

Stalin did not fall from the moon!

PDF edition
Feb 2001
<http://surf.to/anarchism>

Articles from Workers Solidarity

The importance of Russia

Originally given as talk to WSM public meeting (1991)

The Russian revolution of 1917 has been a subject of key importance to anarchists for 70 years now, for two reasons. The first reason is that for the first time in history a working class revolution succeeded in ousting the old ruling classes. The second reason is that after the old ruling class was ousted a new class came to power. Those of us who want to make a revolution to-day must understand where the successes and failures of the past came from.

The Russian revolution demonstrated that it was possible for the working class to take over the running of the economy and to bring down their old rulers, not once but twice in a single year. After the February revolution of 1917 the workers entered into a period of almost constant struggle with the state and the bosses. At the start of this period many workers supported the Kerensky government. This struggle changed their attitudes on a mass basis and gave them the confidence to try to overturn all the old order and privilege. Committees sprung up in the factories and the armed forces. In the run up to October the workers had already taken control of the factories, for the most part. The purpose of the October revolution was to smash the state, destroying the power of the bosses to use armed force to recover their property.

There were several organisations arguing for a workers revolution in this period. This included many anarchists particu-

larly in Kronstadt. They were however much fewer in number than the Bolshevik party which came to claim the revolution as its legacy alone. During the 1905 revolution the anarchists had raised the



lary in Kronstadt. They were however much fewer in number than the Bolshevik party which came to claim the revolution as its legacy alone. During the 1905 revolution the anarchists had raised the

slogan "All power to the soviets", at the time this was opposed by what became the Bolshevik party but in 1917 they used this slogan to gain mass support. Other Marxists at the time were, incorrectly to accuse the Bolsheviks as having abandoned Marxism for Anarchism but as events were to show they had done no

such thing.

The revolution was made by no single organisation, but rather was the work of the working class of Russia. During the October revolution 4 anarchists were members of the Revolutionary military committee that co-ordinated the military side of the revolution. An Anarchist sailor from Kronstadt led the delegation which dissolved the constituent assembly.

Explaining failure

After October the working class of the Russia set about the process of building the new society on the ruins of the old. Within a few short years however the revolution had collapsed. The old bosses never came back as a class although many individuals returned. Instead a new class of rulers arose, one which successfully incorporated many of the revolutionaries of 1917. Too socialists to-day there is no more pressing task than understanding not only why the revolution failed but also why it failed in such a manner. The fact the patient died is now obvious, the question is what it died of.

Many Socialists have tried to explain this degeneration of the revolution as a product of a unique set of circumstances, comprising the backwards state of the USSR and the heavy toll inflicted by three years of civil war and western intervention. According to this theory the Bolsheviks were forced to take dictatorial measures in order to preserve the revolution. These were intended as emergency measures



Workers Solidarity Movement

only and would have been repealed later if not for Stalin's rise to power in the 20's. This interpretation of history presents the Bolsheviks as helpless victims of circumstances.

This is not a view we would accept as most of you are no doubt aware. It is a view that falls beneath even a casual look at what occurred in the USSR between 1917 and 1921. It also collapses when you look at what Leninist ideology had stood for before and after the revolution. We instead lay the blame at the feet of Lenin and the Bolshevik party. The degeneration was part and parcel of the policies of the Bolsheviks.

Workers Control: More than a slogan?

What actually happened in this period was the replacement of all the organs of workers democracy and self-management with Bolshevik imposed state rule. One example of many is given by the factory committees. These were groups of workers elected at most factories before, during and after the October revolution. The delegates to these committees were mandatable and recallable. They were elected initially in order to prevent the individual bosses from sabotaging equipment. They quickly attempted to expand their scope to cover the complete administration of the workplace and displaced the individual managers. As each workplace relied on many others to supply raw materials, power and to take their products on to the next stage of production the Factory Committees tried to federate in November 1917.

They were prevented from doing so by the Bolsheviks through the trade union bureaucracy. The planned "All Russian Congress of Factory Committees" never took place. Instead the Bolshevik party decided to set up the "All Russian council of workers control" only 25% of the delegates coming from the factory committees. In this way the creative energy of Russian workers which would have resulted in a co-ordinating centre not under Bolshevik control was blocked in favour of an organisation the party could control. This body was in itself still born, it only met once. In any case it was soon absorbed by the Supreme Economic Council set up in November 1917 which was attached to the Council of Peoples Commissars, itself entirely made up of Bolshevik party members.

So within a few short months of October the Bolsheviks had taken control of the economy out of the hands of the Working class and into the hands of the Bolshevik party. This was before the civil war, at a

time when the workers had showed themselves capable of making a revolution but according to the Bolsheviks incapable of running the economy. The basis of the Bolshevik attack on the factory committees was simple, the Bolsheviks wanted the factories to be owned and managed by the state, the factory committees wanted the factories to be owned and managed by the workers. One Bolshevik described the factory committees attitude as " We found a process which recalled the anarchist dreams of autonomous productive communes".

