

The Progressive Diplomats of the “New Era”:  
Private Citizens in American-Russian Relations, 1917-1921

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## Contents

Introduction.....	4
Chapter 1: The American Red Cross in Russia, at the Zenith of Progressivism.....	14
Chapter 2: International Progressive Humanitarianism in the “New Era” .....	34
Conclusion.....	52
Bibliography.....	54

## Introduction

“American progressivism reached its zenith in the early and mid-teens. Progressive values seemed to sweep all others before them. Never were selfishness, hedonism, and materialism so universally denigrated. Never were selflessness, sacrifice, service, altruism, brotherly love, and devotion to the public interest more widely celebrated. The spirit of human betterment was a palpable presence in the land.” – David B. Danbom, historian<sup>1</sup>

The traditional narrative of interwar isolationism holds that in the years following the First World War the United States turned inward to disentangle itself from the problems of Europe and the world.<sup>2</sup> The “isolationist impulse” which found its roots in disillusionment with Wilsonian internationalism, argued historian Selig Adler, turned America in onto itself, encouraging a Republican foreign policy which shunned the internationalist and Progressive aims of Wilsonianism and the commitments which they required.<sup>3</sup> Yet even as the U.S. Senate rejected the Treaty of Versailles and its plans for postwar order and Americans replaced President Wilson with a profoundly less internationalist successor, institutions and individuals within the United States sought to maintain and even expand war-time and prewar connections to foreign peoples by means of non-governmental organizations and actions. Indeed, many maintained lofty visions of a more interconnected world but hoped “that economic, rather than political, forces would be the key to maintain peace and stability in the postwar world.”<sup>4</sup> Among these internationally minded Americans were those who served on the American Red Cross Mission to Russia in 1917 and continued their work on behalf of the Russian people even after

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<sup>1</sup> David B. Danbom, *“The World of Hope”: Progressives and the Struggle for an Ethical Public Life* (Philadelphia: Temple U.P., 1987): 150.

<sup>2</sup> For important historical arguments which have defined American diplomacy in the 1920s as isolationist, see: Selig Adler, *The Isolationist Impulse: Its Twentieth-Century Reaction* (New York: Abelard-Schuman, 1957); Foster Rhea Dulles, *America’s Rise to World Power: 1898-1954* (New York: Harper, 1955).

<sup>3</sup> Adler, *The Isolationist Impulse*.

<sup>4</sup> John M. Carrol, “American Diplomacy in the 1920s,” *Modern American Diplomacy*, edited by John M. Carrol and George C. Herring (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources, 1986): 54.

the end of the Provisional Government that they had tried to support and the war that they had aimed to win.<sup>5</sup>

This thesis focuses on the activities of two prominent New York City lawyers, Allen Wardwell and Thomas D. Thacher, from their Red Cross Mission to their postwar efforts to establish commercial ties between the United States and the nascent Soviet regime.<sup>6</sup> These subjects demonstrate how private citizens answered the Progressive call for collective responsibility by pursuing the public good where the U.S. government did not. They influenced the terms of U.S. foreign relations without acting directly as government agents.<sup>7</sup>

In considering the significance of such figures in American public life and in the American-Russian relationship, this thesis draws on and aims to contribute to scholarly literature on one of the most important and troublesome geopolitical relationships of the twentieth century.<sup>8</sup> It also brings the Russian element into a literature of postwar U.S. diplomacy dominated by discussion of the United States and Western Europe.<sup>9</sup> The subjects of this case study illustrate what some scholars have already pointed to: the function of private citizens in the

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<sup>5</sup> Hereafter the “American Red Cross” will also be referred to as the “Red Cross” and “A.R.C.”

<sup>6</sup> The collections of personal papers herein considered are located in Columbia University’s Rare Books and Manuscripts Library. They are a particularly interesting source considering that they have yet to be mined to their full potential by historians. Several scholars cited in this thesis, most notably Saul and Polk, have made use of the papers, but they do so primarily as sources for tangentially relevant information.

<sup>7</sup> On Progressive “collective responsibility,” see Olivier Zunz, *Philanthropy in America: A History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton U.P., 2012): 45.

<sup>8</sup> Particularly relevant literature on U.S.-Russian relations includes: David S. Foglesong, *America’s Secret War Against Bolshevism: US Intervention in the Russian Civil War, 1917-1920* (Chapel Hill, NC: U. of North Carolina Press, 1995); Norman E. Saul, *War and Revolution: The United States and Russia, 1914-1921* (Lawrence, KS: U.P. of Kansas, 2001); David W. McFadden, *Alternative Paths: Soviets and Americans, 1917-1920* (New York: Oxford U.P., 1993); George F. Kennan, *Soviet-American Relations, 1917-1920*, vol. 1, *Russia Leaves the War* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton U.P., 1956); Leo J. Bacino, *Reconstructing Russia: US Policy in Revolutionary Russia, 1917-1922* (Kent, OH: Kent State U.P., 1999).

<sup>9</sup> Relevant literature on U.S. foreign policy during the period includes: Adler, *The Isolationist Impulse*; Ronald E. Powalski, *Toward an Entangling Alliance: American Isolationism, Internationalism, and Europe, 1901-1950* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1991); Foster Rhea Dulles, *America’s Rise to World Power: 1898-1954* (New York: Harper, 1955); Carl P. Parrini, *Heir to Empire: United States Economic Diplomacy, 1916-1923* (Pittsburgh: U. of Pittsburgh Press, 1969); John Milton Cooper, Jr., *The Vanity of Power: American Isolationism and the First World War 1914-1917* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing Corp., 1969); Frank Costigliola, *Awkward Dominion: American Political, Economic, and Cultural Relations with Europe, 1919-1933* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell U.P., 1984).

pursuance of foreign policy aims during the immediate postwar era, especially after the Senate's rejection of the Treaty of Versailles. By looking at this established framework in the context of the American-Russian relationship from the U.S. declaration of war in 1917 to the end of wartime Communism and the initiation of the New Economic Policy in 1921, this study shows that this phenomenon was of particular importance in a theater of the world and a realm of U.S. diplomacy which lacked U.S. diplomatic staff.

This paper is inspired by Michael Hogan's thesis that in the postwar era the U.S. government and business community collectively decided to create "a new economic order, organized around self-regulating economic groups and led by responsible private officials supposedly committed to public goals" – a new order which would retain "such old virtues as voluntarism, individualism, and equal economic opportunity."<sup>10</sup> Hogan maintained that this collaboration between the government and private commercial interests, structured on essentially Progressive principles, played an important role in the ordering of the domestic economy and of U.S.-European trade relations. Other scholars have built on Hogan's initial work, adding work beyond the context of Anglo-American relations in the 1920s.<sup>11</sup> Hogan's focus on regulation and international banking deals left no room for the humanitarian element addressed in this thesis, but others have applied the notion of the private-public alliance to realms of philanthropy. Olivier Zunz, for example, has drawn attention to the cooperation between the U.S. government and private American philanthropy in pursuing the public good at home.<sup>12</sup> Likewise, historians such as Volker R. Berghahn have demonstrated that private organizations have exercised power

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<sup>10</sup> Michael J. Hogan, *Informal Entente: The Private Structure of Cooperation in Anglo-American Economic Diplomacy, 1918-1928* (Columbia, MO: U. of Missouri Press, 1977): 3.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Joan Hoff-Wilson, *American Business and Foreign Policy, 1920-1933* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1973).

<sup>12</sup> Olivier Zunz, *Philanthropy in America*.

in the U.S. diplomatic process.<sup>13</sup> Progressivism's collective responsibility manifested itself in the realm of informal economic diplomacy (as Hogan and others have argued), in the realm of domestic philanthropy (as Zunz has argued), as well as in the realm of international humanitarianism.

This point that private entities could cooperate in pursuance of foreign policy change is demonstrated well by an episode in the spring of 1920. On Friday, April 9, 1920, seventeen of New York's most prominent lawyers and industrial executives convened at the Bankers' Club for an informal luncheon to discuss American-Russian trade relations.<sup>14</sup> The United States, like the rest of the West, had severed diplomatic and economic ties to Russia soon after the Bolshevik Revolution and the separate peace at Brest-Litovsk.<sup>15</sup> By 1920, Leninist Russia – which was still in the throes of civil war – was diplomatically and economically isolated from its tsarist predecessor's major trade partners, thanks in large part to a mutual contempt between Lenin's government and the West. Come the spring of that year, though, some within both camps stood ready to relax their ideological aversions to intercourse for the purpose of mutually beneficial trade. The Western powers were eager to open a massive and potentially lucrative market to their industrial interests, and Lenin's "War Communism" prevented a country devastated by the

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<sup>13</sup> Volker R. Berghahn, "Philanthropy and Diplomacy in the 'American Century,'" *Diplomatic History* 23, no. 3 (Summer 1999): 393–419. Historians of the American Red Cross have argued that the organization strongly influenced U.S. foreign policy. This will be discussed in Chapter I.

<sup>14</sup> Meeting minutes, 10 April 1920, Box 5, "Correspondence on Russia – Feb.- March 1920," Allen Wardwell Papers, Bakhmeteff Archive, Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Columbia University (hereafter cited as Wardwell Papers).

<sup>15</sup> Technically, the United States Congress declared in 1911 that Russia's oppression of its subjects, especially the Jews, violated the terms of the then operating commercial treaty, terminating the agreement. Though diplomatically significant, the termination of the treaty did not result in the termination of trade. Indeed, the First World War increased American exports to Russia even in absence of the agreement. For more on this point, see: Kennan, *Russia Leaves the War*, 32-34. For the purpose of this thesis, then, the termination of trade following the Bolshevik seizure of power and the U.S. embargo of Bolshevik-controlled Russia constituted the cessation of trade between the United States and the Russian state.

Great War, revolution, and civil from regaining its productive capabilities.<sup>16</sup> The men gathered at the Bankers' Club luncheon assembled to discuss their part in what they perceived to be a changing geopolitical system. As European nations began "contemplating arrangements to open trade with Russia either with or without recognition of the Soviet Government" and as certain officials in Washington began considering the same, the assembled élites of New York capital and industry gleefully anticipated their role in the process.<sup>17</sup> A League of Nations commission "was about to proceed to Russia to investigate the possibility of trade relations," but the United States, having opted to not join the League, would not be represented.<sup>18</sup> Not wanting to be excluded from the potential opportunity, the organizers of the April 9 meeting were eager to form their own private commission, funded by American commercial interests, to pursue a liberalization of trade with Russia. Chief among the luncheon's organizers was Allen Wardwell.

Wardwell fit nicely into the list of prominent New Yorkers at the meeting, but his experiences in the years prior to the conference make his name stand out on the page. Born in 1873 into the upper crust of New York life, he attended Harvard and Yale and went on to become a leading expert in banking law, lending his name to his firm. By the outbreak of the First World War, Wardwell was far too old for military service. Still, in the summer of 1917, Mr. Allen Wardwell became Major Wardwell – not of the U.S. Army but of the American Red Cross. For the next year, Wardwell represented American interests in Russia and became an expert, at least in the eyes of his peers, on the foreign land.<sup>19</sup> He was not, then, just another business expert lending his expertise to the cause of bettering the world or his country's position in it. His

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<sup>16</sup> This thesis focuses primarily on American interests in the relationship. For more detailed discussion of the transformation of Soviet foreign relations, especially as they pertain to this shift beginning in 1920 which, in part, led to the NEP and Russian acceptance of foreign capital, see: Jon Jacobson, *When the Soviet Union Entered World Politics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994): 18-22, 32-50.

<sup>17</sup> Meeting minutes, 10 April 1920, Box 5, "Correspondence on Russia – Feb.- March 1920," Wardwell Papers.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Wardwell's expertise will be examined further in Chapter 2.

presence at the Bankers' Club demonstrates that he is one such individual who had a particular connection to the Russian nation and interest in the Russian-American relationship that endured for many years.

