

with the simultaneous implementation of a particularly modern understanding of politics—put succinctly, an understanding that views populations as both the means and the goal of some emancipatory project. This vantage point can serve to shift the focus of debate away from all-or-nothing propositions about totalitarian regimes to a study of how states might (or might not) employ certain practices in a totalitarian manner. The task, then, is not to seek reasons to dismiss Russia as anomalous but to identify what was specific about Russia's particular constellation of more general European features. The Soviet experience cannot be limited either to a case of Russian backwardness or to some surreal attempt to build socialism in practice. Insofar as Soviet Russia represents a problem, it is a problem of the modern project itself.

Peter Holquist, "Information Is the Alpha and Omega of Our Work': Bolshevik Surveillance in Its Pan-European Context," *The Journal of Modern History*, LXIX, 3 (September 1997), pp. 415–450.

First Decrees of the New Soviet Government

Lenin and the Bolsheviks came to power with little initial resistance and immediately embarked on a radical program of political transformation. Their first decree called for an end to the world war and denounced the agreements to divide and share the spoils among the "imperialist" powers. The Soviets antagonized Russia's former allies by publishing the secret agreements that the tsarist and provisional governments had signed with the West. They followed with a decree seizing the land of the landlords and turning it over to the use of the peasants. This idea was essentially borrowed from the land program of the peasantist Socialist Revolutionary party, which had delayed implementing it while tied to the more moderate policies of the Provisional Government. As a result of the general breakdown of order in the country and the new permissiveness approved by the Soviet government, peasants rapidly appropriated noble lands, abolished private property in the countryside, and redistributed the land among themselves. In a few months, Russia's peasants themselves had carried out one of the most extensive land reforms in history.

Fearing a counter-revolutionary offensive from their opponents, the Bolsheviks suppressed newspapers, arrested liberal politicians, and created a political police, the Extraordinary Commission to Suppress Counter-Revolution (Cheka). Yet in his first six months in power, Lenin's objective "was emphatically not the capture and consolidation of state power but rather the dissolution of the state itself."¹ His unrealized hope was that ordinary workers and peasants would substitute themselves for the repressive apparatus of the old order. The revolution was supposed to be about emancipation, equality, and freedom. "You are the power," he told the workers, "do all you want to do, but take care of production, see that production is useful. Take up useful work, you will make mistakes but you will learn."² But as Neil Harding notes, "His advent to power swiftly disabused him of the utopian vision of an immediate transition to popular participation in and control over what he discovered to be exceedingly complex structures."³ By April 1918, he was clearly replacing the idea of a "commune state" run by working people with a concept of a "dictatorship of the proletariat," reviving another strain of Marxism that would prove to be have a much longer and darker tenure.

1. Neil Harding, *Lenin's Political Thought. Vol. 2. Theory and Practice in the Socialist Revolution* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1981), p. 178.

2. V. I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, vol. XXVI (Moscow, 1960–1970), p. 468.

3. Harding, *Lenin's Political Thought*, vol. 2, p. 126.

LENIN'S DECREE ON PEACE, OCTOBER 26 [NOVEMBER 9], 1917

The workers' and peasants' government created by the revolution of October 24–25 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. In accordance with the sense of justice of the democracy in general, and of the toiling classes in particular, the government conceives the annexation or seizure of foreign lands to mean every incorporation into a large or powerful state of a small or weak nation without the precisely, clearly and voluntarily expressed consent and wish of that nation, irrespective of the time when such forcible incorporation took place, irrespective also of the degree of development or backwardness of the nation forcibly annexed to, or forcibly retained within, the borders of the given state, and irrespective, finally, of whether this nation resides in Europe or in distant, overseas countries.

If any nation whatsoever is forcibly retained within the borders of a given state, if, in spite of its expressed desire—no matter whether expressed in the press, at public meetings, in the decisions of parties, or in protests and uprisings against national oppression—it is not accorded the right to decide the forms of its state existence by a free vote, taken after the complete evacuation of the troops of the incorporating or, generally, of the stronger nation and without the least pressure being brought to bear, such incorporation is annexation, i.e., seizure and violence. The government considers it the greatest of crimes against humanity to continue this war over the issue of how to divide among the strong and rich nations the weak nationalities they have conquered, and solemnly announces its determination immediately to sign terms of peace to stop this war on the conditions indicated, which are equally just for all nationalities without exception. At the same time the government declares that it does not regard the above-mentioned terms of peace as an ultimatum; in other words, it is prepared to consider any other terms of peace, but only insists that they be advanced by any of the belligerent nations as speedily as possible, and that in the proposals of peace there should be absolute clarity and the complete absence of all ambiguity and secrecy.