There were many anarchists involved in the factory committee movement at the time, mainly through the K.A.S., the Confederation of Anarcho-Syndicalists. In some areas they were the dominant influence in the factories. From this stage on the influence of the KAS was to grow rapidly in the Unions to the point where the Bolsheviks started to physically suppress its activists in 1918. At the first all Russian council of trade unions the anarcho-syndicalists had delegates representing 75, 000 workers. Their resolution calling for real workers control and

vision of workers control but as we have seen this was a process that was already under way. It did however mean that most of the non-Bolshevik revolutionaries temporarily sunk their differences with the Bolsheviks in order to defeat the whites.

The Civil War

The civil war greatly weakened the ability of the working class to resist the further undermining of the gains they had made in 1917. During the civil war emphasis was placed on the need for unity to defeat the whites. After the civil war a much weakened working class found itself faced with a complete state structure armed with all the repression apparatus of the modern state. Many of the activists had been jailed or executed by the Bolsheviks. In 1921 at the end of the civil war only a fresh revolution could have set the USSR back on the path towards socialism.

The repression of workers democracy by the Bolsheviks was as a result of Bolshevik ideology rather than due to character flaws in the Bolshevik leadership. Lenin

Trotsky even more than Stalin or Lenin was the most prominent supporter of what was called the parties historical birthright.

not state workers control was defeated by an alliance of the Bolshevik, Menshevik and Social-Revolutionary delegates. By the end of 1918 Workers Control was replaced with individual management of the factories (by Bolshevik decree) and the KAS had been weakened by armed Cheka raids and the closing down of its national publication in April and May 1918.

All this occurred before the civil war and the allied intervention attempted to smash the revolution. The civil war was to reap an enormous harvest on the Soviet union as the combined forces of White generals and 17 foreign armies captured up to 60% of the land area and threatened to capture Petrograd. It also provided the excuse the Bolsheviks were to use for the suppres-

had a very limited view of what socialism was, seeing it as little more than an extension of state capitalism.

"State capitalism is a complete material preparation for socialism, the threshold of socialism, a rung on the ladder of history between which and the rung called socialism there are no gaps".

The introduction of Taylorism and one man management in the factories in 1918 and 1919 displays a similar fixation with efficiency and productivity.

Lenin also believed that ordinary workers could not run society. A party of intellectuals was necessary to do this. He thought that workers were unable to go beyond having a "trade union conscious-

ness” because of the fact they had no time to study socialism.

“There are many...who are not enlightened socialists and cannot be such because they have to slave in the factories and they have neither the time nor the opportunity to become socialists”.

Briefly in 1917 Lenin was forced to acknowledge this to be wrong when he admitted that the workers were 100 times ahead of the party from February to October.

This was the justification behind the dictatorship of the party. In a modern sense it is the justification behind putting the party before all else. Some Leninists today will happily argue that a socialist should have no principles beyond building the party and that even scabbing is excusable if it is in the parties interests. Leninist organisations tend to look at struggles purely in terms of recruitment, remaining involved just long enough to pick up any activists then heading on for the next one. For the Leninists the chance of a revolution being successful is mainly determined by the size of their party at the time.

What is socialism

Anarchists have a different view of what socialism is and how people become socialists. We do not think it is something that comes from reading books or engaging in debates. The basic ideas of socialism are produced whenever workers come into conflict with the bosses. It is at this time that large numbers of people actively ask who runs the factories, what is the role of the state, etc. The purpose of an anarchist organisation is not simply to grow by grabbing activists out of campaigns. Its function is to get involved with such struggles using its reservoir of experience and theory to win them. It’s function is to link up many individual struggles into a widespread anti-capitalist movement. Its function is to agitate for the smashing of the state and it’s replacement with a society based on communism and workers self-management.

We do not see the number of people in our organisation as being the most important factor behind the success or failure of a revolution. Rather we look at the level of confidence in the class, and the level of understanding about what needs to be built as well as what must be destroyed. Although we want our ideas to be taken up and used on a mass basis we have no wish to get become leaders in order for this to happen.

The Bolsheviks saw their party as com-

prising all the advanced revolutionaries (vanguard). They saw socialism as something best implemented by a professional leadership of intellectuals. So when they talked of dictatorship of the proletariat they did not mean the working class as a whole exercising control of society. They meant the party holding power on behalf of the working class and in practise the leadership of the party being the ones making all the important policy decisions.

The Parties birth-right

They believed the party, because of its unique position was always right and therefore it had the right to rule over all the class. Therefore while the Soviets had been useful to the Bolsheviks up to the October revolution after the revolution they became a threat. They could and did decide policy which would contradict the party line. Most of them were not under sufficiently under the control of the party as they contained many other revolutionaries also. So the Bolsheviks proceeded to turn them into organs which rubber stamped party decisions.