Also involved in the postwar discussions on Russia was future U.S. Solicitor General Thomas D. Thacher. He too was a Manhattan lawyer-turned-humanitarian and an advocate for friendly relations between the Russian and American peoples. Like Wardwell, he was born into a well-off family. He attended Yale College and then Yale Law School before dropping out, being admitted to the bar, and joining his father's law firm – which still bears the family name – in 1906. In 1917, Thacher, too, was granted the title of Major. He was designated as the Mission's secretary and set sail for Russia with the rest of the rest of the group.<sup>20</sup>

That Thacher and Wardwell were lawyers is particularly important when considering their roles in this system of civilian control of foreign policy. For Hogan, the main players in the informal diplomacy of the period were businessmen, especially financiers and those with interests in the petroleum industry. The businessmen worked with diplomats and legislators. Likewise, Zunz's exploration of twentieth-century American philanthropy and its relationship with U.S. government and law focuses on the ties which bound humanitarians, academics, industrialists, financiers, and politicians, but not lawyers. Where lawyers are mentioned, they are often mentioned as humanitarians or legislators or representatives of big business, not as lawyers *per se*. While Thacher and Wardwell would not have considered themselves lawyers to the exclusion of other identities, both of them spent the large majority of their careers in law, and both of them are best remembered outside of historical scholarship for their contributions to the legal field and their namesake law firms.

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<sup>20</sup> Thacher was referred to as "Major" less commonly than Wardwell was. This is perhaps because Wardwell eventually became the head of the Russian Mission (after the departure of Thompson and Robins) and was therefore addressed as a superior officer more frequently.

Most of the other members of the Mission to Russia were more traditional actors. Chief among them were mining and finance mogul William Boyce Thompson, a man whose knack for creating profitable businesses made him an ideal executive in the philanthropic setting too, and “social economist” Raymond Robins, a political activist and intellectual whose crusading spirit matched that of many stereotypically Progressive humanitarians.<sup>21</sup> These men joined dozens of other American civilians with new military titles and uniforms and with professional or academic expertise that would allow them to aid one of America’s new, wartime allies.<sup>22</sup> Their Mission to Russia was one component of the American Red Cross’s quasi-governmental program to bring aid and comfort to Allied troops and civilians across the world for the stated purpose of furthering the Allied war aims. “In each place, the endeavor was to do the things that were most needed and thereby to strengthen the Allied nation where it was weakest – always, of course, confining activities to the field that the Red Cross could properly undertake.”<sup>23</sup> The program was completely aligned with the U.S. government’s policies and aimed to support military operations by providing hospitals, ambulances, and medical supplies to Allied forces. In Russia, “a commission of specialists” was tasked with “assisting” the country by evaluating and remedying the problems that further threatened the stability of the important Allied power.<sup>24</sup> Stability ensured, in their logic, that Russia would stay in the war. Allen Wardwell did not wear his uniform simply for show. He was on a mission of military importance, and, though technically a civilian not engaged in official governmental work, he represented the United States government.

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<sup>21</sup> For biographies of Thompson and Robinson, respectively, see: Hermann Hagedorn, *The Magnate: William Boyce Thompson and his Time, 1869-1930* (New York: Reynal & Hitchcock, 1935); Neil V. Salzman, *Reform and Revolution: The Life and Times of Raymond Robins* (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 1991).

<sup>22</sup> Box 4, “Red Cross Mission – Personnel,” Wardwell Papers.

<sup>23</sup> *Work of the American Red Cross*, 65.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 82.

While matters of state were certainly at the forefront of the Mission and the minds' of its participants, undergirding the entire operation was a humanitarian impulse. The Red Cross itself – though brought into the fold of the American political-military apparatus come the time of U.S. intervention in the First World War – was founded as a humanitarian organization. And while the members of the Russian Mission enthusiastically embraced the military aims of their work, they did so with the genuine intent to help the Russian people, not just their own nation's war effort.

The first section of this thesis focuses on the purposes of the American Red Cross Mission to Russia in 1917, looking especially at the papers of Allen Wardwell and Thomas D. Thacher. It further explores the relationship between the Red Cross agents and the United States government, concluding – in line with the aforementioned scholarship – that these private individuals often acted as representatives of the U.S. government in a sphere not readily accessible to U.S. diplomatic staff. As *de facto* agents of the state, they pursued victory in the First World War. But as individuals not actually employed by the state, they did so in a manner that was uniquely humanitarian and Progressive in spirit. This middle ground between being agents of the state and independent humanitarians and patriots can help historians understand the roles played by individuals in later efforts to re-establish trade between the United States and Russia. This aspect is unique to the Russian iteration of the A.R.C.'s wartime work, for in no place did private citizens acting under the aegis of the Red Cross accept so much quasi-governmental responsibility.

American Red Cross members who were deployed to Western Europe were met by an impressive and internationally coordinated philanthropic apparatus that existed side-by-side with and under the aegis of military and diplomatic ones. Wardwell, Thacher, and their peers, on the other hand, found relatively little help. To be sure, they did not act in a vacuum. Other American

humanitarian organizations, most notably the Y.M.C.A., operated in Revolutionary Russia, as did the Russian Red Cross, which helped the American delegation navigate their way through the country and through social circles.<sup>25,26</sup> But Russia was a massive country with few American diplomatic personnel. This situation became more extreme – and more unique in the context of the A.R.C.’s broader goals – when the Bolshevik Revolution cast doubt on the ability of the American Embassy to fulfill its diplomatic duties.

The remainder of the thesis follows the two lawyers into their post-war activities regarding Russia. Their activities and thoughts, as recorded in their collected papers, demonstrate a consistent desire to aid the Russian people in times of famine and turmoil through aide and trade. The consideration of both wartime and interwar sources will demonstrate how a compassionate impulse in the work of American elite humanitarians remained constant even as other rationales for such work changed with evolving international politics. This compassion for a foreign people was not a secondary cause for action that remained even as primary causes for action shift but rather a primary cause itself that was manipulated and couched in terminology suiting different historical circumstances. By playing to America’s political, military and economic self-interest, Wardwell, Thacher, and others like them attempted to gain the support of America’s élites for their humanitarian schemes. And by doing so in a realm of foreign relations that was relatively untouched by the U.S. government given the lack of diplomatic ties, these individuals blurred the lines between diplomat, industrialist, and philanthropist. The final section of this paper – which discusses their work on liberalizing trade relations between the United

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<sup>25</sup> The Y.M.C.A.’s work in Russia during the period at hand was substantial but will not be considered except in passing in this thesis. For more on the Y.M.C.A., especially as it interacted with the A.R.C. Mission to Russia, see: Jennifer Ann Polk, “Constructive Efforts: The American Red Cross and YMCA in Revolutionary and Civil War Russia, 1917-24” (PhD diss., University of Toronto, 2012).

<sup>26</sup> For the Russian Red Cross’s aid to the American mission in the late summer and fall of 1917, see: Box 2, “Red Cross Mission – Copies of Letters Sent Home,” Wardwell Papers. There are multiple correspondences detailing the happenings of the trip, including cooperation between the Red Cross organizations.

States and Russia prior to Lenin's announcement of the New Economic Policy (NEP) in the spring of 1921 – will highlight these points and draw comparisons to more well-known instances of using commercial and economic means to benefit foreign populations in need.

## Chapter 1: The Red Cross in Russia, at the Zenith of Progressivism

“...the progressives threw themselves into the war effort with characteristic fervor. Many went to Europe. Women and men too old or too proud to fight donned Red Cross and YMCA uniforms and offered their services.” – David B. Danbom, historian<sup>27</sup>

“In August, 1917, the Red Cross sent a commission of specialists to Russia for the purpose of assisting this country in the same way it was helping other Allied nations. However, because of the disorganized state of the country, it was impossible to carry out the full original plan.” – *The Work of the American Red Cross*<sup>28</sup>

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Scribbling in his diary while in Russia, Frederick Lee Barnum, an American doctor working to establish hospitals and treat ill Russian civilians asked: “If the Red Cross is a neutral [organization]...why do they give aid to the Omsk [government] and not to the Bolsheviks? If they are in this country to help the poor, why are they afraid of the Bolsheviks...?”<sup>29</sup> The answer is, of course, that the American Red Cross was not a truly neutral organization. Nor was its Russian Mission a purely humanitarian one. No, it did not officially take sides in the Russian Civil War.<sup>30</sup> And, yes, its mission by the time the Bolsheviks began consolidating power was largely to aid the Russian people in the face of famine, destitution, and disease across the war-torn country. But when the Mission first set sail for Russia in the summer of 1917, its purpose was that of assistance to an Allied nation still in the throes of the First World War.

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<sup>27</sup> David B. Danbom, *“The World of Hope”: Progressives and the Struggle for an Ethical Public Life* (Philadelphia: Temple U.P., 1987): 203.

<sup>28</sup> *The Work of the American Red Cross during the War: A Statement of Finances and Accomplishments for the Period July 1, 1917 to February 28, 1919* (Washington, D.C.: American Red Cross, 1919): 82.

<sup>29</sup> Diary, vol. 1, 1918, Frederick Lee Barnum Papers, Bakhmeteff Archive, Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Columbia University (hereafter cited as Barnum Papers). The Omsk government to which the author, Frederick Lee Barnum, refers is the anti-Bolshevik government established in Omsk, Russia, during the Russian Civil War.

<sup>30</sup> This is a point that Wardwell emphasized in a letter to Chicherin. He pledged to condemn atrocities committed by all parties. In a response, Chicherin acknowledged that the A.R.C. was not a political organization. On these points, see: Wardwell to Chicherin, 11 September 1918, and Chicherin to Wardwell, n.d., Box 1, Wardwell Papers. Though this thesis does not aim to answer the question of Red Cross neutrality in the Civil War, it is clear that officials of the A.R.C. were at times highly critical of the Bolsheviks but that they also worked with the Leninist regime in an effort to keep humanitarian operations open.

*The American Red Cross and the Progressive Spirit*

The American Red Cross was transformed by the mobilization of national resources – private and public – which followed the U.S. declaration of war in the in spring of 1917. Scholars of the Red Cross such as Julia F. Irwin, John F. Hutchinson, and Marion Moser Jones have emphasized the centrality of the First World War to the growth of the American Red Cross, citing increased government and popular support for the organization because of the war.<sup>31</sup> Taken together, the historians’ arguments that the war affected the “deliberate militarization of charity” in national Red Cross societies across the globe and that it mobilized civilian volunteers *en masse* demonstrate that there was transnational tendency to channel wartime patriotism toward the elevation of Red Cross societies from humanitarian associations into para-state organizations.<sup>32,33</sup> Irwin’s monograph presupposes this elevation of the A.R.C. from a charitable society at the whim of geopolitics to an organization capable of acting on and influencing the world political stage, stating that “it was the Great War era that marked [the Red Cross’s] most conspicuous and considerable involvement” in U.S. foreign affairs.<sup>34</sup> The book’s thorough research and use of multiple American archives makes it an important foundation for the present historian’s consideration of the Red Cross in the war and immediate-post-war period. But for all of her research, Irwin includes relatively little discussion of the Russian Mission, preferring to focus on the more expansive projects in France and Belgium as well as developments in

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<sup>31</sup> Julia F. Irwin, *Making the World Safe: The American Red Cross and a Nation’s Humanitarian Awakening* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2013); John F. Hutchinson, *Champions of Charity: War and the Rise of the Red Cross* (West View Press, 1996); Marion Moser Jones, *The American Red Cross: from Clara Burton to the New Deal* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins U.P., 2012).

<sup>32</sup> Hutchinson, *Champions of Charity*, 350; Jones, *The American Red Cross*, 160, 163-164. Note that both are focused on the home front and the actions of Clara Barton, Mabel Boardman, and other organizers in the United States. Neither emphasize the roles of the businessmen and lawyers who shipped off Russia in the summer of 1917.

<sup>33</sup> Tammy M. Proctor, *Civilians in a World at War, 1914-1918* (New York: NYU Press, 2010), 169.

<sup>34</sup> Irwin, *Making the World Safe*, 5.

Washington which influenced the dispatch of foreign aid. Irwin's focus on the Western and home fronts suits her project well, but it leaves a gap to be filled.

