

Contrast Between the Petrograd Soviet's Orders No. 1 and 2

At the end of the 1917 February Revolution, Russia, soon to be without a tsarist regime, needed a new ruling body to fill the governmental void. The two pre-existing institutions most capable of taking control were the Duma and the Petrograd Soviet. The former a legislative assembly populated by members of the upper classes, the latter a council of the working class, the two attempted to reign simultaneously as what Lenin would term a 'dual power'. However, the Petrograd Soviet got a slight head start in declaring its own authority. A day before tsar Nicholas II abdicated the throne and two days before the Duma transformed into the Provisional Government, the Soviet of Workers' and Soldier's Deputies released Order No. 1 to Petrograd troops. Order No. 1 consisted of commands designed to empower the lower ranks over their officers, and is now well-known as an assertion of power of the Petrograd Soviet over the Provisional Government and an early indication of the failures awaiting 'dual power'.¹

However, the Petrograd Soviet released a second order that day that lacked the bold undertones of class warfare and Soviet dominance that Order No. 1 had in spades.² Order No. 2 displayed a slightly less radical position on military order and distribution of authority in the 'dual power' setup than Order No. 1, as demonstrated by its mentions of the Provisional Government, specifications on the role of the elected committees, and explicit statements about who the lower ranks should obey.

The State Duma, soon to be the Provisional Government, was mentioned once in Order No. 1, and in a way that completely undermined its authority in comparison to that of the Petrograd Soviet. The exact order was: "The orders of the military commission of the State Duma shall be executed only in such cases as do not conflict with the orders and resolutions of the Soviet of

1 Sheila Fitzpatrick, *The Russian Revolution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 47-48.

2 Ibid

Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies.”³ This left the hierarchy of the two bodies completely unambiguous. According to Order No. 1, the Petrograd Soviet had the ultimate say, and if the Provisional Government ever issued a decree instructing the soldiers to act in a way that the Soviet disapproved of, the Soviet could issue an order declaring the opposite, and the latter would take precedence.

Order No. 2, while not refuting this claim, did attempt to soften the blow by stating multiple times that the Provisional Government was in complete agreement with the orders given earlier. The last two points of Order No. 2 are used to rehash three of the commands given in Order No. 1, not to explain, extend, or alter them in any, but purely for the purpose of pointing out that the Provisional Government agreed with them and was helping execute these commands. The final point of Order No. 2, in its entirety, is: “Reaffirming the demands made under points 6 and 7 of Order No. 1, the Executive Committee notes the fact that some of these are already being carried into effect by the Provisional Government.”⁴ After Order No. 1's assertion that the Provisional Government should only be listened to if the Soviet agreed with it, Order No. 2 made a deliberate effort to show that the two separate bodies were in agreement.

Aside from emphasizing the Provisional Government's role in policy, Order No. 2 mainly expanded upon the role of the elective committees that Order No. 1 announced should be formed from the lower ranks. Order No. 1 stated that these committees should exist and that they should be the head of the military's political actions, but it did not specify precisely what their duties included and where their authority ended. Order No. 2 came in to fix that, and particularly to address the notion that these committees had the power to elect officers. While saying that the idea had “been submitted for consideration to a special commission”⁵ and that committees would have the power to veto future officer appointments, Order No. 2 also explicitly stated that these

3 Frank Golder, ed., *Documents of Russian History, 1914-1917* (New York: The Century Co., 1927), pp. 286-290. (<http://soviethistory.org/index.php?page=article&ArticleID=1917orderone1&SubjectID=1917armyrevolt&Year=1917>)

4 Golder, *Documents*.

5 Golder, *Documents*.

committees did not currently hold the power of electing officers and that current officers must remain in place. This is certainly not a complete refutation of the power given to the lower ranks over the officers, but it does place more faith in the current officers of the army than Order No. 1 had originally implied the Petrograd Soviet had.

Order No. 1 granted the lower ranks freedoms that they had never had, including the ability to act as a normal citizen when off duty, not required to spring to attention or salute at an officer's whim. However, Order No. 2 was around to remind soldiers that they still had to submit to the appropriate authorities at the appropriate time. "To this elective organ of their own choice, the soldiers are bound to submit in matters of their public and POLITICAL life. As for the military authorities,- the soldiers are bound to submit to all their orders that have reference to the military service."⁶ A functional military must have disciplined soldiers, and Order No. 2 was to remind the lower ranks of this, despite the fact that Order No. 1 had brought the army officers down several notches by requiring them to address their soldiers politely and refusing them the right to carry arms.

Order No. 1 encouraged the enlisted men of the army's lower ranks to recognize the Petrograd Soviet authority above all others and it put them on more even social terms with the army officers, who were simultaneously denied the right to bear arms. Order No. 2 does not reject these notions, but shows the immediate attempts of the Executive Committee of the Soviet to soften the radical tone of Order No. 1 via emphasis of the Provisional Government's agreement with the Soviet's decrees and a reminder to the enlisted men that they must still submit to their superior's orders. However, the damage had been done, and the split between the lower ranks and the army officers was to be the final nail in the coffin of 'dual power'.

6 Golder, *Documents*.