

David R. Francis, Ambassador to Four Russian Governments

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Abstract

This article examines the tenure of David R. Francis, U.S. ambassador to Russia from 1916 to 1918, highlighting his challenges in navigating the collapse of the Russian Empire, the rise of the Provisional Government, and the Bolshevik Revolution. Despite his lack of diplomatic experience, Francis grappled with complex issues, including prisoner-of-war management, strained U.S.-Russian relations, and Allied intervention efforts. The author argues that Francis' performance reflects broader shortcomings of Wilsonian diplomacy, characterized by liberal illusions and democratic prejudices ill-suited to revolutionary Russia. Through a critical analysis of Francis' actions and memoirs, the article questions his legacy while situating his failures within the context of U.S. foreign policy under Woodrow Wilson.

David R. Francis, Ambassador to Four Russian Governments

Vladimir Noskov

David R. Francis presented himself as the “United States Ambassador to Russia under the Czar, the Provisional Government and the Bolsheviks.” Actually he represented his country before four Russian Governments: the Imperial, Provisional, Soviet, and Northern ones. During his stay in Russia Francis changed the place of his residence three times moving from Petrograd first to Vologda and finally to Archangel. He was an eyewitness of the greatest events in history of Russia: the First World War, February Revolution, downfall of the Empire, October Revolution, and Civil War. During two and half years of his residence in Russia, Francis met a lot of prominent people of the time, including Nicholas II, the last Emperor of Russia, and Vladimir I. Lenin, the first Soviet leader. Francis’ diplomatic experience was unique and had no parallel in the history of Russian-American relations. That is why his memoirs are of special interest for historians and general public as well.

The most striking feature of his Russian experience is the fact that Francis was not a diplomat at all. Practically nothing in his previous life might help him in his ambassadorial work. David Rowland Francis was born in Richmond, Kentucky, in 1850, and removed to St. Louis, Missouri, in 1866 to enter Washington University. After graduation he became a clerk and soon afterwards partner in a commercial house, thus beginning his successful business career. Francis was also an officer or trustee in many banking and philanthropic institutions. At that same time he rose to prominence in politics, serving as mayor of St. Louis (1885–1889) and the youngest governor of Missouri (1889–1893). For a short time Francis served Secretary of Interior in President Grover Cleveland’s cabinet. He was a devoted Democrat but opposed William J. Bryan’s candidacy in 1896 and afterwards was out of politics for ten years. Francis married Jane Perry, belonging to a prominent Missouri family, and they had six sons.

One of Francis’ most brilliant achievements was his campaign to organize the 1904 World Exposition at St. Louis. From one side, it was a typical story illustrating his unusual business and administrative abilities. From another, the episode was of special importance in Francis’ biography because it provided him with the only international experience prior to his appointment to a diplomatic post. This wonderful saga begun in the summer of 1889 when Francis began pushing for a world’s fair to be held in St. Louis and lasted for fifteen years.

In 1903 Francis made a tour around principal European capitals to encourage foreign participation. He met King Edward VII of Great Britain, French president Emile Loubet, Kaiser Wilhelm II of Germany, and King Leopold II of Belgium. From Europe Francis hastened back to St. Louis, where on the Dedication Day Ceremony he welcomed members of the diplomatic corps including British, French, Italian, and Russian ambassadors. The St. Louis Fair lasted for seven months during which Francis was said to be “the most photographed man in America.”¹ The fair was the largest international exposition the world ever seen by the moment and it was a great financial success.² In mid-1906, Francis, with his companions, made another trip to Europe where he “was tireless in tracking down monarchs and prime ministers” wherever they might be found.³

At the same time Francis returned to active political life and came around to support Woodrow Wilson in 1912. Francis also strengthened his friendship with Charles R. Crane, a wealthy Chicago businessman and prominent Democratic campaign contributor, who was a friend of the new president. Crane had reputation of one of the most active and influential promoter of the rapprochement with Russia. The so-called Crane circle included, among others, such diverse people as journalists Arthur Ruhl and Stanley Washburn, businessmen Frederick M. Corse and Raymond Robins, and the YMCA leader John R. Mott,—to list only those persons whom, as well as Crane himself, Francis would meet later in Petrograd. The most outstanding figure among Crane’s followers was an expert in Russian language and institutions Samuel N. Harper.

On the eve of the First World War the post of the US Ambassador at St. Petersburg was vacant and interrelations between two powers were rather cool. In July 1914, the ambassadorship to Russia was offered to an international lawyer and active Democratic supporter George T. Marye but in the early 1916 he was forced to resign as a result of his inability to meet Wilson’s hopes. With Crane’s assistance a new ambassador in the person of Governor Francis was appointed and Harper was named an unofficial advisor to accompany him to Russia.⁴ As his biographer wrote, in his mature years Francis represented “the perfect image of a successful American businessman and civic leader” and was “proud of his contributions to the community, pleased with his accomplishments and with himself.” He was “a brash, opinionated, stubborn, smart, sometimes foolish, straight-talking, quick-acted, independent-minded, proud, self-made man.” Francis “was rich and getting richer, busy with his directorships and his civic duties, regularly travelling the country to speak to large audiences and meet with other powerful men, who were his friends.”⁵

¹ Harper Barnes, *Standing on a Volcano. The Life and Times of David Rowland Francis* (St. Louis: Missouri Historical Society Press, 2001), 72-75, 123-125, 131, 144.

² Robert W. Rydell, *All the World’s Fair: Visions of Empire at American International Expositions, 1876–1916* (Chicago: Chicago UP, 1984), 155-183.

³ Barnes, *Standing on a Volcano*, 168.

⁴ Paul A. Goble, “Samuel N. Harper and the Study of Russia,” *Cahiers du monde russe et soviétique* XIV, no.4 (Octobre–Décembre 1973): 613.

⁵ Barnes, *Standing on a Volcano*, VII, XI, 178.

In the meantime, as the editor of his letters noted, “Francis was shrewd and capable in the world he knew, but international diplomacy was not in that world.”⁶ The Russian ambassador in Washington characterized him as a thriving provincial businessman with a good fortune and great self-assurance.⁷ The new American ambassador had but a little international experience, no theoretical preparation, no practical knowledge, no diplomatic abilities required for the post. In George F. Kennan’s opinion, “Francis was not what you would call a cosmopolitan person. He was a product of the old West, a ‘provincial’ in the best sense of the term, in whose character there was reflected something of the ‘showboat’ Mississippi: the vigor, the earthiness, the slightly flamboyant elegance, and the uninhibited enjoyment of the good things of life. His values and opinions were, at his age of 67, firmly established, and were not to be essentially shaken even by the experience of residence in a foreign capital in dramatic times.”⁸ He was made a diplomat by chance as a consequence of a “Democratic débauche” in the Foreign Service and demoralization of the State Department that followed Woodrow Wilson’s rise to presidency.

