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## Abandoning Democracy: Woodrow Wilson and Promoting German Democracy, 1918–1919\*

Historians have often drawn a straight line from the foreign policy of U.S. President Woodrow Wilson to subsequent efforts of the United States to promote democracy decades later. His interventions in Latin America and elsewhere have been seen as the precursor to the policies of democracy promotion and democratic interventionism that have been pursued by various American presidents, by both military and nonmilitary means, over the course of the twentieth century and into the twenty-first.<sup>1</sup> In an influential and oft-cited work, political scientist Tony Smith defines “Wilsonianism” as the belief that “American national interests could best be pursued by promoting democracy worldwide.”<sup>2</sup> Through a study of Wilson’s attitudes toward democracy promotion in Germany after the November 1918 armistice, however, this article demonstrates that the trend in Wilson’s willingness to intervene to promote democracy over his terms in office was, if anything, actually sharply downward. By the end of his presidency, Wilson’s actions show him to have been firmly of the opinion that the mission of the United

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1. See, in particular, Tony Smith, *America’s Mission: The United States and the Worldwide Struggle for Democracy in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton, NJ, 1994); Constance G. Anthony, “American Democratic Interventionism: Romancing the Iconic Woodrow Wilson,” *International Studies Perspectives* 9 (2008), 239–53. See also Frank Ninkovich, *The Wilsonian Century: U.S. Foreign Policy Since 1900* (Chicago, IL, 1999). For twenty-first century discussions of Wilsonianism and American democratic interventionism, see G. John Ikenberry, Thomas J. Knock, Anne-Marie Slaughter, and Tony Smith, *The Crisis of American Foreign Policy: Wilsonianism in the Twenty-first Century* (Princeton, NJ, 2009); Lloyd E. Ambrosius, “Woodrow Wilson and George W. Bush: Historical Comparisons of Ends and Means in Their Foreign Policies,” *Diplomatic History* 30, no. 3 (2006): 509–43.

2. Smith, *America’s Mission*, xv.

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States in the world was only to protect existing democracies from external threats—not to help promote the creation of new democratic governments. After the signing of the armistice, Wilson did not pursue in any meaningful way a policy to promote democracy in Germany, ignoring entirely the views of those American officials most familiar with the situation there. Wilson formulated a policy of nonengagement with the newly republican Germany, and he left German democrats to fend for themselves.

In the existing scholarship, a dominant narrative assumes a growing crescendo of Wilsonian enthusiasm for democratic interventionism over the course of his presidency. Wilson's Latin American interventions in Mexico, Haiti, and the Dominican Republic during his first term in office show a strong willingness to intervene in the affairs of other countries for democratic motives (although generally without democratic results).<sup>3</sup> This willingness to intervene, it is said, then continues to be reflected in Wilson's declaration of his ambition to make the world "safe for democracy" in his decision to go to war against Germany in 1917,<sup>4</sup> and the pinnacle of Wilson's democratic interventionism is reached in his armistice negotiations with Germany in October–November 1918, in which Wilson insisted on internal reforms in Germany as a precondition to an armistice. These prearmistice negotiations, one author recently concluded—explicitly linking them to Wilson's Latin American interventions—"revolutionized the face of American diplomacy," and in their wake, "not much" was left of "the principle of non-interference" in the domestic affairs of other countries.<sup>5</sup>

Standing somewhat awkwardly aside from this narrative is the historiography dealing with Wilson's 1918 decision to intervene in Russia. While a few authors' portrayal of Wilson's decision making in that case fits comfortably within this narrative—contending that Wilson intervened vigorously in the pursuit of a pro-democracy, anticommunist agenda<sup>6</sup>—the dominant interpretation has been that Wilson intervened only reluctantly. Wilson's intervention in Russia, it is usually contended, was sharply limited to concrete objectives: rescuing a corps of trapped Czech soldiers and restraining the Japanese. The authors who propound the dominant view contend that, as best he could, Wilson firmly resisted using American resources (military or otherwise) to promote democracy in revolutionary Russia. Even with American military forces on Russian soil, Wilson earnestly attempted to adhere to a principle of noninterference in Russian affairs. Yet these authors generally make no effort to compare Wilson's Russian policy with others' views about

3. See, in particular, Anthony, "American Democratic Interventionism," as well as note 21, below.

4. Wilson Address to a Joint Session of Congress, April 2, 1917, Arthur S. Link, ed., *The Papers of Woodrow Wilson* (Princeton, NJ, 1966–1994) [hereafter *PWW*], Vol. 41, 519–27.

5. Binoy Kampmark, "No Peace with the Hohenzollerns: American Attitudes on Political Legitimacy towards Hohenzollern Germany, 1917–1918," *Diplomatic History* 34, no. 5 (2010): 769–91 at 771, 777–78, 791.

6. See, in particular, David S. Foglesong, *America's Secret War Against Bolshevism: U.S. Intervention in the Russian Civil War, 1917–1920* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1995).

Wilson's earlier Latin American interventions, and they put forward no arguments about Russia's place in Wilson's thinking about democratic interventionism over the course of his presidency. It is no wonder, then, that a recent attempt to analyze Wilson's attitudes toward democratic interventionism, adhering to the dominant narrative, makes little reference to Wilson's Russian policy.<sup>7</sup>

It is certainly well beyond this article's scope to attempt to explain Wilson's attitude toward democratic intervention in his first-term interventions in Latin America as compared with his second-term policies as they related to Russia and Germany. This article's analysis of American democracy promotion policy toward Germany after the armistice seeks to establish and emphasize Wilson's unwillingness to become involved in promoting democracy in other countries only in the second half of his presidency, leaving a study of Wilson's attitudes toward democracy promotion over the full course of 1913–1921 to other scholars. Wilson's attitudes in 1918–1919, however, are clear, and indeed, if anything, Wilson's experiences in Russia during 1918 made him still more resistant to pursuing any policy of democracy promotion in Germany from late 1918 into 1919. Placed into this wider context of Wilson's general attitudes toward democracy promotion, Wilson's prearmistice negotiations with Germany appear in a different light. The German imperial government, he believed, represented a clear and present danger to international security—a threat that could only be removed through internal German reforms. Wilson was willing to intervene to topple what he regarded to be a criminal regime that was “running amuck.”<sup>8</sup> Only the *international* character of this threat, however, justified the intervention into German domestic affairs. Wilson's actions were very narrowly tailored to achieving this international aim, and once that threat was dealt with, he would go little further. Building a new democracy in Germany was, Wilson believed, up to the Germans alone.

In the historiography on Wilson, German democratization as an American war aim in 1917–1918 is almost universally assumed,<sup>9</sup> yet Wilson's attitude toward promoting democracy in Germany after the armistice has seen no significant analysis. Douglas Newton, in his 1997 book *British Policy and the Weimar Republic, 1918–1919*, poses a question that previously had gone ignored: Why, he asks, did Britain not pursue a policy of actively attempting to strengthen democracy in Germany during the period from the armistice to the conclusion of the Paris Peace Conference? Exhausting the relevant British archives, Newton traces the evolution of the British aim of German democratization over the course of the war and examines how that objective disappeared from the British agenda as soon as the war was over. He focuses on the group within the British government most

7. Anthony, “American Democratic Interventionism.”

8. Wilson Address to a Joint Session of Congress, April 2, 1917, *PWW*, Vol. 41, 526.

9. See, for example, David M. Esposito, *The Legacy of Woodrow Wilson: American War Aims in World War I* (Westport, London, 1996), 5, 97–111; Lloyd E. Ambrosius, *Wilsonian Statecraft: Theory and Practice of Liberal Internationalism during World War I* (Wilmington, DE, 1991), 100–2; Ross A. Kennedy, *The Will to Believe: Woodrow Wilson, World War I, and America's Strategy for Peace and Security* (Kent, OH, 2009), 137–38, 148–49.

responsible for following the rapidly changing postwar political situation in Germany—the diplomatic intelligence officials at the Political Intelligence Department (PID) of the Foreign Ministry—who were the only consistent advocates of pursuing a policy of promoting German democratization. Newton examines how British policy makers consistently ignored the PID’s counsel, primarily because of domestic political reasons. Having just won an election in December 1918 on a rabid platform of punishing the Kaiser and making Germany pay, the coalition government of Prime Minister David Lloyd George was heavily beholden to Conservative reactionaries. Any policy of promoting German democratization was rendered politically impossible.<sup>10</sup>

Far more surprising than Britain’s failure to act on democracy promotion in Germany during the Paris Peace Conference, however, was the unwillingness of the United States to do so. Yet historians have neglected to appreciate how Wilson decided not to pursue a policy of promoting democracy in Germany after the armistice. None of the reasons that explain Lloyd George’s unwillingness to pursue a democracy promotion policy toward Germany satisfactorily account for Wilson’s having done so. Although there were some similar domestic pressures in the U.S. Congress, that legislative body has nothing of the hold of Parliament over the British prime minister, and Wilson was hardly known for his deference to congressional wishes. Indeed, Lloyd Ambrosius demonstrates ably that Wilson “viewed the conduct of American foreign relations as primarily a presidential function,” and believed emphatically that the role of congress was to follow the president’s lead.<sup>11</sup>

Even though the chronology of German–American relations in that period has been the subject of near-exhaustive treatment, American policy with respect to democracy promotion in Germany from November 1918 to the summer of 1919 has never been meaningfully examined. The best and most detailed account of German–American relations in this period is certainly that of Klaus Schwabe, and the depth of his archival research in Germany and the United States is unparalleled. Schwabe’s tendency is to orientate most of his analysis of the events of that period squarely around their impact, or lack thereof, on the final terms of the Treaty of Versailles, focusing on his concept of a “Wilsonian peace.”<sup>12</sup> To be sure, Schwabe produces a masterful analysis of the American objectives that *were* important to Wilson and pursued by him as he negotiated the peace treaty, and that analysis is not challenged here. Yet the central research problem that Newton identifies and resolves—explaining Britain’s decision not to pursue a policy of

10. Douglas Newton, *British Policy and the Weimar Republic, 1918–1919* (Oxford, 1997).

11. Lloyd E. Ambrosius, *Woodrow Wilson and the American Diplomatic Tradition: The Treaty Fight in Perspective* (Cambridge, 1987), 136. See also Ambrosius, *Wilsonian Statecraft*.

12. Klaus Schwabe, *Deutsche Revolution und Wilson-Frieden: Die amerikanische und deutsche Friedensstrategie zwischen Ideologie und Machtpolitik 1918/19* (Düsseldorf, 1971). For an updated, modestly abridged English translation, see Klaus Schwabe, *Woodrow Wilson, Revolutionary Germany, and Peacemaking, 1918–1919: Missionary Diplomacy and the Realities of Power*, trans. Rita and Robert Kimber (Chapel Hill, NC, 1985).

promoting German democratization—is one that Schwabe generally neglects to consider as it relates to the United States. Moreover, one of the most important developments in the historiography since Schwabe's work has been the development of a consensus that it was the *political* impact of the treaty, rather than the impact of its actual terms, that turned out to have the greatest effect on interwar Germany.<sup>13</sup> Accordingly, this article seeks to take a much broader view of the American attitude toward democracy promotion—as Newton does for the British case—by focusing primarily on the wider political situation, and less on the specific terms of the treaty.