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 October, 25, 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 England, where there was the Chartist movement, 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 organizations.

In the manifesto of March 14, we called for the overthrow of the bankers, but, far from overthrowing our own bankers, we entered into an alliance with them. Now we have overthrown the government of the bankers.

That government and the bourgeoisie will make every effort to unite their forces and drown the workers' and peasants' revolution in blood. But the three years of war have been a good lesson to the masses: the Soviet movement in other countries and the mutiny in the German navy, which was crushed by the Junkers of Wilhelm the hangman. Finally, we must remember that we are not living in the wilds of Africa, but in Europe, where news can spread quickly.

The workers' movement will triumph and will pave the way to peace and socialism.

V. I. Lenin, *Selected Works in Two Volumes* (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1952), II, Part 1, pp. 328–330, 332–333.

DECREE ON THE LAND, OCTOBER 26 [NOVEMBER 8], 1917

Landlord ownership of land is abolished forthwith without any compensation. The landed estates, as also all crown, monasterial and church lands, with all their livestock, implements, buildings and everything pertaining thereto, shall be placed at the disposal of the *volost* [township] land committees and the *uezd* [district] soviets of peasants' deputies pending the convocation of the Constituent Assembly. . . .

4. The following peasant mandate, compiled by the *Izvestia* of the All-Russian Soviet of Peasants' Deputies from 242 local peasant mandates and published in No. 88 of *Izvestia* (Petrograd, no. 88, August 19, 1917), shall serve everywhere to guide the implementation of the great land reforms until a final decision on the latter is taken by the Constituent Assembly.

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

Peasant Mandate on the Land

'The land question in its full scope can be settled only by the popular Constituent Assembly.

'The most equitable settlement of the land question is to be as follows:

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

"All land, whether state, appanage, crown, monasterial, church, factory, primogenitary, private, public, peasant, etc., shall be alienated without compensation and become the property of the whole people, and pass into the use of all those who cultivate it.

"Persons who suffer by this property revolution shall be deemed to be entitled to public support only for the period necessary for adaptation to the new conditions of life.

"2) All mineral wealth, e.g., ore, oil, coal, salt, etc., as well as all forests and waters of state importance, shall pass into the exclusive use of the state. All the small streams, lakes, woods, etc., shall pass into the use of the communities, to be administered by the local self-government bodies.

"3) Lands on which *high-level scientific* farming is practiced, e.g., orchards, plantations, seed plots, nurseries, hot-houses, etc. *shall not be divided up, but shall be converted into model farms*, to be turned over for exclusive use to the state or to the communities, depending on the size and importance of such lands.

"Household land in towns and villages, with orchards and vegetable gardens shall be reserved for the use of their present owners, the size of the holdings, and the size of tax levied for the use thereof, to be determined by law. . . .

"6) The right to use the land shall be accorded to all citizens of the Russian state (without distinction of sex) desiring to cultivate it by their own labor, with the help of their families, or in partnership, but only as long as they are able to cultivate it. The employment of hired labor is not permitted. . . .

"7) Land tenure shall be on an equality basis, i.e., the land shall be distributed among the toilers in conformity with a labor standard or a consumption standard, depending on local conditions.

"There shall be absolutely no restriction on the forms of land tenure: household, farm, communal, or cooperative, as shall be decided in each individual village and settlement.

"8) All land, when alienated, shall become part of the national land fund. Its distribution among the toilers shall be in charge of the local and central self-government bodies, from democratically organized village and city communities, in which there are no distinctions of social rank, to central regional government bodies.

"The land fund shall be subject to periodical redistribution, depending on the growth of population and the increase in the productivity and the scientific level of farming. . . .

V. I. Lenin, *Selected Works in Two Volumes* (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1952), II, Part 1, pp. 338–343.

DECREE ON SUPPRESSION OF HOSTILE NEWSPAPERS, OCTOBER 27 [NOVEMBER 9], 1917

In the serious decisive hour of the revolution and the days immediately following it the Provisional Revolutionary Committee was compelled to adopt a whole series of measures against the counter-revolutionary press of all shades.

Immediately on all sides cries arose that the new socialistic authority was violating in this way the essential principles of its program by an attempt against the freedom of the press.

The Workers' and Soldiers' Government draws the attention of the population to the fact that in our country behind this liberal shield there is practically hidden the

liberty for the richer class to seize into their hands the lion's share of the whole press and by this means to poison the minds and bring confusion into the consciousness of the masses.