Francis sailed for Russia on April 8, 1916, leaving his family at home. He was accompanied by his African-American valet Philip Jordan. Arthur Ruhl, who crossed the Atlantic on the same steamboat, remembered that “his man Friday, Phil, a body-servant of the old-fashioned Southern kind, already mourning, after but a week of foreign ways, for the hot biscuits of St. Louis.”⁹ Harper, another Francis’ companion, wrote after several days of cruise: “I heard enough of them to realize that our new ambassador was a very blunt, outspoken American, who believed in speaking his mind regardless of the rules of diplomacy.”¹⁰

Francis arrived at Petrograd in the morning on April 15 (28) and was met at the station by the embassy people. Staff of the US embassy in the Russian capital at the moment consists of nine men. The senior diplomat was a veteran Herbert H.D. Pierce, a Special Agent of the State Department with the rank of Minister Plenipotentiary, appointed in 1915 to assist the ambassador in Russia. Long before this appointment he served in Russia for seven years and his prolonged experience taught him that the “entire social fabric of Russia, the point of view of the Russian mind and its manner of thought, differ widely from our own, and are not susceptible of estimation upon the same basis of comparison.”¹¹ Francis had not enough time to know this lesson because his cooperation with the experienced adviser was very short. The next in rank was first secretary of the embassy Fred M.

⁶ Jamie H. Cockfield, ed. *Dollars and Diplomacy: Ambassador David Rowland Francis and the Fall of Tsarism, 1916–1917* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1981), 4.

⁷ See: Vasyukov, V.S. *Vneshnyaya politika Rossii nakanune Fevral'skoy revolyutsii* (Moscow: Mysl', 1989), 182.

⁸ George F. Kennan, *Russia and the West under Lenin and Stalin* (Boston & Toronto: Little, Brown & Company, 1960), 50.

⁹ Arthur Ruhl, *White Nights and other Russian Impressions* (N.Y.: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1917), 4.

¹⁰ Barnes, *Standing on a Volcano*, 188.

¹¹ Herbert H.D. Pierce, Russia, in: *Atlantic Monthly* 90, no. 540 (October 1901): 465.

Dearing, Francis' fellow-countryman but his antipode in the realm of diplomacy. Another Missourian, Frederick A. Sterling, and John C. White held the posts of second secretary, and John L. Ryan was third secretary.

The staff of attachés to the embassy included a brilliant naval officer Newton A. McCully who was appointed the first permanent US naval attaché with residence in Petrograd and played a prominent part in Russian-American relations during the First World War, the 1917 Revolution, and the Civil War in Russia. By April 1916, McCully had served in Petrograd for one and half a year, was well acquainted with Russian affairs and won the reputation of the most experienced and informed member of the embassy staff. A former newspaperman Henry D. Baker became the first US commercial attaché in Russia. He served there from the end of 1914 and was active in promoting closer Russian-American relations in trade and commerce. Military attaché 2d Lt. E. Francis Riggs reached the post just recently and was officially presented to the Emperor on February 10 (23), 1916. The last addition to the embassy staff was Captain James C. Breckinridge of the Marine Corps. He was assigned to duty as assistant naval attaché at Petrograd on February 16 and arrived there shortly before Francis' arrival. All diplomats mentioned above accompanied the ambassador to the official Imperial reception which took place in the Aleksandrovskii Palace at Tsarskoe Selo on April 22 (May 5), 1916.¹²

Within a few months after the reception, almost the whole embassy staff was substituted. In May and June 1916 attaché Baker and all secretaries were reappointed to other posts. Harper also left Petrograd in August. Dearing, who was very critical of embassy's work and elaborated plans "to revamp U.S. Embassy," entered into conflict with Francis and in the fall of the year left Russia without a new appointment in the Foreign Service. In the course of 1916 secretaries Norman Armour, Sheldon Whitehouse, and Livingston Phelps joined the staff, followed by first secretary James G. Bailey in the early 1917. Of great help to Francis were the appointments of J. Butler Wright as counselor and William C. Huntington as commercial attaché later in 1916. The last imperial Russian foreign minister stated that Francis produced "an impression of not a diplomat, but a businessman, as well as all his embassy staff; even their residence was more like a commercial office than an embassy". In his opinion, only Wright and Huntington looked like real diplomats. "Especially Huntington was able to serve as an example for foreign diplomats."¹³

Counselor Wright arrived at his post on November 4 (17), 1916, and found a staff beset with disorganization and inefficiency. Francis seemed "a rather daft, grandfatherly country gentlemen" with "great sense of nature, good keenness and common sense." But as ambassador he had "very little conception of the social amenities as regards the Diplomatic Service." As the weeks passed, Wright and

¹² D.R. Francis to Frank L. Polk, May 9, 1916, in: *Dollars and Diplomacy*, 20-22. Russian official account of the reception see: *Kamer-furyerskiye zhurnaly 1916-1917* (St. Petersburg: D.A.R.K., 2014), 138-139.

¹³ Pokrovsky, N.N. *Posledny v Mariinskom dvortse: vospominaniya ministra inostrannykh del* (M.: NLO, 2015), 192.

many of the embassy staff worried that the ambassador's inexperience might cause him to do something foolhardy and embarrassing. As a result Wright and his colleagues hovered nervously around the ambassador, creating a tense work environment.¹⁴ "Wright performed his duties with great conscientiousness, but found it difficult to strike the right tone in his relation to Francis," Kennan wrote, "In Wright's eyes, Francis personified all the characteristic weakness of the political appointee in a diplomatic position. In Francis' eyes, Wright manifested the worst traits of the career officer."¹⁵

After the First World War erupted the US embassy at Petrograd was assigned to represent the German and Austro-Hungarian interests in Russia. The main part of this job was supervision over a great number of prisoners of war. To coordinate the POW work the so called Second Division of the Embassy was created and a prominent social worker Edward T. Devine arrived in March 1916 to head it. The Division was assisted by the members of the American Young Men's Christian Associations headed by Dr. Archibald C. Harte. Devine's friction with Francis over their respective jurisdiction and his reputation of being pro-German led to his recall and in October the former secretary of the St. Petersburg embassy Basil Miles replaced him as head of the Division. "Mr. Basil Miles, the new head of the Second Division of the Relief Branch of the embassy, has taken charge and gives promise of being very satisfactory," Francis wrote to his wife.¹⁶ Miles was appointed special assistant to the Ambassador with the rank of Minister Plenipotentiary. Soon the Foreign Service "emergency man" William F. Sands arrived in Petrograd as another special assistant to the Ambassador to help Miles in his division. On the whole, in the early 1917 at least 50 people made up the US embassy in Petrograd: 28 of the regular staff and 22 in the Second Division, making it the largest diplomatic mission in Russia.¹⁷ The staff of the US Consulate-General at Petrograd consisted of five people headed by an experienced diplomat North Winship.¹⁸

Most of the people named above was not mentioned in the Francis' ego-centric memoirs or mentioned but scarcely. The ambassador constantly presents on the first plan in his self-centered memoirs. For example, Francis wrote practically nothing about the Second Division that carried out the main part of the embassy's routine jobs. Meantime most of secretaries and attachés were more informed and experienced in their duties than the ambassador in his ones. Unfortunately, Francis' "awkwardness made itself felt in the Ambassador's relations with his career associates,—Kennan noted.—He could not help but be aware of their greater familiarity both with diplomatic life in general and with the Petrograd

¹⁴ William Allison, *American Diplomats in Russia: Case Studies in Orphan Diplomacy, 1916–1919* (Westport, CT, & London: Praeger, 1997), 51–53.

