



KRONSTADT & COUNTERREVOLUTION

International Bolshevik Tendency

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International Bolshevik Tendency

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Introduction

The subject of this pamphlet is the Bolshevik suppression of the revolt of the Kronstadt naval garrison in March 1921. Over the years, the more sophisticated elements in the anarchist and social-democratic milieus have sought to use this incident as "proof" that the regime of Lenin and Trotsky in the early years of the revolution was not qualitatively different from the brutal Stalinist dictatorship which followed it. For this reason alone the events at Kronstadt deserve serious study.

The main item contained herein is an extended review essay on Paul Avrich's valuable book, *Kronstadt 1921*. The essay, which is reprinted with the permission of the author, originally appeared a decade ago in *Workers Vanguard*, publication of the then-Trotskyist Spartacist League (SL). We have also included the ancillary material which appeared in *WV* at the time. (Unfortunately, in the decade since this material was first published, the SL has been transformed into an organization which can no longer be considered revolutionary in any sense.) Finally, we reprint Max Shachtman's 1934 article on the relation of the revolutionary vanguard to the rule of the proletariat.

The Revolutionary Socialist League (RSL), which for over a decade posed as a Trotskyist organization, recently announced that it had switched sides on Kronstadt. This is part and parcel of the group's explicit repudiation of Leninism which is explained in a recent eight-part series in the *Torch*, by RSL chief honcho Ron Taber. In part one of "A Look At Leninism" (January 1987) Taber posed the following question as the "unifying theme" of his opus: "What responsibility does Leninism/Bolshevism have for the social system, and the crimes, of what we have loosely called Stalinism and more accurately labelled state capitalism?" His conclusion, all too familiar to those acquainted with the scribblings of Cold War ideologues, is that Leninism leads to Stalinism. In the concluding installment of the series, which appeared last February, Taber explains that he no longer wishes to be associated with those who consider themselves Marxists because, "The latter are too burdened with statism, the belief in the inherent progressiveness of nationalized property and state planning and various other baggage that points toward state capitalism."

In this the RSL is at least true to itself. The one fixed point in the RSL's ideological universe since its origins in the bowels of the anti-Soviet American Shachtmanite movement in the early 1970's has been its characterization of the USSR as "state capitalist". In rejecting the "totalitarianism" supposedly inherent in a collectivized economy, Taber has merely generalized the RSL's long-standing petty-bourgeois hostility to the USSR into a wholesale repudiation of Marxism.

As against the state-capitalist, anarcho-liberals of the RSL, we of the Bolshevik Tendency unconditionally defend the system of nationalized property which exists in the Soviet Union against both imperialist aggression and internal capitalist restoration. Inextricably linked to our defensist position is the call for a workers *political revolution* to oust the parasitic Stalinist caste which destroyed the Bolshevik Party and usurped political power for itself. For us the issue of Kronstadt is clear-cut. The survival of the revolution--the first in the world to successfully liquidate the capitalists as a class and establish the rudiments of social planning of production--depended on retaining the island fortress guarding Petrograd. Therefore, we support Lenin and Trotsky and recognize the tragic necessity to militarily suppress the mutineers.

The ideology of "anti-statism" was effectively demolished politically by Marx and Engels in the 1870's in their struggle with Bakunin in the First International. Yet, largely as a result of the evident bankruptcy of most organizations claiming the mantle of Marxism, anarchism continues to exert an influence over a section of revolutionary-minded youth. We publish this material as a contribution to the political education of these young militants--to help the best of them find the road to Trotskyism, the only consistently revolutionary program for our epoch.

Bolshevik Tendency
June 1988

Introduction to the Second Edition

In this edition we have included additional material on the Kronstadt rebellion from the American Trotskyist journal of the 1930s, *The New Internationalist*. It is also necessary to make a factual correction to a *Workers Vanguard* article regarding Avrich's report on Bolshevik repressions of the Kronstadt mutineers. In "Why the Bolsheviks Took Hostages," (reprinted on page 11 of this pamphlet) it is asserted that:

"Although no precise figures are available, Avrich writes that 'losses on the rebel side were fewer' than among the Bolshevik attackers, and estimates the number of Kronstadters killed in the fighting at 600 and those executed in the aftermath at 13."

Avrich stated that:

"according to Harold Quarton, the well-informed American consul in Viborg, total Soviet casualties amounted to about 10,000, which seems a reasonable calculation of all the dead, wounded, and missing taken together...."

"Losses on the rebel side were fewer, but by no means inconsiderable. No reliable figures are available, but one report puts the number killed at 600, with more than 1,000 wounded and about 2,500 taken prisoner during the fighting. Among the dead, more than a few were massacred in the final stages of the struggle. Once inside the fortress, the attacking troops took revenge for their fallen comrades in an orgy of bloodletting."

--*Kronstadt 1921*, pp 210-11

Avrich made it clear that far more than 13 were executed in the aftermath:

"Finally, it remains to describe the fate of the Kronstadt survivors. None of the captured rebels received a public hearing. From more than 2,000 prisoners taken during the struggle, 13 were chosen to be tried *in camera* as ringleaders of the mutiny....the 13 'ringleaders' were tried on March 20 and condemned to execution.

"Of the remaining prisoners, several hundred are said to have been shot at once in Kronstadt. The rest were removed by the Cheka to its prisons on the mainland. In Petrograd the jails were filled to overflowing, and over a period of several months hundreds of rebels were taken out in small batches and shot....Others were sent to concentration camps, such as the notorious Solovki prison in the White Sea, condemned to forced labor, which for many meant a slow death from hunger, exhaustion, and illness."

--*Ibid.*, pp 214-15

Avrich's footnotes indicate that his figures for executions are based on a report by Fyodor Dan, a leading Menshevik arrested in 1921, and exiled in January 1922. Dan talked to Kronstadt rebels while in jail in Petrograd. Avrich also mentioned in a footnote that:

“According to a recent Soviet work, however, the majority of captured sailors were subsequently pardoned, ‘severe punishment’ (i.e., execution) being meted out only to the ringleaders and implacable enemies of Soviet authority....”

--*Ibid.*, p 215

On the mass executions reported by Victor Serge in 1938, the editors of *The New Internationalist* aptly observed:

“It is quite possible that more foresight and skill *might have* reduced the danger of a Kronstadt or in any case minimized the scope of its repercussions. The Russian revolution committed many excesses and had many a blunderer, coward and scoundrel in its leadership; we know of no revolution without them. It is unworthy of a Marxist, however, to confuse the excesses with the main line of activity, or to lose his sense of proportions by identifying the two.”

In his 6 July 1938 piece, “More on the Suppression of Kronstadt,” Trotsky wrote that he did not know if there were any “needless victims” of repression, as Felix Dzerzhinsky, the head of the Cheka, was in charge of them. Trotsky remarked that,

“For lack of data, I cannot undertake to decide now, *a posteriori*, who should have been punished and how,” and then states:

“But I am ready to recognize that civil war is no school of humanism. Idealists and pacifists always accused the revolution of ‘excesses’. But the main point is that ‘excesses’ flow from the very nature of revolution which in itself is but an ‘excess’ of history. Whoever so desires may on this basis reject (in little articles) revolution in general. I do not reject it. In this sense I carry full and complete responsibility for the suppression of the Kronstadt rebellion.”

As partisans of the October Revolution, we are prepared to share this responsibility.

International Bolshevik Tendency,
April 2002

Kronstadt and Counterrevolution

In March of 1921 the garrison of the key fortress of Kronstadt, located on an island in the Gulf of Finland a few miles from Petrograd, revolted against the Bolshevik government. The mutineers held Kronstadt for two weeks, until the Soviet regime finally retook it by a direct assault across the ice resulting in great bloodshed on both sides. The rebels claimed to be fighting to restore a purified Soviet power freed from the monopoly of the Communists; the Bolsheviks charged that the revolt was a counterrevolutionary mutiny and that, whatever the sailors' intentions, it could only aid the White Guards.

Ever since, supporters of the Kronstadt revolt have claimed that this event proves the anti-working-class nature of the Bolshevik regime, demonstrating that there is really no significant difference between Leninism and Stalinism—or, more specifically, that the latter flows naturally from the former. In fact, the Kronstadt uprising has become the center of a great myth, assiduously propagated by the anarchists but seized upon by a whole array of anti-revolutionary forces ranging from social democrats to tsarist restorationists.

The principal aim of the "hue and cry over Kronstadt" is and always has been to discredit the Marxists' struggle for the dictatorship of the proletariat over the bourgeoisie, and in particular to smear Trotskyism, the contemporary embodiment of authentic Leninism. Thus the famous pamphlet of the anarchist Ida Mett. (*The Kronstadt Commune* [1938]) was written to deflect Trotsky's devastating critique of the Spanish anarchists' treachery in the suppression of the Barcelona May Days of 1937.

Today once again there is a growing congruence of imperialist and pseudo-leftist denunciations of the USSR. The advent of the Democratic administration of Jimmy Carter marked the ascendancy of post-Watergate liberalism in the U.S. and the attempt to refurbish the ideological credentials of American imperialism internationally. While Carter has been unable to alter the post-Vietnam world balance of power, he has managed to line up an unholy alliance of cold warriors and ostensible socialists behind his "human rights" crusade against the Soviet bloc.

Thus it is only a matter of time until

Kronstadt again becomes a rallying cry for anti-Communism, this time no doubt including a "self-criticism" by some ex-Trotskyist revisionists of the Bolsheviks' suppression of the 1921 revolt. As the fracturing Maoists froth against "Soviet social-imperialism"; as the reformist Socialist Workers Party proclaims to anti-Soviet Shachtmanites and De Leonists, "Our party is your party"; as Ernest Mandel & Co. praise the "progressive features" of Eurocommunism, it falls to the international Spartacist tendency to uphold the necessary measures undertaken by the Bolshevik revolutionaries in their hour of greatest danger.

The relevant facts about the Kronstadt revolt have been assembled by a pro-anarchist scholar, Paul Avrich, in his book, *Kronstadt 1921*. Published in 1970 and reissued in paperback four years later, the Avrich book is qualitatively superior to all previous anti-Bolshevik Kronstadt studies, both the philistine works of liberal academics and the "leftist" tracts of such figures as Emma Goldman, Alexander Berkman, Anton Ciliga and Ida Mett.

In the edition of Mett's pamphlet on Kronstadt produced by the anti-Leninist "Solidarity" grouping in Britain, the publishers "recommend in particular" Avrich's book. The well-known British periodical *Anarchy* devoted a special issue to Kronstadt, featuring a lengthy review of *Kronstadt 1921*, which while differing with some of Avrich's judgments praises its factual content in the following terms:

"*Kronstadt 1921* will from now on be the standard source of information about what happened at Kronstadt. The great value of the book is that it gathers in one place all the significant facts about the rising, with full reference to the accessible sources... firmly establishing the rising in its various contexts."

Avrich himself contributed an introduction to this issue of *Anarchy* in which his political outlook is made explicit: "The Kronstadt sailors," he writes, "were revolutionary martyrs fighting to restore the idea of free soviets against the Bolshevik dictatorship, and their suppression was an act of brutality which shattered the myth that Soviet Russia was a 'workers' and peasants' state'."

We, too, strongly recommend this book to every would-be communist. For, despite his sympathies with the

anti-Bolshevik rebels, Avrich has conscientiously assembled the relevant facts (while digging up some important new ones) and his book is therefore invaluable to revolutionary Marxists. If "libertarians" have drawn comfort from *Kronstadt 1921*, that is testimony only to their incurable political muddle-headedness and resultant incapacity to interpret the facts before their eyes.

Unrest in the Countryside, Starvation in the Cities

The Avrich book, despite its openly partisan stance toward the rebellion, provides decisive evidence that the victory of the Kronstadt uprising would have given tremendous aid to the counterrevolutionary White Guards who were lying in wait in imperialist naval and army bases ringing Red Russia. Although defeated in the civil war, the tsarist counterrevolutionaries awaited the first opportunity to pounce on a Soviet regime presiding over a famine-stricken country with its industry devastated and the rural areas rife with peasant unrest.

The events at Kronstadt are simply not comprehensible unless they are seen against the social background of Russia in 1921 and linked with the events of the preceding three years. Avrich tells it well enough:

"...the winter of 1920-1921 was an extremely critical period in Soviet history. Although the military struggle had been won and the external situation was rapidly improving, the Bolsheviks faced grave internal difficulties. Russia was exhausted and bankrupt. The scars of battle were visible in every corner of the land. During the last two years the death rate had mounted sharply, famine and pestilence claiming millions of victims beyond the millions who had fallen in combat. Not since the Time of Troubles in the seventeenth century had the country seen such suffering and devastation. Agricultural output had fallen off drastically; industry and transportation were in a shambles. The time had come to bind up the nation's wounds, and for this a shift was needed in domestic policy.... this meant the abandonment of 'War Communism,' a program improvised to meet the emergency of the Civil War. As its name implies, War Communism bore the harsh stamp of regimentation and compulsion. Dictated by economic scarcity and military necessity, it was marked by an extreme centralisation of government controls in every area of social life. Its cornerstone was the forcible seizure of grain from the peasantry. Armed detachments were

sent into the countryside to requisition surplus produce with which to feed the cities and to provision the Red Army.... "There is little doubt that compulsory requisitioning... saved the Bolshevik regime from defeat, for without it neither the army nor the urban population could have survived. Yet the inevitable price was the estrangement of the peasantry.... To the peasants the Bolshevik Revolution meant first and foremost the satisfaction of their land hunger and the elimination of the nobility, and now they wanted only to be left in peace. Entrenching themselves on their new holdings, they guarded suspiciously against any outside intrusions.... As the Civil War deepened and requisition teams descended into the countryside, the peasants began to regard the Bolsheviks as adversaries rather than as friends and benefactors....

"Yet the bulk of the peasants, for the duration of the Civil War, continued to tolerate the Soviet regime as a lesser evil than a White restoration. However acute their antipathy for the ruling party, still more did they fear a return of the gentry and the loss of their land. The food collection squads, it is true, often met with resistance in the villages, resistance which claimed more than a few Bolshevik lives, but the peasants shrank from armed opposition on a scale serious enough to threaten the existence of the government. However, with the defeat of Wrangel's army in the fall of 1920, the situation changed rapidly. Now that the White danger had evaporated, peasant resentment... flared up out of control. Waves of peasant risings swept rural Russia.... The insurgents... had no coherent program, though everywhere their slogans were the same: 'Down with requisitioning,' 'Away with food detachments,' 'Don't surrender your surpluses,' 'Down with the Communists and the Jews.' Beyond this, they shared a common hatred of the cities."

Kronstadt 1921

For anarchists, Maoists, New Leftists and other anti-Marxists there is no essential difference between the peasant small-property holder, or would-be small-property holder, and the urban factory worker. Both are part of "the people." But all of historical experience—from France in 1848 to Portugal in 1975—confirms the elementary Marxist notion that the peasant is *not* inherently collectivist and anti-capitalist in political tendency, but rather pursues that policy which appears to support his immediate economic aims: to gain the land, where he does not have it; to defend his ownership and free use of his plot where he does have it.

The peasant is a primitive small businessman. He wants easy credit, low prices on the things he buys and high prices on the things he sells. A landless peasantry, or one which sees itself threatened with dispossession by the

landlords, can thus be brought to support the socialist proletariat. A landholding peasantry which feels secure against landlord restoration is something else again. The Russian peasantry of 1921, which Avrich describes with none of the false sentimentality of many anarchists, was not a socialist force but a *problem* for the socialist forces. The Kronstadt mutiny, made by peasants in uniform, was not fundamentally different from the other peasant risings described above by Avrich.

Had production been maintained in the urban centers, the Soviet government could have obtained the necessary agricultural products from the peasantry through the "normal" medium of the market. But, as Avrich correctly depicts it, the situation in the cities was:

"...in many ways worse than in the countryside. Six years of turmoil had shattered the nation's industrial economy. Although published statistics vary in many details, the picture which emerges is one of near collapse. By the end of 1920 total industrial output had shrunk to about a fifth of 1913 levels....

"Many large factories could operate only part-time, and their work forces dwindled to fractions of what they had been four or five years earlier. Some important sectors of heavy industry ground to a complete standstill. And in consumer-goods enterprises total production fell to less than a quarter of prewar levels.... Compounding the disaster were two additional factors: the throttling effects of the recent Allied blockade and the disorganization of the country's transportation system....

"The breakdown of the railroads held back the delivery of food to the hungry cities. Provisions became so scarce that workmen and other townspeople were put on starvation rations.... the factory hands seldom had enough to nourish themselves and their families, and they joined the droves of city folk who were abandoning their homes and flocking to the countryside in search of food. Between October 1917 and August 1920... the population of Petrograd fell from almost 2.5 million to about three-quarters of a million, a drop of nearly two-thirds. During the same period Moscow lost nearly half its inhabitants...."

Dictatorship of the Decimated Proletariat

Avrich's competent description of the objective situation confronting the Bolsheviks in 1921 should challenge the smug prejudices of the anarchists and syndicalists who share his anti-Bolshevik bent. But the denizens of the "libertarian" left's ivory towers are undismayed by hard realities. Blithely they charge the Bolsheviks with "abandoning workers' control of industry" during this period. One is tempted to

reply: *what* workers, *what* industry? The fact is that the militant, class-conscious proletariat that the Bolsheviks had led to power in 1917 had been chewed up during the Civil War, leaving its advance guard (the Bolshevik party) suspended above a sea of hostile peasants.

Victor Serge, a former Left Oppositionist who subsequently broke with the Trotskyist movement by taking up cudgels against the Bolsheviks over Kronstadt, and who is now a darling of many liberals and anarchists, provides an eyewitness account confirming this conclusion:

"At no time did the revolutionary workers form more than a trifling percentage of the masses themselves. In 1920-1921, all that was energetic, militant, ever-so-little socialistic in the labor population and among the advanced elements of the countryside had already been drained by the communist party, which did not, for four years of civil war, stop its constant mobilization of the willing—down to the most vacillating. Such things came to pass: a factory numbering a thousand workers, giving as much as half its personnel to the various mobilizations of the party and ending by working only at low capacity with the five hundred left behind for the social battle, one hundred of them former shop keepers.... And since, in order to continue the revolution, it is necessary to continue the sacrifices, it comes about that the party enters into conflict with that rank and file. It is not the conflict of the bureaucracy and the revolutionary workers, it is the conflict of the organization of the revolutionists—and the backward ones, the laggards, the less conscious elements of the toiling masses."

—*New International*, February 1939

Perhaps the Bolsheviks brought it all upon themselves? The egocentric ignoramus Emma Goldman assures readers of her *My Disillusionment in Russia* that the peasants "gave willingly and generously" until the brutal Bolsheviks, apparently out of sheer malice, dissolved the peasant Soviets and left the peasants' grain to rot. (The understanding she displays about the psychology of the Russian peasant is matched only by her observation that Russians in general are "capable of almost anything except sustained effort." This she does not, however, blame on the Bolsheviks, who are to blame for everything else.)

Other "libertarian" critics have had 50 years now to give us their views on this question: what is the anarchist answer to the Allied blockade, flooded coal mines, torn-up railroads and blasted bridges, etc., with the consequence that there was nothing to trade the peasantry in exchange for its grain? If Avrich thinks

there was another path, he conceals this from his readers. His anarchist reviewers do not indicate any disagreement with his description of the reality that the Bolsheviks had to deal with. The truth is that they offer no other program because they have none. The anarchist objections are not so much to the measures the Bolsheviks took to deal with the reality facing the Russian workers as a refusal even to recognize that reality itself.

The Bolsheviks did not ignore the reality they faced. They took the measures necessary to deal with it—with mistakes, undoubtedly, and excesses. But when has there been a revolution without them? Had they waited for the peasants to “willingly and generously” turn over their grain out of good will, had they permitted the enemies of the revolution to carry on agitation behind the lines, then there would have indeed been no Kronstadt tragedy... because there would have been no revolutionary conquests left to defend. Rather there would have been, at best, a Petrograd Commune, drowned in blood, a subject for condescending doctoral theses to be placed on the library shelves along with academic studies of Luxemburg and Gramsci, who are considered safe subjects for sympathetic study because, after all, they lost.

The great crime of the Bolsheviks, from the viewpoint of their “democratic” critics, is that they *won*. For the first time in history, a propertyless, oppressed class took and held power, proving in practice that the proletariat can indeed rule.

Revolt of Demoralized Elements

The Russian working class had been altered, and not for the better, by the terrible material privations which ensued upon its seizure of power. And the garrison at Kronstadt had changed too. The Kronstadt of 1921 was not the revolutionary Kronstadt of 1917 or 1905. Trotsky observed that:

“A revolution is ‘made’ directly by a *minority*. The success of a revolution is possible, however, only where this minority finds more or less support, or at least friendly neutrality on the part of the majority. The shift in different stages of the revolution, like the transition from revolution to counterrevolution, is directly determined by changing political relations between the minority and the majority, between the vanguard and the class.

“Among the Kronstadt sailors there were three political layers: the proletarian revolutionists, some with a serious past and training; the intermediate majority, mainly peasant in origin; and, finally, the reactionaries, sons of kulaks, shopkeepers and priests. In Czarist

times, order on battleships and in the fortresses could be maintained only so long as the officers, acting through the reactionary sections of the petty officers and sailors, subjected the broad intermediate layer to their influence or terror, thus isolating the revolutionists, mainly the machinists, the gunners, and the electricians, i.e. predominantly the city workers....

“Yes, Kronstadt wrote a heroic page in the history of the revolution. But the civil war began a systematic depopulation of Kronstadt and the whole Baltic fleet. Already in the days of the October uprising, detachments of Kronstadt sailors were being sent to help Moscow. Other detachments were then sent to the Don, to the Ukraine, for requisition of bread and to organize the local power. It seemed at first as if Kronstadt were inexhaustible. From different fronts I sent dozens of telegrams about the mobilization of new ‘reliable’ detachments from among the Petersburg workers and the Baltic sailors. But already in 1918, and, in any case, not later than 1919, the fronts began to complain that the new contingents of ‘Kronstadters’ were unsatisfactory, exacting, undisciplined, unreliable in battle and doing more harm than good.... those sailors who remained in ‘peaceful’ Kronstadt until the beginning of 1921, not fitting in on any of the fronts of the civil war, stood by this time on a level considerably lower, in general, than the average level of the Red Army, and included a great percentage of completely demoralized elements, wearing showy bell-bottom pants and sporty haircuts.”

—“Hue and Cry Over Kronstadt” (April 1938) in Leon Trotsky, *Writings, 1938-39*

Although as a non-Marxist he denies the importance of this crucial fact, Avrich does confirm Trotsky’s description of the change in composition of the Kronstadt garrison:

“There can be little doubt that during the Civil War years a large turnover had indeed taken place within the Baltic Fleet, and that many of the old-timers had been replaced by conscripts from the rural districts who brought with them the deeply felt discontents of the Russian peasantry. By 1921, according to official figures, more than three-quarters of the sailors were of peasant origin, a substantially higher portion than in 1917, when industrial workers from the Petrograd area made up a sizable part of the fleet.”

Kronstadt was, in fact, simply another of the peasant uprisings whose character is adequately described by Avrich, albeit by uniformed peasants with enough remnants of revolutionary tradition to give their formal program a more palatable taste than the slogans of their rural brethren.

The class character of the revolt helped determine the response—or, rather, lack of response—to it in the cities. As Trotsky noted, although the workers of Petrograd had been subject to the same consciousness-destroying processes as the Kronstadt sailors, and were “hun-

gry,” “irritable” and “dissatisfied,” yet:

“The Kronstadt uprising did not attract the Petrograd workers. It repelled them. The stratification proceeded along class lines. The workers immediately felt that the Kronstadt mutineers stood on the opposite side of the barricades—and they supported the Soviet power.”

—“Hue and Cry Over Kronstadt”

This observation is confirmed from yet another political quarter by the anti-Communist historian Leonard Schapiro (who simultaneously throws some light on the “generous” peasantry):

“... whereas in Petrograd the relations between townfolk and peasantry had been exacerbated through the extortionate barter prices which the peasant extracted on the black market for his food, if not the majority of the sailors were of peasant origin and consequently felt more sympathy than townfolk with the hardships which the forcible state food collection inflicted on the peasantry. The political picture in the two towns was therefore entirely different.”

