FRIENDS OF SOVIET RUSSIA:
THE FRIENDLY FRONT SURVIVES THE FAMINE

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"Come to the assistance of the famine-stricken areas of Soviet Russia."[1]

The 1917 Bolshevik revolution was critical in the formation and direction of the emerging communist movement in America. Simultaneously, the "Red Scare" hysteria gripped the United States and the fledgling Communist Party of America (C.P.A.) went underground. In an effort to reach a mass audience and to conform to legalities, the party launched a campaign of "front" organizations. These organizations became part of the "aboveground" movement that appealed to throngs of Americans. They espoused issues that were of communist concern, but non-revolutionary enough to attract the attention of a wider audience. The Friends of Soviet Russia (F.S.R.) formed in August 1921, becoming pioneers in the front movement. The front found success by declaring itself an "organization of American workers without distinction as to political affiliation," and by espousing humanitarian causes such as relief of the Russian famine.[2] They transmitted their messages through their official organs: *Soviet Russia* and *Soviet Russia Pictorial*.

[1] Maxim Gorky as quoted in Benjamin M. Weissman, "Herbert Hoover's 'Treaty' with Soviet Russia: August 20, 1921," *Slavic Review* 28, no. 2 (1969): 276.
[2] "Program of the Friends of Soviet Russia," *Soviet Russia* 7, no. 11 (1922): 287.

Although historians like Theodore Draper argue that the F.S.R. "was born of the Russian famine and died with it," a thorough examination of the front's work and literature reveals that the front survived for almost a decade by focusing on issues beyond the famine. [3] Following the success found through famine relief, the F.S.R.'s mission shifted to reconstruction of the Soviet Union and later the controversial topic of recognition.

The 1920s did not begin well for Bolshevik Russia. A devastating drought brought grain production in 1921 to just one-sixth of its previous year's total.[4] This factor, coupled with the "dislocations stemming from war, civil conflict, and forced requisitions of grain by the government," resulted in a famine that threatened the collapse of the newly emerging government.[5] In July 1921, celebrated Russian author Maxim Gorky revealed the Soviet's desperation to the world when he appealed to "come to the assistance of the famine-stricken areas of Soviet Russia."[6] Reports painted a grim picture of the famine. There were claims that over forty million people were affected by the famine and that over one million of those people were already irrevocably condemned to their graves.[7] Depressing details such as abandoned children starving to death, bodies strewn about the street (while dogs devoured them), and women committing suicide along with their children flooded the world.[8] The Soviet Union (and especially the Volga region) was plagued with "hunger, malaria and cholera" which made any visitor "recall the black death which originated here in the Middle Ages."[9]

[3] Theodore Draper, *American Communism and Soviet Russia: The Formative Period* (New York: Viking, 1960), 11.

[4] Vernon Kellogg, "The Russian Famine," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 100 (1922): 105. Kellogg reports that the country's yearly pre-war production of grain had been over 120,000,000 poods (with 1 pood equaling 36 pounds). By 1920, that number had been reduced to eighteen million poods and to a meager three million by 1921.

[5] John L. Gaddis, *Russia, the Soviet Union and the United States. An Interpretive History* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1990), 101.

[6] Benjamin M. Weissman, "Herbert Hoover's "Treaty" with Soviet Russia: August 20, 1921," *Slavic Review* 28, no. 2 (1969): 276.

[7] Floyd Gibbons, "Graphic Picture of Real Horror; Correspondent Says Russian Famine Net Red Lies; Starvation, Death, Suffering Has Stricken Populace; Abandoned Children Dying by the Hundreds," *Los Angeles Times*, September 3, 1921, I2.

[8] Ibid.

[9] "Starving Ask for Americans; 'When Will They Come?' is Old Man's Question; Faces Grow Thinner on Trip Up Volga River; Church Services Are Only Prewar Activity," *Los Angeles Times*, November 9, 1921, I5.

With the desperation of the situation now apparent to all, the proud Soviet government was forced to ask the world for assistance. The United States answered the call in August 1921 through the American Relief Administration (A.R.A), led by future President Herbert Hoover. The A.R.A. distributed food, clothing, and medications with the stipulation that supplies would be dispensed without regard to "race, religion or social or political status." With the goodwill of the American people on such a high, it would not take long for the Communist Party of America to tap into their charitable and humanitarian nature.