¹⁵ George F. Kennan, *Russia Leaves the War* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), 43.

¹⁶ D.R. Francis to Jane Francis; October 18/31, 1916, in: *Dollars and Diplomacy*, 55.

¹⁷ Norman E. Saul, *War and Revolution: the United States and Russia, 1914–1921* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2001), 69–70.

¹⁸ *Ves' Petrograd na 1917 god*, 97.

scene in particular. On the other hand, it was difficult for him to seek and accept their opinions without betraying his own ignorance and forfeiting the dignity of his position.”¹⁹ “Apart from his ignoring the appearance of things in a capital rife with rumors about spying and espionage, Francis made additional mistakes due to the unfamiliarity of both setting and role,—another historian stated.—His outlook was shaped by the shibboleths around which he had fashioned careers in business and the Democratic party.”²⁰

Arriving at Petrograd, Francis found that the state of the embassy building was a problem. The US Embassy rented the mansion of Count Michael N. Grabbe on Furshtatskaya street. The ambassador had his office on the second floor, near two small private rooms that Philip Jordan had furnished as his bedroom and sitting room. But this poorly furnished “palace” was considered a “laughing stock among Russians and diplomats alike,” chargé Charles S. Wilson reported.²¹ Francis was appalled at the rundown condition and inadequate furnishing of the embassy that was described by an eyewitness as looking more like a warehouse than a residence. “It is a large house and susceptible of being made very attractive, but it is out of repair and has little furniture and no furnishing whatever,” the ambassador wrote to his son.²² “The Embassy building is in very poor condition. I am sleeping in the Embassy and taking breakfast here, which is furnished by the wife of one of the messengers; my luncheon and dinner I get elsewhere,” he reported to the Secretary of State.²³ On May 17 (30) Francis cabled Lansing: “Just completed visits to my colleagues whose elegantly founded, well located embassies put me to shame. Am. Embassy inconvenient ill adapted almost absolutely unequipped.”²⁴ Francis was obliged to advance his own cash to pay for a dining room suite, kitchen utensils and supplies, curtains, and shades.²⁵ From another side, the Francis residence was located “in a fashionable part of the city lying between its center and the Tauride district to the east. Since this latter district included the later Soviet headquarters at the Smolny Institute, as well as the Parliament building, the American Embassy found itself in the midst of some of the most dramatic and violent happenings of the revolutionary period.”²⁶

Francis’ personal connections in the Russian capital were rather limited. As Kennan noted, “Francis’ taste and habits were the robust and simple ones of the American Middle West at the turn of the century. As such, they bore little affinity to the refined predilections of continental diplomatic society.” The “Governor’s preference for an evening’s entertainment ran to good cigars, good whisky, and a few cronies around the card table, rather than to large and elegant mixed gatherings. For this reasons, as well as by reason of a certain parsimoniousness,

¹⁹ Kennan, *Russia Leaves the War*, 38.

²⁰ David Mayers, *The Ambassadors and America’s Soviet Policy* (N.Y.–Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 72.

²¹ Saul, *War and Revolution*, 9.

²² Barnes, *Standing on a Volcano*, 194–195.

²³ D.R. Francis to R. Lansing, May 2, 1916, in: *Lansing Papers, 1914–1920*, II, 312.

²⁴ Saul, *War and Revolution*, 67.

²⁵ Barnes, *Standing on a Volcano*, 201.

²⁶ Kennan, *Russia Leaves the War*. P. 36.

he lived for the most part quietly in his Embassy apartment, confining his social life largely to the American colony, taking relatively little part in the social doings of high Petrograd society.”²⁷ In April 1916 there were 202 American citizens in the Russian capital.²⁸

Significantly, Francis’ first visitor after his arrival was H. Fessenden Meserve who represented the National City Bank of New York in Russia.²⁹ A Missourian, Samuel McRoberts, vice president of the bank, also arrived in Petrograd on May 2 (15), 1916, for the purpose of consummating a loan of \$50,000,000 to the Russian government.³⁰ Francis actively supported McRoberts during his visit to Petrograd and helped to negotiate a loan. At the very end of the year a branch of the National City Bank was opened at Petrograd. Another respected American businessman in the Russian capital was L. McAllister Smith of Guaranty Trust Company of New York. But the main figure in the local American business community was the representative of the New York Life Insurance Company Frederick M. Corse. “The tall, fifty-one-year-old Vermonter was fluent in Russian and considered to be the dean of the American colony in Petrograd. He was Francis’s closest male friend.”³¹ It was Corse who initiated the establishment of the American Hospital in Petrograd. In December 1916, Francis was personally introduced to each of the wounded soldiers at the hospital.³² Friction within the American community led to one faction separating to sponsor the American Refuge for Refugee Women and Children from the war zone. Its main backers were the Meserves and McAllister Smiths. Both factions received the additional support from the US embassy.

Another circle of the Francis’ acquaintances consisted of American wives of Russian noblemen with high social standing: Baroness Frances Ramsay who was a sister of Sheldon Whitehouse; Countess Lilie Nostitz; Princess Susan Beloselskaya-Belozerskaya; Princess Julia Cantacuzène-Speransky, granddaughter of President Grant. Assistant foreign minister Vladimir A. Artzimovich, a former consul at San Francisco, also was married to an American. He was America’s confidential friend in the ministry but was dismissed in October 1916. There was also the educational and philanthropic *Mayak* (Lighthouse) Society in Petrograd, sponsored by the YMCA and headed by General Secretary Franklin A. Gaylord. Pastor George A. Simons ran the affairs of the American Methodist Episcopal Chapel in Petrograd. In 1915 a branch of Russian-American Chamber of Commerce and the Society for Promoting Mutual Friendly Relations between Russia and America were established at Petrograd. The Society was headed by the former Russian

²⁷ Ibid., 36-38.

²⁸ *Izvestiya Obshchestva sblizheniya mezhdu Rossiyei i Amerikoy*, 2 (April 1916): 45.

²⁹ Barnes, *Standing on a Volcano*, 193.

³⁰ D.R. Francis to R. Lansing, May 20, 1916, in: *Lansing Papers*, I, 149; D.R. Francis to R. Lansing, July 25, 1916, in: *Dollars and Diplomacy*, 37.

³¹ Barnes, *Standing on a Volcano*, 207.

³² Lyubov Ginzburg, Rediscovering the “Living Human Documents” of a Goodwill Initiative. Letters from Russian Soldiers cared for at the City Hospital of the American Colony in Petrograd, 1914–1918, in: William Benton Whisenhunt & Norman E. Saul, eds. *New Perspectives on Russian-American Relations* (New York & London: Routledge, 2016), 129-131, 135.

