder 16, Harper Papers.

<sup>152</sup> Harper to Houston, April 19, 1917, Box 3, Folder 16, Harper Papers.

was, gained steadily increasing popular support at the time. In a *Chicago Herald* editorial, he asked “how many times must the new government and the Russian people state that they will prosecute the war until victory?” He concluded that “not only has such a statement come from the official provisional government; it has also been made by the organized Council of Workmen and soldier deputies and by the Council of Soldiers.”<sup>153</sup> German enemies, not Russians, created these rumors, he argued, since taking this line both masked the increasingly large fissures appearing in Russian politics at the time and showed that the Russian masses still supported the Cadets’ war aims.

Alongside this association, Harper claimed that Russia’s “extreme radicals” made their far-left, socialist demands because many of them had no realistic grasp of Russian conditions in the summer of 1917, partially because he believed that many such “radicals” lived abroad. Harper maintained that their programs did not correspond to popular opinion, thereby incorrectly implying that the right Cadets’ platform did. Doing so pinned the political unrest on a narrow band of misinformed extremists, not the fact that the populace grew ever more discontented with the political status quo and, thus, moved to support more radical parties. In April 1917, Harper noted that “a great many people” in Chicago claimed to be “bona fide Russian revolutionists, and are planning to start for Russia immediately.” If Russia allowed these “enemies” inside, they would wreak havoc on the post-February liberal government and, therefore, Russia’s involvement in WWI. Indeed, Harper claimed to have first-hand knowledge of the situation since he saw Trotsky, a Bolshevik party leader, the Reds’ future Commissar for Foreign Affairs, and the founder of the Red Army, agitating on a dock in Halifax just before sailing for Russia, and recounted that “he and his people were talking pacifism and peace very frequently and openly,

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<sup>153</sup> Draft of *Chicago Herald* editorial, April 19, 1917, Box 3, Folder 16, Harper Papers.

both before their departure and on the boat.”<sup>154</sup> Such radicals exercised a negative influence, however, not because of their proposed solution to Russia’s political crisis, but simply because they lived abroad and were “quite out of touch with the new spirit that has developed in Russia these last years,” despite that fact that Harper, too, spent most of his life outside of Russia.<sup>155</sup> Tracing these ideas within the United States, Harper attended meetings of Russian socialists in Chicago and reported what he heard to Richard Crane of the Department of State.<sup>156</sup> After all, what would happen if radicals like Trotsky returned to Russia and convinced soldiers to withdraw from the conflict or to fight with less fervor?

Harper often used the term “pacifism” to describe Russian radical socialists’ political ideology. He referenced a familiar American cultural and political symbol and, thus, implicitly compared these “radicals” to striking workers in the United States, thereby placing even more distance between the version of Russia that leaders like Lenin and Trotsky stood for, and his imagined rendering of it. Historians Charles F. Howlett and Robbie Lieberman argue that, during the first years of WWI, American pacifists such as Eugene V. Debs, a five time socialist candidate for president and well-known labor organizer, articulated a brand of opposition to the war that linked international peace with worker solidarity in America. Insisting that peace abroad was impossible without domestic social justice, including workers’ rights and improved working conditions for the masses, these pacifists coupled calls for international peace and workers’ rebellion in the popular American mind. Peace movements came to be linked with the Socialist Party of America.<sup>157</sup> Thus, by associating Trotsky and the Bolsheviks with pacifism, Harper used the term as a framing device to attempt to explain why Trotsky and the Reds remained out of

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<sup>154</sup> Harper to Sack, April 18, 1917, Box 3, Folder 15, Harper Papers.

<sup>155</sup> Harper to Crane, April 12, 1917, Box 3, Folder 15, Harper Papers.

<sup>156</sup> Harper to Crane, April 12, 1917, Box 3, Folder 15, Harper Papers.

<sup>157</sup> Charles F. Howlett and Robbie Lieberman, *A History of the American Peace Movement from Colonial Times to the Present* (Lewiston: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2008), 188-89, 195, 206.

touch with the Russian masses. By drawing on American-specific references, he likened them to rebelling workers and American socialists, groups that stood on the American political establishment's fringes. The party, he reasoned, could not possibly enjoy respect and support in a country whose population almost unanimously supported the Cadets and, therefore, Allied war aims.

By the end of the spring, however, Harper's belief that Russia was "trying an experiment in real democracy" had not faltered. Feeling alone in this opinion, he asked Crane and the Department of State "why are you people so down on any one who insists on being optimistic, because he sees the constructive side of what is going on in Russia. I am beginning to feel that I am . . . looked on as a case of small pox."<sup>158</sup> In response to rumors of peasants seizing land and army desertions in Russia, Harper continued to dismiss the news as false or "irresponsible gossip." Nonetheless, he commented that if these events took place, he was "ready to abandon optimism and expect general hell in Russia, Russia out of the conflict, *and America in one devil of a fix*."<sup>159</sup>

### **Optimism Declining: Harper in Russia, Summer 1917**

In June, Harper traveled to Russia hoping to see the "historical gathering" of the Constituent Assembly and as an interpreter for the Root Commission, a government appointed group of Americans sent to befriend the Provisional Government and ensure that Russia remained in WWI.<sup>160</sup> Setting itself the goal of furthering American interests in Russia, the commission needed a leader whose values reflected its intentions. Rumors circulated that

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<sup>158</sup> Harper to Crane, May 12, 1917, Box 4, Folder 5, Harper Papers.

<sup>159</sup> Harper to Howard, May 13, 1917, Box 4, Folder 5, Harper Papers. Author's emphasis.

<sup>160</sup> Harper to McCarthy, April 6, 1917, Box 3, Folder 14, Harper Papers. On the nature, goals, and composition of the Root Commission see Filene, *Americans and the Soviet Experiment*, 18.

President Woodrow Wilson would name Harper its leader but, in the end, the government appointed Elihu Root, the former Secretary of War during the Roosevelt administration and a lawyer who had defended corporate titans including Andrew Carnegie.<sup>161</sup> The commission also appointed Cyrus McCormick as a member, since he owned manufacturing enterprises in Russia.<sup>162</sup>

Harper gained much understanding of the country's political situation by serving as an interpreter, rather than a full member. He saw scenes and people, including gatherings of angry workers and Lenin, that, had he been a member, might have embarrassed the mission as a whole.<sup>163</sup> For instance, he "followed closely political trends, [saw] representatives of various parties, and [went] in the evening to the Bolshevik headquarters, where Lenin and others spoke . . . to large crowds."<sup>164</sup> He also served as "chief political adviser" to the American ambassador to Russia, David R. Francis, and in this capacity translated Russian newspapers, observed political rallies in Petrograd, and reported his findings to the embassy.<sup>165</sup>

Harper quickly became attuned to political life in Russia as a result of these encounters. He explained to Richard Crane that he had "many friends in the new government" who told him "the whole truth—Russia has many problems to face." One was so severe and unprecedented that it warranted special attention: Russia "must at one and the same time consolidate the Revolution

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<sup>161</sup> See, for example, "Harper Is Likely to Head Russia Mission," *Chicago Examiner*, April 22, 1917, 4; "Harper Leads for Russ Post," *Chicago Examiner*, April 25, 1917, 3; Harper to Williams, April 1917, Box 3, Folder 12, Harper Papers; Harper to Williams, April 25, 1917, Box 4, Folder 1, Harper Papers, in which Harper wrote that "the newspapers are persistently connecting my name with the new commission." See also "Wilson to Secretary of State, April 12, 1917," in *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States: The Lansing Papers, 1914-1920*, Volume II (Washington: Department of State, 1940), 326, in which former President Wilson wrote that he advised Harper's selection to the commission because "Professor Harper is widely known and trusted in Russia. We must find the right men . . . [they should be] genuinely enthusiastic for the success of the Russian revolution."

<sup>162</sup> Members of the Root Commission, April 1917, Box 4, Folder 3, Harper Papers.

<sup>163</sup> Harper, *The Russia I Believe In*, 99.

<sup>164</sup> *Ibid.*, 100.

<sup>165</sup> Harper to Paula (Sister), August 12, 1917, Box 4, Folder 10, Harper Papers.

and wage a war.” Commenting on a demonstration he saw in Petrograd, Harper wrote that “the Extremists organized a protest against the Provisional Government, and the War of Capitalists . . . there were many groups of straight anarchists.” Even though he claimed that his optimism had “not been shaken by . . . [these] rather disturbing tendencies,” Harper now acknowledged that a radical movement was underway in Russia and that, even though he believed it posed only a minor threat, it was a “disturbing” one.<sup>166</sup>

Harper defended the Provisional Government, while still acknowledging the “threat” of radical socialists, by claiming that the “legacy of the old regime” inhibited Russia’s realization of the February Revolution’s promises. Historian Louise McReynolds argues that between 1905 and 1917 an ever-widening chasm between the tsarist government, which at best nominally acknowledge the increasingly politically cognizant public’s need for information and a voice in public affairs, and the public itself, deepened, wrecking the government’s chance to loosen restrictions on political speech and to give the restless masses a collective voice.<sup>167</sup> Harper believed that this gap, a fundamental disconnect between the former tsar and his people, limited the Provisional Government’s ability to censor radical socialists who challenged its legitimacy and, therefore, prevented it from “consolidating the conquests of the revolution.” If the Provisional Government engaged in censorship, he believed, it risked mimicking the “enormous . . . demoralization of the old policing system [*okhranka*]” and, in doing so, imperiled the popular support on which Harper believed it depended for its institutional viability.<sup>168</sup> Thanks to this conundrum, the Bolsheviks enjoyed the freedom to agitate, making Russia an “open-discussion

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<sup>166</sup> Harper to Crane, summer 1917, Box 4, Folder 9, Harper Papers. For another example, see Harper to Prince, July 12, 1917, Box 4, Folder 9, Harper Papers.

<sup>167</sup> Louise McReynolds, “Autocratic Journalism: The Case of the St. Petersburg Telegraph Agency,” *Slavic Review* 49 (1) (1990): 48-57.

<sup>168</sup> Harper to Ella Harper, July 7, 1917, Box 4, Folder 9, Harper Papers. Harper’s mention of to the “old policing system” is a reference to the *okhranka*, the tsarist secret police responsible for patrolling anti-government political activity.

school, with no restrictions on anybody.”<sup>169</sup> The old regime’s legacy, not the Provisional Government’s failure to align with the populace’s political preferences, explained why Russia slowly descended into disorder. A hefty dose of liberalism gave this chaos the freedom to exist, he believed.

Attempting to square the reality of Petrograd riots with a revolution that he claimed had perpetuated peace and democracy, Harper again relied on his Cadet perspective by portraying Russia to U.S. government bureaucrats and the American public as an “experimental laboratory.” In it, other nations could learn about radical socialism’s many pitfalls. One such experiment, led by fanatics who “had been reading Marx all their lives, waiting for an opportunity to apply him,” came on July 17, 1917, when “Lenin and his crowd tried to establish a ‘dictatorship of the proletariat.’” The event, today known as the July Days or the July Uprising, featured Petrograd soldiers and workers taking to the streets in opposition to the Provisional Government’s failed Galician offensive and calling for “All Power to the Soviets.”<sup>170</sup> The incident alarmed Harper, since Petrograd’s workers and soldiers “came blame near” wresting power from the Provisional Government. The near miss of this “real disaster” had value since it showed “to the world, and for the rest of the world, that this Utopia [far-left socialism] can be worked.” In other words, radical socialism and its bedfellows were real threats that countries learning from Russia’s experience should safeguard themselves against. Russia and the February Revolution, he reasoned, had “been of service to humanity.”<sup>171</sup> In making this claim, however, Harper had both praised the Cadet liberals by showing that under their watch freedom of speech reigned supreme, and condemned radical socialism by associating it with disaster and chaos.

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<sup>169</sup> Harper to Prince, July 12, 1917, Box 4, Folder 9, Harper Papers.

<sup>170</sup> For a discussion of the July Days, see Wade, *The Russian Revolution*, 183-88; Alexander Rabinowitch, *Prelude to Revolution: The Petrograd Bolsheviks and the July 1917 Uprising* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), 135-228.

<sup>171</sup> Harper to Crane, July 23, 1917, Box 4, Folder 9, Harper Papers.

By October, Harper's response to Petrograd's tumult shifted. He made clear to Charles Mott, a founder of General Motors Company and former mayor of Flint, Michigan, that he supported "any government . . . that will contribute to [Russia's] stability" and urged that the United States "must back Russia to the end, and for the next years to come" to preserve order.<sup>172</sup> Such a government, though perhaps not the ideal Constitutional Democratic one that Harper lauded, would at least prevent radical-led "sporadic . . . violent . . . crisis." He also insisted that stopping the Bolsheviks from coming to power in 1917 would save the United States future time and money, since Washington inevitably would not be able to cooperate with and, therefore, would depose, a radical socialist government: "a dollar spent here now will save a hundred."<sup>173</sup>

By the late fall of 1917, then, Harper adopted a seemingly more nuanced view of the Russian situation. Yet his claims do not indicate that he was becoming a realist who judged Russia on its own terms. Rather, his shifting understanding speaks to the degree to which his Cadet-oriented perspective prevented him from seeing Russia realistically. Certain that the Provisional Government's only aims were to keep Russia in the war and build democracy, Harper had to find reasons to account for why the liberals had not already accomplished these objectives, and he chose to do so by showing the roadblocks that stood in the way. Thus his portrayal of Russia that fall resulted from a perspective that could account only for liberal political evolution or a lack thereof, not socialism's rising popularity and the Provisional Government's breakdown.

## Harper and the October "Revolt"

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<sup>172</sup> Harper to Mott, August 28, 1917, Box 4, Folder 10, Harper Papers.

<sup>173</sup> Harper to Ella Harper, August 9, 1917, Box 4, Folder 10, Harper Papers.



Harper initially believed that the October Revolution represented another manifestation of Petrograd's ongoing chaos. Like the Cadets, he argued that a narrow band of radicals opposed to Russian democracy and the country's ongoing involvement in the war had made possible this "revolt."<sup>174</sup> As a result, one finds extremely sparse mention of the October Revolution in Harper's personal papers, a trend that parallels a dearth of newspaper articles bearing his name in its immediate aftermath. This absence is partially due to the fact that Harper left Russia for Chicago in September 1917 and, thus, did not witness the event firsthand. Yet, more importantly, it speaks to his perception that the Bolshevik Revolution represented little more than an illegitimate coup d'état carried out without the populace's approval.

The American public knew little about the Bolsheviks. H J Haskell, an editor of the *Kansas City Star*, asked Harper about "the correct use of the group of words having to do with the Bolsheviks." "Is Bolshevik plural? Is the singular Bolshevik?" he queried.<sup>175</sup> Harper responded that "Bolshevik" was not the preferable term, since it described individual party members, but instead recommended "Bolshevism," the ideological, political, and social system the party set out to create.<sup>176</sup> Apparently confused over the terminology himself, Harper used three words to refer to the Bolsheviks in similar contexts within one newspaper article: "Bolshevik," "Bolshevichsky," and "Boloshevik."<sup>177</sup>

Growing pessimistic about a Cadet Russia, Harper asked Harry Pratt Judson, president of the University of Chicago, to excuse him from teaching for the remainder of the semester. To justify his request, Harper argued that his work on Russia and helping the American public

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<sup>174</sup> On the liberals negative reaction to the October Revolution, see Rosenberg, *Liberals in the Russian Revolution*, 263-68.

<sup>175</sup> Haskell to Harper, December 21, 1917, Box 4, Folder 15, Harper Papers.