Everyone knows that the bourgeois press is one of the most powerful weapons of the bourgeoisie. Especially in this critical moment when the new authority, that of the workers and peasants, is in process of consolidation, it was impossible to leave this weapon in the hands of the enemy at a time when it is not less dangerous than bombs and machine guns. This is why temporary and extraordinary measures have been adopted for the purpose of cutting off the stream of mire and calumny in which the yellow and green press would be glad to drown the young victory of the people.

As soon as the new order will be consolidated, all administrative measures against the press will be suspended; full liberty will be given it within the limits of responsibility before the laws, in accordance with the broadest and most progressive regulations in this respect.

Bearing in mind, however, the fact that any restrictions of the freedom of the press, even in critical moments, are admissible only within the bounds of necessity, the Council of People's Commissaries decrees as follows:

General rules on the press.

The following organs of the press shall be subject to be closed: (a) those inciting to open resistance or disobedience towards the Workers' and Peasants' Government; (b) those sowing confusion by means of an obviously calumnious perversion of facts; (c) those inciting to acts of a criminal character punishable by the penal laws.

The temporary or permanent closing of any organ of the press shall be carried out by a resolution of the Council of People's Commissars.

The present decree is of a temporary nature and will be revoked by special *ukaz* [governmental order] when the normal conditions of public life will be reestablished.

Chairman of the Council of People's Commissars,
Vladimir Ulianov (Lenin)

English translation in *Bolshevik Propaganda: Hearings before a Subcommittee of the Committee on the Judiciary, U. S. Senate, 65th Congress, 3rd Session, Feb. 11, 1919 to Mar. 10, 1919* (Washington, Government Printing Office, 1919), p. 1243.

DECLARATION OF THE RIGHTS OF THE PEOPLES OF RUSSIA, NOVEMBER 2 [15], 1917

The October revolution of the workmen and peasants began under the common banner of emancipation.

The peasants are being emancipated from the power of the landowners, for there is no longer the landowner's property right in the land—it has been abolished. The soldiers and sailors are being emancipated from the power of autocratic generals, for generals will henceforth be elective and subject to recall. The workingmen are being emancipated from the whims and arbitrary will of the capitalists, for henceforth there will be established the control of the workers over mills and factories. Everything living and capable of life is being emancipated from the hateful shackles.

There remain only the peoples of Russia, who have suffered and are suffering oppression and arbitrariness, and whose emancipation must immediately be begun, whose liberation must be effected resolutely and definitely.

During the period of tsarism the peoples of Russia were systematically incited against one another. The results of such a policy are known—massacres and programs on the one hand, slavery of peoples on the other. There can be and there must be no return to this disgraceful policy of instigation. Henceforth the policy of a voluntary and honest union of the peoples of Russia must be substituted.

In the period of imperialism, after the February revolution, when the power was transferred to the hands of the Kadet [leading liberal party] bourgeoisie, the naked policy of instigation gave way to one of cowardly distrust of the peoples of Russia, to a policy of fault-finding and provocation, of "freedom" and "equality" of peoples. The results of such a policy are known: the growth of national enmity, the impairment of mutual trust.

An end must be put to this unworthy policy of falsehood and distrust, of fault-finding and provocation. Henceforth it must be replaced by an open and honest policy which leads to complete mutual trust of the people of Russia. Only as the result of such a trust can there be formed an honest and lasting union of the peoples of Russia. Only as the result of such a union can the workmen and peasants of the peoples of Russia be cemented into one revolutionary force able to resist all attempts on the part of the imperialist-annexationist bourgeoisie.

Starting with these assumptions, 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 definitely. The united will of these congresses, the Council of the People's Commissaries, resolved to base its activity upon the question of the nationalities of Russia, as expressed in the following principles:

The equality and sovereignty of the peoples of Russia.

The right of the peoples of Russia to free self-determination, even to the point of separation and the formation of an independent state.

The abolition of any and all national and national-religious privileges and disabilities.

The free development of national minorities and ethnographic groups inhabiting the territory of Russia.

The concrete decrees that follow from these principles will be immediately elaborated after the setting up of a Commission on Nationality Affairs.

Chairman of the Council of People's Commissars,
V. Ulianov (Lenin)
People's Commissar of Nationality Affairs,
Iosef Jugashvili (Stalin)

English translation in *The Nation*, December 28, 1919.

==== The Dissolution of the Constituent Assembly ====

The convening of the Constituent Assembly, something like a constitutional convention, had long been the goal of liberal and socialist opponents of tsarism. The Provisional Government had delayed calling it because of the war, and many fundamental reforms were thereby postponed. The Bolsheviks supported the convening of the Assembly, and elections took place in mid-November, but the results were disappointing to the Leninists. Although the overwhelming majority of the population had voted for socialist parties, the largest number of votes went