Ambassador to Washington Roman R. Rosen. In June 1916 the Society Council gave a dinner in honor of the new US Ambassador.³³ Nevertheless Francis was slow to make friends among the Russians. "I gave a Fourth of July reception yesterday," he wrote to his wife. "The guests were mainly, if not altogether, Americans, as Russians do not understand the Fourth of July, and furthermore I have made comparatively few social acquaintances among the Russians."³⁴

Francis' circle of knowledgeable acquaintances, his place in the Russian high society, and his influence in governmental lobby were far smaller than that of the British or French ambassadors. Francis "had found himself overshadowed, in his relation to Russian court circles, by his French and British colleagues, who were more experienced, better connected, more at home in the world of dynamic diplomacy and aristocratic social forms."³⁵ The most influential foreign representative in Petrograd was obviously the British ambassador Sir George W. Buchanan. The stuffy and proper Englishman sharply contrasted with the casual Francis.³⁶ Next in influence was the French ambassador Maurice Paléologue. His first meeting with the US ambassador went very poorly because Francis efforts to avoid giving the slightest hint of partiality in the war won the ire of the French ambassador³⁷. "Francis seems to have found no easy approach to his diplomatic colleagues,"—Kennan noted.—"They, for their part, tended either to ignore him or to view him with amusement and condescension. His rare diplomatic dinners ... failed to accord with the standards of diplomatic elegance then prevailing in the Russian capital."³⁸ Francis "was alternately ignored and patronized by his British and French colleagues. He seldom entertained and led an unsociable life in the dilapidated embassy."³⁹ Both Buchanan and Paléologue scarcely mentioned Francis in their memoirs and so Russian officials did.

The whole term of Francis' stay in Russia may be divided on five periods: last months of the Imperial Russia (April 1916–February 1917), revolutionary turmoil under the Provisional Government (February–October 1917), dawn of the Bolshevik era in Petrograd (October 1917–February 1918), stop-off in the Soviet Vologda (March–July 1918), and the final sojourn to Arkhangel'sk occupied by the Allied forces (August–November 1918). Actually, Francis saw five different Russias from his windows. He was made to act in five different historical situations and presented five different images of Russia in his book. That is why his *Russia from the American Embassy* appeared before the reader as many-faced, varied, and even contradictory.

³³ *Izvestiya Obshchestva sblizheniya mezhdu Rossiyei i Amerikoy*, 3 (Sentyabr 1916): 34.

³⁴ D.R. Francis to Jane Francis, July 5, 1916, in: *Dollars and Diplomacy*, 31.

³⁵ Kennan, *Russia Leaves the War*, 16.

³⁶ Saul, *War and Revolution*, 71.

³⁷ Benson L. Grayson, *Russian-American Relations in World War I* (N.Y.: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., 1979), 79.

³⁸ Kennan, *Russia Leaves the War*, 38.

³⁹ Mayers, *The Ambassadors and America's Soviet Policy*, 74.

"The mission upon which I have started is a very difficult one", Francis wrote after his appointment.⁴⁰ But he was not able to realize then how difficult it would prove! His main assignment in Russia was to negotiate a new commercial treaty instead of the old 1832 treaty abrogated by the US government in 1911. Surprisingly for the instigators of the abrogation this sanction did not affect Russian policy at all. The abrogation had accomplished nothing. Meanwhile, Russian-American relations were frigid and the abrogation only added to existing difficulties.⁴¹ Woodrow Wilson himself actively supported the abrogation in search for votes at the eve of the 1912 election but becoming President he was forced to try to restore normal commercial relations with Russia. Ambassador Marye could not accomplish the task. And now, the military correspondent Richard W. Child wrote in 1916, we "need diplomatic and commercial representation in Russia of a standard of excellence which can eradicate a growing suspicion of our sordidness;" we "need the proper official representation also because at the end of the war we must strive to make a commercial treaty with Russia."⁴²

Interested primarily in negotiating a new commercial treaty, Francis accepted the post under the mistaken impression that he could accomplish this end without difficulty. But from the very beginning he was shockingly disappointed by Russian refusal even to discuss the matter. Instead Russian foreign minister Sergei D. Sazonov several times reminded Francis that "the treaty had been denounced by America and not by Russia."⁴³ With the treaty his primary interest, Francis was to find his stay in Russia marked by frustration, bitterness, and failure.⁴⁴ Actually, the main job of the US embassy in Russia during the First World War was the care of German and Austro-Hungarian prisoners-of-war. Ambassador Marye complained that "operation of the embassy was swamped by the influx of unexpectedly high numbers of POWs; 80 percent of its work was devoted to this issue."⁴⁵ The POW work was greater than all other business of the embassy combined, Francis reported in July 1916.⁴⁶ "At the end of 1916, the American Embassy and Consulates in Russia were undertaken to care for more than two million military and civilian prisoners in concentration camps scattered throughout European Russia and Siberia", Countess Nostitz wrote.⁴⁷ The necessity to fulfill these enormous obligations became an unpleasant surprise for Francis who had but a little interest in the job. "He would have preferred to ignore the military-

⁴⁰ D.R. Francis to Ch. S. Hamlin, April 20, 1916, in: *Dollars and Diplomacy*, 14.

⁴¹ Clifford L. Egan, Pressure Groups, the Department of State, and the Abrogation of the Russo-American Treaty of 1832, in: *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, 115, no. 4 (August 1971): 334.

⁴² Richard W. Child, *Potential Russia* (N.Y.: E.P. Dutton & C°, 1916), 199-201.

⁴³ D.R. Francis to R. Lansing, May 7, & June 16, 1916, in: *Dollars and Diplomacy*, 18, 28-29.

⁴⁴ Grayson, *Russian-American Relations in World War I*, 74.

⁴⁵ Mayers, *The Ambassadors and America's Soviet Policy*, 69.

⁴⁶ Saul, *War and Revolution*, 45.

⁴⁷ Countess Nostitz, *The Countess from Iowa* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1936), 172.

prisoner issue and was dismayed by the scope of problems in what he called the 'uncongenial task' of representing German and Austrian interests.⁴⁸

Francis had one-sided view of internal situation in late Imperial Russia influenced by his acquaintances in liberal Russian circles. As Harper noted, the ambassador quickly had "interested himself in the work and views of the people's organizations, whose leaders were soon to head the revolution of March, 1917."⁴⁹ A prospect of revolution was first hinted by him as early as August 1916, when Francis reported to the Secretary of State: "I do not think there will be a revolution immediately after the close of the war," but "if the Court Party does not adopt a more liberal policy by extending more privileges to the people and their representatives in the Duma, a revolution will take place before the lapse of even a few years."⁵⁰ "It is more than interesting to be in the position which I occupy at this time,"—Francis wrote in December 1916.—"This is the most critical period of the world's history in my opinion, and Petrograd is occupying a very prominent place in the theater of affairs – in fact it is second to none."⁵¹ Francis anticipated some events of importance in Russian history but was sure that "there is no danger of a revolution before the end of the war."⁵² His own position began to strengthen due to the breaking off the diplomatic relations between the USA and Germany on February 3, 1917. "The Russians are very much pleased with the stand we have taken and are already beginning to treat us as Allies," Francis reported.⁵³ A bit later the ambassador repeated to Wilson, that he did "not anticipate any revolution ... in the immediate future."⁵⁴

On February 23 (March 8), 1917, the revolution in Petrograd did erupt. According to Countess Nostitz, when its outcome had become clear Francis said to her: "It doesn't surprise me. But all the same I consider my colleagues of some of the other Embassies have made a great mistake in backing up the opposition movement against the Imperial Family. I told them so at our last conference. I said —'Gentlemen, in the Middle States, from where I come, we don't swap horses while crossing a stream.'⁵⁵ Only after the Emperor's abdication he recognized that "This is undoubtedly a revolution, but it is the best managed revolution that has ever taken place for its magnitude."⁵⁶ A downfall of thousand years Empire meant a dawn of the new era in Russia and in history of Russian-American relations as well as in the Francis' diplomatic career.

