

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

### Evidence 27: Telegram From the American Consulate General in Moscow to Byrne, U.S. Secretary of State, March 20, 1917

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#### Introduction

As the Revolution unfolded, the import of recent events increasingly concerned foreign dignitaries. The documents below, from the American Consulate in Moscow, outline some of the issues that quickly came to the foreground of the revolutionary agenda, including land reform and an end to the war for soldiers and the lower classes, and autonomy or independence for non-Russian groups in the empire.

#### Document

CONFIDENTIAL

No. 1019 American Consulate General,  
Moscow, Russia, March 20th, 1917.

Subject. The political and economical situation in Moscow.

The Honorable  
The Secretary of State,  
Washington, D. C.

Sir:

For the information, and as of interest to the Department in following the great revolution now in progress in Russia, there are enclosed herewith the originals and translations of the Moscow papers giving a full description of the matter. This same information has been sent the Embassy together with full accounts of the situation.

It will be observed that the papers are allowed only to publish news favoring the revolutionary party.

There is further enclosed a memorandum on the situation prepared by Mr. David B. Maggowan, the Vice Consul at this post. It is of interest as

showing the other phase of the situation.

At the present writing the street cars are all running, and life has assumed its normal course. There is an undercurrent of unrest, however, and the shortage of food supplies tends to augment the discontent. Long bread lines stretching for blocks may be seen on every street awaiting often to be told that there is none left. The daily allowance is one funt or nine tenths of a pound. To obtain this one must stand in the bread lines for two or three hours, and often longer. The supply of flour is short and the revolution of the past few days has diminished even this. It is known that the Jews have cornered large quantities and are holding it for higher prices.

Prices of all articles of necessity are rapidly rising. It is difficult to give a table showing same as the figures given out are purely fictitious, each shop charging what they can get. Flour, for instance cannot be bought at all. There is none for sale in the city. Meat is practically unobtainable, and then only three days in the week. Milk, eggs, flour, bread, and meat will soon be sold only by card.

The city is thronged with refugees and houses are unobtainable even at exorbitant prices.

As the Consulate General is furnishing the Embassy daily with full information in regard to the political situation it is presumed that, through this source, the Department is kept thoroughly advised of the situation.

I have the honor to be, Sir,  
Your obedient servant,  
[signature unintelligible--ed.]  
American Consul in Charge.

Enclosures:  
Newspaper translations.  
Memorandum Mr. Macgowan.

MEMORANDUM.

Moscow, Russia, March 19, 1917.

The coup d'etat, a stage of the uncompleted revolution, executed by revolutionary workingmen and soldiers, too recently recruited to have

acquired discipline or to have lost touch with their late companions in field and factory, has whetted already keen appetites for land, social reorganization and autonomy or independence. The Imperial Duma, declared dissolved, it would seem, in lighthearted confidence that the bread riots could be ended with machine guns, if the Duma were safely out of the way, neither initiated the crisis nor is certain to guide its further development. Discipline was shaken, perhaps irreparably, when soldiers disarmed their officers. In the absence of popular interest in the war, the zeal of the revolutionists and to a certain extent of the liberals also having depended always on the uses they expected to make of the difficulties created by the war in the reshaping of home affairs, it is to be feared that troops at the front will slip away from their commands and return to take part in the carnival of liberty, which to most of them means seizing the large estates for themselves. The workingmen are demanding an immediate Constituent Assembly and there is a tendency not to return to factory and barrack, nor to yield newly acquired weapons, until the political and social reorganization are assured. There is imminent danger of a debacle. Thus, Thursday night a former Deputy of the Imperial Duma returned from Petrograd to Moscow. The train, including the first class car in which the Deputy had reserved a compartment, was seized by soldiers under arms. He demanded what they were doing in the first class car. The soldiers answered they were going to their native villages to see their relatives. He asked if they had leave of absence and was told "No." They were going "just so". Asked when they would return to their regiments, they said the war might be over before they had to return. Soldiers are represented in the powerful Councils of Workingmen's Delegates; they retain their rifles and they are to have votes. If the soldiers at the front should seize trains and return, as happened after the Russo-Japanese war, there is reason to fear that the excesses then committed will be a foretaste of worse to come. In these circumstances the Anglo-French offensive, vigorously and successfully pushed to the conviction of the wavering Russian troops that the war can be fought to an end so that there will be no need to abandon it in order to share in the "expropriation" of the land, is the main hope for Russia, as respects not only the hopeful prosecution of the war, but as respects the peaceful evolution of political and social order. Already about ten days have been lost for preparation of munitions, and it is to be feared that, even if they return to work, the munitions workers will have little heart for the business. Thus, with minds distracted more than ever by domestic events, handicapped and disorganized as never before, it can

hardly be expected that a blow delivered now or in the near future by the Germans would meet with effective resistance, unless the Western Powers should create an effective diversion.

Federalism on a basis of nationalities, preached a generation ago by General Dragomiroff, has revived instantly. Sanguine representatives of border nationalities have carved out in their minds not less than seven autonomous or independent states: Poland, Ukraine or Little Russia, Finland, Lithuania with Baltic Provinces, Caucasus, Armenia and Siberia.

Monarchical sentiment is still strong in spite of the isolation of the reigning family, deserted before the end even by Grand Dukes, which facilitated the dethronement of the Emperor. When for the first time church services were read without mention of the emperor or the dynasty there was weeping in many churches. Reaction, violent as the revolutionary blow was violent, is sure to come and it will enlist powerful property interests. Indications thus point to a protracted class struggle.

D.B.M.

Source:

Records of the State Department, National Archives, Washington, D.C.