—*The Origins of the Communist Autocracy*

And still another confirmation of the character of these peasant sailors during this period comes from Victor Serge, who describes measures taken to recapture an outlying Kronstadt fortress which had, during an attack on the city in 1919 by the Whites, gone over to the counterrevolutionary forces:

“The actual operations leading to the sailors’ capture of the fort of Krasnaya Gorka were directed by Bill Shatov [a Russian-American anarchist who had returned from the United States and worked closely with the Bolsheviks in defense of the Soviet power]. I was present at a private meeting in his room at the Astoria, which concerned the best method of using the crews of the Fleet. Shatov explained that these merry youngsters were the best fed in the garrison, the best accommodated, and the most appreciated by pretty girls, to whom they could now and then slip a tin of food; consequently none of them was agreeable to fighting for more than a few hours, being concerned to get a comfortable sleep on board ship.”

Memoirs of a Revolutionary *

The social and political character of the Kronstadt mutineers was revealed in their program, characterized by Avrich as having:

“... an overriding preoccupation with the needs of the peasant and small producer and a corresponding lack of concern for the complexities of large-scale industry.... the Kronstadt program paid comparatively little attention to questions affecting the industrial proletariat.”

The reviewer of Avrich’s book in *Anarchy* magazine rhapsodizes over the Kronstadt mutineers as expressing “revolutionary class-consciousness of the Russian proletariat at its peak.” Since the anarchists cannot distinguish proletarians from peasants, that is, social

classes, it's not surprising that they display a similar blindness when surveying class consciousness. We cannot do better than quote Avrich on this score:

"Although the rebels... denied any anti-Semitic prejudice, there is no question that feelings against the Jews ran high among the Baltic sailors, many of whom came from the Ukraine and the western borderlands, the classic regions of virulent anti-Semitism in Russia. For men of their peasant and working-class background, the Jews were a customary scapegoat in times of hardship and distress. Traditional nativism, moreover, led them to distrust 'alien' elements in their midst, and the revolution having eliminated the landlords and capitalists, their hostility was now directed against the Communists and Jews, whom they tended to identify with one another."

Here was that "spontaneous" consciousness which anti-Leninists of all stripes extol in distinction to the socialist consciousness which wicked Bolsheviks attempt to introduce "from the outside," and which the Kronstadt sailors had indeed thrown off.

Avrich gives us a close-up of one particular "peak" of consciousness when he describes the diary of a sailor stationed at the Petrograd naval base during the mutiny:

"In one particularly vicious passage he attacks the Bolshevik regime as the 'first Jewish Republic'; and labels the Jews a new 'privileged class,' a class of 'Soviet princes'...calling the government ultimatum to Kronstadt 'the ultimatum of the Jew Trotsky.' These sentiments, he asserts, were widely shared by his fellow sailors, who were convinced that the Jews and not the Russian peasants and workers were the real beneficiaries of the revolution.... Such beliefs, no doubt, were as prevalent in Kronstadt as in Petrograd, if not more so."

And in the one mainland mutiny in sympathy with Kronstadt, among the riflemen of the 27th Omsk division stationed at nearby Oranienbaum, this anti-Semitism was openly expressed. Spurred on by their ex-tsarist commander (who later said that he had been waiting for just such an opportunity), the soldiers raised the war cry, "Go to Petrograd and beat the Jews."

Although support for the Kronstadt uprising can be dismissed, for serious revolutionists, on the grounds of the preceding general considerations alone, it will nevertheless be instructive to examine in detail the mutiny's immediate pre-history, course of events, and subsequent political evolution. Prior to Avrich's researches, the "case against Kronstadt" rested on the—entirely adequate—social characterization of the revolt as a petty-bourgeois outburst against the beleaguered workers state, an outburst which would have opened the door for capitalist counter-

revolution.

The defenders of Kronstadt have centered their arguments around refuting the contemporary Bolshevik charges of a White Guard plot and extolling the revolutionary purity of the mutineers. Avrich has, as our extensive quotations have shown, accepted and further substantiated the Marxist description of the social context and character of the revolt. But it is the original discoveries of this pro-anarchist author that are the most important contribution of this book, for they fully confirm the Bolshevik and not the "libertarian" line on Kronstadt.

In brief, the attentive reader of *Kronstadt 1921* will learn that:

1) A few months before the revolt its principal leader attempted to join the Whites but was turned down.

2) A few weeks before the revolt a White agent stationed near the base sent his headquarters a detailed report on the military and political situation inside the fortress, with the information that the Whites had recruited a group of sailors on the inside who were preparing to take an active role in a forthcoming uprising there.

3) The principal leader of the revolt (the would-be White recruit) did in fact play an important role in turning a mass protest meeting into a decisive break with the Bolshevik government.

4) After being defeated at Kronstadt, the leaders of the revolt fled to Finland where, a few weeks later, they entered into an open and conscious alliance with the White counterrevolutionaries. The joint program agreed to include the establishment of a "temporary military dictatorship" after the Bolsheviks had been overthrown.

These facts blow to smithereens the anarchist myth of "revolutionary Kronstadt" rising up against "Bolshevik dictatorship" and fully vindicate the decision of the Communist government to retake the mutinous garrison by force.

*The "Solidarity" grouping has issued extracts of this book, dealing with Kronstadt and Serge's doubts and criticisms of the Bolsheviks' suppression of the mutiny, but they did not include this most revealing paragraph. Perhaps they will include it in the next edition of their pamphlet now that we have called it to their attention. After all, surely they do not wish to be listed in the company of those "Trotskyists and sundry others who have indulged in a systematic campaign of misrepresentation and distortion" about Kronstadt.

PART 2 OF 2

Review of *Kronstadt 1921*
by Paul Avrich

"The Kronstadt uprising," wrote Leon Trotsky, "was only an *episode* in the history of the relations between the proletarian city and the petty bourgeois village" ("Hue and Cry Over Kronstadt"). It was, in essence, simply one more in the series of kulak-led peasant revolts which broke out toward the end of the Civil War (the Makhno movement in the Ukraine, hailed by the anarchists; the revolt in Tambov province led by the Socialist Revolutionaries). The difference was that in this case the insurgents were peasants in uniform (the sailors), and it received world renown as a rising of the supposed revolutionary "purest of the pure"—who could forget the heroic role of "Red Kronstadt" in 1917?—against the Bolshevik dictatorship.

Paul Avrich's *Kronstadt 1921* confirms Trotsky's description of the changes in the social composition of the Baltic fleet during the Civil War years, and the fact that most of the mutineers' demands were a direct expression of the peasant discontent. Many sailors had received furlough during the summer and fall of 1920, returning home to their native villages in the Ukraine and other border regions. There many of them were deeply affected by their rural relatives' hatred of the Bolshevik food-requisitioning policies (squads of city workers who came to take grain, government-encouraged committees of the village poor).

As Stepan Petrichenko, leader of the Kronstadt "Provisional Revolutionary Committee," later recorded: "When we returned home our parents asked us why we fought for the oppressors. That set us thinking."

The peasant discontent spread to urban workers after the Soviet government was forced to reduce bread rations in already-hungry Petrograd and Moscow in late January (an "apparently unavoidable act" according to Avrich). Shortly afterwards 60 factories in the old capital were forced to close for lack of fuel, sending their workers out onto the streets to beg for food. The tensions flared in the last week of February when workers in the Trubochny metal factory, under Menshevik influence,

sparked walkouts and anti-government demonstrations in surrounding industrial districts. At the height of the disturbances a delegation of sailors from Kronstadt visited the city and found armed Communist squads everywhere. Petrichenko wrote, "One might have thought that these were not factories but the forced labor prisons of tsarist times."

After a week of turmoil the local Bolshevik organization, headed by Zinoviev, managed to still the unrest by sending the best agitators out to the streets and factories to explain the emergency situation, strengthening military forces in Petrograd and announcing a series of measures to meet the demands of the hungry population: workers were permitted to leave the city to forage for food, roadblock detachments of the Red Army in Petrograd province were removed, and plans to replace grain requisitioning with a tax in kind were publicly aired. Thus when the Kronstadt mutiny broke out a week later the city remained quiet. Captured seamen in prison reportedly accused the workers of selling out "for a pound of meat." But, in fact, the Petrograd demonstrations were over food and fuel shortages.

Mutiny

The Kronstadters' grievances were of an altogether different order and their program consequently far-reaching: to overthrow Bolshevik rule. At a meeting on February 28 aboard the dreadnought *Petropavlovsk* the Kronstadt delegation gave a report on their trip to Petrograd and the assembly voted a lengthy resolution including the following demands: new elections to the soviets; no restrictions on the anarchists or socialist parties; no controls on trade unions or peasant organizations; a non-party conference of workers, soldiers and sailors of the region; freeing Menshevik and SR prisoners as well as those imprisoned during the recent rural and urban unrest; abolition of the political departments in all military units; removal of roadblock detachments; equalization of rations; abolition of Communist fighting detachments; and no restrictions on peasant farming or marketing.

This was not the pressure of backward sectors of the proletariat clamoring for an alleviation of starvation conditions; it was the action of a well-fed military elite acting as spokesman for the grievances of a hostile class—the petty-bourgeois peasant proprietor. The

resolution—which became the political manifesto of the Kronstadt mutiny—was signed by Petrichenko as chairman of the squadron meeting.

The next day there was a mass meeting at Anchor Square in Kronstadt at which Petrichenko was one of the main orators, and on March 2 a meeting of the local soviet. Kuzmin, the ranking Bolshevik commissar of the northern fleet, spoke warning the seamen of the threat of attack from the West, that the flare-up in Petrograd had passed and that if they openly revolted against the government, "the Bolsheviks will fight with their last ounce of strength." Avrich, reflecting a common theme of Kronstadt supporters, complains that Kuzmin's "defiant tone" had "alienated" the audience and counsels that "a more tactful approach was surely in order."

This concern for tact is particularly touching given that what was happening was a *military revolt* by the key unit guarding the approaches to Petrograd; and, moreover, that Kuzmin and two other leading Kronstadt Bolsheviks were *arrested* at the close of the meeting. Yet the anarcho-liberals don't complain about the "tactlessness" of Petrichenko and his confederates! Perhaps this is too much to ask from such "rebellious spirits" as Kronstadt sailors.

As the meeting, chaired by Petrichenko, was proceeding to elect a new soviet a seaman interrupted, shouting out that 15 truckloads of armed Communists were on their way to break up the gathering. Under the impact of this provocation (there was no impending attack) the conference took a step by which, writes Avrich, "the Kronstadt movement placed itself outside the pale of mere protest": a Provisional Revolutionary Committee was formed to administer the city and garrison against the Soviet power. At the conclusion of the meeting the Committee dispatched armed squads to take over the arsenals, telephone exchange, food warehouses, water and power plants, Cheka headquarters and other key points. In addition to the arrest of the Communist leaders, all military leaves were canceled and exit from the island was banned without special permission. The rebellion had begun.

Suppression

That very night the Kronstadters sent a delegation to the nearby Oranienbaum airbase, which declared itself for the mutiny. However, within hours the barracks were surrounded by armed Communists from the district and the mutineers arrested. Thereafter the

rebels did not venture out from their supposedly impregnable island fortress. As Commissar of War, Trotsky issued an ultimatum commanding the sailors to lay down their arms: "Only those who surrender unconditionally may count on the mercy of the Soviet Republic. At the same time, I am issuing orders to prepare to quell the mutiny and subdue the mutineers by force of arms.... This warning is final." The Petrograd Defense Committee under Zinoviev arrested the families of the Kronstadters as hostages.

Avrich terms these measures "harsh" and asks, incredibly, "was force really necessary?" Yet everything the Kronstadt leaders had done made it clear they were bent on insurrection! Nonetheless on March 6 the Petrograd Soviet telegraphed the mutineers to inquire if a delegation of party and non-party members would be permitted to enter Kronstadt to investigate the situation. The gesture was brusquely rejected by the Revolutionary Committee, and the next day military operations to retake the island began. The first assault was led by military cadets, selected Red Army units and Cheka detachments. However it was forced to withdraw under heavy artillery fire.

The number of troops in this initial attack was clearly insufficient to storm the island. Under the command of Marshal Tukhachevsky a new assault was carefully prepared. Simultaneously the Tenth Congress of the Communist Party was meeting in Moscow and 300 delegates, over a quarter of the attendance, volunteered to accompany the troops in the perilous crossing of the ice. They also issued a leaflet to the rebels declaring that "free soviets" would mean restoring the "bourgeoisie, landlords, generals, admirals and noblemen, the princes and other parasites." The slogan was a cover for the overthrow of Soviet power. The Kronstadters would have to choose: "either with the White Guards against us, or with us against the White Guards."

The Tenth Congress also approved the abolition of grain requisitioning and an end to the militarized economic structure known as War Communism. In their place was substituted the New Economic Policy (NEP), whose cornerstone was a tax in kind on agricultural production. While this measure soon cut the ground out from under the peasant revolts, there was no time to lose in subduing the Kronstadt revolt. Already there was slush in the streets of Kronstadt and it was at most two more weeks until the ice broke (making attack

impossible and provision of supplies to the mutinous garrison by Western naval forces a simple matter).

So on March 16 a Soviet assault force estimated at 50,000 men advanced on the island at night. The rebels were cold and hungry, as their supplies were all but exhausted, and their morale sapped by the lack of any echo on the mainland to their uprising. Led by Red Army officer cadets the Soviet forces breached the defense wall at a tremendous cost in lives and by the next evening had overpowered the sailors. As soon as things began to look bleak the heads of the rebellion abandoned their men and fled to Finland. Left leaderless the bulk of the ranks followed suit, and the rebellion was over.

White Guard Plot? The National Center

From the beginning the Bolsheviks denounced the mutiny as part of a White Guard plot. Lenin reported to the Communist Party's Tenth Congress on 8 March 1921:

"We have witnessed the passing of power from the Bolsheviks to some kind of indefinite conglomeration or alliance of motley elements, presumably only a little to the right and perhaps even to the 'left' of the Bolsheviks—so indefinite is the sum of political groupings who have attempted to seize power in their hands in Kronstadt. It is beyond doubt that concurrently the White Guard Generals—as you all know—played a major part in this. This has been proved to the hilt."

This is deeply resented by Kronstadt enthusiasts as besmirching the honor of the sailors, who only wanted to carry out the anarchist "third revolution." Avrich also tries to belittle references to White Guard connections, but his research was so thorough as to provide a mountain of evidence to back up the Bolshevik case. While the bulk of the sailors—like the peasants who took up arms against the Soviet government at the end of the Civil War—certainly did not desire a return of the landlords, their leaders had extensive contacts with counterrevolutionary forces.

The most blatant evidence of these ties at the time was the announcement of the Kronstadt rebellion in the White Guard organ *Obschye Dyelo* as early as February 10, and in succeeding days in leading imperialist newspapers such as *Le Matin*, *L'Echo de Paris* and the *New York Times*. These reports, with details down to the arrest of the fleet commissar, would not be so remarkable but for the fact that they were printed two weeks before it occurred! Avrich remarks that "false rumors of this type...were by no means rare at the

time." However, not only did these reports exactly foreshadow the mutiny, but they all apparently originated from a single source: the Russunion news agency in Helsinki, Finland. This notorious center of anti-Soviet propaganda was closely tied to the monarchist/Kadet National Center. Avrich concludes that on the basis of his investigation, "there is no question that plans were afoot within the National Center to support an anticipated rising at Kronstadt. And...the Center's Baltic agents had no intention of confining themselves to a mere auxiliary role."

One of the most interesting new facts uncovered by Avrich was the existence of a handwritten, unsigned report in the National Center archives, labeled "Top Secret" and entitled "Memorandum on the Question of Organizing an Uprising in Kronstadt":

"The Memorandum is dated '1921' and puts forward a detailed contingency plan for an anticipated revolt in Kronstadt. From internal evidence, it is clear that the plan was drawn up in January or early February 1921 by an agent of the [National] Center located in Viborg or Helsingfors [Helsinki]. He predicts that a rising of the sailors would erupt during 'the coming Spring.' There are 'numerous and unmistakable signs' of discontent with the Bolsheviks, he writes, and if a 'small group of individuals, by quick and decisive action, should seize power in Kronstadt,' the rest of the fleet and garrison would eagerly follow them. 'Among the sailors,' he adds, 'such a group has already been formed, ready and able to take the most energetic actions.'..."

"The author is obviously well acquainted with the situation in Kronstadt. There is a long and well-informed analysis of the base's fortifications."

—Kronstadt 1921

The well-informed counterrevolutionary agent knew the value of taking out the Kronstadt island fortress. He noted: "Furthermore, if one assumes that military operations will be launched from Kronstadt to overthrow Soviet authority in Russia, then for this purpose also the dispatch to Kronstadt of General Wrangel's Russian armed forces would be needed. In connection with this, it is appropriate to mention that for such operations—or merely for the threat of such operations—Kronstadt can serve as an invulnerable base. The nearest object of action from Kronstadt would be defenseless Petrograd, whose conquest would mean that half the battle against the Bolsheviks shall have been won."

—from the "Memorandum on the Question of Organizing an Uprising in Kronstadt," reprinted as an appendix to *Kronstadt 1921*

This revealing document should be pasted to the noses of the anarchist/liberal scoffers at the notion of a White plot.

White Guard Plot? The General and the Red Cross

Defenders of the Kronstadt mutiny are particularly incensed by any reference to the role played in the uprising by tsarist military officers. There was indeed a tsarist General Kozlovsky present at Kronstadt at the time, but the American anarchist Alexander Berkman claimed (in his pamphlet, *The Kronstadt Rebellion* [1922]) that he "played no role whatever in the Kronstadt events." Ida Mett in her tract has a whole section (entitled "Bolshevik Slanders") devoted to denying "this legend about General Kozlovsky, leader of the mutiny." "At the time of the insurrection," she explains,

"he happened to be in command of the artillery at Kronstadt. The communist commander of the fortress had defected [i.e., supported the Soviet government]. Kozlovsky, according to the rules prevailing in the fortress had to replace him. He, in fact, refused, claiming that as the fortress was now under the jurisdiction of the Provisional Revolutionary Committee, the old rules no longer applied. Kozlovsky remained, it is true in Kronstadt, but only as an artillery specialist.... Kozlovsky was the only general to have been present at Kronstadt. This was enough for the Government to make use of his name."

—*The Kronstadt Commune* (1938)

But, alas for the anarchists, liberals, White Guardists and other enemies of Bolshevism, on this point as well Avrich's researches bear out Lenin's statement.

In the first place Kozlovsky was not merely a "specialist" but in charge of the artillery; and the officer who was eventually named fortress commander by the Kronstadt mutineers was another tsarist officer, the former Lieutenant Colonel Solvianov! As to the absurd claim that Kozlovsky was "just doing his job," oblivious to political events like a mutiny, Avrich reports his remark on March 2 to the Bolshevik commissar of the fortress: "Your time is past. Now I shall do what has to be done." And what had to be done? Avrich writes:

"From the very outset, the specialists threw themselves into the task of planning military operations on behalf of the insurrection. On March 2, as Kozlovsky himself admitted, he and his colleagues advised the Revolutionary Committee to take the offensive at once in order to gain the initiative against the Bolsheviks. The officers worked out a plan for an immediate landing at Oranienbaum...in order to seize its military equipment and make contact with sympathetic army units, then to move against Petrograd before the government had time to muster any effective opposition."

The author of *Kronstadt 1921* concludes that the officers never played more than an "advisory" role during the rebellion, and in any case could not have won real influence because of "the sailors' independent spirit and traditional hatred of officers." His main proof is that the Provisional Revolutionary Committee frequently rejected the tsarist officers' advice. Perhaps so, although (as reported above) the mutineers *did* send a party to Oranienbaum, where the revolt was crushed only thanks to swift action by the local Communist Party. It is not hard to see that the "real influence" of the tsarist officers would have been overwhelming had the rebels scored any success on the mainland (where the sailors would be totally unprepared), and above all if the indispensable food and military aid had arrived from the Western imperialists. As it was, the White Guard commander Baron Wrangel sent a message to Kozlovsky in Kronstadt offering the aid of the imperial army as soon as it could be mobilized.

Petrichenko, the leader of the Provisional Revolutionary Committee, also fulminates against Bolshevik charges of "alleged support to Kronstadt of counter-revolutionary foreign and Russian organisations":

"In their publications the Communists accuse us of accepting an offer of food and medicine from the Russian Red Cross, in Finland. We admit we saw nothing wrong in accepting such an offer.... We felt that the Red Cross was a philanthropic organisation, offering us disinterested help that could do us no harm....

"Their representative, a retired naval officer called Vilken, remained in Kronstadt....

"Was this the 'aid of the international bourgeoisie'?"

—quoted in Mett, *The Kronstadt Commune*

Thanks to Avrigh's investigations, this rhetorical question can now be definitively answered... in the affirmative. He states categorically that "there can be no doubt that the National Center in its efforts to organize a supply line to Kronstadt, used the Russian Red Cross as a cover." He suspects the author of the secret memorandum to be none other than Professor G. Tseidler, director of the Russian (i.e., tsarist) Red Cross in Helsinki. Tseidler was connected with the National Center, and with its representative in the Finnish capital, D. Grimm (who was simultaneously General Wrangel's representative). The Center, in turn, was "in constant contact with the French foreign ministry throughout the uprising."

On March 6 the semi-official organ of

the Kadet/monarchist National Center, *Obshchye Dyelo*, issued an impassioned appeal "for Kronstadt": "Let the insurgents be given arms, let food be secured for Petrograd. The struggle against the Bolsheviks is our common cause!" The very next day the Russian Union of Commerce and Industry in Paris pledged two million Finnish marks to aid Kronstadt "in the sacred cause of liberating Russia," communicating this news (and the report of a promise of food aid by the French foreign minister) to the mutineers by radiogram. Already on March 16 the entire amount pledged had been deposited in Russian banks in Europe. Concerning Vilken, a former captain in the Imperial Navy who had served as commander of the *Sevastopol* (one of the centers of the mutiny), Avrigh writes: "The Bolsheviks rightly call him a White Agent...." Yes, this was the "aid of the international bourgeoisie!"

White Guard Plot? Petrichenko and "Free Soviets"

As we have seen, a key role in the uprising was played by Stepan Petrichenko, who headed the delegation to Petrograd, chaired the squadron meeting which heard the delegation's report, authored the *Petropavlovsk* resolution which became the charter of the insurrection, chaired the conference to reelect the Kronstadt soviet (where the mutiny was declared), and headed the Provisional Revolutionary Committee.

Petrichenko was the son of a Ukrainian kulak, and apparently about as alienated from the Soviet government as possible. According to Avrigh, this "libertarian" hero "tried to join the Whites" during his furlough in the summer of 1920. The author of *Kronstadt 1921* claims that the Whites turned Petrichenko down because of his former brief membership in the Communist Party. If the Whites really did reject the application of the would-be volunteer, they passed up a prime opportunity to plant an agent in a key Bolshevik military position. Petrichenko had been in the Russian navy since 1912 and was now a senior clerk on the battleship *Petropavlovsk*, moored next to the island-fortress of Kronstadt which was the only defense of Petrograd from the sea.

The curious behavior of the Whites in turning down the application of a potentially valuable agent would be, we should note, in contradiction to their policy elsewhere. In fact, Baron Wrangel made it a practice upon capturing Red Army soldiers to shoot the officers

and sergeants and then invite the surviving ranks to "volunteer" for the White army or suffer the same fate as their leaders. But even if one accepts Avrigh's rather implausible supposition that the Whites refused to recruit Petrichenko (and then on top of this allowed the Red Navy cadre to walk away unharmed!), *Kronstadt 1921* provides plenty of evidence that he did everything possible to turn the sailors' protest into open mutiny against the Soviet power:

"...it was the bogus report that Communists were preparing to attack the [March 2] meeting that actually precipitated the formation of the Provisional Revolutionary Committee, the step by which the sailors crossed the Rubicon of insurrection. Who was responsible for launching the rumor? According to Petrichenko it was the work of the Communists themselves, with the object of breaking up the conference. Although certainly possible, there is no evidence that this was the case.... And it is worth noting that Petrichenko himself took up the rumor and announced that a detachment of 2,000 Communists were indeed on their way to disperse the meeting."

