

fallen from that tribune, welding them together but beating them down. Did they stand then alone? Was Russia rising against them? Was it true that the Army was marching on Petrograd? Then this clear-eyed young soldier had spoken, and in a flash they knew it for the truth. . . . *This* was the voice of the soldiers – the stirring millions of uniformed workers and peasants were men like them, and their thoughts and feelings were the same. . . .

Kameniev jangled the bell, shouting, 'Keep your seats and we'll go on with our business!' And Trotsky, standing up with a pale, cruel face, letting out his rich voice in cool contempt, 'All these so-called Socialist Revolutionaries, *Bund* – let them go! They are just so much refuse which will be swept away into the garbage-heap of history!'

Source: *John Reed, Ten Days That Shook the World (Harmondsworth, Penguin Books, 1966), pp. 96, 99–100, 102–3, 104.*

### Document 2.15 'To the Citizens of Russia'

The announcement of the victory of 'the revolution' came not from the Congress of Soviets itself, but from the Military Revolutionary Committee of the Petrograd Soviet.

The Provisional Government has been deposed. State power has passed into the hands of the organ of the Petrograd Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies, the Military Revolutionary Committee, which leads the Petrograd proletariat and garrison.

The cause for which the people have fought, namely, the immediate offer of a democratic peace, the abolition of land ownership, workers' control over production, and the establishment of Soviet power – this cause has been secured.

Long live the revolution of workers, soldiers and peasants!

Source: 'To the Citizens of Russia', *Proclamation of the Military Revolutionary Committee, 25 October (7 November) 1917, in Lenin, PSS, vol. 35, p. 1.*

### Document 2.16 Lenin on the Significance of the Revolution

The Second Congress of Soviets endorsed the Bolshevik seizure of power, despite the protests of the minority, and the power of soviets was proclaimed in the centre and the localities. Executive authority was entrusted to an exclusively Bolshevik government, the Council of People's Commissars (Sovnarkom), headed by Lenin. Lenin addressed the congress on the night of 25–6 October. In keeping with his theory of imperialism and 'April Theses', Lenin staked everything on an alliance with the peasantry and aid from revolution abroad.

Comrades, the workers' and peasants' revolution, about the necessity of which the Bolsheviks have been speaking all the time, has come to pass.

What is the significance of this workers' and peasants' revolution? First of all, the significance of this revolution is that we shall have a Soviet Government, our own organ of power, without the participation of any bourgeois. The oppressed masses will form a government themselves. The old State machinery will be uprooted and a new machinery of government will be created, embodied in the Soviet organizations.

This is the beginning of a new period in the history of Russia, and the present, third Russian revolution must ultimately lead to the victory of socialism.

One of our immediate tasks is the necessity of ending the war at once. But in order to end this war, which is closely bound up with the present capitalistic system, it is clear to all that it is necessary to overcome capitalism itself.

We will be aided in this work by the world workers' movement, which is already beginning to develop in Italy, England, and Germany.

A just and immediate offer of peace by us to the international democracy will find everywhere a fervent response among the masses of the international proletariat. In order to strengthen this confidence of the proletariat, it is necessary to publish at once all secret treaties.

An enormous part of the peasantry within Russia has said: enough of playing games with the capitalists – we will go with the workers. We shall win the confidence of the peasantry by one decree, which will abolish *pomeshchik* [landlord] landownership. The peasants will understand that their only salvation lies in an alliance with the workers.

We will institute real workers' control over production.

You have now learned how to work together in harmony, as evidenced by the revolution that has just occurred. We now possess the strength of a mass organization, which will triumph over everything and which will lead the proletariat to world revolution.

In Russia we must now devote ourselves to the construction of a proletarian socialist state.

Long live the socialist world revolution. (*Storm of applause.*)

Source: *Browder and Kerensky (eds), The Russian Provisional Government 1917, vol. III, p. 1793.*

### Document 2.17 More Warnings

The last issue of *Izvestiya* before the Bolsheviks took it over condemned the seizure of power.

