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Paper 1

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Professor Wood

Apr 20 Individual's Social Class often Defines Opinion Toward the Miliukov Note

During late March to late May of 1917 Russia was besieged with a particular difficulty concerning the policy of its involvement in the war. Russia was now under a new government, one that had not declared war or signed alliances with those countries involved in the war. Since this new government had not been involved in these past decisions, there was still uncertainty as to whether Russia would continue to play a role in the war. Furthermore if Russia did continue to play a role in the war, there was uncertainty as to whether it would fight an offensive war or if it would just defend its borders and wait for its allies to win. With all this doubt, many of Russia's allies questioned Russia's commitment to the war. In an attempt to allay the concerns of its allies, Pavel Miliukov, the minister of Foreign Affairs in the Provisional Government, secretly sent a letter on April 18, 1917 that some scholars imply committed Russia to take an offensive approach towards the war.¹ This letter became known as the Miliukov Note. A few days later on April 20 the public gained knowledge of this letter causing a controversy where people argued whether Russia should support the Miliukov Note's implied promise to fight an offensive war.² Yet while many individuals had different opinions toward the Miliukov Note's proposal

¹ Michael Kort, *Soviet Colossus* –p. 97

² Time line of Russian Revolution,

<http://www.marxists.org/history/ussr/events/timeline/1917.htm>

to fight an offensive war, one interesting question which arises was whether individuals within the same social classes tended to share an opinion either or favor against the Miliukov Note's proposal to fight an offensive war during late March to late May of 1917?

Before one dives into this issue, it would be beneficial to analyze what exactly was in the Miliukov Note concerning the Russian commitment to the war. Historian Michael Kort indicates that Miliukov note suggests a promise to the allies that the Provisional Government, the new Russian Government at the time, would fight an offensive war³, but what evidence can be gleaned directly from the source to validate this suggestion? First, Miliukov states explicitly that Russia has no plans to leave the war; he describes "reports alleging that Russia is ready to conclude a separate peace with the Central Powers" as "absurd."⁴ Second, Miliukov states that the Provisional Government of Russia will not "slacken" "in the common struggle of the Allies."⁵ The Tsar attempted to fight an offensive war in order to annex land, so Miliukov appears to be stating that Russia will continue its offensive policy since otherwise the new government will be less committed than the Tsar. Finally, throughout the note when Miliukov discusses the end of the war he uses some form of the word "victorious." Some examples of this diction can be seen when he writes that it is "the aspiration of the entire nation to carry the world war to a decisive victory" and "Continuing to cherish the firm conviction of the victorious issue."⁶ The

³ Michael Kort, *Soviet Colossus*-p. 97- 98

⁴ Miliukov, Minister of Foreign Affairs, "Milyukov's Note of 18 April"(April 18, 1917), in McCauley, in The Russian Revolution and The Soviet State, doc 2/15 b p.46

⁵ Miliukov, "Note", in McCauley, Russian Revolution, p.47

⁶ Miliukov, "Note", in McCauley, Russian Revolution, p.47

conditions of decisive victory generally suggest that the enemy government has at least lost control of much of its territory. This note, however, offers some ambiguity on the issue of Russia committing itself to fight an offensive war. Throughout the note, Miliukov does not make any definite promises that would necessarily commit Russia to this action. Furthermore on the few occasions, when Miliukov does make a definite promise it is often vague. For example, when Miliukov states that the Provisional Government “will, in every way, observe the obligations assumed towards our Allies,”⁷ he does not identify exactly what obligations he has in mind. Despite some ambiguity, the Miliukov Note through its refusal to leave the war, promise to maintain the level of Russia’s commitment, and diction ultimately appears to promise the allies that Russia would commit to fight an offensive war.

With Miliukov’s Note defined, one must now turn to the question at hand: did individuals within the same class tend to share the same opinion towards this offensive strategy? If one looks at the classes of conservatives and socialist activists, it seems there was a general agreement of opinion within a class. Most people within the conservative (in this case meaning old tsarist officials, merchants and politicians in the Provisional Government) class laud the strategy of the Miliukov Note. For example, *Novoe Vremia*, a newspaper with conservative leanings, claims, “all Russian citizens will consider the basic thesis of yesterday’s note [the Miliukov Note] a correct one.”⁸ Members of the Provisional Government also supported Miliukov’s statement. This can be seen from the words of Aleksandr Guchkov, a

⁷ Miliukov, “Note”, in McCauley, Russian Revolution, p.47

⁸ Novoe Vermia (newspaper), “On the Miliukov Note”, (April 21 1917) Robert P. Browder and Alexander F. Kerensky, in The Russian Provisional Government p. 1236

conservative, who calls for “one more heroic effort, an effort of the whole country, of both the front and the rear- and the enemy shall be crushed.”⁹ Even Conservative members of society not actively involved in the press or politics such as some of the merchants appeared to also agree with the offensive since it offered the possibility of annexations that would benefit them. One merchant expressed such support when he commits how “the Dardanelles... should be in the hands of Russia.”¹⁰ Similar to the conservative class, most socialist activists appeared to have a particular opinion to the Note’s war stance, but unlike the conservatives they were against it. This group demonstrated its displeasure with the Miliukov Note by describing it as being imperialist. *Rabochaia Gazeta*, a newspaper with Menshevik ties, for example, states that the proposed offensive in the note will “abandon the country to flood and annihilation in order to please our imperialists.”¹¹ The Socialist-Revolutionary newspaper *Delo Naroda* shows further opposition of the Miliukov Note among socialist activists when it writes that this note is “refusing the masses their right to bear the testaments of brotherhood and love to the world which is choking with blood.”¹² Furthermore, the socialist politicians show disagreement with the proposed offensive in the Miliukov Note because they do not want to destroy any possibility of being able to “come to an arrangement with the