She and her colleagues rightly do not dwell on the likes of Wardwell, Thacher, Thompson and Robins.<sup>35</sup> These men did not drastically change the American Red Cross. Their story is interesting not insofar as it shaped the Red Cross or even the world of charity but, rather, insofar as it demonstrates the functions private citizens in roles of national importance.<sup>36</sup> The phenomena which Irwin studies do provide instructive corollaries to the subject at hand, though. Notably, she opens her book with the story of Edward T. Devine, "one of the leading American social economists and a noted public intellectual" who "saw little choice but to put his professional commitments on hold" for the sake of the war.<sup>37</sup> Mr. Devine was not dissimilar to the characters of this paper's narrative. As a member of the American social elite, Devine committed himself to the cause of the United States and the Entente by lending his expertise and not his body. According to Irwin, "he understood [humanitarian assistance] as a vital complement to the armed intervention" and a necessary component of the nation's war effort.<sup>38</sup> To borrow historian David B. Danbom's formulation, Devine was one of "the progressives [who] threw themselves into the war effort with characteristic fervor," one of the "[m]any [who] went to Europe," offering his services in lieu of his body.<sup>39</sup>

His decision came at a time of increased emphasis on civic duty, on a wave of republican devotion which rode the ideological coattails of Progressivism. Theodore Roosevelt and

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<sup>35</sup> N.B. Foster Rhea Dulles's history of the A.R.C. also pays very little attention to the Russian Mission, devoting just a page to the matter. See: Foster Rhea Dulles, *The American Red Cross: A History* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1950), 190.

<sup>36</sup> George F. Kennan's two volumes on U.S.-Russian diplomatic relations during the period at hand include a great deal of discussion of the cast of characters herein considered, especially Robins and Thompson, the most conspicuously political of all the Red Cross Mission members. See: Kennan, *Russia Leaves the War*; Kennan, *Soviet-American Relations, 1917-1920*, vol. 2, *The Decision to Intervene* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton U.P., 1958).

<sup>37</sup> Irwin, *Making the World Safe*, 1.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

<sup>39</sup> Danbom, "The World of Hope", 203.

Progressive reformers had championed such “collective responsibility.”<sup>40</sup> It is in that understanding of collective responsibility that historian Richard Hofstadter identified a Progressive “pressure for civic participation” and “call for sacrifice.”<sup>41</sup> Though some historiographical debate exists as to how collectivist or individualist the Progressive philosophy really was, it suffices to say for all purposes excepting the truly philosophic and academic that the Progressive mindset was one which clearly emphasized the individual’s willingness to sacrifice for the whole.<sup>42</sup> Progressives who had been used to crusading for reform and the amelioration of social ills at home easily made the transition to devotion to the betterment of man abroad. The expansion of collective responsibility to the international plane is illustrated well by Woodrow Wilson, who appealed to the notion in his April 2, 1917, “War Message to Congress.” Asking Congress to declare war on Germany, Wilson expressed his view that it was America’s duty and privilege to endure the “fiery trial and sacrifice” of armed conflict and to “spend her blood and her might for the principles that gave her birth and happiness and the peace which she has treasured.”<sup>43</sup>

Devine’s sacrifice was, then, in the same vein of individual sacrifice in Progressive reform movements at home and a microcosm of the Wilson’s grand scheme to channel that impulse to sacrifice toward the national good abroad. It was motivated not just by wartime patriotism but by prevailing notions of voluntary devotion to the collective. Writing of the Great War era, historian Olivier Zunz stated that sacrificing one’s money and effort was “marketed as national duty and a means to victory” and that contributing was often “voluntary in name only,”

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<sup>40</sup> See, again: Zunz, *Philanthropy in America*, 45.

<sup>41</sup> Richard Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform*, 281.

<sup>42</sup> N.B. Some call Progressivism an intensely individualistic movement which still elevated the role of the common good, while others forego this explanation and only see it as a form of collectivism. Cf. Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform*, 6.

<sup>43</sup> Woodrow Wilson, “War Message to Congress,” in *Woodrow Wilson Papers* 41, edited by Arthur S. Link, et al., (Princeton, NJ: Princeton U.P., 1983): 526.

as employers were known to coerce employees to contribute fractions of their wages. Contributions of time and money were so highly regarded that “humanitarian work gave many a conscientious objector a viable alternative to direct military engagement.”<sup>44</sup> That humanitarian work could supplant military duty to any “viable” degree suggests the importance of the work in the American mindset during the Great War. Taking this mindset into account, it is to be expected that while Devine boarded a ship to France and not Siberia, the impetus which sent him to France is much the same as the ones which sent his counterparts to Russia.

Thus while scholars such as Michael Hogan have looked to the postwar years and the fall of Wilsonianism as a starting point for private diplomacy, the root of the impulse which compelled Wardwell, Thacher, and their peers to act as *de facto* national agents can be seen in their wartime actions and even earlier in the programs of the American Red Cross. The impulse is Progressive in nature, and the men herein discussed – or, rather, their ideas – are products of the Progressive ideological milieu of prewar America.

Even before the Red Cross became a *de facto* wing of the U.S. military during the war, it operated on essentially Progressive principles. The very concept of Red Cross societies harkens to the notions which underlay Progressivism. Generally speaking, they were (and continue to be) non-government organizations with some government patronage that cared for injured soldiers and society’s destitute by means of voluntary donations of time and money. The relegation of tasks which clearly serve the public interest – viz. the well-being of the nation’s military – to a non-government entity is not Progressive *per se*, but Progressives often preferred to limit the size of government. On this point, Richard Hofstadter wrote: “Occasionally, very occasionally, they had argued for the exercise of a few positive functions on the part of the national government,

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<sup>44</sup> Zunz, *Philanthropy in America*, 65.

but chiefly they preferred to keep the positive functions of government minimal.”<sup>45</sup> As will be discussed below, the exact standing of the American Red Cross in the U.S. public sphere was vague enough to cause some confusion in its missions abroad. The organization received a Congressional charter in 1905, granting it some semblance of official status without conferring to it any authority in American government or forcing upon it any obligation to follow Congressional will.<sup>46</sup> Its status as a nationally important organization was furthered by the participation of several important politicians. President Taft was among the most notable of the Red Cross’s leaders following his presidency. Crucially, the sitting U.S. President was the honorary chairman of the Board of Directors, but he did not wield executive power in the organization. So even though the organization retained full autonomy, it always looked quite official.

Its leadership and membership also always looked quite like that of Progressive reforms movements. It mixed middle-to-upper-class (and often female) philanthropists, such as its founder Clara Barton and its later leader Mabel Thorp Boardman, and political patrons like Taft.<sup>47</sup> As a volunteer organization chartered to provide support for America’s Armed Forces and aid the American people in times of national calamities, the society operated on the notions of voluntarism and collective responsibility that have long been considered touchstones of

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<sup>45</sup> Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform*, 306.

<sup>46</sup> Congressional charters were common for public-interest organizations and were issued pursuant to U.S. Code Title 36, Subtitle III. Chartered organizations retained autonomy from the U.S. government. For the Code defining the A.R.C.’s “Organization” and “Purposes,” see, respectively: 36 U.S.C. § 300101 (1905); 36 U.S.C. § 300102 (1905).

<sup>47</sup> Female reformers were important elements of the Progressive Era. Literature on the participation of women in Progressive-Era reform movements constitutes an important (and particularly recent) part of the scholarly corpus on the era. This thesis does not endeavor to explore the role of women or gender in the Progressive-inspired quasi-diplomacy of the Red Cross given the lack of prominent female actors in the Russian Mission. The entire roster of the Mission proper was male, but there were some female staffers in the organization’s offices once they were established. Of course, female nurses worked in Russia as they did on other theaters of war. Thanks, in part, to fiction authors like Mary Borden and Ellen LaMotte, the roles of women in Red Cross hospitals in Belgium and France are relatively well-documented. There is, however, a dearth of sources written by American (or other Western) women in the Russian theater, most likely because so few were employed there.

Progressive philanthropy and politics. For Progressives, philanthropy and politics were interwoven. The same held true for the A.R.C.

Consider, for example, the first A.R.C. humanitarian effort in Russia, a famine-relief effort which began in 1891. Jones writes that “the American Red Cross began to address humanitarian crises abroad” for the first time in the 1890s as a participant in a wave of “new imperial humanitarianism” that spread across Europe and America.<sup>48</sup> Like the international humanitarianism discussed throughout this thesis, Jones’s “imperial humanitarianism” is distinctly Progressive insofar as it called for private individuals and organizations to campaign for the betterment of the world without a state apparatus to affect that change. Moreover, its distinctly nationalist aims of expanding U.S. power and status via overseas philanthropy made imperial humanitarianism resemble other forms of soft power.<sup>49</sup> In turn, the institutions which exercised this form of pointed humanitarianism began to resemble state institutions which are more traditionally associated with the exercise of soft power.

Though its 1891 work fell far short of a veritable exercise of soft power, it did demonstrate the willingness of the organization to pursue nationalist foreign policy aims. In response to the Russian famine of 1891 and 1892, the U.S. government promoted charitable donations of corn to Russia to relieve the famine and to open a new corn market on a European continent unaccustomed to North American corn.<sup>50</sup> The government wanted to both help the Russian people and use the situation to expand its nation’s economic influence in the world. While the A.R.C. was not expressly concerned with the economic opportunity that the

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<sup>48</sup> Jones, *The American Red Cross*, 61.

<sup>49</sup> There is an expansive literature on the development of soft power, especially economic diplomacy and imperialism, in twentieth-century America. While this thesis does not dwell on the intricacies and debates in the corpus, an understanding of the concepts discussed is useful. Important texts include: Joseph S. Nye, “Soft Power,” *Foreign Policy* 20 (Autumn 1990): 153-171; Todd Hall, “An Unclear Attraction: A Critical Examination of Soft Power as an Analytical Category,” *The Chinese Journal of International Politics* 3, no. 2 (2010): 189-211.

<sup>50</sup> Jones, *The American Red Cross*, 65-66.

distribution scheme posed for its donors or “in the business of Americanization,” the organization, under the leadership of Clara Barton, was happy to send the grain off to Russia to feed the starving peasants.<sup>51</sup> In doing so, the A.R.C. acted as a *de facto* agent of U.S. commercial and agricultural interests.<sup>52</sup> By playing the role of the internationalist humanitarian, the A.R.C. helped the U.S. government wield American power abroad. What is distinctly Progressive about this phenomenon is that while the U.S. government provided some guidance for the project, it left the action to private institutions.

Similarly, in 1915, the Red Cross stepped into a foreign crisis to both aid foreign civilians and advance U.S. interests. In that year, President Wilson’s State Department asked the American Red Cross to relieve civilian starvation during the Mexican Revolution.<sup>53</sup> When it did so, the State Department relied on the good graces of the A.R.C. – whose leadership was actually reluctant to take up the mission given certain logistical constraints imposed by the Mexican regime – rather than a state mandate.<sup>54</sup> Just as reformers and philanthropists voluntarily took up the call to help the less fortunate within U.S. borders, the volunteers of the A.R.C. went to the aid of the Mexican people out of obligation to the good of humanity, not just that of the United States. It was with that legacy that the 1917 Mission set off to Russia.

The changes to the A.R.C. brought about during the First World War transformed it from an organization based on Progressive principles that was sometimes coopted for political ends into a full-blown political tool. From the time of its federal charter in 1905, it had been expected that the A.R.C. would “provide volunteer aid in time of war to the sick and wounded of the

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<sup>51</sup> Polk, “Constructive Efforts,” 18.

<sup>52</sup> In fact, Jones argues that it was only successful in expanding American markets. The material aid did not relieve the famine. So while the impetus may have been humanitarian, the only accomplishment was economic (Jones 68).

<sup>53</sup> For a full account of this predecessor to the A.R.C. mission at hand, see: George E. Paulsen, “Helping Hand or Intervention? Red Cross Relief in Mexico, 1915,” *Pacific Historical Review* 57, no. 3 (August 1988): 305-325.

<sup>54</sup> Paulsen, “Helping Hand,” 305, 318.

