

Documents of the Russian Revolution

Decree on Peace

The Second-All Russian Congress of Soviets of Workers' and Soldiers' and Peasants' Deputies
8 November 2017

The Decree on Peace, enacted one hundred years ago today, was the first decree of the Workers' and Peasants' Government after its assumption of power in Petrograd. Written and introduced by Lenin, it was adopted unanimously by the All-Russian Congress of Soviets of Workers,' Soldiers' and Peasants' Deputies on November 8 (October 26, O.S.).

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The Workers' and Peasants' government, created by the revolution of October 24-25 [O.S.], and basing itself on the Soviet of Workers, Soldiers and Peasants Deputies, proposes to all belligerent peoples and their governments to immediately begin negotiations about a just, democratic peace.

By a just or democratic peace, for which the overwhelming majority of the working and toiling classes of all the belligerent countries, exhausted, tormented and racked by the war, are craving—a peace that has been most definitely and insistently demanded by the Russian workers and peasants ever since the overthrow of the tsarist monarchy—by such a peace the Government means an immediate peace without annexations (i.e., without the seizure of foreign lands, without the forcible incorporation of foreign nations) and without indemnities.

The Government of Russia proposes that this kind of peace be immediately concluded by all the belligerent nations, and expresses its readiness to take all the resolute measures now, without the slightest delay, pending the final ratification of all the terms of such a peace by plenipotentiary assemblies of the people's

representatives of all countries and all nations.

In accordance with the legal concepts of democracy in general, and of the working classes in particular, the Government understands by incorporation or seizure of foreign territory to mean every incorporation of a small or weak nation into a large or powerful state without the precisely, clearly, and voluntarily-expressed consent and wish of that nationality, irrespective of the time when this forcible incorporation took place, irrespective also of the degree of development or backwardness of the nation forcibly annexed to the given state, or forcibly retained within its borders, and irrespective, finally, of whether this nation is in Europe or in distant, overseas countries.

If any nation whatsoever is forcibly kept within the borders of a given state, if, in spite of its expressed desire—no matter whether expressed in the press, in national assemblies, in the decisions of parties, or in protests and uprisings against the national yoke—is not accorded the right to decide the forms of its state existence by a free vote, taken after the complete evacuation of the troops of the incorporating or generally more powerful nation and without the least pressure being brought to bear, then its incorporation is annexation, i.e., seizure and an act of violence.

The Government considers it the greatest of crimes against humanity to continue this war over the issue of how to divide among the strong and rich nations the weak nationalities they have conquered, and solemnly announces its determination immediately to sign terms of peace to stop this war on the terms indicated, which are equally just for all nationalities without exception.

At the same time the government declares that it does not regard the above-mentioned peace terms as an ultimatum; in other words, it is prepared to consider any other peace terms, and insists only that they be

advanced by any of the belligerent countries as speedily as possible, and that in the peace proposals there should be absolute clarity and the complete absence of all ambiguity and secrecy.

The Government abolishes secret diplomacy, and expresses for its part, the firm determination to conduct all negotiations absolutely openly before the entire people. It will proceed immediately with the full publication of the secret treaties endorsed or concluded by the government of land-owners and capitalists from February to October 25, 1917. The Government proclaims the unconditional and immediate annulment of everything contained in these secret treaties insofar as it is aimed, as is mostly the case, at securing advantages and privileges for the Russian landowners and capitalists and at the retention, or extension, of the annexations made by the Great Russians.

While turning to the governments and peoples of all countries with the proposal to begin immediately open negotiations for peace, the Government, for its part, expresses its readiness to conduct these negotiations in writing, by telegraph, and by negotiations between representatives of the various countries, or at a conference of these representatives. In order to facilitate such negotiations, the Government is appointing its plenipotentiary representative to neutral countries.

The government proposes to all governments and peoples of all belligerent countries to conclude an armistice at once; at the same time it considers it desirable that this armistice should be concluded for a period of not less than three months—i.e., a period during which it would be entirely possible to complete the negotiations for peace with the participation of representatives of all peoples and nationalities which were drawn into the war or forced to take part in it, as well as to call the plenipotentiary assemblies of people's representatives in every country for the final ratification of the peace terms.

While addressing this proposal for peace to the governments and peoples of all the belligerent countries, the Provisional Workers' and Peasants' Government of Russia appeals also in particular to the class-conscious workers of the three most advanced nations of mankind and the largest states participating in the present war, namely, Great Britain, France, and Germany. The workers of these countries have made

the greatest contributions to the cause of progress and socialism; they have furnished the great examples of the Chartist movement in England, a series of revolutions of world historic significance made by the French proletariat, and, finally, the heroic struggle against the Anti-Socialist Law in Germany, and the prolonged, persistent and disciplined work of creating mass proletarian organizations in Germany, a work which serves as a model to the workers of the whole world. All these examples of proletarian heroism and historical creative work are a pledge that the workers of the above mentioned countries will understand the tasks now facing them in liberating mankind from the horrors of war and its consequences, that these workers, by comprehensive, determined, and supremely vigorous action, will help us to complete the cause of peace successfully, and, along with it, the cause of emancipating the toiling and exploited masses of the population from all forms of slavery and exploitation.



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