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A Speech by the Minister of Justice Kerensky.

Given in Helsinki.

The Minister of Justice A.F. Kerensky held the following speech at the general meeting of the Soviet of deputies for the army, navy and workers at Sveaborg Port on 29 March 1917.

Citizens soldiers! In the name of the free Russia, in the name of the Provisional Government, I, the minister of justice, express my cordial greetings. (Stormy applause).

Comrades – soldiers, citizens, sailors and officers! If you had not determinedly taken yourself to the side of the people and helped it with your weapons carrying hands, Russia would have not changed into a free democratic country. Glory and gratitude for all of you, everlasting glory for times eternal. (Stormy applause).

Comrades! But I am not only a minister but also vice chairman of the Soviet of Petrograd soldiers' and workers' deputies. I am an old socialist and democrat, member of the socialist-revolutionary party and believe me that when I stepped forward to join the Provisional Government I will be there as your hostage, a hostage of soldiers, workers, peasants, officers and supporters of the republic, as a guarantor for all of those who desire to create a free republican Russia. (Stormy applause). Do believe me and rest assured that as long as I am the minister of justice no-one can threaten you and no-one dares to rise against the new system and the free Russia. (Stormy applause).

Comrades. I am not only a minister but also the supreme procurator, and I hold the whole penal system in my hands and not one of the enemies of the new Russia will escape me. (Stormy applause and cheers). I myself have experienced and I know, what sufferings the peasants and workers in Russia have endured, along with the heroic officers, your comrades Tsion and Emelyanov* and others, who lost their heads for the freedom of the people. (Stormy applause).

Yesterday in the Senate the Provisional Government took an oath to the people promising that they will accomplish their duties, summon the Constituent Assembly and hand over to it this power the Provisional Government now possesses, but doing this we only want to surrender it to the very hands of the people. (Stormy applause).

Comrades. We ministers, the whole Provisional Government took yesterday an oath to fight against and to repel, with all available means, every attempt to restore the old regime. (Stormy applause).

But, comrades, we, the new Russia, the free Russia, have got freedom with the tips of your bayonets and with your swords not only for Russia but also to all the peoples, which have been tied to our people with the shackles of the old autocracy. (Applause.) I did not come here only to say hello to you and to make a deep bow in front of you, but to bring the people of Finland the news about that freedom, which the free peasant, worker, soldier has donated. Baron Korff can confirm that already a year ago I came here discussing with everybody, and I know what the people of Finland thinks.

(Applause.)

Comrades. Let me today, on behalf of you and myself, declare that all enemies of the old regime, all citizens of Finland who have committed political crimes, even those who by any means have tried to liberate Finland from the old regime, are from now on our brothers and let me grant them a general amnesty. (Stormy applause).

Comrades. The envoys of England and France have told us that Europe is upset and surprised about the immensity of the revolution made by us, and lack of hate, and of bloodlessness in which it took place. It is for us to maintain the honour of the Russian people, which firmly has the trust on its own might and is afraid of nothing. (Stormy applause).

Comrades. On these days I will leave for the Headquarters to meet with the chief of staff Alexeyev. Let me tell him that from now on he can trust on the whole army and the Baltic Sea Navy, which can defend the free Russia and the new regime that we together have created: "Can I tell this to him?" (Applauses and cheers: that is what we request, hurray).

Comrades, I cannot speak longer. During these days after May 12 I have hardly slept only doing all I could. I had trust in the people of Russia, in the great wisdom of the Russian peasants and workers, and when during these days doubts were noticed, I have assumed responsibility and said: Feel no fear. The Russian people will show what they are capable of and the whole world will be surprised. (Applause.)

There is only one thing I am asking from you. If doubts, disbelief, some sort of hesitation arise among you, just summon me, and I myself will tell you everything what is needed. But now, as long as I sit in the Provisional Government, I am convinced and believe that you are with me and the free Russia, the free democracy and the free navy will grant me the opportunity to take the matter already began to the end. (Stormy applause).

Comrades. I must say that all information that we have from the boundary regions, centers and fronts indicate that our common belief in the victory of the new regime rests everywhere on a firm base told by the messages that everybody has taken the side of the Provisional Government, the side of the soldiers, workers, deputies, peasants, sailors and officers, and that whoever is taking part in the revolution has nothing to fear. We are the masters of the country, we are her only masters, we – the Russian democrats. And what we are doing, the measures of which the newspapers are aware in reporting and for which the old regime needed years, we solve now in an hour, in 15 minutes. This is how the feelings intensify within the country, this is the power of the creative politics withing the people of Russia which the old regime until now was keeping in shackles and in oppression. But the old regime will never again rise in the country, Czarism will never come to Russia.

Gentlemen. Yesterday we ministers took an oath before the people. Let us everybody swear now that we are going to rescue Russia and we furnish her with a new regime through our common efforts, and that we are going to trust each one of us up to the very end.

* Tsion and Emeljanov were officers, who were executed for taking part in the Sveaborg mutiny of 1906.

The note above and translation by Pauli Kruhse.