

*Robin*

# **EDUCATION FOR SOCIALISTS**

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**THE KRONSTADT REBELLION**

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## Introductory Note

In March 1921 a brief uprising against the Bolshevik regime took place among the sailors at the Kronstadt naval base near Petrograd. The movement reflected widespread discontent with the strict regime of "war communism" and the famine conditions imposed by the long civil war and the imperialist blockade of the Russian revolution. However, it directed this sentiment in a counter-revolutionary direction. The uprising was quickly suppressed by Soviet Red Army forces.

This episode has since been used by anarchists, liberals, and other opponents and critics of revolutionary Marxism to demonstrate their contention that Lenin's revolutionary regime was the embryo of Stalin's bureaucratic tyranny. During the Spanish Civil War, when leaders of the Spanish anarchist movement joined the capitalist Popular Front government, their embarrassed cothinkers abroad raised the issue of Kronstadt in an effort to fend off revolutionary Marxist criticisms of the anarchist betrayal in Spain. The ensuing debate produced the materials reprinted in this *Education for Socialists Bulletin*.

Anarchists today continue to raise the issue of Kronstadt in their polemics against Marxism. The contributions of Trotsky, John G. Wright, and the editors of *New International*, reprinted in this bulletin, stand up as an effective refutation of the anarchist position.

# The Questions of Wendelin Thomas

The following letter was written in reply to questions put to the author by Wendelin Thomas, who argued for the view that there was a basic identity between Bolshevism and Stalinism, as shown by Lenin's attitude towards opponents like the Mensheviks, the Kronstadt insurgents and the independent Makhno bands in the Ukraine during the Civil War. Thomas is a former Communist deputy of the German Reichstag and now a member of the International Commission investigating the Moscow Trials. —Ed.

Esteemed Comrade:

I do not think that the questions which you asked me have a direct relationship to the investigations of the New York Commission and can have an influence on its conclusions. Nevertheless I am fully prepared to reply to your questions in order to acquaint with my actual views all those who are interested in them.

## "End Justifies Means"

Like many others, you see the source of evil in the principle: "The end justifies the means". This principle is in itself very abstract and rationalistic. It permits most varied interpretations. But I am prepared to take upon myself the defense of this formula—from the materialistic and dialectical viewpoint. Yes, I consider that there are no means that are good or bad in themselves or in connection with some absolute supra-historical principle. Those means that lead

to the raising of the power of man over nature and the liquidation of the power of man over man are good. In this broad historical sense the means can only be justified by the end.

Does not this mean, however, that falsehood, treachery, betrayal are permissible and justified if they lead to "the end"? All depends on the nature of the aim. If the aim is the liberation of mankind then falsehood, betrayal, and treachery can in no wise be appropriate means. The Epicureans were accused by their opponents of sinking to the ideals of a pig when they advocated "happiness". To which the Epicureans, not without foundation, replied that their opponents understand happiness... in a pig-gish way.

You make reference to Lenin's words that a revolutionary party has the "right" to make its opponents hated and despised in the eyes of the masses. In these words you see a principled defense of amoralism. You forget, however, to point out where, in which political camp are the representatives of lofty morals. My observations tell me that political struggle in general utilizes widely exaggeration, distortion, falsehood and slander. The revolutionists are always the most slandered: in their time Marx, Engels and their friends; later—the Bolsheviks, Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg; at the present time—the Trotskyists. The hatred of the possessors toward the revolution; the dull conservatism of the petty bourgeoisie, the conceit and superciliousness of the intellectuals; the material interests of the labor

bureaucrats—all these factors combine in the hounding of the revolutionary Marxist. At the same time the Messrs. Slanderers do not forget to be indignant at the amoralism of the Marxists. This hypocritical indignation is nothing but a weapon of the class struggle.

## Lenin's Position

In the words quoted by you, Lenin merely wanted to say that he no longer considers the Mensheviks proletarian fighters and he makes it his task to make them hateful in the eyes of the workers. Lenin expressed his thought with his characteristic passion and opened the possibilities for ambiguous and unworthy interpretations. But on the basis of the complete works of Lenin and his life's work I declare that this irreconcilable fighter was a most loyal opponent, for despite all exaggerations and extremes he always strove to tell the masses what is. The struggle of the reformists against Lenin, on the contrary, was thoroughly penetrated with hypocrisy, falsehood, trickery and forgeries under the cover of universal truths.

