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Memorandum

PERSONAL AND CONFIDENTIAL

February 15, 1926

Dear Mr. Kingsley:

I appreciate very much your writing me so fully regarding my memorandum on Russia and also for your kindness in sending me the data concerning the life insurance relationship with Russia. It is evident that you have a real grievance and I do not wonder at your indignation over the manner in which your people have been treated. Nor do I have the slightest sympathy with the way the Russian Government has acted regarding many other of its obligations.

And of course no one has less sympathy than I have with any government or organization which advocates Communism or seeks to stimulate a world revolution.

The difficulty with the situation, however, is that we are not dealing with individuals in this matter, but with the people as a whole. You are familiar with Edmund Burke's statement about the impossibility of indicting a people.

The real problem, as I see it, is not whether the present party in control of the Russian Government represents views which we can endorse, or whether indeed the Russian Government ought not to be severely condemned. Theoretically and logically, we ought to do everything possible to keep the Russian Government "thumbs down". But it is not a theory which confronts us; it is a very real fact. From our point of view, we want to trade with Russia. We not only want to trade ourselves, but we want other nations to trade with them and thus promote world prosperity. We have got to recognize that so far as Russia is concerned, it represents an enormous population whose restoration to an orderly society is of supreme importance to the progress of civilization.

As I view it, therefore, the real question is this: How can Russia be once more restored to the family of nations, so that her full contribution may be made to the welfare of the world?

It seems to me that when a nation has been recognized by Governments like England and France, it is rather difficult for the United States to maintain that the moral principles which surround us are different from those which govern the governments of England and France, and that we have a right to take a more elevated position in the matter than these other nations. To be sure, Russia was recognized by England while under the control of a Labor Government, but it is equally certain that the Tory Government has resisted all efforts to withdraw the recognition of Russia which had been given by the Labor Government. My personal opinion is that there is not the slightest prospect of the recognition of Russia being withdrawn by either England, France or Italy.

Those who are familiar with the situation know that there are constructive forces at work in Russia. What we want to do is to strengthen those forces. It seems to me that institutions like the Chamber of Commerce of New York should be on the qui vive for opportunities to work in that direction. What may best constitute such strengthening, I do not presume to know. But it does seem to me a mere negative policy gets nowhere. Nor does it seem to me that the position of the Chamber of Commerce is tenable merely upon the theory that it is supporting the action of the United States State Department. The State Department may be wrong! But right or wrong, I do not believe that the policy of the State Department should be endorsed merely because it is the policy of the State Department. Nor do I think that we should assume that the State Department has inside information which justifies its policy. It may or may not have. My point is that the Chamber of Commerce of New York should inform itself and take action on the basis of facts it has ascertained on its own account, and that the Chamber of Commerce should declare its purpose not merely to condemn Bolshevism, but to cooperate with those elements in and out of Russia which are seeking to bring about a gradual change in Russia in the right direction.

It seems to me that the passage of the resolution of the Chamber of Commerce on January 7 leaves the situation and leaves the Chamber of Commerce in a purely negative position, and does nothing whatever to either promote or to plan for any progressive or constructive action. As I interpret the purpose of the Chamber of Commerce of New York, it does not seem to me that that is a strong or helpful position.

Sincerely yours,

(Signed) IVY L. LEE

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