⁴⁸ Mayers, *The Ambassadors and America's Soviet Policy*, 73.

⁴⁹ Barnes, *Standing on a Volcano*, 204.

⁵⁰ D.F. Francis to R. Lansing, August 14, 1916, in: *Lansing Papers*, II, 319.

⁵¹ D.R. Francis to Ph. B. Fourke; December 10/23, 1916, in: *Dollars and Diplomacy*, 71-72.

⁵² D.R. Francis to C. Thompson; January 4/17, 1917, in: *Dollars and Diplomacy*, 78.

⁵³ D.R. Francis to R. Lansing; January 29/February 11, 1917, in: *Lansing Papers*, II, 321-322.

⁵⁴ David S. Foglesong, "A Missouri Democrat in Revolutionary Russia: Ambassador David R. Francis and the American Confrontation with Russian Radicalism, 1917," *Gateway Heritage*, 12, no. 3 (Winter 1992): 26.

⁵⁵ Countess Nostitz, *The Countess from Iowa*, 195.

⁵⁶ D.R. Francis to R. Lansing; March 2/15, 1917, in: *Dollars and Diplomacy*, 91.

The US ambassador was the first foreign diplomat who posed the question of recognition of the Russian Provisional government. Three days after the Emperor abdication Francis telegraphed to Washington his reasons for speedy recognition trying to convince Lansing that it was “the most amazing revolution” which was “the practical realization of that principle of government which we have championed and advocated, I mean government by consent of the governed.”⁵⁷ To his mind the Russian revolution was the equivalent of the American one almost a century and a half before.⁵⁸ His decision was influenced also by the new Russian foreign minister Pavel N. Milyukov who found in Francis “a credulous interlocutor.”⁵⁹ Milyukov himself recalled: “The Ambassador from the United States, the dear Francis (who was in no way a diplomat), clearly wanted America to be the first to recognize the Russian revolution, and I willingly entered a little conspiracy with him.”⁶⁰ As George Buchanan noted ironically, “The United States Ambassador was the first to recognize the Provisional Government officially on March 22, an achievement of which he was always proud.”⁶¹

But Francis was not able to follow the rapid and chaotic sweep of events that led Russia from one crisis to another. His view of unfolding events was limited and based on illusions. Francis confessed such “assumptions concerning the Russian situation” which “were least likely to be fulfilled,” namely, “that Russian political life would advance at once toward a stable parliamentary system and that Russia would continue to wage war.”⁶² “In the euphoria that followed the tsar’s abdication, Francis and other U.S. officials neglected the deeper social and economic origins of the revolution, underestimated the strength of the Soviet, and exaggerated the power of the Provisional Government. An inflated notion of the influence and authority of the Duma leaders distorted Francis’ perspective and alleviated his concern about the unpredictability of the workers and soldiers.”⁶³ He “never grasped the degree to which political authority had become fragmented or understood the army’s demoralization.” Besides, “Francis labored under the haziest knowledge of the ideological divisions within the Marxist and non-Marxist socialist parties.”⁶⁴ Francis “was sufficiently aware of the plight of the Russian people to welcome jubilantly the overthrow of the Tsar and the coming to power of the Provisional Government,” the former consul DeWitt C. Poole said. With “the members of the Provisional Government Francis had a bridge of understanding, and with them in power over a period of years Francis might have gone down as a pretty successful ambassador.” Those pro-Allied liberals, Poole

⁵⁷ Francis telegram to Lansing, March 18, 1917, in: *FRUS 1917*, 1207.

⁵⁸ Barnes, *Standing on a Volcano*, 227, 239.

⁵⁹ Mikhaylovsky, G.N. *Zapiski. Iz istorii rossyskogo vneshnepoliticheskogo vedomstva. 1914–1920* (Moscow: Mezhdunarodnye otnosheniya, 1993), 1, 280.

⁶⁰ Paul Miliukov, *Political Memoirs, 1905–1907* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1967), 439.

⁶¹ Sir George Buchanan, *My Mission to Russia, and Other Diplomatic Memoirs* (London a.o.: Cassel & Company, 1923), II, 91.

⁶² Kennan, *Russia Leaves the War*, 16.

⁶³ Foglesong, “A Missouri Democrat in Revolutionary Russia,” 28.

⁶⁴ Mayers, *The Ambassadors and America’s Soviet Policy*, 77-78.

continued, “were well inside the understanding and liking of Francis or any other rather narrowly American American.”⁶⁵

On March 25 (April 7), 1917, news of the US entering the war against Germany reached Petrograd. This created new situation in Russian-American relations and made the US ambassador popular figure in the Russian capital. “That revolution and our entering the war, so nearly contemporaneous as they were, mark a new era in the history of society,” Francis reported. “Our form of government is their model; our taking part in the contest has infused into them a confident spirit and imbued them with a firm determination.”⁶⁶ As Francis stated a bit later, “in my judgment the American Embassy is respected to a greater extent and has more influence with the Provisional Government and with the people generally than any other mission in Russia.”⁶⁷ Owing to his position as envoy of Russia’s new powerful ally, Francis indeed enjoyed a rather elusive prestige in Petrograd. But his ambassadorial position was compromised and diminished by the flux of special US missions with no clearly defined responsibilities which one after another was arriving on the Petrograd scene during the summer of 1917.

The first of them were the Railway or Stevens Commission and the so-called Root Mission. Francis readily supported the former and even tried to direct its activities but was reluctant as to the advisability of the latter which was sent by the Wilson administration regardless of the ambassador’s opinion. From the very beginning the question of confusion of authority arose. As Root remarked, “It is plain that we can’t have three bodies dealing with the Russian Government at the same time—the regular Embassy, the President’s Mission & the R.R. Commission.”⁶⁸ But Wilson refused to define authority clearly. As a result, Stevens sometimes interfered to diplomatic matters, Root discussed railroad questions, and Francis tried to do everything maneuvering between two chiefs of missions and different branches of the Russian government. The Root Mission departed Petrograd on June 26 (July 9) leaving behind the US Military Mission which turned out to be one more quasi-political body representing special Army interests. It was headed by Br.-General William V. Judson.

Probably, the most exotic was the American Red Cross Mission (ARCM) which soon arrived at Petrograd to add more embarrassments for the ambassador. The mission was promoted by a Montana copper magnate William B. Thompson who tried to use it as an instrument of America’s support of Russia’s continued participation in the war. Neither the ambassador nor other official representatives on the scene felt that there was a need for such a mission.⁶⁹ The result was deplorable misunderstanding between the ARCM and the US embassy.⁷⁰ One

⁶⁵ See: Kennan, *Russia Leaves the War*, 17; Foglesong, “A Missouri Democrat in Revolutionary Russia,” 28.

⁶⁶ Francis telegram, April 21, 1917, in: *FRUS 1917. Supplement 2. The World War*, I, 36.