Armed Forces.”<sup>55</sup> Never since the charter, though, had the United States been at war. With the Great War at hand, it was time for the A.R.C. to fulfill its mission. To do so, it reformed its governance structure and replaced Mabel Boardman, who was first and foremost a humanitarian, with Henry Davison Pomeroy, who was first and foremost a businessman.<sup>56</sup> A successful J.P. Morgan executive, Davison joined the A.R.C. much in the same way that Devine, Thompson, Wardwell, and Thacher did. He did it to fulfill that Wilsonian patriotic and civic duty to see America to victory. In 1917, he became the chairman of a newly formed War Council, a new executive committee established by President Wilson to govern the A.R.C. for the remainder of the war. Here the A.R.C.’s place in the American public sphere grew grayer. Not only was it about to become a key surrogate for the U.S. government but now its own governance was being dictated, in part, by public officials in Washington. However, even as official meddling in the organization was on the rise, the fundamental notions which underlay the meddling relied on a private-public alliance.<sup>57</sup>

From the creation of a War Council composed largely of businessmen, one sees a government reliance on business acumen to run a semi-public organization for the public good. This intervention was instrumental in enlarging the A.R.C.’s scope in domestic fundraising and its international aims. Indeed, the government’s intervention in the voluntary relief organization quickly transformed the American Red Cross from a little-respected society to the nation’s “biggest mass charity,” with millions of members and donations from across the country.<sup>58</sup>

Barton may have sent her shipment of corn to Russia primarily for the sake of humanity, but

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<sup>55</sup> 36 U.S.C. § 300102 (1905).

<sup>56</sup> A good history of A.R.C. leadership changes throughout the early decades of the twentieth century can be found in Jones’s *The American Red Cross*.

<sup>57</sup> For a concise summary of Henry Davison’s fundraising for and reorganization of the A.R.C., see Zunz, *Philanthropy in America*, 57-66.

<sup>58</sup> Zunz, *Philanthropy in America*, 57-58.

Davison had the war on his mind. Thus while the humanitarian sentiment expressed by the A.R.C. in 1917 mirrored the sentiment in 1891, it was joined by an expressly nationalist and military-minded aim, in line with Hutchinson's militarization of charity thesis.

The American Red Cross had essentially been nationalized for the war effort, putting it under the aegis of Washington and making it a *de facto* department of the United States government.<sup>59</sup> Under the new War Council, the organization mobilized its domestic, grass-roots networks to produce items of the U.S. military, and it deployed resources to Europe and Asia to enable the Allies to execute the war as well as possible.<sup>60</sup> It was an officially non-government organization with a government official at the helm that was drafted into government work. Its members, then, were necessarily working on behalf of the United States government, even as they remained private citizens.

### *The Mission to Russia*<sup>61</sup>

While most other Majors and Colonels headed for Europe by way of steamers across the Atlantic, Wardwell, Thacher, Thompson, and the rest of their contingent left New York City and headed west. From Grand Central Station they headed by train to Chicago and then onto Vancouver, the departure point for the *R.M.S. Empress of Asia*.<sup>62</sup> On the long journey to Japan, the last stopping point before reaching Russian soil, the new Mission colleagues got to know

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<sup>59</sup> Tammy M. Proctor writes of the connections between various national Red Cross organizations and their nations' militaries, concluding that some, notably that of Germany, were synchronized with their states' militaries. For discussion on this point, see: Proctor, *Civilians at War*, 169-173.

<sup>60</sup> For a full report of domestic resources employed for the war effort, see *Work of the American Red Cross*, 9-47.

<sup>61</sup> The American Red Cross Mission to Russia was, more accurately, a mission to "European Russia." Though some of its members travelled extensively throughout the lands which had previously been under Russian Imperial authority and would soon be part of the Soviet Union, the Mission itself was, for all intents and purpose, dedicated to the geographic region under Russian political control west of the Ural Mountains. That said, Mission members were not restricted solely to the Mission. For example, Wardwell became involved with the American Red Cross in Romania, as well.

<sup>62</sup> N.B. They travelled by private transportation the entire way, not on military vessels. By using a Pacific route, they could access Russia without crossing the front in Europe.

each other and started reading up on Russia.<sup>63</sup> In Japan, they rendezvoused with Japanese Red Cross officials in their first encounters with foreigners as representatives of the United States. Their stop was short, though, as they quickly moved onto Vladivostok by ship and then to Petrograd by way of the Trans-Siberian Railroad. Their mission lay to the west, where the new Provisional Government struggled to keep its country interested in continuing the war against Germany.

This struggle was what drew most of the Mission members into the project. When they landed in Russia, they were no longer mere lawyers and businessmen and professors; nor were they simply humanitarians who wanted to distribute condensed milk to starving children and build hospitals for those injured at the front.<sup>64</sup> They were those crusading volunteers, imbued with the Progressive spirit of sacrifice and military titles fit for true crusaders, trying to win the war. The better-documented men on the Mission's roster, i.e. Thompson and Robins, have been criticized for their perceived narcissism in their functions. Thompson's own biographer, Hermann Hagedorn, and subsequent historians, most notably George F. Kennan, understood the businessman's desire to go to Russia as a personal thrill rather than a selfless sacrifice in the face of danger. Hagedorn wrote: "Thompson no longer found promotions and stock operations stimulating enough for his imagination... The overthrow of the Czar startled and thrilled him."<sup>65</sup> His self-gratification had a patriotic twist, though. Deciding that "Russia would be the decisive factor in the war," he was determined to make it hold firm to its part of the conflict.<sup>66</sup> That is, even though Thompson asked to go to Russia to give himself a personal challenge, he sought out

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<sup>63</sup> For travel accounts, see: Box 2, "Red Cross Mission – Copies of Letters Home," Wardwell Papers.

<sup>64</sup> For a full explanation of the humanitarian services provided, see: *Work of the American Red Cross*, 82-86. The report claims: "During the winter and spring of 1918 the Red Cross distributed 450,000 cans of condensed milk, helping 25,000 babies, a large number of whom would otherwise undoubtedly have perished" (pp. 82). N.B. Condensed milk distribution was a major project and one of particular importance to Thacher. On the matter, see: Box 2, "Milk distribution," Thacher Papers.

<sup>65</sup> Hagedorn, *The Magnate*, 181.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*

the challenge whose successful completion would benefit the nation. And his undertaking of the mission was certainly not without sacrifice. He paid millions of dollars in total to help outfit the operation and to support friendly Russian politicians.<sup>67</sup> Indeed, his support for the war effort was even greater than his other political affinities, as he later pressured the United States government to recognize the Bolsheviks – whose political platform he did not espouse – in order to convince the new Soviet regime to remain in the war.<sup>68</sup>

Like Thompson, the other members of the Mission saw themselves as patriots making sacrifices for their nation. Even those who sought to deny the gravity of their service recognized that it was a sacrifice taken with some danger. The author of one report from the field wrote: “It is difficult to compare the type of service [of A.R.C. members in Russia] with that at the front, and I hesitate to make such comparison by recommending a particular form of reward which should be made” for honorable service.<sup>69</sup> While the report does implicitly treat A.R.C. work as a lesser sacrifice insofar as it came with less danger, it acknowledges some level of national service.

The fact that the delegation to Russia was made up of civilians donning military titles and uniforms to relieve the Allied military and diplomatic apparati in Russia of their responsibilities demonstrates this Progressive ethos which enabled the private-public alliance and the elevation of private individuals to roles of public importance. That the A.R.C. decided to adopt this pseudo-military flair is an interesting point and not one that should be taken as historically

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<sup>67</sup> Kennan, *Russia Leaves the War*, 54-60. This support compromised A.R.C. neutrality and made Thompson fear for his life when the Bolsheviks assumed power. The State Department, which had not fully known about his political activities in Russia, was confused as to why Thompson feared the Revolution. American officials were not happy to hear that he had violated neutrality in that way. Discussion of this point is included in the Kennan source listed in this footnote.

<sup>68</sup> See: Corliss Lamont, *Yes to Life: Memoirs of Corliss Lamont* (New York: The Continuum Publishing Company, 1991): 3-6.

<sup>69</sup> “Memorandum of Services of attachés, other than American, with the American Red Cross Mission to Russia,” n.d., Box 4, “Mission – Reports (by Wardwell and Others),” Wardwell Papers.

inevitable. Some other national Red Cross organizations, e.g. Germany's, refashioned themselves using military symbolism and terminology during the First World War, but doing so was not an expected norm across the belligerent nations.<sup>70</sup> In photographs of the Mission's members with Japanese Red Cross counterparts whom they met in Japan *en route* to Siberia in August 1917, A.R.C. members wore military uniforms, but members of the Japanese Red Cross did not.<sup>71</sup> That is to say that not all Red Cross organizations fashioned themselves as military operations.



Figure 1: The American Red Cross Mission to Russia poses for a picture with Japanese Red Cross officials while in Japan *en route* to Russia, August 1917. The A.R.C. members wear military-style uniforms while their Japanese counterparts wear civilian attire.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Proctor, *Civilians at War*, 169.

<sup>71</sup> Photograph 34, Box 10, Wardwell Papers.

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



Figure 2: Colonel Thompson poses for a photograph in Tokyo with Japanese Red Cross nurses (back row) and Japanese Red Cross officials (front row), August 1917.<sup>73</sup>

Indeed, not all of the American Red Cross was fashioned as such. While the Mission members were given military titles, important members of the stateside organization did not take them. Davison, for example, was the Chairman of the War Council, but he was not a “general.”<sup>74</sup> The thirty-one million members of the organization that participated from their homes and local chapters did not take up military titles either.<sup>75</sup> The Department of War authorized “the militarization of Red Cross workers on duty in foreign theaters of war,” but did not command it.<sup>76</sup> The members of the Russian Mission took the titles consciously, not as a matter of tradition. The two early leaders of the Mission, Frank Billings and William Boyce

<sup>73</sup> Photograph 34, Box 10, Wardwell Papers.

<sup>74</sup> Some secondary literature refers to the War Council as the “New Council.” Red Cross sources, as well as the majority of secondary literature, refer to the council by the name used in this thesis.

<sup>75</sup> For self-reported membership data, see *Work of the American Red Cross*, 9-15.

<sup>76</sup> General Orders No. 82, dated 5 July 1917, quoted in Polk, “Constructive Efforts,” 43.

Thompson, wished to take on ranks because doing so might “be necessary to accomplish [the] purpose” of the Mission, thinking that their officious titles would better enable them to deal with Russian officials. In fact, Billings expressed that he would not normally “care for rank” were it not for the advantages conferred.<sup>77</sup> Thompson even paid for the uniforms himself after discussion with other Mission members and the Washington headquarters yielded the conclusion that the military flair would make the delegation seem more legitimate.<sup>78</sup> Writing nearly a century later, Jennifer Ann Polk concluded, based on a comparative analysis with the YMCA in the same theater, that the “seeming – and actual – legitimacy conferred on the Red Cross by its official standing with the American government,” as demonstrated by the Department of War’s willingness to grant A.R.C. members abroad the use of military titles, “opened doors that might otherwise have remained shut,” in accordance with Billings and Thompson’s understanding of the situation.<sup>79</sup>

The fact that the Red Cross dressed itself up as a para-state organization, with the symbols of a military one, is significant in itself when considering it as a legacy of the Progressive tendency to conflate the public and private, but it becomes even more significant when one remembers that its members leaned Progressive themselves. The man who would come to direct the Mission, Raymond Robins, was a devoted Progressive appointed to the commission at the request of Theodore Roosevelt.<sup>80</sup> On paper, conservative figures like William Boyce Thompson countered this politically Progressive element, and most figures – including Wardwell and Thacher – were neither Progressive die-hards nor staunch conservatives.<sup>81</sup> In

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<sup>77</sup> Billings to Davison, 29 June 1917, Box 3, Thomas Day Thacher Papers, Bakhmeteff Archive, Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Columbia University (hereafter cited as Thacher Papers).

<sup>78</sup> Box 2 of AW Papers

<sup>79</sup> Polk, “Constructive Efforts,” 43-44.