By 1918 this process had been completed to the extent that the decisions to sign the treaty of Brest-Livtosk which surrendered a huge area of the revolutionary Ukraine to Germany and the Austro-Hungarian empire was made at a party Central Committee meeting. Indeed the central committee was split, the decision going through only by one vote, yet the Soviets had no role at all in this decision making. This was again before the Civil war and the famine was to provide an excuse for such manoeuvres.

The success and failure throws up all the questions that still separate anarchism from all other socialist theories. Where do revolutionary ideas come from. Lenin was quite clear on this in 'What is to be Done

“History in all countries attests that, on it’s own, the working class cannot go beyond the level of trade union consciousness, the realisation that they must combine into trade unions, fight against the employers, force the governments to pass such laws as benefit the conditions of the workers...As for the socialist doctrine, it was constructed out of the philosophical, historical and economic theories elaborated by educated members of the ruling class by intellectuals”.

Creative energy

Anarchists on the other hand point to the creative energy of the working class, the creation of Soviets in 1905 and of the Hungarian Workers Councils in 1956 for

instance were spontaneous events, unguided by any organisation. Revolutionary organisations are created by sections of the working class although it is certainly true that as the ruling class dominate education it may well be ex-members of this class that write down and formalise these ideas.

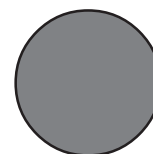
The Leninists also see their party as representing the working class. This was the justification of the suppression of all rivals in 1918 for the Bolsheviks and for the closing down of factions in the party from 1918 to 1921. Trotsky even more than Stalin or Lenin was the most prominent supporter of what was called the parties birthright. In the early 20’s he was to repeatedly use this idea of the parties birthright against minority groups and individuals in the Bolshevik party. The most astounding part of this however was the willingness of the same groups and individuals to accept this silencing in the name of the party. By the 30’s this whole process was to reach its logical conclusion with Stalins show trials of many of the old Bolshevik leadership.

The right of the party to dictate over the class was clearly expressed in 1921 by Trotsky at the 10th party congress. In attacking a faction within the Bolshevik party he said of them

“They have come out with dangerous slogans. They have made a fetish of democratic principles. They have placed the workers right to elect representatives above the party. As if the party were not entitled to assert its dictatorship even if that dictatorship temporarily clashed with the passing moods of the workers’ democracy!”

Here we have one of the clearest statements of the ideology behind Bolshevik practise in these years. This is the road many of to-days revolutionaries would like to lead us on to.

We have an entirely different project of how capitalism is to be overthrown and what is to replace it. We don’t think Workers democracy is icing on the cake or a step towards a workers state. We have no illusions in the neutrality of the state, no matter in whose hands power may lie. We wish to take part in the building of a workers movement not only capable of tearing down existing society but also of building a new society free of exploitation on its ruins.



A fresh look at Lenin..

Originally published in Workers Solidarity No. 31 (1991)

THE COLLAPSE of the regimes in Eastern Europe has thrown up all sorts of questions about socialism. So let's go back to the beginning. The Russian revolution of 1917 was, initially, a shot in the arm for socialists everywhere. It was possible, it existed and now it only remained to imitate it everywhere else.

But as time passed it became obvious that something had gone terribly wrong. Instead of being the inspiring picture of our future, Russia had turned into a squalid class-ridden dictatorship.

As purge followed purge and the new rulers allocated themselves the best of everything, the socialist movement in the West floundered as it sought explanations for what had gone wrong.

FLAT EARTH SOCIETY

There were those who found the idea of an existing socialist society so attractive that they refused to believe all the evidence to the contrary. These were the people who wrote glowing articles about the mechanisation of agriculture while old Bolsheviks were being tortured in the cellars of Stalin's secret police.

With the upheavals in Eastern Europe most of these Stalinists with rose-tinted spectacles have had to start facing reality, albeit begrudgingly. Those who still refuse to do so are no different in attitude or degree of stupidity from the Flat Earth Society or the fanatics of the Bermuda Triangle.

Among those socialists who accept that something went badly wrong (and not just in the last year or two!), the debate continues. Why should a revolution led by dedicated followers of Lenin have produced an oppressive regime where workers had no rights and bureaucrats

had all the power and privileges.

TROTSKY

Two explanations seem the most worthy of consideration. The first, put forward by Trotsky and his subsequent followers, comes down to this: no amount of dedication on behalf of the communists could offset the dreadful weight of the material difficulties.

In such a backward country, beset by civil war on all sides, with much of its working class destroyed in battle, degeneration was avoidable. Perhaps if Lenin had lived, or if Trotsky had replaced him as the no.1 leader, things might have been different - but it was not to be.

LENIN ...AND FATE

"Lenin certainly did not call for a dictatorship of the party over the proletariat, even less for that of a bureaucratised party over a decimated proletariat. But fate - the desperate condition of a backward country besieged by world capitalism - led to precisely this".

Tony Cliff, **Lenin**, Vol.3, page 111.