<sup>176</sup> Harper to Haskell, December 27, 1917, Box 4, Folder 15, Harper Papers.

<sup>177</sup> See "“Treason to Russia,” Professor Harper Thus Sums Up Operations of Bolsheviks,” *Christian Science Monitor*, November 27, 1917, 2-3.

understand its predicament was more important than his teaching responsibilities. He observed that “the situation in Russia certainly looks dark these last weeks. And it looks darker each day, as the reports come through.” Yet he retained hope that Russia could shed the Bolshevik yoke, writing that “the constructive men will come forward after [Russia] has reached rock bottom.” Even so, he concluded, “it would seem that it is without bottom over there.”<sup>178</sup>

The situation appeared so dark primarily because of the Bolsheviks’ “extreme radicalism.” “The Bolsheviks are certainly ‘whole-hoggers’ as one might translate the word,” wrote Harper to William Phillips, Assistant Secretary of State under former President Woodrow Wilson. Using the term “whole-hoggers” to depict the Bolsheviks as a party bent on seeing every aspect of the former tsarist system and Russian capitalism dismantled without delay, Harper implicitly compared the Bolsheviks, revolutionaries concerned with social change, with their February predecessors, who had been merely concerned with political issues. The party’s extremism did not cease when it “set about to confiscate all property,” but also extended to penalizing “people who have owned some property.” Surely, Harper reasoned, their radicalism would not lead them to “arrest . . . the Cadets.”<sup>179</sup> Both symbolically and literally, the Bolsheviks threatened to destroy his imagined version of Russia.

In the first iteration of what would become a years-long effort to discredit the Bolsheviks in the American public’s mind, Harper issued his first widely circulated statements on the party only days after they came to power. In the *Christian Science Monitor*, he labeled the Reds crazed extremists who instituted policies directly antithetical to American and Allied war aims. He insisted that Trotsky acted on one of his party’s fundamental goals, making secret treaties among the Allies available to the public by “giving them out to the world.” Doing so, Harper argued,

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<sup>178</sup> Harper to Judson, December 14, 1917, Box 4, Folder 15, Harper Papers.

<sup>179</sup> Harper to Phillips, December 14, 1917, Box 4, Folder 15, Harper Papers.

was comparable to a card game, in which one player (Russia) “throws all the cards on the table.” “But when only one side does this, while the opponent [Germany] still holds his hand covered, the former is simply a fool and not a bold gambler.” He emphasized that making secret treaties public represented a Bolshevik tactic of “bringing about the revolution in Germany, and perhaps in France *and even America*.”<sup>180</sup>

Harper also cast Bolshevik aims as antithetical to American interests by arguing that the party sought to demobilize the Russian army, ensuring that Russia and the Allies would lose the war. He wrote that “the Bolsheviks destroy the small amount of discipline [in the army] . . . and then start in to demobilize.” If the main line of Russian soldiers defending the country’s borders disbanded, these soldiers, who the Bolsheviks exposed to antiwar propaganda, would “sweep the country clean as they retire in disorder,” thus adding another layer of chaos to an already perilous situation.<sup>181</sup>

In short, the Reds’ goals of “revolution . . . stupidity, fanaticism, or whatever you want to call it” were “treason to Russia and to her allies.”<sup>182</sup> Harper’s Bolsheviks, senseless radicals calling for a social revolution in the United States, undermined both Russia and her Allies’ chances at victory in the war, and caused general hatred toward capitalism and private property. The opposite of the Cadets, the Bolsheviks began to bring Harper’s view of Russia full circle, from that of an excited optimist to a bitter foe of Red Russia.

## Conclusion

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<sup>180</sup> ““‘Treason to Russia.’” Professor Harper Thus Sums Up Operations of Bolsheviks,” *Christian Science Monitor*, November 27, 1917, 2-3. Author’s emphasis.

<sup>181</sup> Ibid.

<sup>182</sup> Ibid.

As 1917 ended, neither Harper's opinion of the February Revolution nor his visceral dislike of the Bolsheviks changed. Informed by a perspective that failed to account for socialism's popularity and held Cadet-style liberalism as normative, Harper's optimism crested early in the year and collapsed by the end of it. Even though his view forced him to account for the Provisional Government's failure, he still believed that the October Revolution lacked popular legitimacy and that it represented a deviation from Russia's path toward freedom, not a viable alternative to western-style industrial democracy. Most importantly, throughout the year, he brought the business community, Washington bureaucrats, and the American public with him on this intellectual journey, urging them to imagine Russia in the same way. At a conference of the American Historical Association on December 27-29, he presented a paper that analyzed the "March Revolution of 1917."<sup>183</sup> He already conceptualized it as Russia's legitimate revolution unlike that of October. His myopic tunnel vision did not end with 1917, however. Over the next three years, Harper would gauge political developments in Russia against the February Revolution's metric, not October's. And Bolshevik Russia would not measure up.

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<sup>183</sup> Bulletin of American Historical Association, Box 4, Folder 15, Harper Papers.

### Chapter 3: **“Bolshevism as a Doctrine is Immoral:” Harper and the Genesis of Soviet- American Incompatibility**

In June 1918, caricature artist J N Darling sketched a cartoon for the *Des Moines Register*. Entitled “The International Squirrel Cage,” it depicted a rapidly spinning hamster wheel labeled “Revolution.” Inside it ran a bear, an ages-old symbol of Russia, furiously struggling to keep pace with the wheel’s precipitate speed. On the sidelines stood a short, confused, powerless woman labeled “the world” dropping her umbrella while clutching her forehead in her trembling hands. Discombobulated, neither the bear nor the lady knew what was about to happen, nor could either stop the rapidly unfolding process.<sup>184</sup>

This cartoon exemplifies the political changes afoot in Russia between 1918 and 1921 and the multitude of international reactions to them. Seven months before, a radical socialist party, the Bolsheviks, came to power, replacing the country’s Provisional Government with promises to spread socialist revolution worldwide while nationalizing domestic industry and giving political power to Russia’s working class. On March 3, 1918, the Bolsheviks signed the Brest-Litovsk Treaty, a peace agreement with the Central Powers that removed Russia from WWI and ceded massive amounts of the former Russian empire’s territory, natural resources, and population to Germany. A civil war that would last until 1922 erupted as numerous political factions fought the Bolsheviks for control of the state. The experience brought the Russian populace to the brink of collective exhaustion and ripped apart the country’s social fabric.<sup>185</sup> In 1918, a multinational Allied coalition intervened in Russia in the hopes of undermining Bolshevik power and, that year, the Allies backed the White movement, a diverse band of anti-

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<sup>184</sup> “The International Squirrel Cage,” June 29, 1918, Box 7, J.N. “Ding” Darling Papers, University of Iowa Libraries Special Collections and University Archives. See appendix E.

<sup>185</sup> Donald J. Raleigh, *Experiencing Russia’s Civil War: Politics, Society, and Revolutionary Culture in Saratov, 1917-1922* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), 412-15.

Bolshevik forces. Nonetheless, the Bolsheviks' control solidified until their victory in the early 1920s.

Americans reacted strongly to Bolshevism's new power. As historian David Engerman has shown, their levels of hatred or praise for Russia's Bolsheviks represented an unprecedented turn in Russian-American relations, since they exceeded in depth and quantity American resentment for tsarism.<sup>186</sup> American's fear of communism grew, leading to the First Red Scare of 1919-20, in which government officials hysterically repulsed Bolshevik-inspired domestic anarchy and social revolution, targeting those suspected of Red sympathies. Just like the shocked elderly lady in Darling's cartoon, the world stood in uncertainty as it observed the revolutionary cauldron brewing. Who were the Bolsheviks? How did the United States relate to Russia's new regime? Could this anticapitalist system morph into the new global standard?

This chapter examines Harper's private and public reactions to the Bolsheviks' rise to power between 1918 and 1921, when he served as a professor at the University of Chicago and a Special Assistant in the Department of State's Russian Bureau. Both positions and the respect he garnered from the public allowed him to comment on Bolshevism in ways that placed an intellectual straightjacket on the public's and government's understanding of it. I argue that by measuring the Bolsheviks against a metric that prized democracy and human rights and, therefore, held the February Revolution's aims supreme, Harper helped to define Soviet Russia as fundamentally incompatible with the United States's system of moral values, culture, and government. In portraying Red Russia in this way, he concluded that the United States could no longer cooperate with it and led the American populace to think similarly. I also contend that two factors, Harper's lack of travel to Russia during the period, and the nature of the sources that he

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<sup>186</sup> Engerman, *Modernization from the Other Shore*, 127.

used to justify his preexisting beliefs on Russian politics, accounted for his distorted portrayal of Bolshevism.

### **“Gatling guns, robbery and so forth:” Harper Defines the Bolsheviks**

Harper had only a vague idea of the Bolsheviks’ tenets and worldview. In fact, in 1919 he did not “have a definite conception of just what the theory of Bolshevism is, to say nothing of its practices.”<sup>187</sup> In this way he was not unique, however, since Americans’ confusion over Bolshevism extended to the academy, causing many intellectuals to misunderstand it.<sup>188</sup> The American mass circulation press profusely discussed the Bolshevik party, particularly in the context of the Reds as new players in the Great War, but Americans still tended to resort to generalizations about the Russian masses and their collective mindset, instead of attempting to understand the Bolsheviks as a political faction with a distinct vision for the country.<sup>189</sup> In short, Americans read about the Reds as new participants in world affairs and received news of the conditions of the Russian populace, yet, especially in the first year following the October Revolution, lacked an sense of who the Bolsheviks were and what their practices represented. Operating in this atmosphere, Harper missed no opportunity to malign the party and, therefore, to set the tone for its reception in the United States.

Reasoning that the Bolsheviks governed without popular support, Harper argued that this Red practice widened the chasm between them and the liberals. Describing Russia’s new rulers to an inquisitive high school teacher, he underscored that the word Bolshevik meant “majority,”

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<sup>187</sup> Harper to Guerchen, March 16, 1919, Box 6, Folder 15, Harper Papers.

<sup>188</sup> Engerman, *Modernization from the Other Shore*, 90.

<sup>189</sup> On American generalizations about Russia, see Filene, *Americans and the Soviet Experiment*, 15. Using “Chronicling America,” a remarkably complete, searchable online compilation of local and national American newspapers, a search of the term “Bolshevik” during 1917 and 1918 returns 14,243 articles containing the word, indicating that coverage of the party was widespread.

even though the party “ceased to have a majority in the councils of the [Social Democratic] party” before the October Revolution.<sup>190</sup> In reality, the name emerged from a 1903 split with the Mensheviks at a meeting of the Social Democratic party, in which the Bolsheviks did hold a majority. These types of misrepresentations led Harper to claim that the Reds represented a thin minority with little support.<sup>191</sup> Justifying his assertion, he quoted Lenin saying “in capitalist countries, the Communist party can not be a majority in the proletariat. It in fact is the conscious, energetic minority.”<sup>192</sup> Measured using a yardstick of majoritarian democracy, the Bolsheviks failed.

Harper repeated that the Cadets engaged in a political revolution that overthrew the tsar and instituted a new form of government, while the Bolsheviks, in a “confused state of mind—resting on economic distress and a spirit of vengeance,” carried out a “social revolution, class war, under [the] dictatorship of one class—the proletariat.” Because of this, Harper told his University of Chicago students, the Reds opposed “industrial democracy as we understand the practice.”<sup>193</sup>

He sharply distinguished the Bolsheviks from their historical predecessors, hoping to show that the party was un-Russian. Drawing from sources that emphasized Bolshevik plans to build “communes” or “cooperative cultivating societies” (to collectivize agriculture and substitute collective farms for private ones), Harper told his students that these proposed communes had “nothing in common with the old Russian *mir*,” a collective farming arrangement common in imperial Russia that involved peasants in shared farming. Under this system,

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<sup>190</sup> Harper to Jacobs, April 7, 1919, Box 6, Folder 16, Harper Papers. This teacher was M.R. Jacobs of Montebello High School in Montebello, California.

<sup>191</sup> Harper to unknown, January 20, 1918, Box 4, Folder 18, Harper Papers.

<sup>192</sup> “Excerpts from Speeches and Decisions of Second Congress of Third International, (July 19-August 6, 1920),” Box 8, Folder 10, Harper Papers.

<sup>193</sup> Class Lecture, 1919, Box 32, Folder 47, Harper Papers.



villagers periodically reallocated land to ensure they farmed equitable portions of it. For Harper, this system was an “ownership society,” not, as historian Moshe Lewin argued, a historically communal institution that provided the Bolsheviks a collective foundation on which to build.<sup>194</sup> Harper claimed that plans to collectivize agriculture broke with Russia’s history of private property, despite the fact that most peasants had a weak conception of what constituted private property before the 1906 Stolypin Reforms, which sought to end communal practices and settle peasants on private plots of land.

Harper also explained the Bolsheviks’ belief in world socialist revolution, which he presented as evidence of the party’s fanaticism. “The Bolshevik movement is an international one and the revolution in Russia was but the first incident in its progress,” he told the Department of State.<sup>195</sup> Harper worried after reading Bolshevik statements on the Baku Conference of Oppressed Peoples of the East. Held in Azerbaijan in September 1920, the event signaled the Soviet state’s commitment to promoting nationalist movements in non-Russian territories of the former Russian empire. A response to a call from the Second Conference of Moscow’s Third International, an organization formed by Lenin to unite disparate revolutionary parties around the world with the common goal of socialist revolution, the Baku Conference drew 2,000 people to the city, including socialists from western Europe and the United States. The Bolsheviks broadcast news of the event on radio waves that reached Europe, claiming that the party stood behind “oppressed workers and peasants” the world over, making the event a

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<sup>194</sup> Class Lecture, 1919, Box 7, Folder 11, Harper Papers. On the continuity of the old Russian *mir* under Soviet rule, see Moshe Lewin, *Russian Peasants and Soviet Power: A Study of Collectivization*, trans. Irene Nove (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1968), 26, 85-93. Lewin points out that the *mir* played an important institutional role in confiscating and redistributing the gentry’s landed estates in the early years of Bolshevik power.

<sup>195</sup> “The Bolshevik Program of World Revolution and Its Application to the United States,” May 1920, Box 7, Folder 25, Harper Papers.

critical moment in the history of anti-imperialism.<sup>196</sup> In response to news of it, Harper wrote that the Bolsheviks gave “a very large per cent age of attention . . . to revolutionary movements abroad.” This emphasis indicated that “the Bolos feel more than ever before that their tenure in Russia is dependent on their being able to have corresponding movements in other countries.”<sup>197</sup> Even if the Bolsheviks lost power in Russia, Harper remained anxious that they would “go west, or east” in order to “continue the great work of saving mankind from the rapacious capitalists.”<sup>198</sup> He assured Breckenridge Long, the Assistant Secretary of State, that Lenin “still entertain[ed] the hope of running the whole world into one Soviet republic and of obliterating all frontiers.”<sup>199</sup> In Harper’s intellectual universe, one dominated by musings of nationalism and essentializations of national character, a political system that promoted internationalism through revolution was radical indeed.

In Harper’s mind, Bolshevism represented destruction. He wrote that “if Bolshevik stands for anything it is for conscious, organized loot. There is not one constructive syllable in their whole programme.” To build socialism in Russia, Lenin set out to “destroy, as much as possible, everything that lies at the basis of the bourjoise order of society . . . [to] destroy every tangible thing possible so the ground will be clear for building up the socialistic regime.”<sup>200</sup> When compared to the “constructive” forces of the Provisional Government and the *zemstvo* system, the Bolsheviks seemed ruinous.

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<sup>196</sup> Robert J.C. Young, *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2001), 127, 135-37.