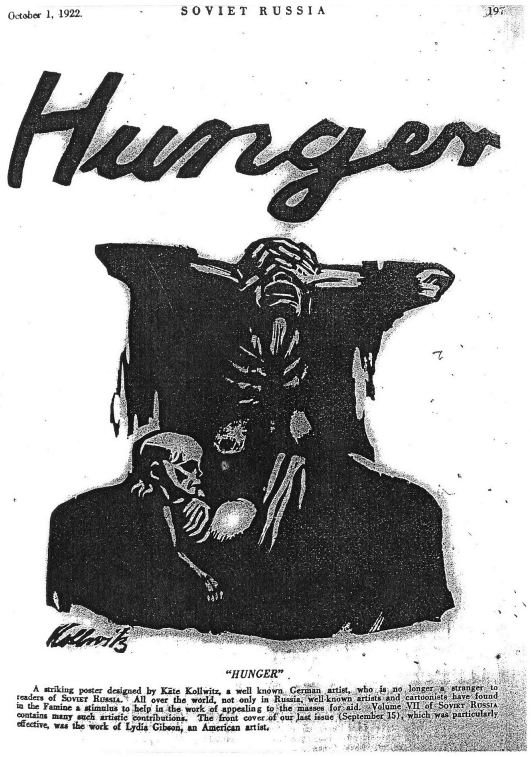
As a result, the C.P.A launched the F.S.R. as a membership front.[10] The F.S.R. claimed to come into existence because of the "cruelly afflicted" people of the Soviet Union and pledged that "all relief gathered by it [would] be distributed in Russia by the Soviet government to those in need, regardless of their political opinions."[11] Like Hoover's A.R.A, the Friends claimed a wholly nonpartisan and benevolent intent and initially mirrored their organization's goals on the Hoover model.

The F.S.R. collected funds for the famine immediately after their August inception. Through a series of conferences, they appealed for funds "as well as circulation of subscription lists for the collection of money."[12] In only three months, the front organization raised over $250,000.[13] They continued their initial famine work by publishing pamphlets such as *The Russian Famine in Pictures* and *Famine in Russia and Capitalism Abroad,* and in magazines like *The Nation* with the intention of raising another $50,000 by the following month. The F.S.R. had found their niche and their next move was structured to reach a wider audience than they were already enjoying.

The Friends adopted the semi-monthly *Soviet Russia* magazine as their official organ beginning in January 1922.[14] Although the magazine focused primarily on the famine, it also contained articles that discussed other issues affecting the Soviet Union. Not only did staff writers make appeals, but notables like union leader Eugene Debs and Noble Peace Prize recipient Fridtjof Nansen contributed commentaries as well. In this sense, the Friends of Soviet Russia

[10] Draper, 176.
[11] "Program of the Friends," 287.
[12] "A Summary of Its Works by The Friends of Soviet Russia," *Soviet Russia* 6, no. 1 (1922): 21.
[13] Ibid.
[14] Roger N. Baldwin, "Report of the Investigating Committee of Five: To the Friends of Soviet Russia," *Soviet Russia* 7, no. 9 (1922): 238-241.

attempted to match the credibility of mainstream publications, which featured corroborating stories by more convincing witnesses like A.R.A. representative, Vernon Kellogg.[15]



Kollwitz, Kate. **"Hunger."** *Soviet Russia* 7, no. 7 (1922): 197.

(Figure 1)

Descriptions of the horrible situation endured by the famine-stricken Russians filled pages of the magazine (see Figure 1). They used stories of the "interminable days and nights of the terrible winter months that lie before them" and urged readers to "help some miserable man or woman or child."[16] *Soviet Russia* continued comparing the good fortune of the United States and the sorrowful conditions of the Soviets as a tool of appeal to their readers. The

[15] "Food is Urged to Save Russia," *Los Angeles Times*, November 30, 1921, I8.
[16] Fridtjof Nansen, "What Can We Do for Russia?" *Soviet Russia* 6, no. 2 (1922): 46.

publication reminded readers that, "in America, there is such abundance of food that the farmer has not yet been able to dispose of his crops from last year." The wheat surplus was "rotting in the storehouses because they cannot sell it."[17]

Soviet Russia invited American workers to assist their Russian comrades who had "thrilled and inspired the workers of all nations and challenged the plaudits of the whole world."[18] It was the American "laborers'" responsibility to rescue their brothers from their dismal situation, which would help them get back on their feet. A brotherhood of loyalty united and encouraged workers to "give and to give at once and give freely and to the last dollar and the last penny that may be spared to the Friends of Soviet Russia."[19]

Besides appealing to readers for famine relief, the Friends of Soviet Russia also had the peculiar task of defending the Bolshevik government against any accusations of having some responsibility for it. While they presented the desperate situation occurring in the Volga region, they stayed away from showing the more graphic scenarios: such as reports of rampant cannibalism and murders.[20] The Friends became the vanguard of the Soviet government against allegations of instability, incompetence, and indifference.