"The proletariat of a backward country was fated to accomplish the first socialist revolution. For this historic privilege it must, according to all the evidences, pay with a second supplementary revolution against bureaucratic absolutism"

Trotsky, **The Age of Permanent Revolution: A Trotsky Anthology**, page 278.

Thus according to the Trotskyists, it was hard material factors such as backwardness and the isolation of the young Bolshevik state which resulted in the tragic degeneration of the revolution. And don't forget "fate" - a most unusual term for 'scientific socialists' to use.

An alternative explanation of events in Russia is provided by the anarchists, who see the prime cause of the revolution's failure in the ideas of the Bolsheviks. The anarchist argument has the great advantage that it was not constructed to explain events after they took place but was formulated before and during the revolution.

Anarchists had always gone in for dire predictions of what would happen if revolutionaries attempted to take over the state instead of smashing it at the first opportunity. They understood two things: firstly, either the working class has direct and absolute control or some other class does; secondly, the state only serves the needs of a *minority* class which seeks to rule over the majority. No party could claim the right to make decisions for the working class, this would be the start of their progress towards becoming a new ruling class.

TOLD YOU SO!!!

Forty five years before 1917, Michael Bakunin, the leading anarchist in the International Working Mens' Association, warned of just such a prospect. He saw that the authoritarians would interpret the 'dictatorship of the proletariat' to mean their own dictatorship which

"would be the rule of scientific intellect, the most autocratic, the most despotic, the most arrogant and the most contemptuous of all regimes. They will be a new class, a new hierarchy of sham savants, and the world will be divided into a dominant minority in the name of science, and an immense ignorant majority"

Paul Avrich, **The Russian Anarchists**, page 93.

While a small minority of anarchists thought it would be possible to co-operate with the Bolsheviks, the majority were positive that, though the Bolsheviks did not set out to create a new class system, this was precisely what they were achieving. The anarchist Sergven recorded in 1918 that

"The proletariat is being gradually enserfed by the state. The people are being transformed into servants over whom there has arisen a new class of administrators - a new class born mainly from the womb of the so-called intelligentsia. Isn't this merely a new class system looming on the revolutionary horizon".

CENTRALISED POWER

And he could point a finger at the cause of this enserfment.

"We do not mean to say...that the Bolshevik party set out to create a new class system But we do say that even the best intentions and aspirations must inevitably be smashed against the evils inherent in any system of centralised power"

Ibid page 124.

In other words, unless centralised state power is immediately destroyed, the revolution is doomed to create a new ruling class. Either the masses have real power or the state does. For the anarchists it was a case of either a federation of workers' councils where the power came from below or the authority of the party/state giving orders to the masses. The two could not co-exist.

"SCIENTIFIC" SOCIALISTS

Thus the two most plausible explanations for the failure of the revolution are opposed to each other. On the one hand we have the Trotskyists who, being 'scientific socialists' see the cause of the failure in 'material circumstances' such as Russian backwardness, civil war and the failure of the revolution to spread across Europe. The Bolsheviks, had, it appears, understood Marxism and applied it correctly and yet were faced with events beyond their control that conspired to defeat them. Consequently the theory and party structure put forward by Lenin, remain, according to this school of thought, adequate today.

The Anarchists would agree that a revolution can't survive for too long if isolated in the middle of a sea of capitalism. They don't, however, believe that this explains everything that happened. What you end up with will be related to what you seek and how you fight for it. They argue that it was precisely the theory and party structures of Bolshevism that led to the bureaucratisation and death of the genuine liberatory revolution.

BEING REALISTIC

Neither argument is entirely satisfying. It is undoubtably true that the Bolsheviks had to face very difficult conditions when they assumed power. But according to their own mentor this will always be the case.

"...those who believe that socialism will be built at a time of peace and tranquillity are profoundly mistaken: it will everywhere be built at a time of disruption, at a time of famine."

Lenin, **Collected Works**, Vol.27 page 517.

This makes sense. Revolution, by its very nature, involves some disruption and civil war (though not necessarily famine). If a party organised on Bolshevik lines cannot survive a period of disruption without degenerating into a bureaucratic monolith then clearly such a form of organisation must be avoided at all costs.

Some anarchists tend to oversimplify the problem and see the Bolsheviks as setting out from day one to become an elite of privileged rulers. This is similarly unsatisfying. Are we really to believe that the whole Bolshevik party were only interested in making a revolution for the sole purpose of getting their grubby hands on state power so that they could make themselves into a new ruling class?

The briefest look at what they suffered in the Tsarist prisons, in Siberia, in exile and later in Stalin's purges suggests that such a notion is highly suspect! We must accept that most of them were courageous men and women with high ideals.

WHAT POLITICS?

Nevertheless there is a great strength to the anarchist case. It points to errors in the theory and practice of Bolshevism itself. It says that no matter how honest their intentions, their politics still lead them to be objectively opposed to the interests of the working class. It turns our attention to the theories of those who led Russia from workers' control to Stalinism.