Yesterday we called the Bolshevik uprising an insane venture. Today, when the attempt was crowned with success in Petrograd, we have not changed our

mind. We repeat that this is not a transfer of power to the Soviets, but a seizure of power by one party – the Bolsheviks. Yesterday we were saying that this means the thwarting of the greatest gain of the revolution – the Constituent Assembly. Today we must add that it means the thwarting of the Congress of Soviets and, very probably, of the whole Soviet organization. These are the facts: the Socialist Revolutionary Party and the Mensheviks of the Social Democratic Party (the defensists as well as the Internationalists) have found it impossible, under the present circumstances, to participate in the Congress. The representatives from the front adhere to the same opinion. When these factions depart from the Congress, it will be left only with what it should have been left as a result of a complete Bolshevik overthrow, i.e., with only the Bolsheviks. They can call themselves whatever they please, but this will not alter the fact that the Bolsheviks alone participated in the uprising. All the other socialist and democratic parties are protesting against it . . .

To date, the Bolsheviks have seized Petrograd but not all of Russia. The danger of a bloody civil war is threatening. Bloodshed and pogroms – this is what we must prepare ourselves for. This can only be averted, if it is not already too late, by one event: if a democratic government, recognized by all democratic elements and parties, is formed anew, and if the Bolsheviks agree to submit to such a government.

The entire responsibility for the future of the country now falls on them alone.

*Source: Izvestiya, 26 October (8 November) 1917, p. 1; Browder and Kerensky (eds), The Russian Provisional Government 1917, vol. III, p. 1801.*

### **Bolsheviks in Power – First Steps**

Neither the February nor the October revolution was caused by rising social classes bursting into prominence (the Marxist view); rather, a specific set of conjunctural factors was abetted by long-term social and political strains. The Bolsheviks in October 1917 were the beneficiaries of a broad coalition united only in despair at the ineffectiveness of the Provisional Government. In October 1917 the aims of the social movements and those of the Bolsheviks coincided; together they swept away the old government and took the destiny of Russia into their hands. Power was in the hands of the Bolsheviks, but what would they do with it? On coming to power the Bolshevik government issued a flurry of decrees dealing with the most urgent issues facing the country. The attempt to end the war by simply declaring Russia's refusal to fight did not prove an effective strategy, while inside the country the Civil War gathered pace.

### **Document 2.17 Decree on Peace**

The day after seizing power the Bolsheviks called for all the belligerent governments to end the war, threatening them with overthrow by their own proletariats if they failed to respond.

The workers' and peasants' government created by the revolution of 24–5 October and relying on the Soviets of Workers', Soldiers' and Peasants' Deputies calls upon all the belligerent peoples and their governments to start immediate negotiations for 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.

This is the kind of peace the government of Russia proposes to all the belligerent nations to conclude immediately, and expresses its readiness to take all the resolute measures immediately, without the least delay, pending the final ratification of all the terms of such a peace by authoritative assemblies of the people's representatives of all countries and all nations . . .

The government abolishes secret diplomacy, and, for its part, announces its firm intention to conduct all negotiations quite openly under the eyes of the whole people. It will immediately proceed to the full publication of the secret treaties endorsed or concluded by the government of landlords and capitalists from February to 25 October 1917. The government proclaims the absolute and immediate annulment of everything contained in these secret treaties in so far as it is aimed, as is mostly the case, at securing advantages and privileges for the Russian landlords and capitalists and at the retention, or extension, of the annexations made by the Great Russians . . .

In proposing an immediate armistice, we appeal to the class-conscious workers of the countries that have done so much for the development of the proletarian movement. We appeal to the workers of France, who have in repeated uprisings displayed the strength of their class-consciousness, and to the workers of Germany, who waged the fight against the Anti-Socialist Law and have created powerful organisations.

*Source: 'Decree on Peace', 26 October (8 November) 1917, Lenin, PSS, vol. 35, pp. 13–14, 15, 17.*

### Document 2.18 Decree on Land

The Decree on Land helped stabilise Bolshevik rule in the countryside. The Socialist Revolutionary land programme was adopted in its entirety, legalising peasant seizures of land but prohibiting the private ownership of land.

1 Landlord ownership of land is immediately abolished without compensation.

2 The landed estates, as well as crown, monastery and church lands, with their livestock, implements, buildings and everything associated with them, is to be placed at the disposal of the *volost'* [parish] Land Committees and the *uezd* [district] Soviets of Peasants' Deputies pending the convocation of the Constituent Assembly . . .