The Soviet-friendly front drew blame away from the Bolsheviks and instead focused on the drought as "the chief cause of the famine."[21] If the Bolsheviks were responsible for the famine, they argued, it would be spread throughout the Soviet states instead of primarily along the Volga region.[22] Besides the drought, the F.S.R blamed the famine on the wars the Soviets had participated in, including the American supported World War.[23]

The F.S.R. presented the American-led commercial blockade as a major contributing factor to the Russian famine. The blockade "prevented…agricultural machinery from going into" the Soviet Union and consequently, the "area of cultivation in Russia [had] been reduced from year to year."[24]

[17] Nansen, 47.
[18] Eugene V. Debs, "An Appeal for Contributions for Russian Famine Relief," *Soviet Russia* 6, no. 6 (1922): 166.
[19] Ibid.
[20] "Cannibalism in Russia; Graphic Stories of Starvation Told by Returning Travelers; Thousands of Corpses Seen," *Los Angeles Times*, April 1, 1922, I2.
[21] Nansen, 43.
[22] Ibid.
[23] Kellogg, 106.
[24] Nansen, 43.

The Americans countered the criticism of the blockade by insisting that the famine was in part a result of the Soviet government's incompetence. The requisitioning of surplus program was shown as a "fatal error" which motivated peasants to harvest the minimum amount of crops necessary to feed themselves.[25] When the drought came unexpectedly, the farmers and the country found themselves without a storage supply of crops to augment their meager harvest. The F.S.R. responded to the requisition accusation by stating that the "Soviet Government discovered the bad results of this principle, and therefore gave up the system of requisitioning" as well as introducing a "system of taxing" which allowed farmers to keep their surplus and introduce it into market if they so desired.[26] The Soviets, it seemed, were capable of conceding error in their system and making the necessary corrections for the benefit of their people.

While blame for the famine had been assigned and reassigned by both the Soviets and the Americans, the relief effort also came under scrutiny. Hoover had made it clear from the beginning that A.R.A. relief would be completely free of political influence. He ordered relief workers to "keep their lips discretely closed about all things having a political significance."[27] The A.R.A.'s mission was to come to the aid of the children of Russia without taking into account their parent's political or religious affiliations, which they claimed had been the method employed by a "group friendly to the Soviets" who collected funds solely for the benefit of Bolshevist party members.[28] The insult was not lost on the F.S.R., which began a campaign discrediting the work of future President Hoover.

Far from political ambivalence, the Soviets and the Friends saw the A.R.A relief as a political ploy to undermine the Leninist government. Hoover's relief plan was suspected as a form of interference through "bread intervention" more than humanitarian goodwill.[29] The F.S.R. accused the U.S. government of limiting food distribution in an effort to discredit the Soviet government and cause the disgruntled peasants to revolt. Besides the A.R.A.'s ulterior motives, the Friends also discredited the effectiveness of the relief provided by the organization.

Soviet Russia argued that although the A.R.A. provided help for the Soviet children, their efforts were seen as a mere "drop in the

[25] Kellogg, 106.
[26] Nansen, 43.
[27] "Russian Relief," *Los Angeles Times*, October 18, 1921, II4.
[28] Ibid.
[29] Gaddis, 99.

bucket." Their contributions were not the solution to the famine, but merely a "rather hastily constructed makeshift" effort which provided relief to only one-sixth of the children and at "only one-third of the normal feeding required" by them.[30] Despite the resentment between Herbert Hoover and supporters of the Soviet government, the philanthropic nature of the United States continued to make headlines.

As 1922 began, American relief efforts reached a new high. In January of that year, President Harding signed a bill authorizing "the purchase and shipment to Russia of $20,000,000 worth of corn, seed grain and condensed milk."[31] The A.R.A. quickly announced in the same month that they achieved their goal of feeding over one million Soviets.[32] Despite American generosity and seemingly successful campaigns, the U.S. relief effort laid blame for the continued misery of Russian citizens squarely on Soviet shoulders. The Soviet infrastructure and especially the Bolshevik rail system came under heavy scrutiny by the A.R.A. Hoover contended that America's aid was useless because the Bolshevik transportation system was not working. He declared that the "number of persons who will die from starvation in famine-stricken Russia is almost wholly dependent on the Russian railways now transporting grain for the American Relief Administration."[33] This claim undermined the Bolshevik government and drew a response from Friends of Soviet Russia.

According to Albert A. Johnson (of the Russian Commission on the Near East) and Paxton Hibben, Secretary of the Near East Relief's Special Russian Commission, the Soviet railways and waterways were more than capable of handling "all the food Mr. Hoover's $20,000,000 will buy and as much again, besides."[34] Despite their arguments, things continued to take a downward spiral for both the Soviet government and the Friends of Russia famine relief effort.