⁶⁷ D.R. Francis to R. Lansing, April 25/May 8, 1917, in: *Lansing Papers*, II, 332-334.

⁶⁸ E. Root to R. Lansing, May 6, 1917, in: *Lansing Papers*, II, 329.

⁶⁹ Neil V. Salzman, *Reform and Revolution: The Life and Times of Raymond Robins* (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 1991), 177.

⁷⁰ Kennan, *Russia Leaves the War*, 61.

more US agency was created by the Committee on Public Information (CPI) under the title the American Press Bureau at Petrograd. The CPI was represented by journalist Arthur Bullard and the Committee associate chairman Edgar Sisson who considered himself as “Special Representative of President Wilson in Russia.” “Thus the making of trouble and confusion were implanted firmly in the situation by official Washington before Sisson even arrived in Russia.”⁷¹

After the CPI emissaries’ arrival, the situation with US official representation in Petrograd was confused to the highest degree. Petrograd was “host to high-level U.S. commissions, delegations, and missions that collectively eclipsed the embassy’s significance.”⁷² Francis and “a number of other high-ranking State Department officials already at their posts in Russia did not look favorably at the prospect of the preemption of their responsibilities by the special commissions. The ambassador and his staff viewed the personnel of the various commissions as Johnnies-come-lately and as too inexperienced to understand either the political complications of the Revolution or the Russian military’s failures on the eastern front.”⁷³ Bullard described the situation in the following words: “No one of the ambassadors was of strong enough character to dominate and control his own flock. Grouped, about each embassy, there were military missions, secret services, publicity agents, commercial attachés, all busily engaged in trying to serve their country, but with no one to co-ordinate their actions. They were continually getting in each other’s way.” And, he added. “Our own representatives—embassy, military mission, Red Cross, and consulates—were just as bitterly divided.”⁷⁴

At the same time the ambassador’s “neglect of discerning reports” by his more competent and informed subordinates “meant that Francis denied himself real familiarity with the Russian situation.”⁷⁵ In the mid-September J. Butler Wright noted in his diary that amid rumors “that the ‘Bolshevik’ sentiment is growing in strength throughout the country everyone, with only the exception of D.R.F., believes that a clash—and a serious one—is bound to occur soon.” The counselor was amused by “the glowing reports of D.R.F.” which were not distinguished by brilliant insights or farsighted prescriptions.⁷⁶ On the morning of October 26 (November 8), 1917, Francis once more woke up in a completely new country. “Situation here undetermined but this Bolshevik government can not survive and I think will collapse within few days,” Francis telegraphed to Washington on the fourth day of the October Revolution.⁷⁷ The “ ‘Governor,’ as Harper and other advisers called Francis—and in character he remained the ex-governor of Missouri, the Show-Me state—was confident that the Bolsheviks

⁷¹ Ibid., 50-51.

⁷² Mayers, *The Ambassadors and America’s Soviet Policy*, 86.

⁷³ Neil V. Salzman, ed. *Russia in War and Revolution: General William V. Judson’s Accounts from Petrograd, 1917–1918* (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 1998), 30.

⁷⁴ Arthur Bullard, *The Russian Pendulum* (N.Y.: The Macmillan Company, 1919), 111-113.

⁷⁵ Mayers, *The Ambassadors and America’s Soviet Policy*, 86.

⁷⁶ Foglesong, “A Missouri Democrat in Revolutionary Russia,” 37-40.

⁷⁷ Francis telegram, November 11, 1917, in: *FRUS 1918. Russia*, III, 207.

would not take power, and then, that they would fall.”⁷⁸ With such a view the ambassador “seemed to have no policy at all except to insist that the Bolsheviks could not last.”⁷⁹

Lt.-Colonel Raymond Robins, who replaced Thompson as the head of ARCM, and General Judson from the very beginning were in favor of some limited contacts with the Bolshevik government considering them as a matter of necessity. But Francis officially informed Judson on November 7 (20) that “it was my policy to do nothing or permit no act to be performed by anyone connected with the Embassy or under my control that could be construed as a direct or indirect recognition of what is generally known as the ‘Bolshevik’ government.”⁸⁰ The start of the Soviet-German peace negotiations at Brest-Litovsk created a new situation. Judson insisted on contacts with the Soviet leadership in order to influence conditions of the armistice and Francis begun to be inclined to his opinion but on November 23 (December 6) Lansing forbade “all direct communication with the Bolsheviks.” Under pressure from opposite sides, a disoriented Francis acted contradictorily or preferred not to act at all.

All the significant American representatives in Petrograd jointly agreed to recommend opening informal channels of communication with the Bolshevik government in order to coordinate actions against Germany. The American community was united on one other issue as well: the necessity of replacing the ambassador with someone more reliable and with better judgment.⁸¹ After Francis’ conviction was proved wrong by the Bolshevik seizure of power, the sense that the elderly ambassador was tired, confused, and out of touch with Russian reality contributed to a movement by other US envoys in Russia to have him recalled.⁸² Sisson, the prime instigator of the recall move, reported on November 21 (December 4): “Found Ambassador without policy except anger at Bolsheviks, unamenable to arguments or entreaties of his official advisers, military and civil.” In his opinion “no fruitful work can be done here by any division of our Government so long as Francis remains in charge of Embassy.” The ambassador “impress every one as a sick man absolutely unfitted to the strain physical and mental of his great post,” Sisson added.⁸³ The next day Judson wrote in his diary that Francis “seems to me completely exhausted and overwrought by the strain he has recently been under.”⁸⁴ Two days later Huntington reported to Harper that Francis was increasingly tired, despondent, and in ill health⁸⁵. Bullard shared the common opinion in his letter to Edward House: “Francis is a sick man entirely overwhelmed by the situation,” and “he has created hopelessly

⁷⁸ Albert Rhys Williams, *Journey into Revolution. Petrograd, 1917–1918* (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1969), 82.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 196–197.

⁸⁰ *Russia in War and Revolution*, 136.

⁸¹ David W. McFadden, *Alternative Paths: Soviets and Americans, 1917–1920* (New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 91–92.

⁸² Foglesong, “A Missouri Democrat in Revolutionary Russia,” 38.

⁸³ Kennan, *Russia Leaves the War*, 125–126.

⁸⁴ *Russia in War and Revolution*, 165.