<sup>80</sup> Salzman, *Reform and Revolution*, 2; Lasch, *The American Liberals and the Russian Revolution*, 70.

<sup>81</sup> Note that there could be conservative Progressives. Hofstadter notes, for instance, that Theodore Roosevelt was both conservative and Progressive. Here, I use “conservative” to mean anti-Progressive.

practice though, Thompson failed to be a conservative counterweight to Robins, becoming instead “Robins’ foremost ally” in support of Bolshevism after it became clear that Lenin would remain in power.<sup>82,83</sup>

Politics aside, the composition of the Mission was one which demonstrates the Progressive ideal of citizens setting aside self-interest for the sake of civic duty. Officially a “Social Economist” on the commission’s roster, Robins was dedicated to reform and social justice and focused his professional energies on such tasks.<sup>84</sup> The others were not. Allen Wardwell and Thomas D. Thacher were Yale-educated lawyers with prominent law practices in New York. Thompson was, among other things, the Director of the New York Federal Reserve Bank. The original chairman of the commission was Frank Billings, a professor of medicine at the University of Chicago. Indeed, the plurality of the group consisted of professors of medicine or related fields, and most others were experts in industries such as railroads.<sup>85</sup> Each man played, at least in theory, to his strengths as developed in his professional life, but none were professional philanthropists or bureaucrats or aid workers. Polk posited in her dissertation that the roster was full of experts, pointing to the doctors and engineers, but says that Thompson, whose commercial expertise had little direct significance to the specific tasks required of the group in Russia, was not an expert lending his skills to the Mission. In her view, he was but a self-confident, self-financing opportunist.<sup>86</sup> She fails to recognize that he was a self-confident, self-financed, expert leader. What he brought to the Mission (other than funds and some socio-political clout) was business and leadership acumen. The same can be said of Wardwell and

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<sup>82</sup> Lasch, *The American Liberals and the Russian Revolution*, 70.

<sup>83</sup> Upon his return to the United States, Thompson actually tried (and failed) to persuade President Wilson to recognize the Bolshevik regime as a means of keeping Russia an Ally in the war against Germany. For more on this, see his biography: Hermann Hagedorn, *The Magnate*. See also: Lamont, *Yes to Life*, 3-6.

<sup>84</sup> For the entire roster, see: Box 4, “Red Cross Mission – Personnel,” Wardwell Papers.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>86</sup> Polk, “Constructive Efforts,” 43-44.

Thacher. The Mission, after all, was to deliver material, not legal, aid. In agreeing to join the Mission, each man agreed to participate in this essentially Progressive framework of putting private skills to use for the public good where government was unable (or unwanted).

They were “a commission of specialists” – to borrow the A.R.C.’s own terminology – determined to help a floundering country remain in the war, much like those business experts who Hogan writes of in the postwar era.<sup>87</sup> While Hogan began his narrative at the end of World War I and focuses on private commerce’s abilities to create prosperity and global stability in the interwar era, those same principles which underlay the business-government cooperation in Hogan’s 1920s were present in the summer of 1917 and in humanitarian endeavors.

*Red Cross Humanitarianism as an “Instrumentality of the United States”*

Those experts were put to work for humanity and for the United States, even when they claimed complete, humanitarian neutrality. In September 1918, after all the members who had previously outranked Wardwell had left their A.R.C. posts in Russia, Allen Wardwell wrote to the Soviet People’s Commissar for Foreign Affairs, Georgi V. Chicherin, as the “Major Commanding the American Red Cross in Russia”: “In the name of humanity I feel it my duty as representing the American Red Cross in Russia to protest against the extreme measures now being adopted by the Soviet government against its own subjects.”<sup>88</sup> Wardwell was, very clearly, an American, representing an American organization, seeking the alleviation of social ills and humanitarian crises. In the same letter, he emphasized this humanitarian role, writing that that “[t]he American Red Cross on the trying conditions has used every effort to relieve some of the

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<sup>87</sup> *Work of the American Red Cross*, 65.

<sup>88</sup> Wardwell to Chicherin, 11 September 1918, Box 1, “Correspondences,” Wardwell Papers. Wardwell here refers to the Red Terror, specifically condemning class-based and political violence. The details of the events of the Bolshevik Revolution and the Russian Civil War are largely tangential to the topic at hand, but the interested reader may find several of Wardwell’s reports interesting as they relate to Bolshevik political violence. See: Box 4, “Red Cross Mission – Reports (by Wardwell and Others),” Wardwell Papers.

suffering which is being endured by the people within the limits of Soviet Russia.” And he insisted neutrality, claiming that the organization would “not hesitate” to condemn equally all parties who committed atrocities against Russian civilians.<sup>89</sup> He tried to emphasize, then, that he was an American representing an American organization but not a foreign agent trying to influence the political situation in Soviet Russia.

The American Red Cross first went to Russia with explicitly political aims, though, at least insofar as keeping Russia in the war was a political stance. In the foreword to a postwar report, Davison wrote that “the American Red Cross was face to face with obligations of large proportions on behalf of humanity,” not on behalf of the United States or the Allies.<sup>90</sup> The report later stated that the A.R.C. sent the Russian Mission for “the purpose of assisting this country [i.e. Russia] in the same way it was helping other Allied nations.”<sup>91</sup> Taken in a vacuum, helping Russia as it helped other Allies did not necessarily make the A.R.C.’s mission political. There is not, after all, necessarily a political bent to curing disease and feeding starving children. Indeed, Davison positioned such tasks as humane, not political, “obligations.” But in “each place [of A.R.C. operation], the endeavor was to do the things that were most needed and thereby to strengthen the Allied nation where it was weakest,” so as to allow for better execution of the war.<sup>92</sup> In Russia, popular morale was perhaps the greatest threat to the war effort. Bad morale had brought down the Tsar, much to the liking of many in the United States. In the months after the February Revolution, though, bad morale threatened to bring down the regime that the United States liked.<sup>93</sup> Wilson thought the Provisional Government represented a Russian nation that had

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<sup>89</sup> Wardwell to Chicherin, 11 September 1918, Box 1, “Correspondences,” Wardwell Papers.

<sup>90</sup> *The Work of the American Red Cross*, iii.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, 82.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, 65.

<sup>93</sup> The United States was the first nation to officially recognize the Provisional Government. Many in America saw the initial revolution as one which freed Russia from unnatural autocracy. Americans began to feel as though

always been “in fact democratic at heart” and constituted “a fit partner for a League of Honour.”<sup>94</sup> Naturally, then, his administration wanted the Provisional Government to stay in power and see out the democratization of Russia and the completion of the war.<sup>95</sup> By attempting (and obviously failing) to reinforce the morale of the Russian people to keep them from falling prey to the Bolshevik slogan of “Peace, Land, Bread,” the A.R.C. acted not only as a humanitarian organization but also, true to its charter, as “an instrumentality of the United States.”<sup>96</sup>

That latter role is further evidenced by the Red Cross’s relief efforts directly aimed at Allied military forces in Russia. Assistance to the United States Armed Forces was the first purpose of the American Red Cross according to its 1905 Congressional mandate.<sup>97</sup> When American troops were deployed to Archangel, “the Red Cross sent an expedition” there to “assist,” establishing a hospital which was used mostly for American servicemen and distributing “comfort to American and Allied soldiers.”<sup>98</sup> While the American Red Cross did not establish substantial medical facilities in European Russia during the First World War, especially as compared to other theaters of combat (notably France and Belgium), it was not for lack of trying. Frederick Lee Barnum was quite frustrated by the inability of the Red Cross to establish

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Russians were fellow democrats waiting to reach their potential. For more on American attitudes toward Russian democracy in 1917, see: Foglesong, *The American Mission*, 50-53.

<sup>94</sup> Wilson, “War Message to Congress,” 524.

<sup>95</sup> Morale was obviously an issue across Europe during the First World War. Many countries experienced popular unrest among civilians as well as break downs of military discipline leading to mutinies and high rates of desertion. Ultimately, Germany was forced to sue for peace in part because the Allies effectively starved the Central Power into submission. Red Cross aid was meant to comfort civilians and soldiers alike, providing basic material needs to as to alleviate causes of unrest. If Russian civilians had food to eat and milk to give to their children, they would be less likely to agitate against the fragile Provisional Government and be more willing to accept Kerensky’s continuation of the war. That Petrograd food riots sparked the Bolshevik Revolution in the fall 1918 prove that starvation conditions were highly destabilizing in Russia and that the A.R.C. aim of placating civilians through material aid was a valid one.

<sup>96</sup> 36 U.S.C. § 300101 (1905).

<sup>97</sup> 36 U.S.C. § 300102 (1905).

<sup>98</sup> *Work of the American Red Cross*, 83.

hospitals because of Bolshevik interference.<sup>99</sup> In his diary, he questioned: “Why is it that the Russian authorities refuse to cooperate with the R.C. in establishing hospitals, etc., and place obstacles in the way to prevent it?”<sup>100</sup> What is more important than specific claims of obstruction is the sense of frustration of an A.R.C. member who could not do his task. The Red Cross reported that the “increasingly chaotic conditions in Russia...made the work more and more difficult” as the Mission progressed.<sup>101</sup> These difficulties prevented the full achievement of goals in European Russia, but the organization was proud of its accomplishments in Siberia, where it considered the “medical service for the benefit of American and Allied troops and numerous refugees...probably the most important work carried on by the Red Cross.”<sup>102</sup> While it is important to remember that Wardwell, Thacher, and their Russian Mission peers did not directly oversee the Siberian operations, the Russian and Siberian organizations were linked in spirit, logistics, and politics. Therefore, the achievements and interests of the Siberian Mission might be understood as important corollaries to those of the Russian one. So just as the A.R.C. was particularly proud of the military relief provided in Siberia, it would have likely been proud of similar relief in European Russia.

That the A.R.C. had such aims demonstrates, first, that it followed its guiding mission of being an “instrumentality of the United States,” and, by extension, that its mission was inherently Progressive insofar as it put private resources at the disposal of the national good but not the national government. This allocation of private resources to the national good and to the good of the Russian people can also be seen in the postwar work of Wardwell and Thacher.

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<sup>99</sup> Diary, vol. 1, 1918, Barnum Papers.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

<sup>101</sup> *Work of the American Red Cross*, 82.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid., 83.

## Chapter 2: International Progressive Humanitarianism in the “New Era”

“Corporate spokesmen proclaimed a ‘New Era’ that promised the achievement of many of the things progressives had wanted. Businessmen gave notice that they were now recognizing their responsibilities to the society of which they were parts.” – David B. Danbom, historian

“Until trade with Russia is restored to its normal course...we shall hear much of bolshevism. When it has been restored we shall be able to forget the whole nasty business as a horrid dream...Restore normal trade conditions and theories of government will be compelled to meet the facts of life or get out of the road. The first and most vital step is to open up Soviet Russia.” – Thomas D. Thacher<sup>103</sup>

“...the relief measures will build a situation which, combined with the other factors, will enable the Americans to undertake the leadership in the reconstruction of Russia when the proper moment comes.” – Herbert Hoover<sup>104</sup>

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In a 1919 letter to Thomas D. Thacher, the early-twentieth-century Harvard historian and librarian Archibald Cary Coolidge wrote that the state of affairs in Russia posed “the greatest political and social problem in the world.”<sup>105</sup> Thacher had witnessed first-hand the turmoil which worried Coolidge so much. In his Red Cross days, he saw the collapse of the Provisional Government which Wilson had once hailed as the salvation of a democratic people and the poverty and hunger which helped bring that government to its knees. Perhaps it is no wonder, then, that he, along with his colleague Allen Wardwell, would remain involved in the Russian situation for the rest of his life. The days of setting aside work for a years-long trip to foreign lands might have been over, but the civic spirit which once compelled Thacher and Wardwell to venture to Russia remained even after the war.

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<sup>103</sup> Thomas D. Thacher, “Economic Force and the Russian Problem,” *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 84 (July 1919): 126.