<sup>197</sup> Harper to Dixon, October 22, 1920, Box 8, Folder 13, Harper Papers.

<sup>198</sup> Harper to Pa Bolshy (Corse), November 1, 1920, Box 8, Folder 14, Harper Papers. For reasons that are not clear, Harper always referred to Frederick M. Corse, the manager of the National City Bank branch in Petrograd, as “Pa Bolshy.” From here forward, I refer to him as “Corse,” even when the original letter indicates “Pa Bolshy.”

<sup>199</sup> Harper to Long, March 22, 1920, Box 7, Folder 20, Harper Papers.

<sup>200</sup> Harper to Loudschie, May 6, 1918, Harper Papers.

The Russian civil war exemplified the chaos that resulted when Bolshevik class warfare and internationalism fused, insisted Harper. He told an audience at the University of Chicago that the civil war was a “war of a specific kind, namely, class war, produced deliberately and according to a definite program.”<sup>201</sup> The conflict had been avoidable. Rather than portraying the struggle as a result of competing conceptions of how the revolutionary state would be governed, he argued that the Bolsheviks “stirred up class hatreds, preached violent class struggle and then started this class revolution.” Furthermore, the Bolsheviks arbitrarily drew these class divisions by antagonizing the peasants, pitting the poor against the rich. Harper correctly expressed doubt as to whether these classes had firm definitions, since he saw evidence that the description of a member of the “poorest peasants” shifted constantly, an occurrence that historians have described as pervasive during the early years of Red rule.<sup>202</sup>

In defining the Bolsheviks in the first months of 1918 to an expectant audience, Harper remained ignorant of some facts, such as that Russian peasants had a historically poor understanding of private property, or that the Bolsheviks governed with a measure of popular support, but correctly identified others, including the Reds’ commitment to world socialist revolution and the evolving definition of classes in the peasant village. Yet the facts that he omitted tended to legitimate the Bolsheviks, while those he underscored allowed him to portray Bolshevism as a destructive, dogmatic ideology opposed to democracy and forced on the Russian populace by a small group of radical socialists.

## **Bolshevik Cooperation with Germany and the Sisson Documents**

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<sup>201</sup> “Co-Operation Viz Bolshevik Tyranny,” February 27, 1919, Box 33, Folder 14, Harper Papers.

<sup>202</sup> Lewin, *Russian Peasants and Soviet Power*, 71-78.

In WWI, Germany and the Central Powers (Austria-Hungary, Bulgaria, and the Ottoman empire) constituted the United States's enemies. Fighting a two front war, the Germans clashed with the Russians in the east and the European Allies in the west. When the Bolsheviks signed the Brest-Litovsk Treaty in March 1918, its terms negated the Russian threat on Germany's eastern front by surrendering a large portion of formerly Russian territory to it. In doing so, the Bolsheviks acted on their ideological antipathy toward Russia's participation in the war and out of necessity to secure domestic support for ending the unpopular conflict. By signing the treaty, then, the Reds both fulfilled their promises of peace to the Russian masses and buttressed their legitimacy.<sup>203</sup>

Harper's understanding of these events developed in an environment of mass American, wartime Germanophobia. During 1918, the United States feared Germans and imagined them as enemy saboteurs. School districts across the country banned teaching German language in their classrooms. Americans began to refer to German foods, frankfurters and sauerkraut, using a new, more Anglicized terminology, hotdogs and liberty cabbage. Teachers and professors regularly lost their jobs due to accusations that they shared cultural or financial ties with Germany.<sup>204</sup> Thus, Americans stood primed for and, therefore, susceptible to anti-Germanism.

Operating in this environment, Harper linked the Bolsheviks to Germany. For him, Russia's negotiations with Germany represented its capitulation to America's common enemy and invited suspicions that the Bolsheviks themselves were German in nature or psychology and that they subversively chose to cooperate with Germany. Harper now labeled the party the "Bolsheviki Germans."<sup>205</sup> The Reds began "playing the German game," by taking orders from

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<sup>203</sup> Wade, *The Russian Revolution*, 258-60.

<sup>204</sup> Howlett and Lieberman, *A History of the American Peace Movement*, 208-10.

<sup>205</sup> Harper to Leggex, September 17, 1918, Box 5, Folder 23, Harper Papers.

the Kaiser and accepting funds from the German treasury.<sup>206</sup> Already political outliers in Harper's mind because of their emphasis on social revolution, the Bolsheviks were now German agents.

Thinking strategically about the Bolshevik-German relationship was in America's best geopolitical and economic interest, Harper insisted to H E Eames, an Army colonel. "We feel that we must keep a hand in Russia, so as not to give [the] Germans a free field," he noted. Reasoning that "we lose the war in the end if Germany gets Russia," Harper believed that the ultimate victory for the Allies was the opportunity to exercise geopolitical influence in Russia over the coming decades.<sup>207</sup> The "Bolsheviki Germans" could imperil the United States's chance to form economic and diplomatic bonds with Russia after the war, ties that would allow the U.S. to sell manufactured goods in the country while extracting cheap raw materials from Siberia.

In early 1918, Harper believed he had proof of the Bolshevik-Germany relationship. In February, Edgar Sisson, a representative of the U.S. Committee on Public Information stationed in Petrograd, received a cache of document, most of them in Russian, from Raymond Robins, a representative of the American Red Cross in Russia. These so-called "Sisson documents," if authentic, showed that Lenin, Trotsky, Zinoviev (head of the Communist International), and other Bolshevik party leaders received financial assistance from Germany immediately before carrying out the October Revolution.<sup>208</sup> The documents also dealt with Lenin's return home from Switzerland to Russia in a sealed German railcar in April 1917.

The National Board of Historical Research, a branch of the American Historical Association, asked Harper and J. Franklin Jameson, an historian of colonial and revolutionary

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<sup>206</sup> Harper to Corse, July 29, 1918, Box 5, Folder 14, Harper Papers.

<sup>207</sup> Harper to Eames, May 9, 1918, Box 5, Folder 5, Harper Papers.

<sup>208</sup> Helena M. Stone, "Another Look at the Sisson Forgeries and their Background," *Soviet Studies* 37 (1) (1985), 90.

America who had no knowledge of Russian language or history, to be the sole members of a committee that would scrutinize the documents to determine whether or not they had been forged.<sup>209</sup> At stake was a potential redefinition of the Bolsheviks based on textual evidence. To what degree had the Germans orchestrated the October Revolution in order to weaken the Allies' cause? Did the Germans still support the Bolsheviks? How would Germany's control of Russia's new government affect future American economic and political interests?

As the two studied the documents, Harper took precautions to ensure that he made conclusions substantiated by their text. For example, he contacted Sisson to ask for original copies.<sup>210</sup> He worried over the accuracy of some Russian to English translations that the government would publicize in the coming months, noting that he found over seventy-five translation errors that could alter the documents' meaning.<sup>211</sup>

Harper and Jameson soon concluded that German and Bolshevik authorities had written them. In October 1918, the Committee on Public Information officially published their findings. In the final report, the two adhered closely to textual evidence and neither confirmed nor denied the link between German financing and the October Revolution that the documents' validity seemed to suggest. They argued that doing so was outside of their purview.<sup>212</sup> The only conclusion that Harper made was that "by starting a social revolution in Russia, Lenin was objectively aiding the enemy from a military point of view."<sup>213</sup>

Even so, Harper was no unbiased judge. Decades later, historian George T. Blakey criticized him for conducting the investigation too rapidly and for allowing the Allies' war aims

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<sup>209</sup> Harper, *The Russia I Believe In*, 112.

<sup>210</sup> Harper to Sisson, October 1, 1918, Box 5, Folder 25, Harper Papers.

<sup>211</sup> Harper to Jameson, October 30, 1918, Box 6, Folder 4, Harper Papers.

<sup>212</sup> Committee on Public Information, War Information Series, "The German-Bolshevik Conspiracy," 1919, 29.

<sup>213</sup> Harper, *The Russian I Believe In*, 112.

to color his judgment.<sup>214</sup> At the time a socialist newspaper, the *New York Call*, raised doubts about Harper's ability to examine the documents' objectively, claiming that he prematurely brought his conclusions to the press before he and Jameson issued their final statements under government auspices.<sup>215</sup> Yet, most importantly, Harper's understanding of the Bolsheviks was at stake. If the documents proved to be forgeries, the Bolsheviks might appear to be legitimate from the Allies' point of view.

Despite the report's lack of conclusiveness, the press took the matter to the extreme, surmising that Lenin and Trotsky were German agents whom Berlin paid to carry out a socialist revolution in Russia. Opinions in the press that dissented from this view remained few and reached a minute readership.<sup>216</sup> For example, one article maintained that the Germans used the Bolsheviks as a tool to fight the United States: "Proofs removing any doubts that Nicolai Lenine and Leon Trotsky, the Bolshevik leaders, are paid German agents—if indeed any doubts have remained—are laid before the world today." The article's author wrote that Germany co-opted the Bolsheviks to "betray Russia into deserting her allies" and used Harper's and Jameson's statements to show that "the Bolshevik revolution, which threw Russia into such [an] orgy of murder and excesses as the world seldom has seen" had been "arranged by the German general staff." The author added that one document in the published series showed that the Bolsheviks,

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<sup>214</sup> George T. Blakey, *Historians on the Homefront: American Propagandists for the Great War* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1970), 100-104, 149.

<sup>215</sup> "The Bolshevik Documents," *New York Call*, November 1, 1918, Box 61, Folder 22, Harper Papers. This accusation appears to be true. See Harper to Williams, October 27, 1918, Box 6, Folder 4, Harper Papers.

<sup>216</sup> Filene, *Americans and the Soviet Experiment*, 47. For an exception, an article that took a moderate line by reporting Harper and Jameson's conclusions almost exactly as they appeared in the Committee on Public Information's pamphlet, see "Historians Pass on Sisson Documents," November 12, 1918, *New York Times*, 14. The article's author concluded "the special committee, while not vouching for the authenticity of any of the documents, finds no internal evidence of forgery in the main bulk of them."

backed by Germany, sent “agents, agitators, and agent destructors” to the United States and other Allied countries through Vladivostok.<sup>217</sup>

Others took a similar line, but claimed that the Bolsheviks’ ideology would allow the Germans to overtake Russia. A reporter for the *New York Times* drew a sharp line between the Russian populace’s interests and the Bolshevik-German saboteurs who betrayed them:

“The present Bolshevik government is not a Russian government at all, but a German government, acting solely in the interests of Germany and betraying the Russian people, as it betrays Russia’s natural allies, for the benefit of the Imperial German government alone. And [the documents] show also that the Bolshevik leaders, for the same German imperial ends, have equally betrayed the working classes of Russia whom they pretend to represent.”<sup>218</sup>

These German agents, Lenin and Trotsky, were responsible for Russia signing the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, “a betrayal of the Russian people.” Moreover, they allowed Germany to infiltrate the Russian military, leaving war-time Petrograd open to German invasions from the east.<sup>219</sup>

Other reporters assigned geopolitical significance to Harper and Jameson’s discoveries. A correspondent for the *Chicago Tribune* wrote that the Sisson documents proved that the Bolsheviks planned to use Vladivostok as a submarine launching point to spread war to the Pacific Ocean and that the Germans ordered their Bolshevik vassals to “furnish information regarding the amounts and places of storage of supplies received by Russia from America, England, and France.” The Germans used Russia as a launching point for socialist propaganda against capitalist nations, including the United States, concluded the commentator.<sup>220</sup>

Harper, too, publicly weighed in on the documents’ implications, but only after the government published them. He implied that Lenin and Trotsky did not take money from

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<sup>217</sup> “Proves Lenine and Trotsky Hun Agents: U.S. Reveals Papers Showing Treachery and War on U.S.,” *Chicago Tribune*, September 15, 1918, 1.

<sup>218</sup> “Documents Prove Lenine and Trotzky Hired by Germans,” *New York Times*, September 15, 1918, E5.

<sup>219</sup> Ibid.

<sup>220</sup> “Germany Uses Bolsheviks to Fight America: Secret Documents Bare Plot to Spread War to Pacific Ocean,” *Chicago Tribune*, September 17, 1918, 7.



Germany to use as Berlin decreed, but, instead, were “active” agents who used German financing for their own purposes. By doing so, the Bolsheviks tricked the masses into believing in the party’s ability to bring positive change long enough not to overthrow them. “All this does not excuse Lenine,” Harper wrote “and in fact should condemn him more definitely than if he were a mere servant of the German Government.” By accepting German funds, but using them to enable the party to rule without mass support, Lenin “helped the German game more effectively than if he had been a simple agent.”<sup>221</sup>

Harper also reasoned that the Sisson documents should show the American public that a hostile foreign policy toward the Bolsheviks did not mean that “America has declared war on the Russian people.”<sup>222</sup> Rather, since the Reds were German agents and, therefore, did not serve what Harper believed to be Russia’s and America’s best interests, they stood outside the bounds of his vision of a Russian nation state. The Bolsheviks epitomized everything that Russia was not, he told Americans.

Yet, decades later, scholar-diplomat George F. Kennan showed that the Sisson documents were likely forgeries, in places at least, and identified their author as Anton Martynovich Ossendowski, a Petrograd journalist.<sup>223</sup> Later work by Helena M. Stone built on Kennan’s to give context to accusations against Lenin and argued that Harper and Jameson drew their conclusions from an extremely thin evidentiary basis.<sup>224</sup> In a recent analysis of telegrams exchanged between Germany and the Bolsheviks, historian Semion Lyandres finds no evidence that the party received money from Germany either before or during the October Revolution. He

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<sup>221</sup> “Authenticity of Bolshevik Papers: Prof. S.N. Harper Discusses This Question and States His Opinion on the Status of Lenine and His Organization,” *Christian Science Monitor*, September 26, 1918, 5.

<sup>222</sup> Ibid.

<sup>223</sup> George F. Kennan, “The Sisson Documents,” *The Journal of Modern History* 28 (2) (1956), 130-54.

<sup>224</sup> Stone, “Another Look at the Sisson Forgeries,” 101.

even cites archival evidence from the Provisional Government, which shows that even it could find no evidence of the Bolsheviks receiving German money at any point.<sup>225</sup>

Thus, when overstated by the press, Harper's conclusions tended to reinforce the same idea he communicated to Richard Crane in 1920—"the utter impossibility of cooperating or having dealings with the Bolsheviks." Of course, Harper based his reasoning on the premise that the party had no popular support, despite the fact that, in April 1918, he received word from the American consulate in Irkutsk, a city in eastern Siberia, that diplomatic officials there "considered the Bolsheviks fully in power" and believed that "the majority of the people in the country are for as radical changes as those advocated by the Bolsheviks."<sup>226</sup> Even though evidence such as these dispatches suggested otherwise, Harper now believed he had textual proof to show that the Bolsheviks ruled illegitimately, and he and the press used it to draw a firm line between the Bolsheviks and America's political system.

## **Bolshevism, American Business, and the Question of Intervention**

In the summer of 1918, R C Martens, the head of R. Martens and Company, a firm that operated steamships to and from Russia, set about deciphering how his company would function in Bolshevik Russia. Martens conducted extensive research on Siberia's topography, resource base, and commercial infrastructure. He sketched detailed agricultural maps of Siberia and presented his findings to the American-Russian Chamber of Commerce in New York City, filing numerous petitions with the American government (probably the Department of Commerce) to

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<sup>225</sup> Semion Lyandres, *The Bolsheviks' "German Gold" Revisited: An Inquiry into the 1917 Accusations* (Pittsburgh: The Carl Beck Papers in Russian and East European Studies, The University of Pittsburgh, 1995), 93-104.