5 The land of ordinary peasants and ordinary Cossacks shall not be confiscated. . . .

#### *Peasant Mandate on Land*

1 Private ownership of land shall be abolished forever; land shall not be sold, purchased, mortgaged or otherwise alienated.

Source: 'Decree on Land', 26 October (8 November) 1917, written by Lenin, PSS, vol. 35, p. 24.

### Document 2.19 The Sovnarkom 'Decree on the Press'

Two days after seizing power the Bolsheviks issued a decree limiting press freedom, and although proclaimed as a 'temporary and emergency measure', it remained in force until the 1990 press law once again restored freedom of speech.

In the serious decisive hour of revolution and the days that immediately followed, the Military Revolutionary Committee had to undertake a whole number of measures against the counter-revolutionary press of all hues. Immediately from all sides cries were raised that the new socialist authorities had in this way violated the basic principle of their programme by encroaching on the freedom of the press.

The Workers' and Peasants' Government points out that in our society, behind this liberal screen, in fact there is only freedom for the property-owning classes, seizing the lion's share of the press, freely poisoning minds and introducing confusion in the consciousness of the masses. Everyone knows that the bourgeois press is one of the most powerful weapons of the bourgeoisie. Especially in critical moments when the new power, the power of the workers and peasants, is only just gaining a foothold, it is impossible to leave this weapon entirely in the hands of the enemy at this time, when it is no less dangerous than bombs and machine-guns. That is why temporary and extraordinary measures have been adopted to cut off the stream of filth and

lies in which the yellow and green press would gladly drown the youthful victory of the people.

As soon as the new order is consolidated, all administrative restrictions on the press will be lifted; it will be allowed full freedom within the limits of responsibility before the courts according to the widest and most progressive laws in this respect. Considering, however, that only the absolutely necessary limits on the press, even in critical moments, are permissible, the Council of People's Commissars decrees as follows:

#### *General Regulations on the Press*

1 Press organs to be closed are only those: (a) calling for open resistance or insubordination to the Workers' and Peasants' Government; (b) sowing confusion by the obvious distortion of facts; (c) calling for openly criminal actions, i.e., of a criminally punishable character.

2 The temporary or permanent banning of press organs is carried out only by a resolution of the Council of People's Commissars.

3 The present regulation is temporary and will be revoked by a special decree with the onset of normal conditions of social life.

Chairman of the Council of People's Commissars  
Vladimir Ul'yanov (Lenin)

Source: 'Decree on the Press', 27 October (9 November) 1917, Pravda, 28 October 1917; in *Istoriya sovetskoi politicheskoi tsenzury: dokumenty i kommentarii* (Moscow, Rosspen, 1997), pp. 27-8.

### Document 2.20 Declaration of the Rights of the Peoples of Russia

One of the most important issues facing the new government was the national question. The following extract outlined the principles of Bolshevik policy.

The unworthy policy of distrust and falsehood must be ended. Henceforth it must be replaced by an open and honest policy to create mutual trust among the peoples of Russia. Only as a result of such trust can there be formed an open and honest union of the peoples of Russia. Only as the result of such a union can the toilers and peasants of the peoples of Russia be forged into one revolutionary force able to resist all the attempts by the imperialist and annexationist bourgeoisie.

Emerging from these principles, the First Congress of Soviets in June of this year proclaimed the right of the peoples of Russia to free self-determination. The Second Congress of Soviets in October of this year reaffirmed this inalienable right of the peoples of Russia more decisively and firmly. The united will of these congresses, and the Council of People's Commissars, resolve to base their work on the question of the nationalities of Russia on the following principles:

*Pravda* stated that 'Gorky has begun to talk the language of the enemies of the working class'. This is not true. Appealing to the most conscious representatives of the working class I say: fanatics and superficial fantasists, arousing in the working class hopes that cannot be fulfilled in the given historical circumstances, will lead the Russian proletariat to defeat and destruction, and the defeat of the proletariat will provoke a long and sad period of reaction in Russia . . .