This certainly sounds like the work of a "small group of individuals" ready to foment "the most energetic actions," referred to in the previously quoted White Guard secret memorandum!

When confronted with evidence of ties between the Kronstadt rebel leaders and tsarist counterrevolutionary forces, defenders of the uprising invariably hark back to the *Petropavlovsk* resolution, the manifesto of the mutiny. This was not a White Guard document but a "programme for the renewal of the Revolution," wrote anarchist sympathizer Victor Serge. Avrigh, moreover, argues that:

"For all their animosity towards the Bolshevik hierarchy, the sailors never called for the disbandment of the party or its exclusion from a role in Russian government and society. 'Soviets without Communists' was not, as is often maintained by both Soviet and non-Soviet writers, a Kronstadt slogan."

But whether or not the slogan "Soviets without Communists" was raised by the Kronstaders—and emigré circles which were in touch with them claimed that it was—it is perfectly clear that their aim was to bring down Bolshevik rule. They had gone far beyond merely demonstrating for a change of policy.

Here was an armed insurrection; all contact with the outside was broken off, the Petrograd government was defied, official Soviet appeals were ignored; an effort was made to incite Red Army units on the mainland to join the mutiny; hundreds of Communist Party

cadres were arrested. These facts in themselves are quite sufficient proof. Add to this the references in the *Kronstadt Izvestia* to a "ninth wave of the Toilers' Revolution" which will sweep away the "tyrants with all their corruption" and the defiant reply to an ultimatum from Trotsky, the Soviet Commissar of War: "Listen Trotsky," wrote the Kronstadt Provisional Revolutionary Committee, "the leaders of the Third Revolution are defending the true power of the soviets against the outrages of the commissars" (cited in *Kronstadt 1921*).

All sides agree that the watchword of the Kronstadt rebellion was "free soviets"—"free," that is, from the control of the Bolsheviks. What would that mean concretely in the spring of 1921? Trotsky and Lenin maintained that this slogan in practice meant the abolition of the proletarian dictatorship, then exercised through the Communist Party. Moreover, the Soviet leaders were not the only ones to hold this analysis. At the very height of the uprising, the Kadet spokesman Miliukov proclaimed as his own the slogan "Down with the Bolsheviks! Long live the Soviets!" and identified this as the Kronstadt slogan.

Even many who sympathized with the Kronstadters' "libertarian" rhetoric could see this reality clearly. Serge, who refused to pick up arms against the rebels, wrote later:

"After many hesitations, and with unutterable anguish, my Communist friends and I finally declared ourselves on the side of the Party....

"If the Bolshevik dictatorship fell, it was only a short step to chaos, and through chaos to a peasant rising, the massacre of the Communists, the return of the émigrés, and in the end, through the sheer force of events, another dictatorship, this time anti-proletarian."

—*Memoirs of a Revolutionary, 1901-1941* (London, 1963)

Bolshevik Lies?

Supporters of the rebellion make much of supposed "lies" told by the Bolsheviks, such as leaflets attributing the rising solely to machinations by White generals. Whether or not there was some exaggeration—after all, there was considerable substance to the charges of a White plot, as we have shown—the Bolsheviks were quite explicit in acknowledging that the mutiny had a mass character. "They did not want us and they did not want the Whites either," Lenin said to the Tenth Party Congress. Addressing the troops who put down the revolt, Trotsky said, "We waited as long as possible for our

blind sailor comrades to see with their own eyes where the mutiny led. But we were confronted with the danger that the ice would melt away and... we were compelled to make the attack."

These were assessments of the rank and file of the rebellion: the Bolsheviks never claimed that 15,000 sailors of the Soviet navy had consciously and deliberately gone over to the Whites. What they did maintain throughout, and what Avrich's book confirms, is that the leadership in Kronstadt included tsarist officers pursuing counterrevolutionary aims, and that success for the mutiny would quickly lead to a White Guard victory. As Trotsky put it:

"All the reactionary elements, in Russia as well as abroad, immediately seized upon this uprising. The white émigrés demanded aid for the insurrectionists. The victory of this uprising could bring nothing but a victory of counter-revolution, entirely independent of the ideas the sailors had in their heads. But the ideas themselves were deeply reactionary. They reflected the hostility of the backward peasantry to the worker, the conceit of the soldier or sailor in relation to the 'civilian' Petersburg, the hatred of the petty bourgeois for revolutionary discipline. The movement therefore had a counter-revolutionary character and since the insurgents took possession of the arms in the forts they could only be crushed with the aid of arms."

—"The Questions of Wendelin Thomas," in *The Writings of Leon Trotsky 1937-38*

The Bolsheviks were Marxists who based their action on an analysis of the class forces involved. And a striking confirmation of their analysis is provided by the behavior of Petrichenko and his comrades following the crushing of the mutiny. Let Avrich tell the story:

"In May 1921 Petrichenko and several of his fellow refugees at the Fort Ino [Finland] camp decided to volunteer their services to General Wrangel. At the end of the month they wrote to Professor Grimm, Wrangel's representative in Helsingfors, and offered to join forces in a new campaign to unseat the Bolsheviks and restore 'the gains of the March 1917 Revolution.' The sailors put forward a six-point program as the basis for any common venture: (1) all land to the peasants, (2) free trade unions for the workers, (3) full independence for the border states, (4) freedom of action for the Kronstadt fugitives, (5) the removal of shoulder epaulettes from all military uniforms, and (6) the retention of their slogan 'all power to the soviets but not the parties.' Surprisingly, however, the slogan was to be retained only as a 'convenient political maneuver' until the Communists had been overthrown. Once victory was in hand, the slogan would have been shelved and a temporary military dictatorship installed to prevent an-

archy from engulfing the country." [our emphasis]

—*Kronstadt 1921*

The White general accepted these terms. A few months later the National Center held a Congress of National Union of all anti-Communist forces, to which the Kronstadt refugees sent a telegram "warmly endorsing their program." And Avrich also has discovered:

"...in the archives of the National Center there is a confidential document of October 30, 1921, signed by Petrichenko and Yakovenko (as chairman and deputy chairman of the Provisional Revolutionary Committee), which authorizes one Vsevolod Nikolaevich Skosyrev to join the Russian National Committee in Paris as a representative of the refugees for 'the coordination of active work with other organizations standing on a platform of armed struggle against the Communists.'"

—*Ibid.*

This is the reality of the Kronstadt revolt. It took the Kronstadt leaders no more than two months to pass openly into the camp of the Whites, assuming that they hadn't been there all along. Paul Avrich ends his introduction to *Kronstadt 1921* with the remark: "Yet Kronstadt presents a situation in which the historian can sympathize with the rebels and still concede that the Bolsheviks were justified in subduing them." We can certainly agree that he has proved the latter point beyond all doubt. Anyone who after reading this book condemns the suppression of the Kronstadt mutiny by the beleaguered Soviet regime must be counted among the conspicuous allies of counterrevolution. ■

London, U.K.
17 May 1978

Dear *Workers Vanguard*:

In the 3 March and 28 April issues of your paper you published an extended discussion of Paul Avrich's book on the Kronstadt rising. In suggesting that revolutionaries read this book your paper has done an inestimable good.

But those who read that book will find that your "review" of it shows that it is not only the critics of Lenin and Trotsky who can be accused of "incapacity to interpret the facts before their eyes" (3 March, p. 6). Both the Petrograd strikers and the rebellious sailors are grossly distorted in your description. You claim, quoting Trotsky, that the Petrograd workers were hostile to the Kronstadt rising (3 March, p. 11). Any reader would have to wait till the second part, eight weeks later, to find out that

there was massive unrest in Petrograd which partly triggered off the sailors and which was suppressed by the Bolsheviks. This urban turmoil you coyly claim was ended by a combination of propaganda, military strength and concessions (28 April, p. 4). A reader of Avrich will find that you omit to mention such activities as the stopping of rations and mass arrests!

Most importantly you are strikingly selective in your account of the White plot that Avrich has demonstrated. What you don't note is his conclusion that there is no known link between National Center plans for a coup and the actual rising itself. Most significantly, unmentioned by you, the Kronstadt Revolutionary Committee published a brilliant article warning the population of attempts to use the defeat of the Bolsheviks to restore reaction.

There are several other examples of failing to mention Avrich's views or qualifications which affect your own versions of his book. Your articles, bringing to Marxists' and anarchists' attention the involvement of Whites, the anti-semitism among the sailors, the connections of some of the Kronstadt leaders with rightist emigrés after their flight, etc., is certainly the most substantial Trotskyist work to date on the topic. But not only do you not understand Avrich's book, neither do you understand the thrust of critical views on the Bolsheviks in 1921. As you may say the working class was decimated in the Civil War, the Leninists were suspended above the peasantry. But that is not to say that the oppressed class took and held power. On the contrary, destroyed by massacre and privation, let down by the Western working class, the class that took power did not hold it. To say that there was no alternative programme to the Bolsheviks (save defeat) is to say that there was no programme for democratic socialism that was viable for the Russia of 1921.

Yours,
S. Max

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WV replies: S. Max raises two specific criticisms of our article "Kronstadt and Counterrevolution" (*WV* Nos. 195 and 203) and briefly presents a general political attack on Leninism. He claims that we distort the relation of the striking Petrograd workers to the Kronstadt mutineers and that we draw an illegitimate conclusion from the evidence Avrich presents about the relation of the counterrevolutionary National Center to the mutiny. He also

implies that the Kronstadt mutiny was a legitimate struggle for "democratic socialism," and that we are fatally pessimistic about proletarian democracy in Russia after 1921.

We have never denied or tried to hide the fact that the Bolsheviks used state repression against the Petrograd strikers in February 1921, as well as making concessions to them. In fact, in a polemic against the social-democratic Socialist Labor Party in the very issue preceding Part I of "Kronstadt and Counterrevolution," we stated:

"In February 1921 a strike wave broke out in Petrograd. The Soviet government quelled this through a combination of concessions...and repression (arresting Menshevik agitators)."

— "The SLP and the Russian Question," *WV* No. 194, 24 February 1978

Yet in the late 1930's Trotsky maintained that the Kronstadt mutiny "repelled" the Petrograd workers. Avrich confirms this from the side of the Kronstadters:

"Refugees in Finland later complained that they had thought the Petrograd workers 'meant business' and that the strikes would develop into a full-fledged revolution. Similarly, captured sailors whom [the Menshevik leader] Dan encountered in prison accused the workers of selling out to the government 'for a pound of meat'."

— *Kronstadt 1921*

Why were the Petrograd workers, many of whom had just struck against the Bolshevik government, unsympathetic, if not outright hostile, to the mutinous sailors? Most anarcho-libertarian defenders of Kronstadt (though not Avrich) deny any class conflict between workers and peasants, amalgamating them into the "people" or "toilers" (Max uses the phrase "the oppressed class") versus state authoritarianism. But in any backward workers state there is a short-term conflict of interest between the proletariat and small agricultural proprietors. The former want food at the cheapest price; the latter want the maximum income for their produce. In the economically ruined Russia of 1921, this class conflict was aggravated to the nth degree.

The objective impact of the Kronstadt program would have meant even greater starvation for the urban workers. The Kronstadt sailors (largely peasants in uniform) called for an end to grain requisitioning, which would have led to a drastic reduction in the food supply to the cities. Significantly in this respect, the semi-syndicalist Workers Opposition in the Bolshevik Party (also often

hailed along with the Kronstadters by anti-Leninist leftists) stood for *continuing* the state requisitioning of grain. The Petrograd workers, whatever their discontents with the Bolshevik regime, instinctively recognized the anti-proletarian nature of the Kronstadt mutiny.

S. Max makes much of the fact that "there is no known link between National Center plans for a coup and the actual rising itself." It is true that there is no *direct*, irrefutable proof that any of the leaders of the Kronstadt mutiny were National Center agents. However, the circumstantial evidence linking the Kronstadt mutiny to White Guard plotting was substantial from the outset, and Avrich's researches have unearthed new material, all of which leads unmistakably to the conclusion that there was a connection.

By way of comparison, there is, for example, no direct evidence that Hitler ordered or even knew about the mass execution of the Jews. Himmler claimed that the official order for "The Final Solution" was for deportation of the Jews, not their mass murder. And in his biography, *Hitler* (1974), the German historian Joachim C. Fest states:

"For in the table talk, the speeches, the documents or the recollections of participants for all these years, not a single concrete reference of his [Hitler's] to the practice of annihilation has come to us."

Would S. Max care to make the legalistic argument that there is no known link between Hitler and the actual mass execution of the Jews?

The evidence, much of it new, which Avrich presents about the link between the National Center and the Kronstadt mutiny is conclusive for anyone not blinded by partisanship. We will recapitulate:

1) A few months before the outbreak, its principal leader, Stepan Petrichenko, attempted to join the Whites but was supposedly turned down.

2) A few weeks before the revolt a White agent stationed near the base sent his headquarters a detailed report on the military and political situation inside the fortress, with the information that the Whites had recruited a group of sailors on the inside who were preparing to take an active part in the forthcoming uprising there.

3) Petrichenko played an important role in turning a mass protest meeting into a decisive break with the Soviet government.

4) The mutineers accepted food and medical supplies from the Russian Red

Cross, a known front for the National Center with an office in Finland that was in contact with the Kronstadt rebels throughout the mutiny.

5) Immediately after its suppression, leaders of the revolt who had escaped to Finland entered into an open alliance with the National Center and the White general Wrangel.

But, says S. Max, didn't the Kronstadters put out propaganda warning against any attempt by White Guardists to exploit the uprising? Of course, they did. No one denies that the *mass* of the peasant-derived sailors were against the restoration of the old order, of the return of the landlords. As Lenin said at the time: "They don't want the White Guards, and they don't want our power either" (quoted in Avrich).

Even if all the Kronstadt propaganda had been written by White agents (and, of course, it was not), they would still have had to denounce capitalist restoration. That leaders of the Kronstadt mutiny were capable of just such duplicity was demonstrated immediately after its suppression. When Petrichenko & Co. entered into an alliance with the White Guards, they agreed to retain the slogan, "All power to the soviets, but not the parties," for its popular appeal. But secretly they determined to set up a "temporary military dictatorship" if they won.

However, whether Petrichenko actually was a White agent is, in a sense, beside the point. Even if the mass of Kronstadt sailors had been politically conscious enough to turn their guns on the White forces sent to "aid" them (and this is questionable), they simply would have been pushed aside. Regardless of the subjective attitudes of the sailors, the success of their mutiny could only have served the cause of capitalist counterrevolution.

Even if we leave aside the issue of White Guardist intervention, the dynamic of the Kronstadt mutiny would have led to capitalist restoration. The Kronstadters' program had nothing to do with socialism, democratic or otherwise. Avrich rightly characterizes it as anarcho-populism. The Kronstadters opposed state farms in favor of private peasant proprietorship; they opposed centralized economic planning in favor of workers self-management. This economic regime necessarily implied the free exchange of commodities between independent producers. Such a reactionary utopian system would have rapidly generated a new capitalist class from among the most successful peasants, artisans and enterprises.

Given the catastrophic economic

conditions of 1921, *no* program could have restored proletarian democracy as it existed in 1917-18. In 1921 the Bolsheviks temporarily suspended soviet democracy to preserve proletarian state power. Lenin and Trotsky fully intended to restore soviet democracy when objective conditions allowed. In late 1922 Lenin took the first step toward that restoration in opposing the bureaucratization of the Bolshevik party. Trotsky continued that struggle. Whether and how the struggle against the bureaucratic degeneration of the Russian Revolution could have succeeded is beyond the scope of this reply. A correct policy in the Communist International (e.g., in the German crisis of 1923) would have been a decisive factor. But of the Kronstadt mutiny, one thing is certain: had it succeeded, it would have gravely threatened the greatest victory ever for the socialist cause—the Russian Revolution.

Why the Bolsheviks Took Hostages

Faced with the grave threat to the October Revolution posed by the Kronstadt insurrection of 1921, the Bolshevik authorities ordered the families of the mutineers arrested and held as hostages. The wife and two sons of tsarist artillery officer and rebel leader General Alexander Kozlovsky, for example, were seized in Petrograd and imprisoned (although his 11-year-old daughter was released).

For pro-anarchist scholars like Paul Avrich, as well as for numerous Menshevik, social-democratic and capitalist critics of Leninism, this particular measure stands as the most barbarous "excess" committed by the Bolsheviks and the most damning confirmation of their ruthless immorality. To kill at the front is one thing, they argue, but to shoot innocent hostages is unthinkable.

The question of hostages arose within the revolutionary movement long before 1921. In *Their Morals and Ours*, Trotsky recalls that after the Paris Commune had been drowned in blood there were plenty of "democratic philistines" who, adapting to reaction, reviled the Communards for shooting 64 hostages, including the archbishop of Paris. But Marx, he points out, "did not hesitate a moment in defending this bloody act of the Commune." In a circular issued by the General Council of the First International Marx wrote:

"...the Commune...was obliged to resort to the Prussian practice of securing hostages. The lives of the hostages had been forfeited over and over again by the continued shooting of prisoners on the part of the Versailles. How could they be spared any longer after the carnage with which MacMahon's praetorians celebrated their entry into Paris? Was even the last check upon the unscrupulous ferocity of bourgeois governments—the taking of hostages—to be made a mere sham of?"

The tactic of taking hostages was formally recognized as a necessary defense measure by the Bolsheviks in a decree of 1919 written by Trotsky at a time when the Soviet republic was struggling for its life, wracked by civil war and imperialist intervention. It was directed in part against tsarist officers like Kozlovsky who might be tempted to betray the Red Army forces then under their command. The Bolsheviks warned:

"Let the turncoats know that they are at the same time betraying the members of their own families—fathers, mothers, sisters, brothers, wives, and children."

The decree was invoked at the time of the Kronstadt insurrection, when the insurgents' success would have exposed Petrograd to an imperialist naval assault.

It is generally overlooked by those whose hearts bleed for the hostages taken by the Bolsheviks that this was done only *after* several leading Kronstadt Bolsheviks—including Kuzmin, commissar of the Baltic fleet; Vasiliev, chairman of the Kronstadt soviet; and Korshunov, commissar of the battleship squadron—had been taken hostage by the mutineers. Avrich notes this, although consistently referring to these and the rest of the 300 Communists locked up by the Kronstadters as "prisoners" rather than hostages. These loyal defenders of the Soviet regime, he admits, lived in constant fear of being shot.

As for Serge's claim that "hundreds and more likely...thousands [of Kronstadters] were massacred at the end of the battle or executed afterward" (*New International*, February 1939), this is refuted in *Kronstadt 1921*. Although no precise figures are available, Avrich writes that "losses on the rebel side were fewer" than among the Bolshevik attackers, and estimates the number of Kronstadters killed in the fighting at 600 and those executed in the aftermath at 13. Perhaps his more sober assessment will help lay to rest the anarchist/liberal myth that the Bolsheviks' suppression of Kronstadt assumed the proportions of a latter-day massacre of the Communards.

Today the term "White counterrevolutionary armies" probably does not convey the same meaning to many militants as it did 50 years ago, when their bloody deeds were common knowledge in the workers movement the world over. But the question of taking hostages and the Bolsheviks' military measures in suppressing the Kronstadt revolt cannot be fully understood without a knowledge of what a White victory would have meant.

In Siberia, the White admiral Kolchak turned on and killed even the Mensheviks and Socialist-Revolutionaries who tried to ally with him against the Communists. In the south the Whites were led by General Denikin, whose regime was described by the American historian G. Stewart (not a pro-Bolshevik) as "a simple dictatorship

of the sword" where "pillage became the order of the day." The same writer credits other White leaders with deeds which "would have done credit to Genghis Khan" and of being responsible for "murders and plundering which would have disgraced any medieval footpad."

General Wrangel was as ruthless as his comrades. In fighting outside Stavropol he captured 3,000 Bolshevik soldiers, lined up all the officers and NCOs and had them shot, offering the ranks similar treatment unless they "volunteered" for the White forces.

Even the American officers intervening in Russia were appalled by the sheer savagery of the Whites. General W.S. Graves, with the American forces in Siberia, described one of his White counterparts as a "notorious murderer, robber and cut-throat," and "the worst scoundrel I ever saw or heard of." Not even pro-White authors can conceal the real character of the tsarist reactionaries. In *The White Generals* by Richard Luckett, the pro-monarchist author notes that:

"...it was in their treatment of the Jews that the Whites were at their most inconsequentially brutal. The Jews were the traditional scapegoats: now they were widely believed to be directly responsible for the spread of Bolshevism. The combination of hallowed prejudice with the certain knowledge that several prominent members of the Bolshevik party were of Jewish origin was irresistible.... The terror went on...."

By the end of 1920 the White forces had been driven from Soviet soil by Trotsky's Red Army. This fact is sometimes cited by defenders of the Kronstadt mutiny who wish thereby to debunk Bolshevik fears of a counter-revolution. But, as Avrich noted in his descriptions of the social and economic climate of Russia as 1921 began, the very fact of the defeat of the Whites threatened to unleash powerful *internal* forces which could well play into their hands. For the Whites still existed and were very much alive outside of Russia. They had a "National Center" in Paris which coordinated their activities around the world, including running networks of agents inside the Soviet Republic and on its borders. More importantly, they still had an army. General Wrangel commanded nearly 100,000 armed men interned in Serbia, Bulgaria and Turkey, who were being

maintained by the French. He also had a fleet interned in a Tunisian port (only a few days' sailing from Kronstadt when the ice melted), which included a battleship, destroyers, several dozen other ships and 5,000 sailors.

Revolutionary Responsibility

While citing Trotsky's authorship of the 1919 decree on the taking of hostages, Avrich seeks to relieve him of responsibility for the decision to take hostages at Kronstadt, pointing out that even before Trotsky had arrived in the city the Petrograd Defense Committee had not only taken hostages but had sent the mutineers a message demanding the immediate release of three Communist officials who had been imprisoned, threatening:

"If but a hair falls from the head of a detained comrade, it will be answered by the heads of the hostages."

But although Trotsky did not personally command the forces which suppressed the Kronstadt uprising (contrary to a number of accounts), he *refuses* to be relieved of responsibility for it:

"I am ready to recognize that civil war is no school of humanism. Idealists and pacifists always accused the revolution of 'excesses.' But the main point is that 'excesses' flow from the very nature of revolution which in itself is but an 'excess' of history. Whoever so desires may on this basis reject (in little articles) revolution in general. I do not reject it. In this sense I carry full and complete responsibility for the suppression of the Kronstadt rebellion."

—L. D. Trotsky, "More on the Suppression of Kronstadt," 6 July 1938

Trotsky points out that when the October Revolution was defending itself against imperialism on a 5,000-mile front, the workers of the world followed the struggle with such sympathy that it was a risky business to raise the charge of the "disgusting barbarism" of the institution of hostages. It was only much later, with the degeneration of the Soviet state and the triumph of Stalinist reaction, that the anti-Bolshevik moralists crawled out of their crevices to proclaim that while Stalinism was atrocious, it flowed, after all, from Leninism—for hadn't Trotsky also used "Stalinist" methods to crush the Kronstadt insurrection?

But the "disgusting barbarism" of taking hostages, like the "disgusting barbarism" of the Civil War itself, from which it is inseparable, is justified by the *historical content* of the struggle. As Trotsky later wrote of Victor Serge, who broke with the Trotskyist movement largely over this question:

"Victor Serge himself cannot tell exactly what he wants: whether to purge

the civil war of the practise of hostages, or to purge human history of civil war? The petty-bourgeois moralist thinks episodically, in fragments, in clumps, being incapable of approaching phenomena in their internal connection. Artificially set apart, the question of hostages is for him a particular moral problem, independent of those general considerations which engender armed conflicts between classes. Civil war is the supreme expression of the class struggle. To attempt to subordinate it to abstract 'norms' means in fact to disarm the workers in the face of an enemy armed to the teeth. The petty-bourgeois moralist is the younger brother of the bourgeois pacifist who wants to 'humanize' warfare by prohibiting the use of poison gases, the bombardment of unfortified cities, etc. Politically, such programs serve only to deflect the thoughts of the people from revolution as the only method of putting an end to war."