It is too often taken for granted among socialists that we know what the Bolsheviks stood for. Before we can understand why things went wrong in Russia we need to know what exactly the Bolsheviks proposed to do on coming to power, what kind of structure they put forward, what form they thought the revolution would take, and what kind of society did they set out to create.

FROM LENIN'S MOUTH

It is particularly interesting to look at the ideas of V.I.Lenin - he was the unquestioned leader of the Bolsheviks and is still regarded as the greatest ever

socialist, after Marx, by the vast majority of those who see themselves as revolutionary socialists.

It can be a dangerous practice to pick quotations for use in an article such as this. Who is to say that they are not taken out of context. To allow the reader to make up his/her own mind all sources are provided so that the complete piece can be read if desired. It is felt necessary to use Lenin's own words lest there be an accusation that words are being put in his mouth.

LENIN'S SOCIALISM

The starting point must be Lenin's conception of 'socialism':

"When a big enterprise assumes gigantic proportions, and, on the basis of an exact computation of mass data, organises according to plan the supply of raw materials to the extent of two-thirds, or three fourths, of all that is necessary for tens of millions of people; when raw materials are transported in a systematic and organised manner to the most suitable places of production, sometimes situated hundreds of thousands of miles from each other; when a single centre directs all the consecutive stages of processing the materials right up to the manufacture of numerous varieties of finished articles; when the products are distributed according to a single plan among tens of millions of customers."

"...then it becomes evident that we have socialisation of production, and not mere 'interlocking'; that private economic and private property relations constitute a shell which no longer fits its contents, a shell which must inevitably decay if its removal is artificially delayed, a shell which may remain in a state of decay for a fairly long period ...but which will inevitably be removed"

Lenin, **Collected Works**, Vol.22, page 303.

SOCIALISM?

This is an important passage of Lenin's. What he is describing here is the economic set-up which he thought typical of **both** advanced monopoly capitalism and socialism. Socialism was, for Lenin, planned capitalism with the private ownership removed.

"Capitalism has created an accounting apparatus in the shape of the banks, syndicates, postal service, consumers' societies,

and office employees unions. Without the big banks socialism would be impossible.

The big banks are the "state apparatus" which we need to bring about socialism, and which we take ready made from capitalism; our task is merely to lop off what characteristically mutilates this excellent apparatus, to make it even bigger, even more democratic, even more comprehensive. Quantity will be transformed into quality.

"A single state bank, the biggest of the big, with branches in every rural district, in every factory, will constitute as much as nine-tenths of the socialist apparatus. This will be country-wide book-keeping, country-wide accounting of the production and distribution of goods, this will be, so to speak, something in the nature of the skeleton of socialist society.

Lenin, **Ibid**, Vol.26 page 106.

This passage contains some amazing statements. The banks have become nine-tenths of the socialist apparatus. All we need to do is unify them, make this single bank bigger, and "Hey Presto", you now have your basic socialist apparatus.

Quantity is to be transformed into quality. In other words, as the bank gets bigger and more powerful it changes from an instrument of oppression into one of liberation. We are further told that the bank will be made "even more democratic". Not "made democratic" as we might expect but made more so. This means that the banks, as they exist under capitalism, are in some way democratic. No doubt this is something that workers in Bank of Ireland and AIB have been unaware of.

For Lenin it was not only the banks which could be transformed into a means for salvation.

"Socialism is merely the next step forward from state capitalist monopoly. Or, in other words, socialism is merely state capitalist monopoly which is made to serve the interests of the whole people and has to that extent ceased to be capitalist monopoly"

Lenin, **Ibid**, Vol. 25 page 358.

"State capitalism is a complete material preparation for socialism, the threshold of socialism, a rung on the ladder of history between which and the rung called socialism there are no immediate rungs".

Lenin, **Ibid**, Vol. 24 page 259.

BUILDING CAPITALISM

This too is important. History is compared to a ladder that has to be climbed. Each step is a preparation for the next one. After state capitalism there was only one way forward - socialism. But it was equally true that until capitalism had created the necessary framework, socialism was impossible. Lenin and the Bolshevik leadership saw their task as the building of a state capitalist apparatus.

"...state capitalism would be a step forward as compared with the present state of affairs in our Soviet Republic. If in approximately six months time state capitalism became established in our Republic, this would be a great success and a sure guarantee that within a year socialism will have gained a permanently firm hold and will become invincible in our country"

Lenin, **Ibid**, Vol. 27 page 294.

"While the revolution in Germany is still slow in "coming forth", our task is to study the state capitalism of the Germans, to spare no effort in copying it and not shrink from adopting dictatorial methods to hasten the copying of it"

Lenin, **Ibid**, Vol. 27 page 340.

WHAT DIFFERENCE?

The sole difference between state capitalism under the 'dictatorship of the proletariat' and the capitalism of other countries is that a different class would be in control of the state, according to Lenin's theory. But what, we are entitled to ask, is the difference between the two states if the working class does not control the Soviet state, becomes in fact controlled by it, and dictated to by it?