<sup>104</sup> Herbert Hoover quoted in Lloyd C. Gardner, *Imperial America: American Foreign Policy Since 1898* (New York: Harcourt, 1976): 106.

<sup>105</sup> Archibald Cary Coolidge to Thomas Day Thacher, 3 December 1919, Box 1, Thacher Papers. In this memorandum, Coolidge expressed delight at Harvard’s relatively impressive Russian collection and his hope that the University would continue to expand it given the importance of Russia in twentieth-century geopolitics.

Historiography Revisited

Orthodox historiography dates the death of Progressivism somewhere between the end of World War I and the election of Warren G. Harding in 1920. The twentieth-century historian Richard Hofstadter posited that the war marked “the apotheosis as well as the liquidation of the Progressive spirit.”<sup>106</sup> People repudiated President Wilson’s internationalist foreign policy objectives and, in doing so, rejected “the Progressive rhetoric and the Progressive mood” that embodied Wilsonianism.<sup>107</sup> He explained: “The pressure for civic participation was followed by widespread apathy, the sense of responsibility by neglect, the call for sacrifice by hedonism.”<sup>108</sup> David Traxel, a more recent historian, wrote that after the war “there were more rewarding personal things to do” than “social struggle.”<sup>109</sup> Nor was there a need for patriotic sacrifice.<sup>110</sup> Gone were the calls to leave one’s job in New York for A.R.C. fieldwork in Europe.

Such an understanding, especially when combined with Adler’s theory of the postwar expression of an isolationist impulse, implies that projects such as those undertaken by the American Red Cross during the First World War became less frequent in the interwar period. This may be largely true. Indeed, in the case of the American Red Cross, the end of the war did hail the drastic decrease in humanitarian efforts at home and abroad. But, as other historians have argued and the continued work of the subjects of this thesis demonstrates, iterations of the

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<sup>106</sup> Hofstadter, *Age of Reform*, 275.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, 281.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, 282.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, 356.

<sup>110</sup> Traxel, *Crusader Nation: The United States in Peace and the Great War, 1898-1920* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2006): 352. Obviously the absence of war lent itself to a decreased demand for patriotic sacrifice, but Traxel argues (much as Hofstadter did) that the decreased demand was also a result of a general change in sentiment regarding self-sacrifice.

Progressive mindset continued into the 1920s even as various institutions and organizations shrank to prewar size.<sup>111</sup>

In opposition to orthodox positions, Michael Hogan argued that the cooperation between political and business interests to pursue stabilizing work around the world thrived after World War I in a political atmosphere dominated by fear of political entanglements abroad and in a bourgeois culture which continued to value the application of business acumen honed in the private sector to matters of public importance.<sup>112</sup> That is, rather than morph into or be taken over by the isolationist impulse which Adler claims grasped the nation in the early 1920s, the Progressive impulse toward public service remained more or less unchanged in men like Wardwell and Thacher, even if the animus no longer bore the name of Progressivism. Contrary to Hofstadter's position, the Progressive spirit was not dead.

#### *Civic Participation and Public Expectation*

It is clear from their postwar work – which will be discussed below – that Wardwell and Thacher continued to be motivated by internal impulses, but this internal motivation was fostered by public expectation. Upon their return to the United States, multiple members of the Mission received substantial attention. The most notable and well-documented case of this is that of Raymond Robins, whose supposed Bolshevik sympathies earned him a Congressional inquiry.<sup>113</sup> This episode was one of the Mission's greatest claims to fame at the time and remains one of the

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<sup>111</sup> Though the orthodox opinion was that Progressivism died with either the end of WWI or the election of Warren G. Harding to the Presidency, many scholars have questioned this trope for decades. On this point, cf. Arthur A. Ekirch, Jr., *Progressivism in America: A Study of the Era from Theodore Roosevelt to Woodrow Wilson* (New York: New Viewpoints, 1974): 260-275. For recent work which contends the orthodox stance, cf. Kevin C. Murphy, "Uphill All the Way: The Fortunes of Progressivism, 1919-1929," (PhD diss., Columbia University, 2013).

<sup>112</sup> Hogan, *Informal Entente*, 3.

<sup>113</sup> For the best overview of Robins's treatment upon his return, see his biography, Salzman's *Reform and Revolution*, 276-288. There are also multiple correspondences on the matter in the collected papers of both Wardwell and Thacher. Wardwell spoke extensively to Thompson and Robins on the matter (see: Box 1, "Correspondence," Wardwell Papers). For reports and correspondences on it which show Wardwell's continued interest in the case and his support for Robins, see: Box 3, "Defense of Raymond Robins," Wardwell Papers. For Thacher's correspondences on the case, see: Box 1, Thacher Papers.

best documented aspects of it.<sup>114</sup> Less discussed is the sometimes celebrity-like status of other returnees, most notably Allen Wardwell.

The administration did not chase after Wardwell for his links to the Communists like the Republican Congress did for Robins – though some within the State Department did take note of his presumed moderate stance on the Bolsheviks.<sup>115,116</sup> Rather, the government sought to garner intelligence on the Russian situation from him, extending his function as a *de facto* agent of the U.S. government into the postwar years. In January 1919, Wardwell was invited to Washington to tell the Department of War, including the Secretary of War himself, “something of [his] observations on conditions in Russia.”<sup>117</sup> Later that year, American diplomat DeWitt Clinton Poole, whose diplomatic tenure in Russia largely coincided with Wardwell’s humanitarian mission there, suggested that the A.R.C. Major’s knowledge might be so valuable to Secretary of State Lansing and President Wilson as to warrant a meeting.<sup>118</sup> Poole wrote Wardwell possessed “of all Americans the widest personal knowledge of the [Red] terror.”<sup>119</sup> Because of this, he could once again be an expert in service of his nation.

The administration’s consideration of Wardwell’s knowledge in the matter demonstrates a continued interest on the part of the government in the use of private expertise to aid the

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<sup>114</sup> Even within the State Department, Wardwell and Thacher were sometimes considered the associates of Robins and Thompson – i.e. they were not considered terribly important individuals in their own right. DeWitt Clinton Poole wrote a note to Secretary of State Lansing that Wardwell “was associated with Colonel Robins,” indicating that Lansing knew who Robins was but was liable to not know Wardwell. From the association, he concluded that Wardwell could not “be accused of prejudice against the Bolsheviks,” implying that Robins’s supposed Bolshevik sympathies were well known to the Secretary. See DeWitt Clinton Poole, *An American Diplomat in Bolshevik Russia*, ed. Lorraine M. Lees and William S. Rodner (U. of Wisconsin Press, 2015): 278.

<sup>115</sup> Poole, *An American Diplomat in Bolshevik Russia*, 278.

<sup>116</sup> This is not to say that the Executive Branch did not have anti-Communist agendas akin to Congress’s inquiries and anti-Communist legislation. For more a brief background on official responses to Communism in the U.S. government, see: Larry Ceplair, *Anti-Communism in Twentieth-Century America: A Critical History* (Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger, 2011): 19-32.

<sup>117</sup> Stanley King to Allen Wardwell, 29 January 1919, Box 5, “Correspondences on Russia – January 1919,” Wardwell Papers.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>119</sup> Poole to Secretary Lansing, memorandum, 12 August 1919, quoted in Poole, *An American Diplomat in Bolshevik Russia*, 278.

government in its functions. Government's reliance on private individuals for information is not a practice limited to the interwar years.<sup>120</sup> What is notable about this case is that Wardwell's testimony on a foreign country was necessitated by a lack of intelligence through traditional government channels – viz. the military or Foreign Service. Whereas the Department of War had significant assets on the Western Front to enable it a full picture of what was happening in France, its resources in Moscow and Petrograd during the Bolshevik Revolution and the subsequent Terror were relatively limited. The Military Mission in Moscow in the fall of 1917 only consisted of several people, and their State Department colleagues at the American Embassy were likewise few in number.<sup>121</sup> At the same time that the U.S. government was hesitant to have diplomatic staff in Soviet Russia, the American Red Cross was sending more staff in to oversee humanitarian projects, at least in areas deemed safe enough to do so.<sup>122</sup> In place of diplomats and military officials then, people like Allen Wardwell, vested with military titles and given access to important members of the Russian regime, could serve as key intelligence assets. Whether or not Wardwell was truly the most knowledgeable American when it came to the Terror, as Poole claimed, he certainly had encounters with Russian Communists. From high-level conversations with Soviet commissar Chicherin on Bolshevik cruelty and the A.R.C.'s intervention in Russia to more passive interactions like attending the Fifth Congress of Soviets, his knowledge of Bolshevik politics during his time in Russia was second probably only to Colonel Robins's.<sup>123,124</sup> Likewise, he saw the Soviet machinery in action like few of his countrymen could have. From the time he was hailed as a hero traveling across Siberia in August

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<sup>120</sup> Still today, Congress and the various departments of the U.S. government call on non-government individuals to testify on a variety of matters.

<sup>121</sup> On official American personnel in Russia during the Revolution, see Kenna, *Russia Leaves the War*, 34-50.

<sup>122</sup> *Work of the American Red Cross*, 83.

<sup>123</sup> Chicherin to Wardwell, 11 September 1918, Box 1, Wardwell Papers; Karl Radek to Allen Wardwell, telegram, 4 July 1918, Box 1, Wardwell Papers.

<sup>124</sup> Robins had unparalleled access to Lenin and Trotsky during his time in Russia. See Salzman, *Reform and Revolution*, 203-240.

1917 to the time his aid supply train to Romania was stormed by Red Guards, he had been privy to events that most Americans learned about only through newsmen and telegrams.<sup>125</sup> Hence the Department of War's request that Wardwell be "graciousness in being ready to come to Washington to make [his] information available."<sup>126</sup> That the Department relied, at least rhetorically, on Wardwell's "graciousness" implies two things. First, he retained enough agency as a private citizen to not "make [his] information available." Second, the Department understood that he would be willing to cooperate without coercion. And the fact that in the later, State Department memorandum Poole offered to "arrange" a meeting between Lansing, Wilson and Wardwell, rather than summon the Major in a more official capacity, implies the same.<sup>127</sup> As a private actor, even one labeled a representative of his nation and doing work encouraged by the state, he retained the right to his own knowledge as private information.

Wardwell's importance to the government stemmed not merely from his presence in Russia but from his unique ability to convey useful information. That is, his being a Major in the A.R.C. did not make him an asset; his unique ability to help the various departments of the Wilson administration did. This point is made evident by the treatment of other A.R.C. returnees. Not all of Wardwell's peers received what they believed to be their fair share of attention from the government. While Poole batted around the notion of having Wardwell meet with Wilson, the two highest-ranking A.R.C. officials in Russia were denied access to the President. Robins, as a prime target of the Red Scare, "was not taken seriously" at the State Department or the White House.<sup>128</sup> Colonel Thompson, whose rank in the Red Cross and prewar

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<sup>125</sup> Report, 25 December 1917, author unknown, Box 4, "Red Cross Mission – Reports (by Wardwell and Others), Wardwell Papers.

<sup>126</sup> Stanley King to Allen Wardwell, 29 January 1919

<sup>127</sup> See again Poole, *An American Diplomat in Soviet Russia*, 278. N.B. Poole offers to "arrange" a meeting between Wardwell and Lansing and/or Wilson.

<sup>128</sup> Kennan, *Decision to Intervene*, 208.

social standing exceeded those of Wardwell, provides another case in point. As one of the “recognitionists” – i.e. those who sought American recognition of the Bolshevik regime – he found himself shut out of political channels in Washington even before the cessation of hostilities in Europe.<sup>129,130</sup> That a man of high status within the A.R.C. would be ignored implies that neither status nor membership in the Mission made a person an important post-Mission asset. Wardwell’s desirability in Washington, then, was a result of his perceived expertise and knowledge; it was a product of the mindset inherent to Progressivism that private experts could benefit the public sector.