<sup>226</sup> Thomas to Harper, April 15, 1918, Box 5, Folder 4, Harper Papers. Thomas received similar pieces of information from Raymond Robins, the head of the American Red Cross in Russia.

share his knowledge of Russian economic conditions.<sup>227</sup> An International Harvester executive and the vice chairman of the War Industries Board, Alexander Legge, fretted about business ventures that his company planned to launch in Russia just before the October Revolution. His main concern was how to “protect the enterprise” from the Bolsheviks, who Legge worried might harass the company’s executives, or even seize the operation.<sup>228</sup> In response to enquiries such as these, the American-Russian Chamber of Commerce convened meetings of manufacturing executives to discuss the situation.<sup>229</sup>

Martens and Legge exemplify the conundrum into which Bolshevism placed the American business community. What line would the Reds, whom many Americans heard were radicals bent on communalizing or nationalizing businesses, take toward foreign corporations operating in Russia? Did booming American business have any future in Russia, or should it turn its attention elsewhere for open markets? After all, American exports to the country dropped from \$424,510,459 in mid-1917 to \$17,335,518 in 1918, an alarming loss of over \$407,174,941, or 2448 percent, in a single year.<sup>230</sup>

Harper weighed in on some of these questions, publically depicting the Bolsheviks and their program as antithetical to American business interests in Russia and to industrial capitalism generally. He was quick to highlight the party’s hostility toward private business by noting that “the very base of Bolshevism” rested on “the abolition of private property, and . . . also the abolition of private trade.” Citing statements from the Petrograd Soviet, Harper told the American public that Bolshevik authorities raided and closed 7,350 Petrograd stores of “a

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<sup>227</sup> American-Russian Chamber of Commerce to Harper, July 27, 1918, Box 5, Folder 14, Harper Papers.

<sup>228</sup> Legge to Harper, July 6, 1918, Box 5, Folder 11, Harper Papers.

<sup>229</sup> American-Russian Chamber of Commerce to Harper, June 3, 1918, Box 5, Folder 9, Harper Papers.

<sup>230</sup> *Foreign Commerce and Navigation of the United States for the Calendar Year 1921*,” Department of Commerce, Bureau of Foreign and Domestic Commerce (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1922), x-xi. This \$407,174,941 loss is equivalent to approximately \$4.3 billion in the dollar’s present buying power.

speculative character.”<sup>231</sup> A broadscale “destruction of property,” combined with anarchy in the Russian provinces, resulted in Bolshevik “seizures and confiscations” of private businesses.<sup>232</sup> How could a regime so ruthless toward private property and free enterprise, basic components of capitalism, allow businesses to function unimpeded?

At this point, an extensive debate raged over how the United States might undermine the Bolsheviks. On the one hand, proponents of a more aggressive approach favored armed intervention to depose the Reds, while popular sentiment and the United States’s official foreign policy took a softer line. For example, the Wilson administration, constrained by the idealistic aims of self-determination, its wartime proclamation to make the world “free for democracy,” and an isolationist public, resorted to secretive and semisecretive means that needed neither Congressional approval nor funding to undermine Bolshevik power. These tactics included covert assistance to anti-Bolshevik groups, intelligence gathering in Russia, and material assistance to the Russian populace.<sup>233</sup>

In this debate, Harper took the softer line and preferred “economic relief.”<sup>234</sup> He took for granted that the party was illegitimate and argued that the proper way to oust it was by selling Russians the very manufactured goods that the Bolsheviks sought to prevent American firms from producing within the country.<sup>235</sup> Doing so would bring about a degree of order and sanity, believed Harper, that would cause Russians to see clearly the poor decision they had made in allowing the Bolsheviks into power: “There will be no political order in Russia until the

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<sup>231</sup> “Closing of Stores in Petrograd: Severe Repressive Measures Carried Out by Bolshevik Authorities to Stop Private Trade- Shortness of Supplies Result,” *Christian Science Monitor*, Box 8, Folder 11, Harper Papers.

<sup>232</sup> “Notes by Professor Harper,” February 7, 1918, Box 4, Folder 20, Harper Papers.

<sup>233</sup> David S. Foglesong, *America’s Secret War Against Bolshevism: U.S. Intervention in the Russian Civil War, 1917-1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), 5.

<sup>234</sup> Harper to Corse, May 9, 1918, Box 5, Folder 6, Harper Papers.

<sup>235</sup> Harper to Porter, April 21, 1918, Box 5, Folder 5, Harper Papers.

economic distress is relieved. And to accomplish the latter someone must help Russia get, or produce, manufactured articles.”<sup>236</sup> Advised by Harper, the American-Russian Chamber of Commerce told members that “the thing nearest to the Russian heart is the question of securing general merchandise in the form of boots, shoes, socks, underwear.” If American manufacturers sold these items in Russia, the Chamber argued, the resulting transactions would “assist in bringing about more stable conditions.”<sup>237</sup> Believing that this idea deserved wide publicity, Harper encouraged an anti-Bolshevik group, the American League to Aid and Cooperate with Russia, to organize a nationwide propaganda campaign to show the American populace the plan’s merits.<sup>238</sup> Rather than directing the business community toward other open markets, then, Harper condemned Russia’s existing regime and took for granted that its failure to embrace private property and trade numbered among its many shortcomings.

Accordingly, Harper never advocated intervention, fearing that Europe might view it as antithetical to American war aims.<sup>239</sup> He worried that U.S. action would proceed without a plan and that, eventually, the number of American troops in Russia would become massive.<sup>240</sup> The thought of intervention “disturbed” him, unless the mission had a “clear statement of objects” that, once accomplished, would force American troops to withdraw from Russia.<sup>241</sup> In the *Christian Science Monitor*, Harper urged the public not to use the term “intervention” for fear that the Bolsheviks would utilize it in propaganda to depict the Allies as imperialists bent on

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<sup>236</sup> Harper to Crane, March 23, 1918, Box 5, Folder 3, Harper Papers.

<sup>237</sup> American-Russian Chamber of Commerce to Harper, February 19, 1918, Box 4, Folder 22, Harper Papers.

<sup>238</sup> Harper to Ross, June 14, 1918, Box 5, Folder 9, Harper Papers.

<sup>239</sup> Foglesong, *America’s Secret War Against Bolshevism*, 158.

<sup>240</sup> Harper to Carpenter, June 11, 1918, Box 5, Folder 9, Harper Papers.

<sup>241</sup> Harper to Crane, March 23, 1918, Box 5, Folder 3, Harper Papers.

world domination, thereby validating the party's message and building its support base.<sup>242</sup>

Harper toured several colleges in Kansas and Colorado in February 1918 discussing the line U.S. policy toward Russia should take and never mentioned armed intervention.<sup>243</sup>

Of course, providing economic assistance to Russia involved the American business community, which would supply raw materials and manufactured goods. In Harper's view, it now had a distinctly anti-Bolshevik role to play. Much like during the tsarist regime's final months when he encouraged businessman to invest freely in the country, Harper still urged them to use their economic might to assist Russia, only now for a different reason.

## **The Shaping of Harper's Understanding of Bolshevism**

Between 1918 and 1921, Harper deprived himself of what could have been an analytically useful view of Russian political reality by not traveling to the country.<sup>244</sup> Tied to his University of Chicago office due to teaching responsibilities, he was uncertain of whether he would be able to enter Russia in the midst of civil war. Unlike in 1916-17 when frequent visits to the country shaped his opinion of its political conditions, his lack of travel afterward forced him

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<sup>242</sup> "Aid for Russia Program Delayed: False Reports by Germans Holds Back Plans, Which Now Are Taking Definite Shape," *Christian Science Monitor*, August 10, 1918, 2. In the end, however, the Bolsheviks did exactly this. See Donald J. Raleigh, "The Russian Civil War, 1917-1922," in *The Cambridge History of Russia Volume 3: Russia in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Ronald Grigor Suny (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 145.

<sup>243</sup> Saul, *War and Revolution*, 228-29. Saul draws on local press reports of Harper's lectures at various colleges and universities to make this conclusion. For the relevant newspaper articles, see "Pleads Patience for the Russians: Slav is a Victim of the Disease Requiring Heroic Treatment, First Were Sincere," *University Daily Kansan* (Lawrence, Kansas), February 27, 1918, , 1; "Pleads Patience for the Russians: Slav is a Victim of the Disease Requiring Heroic Treatment, First Were Sincere," *Lawrence Journal-World* (Lawrence, Kansas), February 27, 1918, 1; "Announcements," *Lawrence Journal-World*, February 27, 1918, 2. Research in Harper's personal papers shows that he made no mention in private correspondence of advocating for intervention on this lecture tour.

<sup>244</sup> See Harper to Faville, January 21, 1921, Box 8, Folder 22, Harper Papers for Harper's statement on his lack of travel to Russia during 1918-21. In this letter, he wrote "I have not been in Russia since the Bolsheviks came into power."

to rely heavily on highly biased sources to understand the country. Now taking his cues almost entirely from ultra-wealthy Russian businessmen, Cadets, official party decrees, Bolshevik newspapers (*Pravda* and *Izvestia*), and disgruntled American diplomatic officials who fled Russia during the civil war, Harper internalized these sources' views, which often complemented with his own ideological predispositions, and spread them to the public. Thus, ironically, when he informed the public and the United States government on Russia's political situation the most, Harper observed on-the-ground Russian conditions least. Therefore, to analyze the sources that Harper read and those Russians with whom he spoke is to understand one root of the bias that he brought to interpreting Russian during its civil war.

On July 22, 1919, the *New York Tribune* reported on an eccentric Russian staying in New York City's posh Ritz-Carleton, located directly on Central Park. "His name is Batolin," noted the paper "and why he came has not been disclosed." Writing for the society and culture section, the investigating reporter labeled the man "Russia's John D. Rockefeller." He preferred to use \$500 bills to pay for his food and hotel room, and, unlike the average New Yorker, "always gets into a taxicab backwards." Lurking around the Ritz until midnight, the reporter looked for a man who "alighted backward from a taxi cab to pay the driver with a \$500 bill," all to no avail. The only details that Mr. Michaels, this mysterious Russian man's spokesman, revealed were that his boss had "been in conference with numerous prominent men," including Colonel Edward M. House, Woodrow Wilson's advisor and a member of the American delegation to the Paris Peace Conference in 1919, among other figures in the Department of State. An enigma, Russia's

Rockefeller was nearly impossible to speak with, primarily because he always lurked inside his room, or was out and about in the city.<sup>245</sup>

This man was Petr Prokof'evich Batolin, a wealthy Russian business tycoon.<sup>246</sup> Prior to 1921, Batolin directed the Russo-Asiatic Bank, located in Petrograd with a branch in Shanghai; headed Emba Caspian Oil Company, an oil venture searching for crude in western Kazakhstan; served as chairman of the Board of Directors of the Petrograd International Loading and Storage Warehouse Company; owned the Kama Viatka Trading Company; served as managing director of the Ivan Stakhtiev Trading Company; held a membership on the Board of Directors of the Russian Bankers, Manufacturers, and Merchants Association of Paris; and was a member of the Council of Ship Owners.<sup>247</sup> Batolin had a large financial stake in Siberia, the region from which many of the dairy products one of his firms exported came.<sup>248</sup> According to him, his corporations controlled approximately two-thirds of all Russian industry.<sup>249</sup> His companies employed some 800,000 Russians, he claimed. Batolin managed to prevent his workers from going on strike or creating disorder, even in 1917 when Russian workers elsewhere did so regularly.<sup>250</sup> Though he probably exaggerated these figures, Batolin was obviously well connected and wealthy. He represented the Russian aristocracy, and had significant financial interests at stake in a new Russia whose ruling party took an unfavorable line toward private enterprise.

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<sup>245</sup> "Russian 'John D. Rockefeller' Arrives in N.Y. Incognito: Ritz Bellboy Says He Uses Only \$500 Bills and He Always Enters Taxi Backward, While His Secretary Says He Has Conferred at State Department," July 22, 1919, *New York Tribune*, 9.

<sup>246</sup> See appendix F.

<sup>247</sup> "Russian Bankers, Manufacturers and Merchants Association Greets Secretary Hughes' Note on Russia," *Bulletin of the Russian Information Bureau in the U.S.*, May 28, 1921, 8.

<sup>248</sup> Harper, *The Russia I Believe In*, 117.

<sup>249</sup> Conversation between Batolin and Long, September 7, 1918, Box 5, Folder 21, Harper Papers.

<sup>250</sup> Harper to Mott, August 17, 1918, Box 5, Folder 18, Harper Papers. See also Harper to Mussey, August 23, 1918, Box 5, Folder 19, Harper Papers for a similar mention of Batolin's ability to prevent labor related strife in his company's factories.



The two met in Petrograd during Harper's trip to Russia in the summer of 1917 through a mutual friend, W. Chapin Huntington, the American commercial attaché to Russia. During their first dinner together, Batolin repeatedly apologized that he did not have any vodka to offer to Harper and Huntington, leading Harper to phone the American embassy for a half dozen bottles, which arrived toward the end of the meal. After dinner, Batolin asked Harper to tell future generations of Americans that "things were so upset in Russia in the summer of 1917 that the Russians drank their vodka after, instead of before, dinner," an unimaginable act for a man of Batolin's social prominence. Harper quickly befriended him, realizing that they shared similar views on the breakdown of the Provisional Government that summer and the ensuing tide of socialist parties.<sup>251</sup>

Batolin came to the United States to assist Harper. Worried that his calls for economic assistance and his anti-Bolshevism went unheeded in the Department of State and with President Wilson, Harper seized the opportunity to use Batolin as leverage to promote his ideas. To generate "a little more real understanding of the Russian situation [among] Washington officialdom," Harper needed a man who would be unknown to, yet credible with, the Department of State. Batolin fit the bill perfectly. Unfamiliar with the Department of State's diplomatic methods and standard practices, he stated what he believed was the correct line for the United States to take toward Russia.<sup>252</sup>

Like Harper, Batolin believed that Bolshevism represented an ugly scar that a small group of radicals left on Russia. The best way to soften it, he maintained, was through economic assistance, which would empower Russians to overthrow the Bolsheviks, rather than through military intervention, which would validate the party's message of western imperialism. Harper

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<sup>251</sup> Harper, *The Russia I Believe In*, 117.

<sup>252</sup> Ibid, 118.

paraded Batolin, who spoke no English, before officials in the United States government and corporate circles and translated for him. Batolin spoke with Robert Lansing, the Secretary of State; Alexander Legge; Breckenridge Long; William C. Redfield, the Secretary of Commerce; and numerous others.<sup>253</sup>

In conversations with these shapers of the United States's industrial and diplomatic policy toward Soviet Russia, Batolin insisted that the Russian masses accepted only liberal capitalism as a form of economic and political organization. Bolshevism, did not "create a basis for the industrial development of Russia because of the fact of its association with anarchy." "The rabble element of the population of towns and villages" formed the Reds' main constituency, Batolin alleged. This uncultured element of the population never "succeeded in creating their own wealth by honorable work" and, therefore, used Bolshevism to "live at the expense of the work of others" due to their "laziness and . . . incapacity." Instead of electing the officials who represented their interests, as in a democratic, industrial society, this class resorted to anarchy. Despite the Socialist Revolutionaries' widespread popularity at the time, he maintained that the masses did not support moderate Socialist Revolutionary or Menshevik-style socialism since neither "differed greatly from Bolshevism."<sup>254</sup> The party represented the polar opposite of industriousness, order, and democracy and, therefore, could not possibly enjoy popular support.