—L. D. Trotsky, "Moralists and Sycophants against Marxism," *The New Internationalist*, August 1939

The Mensheviks and SR's in White Guard Camp

The real purpose of all the "hue and cry" over Kronstadt has been to tar the Trotskyist Left Opposition and Lenin himself with responsibility for the Stalinist bureaucratic usurpation of the Russian Revolution. Thus the introduction to Ida Mett's 1938 pamphlet, *The Kronstadt Commune*, published by the British anarchoid "Solidarity" group states:

"The task for serious revolutionaries today is to see the link between Trotsky's attitudes and pronouncements during and before the 'great trade union debate' of 1920-1921 and the healthy hostility to Trotskyism of the most advanced and revolutionary layers of the industrial working class. This hostility was to manifest itself—arms in hand—during the Kronstadt uprising. It was to manifest itself again two or three years later—this time by folded arms—when these advanced layers failed to rally to Trotsky's support, when he at last chose to challenge Stalin, within the limited confines of a Party machine, towards whose bureaucratization he had, signally contributed."

In particular the anarchists and other defenders of the Kronstadt mutiny argue that since the Bolsheviks had suppressed all opposition parties, therefore armed revolt was the only means of achieving "freedom." Mett wrote in her tract that the uprising protested "the monopoly exercised by this party [the Bolsheviks] in all fields of life." And Victor Serge claimed at the time of his break with Trotsky that, "It is indeed in the field of repression that the Central Committee of the Bolshevik party committed the most serious mistakes from the beginning of the revolution," contributing dangerously, so he said, to the rise of Stalinism.

As the Kronstadt "political charter" demanded the legalization of the Mensheviks, Socialist-Revolutionaries and anarchists, and as the banning of these groups has been used for decades by anti-Soviet forces as proof of the "inherently totalitarian" nature of Leninism, it is worth considering why they were outlawed in the first place. It was *not*, as the unholy alliance "for Kronstadt" maintains, because of a Bolshevik plot to erect a one-party regime; rather, these pseudo-socialists and "libertarians" were gradually restricted in their activities and finally illegalized because of specific counterrevolutionary activities.

Curiously enough, these dubious bed-fellows are concerned with alleged violations of Soviet liberties only *after* 7 November 1917, never mentioning that the Bolsheviks were viciously persecuted by the Kerensky government, in which sat Mensheviks and SR's. Following the July Days, when government troops fired on demonstrating workers and soldiers, the Bolshevik press was shut down, the party's leaders were driven into hiding and a Bolshevik leafletter was lynched in Petrograd. With this in mind, it is understandable when we are more than a little skeptical about the Menshevik/SR professions of devotion to freedom of the press, democracy and so on.

It is also necessary to keep in mind just what the Bolshevik party represented by the year 1921, namely the virtual totality of those committed to defending the gains of October. The struggle for the first proletarian revolution in history hardened the split lines among Russian social democrats, with the *Mezhrayontsy* led by Trotsky going over to Lenin in July 1917 and the *Borotba* group in the Ukraine in September. Following the victory a process of political differentiation began within the various non-Bolshevik socialist and anarchist groups, with many of their rank and file joining the Bolsheviks either individually or as part of a regroupment process. This included three splits from the Socialist-Revolutionaries: the Populist Communists in November of 1918, the SR Maximalists in April 1920 and the Revolutionary Communists in September of the same year. The majority of the Jewish Bund went over to the Bolsheviks also in November 1918.

The Left SR's

The most significant of the non-Bolshevik groups was the Left Socialist-Revolutionary Party, which had split from the SR party as a whole because of the latter's support for the war and the landlords under Kerensky. The Left SR's were part of a coalition Soviet government with the Bolsheviks in which they played an active role, including participation in the Cheka (the body charged with combatting the counter-revolution), until the peace of Brest-Litovsk was signed with Germany

This draconian peace, which gave the German imperialists control of large areas of Russia, was forced on the Soviet government, which had no army with which to resist. The masses "voted with their feet" against war by simply deserting. Having lost the vote on the treaty at the Fourth All-Russian Soviet Congress, in March of 1918, the Left Socialist-Revolutionaries left the government and set about organizing, in the words of their Central Committee, "a series of terrorist acts against the leading representatives of German imperialism." They hoped thereby to provoke a renewal of war between Germany and the defenseless Soviet republic.

Of course, such a course meant an armed confrontation with the Bolsheviks. The Left SR's noted that since "it is possible that the Bolsheviks may take aggressive counter-action against our party, we are determined in such an event to defend the position we have taken up by force of arms." On 6 July, using their positions within the Cheka, the Left SR's assassinated the German ambassador in Moscow and undertook a poorly prepared putsch in Moscow and Petrograd. Their leaders later claimed they did not "really" intend to make a rising. Perhaps they didn't, for this heterogeneous petty-bourgeois grouping seemed incapable of presenting a coherent program.

However, it did have a mass of undisciplined members, some of whom began to renew the party's tradition of terrorism—this time directed against the Bolsheviks. On 30 August 1918 Lenin was wounded in an assassination attempt by an SR, and Bolshevik leaders Volodarsky and Uritsky were killed. (An attempt was also made on Trotsky's life in this period.) What is surprising, on the surface, is the relative leniency with which the Bolsheviks treated the Left SR's: their organization was not declared illegal, although their press was closed down and their delegates to the Congress of Soviets were expelled. However, SR's who categorically renounced solidarity with the assassination and the ensuing revolt were permitted to rejoin the Soviets. The Bolsheviks were relatively successful, moreover, in winning the ranks of the Left SR's, most of whom did not

support or take part in the criminal actions of their leadership.

The Right SR's

As for the Right Socialist-Revolutionaries, they supported the counter-revolution from the very start, negotiating with the tsarist army commanders immediately after the October Revolution and participating thereafter, in the words of anti-Communist academic Leonard Schapiro, "in many of the plots, conspiracies, or other anti-Communist activities within or outside Russia." As early as the spring of 1918 they entered into direct collaboration with the imperialist invaders. As Serge wrote:

"The leaders of the counter-revolutionary parties (SRs, Mensheviks and Kadets) had recently, in March, set up a common organization, the 'League for Renewal' (*Soyuz Vozrozhdeniya*). 'The League,' one of the SR leaders has written, 'entered into regular relations with the representatives of the Allied missions at Moscow and Vologda, mainly through the agency of M. Noulens [the French ambassador].... The League for Renewal was the main clandestine organization of the 'Socialist' petty-bourgeoisie and of the liberals who were determined to overthrow the Soviet government by force. In Moscow the Octobrists, representing the big bourgeoisie, joined the organization and linked it with the 'Right Centre', a united front of reactionary tendencies inspired by the generals Alexeyev and Kornilov.... There was thus a chain of counter-revolutionary organizations running uninterruptedly from the most 'advanced' Socialists to the blackest reactionaries.... In June, M. Noulens sent the League a semi-official Note from the Allies approving of its political programme and promising it military assistance against the German-Bolshevik enemy."

—*Year One of the Russian Revolution*

The SR policy was to support a kind of "popular front" of all anti-Bolsheviks, including the openly monarchist officers. In September of 1918 a conference of these forces met at Ufa and formed an "All-Russian Provisional Government." Of the 150 delegates attending, half were SR's; also represented were the Mensheviks (although this group was not carrying out official party policy), the *Edinstvo* group of Plekhanov, the Kadets and various anti-Communist governments from the border regions.

The Kadet/SR government formed here did not last long, being overthrown by their ally Admiral Kolchak a few weeks later. (In general, during the early stages of the Civil War, the tsarist generals were intolerant of all "social-

ists," not yet realizing the value of a "left cover" for their anti-Bolshevik campaign.)

The Mensheviks

Avrich goes to considerable lengths to absolve the Mensheviks of participation in the anti-Bolshevik front. He claims, "In contrast to the Kadets and SR's, the Mensheviks in exile held aloof from anti-Bolshevik conspiracies and made no attempt to aid the rebels." The reality was rather different.

Those Mensheviks who could not stomach uniting with the tsarists were in a bad position. Menshevik theory called for the bourgeoisie to rule after the tsar had been overthrown, and now the bourgeoisie was fighting a civil war to implement, so to speak, the Menshevik program. The official Menshevik position was not to try to overthrow the Soviet government by force of arms, yet prominent Mensheviks joined virtually every counterrevolutionary coalition engineered by the Right SR's. Moreover, the government formed in Georgia under Menshevik leader N. Zhordania revealed their treacherous course.

The Menshevik republic in Georgia initially collaborated with the German forces which occupied the Caucasus in 1918. After the withdrawal of the Germans and their Turkish allies the Mensheviks formed a new government in February 1919. These "democrats" and "socialists" proceeded to ban the Communist Party and to carry out oppressive policies against national minority peoples in the region. In May of that year the White general Denikin occupied the area. The Mensheviks rejected Soviet proposals for a joint struggle against the Whites, with Zhordania declaring, "I prefer the imperialists of the West to the fanatics of the East." Finally, when the troops of White general Wrangel were trapped in the Crimea, the Mensheviks assisted him in transporting personnel and supplied him with vital war materiel.

The Mensheviks suffered a precarious existence during the Civil War—half-suppressed, half-tolerated. This corresponded not to some preconceived Leninist doctrine in favor of a single-party state (there never was such a doctrine) but rather to the reality of a "bourgeois workers party" in the middle of a civil war between the bourgeoisie and the workers. The Mensheviks were active in fomenting the anti-government strikes in Petrograd on the eve of the Kronstadt mutiny, and in the course of the first three months of 1921 some 5,000 Mensheviks were arrested, includ-

ing the entire party central committee. On 17 March, as the refugees from Kronstadt were crossing the ice to refuge with the Whites in Finland, the deposed Menshevik government in Georgia set sail to West European exile. They had chosen sides in the Civil War and their side lost.

The Anarchists

The anarchists ranged from harmless utopians, active terrorists and pro-Soviet revolutionists through to outright criminals. Considering Avrich's political sympathies we can do no better than to quote his description of Russian anarchism and its relation to the new workers state:

"During the spring of 1918, local anarchist groups began to form armed detachments of Black Guards which sometimes carried out 'expropriations', that is, held up banks, shops and private homes. Most of their comrades—especially the 'Soviet anarchists'—condemned such acts as parodies of the libertarian ideal, which wasted precious lives, demoralized the movement's true adherents and discredited anarchism in the eyes of the general public....

"After the bitter opposition of the anarchists to the treaty of Brest-Litovsk their formation of armed guards and occasional underworld excursions led the Bolsheviks to act against them. On the night of 11-12 April 1918 the Cheka raided twenty-six anarchist centres in Moscow, killing or wounding some forty anarchists and taking more than five hundred prisoners [most of whom were subsequently released]....

"The breathing space that Lenin won at Brest-Litovsk was of short duration. By the summer of 1918 the Bolshevik regime was plunged in a life-and-death struggle with its enemies, both foreign and domestic. While most anarchists continued to support the government, a growing number called for a mass rising against Reds and Whites alike.... Fiery manifestoes...encouraged the people to revolt against their new masters. In the south, a spawning ground for anarchist 'battle detachments,' the Bakunin Partisans of Ekaterinoslav sang of a new 'era of dynamite' that would eliminate the oppressors of every political hue.... And in Moscow, the new capital, anarchist Black Guards who had survived the Cheka raids of April 1918 went so far as to plan an armed seizure of the city, but were talked out of it by their more moderate comrades. The campaign of terrorism continued for many months, reaching a climax in September 1919, when a group of 'underground anarchists,' in league with Left SR's, bombed the Moscow headquarters of the Communist party, killing or wounding sixty-seven people. This, however, only led to greater repression."

—Paul Avrich, ed., *The Anarchists in the Russian Revolution*

Despite this, as even Leonard Schapiro acknowledges, "the Anarchists were never at any time officially outlawed by decree.... Although individual publications were frequently suppressed... it is apparently true to say that until the spring of 1921 there was no time during which at least some of their groups did not enjoy some vehicle of self-expression" (*The Origin of the Communist Autocracy*). It is certainly true, of course, that the Bolsheviks were rather less tolerant of such "vehicles of self-expression" as were thrown into their Moscow headquarters. And yet they did try to meet the "sincere anarchists" halfway. To no avail. As Schapiro describes it:

"When Kamenev in 1920 offered the Moscow Anarchists freedom to issue their papers and to run their clubs and bookshops in exchange for their adoption of party discipline and a purge of the criminal and irresponsible elements which had infiltrated into their membership, they indignantly rejected the offer."

Ibid.

Dictatorship of the Party?

It would be foolish to maintain that every single arrest of a Left SR, Menshevik or anarchist was a correct action. Despite the documented attempts of the Bolsheviks to differentiate—and foster differentiation—between "defeatist" and "defensist" currents among their social-democratic, populist and anarchist opponents, a desperate civil war does not create an ideal climate for judicial impartiality. Nor was it easy to distinguish among the variegated wavering currents in all these petty-bourgeois groupings.

The Bolsheviks were the only force in the revolutionary crisis of 1917 to fight for a regime based on soviet power. They led the insurrection which established the Soviet republic. Throughout the Civil War and until the Stalinist victory clamped on the straitjacket of bureaucratic rule, the party of Lenin and Trotsky sought to maintain its leadership of the proletarian dictatorship through the support of the majority of the workers, expressed through the soviets. The events surrounding the Kronstadt mutiny, however, threatened the very existence of the Soviet regime under extremely unfavorable circumstances.

In a stable workers state Leninists favor full democratic rights for all political tendencies which do not seek the forcible overthrow of the proletarian dictatorship. That includes recognizing the possibility of the Communists losing

a vote in soviet bodies. But the embattled Russian workers republic of 1918-22 was anything but stable, and had the Bolsheviks stepped down to be replaced by social-democratic, populist or anarchist elements, then very soon both the Leninists and their petty-bourgeois opponents would have found themselves facing the White firing squads. No doubt we would today be reading the theses, monographs and books by "left" academics about the admirable, but after all impractical and utopian Russian Marxists.

As one Russian socialist expressed it in 1920:

"In a class struggle which has entered the phase of civil war, there are bound to be times when the advance guard of the revolutionary class, representing the interests of the broad masses but ahead of them in political consciousness, is obliged to exercise state power by means of a dictatorship of the revolutionary minority."

We agree entirely with this concise summary of Bolshevik policy during the Civil War and the Kronstadt crisis. And who authored this concise defense of Leninism? None other than the Menshevik Julius Martov. ■

Dictatorship of Party or Proletariat?

Remarks on a Conception of the A.W.P. . . . and Others

EVER since the Russian revolution restored the idea of proletarian dictatorship to its rightful place in living Marxian doctrine, the social reformists of all varieties have condemned it as obsolete or rejected it with a contemptuous reference to its possible or exclusive applicability to Uzbecks, Bashkirs and other Asiatic Bolsheviks. In the last year, however, the titanic shock of the Austrian cataclysm has blown breaches through the democratic dogmas of official socialism and everywhere in its ranks new voices are being heard.

"The establishment of the proletarian dictatorship," declares the latest program of the American Socialist Party's "Militants Group", "is again being proclaimed by one party after another as the first step on the road to socialism." Otto Bauer has somewhat belatedly reminded himself that the "revolutionary dictatorship of the working class" ought to be established when next the opportunity is afforded in Austria. The Detroit convention of the Socialist Party voted for the idea, after which a corps of National Executive Committee lawyers, apparently oblivious of the fact that the United States Supreme Court would willingly and freely do the job for them, was sent scurrying through law libraries to find out if the dictatorship of the proletariat is constitutional. Even Mr. Norman Thomas is in the mode and dallies distantly with one of the less impolite pseudonyms for the dictatorship, workers' democracy.

If the late Elbert H. Gary could say, "We are all socialists now" —it can be said today, "We are all for the dictatorship of the proletariat now." And exactly in the same spirit. For, are we not to be permitted a meek skepticism about the sudden conversion to proletarian dictatorship on the part of many who up to yesterday were justly considered congenital Right wingers? Alas, the skepticism is more than warranted the minute one looks a line further than the formula itself in the various new documents that multiply like rabbits.

The resolution of the "Left" wing minority at the Paris conference of the Second International last August declares itself, for example, for the "dictatorship of the revolutionary party". The Militants Group, which supported this resolution, has tardily discovered that this is a bad translation (*cf.*, their program, p. 15). It should read "the dictatorship of the revolutionary *classes*". Which classes? The proletariat and what other? To muddle up what is already obscure, we are told further that proletarian democracy "is the only guarantee for the development of the dictatorship by the revolutionary classes *into* a dictatorship of workers and peasants". Assuming for the moment that by the time this article appears it will not have been discovered that another bad translation has been made, it is not improper to ask just what is to be the content of the dictatorship by the revolutionary *classes* which, with the aid of one thing or another, is to *develop into* what is apparently something else, a dictatorship of workers and peasants.

We are further confounded by the proposal (p. 16) that the "phrase 'dictatorship of the proletariat' may not be advisable to express the ideas for which it stands . . . it is desirable to designate it by some other term, such as 'workers' democracy'" The American Workers Party thus gains an adherent, for it advances essentially the same idea in its program and discussions. But the Militants Group is not the only one. Norman Thomas (*New Leader*, May 12, 1934) shows just what can be done with this "pseudonym" for the dictatorship of the proletariat, by saying "that even in a transitional period the ideal to hold up and to work for is workers' democracy *rather than* a dictatorship of the proletariat, which means a dictatorship of one party".* The Militants Group program (p. 14) which is for the proletarian dictatorship (but not for the "Russian way") is, however, opposed to the "one party dictatorship for which Stalinism stands". (We shall see presently who stands for that.) One of the latter-day Militants who wisely hopped on its bandwagon at the last moment as the most effective way of saving reformism and who instantly became a prominent luminary—Haim Kantorovitch—rounds out the conception: "What we have in Russia at present is not a dictatorship of the proletariat, but a dictatorship *ovér* the proletariat." (*Towards Socialist Re-orientation*, p. 19, Italics by H. K.)†

So they are all for one kind of dictatorship of the proletariat or another, just as even Morris Hillquit was in 1921 when he cleverly adjusted himself to the spirit of the day in order to save the spirit of yesterday. But they all recoil like one man from the Medusa: "dictatorship of the party", or "dictatorship of one party". (The Militants Group proposes the re-legalization of the Mensheviks in Russia!) To some, that is pure Bolshevism. Others, who wrap themselves in a few shreds of Bolshevism against the winds of Left wing criticism, shrewdly make the idea seem odious by calling it Stalinism.

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The hostility to a dictatorship of the party is shared by the American Workers Party. In its open letter to the Revolutionary Policy Committee of the Socialist Party it assails the Stalinists for their "revisionist identification of workers' democracy with party dictatorship". In the discussion session between its sub-committee and the Communist League of America's (June 6, 1934), a warm polemic developed because of our refusal to accept their standpoint on this question. Now, the dictatorship in all its aspects and implications remains the fundamental question of the program. The

*Unless otherwise indicated, all italics are my own. M. S.

†Kantorovitch's Militants demand the defense of the Soviet Union, where a dictatorship *over* the proletariat prevails. Why? What class is dictating *over* the proletariat? What system of property relations does this class represent and defend,

well or ill? In any other country where there exists a dictatorship *over* the proletariat (Italy, Germany, France, United States) we regard it as simple social patriotism to "defend the fatherland". Loose and ambiguous language does not always mean a loose mind; sometimes it means an extremely "astute" one.

conception of comrades Budenz, Burnham and Hook was not only that the dictatorship of the proletariat and the dictatorship of the party are not identical (which they are not, to be sure), but that they exclude each other, the latter producing the degeneration of the former; that there is an *immanent contradiction and conflict* between the two. Our own standpoint was not only gratuitously compared with Stalin's, but we were confidently challenged to present and defend it.

It is not in the spirit of accepting a challenge that we intend to do precisely that, but more out of consideration for the obviously urgent need of establishing clarity in this highly important question, mindful not only of the A. W. P. position but also of the position of those thinking socialists who no longer shy away from either the phrase or the idea of the proletarian dictatorship (even in America).

Is the dictatorship of the proletariat identical with the dictatorship of the party? Obviously not. That would be as absurd as to ask if the proletariat itself is identical with its party. Did any representative Bolshevik ever entertain such an idea, before or after Lenin's death? Never, to our knowledge. In 1922, the eleventh congress of the Russian Communist Party "especially underscored" the resolution of the eighth congress, in 1919, on the mutual relations between party and Soviet organs: "The functions of the party collective must in no case be confounded with the powers of the state organs, such as are the Soviets. Such a confusion would yield disastrous results, particularly in the military field. The party endeavors to direct the activity of the Soviets, but not to replace them." (*Russische Korrespondenz*, April-May 1922, p. 283.)

—Then it is not a dictatorship of the party, said the Bolsheviks!

—Not so fast! It is a dictatorship of the proletariat. So the Bolsheviks said, and so indeed it was. But never did they put the question: dictatorship of the proletariat *or* dictatorship of the party, dictatorship of the proletariat *versus* dictatorship of the party. They left that kind of metaphysic to two classes of opponents: the reformists, led by Kautsky, and the ultra-Leftist, semi-anarchist or semi-syndicalist groups, led by the German Communist Labor Party. The reason why they never *counterposed* the two will be seen from the writings of Lenin and other authoritative spokesmen. *Magister dixit*—that does not prove the validity of one side of the argument or the other. Not necessarily or at all times. But this time what is involved is precisely what these authentic teachers did say on the question. Consequently we permit ourselves to confine the dispute essentially to quotations from Lenin, Trotsky and others so as to establish whether the dictatorship of the party is Leninist or "revisionist", i. e., a Stalinist innovation.

"The question arises:" asked one group of German ultra-Leftists in its pamphlet of 1920, "Who should be the wielder of this dictatorship; the Communist Party or the proletarian class . . .? On principle, should we strive towards the dictatorship of the Communist Party or the dictatorship of the proletarian class?"

To which Lenin, who advised western revolutionists to praise the Bolsheviks less and learn from their experiences more, retorted: "The very posing of the question: 'Dictatorship of the party or dictatorship of the class?—Dictatorship (party) of the leaders or dictatorship (party) of the mass?' is proof of a quite incredible and hopeless mental confusion. People wear themselves out in order to concoct something extraordinary, and in their intellectual zeal make themselves ridiculous." (*Collected Works*, Vol. XXI, p. 225 [German edition].)

At the end of the same year, in a speech to the party fraction in the eighth all-Russian Soviet congress, Lenin dealt with exactly the same question from a somewhat different angle: "The dictatorship of the proletariat cannot be realized by means of an unbroken organization, for not only with us, in one of the most backward capitalist countries, but in all the other capitalist countries as well, the proletariat still remains so split up, so bowed down, here and there so corrupted (particularly by imperialism in the separate countries), that an all-embracing organization of the proletariat cannot directly realize its dictatorship. The dictatorship can be realized only by that vanguard which has absorbed the revolutionary energy of the class. In this manner there arises to a certain extent a system of cog-wheels. That is what the mechanism of the foundation of the dictatorship of the proletariat looks like, the essence of the transition from capitalism to Communism." (*Selected Works, The Struggle for the Social Revolution*, p. 590. [German edition].)

Again, in his speech to the educational congress held shortly after the revolution, Lenin declared: "When we are reproached for establishing the dictatorship of a single party and the single socialist front is proposed to us, we reply: 'Yes, dictatorship of a single party and on that score we shall not yield, for it is this party which, in the course of many years, has won its place as vanguard of the whole industrial proletariat.'" (G. Zinoviev, *Le Léninisme*, p. 303.)

In this spirit, the twelfth congress of the Russian Communists adopted a resolution stating: "The dictatorship of the working class can be secured in no other way than through the form of the dictatorship of its advanced vanguard, that is, the Communist party."