Anarchists have always held that the state, in the real sense of the word, is the means by which a minority justifies and enforces its control over the majority.

Lenin underlined this point when in March 1918 he told the Bolshevik Party that they must

"...stand at the head of the exhausted people who are wearily seeking a way out and lead them along the true path of labour discipline, along the task of co-ordinating the task of arguing at mass meetings about the conditions of work with the task of unquestioningly obeying the will of the Soviet leader, of the dictator during the work.

Lenin, **Ibid**, Vol. 27 page 270.

NO TIME FOR SOCIALISM!

Lenin could not accept that working class people were more than capable of running their own lives. He continually sought justifications for the dictatorship of his party.

In June 1918 he informed the trade unions that

"there are many...who are not enlightened socialists and cannot be such because they have to slave in the factories and they have neither the time nor the opportunity to become socialists"

Lenin, **Ibid**, Vol. 27 page 466.

The month previously he had written

"Now power has been siezed, retained and consolidated in the hands of a single party, the party of the proletariat..."

Lenin, **Ibid**, Vol. 27 page 346.

One could be forgiven for thinking that the party which had siezed power was not a party of the proletariat when it so clearly distrusted them, dissolved their workplace councils, suppressed the rising of the Kronstadt workers in 1921, when it gradually strangled criticism from within its own ranks, and when its own leader flatly instructed the workers in October 1921:

"Get down to business all of you! You will have capitalists beside you, including foreign capitalists, concessionaries and leaseholders. They will squeeze profits out of you amounting to hundreds per cent; they will enrich themselves, operating alongside of you. Let them, Meanwhile you will learn from them the business of running an economy, and only when you do that will you be able to build up a communist republic."

Lenin, **Ibid**, Vol. 33 page 72.

Lenin knew too much about socialism to simply drop all talk of workers eventually running the economy. As he once said, in a lucid moment:

"The liberation of the workers can be achieved only by the workers' own efforts".

Lenin, **Ibid**, Vol. 27 page 491.

He was too little of one to actually allow them to do so.

Joe King

FOR THE LENINIST far left the collapse of the USSR has thrown up more questions than it answered. If the Soviet Union really was a 'workers state' why were the workers unwilling to defend it? Why did they in fact welcome the changes?

What happened to Trotskys "political revolution or bloody counter revolution"? Those Leninist organisations which no longer see the Soviet Union as a workers state do not escape the contradictions either. If Stalin was the source of the problem why do so many Russian workers blame Lenin and the other Bolshevik leaders too.

The mythology of "Lenin, creator and sustainer of the Russian revolution" is now dying. With it will go all the Leninist groups for as the Soviet archives are increasingly opened it will become increasingly difficult to defend Lenin's legacy. The Left in the west has dodged and falsified the Lenin debate for 60 years now. Now however there is a proliferation of articles and meetings by the various Trotskyist groups trying to convince workers that Lenin did not lead to Stalin. Unfortunately much of this debate is still based on the slander and falsifications of history that has been symptomatic of Bolshevism since 1918. The key questions of what comprises Stalinism and when did "Stalinism" first come into practice are dodged in favour of rhetoric and historical falsehood.

Stalinism is defined by many features and indeed some of these are more difficult than others to lay at the feet of Lenin. The guiding points of Stalin's foreign policy for instance was the idea of peaceful co-existence with the West while building socialism in the USSR ("socialism in one country"). Lenin is often presented as the opposite extreme, being willing to risk all in the cause of international revolution. This story like many others however is not all it seems. Other points that many would consider characteristic of Stalinism include, the creation of a one party state, no control by the working class of the economy, the dictatorial rule of individuals over the mass of society, the brutal crushing of all workers' action and the use of slander and historical distortion against other left groups.

SOCIALISM IN ONE COUNTRY

The treaty of Brest-Livtosk of 1918, which pulled Russia out of World War I, also surrendered a very large amount of the Ukraine to the Austro-Hungarians. Obviously, there was no potential of continuing a conventional war (espe-

Stalin did not fall from the moon!

Originally published in Workers Solidarity No. 33 (1991)

cially as the Bolsheviks had used the slogan "peace, bread, land" to win mass support). Yet, the presence of the Makhnovist movement in the Ukraine, clearly demonstrated a vast revolutionary potential among the Ukrainian peasants and workers. No attempt was made to supply or sustain those forces which did seek to fight a revolutionary war against the Austro-Hungarians. They were sacrificed in order to gain a respite to build "socialism" in Russia.

The second point worth considering about Lenin's internationalism is his insistence from 1918 onwards, that the task was to build "state capitalism, as

"If we introduced state capitalism in approximately 6 months' time we would achieve a great success..".¹ He was also to say "Socialism is nothing but state capitalist monopoly made to benefit the whole people".²

This calls into question Lenin's concept of socialism.