Your evaluation of the Kronstadt uprising of 1921 is basically incorrect. The best, most sacrificing sailors were completely withdrawn from Kronstadt and played an important role at the fronts and in the local Soviets throughout the country. What remained was the gray mass with big pretensions ("We are from Kronstadt"), but without political education and unprepared for revolutionary sacrifice. The country was starving. The Kronstadters

demanding privileges. The uprising was dictated by a desire to get privileged food rations. The sailors had cannon and battleships. All the reactionary elements, in Russia as well as abroad, immediately seized upon this uprising. The white emigres 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.

No less erroneous is your estimate of Makhno. In himself he was a mixture of fanatic and adventurer. He became the con-

centration of the very tendencies which brought about the Kronstadt uprising. The cavalry in general is the most reactionary part of the army. The equestrian despises the pedestrian. Makhno created a cavalry of peasants who supplied their own horses. These were not downtrodden village poor whom the October Revolution first awakened, but the strong and well-fed peasants who were afraid of losing what they had. The anarchist ideas of Makhno (the ignoring of the State, non-recognition of the central power) corresponded to the spirit of this kulak cavalry as nothing else could. I should add that the hatred of the city and the city worker on the part of the followers of Makhno was complemented by a militant anti-Semitism. At the very time when we were carrying on life and death struggle against Denikin and Wrangel, the Makhnovists attempted to carry on an independent policy. Straining at the bit, the petty bourgeois (kulak) thought he could dictate his contradictory views to the

capitalists on the one hand and to the workers on the other. This kulak was armed, we had to disarm him. This is precisely what we did.

#### Stalin and the Bolsheviks

Your attempt to conclude that Stalin's forgeries flow from the "amoralism" of the Bolsheviks is basically false. In the period when the revolution fought for the liberation of the oppressed masses it called everything by its right name and was in no need of forgeries. The system of falsifications flows from the fact that the Stalinist bureaucracy fights for the privileges of the minority and is compelled to conceal and mask its real aims. Instead of seeking for an explanation in the material conditions of historical development, you create the theory of "the original sin", which fits the church but not the socialist republic.

Respectfully yours,

L. Trotsky

Coyoacan, July 6, 1937.

# 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.

**T**HE 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.<sup>1</sup> 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."<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>3</sup>

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.<sup>4</sup> 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".<sup>5</sup> 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, 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 resolu-

<sup>1</sup>In Jan.-March 1921, occurred the Tumenek 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.

<sup>2</sup>*Sotsialisticheski Vestnik*, Aug. 25, 1937.

<sup>3</sup>*Sots. Vestnik*, April 5, 1921. Our emphasis.

<sup>4</sup>The 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.

<sup>5</sup>*The Kronstadt Rebellion*, p. 12. Emphasis in the original.

tion 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. Lawrence<sup>6</sup> 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."<sup>7</sup> 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*.<sup>8</sup> 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.<sup>9</sup>

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.*<sup>10</sup>

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?

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

<sup>6</sup>*Vanguard*, Feb.-March, 1937.

<sup>7</sup>*Loc. cit.*, pp. 12-13.

<sup>8</sup>*Loc. cit.*, p. 11.

<sup>9</sup>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.)

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

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.<sup>11</sup> 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.<sup>12</sup>

In a subsequent issue Miliukov's organ, *Poslednya Novosti*, in-

<sup>11</sup> In 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.

<sup>12</sup> *Poslednya Novosti*, March 11, 1921.

sisted that the Bolshevik power could be supplanted only through Soviets "freed" from the Bolsheviks.<sup>12</sup>

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.<sup>14</sup> 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.<sup>15</sup> 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 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).<sup>16</sup> 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* . . .

<sup>12</sup> *Idem.*, March 18, 1921.

<sup>14</sup> In 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.)

<sup>15</sup> "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.

<sup>16</sup> 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 Antibolchevique. Petrograd et Moscou Serient 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." (*Foerische Zeitung*, March 10.)

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

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."<sup>17</sup>

*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.*, 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."<sup>18</sup>

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,

<sup>17</sup> 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 Southwest 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.)

<sup>18</sup> *Sots. Vestnik*, April 5, 1921. Our emphasis.



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"<sup>19</sup>—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, Eston-

ian 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 "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

<sup>19</sup> Berkman, *The Kronstadt Rebellion*, p. 8.

