

Summer 1996

## Between Ideology and Realpolitik: Woodrow Wilson and the Russian Revolution, 1917-1921, by Georg Schild

David W. McFadden  
Fairfield University, [dmcfadden@fairfield.edu](mailto:dmcfadden@fairfield.edu)

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.fairfield.edu/history-facultypubs>

Copyright 1996 by the Association for Slavic, East European, and Eurasian Studies. This book review is included here with permission from the publisher.

Peer Reviewed

---

### Repository Citation

McFadden, David W., "Between Ideology and Realpolitik: Woodrow Wilson and the Russian Revolution, 1917-1921, by Georg Schild" (1996). *History Faculty Publications*. 2.  
<https://digitalcommons.fairfield.edu/history-facultypubs/2>

### Published Citation

David W. McFadden, review of "Between Ideology and Realpolitik: Woodrow Wilson and The Russian-Revolution, 1917–1921," by Georg Schild. "Slavic Review" 55, no. 2 (Summer1996): 487-488.

This item has been accepted for inclusion in DigitalCommons@Fairfield by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@Fairfield. It is brought to you by DigitalCommons@Fairfield with permission from the rights-holder(s) and is protected by copyright and/or related rights. **You are free to use this item in any way that is permitted by the copyright and related rights legislation that applies to your use. For other uses, you need to obtain permission from the rights-holder(s) directly, unless additional rights are indicated by a Creative Commons license in the record and/or on the work itself.** For more information, please contact [digitalcommons@fairfield.edu](mailto:digitalcommons@fairfield.edu).

endar dating (13 days different at the time) introduced further misunderstandings. Lyandres has worked through these and other problems with great care. He also provides excellent brief accounts of the history of the controversy, of the origins of the telegrams and their issuance in 1917, and a fine concluding interpretation of the telegrams' content and significance.

Lyandres's findings open some intriguing questions about the whole issue of German money. German documents captured after World War II showed plans to send money to Russia and claimed to have influenced events there. The assumption was that this was done via the Scandinavian connection claimed by the Provisional Government and that the two sets of documents complemented and reinforced each other. If the Helphand-Scandinavian business shown in the Provisional Government documents was not the channel for German money, however, what then? Were there other, still unknown, channels? Did any German money get into Russia at all? Indeed, as Lyandres points out from his archival research, the only known, *documented proof* of German money going to the Bolsheviks is that money was delivered by a Swiss socialist, Carl Moor, to the Bolshevik Foreign Bureau in Stockholm; it was, however, used to support the Third Zimmerwald Conference of antiwar socialists that met in Stockholm in September rather than being sent to Petrograd.

Lyandres, judiciously, does not claim more than his documents show: no German money via the presumed Helphand route in 1917. That, however, is a major contribution to our understanding of the Russian revolution. It will affect the interpretation of all serious historians and should influence a broader readership that has tended lightly to assume a proven connection between "German Gold" and Bolshevik successes in 1917.

REX A. WADE  
George Mason University

***Between Ideology and Realpolitik: Woodrow Wilson and the Russian Revolution, 1917-1921.***

By Georg Schild. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1995. 173 pp. Bibliography. Index. Hard bound.

Georg Schild has written a tight, clear analysis of Woodrow Wilson's policy toward the Russian revolution, using mainly published primary sources, including the *Papers of Woodrow Wilson* and *Foreign Relations of the United States*, and a wide array of secondary sources from the United States, Britain, and Germany.

*Between Ideology and Realpolitik* strives to clarify an extremely complex situation without claiming either that Wilson was driven by anti-Bolshevik hatreds or that he was acting solely to preserve unity with the western allies. Although Schild argues that American decisions from 1917 to 1919 "were based on considerations of *realpolitik* rather than ideology" and that "after the end of war, the President returned to a more purely ideological foreign policy" (7), the thrust of his thesis denies the latter claim and makes the case for a paramount pragmatism. Even when Schild highlights Wilson's belief in a "democratic Russia" prevailing over Bolshevism, he stresses the president's willingness to let time, rather than overt American actions, be the determining factor.

