The agreement by the Government of People’s Commissars to sign the new conditions of peace, which have worsened since Brest and are being dictated by the German counter-revolutionaries, has incited passionate protest among broad masses of the proletariat.

1. [From Ural’skii rabochii, 3 March (17 February) 1918. For the continuation of this article, see Documents 2:18–20. The series of articles devoted to war and peace was written by E.A. Preobrazhensky during a period of sharp disputes within the Party: to sign or not to sign the annexationist and predatory peace-agreement pressed upon the Soviet state by the Central Powers. In opposition to Lenin and his supporters, who decided to sign the Brest peace at any price, the Left-Communists came out with N.I. Bukharin at their head (E.A. Preobrazhensky included), and the then People’s Commissar of Foreign Affairs L.D. Trotsky. V.I. Lenin managed to prove the necessity and inevitability of signing the peace on 3 March 1918, in Brest-Litovsk. According to this peace, Russia lost approximately one million square kilometres of territory and was obliged to demobilise its army and fleet and pay six billion marks in gold. After using the interlude of peace needed to restore the country’s economy, create the Red Army and stabilise the Soviet state, and also in connection with the Revolution in Germany, within eight months the Soviet government annulled the Brest treaty, on 13 November 1918.]
and caught the ranks of our Party completely unprepared for this decision. There exists an absolutely erroneous notion that the decision to sign the peace-pact was dictated by the German offensive, and that in this regard it is a product of confusion and panic in the leading circles of our Party and among members of the Central Executive Committee. This notion is fundamentally mistaken and can be explained by the complete lack of information among rank-and-file party-members concerning the internal struggle that, since the time of the Brest negotiations, has been waged inside our Party and also inside the Party of Left S-Rs on the question of peace at any price or socialist war. A far-reaching discussion was impossible in the press and at meetings for quite obvious reasons: this would have meant informing the ruling imperialists of Germany of the existence of such disagreements and would have weakened the position of our delegation at Brest, which up to the end defended the demand for a democratic peace without annexations.

Discussing the situation that had come about in connection with the exorbitant peace-conditions proposed by the German imperialists at Brest, three tendencies emerged in the Party that the reader will see below essentially came down to two: either for signing the annexationist peace or for socialist war.

From the very beginning, comrade Lenin and his group of supporters stood for signing the annexationist peace on the following two grounds. Although our worker-peasant Revolution was victorious within the country, it had not yet grown strong, and its fate in future depends completely upon a socialist revolution in Europe. Although the world proletarian revolution is maturing with every passing day, there are no guarantees that it will begin within the next few weeks. In such conditions, to enter into single combat with German imperialism and to wager all the achievements of the October Revolution would mean gambling with an enormous probability of defeat, for not only a socialist war, but even serious resistance, is out of the question at the moment. It is much more expedient, therefore, to buy our way out of imminent war by conceding Courland to the German imperialists and by accepting their other demands in order to strengthen Soviet power inside the country and eliminate all the consequences of the War, leaving the Austro-German alliance and the Entente imperialists to continue exterminating each other until the moment of a general European revolution. Meanwhile, the Soviet power could prepare its forces for a real revolutionary war, and enter at a moment when victory over imperialism would be assured both by our own onslaught from without and by the pressure of the working masses of Europe from within. Otherwise, our revolution will be strangled by a simultaneous onslaught by German imperialism and by the forces of bourgeois counter-revolution lurking within the country.

Comrade Trotsky defended a point of view that found expression in breaking off the Brest negotiations, that is, to stop the War but not sign a peace, which