Perhaps more important for the broader discussion at hand was Wardwell’s celebrity status in private circles, for Progressivism was a populist movement which relied on the public’s enthusiasm for reform and the causes of the day. After his departure from his A.R.C. post, Wardwell remained well-regarded by those in the organization. An educational coordinator at a Red Cross hospital for men returning from European combat asked Wardwell to speak “of the advantages of American citizenship and institutions” as influenced by his Russian experience.<sup>131</sup> Presumably Wardwell’s encounters with Bolshevism, the antithesis of Americanism, made him an expert on the former’s flaws and the latter’s greatness. In the A.R.C., then, he was valued for his unique experiences and the information that they conveyed to him. But whereas Washington bureaucrats cared about Soviet violence perpetrated against class enemies, the A.R.C. saw him as an ideal citizen who could continue to help his countrymen by educating them.

Civic, non-official interest in the Russian situation filtered through other elements of the American élite, as well. Major institutions of higher education took note of the increasing

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<sup>129</sup> For discussion of the “recognitionists,” see McFadden, *Alternative Paths*, 38, 162.

<sup>130</sup> Thompson was denied access to the President. See: Lamont, *Yes to Life*, 3-6.

<sup>131</sup> Henry M. Post to Allen Wardwell, 17 January 1919, Box 5, “Correspondences on Russia – January 1919,” Wardwell Papers.

geopolitical importance of Russia. Harvard University, for example, began to increase its collections of Russian-language materials and increase course offerings on Russia.<sup>132</sup> Likewise, the Council on Foreign Relations – a prominent American organization formed between 1918 and 1921 – held conferences and published prolifically on the matter.<sup>133</sup> And when these various institutions focused on Russia, they invited Thacher and Wardwell to join the conversation.

Their high-level advocacy did not stop on the institutional level. Thacher even helped keep his friend, Supreme Court Justice Louis Brandeis, in the loop by sending him a “brief statement on the Russian situation,” evidently in response to the Justice’s interest in the subject.<sup>134</sup> Interestingly, Thacher expressed his “deep appreciation” for Brandeis’s interest.<sup>135</sup> That is, not only did Thacher play the role of advocate for the Russian people, he sincerely cared that people listened to his advocacy. He stated: “It is hard for me to see the days go by with no effective action taken to meet or even face the tremendous and far-reaching problems presented in Russia.”<sup>136</sup> Taken with his extensive record of support for Russian relief, Thacher’s dismay seems genuine. The combination of this dismay and the public’s interest helps to explain why Wardwell and Thacher continued to extoll the virtues of Russian relief to their peers.

Importantly, even those in civil society who were not part of such prominent institutions as the Red Cross, Harvard, and the Council on Foreign Relations took interest in the lawyers’ experiences and the lessons to be learned. In his history dissertation, Kevin Murphy ascribed to the Progressives a “belief in a crusading, dispassionate, and well-informed middle-class as a vehicle for change.”<sup>137</sup> A Progressive citizenry was a well-informed one eager to see change in

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<sup>132</sup> Coolidge to Thacher, 3 December 1919, Box 1, Thacher Papers.

<sup>133</sup> Box 8, “Printed Materials,” Wardwell Papers. N.B. Multiple Council on Foreign Relations publications can be found in this folder.

<sup>134</sup> Thacher to Justice Brandeis, 4 June 1918, Box 1, Thacher Papers.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid.

<sup>137</sup> Murphy, “Uphill All the Way,” 6.

the world. The Progressive spirit may have been dead in some respects, but New York City's finest citizens were still eager as ever to learn about the world and how they could change it for the better. For his part, Thacher sent materials to his New York peers much in the same way that he forwarded reading to Justice Brandeis. And the recipients at least claimed to be quite happy to have received the materials. Henry Sloane Coffin, for example, wrote that he had "seldom enjoyed more any gift than that of this book" which Thacher had given him, "an enlightening account of the background against which one must view everything that [was] taking place in Russia."<sup>138</sup> Coffin, who was at the time the minister of the Madison Avenue Presbyterian Church, further stated that he would "keep the book in circulation among friends" so that others could learn about the situation, and he thanked Thacher for an address to the congregation.<sup>139</sup> That address was one of many given by the two lawyers after their return to New York.

Speaking engagements provided outlets for them to educate their fellow citizens and for their fellow citizens to consume the information which they craved. Numerous New York social clubs invited Wardwell to speak about his experiences as the clubs' members sought to learn about, to again borrow Archibald Coolidge's wording, "the greatest political and social problem in the world" of the day.<sup>140</sup> Wardwell wrote to a *Christian Science Monitor* reporter that he had spoken "at private Clubs" and an evening meeting at his church.<sup>141</sup> After dining with him one evening, the president of one such club "was so much impressed by what [Wardwell] had to say about the present conditions in Russia" that she hoped he would talk about "the situation in Russia to an audience" at her organization.<sup>142</sup> It bears noting that the public's interest in the

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<sup>138</sup> Henry Sloane Coffin to Thacher, 26 December 1918, Box 1, Thacher Papers.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid.

<sup>140</sup> Coolidge to Thacher, 3 December 1919, Box 1, Thacher Papers.

<sup>141</sup> Allen Wardwell to L. H. Allen, 21 January 1919, Box 5, "Correspondences on Russia – January 1919," AW Papers.

<sup>142</sup> Unknown to Allen Wardwell, 22 January 1919, Box 5, "Correspondences on Russia – January 1919," AW Papers.

Mission's returning members demonstrates not only an appreciation for the perceived significance of their work but also an appreciation for world news.

In an age of renewed isolationist spirit, people still wanted to know what was happening on the international scene and were not simply satisfied by articles in newspapers and magazines. Wardwell's correspondences with one reporter, Miss Allen of the *Christian Science Monitor*, demonstrate that the press was eager to publish stories about the Russia. The reporter was so adamant in her insistence that she be able to publish an interview with him one can assume that that the general reading public (or, perhaps, her editors) was interested in what the man had to say about Russia.<sup>143</sup>

The public's interest can likely be explained by the Red Scare which had already devoured Wardwell's colleague Raymond Robins. An increased concern about Communism brought with it an interest in Red Russia. Men like Wardwell and Thacher could help satiate that interest. The Red Scare did not, however, prevent philanthropic efforts like those previously conducted by the American Red Cross from helping Russians. Instead, it helped create a philanthropic attitude concerned with helping to liberate the victims of Communism abroad.

*Helping Russians, Not Soviet Russia*

Among the humanitarian ventures of Wardwell and Thacher – some of which were conducted together, others not – was the New York Committee for Russian Relief, “an organization...formed for the purpose of collecting money for relief in Soviet Russia, and its federated parts – the Ukraine and White Russia.”<sup>144</sup> Wardwell, who was on the Executive

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<sup>143</sup> For this adamant insistence, see: L.H. Allen to Allen Wardwell, 17 January 1919, Box 5, “Correspondences on Russia – January 1919,” AW Papers. A note on the draft: For the next revision, I plan on talking more about this element of the press really wanting to know about it. I will cite the Allen to Wardwell letter in doing so. Forgive the fact that it's just tacked on right now.

<sup>144</sup> “An Opportunity for Russians in America to Aid their Relatives and Friends in Soviet Russia,” n.d., Box 8, Wardwell Papers.

Committee of the organization, and Thacher were joined by other prominent lawyers, including Paul B. Cravath and Wardwell's partner Frank L. Polk, as well as banker Felix Warburg, future Governor of New York Herbert Lehman, former Ambassador to the United Kingdom and future Democratic presidential nominee John W. Davis, and numerous other New Yorkers of great prominence, including multiple women.<sup>145,146</sup> Framing its campaign as "An Opportunity for Russians in America to Aid their Relatives and Friends in Soviet Russia," the Committee solicited contributions, "larger or small," for support of Quaker charities in Russia. These donations were to support the Russian people much in the same way that the American Red Cross had during the First World War. Condensed milk, bread, clothing, and medical care were still on the list.<sup>147</sup>

Unlike the A.R.C. Mission during the war, the Committee's never explicitly appealed to the political advantages of providing material aid, but the organizers no doubt had such advantages on their minds. For starters, aid had to essentially be green-lighted by then Secretary of Commerce Herbert Hoover's pet project, the American Relief Administration. Hoover supported aid to Russia on explicitly political grounds, stating that "the relief measures [would] build a situation which, combined with the other factors, [would] enable the Americans to undertake the leadership in the reconstruction of Russia when the proper moment comes."<sup>148</sup>

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<sup>145</sup> "An Opportunity for Russians in America to Aid their Relatives and Friends in Soviet Russia," n.d., Box 8, Allen Wardwell Papers. N.B. Cravath, Wardwell, and Warburg were on the nine-person Executive Committee of the organization, but Thacher, Davis, Lehman, and Polk, were not.

<sup>146</sup> As stated above, Wardwell and Polk were partners in the firm now known as Davis, Polk & Wardwell. The Davis listed above was not a partner at said firm. Paul Cravath – partner of the firm now known as Cravath, Swaine & Moore – was a very prominent figure in the New York legal world, a close colleague of Allen Wardwell, and a fellow philanthropist. Numerous correspondences and dinner invitations between the two can be found in Wardwell's papers (see Box 8, Wardwell Papers). Although Cravath's work falls outside the scope of this paper, his philanthropic pursuits – which mirror Wardwell's in both magnitude and focus – would be a matter of some importance for historians interested in broader questions of the New York legal community's humanitarian campaigns for Russia and other causes in the interwar period.

<sup>147</sup> "An Opportunity for Russians in America to Aid their Relatives and Friends in Soviet Russia," n.d., Box 8, Wardwell Papers.

<sup>148</sup> Hoover quoted in Gardner, *Imperial America*, 106.

That said, one need not even venture further than the Committee's own roster to find such sentiments.

In 1919, Thacher authored an article entitled "Economic Force and the Russian Problem" on the premise that "in Russia the economic factor was the primary and direct cause for revolution."<sup>149</sup> He argued that Bolshevik political legitimacy essentially lay in the new state's supposed ability to provide those economic necessities which the Tsarist and Provisional governments had failed to provide.<sup>150</sup> The Bolsheviks had, after all, come to power on the slogan of "Peace, Land, Bread." The only way to undo the political effects of the Bolshevik Revolution was, then, to channel the "relentless economic forces" which brought down previous regimes against the current one.<sup>151</sup> Allied governments agreed, more or less, with this thinking – hence the embargo on Red Russia. But Thacher saw the embargo – which tightened the food supply and thereby "increased economic oppression" – as counterproductive.<sup>152</sup> He wrote:

It has aroused whatever revolutionary or national feeling is left in Russian life to support leaders who, whatever else may be said, are sincere in opposition to foreign domination. It has at the same time relieved these leaders of responsibility for starvation conditions, and has shifted the burden of this responsibility to the Allies...By intensifying starvation conditions, we have placed in the hands of the bolshevik [sic.] leaders and instrument of the most grim and terrible power, the control of an inadequate food supply, the power of compelling men to serve in order to be fed.<sup>153</sup>

To break the Soviet regime then, the resumption of material aid and then trade was necessary. On the one hand, active assistance, mirroring what the Red Cross did during the First World War, would demonstrate America's good will and the fault of the Soviet regime in their people's

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<sup>149</sup> Thomas D. Thacher, "Economic Force and the Russian Problem," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 84 (July 1919): 121-126. N.B. A manuscript of the article can be found in Box 6, "Printed Materials," Thacher Papers.

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.*, 121 .

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*, 122.

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.*, 122.

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*, 122-123.

plight. He argued, therefore, for the resumption of such aid.<sup>154</sup> To stop short at such assistance, though, would leave the “economic vacuum” unfilled. Western, especially American, capital was necessary for that task. Not only did the Russians need American grain; they also needed U.S.-manufactured “agricultural equipment and binder twine” to harvest their own grain harvests.<sup>155</sup> Only with the restoration of trade and the amelioration of the Russian peoples’ economic plight would loosen the Soviet grip on power. Hence his conclusion: “The first and most vital step is to open up Soviet Russia.”<sup>156</sup>

*Using Business for the Public Good*

To achieve this opening of Russia, Thacher, Wardwell, and others sought the help of the business community. Here it is helpful to recall the aforementioned April 9, 1920, Bankers’ Club meeting. The meeting and related conferences and correspondences regarding U.S. trade with Russia are useful starting points in understanding how private citizens worked toward the international public good. With the closure of trade came the closure of an enormous market for American industry and commerce. Like in 1891 when American institutions sought to both open markets and help starving people in famine-ridden Russia, the 1920 push to reestablish trade was motivated by both economic and humanitarian causes.

