

THE NEW YORK TIMES MAGAZINE
20 December 1981

Letters

T O T H E E D I T O R



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A Response From Armand Hammer

In my view, Edward Jay Epstein's article "The Riddle of Armand Hammer" (Nov. 29) unfairly represents several important aspects in the story of my life. There are some misrepresentations which go beyond the levels of tolerance. These are the ones that by a pen stroke attempt to denigrate or destroy the very meaning of one's life. This I cannot tolerate in silence.

My role as a capitalist, in contrast to my father's support of the Socialist and Communist Parties, is well known. My belief that communication between the two superpowers through trade and cultural exchanges — while maintaining a strong defense and striving for limitation of armaments — can avert the possibility of nuclear war is well documented.

The writer implies that I created my personal empire largely by dealing with nations hostile to the United States. He further states that I became a multimillionaire capitalist through my cordial relations for more than half a century with the leaders of the Soviet Union. When I went to the Soviet Union for the first time in 1921, I had already built a multimillion-dollar business.

As a young premedical student at Columbia, unfortunate

her's small pharmaceutical company. My father, a busy general practitioner in New York, had invested with a dishonest partner. I had no choice but to save the business by day, and study for my degree at night.

Fortunately, I was able to do this and on graduation found myself both a physician, intending to specialize in bacteriology, as well as a millionaire.

Since I had a six-month wait before starting my residency at Bellevue, I went to the Soviet Union to fight typhus in the Urals as well as to collect moneys due my company for pharmaceuticals shipped to the Soviet Union on credit.

Overtaken by events, I found the role of businessman thrust upon me. I saw the horror of famine in the Urals and realized people could be saved by importing American grain. I put at risk a million dollars, arranging a grain shipment, for which I was reimbursed with goods salable in the United States. This brought me to the attention of Lenin.

An article quoting me in The New York Times of June 14, 1922, when I first returned on a visit home, best describes my role: "When I conferred with officials of the Government, I told them I was a capitalist; that I was out to make money, but entertained no idea of grabbing their land or their empire. They said in effect: 'We understand you did not come for love. As long as you do not mix in our politics, we will give you our help.'"

There was nothing hidden about these arrangements, which I detailed in my 1933 book, "The Quest for the Romanoff Treasure." Further documentation, including the Lenin letters, appeared in Bob Considine's biography, "The Remarkable Life of Dr. Armand Hammer," published in 1975.

The article implies that my

decades. In 1930, I left Moscow, never having met Stalin, and did not return until 1961, when President John F. Kennedy asked me to serve as an emissary to Nikita S. Khrushchev.

During the height of Hitler's alliance with Stalin, I took a very strong pro-British position and worked with President Franklin D. Roosevelt to create the destroyer-for-bases exchange in 1940.

I will not quote from all the records available in the archives, except for a sworn statement by Eleanor Roosevelt: "Not only did I know Dr. Hammer very well in a business way, but I knew him much better socially. He was many times to the White House for dinner . . . Not only do I admire him, but for his great service to our country in the late war, my husband, the President, esteemed him highly."

Several days after his inauguration, President Kennedy asked me to go to Moscow to open new lines of communication with Mr. Khrushchev following the summit breakdown after the U-2 incident. My mission was considered very successful by the President, when I reported to him in the White House family quarters in the presence of Representative James Roosevelt.

In August 1978, Marshall Shulman, special adviser on Soviet affairs, asked me on behalf of President Jimmy Carter to journey to Moscow and meet with Leonid I. Brezhnev in an attempt to free an American businessman. Francis Jay Crawford, a representative of International Harvester, was being held on charges of black-marketing and faced the probability of imprisonment. I was able to confer with Mr. Brezhnev and a favorable solution was immediately reached.

Occidental's historic fertilizer barter agreement with the

controversial, but it was part of our national foreign policy, initiated immediately following President Nixon's 1972 Moscow summit conference. The transaction was studied by the Administration and the Congress. Over the course of a year, a task force of Cabinet departments, including the Secretaries of State, Commerce and Treasury, as well as Henry Kissinger, then national security adviser, reviewed and approved it. This culminated in the issuance of President Richard M. Nixon's "national interest letter" to William J. Casey, then president of the Export-Import Bank, now Director of Central Intelligence.

The fertilizer transaction with all its complexities was proceeding successfully when the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan. While President Carter was contemplating an embargo, I felt it important that our position be clearly stated, and I wrote him on Jan. 17, 1980: "I am very much in support of whatever decisions you make in relations with the Soviet Union. . . . Occidental is an American company and will support the decision you deem in the best interest of our country."

The President wrote back on Jan. 29: "Thank you for your continued support of our decisions. . . . I wish to express my appreciation for your understanding and support as we make those decisions that we believe are best for the country and the world."

The article also unfairly represents, I believe, my relations with President Reagan, citing national security adviser Richard V. Allen's efforts to limit my access, and describing President Reagan's responses to my letters as "cool."

The President recently honored me with a commission as chairman of the President's

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