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Memorandum

PERSONAL AND CONFIDENTIAL

March 3, 1926.

My dear Senator:

I cannot tell you how much I appreciate the trouble you have taken to write me so fully as you have done under date of March 2. When men like you and Judge Hughes have such decided views on this subject, I must confess that it tends to influence my own conclusions very distinctly. I had a meeting yesterday with some of the members of the Chamber of Commerce Executive Committee and they feel very strongly that they are right and that the Chamber ought to follow the leadership of the Government in this situation.

One of the members of the Committee wrote me a letter to the effect that he was sorry I was allying myself with the Bolshevik movement. I enclose my reply to Mr. Trevor on that subject because my action is as far from allying myself with the Bolsheviks as anything can be. What I am doing is seeking light, in the hope that the American people may obtain all the light there is in dealing with this difficult subject. I had a letter from Senator Borah the other day in which he made use of the following language:

"I have no quarrel with the Chamber of Commerce of New York City or with the United States Chamber of Commerce. But the failure of these great organizations to work out a constructive position is a matter which you hear commented upon with reference to a number of subjects.

"There are one hundred forty million people in Russia. As a people, they are a great people. They occupy nearly one-sixth of the earth's surface. Their potential wealth is beyond the power of language to describe. And to have no constructive policy with reference to that kind of a situation is to confess intellectual bankruptcy. Frightened and intolerant we simply say we will do nothing. It is a challenge to the character and the constructive capacity of those who are responsible for our policy".

My feeling is that this situation does present a real challenge to constructive thought. I do not think we can deal with Russia on the moral grounds we would apply to individuals. A Russian is a Russian and will continue to be a Russian. It does not seem to me that we have much to say as to what Russia does inside of Russia, but that we do have a great deal to do with what Russia does outside of Russia. If it is possible to develop some kind of modus vivendi whereby we could get Russia, in her international relations, to give such guaranties and assurances that would make free commercial intercourse with her possible, it seems to me that great progress would be made.

I confess I am very much impressed by your statement that the recognition of one Government by another "involves an acceptance by the recognizing Government of the principles, purposes and avowed intentions of the recognized Government as being in conformity with the rules which govern the conduct of civilized nations toward each other". Assuming the correctness of your interpretation of the meaning of recognition, I find it extremely difficult to understand the action of England, France and Italy in according recognition to Russia. Of course the recognition by England was accorded under a Labor Government, but that was not true of either France or Italy. I am frank to say that as you put the matter, there is no possible alternative for our Government, except to refuse recognition.

Likewise, if it should prove to be the case that the immediate effect of recognition by us would be to give strength to the Communist doctrines promoted with Russian Government, I certainly would not want to see recognition accorded. Somehow I had felt that since recognition by England, France and Italy, the strength of Communism in Russia itself had tended to decline and that there was a steady growth of Capitalistic principles, although within the pale of Communism.

I quite recognize that popular government is still on trial and that it has received severe blows from what has happened in Italy, Spain and elsewhere. None of us, of course, would want to do anything in this country that would weaken the strength of popular government anywhere. Surely nothing should be done that would cause the American people to lose faith in the principles upon which our Government is based. If our recognition of the Russian Government were to be regarded by our own people as accepting the doctrines of the Bolsheviks, then I would be one of the first to oppose recognition in any form.

The whole problem, therefore, is one of the premises upon which we act. Assuming your premises to be accurate, there is no possible alternative to your conclusions. The question that I have raised is as to the premises upon which we should base our conclusions. I have felt that the Russian situation presented a problem of unique quality. It had seemed to me that the recognition of Mexico involved recognition of a country the principles of whose Government many of us could not endorse. Likewise, it would seem that the policy of drift with reference to Russia was getting us nowhere, and that the problem after all was a very practical one which had to be settled after consideration of all the practical questions involved, with a view to bringing about as permanent results the promotion of the peace, security and financial stability of the world. I had felt that the Chamber of Commerce was not fully posted concerning all of the factors in the matter. I certainly do not pretend to be fully posted. But in the Chamber of Commerce, American business has a reservoir of the most competent, conservative and intelligent business opinion that there is in this country, and that in so gigantic a situation as is presented by the Russian problem, the Chamber of Commerce should secure at first-hand the most authoritative information obtainable, and, on the basis of that information, be in a position to guide the thought of American business men, and possibly assist the American Government in moving toward a constructive solution of this most baffling situation.

The policy of the Chamber of Commerce as taken is, as I view it, simply negative. Some of its members have some information, but my belief is that the action of the Chamber has been taken on the basis of certain general impressions rather than after a critical examination of all the facts and factors which must be faced very frankly before the problem can be solved. The purpose of my raising the question was not to seek to induce the Chamber of Commerce to reverse its declared position as of January 7, but to induce it to take active measures to inform itself with a view to aiding ultimately in working out a solution of the problems. The situation is certainly dynamic and calls for a constant examination of facts which are continually changing. It certainly challenges business men to be in a position when the time comes to meet the issue in a very large way and in the light of all the facts.

I hope, my dear Senator, that I have not trespassed too much upon your time in imposing upon you this second communication. I have felt very much complimented at your taking the trouble to write me as you did. I, for one, am very frank to say that I would never want this country to recognize Russia if you yourself--after examining all the facts--should deem it unwise. What I would like to see, however, is a condition brought about under which you--and men like you--would think it wise to accord such recognition. When that time comes, we would be really getting somewhere, and it is to contribute toward that end that I would like to see the Chamber of Commerce of New York study this problem and be in a position to offer constructive suggestions.

With high regard and all good wishes for your continued health and strength, I am,

Very sincerely yours,

(Signed) Ivy L. Lee

Hon. Elihu Root,
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