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Seventh All-Russian Bolshevik Conference: Resolution on the war

15 May 2017

This resolution on the war was passed unanimously with seven abstentions at the Seventh All-Russian Bolshevik Conference, which took place in Petrograd (now St. Petersburg) from May 7 to 12 (April 24-29, O.S.). The text of the resolution was drafted by Lenin. It is published here in a new translation, based on the Russian original text.

For a review of the background, see "This Week in the Russian Revolution, May 8 – 14"

I. The present war is, on the part of both groups of the belligerent powers, an imperialist war, i. e., one waged by the capitalists for the division of the profits obtained from world domination, for markets for finance (banking) capital, for the subjugation of the weak nationalities, etc. Each day of war enriches the financial and industrial bourgeoisie and impoverishes and saps the strength of the proletariat and the peasantry of all the belligerent and also the neutral countries. Moreover, in Russia itself, prolongation of the war presents the greatest threat to the revolution's gains and its further development.

The passing of state power in Russia to the Provisional Government, a government of the landowners and capitalists, did not and could not alter the character and meaning of the war as far as Russia is concerned.

This fact was demonstrated in an especially striking manner when the new government not only failed to publish the secret treaties between Tsar Nicholas II and the capitalist governments of Britain, France, etc., but even formally and without consulting the people confirmed these secret treaties, which promise the Russian capitalists a free hand to rob China, Persia, Turkey, Austria, etc. The concealing of these treaties from the people of Russia means that the latter is being deceived about the true character of the war.

Therefore, the proletarian party cannot support the current war, or the current government, or its loans, without completely breaking with internationalism, i.e., the fraternal solidarity of the workers of all countries in the struggle against the yoke of capital.

No trust can be placed in the present government's promises to renounce annexations, i. e., conquests of foreign countries or retention by force of any nationalities within the borders of Russia. For, in the first place, the capitalists, bound together by thousands of threads of banking capital, cannot renounce annexations in this war without renouncing the profits from the billions they invested in loans, concessions, war industries, etc. And second, the new government, after renouncing annexations to deceive the people, declared through the person of Miliukov on April 9, 1917 in Moscow that it had no intention of renouncing them, and, in the note of April 18 and its explanation of April 22, confirmed the aggressive character of its policy. In warning the people against the capitalists' empty promises, the Conference therefore declares that it is necessary to make a clear distinction between a renunciation of annexations in words and a renunciation of annexations in deeds, i. e., the immediate publication and abrogation of all secret, predatory treaties and the immediate granting to all nationalities of the right to determine in a free vote whether they wish to form independent states or to be part of some other state.

II. The so called "revolutionary defencism", which in Russia has now permeated all the populist parties (the Popular Socialists, the Trudoviks, and the Socialist-Revolutionaries), and the opportunist party of the social-democratic Mensheviks (the Organizing Committee,

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Chkheidze, Tsereteli, and others), as well as the majority of the revolutionaries who are not aligned with any party, represents, in terms of its class significance, on the one hand, the interests and point of view of the prosperous peasants and a section of the small proprietors, who, like the capitalists, profit from the force exerted over weak peoples. On the other hand, the "revolutionary defencism" is a result of the deception by the capitalists of a part of the urban and rural proletariat and semi-proletariat, who, by virtue of their class position, have no interest in the profits of the capitalists and in the imperialist war.

The Conference recognizes that any concessions to "revolutionary defencism" whatsoever are absolutely impermissible and in effect signify a complete break with internationalism and socialism. As for the defencist tendencies among the broad popular masses, our party will fight against these tendencies by ceaselessly explaining the truth that an unconscious and trusting attitude toward the government of the capitalists is at this point one of the chief obstacles to a quick end of the war.

III In regard to the most important question of all, namely, how to end the present capitalist war as soon as possible, not by a coercive peace, but by a truly democratic peace, the Conference recognizes and declares the following:

This war cannot be ended by a refusal of the soldiers of one side only to continue the war, by a simple cessation of hostilities by one of the belligerent sides.

Yet again, this conference protests against the base slander which is spread by the capitalists against our party, namely that we are in favor of a separate peace with Germany. We consider the German capitalists to be robbers just as the Russian, British, French, and other capitalists, and Emperor Wilhelm to be a crowned robber just as much as Nicholas II or the British, Italian, Rumanian, and all other monarchs.

Our party will patiently but persistently explain to the people the truth that wars are waged by *governments*, that wars are always indissolubly bound up with the policies of definite *classes*, that this war can be ended by a democratic peace *only* through the transfer of the entire state power, in at least several of the belligerent countries, to the class of the proletarians and semi-proletarians, which is really capable of putting an end to the yoke of capital.

In Russia, the revolutionary class would after the seizure of state power adopt a series of measures that would undermine the economic rule of the capitalists, as well as measures that would completely disarm them politically, and it would immediately and openly offer to all nations a democratic peace on the basis of a complete renunciation of any annexations and indemnities. Such measures and such an open offer of peace would create complete trust among the workers of the belligerent countries toward each other and would inevitably lead to uprisings of the proletariat against those imperialist governments which would resist the offered peace.

Until the revolutionary class in Russia takes the entire state power, our party will do all it can to support those proletarian parties and groups abroad that are, already during the war, truly conducting a revolutionary struggle against their imperialist governments and their bourgeoisie. In particular, our party will support the mass fraternization of the soldiers of all the belligerent countries that has already begun at the front, seeking to turn this spontaneous expression of solidarity of the oppressed into a movement that is conscious and organized as well as possible for the transfer of all state power in all the belligerent countries into the hands of the revolutionary proletariat.

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