By April of 1922, the American people began to believe that the famine in the Soviet Union was being conquered. In that month, A.R.A. chief Herbert Hoover advised President Harding that America's twenty million dollar Christmas gift was probably more

[30] A. Eiduk, "The American Relief Administration," *Soviet Russia* 6, no. 2 (1922): 48.
[31] "America's Christmas Gift," *Los Angeles Times*, January 16, 1922, II4.
[32] "Over a Million Russians Fed," *Los Angeles Times*, January 20, 1922, I18.
[33] "Lives Depend on Rails; Number of Russians to Die Up to Red Transportation; Food Is There, Says Hoover," *Los Angeles Times*, March 7, 1922, I1.
[34] Ibid.

than was needed since "famine conditions in Russia were… improving greatly."[35] Two months later, Colonel Haskell (head of A.R.A. in the Soviet Union) reported that the American relief saved over eight million Soviet lives and considered the A.R.A.'s mission accomplished.[36]

While the majority of Americans rejoiced over their charitable accomplishment, the Friends of Soviet Russia clung on to the perception that a famine still existed and refused to let it go. They considered Hoover's reluctance to continue sending relief as another stalling tactic, which rather than "feeding the starving Russians" was in fact, "talking them to death."[37] The F.S.R. contended that, "although the picture as a whole is…favorable, it would be wrong to conclude that the famine and its consequences are at an end." The Friends argued that the Soviets were on their way to recovery from the famine, but still had an "imperative need of outside help."[38] In a last desperate attempt to conserve their famine-based membership, the Friends used their October 1922 issue of *Soviet Russia* to graphically illustrate the severity of the famine, which most Americans had by now forgotten. The "Hunger" sketch depicts a desperate and skeletal mother grieving the death of her emaciated child. (Figure 1) The morbid child rests peacefully, defeated by the famine on her lap with the tale-tell inflated stomach caused by starvation.[39]

The Friends of Soviet Russia found much success in attracting more members and a considerable amount of funds through their famine relief campaign. The F.S.R. refused to let the momentum that had created their front organization go to waste and instead of dying with the famine, simply readjusted their objective. The goal of the F.S.R. shifted from famine relief to rebuilding the tattered Soviet Republic. The reconstruction of Soviet Russia became the new banner of the front.

While interest in the F.S.R. diminished after the famine issue had been sufficiently exploited, the organization continued its work by defending the **"**rebuilding of the country's shattered economy" through appeals for "machines and other outside help."[40] They went about their mission by shifting their stance from a "cry for bread," to

[35] "Famine Situation Relieved," *Los Angeles Times*, April 20, 1922, I7.
[36] Ibid.
[37] Paxton Hibben, "Hoover's View on Russian Transportation," *Soviet Russia* 6, no. 8 (1922): 234.
[38] Pierre Pascal, "The Russian Famine," *Soviet Russia* 7, no. 6 (1922): 154-155.
[39] Kate Kollowitz, "Hunger," *Soviet Russia* 7, no. 7 (1922): 197.
[40] "Program of the Friends," 287.

the necessities of production as well as demonstrating to their readers the potential for investment opportunities.[41]

With the U.S./British blockade lifted since July 1920, the Soviets were optimistic and sought to improve trade relations and begin industrial reconstruction of the war and famine-torn country.[42] As a result, Lenin instituted an economic plan, which "marked the beginning of a concerted effort to harness the resources and skills of capitalism in support of the new Socialist order."[43] Lenin intended to stabilize the Soviet government through an effort of attracting and developing "concessions, trade, and technical assistance."[44] Over the next few years, the United States was eager to oblige.

By 1922 it became evident that the Bolshevik government was no longer in danger of collapsing and the American position grew stronger in opposition of recognition. Ironically, the American view on trade and commerce became one of acceptance.[45] President Coolidge, who adamantly refused to recognize the Soviet Union politically, stated in 1923 that the United States had "no objection to the carrying on of commerce by our citizens with the people of Russia."[46] Herbert Hoover went even further by proclaiming that the Soviet government would not be recognized without first reaching reconstruction through agricultural and industrial endeavors.[47] Washington's position emboldened Lenin and Soviet supporters to attain the goal of reconstruction and modernization.

During the initial stage of reconstruction, The F.S.R. saw agricultural modernization as a key to stabilizing the effects that the devastating famine had caused. With this in mind, the Friends began imploring Americans to "aid in the purchasing of tractors and plows which in return will prevent Russia to fall into another famine." They presented agricultural reconstruction and modernization as a humanitarian effort that would avert future starvation and mass deaths.[48]

The F.S.R. once again found success in its pleas. Through campaigns such as the "International Tool Collection Week," they

[41] "International Tool Collection Week," *Soviet Russia* 6, no. 9 (1922): 273.
[42] Cecil A. James, "Reciprocal Trade with the Soviet Union," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 168 (1933): 238.
[43] Gaddis 101.
[44] Ibid.
[45] Gaddis, 96.
[46] James, 238.
[47] "Hoover Hits Pleas for Reds," *Los Angeles Times*, March 23, 1923, I3.
[48] "International Tool Collection Week," 273.

managed to raise substantial funds.[49] Their fund-raising achievement was such that in May 1922, the F.S.R. dispatched a Soviet-bound boat from New York with "twenty tractors, a number of plows and auto trucks, agricultural implements of all kinds, food for the working force, and fodder for the animals."[50] The Friends seemed to have survived the famine along with the Soviet population.