Wardwell’s involvement began in February of that year when he received a confidential letter from the New York Chamber of Commerce’s president, Alfred E. Marling. Marling wrote that his organization was interested in exploring American private individuals’ potential roles in the “Reconstruction of Russia,” a topic which had “been receiving the consideration of

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<sup>154</sup> Thacher, “Economic Forces and the Russian Problem,” 123-126.

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid.*, 126.

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*, 126.

prominent” Europeans.<sup>157</sup> Wardwell’s “counsel and advice” would be “deeply appreciated,” presumably because of his unique ability (and his reputation for being able) to speak to the political situation in Russia.<sup>158</sup> The reasons for the Chamber of Commerce’s interest in this reconstruction are not stated. One can only assume, given the context, that the Chamber was interested in the economic opportunity associated with the rehabilitation of the Russian economy. There were power stations to be built, railroads to be laid, and natural resource extraction sites to be developed.<sup>159</sup> American contractors would be able to benefit from physical reconstruction. American exporters would be able to benefit from a rehabilitated market. American commercial bankers would be able to benefit from the increased need for credit in a growing economy.

This economic benefit was certainly at the forefront in conferences throughout the spring of 1920. After the initial Chamber of Commerce session in February, many prominent New Yorkers discussed the possibility of opening trade. All of them included at least some discussion of profits to be made. One wrote: “While Americans do not need Russia as a customer just now, they do need to keep Russia open as a possibility...What they do now will undoubtedly be with a view to the future but it appears imperative that steps should be taken now.”<sup>160</sup> Two weeks prior to the aforementioned Bankers’ Club meeting, on Monday, March 29, 1920, representatives of “several important American Commercial organizations” – namely, the National Foreign Trade

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<sup>157</sup> Alfred E. Marling to Allen Wardwell, 11 February 1920, Box 5, “Correspondence on Russia – Feb.-March 1920,” Wardwell Papers.

<sup>158</sup> Ibid.

<sup>159</sup> In his proposal, “Russian-American Commercial Relations,” Lenin wrote to Robins that if America allowed the Soviets to import U.S. capital to reconstruct the Russian economy, the U.S. would be rewarded with contracts for building power stations and the development of natural resources throughout the country. Kennan terms the promise of these lucrative opportunities as “bait” for American capitalists. No doubt, American industrialists were interested in such opportunities. For discussion of Lenin’s proposal to Robins, including the political ramifications of it, see: Kennan, *Decision to Intervene*, 217-220.

<sup>160</sup> George Hurley to E.P.R. Ross, 26 March 1920, Box 5, “Correspondence on Russia – Feb.-March 1920,” Wardwell Papers.

Council, American Manufacturers' Export Association, Chamber of Commerce of the State of New York, Merchants Association, and the American-Russian Chamber of Commerce – met at the University Club and adopted two noteworthy resolutions.<sup>161</sup> First, the conference resolved “that any governmental restrictions preventing trading between the citizens of the United States and the citizens of Russia be removed” and that such a resolution should be adopted by the organizations represented at the conference.<sup>162</sup> Second, the “conference recommend[ed] the creation of an unofficial commission representing the important commercial organizations of this country to investigate economic conditions in Russia as bearing upon the advisability and feasibility of resuming commercial relations between the people of this country and the people of Russia.”<sup>163</sup> Taken as a whole, the resolutions demonstrate that the leaders of private-sector commerce were interested in both affecting change in government policy and committing private resources to the expansion of commerce. Like in Marling's letter to Wardwell, though, the reasoning for the resolutions is left unstated.

The reasoning becomes more apparent in April. With the University Club resolutions in mind, the men present at the Bankers' Club resolved to determine who within the business community would be willing to undertake a privately financed and organized effort to encourage the removal of trade barriers between the United States and Russia. They drafted an inquiry addressed to business leaders in entirely economic terms, making no reference to aiding the Russian people, asking: 1) would the recipient's company be interested in the opening of trade

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<sup>161</sup> Resolutions of the Meeting, pp. 1., 29 March 1920, “Trade with and Aid to Russia, 1919-24 – Manuscripts and Related Items,” Box 8 Wardwell Papers. A full roster of the attendees may be found here.

<sup>162</sup> Resolutions of the Meeting, pp. 2, 29 March 1920, Box 5, “Correspondence on Russia – Feb.-March 1920,” Wardwell Papers.

<sup>163</sup> Ibid.

with Russia?; 2) would the recipient's company be willing to pay expenses incident to the effort?; and 3) who would be appropriate to be on a commission to seek these changes?<sup>164</sup>

The first point – essentially an up-or-down question as to whether the recipients think private steps should be taken to resume trade with Russia – helps the historian understand the mood in the commercial and industrial sectors toward foreign relations. Many of the respondents answered in the affirmative – i.e. they viewed such a commission in a positive light. While it can be assumed that none viewed the Leninist regime in a positive light, most paid little attention to the government when they wrote back to Wardwell with their answers. They cared more about the opportunity to break into a market of millions of people, especially when they represented industrial producers such as the American Car and Foundry Company, which would have welcomed the idea of selling its railroad wares to a vast country with massive railroad networks. That said, multiple declined to join in the venture. In his response, Ralph Dawson of the Guaranty Trust Company wrote that his company was “obliged to express a disinclination to make public an opinion regarding the Russian situation, in consideration of the existing difficulties and political complications.”<sup>165</sup> If there is any surprise to this response it is that the Guaranty Trust Company was in the minority in rejecting the proposal to open commercial relations with Russia. As historian David Danbom wrote, business “had learned to cover its flank” and present publicly likable images to the American consumer after decades of harsh critiques.<sup>166</sup> In the spring of 1920, the American public remained hostile toward Russian Communism, and the American government was still far from recognizing the legitimacy of the new Russian regime.

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<sup>164</sup> Minutes, 9 April 1920, Box 5, “Correspondence on Russia – April 1920,” Wardwell Papers.

<sup>165</sup> Ralph Dawson to Allen Wardwell, 23 April 1920, Box 5, “Correspondences on Russia – January 1919,” Wardwell Papers.

<sup>166</sup> Danbom, “*The World of Hope*”, 222.

No company expected to benefit from the mission without contributing to it; every company which responded in the affirmative to the first question agreed to contribute to the funds necessary to reopen trade. This perfect correlation implies that respondents did not consider such a request for contributions to be bizarre or overly burdensome. The Worthington Pump and Machinery Corporation of New York responded that it was “prepared to assume its share of the expense incident to the sending of such a Commission.”<sup>167</sup> The only qualification that the company made was that it would assume its share, and therefore not a more substantial burden, to the overall expense. Similarly, the American Car and Foundry Company responded in the affirmative with the proviso “that a sufficient number of companies join in the matter.”<sup>168</sup> The company was willing to help shoulder the burden of opening up the Russian market but was unwilling to go it alone. For these companies, the opening of trade was an investment; they did not want to sink too much money into the venture because they were motivated by profit. But the willingness to contribute to a mission that would open trade opportunities for all American businesses, not just their own, demonstrates their willingness to work toward the collective good of U.S. industry and commerce. And in an era in which the business of the United States was often thought to be business, this was no trivial contribution to the general welfare.

Even though this one set of correspondences emphasizes the profit motive for the resumption of trade with Russia, the organizers of the movement to resume trade, Wardwell included, had broader, and more humanitarian, motives. They tended to recognize that American profits went hand-in-hand with the amelioration of Russian destitution and instability. One memorandum suggested that “[e]very American firm having investments in Russia and Europe is interested in the promotion of trade with Russia” to benefit the bottom line, as “American

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<sup>167</sup> Worthington Pump letter to Allen Wardwell, 19 April 1920, Box 5, “Correspondences on Russia – April 1919,” Wardwell Papers.

<sup>168</sup> Goodwin to Wardwell, 19 April 1920, Box 5, “Correspondences on Russia – April 1919,” Wardwell Papers.

commerce desires to take advantage of all profitable opportunities.”<sup>169</sup> It also emphasizes other benefits of trade. It states: “Trade with Russia immediately is advisable” to reestablish “normal conditions in Russia” and “restore the economic stability of Europe.”<sup>170</sup>

In this way, elements of the business community agreed with Thacher’s thesis. Again, it should be noted that not all of the businessmen interested in opening up Russia were explicitly interested in the plight of the Russian people or its geopolitical implications. However, in light of Thacher’s article, explicit references to the stability of Russia and Europe, and calls for “reconstruction,” the overall efforts of the New York business community to revive trade with Russia had a necessarily humanitarian-cum-political slant.

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<sup>169</sup> Memorandum, n.d., Box 8, “Trade with and Aid to Russia, 1919-1924 – Manuscripts and Related Items,” Wardwell Papers.

<sup>170</sup> Ibid.

## Conclusion

“In conclusion, let me say that I favor recognizing Russia, because I believe it is to our economic interest to do so. I further believe that that we, as a Christian people who are interested in the welfare of one hundred fifty millions of people, should endorse this proposal. To isolate the Soviet Republic and attempt to prevent its people from buying food supplies or to make it difficult for them to do so, is little less than criminal. The sooner America recognizes Russia, the sooner educational, economic, and political achievements will go forward hand in hand, and Russia will finally become one of the leading nations of the world.” – Senator Burton K. Wheeler of Montana<sup>171</sup>

Senator Wheeler’s statement points to the *mélange* of motivations for trade with Russia during the early interwar period. Many Americans did not support any form of relations with the Soviet regime, but those who did seek to open trade with the Russians had different outcomes on their minds. No doubt, some supported it for purely economic reasons (especially during the postwar depression), some for purely humanitarian ones, some for other *raisons d’état*, some for a mix of everything. Those who did support trade with Russia in the interwar period relied on the unstated premise that a solution to economic or humanitarian or political woes can lie in non-state-orchestrated economic action. They wanted to make the global marketplace freer and less restricted by Western embargos on Communists and Communist controls on imports. Those who sought trade for political and diplomatic ends, like those discussed by Thacher in his 1919 article, sought economic quasi-diplomacy.

Looking ahead to the years following World War II, this non-statist approach to economic diplomacy provides an interesting corollary to the heavy-handed, government-run, economic diplomacy of the Marshall Plan. There are certain strong parallels between the goals of Thacher and Wardwell and those of Truman and Marshall decades later. For example, like the creators of the Marshall Plan, the subjects of this thesis sought to limit Communist influence by increasing the material well-being of those foreign peoples at risk of falling prey to Soviet

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<sup>171</sup> Burton K. Wheeler, “Shall We Recognize Russia?,” 11 July 1923, originally published in *Zion’s Herald*, Box X, “Subject File – Trade with Russia (1920s & 1930s),” Thacher Papers.

propaganda and influence. But more crucial to the study at hand are the differences. Historians of American liberalism like to point to the difference between pre- and post-New Deal liberalism. The Progressives, as pre-New Deal liberals, tended to seek solutions without the demanding massive expansion of federal power.<sup>172</sup> This is not to say that Progressives did not expand the scope of government; they did indeed, especially with regard to commercial regulation. Rather, by comparing Progressives to post-New Deal liberals, one sees that Progressives placed relatively more collective responsibility in the hands of private individuals than in the hands of government officials. The American Red Cross Mission to Russia during World War I was one instance of this Progressive mindset at work, for the Mission harnessed the capabilities of the civilian, non-government experts to aid the Armed Forces and the Foreign Service. Though Wardwell, Thacher, and their interwar projects should not necessarily be labeled “Progressive,” they maintained that extra-governmental crusading element which was so important to the Progressive spirit. To that end, by carrying their humanitarian efforts into the interwar period, they preserved some element of a Progressive ethos which underpinned their work during the First World War.

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<sup>172</sup> See Hofstadter, *Age of Reform*, 306.

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