

subjected to them. There was a vast difference between being under surveillance by British mass observation or by the NKVD's secret political departments. But to determine how different it was, and in what ways, one must situate the Bolshevik surveillance project both in the current of Russian history and within its more general pan-European context. . . .

In Soviet Russia we see neither some unique socialist case nor a Russian exception to European norms, but instead a highly specific manifestation of a new governmental modality of politics. This article has emphasized the significance of the First World War, which provided the context within which many of these features took on their particular forms. What set the Soviet regime apart was not "ideology" in a general sense, nor some totalitarian essence, but the intersection of a particular ideology 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. 415–50

### 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 counterrevolutionary 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.<sup>1</sup> 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."<sup>2</sup> 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."<sup>3</sup> 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.

### 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.

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.

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V.I. Lenin, *Selected* Part 1, pp. 328–30

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 I, pp. 328–30, 332–33.



"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. 338-43.

### 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'