While the Soviets patriotically presented their agricultural modernization project as imperative in "rebuilding…the country's economy" and therefore aiding in the "rehabilitation of Europe, and guaranteeing of world peace," Americans perceived it in a very different light.[51] Americans viewed the Soviet agricultural reconstruction effort as a result of weakening Leninist control and the emergence of a "new and growing middle-class," which demanded the right of private citizens to "be permitted to import agricultural machines, tools and seeds free."[52] American influence in the Soviet Union by companies like General Motors, lent their support to the demands.[53] The Soviet government ordered millions of dollars worth of agricultural equipment, consisting of primarily tractors.[54] With an influx of equipment entering the Soviet Union, the demand shifted to human resources.

The F.S.R., like the Soviets, realized that no amount of machinery could rebuild the country without the technical expertise necessary to run it. As part of the successful International Tool Collection Week, the Friends requested the assistance of "specialists, industrial and agricultural organizers."[55] Surprisingly, the Americans answered the call for manpower. In May 1922, almost seventy engineers, miners, and farmers traveled to the Soviet Union in an effort to "strike directly at the heart of Russia's industrial problem."[56] The group was considered the advance party for a potential of up to seven thousand brave souls who would enter into a two-year obligation with the Soviet government. The motivation behind their trip may have been based on their sense of

[49] Ibid.
[50] Willy Munzenber, "Foreign Workers Aid Russian Reconstruction," *Soviet Russia* 7, no. 2 (1922): 42.
[51] "Nationwide Interest in Tractor Drive," *Soviet Russia Pictorial* 8, no. 6 (1923): 114.
[52] "Russ Foreign Trade Monopoly Broken; People's Commissars Rule Private Persons May be Importers," *Los Angeles Times*, May 24, 1922, I3.
[53] Ibid.
[54] "Tractors for Russia," *Los Angeles Times*, February 5, 1923, II4.
[55] "International Tool Collection Week," 273.
[56] "Pioneers on way to Reds," *Los Angeles Times*, May 27, 1922, 14.

patriotism, as some of the volunteers were of Russian descent.[57] By July of the next year, over one thousand Russian workers made the trip back home, bringing with them a reported one million dollars in equipment. Not only Russians, but also eager Americans would rebuild the Soviet Union.[58]

To encourage the migration of Americans to the Soviet Union, the F.S.R. reported the progress of the American Tractor Unit (A.T.U.), which they had sent. The A.T.U. was composed of a "husky bunch from North Dakota" that was entrusted with the care of the machinery purchased with F.S.R. funds and taught the peasants the use of the modern equipment.[59] The North Dakota boys were upbeat and even envious of their Soviet counterparts, commenting that farming without a mortgage was a luxury they were not afforded in America.[60] Despite the enthusiasm from American farm boys and returning expatriates, Soviet stability demanded more economic investment. Foreign machinery and workers were not enough to fully reconstruct the Soviet Union. The Soviets, the F.S.R., and the United States joined forces to achieve the next phase in the reconstruction objective: industrialization.

An effective advertisement campaign greatly assisted in the industrialization of the Soviet Union.[61] F.S.R. promotion and U.S. endorsement varied widely in their approach. The friendly front adopted the concept of an emerging and "new" Soviet society, while the mainstream American media approached industrialization through a capitalist lens.

In an effort to entice investors to the Soviet Union, the F.S.R. promoted the country as the emerging power of the European continent. The F.S.R. displayed the country's vast and seemingly endless resources as a significant advantage to the country.[62] While the ruble began to stabilize, the F.S.R. depicted neighboring European countries as being "on the brink of bankruptcy."[63] Requests for entrepreneurs to "help in importing and establishing a self-sustaining industrial system" were followed by the assurance

[57] Ibid.
[58] "Russian Reconstruction," *Soviet Russia Pictorial* 8, no. 7 (1923): 145.
[59] Anna L. Strong, "North Dakota in the Urals," *Soviet Russia Pictorial* 8, no. 5 (1923): 91.
[60] Ibid.
[61] Roger N. Baldwin, "Report of the Investigating Committee of Five: To the Friends of Soviet Russia," *Soviet Russia* 7, no. 9 (1922): 238-241.
[62] James, 235.
[63] "The Backbone of the Famine is Broken Advertisement," *Soviet Russia Pictorial* 8, no. 11 (1923): 259.

that the "Russian Soviet Government is better able to keep any promises it now makes than any other government" in the area.[64]

While the F.S.R. was busy promoting the Soviet's emerging role in the region, Washington fantasized about capitalist ideas creeping into the Kremlin. The Soviet's venture into industrialization was perceived as an embrace of capitalistic principles. Lenin seemed to "have finally awakened to a sense of the utter hopelessness of his theories" and accepted that "free economic action in matters industrial and agricultural must be given free play."[65]

Whether industry was inspired by self-actualization or reception of capitalist ideals, the opportunities for business and commerce in the Soviet Union were great. Although the F.S.R. emphasized attracting labor organizations to invest in Soviet industry, it was also "eagerly inviting foreign capital," regardless of their affiliation.[66] Readers of *Soviet Russia* were enticed with "substantial holdings…and handsome dividends" for investing in dilapidated ventures such as a state electronic lamp works, chinaware factories, and book and shoe factories.[67] With minimal funds, these industries would rise from the ground and not only profit the country, but the investor as well. No other venture exemplified this idea more than Hillman's Amalgamated Workers of America.