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<sup>253</sup> Harper kept a list of people with whom Batolin met and spoke. It indicates that he also met with Louis Brandeis, associate justice of the United States Supreme Court; Walter Rogers, the foreign cables manager for the Committee on Public Information; Vance McCormick, a prominent New York businessman and member of the War Trade Board; a Mr. Wooley, president of the National Radiator Company in Chicago; Cyrus McCormick, president of International Harvester's Chicago Branch; Colonel EM House, Wilson's unofficial advisor on foreign affairs; David F. Houston, the Secretary of Agriculture; Franklin Lane, the Secretary of the Interior; and Richard Crane, a Department of State official. See Harper to House, September 7, 1918, Box 5, Folder 21, Harper Papers.

<sup>254</sup> Batolin (via Harper as translator) to Crane, January 27, 1919, Box 6, Folder 13, Harper Papers.

As a result of what he depicted as the Reds' hatred of industry and democracy, and due to Russia's inability to overthrow them, Batolin recommended economic assistance as the United States's policy of choice. In a conversation with Breckenridge Long, Batolin observed that material aid, such as "three or four ship loads of wheat or rye" delivered to Archangelsk would help the Russian masses subsist, while causing Russians to regard Americans "as saints in a church; a monument would be erected to them, and the people would turn to them with tears in their eyes." He believed that if America delivered aid, "the political effect . . . would be 3000%," this is, likely to turn the masses against the Bolsheviks who had promised, but failed, to provide "bread, land, and peace."<sup>255</sup>

Harper believed that Batolin's visit yielded favorable results. Afterward he wrote that "the Russian Batolin was a great success. . . . I was told very definitively that he gave the impulse to the economic side of our Russian program . . . he made a great hit."<sup>256</sup> Some of Batolin's suggestions found their way into Cyrus McCormick's September 1918 report to Woodrow Wilson.<sup>257</sup>

Even though he claimed to speak for them, Batolin hardly voiced the Russian masses' opinions. Given his business background and interests, and the type of political system most favorable to them, he could not judge the Bolsheviks with detachment. After all, had Harper spoken with an urban Russian factory worker, a soldier in the Red Army, or others who benefitted from Bolshevik power, he would have received a different portrayal of the country's political situation. Harper's decision to rely on Batolin as a source reinforced a way of

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<sup>255</sup> Conversation between Batolin and Breckenridge Long, September 7, 1918, Box 5, Folder 21, Harper Papers.

<sup>256</sup> Harper to Williams, October 18, 1918, Box 6, Folder 3, Harper Papers.

<sup>257</sup> Harper to House, September 15, 1918, Box 5, Folder 22, Harper Papers.

conceptualizing Russian political reality, and the appropriate way for the United States to relate to it, that did not always correspond with on-the-ground conditions in Russia.

Harper also corresponded with Ariadna Vladimirovna Tyrkova-Williams both before the October Revolution and during the civil war. A prominent feminist and Cadet party leader, Tyrkova-Williams was born in St. Petersburg in 1869 to wealthy, landowning parents. Later in life, she joined the Cadet party, eventually gained membership on its Central Committee, and married Harold Williams, a close friend of Harper's and a New Zealand journalist who reported on Russian affairs for papers ranging from London's *Times* to the *Daily Chronicle*. Predisposed to see workers' revolution as menacing and negative, Tyrkova-Williams broke with many of her liberal contemporaries by arguing that the Revolution of 1905 represented the climax, rather than the beginning of, the liberals' struggle against the autocracy. Her views fell on the far right wing of the party since she argued that a cadre of liberals, not the masses, should govern in the populace's best interests. Highly anti-Bolshevik, she publicly accused Lenin and the Reds of using German money to carry out the October Revolution.<sup>258</sup> In her 1919 memoirs, a bitter diatribe against Bolshevism, Tyrkova-Williams commented that only "intoxicated, simpleminded and ignorant working men and peasants" supported the Bolshevik revolution and noted that "the Socialists" had made Russia "a tremendous experimental station for their dogmas and theories."<sup>259</sup>

Harper found validation for his opinions in his correspondence with Tyrkova-Williams. She often referred to the Bolsheviks as "radical snobs," or a party that forced its extreme policies on the Russian masses. Harper picked up the phrase from her and used it to describe the Reds to

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<sup>258</sup> Rosenberg, *Liberals in the Russian Revolution*, 34, 426, 270.

<sup>259</sup> Ariadna Tyrkova-Williams, *From Liberty to Brest-Litovsk: The First Year of the Russian Revolution* (Westport: Hyperion Press, 1919), 88, vii-iii.

others.<sup>260</sup> He remained close friends with Harold Williams throughout the period and the two shared a flourishing correspondence on Russian events. Tyrkova-Williams, Williams, and Harper all agreed on Bolshevism's fundamentally illegitimate nature and Harper corroborated his opinions in part because a native Russian and her journalist husband shared them.<sup>261</sup> Taking cues from Tyrkova-Williams and repeating her thoughts on the Bolsheviks to others, Harper regularly kept her informed of the Wilson administration's policy toward Russia and assured her that he urged the American press to underscore the "terrible experiences through which you have passed."<sup>262</sup>

On March 15, 1919, acting Secretary of State Frank Polk appointed Harper Special Assistant in the Department of State's Russian Bureau, a subdivision of the Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs, to conduct an investigation on Bolshevism's fundamental theories and practices.<sup>263</sup> In this semibureaucratic consulting position, Harper worked extensively with sources from Russia, including official Bolshevik party decrees, speeches by Red leaders, Russian newspapers, and written accounts from American diplomats. This job required him to translate large volumes of these materials for use by higher-ups and to travel to Washington each month to give oral explanations of them.<sup>264</sup> In essence, he used these materials to conduct "informal classes for the members of the Russian Division on the subject of Soviet institutions."<sup>265</sup>

Harper attained this position at roughly the same time that the Department of State began to emphasize analysts of Russia's importance in formulating the United States's foreign policy

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<sup>260</sup> Harper to Williams, October 15, 1918, Box 6, Folder 2, Harper Papers.

<sup>261</sup> Charlotte Alston, *Russia's Greatest Enemy?: Harold Williams and the Russian Revolutions* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2007), 135-36, 139-40, 170.

<sup>262</sup> Harper to Tyrkova-Williams, July 2, 1918, Box 5, Folder 11, Harper Papers.

<sup>263</sup> Polk to Harper, March 15, 1919, Box 6, Folder 15, Harper Papers.

<sup>264</sup> Harper, *The Russian I Believe In*, 127; Harper to Crane, May 5, 1920, Box 7, Folder 24, Harper Papers.

<sup>265</sup> Harper, *The Russian I Believe In*, 127.

toward the country. Their views circulated in various government bureaus and often reached the White House, since the issue of how to interact with Red Russia represented a pressing question at the time. These analysts worked at the intersection of the academic and policy realms, but their interpretations had roots in neither.<sup>266</sup>

Harper launched a search for Bolshevik newspapers, querying journalists, diplomats, and others on how he and the department might acquire as many as possible.<sup>267</sup> Relying heavily on these sources, in turn, meant that Harper's primary means of understanding a distant society with a new form of government was through official party sources and first-hand written accounts, a method that he believed to be superior to traveling to Russia, since it avoided the Potemkin Village effect to which he feared the Bolsheviks subjected many foreign visitors by showing them only the wealthy portions of Russia's two capital cities, Petrograd and Moscow.<sup>268</sup>

The sources Harper read painted a bleak, sometimes bone-chilling, portrait of the Reds' activities and aims. For example, he analyzed and translated a report of the Extraordinary Commission to Combat Counter-Revolution, Speculation, and Official Crimes (Cheka) from Odessa, a city in present-day southern Ukraine.<sup>269</sup> The document detailed the cases of fourteen men accused of crimes including blackmail, "illegal requisition," and "belonging to the volunteer

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<sup>266</sup> Engerman, *Modernization from the Other Shore*, 85, 147.

<sup>267</sup> See Harper to Read, April 13, 1919, Box 6, Folder 17, Harper Papers; Harper to Humes, March 20, 1919, Box 6, Folder 15, Harper Papers, in which Harper wrote that he asked his secretary in Chicago to comb the *Nation* and the *Dial* to see if either contained already translated Bolshevik legislation; and "Report to American Embassy in Paris," January 1920, Box 7, Folder 12, Harper Papers, in which Harper wrote to the American Embassy in France that the Department of State's research priorities included documents that spoke to the international spread of Bolshevism, and sources in connection with the "Third or Communist International." Finally, numerous letters in Harper's files from as early as April 1918 indicate that much of his information on Russia came from newspapers that W. Chapin Huntington sent him from Russia.

<sup>268</sup> Harper to Boyer, May 16, 1920, Box 7, Folder 25, Harper Papers. Harper wrote that he found newspapers and printed sources to be "a better source of information than the accounts brought out by poorly equipped observers after a few weeks of carefully guided life in Moscow or Petrograd."

<sup>269</sup> The Cheka, a committee created by Lenin and the Bolsheviks in 1917 as a temporary measure to combat those who sought to sabotage the party's efforts, was the predecessor of the Soviet KGB.

army.” The committee freed seven and unceremoniously shot the other seven after brief trials. It subjected Tikhon Baranov, one of the accused, to execution by a firing squad after seeing evidence that he engaged in “threats and insults to official representations of Soviet institutions.”<sup>270</sup>

Sources such as these rattled Harper. After translating soviet election results in *Pravda*, he concluded that communist power steadily increased since the paper indicated that the Bolsheviks won “an overwhelming victory . . . in Moscow elections.” He feared that this victory might promote an even stronger attitude of noncompromise between the Bolsheviks and the Mensheviks and Socialist Revolutionaries, moderate socialist parties that Harper viewed as Russia’s only viable alternative to the Bolsheviks by 1920.<sup>271</sup> This profound shift in opinion from supporting the right Cadets, who refused to compromise with socialist parties, to advocating moderate socialism as a preferable alternative to Bolshevism, stemmed largely from the grim picture of the Reds that Harper gleaned from his sources. Drawing conclusions from Western European and Soviet newspapers, he believed that Lenin stood on the cusp of igniting socialist revolution in Switzerland and elsewhere. Reading Lenin’s words “the Dictatorship of the Proletariat in all lands is only a question of time” in a diplomatic dispatch from Stockholm led him to this conclusion. Analyzing *Severnaia Kommuna*, a Soviet newspaper, Harper saw evidence that the Bolsheviks launched a war on Russian Orthodoxy, based on an announcement that railway authorities removed all icons from train stations.<sup>272</sup>

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<sup>270</sup> “Extraordinary Commission to Combat Counter-Revolution, Speculation, and Official Crimes,” April 29, 1919, Box 6, Folder 18, Harper Papers. The accusation of “belonging to the volunteer army” probably refers to an accusation that the person in question joined a local militia, or any military-like body except the Red Army, the official Bolshevik force.

<sup>271</sup> Harper to Allen, April 29, 1920, Box 7, Folder 23, Harper Papers.

<sup>272</sup> “HINTS,” May 1, 1919, Box 6, Folder 19, Harper Papers.

Not only the information within these sources, but the nature of the sources themselves led Harper to perpetuate and exaggerate this notion. Historian Donald J. Raleigh argues that a wide chasm existed between the Bolsheviks' "external language," which it used for mass consumption in newspapers, speeches, and other "official" party mediums, and its "internal language," found in party documents, private reports, and not meant for the public. The former masked numerous "internal contradictions and contestations," replacing them with the façade of "coherence and unity" within the party. The Red press bolstered this veneer by using language that depicted the Bolsheviks and their enemies as stark opposites: labor versus capital, freedom versus slavery, workers versus the bourgeoisie.<sup>273</sup> Soviet newspapers overflowed with word of world revolution, often reporting on socialism's inevitable triumph, while omitting local events that did not fit its ideologically driven narrative.<sup>274</sup> At the same time, however, the party's internal language revealed that provincial Bolsheviks often disagreed with their Moscow counterparts on the Brest-Litovsk Treaty, the former condemning it as a horrific mistake, while the latter used external language to portray unanimous Red support for it.<sup>275</sup> Members of the public frequently wrote to newspaper editors to express their approval or dissatisfaction with the publication's contents but, ultimately, Soviet authorities made the final call on the news items made available to readers.<sup>276</sup>

Thus reading only external language led Harper to believe that the Bolsheviks were a more unified, menacing force than they actually were. Despite the bold claims in these sources, Harper read them uncritically, no doubt aware that the Red press featured a distinctly ideological

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<sup>273</sup> Donald J. Raleigh, "Languages of Power: How the Saratov Bolsheviks Imagined Their Enemies," *Slavic Review* 57 (2) (1998): 321-22, 330.

<sup>274</sup> Raleigh, *Experiencing Russia's Civil War*, 227.

<sup>275</sup> Raleigh, "Languages of Power," 331.

<sup>276</sup> Matthew E. Lenoe, "Letter-Writing and the State: Reader Correspondence with Newspapers as a Source for Early Soviet History," *Cahiers du monde russe et soviétique* 40 (1/2) (1999): 167-69.



bias that omitted some facts while underscoring others. Yet taking these sources at their word both strengthened his arguments against Bolshevism and accentuated the degree to which he believed that the party represented the enemy of democracy, capitalism, and liberalism.

In July 1919, a harrowing letter from an American diplomatic official who fled civil war Ukraine earlier that year came across Harper's desk. The report, an account of the official and his family's final days in Charkow (modern-day Kharkov, eastern Ukraine), detailed a ghastly site its author witnessed, the result of a Bolshevik reaction to "counter-revolutionary" activity, known today as the "Red Terror:"

Many prominent figures were imprisoned, and quite a number of them are no longer living to tell of the tortures to which they were subjected while in prison. This can only be partly conjectured after viewing the lacerated and disfigured bodies after they were disinterred, many of which I personally inspected on the spot as they were taken out of the huge trenches, which they were compelled to dig, and into which their bodies were afterwards thrown like so many wild beasts. I personally stood by last Sunday morning while 13 bodies were exhumed, amongst them 1 woman and 1 priest, and several officers of the Regular Army, who died for no other reason than that they were "Suspected of Sympathizing with the Volunteer Army," and consequently were Counter Revolutionarists that must be wiped out, if Socialism is to finally come to its own in the world. You can form an idea of the inquisition that these poor martyrs endured, when I tell you that the woman corpse had the right breast cut away; on some bodies hands were missing; on others only fingers were torn out of their sockets; others again were minus a leg, or a foot. I also saw the Skins from 5 hands, including the nails, all of which appeared to have come off the hands after immersion in boiling water, for these ghastly gloves were found in the torture chamber by the public upon entering the basement in which these Champions of the Freed Socialistic Republic [Bolsheviks] held their inhuman Inquisitions. Bodies are being found in various locations in the town, and it is impossible to conjecture how many will yet be unearthed as time goes on; so far as we are able to estimate, some two hundred or more have been recovered, of course many of them quite unrecognizable as [some] are fearfully mutilated, and besides have been too long dead, and are in consequence too much decomposed.<sup>277</sup>

The account paints the most grim, inhumane portrait of the Bolsheviks possible, while omitting other dimensions of the situation. What positive changes had the party brought to the city? What was the local populace's take on the Reds? How did the Bolsheviks govern elsewhere?

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<sup>277</sup> July 2, 1919, Box 6, Folder 25, Harper Papers.

Moreover, a corresponding “White Terror,” an equally violent, repressive movement that featured a diverse band of anti-Bolshevik forces executing Red Army generals in similar ways and carrying out systematic terror against Red villages, occurred at the same time.<sup>278</sup> Yet the report made no mention of it. In an environment in which a lack of technology severely limited the ability to communicate rapidly between the United States and Russia, and in which knowledge of the realities of Bolshevik rule ran short, Harper believed that such statements showed the full picture of Red power. Indeed, in the absence of other sources or seeing conditions for himself, he had no choice but to rely on accounts like these.