In far greater detail, we have the view of Trotsky, written down in a work which enjoyed the official approval of the Russian Communists and the Communist International as well as a wide distribution in several languages. "The exceptional rôle of the Communist party in the victorious proletarian revolution is quite comprehensible. The question is of the dictatorship of the class. Into the composition of the class there enter various strata, heterogeneous moods, different levels of development. The dictatorship, however, presupposes unity of will, direction, action. Along what other road then can it be attained? The revolutionary supremacy of the proletariat presupposes within the proletariat itself the political supremacy of a party, with a clear program of action and an inviolable internal discipline.

"The policy of coalitions contradicts internally the régime of the

revolutionary dictatorship. We have in view, not coalitions with bourgeois parties, of which of course there can be no talk, but a coalition of Communists with other 'Socialist' organizations, representing different stages of backwardness and prejudice of the laboring masses.

"The revolution swiftly undermines all that is unstable, wears out all that is artificial; the contradictions glossed over in a coalition are swiftly revealed under the pressure of revolutionary events. We have had an example of this in Hungary, where the dictatorship of the proletariat assumed the political form of a coalition of the Communists with the compromisers decked in red. The coalition soon broke up. The Communist party paid heavily for the revolutionary incompetence and political treachery of its companions. It is quite obvious that for the Hungarian Communists it would have been more advantageous to have come to power later, after having afforded the Left compromisers the possibility of compromising themselves once and for all. How far this was possible, is another question. In any case, the coalition with the compromisers only temporarily hid the relative weakness of the Hungarian Communists, at the same time prevented them from growing stronger at the expense of the compromisers, and brought them to disaster.

"The same idea is sufficiently illustrated by the example of the Russian revolution. The coalition of the Bolsheviks with the Left Social Revolutionists, which lasted for several months, ended with a bloody conflict. True, the reckoning for the coalition had to be paid, not so much by us Communists as by our perfidious companions. It is obvious that such a coalition, in which we were the stronger side, and therefore were not taking too many risks in the attempt to make use of the extreme Left wing of petty bourgeois democracy for the duration of an historical stretch of the road, tactically must be completely justified. But nonetheless, the Left S. R. episode quite clearly shows that the régime of compromises, agreements, mutual concessions—for that is what a coalition régime is—cannot last long in an epoch in which situations change with extreme rapidity, and in which supreme unity in point of view is necessary in order to render possible unity of action.

"We have more than once been accused of having substituted for the dictatorship of the Soviets the dictatorship of our party. Yet it can be said with complete justice that *the dictatorship of the Soviets became possible only by means of the dictatorship of the party*. It is thanks to the clarity of its theoretical vision and its firm revolutionary organization that the party assured the Soviets the possibility of becoming transformed from amorphous parliaments of labor into the apparatus of the domination of labor. In this 'substitution' of the power of the party for the power of the working class there is nothing accidental, and in reality there is absolutely no substitution at all. The Communists express the fundamental interests of the working class. It is quite natural that, in the period in which history places these interests on the order of the day in all their magnitude, the Communists should become the recognized representatives of the working class as a whole. . . . The Kautskyans accuse the Soviet power of being the dictatorship of a

'section' of the working class. 'If only,' they say, 'the dictatorship was carried out by the *whole* class!' It is not easy to understand what they actually have in mind by this. The dictatorship of the proletariat, by its innermost essence, signifies the direct domination of the revolutionary vanguard, which rests upon the heavy masses, and where necessary, obliges the backward rear to conform with the head." (*Terrorismus und Kommunismus*, p. 90ff.)

By this time a fairly accurate idea should exist as to where the "revision" is located, or rather where it is *not* located. Now let us inquire into where a revision, without quotation marks, actually did occur. The results will not prove uninteresting, and to some—surprising.

In 1924, a brochure called *The Results of the Thirteenth Congress of the Russian Communist Party* commented on the phrase "dictatorship of the party" as follows: "I remember that in one of the resolutions of our congress, it even appears, in the resolution of the twelfth congress, such an expression was permitted, naturally as an oversight [!] . . . Then Lenin is wrong in speaking of the dictatorship of the proletariat and not of the dictatorship of the party," concludes the author with that irony peculiarly his own.

The author is no other than the same Stalin to whom Kantorovich and others, with such cruel injustice, attribute the introduction into Soviet life of the idea of party dictatorship as against the dictatorship of the proletariat! Had they said black is white they could not be further from the truth.

Immediately after the appearance of the brochure, Zinoviev penned a stiff reply in which the Lenin position was reproduced and which, with the approbation of the overwhelming majority of the members of the Central Committee and the Political Bureau, appeared in *Pravda* (No. 190). By 1926, however, not only had Zinoviev joined with Trotsky in the famous Opposition Bloc but Stalin had gained sufficient control of the party apparatus to attack more impudently and with greater impunity every fundamental idea for which Lenin and the party ever stood. Stalin now took the offensive on the question and raked Zinoviev fore and aft for his views on the dictatorship of the proletariat and the party, especially as expressed in his book *Leninism*, compiled from lectures delivered in 1924 which were, in their time, anonymously directed at Stalin. The polemic can be found, among other places, in the speeches delivered by the two opponents at the November-December 1926 plenary session of the executive committee of the Communist International (seventh plenum).

The theoretical import of the dispute is far from trifling, but the practical results of Stalin's position are of even greater concern. Stalin's standpoint did not mean, as might be superficially indicated, that he stood for the rule of million-headed masses instead of its "undemocratic usurpation" by a comparatively tiny party. Just the opposite tendency should be discerned. After mechanically counterposing the one to the other, Stalin has strangled Soviet democracy by strangling party democracy. The Soviets themselves have been hollowed out into shells because the Stalinist apparatus has systematically clubbed the party into an amorphous, impotent pulp. (The

reformist elucubrations about Stalin's "dictatorship of the party" are positively ludicrous, even in the sense in which it is used; it is precisely the party that Stalin has crushed!) The indispensable pre-requisite for the reestablishment and the widest extension of Soviet democracy, for the reconsolidation of the proletarian dictatorship which Stalinism has undermined, is nothing short of the rebuilding and restoration to its former supremacy of the revolutionary Communist party in the U. S. S. R.!

To probable critics:

Shouldn't the real (?!) power lie with the Soviets, after all? Yes, but not *as against* the revolutionary party (see, Germany and Austria in 1918, Cronstadt, Miliukov's slogan: "Soviets without Communists"). The Soviet system is the political form of the dictatorship of the proletariat which is firmly realizable only through its vanguard, the party.

Isn't a Soviet-party conflict theoretically possible, and in that case who would submit to whom? All sorts of things are theoretically possible; consequently, "theoretically" the party would submit and seek to convince the Soviets.

Aren't you presupposing an ideal, incorruptible revolutionary party, which you really cannot guarantee? We guarantee nothing in the class struggle. If the party degenerates, fight inside for its regeneration; if that becomes hopeless, fight to build a new one. Without it—no dictatorship of the party, nor of the proletariat; no Soviet democracy—only the triumph of reaction.

How can you one-party-dictatorship people win the socialists when you tell them that after the revolution their party will be suppressed? (The Stalinists often ask us how we can propose a united front with the party that betrayed the workers!) We do not, however, tell the socialists anything of the kind. The revolutionary dictatorship will suppress only those who take up arms against it—the Bolsheviks never did more than that in Russia (see, Trotsky's article in 1932 on Socialist and Communist relations in the struggle to seize power in Germany, *The Militant*, No. 168.)

How can you be so sure that events, let us say, in the United States will follow the Russian pattern in such details? 1. It is not the "Russian" pattern; 2. The Hungarian revolution broke its neck on this "detail"; 3. History is not for professors, but something to learn from, and truth being always concrete, the lessons to be drawn from the history of the last seventeen years, at least, of revolutionary struggle lead to certain inescapable conclusions. We leave it to Kantorovitch to mumble (at this late date!) about the "possibility" of following several "non-Russian" roads to power. We follow Lenin.

Max SHACHTMAN

The Truth About Kronstadt

The following article is a summary presentation of material contained in a pamphlet on this subject by the writer, which is planned for early publication.

THE MORE INDEFENSIBLE and iniquitous becomes the course pursued by the Anarchists in Spain, the louder their confrères abroad cry about Kronstadt. During the years of revolutionary upsurge, the Anarchists, the Mensheviks, the S.R.'s *et al.*, were on the defensive. Today, Stalinism has provided them with a demagogic cover for an offensive against those principles which alone made October possible. They seek to compromise Bolshevism by identifying it with Stalinism. They seize upon Kronstadt as their point of departure. Their theorem is most "elementary": Stalin shoots workers only because it is the essence of Bolshevism to shoot down workers; for example, Kronstadt! Lenin and Stalin are one. *Q.E.D.*

The whole art lies in distorting historical facts, monstrously exaggerating every subsidiary issue or question on which the Bolsheviks may have erred, and throwing a veil over the armed uprising against the Soviet power and the *real* program and aims of the mutiny.

Our task is primarily to expose the distorters and falsifiers at work on the historical "facts" that serve them as a basis for their arraignment of Bolshevism.

First, as to the background of the mutiny. Far from occurring at a time when the Soviet power was out of danger (as the ideological adversaries of Bolshevism imply), it occurred in the year 1921, a crucial year in the life of the workers' state. By December 1920 the fronts in the Civil War were liquidated. There were no "fronts" but the danger still remained. The land with the barbaric heritage of Asiatic Czarism had been literally bled white by the havoc of the imperialist war, the years of Civil War and of imperialist blockade. The crisis in foodstuffs was aggravated by a fuel crisis. Vast sections of the population faced the immediate prospect of dying from hunger or freezing to death. With industry in ruins, transportation disrupted, millions of men demobilized from the army, the masses on the point of exhaustion, fertile soil was indeed available for the intrigues of the counter-revolution.

Far from reconciling themselves to defeat, the White Guards and their imperialist allies were stirred to new activity by the objective difficulties confronting the Bolsheviks. They made attempt after attempt to force a breach "from the inside", banking largely upon the support of petty bourgeois reaction against the difficulties and privations accompanying the proletarian revolution.¹ The most important episode in this series took place in the very heart of the revolutionary stronghold. In the naval fortress of Kronstadt, a mutiny flared on March 2, 1921.

Nowadays a Dan says blandly: "The Kronstadters did not at all begin the insurrection. It is a slanderous myth."² But in 1921, the

S.R.'s crawled out of their skins to make light of the uprising and all that it implied, while the Mensheviks tried to minimize and explain it away as something really unimportant in itself. The S.R.'s vowed that "the peaceful character of the Kronstadt movement was beyond any doubt"; if any insurgent steps were taken, they were only "measures of self-defense". Here is what the Mensheviks wrote not in the year 1937 but in 1921 when the events were still fresh:

The fact that Kronstadt's break with the Soviet power assumed the character of an armed uprising and ended in a bloody tragedy is of secondary importance in itself and, to a certain extent, accidental. Had the Soviet power evinced a little less granite hardness towards Kronstadt, the conflict between it and the sailors would have unfolded in less grave forms. This, however, would have in no way changed its historical significance. . . . Only on March 2, in reply to repressions, threats, and commands to obey unconditionally did the fleet reply with a resolution of non-recognition of the Soviet power and place two commissars under arrest.³

When Mensheviks originally presented their version of the Kronstadt events, they did not at all deny that Kronstadters *began* the mutiny. To be sure, they tried to convey the impression that there was more than ample justification for this in the alleged "repressions, threats, and commands". But you will observe that they simultaneously tried to evade the nub of the issue, the uprising itself, as a fact, after all, of little importance, secondary, and even "accidental". Why this glaring contradiction? They themselves supply the answer. It is their open avowal that this mutiny unfolded on the basis of anti-Soviet aims and program.⁴ The truth being what it was, it is hardly surprising that Berkman rushed to give us his oath for it that the Kronstadt mutineers were really "staunch adherents of the Soviet system" and were "earnestly seeking to find, by means friendly and peaceful, a solution of the pressing problems".⁵ In any case, these purveyors of "truth" are all agreed upon one thing, namely, that these "staunch" partisans of the Soviet power proceeded in the friendliest spirit of peace to take up arms—on the basis of a resolution of "non-recognition of Soviet power". But they did it, you see, "only on March 2".

"Only on March 2"! Every pertinent detail must be dolled up, otherwise the truth might not be so palatable. By this formulation,

¹In Jan.-March 1921, occurred the Tumensk mutiny in the Tobolsk area in Siberia. The insurgents numbered 20,000 men. In May 1921, White Guard detachments aided by the Japanese descended on Vladivostok, which they held for a short time. After the signing of the Riga treaty (March 18, 1921), White Guard bands, some numbering thousands, others mere handfuls, invaded the Ukraine and other points of Soviet territory. Another series of raids followed into Karelia which began in October 23, 1921 and was liquidated only in February 1922. As late as October 1922, Soviet territory was dotted with roaming guerilla bands of the counter-revolution.

²*Sotsialisticheski Vestnik*, Aug. 25, 1937.

³*Sots. Vestnik*, April 5, 1921. Our emphasis.

⁴The S.R.'s were a trifle less precise on the political and seamy side of the mutiny. They said: "The working class organizations demanded a drastic change of power: some in the form of freely elected Soviets, others in the form of convoking the Constituent Assembly." (*The Truth About Russia, Volya Rossii*, Prague, 1921, p. 5.) In publishing this book the S.R.'s abroad made only a belated acknowledgement of their political part in the mutiny, even though their spokesmen in Russia at the time hid behind a mask of non-partisanship. This book has served as the principal, if not the only, source drawn upon by all the past and present critics of Bolshevism. Berkman's pamphlet, *The Kronstadt Rebellion* (1922) is merely a restatement of the alleged facts and interpretations of the S.R.'s, with a few significant alterations.

⁵*The Kronstadt Rebellion*, p. 12. Emphasis in the original.

the Mensheviks, who only echo the S.R.'s, intend to evoke in the reader's mind, if not years and months then at least weeks of "provocation", "threats", "commands", "repressions", *etc., etc.* But stretch their chronology as they will, these historians together with their neophytes cannot antedate March 2 except by reference to events "towards the end of February". Their history of Kronstadt dates back as far as (and no further than) February 22—for occurrences not in Kronstadt but in Petrograd. As for Kronstadt itself, they can anticipate March 2 only by reference to February 28! Count as they will, they have at their disposal: *three* days and *three* resolutions. March 2 with its resolution of non-recognition of the Soviet power is preceded only by March 1 with its resolution for "freely elected Soviets". What happened within this interval of less than 24 hours to cause this swing from one alleged pole to its diametrical opposite? The only answer we get from the lips of the adversaries is the following: a Conference took place at Kronstadt. And what happened there?

Each "historian" gives his own account. Lawrence⁶ would have it, that the Conference was called for the purpose of drawing up and passing a resolution. Berkman insists that it was rather a gathering "to take counsel with the representatives of the Government."⁷ The S.R.'s swear that it was an electoral body, gathered for the specific purpose of electing a new Soviet, although the incumbent Soviet's term *had not yet expired.*⁸ To believe Berkman (and Lawrence), the Kronstadters were provoked to mutiny by Kuzmin's speech. In this they only improve on the S.R.'s who blame Kuzmin and Vassiliev.⁹

The most complete account of Kuzmin's speech is to be found in *Kronstadt Izvestia*, *i.e.*, the organ of eye witnesses and chief participants at the Conference. Here it is:

Instead of calming the meeting comrade Kuzmin irritated it. He spoke of the equivocal position of Kronstadt, patrols, dual power, the danger threatening from Poland, and the fact that the eyes of all Europe were upon us; assured us that all was quiet in Petrograd; underscored that he was wholly at the mercy of the delegates and that they had it in their power to shoot him if they so willed. He concluded his speech with a declaration that if the delegates wanted an open armed struggle then it would take place—the Communists would not voluntarily renounce power and would fight to the last ditch.¹⁰

We leave it to future psychologists to decide why the S.R.'s chose to treat the contents of Kuzmin's speech in a different manner from Berkman's, and why they refrained from resorting to quotation marks as Berkman and Lawrence do in referring to Kuzmin's concluding statement. We cannot here take up in detail the glaring discrepancies in the various versions. Suffice it to say that the more we learn about Kuzmin's speech the more acutely the question poses itself: Just who did play the part of provocateur at this meeting?

⁶ *Vanguard*, Feb.-March, 1937.

⁷ *Loc. cit.*, pp. 12-13.

⁸ *Loc. cit.*, p. 11.

⁹ Victor Serge believes that it was all Kalinin's fault. "The Central Committee committed the enormous mistake of sending Kalinin. . . ." (*La Révolution Proletarienne*, Sept. 1937.)

¹⁰ *Izvestia of the Prov. Rev. Com. of Kronstadt*, No. 11, March 13, 1921.

A special point is made in all accounts of the fact that Kuzmin insisted that Petrograd was quiet (Berkman adds—on whose authority?—"and the workers satisfied"). Why should this have provoked anybody who was not being goaded into provocation? Was Kuzmin telling the truth? Or did the *Kronstadt Izvestia* lie when in its very first issue, on the next day, it carried a sensational headline: *General Insurrection in Petrograd*? Moreover, why did *Izvestia* keep lying about this and other alleged insurrections? Why did it even reprint dispatches from Helsingfors to bolster up its campaign of slander? In short, take Kuzmin's speech point by point as reported by *Izvestia*—or in any of the alleged summaries of it, yes, with or without Berkman's insidious quotation marks—and tell us not whether you are "simple men", "men and not old women", etc., etc., but whether if you had been delegates at this meeting to "elect a new Soviet", you would have thereupon stayed and appointed a "Provisional Revolutionary Committee"? Tell us, furthermore, whether you would have taken up arms in mutiny against the Soviet State? If not, why do you peddle this S.R. garbage and seek to confuse the vanguard of the working class with regard to what actually took place in Kronstadt—and especially at this meeting?

An incident far more ominous and elucidating than anything that Kuzmin might or might not have said took place at this gathering, which all the Berkman's slur over in a very tell-tale fashion. The Conference was thrown into a frenzy not by anything said by Kuzmin or Vassiliev (or Kalinin who was *not* present), but by a statement made from the floor that the Bolsheviks were marching arms in hand to attack the meeting. It was this that precipitated the "election" of a Provisional Revolutionary Committee. We look in vain in the writings of the "truthful" historians for any clarification as to the source of these "rumors". More than that, they conveniently "forget" (Berkman among others) that the Provisional Revolutionary Committee officially laid this rumor at the door of the *Bolsheviks themselves*. "This rumor was circulated by Communists in order to break up the meeting." (*Izvestia*, No. 11.) *Izvestia* furthermore admitted that the "report" that the Bolsheviks were about to attack the meeting with "fifteen carloads of soldiers and Communists, armed with rifles and machine guns" was made by "a delegate from *Sevastopol*". Even after the suppression of the mutiny the S.R.'s insisted that "according to the testimony of one of the authoritative leaders of the Kronstadt movement", the rumor about Dulkis and the *Kursanti* was true. Not only were rumors spread throughout the meeting, but the chairman concluded on this self-same note. From the account in *Kronstadt Izvestia* we learn that: "At the very last moment, the *comrade chairman* made an announcement that a detachment of 2,000 men was marching to attack the meeting, whereupon the assembled body dispersed with mingled emotions of alarm, excitement, and indignation. . . ." (No. 9, March 11, 1921.)

Who spread these rumors and why? We say: The ones who

circulated them were the same people who spread the lies about the insurrection in Petrograd; the very ones who raised the slogan of the Constituent Assembly at the beginning and then switched to the "more realistic" slogan of "*Down with the Bankrupt Commune!*" (resolution adopted in Kronstadt on March 7); the very ones who charged that the "Bolshevik power had led us to famine, cold and chaos"; those who, masquerading as non-partisans, were duping the masses in Kronstadt; those who were seeking to capitalize on the difficulties of the Soviet power, and who headed the movement in order to guide it into the channels of the counter-revolution.

There is not a shadow of doubt that the S.R.'s were the prime, if not the sole, movers of this campaign of "rumors", which brought such infamous fruit. Any possibility for a peaceful solution of the Kronstadt crisis was eliminated, once a dual power was organized in the fortress. Time was indeed pressing, as we shall shortly prove. However one may speculate about the chances for averting bloodshed, the fact remains that it took the leaders of the mutiny only 72 hours to lead their followers (and dupes) into a direct conflict with the Soviets.

It is by no means excluded that the local authorities in Kronstadt bungled in their handling of the situation. The fact that the best revolutionists and fighters were urgently needed at vital centers would tend to support the contention that those assigned to so relatively "safe" a sector as Kronstadt were not men of outstanding qualifications. It is no secret that Kalinin, let alone Commissar Kuzmin, was none too highly esteemed by Lenin and his colleagues. The affinity between "mistakes" and such individuals as Kalinin is wonderful indeed but it cannot serve as a substitute for political analysis. In so far as the local authorities were blind to the full extent of the danger or failed to take proper and effective measures to cope with the crisis, to that extent their blunders played a part in the unfolding events, *i.e.*, facilitated for the counter-revolutionists their work of utilizing the objective difficulties to attain their ends.

How was it possible for the political leaders to turn Kronstadt so swiftly into an armed camp against the October revolution? What was the *real* aim of the mutineers? The supposition that the soldiers and sailors ventured upon an insurrection merely for the sake of the slogan of "Free Soviets" is absurd in itself. It is doubly absurd in view of the fact that the rest of the Kronstadt garrison consisted of backward and passive people who could not be used in the Civil War. These people could have been moved to insurrection only by profound economic needs and interests. These were the needs and interests of the fathers and brothers of these sailors and soldiers, that is, of peasants as traders in food products and raw materials. In other words, underlying the mutiny was the expression of the petty bourgeois reaction against the difficulties and privations imposed by the conditions of the proletarian revolution. Nobody can deny this class character of the two camps.

All other questions can be only of secondary importance. That the Bolsheviks may have committed errors of a general or concrete character, cannot alter the fact that they defended the acquisitions of the proletarian revolution against the bourgeois (and petty-bourgeois) reaction. That is why every critic must himself be examined from the standpoint as to which side of the firing line he finds himself. If he closes his eyes to the social and historical content of the Kronstadt mutiny then he is himself an element of petty bourgeois reaction against the proletarian revolution. (That is the case with Alexander Berkman, the Russian Mensheviks, and so on.) A trade union, say, of agricultural laborers may commit errors in a strike against farmers. We can criticize them but our criticism should be based upon a fundamental solidarity with the worker's trade union and upon our opposition to the exploiters of the workers even if these exploiters happen to be small farmers.

The Bolsheviks never claimed that their politics were infallible. That is a Stalinist credo. Victor Serge, in his assertion that the N.E.P. (i.e., a limited concession to unlimited bourgeois demands) was belatedly introduced, only repeats in a mild form the criticism of an important political error which Lenin himself sharply recognized in the spring of 1921. We are ready to grant the error. But how can this change our basic estimate? Far outweighing a speculation on the part of Serge or anybody else that the mutiny could have been avoided if only the Bolsheviks had granted the concession of the N.E.P. to Kronstadt, is the mutiny itself and the categorical declaration of *Kronstadt Izvestia* that the mutineers were demanding "not free trade but a genuine Soviet power" (No. 12, March 14, 1921).

What could and did this "genuine Soviet power" signify? We have already heard from the S.R.'s and Mensheviks their estimate of the basis of the mutiny. The S.R.'s and Mensheviks always maintained that their aims were identical with those of the Bolsheviks but only that they intended to attain them in a "different" way. We know the class content of this "difference". Lenin and Trotsky contended that the slogan of "Free Soviets" signified materially and practically, in principle as well as essence, the abolition of proletarian dictatorship instituted and represented by the Bolshevik party. This can be denied only by those who will deny that with all their partial errors the policies of the Bolsheviks stood always in the service of the proletarian revolution. Will Serge deny it? Yet Serge forgets that the elementary duty of a scientific analysis is not to take the abstract slogans of different groups but to discover their real social content.¹¹ In this case such an analysis presents no great difficulties.