# Anarchist Tactics in Spain

Guy A. Aldred

[In anti-parliamentarian movement since 1906; founder of Bakunin Press in London; author of several anarcho-communist pamphlets; arrested for sedition for first time in 1909; editor of *Herald of Revolt*, *Spur*, and other journals; now member of United Socialist Movement, whose secretary, Ethel MacDonald, was in Barcelona for eleven months as radio propagandist and editor of English edition of C.N.T. Bulletin; formerly associated with Spanish anarchists, but broke with them and contacted radical sections of Dutch and French anarchists. We print below the important excerpts from Aldred's contribution to the discussion.]

THERE WAS NO STRATEGY in the C.N.T. leadership. It shut itself up from the world of struggle, a bureaucracy hidden in a big building in Barcelona, and was prepared to pay any price for place and position, miscalled power. It had no strategy. Had the C.N.T. pursued anarchist strategy, the onus of responsibility for the struggle against fascism would have been thrown on the shoulders of the world proletariat. In Barcelona, after July 19, the C.N.T. had the opportunity to socialize life; to destroy all bourgeois credit; to make war on the alien capitalist exploiter; and to render impossible of existence the petty property groups that became the backbone of the Stalinist counter-revolution. It is true to say that the C.N.T. is responsible for this counter-revolution. It lacked revolutionary moral courage, despite the barricade heroism of Durruti, Ascaso, etc. Its foreign leadership rejoiced in the idea of power. Emma Goldman spoke to the *Manchester Guardian* as the representative of the Barcelona and Valencia governments and defended Montseny's position. Ethel MacDonald was told that, on July 20, 1936, the C.N.T. Committee secretly met, and declared that the time was not ripe for the revolutionary struggle. Stevens asserted this in the Dutch syndicalist press and challenged contradiction.

The C.N.T. leadership cannot be defended. This does not indict anarchism and even less anti-parliamentarism. It does not indict the rank and file of the C.N.T. or the Friends of Durruti. It indicts the C.N.T. leadership for its departure from, and betrayal of, anarchism. The anarchist leadership in Spain is tending to forget the crimes of Stalinism by a growing flirting with this monstrous evil of Red fascism. This fact does not justify Trotskyism. And it does not mean the bankruptcy of anarchism; only of reformism as opposed to social revolution.

*Anarchism and class collaboration.* When Rocker explains the anarchist failure to take power in May 1937, or at least, to resist the Stalinist aggression, by stating that the anarchists "were opposed to any dictatorship from whichever side it proceeded", he betrays his ignorance of the class issue involved. To be so opposed to dictatorship that you surrender to dictatorship is obviously

confusion. Actually, of course, the anarchists surrendered to the anti-fascist or Popular Front government.

When Felix Morrow deduces from this conduct of the anarchists, inspired by various motives, some good, some bad, that anarchism, *per se*, stands for class collaboration in the period of social revolution, he is writing nonsense. If he is arguing from fact, one can deduce from the events of the Russian Revolution that Trotskyism and Leninism stand equally for class collaboration. Actually, anarchism does not stand for class collaboration but for the conquest of bread and freedom by the working class; for the liquidation of political into industrial or use-value society.

Felix Morrow is quite right when he declares that there exists in Spain today a corrupt, degenerate Spanish bureaucracy. It is quite true to aver that Rudolf Rocker defends that bureaucracy. Emma Goldman does the same. On that account, when she came to Britain, she set to work to destroy the anti-parliamentary movement here and to establish a controlled, dictated anarchist bureau, defended by capitalists and on all fours with the Stalinist bureaus of murder apology. But this is not anarchism any more than Stalinism is communism or socialism.

Felix Morrow denies that Kronstadt is a burning question. At least it is a key issue. Surely Trotsky's attitude towards the imprisonment and murder of anarchists in the Soviet Republic, the question of the legitimate revolutionary demands of Kronstadt that were drowned in blood, the reactions of Zinoviev and others, since murdered themselves, Trotsky's falsehood about Makhno, are historical matters worthy of consideration. If the Stalinists are wrong to believe that history begins and ends with Stalin, what right has Morrow to assume that it begins and ends with Trotsky?