⁹ Guchkov, “The Meeting of the Members of the Four State Dumas” (April 29th, 1917) in Robert P. Browder and Alexander F. Kerensky, The Russian Provisional p. 1260

¹⁰ Morgan Price “Memorandum to C. P. Scott” (6 April 1917) in Tania Rose, ed. Dispatches From the Revolution p. 39

¹¹ *Rabochaia Gazeta* (newspaper), “On the Miliukov Note”, (April 21 1917). Browder and Kerensky, Provisional Government p. 1238

¹² *Delo Naroda* (newspaper), “On the Miliukov Note”, (April 21 1917). Browder and Kerensky, Provisional Government p. 1239

German Socialists to upset the ruling class in Germany and establish an international settlement in Eastern Europe.”¹³ With a clear opinion from within the conservative and socialist activist groups, one might assume that members of the same class tended to have the same opinion towards the Miliukov Note.

While it appears that individuals of the same social class tended to share the same view towards the Miliukov Note from this analysis alone, it is important to realize that the conservatives and socialist activists only represented a minority of the population. To get a better understanding of whether individuals in the same social group tended to view the Miliukov Note in a particular manner, one needs to look at the majority of the population: the workers, soldiers and peasants. When one looks at the workers during this time, one can see that most workers appeared to be opposed to the Miliukov Note. This disagreement is evident from their negative opinion of fighting the war in general. A war, which many workers describe as one being fought over “capitalists’ inflamed greed.”¹⁴ Many of the peasants, on the other hand, were in support of the Miliukov Note’s offensive approach. This support was illustrated by the manner in which the peasants addressed ending the war. Most of the time when the peasants address their terms to ending the war they used diction that includes such words as “beat” or “victorious”. Additionally, the peasants only mention Russians as achieving the victory. For example, the peasants describe the

¹³ Morgan Price “The Background of the Revolution” (11 April 1917) in Tanya Rose, in Dispatches From the Revolution p. 41

¹⁴ Smolensk Initiative Group of Women and Mothers, “To All Russian Women and Mothers”(May 5th 1917) in Steinberg, Voices doc 13 p98

end of the war as one in which “we need to beat the German”¹⁵ and one in which “we have to vanquish the enemy”¹⁶. Since the only feasible way for victory to occur by the Russian’s own hands was through invading the enemies land the peasants appear to support the Note’s proposed offensive. Soldiers, however, were one group out of the three that demonstrated a strong division of opinion within a social group towards the Miliukov Note’s proposed offensive. While during this time most soldiers expressed the same desire for achieving peace quickly, there is a division between how this peace should be achieved among soldiers. Some soldiers were adamant that an offensive would allow for a quick conclusion to the war and thus supported the Miliukov Note. They illustrate this idea through their arguments that the Russian soldiers “must tear peace from the enemy” and that it would take only “two to three months of concerted effort.”¹⁷ Many other soldiers, however, did not support an offensive. They demonstrate this lack of support through their focus on how the poor conditions of the “filthy wet dugouts” leave them “hungry, cold, unshod, tattered.”¹⁸ Furthermore, these soldiers state directly that they want an “end the war no matter what.”¹⁹ From the viewpoint of the workers, soldiers and peasants during late March to late May of 1917 one can see that while the workers and peasants generally expressed the same opinion in their social groups, the

¹⁵ Peasants of Rakalovsk Volost, Viatka Province, Letter to the Petrograd Soviet (April 26th 1917) in Steinberg, Voices, doc. 40 p. 132

¹⁶ Peasant, Letter to the Petrograd Soviet (April 27th 1917) in Steinberg, Voices, doc. 41 p. 134

¹⁷ Soldiers from the 186th Artillery Division, Appeal to all soldiers of the 12 Army (May 4th 1917) in Mark D. Steinberg, Voices, 1917, doc. 32 p. 120

¹⁸ Soldiers in 64th Infantry Division, “Letter to Minister of War Aleksandr Guchkov” (April 13th 1917) in Steinberg, Voices, doc. 30 p. 118

¹⁹ Volkov, “A Voice from the Trenches” (May 30 1917), in Steinberg, Voices, doc. 33 p. 122

soldiers showed a division of opinion towards the Miliukov Note's proposed offensive strategy.

From this analysis, one can note that members of most social classes tended to view Miliukov Note's offensive stance on the war in a similar manner. Generally, conservatives and peasants supported the Miliukov Note's offensive while workers and socialist activists opposed the Miliukov Note's offensive strategy. However while many social classes tended to have a particular view, the soldiers showed a division among themselves toward the Miliukov Note's offensive strategy. Maybe there were underlining factors that affected a soldier's opinion towards the Note's proposed offensive. For instance, maybe members of the artillery who do not have to charge across between trenches tended to feel differently than the infantry. Either way it can be concluded that during late March to late May of 1917 while most social classes had a majority of individuals who shared a similar opinion toward the Miliukov Note's proposed offensive, not all social classes, such as the soldiers, had such a consensus.

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