As head of the Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America (A.C.W.A.), Sidney Hillman decided to invest in the new Soviet Union in 1922. In a deal worked out with Lenin's consent, Hillman would take over all dwindling clothing operations in the Bolshevik state. The A.C.W.A. supported the plan and voted to make an "appropriation of $10,000 to defray initial expenses and voted the purchase of $50,000 worth of the stock for the union."[68] The stock in question was Hillman's attempt to raise one million dollars in capital in order to revitalize the Soviet clothing industry. The F.S.R. supported the campaign by selling stock at ten dollars a share to "investors" through the *Soviet Russia Pictorial* magazine and proudly announced that "Premier Lenin insisted on showing his

[64] Robert Minor, "A Splendid Opportunity," *Soviet Russia* 7, no. 11 (1922): 302-303.

[65] "Lenin Embraces Capitalism; Admits That No Real Progress is Possible Until Extremist Policies Are Given Up and Capitalistic System of Industry is Restored," *Los Angeles Times*, December 12, 1922, I12.

[66] "Russian Concessions," *Soviet Russia Pictorial* 8, no. 9 (1923): 201.

[67] A.A. Heller, "A Program of Reconstruction," *Soviet Russia* 7, no. 9 (1922): 231.

[68] "Americans to Run Bolshevik Factories; Concessions on Clothing and Textile Manufacture are Awarded," *Los Angeles Times*, May 12, 1922, I9.

approval of the new corporation by buying two shares of stock from Hillman."[69] The A.C.W.A. opened up shop in the Soviet Union under the Russian-American Industrial Corporation (R.A.I.C) moniker.[70] While the F.S.R. continued publishing optimistic experiences by American investors like the Allied American Corporation and the American International Harvesting Machinery Company, the possibility of recognition by the U.S. seemed farther away than ever.[71]

Along with pushing an agenda for reconstruction, by 1923, the Friends of Soviet Russia made a strong stance in favor of Soviet recognition by the United States. American political recognition would establish the Soviet Union as the world power the front envisioned. Appeals to Presidents Harding and Coolidge then fell on deaf ears as Secretary of State Charles Evans Hughes continually advised against recognizing the Bolshevik government.[72] Unlike the Secretary, the American public had divided views regarding the recognition issue. Some saw it as "rather inconsistent…to recognize the Bolsheviks economically and declare them outside the pale politically."[73] The Friends quickly capitalized on the division and launched their campaign to seek recognition.

The F.S.R. played on American patriotism to attract support to their cause. They paralleled the Bolshevik struggle with that of America's Revolutionary War. The Friends defended Soviet communism by insisting that, "in the spirit of the Declaration of Independence…the people of a country have rights to determine their own form of government without direct or indirect interference by other governments."[74] They reminded Americans that, "it took [the United States] eleven critical years after your revolution before you adopted a Federal Constitution and established a truly stable government."[75] If the patriotism ploy did not appeal to Americans, then perhaps the emergence of the Soviet Union as a major world power would.

[69] Minor, 301.
[70] "Clothe Russia," Advertisement," *Soviet Russia Pictorial* 8, no. 2 (1923): 40.
[71] "American Trade with Soviet Russia," *Soviet Russia Pictorial* 9, no. 3 (1924): 63.
[72] Gaddis, 97.
[73] Jerome Davis, "Should America Quarantine the Russian Soviet Government?" *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 126 (1926): 124.
[74] "Program of the Friends," 287.
[75] Albert F. Coyle, "Should America Recognize the Russian Republic?" *Soviet Russia Pictorial* 8, no. 11 (1923): 236.

According to the F.S.R., the rise of the Soviet Union as a superpower was inevitable. While Greece, Germany, Spain, and Poland were coping with civil war, dictatorships, and hunger, the Soviets found themselves in "absolute harmony and peace."[76] The United States would be wise in conceding that the communist country was going to be amongst "our most powerful neighbors whether we like it or not."[77] Based on this theory, the world leaders would include China, India, North America, and of course, the Soviet Union, and recognition was only naturally necessary.[78] Even with their innovative and persuading arguments, the American government refused to grant recognition.