Trotsky's falsehood—"The Makhno movement was a kulak movement"—may not be in the same category as the rewriting of John Reed's *Ten Days That Shook the World*, the producing of films of the revolution that leave out Trotsky, the re-telling of Lenin's hiding until Stalin overshadows Lenin; but the earlier, simple falsehood, contains the seeds of the later gigantic crop of lies and slanders. Falsehood is falsehood; and one cannot play at error without expecting ambition to improve on one's prentice and amateurish beginnings. To my mind, the genius of Trotsky notwithstanding, Trotskyism did pioneer Stalinism. I do not think it would be difficult to develop this point in debate; and personally, I would like to debate it on the public platform. I would be glad of an opportunity of defending the anarchist case against Trotskyism as well as against Stalinism. This is not to defend the Rockers, the Goldmans, or the foreign service of the corrupt, bureaucratic Spanish C.N.T.

GLASGOW, Dec. 29, 1937

Guy A. ALDRED

## T. H. Bell

[Anarchist for almost fifty years; personal friend of Kropotkin, Malatesta, Tarrida del Marmol, Tucker, Goldman, Rocker; introduced first Spanish anarchist literature in Mexico in 1891; host in England of released survivors of Montjuich tortures; declares that Rudolf Rocker "will tell you if you ask him that no one in his opinion has any better title than I have to speak for that English-speaking anarchist movement which your article attacked"; frequent contributor to American and English anarchist journals. Below are printed the most relevant excerpts from Bell's contribution to the discussion.]

BUT ALTHOUGH I admit that some of your criticisms are amply justified, I laugh at your notion that because of the errors it has committed in Spain the anarchist movement is to be dismissed from the scene. It is just coming on to it. For even if the C.N.T.-F.A.I., and the other radical workers of Spain are to be crushed completely by the Franco-Hitler-Mussolini combination they have already accomplished one great historic feat of the highest importance. For, crushed or victorious, they have stopped that triumphant march of fascism which seemed about to trample on all Europe. You remember how at one time the workers in Northern Italy had seized the factories and we thought the social revo-

lution just on the edge. Alas! they looked for leadership to the men of their political party. These men were lawyers, doctors, journalists, politicians, everything but producers; they felt their own incompetence in matters of production; so they advised the workers to give the factories back; matters would be adjusted by political means. Just then too it became evident to the Italian workers that the *affaire* in Russia had resulted not in a free society, but in a fresh tyranny. They were discouraged and bewildered for the moment. And Mussolini, inspired and taught by the example of Lenin, saw his opportunity and took it. Later in Germany seven millions of social democrats, disheartened, stood patiently to have fetters fitted on their feet; five million communists, "left without orders", obediently held out their hands for the handcuffs.

The fascists and the Nazis therefore seemed fully justified in their claim that they represented daring and energy; anyhow they marched in triumph onward and onward—till at Barcelona the men of the C.N.T.-F.A.I., the anarcho-syndicalists, met them—with bare hands and heroic hearts—and stopped them dead. The overblown balloon of fascist reputation went off there with a pop.

The anarcho-syndicalists of Spain have put a stop not only to the triumphant march of fascism; they have put a stop to the westward march of "communism". You people of THE NEW INTERNATIONAL are behind the times on the Spanish news. It is true that the Stalinists did seize power in the Spanish revolution; but they were not able to hold it. The indignation of the Spanish people arose to such a degree, and the increased moral influence of the C.N.T. became so apparent—in spite of the blunders of some leaders and the imprisonment or murder of others—that Stalinist Russia has finally recognized its inevitable defeat and quit the scene. Even if the anarcho-syndicalists in the long run are trampled into the mire by the overwhelming forces of the fascist enemy, in the next rising in Europe the workers will begin just where they left off.

In one other important matter the anarcho-syndicalists of Spain have vindicated their doctrine with extraordinary success. Many of your readers are probably aware now that the workers in Russia when they themselves ran the workshops at first—before the communists put in their commissars—organized production with more ability than has been generally conceded to them. Their difficulties lay in the region of exchange rather than that of production. Given a little experience and made to feel the responsibility, they could soon have obtained a considerable degree of efficiency. But the tale of their failure, "necessitating communist control", has been told so often that those who tell it really take it to be true. It has even affected some of us who ought to have known better. I make my confession here that I was not myself over-optimistic about the immediate success of the workers in organizing industry in Spain, though I knew that a good deal of study had been given to it. It is evident that they have really had magnificent success, a success that should stop once for all the old notion that things can be run at first only by a superior class, a Samurai or a Bolshevik party. The Catalonian workers are not only producing with greater efficiency than ever before the necessities of life, they have developed in an incredibly short time a production of arms and ammunitions which enables them now to face the enemy on something more approaching an equal footing. The anarchist doctrine of the creative ability of a free people has been vindicated nobly.