Studies of American policy during the Paris Peace Conference are equally neglectful of the question of American democracy promotion in Germany. Arthur Walworth in his book *Wilson and His Peacemakers* goes so far as to subtitle his introduction “A World to Be Saved by Democracy,” but neglects the issue of the United States promoting democracy in Germany.<sup>14</sup> Inga Floto's study of American diplomacy at the Paris Peace Conference similarly ignores this matter.<sup>15</sup>

This article seeks to provide an important corrective to these works. Since there certainly is no need to duplicate Schwabe's exhaustive treatment of the details of German–American relations, this study is tailored narrowly to examining the question of democracy promotion as an American aim and to providing the interpretive framework for it that Schwabe's work lacks. This article devotes itself solely to documenting and explaining Wilson's unwillingness to act to promote democracy in Germany after the conclusion of the armistice in 1918.

This reluctance was grounded primarily in two factors. First, comparative analysis of Wilson's attitude toward promoting democracy in Russia with that of promoting it in Germany shows that, at least during his second term in office, he had developed a significant ideological commitment to noninterference in the internal political affairs of other nations—one that only grows over the course of 1918–1919.<sup>16</sup> Second, this reluctance to interfere was compounded by Wilson's deep and abiding distrust of the democratic *bona fides* of the provisional German government, which was contrary to the views of those American officials most familiar with the situation there. This distrust of the provisional government extended to all of the major German political factions and even to the German people

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13. See, for example, Margaret MacMillan, *Paris 1919: Six Months That Changed the World*, (New York, 2001), 480, 493–94; Zara Steiner, *The Lights That Failed: European International History 1919–1933* (New York, 2005), 67–70; Sally Marks, “Smoke and Mirrors: in Smoke-Filled Rooms and the Galerie des Glaces,” and William R. Keylor, “Versailles and International Diplomacy,” in Manfred F. Boemeke, Gerald D. Feldman, and Elisabeth Glaser, eds., *The Treaty of Versailles: A Reassessment After 75 Years* (New York, 1998), 337–70, 469–506.

14. Arthur Walworth, *Wilson and His Peacemakers: American Diplomacy at the Paris Peace Conference, 1919* (New York, 1986), xi.

15. Inga Floto, *Colonel House in Paris: A Study of American Policy at the Paris Peace Conference 1919* (Aarhus, 1973).

16. For another critique of Wilson's ideological rigidity in pursuing his policies, see Daniel Larsen, “War Pessimism in Britain and an American Peace in Early 1916,” *The International History Review* 34, no. 4 (2012): 795–817.

themselves. It had its origins in the German people's apparent sanction of what Wilson saw as unconscionable actions by the Imperial German government—in particular, the Reichstag's ratification of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk in 1918, which imposed harsh terms on the Russians. Wilson was significantly suspicious of the provisional German government's intentions, and insisted on a lengthy "probationary period" through which the government would have to pass in order to prove itself a genuine democratic partner.

To be sure, a hands-off policy, in and of itself, is not proof of an unwillingness to act to foster democracy. There are no doubt many times when a policy of actively promoting democracy would only prove a counterproductive "kiss of death" to prodemocratic forces, and a strict policy of noninterference is in fact the wisest course. Yet in this case, Wilson's policy was wholly unsupported by any meaningful analysis of the situation, and there is simply no evidence of Wilson ever worrying about the risks of damaging German democracy through actively seeking to support it. Indeed, most reports emphasized positive attitudes in Germany toward Wilson taking an active role—suggesting even that Germany "will do anything the president wants at present."<sup>17</sup> Those who were most familiar with the situation in Germany believed that nonengagement was seriously destructive of, rather than conducive to, the goal of German democracy.

Direct evidence of Wilson's attitude toward promoting democracy in Germany from late 1918 onwards is very scarce, and no doubt explains the lack of scholarly attention to this matter. While Wilson speaks of "Germany" endlessly during the peace negotiations, he talks almost exclusively of its future, and only very rarely of its present. There are a few records of Wilson mentioning the new German government from time to time—almost universally referring to it in skeptical terms—but there are virtually no records in which Wilson discusses the specific question of promoting democracy in Germany. The fact that there is so little paper trail on this matter in itself helps to demonstrate the lack of importance Wilson accorded to democracy promotion. If Wilson considered it an important aim and sought to pursue it, some meaningful direct evidence of his attitudes would have survived.

This is not to say, of course, that Wilson had ceased to *hope* for the establishment of a German democracy. Plainly he hoped the Germans would do so. He did not believe, however, that it was the business of the United States to *promote* democracy in Germany. For a desired outcome to be considered a foreign policy "aim," a leader must do more than piously wish that it take place. Its achievement must be actively under consideration and believed to be important. Wilson apparently never discussed promoting democracy in Germany and he persistently ignored the counsel of those who supported taking active steps to promote it. While he hoped to see a German democracy, he adhered firmly to the belief that Germany had to arrive there on its own.

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17. Grant-Smith to Lansing, November 21, 1918, *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States, 1919: The Paris Peace Conference* (Washington, 1942–1947) [hereafter *FRUS-PPC*], Vol. II, 96.

In order to show the extent to which democracy promotion was not treated as a key American aim, this article necessarily must take an indirect approach. Newton focuses his study by examining the experiences of the British diplomatic intelligence officials who sought to encourage an active policy of promoting democracy in Germany. This article follows a similar methodological approach by concentrating on the experiences of their American counterparts, who unlike Wilson *did* regard promoting democracy in Germany to be an important American objective—looking in particular at Ellis Loring Dresel, who led the American Commission to Negotiate Peace’s Division of Current, Diplomatic, and Political Correspondence. Dresel’s importance in illustrating the issue of democracy promotion in Germany has been almost universally overlooked. Most of the vast literature on the Paris Peace Conference ignores Dresel entirely, or only includes fleeting references to him.<sup>18</sup> Schwabe includes a chronology of Dresel’s activities as part of his examination of American–German relations in the immediate postwar period, yet for Schwabe, Dresel was little more than a minor functionary among many, and Dresel’s significance in illuminating the question of promoting democracy in Germany goes almost wholly unnoticed. From the beginning, Dresel and other leading American diplomatic officials most familiar with the situation in Germany believed that Germany’s interim government was sincerely democratic, both deserving of and needing American moral and material support. Yet like their British counterparts, their views had no marked impact on U.S. decision making.

The issue of democracy promotion has usually been conflated entirely with the problems of anticommunism and of food relief policy. The question of promoting democracy in Germany, however, should be distinguished from the objective of containing “Bolshevism.” The end of the war had produced a small but violent faction in Germany called the Spartacists, who sought to impose communism on Germany.<sup>19</sup> As a revolutionary crescendo swept over Europe in early November 1918, Wilson briefly tried to pursue the contradictory aims of seeing whether he could encourage the maintenance of public order in Germany without interfering in its political affairs. The latter, however, took precedence over the former, and

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18. See, for example, Walworth, *Wilson and His Peacemakers*; MacMillan, *Paris 1919*; Michael Dockrill, John Fisher, eds., *The Paris Peace Conference, 1919: Peace without Victory?* (Basingstoke, 2001); Seth P. Tillman, *Anglo-American Relations at the Paris Peace Conference of 1919* (Princeton, NJ, 1961); Boemeke, *Treaty of Versailles*; N. Gordon Levin, Jr., ed., *Woodrow Wilson and the Paris Peace Conference* (Lexington, 1972); Alan Sharp, *The Versailles Settlement: Peacemaking in Paris, 1919* (Basingstoke, 1991).

19. For a good, if old, compilation of the overwhelmingly German-language literature on the German Revolution, see Georg P. Meyer, *Bibliographie zur deutschen Revolution 1918/1919* (Göttingen, 1977). For English-language accounts, see Pierre Broué, *The German Revolution 1917–1923*, trans. John Archer (Boston, 2005); Richard M. Watt, *The Kings Depart: The Tragedy of Germany: Versailles and the German Revolution* (New York, 1968); Richard Bessel, *Germany After the First World War* (Oxford, 1993); Hans Mommsen, *The Rise and Fall of Weimar Democracy*, trans. Elborg Forster and Larry Eugene Jones (Chapel Hill, NC, 1996), chaps. 1–3; Matthew Stibbe, *Germany 1914–1933: Politics, Society and Culture* (London, 2010), chaps. 1–3.



further efforts to encourage the maintenance of public order were largely abandoned even as the instability in Germany worsened over the next few months.

Marxist historian Arno Mayer's focus on Bolshevism in place of democracy promotion leads him considerably astray. Mayer theorizes that Bolshevism was the primary driver of the policies of the Allies and of the United States during the period of the Paris Peace Conference. Although German–American relations do not see detailed treatment, Mayer arrives at the conclusion that the United States vigorously pursued a policy of seeking to suppress Bolshevism in Germany.<sup>20</sup> Anticommunism did remain something of an American aim in 1918–1919, even as democracy promotion—which Mayer does not address—was not. This article, by restoring the focus to democratization, demonstrates that Mayer significantly overstates his case: While the United States was prepared to consider taking some very limited action to undermine Bolshevism and help prevent disorder in Germany, Wilson certainly was not sufficiently concerned to pursue a vigorous policy of democracy promotion there.

Similarly, historians have neglected to appreciate that the issue of promoting democracy in Germany during this period is considerably broader than simply the matter of food relief policy, which was directed by U.S. Food Administrator Herbert Hoover. Hoover had two primary goals, one humanitarian and one economic: He sought to feed people who needed to be fed while disposing of a great surplus of American food stocks that, if sold on the open market, risked triggering a price collapse to the financial ruin of American agriculture. Although food relief was sometimes seen as a potential *means* of influencing affairs in Germany, and Hoover sometimes had this on his mind, democracy promotion was fundamentally an overarching *political objective* that encompassed more than simply the narrow matter of arranging the importation of food. As it would happen, the issue of German food relief degenerated into protracted, complicated, and at times ugly infighting among the Allies and the United States, focusing on German gold for reparations and the German mercantile fleet, among other things, which delayed the arrival of food until the end of March 1919. This article will not address this debate; most of it was essentially irrelevant to the question of U.S. democracy promotion policy, and in any case Schwabe documents it all very ably.

Finally, it is certainly true that Wilson had to operate within a framework constrained by the desires and policies of Great Britain, France, and the other Allies. A vigorous American push for an active, energetic policy of democracy promotion in Germany might well have been effectively stymied. Those potential constraints, however, are not at issue here: Wilson neglected German democratization not because alliance limitations proved too burdensome, but because he did not consider it an appropriate aim for the United States to pursue.

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20. Arno J. Mayer, *Politics and Diplomacy of Peacemaking: Containment and Counterrevolution at Versailles, 1918–1919* (London, 1968).