### **The Specter of Communism in the United States**

Because he relied on these sources, Harper feared that radical socialists agitated in the United States, bringing the nation to the brink of revolution. Based on a thin margin of evidence and heavily driven by his ideological convictions, this tacit acknowledgement that at least a modicum of social inequality existed in the United States led him to work closely with the Department of State and the Department of Justice to monitor Russians and suspected socialists in America and, thus, to draw an even clearer line between Bolshevism and American industrial democracy.

Harper worried about labor discontent in Chicago. He remained ill at ease that worsening economic conditions in 1920 and, specifically, the decline in the value of Liberty Bonds, government issued promissory notes to help finance the Allied war effort that many workers bought into, would leave these laborers discontented and, thus, susceptible to an influx of

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<sup>278</sup> Viktor G. Bortnevski, “White Administration and White Terror (The Denikin Period),” *Russian Review* 52 (1993): 355.

Bolshevik propaganda that he feared infiltrated many Chicago factories. This disgruntlement, Harper reasoned, could blossom into full on revolt.<sup>279</sup>

Russians who came to the United States after fleeing the civil war in their homeland also ranked high on Harper's list of suspected revolutionaries. In the front of his mind were members of Chicago's "Russian colony," a group of Russian émigrés living in the city. Harper received word of "a man of unusual ability and extreme cleverness, very much like Lenin" who agitated Chicago workers. This man, Santeri "Santtu" Nuorteva, was born in Finland in 1881 as Alexander Nyberg. A member of the Finnish Social Democratic party, Nuorteva and his family fled Finland in 1911 after police threatened to imprison him for criticizing the tsarist government. Arriving in the United States in 1912, Nuorteva began to publish numerous socialist newspapers and maintained close affiliation with the Socialist Party of America. An organizer of workers with extensive contacts in the United States, Finland, and elsewhere, Nuorteva initially represented the Finnish Reds but, after their defeat in the Finnish civil war in 1918, became an advocate for and representative of Soviet Russia in the United States. He opposed the Allies' war aims and repeatedly agitated against them, landing him on the U.S. Department of Justice's and the Federal Bureau of Investigation's watch list. Nuorteva eventually came under investigation by a United States Senate committee investigating Bolshevism in 1919, fled to Canada, and was deported to Russia.<sup>280</sup> Harper was concerned about the "rapid expansion" of Nuorteva's "influence in the [Russian] colony," causing him to put his friends in the business and political worlds on alert.<sup>281</sup>

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<sup>279</sup> Harper to Allen, January 1920, Box 7, Folder 15, Harper Papers.

<sup>280</sup> Auvo Kostiaainen, "A Wonderful Man" or "A Dangerous Bolshevik"? Santeri Nuorteva in the United States, 1912-1920," *American Communist History* 6 (2) (2007): 197-207.

<sup>281</sup> Harper to Porter, April 14, 1919, Box 6, Folder 17, Harper Papers.

Chicago, one of the United States's largest and best-known working class cities at the time, oversaw several sizeable workers' strikes and general unrest between 1918 and 1921, ensuring that poor labor relations in the city often validated Harper's view of Bolshevism and radical socialism more broadly as upheaval-prone. Historian Robin F. Bachin argues that, in the first quarter of the twentieth century, Chicago city planners' efforts to create public venues for mass culture and open recreational spaces helped to unite workers and working class immigrants, the very groups that Harper feared were most likely to support Bolshevism. In 1919, after a number of Chicago factory owners reduced wages during the war despite drastic increases in the cost of living, local packinghouse workers went on strike and organized a demonstration that demanded the right to form unions. That fall, 90,000 steel workers coordinated a widespread protest that called for unionism. During 1919 alone over 250,000 workers went on strike in Chicago, leaving the city with one of the highest strike rates in the country. City leaders tended to associate these events with Bolshevism and believed that this ideology gave laborers a license to revolt.<sup>282</sup> The Chicago press regularly delivered news on what it believed to be Bolshevik agitation in the city, giving labor incidents a decidedly dramatic, threatening tone, all while heftily condemning Bolshevism.<sup>283</sup> Eugene Debs, then running on the socialist ticket for

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<sup>282</sup> Robin F. Bachin, *Building the South Side: Urban Space and Civil Culture in Chicago, 1890-1919* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 206, 288-9, 293.

<sup>283</sup> For examples of Chicago newspapers running this type of story, see the *Chicago Tribune* "Circular Calls for Bolshevik Uprising Here," November 29, 1918, 15; "Bolshevik Fans Cheer Revolt at Socialist Fest," January 6, 1919, 13; "Bare Bolshevik Effort to Rule Chicago Unions," February 22, 1919, 4; "Bolshevik Meet in Evanston! O Horrors! O Help!," April 16, 1919, 3; "Bolshevik Co-Eds Turn U. of C. Minds from "Revolution"," May 23, 1919, 17; "Milan Workers at Steel Mill Go Bolshevik," March 26, 1920, 3. See also the *Chicago Defender*, "Billy Gordon, Pugilist, Among "Red" Leaders," April 5, 1919, 11. On the *Chicago Defender's* take on Bolshevism, see Bachin, *Building the South Side*, 295.

president, garnered substantial support in the city and, in 1920, received over one million votes, thereby indicating socialism's local popularity.<sup>284</sup>

Outside of Chicago, too, both Russians and non-Russians suspected of disseminating Bolshevik propaganda concerned Harper, prompting his attention to their activities. He kept lists of Russian "radicals" detained at Ellis Island, including their often large number of aliases.<sup>285</sup> For the Department of State, he carefully reviewed Louis C. Fraina's translation and annotation of Lenin and Trotsky's *The Proletarian Revolution*. Fraina, a founding member of the American Communist Party, was "an able writer, in the same class with Lenin and Trotsky," remarked Harper. Reviewing the book, he believed that it had "probably become the 'Bible' of all the radical intellectuals of the country" and noted that "Lenin is mighty lucky to have so able a man [as Fraina] stationed here in the United States."<sup>286</sup> Informed by official Bolshevik sources, Harper assumed that Lenin appointed men such as Fraina and Nuorteva, not that they were merely dissatisfied with the state of American social and political organization.

Albert Rhys Williams, an American journalist who witnessed the October Revolution, also made Harper's list of suspects. Originally a minister, Williams worked in Petrograd as a journalist in the summer and fall of 1917 as the Bolsheviks gradually gained power. During this time he became a personal friend of Lenin and an ardent supporter of the Bolshevik cause. After returning to the United States in 1918, Williams felt ashamed that the Allies had intervened in the Russian civil war against the Bolsheviks and, as a result, began a nationwide lecture circuit in

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<sup>284</sup> Ernest Freeburg, *Democracy's Prisoner: Eugene V. Debs, the Great War, and the Right to Dissent* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008), 244-45, 2.

<sup>285</sup> "RUSSIAN RADICALS HELD AT ELLIS ISLAND," February 3, 1920, Box 7, Folder 15, Harper Papers.

<sup>286</sup> "The Proletarian Revolution in Russia by Lenin and Trotsky with Introduction by Louis C. Fraina," 1919, Box 7, Folder 1, Harper Papers. See Vladimir Lenin and Leon Trotsky, *The Proletarian Revolution in Russia*, edited and with an introduction, notes, and supplementary chapters by Louis C. Fraina (New York: The Communist Press, 1918).

which he educated audiences on Russia and called for the United States to withdraw from the country. A longtime advocate of socialism who was not content with the American status quo, Williams argued that the Sisson documents were forgeries and, therefore, piqued Harper's negative interest. Labeling him simply "another bolsheviki," Harper resented and dismissed Williams's theory on the documents, claiming that it did not "hand together."<sup>287</sup>

The American Communist Party did not escape Harper's gaze, either. Serving the Department of State, he monitored the party's official statements and reported that a Bolshevik party congress accepted five of its delegates who "claimed to represent the American working class."<sup>288</sup> After reading reports on Americans who attended a meeting of the Third International in Moscow, Harper began keeping tabs on John Reed.<sup>289</sup> A Harvard graduate and a journalist who openly supported socialism, Reed witnessed the Bolshevik revolution firsthand. An admirer of the Reds, he traveled extensively in Russia during the civil war years and drifted between there and the United States until his death in Russia in October 1920.<sup>290</sup> Harper corresponded with J. Edgar Hoover, then the Special Assistant to the Attorney General and later head of the

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<sup>287</sup> Harper to Corse, September 19, 1918, Box 5, Folder 23, Harper Papers. Williams was a prolific writer. For a sample of his work on Russia, see *Lenin: The Man and His Work* (New York: Scott and Seltzer, 1919); *The Bolsheviks and the Soviets: The Present Government of Russia, What the Soviets Have Done, Difficulties the Soviets Faced, Six Charges Against the Soviets, the Soviet Leaders and the Bolsheviks, the Russians and America* (New York: The Rand School of Social Science, 1919); *The Russians Land* (New York: New Republic, Inc., 1927); *The Soviets* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and Company, 1937); *The Russians: The Land, the People, and Why They Fight* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and Company, 1943); *Through the Russian Revolution* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1967); *Journey into Revolution: Petrograd, 1917-1918*, ed. Lucita Williams (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1969).

<sup>288</sup> See, for example, "Agreement for the Unification of the American Communist Party and the American Communist Labour Party," 1920, Box 7, Folder 13, Harper Papers; "To all members of the Russian Federation Communist Party of America," January 24, 1920, Box 7, Folder 14, Harper Papers. On the Bolsheviks accepting American delegates, see Department of State Memorandum, 1920, Box 8, Folder 13, Harper Papers.

<sup>289</sup> Translation, September 17, 1920, Box 8, Folder 10, Harper Papers.

<sup>290</sup> Reed authored a well-known account of the October Revolution, *Ten Days That Shook the World* (New York: Boni and Liveright, 1919).

Federal Bureau of Investigation, on documents that shed light on the United Communist Party of America's and Reed's activities and whereabouts.<sup>291</sup>

Harper took steps to counter Bolshevism's influence by engaging in counter propaganda and cooperating with government officials to investigate suspect communist sympathizers. For example, he worked "to get the facts of the Bolsheviki regime before the public, and particularly the workmen." Hoping to discredit the Reds, he spread negative testimonies to Chicago workers from Americans who traveled to Soviet Russia, since he anticipated an approaching "unemployment situation" that might disgruntle factory laborers.<sup>292</sup> The superintendent of the Department of Justice's Chicago office asked Harper to help investigate a local "confidential matter" related to his field of expertise.<sup>293</sup> Though no documentation remains in Harper's papers to confirm the consultation's character, it probably concerned suspect socialists in or around Chicago. Harper assisted J. Edgar Hoover in gathering evidence on Ludwig C.A.K. Martens, a Russian socialist who claimed to represent the Soviet government in the United States and later faced deportation proceedings aimed at preventing him from distributing propaganda on behalf of the Bolsheviks.<sup>294</sup> The material Harper relayed to Hoover undoubtedly played a major role in having Martens deported.

Harper's portrayal of Bolshevism and his investigative work on suspected socialists dovetailed with a larger national relationship with radicalism at the time. As labor strife sprang up nationwide, authorities tended to blame those suspected of holding socialist sympathies for

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<sup>291</sup> Harper to Hoover, December 11, 1920, Box 8, Folder 18, Harper Papers; Harper, *The Russia I Believe In*, 129.

<sup>292</sup> Harper to Crane, February 6, 1919, Box 6, Folder 14, Harper Papers.

<sup>293</sup> Brennan to Harper, November 12, 1920, Box 8, Folder 15, Harper Papers.

<sup>294</sup> Harper, *The Russia I Believe In*, 124. For correspondence between Harper and Hoover, among others, on the Martens case, see Harper to Hoover, November 18, 1919, Box 7, Folder 7, Harper Papers; Harper to Hoover, January 20, 1920, Box 7, Folder 13, Harper Papers; Harper to Allen, January 30, 1920, Box 7, Folder 14, Harper Papers; Harper to Hoover, January 31, 1920, Box 7, Folder 14, Harper Papers.

them.<sup>295</sup> This movement's most memorable manifestation, the First Red Scare, gained steam in 1919 when A. Mitchell Palmer, the U.S. Attorney General, spearheaded a series of "Palmer Raids" in which authorities arrested over four thousand suspected socialists and deported 249 "conspirators" on accusations of anarchism.<sup>296</sup> The sensationalist, "yellow" press covered radicalism in America, often casting those who did not support the political status quo as "anarchists" or "Reds" bent on overthrowing the system. Mass circulation newspapers overdramatized encounters between government officials and suspected extremists, thus echoing the authorities' xenophobic hysteria to readers nationwide. By engaging in Red-baiting, the press created an audience eager for future similar news.<sup>297</sup>

Speaking to an expectant public and an alarmed government, Harper and his efforts to monitor suspect socialists helped to perpetrate the First Red Scare and, thus, to broaden an already wide intellectual, political, and moral chasm between Americans and the Bolshevik regime.<sup>298</sup> Remembering these years, he admitted that his work had been "of little avail in tempering the Red-baiting campaign of Mitchell Palmer."<sup>299</sup> Yet Harper's toils had a far larger effect than he would have willingly admitted. In casting men such as Nuorteva, Williams, and Reed as the ultimate "other," he did the same to the Bolshevik regime, the radical hotbed from which he believed all of them emerged. Thus he gave intellectual and political justifications to

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<sup>295</sup> Nell Irvin Painter, *Standing at Armageddon: The United States, 1877-1919* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1987), 387-90.

<sup>296</sup> Markku Ruotsila, *British and American Anticommunism before the Cold War* (London: Frank Cass, 2001), 173.

<sup>297</sup> Leonard Ray Teel, *The Public Press, 1900-1945: The History of American Journalism* (London: Praeger, 2006), 83-85, 91.

<sup>298</sup> On Harper's contact with those who perpetrated the Red Scare, see Goble, "Samuel Harper and the Study of Russia," 614. On the widening chasm between Americans and the Bolshevik regime that the Red Scare caused, see Filene, *Americans and the Soviet Experiment*, 62-3.

<sup>299</sup> Harper, *The Russia I Believe In*, 129. A. Mitchell Palmer, the man that many historians argue played a large role in the event, was the Attorney General of the United States from 1919-21.



the authorities who directed America's first knee-jerk reaction to communism, and to an expectant populace that followed suit.

## **No Room for Compromise: Recognition of Soviets versus Recognition of Bolsheviks**

In early February 1919, the Senate Judiciary Committee subpoenaed Harper to testify on the methods and effectiveness of Bolshevik propaganda in the United States and political conditions in Russia in a hearing to take place between February 11 and March 10.<sup>300</sup> The committee prized Harper's expertise on Russian conditions, claiming that he would serve as a "lead witness" in the proceedings.<sup>301</sup>

At this hearing, Senator Lee Slater Overman, a Democrat from North Carolina, questioned Harper on the soviets' composition: "Is the soviet part of the Bolshevik government? Is it one and the same thing?"<sup>302</sup> Harper responded bluntly: "In my opinion, it is one and the same thing." He then explained that even though the soviets began as democratic bodies that expressed the popular will, the Bolsheviks overtook them and perverted their nature:

"The parallel is often drawn that the soviets are like a parliament of a western country, while the Bolsheviks are simply the majority party in that parliament. But inasmuch as the idea of turning over to the soviets all power of organizing the country on this soviet basis is the Bolshevik idea, opposing the idea of the other socialists' parties, and, of course, of the bourgeois parties [is too]. In actual fact I do not see what distinction can be made between the Bolsheviks and the soviets."