ONE PARTY STATE

Another key feature many would associate with Stalinism was the creation of a one party state, and the silencing of all opposition currents within the party. Many Trotskyists will still try to tell you that the Bolsheviks encouraged workers to take up and debate the points of the day, both inside and outside the party. The reality is very different for the Bolsheviks rapidly clamped down on the revolutionary forces outside the party, and then on those inside that failed to toe the line .

In April 1918 the Bolshevik secret police (The Cheka) raided 26 Anarchist centres in Moscow. 40 Anarchists were killed or injured and over 500 imprisoned³. In May the leading Anarchist

publications were closed down⁴. Both of these events occurred before the excuse of the outbreak of the Civil War could be used as a 'justification'. These raids occurred because the Bolsheviks were beginning to lose the arguments about the running of Russian industry.

In 1918 also a faction of the Bolshevik party critical of the party's introduction of 'Talyorism' (the use of piece work and time & motion studies to measure the output of each worker, essentially the science of sweat extraction) around the journal *Kommunist* were forced out of Leningrad when the majority of the Leningrad party conference supported Lenin's demand

"that the adherents of Kommunist cease their separate organisational existence".⁵

The paper was last published in May, silenced

"Not by discussion, persuasion or compromise, but by a high pressure campaign in the Party organisations, backed by a barrage of violent invective in the party press...".⁶

So much for encouraging debate!!

A further example of the Bolsheviks 'encouraging debate' was seen in their treatment of the Makhnovist in the Ukraine. This partisan army which fought against both the Ukrainian nationalists and the White generals at one time liberated over 7 million people. It was led by the anarchist Nestor Mhakno and anarchism played the major part in the ideology of the movement. The liberated zone was ran by a democratic soviet of workers and peasants and many collectives were set up.

ECHOS OF SPAIN

The Makhnovists entered into treaties

with the Bolsheviks three times in order to maintain a stronger united front against the Whites and nationalists. Despite this they were betrayed by the Bolsheviks three times, and the third time they were destroyed after the Bolsheviks arrested and executed all the delegates sent to a joint military council. This was under the instructions of Trotsky! Daniel Guerin's description of Trotsky's dealings with the Makhnovists is instructive

*"He refused to give arms to Makhno's partisans, failing in his duty of assisting them, and subsequently accused them of betrayal and of allowing themselves to be beaten by white troops. The same procedure was followed 18 years later by the Spanish Stalinists against the anarchist brigades"*⁷

The final lid was put on political life outside or inside the party in 1921. The 1921 party congress banned all factions in the communist party itself. Trotsky made a speech denouncing one such faction, the Workers Opposition as having

"placed the workers right to elect representatives above the party. As if the party were not entitled to assert its dictatorship even if that dictatorship temporarily clashed with the passing moods of the workers democracy".⁸

Shortly afterwards the Kronstadt rising was used as an excuse to exile, imprison and execute the last of the anarchists. Long before Lenin's death the political legacy now blamed on Stalin had been completed. Dissent had been silenced inside and outside the party. The one party state existed as of 1921. Stalin may have been the first to execute party members on a large scale but with the execution of those revolutionaries outside the party and the silencing of dissidents within it from 1918 the logic for these purges was clearly in place.

THE WORKING CLASS UNDER LENIN

Another key area is the position of the working class in the Stalinist society. No Trotskyist would disagree that under Stalin workers had no say in the running of their workplaces and suffered atrocious conditions under threat of the state's iron fist. Yet again these conditions came in under Lenin and not Stalin. Immediately after the revolution the Russian workers had attempted to federate the factory committees in order to maximise the distribution of resources. This was blocked, with Bol-

shevik 'guidance', by the trade unions.

By early 1918 the basis of the limited workers control offered by the Bolsheviks (in reality little more than accounting) became clear when all decisions had to be approved by a higher body of which no more than 50% could be workers. Daniel Guerin describes the Bolshevik control of the elections in the factories

*"elections to factory committees continued to take place, but a member of the Communist cell read out a list of candidates drawn up in advance and voting was by show of hands in the presence of armed 'Communist' guards. Anyone who declared his opposition to the proposed candidates became subject to wage cuts, etc."*⁹

On March 26th 1918 workers control was abolished on the railways in a decree full of ominous phrases stressing "iron labour discipline" and individual management. At least, say the Trotskyists, the railways ran on time. In April Lenin published an article in *Isvestiya* which included the introduction of a card system for measuring each workers productivity. He said

*"..we must organise in Russia the study and teaching of the Talyor system". "Unquestioning submission to a single will is absolutely necessary for the success of the labour process...the revolution demands, in the interests of socialism, that the masses unquestioningly obey the single will of the leaders of the labour process"*¹⁰

This came before the civil war broke out and makes nonsense of the claims that the Bolsheviks were trying to maximise workers control until the civil war prevented them from doing so.