## WILSON AND DEMOCRACY PROMOTION

Several historians have noted the contradiction between Wilson's rhetoric of non-interference during his first term in office and his pursuing a foreign policy of seemingly precisely the opposite in Latin America.<sup>21</sup> Wilson began his presidency seeking "to usher in a new age of hemispheric harmony."<sup>22</sup> Yet, as conflicts emerged over the course of his first term, Wilson dispatched American military forces to Mexico in 1914–1916, Haiti in 1915, and the Dominican Republic in 1916 with, it is said, "democratic intentions"—albeit without resulting in democratic governments.<sup>23</sup>

In Russia and Germany in 1918–1919, however, Wilson sought as best he could to avoid intervening in Russian and German affairs to promote democracy. The dominant body of scholarship on the U.S. intervention in Russia, led by Betty Miller Unterberger, has argued persuasively that Wilson never wanted to get involved there. "[M]oral issues" of nonintervention played a crucial role in Wilson's reluctance.<sup>24</sup> Of the recent authors to turn to the question of Russian–American relations in this period, only one has sought to resurrect the claim—not otherwise much seen since the 1950s<sup>25</sup>—that there was a vigorous American attempt to pursue a policy of interventionism in Russia.<sup>26</sup> This argument has been dismissed variously as "unconvincing"<sup>27</sup> and "add[ing] up to less than advertised."<sup>28</sup> Most scholars have argued that Wilson intervened with a relatively small number of troops in summer 1918 only after relentless Allied pressure, and only when Japan made clear that it intended to intervene by itself if the Americans did not act. Wilson "joined it, not because he believed in it, but because he thought he could 'impose greater restraint on Japan within rather than outside it.'"<sup>29</sup> A stranded corps of Czech soldiers in east Russia provided an important additional humanitarian justification for intervening. As he dispatched American forces, he warned the Allies that he would not countenance "any interference of

21. Anthony, "American Democratic Interventionism"; Mark T. Gilderhus, *Diplomacy and Revolution: U.S.-Mexican Relations Under Wilson and Carranza* (Tuscan, 1977); Mark T. Gilderhus, *Pan American Visions: Woodrow Wilson in the Western Hemisphere 1913-1921* (Tucson, 1986); Lloyd Gardner, *Safe for Democracy: The Anglo-American Response to Revolution, 1913-1923* (New York, 1984); David Healy, *Drive to Hegemony: The United States in the Caribbean 1898-1917* (Madison, WI, 1988); Friedrich Katz, *The Secret War in Mexico: Europe, The United States and the Mexican Revolution* (Chicago, IL, 1981).

22. Healy, *Drive to Hegemony*, 180.

23. Anthony, "American Democratic Interventionism," 244.

24. Betty Miller Unterberger, *America's Siberian Expedition, 1918-1920: A Study of National Policy* (Durham, NC, 1956), 32.

25. See, for example, William Appleman Williams, *American-Russian Relations, 1781-1947* (New York, 1952).

26. Foglesong, *America's Secret War*.

27. Betty Miller Unterberger, "Wilson vs. the Bolsheviks," *Diplomatic History* 21, no. 1 (1997): 127–31 at 131.

28. David Steigerwald, "The Reclamation of Woodrow Wilson," *Diplomatic History* 23, no. 1 (1999): 79–99 at 89.

29. Unterberger, *America's Siberian Expedition*, 88.

any kind with the political sovereignty of Russia” or “any intervention in her internal affairs.”<sup>30</sup> These authors have argued that Wilson was genuine in this conviction. Unterberger remained firmly of the same opinion when she later revisited the matter.<sup>31</sup> Similarly, Victor Fic argues that Wilson “considered himself a guardian of unity of the Russian state and of the interests of its people, against international predators, while the country was passing through a period of great turmoil. ‘Hands off Russia’ was his motto.”<sup>32</sup> Georg Schild likewise contends that Wilson believed firmly that “Russian democracy would prevail without outside interference.”<sup>33</sup> Eugene Trani rejects the notion that containing Bolshevism in Russia was important to Wilson, accusing those who make this argument of “projecting cold war attitudes into the past.”<sup>34</sup> On September 25, 1918, Wilson made a final decision that no more troops would be sent to Russia. Despite Allied “pressure . . . for an expedition to all parts of Russia,” the president would not be moved. The Allies were informed flatly that, beyond the troops already deployed to rescue the Czechs, “our assistance cannot be given in the carrying out of any other program.”<sup>35</sup> In a conversation with British intelligence and liaison officer William Wiseman on October 16, 1918, Wilson explained,

My policy regarding Russia is very similar to my Mexican policy. I believe in letting them work out their own salvation, even though they wallow in anarchy for a while. I visualize it like this: A lot of impossible folk, fighting among themselves. You cannot do business with them, so you shut them all up in a room and lock the door and tell them that when they have settled matters among themse[lv]es you will unlock the door and do business.<sup>36</sup>

At the same time that Wilson was becoming increasingly firm in his reluctance to involve the United States in the internal political affairs of other countries, he was becoming more and more skeptical of the democratic *bona fides* of all of the major political factions in Germany, developing “serious doubts about the disposition of Germany’s masses and their elected representatives.” As Ross Kennedy observes, Wilson was deeply disturbed by the fact that instead of “repudiat[ing] their government’s conquests,” the German people “seemed excited by them.” When the Reichstag ratified the expansionist treaty of Brest-Litovsk—with future German

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30. Aide-Mémoire, July 17, 1918, *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States, 1918: Russia* (Washington, 1931–1932), Vol. II, 289.

31. Betty Miller Unterberger, *The United States, Revolutionary Russia, and the Rise of Czechoslovakia* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1989).

32. Victor M. Fic., *The Collapse of American Policy in Russia and Siberia, 1918: Wilson’s Decision Not to Intervene (March–October, 1918)* (Boulder, CO, 1995), 380.

33. Georg Schild, *Between Ideology and Realpolitik: Woodrow Wilson and the Russian Revolution, 1917–1921* (Westport, London, 1995), 89.

34. Eugene P. Trani, “Woodrow Wilson and the Decision to Intervene in Russia: A Reconsideration,” *Journal of Modern History* 48, no. 3 (1976): 440–61 at 444.

35. Fic, *Collapse of American Policy*, 373–75.

36. Wiseman Memorandum, [c. October 16, 1918], *PWW*, Vol. 51, 350.

president Friedrich Ebert's Majority Socialist Party voting only to abstain, not to oppose—Wilson was left “perplexed and frustrated,” and the president seems to have concluded that “most of Germany's people evidently shared at least some of the hunger for conquest that animated their autocratic leaders.”<sup>37</sup>

These two factors—a moralistic ideological belief that promoting democracy constituted impermissible interference in the internal political affairs of other countries, combined with a deep skepticism of the democratic intentions of any of the major German political factions—set the stage for Wilson's policy toward Germany in late 1918 and early 1919.

When compared with Wilson's “hands off” Russian policy, the aggressive approach Wilson took toward Germany's internal affairs in his prearmistice exchange of notes with Germany is not the grave contradiction that it seems at first glance. While Wilson recoiled from anything that smacked of attempting to dictate a country's path to democracy, he had committed himself to destroying autocratic regimes that had proven themselves clear and present international dangers. At Mount Vernon in July 1918, Wilson had demanded, as a precondition to peace, the Central Powers' “destruction of every arbitrary power that can . . . disturb the peace of the world.”<sup>38</sup> It is evident that there is considerable tension between these two somewhat contradictory concepts, but they are not wholly incompatible, and Wilson's policy toward Germany during the prearmistice negotiations is only comprehensible in the light of both of them.

A careful analysis of the text of these notes shows the tension and interplay between these two ideas as they played out. Wilson was primarily concerned with removing the threat to the world that the Imperial German government represented, and he meticulously refrained from telling the Germans with what they ought to replace it or how. In his note of October 14, he reemphasized his insistence on “[t]he destruction of every arbitrary power anywhere that can separately, secretly, and of its single choice disturb the peace of the world; or, if it cannot be presently destroyed, at least its reduction to virtual impotency.” He wanted the Germans to “alter” their government to remove the Kaiser's ability to endanger international tranquility. Beyond that, however, any decisions about internal reforms were left carefully up to the Germans alone.<sup>39</sup>

When Germany replied by stressing the reforms it had already implemented,<sup>40</sup> the president struggled with the balance between ensuring the removal of the international threat that the German imperial government represented while adhering to the principle of political noninterference. At a cabinet meeting on October 22, Secretary of Agriculture David Houston argued forcefully for pressing for greater German democratization. He urged Wilson to demand several specific reforms of the Reichstag and the German upper chamber, the Bundesrat, as well as

37. Ross Kennedy, *The Will to Believe*, 134–38.

38. Wilson Address at Mount Vernon, July 4, 1918, *PWW*, Vol. 48, 514–17.

39. Wilson Note to German Government, October 14, 1918, *PWW*, Vol. 51, 333–34.

40. German Government Note to Wilson, October 20, 1918, *PWW*, Vol. 51, 402.

the separate Prussian parliament. Houston had a program of precise changes he wanted: Reichstag voting districts must be made more democratic, the constitution must be restructured to curtail Prussian influence, and the special powers of the Prussian aristocracy must be abolished. Wilson objected to the intrusion into internal German affairs that such demands represented, and he totally rejected even referring to these issues in his reply.<sup>41</sup>

Wilson's subsequent note on October 23 was aggressive on the issue of internal German reform, but Wilson's primary emphasis remained on the Kaiser's continued "unimpaired" power over the ability of the country to make war. This note may well represent the pinnacle of the president's democratic interventionism with respect to German affairs, but as a "pinnacle," Wilson's democracy promotion here was in a distinctly minor key. A third of the note was devoted to German internal reform, but almost all of it was cast in strictly negative terms—getting the Germans to remove the international threat that the Kaiser's imperial government represented. He expounded at length on the international dangers of the present powers of the "King of Prussia" and the "military authorities of the Empire," but whether the Germans removed this international peril by neutering the Kaiser's military authority or removing him altogether remained up to them. Only a single vague clause gave the Germans any positive indication of what Wilson wanted instead: "the United States cannot deal with any but veritable representatives of the German people who have been assured of a genuine constitutional standing as the real rulers of Germany."<sup>42</sup>

Schwabe observes that "Wilson knew how desperate the German government was to learn just what his intentions for Germany were," and yet Wilson adhered firmly to a policy of impartial silence, "refusing to communicate with emissaries of the Chancellor as well as with German 'republicans.'" Noting the scarcity of direct evidence of Wilson's motives for this, Schwabe puts forward a complex patchwork of speculative reasons for this silence, attempting to tease out exactly what the president was attempting to accomplish.<sup>43</sup> This patchwork can be simplified immensely in favor of a much more straightforward explanation: Wilson declined to tell the Germans exactly what to do simply because he believed that it was inappropriate for him to do so.

On November 8 and November 12, Washington issued two statements that seemed to nudge Germany in a particular direction, but with little direct evidence of Wilson's intentions, Schwabe again overinterprets these statements to indicate that Wilson wanted to make a "firm stand with the nonrevolutionary forces of Europe."<sup>44</sup> Wilson had expressed concerns about Bolshevism in Germany as early

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41. David Houston, *Eight Years with Wilson's Cabinet* (New York, 1926), Vol. I, 310–11; Schwabe, *Woodrow Wilson*, 66.

42. Wilson Note to German Government, October 23, 1918, *PWW*, Vol. 51, 417–19.

43. Schwabe, *Woodrow Wilson*, 72–81.

44. Schwabe, *Woodrow Wilson*, 120–21.

as October 23,<sup>45</sup> and the best interpretation is that he sought to strike a balance between the contradictory ideas of helping to encourage the maintenance of public order in Germany without interfering in its political affairs. The November 8 statement was a circular issued to U.S. delegations informing them that Hoover would soon depart for Europe to “relieve the nationalities there which are suffering greatly from famine and want.” This was to be publicized widely “in Austria-Hungary and Germany[,] adding that respect for constituted authority and preservation of public order are essential for speedy and effective relief to reach the people.”<sup>46</sup> The statement on November 12, solicited by the German government, said that Wilson was “ready to consider favorably the supplying of foodstuffs to Germany . . . provided he can be assured that public order is being and will continue to be maintained in Germany.”<sup>47</sup> Yet what is most notable about what these statements say is what they do not. Compared to what Wilson might have said, it is difficult to imagine statements more limited in their scope than these. Considering the extent of Wilson’s influence in Germany and its desperation to know what he wanted it to do, these minimalist actions barely constitute a small nudge—an important one, to be sure—but hardly a “firm stand.” Even more notable than this is the fact that this pair of statements constituted the last time the U.S. government would try to exert any influence *at all* over Germany’s internal situation until the following April—despite growing instability in Germany over the next few months.