⁸⁵ Saul, *War and Revolution*, 201.

hostile relations with people where it is his obvious duty to seek cooperation.”⁸⁶ The recommendations for Francis’ removal were supported by Basil Miles and William F. Sands, who had already returned to Washington and tried pushed the decision through the State Department.⁸⁷

Sir George Buchanan left Petrograd on December 25, 1917 (January 7, 1918), and Francis, being the next in seniority, replaced him as a doyen of the diplomatic corps. His debut in this capacity took place a week later when Francis led the entire corps in its unanimous protest against the arrest of the Romanian minister Count Diamandy and all his staff by the Bolsheviks.⁸⁸ Vladimir Lenin responded by pointing to the extremely dangerous situation in which Russian troops found themselves in the Romanian front. Nevertheless, the Romanians were released the following day and then deported from Russia. Significantly, unpublished version of the Francis’ memoirs differs in this particular case from the published one.⁸⁹ In the course of further events Francis was becoming increasingly isolated—from Washington, the Soviet government, and his own staff.⁹⁰ On February 7, 1918, Harper concluded that a new ambassador was needed because “men of wide vision and men of action are required at this most critical post.”⁹¹ At the same time, Robins was bound to appear in Petrograd as “the real American Ambassador” and thus to diminish Francis’ prestige and his potential usefulness in the formal ambassadorial position.⁹²

By the end of January the wife of the naval attaché at Petrograd came to a conclusion that there was “no place for Americans! There is nothing that they can accomplish.”⁹³ The same day the Soviet delegation at Brest-Litovsk interrupted peace negotiations giving a pretext for German offensive which begun on February 18, 1918, and created danger for Petrograd.⁹⁴ Two days later at a conference of Allied representatives the decision had been made to abandon the Russian capital. While the Soviet government was preparing to escape to Moscow the Americans made a choice in favor of Vologda, a railroad junction 300 miles to

⁸⁶ McFadden, *Alternative Paths*, 92.

⁸⁷ Kennan, *Russia Leaves the War*, 385-386.

⁸⁸ See: *FRUS 1918. Russia*, I, 477-478; Kennan, *Russia Leaves the War*, 330-342. French version: Louis de Robien, *The Diary of a Diplomat in Russia, 1917–1918* (N.Y. & Washington: Praeger Publishers, 1970), 190-194. Romanian version: Flavius Solomon & Andrei Cușco, “How Much Ideology can Diplomacy Endure? The Early Phase of Soviet-Romanian Relations, November 1917–February 1918,” *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas*, N.F. 63, Heft 3 (2015): 400-407. Soviet version: Zalkind, I.A. “NKID v semnadsatom godu,” in: *Utro Strany Sovetov* (Leningrad: Lenizdat, 1988), 204.

⁸⁹ Kennan, *Russia Leaves the War*, 338.

⁹⁰ Saul, *War and Revolution*, 222-224.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 229.

⁹² Kennan, *Russia Leaves the War*, 395-396.

⁹³ Pauline S. Crosley, *Intimate Letters from Petrograd* (New York: E.P. Dutton & Company, 1920), 273.

⁹⁴ In between the change of calendars occurred. Until February 1918 Russia clung to the Julian (or Old Style) calendar, which was 13 days behind the Gregorian (New Style) calendar used in Western Europe and the United States. So February 1, O.S., turned into February 14, N.S.

the east of Petrograd. There Francis might decide to continue his way further east until Vladivostok or to go to Arkhangel'sk in the Northern Russia. On February 26 & 27 the American colony consisted of more than 60 people left Petrograd.⁹⁵ It included the embassy staff, officers of the military mission, Red Cross and YMCA people, personnel of the New York City Bank, and some other Americans. Most of the other diplomatic missions followed the Americans or joined them later. Thus Vologda turned to be a "diplomatic capital of Russia", as Francis termed the city.

"I went out from Petrograd to Vologda to see Mr. Francis early in March 1918, ten days after all the embassies had fled from the panic-stricken capital," the theatric critic Oliver M. Saylor wrote. "The day I arrived in Vologda, the Ambassador gave out to the Russian press the following statement, which was copied throughout Russia: ... America still counts itself an ally of the Russian people and we shall be ready to help, no matter what Government organizes a vigorous resistance to the German invasion." "Here again, with all its genuine sympathy, was the same misunderstanding of the social revolution as a mere political quarrel,"—concluded the author.—"Here again was the delusion in which most people outside Russia resisted—the delusion that Russia could fight once more if she wished to."⁹⁶

News of the Brest-Litovsk treaty concluding on March 3, 1918, quickly reached Vologda. Francis decided to "inveigh against Brest-Litovsk" hoping to destroy it especially after the Murmansk experiment where the Allies cooperated with the local Soviet in the joint efforts to organize anti-German front. On April 5, Francis telegraphed to Lansing: "Transportation conditions deplorable and require improvement, which we can best render having demonstrated our ability thereof by bettering Soviet government service." The ambassador even suggested "to place American Railway Commission in charge of Soviet government." "Furthermore, in event of Allied intervention from east or west or both, railroad efficiency is essential," he continued. Francis recommended to ignore "mistakes of Soviet government and outrages practiced" in order to "induce Soviet government to ask Allied assistance, so that when Allies enter Russia, will not with Soviet government's refusal, but Soviet government's welcome."⁹⁷ By May 2, Francis had decided that "time for Allied intervention has arrived" because the Russian people were ready to welcome it.⁹⁸ On June 4, after the Czecho-Slovak revolt, he made a trip to Petrograd trying to establish contact with anti-Bolshevik forces in the former capital on the assumption that soon the Bolshevik power would collapse.⁹⁹ In his opinion, the Czecho-Slovak case might justify the intervention of the Allied powers in Russia.¹⁰⁰ "Russian people confidently expecting Allied intervention and will welcome it," Francis stated. "Russian people are expecting

⁹⁵ Saul, *War and Revolution*, 234-235.

⁹⁶ Oliver M. Saylor, "Russia looks to America," *North American Review*, 209, no. 759 (February 1919): 191-193.

⁹⁷ Francis telegram, April 5, 1918, in: *FRUS 1918. Russia*, III, 228.

⁹⁸ Francis telegram, May 2, 1918, in: *FRUS 1918. Russia*, I, 519-521.

⁹⁹ McFadden, *Alternative Paths*, 136.

¹⁰⁰ Francis telegram, June 11, 1918, in: *FRUS 1918. Russia*, I, 561.

America to lead in intervention,” he continued. “At the same time these people require leadership and look to us therefore.”¹⁰¹

During his stay in Vologda and later in Arkhangel'sk, Francis kept acquaintances with a lot of people prominent not only in local affairs but in all-Russian politics as well. On July 4, 1918, he reported: “I gave a Fourth of July reception to-day.” The “feeling in Vologda is very friendly towards the Embassy as it is realized that we have added much to the reputation of the city.”¹⁰² But this idyll disappeared two days later when Left Socialist-Revolutionaries assassinated Count Mirbach, Germany's envoy to Russia, and anti-Bolshevik uprising erupted in Moscow followed by a mutiny in Yaroslavl'. In response the Extraordinary Revolutionary Staff was created in Vologda. It assumed all powers in the city and stationed the military guard at the door of the embassy. The Soviet government tried to force the diplomats to remove to Moscow. Instead they decided to escape to Arkhangel'sk where the Allied intervention was anticipated.

On July 24, 1918, Francis at the head of the entire diplomatic corps left Vologda and reached Arkhangel'sk after the Allied forces occupied the city. Now Arkhangel'sk turned to be the second diplomatic capital of Russia alongside with Moscow. From Arkhangel'sk Francis “called for large, aggressive military campaigns to reorganize Russian resistance to Germany and eradicate the menace of Bolshevism.”¹⁰³ “There Francis became enmeshed in the affairs of Nicholas Chaikovsky and the anti-Bolsheviks of the area, whose career involved coup, countercoup, and kidnappings.”¹⁰⁴ He practiced direct and sometimes crucial personal intervention in the local politics acting more like a governor of Missouri than an ambassador. Francis even pressed (or “advised” “very categorically,” in his own words) the appointments of officials in the Northern Government. But by the fall of the year he depleted his own resources of energy and health. The timely arrival of Rear Admiral McCully, who was appointed commander of the American naval forces in North Russia, saved him. Placed aboard the USS *Olympia* on a stretcher, Francis left Arkhangel'sk for England on November 7, 1918. It was the first anniversary of the October Revolution and four days before the Armistice that ended the First World War.

