

From the archives of the Revolution

Declaration of the Bolshevik Faction at a session of the First All-Russian Congress of Soviets on the Question of the Offensive

Leon Trotsky
23 June 2017

This declaration of the Bolshevik faction at the First All-Russian Congress of Soviets was written by Trotsky, but delivered by another delegate, P. Pozern, on June 17 (June 4, O.S.). In it, the Bolsheviks oppose the military offensive being planned by the Provisional Government and warn of its catastrophic political implications. The statement was published in Pravda on June 20 (June 7, O.S.), 1917. [1]

We, the factions, groups and individual delegates of the Congress who have signed below, feel that, among the first order of work of the Congress, it is necessary to raise the question upon which the fate of not only all the other undertakings of the Congress depends, but—in the full and precise sense of the word—the fate of the entire Russian revolution: the question of the military offensive being prepared for the immediate future. That the offensive has been decided upon, and is next in line, can openly be seen in many irrefutable facts and statements, available for public verification; in the formation of death battalions; in the disbandment of certain regiments; and, finally, in the direct statement by Minister Kerensky in his explanation of the prohibition of the Ukrainian Congress.

Given all the conditions of the moment we are passing through, the offensive on the front, dictated by the magnates of allied imperialism, pursues a purely political goal: to push back and completely remove from the consciousness of the broad popular masses the results of the diplomatic negotiations with the allies, which revealed the profoundly imperialistic character of the group that includes pre-revolutionary Russia (questions about Albania, Greece, Persia, notes in

response and statements of allied diplomats).

The army does not know the international goals for which it has been called upon to shed its blood in the given circumstances. Yet, having confronted both the people and the army with the fact of an offensive with all of its consequences, Russia's counterrevolutionary circles are calculating that the offensive will result in a concentration of power in the hands of the military-diplomatic and capitalist groups tied to British, French and American imperialism, and free them from the need to deal with the organized will of Russian democracy in the future.

Clearly in anticipation of such a favorable shift for the propertied classes in the relationship of forces, Rodzianko convenes his own June-Thirders in Petrograd, figuring that the old State Duma might successfully be set against the Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies, and might help guarantee the course of a strong and decisive imperialism, decisive mainly against the revolution and democracy.

Leon Trotsky (1879-1940), was the co-leader of the 1917 Russian Revolution, socialist opponent of Joseph Stalin, founder of the Fourth International, and strategist of world socialist revolution.

The behind-the-scenes, counterrevolutionary initiators of the offensive, who do not halt—to use the justifiable expression of the Congress of the Party of Socialist-Revolutionaries—before “military adventurism,” are consciously trying to play upon the disintegration of the army caused by the entire domestic and international position of the nation. In pursuit of these goals, they are instilling in the

desperate elements of democracy the fundamentally erroneous idea that the very fact of an offensive is capable of “reviving” the army, and by this mechanical means, making up for the absence of a definite program of action for liquidating the war. Meanwhile, it is obvious that such an offensive can only completely disorganize the army, setting some parts of it against the other.

In these conditions, a colossal historical responsibility rests upon the Congress of Soviets of the Workers’ and Soldiers’ Deputies. The Congress cannot remain silent about the blow being openly prepared and fully organized against the international revolutionary struggle for peace, a blow against the positions won and organized by Russian democracy. The Congress must immediately repulse the counterrevolutionary onslaught, whose path the offensive is supposed to clear; otherwise the Congress must take responsibility for this policy fully and openly.

In warning the working class, the army, and the peasantry against the threat which hangs over the country, we insist that this question be raised as the first order of business at the Congress.

P. Pozern, Delegate of the Minsk Workers’ and Soldiers’ Deputies

The Bureau of the Faction of the Russian Social-Democratic Workers’ Party (Bolsheviks) at the Congress

Bureau of the United Social-Democratic Internationalists

“Pravda” No 75

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Notes from the Editors of Trotsky’s Works:

[1] The fact that this declaration belongs to the pen of comrade Trotsky has been established on the basis of the following passage from his book of reminiscences about Lenin:

“I recall that I made the proposal to demand that the Congress of Soviets immediately raise the question of the offensive at the front which was being prepared. Lenin approved this idea, but evidently wanted to further discuss it with other members of the Central Committee. At the first session of the Congress, comrade Kamenev introduced the draft of a declaration by the Bolsheviks on the offensive that had hastily been written by Lenin. I do not know if this document has been preserved. Both to the Bolsheviks in attendance,

and to the internationalists as well, its text appeared, and I don’t recall for what reasons, inappropriate for the Congress. Pozern, who we wanted to give the speech, also objected to the text. I drafted a second text, which was then read aloud” (“On Lenin”, pp. 56-57).



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