#### WILSON AND THE GERMAN GOVERNMENT

At the same time that Wilson resisted becoming involved in Germany’s internal affairs, the short-lived reformist German government of Prince Max of Baden that handled the prearmistice negotiations made no progress in allaying his suspicions of the genuineness of Germany’s conversion to democracy—in part because of the efforts of British intelligence, which sought to shape the president’s views toward the changing regime in Germany. Reginald Hall, the rightwing head of British naval intelligence, had a “taste for intrigue”<sup>48</sup> and frequently deployed the intelligence he collected on his own initiative to achieve his own political ends.<sup>49</sup> The German intercepts that he selected to pass on to Washington apparently were those that supposedly showed acts of duplicity on the part of the new government. One intercept between the German foreign minister, Wilhelm Solf, and a German

45. Anne Wintermute Lane and Louise Herrick Wall, eds., *The Letters of Franklin K. Lane: Personal and Political* (London, 1922), 295–96.

46. Schwabe, *Woodrow Wilson*, 80.

47. Lansing to Swiss Minister, November 12, 1918, *FRUS-PPC*, Vol. II, 630.

48. Room 40 Memoir by W. R. Clarke, HW 3/3, UK National Archives, Kew.

49. Daniel Larsen, “British Intelligence and the 1916 Mediation Mission of Colonel Edward M. House,” *Intelligence and National Security* 25, no. 5 (2010): 682–704 at 685–86. See also Daniel Larsen, “Intelligence in the First World War: The State of the Field,” *Intelligence and National Security* (forthcoming): <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/02684527.2012.727070>.

general was passed to the president from the State Department on October 15.<sup>50</sup> Although the contents do not seem particularly damning—especially if the decrypt represents the worst material that Hall had to pass along—they affected Wilson deeply. On October 16, in an interview with British liaison officer William Wiseman (who despite being in British intelligence, belonged to a different agency, and had only a very limited relationship with Hall),<sup>51</sup> Wilson said emphatically that “[e]very word” of the decrypt “breathed the old Prussian trickery and deceit. It was hard to see how we could ever trust such people.”<sup>52</sup> On October 31, Secretary of State Robert Lansing passed to the president an intelligence report from Hall—one that was “highly suspect” and “apparently manufactur[ed]” according to Christopher Andrew—saying that the Kaiser had said that “[d]uring peace negotiations or even after peace, my U boats will find an opportunity to destroy the English fleet.” Lansing, however, passed the report along to the president, having given it “full credence.” It seems probable that Wilson did so as well.<sup>53</sup>

Schwabe accepts as reliable evidence that, on November 8, Wilson endorsed the idea that the German government now represented a clean break with its past rulers. Wilson is supposed to have said that Germany “had shaken off imperialistic rule and the military autocracy” and that “they might . . . ultimately be a bulwark for peace in Europe.” The source is a memorandum by Homer S. Cummings, the vice-chairman of the Democratic National Committee, of Cummings’s memory of a conversation with Wilson, printed in Ray Stannard Baker’s *Woodrow Wilson: Life and Letters*.<sup>54</sup>

This evidence seems to have led Schwabe to the conclusion that the primary reason that Wilson suddenly became silent toward Germany after November 12 was alliance pressure. The French president, Georges Clemenceau, wanted Germany to start addressing their notes to both the Allies and to the United States, rather than to the Americans alone. When Wilson accepted this request, Schwabe argues, the “United States Government now wanted to dispel every last trace of what could appear to be unilateral dealings with Germany.”<sup>55</sup> Yet while Clemenceau’s request might explain the stopping of Washington’s exchange of diplomatic notes with Germany, it does not follow logically that Wilson had to adopt a policy of total silence. If Wilson was determined to pursue an active policy of promoting democracy in Germany, he had other tools available to him besides that of dispatching formal diplomatic notes to Berlin. Had Wilson simply gone out

50. Lansing to Wilson, October 15, 1918, *PWW*, Vol. 51, 345–46.

51. See Wilton Fowler, *British-American Relations 1917–1918: The Role of Sir William Wiseman* (Princeton, NJ, 1969).

52. Wiseman Memorandum, [c. October 16, 1918], *PWW*, Vol. 51, 348; Christopher Andrew, *For the President’s Eyes Only: Secret Intelligence and the American Presidency from Washington to Bush* (New York, 1995), 59.

53. Lansing to Wilson, October 31, 1918, *PWW*, Vol. 51, 527–28; Andrew, *For the President’s Eyes Only*, 59.

54. Baker, *Woodrow Wilson: Life and Letters*, Vol. 8, 564–65; Schwabe, *Woodrow Wilson*, 80, 123.

55. Schwabe, *Woodrow Wilson*, 123.

and given speeches in general terms, for example, on the blessings and benefits of democracy and elections, the Allies could scarcely have objected.

The reliability of the Cummings memorandum—coming *before* the Kaiser's abdication and declaration of a German republic on November 9—should be discounted. Internal evidence suggests that the memorandum was not written until long after the event, and it seems more geared toward inflating Cummings' importance in the eyes of those reading Baker's book than in providing an accurate account. It is at variance with the remainder of the (admittedly limited) evidence available on Wilson's views toward the German leadership from October through the end of the peace conference, which is otherwise uniformly skeptical. Considering, however, that Wilson had expressed severe hostility toward this same government only a few weeks before, there is simply no reason why Wilson would so dramatically shift his views.

Max's government came to an abrupt end on November 9, as Ebert briefly became Chancellor and shortly thereafter head of a provisional Council of the People's Deputies.<sup>56</sup> It surely did not help Ebert that he retained Solf, who had so dramatically attracted Wilson's ire, as foreign minister. While there is no evidence of Wilson's initial reaction to Ebert as the new head of government, his attitude in December and afterward was distinctly cool. Yet Wilson's refusal to act to promote democracy in Germany or to support Ebert's new government was completely unsupported by those government officials who were most knowledgeable about the situation unfolding there—and who urged an active U.S. policy. Those American officials' immediate consensus opinion was deeply sympathetic to the new German provisional government under Ebert's Majority Socialist Party. As Ulysses Grant-Smith, U.S. chargé d'affaires to Denmark put it, Ebert and his allies were "the forces of real democracy" in Germany. William C. Bullitt, Chief of the Division of Western European Affairs and Pleasant Stovall, the U.S. Minister to Switzerland agreed. Only the U.S. Minister to the Netherlands viewed German actions in purely cynical terms.<sup>57</sup>

Bullitt, Stovall, and Grant-Smith warned of rising disorder and advocated immediate action to protect and promote the fledgling German democratic government. Calls for American statements to Germany to aid Ebert's troubled new government began the day of the armistice and poured in repeatedly from the three of them. Bullitt urged a statement announcing an Allied "determination to

56. See Broué, *The German Revolution*, chaps. 8–9.

57. For example, Stovall to Lansing, November 19, 1918 *FRUS-PPC*, Vol. II, 89–94; Grant-Smith to Lansing, November 21, 1918, *FRUS-PPC*, Vol. II, 96–97; Bullitt to Lansing, November 25, 1918, *FRUS-PPC*, Vol. II, 99–101; Garrett to Lansing, November 30, 1918, *FRUS-PPC*, Vol. II, 105–6. Stovall was largely dismissed as a diplomatic nonentity. See, for example, Rachel West, *The State Department on the Eve of the First World War* (Athens, 1978), 110–11. His reports and recommendations almost certainly represent the views of the far more knowledgeable top U.S. career diplomat in Switzerland, Hugh Wilson. See Hugh Wilson, *The Education of a Diplomat* (London, 1938), chaps. 12–14; Hugh Wilson, *Diplomat Between Wars* (New York, 1941), chaps. 1–6.



sign peace only with the representatives of a constitutional assembly” to support Ebert’s policy of moving quickly with fresh elections to elect an assembly to draft a new constitution.<sup>58</sup> Grant-Smith recommended that Wilson simply “put it as clearly as possible before the German nation that he wants general elections,” observing that the “country will do anything the president wants at present.” Stovall, meanwhile, favorably passed along a report calling for the president to again and more explicitly “make it clear to the German people that unless order is maintained throughout Germany, [he] will not help with food.”<sup>59</sup>

Importantly, distinguishing Germany from the cases of Mexico and Russia, these desires for the United States to intervene (and only rhetorically so) were shared by the German provisional government. Ebert’s preferred policy of holding early elections was running into stiff opposition by the leftwing Independent Socialists, who wanted to postpone conducting elections and immediately implement a program of radical socialist reform.<sup>60</sup> In late November, Grant-Smith reported that Ebert’s second-in-command was saying privately that “opposition to the Constituent Assembly would disappear if Wilson were to say that peace could be made only with the Constituent Assembly or [a] government supported by it.”<sup>61</sup>

On November 22, however, Wilson sent Lansing a terse note turning down this idea of refusing to negotiate except with members of an elected assembly on technical grounds. Vastly overestimating how long it would take to conduct an election and vastly underestimating how long it would be before any German representative would be allowed into the peace conference, he objected that they would “have to wait for the German representative . . . until after the conference had been for a long time in session.”<sup>62</sup> Even more crucially, the suggestions for a simple statement expressing his wish for elections were simply ignored.

Lansing responded by sending Wilson a dire telegram from Grant-Smith,<sup>63</sup> as well as another memorandum by Bullitt, even more urgent than the week before.<sup>64</sup> Reluctantly reversing himself, Wilson gave Lansing instructions for Colonel Edward House, who had been sent to France in mid-October to handle the pre-armistice negotiations. House was asked to propose to the Allies a statement to Germany that there could be “no official dealings . . . until a constituent assembly had been brought together.”<sup>65</sup>

58. Bullitt Memorandum, November 18, 1918, *PWW*, Vol. 53, 122.

59. Grant-Smith to Lansing, November 21, 1918, *FRUS-PPC*, Vol. II, 96–97.

60. See, for example, Mommsen, *The Rise and Fall of Weimar Democracy*, chap. 2.

61. Grant Smith to Lansing, November 26, 1918, *FRUS-PPC*, Vol. II, 103, copy in *PWW*, Vol. 53, 194–95.

62. Wilson to Lansing, November 22, 1918, *PWW*, Vol. 53, 160; MacMillan, *Paris 1919*, 459–60.

63. Grant Smith to Lansing, November 26, 1918, *FRUS-PPC*, Vol. II, 103, copy in *PWW*, Vol. 53, 194–95.

64. Lansing to Wilson, November 25, 1918, Bullitt Memorandum, November 25, 1918, *FRUS-PPC*, Vol. II, 98–101.

65. Wilson to Lansing, November 25, 1918, *PWW*, Vol. 53, 193–94.

House, however, had taken ill with a terrible case of influenza, and was unable to push the proposal himself. Instead, the task fell to House's secretary and son-in-law, Gordon Auchincloss, who appears to have done nothing more than deliver the request to the Allies.<sup>66</sup> On December 1, the French reacted with opposition. They objected that the successful election and seating of a constituent assembly would have the effect of stopping "the federalist movement which is taking shape in Germany,"—essentially a veiled call for Germany's breakup. A statement would also "run the risk of coming to the aid of the enemy" before being assured "indispensable guarantees against the resumption of hostilities." Finally, they flung the American president's principles back in his face, lecturing him that a statement to the Germans would "constitute a direct intervention in the internal policy of another country, and this is in itself already contrary to the practices of great democracies which profess an absolute respect for the internal life of other states."<sup>67</sup> This was the end of the initiative.