Francis spent the remaining eight years of his life trying to convince the American public that he was right, as he did in his testimony before the Overman Committee and in his memoirs.¹⁰⁵ He published his *Russia from the American Embassy* soon after his official resignation in 1920. But the ambassador's book “proved to be more a defense of his actions in Russia than a historical memoir.”¹⁰⁶ “His political role was not a great one, but his simple, outspoken, American pragmatism provided a revealing contrast to the intensely theoretical controversies

¹⁰¹ Francis telegram, June 22, 1918, in: *FRUS 1918. Russia*, II, 220-223.

¹⁰² Francis telegram, July 4, 1918, in: *FRUS 1918. Russia*, I, 568.

¹⁰³ David S. Foglesong, *America's Secret War Against Bolshevism. U.S. Intervention in the Russian Civil War, 1917-1920* (Chapel Hill & London: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), 295.

¹⁰⁴ Mayers, *The Ambassadors and America's Soviet Policy*, 83.

¹⁰⁵ Allison, *American Diplomats in Russia*, 44-46.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 47.

that raged around him, and one comes away from the reading of his memoirs with the feeling that America could have been in some ways much worse served, if in other ways better,” Kennan noted.¹⁰⁷ Russian historian Yurii Got’e stated in his review of Francis’ memoirs that documents cited by the author constitute the most valuable part of the book. But “Russia, Russian people, and Russian interrelations were not very comprehensible mystery for him.” Francis, in his opinion, was “a foreigner with, perhaps, the most alien psychology to us.” American ambassador was “not able to comprehend neither Russia itself, nor what is going on here.” Therefore his memoirs are “not an impartial account of events which took place in Russia in 1916–1918, but their reflection in the mind of businessman who to his own surprise become their eyewitness,” concluded the reviewer.¹⁰⁸

David R. Francis died in 1927. Historians differ in their opinions of his legacy. Francis was the “most fascinating, controversial, and, perhaps, misunderstood American in Russia during the revolutionary years,” William Allison noted.¹⁰⁹ Consequently, to evaluate “Ambassador Francis is not easy task. Historians have called him incompetent, misplaced, and more recently, astute and dedicated. His character has generally been praised. His skill as a diplomat, however, has often been criticized.”¹¹⁰ “If, as was the case, he was poorly prepared in many ways for this unusual task, one cannot deny him a certain admiration for the spirit in which he accepted and performed it,” George F. Kennan wrote.¹¹¹ But even his carefully balanced study “have not erased the negative portrait of David R. Francis as a nice old fellow who had no experience in diplomacy and was over his head representing the United States in revolutionary Russia.”¹¹² According to Jamie H. Cockfield’s opinion, the “problem with his work came in his inability to comprehend and interpret events.”¹¹³ David Mayers stated categorically: “Mediocre U.S. diplomacy in St. Petersburg, broken by the accidental appearance of able envoys, culminated in the careers of Marye and Francis.”¹¹⁴ Only David S. Foglesong stays apart with his conclusion that “a careful review of the available evidence suggests the need to revise the common image of Ambassador Francis as a doddering, diplomatic dilettante.”¹¹⁵

As Kennan wrote many years ago, “It was easy for the members of the American community and the diplomatic corps to ridicule Francis and to deprecate his ability. An injustice had been done to him, and undeserved one, in sending him to such a post at such a time. Only the greatest unfamiliarity with the requirements of normal diplomatic life could have explained a belief that Francis at his age and with his experience and temperament, would have been well equipped to

¹⁰⁷ Kennan, *Russia and the West under Lenin and Stalin*, 50–51.

¹⁰⁸ Got’e, Yurii, “Vospominaniya posla Frensisia o Rossii,” *Annaly*, 3 (1923): 292–293.

¹⁰⁹ Allison, *American Diplomats in Russia*, 13.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, P. 47.

¹¹¹ Kennan, *Russia and the West under Lenin and Stalin*, 50.

¹¹² Barnes, *Standing on a Volcano*, XII.

¹¹³ *Dollars and Diplomacy*, 4.

¹¹⁴ Mayers, *The Ambassadors and America’s Soviet Policy*, 85.

¹¹⁵ Foglesong, “A Missouri Democrat in Revolutionary Russia,” 39.

meet those requirements.”¹¹⁶ This conclusion paves the way for considering the Francis problem as a part of the much broader Wilson problem. It was President Wilson who “thought that all people, whether they be Mexican peons or Russian peasants, whites or orientals, were capable of being trained in the habits of democracy.”¹¹⁷ “In both Mexico and Russia, finally, Wilson had started out fighting counter-revolution, and ended struggling to contain and control the very forces he had unknowingly encouraged by condemning reactionary special interests and imperialism.”¹¹⁸ “In wartime Russia,”—Christopher Lasch explained,—“Wilsonians sought initially to buttress the pro-Allied liberal-nationalist regime of the March Revolution, in order to save the moral and material strength of a liberalized Russia for the anti-German coalition. Then too, even after failing to prevent the triumph of Russian Bolshevism, the Wilson Administration continued its limited efforts, by means of intervention and diplomacy, to end the single-party rule of the Bolsheviks and hopefully to bring Russia back to the lost liberalism of the March Revolution.”¹¹⁹ As David McFadden concluded, “Wilson’s policy was so torn between anti-Bolshevism and anti-intervention that it was not a Wilson policy at all, but instead a nonpolicy, often determined by subordinates, allies, or events in Russia.”¹²⁰

Francis’ diplomatic career is a particular case of Wilsonianism with its liberal illusions and democratic prejudices. That is why Francis’ failure as a diplomat may be considered as a display of Woodrow Wilson’s greater diplomatic fiasco which culminated in the Senate refusal to ratify the Versailles Treaty. Francis was an ordinary American politician with a rather narrow provincial outlook. Finding himself in Petrograd he wished to see in Russia as another America. But Russia is a world in itself, and a foreign embassy is not the best point for observation. History itself, with the magnitude of events, was against Francis. Nevertheless he was not the worst of the US ambassadors in Russia. Francis was not, of course, the right man in the right place, but obviously he deserves sympathy and his memoirs—the closest attention.

¹¹⁶ Kennan, *Russia Leaves the War*, 40.

¹¹⁷ Arthur Link, *Wilson the Diplomatist* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1957), 14.

¹¹⁸ Lloyd C. Gardner, *Wilson and Revolutions, 1913–1921* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott Co, 1976), 18.

¹¹⁹ Christopher Lasch, *The American Liberals and the Russian Revolution* (New York & London: Columbia University Press, 1962), 7.

¹²⁰ David W. McFadden, “Did Wilson have a Russian Policy?” *Reviews in American History* 24 (1996): 628.