Let us listen to the most authoritative spokesman of the Russian counter-revolution on his evaluation of the Kronstadt program. On March 11, 1921, in the very heat of the uprising, Miliukov wrote:

This program may be expressed in the brief slogan: "Down with the Bolsheviks! Long live the Soviets!" . . . "Long live the Soviets", at the present time, most likely signifies that the power will pass from the Bolsheviks to

the moderate socialists, who will receive a majority in the Soviets. . . . We have many other reasons for not protesting against the Kronstadt slogan. . . . It is self-evident for us, that leaving aside a forceful installation of power from the right or the left, this sanction [of the new power—J. G. W.] which is of course temporary, can be effected only through institutions of the type of Soviets. Only in this way can the transfer be effected painlessly and be recognized by the country as a whole.¹²

In a subsequent issue Miliukov's organ, *Poslednya Novosti*, insisted that the Bolshevik power could be supplanted only through Soviets "freed" from the Bolsheviks.¹³

In their defense of the Kronstadt mutiny, the Mensheviks, as staunch partisans of capitalist restoration, held essentially the same viewpoint as Miliukov. Together with the latter, the Mensheviks defended in Kronstadt a step towards the restoration of capitalism.¹⁴ In the years that followed they could not but favor in the main Stalin's course (advised by Abramovich and others in 1921) of "decisively breaking with all adventurist plans of spreading the 'world revolution'", and undertaking instead the building of socialism in one country. With a reservation here and a bleat there, they are today quite in favor of Stalin's gospel of socialism in one country. In this, as in remaining true to the banner raised by the Kronstadt mutiny, they only remain true to themselves—as the arch supporters of every open or veiled trend toward capitalist restoration in Russia and capitalist stabilization in the rest of the world.

The connection between the counter-revolution and Kronstadt can be established not only from the lips of the adversaries of Bolshevism but also on the basis of irrefutable facts. At the beginning of February when there was no sign of any disturbances either in Petrograd or nearby Kronstadt, the capitalist press abroad published dispatches purportedly relating to serious trouble in Kronstadt, giving details about an uprising in the fleet and the arrest of the Baltic Commissar.¹⁵ These dispatches, while false at the time, materialized with amazing precision a few weeks later.

Referring to this "coincidence", Lenin in his report to the Tenth Party Congress on March 8 1921 had the following to say:

We have witnessed the passing of power from the Bolsheviks to some kind of indefinite conglomeration or alliance of motley elements, presumably only

¹²In his recent comments on Kronstadt, Victor Serge concedes that the Bolsheviks once confronted with the mutiny had no other recourse except to crush it. In this he demarcates himself from the assorted varieties of Anarcho-Menshevism. But the substance of his contribution to the discussion is to lament over the experiences of history instead of seeking to understand them as a Marxist. Serge insists that it would have been "easy" to forestall the mutiny—if only the Central Committee had not sent Kalinin to talk to the sailors! Once the mutiny flared, it would have been "easy" to avoid the worst—if only Berkman had talked to the sailors! To adopt such an approach to the Kronstadt events is to take the superficial viewpoint: "Ah, if history had only spared us Kronstadt!" It can and does lead only to eclecticism and the loss of all political perspectives.

¹³*Poslednya Novosti*, March 11, 1921.

¹⁴*Idem.*, March 18, 1921.

¹⁵In the programmatic theses on Russia proposed by the Central Committee of the Mensheviks in 1921, we find the following: "Inasmuch as in the immediate period ahead the capitalist forms will retain their sway in world economy, therefore the economic system of the Russian Republic cannot but be consonant with the capitalist relations prevailing in the advanced countries of Europe and America. . . ." (*Sots. Vestnik*, Dec. 2, 1921.)

¹⁶"The Revolt of the Baltic Fleet Against the Soviet Government"—a signed article in *l'Echo de Paris*, Feb. 14, 1921. On the same day *Matin*, another Parisian newspaper, carried a dispatch under the heading: "Moscow Takes Measures Against the Kronstadt Insurgents." The Russian White Guard press carried similar dispatches. The specified source was Helsingfors, from where the dispatches were sent out on Feb. 11.

a little to the right and perhaps even to the "left" of the Bolsheviks—so indefinite is the sum of political groupings who have attempted to seize power in their hands in Kronstadt. It is beyond doubt that concurrently the White Guard Generals—as you all know—played a major part in this. This has been proved to the hilt. Two weeks prior to the Kronstadt events, the Parisian press already carried the news that there was an insurrection in Kronstadt. (*Works*, Vol. XXVI, p. 214.)

It is an easily established fact that when these dispatches came to the attention of Trotsky, *before any outbreaks in Kronstadt*, he immediately communicated with the Commissar of the Baltic fleet warning him to take precautions because the appearance of similar dispatches in the bourgeois press referring to other alleged uprisings had been shortly followed by counter-revolutionary attempts in the specified regions. It goes without saying that all the "truthful" historians prefer to pass over in silence this "coincidence", together with the fact that the capitalist press seized upon the mutiny to conduct an "unprecedented hysterical campaign" (Lenin).¹⁶ News items in this campaign could be adduced to any number, but no list would be complete without the reports on the same subject that appeared in the *Kronstadt Izvestia*:

First issue, March 3: "GENERAL INSURRECTION IN PETROGRAD."

March 7: Headline—"Last Minute News From Petrograd"—"Mass arrests and executions of workers and sailors continue. Situation very tense. All the toiling masses await an overturn at any moment."

March 8: "The Helsingfors newspaper *Hufvudstadsbladet* . . . prints the following news from Petrograd. . . . Petrograd workers are striking and demonstratively leaving the factories, crowds bearing red banners demand a change of government—the overthrow of the Communists."¹⁷

March 11: "The Government In Panic." "Our cry has been heard. Revolutionary sailors, Red Army men and workers in Petrograd are already coming to our assistance. . . . The Bolshevik power feels the ground slipping from under its feet and has issued orders in Petrograd to open fire at any group of five or more people gathering in the streets. . . ."

It is hardly surprising that the White Guard press abroad launched an intensive drive to raise funds, clothing, food, etc.,

¹⁶ In his concluding speech on March 16, Lenin read to the Congress a report covering the campaign in the press. Here are a few headlines in the papers referred to by Lenin:

"Moscow Rising Reported. Petrograd Fighting." (*London Times*, March 2, 1921.)

"L'Agitation Antibolchévique. Petrograd et Moscou Seraient aux Mains des Insurgés qui ont Formé un Gouvernement Provisoire." (*Matin*, March 7.)

"Kronstadt gegen Petrograd, Sinowjew Verhaftet." (*Berliner Tageblatt*, March 7.)

"Les Marins Révoltés Débarquent à Petrograd." (*Matin*, March 8.)

"Der Aufstand in Russland." (*Vossische Zeitung*, March 10.)

"Petrograd Fighting. Red Batteries Silenced." (*London Times*, March 9.)

¹⁷ The Mensheviks in Russia had no press of their own, and therefore could participate only clandestinely in the campaign of the imperialists abroad, and their S.R. allies in Kronstadt. Here is an opening paragraph in one of their leaflets, dated March 8, 1921, and issued in the name of the "Petersburg Committee of S.D.L.P.D.": "The structure of the Bolshevik dictatorship is cracking and crumbling. Peasant uprisings—in the Ukraine, in Siberia, in South-west Russia. . . . Strikes and ferment—among workers in Petersburg and Moscow. . . . The sailors in Kronstadt have risen. . . . Starvation, cold, misery and unprecedented embitterment rife among the population in the rest of Russia. . . . This is the unalluring picture of the Soviet Republic three years after the seizure of power by the Bolsheviks. The structure of the Bolshevik dictatorship is cracking and crumbling. . . ." (*Sots. Vestnik*, April 20, 1921.)

¹⁸ *Sots. Vestnik*, April 5, 1921. Our emphasis.

under the slogan: "*For Kronstadt!*"

How explain away this array of facts and incontrovertible evidence? Very simply: By charging the Bolsheviks with slander! No one is more brazen than Berkman in denying the connection between the counter-revolution and the mutiny. He goes so far as to declare flatly that the Czarist General Kozlovsky "played no rôle whatever in the Kronstadt events". The admissions of the S.R.'s themselves, and Kozlovsky's statements in an interview he gave to the press, establish beyond all doubt that Kozlovsky together with his officers openly associated themselves from the outset with the mutiny. Kozlovsky himself was "elected" to the "Council of Defense". Here is how the Mensheviks reported Kozlovsky's interview: "On the *very first day* of the insurrection the Council of Military Specialists had elaborated a plan for an immediate assault on Oranienbaum, which had every chance for success at the time, for the Government was caught off guard and could not have brought up reliable troops in time. . . . The *political leaders* of the insurrection would not agree to take the offensive and the opportunity was let slip."¹⁸

If the plan failed, it was only because Kozlovsky and his colleagues were unable to convince the "political leaders", i.e., his S.R. allies, that the moment was propitious for exposing their true visage and program. The S.R.'s thought it best to preserve the mask of "defense" and to temporize. When Berkman wrote his pamphlet, he knew these facts. Indeed, he reproduced the interview of Kozlovsky almost verbatim in his pages, making, as is his custom, a few significant alterations, and hiding the real source of what appears as his own appraisal.

It is no accident that Berkman and his neophytes have to plagiarize from all the Kozlovskys, and the S.R.'s and the Mensheviks. The rejection by the Anarchists of the Marxian analysis of the state inevitably leads them to the acceptance of any and all other views up to and including participation in the government of a bourgeois state.

How much time was there to "negotiate"? The mutineers were in control of the fortress on March 2. Both Kozlovsky and Berkman vouch for the fact that the Bolsheviks had been "caught by surprise". Trotsky arrived in Leningrad only on March 5. The first attack against Kronstadt was launched on March 8. Could the Bolsheviks have waited longer?

Many military experts hold the opinion that the failure of the mutiny was largely due to the failure of the ice to thaw. Had the waters begun to flow freely between Kronstadt and Leningrad, land troops could not have been used by the Soviet Government, while naval reinforcements could have been rushed to the insurgents already in control of a first class naval fortress, with battleships, heavy artillery, machine guns, etc., at their disposal. The danger of this development is neither a "myth" nor a "Bolshevik slander". *In the streets of Kronstadt ice was already thawing.* On March 15,

three days before the capture of the fortress in a heroic assault in which 300 delegates of the Tenth Party Congress participated, No. 13 of *Kronstadt Izvestia* featured on its front page an order to clear the streets "in view of the thaw". Had the Bolsheviks temporized, they would have precipitated a situation that would have taken an immeasurably greater toll of lives and sacrifices, let alone jeopardizing the very fate of the revolution.

When all these historians cite the names of the fortress and the names of the warships, *Petropavlovsk* and *Sevastopol*—"the ships that in 1917 had been the main support of the Bolsheviks"¹⁹—they carefully avoid mentioning the fact that the personnel of the fortress as well as of the warships could not have possibly remained static throughout the years between 1917 and 1921. While the fortress and the ships remained well-nigh intact physically, a great deal happened to the revolutionary sailors in the period of the Civil War, in which they played a heroic part in practically every sphere. It is of course impossible to paint the picture as if the Kronstadt sailors had participated in the October revolution of 1917 only to remain behind in the fortress and on the ships while their comrades-in-arms fought the Wrangels, Kolchaks, Denikins, Yudenitches, etc. But that is, in effect, what the opponents of Bolshevism attempt to imply with their harping on the words "Kronstadt", "revolutionary sailors", and so on. The trick is all too obvious. Trotsky's recent reply to Wendelin Thomas which pricks this bubble could not but have aroused their ire. With contemptible hypocrisy, all of them rise in fake indignation against Trotsky's pretended slur on the "mass". Yet in replying to Thomas, Trotsky merely rephrased the facts he brought out in 1921: "A great many of the revolutionary sailors, who played a major part in the October revolution of 1917 had been in the interim transferred to other spheres of activity. They were replaced in large measure by chance elements, among whom were a good many Latvian, Estonian and Finnish sailors, whose attitude to their duties was that of holding a temporary job and the bulk of whom were non-participants in the revolutionary struggle."

There is no spectacle more revolting than that of people who have, like the Anarchists and Mensheviks, been among other things the co-partners of Stalinism in its People's Frontism, and who bear the responsibility for the massacre of the flower of the Spanish proletariat, pointing an accusing finger at the leaders of the October revolution for putting down a mutiny against the revolution: It was all the fault of the Bolsheviks. They provoked the Kronstadters. . . . *Etc., etc.*

There is no denying that the S.R.'s and Mensheviks are experts, if not final authorities, on provocation. Nothing that Kerensky and Co. did ever provoked them even to justify the taking up of arms against the Provisional Government. On the contrary, the Mensheviks were very emphatic in 1917 in their demands that revolutionary Kronstadt—and Bolsheviks in general—be

¹⁹ Berkman, *The Kronstadt Rebellion*, p. 8.

"curbed". As for the S.R.'s, they did not long hesitate to take up arms in the struggle against October. Bolshevism always did "provoke" these gentlemen who have invariably taken their positions on the other side of the barricades.

These are the incontestable facts. The sailors composed the bulk of the insurgent forces. The garrison and the population remained passive. Caught off guard by the mutiny, the Red Army command at first sought to temporize, hoping for a shift in the moods of the insurgents. Time was pressing. When it became obvious that there was no possibility of tearing the grey mass from the leadership of the S.R.'s and their henchmen, Kronstadt was taken by assault. In so doing the Bolsheviks only did their duty. They defended the conquests of the revolution against the plots of the counter-revolution. That is the only verdict that history can and will pass.

John G. WRIGHT

Hue and Cry Over Kronstadt

A "People's Front" of Denouncers

THE CAMPAIGN AROUND KRONSTADT is being carried on with undiminished vigor in certain circles. One would think that the Kronstadt revolt occurred not seventeen years ago, but only yesterday. Participating in the campaign with equal zeal and under one and the same slogan are anarchists, Russian Mensheviks, left social-democrats of the London Bureau, individual blunderers, Miliukov's paper, and, on occasion, the big capitalist press. A "People's Front" of its own kind!

Only yesterday I happened across the following lines in a Mexican weekly which is both reactionary Catholic and "democratic": "Trotsky ordered the shooting of 1,500 [?] Kronstadt sailors, these purest of the pure. His policy when in power differed in no way from the present policy of Stalin." As is known, the left anarchists draw the same conclusion. When for the first time in the press I briefly answered the questions of Wendelin Thomas, member of the New York Commission of Inquiry, the Russian Mensheviks' paper immediately came to the defense of the Kronstadt sailors and . . . of Wendelin Thomas. Miliukov's paper came forward in the same spirit. The anarchists attacked me with still greater vigor. All these authorities claim that my answer was completely worthless. This unanimity is all the more remarkable since the anarchists defend, in the symbol of Kronstadt, genuine anti-state communism; the Mensheviks, at the time of the Kronstadt uprising, stood openly for the restoration of capitalism; and Miliukov stands for capitalism even now.

How can the Kronstadt uprising cause such heartburn to anarchists, Mensheviks, and "liberal" counter-revolutionists, all at the same time? The answer is simple: all these groupings are interested in compromising the only genuinely revolutionary current which has never repudiated its banner, has not compromised with its enemies, and which alone represents the future. It is because of this that among the belated denouncers of my Kronstadt "crime" there are so many *former* revolutionists or *half*-revolutionists, people who have lost their program and their principles and who find it necessary to divert attention from the degradation of the Second International or the perfidy of the Spanish anarchists. As yet, the Stalinists cannot openly join this campaign around Kronstadt but even they, of course, rub their hands with pleasure; for the blows are directed against "Trotskyism," against revolutionary Marxism, against the Fourth International!

Why in particular has this variegated fraternity seized precisely upon Kronstadt? During the years of the revolution we

clashed not a few times with the Cossacks, the peasants, even with certain layers of workers (certain groups of workers from the Urals organized a volunteer regiment in the army of Kolchak!). The antagonism between the workers as consumers and the peasants as producers and sellers of bread lay, in the main, at the root of these conflicts. Under the pressure of need and deprivation, the workers themselves were episodically divided into hostile camps, depending upon stronger or weaker ties with the village. The Red Army also found itself under the influence of the country. During the years of the civil war it was necessary more than once to disarm discontented regiments. The introduction of the "New Economic Policy" (N.E.P.) attenuated the friction but far from eliminated it. On the contrary, it paved the way for the rebirth of kulaks, and led, at the beginning of this decade, to the renewal of civil war in the village. The Kronstadt uprising was only an *episode* in the history of the relations between the proletarian city and the petty bourgeois village. It is possible to understand this episode only in connection with the general course of the development of the class struggle during the revolution.

Kronstadt differed from a long series of other petty bourgeois movements and uprisings only by its greater external effect. The problem here involved a maritime fortress under Petrograd itself. During the uprising proclamations were issued and radio broadcasts were made. The Social Revolutionaries and the anarchists, hurrying from Petrograd, adorned the uprising with "noble" phrases and gestures. All this left traces in print. With the aid of these "documentary" materials (*i.e.*, false labels), it is not hard to construct a legend about Kronstadt, all the more exalted since in 1917 the name Kronstadt was surrounded by a revolutionary halo. Not idly does the Mexican magazine quoted above ironically call the Kronstadt sailors the "purest of the pure".

The play upon the revolutionary authority of Kronstadt is one of the distinguishing features of this truly charlatan campaign. Anarchists, Mensheviks, liberals, reactionaries try to present the matter as if at the beginning of 1921 the Bolsheviks turned their weapons on those very Kronstadt sailors who guaranteed the victory of the October insurrection. Here is the point of departure for all the subsequent falsehoods. Whoever wishes to unravel these lies should first of all read the article by comrade J. G. Wright in *THE NEW INTERNATIONAL* (February, 1938). My problem is another one: I wish to describe the physiognomy of the Kronstadt uprising from a more general point of view.

Social and Political Groupings in Kronstadt

A REVOLUTION IS "MADE" directly by a *minority*. The success of a revolution is possible, however, only where this minority finds more or less support, or at least friendly neutrality on the

part of the majority. The shift in different stages of the revolution, like the transition from revolution to counter-revolution, is directly determined by changing political relations between the minority and the majority, between the vanguard and the class.

Among the Kronstadt sailors there were three political layers: the proletarian revolutionists, some with a serious past and training; the intermediate majority, mainly peasant in origin; and, finally, the reactionaries, sons of kulaks, shopkeepers and priests. In Czarist times, order on battleships and in the fortress could be maintained only so long as the officers, acting through the reactionary sections of the petty officers and sailors, subjected the broad intermediate layer to their influence or terror, thus isolating the revolutionists, mainly the machinists, the gunners, and the electricians, *i.e.*, predominantly the city workers.

The course of the uprising on the battleship *Potemkin* in 1905 was based entirely on the relations among these three layers, *i.e.*, on the struggle between proletarian and petty bourgeois reactionary extremes for influence upon the more numerous middle peasant layer. Whoever has not understood this problem, which runs through the whole revolutionary movement in the fleet, had best be silent about the problems of the Russian revolution in general. For it was entirely, and to a great degree still is, a struggle between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie for influence upon the peasantry. During the Soviet period the bourgeoisie has appeared principally in the guise of kulaks (*i.e.*, the top stratum of the petty bourgeoisie), the "socialist" intelligentsia, and now in the form of the "Communist" bureaucracy. Such is the basic mechanism of the revolution in all its stages. In the fleet it assumed a more centralized, and therefore more dramatic expression.

The political composition of the Kronstadt Soviet reflected the composition of the garrison and the crews. The leadership of the Soviets already in the summer of 1917 belonged to the Bolshevik Party, which rested on the better sections of the sailors and included in its ranks many revolutionists from the underground movement who had been liberated from the hard-labor prisons. But I seem to recall that even in the days of the October insurrection the Bolsheviks constituted less than one-half of the Kronstadt Soviet. The majority consisted of S.R.s and anarchists. There were no Mensheviks at all in Kronstadt. The Menshevik Party hated Kronstadt. The official S.R.s, incidentally, had no better attitude toward it. The Kronstadt S.R.s quickly went over into opposition to Kerensky and formed one of the shock brigades of the so-called "left" S.R.s. They based themselves on the peasant part of the fleet and of the shore garrison. As for the anarchists, they were the most motley group. Among them were real revolutionists, like Zhuk and Zhelezniakov, but these were the elements most closely linked to the Bolsheviks. Most of the Kronstadt "anarchists" represented the city petty bourgeoisie and stood upon a lower revolutionary level than the S.R.s. The president of the Soviet was a

non-party man, "sympathetic to the anarchists", and in essence a peaceful petty clerk who had been formerly subservient to the Czarist authorities and was now subservient . . . to the revolution. The complete absence of Mensheviks, the "left" character of the S.R.s, and the anarchist hue of the petty bourgeois were due to the sharpness of the revolutionary struggle in the fleet and the dominating influence of the proletarian sections of the sailors.

Changes During the Years of the Civil War

THIS SOCIAL AND POLITICAL characterization of Kronstadt which, if desired, could be substantiated and illustrated by many facts and documents, is already sufficient to illuminate the upheavals which occurred in Kronstadt during the years of the civil war and as a result of which its physiognomy changed beyond recognition. Precisely about this important aspect of the question, the belated accusers say not one word, partly out of ignorance, partly out of malevolence.

Yes, Kronstadt wrote a heroic page in the history of the revolution. But the civil war began a systematic depopulation of Kronstadt and of the whole Baltic fleet. Already in the days of the October uprising, detachments of Kronstadt sailors were being sent to help Moscow. Other detachments were then sent to the Don, to the Ukraine, for requisition of bread and to organize the local power. It seemed at first as if Kronstadt were inexhaustible. From different fronts I sent dozens of telegrams about the mobilization of new "reliable" detachments from among the Petersburg workers and the Baltic sailors. But already in 1918, and, in any case, not later than 1919, the fronts began to complain that the new contingents of "Kronstadters" were unsatisfactory, exacting, undisciplined, unreliable in battle and doing more harm than good. After the liquidation of Yudenich (in the winter of 1919), the Baltic fleet and the Kronstadt garrison were denuded of all revolutionary forces. All the elements among them that were of any use at all were thrown against Deniken in the south. If in 1917-1918 the Kronstadt sailors stood considerably higher than the average level of the Red Army and formed the framework of its first detachments as well as the framework of the Soviet regime in many districts, those sailors who remained in "peaceful" Kronstadt until the beginning of 1921, not fitting in on any of the fronts of the civil war, stood by this time on a level considerably lower, in general, than the average level of the Red Army, and included a great percentage of completely demoralized elements, wearing showy bell-bottom pants and sporty haircuts.

Demoralization based on hunger and speculation had in general greatly increased by the end of the civil war. The so-called "sack-carriers" (petty speculators) had become a social blight, threatening to stifle the revolution. Precisely in Kronstadt where the

garrison did nothing and had everything it needed, the demoralization assumed particularly great dimensions. When conditions became very critical in hungry Petrograd the Political Bureau more than once discussed the possibility of securing an "internal loan" from Kronstadt, where a quantity of old provisions still remained. But delegates of the Petrograd workers answered: "You will get nothing from them by kindness. They speculate in cloth, coal, and bread. At present in Kronstadt every kind of riff-raff has raised its head." That was the real situation. It was not like the sugar-sweet idealizations after the event.

It must further be added that Lettish and Esthonian ex-sailors who feared they would be sent to the front and were preparing to cross into their new bourgeois fatherlands, Latvia and Esthonia, had joined the Baltic fleet as "volunteers". These elements were in essence hostile to the Soviet authority and displayed this hostility fully in the days of the Kronstadt uprising. . . . Besides these there were many thousands of Lettish workers, mainly former farm-laborers, who showed unexampled heroism on all fronts of the civil war. We must not, therefore, tar the Lettish workers and the "Kronstadters" with the same brush. We must recognize social and political differences.

The Social Roots of the Uprising

THE PROBLEM OF A SERIOUS student consists in defining, on the basis of the objective circumstances, the social and political character of the Kronstadt mutiny and its place in the development of the revolution. Without this, "criticism" is reduced to sentimental lamentation of the pacifist kind in the spirit of Alexander Berkman, Emma Goldman, and their latest imitators. These gentlefolk do not have the slightest understanding of the criteria and methods of scientific research. They quote the proclamations of the insurgents like pious preachers quoting Holy Scriptures. They complain, moreover, that I do not take into consideration the "documents", i.e., the gospel of Makhno and the other apostles. To take documents "into consideration" does not mean to take them at their face value. Marx has said that it is impossible to judge either parties or peoples by what they say about themselves. The characteristics of a party are determined considerably more by its social composition, its past, its relation to different classes and strata, than by its oral and written declarations, especially during a critical moment of civil war. If, for example, we began to take as pure gold the innumerable proclamations of Negrin, Companys, Garcia Oliver and Co., we would have to recognize these gentlemen as fervent friends of socialism. But in reality they are its perfidious enemies.