Shortly thereafter, Wilson departed from the United States for Europe. Aboard ship, Wilson's comments reflect how he conceptualized what might be described as a "probationary policy" toward Germany. Although Wilson was speaking in the direct context of Germany's admission to the League of Nations, we see in his words the best evidence available of Wilson's skepticism toward the German government and his attitude that Germany must find its own way to democracy. Wilson is recorded as saying "that he considered it necessary for Germany to pass through a probationary period. . . . He considered this necessary because it must still be proved that the German people have a responsible, decent government." Another observer recorded Wilson emphasizing that it was "Germany's present chaotic state" that "make[s] it necessary to put her on probation."<sup>68</sup> At the same time, the U.S. outposts in Switzerland and Denmark, closely following the developments in Germany, were reaching the opposite conclusion. They were becoming increasingly convinced that Ebert's government was exactly what the United States sought—leadership committed to democratic reform and institutions, even at the expense of their own agenda. They saw a deeply vulnerable ideological ally, worthy of and needing American moral and material aid.<sup>69</sup>

#### ELLIS LORING DRESEL

Over the next several months, the question of the United States promoting democracy in Germany would become the primary concern of Ellis Loring Dresel, a

66. Auchincloss Diary, November 26, 1918, Auchincloss Papers, Yale University Library [hereafter YUL].

67. House to Lansing, November 30, 1918, *FRUS-PPC*, Vol. II, 106–7.

68. Schwabe, *Woodrow Wilson*, 175; Bullitt Diary, December [10], 1918, *PWW*, Vol. 53, 352.

69. Hugh Wilson to American Commission to Negotiate Peace [hereafter ACNP], December 15, 1918, National Archives and Records Administration, Record Group 256: Records of the American Commission to Negotiate Peace, 1918–1931 [hereafter NARA-ACNP], 862.00/29; Lithgow Osborne (Copenhagen) to ACNP, January 4, 1919, NARA-ACNP 862.00/68; Stovall to Lansing, December 3, 1918, *FRUS-PPC*, Vol. II, 108–10.

diplomat who had been highly placed in the embassy in Berlin before the break in relations with Germany in 1917. Dresel was a close friend of Joseph Grew, the recently appointed Secretary of the American Commission to Negotiate Peace. Grew knew Dresel from his time in Berlin, where Grew had been the top diplomat beneath the ambassador at the U.S. embassy. Over the next few months, Grew would be Dresel's primary source of support within the commission. In theory, Grew's position was supposed to be a strong one, controlling the American commission beneath the five commissioners—Wilson, House, Lansing, General Tasker Bliss, and Republican Henry White. In reality, however, Grew's position was weakened by bureaucratic turf battles and presidential mistrust, leaving him “a combined department store manager, director of traffic and floor sweeper” of the American headquarters in Paris.<sup>70</sup>

Summoned to Paris in December 1918, Dresel worked with Grew to plan a mission into Germany and gain approval for it from their superiors. On December 17, a few days after the president's arrival, Dresel's mission was authorized. Meeting very briefly with Colonel House on his way out, Dresel departed for Berne, where, after making arrangements with German officials, he crossed the border into Germany on December 27, taking with him Franklin Day, a very young diplomat attached to the U.S. legation in Berne whose knowledge of Germany Dresel praised as “encyclopedic.”<sup>71</sup>

Dresel and Day visited Munich and Berlin and interviewed several prominent officials before departing from Germany on January 5. On January 10, Dresel submitted his report, which put forth a positive view of the German government and argued that the best way to promote democracy in Germany was to seek to strengthen its hand. He laid out the complex kaleidoscope of German politics with all its competing factions, calling the leaders of Ebert's Majority Socialist Party “practical common sense men of moderate ideas.” He labeled Ebert's short-term agenda “a constructive program” aimed at building a German democracy and praised his “willingness to cooperate with moderate men of other parties.” He saw the government as so pacific that he worried that their “chief handicap” was their “disinclination . . . to shed blood.” He emphasized that while there was no danger of immediate mass starvation, there were “marked signs of insufficient nutrition.” At the same time, Dresel was clear on the importance of not falling victim to German propaganda. If observers were sent, he warned that “persistent endeavors [would] be made to convert observers to German views,” and he complained about the “undesirability” of having reporters in Germany, whom he

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70. Waldo H. Heinrichs, *American Ambassador: Joseph C. Grew and the Development of the United States Diplomatic Tradition* (Boston, 1966), 38–41; Joseph Grew, *Turbulent Era: A Diplomatic Record of Forty Years, 1904–1945* (Boston, 1952), Vol. I, 366, 369–70, 384; House Diary, December 14, 1918, *PWW*, Vol. 53, 389–91.

71. Dresel to Grew, December 23, 1918, Ellis Loring Dresel Papers, 160:4, Harvard University Houghton Library [hereafter HL]; Wilson, *Education of Diplomat*, 177; Dresel to Grew, January 10, 1919, *FRUS-PPC*, Vol. II, 132–33; House Diary, December 17, 1918, *PWW*, Vol. 53, 418–19.

thought too easily swayed by German viewpoints.<sup>72</sup> Indeed, despite his obvious sympathy for Ebert's government, Dresel was anything but a German partisan—later that year, he initiated a successful effort to force the Germans to amend their constitution to eliminate an inconsistency with the Treaty of Versailles.<sup>73</sup>

Dresel made a number of recommendations. Most importantly, he made the same recommendation that others had been making since November, with the explicit goal of positively influencing the coming elections in Germany, which were scheduled for January 19: renewing the call for statements “relative to non-negotiation except with a stable government elected by the will of the people” and concerning “non-supply of food stuffs and other commodities” except to such a government. Again contrasting with the Mexican and Russian situations, many of the prodemocratic Germans that Dresel interviewed specifically requested—unprompted—that Wilson intervene in such a fashion. Dresel also urged that a more permanent commission of observers immediately be sent into Germany, along with economic and food experts. He recommended that preliminary arrangements for delivery of fats, which were desperately needed, be made “at once.” He proposed that the coal situation be investigated so as to meliorate critical shortages in certain places of the country, especially Bavaria.<sup>74</sup>

Although Grew naturally described his friend's report as “of the greatest interest and value”<sup>75</sup> and although Grew recorded in his minutes of a meeting of the commissioners that the commissioners (i.e., Lansing, Bliss, and White) had “great interest” in Dresel's observations,<sup>76</sup> none of Dresel's recommendations were pursued aside from the proposal for a more permanent political observation mission, and plans for that had already been in the works for some time.<sup>77</sup> Well over a month had passed since the French had last rejected the proposal to issue a statement to Germany. If promoting democracy in Germany was important to the president, he had the option to pursue it again—and with more persuasion and emphasis behind it than simply handing over a telegram, as Auchincloss had done—with the threat, at least as it pertained to a statement about American food relief, of acting unilaterally. Yet the president took no action.<sup>78</sup>

In Germany, meanwhile, with the complete silence from the Americans since November, Ebert's allies in the press had been reduced to the outright fabrication

72. Dresel to Grew, January 10, 1919, *FRUS-PPC*, Vol. II, 132–43. See also Grew Diary, 7 January 1919, Grew Papers, 13, HL.

73. Dresel to Harrison, August 26, 1919, NARA-ACNP, 862.011/11. Similarly, Dresel would later ask a subsequent mission to look into several disputes, including those the Germans had with the Poles, suspecting that the German military's claim of a purely defensive posture was not truthful. See Dresel to Gherardi, February 4, 1919, NARA-ACNP, 184.01202/2.

74. Dresel to Grew, January 10, 1919, *FRUS-PPC*, Vol. II, 143–44.

75. Grew to Hugh Wilson, January 13, 1919, Grew Papers, 13, HL.

76. Commissioners Meeting Minutes, January 9, 1919, Grew Papers, MS Am1687.2, HL.

77. Storey Memorandum, [December 1918], NARA-ACNP, 184.01/1; Storey Memorandum, December 24, 1918, NARA-ACNP 184.01/2.

78. Schwabe, *Woodrow Wilson*, 161.

of statements of U.S. and Allied wishes. The newspaper of Ebert's Majority Socialists reported—with no basis whatsoever—Allied demands for the preservation of order, while warning ominously that the appearance of a Spartacist takeover would mean an Allied invasion. At the same time, Ebert's enemies were able to claim—with no evidence to the contrary—that “the Entente does not recognize the present government.”<sup>79</sup>

Grew, who regarded Dresel as “much needed” in Paris, arranged for his friend to be given a post as head of a new Division of Current, Diplomatic, and Political Correspondence, which was to be responsible for managing incoming and outgoing correspondence about the situation in Europe.<sup>80</sup> Taking Dresel's place as the head of the much larger mission about to be dispatched to Germany was Walter Gherardi, who had been U.S. naval attaché to Germany before the break in relations in 1917. Most of those assigned to the mission were soldiers. Although Dresel pressed for them to be allowed to go into Germany in civilian clothes once German permission had been secured, believing that uniforms would hamper their ability to collect information, General Bliss was insistent that military dress only was appropriate. Bliss prevailed.<sup>81</sup>

By January 20, detailed plans for the mission had been drawn up, and not long after it received German approval four days later, the mission arrived in Germany. Using Berlin as his headquarters, Gherardi deployed members of his party throughout Germany to report back to him, including sending the young Day to Weimar to study the unfolding political situation there.<sup>82</sup> Gherardi's first telegram from Berlin on February 2 at once emphasized the gravity of the situation. Crises had broken out in several German cities where the Spartacists had taken control. Gherardi wrote, “The outcome of the present struggle will show whether the government . . . can restore [an] orderly condition and preserve democracy.”<sup>83</sup> Gherardi's reports quickly began to take a more mixed tone, however, as it became apparent to him that Ebert's political party, the Majority Socialists, would form a parliamentary coalition with the German Democratic Party, which Gherardi accused of having “stood for Pan-Germanism.” Yet he continued to describe Ebert as a “leader of those who genuinely seek for higher political ideals for Germany.” Furthermore, he objected to the only other party with

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79. Mayer, *Politics and Diplomacy*, 103–5.

80. Grew to Hugh Wilson, January 13, 1919, Grew Papers, 13, HL; Dresel to Hugh Wilson, February 1, 1919, Dresel Papers, 445, HL; Dresel to Grew, January 31, 1919, *FRUS-PPC*, Vol. XI, 495–96; Grew, *Turbulent Era*, Vol. I, 383.

81. Dresel Memorandum, January 16, 1919, NARA-ACNP, 184.012/3; Bliss to Lansing, January 17, 1919, NARA-ACNP, 184.01/5; Memorandum, [January 1919], NARA-ACNP, 184.01/6; Dresel to Stovall, January 27, 1919, NARA-ACNP, 184.012/19.

82. Tyler Memorandum, January 20, 1919, NARA-ACNP, 184.012/9; Hugh Wilson to Dresel, January 24, 1919, NARA-ACNP, 184.012/13; Gherardi to ACNP, February 8, 1919, NARA-ACNP, 184.01202/18. For another account of this mission, see Schwabe, *Deutsche Revolution*, 327–46. Regarded as not particularly important, this material was mostly excised from the English-language version.

