

April 4th: Factory Workers Reject the Provisional Government

After the February Revolution in 1917, the Russian Tsar was forced to abdicate and a general sense of elation spread throughout the population. This euphoria was short-lived, however, as the Provisional Government still failed to satisfy the demands of the peasants, soldiers, and workers. Many workers viewed the Provisional Government as a bourgeois institution that could not be trusted to act on behalf of the working class. After years of oppression in factories, this sense of distrust is not at all surprising. The workers demanded that a new government be formed and the war brought to an end. Workers across Russia organized meetings in factories to address their concerns, drafting resolutions that caused friction between managers and workers.

The factory workers at the large Nobel Engineering Plant drafted such a resolution on April 4th, 1917. This document shows the frustrations of the working class after the February Revolution and their complete rejection of the Provisional Government. The workers at the Nobel Engineering Plant were responsible for a large portion of the defense-related production and their direct involvement in the unpopular war effort played into their distaste for the Provisional Government. After the February Revolution, the workers were able to access politics more easily as new developments were being openly discussed on the streets and in the factories. The workers' distinct rank in society led to their criticism of the bourgeoisie, as they were oppressed and subject to poor working conditions over many years. Many of the sentiments expressed by these workers were shared by other groups as well. Soldiers were exhausted by the

war and wanted an end.¹ Peasants were arguing for land reform. Trotsky himself appealed to peasants, soldiers and workers on March 17 to continue the revolution.² This document by the Nobel Engineering workers reflects their frustration, their sense that the bourgeoisie has too often allowed what they call “working class’ bloodletting.”³

Published in the Petrograd Bolshevik newspaper, *Pravda*, the resolution is mostly written as an appeal to other workers, as it critiques the bourgeoisie quite explicitly. The workers are not afraid to challenge authority. The document starts with five arguments, essentially calling for revolution against the Provisional Government. The workers write how the revolution is a necessity, an “unceasing struggle” that must be fought. The bourgeoisie are painted as a class that cannot be trusted, and they are seen to live in fear of the proletariat, prompting their cruel oppression of the workers. In these arguments, the influence of Marxism is apparent as the workers articulate their “final aim – Socialism.” The document concludes with two demands: a new Constituent Assembly and an end to the war. The workers argue for an “immediate peace,” citing the right of each nation to determine its own future.

The language used by the workers is informal, but concise and demanding. The document is written without embellishments and is accessible to readers from most classes, even those with little education. As a piece meant to stimulate discussion, the language and phrasing is kept simple as the arguments take center stage.

1 Allison Dobry, “Russian Soldiers Denounce the New Revolutionary Government” (student paper, 2010), <http://mit.edu/russia1917/papers/0331-RussianSoldiersDenouncetheNewRevolutionaryGovernment.pdf>.

2 Rebecca Colby, “The Battle for Public Opinion in Revolutionary Russia” (student paper, 2010), <http://mit.edu/russia1917/papers/0317-BattleforPublicOpinioninRevolutionaryRussia.pdf>.

3 “A Resolution by a Workers’ Meeting at the L. Nobel Engineering Plant,” doc. 6.1, in Michael C. Hickey, ed. *Competing Voices from the Russian Revolution* (Santa Barbara, CA: Greenwood Press, 2011).

This document is representative of the frustrations of the working class after the February revolution. After the Tsar abdicated, many were still not satisfied with the effects of the Revolution. After Lenin wrote his April theses, it became clear that the Bolsheviks would still continue to struggle against the Provisional Government, garnering support from groups like the workers.⁴ Eventually, the Bolsheviks would put a new government in place with the October Revolution.

⁴ Robert Mayer, "Plekhanov, Lenin and Working-Class Consciousness," *Studies in East European Thought*, 49, 1 (1997): 159-85.