Despite the United States' intimate involvement in economic matters with the Soviets, they refused to grant official recognition. By the end of 1923, President Coolidge firmly presented the three major arguments against Soviet recognition: first, the Soviet government must recognize at least the claims of the United States against Russia, second, the Soviet government must agree to restore the American property confiscated under the Soviet regime, and third, the Soviet government must agree to abandon its apparently worldwide enterprise to enforce a Communist regime in various foreign countries.[79] As expected, the F.S.R. had a response to the debt, property, and propaganda claims. They appealed to their readers that Coolidge's arguments were without merit and an excuse to reject recognition.

The debt issue was perhaps the most significant obstacle in obtaining recognition. The United States expected the Soviet Union to take responsibility for over one hundred eighty million in debts accumulated from the beginning of World War I. For a country coming out of a famine and attempting to rebuild itself, repayment of the debt seemed an impossible task. The F.S.R. argued that the "indebtedness of the *former* Russian Government to America" was not the new Soviet government's responsibility since the money had been spent by a now non-existing regime on "many unsuccessful crusades against the Soviet Government."[80] Despite the perceived

[76] "Manifesto of the Friends of Soviet Russia," *Soviet Russia Pictorial* 8, no. 11 (1923): 241.
[77] Coyle, 236.
[78] Ibid.
[79] "Recognition of Soviet Remote; President Embarrassed by Misunderstanding; Russian Fate Depending on Three Conditions; Friendship of America is Declared Impossible," *Los Angeles Times*, December 17, 1923, I4.
[80] "Their Arguments Against Recognition," *Soviet Russia Pictorial* 8, no. 10 (1923): 210.

unfairness of the debt, the Friends claimed the Soviets were "ready to discuss American claims and mutual interests," with the condition that the U.S. refrain from "infringing on Russian national dignity."[81]

In regard to the American property rights "which were violated in the Russian Revolution of 1917," the F.S.R. were even more blunt in their rebuttal.[82] War, according to the Friends, changed everything. Americans quickly forgot "the treatment accorded German property-owners residing in America after [the United States] joined the Allies and the German submarines began to destroy American vessels."[83] To make claims of property after a war was not only ridiculous, but also hypocritical of the United States government.

The American public was not the only one weighing in on the recognition question. Politicians battled in the Senate and in Congress over the controversial topic. The Soviet government invited members of Congress to "visit Russia…to obtain first hand knowledge of conditions there."[84] The Friends of Soviet Russia rejoiced in presenting the pro-recognition politicians in their issues of *Soviet Russia Pictorial*. When Wisconsin Congressman James Frear returned from the "fact-finding" mission, he reported favorable conditions in support of Soviet recognition. The Congressman ardently proclaimed that the new communist government "measures up with two-thirds of the European countries in stability and promise" and that the socialist system was "more certain and business-like than systems by a majority of European countries."[85]

A fellow Wisconsin Congressman, Robert M. La Follette ditto-ed the favorable report. Senator La Follette commented that the Soviet Union emerged as an improvement "as contrasted with conditions under the Czar" and emphasized the importance of reaching out to the country eagerly awaiting our friendship.[86] La Follette went further by questioning American policy and affirming that the Secretary of State showed little "concern over the conditions of tyranny that exist in Italy, Hungary, Spain and other European countries (aside from Russia) that are now governed by dictators

[81] "Soviet Russia in the Headlines," *Soviet Russia Pictorial* 9, no. 1 (1924): 19.
[82] "Their Arguments Against Recognition," 210.
[83] "Russian Reconstruction," *Soviet Russia Pictorial* 8, no. 7 (1923): 145.
[84] Grafton Wilcox, "Urge Senators to Visit Russia; Soviets Want Congressmen to Inspect Country; Invitation is Move in Drive for Recognition; Senator Ladd is Sought to Head Delegation," *Los Angeles Times*, March 8, 1923, I4.
[85] "Soviet Russia in the Headlines," *Soviet Russia Pictorial* 9, no. 1 (1924): 19.
[86] Ibid.

and continue to be recognized by our government."[87] The F.S.R. followed up the attack on the alleged hypocritical policy of recognition by reminding readers that Italy, Hungary, Greece, Bulgaria, Spain, and Germany were all dictatorships ruled through fascism, violence, and anti-union police, yet they had all been officially recognized by the United States.[88]

The favorable momentum and sympathy inspired by pro-recognition politicians quickly evaporated as allegations of three million dollars in gold sent to the United States by Moscow in an effort to buy their way into recognition were disclosed. Even more damaging was the possible tie between these monies and "various members of the United States Senate and the House of Representatives who [had] visited Moscow."[89] Though names were not mentioned, the American people rightly wondered whether their politicians' empathy towards Soviet recognition had a price tag attached.

With the previous year ending in disappointment by allegations of corruption, 1924 promised to be a breakthrough year in the F.S.R.'s recognition struggle. The first of February marked the most significant development in the Soviet's claim for legitimacy. In a move that completely countered their close American allies' position, Great Britain agreed to a Soviet recognition, which was "unconditional and leaves all questions of treaties, debts, claims and other obligations to be settled later by agreement between the two governments."[90] The United States must have realized that the domino effect would soon ensue since Britain was seen as the gatekeeper of Western Europe.

