

## Module 03: 1917 — Did the War Cause a Revolution?

### Evidence 30: Miliukov's Note on War Aims, April 18/May 1, 1917

# A

#### Introduction

As the Soviet called for a swift end to armed conflict, the leaders of the Provisional Government remained committed to the war. The note below from Foreign Minister Pavel Miliukov to the Allied Powers directly contradicted the Soviet's "defensist" position. Miliukov's assertion that Russia could "carry the world war to a decisive victory," thereby gaining control over Constantinople and the Dardanelles, provoked a crisis and reorganization of the Provisional Government.

#### Document

May 1/April 18, 1917

On May 1, the Minister of Foreign Affairs instructed the Russian representatives with the Allied Powers to transmit the following note to the Governments to which they are accredited:

"On April 9 of the present year, the Provisional Government issued a declaration to the citizens, containing the views of the Government of free Russia regarding the aims of the present war. The Minister of Foreign Affairs has instructed me to communicate to you the contents of the document referred to, and to make at the same time the following comments:

"Our enemies have been striving of late to saw discord among the Allies, disseminating absurd reports alleging that Russia is ready to conclude a separate peace with the Central Powers. The text of the attached document will most effectively refute such falsehoods. You will note from the same that the general principles enunciated by the Provisional Government are in entire agreement with those lofty ideas which have been constantly expressed, at the very last moment, by many eminent statesmen in the Allied States, and which were given especially vivid expression in the declaration of the president of our new Ally, the great republic across the

Atlantic.

"The Government under the old régime was, of course, incapable of grasping and sharing these ideas of the liberating character of the war, the establishment of a firm basis for the amicable existence of the nations, of self-determination for oppressed peoples, and so forth. Emancipated Russia, however, can now speak in a language that will be comprehensible to the leading democracies of our own time, and she now hastens to add her voice to those of her Allies. Imbued with this new spirit of a free democracy, the declaration of the Provisional Government cannot, of course, afford the least excuse for the assumption that the revolution has entailed any slackening on the part of Russia in the common struggle of the Allies. Quite to the contrary, the aspiration of the entire nation to carry the world war to a decisive victory has grown more powerful, thanks to our understanding of our common responsibility, shared by each and every one. This striving has become still more active, since it is concentrated upon a task which touches all and is urgent, – the task of driving out the enemy who has invaded our country. It is obvious, as stated in the communicated document, that the Provisional Government, while safeguarding the rights of our own country, will, in every way, observe the obligations assumed toward our Allies.

"Continuing to cherish the firm conviction of the victorious issue of the present war, in full accord with our Allies, the Provisional Government feels also absolutely certain that the problems which have been raised by this war will be solved in a spirit that will afford a firm basis for lasting peace, and that the leading democracies, inspired by identical desires, will find the means to obtain those guarantees and sanctions which are indispensable for the prevention of sanguinary conflicts in the future,"

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[Excerpt from Miliukov's Speech at the Congress of the Cadet Party, May 22/May 9, 1917]

At the present time I am not a member of the Provisional Government, but a free citizen and can, therefore, permit myself the liberty, just as N. V. Nekrasov has done, to talk straight, and at the same time meet his wishes.

I admit most frankly, and stand firmly by it, that the main thread of my

aims was to get the Straits for Russia. I fought, unfortunately in vain; against those who favored the new formula [no annexation, and no indemnity, and the right of self-determination], and that Russia should free the Allies from their obligations to help her secure sovereign rights over the Straits. I would say, and say it proudly, and regard it as a distinct service to the country, that until the last moment that I was in office, I did nothing which gave the Allies the right to say that Russia has renounced the Straits.

Source:

*Rech'*, May 3, 1917, and May 24, 1917.