Let me point out that when the anarchists in Spain have blundered and have failed, it has been not when they attempted to apply anarchist doctrines but when they abandoned them. They did quite right not to seize power—and begin another tyranny; though I confess they seem to me to have been too slow to accept responsibility and leadership. (I say, "it seems to me", because their difficulties were certainly enormous.) One would have expected them to set off with heads up and banners flying direct to

their own goal, instead of negotiating and compromising with governmentalists as they did. But, you know, they could not fight the fascists for long with their bare fists; arms had to be obtained somehow or other; the government at Madrid, if it did not possess the arms, possessed at least the sinews of war. He who pays the piper can insist generally on calling the tune. That excuse, I admit, does not cover the utterly wretched weakness of some of these leaders, such as that praise to Stalin to which you refer. It is evident that when anarchists abandon the methods of anarchism they can make a most deplorable mess of it.

LOS ANGELES, Jan. 1938.

T. H. BELL

## The Editors

IN ADDITION TO THE contributions of Guy A. Aldred and T. H. Bell, the February 1938 issue of *Vanguard*, which eagerly seeks to capitalize upon the prominence of its sister-movement in Spain by advertizing itself as the only organ that "presents the authentic position of the C.N.T.-F.A.I.", devotes almost one-third of its pages to a reply to the article by Felix Morrow on "Anarchism in Spain" in the January issue of THE NEW INTERNATIONAL. The article, as readers will recall, ended with an invitation by the editors to anarchist spokesmen to participate in a public discussion in our columns of the criticisms made by the author. The three replies made, two of which are printed in their germane essentials above, require only some brief comments.

1. Reference to the indubitable militancy, bravery and revolutionary spirit which animates every fibre of the masses of Spanish anarchist workers, is, when not demagogic, beside the point under discussion. These qualities of the masses no more justify the treacherous course of the Spanish anarchist leadership than the heroism of the Austrian workers in February 1934 could cover up the perfidy of the social-democratic bureaucracy. The point under discussion is the philosophy and practise of the anarchist leadership as recorded in life by the class struggle in Spain.

2. Notwithstanding all of *Vanguard's* hoarse denials of the existence and growth of an anarcho-syndicalist *bureaucracy* in Spain, the disagreeable fact is too plain and big to be concealed any longer. Guy Aldred, well aware of the facts, does not seek to contest them. Nor can any informed person who knows of the arbitrary and wretched manner in which the C.N.T.-F.A.I. pontiffs excommunicated the Friends of Durruti and left wingers of the Libertarian Youth when they rebelled against the policy of the petty bourgeois cabinet ministers who were the official spokesmen of anarchism in Spain—Mesdames and Messieurs Montseny, Garcia Oliver and consorts. *Vanguard* says smugly that "a critical evaluation of this [the Spanish anarcho-syndicalist] policy in the light of the accumulated experience of the last sixteen months, is on the order of the day". But you will look in vain for such a "critical evaluation". Is it to be made later, perhaps when it is . . . too late? The international anarchist congress in London found not a word of criticism to make; instead it gave an unqualified endorsement to the line of the Spanish anarchist bureaucracy. At the congress of the *Union Anarchiste* in France towards the end of last year a motion was adopted prohibiting any criticism of the leaders of the C.N.T.-F.A.I. even if uttered in the ranks of the organization! The Stalinist parties have such a motion in practise, but even they have not been brazen enough to adopt it formally.

3. The *main* point in Morrow's indictment of anarchist policy in Spain dealt with class collaboration and participation in a bourgeois coalition government. Aldred joins him in condemnation. Bell seeks to make a halting explanation. But in the almost five pages of reply by *Vanguard*, which discourses on almost everything and everybody, there is not a word—not one single word!—devoted to discussing this most vital point. It is hard to believe, but it is true. The anarchists—anti-authoritarian, anti-stateist, anti-governmentalist—for decades derided and castigated

the social democrats for entering bourgeois coalition governments even when the argument of "emergency situation" or "need of unity against reaction" was made. Suddenly they too find themselves confronted with an "emergency situation" (i.e., the intensification of the class struggle) in the only country where they are a powerful mass movement and—they become Ministers of State (yes, of the State which is the source of all evil!), ministers of a bourgeois coalition government. And even after they are unceremoniously kicked out, after the May Days in Barcelona when the anarchist workers were massacred by the same government, they whimper and plead for the right to reënter it: "The participation of the C.N.T. in the government is considered [by the "liberal and democratic powers of Europe"] as the strong guarantee of the independence of Spain." (Augustin Souchy, *Solidaridad Obrera*, Aug. 28, 1937.)