While this is not a book about Soviet policy toward the United States, it is important to note that Schild offers no new research or conclusions to the specialist of Soviet policy, preferring to rely on Richard Debo, Robert Service, and a variety of document collections and opting for a pragmatic view of Soviet calculations rather than an ideological one.

The major problems with Schild's study result from its brevity and the tendency to force many threads into one interpretation. In so doing, he often falls into errors of contradiction and omission. For example, in discussing the refusal of the Wilson administration to recognize the Bolsheviks in November 1917, Schild argues that Wilson made an immediate decision "based on ideological reasons" (41) but later points out correctly that as late as January 1918 Wilson had still not decided how to deal

with the new government and was not always taking the advice of his clearly ideological Secretary of State Robert Lansing.

On the other hand, Schild argues, with George Kennan and Betsy Unterberger, that World War I and allied unity were predominant in the reluctant assent Wilson gave to a limited American intervention in Siberia and north Russia. But this ignores the evidence of American connivance with anti-Bolshevik forces in south Russia so clearly presented by David Foglesong (*America's Secret War against Bolshevism* [1995]). In an otherwise clear and concise discussion of the Russia issue at the Paris Peace Conference, Schild fails to acknowledge the critical political framework that Gordon Auchincloss and other American advisers erected around the Hoover-Nansen food relief plan, ensuring its rejection by the Bolsheviks (see David W. McFadden, *Alternative Paths: Soviets and Americans, 1917-1920* [1993]). Finally, in discussing the aftermath of Paris and the Russo-Polish War, Schild inexplicably omits any serious attention to the European economic blockade and the fight to lift it. (See the seminal article by Norman Gaworek, "From Blockade to Trade: Allied Economic Warfare against Soviet Russia, June 1919 to January 1920," *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas* 23 [1975]: 39-69).

Despite these problems, however, *Between Ideology and Realpolitik* provides a succinct, generally balanced, and readable summary of a contentious problem and an enormous literature. It deserves a place in the library of specialist and nonspecialist alike and may be particularly useful for undergraduates.

DAVID W. MCFADDEN  
Fairfield University

***Crossing Borders: From Revolutionary Russia to China to America.*** By Helen Yakobson. Tenafly, N.J.: Hermitage Publishers, 1994. 211 pp. Pictures. \$12.00, paper.

This family-oriented autobiography by one of the founders of postwar Slavic studies in the United States and the widow of the long-time director of the Slavic Division of the Library of Congress describes the crossing of borders in more than one dimension: from tsarist Russia to communist Russia, from student to teacher, from west to east, from editor to broadcaster, from a Russian to a predominately American Jewish society, from one marriage to another. This is a candid, emotional account of her own experiences and perspectives that reveals her comforts and discomforts, likes and dislikes in a variety of settings.

The parts of the book that will be most useful to scholars and students of Russia are those that depict family life in old Russia; the troubled times of war, revolution, and civil war through the eyes of a child; the transition of an aristocratic-professional family (*zhemchuzhny*) to service to the Soviet state; the transplantation of a sensitive, observant young woman to an eastern milieu in 1930s Harbin and then from Asia to America; and her groundbreaking work during the early years of Voice of America. While impressionistic scenes are vivid and engrossing, especially in the foreign communities of Manchuria and China, the precise chronology is often vague, and little effort is made to relate individual perspectives to actual historical circumstances. Perhaps to do this might have distorted or diminished the colorful "I was there" evoking of the atmosphere of the times.

Perhaps more interesting to some but less to the general reader is the last third of the book, where Yakobson depicts her squabbles with colleagues and administrators as founder of the Russian Department at George Washington University and her somewhat stressful life with Sergius Yakobson. Candor prevails throughout, but one might wish for more objectivity and reserve in this last section. Still, this is one more ably told, if not so unique, story of a woman who crosses many borders and not only survives but triumphs academically as well as personally. The American debt to collective successful Russian immigration after 1917 has still not been fully told or appreciated.

NORMAN E. SAUL  
University of Kansas