83. Gherardi to ACNP, February 2, 1919, NARA-ACNP, 184.01202/2.

which the Majority Socialists might have made a coalition—the even more leftwing Independent Socialists—as a party “whose influences are destructive.” Ironically, the failure of the United States to act to promote democracy in Germany may have contributed to the electoral results that necessitated the coalition: Day observed that the Majority Socialists “lost much ground to the bourgeois parties at the election because of [the] panic” that had been provoked by the Spartacists in their uprising in Berlin during January 5–15. Ultimately, Gherardi reached the conclusion that “there stands between [the Ebert government] and straight Bolshevism no class or party from which a government can be drawn which would have the confidence of even a small part of the people.”<sup>84</sup>

As Dresel had predicted, Gherardi found that the military personnel’s uniforms made it much more difficult for them to gather information. The uniforms’ conspicuousness also led to a credible threat of assassination against Gherardi himself, the discovery of which caused Gherardi to return quickly to Paris. Gherardi appeared before the four commissioners (i.e., excluding Wilson) and gave his presentation, mostly along the lines discussed above. He reiterated his position that he thought it “unfortunate” that the Majority Socialists lacked a majority and repeated his negative view of the Democratic Party. He called Ebert “honest and sincere,” and thought there was in Germany a “genuine wish for democracy.” He concluded ultimately that, as far as promoting democracy in Germany was concerned, “the coalition government in Germany should be maintained” and that the United States should seek to strengthen its hand.<sup>85</sup>

With the plot on his life, Gherardi advised the commissioners to withdraw the military personnel and replace them with civilians. Presumably after Dresel and Gherardi expressed confidence in young Day, the commissioners agreed to leave him in charge in Berlin, with Gherardi’s former secretary as his assistant, though they felt “that if possible, an older man should be sent to act as his superior, if not in practice, at least in name.”<sup>86</sup> Dresel gave his thoughts on Gherardi’s final report to Grew on March 4. “The great need at the present moment,” Dresel wrote emphatically, “is to give what support we can to the good elements which exist.”<sup>87</sup>

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84. Gherardi to ACNP, February 4, 1919, NARA-ACNP, 184.01202/6; Day to ACNP, February 21, 1919, NARA-ACNP, 184.01202/55½; Gherardi to ACNP, February 24, 1919, NARA-ACNP, 184.01202/59. For a more positive take on the German Democratic Party, see Osborne (Copenhagen) to ACNP, January 21, 1919, NARA-ACNP, 862.00/97.

85. Commissioners Meeting Minutes, February 17, 1919, *FRUS-PPC*, Vol. XI, 46–48; Grew, *Turbulent Era*, Vol. I, 377; Gherardi to Department of State, February 22, 1919, NARA-ACNP, 184.01202/56; Day to Dresel, February 13, 1919, NARA-ACNP, 862.00/165.

86. Commissioners Meeting Minutes, February 17, 1919, *FRUS-PPC*, Vol. XI, 48–49; Grew to Arnold Whitridge, February 17, 1919, NARA-ACNP, 862.00/176.

87. Gherardi to ACNP, February 24, 1919, Dresel to Grew, March 4, 1919, NARA-ACNP, 184.0202/59.

## WILSON AND GERMANY, JANUARY-FEBRUARY 1919

It is difficult to establish precisely what Wilson's reaction was in January and February to the success of these democratic elections in Germany. We have no direct evidence of any evaluation on his part as to whether these elections made much progress in satisfying the conditions of Germany's "probation."<sup>88</sup> Nor is it clear how closely Wilson followed Dresel's and Gherardi's activities. He received a copy of Dresel's final report,<sup>89</sup> and he received some of Gherardi's cables from February 3–14,<sup>90</sup> but there are no records of Wilson ever employing this information. There were, however, those with access to the president who continued to propound the view that, elections or not, Germany's new government was merely a cloak for the old militaristic regime. Given Wilson's previous skepticism of the German people, it seems likely that Wilson was receptive to such claims.

Professor George D. Herron, an influential American Christian minister, had been living in Berne, Switzerland and publically promulgating his views of Wilson's foreign policy. Herron earned Wilson's praise in October 1917 and February 1918—on the latter occasion, Herron sent him a memorandum on an Austro-Hungarian peace move, and Wilson had written that it was "extremely interesting and confirms my impression of Herron. I agree *in toto* with his analysis and conclusions!"<sup>91</sup>

Herron fantasized that Ebert's government, under the "guise of a socialist republic," actually wanted to develop a "strong collective autocracy." It would seek to pursue an "insidious program of economic penetration" in nearby countries, along with an aggressive program of "intellectual propaganda for Germanism" through the secret "purchase of newspapers" and "establishment of publishing houses." "By all manner of unimaginable devices, carried out with the most detailed invention and execution," he wrote, the new German government sought to "transmute the German defeat of the present into an ultimate German victory—an ultimate German dominion in Europe." His prominence allowed him to have his views transmitted to the American leadership.<sup>92</sup> Dresel, understandably, had reacted very negatively to Herron's views. When he was staying briefly with the legation at Berne on his travels to Germany, Dresel complained to Grew that he did

not trust [Herron's] discretion nor his judgment. So far as I have gone into the situation, a letter which he wrote to Colonel House in regard to the German

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88. Schwabe makes the same observation about the scarcity of direct evidence. See Schwabe, *Woodrow Wilson*, 161.

89. Schwabe, *Woodrow Wilson*, 161.

90. Woodrow Wilson Papers, Reels 392–93, Library of Congress [hereafter LOC].

91. Milan Babík, "George D. Herron and the Eschatological Foundations of Woodrow Wilson's Foreign Policy, 1917–1919," *Diplomatic History* 35, no. 5 (2011): 837–57. See also Mitchell Pirie Briggs, *George D. Herron and the European Settlement* (London, 1932).

92. Herron Memorandum, January 15, 1919, Stovall to ACNP, January 18, 1919, NARA-ACNP, 862.00/94.

situation is very misleading. . . . I cannot agree, nor can any of us, with Herron's view that [the new German government] is merely a cloak for the old Pan-German militaristic ideas.<sup>93</sup>

Despite these criticisms, however, Herron met with Wilson a number of times in January, where he undoubtedly shared his views on Germany with the president<sup>94</sup>—and which probably helped to shape the president's thinking over the next few months.

At the same time, Wilson's commitment to the principle of noninterference was unwavering. On December 28, 1918, Wilson told a British interlocutor—in a statement that could with equal elegance encapsulate Wilson's entire approach to Germany—that “Russia should be left to settle her own affairs in her own way so long as she does not become a menace to others.”<sup>95</sup> Despite a growing domestic chorus against the Bolsheviks in Russia, on February 15, 1919, he made clear to the Allies that he firmly “advocated the withdrawal of Allied and Associated troops from all parts of Russian territory.”<sup>96</sup> On February 28, in remarks to the Democratic National Committee, Wilson emphasized unambiguously his view that “any people is entitled to any kind of government it damn pleases, and that it is none of our business to suggest or to influence the kind that it is going to have. Sometimes it will have a very riotous form of government, but that is none of our business.” Again, Wilson was speaking in the context of Russia, but he could have been equally describing his German policy.<sup>97</sup>

#### DRESEL CAMPAIGNS FOR PROMOTING DEMOCRACY

With Day alone and in charge, conditions in Germany markedly deteriorated over late February and early March. Serious strikes and disorder had erupted; Day was convinced that Germany “st[ood] before the danger of a second revolution. . . . The calm of the last weeks was a calm before the storm.”<sup>98</sup>

On March 5, Dresel sent to the commissioners a memorandum, labeled “For Action,” which was a remarkable compilation of the information passing through Dresel's office, drawing on Day's reports and other sources of information. “Whether or not the Bolshevik danger has been used by politicians in the hope of getting better conditions of peace is an academic question,” Dresel told the commissioners. “The fact remains that the tendency toward anarchism and lawlessness,” undermining Germany's attempts to transition to democracy, was

93. Dresel to Grew, December 23, 1918, Dresel Papers, 160:4, HL.

94. Schwabe, *Woodrow Wilson*, 161. By contrast, there is no indication that Dresel ever had a personal meeting with the president.

95. Frank Worthington Memorandum, December [28], 1918, *PWW*, Vol. 53, 575.

96. Unterberger, *America's Siberian Expedition*, 137, 145–46.

97. Remarks to Members of the Democratic National Committee, February 28, 1919, *PWW*, Vol. 55, 319.

98. Day to Dresel, February 27, 1919, NARA-ACNP, 862.00/207; Day to Dresel, March 1, 1919, NARA-ACNP, 862.00/214.



“being constantly fed by conditions which are still remediable.” He urged not only that food be sent to Germany—Hoover’s efforts to get food into Germany were still being hung up by French objections over the disposition of German gold—but also for political action to strengthen the hand of the government. He wanted a statement issued saying that food would only “be furnished so long as a stable and orderly government is maintained.”<sup>99</sup>

Dresel’s superiors, however, conflated the issue of food relief with the separate issue of the statement, treating them as the same. A large meeting over the matter of food relief was due<sup>100</sup>—even though these discussions would not cover the issue of a statement to Germany—so the commissioners decided that “it would not be advisable for the United States to take any separate action in the premises at the present time.” There was no contemplation as to whether the United States had any other policy options with which it might promote the formation of democracy in Germany.<sup>101</sup> In light of seriousness of the situation, Day was recalled to Paris.<sup>102</sup>

Over the course of the next month, Dresel continued to send occasional, brief updates to the commissioners on the situation in Germany. With the political situation there seeming to stabilize somewhat—and since his superiors had shown no inclination to act when it was grave—his memorandums continued to provide information in support of Dresel’s desire that the United States take action to assist the democratic elements in Germany, but generally he declined to suggest any specific course.<sup>103</sup>

Dresel raised the question of sending further observers into Germany on March 22, arguing strongly in favor of it. Grew added that Dresel was “unquestionably the person most qualified to undertake such a mission.”<sup>104</sup> With newfound support from House (see Figure 1), Dresel was able to overcome objections from some of the other commissioners and from the military, and his mission was finally authorized on April 12.<sup>105</sup>

With this mission, the first American measure taken with the specific goal of influencing and stabilizing the political situation in Germany in four months, led

99. Dresel Memorandum, March 5, 1919, NARA-ACNP, 862.5018/35.

100. That meeting eventually led to a modest relaxation of the food blockade, but no mention is made of Dresel or U.S. missions. Hoover does not seem even to have been aware of them, relying instead on British intelligence to make his case. See Commissioners Meeting Minutes, March 7, 1919, *FRUS-PPC*, Vol. XI, 99–110; Schwabe, *Woodrow Wilson*, 198–208; Herbert Hoover, *An American Epic* (Chicago, IL, 1960), Vol. III, 337–52.

101. Commissioners Meeting Minutes, March 5, 1919, *FRUS-PPC*, Vol. XI, 96.

102. Dresel to Day, March 3, 1919, NARA-ACNP, 862.00/207; Grew to Dresel, [March 1919], Grew Memorandum, March 3, 1919, NARA-ACNP, 862.5018/34; Commissioners Meeting Minutes, March 3, 1919, *FRUS-PPC*, Vol. XI, 93.

103. See Dresel Memorandum, March 17, 1919, NARA-ACNP, 184.01402/15; Dresel Memorandum, March 14, 1919, NARA-ACNP, 862.00/254; Dresel Memorandum, March 7, 1919, NARA-ACNP, 862.50/28.