In 1917-1918 the revolutionary workers led the peasant masses, not only of the fleet but of the entire country. The peasants seized

and divided the land most often under the leadership of the soldiers and sailors arriving in their home districts. Requisitions of bread had only begun and mainly from the landlords and kulaks at that. The peasants reconciled themselves to requisitions as a temporary evil. But the civil war dragged on for three years. The city gave practically nothing to the village and took almost everything from it, chiefly for the needs of war. The peasants approved of the "Bolsheviks" but became increasingly hostile to the "communists". If in the preceding period the workers had led the peasants forward, the peasants now dragged the workers back. Only because of this change in mood could the Whites partially attract the peasants and even the half-peasants, half-workers, of the Urals, to their side. This mood, *i.e.*, hostility to the city, nourished the movement of Makhno, who seized and looted trains marked for the factories, the plants, and the Red Army, tore up railroad tracks, shot Communists, etc. Of course, Makhno called this the anarchist struggle with the "state". In reality, this was a struggle of the infuriated petty property owner against the proletarian dictatorship. A similar movement arose in a number of other districts, especially in Tambovsky, under the banner of "Social Revolutionaries". Finally, in different parts of the country so-called "Green" peasant detachments were active. They did not want to recognize either the Reds or the Whites and shunned the city parties. The "Greens" sometimes met the Whites and received severe blows from them, but they did not, of course, get any mercy from the Reds. Just as the petty bourgeoisie is ground economically between the millstones of big capital and the proletariat, so the peasant partisan detachments were pulverized between the Red Army and the White.

Only an entirely superficial person can see in Makhno's bands or in the Kronstadt revolt a struggle between the abstract principles of anarchism and "state socialism". Actually these movements were convulsions of the peasant petty bourgeoisie which desired, of course, to liberate itself from capital but which at the same time did not consent to subordinate itself to the dictatorship of the proletariat. The petty bourgeoisie does not know concretely what it wants and, by virtue of its position, cannot know. That is why it so readily covered the confusion of its demands and hopes, now with the anarchist banner, now the populist, now simply with the "Green". Counterposing itself to the proletariat, it tried, flying all these banners, to turn the wheel of the revolution backwards.

The Counter-Revolutionary Character of the Kronstadt Mutiny

THERE WERE, OF COURSE, no impassable bulkheads dividing the different social and political layers of Kronstadt. There were still at Kronstadt a certain number of qualified workers and technicians to take care of the machinery. But even they were chosen by a method of negative selection as unreliable politically

and of little use for the civil war. Some "leaders" of the uprising came from among these elements. However, this completely natural and inevitable circumstance, to which some accusers triumphantly point, does not change by one iota the anti-proletarian physiognomy of the revolt. Unless we are to deceive ourselves with the pretentious slogans, false labels, etc., we shall see that the Kronstadt uprising was nothing but an armed reaction of the petty bourgeoisie against the hardships of social revolution and the severity of the proletarian dictatorship.

That was exactly the significance of the Kronstadt slogan: "Soviets without Communists", which was immediately seized upon, not only by the S.R.s but by the bourgeois liberals as well. As a rather farsighted representative of capital, Professor Miliukov understood that to free the Soviets from the leadership of the Bolsheviks would have meant within a short time to demolish the Soviets themselves. The experience of the Russian Soviets during the period of Menshevik and S.R. domination and, even more clearly, the experience of the German and Austrian Soviets under the domination of the social democrats, proved this. Social Revolutionary-anarchist Soviets could serve only as a bridge from the proletarian dictatorship to capitalist restoration. They could play no other rôle, regardless of the "ideas" of their participants. The Kronstadt uprising thus had a counter-revolutionary character.

From the class point of view, which—without offense to the gentlemen eclectics—remains the basic criterion not only for politics but for history, it is extremely important to contrast the behavior of Kronstadt to that of Petrograd in those critical days. The whole leading stratum of the workers had been drawn too out of Petrograd. Hunger and cold reigned in the deserted capitol, perhaps even more fiercely than in Moscow. A heroic and tragic period! All were hungry and irritable. All were dissatisfied. In the factories there was dull discontent. Underground organizers sent by the S.R.s and the White officers tried to link the military uprising with the movement of the discontented workers. The Kronstadt paper wrote about barricades in Petrograd, about thousands being killed. The press of the whole world proclaimed the same thing. Actually the precise opposite occurred. The Kronstadt uprising did not attract the Petrograd workers. It repelled them. The stratification proceeded along class lines. The workers immediately felt that the Kronstadt mutineers stood on the opposite side of the barricades—and they supported the Soviet power. The political isolation of Kronstadt was the cause of its internal uncertainty and its military defeat.

The N.E.P. and the Kronstadt Uprising

VICTOR SERGE, WHO, it would seem, is trying to manufacture a sort of synthesis of anarchism, P.O.U.M.ism and Marxism, has intervened very unfortunately in the polemic about Kronstadt. In his opinion, the introduction of the N.E.P. one year earlier could have averted the Kronstadt uprising. Let us admit that. But advice like this is very easy to give after the event. It is true, as Victor Serge remembers, that I had already proposed the transition to the N.E.P. in 1920. But I was not at all sure in advance of its success. It was no secret to me that the remedy could prove to be more dangerous than the malady itself. When I met opposition from the leaders of the party, I did not appeal to the ranks, in order to avoid mobilizing the petty bourgeoisie against the workers. The experience of the ensuing twelve months was required to convince the party of the need for the new course. But the remarkable thing is that it was precisely the anarchists all over the world who looked upon the N.E.P. as . . . a betrayal of communism. But now the advocates of the anarchists denounce us for not having introduced the N.E.P. a year earlier.

In 1921 Lenin more than once openly acknowledged that the party's obstinate defense of the methods of military communism had become a great mistake. But does this change matters? Whatever the immediate or remote causes of the Kronstadt rebellion, it was in its very essence a mortal danger to the dictatorship of the proletariat. Simply because it had been guilty of a political error, should the proletarian revolution really have committed suicide to punish itself?

Or perhaps it would have been sufficient to inform the Kronstadt sailors of the N.E.P. decrees to pacify them? Illusion! The insurgents did not have a conscious program and they could not have had one because of the very nature of the petty bourgeoisie. They themselves did not clearly understand that what their fathers and brothers needed first of all was free trade. They were discontented and confused but they saw no way out. The more conscious, *i.e.*, the rightist, elements, acting behind the scenes, wanted the restoration of the bourgeois regime. But they did not say so out loud. The "left" wing wanted the liquidation of discipline, "free Soviets", and better rations. The regime of the N.E.P. could only gradually pacify the peasant, and, after him, the discontented sections of the army and the fleet. But for this time and experience were needed.

Most puerile of all is the argument that there was no uprising, that the sailors had made no threats, that they "only" seized the fortress and the battleships. It would seem that the Bolsheviks marched with bared chests across the ice against the fortress only because of their evil characters, their inclination to provoke conflicts artificially, their hatred of the Kronstadt sailors, or their hatred of the anarchist doctrine (about which absolutely no one,

we may say in passing, bothered in those days). Is this not childish prattle? Bound neither to time nor place, the dilettante critics try (17 years later!) to suggest that everything would have ended in general satisfaction if only the revolution had left the insurgent sailors alone. Unfortunately, the world counter-revolution would in no case have left them alone. The logic of the struggle would have given predominance in the fortress to the extremists, that is, to the most counter-revolutionary elements. The need for supplies would have made the fortress directly dependent upon the foreign bourgeoisie and their agents, the White emigrés. All the necessary preparations toward this end were already being made. Under similar circumstances only people like the Spanish anarchists or P.O.U.M.ists would have waited passively, hoping for a happy outcome. The Bolsheviks, fortunately, belonged to a different school. They considered it their duty to extinguish the fire as soon as it started, thereby reducing to a minimum the number of victims.

The "Kronstadters" Without a Fortress

IN ESSENCE, THE GENTLEMEN critics are opponents of the dictatorship of the proletariat and by that token are opponents of the revolution. In this lies the whole secret. It is true that some of them recognize the revolution and the dictatorship—in words. But this does not help matters. They wish for a revolution which will not lead to dictatorship or for a dictatorship which will get along without the use of force. Of course, this is a very "pleasant" dictatorship. It requires, however, a few trifles: an equal and, moreover, an extremely high, development of the toiling masses. But in such conditions the dictatorship would in general be unnecessary. Some anarchists, who are really liberal pedagogues, hope that in a hundred or a thousand years the toilers will have attained so high a level of development that coercion will prove unnecessary. Naturally, if capitalism could lead to such a development, there would be no reason for overthrowing capitalism. There would be no need either for violent revolution or for the dictatorship which is an inevitable consequence of revolutionary victory. However, the decaying capitalism of our day leaves little room for humanitarian-pacifist illusions.

The working class, not to speak of the semi-worker masses, is not homogeneous, either socially or politically. The class struggle produces a vanguard that absorbs the best elements of the class. A revolution is possible when the vanguard is able to lead the majority of the proletariat. But this does not at all mean that the internal contradictions among the toilers disappear. At the moment of the highest peak of the revolution they are of course attenuated, but only to appear later on a new stage in all their sharpness. Such is the course of the revolution as a whole. Such was the course in Kronstadt. When parlor pinks try to mark out a different route for the October revolution, after the event, we

can only respectfully ask them to show us exactly where and when their great principles were confirmed in practice, at least partially, at least in tendency? Where are the signs that lead us to expect the triumph of these principles in the future? We shall of course never get an answer.

A revolution has its own laws. Long ago we formulated those "lessons of October" which have not only a Russian but an international significance. No one else has even tried to suggest any other "lessons". The Spanish revolution confirms the "lessons of October" by the inverted method. And the severe critics are silent or equivocal. The Spanish government of the "People's Front" stifles the socialist revolution and shoots revolutionists. The anarchists participate in this government, or, when they are driven out, continue to support the executioners. And their foreign allies and lawyers occupy themselves meanwhile with a defense . . . of the Kronstadt mutiny against the harsh Bolsheviks. A shameful comedy!

The present disputes around Kronstadt revolve around the same class axes as the Kronstadt uprising itself in which the reactionary sections of the sailors tried to overthrow the proletarian dictatorship. Conscious of their importance on the arena of present-day revolutionary politics, the petty bourgeois blunderers and eclectics try to use the old Kronstadt episode for the struggle against the Fourth International, that is, against the party of the proletarian revolution. These latter-day "Kronstadters" will also be crushed—true, without the use of arms since, fortunately, they do not have a fortress. COYOACAN, *Jan. 15, 1938*. Leon TROTSKY

Once More: Kronstadt

Readers of THE NEW INTERNATIONAL who have followed the lately revived discussion of the Kronstadt uprising in 1921, to which John G. Wright and Leon Trotsky have contributed articles in recent issues, will be interested in the communications which we print below. The first one is from the well-known Franco-Belgian writer who lived in Russia throughout most of the years after the Bolshevik victory and whose writings, especially his recent *Russia: Twenty Years After*, have been widely read,

Victor Serge:

I receive your review with great pleasure. It is obviously the best revolutionary Marxian organ today. Believe me that all my sympathies are with you and that if it is possible for me to be of service to you, it will be most willingly rendered.

I shall some day reply to the articles of Wright and L. D. Trotsky on Kronstadt. This great subject merits being taken up again thoroughly and the two studies that you have published are far, very far, from exhausting it. In the very first place, I am surprised to see our comrades Wright and L. D. Trotsky employ a reasoning which, it seems to me, we ought to beware of and refrain from. They record that the drama of Kronstadt, 1921, is evoking commentaries at once from the Social Revolutionists, the Mensheviks, the anarchists and others; and from this fact, natural in an epoch of ideological confusion, of the revision of values, of the battles of sects, they deduce a sort of amalgam. Let us be distrustful of amalgams and of such mechanical reasoning. They have been too greatly abused in the Russian revolution and we see where it leads. Bourgeois liberals, Mensheviks, anarchists, revolutionary Marxists consider the drama of Kronstadt from different standpoints and for different reasons, which it is well and necessary to bear in mind, instead of lumping all the critical minds under a single heading and imputing to all of them the same hostility towards Bolshevism.

The problem is, in truth, much vaster than the event of Kronstadt, which was only an episode. Wright and L. D. Trotsky support a highly simple thesis: that the Kronstadt uprising was objectively counter-revolutionary and that the policy of Lenin's and Trotsky's Central Committee at that time was correct before, during and after. Correct this policy was, on an historic and moreover grandiose scale, which permitted it to be tragically and dangerously false, erroneous, in various specific circumstances. That is what it would be useful and courageous to recognize today instead of affirming the infallibility of a general line of 1917-1923. There remains broadly the fact that the uprisings of Kronstadt and other localities signified to the party the absolute impossibility of persevering on the road of War Communism. The country was dying of bitter-end state-ification. Who then was right? The Central Committee which clung to a road without issue or the masses

driven to extremities by famine? It seems to me undeniable that Lenin at that time committed the greatest mistake of his life. Need we recall that a few weeks before the establishment of the N.E.P., Bukharin published a work on economics showing that the system in operation was indeed the first phase of socialism? For having advocated, in his letters to Lenin, measures of reconciliation with the peasants, the historian Rozhkov had just been deported to Pskov. Once Kronstadt rebelled, it had to be subdued, no doubt. But what was done to forestall the insurrection? Why was the mediation of the Petrograd anarchists rejected? Can one, finally, justify the insensate and, I repeat, abominable massacre of the vanquished of Kronstadt who were still being shot in batches in the Petrograd prison three months after the end of the uprising? They were men of the Russian people, backward perhaps, but who belonged to the masses of the revolution itself.

L. D. Trotsky emphasizes that the sailors and soldiers of the Kronstadt of 1921 were no longer the same, with regard to revolutionary consciousness, as those of 1918. That is true. But the party of 1921—was it the same as that of 1918? Was it not already suffering from a bureaucratic befoulment which often detached it from the masses and rendered it inhuman towards them? It would be well to reread in this connection the criticisms against the bureaucratic régime formulated long ago by the Workers' Opposition; and also to remember the evil practises that made their appearance during the discussion on the trade unions in 1920. For my part, I was outraged to see the manoeuvres which the majority employed in Petrograd to stifle the voice of the Trotskyists and the Workers' Opposition (who defended diametrically opposed theses).

The question which dominates today the whole discussion is, in substance, this: When and how did Bolshevism begin to degenerate?

When and how did it begin to employ towards the toiling masses, whose energy and highest consciousness it expressed, non-socialist methods which must be condemned because they ended by assuring the victory of the bureaucracy over the proletariat?

This question posed, it can be seen that the first symptoms of the evil date far back. In 1920, the Menshevik social-democrats were falsely accused, in a communiqué of the Cheka, of intelligence with the enemy, of sabotage, *etc.* This communiqué, monstrously false, served to outlaw them. In the same year, the anarchists were arrested throughout Russia, after a formal promise to legalize the movement and after the treaty of peace signed with Makhno had been deliberately torn up by the Central Committee which no longer needed the Black Army. The revolutionary correctness of the totality of a policy cannot justify, in my eyes, these baneful practises. And the facts that I cite are unfortunately far from being the only ones.

Let us go back still further. Has not the moment come to declare that the day of the glorious year of 1918 when the Central

Committee of the party decided to permit the Extraordinary Commissions to apply the death penalty *on the basis of secret procedure, without hearing the accused who could not defend themselves*, is a black day? That day the Central Committee was in a position to restore or not restore an Inquisitional procedure forgotten by European civilization. In any case, it committed a mistake. It did not necessarily behoove a victorious socialist party to commit that mistake. The revolution could have defended itself better without that.

We would indeed be wrong to conceal from ourselves today that the whole historical acquisition of the Russian revolution is being called into question. Out of the vast experience of Bolshevism, the revolutionary Marxists will save what is essential, durable, only by taking up all the problems again from the bottom, with a genuine freedom of mind, without party vanity, without irreducible hostility (above all in the field of historical investigation) towards the other tendencies of the labor movement. On the contrary, by not recognizing old errors, whose gravity history has not ceased to bring out in relief, the risk is run of compromising the whole acquisition of Bolshevism. The Kronstadt episode simultaneously poses the questions of the relations between the party of the proletariat and the masses, of the internal régime of the party (the Workers' Opposition was smashed), of socialist ethics (all Petrograd was deceived by the announcement of a *White* movement in Kronstadt), of humaneness in the class struggle and above all in the struggle within our classes. Finally it puts us today to the test as to our self-critical capacity.

Unable to reply more thoroughly for the moment to comrades Wright and L. D. Trotsky, I hope you will be good enough to submit this letter to the readers of **THE NEW INTERNATIONAL**. It will perhaps contribute towards priming a discussion which we ought to know how to bring to a successful issue in a spirit of healthy revolutionary comradeship.

PARIS, *April 28, 1938.*

The second communication on the subject comes from one of the editors of the *Partisan Review*,

Dwight Macdonald:

Trotsky's article on Kronstadt in your April issue was, to me, disappointing and embarrassing. Disappointing because I had hoped for a frank and reasonably objective explanation of the Kronstadt affair. Embarrassing because I admire Trotsky and accept many of his theories. An article like this—essentially a piece of special pleading, however brilliant—makes it harder to defend Trotsky from the often-made accusation that his thinking is sectarian and inflexible.

For those who believe, as I do, that the proletarian revolution is the only road to socialism, the question of the day is: how can we avoid the sort of degeneration that has taken place in the U.S.S.R.?

Specifically, to what extent must Bolshevik theory bear the responsibility for the rise of Stalinism? In *The Revolution Betrayed*, Trotsky demonstrates that Stalinism is primarily a reflection of the low level of productivity and economic development of Russia. But even if one accepts this analysis, as I do, an important contributory cause may still be found in certain weaknesses of Bolshevik political theory. Is it not the duty of Marxists today relentlessly to search out these weaknesses, to reconsider the entire Bolshevik line with scientific detachment? My impression is that Trotsky has shown little interest in any such basic reconsideration. He seems to be more interested in defending Leninism than in learning from its mistakes.

The article on Kronstadt is a good example of what I mean. It is impassioned, eloquent, and—unconvincing. Trotsky may be correct in all his contentions. But he approaches the subject in such a way as to make it impossible for the detached observer to form an intelligent opinion. I have neither the time nor the knowledge—and THE NEW INTERNATIONAL certainly hasn't the space—to argue the Kronstadt question here. But I would like to indicate a few misgivings about the *tone* of Trotsky's article. In general, it seems to me that Trotsky takes a polemical approach to a question that should be considered dispassionately, with some respect for the other side. The very title is contemptuous: "Hue and Cry Over Kronstadt". The opposition is characterized in police court terms—"this variegated fraternity", "this truly charlatan campaign". To justify such abuse, Trotsky must bring forward much stronger evidence to offset the statements of Serge, Thomas, Berkman, and Souvarine than he (or Wright) has up to now.

Trotsky begins his article with an amalgam worthy of Vyshinsky: "Participating in the campaign . . . are anarchists, Russian Mensheviks, left social-democrats . . . individual blunderers, Miliukov's paper, and, on occasion, the big capitalist press. A 'People's Front' of its own kind!" (The only category which seems to fit me is "individual blunderer". Trotsky seems unable to imagine anyone criticising Kronstadt unless he has a political axe to grind or is a dupe, while the Stalinists catalogue all critics of the Moscow Trials as Trotskyists, fascists, assassins, and—my own label—Trotskyist stooges.) I can't see as much difference as I would like to see between Trotsky's insistence that, because the enemies of the revolution have used the Kronstadt affair to discredit Bolshevism, therefore all who express doubts about Kronstadt are ("objectively" considered) allies of counter-revolution; and Vyshinsky's insistence that the Fourth International and the *Gestapo* are comrades-in-arms because both oppose the Stalinist régime. This exclusion of subjective motivation as irrelevant, this refusal to consider aims, programs, theories, anything except the objective fact of opposition—this cast of mind seems to me dangerous and unrealistic. I insist it is possible to have doubts about Kronstadt without being either a knave or a fool.

Having created his amalgam, Trotsky defines its lowest common

denominator—and very low it is. “How can the Kronstadt uprising cause such heartburn to anarchists, Mensheviks, and ‘liberal’ counter-revolutionists, all at the same time?” he asks. “The answer is simple: all these groupings are interested in compromising the only genuinely revolutionary current which has never repudiated its banner. . . .” The answer is perhaps a bit too simple—another thing that bothers me, by the way, about Trotsky’s answers. So far as I am conscious, I am not interested in “compromising” Bolshevism; on the contrary, I wish I were able to accept it 100 per cent. But I unfortunately have certain doubts, objections, criticisms. Is it impossible to express them without being accused of counter-revolution and herded into an amalgam of anarchists, Mensheviks and capitalist journalists?

Most of Trotsky’s article attempts to show that the social base of the Kronstadt uprising was petty bourgeois. He makes one major point: that the Kronstadt sailors of 1921 were quite a different group from the revolutionary heroes of 1917. But the rest of his lengthy argument boils down to an identification of all the elements which opposed the Bolsheviks as “petty bourgeois”. He advances little evidence to support this labelling, beyond the indisputable fact that they were all anti-Bolshevik. His reasoning seems to be: only the Bolshevik policy could save the revolution; the Makhno bands, the Greens, the Social Revolutionaries, the Kronstadters, *etc.*, were against the Bolsheviks; therefore, objectively, they were counter-revolutionary; therefore, they were, objectively, working for the bourgeoisie. This reasoning begs the whole question. But even if the initial assumption be accepted, it is still a dangerous intellectual process. It rationalizes an unpleasant administrative necessity—the suppression of political opponents who also are acting for what they conceive to be the best interests of the masses—into a struggle between Good and Evil. A police measure becomes a political crusade, by simply refusing to distinguish between the subjective and the objective categories—as if a bank robber should be indicted for trying to overthrow capitalism! Stalin has learned the trick all too well.

Trotsky has very little to say about the way the Bolsheviks handled the Kronstadt affair itself. He presents no defense for the mass executions which, according to Victor Serge, took place for months after the rebels had been crushed. In fact, he doesn’t mention this aspect at all. Nor does he pay much attention to the crucial question: how seriously did the Bolsheviks try to reach a peaceful settlement before they brought up the field guns? He dismisses this: “Or perhaps it would have been sufficient to inform the Kronstadt sailors of the N.E.P. decrees to pacify them? Illusion! The insurgents did not have a conscious program and they could not have one because of the very nature of the petty bourgeoisie.” Here Trotsky admits, by implication, that Souvarine states: that Lenin was putting the finishing touches on the N.E.P. during the Tenth Party Congress, which broke up to allow the delegates to take part in the attack on Kronstadt. It was a serious

decision Lenin and Trotsky took: to withhold public announcement of N.E.P. until after the rebellion, which asked for some of the very concessions which the N.E.P. granted, had been drowned in blood. How could they be so sure it would have been impossible to compromise with the Kronstadters on the basis of the N.E.P.? A few sentences earlier, Trotsky admits that "the introduction of the N.E.P. one year earlier would have averted the Kronstadt uprising". But the Kronstadters, writes Trotsky, being petty bourgeois, didn't have any "conscious program" and so couldn't have been appealed to by programmatic concessions. Petty bourgeois or not, the Kronstadters *did* have a program. Souvarine, for one, gives it in his life of Stalin as, "Free elections to the Soviets; free speech and a free press for workers and peasants, left-wing socialists, anarchists and syndicalists; the release of workers and peasants held as political prisoners; the abolition of the privileges of the Communist party; equal rations for all workers; the right of peasants and self-employing artisans to dispose of the product of their work." Perhaps Trotsky uses the term "conscious program" in a special sense.