He then explained that the Bolsheviks "definitely expelled from the soviet . . . the right socialist revolutionaries and . . . the Menshevik Social Democrats," justifying their actions by claiming

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<sup>300</sup> Harper to Breed, February 17, 1919, Box 6, Folder 14, Harper Papers; "Senators to Probe Russian Reds Here," February 10, 1919, *New York Sun*, Box 6, Folder 11, Harper Papers.

<sup>301</sup> "Senators to Probe Russian Reds Here," February 10, 1919, *New York Sun*, Box 6, Folder 11, Harper Papers.

<sup>302</sup> In his memoirs, Harper recalled that several of the senators asked "loosely or stupidly worded questions" to which he could not respond in a way that he felt was appropriate. See Harper, *The Russia I Believe In*, 123.

that “the two groups were counter-revolutionists and were working against the soviets, and their presence therefore could not be tolerated.” Yet Harper and the Bolsheviks gauged who constituted a “counter-revolutionist” by vastly different definitions. According to the Reds, he argued, a counterrevolutionary was a person who acted “counter to a revolution of the Bolshevik brand, not the revolution of March, 1917.”<sup>303</sup> In his mind, however, the Bolsheviks were counterrevolutionaries since they subverted the February Revolution’s principal aims. Judging the party against the February Revolution, it once again came up short.

Harper’s testimony exemplifies a larger intellectual and political conundrum in which he and American policy makers found themselves in the early years of Bolshevik rule: how to navigate the complex problem of official recognition. The question turned on whether the Bolsheviks had become synonymous with the soviets or, in other words, whether or not they had expelled other parties from the bodies to such a degree that the Reds constituted almost all of their membership. If this were not the case, the government could recognize the soviets, democratic bodies with freely elected parties, and, in doing so, undermine Bolshevik power while continuing the United States’s relationship with Russia. If it were true, the government could recognize neither the Bolsheviks nor the soviets, both permanent governing institutions, effectively severing diplomatic ties with the country. The latter option meant that the United States would have no formal relations with Red Russia.

Beginning in 1918, Harper debated the question of which, if any, body the United States should recognize. His 1919 response to the Senate represents the final product of his internal deliberation. In January 1918, he could not fathom how he or the government could recognize the Bolsheviks. If the United States did communicate with them, it should do so only to “try to

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<sup>303</sup> U.S. Congress, Senate, *Bolshevik Propaganda: Hearings Before a Subcommittee of the Committee on the Judiciary*, February 11-March 10, 1919, 65<sup>th</sup> Cong., 3<sup>rd</sup> sess., 1919. S.Res 439 and 469, 96-97.

outwit them.”<sup>304</sup> He held that “getting into touch with the Soviets,” which did not “necessarily mean recognizing the Bolsheviks” was “more imperative than ever.” “Communication with the Soviets is not communication with one party, the Bolsheviks,” Harper wrote. “It seems to me that . . . one can make a sharper distinction between Bolsheviks and Soviet.”<sup>305</sup> Attempting to spread his opinions to influential journalists, Harper corresponded with Walter Lippmann, America’s most political connected journalist at the time and himself a follower of Russian events. Harper told him that the soviets were brainchildren of the February Revolution. They “are going to be permanent institutions . . . they are the only authority over there,” he wrote. Bolsheviks made up only a small percentage of their membership, he believed.<sup>306</sup>

By that summer, Harper modified his opinion to account for a clear increase in Red power. “The Soviet idea was a good idea, one of the big contributions of [the February] Revolution,” he wrote.<sup>307</sup> Yet he told the reading public that the soviets, organs through which “workmen, peasants and soldiers . . . raised their voices [during] the first months of the Revolution,” fell prey to Bolshevik trickery in early 1918. He told readers that even though he lacked accurate data on the bodies’ composition, and that their membership varied widely, non-Bolshevik Russians did not accept the idea of a state in which all political power rested with the soviets. In other words, even though the masses voiced their political preferences by backing the February Revolution and the soviet idea, now that the Bolsheviks had power in them, the populace no longer agreed with the bodies’ decisions. Since the soviets ceased to be “strong

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<sup>304</sup> Harper to Lippmann, January 18, 1918, Box 4, Folder 18, Harper Papers.

<sup>305</sup> Harper to Crane, June 11, 1918, Box 5, Folder 9, Harper Papers.

<sup>306</sup> Harper to Lippmann, June 11, 1918, Box 5, Folder 9, Harper Papers. For Harper’s claim that the “Soviet idea” was a product of the February Revolution, see “Russian Soviets and Bolsheviks: Proper Organization of People in Some Kind of Democratic Institution Said to be Necessary for the Future of the World,” *Christian Science Monitor*, July 12, 1918, 6. In reality, the soviets were a product of the Revolution of 1905, not the February Revolution. On Walter Lippmann’s life and career, see Ronald Steel, *Walter Lippmann and the American Century* (London: Transaction Publishers, 2008).

<sup>307</sup> Harper to Corse, July 29, 1918, Box 5, Folder 14, Harper Papers.

organizations of the broader masses of the people,” (read, came under Bolshevik influence), Russia turned its back on them. Recognizing the soviets would be dangerous since doing so might legitimate an “undemocratic” party perverting a fundamentally democratic institution.<sup>308</sup>

By the fall of 1918, Harper’s line of reasoning reached its logical conclusion—that the Bolsheviks undemocratically dominated the soviets, which represented nothing more than “tyranny and suffering.” The Reds changed the soviet from “its original function . . . an agent of national co-operation” to “something to be used by them as an instrument of class war.” Accordingly, he told the public, a system “opposed to the fundamental principle of Russian life,” a government bent on “a doctrine of class war which is not only opposed to our own views and principles, but also to those of the Russian people” ruled the country.<sup>309</sup>

As a result, Harper believed that diplomatic relations with Russia were impossible, since recognizing it in any form would imply cooperation with the Bolsheviks. “Any recognition of the Soviets is a recognition of the Bolsheviks,” he wrote.<sup>310</sup> Doing so would approve of the “present tyranny” in which the Bolsheviks used the soviets to engage. Economic relations, too, could send a similar message, leading Harper to state in 1921 that the United States should cut off all economic ties with Soviet Russia, halting trade with and aid to the country.<sup>311</sup> Unlike David Lloyd George, the British Prime Minister from 1916-22 who reopened economic relations with Soviet Russia in 1920 because he believed that Europe needed wheat and other food supplies

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<sup>308</sup> “Russian Soviets and Bolsheviks: Proper Organization of People in Some Kind of Democratic Institution Said to Be Necessary for the Future of the World,” *Christian Science Monitor*, July 12, 1918, 6.

<sup>309</sup> “Co-Operation Viz Bolshevik Tyranny,” public lecture in “Russian and Reconstruction Series,” February 27, 1919, Box 33, Folder 14, Harper Papers.

<sup>310</sup> Harper to Mott, November 19, 1918, Box 6, Folder 6, Harper Papers.

<sup>311</sup> Harper to Lovich, January 15, 1921, Box 8, Folder 22, Harper Papers; Harper to Porter, April 14, 1919, Box 6, Folder 17, Harper Papers.

from the country despite its politics, Harper argued that America's stance should not support the Bolsheviks in any way, even through mutually beneficial trade.<sup>312</sup>

## **The Failure of U.S.-Soviet Cooperation**

In 1920, a chart showing the differences between the Soviet and American governments circulated among members of the Department of State's Russian Bureau. It consisted of two side-by-side diagrams depicting the source of political power in each system and noted that Americans "directly ELECT" their leaders, yet made no such statement about the Soviet regime.<sup>313</sup> Focusing on the two governments' differences, the chart exemplifies why Harper believed no cooperation with Soviet Russia was possible—the two countries' systems of government were simply incompatible. The Bolsheviks adhered to a dogma so different from that which Harper believed America practiced that, in his view, cooperation with the country was irresponsible, immoral, and patently dangerous to the United States.

The first plank of this dogmatic Bolshevik code was an absolute unwillingness to compromise on any portion of their program. No true Bolshevik, Harper reasoned, could engage in "genuine compromise," since they did so only for "sheer expediency." This hardline stance became so embedded in the party's program that any person who wavered from it was no longer a Bolshevik: "it ceases to be Bolshevism." "This fact itself would seem to preclude the possibility of compromising with them," Harper told his University of Chicago history class in 1919.<sup>314</sup>

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<sup>312</sup> On David Lloyd George's economic policy toward Soviet Russia, see Christine A. White, *British and American Commercial Relations with Soviet Russia, 1918-1924* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992), 115.

<sup>313</sup> Soviet-American Comparison Chart, 1920, Box 55, Folder 8, Harper Papers.

<sup>314</sup> Class Lecture, 1919, Box 32, Folder 47, Harper Papers.

In his view, the Bolsheviks also lived by foreign moral conventions. “These fanatics are not bound by the same code that normal men observe,” wrote Harper. An unwillingness to abide by agreements or treaties comprised a unique but dangerous component of their worldview. Harper told *Christian Science Monitor* readers that Trotsky agreed to cooperate with the Allies in late 1917 by not removing Russia from the war, yet, in March of the following year, signed the Brest-Litovsk Treaty, which did exactly that.<sup>315</sup> He reasoned that after signing the treaty, the Bolsheviks agreed to stop agitating for socialist revolution in Germany. Yet the party “gladly entered upon” the treaty with the intention of disobeying it afterward, which it soon did.<sup>316</sup> In reality, in the late fall of 1917, Trotsky had no intention of withdrawing Russia from the war, but subsequent intraparty debates that Trotsky lost and Lenin won ensured that Russia would exit the conflict, not that Trotsky deliberately lied and planned to renege on his word all along. Observing from his vantage point, Harper worried that the Reds would not honor any agreement that the United States signed with them. The party did not believe in “political democracy,” after all.

Harper also came to believe that Lenin and the Bolshevik leadership aimed to wage war directly on American capitalism and democracy. Quoting Lenin saying that he was “counting on the inevitability of the International revolution,” and Zinoviev saying that “the stage of verbal propaganda and agitation has been left behind . . . the time for decisive battles has arrived,” Harper wrote a report for the Department of State in which he insisted that these statements “show conclusively the direct attack made upon the Government of the United States by the

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<sup>315</sup> “No Cooperation with Bolsheviks: Such a Contingency Declared to be Impossible,” *Christian Science Monitor*, July 9, 1918, 6.

<sup>316</sup> “Memorandum on Certain Aspects of the Bolshevik Movement in Russia: Character of Bolshevik Rule, Economic Results of Bolshevik Control, Bolshevik Program of World Revolution,” October 27, 1919, Box 61, Folder 2, Harper Papers.

Bolsheviks.”<sup>317</sup> For these reasons, having “any dealing[s] with the Bolsheviks” was “utterly immoral, and dangerous” for the United States.<sup>318</sup>

In late 1919 the Department of State’s Russian Bureau assembled all of Harper’s official translation and analysis work to date and reprinted it as a government sponsored pamphlet. This “Memorandum on Certain Aspects of the Bolshevik Movement in Russia” was, in many ways, Harper’s crowning achievement in propagating his anti-Bolshevik interpretation of Russian politics within the Department of State and to the public. In this document, which contained extensive translations of Bolshevik newspapers and telegrams accompanied by Harper’s commentary, he took a similar stance to his portrayal of the Bolsheviks elsewhere, but amalgamated his disparate statements on the Reds into one succinct formulation:

“This study which has been made of the Bolshevik movement . . . shows conclusively that the purpose of the Bolsheviks is to subvert the existing principles of government and society the world over, including those countries in which democratic institutions are already established. They have built up a political machine which, by the concentration of power in the hands of a few and the ruthlessness of its methods, suggests the Asiatic despotism of the early Tsars. The results of their exercise of power . . . have been demoralization, civil war, and economic collapse.”<sup>319</sup>

Unlike Russia’s post-1905 and post-February systems of government, both of which Harper believed carried the promise of a liberal, democratic Russia open to free trade and participation in the Allied cause in WWI, the Bolsheviks ruled in a way entirely contradictory to these standards. In fact, they did so to such a degree that their methods more closely resembled the

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<sup>317</sup> Department of State Memorandum, May 1920, Box 7, Folder 24, Harper Papers.

<sup>318</sup> Harper to Poole, October 4, 1919, Box 7, Folder 3, Harper Papers.

<sup>319</sup> “Memorandum on Certain Aspects of the Bolshevik Movement in Russia: Character of Bolshevik Rule, Economic Results of Bolshevik Control, Bolshevik Program of World Revolution,” October 27, 1919, Box 61, Folder 2, Harper Papers. A 1920 letter from Harper to Bernard, the new secretary of the Russian-American Chamber of Commerce, shows that the Russian Bureau forwarded 50 copies of the publication to the organization for its members’ consumption. See Harper to Bernard, 1920, Box 8, Folder 1, Harper Papers.

centralized, autocratic state of the “early Tsars,” than they did any mile marker on Russia’s road to democracy.

## Conclusion

In 1921, Harper heaped praise on a report to the Department of State solely because of the “clear distinction” it drew between “the Russian Revolution and the Bolshevik coup d’etat.”<sup>320</sup> Still unwilling to view Russia through any lens except that colored by the February Revolution and the promises of liberalism and electoral democracy, Harper failed to see and, therefore, to depict, a portrait of Bolshevik power between 1918 and 1921 that accounted for all aspects of the party’s program and on-the-ground actions. Blinded to facets of the Russian situation that tended to show popular support for the Reds or logical reasoning behind their actions, yet keenly aware of the party’s defects, missteps, and hyperbolic claims of internal unity and international socialist revolution, Harper found in Russia a fertile field for his liberally oriented biases. His individual predilections, combined with limited access to representative sources of Russian political reality and his uncritical reading of them, gave Harper evidence to support this interpretation. Attempting to educate a populace that knew little about Bolshevism, he then transferred his subjectivities onto various strata of American society, including newspaper readers, businessmen, government bureaucrats, and members of Congress.

Nonetheless, he correctly realized that, by 1921, the Bolsheviks held power. With this in mind, he wrote that he was all for “hands off Russia.”<sup>321</sup> In other words, the United States, colored by his dogmatically anti-Bolshevik interpretation of post-1917 Russian politics, should back away from Russia, a country with which it was now totally incompatible, leaving it

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<sup>320</sup> Harper to Allen, January 25, 1921, Box 8, Folder 23, Harper Papers.

<sup>321</sup> Harper to Allen, January 27, 1921, Box 8, Folder 23, Harper Papers.



unrecognized. Though Harper's voice was far from the only one calling for nonrecognition of the Soviet regime, his was certainly one of the most informed and influential, not least because he could claim that it benefitted from years of traveling in and studying Russia, and because it reached the American populace and influential business and political figures at a crucial moment in U.S.-Russia relations. In the end, of course, the Wilson administration did not recognize Red Russia and neither did subsequent Republican governments, including that of Warren Harding, Calvin Coolidge, or Herbert Hoover. Only in 1933, in the wake of the Great Depression, did American businessmen successfully pressure Washington and the Roosevelt administration to establish diplomatic relations with Josef Stalin's Soviet Union.