104. Dresel Memorandum, [March 1919], NARA-ACNP, 184.012/50.

105. Dresel to Arthur Frazier, March 24, 1919, Dresel Papers, 130, HL; Commissioners Meeting Minutes, March 22, 1919, *FRUS-PPC*, Vol. XI, 132; Commissioners Meeting Minutes, March 28, 1919, *FRUS-PPC*, Vol. XI, 138; Schwabe, *Woodrow Wilson*, 313.



**Figure 1:** Diplomat Ellis Loring Dresel (left) walking with Colonel Edward M. House (right), ca. 1919. Photo courtesy of Harvard University Houghton Library, Ellis Loring Dresel Papers (MS Am 1549), folder 465.

by Dresel, finally saw fruition. Using anticommunist worries set off by the serious situation in Germany in late February and early March, Hoover had finally broken through Allied objections about supplying Germany with food, and on March 25, the first American ship loaded with food entered the harbor at Hamburg. Yet with his focus on the details of arranging the importation of food, Hoover appears to have given no thought to issuing a statement to Germany for political effect, as Dresel had been urging. No doubt strongly of the view that Hoover was missing an opportunity, Dresel coincidentally received a well-timed telegram from the minister in the Netherlands reporting that the German lower classes were convinced Russian food was obtainable and that they needed to turn to communism to obtain it. Although this telegram almost certainly only provided a pretext, Dresel issued a memorandum based on it that advised the commission to alert the press to the situation, to instruct Hoover to increase his publicity efforts, and to direct Grew “to bring to the attention of . . . the press all important reports describing the present famine conditions in Russia” as well as to “take such other measures . . . to present this information to the German public.”<sup>106</sup>

106. Dresel Memorandum, April 10, 1919, NARA-ACNP, 862.48/27.

At a meeting of the commissioners—though House and Wilson were absent—Dresel’s memorandum was considered and approved.<sup>107</sup> Making use of the commissioners’ approval, Dresel asked for a schedule of food shipments and a statement from Hoover to release to the German press, which Hoover eagerly provided on April 15. The statement was blunt and forceful:

An equitable and untrammelled distribution of these foodstuffs is only possible so long as stabilized and orderly conditions exist. Mr. Hoover has been very apprehensive of the disturbances in various parts of Germany. . . . Continued interference with public order will greatly jeopardize all the efforts being made, and seriously menaces the health and strength of the whole German people.<sup>108</sup>

This was the first concrete political measure taken by the United States with respect to Germany in four months. Yet it remains unclear just how high knowledge of Dresel’s initiative reached. Dresel obtained the statement from Hoover only a day before he departed for Germany. There is no evidence it was vetted by the president—there is no reference to it in his papers<sup>109</sup>—although there are indications that House had prior knowledge or involvement,<sup>110</sup> particularly as House met with Dresel at least three times in the days before his departure to Germany.<sup>111</sup> Importantly, this statement was issued without the knowledge or involvement of the Allies, showing that small, unilateral actions in this vein were possible without risk to alliance solidarity.

Once the German government’s permission was obtained, Dresel’s mission departed on April 16, arriving in Berlin two days later. Dresel quickly arranged for Hoover’s schedule and statement to receive the widest possible publication in the German Sunday papers on April 20. Dresel reported to Hoover and to House that his statement had had an “excellent effect.”<sup>112</sup>

Dresel was strongly of the opinion that the mission should be “more than a mere information bureau,” and have meaningful authority to try to influence German politics in a positive direction. On this point, however, he could not get approval.<sup>113</sup> As a result, Dresel’s efforts at influencing the German political situation were limited to this single statement. Instead, Dresel’s days were “crowded with endless interviews,”<sup>114</sup> as he focused on his main task: attempting to read the

107. Commissioners Meeting Minutes, April 12, 1919, *FRUS-PPC*, Vol. XI, 150–51.

108. Schwabe, *Woodrow Wilson*, 313. Schwabe mistakenly attributes the initiative for the statement and schedule to Hoover.

109. See Woodrow Wilson Papers, Reel 400, LOC.

110. Dresel to House, April 21, 1919, House Papers, 40:1245, YUL.

111. House Engagement Sheets, April 1919, House Papers, 283:433, YUL.

112. Dresel to Hoover, April 21, 1919, NARA-ACNP, 184.013102/5; Dresel to House, April 21, 1919, House Papers, 40:1245, YUL.

113. Dresel to House and Grew, April 28, 1919, NARA-ACNP, 184.0131/27. Copies in House Papers, 40:1245, YUL; Woodrow Wilson Papers, Reel 403, LOC.

114. Dresel to Allen Dulles, April 23, 1919, Dresel Papers, 113, HL.

tea leaves as to whether Germany would sign the peace terms that the Allies had almost finished drafting (a rather challenging endeavor as Dresel himself had no direct knowledge of what the terms would be).<sup>115</sup> Even still, the aim of securing democracy in Germany was never far from Dresel's mind. "It must," he reminded his superiors, "not be forgotten that whatever the shortcomings of the present government, it is sincerely democratic. The constant press intimations that it is reactionary and merely a cloak for imperialism are unworthy of serious attention."<sup>116</sup>

Dresel's focus was exclusively on the political ramifications in Germany of the handling of the treaty—on strengthening democracy in Germany and making it politically viable for the government to sign, regardless of the treaty's contents. He seems to have been agnostic on the text of the treaty itself. At no point did he try to insert himself into the debate over whether the terms were too harsh or unfair. The most significant of his recommendations were his repeated urgings that the German government be allowed face-to-face negotiations. The most important audience during such negotiations, however, would not be the Allied diplomats across the table, but the German people back home, with Dresel emphasizing the importance of the government to be able to "save its 'face' by being able to point to actual negotiations at Versailles."<sup>117</sup> For similar reasons, he urged gracious diplomatic treatment of the German delegation.<sup>118</sup> The German government needed the opportunity to put on a show, and the Allies needed to play their part in the drama. Most of Dresel's dispatches from late April—that is, after Hoover's statement was released—and early May appear in Wilson's papers,<sup>119</sup> and Wilson even read excerpts of some of them to the other Allied leaders. His interest, however, seemed to be strictly limited to the question of whether Germany would, or would not, sign the treaty. He displayed little concern for the German political situation itself.<sup>120</sup>

After organizing a small, permanent post under Charles Dyar in Berlin to compile press summaries,<sup>121</sup> Dresel's team returned to Paris on May 5<sup>122</sup> and issued their preliminary report, which Lansing forwarded to the president.

115. See Schwabe, *Woodrow Wilson*, 313–18. See also Dresel to Fred Dolbeare, May 2, 1919, Dresel Papers, 106, HL.

116. Dresel and Osborne to Grew, May 10, 1919, *FRUS-PPC*, Vol. XII, 108.

117. Schwabe, *Woodrow Wilson*, 317. Dresel to ACNP, April 28, 1919, *FRUS-PPC*, Vol. XII, 85; Dresel to ACNP, May 3, 1919, *FRUS-PPC*, Vol. XII, 89; Dresel and Osborne to Grew, May 10, 1919, *FRUS-PPC*, Vol. XII, 116.

118. ACNP to State Department, May 3, 1919, NARA-ACNP, 184.013102/24; Dresel to ACNP, April 28, 1919, *FRUS-PPC*, Vol. XII, 85; Dresel to ACNP, May 5, 1919, *PWW*, Vol. 58, 455.

119. Woodrow Wilson Papers, Reels 402–5, LOC.

120. Schwabe, *Woodrow Wilson*, 327–29.

121. State Department to ACNP, April 17, 1919, NARA-ACNP, 184.0131/19; Dresel to Grew, April 23, 1919, NARA-ACNP, 184.013102/9.

122. Memorandum, Undated, NARA-ACNP, 184.0131/14; Dresel to ACNP, May 5, 1919, *PWW*, Vol. 58, 453.

Again, Dresel's emphasis was on the political handling of the treaty, its impact on the new German polity, and on mitigating the harm to the burgeoning democracy there. Although still not aware of the precise treaty terms, Dresel advised the commission that he thought that

the German delegates will sign if assurances are given them that their present bankrupt state will be taken into account in fixing the indemnity terms, that raw materials necessary for the revival of their industries will be given them on easy terms, and that some slight concessions will be made on territorial questions, *which will enable them to claim [that is, to their own people] that they achieved some results by negotiation and that they did not merely accept a peace of violence.*<sup>123</sup>

Dresel's final report offered a detailed analysis of the German political situation. In his conclusion, he recommended that if

the present Government shows any inclination to accept the terms, their hands should . . . be strengthened in every possible way. . . . Should it decide to make peace, it will . . . have a hard struggle with the reactionary element on one side and the extreme radicals on the other.

To that end, he recommended that a mission be sent to Germany, along with financial and economic experts, with instructions to try to reassure the German government and to give them "such moral encouragement as is possible."<sup>124</sup>

#### WILSON AND GERMANY, JUNE 1919

We see Wilson's unwillingness to pursue a policy of democracy promotion in Germany in the president's lack of response to Dresel's recommendations and activities and in the sharp contrast between Wilson's and Dresel's attitudes. Dresel's recommendations appear to have been uniformly ignored, and Wilson remained as skeptical about the new German government as ever. In a meeting with the American delegation on June 3, when asked by Lansing whether it would be possible to establish precisely when Germany could be admitted to the League of Nations, President Wilson responded flatly, "I think it is necessary that we should know that the change in government and the governmental method in Germany is genuine and permanent. We don't know either of them yet."<sup>125</sup>

This skepticism about the new government led to Wilson treating it as merely the successor to, rather than a dramatic break from, the Kaiser's imperial government—and as equally in need of being deterred from starting wars in the future. Wilson's mind-set is perhaps best exemplified in a May 16 personal letter, in which he discussed the "very great offense against civilization which the German state committed and the necessity for making it evident . . . that such things can only lead

123. Dresel to ACNP, May 5, 1919, *PWW*, Vol. 58, 453–55. Emphasis added.

124. Dresel and Osborne to Grew, May 10, 1919, *FRUS-PPC*, Vol. XII, 116–17. See also Dresel to Dolbeare, May 20, 1919, Dresel Papers, 106, HL.

125. American Delegation Meeting Minutes, June 3, 1919, *PWW*, Vol. 60, 64.

to the most severe punishment.”<sup>126</sup> As Schwabe observes, “Wilson was inclined . . . to see the German Republic, morally and in terms of international law, as the equivalent of Wilhelm II’s monarchy.”<sup>127</sup> The terms of the treaty, Wilson told his delegation, “are hard—but the Germans earned that. And I think it is profitable that a nation should learn once and for all what an unjust war means in itself.”<sup>128</sup>

In analyzing the situation in Germany, Dresel always made use of a strictly *political* vocabulary. The treaty and especially how the treaty was handled were always discussed only in terms of the likely political consequences it would involve for the new German polity. Wilson unambiguously rejected the notion that it was appropriate for such considerations to play a role in U.S. policy. As the delegation discussed possible changes and concessions that might be made to the treaty, Wilson insisted on discussing concessions to Germany solely in terms of right and wrong, of “justice” and “injustice.” He instructed the delegation only to consider changes when Germans could show that “the arrangements of the treaty are essentially unjust,” and not “merely that they are hard.” He condemned any consideration of the German political situation as an immoral resort to “expediency.”<sup>129</sup> Yet the goal of German democratization was a *political* goal, based upon nothing other than the political situation in Germany and how that might be affected by American actions—in a word, by “expediency.”