When these little details are pointed out, the mouth of the *Vanguard* writer suddenly fills up with water. He does not even mention anarchist participation in a bourgeois coalition government, but in a shamefaced manner makes an implicit defense of it by reference—to whom?—to Lenin! "As is known, the revolutionary elements (Bolsheviks included) made a united front with the petty bourgeois elements of the so-called Kerensky democracy." Quite so, in the struggle against Kornilov. Only, the Bolsheviks never entered the bourgeois government of Kerensky; the Mensheviks and Social-Revolutionists did. Therein lies the difference.

4. It is not anarchism that is bankrupt; the collapse is due to the abandonment of anarchism. Thus argue Aldred and Bell. We cannot agree. The source of the failure in Spain is to be found in the very heart of anarchist philosophy itself. Anarchism is not a proletarian class doctrine. It is based upon a petty bourgeois idealistic conception of the state. The bourgeoisie admonishes the workers: Don't take power, it is corrupting by its very nature. The anarchists echo this warning. The state is not a class organ to them; it is, *per se*, Evil Incarnate, regardless of what class is in power. They do not, therefore, counterpose the proletarian state to the bourgeois state. It is not surprising, then, that when the concrete "emergencies" of real life jerk the anarchists out of the blue sky of abstraction; when, as a mass movement imminently imperilled by fascism, they find themselves forced to employ all the weapons of power they can lay hands on, including the most concentrated weapon of power, namely, the machinery of state—

they do not try to create such a political weapon in a new (proletarian) form but simply fall back upon it in its existing (bourgeois) form. Why? Because in their doctrinaire narrowness, they consider a proletarian state no different from—and therefore an unnecessary duplication of—the bourgeois state. That is why the Spanish anarchists did not develop the embryonic organs of proletarian power, but simply capitulated to the democratic bourgeois state of Azaña-Companys-Caballero-Negrin-Diaz. That is the essence of the matter.

How significant it is that in the face of so monstrous a disavowal of the basic traditional anarchist principle, not one of the bishops of the anarchist movement has cried out against the C.N.T. bureaucracy in the tone and spirit of Lenin, when he called for a break with the Second International for its war betrayal. The Goldmans, Rockers, Souchys, Frémonts, Santillans—to say nothing of the lesser novices of *Vanguard*—take anarcho-bourgeois coalitionism in their stride as though it were a bagatelle. When it is referred to at all, it is justified on the ground of "emergency", as if, in Trotsky's words, anarchist principles were a raincoat that is good on sunny days but, alas! leaks badly on those "emergency" days when it rains.

5. As for the sempiternal question of Kronstadt and Makhno, we again refer our readers to John G. Wright's article in our last issue and to an article by Leon Trotsky on the same subject in our next issue. The present-day anarchist pother about Kronstadt is usually calculated to becloud the burning question of their policy in Spain. It is more than a little hypocritical for the anarchists to thunder about the "Kronstadt massare", when their leaders covered up the murder of Durruti by the Stalinists for the sake of ministerial unity with the latter; when they sat in one government with the Stalinists while the latter censored and suppressed their papers and imprisoned or assassinated scores of anarchist and other revolutionary militants; when, for the sake of governmental unity with the Stalinists, their leaders sing the praises of Stalin; when the same leaders, who could not reconcile themselves to Leninism or the Bolshevik revolution, officially join in Barcelona with the Friends of the Soviet Union (read: Friends of the G.P.U.) to celebrate the triumph of the Stalinist counter-revolution on November 7, 1937. Kronstadt may have been a great historical tragedy of 1921. But it is not, after all, a paint brush to be used on any and all occasions to whitewash the bankrupt anarchist bureaucracy of 1938. For that job, there is no brush big enough.

# 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 train-

ing; 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 Years of 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 Denikin 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 battlehips. 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 émigrés. 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 impotence 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



# DISCUSSION

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## 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 dan-

gerous 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-employed 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 Bolshevik 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 Kronstadt's 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

**I**N 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

**D**EAR 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 consti-

tute. 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

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## 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.<sup>1</sup>

"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

<sup>1</sup> 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.

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 combatants 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 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.

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## 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."<sup>2</sup> 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

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

<sup>2</sup> 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.

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