
The Provisional Government of Russia and Separate Peace: As Viewed by Socialists

by Morris Hillquit

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Recent newspaper utterance indicate that the American public has formed an utterly false opinion



about the attitude of Socialists, in Russia and the United States, towards the revolutionary government of Russia and on the question of a separate peace between Russia and the Central Powers.

The bulk of the Russian Socialists support the revolutionary government of

Russia and oppose a separate peace.

With the exception of a small group of extremists, the Socialists are free from the illusion that the present political upheaval in Russia offers an opportunity for the establishment of a Socialist regime. Neither industrially nor politically is Russia ripe for the "cooperative commonwealth." The Russian Revolution has done for Russia what the great French Revolution has done for France. It has destroyed autocracy and the rule of the landed nobility. It has enthroned democracy and the political leadership of the industrial and commercial middle classes. But between the two landmarks of history lies a space of 128 years, and the workers of Russia have learned from the experience of the comrades in France and elsewhere during that period. The laboring classes of France bore the brunt of the fight in the revolutions of 1789 and 1848, but were completely defrauded of the fruits of the victories. The masses of the Russian workers are ready to continue the struggle of the Russian Revolution, but

determined to claim for themselves all advantages compatible with the new regime.

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The political foundations of Russian are still in the making. Whether she will emerge from her struggles as a limited monarchy, an oligarchic republic, or a true democracy, will be determined by the play of the divergent social forces that will share in the writing of her permanent political constitution.

The Socialists and workers of Russia feel that their combined power, intelligently directed, may secure a constitution which will guarantee to the people a true and enduring democratic republic, with proper safeguards against excessive economic oppression and full and free opportunity of education and organization, so that the gradual process of complete industrial emancipation of the Russian people may be facilitated and accelerated.

It is for this reason that the workmen's council and the soldier's deputies, which represent the active organization of the Russian Socialists and workers, have constituted themselves into a sort of Committee of Public Safety to watch over the conduct and policies of the Provisional Government.

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Some of our American newspapers have expressed concern and displeasure over the "arrogated" authority of the Russian workers, in uniform and without uniform. They seem to lose sight of the fact that

the entire Provisional Government is self-constituted. *The administration of Russia today is a revolutionary government, resting solely upon the tacit sanction of the people, and the "official" cabinet and the unofficial council of the workers are supported by the same sanction.*

The Council of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies has amply demonstrated the vital importance of its functions by broadening the original plan of the Duma government for a mere palace revolt — the substitution of Tsar Michael for Tsar Nicholas — into one of a thoroughgoing political and democratic revolution.

The complaints about the "turbulence" of the workers is rather naive. Great popular revolutions are of necessity turbulent, especially at the beginning, and, compared with the French Revolution, the revolution in Russia is tame. The stability and harmony of the new Russian republic is in a large measure due to the influence of the constructive Socialist propaganda.

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The position of the Russian Socialists and workers on war and peace is perhaps even more grossly misunderstood here than their attitude towards their government.

To the average American the Russian Revolution is merely an incident of the world war, and its significance is measured by its possible bearing on the outcome of the war. To the Russian people, on the other hand, the preservation and extension of their newly acquired political freedom is the main concern, and they view the problems of war primarily from this point of view. The Russian Socialists and workers want a speedy peace, because they are eager to concentrate all thoughts, efforts, and resources of the nation upon the great task of building a stable democratic republic.

This persistent clamor for peace has created the impression in this country that the Russian Socialists favor a separate peace with Germany. Nothing could

be further from the truth. The Socialists, even of the most extreme type, feel that a separate peace between Russia and the Central Powers at this time might seriously endanger the cause of general peace and European democracy, including the democracy of Russia. The peace which the Russian Socialists strive for is a general peace, and they have so stated in clear and emphatic terms on numerous occasions. But they are not satisfied to wait until the governments of the countries at war will be ready to make peace on their own accord and on their own terms. They urge the workers of all countries, including those in the Central Powers, to exert pressure upon their governments to end the war at once and on a basis which they believe will further world democracy and perpetual peace among nations. Their peace propaganda in Russia is only a part of the general movement for peace which they expect the Socialists to conduct in all countries at war.

In this connection the Socialists of America have repeatedly been charged with sympathetic leanings towards the alleged program of a separate peace between Russia and the Central Powers, and in lieu of other proof these imaginary Socialists have been characterized as pro-Germans. I do not know of a single American Socialist of any standing in his party who favors a separate peace. The vast majority of the Socialists in the United States heartily accept the program of their Russian comrades for a speedy and general peace, and they are determined to exert what influence they have towards that end here.

They are watching the heroic struggles of the Russian proletariat for freedom and self-government with keen sympathy and have sent them many messages of greeting and encouragement, but they have wisely refrained from attempting to influence their course. In a situation as grave and delicate as that which now confronts Russia the masses of the people must be allowed to work out their own salvation without unsolicited outside advice or interference.

Edited by Tim Davenport.

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