In whomsoever's hands power is, I retain my human right to criticise it. And I am especially suspicious, especially distrustful of a Russian in power – not long ago a slave, he becomes an unbridled despot as soon as he gains the possibility of lording over his own.

Source: *Novaya zhizn'*, 19 November 1917.

### Document 2.23 Bogdanov on the Bolshevik Revolution

Gorky's reservations were given a much firmer scholarly foundation by Bogdanov, who outlined a broad theory of Bolshevism as a response to and consequence of total war – what he called 'war communism' by which he meant a 'communism of war', the mobilisation and regulation by the state of all social resources to prosecute the war. In a letter to Anatoly V. Lunacharskii on 19 November 1917 he outlined his views about the emergence of a 'socialism of the barracks'.

I see nothing extraordinary in the sometimes strange but almost always necessary things you have to do. I think that you have not fully grasped the tragedy of our situation. I will try in my own way to explain it.

The root of everything is the war. It gave rise to two basic facts:

(1) Economic and cultural decline; (2) the gigantic development of war communism.

War communism, developing from the front to the rear, has temporarily restructured society: the multi-million commune of the army, rations for the family of soldiers, the regulation of demand, the norming of distribution, production. The whole system of state capitalism is nothing other than a mongrel of capitalism and consumers' war communism, something which contemporary economists do not understand, not understanding organisational analysis. The atmosphere of war communism has engendered maximalism . . .

Maximalism has developed further in Russia than in Europe because capitalism here is weaker and the influence of war communism as an organisational form, correspondingly, stronger. The socialist workers' party earlier was Bolshevik. But the revolution, under pressure from the soldiery, made demands on it that profoundly distorted its nature. It was forced to organise the pseudo-socialist mass of soldiers (peasants, torn from production and living at the expense of the state in barrack communes). Why they? Simply because it was the party of peace, the ideal of the soldiery at the

present time. The party became worker-soldier. But what does this mean? There is a tectological law that states that if a system is composed of higher and lower organised parts, its relationship to the surrounding world is determined by the lesser organised part . . . The position of the party, comprised of heterogeneous class fractions, is defined by its backward wing. A worker-soldier party is objectively simply a soldiers' party. And the degree to which the Bolshevik party has been transformed is striking . . . It has absorbed the whole logic of the barracks, all of its methods, all of its specific culture and ideals.

The logic of the barracks, by contrast with the logic of the factory, is characterised by the fact that it understands any task as a question of shock force, and not as a question of organisational experience and labour. Smashing the bourgeoisie – that's socialism. Seize power, then we can do anything. Agreement? Why? Share the spoils? How can it be otherwise? Alright, then let's share. But wait! We're once again stronger! Then we won't, and so on.

There will not be a socialist revolution in Europe now: its working class is not at the right level of culture and organisation, its level is clearly demonstrated by the history of the war. There will be a number of revolutions there of a liquidationist character, to overcome the legacy of the war, authoritarianism (oligarchy, the dictatorship of the authorities), indebtedness (consequently, the extreme development of rent-seeking), the suppression of newly created nations spawned by the war and the isolation of nations reinforced by state capitalism, and so on – there is much to do. In Russia the soldier-communist revolution is rather more opposed to socialism than something leading to it . . .

Source: A. A. Bogdanov, *Voprosy sotsializma* (Problems of Socialism) (Moscow, *Politicheskaya literatura*, 1990), pp. 352–5.

### The Struggle for a Coalition Government

Plekhanov was right to recall Engels's warning that the premature seizure of power by the working class would be disastrous and lead to civil war. His calls for a coalition government were reflected in desultory attempts to forge some sort of broader government. Most socialists, including many Bolsheviks, hoped that a coalition government would be formed based on the socialist parties represented in the soviets. Lenin, however, was ill-disposed to attempts to dilute his power, while most Mensheviks and Right Socialist Revolutionaries would have found it hard to swallow Lenin as leader anyway. The moderate wing of the Bolshevik party, including Kamenev, Zinoviev and the future prime minister, Alexei Rykov, also sought to broaden the one-party government, and threatened to resign. Lenin's response was typically vituperative, and the moderates therefore fulfilled their threat and resigned from the Bolshevik Central Committee and from Sovnarkom.