The day after this meeting, Hoover sent the president a letter in which he argued that it was a “paramount issue” for the United States “to secure the establishment of democracy in Germany,” rather than to pursue “strict justice” in punishing Germany as a country.<sup>130</sup> Seeking support for his position, Hoover suggested to Dresel that he present his views directly to the president. On June 5, Dresel made one final attempt to influence the outcome. Dresel drafted a personal letter to Wilson and gave it to House, who passed it along with a plea that Wilson read “this altogether admirable letter.”<sup>131</sup>

Dresel was concerned primarily with the political consequences and ramifications of *how* Germany signed, and what worried him most were the perception of the situation within Germany and the political impact of that on its new government. He vigorously defended the German government against accusations that it was “merely a cloak for German militarism.” Conceding the government had “many faults,” with some members who were “not to be trusted,” he emphasized it was “clearly democratic in form and in sentiment, and st[ood] unquestionably for a republican form of government.” He highlighted the humble beginnings of its

126. Wilson to Jan Smuts, May 16, 1919, *PWW*, Vol. 59, 187–88.

127. Schwabe, *Woodrow Wilson*, 342.

128. American Delegation Meeting Minutes, June 3, 1919, *PWW*, Vol. 60, 67.

129. American Delegation Meeting Minutes, June 3, 1919, *PWW*, Vol. 60, 67–70.

130. Hoover to Wilson, June 4, 1919, *PWW*, Vol. 60, 136–37; Herbert Hoover, *The Ordeal of Woodrow Wilson* (London, 1958), 245; Schwabe, *Woodrow Wilson*, 365.

131. House to Wilson, June 5, 1919, *PWW*, Vol. 60, 177; Schwabe, *Woodrow Wilson*, 364–65.

most important figures and called it “altogether incredible that these men . . . harbor ideas of military revenge,” pointing to the “failure to insist in the German counter-reply on an army of more than one hundred thousand men” as “in itself indicative of a non-militaristic attitude.” He continued, “As far as permanency goes . . . a government which has been able to keep above water for seven months, in the convulsions through which Germany has passed, is not a negligible quantity, and surely shows as great elements of stability as a government which has continued for seven years in quiet times.” He feared that if the present government fell, taking its place would be either “an Independent Socialist government, directing all its energies to taking up relations with the proletariat of other countries, [which] would give free reign to the forces of anarchy” or “a military dictatorship of a reactionary nature, [which] would plunge Germany into civil war and endless bloodshed.”

It was too late now to do anything about the form of the negotiations; a change in the terms was the only option that remained. Dresel cited a June 3 message from Dyar whose assessment was that “admission to the League of Nations would induce the German government to sign.” He concluded:

By admitting Germany to the League of Nations without further delay, *the parties of order and true democracy would at once be immensely strengthened*, and it is not evident what if any danger would be incurred. In the present critical situation, can we not afford to take the German people at their word, and give them an opportunity to work out their destiny on lines which will be of benefit to the whole world?<sup>132</sup>

As a result of this pressure from within the commission, Wilson reluctantly shifted his position somewhat, but the gulf between Dresel’s objectives and Wilson’s remained vast. Wilson was persuaded to push for German inclusion in the League of Nations within “a few months” of the signing of the treaty, but only on the condition that the Allies and the United States became “convinced that a democratic government is firmly established in Germany”—a fact about which, plainly, Wilson still had his doubts. Yet even in pursuing this, he continued to see this proposed concession in a fundamentally different light than did Dresel. Where Dresel wanted this concession for the purpose of strengthening democracy in Germany, for Wilson, this was wholly “tactical”: Wilson merely hoped to use it to get Germany to sign the treaty, nothing more. In the end, however, Wilson could not overcome French objections on the issue and the matter was dropped.<sup>133</sup>

132. Dresel to Wilson, June 5, 1919, *PWW*, Vol. 60, 177–78.

133. Schwabe, *Woodrow Wilson*, 374–75; Arthur Link, ed., *The Deliberations of the Council of Four (March 24–June 28, 1919): Notes of the Official Interpreter Paul Mantoux* (Princeton, NJ, 1992), Vol. II, 347–49. See also Klaus Schwabe, “Woodrow Wilson and Germany’s Membership in the League of Nations, 1918–1919,” *Central European History* 8, no. 1 (1975): 3–22 at 19–20.

Dresel sent the commissioners a few memorandums “for information” over the course of the month of June,<sup>134</sup> but otherwise—presumably since none of his recommendations had been approved since April—he seems to have tried to stay out of the way. The final draft of the treaty, with only a few minor concessions, went to the Germans a few days later. The government resigned; after tense negotiations a coalition government was cobbled together to get the treaty signed. Amidst a national furor, they signed the treaty at last on June 28, only hours before the deadline for the resumption of hostilities.<sup>135</sup>

#### CONCLUSION

For both Russia and Germany, at least in terms of policy, Wilson abandoned democracy. Historian Victor Fic condemns Wilson for his policy in Russia, arguing that a vigorous policy of democracy promotion there could have spared Russia the next seven decades of communist rule.<sup>136</sup> This claim has not been particularly well received,<sup>137</sup> and at the very least, Fic’s certainty in his counterfactual assertions surely seems unwarranted. In the German case, as with all counterfactuals, it is difficult to say what the consequences of a more active policy of democracy promotion might have been. Possibly a vigorous policy of democracy promotion might have proved, in the long run, a “kiss of death” that would have ultimately undermined the fragile Weimar Republic still further; on the other hand, a well-crafted policy may well have strengthened the foundations of the Weimar Republic and made it more able to withstand the political storms it would face over the coming decade and a half. Possibly it would have made no meaningful difference at all.

Wilson’s rigidity in refusing even to consider attempting to promote democracy, however, should be regarded as a significant policy error. At least with the most minimally invasive recommendations that crossed the president’s desk, it is easy to see how acting on them might have done a fair amount of good and difficult to see how doing so would have inflicted any harm. With Wilson’s standing in the country, simple hortative statements encouraging the Germans to hold elections and to refrain from violence could have proven important stabilizing factors—ones that might have eased the violence and turmoil of Germany’s transition from imperial rule. The endurance of the nascent republic at Weimar was by no means foreordained. The new German government held on through many anxious moments in late 1918 and early 1919—ones that well-positioned observers seemed

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134. Dresel Memorandum, June 5, 1919, NARA-ACNP, 862.00/359; Dresel Memorandum, June 10, 1919, NARA-ACNP, 862.00/366; Dresel Memorandum, June 12, 1919, NARA-ACNP, 862.00/371; Dresel Memorandum, June 17, 1919, NARA-ACNP, 862.00/379; Dresel Memorandum, June 26, 1919, NARA-ACNP, 862.48/36.

135. See NARA-ACNP, file 184.013202, Dyar’s reports leading up to June 28; Mommsen, *The Rise and Fall of Weimar Democracy*, chap. 3; Schwabe, *Woodrow Wilson*, chap. 6.

136. Fic, *Collapse of American Policy*, 403–26.

137. See, for example, Unterberger, “Wilson vs. The Bolsheviks,” 131.



to think Wilson could have done much to calm. The worst that could have happened is that such hortative statements might have had no effect; it is certainly difficult to see how mere urgings in this vein could possibly have proved destructive. Had Wilson's policy of political nonintervention been based on a well-considered analysis of the German domestic political situation—one that carefully rejected of all of the various options available—the policy decision would be easier to respect. Yet it seems that Wilson's reluctance to attempt to promote democracy in Germany was based largely on a reflexive aversion to doing so.

Although it is beyond the scope of this article, Wilson's attitudes toward democratic interventionism over the whole course of his presidency certainly merit further study. Historians have usually seen a strong commitment for democracy promotion in Wilson's Latin American interventions, but an explanation for the difference in the findings about Wilson's attitudes between those studies and this one remains wanting. The issue of Wilson's racism may, perhaps, prove the key to unlocking this problem.<sup>138</sup> At the same time, however, Wilson explicitly connected his noninterventionist policy for Russia to that of his policy toward Mexico, which may equally suggest that Wilson's Latin American experiences, which never seemed to go quite according to plan, were possibly a primary *cause* of his later reluctance to intervene in Russia and Germany.<sup>139</sup> Finally, however, it may be worth pausing to re-examine Wilson's motives in his Latin American interventions to confirm that there was, in fact, a fundamental shift in Wilson's attitudes at all.<sup>140</sup>

Most importantly, this study fundamentally alters our understanding of "Wilsonianism" as it relates to democracy promotion in the history of American foreign policy. This article demonstrates that actually connecting that aim to Wilson himself is far more fraught with complication than scholars have appreciated, and that Wilson's own foreign policy was, at least by the end of his presidency, hardly "Wilsonian" as scholars such as Tony Smith have defined the term. Today, we usually see the concepts of self-determination<sup>141</sup> and democracy promotion as inextricably linked. In 1947, President Harry Truman effortlessly combined the two notions in his famous declaration, often regarded as echoing Wilson,

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138. See, for example, Lloyd E. Ambrosius, "Woodrow Wilson and The Birth of a Nation: American Democracy and International Relations," *Diplomacy & Statecraft* 18, no. 4 (2007): 689–718.

139. See John Thompson, *Woodrow Wilson: Profiles in Power* (London, 2002), 82–87.

140. John Thompson is due to make precisely this argument. See John Thompson, "Woodrow Wilson" in Michael Cox, Timothy J. Lynch, and Nicolas Bouchet eds. *US Foreign Policy and Democracy Promotion: From Theodore Roosevelt to Barack Obama* (Forthcoming): <http://www.routledge.com/books/details/9780415679800/>.

141. To be sure, there has been a wide-ranging debate about precisely how Wilson understood the term "self-determination," as well the importance he accorded to it. The best writing on this topic is almost certainly that of Lloyd E. Ambrosius, *Wilsonianism: Woodrow Wilson and His Legacy in American Foreign Relations* (New York, 2002), chap. 9. For the most recent, which includes a detailed historiographical study, see Trygve Throntveit, "The Fable of the Fourteen Points: Woodrow Wilson and National Self-Determination," *Diplomatic History* 35, no. 3 (2011): 445–81.

that it was “the policy of the United States to support free peoples who are resisting attempted subjugation by armed minorities or by outside pressures. . . . We must assist free peoples to work out their own destinies in their own way.” Historian Anne Pierce contends that the two presidents pursued essentially the same policy in regards to democracy promotion; it was merely a lack of “attentiveness to details” on Wilson’s part that Wilson, having set Central and Eastern Europe free, “paid little attention to the definition and outcome of their freedom.”<sup>142</sup>

Yet though Wilson was willing to act vigorously to destroy autocracies that had proven themselves clear and present international dangers, he had come to believe that self-determination meant finding democracy on one’s own. Wilson’s attitudes about democratization in Russia and Germany in 1918–1919 show that Wilson did not think of self-determination and democracy promotion as complementary—or even necessarily compatible. In Wilson’s mind, plainly, the two bore little relation to each other. To speak of a “Wilsonian” U.S. intervention in the internal affairs of another country to promote democracy is therefore—at least as far as the Wilson of 1918–1919 is concerned—mostly to utter only a contradiction in terms. As the debate over Wilson’s legacy in American foreign policy continues nearly a century after Wilson’s presidency, scholars need to appreciate that Wilsonianism, at least toward the end of Wilson’s time in office, simply does not entail what they have so often assumed it to mean: making the world safe for its democracies did not signify that Wilson regarded it as America’s mission to help create democracies where none existed, but only to safeguard the ones already there.

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142. Anne R. Pierce, *Woodrow Wilson and Harry Truman: Mission and Power in American Foreign Policy* (Westport, London, 2003), 175–77.