Indeed, following the British example, the Italians negotiated a commercial treaty with the Soviet Union and gave them recognition as part of the deal. The bond between Mussolini and Stalin forged a strong business relationship that declared "coastwise traffic in the Black Sea reserved for the Italian flag" (perhaps in a move to entice others to the benefits attained by embracing recognition).[91]

[87] Ibid.
[88] "Seven Dictatorships," *Soviet Russia Pictorial* 9, no. 1 (1924): 9.
[89] "Soviet Paving Way with Gold; Millions Here to Finance Recognition Drive; Parallel Campaigns to be Waged in Congress; Ambassador-to-be Reported Already in Country," *Los Angeles Times*, November 3, 1923, I3.
[90] "Britain Recognizes Soviet; Diplomatic Relations to Be Resumed With Russia After Suspension of Six Years," *Los Angeles Times*, February 2, 1924, 1.
[91] "Soviet Wins Mussolini; Recognition Will be Given To be Simultaneous With Signing of Commercial Pact at Rome Six Clauses of Treaty Are Outlined; Macaroni Supply Assured," *Los Angeles Times*, February 3, 1924, 1.

Norway, Greece, China, Hungary, and France followed the recognition trend.[92] As one country after another recognized the Soviet Union, the Friends rejoiced, exclaiming that, "in spite of all the efforts of the enemies of the Soviet Government, new Russia gradually succeeds in convincing the world that it is here to stay."[93] The world and the Friends of Soviet Russia awaited the response from the United States.

The United States refused to budge from its initial prerequisites to recognition. The F.S.R. witnessed Soviet success in European recognition and lamented that "soon the United States will be the one nation that refuses to acknowledge its mistakes of the past and insists on sulking in a corner by itself."[94] Unlike the famine relief effort and the campaign to rebuild the country, the recognition of the Soviet Union by the United States was a goal the Friends of Soviet Russia would not see accomplished.

Although the United States embraced economic relations with the Soviet Union, it adamantly refused to grant the country recognition until the Roosevelt administration did so in 1933. By then, the Friends of Soviet Russia was a distant memory and glories of the Russian famine relief were a thing of the past. The reconstruction campaigns that assisted the Soviets by implementing new agricultural technology and expertise, as well as the drive for industrial revival, succeeded and assisted the communist country in reaching stability. In hindsight, the Friends of Soviet Russia may have done more to save the Soviet state than the American Communist Party as a whole. Despite most of Europe giving the Soviet Union recognition, by the end of 1924, the United States clearly would not do so that year. Perhaps in conceding defeat, the

[92] The following five articles are in regards to the continued recognition of the Soviet Union by Norway, Greece, China, Hungary, and France, respectively: "Victory Thrill Felt by Soviet; Recognition of Government Lends Confidence Norway Latest to Present Hand of Welcome Russia Ready to Dictate Own Terms Now," *Los Angeles Times*, February 14, 1924, 4. "Greece Grants Recognition of Soviet Russia," *Los Angeles Times*, March 10, 1924, 1. "Reds Announce Chinese Treaty; Peking Grants Recognition, Declares Russia Conference Will be Called to Settle All Details Mongolia is Conceded as Part of China in Pact," *Los Angeles Times*, June 1, 1924, 3. "Hungary Gives Recognition to Russian Soviet," *Los Angeles Times*, September 17, 1924, 2. "France Recognizes Russia; Text of Note to Red Government is Held Up by Paris Pending Reply from Moscow," *Los Angeles Times*, October 29, 1924, 3.

[93] "Great Britain Recognizes Soviet Russia," *Soviet Russia Pictorial* 9, no. 3 (1924): 58.

[94] "Italy Recognizes Soviet Government," *Soviet Russia Pictorial* 9, no. 4 (1924): 85.

F.S.R combined their *Soviet Russia Pictorial* magazine with the *Labor Herald* and *Liberator* into the *Workers Monthly* in November 1924.[95] The Friends of Soviet Russia had simply outgrown its usefulness.

The Friends of Soviet Russia had been born out of the Russian famine, but they refused to die with it. By appealing to a humanitarian following, they built its membership base and raised hundreds of thousands of dollars and an extensive subscription list. When the United States announced the end of the famine in the Soviet Union, the Friends continued to urge their members to contribute to the relief effort and later convinced their followers to support reconstruction. This new campaign found monetary and voluntary success. As a result, they sent equipment and personnel to Moscow. Appeals for American political recognition of the Soviet Union marked a transition for the organization. The F.S.R. now expected political support and pressure from their readers instead of the contributions they had requested in previous campaigns. As a result, the Friends lost their source of subsistence and were sadly relegated to taking a back seat in the front organization movement they had ignited.

[95] "Workers Monthly," *Soviet Russia Pictorial* 9, no. 10 (1924): 278.