## Conclusion

Torn over how to conclude my thesis, I met with my advisor, Donald J. Raleigh. His first question to me was “Well, Griffin, tell me whether or not you like Harper.” Without much forethought, I responded with a firm, certain, and visceral “no!” Citing the reasons for my answer, I argued that Harper misrepresented Russia and refused to view the country’s development through any lens other than his own. Projecting a democratic future for Russia in 1916 and the first half of 1917 based on a perspective that held democracy, capitalism, and free trade as normative, he became disillusioned when the Bolsheviks came to power in October. He trumpeted his claims to an expectant American public, encouraging Americans to understand Russia as he did. In short, I insisted that I disliked Harper primarily because I thought that his interpretation of Russia and its revolution revealed as much about him as it did about the country he claimed to know so well.

Yet I, like Harper, am a subjective observer. With coursework on Russian history, and access to a century of historical scholarship that has grappled with the same questions that Harper sought to answer, I understand Russia’s past differently than he did. Hindsight is always twenty-twenty. My own subjectivities, the unique, culturally-informed, constantly evolving values that account for my views of the past and present, have led me to understand the Russian Revolution as a justified series of events driven by popular opinion that followed a logical, legitimate political course. Therefore, my proclivities have also come to bear on my portrayal of Harper. Thus, in reflecting upon why I do not “like” Harper, I became aware of my own biases and remembered that, at the time, Harper’s claims would have seemed highly plausible to an audience that had far less access to knowledge about Russia than students today. The differences

in my perception and Harper's, then, are not surprising since each of us formulated them at radically different moments in history. Like my own, Harper's views can be historicized.

In this study, I set out to restore Harper to the historical record and to situate his understanding of Russia at a particular historical juncture—the Russian Revolution. I argue that he staked a powerful and widely respected interpretive claim to revolutionary Russia's political trajectory that adapted to changing circumstances in Russia and the United States, thus reflecting the environment in which he operated. In chapter 1, I contend that, in 1916, Harper contributed heavily to an ongoing conversation on economic opportunity in Russia, reassuring businessmen and investors that the country was business friendly and that it stood on the threshold of developing a democratic political and economic system that would make it more so. As America's Russian expert, Harper especially weighed in on business opportunities in the country, not least because, as American business thrived and searched for new markets, the prism of economic possibilities represented one of the primary ways in which Americans understood Russia. Well-connected in the business world, Harper had access to those for whom his pro-business views mattered. In chapter 2, I demonstrate that Harper saw the events of 1917 through a Cadet-oriented perspective that caused him to praise the February Revolution and condemn its October counterpart. Forced to explain to Washington, businessmen, and the public Russia's gradual disillusionment with the post-February system and its resulting tumult, he attempted to use his inflexible perspective, which could account only for democratic, capitalistic development, not social revolution, to do so. As an American with a university professorship and a privileged social position, he could hardly have taken an opposing view at the time, since doing so would have meant supporting a party and a revolution that withdrew Russia from WWI and the commitment it had made to its Allies, while condemning a revolution that did the opposite. In

chapter 3, I show that Harper gauged the Russian civil war and the early years of Bolshevik power by the February Revolution's standards. Constantly failing to meet his expectations, the Bolsheviks received a negative portrayal from him. Though already predisposed to react unfavorably to the Reds due to his previous vision for Russia, Harper took his information during this period mainly from wealthy Russians, Cadet party members, Bolshevik newspapers, and American observers. Yet, writing and speaking in an environment of rabid anticommunism, taking any view other than the one he did would have likened Harper to John Reed, Eugene V. Debs, or Albert Rhys Williams, all of whom remained on the political establishment's fringe and were the objects of authorities' antiradical, Red Scare driven, suspicions. Ultimately, I conclude, Harper's portrayal of Russia between 1916 and 1921 constructed a binary that, both in his mind and in public opinion, pitted the United States against Soviet Russia.

In short, I have attempted to place Harper's views in conversation with a cohort of Americans that comprised businessmen, the reading public, Washington politicians and bureaucrats, students, and scholars. In doing so, I have shown that, as a filter through which information on Russia passed before reaching the public, Harper molded public opinion on the country during its years of revolution. Adding to knowledge on how the Russian Revolution shaped world history, I have attempted to demonstrate that the event received a portrayal abroad that reflected the unique subjectivities of figures like Harper and the sources from which they took their information.

Even decades after the revolution, Harper's claims and the scholarship they nurtured had profound legacies. As an academic authority at a renowned university, he taught and advised a number of students, some of whom went on to prominent scholarly careers. For example, comments and correspondence between Harper and two of his students in particular suggest that

some of his advisees mirrored his understanding of Soviet Russia in their graduate work and, in turn, carried a broadly similar mindset forward into their scholarship in subsequent decades.

Harold Lasswell, a PhD student advised by Harper in the early 1920s, wrote a paper on a “world-wide conflict, this struggle between communism and capitalism.” He believed that the world faced “a choice between two systems . . . [Soviet] communism and capitalism.”<sup>322</sup> Vernon Van Dyke, another of Harper’s advisees, wrote a master’s thesis on Soviet propaganda about America in 1934. In it, he argued that, even though governments had a “responsibility . . . to refrain from spreading propaganda hostile to foreign governments,” the Soviet Union continued to do so, leveling its sights on Washington.<sup>323</sup> Indeed, neither paper received any criticism from Harper, indicating that he approved of the papers’ claims, thereby laying the foundation of legitimacy for Lasswell’s and Van Dyke’s interpretations.<sup>324</sup>

Both students went on to become well known academics: Lasswell was appointed professor of law at Yale University and president of the American Political Science Association before his death in 1978, and Van Dyke taught international relations at the University of Manchester, DePauw University, the University of Iowa, Yale University, Reed College, and the University of California at Berkeley until his death in 1998. Because Harper lent intellectual authority to both scholars’ claims early on, their ideas persisted, allowing them to resurface in different political contexts. For example, in his now classic work on political psychology, *Propaganda Techniques in World War I*, Lasswell portrayed the Reds negatively by referring to

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<sup>322</sup> Harold D. Lasswell, “Communism versus Capitalism: a World Survey of Discontent,” Box 55, Folder 13, Harper Papers.

<sup>323</sup> Vernon Van Dyke, “Brief Resume of a dissertation entitled: The responsibility of governments to prevent persons, groups, and organizations under their jurisdiction from engaging in propaganda hostile to foreign governments, as demonstrated by the attitudes of Soviet Russia and the United States since 1917,” 1934, Box 55, Folder 13, Harper Papers.

<sup>324</sup> Harper made two minor grammatical corrections to Lasswell’s work, and suggested one grammatical revision and asked for clarification on two minor points in Van Dyke’s thesis.

them as the “ruthless Bolsheviks.” Like countless others, Lasswell understood the Bolsheviks as a foil to democratic America and argued that their lack of patriotism, when compared to American wartime camaraderie, fell short, and led to Russia’s “defection” from its commitment to the Allies during WWI. Van Dyke also continued to present relations between the United States and the Soviet Union as inherently at odds. In 1970, he insisted that Moscow controlled the content of mass media to maintain its power, unlike the United States, which allowed its public free flow of information necessary to promote the democratic process.<sup>325</sup> Elsewhere he wrote that the Bolshevik party promised democracy only “in order to destroy democratic, liberal values” and replaced them with “an authoritarian, totalitarian regime” with which the United States could not cooperate.<sup>326</sup>

Although Lasswell’s and Van Dyke’s claims were similar to numerous others articulated at the same time, Harper had provided the implicit intellectual approval necessary to allow them to do so and, therefore, to engage in what political scientist Matthew Hirshberg calls “perpetuating patriotic perceptions,” the practice of shaping public opinion and discourse during the Cold War, an imagined ideological battle between capitalism and communism, in a way that entrenched differences, rather than similarities, between the two superpowers.<sup>327</sup>

Harper’s voice spread far beyond the academy, reaching Washington bureaucrats, business professionals, and the American populace at large. Though few records remain of how

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<sup>325</sup> Vernon Van Dyke, *Human Rights, the United States, and World Community* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970), 13-15. Van Dyke’s other works include *International Politics* (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1957); *Political Science: A Philosophical Analysis* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1960); *Pride and Power: The Rationale of the Space Program* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1964); *Human Rights, Ethnicity, and Discrimination* (London: Greenwood Press, 1985); *Equality and Public Policy* (Chicago: Nelson-Hall, 1990).

<sup>326</sup> Vernon Van Dyke, *Ideology and Political Choice: The Search for Freedom, Justice, and Virtue* (Chatham: Chatham House Publishers, 1995), 87.

<sup>327</sup> Matthew S. Hirshberg, *Perpetuating Patriotic Perceptions: The Cognitive Functions of the Cold War* (Westport: Praeger, 1993).

the thousands of Americans who heard Harper's talks, read his writings, or spoke to him about a business deal in Russia received them, the Cold War turned on a logic remarkably similar to Harper's: antagonism between two countries with incompatible political systems. Perpetuated in large part by public opinion, it represented the result of optimistic, democratic expectations for Russia that failed to align with the country's course during the six decades following the October Revolution.<sup>328</sup> Herein lies one of Harper's unintentional, yet defining, contributions to American conceptions of Soviet Russia, a world superpower that would dominate the international political scene until its demise in 1991. Though Harper's was not the only voice that stressed this interpretation, it was one of the most influential and, therefore, held considerable sway over the national psyche.

Harper's experience, then, illuminates several important themes in the realm of public opinion and academia. Public intellectuals, those who are both scholars and popular commentators, help to define the way in which a society understands current intellectual and political issues. Therefore, their biases take on an especially important role. In Harper's case, classifying his interpretation of Russia as "right" or "wrong" underestimates its complexity. After all, some agreed with it, both at the time and today.<sup>329</sup> The critical question here is: what if it *was* wrong? Indeed, as experience has shown, figures such as Zbigniew Brzezinski, the Carter Administration's National Security Advisor, and Richard Pipes, a Harvard historian and foreign policy advisor to Ronald Reagan, both of whom held starkly anti-Soviet views, can shape the

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<sup>328</sup> On public opinion as a driving force of the Cold War, see Hirshberg, *Perpetuating Patriotic Perceptions*.

<sup>329</sup> For an example of a scholar whose work, in a broad sense, agrees with Harper's basic view, see Richard Pipes. His most notable works on revolutionary and Soviet Russia include *U.S.-Soviet Relations in the Era of Détente: A Tragedy of Errors* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1981); *Russian Under the Bolshevik Regime* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1994); *A Concise History of the Russian Revolution* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1995); *Three "Whys" of the Russian Revolution* (New York: Vintage Books, 1997); *The Russian Revolution, 1899-1919* (London: Harvill Press, 1997); *Communism: A History* (New York: Modern Library, 2001).

course of international relations. Building influence within the White House, both convinced Washington to take a noncompromising stance toward the Soviet Union.<sup>330</sup> Conversely, Henry Kissinger, a Harvard academic of a different worldview and the Secretary of State in the Nixon and Ford administrations, bolstered the policy of *détente*, a relaxation of tensions between the United States and the Soviet Union in the early 1970s, due to his intellectual clout.<sup>331</sup>

Thus, accounting for public intellectuals' political predilections remains of the utmost importance. After all, just like Harper, shapers of public opinion today articulate their thoughts in a particular cultural and political environment that both constrains and enables their understandings. Accounting for these positionalities holds special relevance in the twenty-first century, in which we are bombarded by a constant flow of instant information, readily available to anyone with access to a television, computer, or smartphone.

Finally, Harper's experience helps to demarcate the limits of knowing more generally. Indeed, his take on Russia stemmed in large part from his familiarity with Russians who were like him and not the unscrubbed masses. Those seeking to understand other societies through similar means face a temptation to stake a claim to broader knowledge that might overstate their case. Therefore, understanding one's own subjectivities and those of one's sources remains paramount in tempering avowals to indisputable knowledge.

Over the last decade, Russia has witnessed the rise of Putinism, and commentators now speak of a "new Cold War" that is said to stem from tensions between Russia and the West over Russia's 2014 annexation of Crimea and military activity in eastern Ukraine. One can only hope that, as the country continues to be the subject of journalists', academics', and public

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<sup>330</sup> Engerman, *Know Your Enemy*, 5.

<sup>331</sup> Jeremi Suri, *Henry Kissinger and the American Century* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), 225-26.



intellectuals' interests, they will attempt to understand and observe, not imagine, Russia, realizing that their claims can have enduring ramifications.<sup>332</sup>

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<sup>332</sup> For a sampling of the many examples of tensions between Russia and the West being labeled a “new Cold War,” see Pavel Koshkin, “What a New Cold War between Russia and the US Means for the World,” *Russia Direct*, April 25, 2014: <http://www.russia-direct.org/qa/what-new-cold-war-between-russia-and-us-means-world>; Edward Lucas, *The New Cold War: Putin's Russia and the Threat to the West* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2014); Stephen F. Cohen, “Another Fateful Turning Point in the New Cold War,” *The Nation*, February 24, 2016: <http://www.thenation.com/article/another-fateful-turning-point-in-the-new-cold-war/>; “Ukraine, Russia, and a New Cold War,” *Al Jazeera*, February 26, 2016: <http://www.aljazeera.com/programmes/upfront/2016/02/ukraine-russia-cold-war-160226142128006.html>.

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*Chicago Tribune*  
*Christian Science Monitor*  
*Evening Herald*  
*Grand Forks Herald*  
*International Marine Engineering*  
*Lawrence Journal-World*  
*Nashville Tennessean and the Nashville American*  
*New York Call*  
*New York Sun*  
*New York Tribune*  
*Ocala Evening Star*  
*Ogden Standard*  
*Russia Direct*  
*Seattle Star*  
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## Appendix A



Samuel Northrup Harper (1882-1943), circa mid-1930s.  
Source: University of Chicago Photographic Archive, Series I, Image apf1-02469.

## Appendix B

### American Exports to Russia, 1915-1921

	1915	1916	1917	1918	1919	1920	1921
European Russia	\$125,794,954	\$309,806,581	\$315,250,020	\$8,902,449	\$30,259,745	\$15,446,832	\$14,187,850
Asian Russia	\$44,198,950	\$160,701,673	\$109,260,439	\$8,433,069	\$52,176,440	\$13,280,886	\$1,113,313
Total	\$169,993,904	\$470,508,254	\$424,510,459	\$17,335,518	\$82,436,185	\$28,727,718	\$15,301,613

For 1915 data, see *Foreign Commerce and Navigation of the United States for the Calendar Year 1919*, Department of Commerce, Bureau of Foreign and Domestic Commerce (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1920), xii-xiii. For 1916 data, see *Foreign Commerce and Navigation of the United States for the Calendar Year 1920*, Department of Commerce, Bureau of Foreign and Domestic Commerce (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1920), x-xi. For 1917-21 data, see *Foreign Commerce and Navigation of the United States for the Calendar Year 1921*, Department of Commerce, Bureau of Foreign and Domestic Commerce (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1922), x-xi.



## Appendix C



Harper's photograph of rural Russia from a trip, probably taken around 1913. Note the contrast between the traditional Russian Orthodox Church, the peasant woman watering the cow in the stream, and the power lines in the foreground and distant background.

Source: University of Chicago Photographic Archive, Series I, Image apf1-02468.

## Appendix D



Harper's photograph of a Russian peasant, circa 1915.  
Source: Samuel N. Harper Russian Pamphlet Collection, Special Collections Rare Book Archive,  
University of Chicago.

## Appendix E



"The International Squirrel Cage," June 29, 1918.  
Source: Box 7, J.N. "Ding" Darling Papers, University of Iowa Special Collections and University Archives. Reproduced with permission.

## Appendix F



Petr Prokof'evich Batolin (right), circa 1914, Moscow.  
Source: *Delovaya elita rossii*, *Rossiyskaya Portretnaya Galereya*, <http://all-photo.ru/portret/index.ru.html?kk=202653c2eb&filter=&glr=5x5&go=Ok>.