To me the most interesting statement in the article is: "It is true . . . that I had already proposed the transition to N.E.P. in 1920. . . . When I met opposition from the leaders of the party, I did not appeal to the ranks, in order to avoid mobilizing the petty bourgeoisie against the workers." As Trotsky points out, Lenin admitted that the policy of "War Communism" was adhered to longer than it should have been. Was this simply a mistake in judgment, as Trotsky implies, or was it a mistake which springs from the very nature of Bolshevist political organization, which concentrates power in the hands of a small group of politicians so well insulated (by a hierarchic, bureaucratic party apparatus) against pressure from the masses that they don't respond to the needs of the masses—until too late? Even when one of the leaders is able correctly to judge the needs of the masses, he can only try to persuade his colleagues of the correctness of his views. If they can't be persuaded, he is inhibited by his political philosophy from appealing to the rank and file for support. It is true, as Trotsky writes, that the bourgeoisie would have sought to profit by any division in the ranks of the Bolsheviks. But are not the dangers of an air-tight dictatorship, insulated against mass pressure, even greater? Are not episodes like Kronstadt inevitable under such conditions? And would a Stalinist clique be able so easily to usurp control of a party which allowed greater participation to the masses and greater freedom to left-wing opposition, both inside and outside the dominant party?

These are the questions which Kronstadt raises. Trotsky does not answer them when he summarizes: "In essence, the gentlemen critics are opponents of the dictatorship of the proletariat and by that token are opponents of the revolution. In this lies the whole secret." The secret is more complicated than this formulation. Rosa Luxemburg all her life opposed Lenin's conception of the

dictatorship of the proletariat. But the Guard officers who assassinated her in 1919 knew very well what her attitude was towards the 1917 revolution.

NEW YORK CITY, April 26, 1938.

The Editors:

The Main Point. Our contributors seem to have missed the main point of the articles by J. G. Wright and Leon Trotsky, developed in even greater detail by the latter, namely, that the flood of Kronstadt-criticism lately unleashed by anarchists, Mensheviks, bourgeois politicians and others is aimed by the latter to discredit revolutionary Marxism, represented by the Fourth International, so that their respective political wares may seem all the more attractive, or at least not quite so unattractive. Macdonald's complaint that all who express doubts about Kronstadt are thrown into a single counter-revolutionary pot, is totally unwarranted. We have yet to see a study of the Kronstadt uprising made from the standpoint of pure historical research or animated by anything but the crassest political aim of demonstrating that Bolshevism is reactionary or bankrupt or that, at the very least, a different political program, party or philosophy should be substituted for it. Whoever wishes, is entitled to do this. The anarchists can show that by their policy there would have been no Kronstadt in Russia, just as there is none in Spain; also, there would have been no proletarian revolution in Russia, just as there is none in Spain. The Menshevik critics are absolutely correct in saying that their policy would have averted Kronstadt and the degeneration of the revolution, because there would have been no revolution to degenerate. Miliukov and Kerensky may boast of the fact that they produced no Stalin in 1923 or Kronstadt two years earlier; but as we recall they almost produced a victorious Kornilov-Cavaignac in 1917.

All critics are entitled to engage in the most thoroughgoing study of Kronstadt, and also to propose a program so different from that of the Bolsheviks—or the essential Bolshevik program with such improvements and safeguards—as would guarantee against or at least lessen the danger of Kronstadts and degeneration. What is more, we are ready to discuss all such proposals. But we are frank to say that while we do not believe in the immaculate conception and evolution of Bolshevism, or in its flawlessness and infallibility, we remain the stoutest partisans of its fundamental principles, proud of its traditions and not very receptive to the substitutes offered by the social democrats, centrists, anarchists or plain bourgeois democrats. We are ready to discuss all revolutionary problems, but from a viewpoint of our own, which we defend until we are shown one that is superior.

Degeneration of Bolshevism. It is quite possible that more foresight and skill *might have* reduced the danger of a Kronstadt or in any case minimized the scope of its repercussions. The Russian revolution committed many excesses and had many a blunderer,

coward and scoundrel in its leadership; we know of no revolution without them. It is unworthy of a Marxist, however, to confuse the excesses with the main line of activity, or to lose his sense of proportions by identifying the two. There is a difference between the zealous fireman who may needlessly ruin some furniture in putting out a conflagration and the arsonist who sets the house afire or the sheriff who evicts the man who built the house. Macdonald wonders if the degeneration is not inherent in the very nature of Bolshevik party organization and its dictatorship; Victor Serge asks when and where Bolshevism began to degenerate and finds the answer in Kronstadt, 1921, before that in the treatment of the Mensheviks in 1920, before that in the Inquisitional procedure of 1918. Neither facts nor Marxian theory support either of these fundamentally idealistic standpoints.

The consummate expression of degeneration—Stalinism—triumphed in the degree to which it *wiped out* the Bolshevik party and its “dictatorship”. The degeneration marks the victory of the Thermidorian counter-revolution. The social representatives of this counter-revolution were the better-situated peasantry, the petty bourgeois and bourgeois elements in the country, increasingly resentful of proletarian and Bolshevik rule. After the War Communism rigors, came the reaction, to which the peasants set the tone. Stalinism represents the yielding of the workers’ bureaucracy to this reaction. To the Marxist it is clear that fundamentally the social forces behind Kronstadt, the social forces behind the Menshevik companions-in-arms of the Allied imperialists, found a far more finished and triumphant expression in the victory of Stalinism! For what does the latter’s development represent, with its labor aristocracy, its “millionaire kolkhozniki”, its reconciliation with “democratic” imperialism, its Soviets without communists, its abandonment of revolutionary principle: the product of the *social forces* variously represented by the Mensheviks, the S.R.s, the Makhnos—or the organizational deficiencies or excesses of Lenin’s party?

Even if we grant Macdonald’s argument that while all this is generally true, “certain weaknesses [which exactly?] of Bolshevik political theory” were a contributory cause of the degeneration, we would still have to say about this vague formula that it was only in the period of reaction, coinciding with Stalin’s rise to power, that the unspecified weaknesses acquired any decisive social significance.

And even if we grant Victor Serge’s proposal to “take up all the problems again from the bottom”, we would still have to say that in endorsing the P.O.U.M.’s substitute for Bolshevism in Spain, he did not go very far beyond his point of departure.

Question of Tone. Victor Serge, implicitly, and Macdonald, explicitly, complain about our “tone”. We find it difficult to understand them. The anarchist bureaucracy is killing the proletarian revolution in Spain and trying to cover its perfidy by shouting: “Stop thief! There go the assassins of Kronstadt and Trotsky the butcher!” How shall we characterize them and their

pleasantries? Or those of their social-patriotic and bourgeois counterparts throughout the world? By polite chafings and chidings? We deliberately word our polemics so that the thinking worker will understand how seriously we take service to the proletarian revolution and its opposite, treachery; so that he will not imagine that the conflict between the two is no more than a misunderstanding between two good friends.

Macdonald charges Trotsky with an amalgam. An amalgam is the equivalent in politics of a mechanically forced union of diverse metals: the Opposition and the Wrangel officer, Trotsky and Hitler, Macdonald and Hearst. What has that in common with the assertion, entirely indisputable, that the anarchist politicians, the social-patriots and bourgeois democrats *à la* Miliukov, are all fighting Bolshevism with the cry of "Kronstadt!" in order to enhance the looks of their respective political wares? But does Macdonald, whom we know as a friend of our movement, notice the tone of his own words?

It happens quite often that amiable critics of the "Trotskyists" will say in the most sophisticated and nonchalant manner: "You people are just like the Stalinists, fundamentally." Or: "Didn't you people massacre the Kronstadters and the Makhanovists?" Or: "If you were in power, you'd act just like Stalin or Vyshinsky or Yagoda." Or: "Don't you think there is just a little truth in the charges of Trotsky's relations with Hitler?" And when we reply to such irresponsible or monstrous remarks with only half the sharpness they deserve, our critics become inexpressibly shocked, and exclaim: "How can you discuss with these Trotskyists! Their tone is insufferable, their manners deplorable!"

Against such criticism, polemic itself is disarmed.

More on the Suppression of Kronstadt

IN MY RECENT ARTICLE on "Kronstadt" I tried to pose the question on a political plane. But many are interested in the problem of personal "responsibility". Souvarine, who from a sluggish Marxist became an exalted sycophant, asserts in his book on Stalin that in my autobiography I kept consciously silent on the Kronstadt rebellion; there are exploits—he says ironically—of which one does not boast. Ciliga in his book *In the Country of the Big Lie* recounts that in the suppression of Kronstadt "more than ten thousand seamen" were shot by me (I doubt whether the whole Baltic fleet at that time had that many). Other critics express themselves in this manner: yes, objectively the rebellion had a counter-revolutionary character but why did Trotsky use such merciless repressions in the pacification (and—?) subsequently?

I have never touched on this question. Not because I had anything to conceal but, on the contrary, precisely because I had nothing to say. The truth of the matter is that *I personally did not participate in the least in the suppression of the Kronstadt rebellion, nor in the repressions following the suppression.* In my eyes this very fact is of no political significance. I was a member of the government, I considered the quelling of the rebellion necessary and therefore bear responsibility for the suppression. Only within these limits have I replied to criticism up to now. But when moralists begin to annoy me personally, accusing me of exceeding cruelty not called forth by circumstance, I consider that I have a right to say: "Messrs. moralists, you are lying a bit."

The rebellion broke out during my stay in the Urals. From the Urals I came directly to Moscow for the 10th Congress of the party. The decision to suppress the rebellion by military force, *if the fortress could not be induced to surrender, first by peace negotiations, then through an ultimatum*—this general decision was adopted with my direct participation. But after the decision was taken, I continued to remain in Moscow and took no part, direct or indirect, in the military operations. Concerning the subsequent repressions, they were completely the affair of the Cheka.

How did it happen that I did not go personally to Kronstadt? The reason was of a political nature. The rebellion broke out during the discussion on the so-called "trade union" question. The political work in Kronstadt was wholly in the hands of the Petrograd committee, at the head of which stood Zinoviev. The same Zinoviev was the chief, most untiring and passionate leader in the struggle against me in the discussion. Before my departure

for the Urals I was in Petrograd and spoke at a meeting of seamen-communists. The general spirit of the meeting made an extremely unfavorable impression upon me. Dandified and well-fed sailors, communists in name only, produced the impression of parasites in comparison with the workers and Red Army men of that time. On the part of the Petrograd committee the campaign was carried on in an extremely demagogic manner. The commanding personnel of the fleet was isolated and terrified. Zinoviev's resolution received, probably, 90% of the votes. I recall having said to Zinoviev on this occasion: "Everything is very good here, until it becomes very bad." Subsequent to this Zinoviev was with me in the Urals where he received an urgent message that in Kronstadt things were getting "very bad". The overwhelming majority of the sailor "communists" who supported Zinoviev's resolution took part in the rebellion. I considered, and the Political Bureau made no objections, that negotiations with the sailors, and in case of necessity, their pacification, should be placed with those leaders who only yesterday enjoyed the political confidence of these sailors. Otherwise, the Kronstadters would consider the matter as though I had come to take "revenge" upon them for their voting against me during the party discussion.

Whether correct or not, in any case it was precisely these considerations which determined my attitude. *I stepped aside completely and demonstratively from this affair.* Concerning the repressions, as far as I remember, Dzerzhinsky had personal charge of them and Dzerzhinsky could not tolerate anyone's interference with his functions (and properly so).

Whether there were any needless victims I do not know. On this score I trust Dzerzhinsky more than his belated critics. For lack of data I cannot undertake to decide now, *a posteriori*, who should have been punished and how. Victor Serge's conclusions on this score—from third hand—have no value in my eyes. But I am ready to recognize that civil war is no school of humanism. Idealists and pacifists always accused the revolution of "excesses". But the main point is that "excesses" flow from the very nature of revolution which in itself is but an "excess" of history. Whoever so desires may on this basis reject (in little articles) revolution in general. I do not reject it. In this sense I carry full and complete responsibility for the suppression of the Kronstadt rebellion.

L. TROTSKY

COYOACAN, July 6, 1938

A Letter and Some Notes

DEAR COMRADES:

Here are a few pages of discussion on Kronstadt 1921 in which I reply simultaneously to L. D. Trotsky and to A. Ciliga. I should like to see THE NEW INTERNATIONAL, where our comrade Trotsky has several times criticized my views on this important subject.

In publishing in your August number a letter which I sent to you, you followed it with commentaries which did not come to my attention, as I did not receive that number. I am sorry. I am told that you raised the question of my attitude towards the P.O.U.M. I would not have failed to answer you fundamentally. Since I am not acquainted with your text, I confine myself today to two remarks:

1. Our comrade L. D. Trotsky wrote recently that "it is necessary to learn to think. . . ." On this point (as on many others) I am entirely of his opinion. It is even necessary, I think, to learn to discuss and that means not to mix up with historical subjects subjects of present-day policy; not to inject into the discussion of a question concerning the Russian revolution in 1921 the polemics concerning the Spanish revolution in 1936-1938. The Marxian method is more serious and more concrete; or if one wishes to discuss, for the purpose of broad syntheses, all the great questions at once, it is well charitably to notify the reader and the interlocutor of the fact; for my part I would excuse myself. . . .

2. On the P.O.U.M., however. This heroic and persecuted workers' party alone represented revolutionary Marxism in the ranks of the Spanish revolution. It gave proof of clairvoyance and a magnificent courage. It was all the more up against it by the fact that even in the best days the uncomprehending and brutal attitude of the Third International towards anarchists and syndicalists had made Marxism unpopular in the labor movement of Spain. Nevertheless, it was not infallible, far from it. And I do not dream of reproaching it for that, for I know of nobody, really, of nobody, infallible down there. On the other hand, nothing is easier than for a dozen comrades to meet, and then announce that they possess the monopoly of the full truth, the only correct theory, the infallible recipe on how to make the revolution succeed—and thenceforth to denounce as traitors, opportunists and incompetents the militants who are at grips with that reality which events and masses constitute. This way of acting seems to me incorrect and vexatious, even if it happens that its defenders say things which are, in themselves, quite right. . . .

PARIS, Oct. 31, 1938

Victor SERGE

* * *

Reply to Trotsky

BY A NOTE published in America at the end of July, Leon Trotsky finally specified his responsibilities in the episode of Kronstadt. The political responsibilities, as he has always declared, are those of the Central Committee of the Russian Communist party which took the decision to "suppress the rebellion by military force if the fortress could not be induced to surrender first by peace negotiations and then through an ultimatum". Trotsky adds: "I have never touched on this question. Not because I had anything to conceal but, on the contrary, precisely because I had nothing to say. . . . *I personally did not participate in the suppression of the rebellion nor in the repressions following the suppression. . . .*"

Trotsky recalls the differences which separated him at the time from Zinoviev, chairman of the Petrograd Soviet. "*I stepped aside,*" he writes, "*completely and demonstratively from this affair.*"

It will be well to remember this after certain personal attacks directed against Trotsky out of bad faith, ignorance and sectarian spirit. For there is room, after all, in history for distinguishing between the general political responsibilities and the immediate personal responsibilities.¹

"Whether there were any needless victims," continues Trotsky, "I do not know. On this score I trust Dzerzhinsky more than his belated critics. . . . Victor Serge's conclusions on this score—from third hand—have no value in my eyes. . . ." Dzerzhinsky's conclusions, however, are from seventh or ninth hand, for the head of the Cheka did not come to Petrograd at that time and was himself informed only by a hierarchical path on which a lot could be said (and Trotsky knows it better than anybody). As for myself, residing in Petrograd, I lived among the heads of the city. I know what the repression was from eye-witnesses. I visited anarchist comrades in the Shpalernaya prison, imprisoned moreover in defiance of all common sense, who saw the vanquished of Kronstadt leave every day for the ordnance yard. The repression, I repeat, was atrocious. According to the Soviet historians, mutinous Kronstadt had some 16,000 combattants at its disposal. Several thousand succeeded in reaching Finland over the ice. The others, by hundreds and more likely by thousands, were massacred at the end of the battle or executed afterward. Where are Dzerzhinsky's statistics—and what are they worth if they exist? The single fact that a Trotsky, at the pinnacle of power, did not feel the need of informing himself precisely on this repression of an insurrectional movement of workers, the single fact that a Trotsky did not know what all the rank and file communists knew: that out of inhumanity *a needless crime* had just been committed against the proletariat and the peasants—this single fact, I say, is

¹ As certain of the attacks to which I allude have come from the anarchist press, let me ask to specify here my thought by means of a recent example: The comrades of the P.O.U.M. and of the C.N.T. having been persecuted and assassinated with impunity in the Spanish republic while the C.N.T. participated in various capacities in a bourgeois government, the C.N.T. obviously bears its share of the political responsibility for these crimes against the labor movement, though it would be unjust to render its leaders *personally* responsible for them.

gravely significant. It is indeed in the field of repression that the Central Committee of the Bolshevik party committed the most serious mistakes from the beginning of the revolution, mistakes which were to contribute most dangerously, on the one hand, to bureaucratizing the party and the state, and on the other, to disarming the masses and more particularly the revolutionists. It is high time this was acknowledged.

* * *

Reply to Ciliga

WHAT greater injustice can be imagined towards the Russian revolution than to judge it in the light of Stalinism alone? Of Stalinism which emerged from it, it is true, only to kill it, but in the course of thirteen or fifteen years of struggles, by favor of the defeat of socialism in Europe and in Asia! It is often said that "the germ of all Stalinism was in Bolshevism at its beginning". Well, I have no objection. Only, Bolshevism also contained many other germs, a mass of other germs and those who lived through the enthusiasm of the first years of the first victorious socialist revolution ought not to forget it. To judge the living man by the death germs which the autopsy reveals in a corpse—and which he may have carried in him since his birth—is that very sensible?

"... All that was still socialistic and revolutionary in this Russia of 1921, was contained in the rank and file," writes Ciliga in the *Révolution Proletarienne* of Nov. 10. "In standing up against them, Lenin and Trotsky, in agreement with Stalin, with Zinoviev, Kaganovich and other, responded to the desires and served the interests of the bureaucratic cadres. The workers were then fighting for the socialism whose liquidation the bureaucracy was already pursuing."² One can see, Ciliga, that you did not know the Russia of those days; thence the enormity of your mistake.

In reality, a little direct contact with the people was enough to get an idea of the drama which, in the revolution, separated the communist party (and with it the dust of the other revolutionary groups) from the masses. At no time did the revolutionary workers form more than a trifling percentage of the masses themselves. In 1920-1921, all that was energetic, militant, ever-so-little socialistic in the labor population and among the advanced elements of the countryside had already been drained by the communist party, which did not, for four years of civil war, stop its constant mobilization of the willing—down to the most vacillating. Such things came to pass: a factory numbering a thousand workers, giving as much as half its personnel to the various mobilizations of the party and ending by working only at low capacity with the five hundred left behind for the social battle, one hundred of them former shopkeepers. . . . And since, in order to continue the revolution, it is necessary to continue the sacrifices, it comes about that the party enters into conflict with that rank and file. It is not the

² Kaganovich scarcely existed in 1921. Stalin stayed in the background. I do not like to see, under the pen of so honest a writer as Ciliga, this bunching together of names belonging to different phases of history.

conflict of the bureaucracy and the revolutionary workers, it is the conflict of the organization of the revolutionists—and the backward ones, the laggards, the least conscious elements of the toiling masses. Under cover of this conflict and of the danger, the bureaucracy fortifies itself, no doubt. But the healthy resistances that it encounters—I mean those not based upon demoralization or the spirit of reaction—come from within the party and the other revolutionary groups. It is within the Bolshevik party that a conflict arises in 1920, not between the rank and file—*which is itself already very backward*—but between the cadres of the active militants and the bureaucratic leadership of the Central Committee. In 1921, everybody who aspires to socialism is inside the party; what remains outside isn't worth much for the social transformation. Eloquence of chronology: it is the non-party workers of this epoch, joining the party to the number of 2,000,000 in 1924, upon the death of Lenin, who assure the victory of its bureaucracy. I assure you, Ciliga, that these people never thought of the Third International. Many of the insurgents of Kronstadt did think of it; but they constituted an undeniable élite and, duped by their own passion, they opened in spite of themselves the doors to a frightful counter-revolution. The firmness of the Bolshevik party, on the other hand, sick as it was, delayed Thermidor by five to ten years.

Let us recall that several analogous movements occurred at the same time. Makhno held the countryside. Red Siberia was in a ferment throughout. In the Tambov region, the peasant army of Antonov numbered more than 50,000 men, with an excellent organization. Led by right-wing Social Revolutionists, it too demanded the end of the régime of repressions and the "dictatorship of the commissars"; it proclaimed the Constituent Assembly. It was the peasant counter-revolution of the plainest kind. Tukhachevsky subdued it with difficulty in the summer of 1921. To try to conceive what would have been the consequences of a defaulting of the Bolshevik party at the time of Kronstadt, it is well to have in mind the spectacle of vast famished Russia, in which transportation and industry were succumbing, while almost everywhere there rose, under variegated forms, not the Third Revolution but a rural Vendée.

Victor SERGE

Reply to Victor Serge

1. WHAT IS SAID so appropriately by Victor Serge in replying to the superficial elucubrations of A. Ciliga is well worth calling to the attention of our readers, especially in light of the widespread attempts by all sorts of liberal muddleheads, social democrats, anarchists and renegades from Marxism to cover their crimes by condemning, as the twin of its antithesis Stalinism, the party that organized and defended the Russian revolution. It is also worth calling to the attention of Victor Serge, for the realities of 18-19 years ago which he describes, are in conflict with his own afterthoughts on the early period of the Russian revolution—afterthoughts, we must repeat, that are *not* unrelated to his position in Spain.

2. Victor Serge finds that a factor which contributed heavily to the victory of Stalinism was "the most serious mistakes from the beginning of the revolution" committed by the Bolshevik leaders in the repression of other groups. We cannot subscribe to this repetition, however guarded, of the hoary reformist analysis of the Bolsheviks' repressions and their rôle in the subsequent development of the Russian revolution. It is unhistorical; it is thoroughly one-sided—and therefore thoroughly false—because it says nothing of *how* and *why* the repressions were directed at Mensheviks, Social Revolutionists and anarchists. That can be learned not from Victor Serge's reflections of recent date, but from that excellent history, *L'An I de la Révolution Russe* (The Year I of the Russian Revolution). For instance:

The anarchists put the Bolsheviks under the obligation for the first time to subdue by force a minority of dissidents of the revolution. Sentimental revolutionists would have resisted. But what would have happened? Either the [anarchist] Black Guards would have finally risen in arms, Moscow would have gone through days of infinitely perilous tumult (remember the want and the lurking counter-revolution, already strongly organized); or they would have been dissolved with time, after numerous incidents difficult to settle. A revolution that did not subdue its dissidents when, armed, they form the embryo of a State within the State, would offer itself divided to the blows of its enemies. (P. 259.)

The leaders of the counter-revolutionary parties—S.R.s, Mensheviks and Kadets—had just contributed, in March [1918], a common organization, the League of the Renaissance (Soyuz Vozrozhdeniya). "The League," writes one of the heads of the S. R. party, "entered into regular relations with the representatives of the Allied missions at Moscow and Vologda, principally through the organ of M. Noulens." . . . The League of the Renaissance was the large clandestine organization of the "socialist" petty bourgeoisie and the liberals determined to overthrow the Soviet power by force. . . . The chain of the counter-revolutionary organizations thus went without interruption from the most "advanced" socialists to the blackest reaction. (P. 276.)

We commend these quotations, and a hundred others which give a complete and accurate picture of *how* the anti-Bolshevik "working-class" groups brought down upon themselves the repressions of the Soviet power, to the attention of the book's author, Victor Serge. They need re-reading, not re-writing. Or, if a new edition is needed, would it not be more in place, in view of the realities of the labor movement today, to add a few pages showing that the Menshevik and anarchist "weapon of criticism" nowadays directed at Bolshevism is in no way superior to their "criticism of weapons" directed at Bolshevism two decades ago?

3. Victor Serge's latest contribution to the story of the suppression of Kronstadt, which does not describe the alleged excesses of the Bolsheviks in the most restrained manner, in our opinion adds nothing fundamental to the discussion. Having already given a good deal of space to Kronstadt, allowing the presentation of contending opinions and stating our own views, we are now terminating, at least for the time being, the discussion of this question in the review.

The EDITORS