With the outbreak of the Civil War things became much worse. In late May it was decreed that no more than 1/3 of the management personnel of industrial enterprises should be elected.¹¹ A few "highlights" of the following years are worth pointing out. At the ninth party congress in April of 1920 Trotsky made his infamous comments on the militarization of labour

"the working class...must be thrown here and there, appointed, commanded just like soldiers. Deserters from labour ought to be formed into punitive battalions or put into concentration camps".¹² The congress itself declared "no trade union group should directly intervene in industrial management".¹³

ONE MAN MANAGEMENT

At the trade union congress that April, Lenin was to boast how in 1918 he had

"pointed out the necessity of recognising the dictatorial authority of single individuals for the purpose of carrying out the soviet idea".¹⁴

Trotsky declared that

*"labour..obligatory for the whole country, compulsory for every worker is the basis of socialism"*¹⁵

and that the militarisation of labour was no emergency measure¹⁶. In *War Communism and Terrorism* published by Trotsky that year he said

"The unions should discipline the workers and teach them to place the interests of production above their own needs and demands".

It is impossible to distinguish between these policies and the labour policies of Stalin.

WORKERS REVOLTS

Perhaps the most telling condemnation

ON QUOTES AND MISQUOTES

The problem when writing an article covering this period of history is where you select your quotations from. Both Lenin and Trotsky changed their positions many times in this period. Many Leninists for example try to show Lenin's opposition to Stalinism by quoting from *State and Revolution* (1917). This is little more than deception as Lenin made no attempt to put the program outlined in this pamphlet into practice. In any case it still contains his curious conception of Workers control.

I have only used quotes from the October revolution to 1921 and in every case these quotes are either statements of policy, or what should be policy at the time. As socialists are aware governments in opposition may well say "Health cuts hurt the old, the sick and the handicapped". It is however in power that you see their real programme exposed.

of the Stalinist regimes came from their crushing of workers' revolts, both the well known ones of East Berlin 1953, Hungary 1956 and Czechoslovakia in 1968 and scores of smaller, less known risings. The first such major revolt was to happen at the height of Lenin's direction of the party in 1921 at Kronstadt, a naval base and town near Petrograd. The revolt essentially occurred when Kronstadt attempted to democratically elect a Soviet and issued a set of proclamations calling for a return to democratic soviets and freedom of press and speech for

"the anarchists and left socialist parties".¹⁷

This won the support of not only the mass of workers and sailors at the base but of the rank and file of the Bolshevik party there as well. Lenin's response was brutal. The base was stormed and many of the rebels who failed to escape were executed. Kronstadt had been the driving force for the revolution in 1917 and in 1921 the revolution died with it.

There are other commonly accepted characteristics of Stalinism. One more that is worth looking at is the way Stalinist organisations have used slander as a weapon against other left groups. Another is the way that Stalin re-wrote history. Yet again this is something which was a deep strain within Leninism. Mharkno for example went from being hailed by the Bolshevik newspapers as the *"Nemesis of the whites"*¹⁸ to being described as a Kulak and a bandit

SLANDER

Modern day Trotskyists are happy to repeat this sort of slander along with describing Mharkno as an anti-Semite. Yet the Jewish historian M. Tchernikover says

"It is undeniable that, of all the armies, including the Red Army, the Makhnovists behaved best with regard to the civilian population in general and the Jewish population in particular."¹⁹

The leadership of the Makhnovists contained Jews and for those who wished to organise in this manner there were specific Jewish detachments. The part the Makhnovists played in defeating the Whites has been written out of history by every Trotskyist historian, some other historians however consider they played a far more decisive role than the Red Army in defeating Wrangel²⁰.

Kronstadt provides another example of how Lenin and Trotsky used slander

against their political opponents. Both attempted to paint the revolt as being organised and lead by the whites. Pravda on March 3rd, 1921 described it as

"A new White plot....expected and undoubtedly prepared by the French counter-revolution".

Lenin in his report to the 10th party congress on March 8th said

"White generals, you all know it, played a great part in this. This is fully proved".²¹

Yet even Isaac Deutscher, Trotsky's biographer said in 'The Prophet Armed'

"The Bolsheviks denounced the men of Kronstadt as counter-revolutionary mutineers, led by a White general. The denunciation appears to have been groundless"²²

RE-WRITING HISTORY

Some modern day Trotskyists repeat such slanders, others like Brian Pearce (historian of the Socialist Labour League in Britain) try to deny it ever occurred

"No pretence was made that the Kronstadt mutineers were White Guards"²³

In actual fact the only czarist general in the fort had been put there as commander by Trotsky some months earlier! Lets leave the last words on this to the workers of Kronstadt

"Comrades, don't allow yourself to be misled. In Kronstadt, power is in the hands of the sailors, the red soldiers and of the revolutionary workers"²⁴

There is irony in the fact that these tactics of slander and re-writing history as perfected by the Bolsheviks under Lenin were later to be used with such effect against the Trotskyists. Trotsky and his followers were to be denounced

as "Fascists" and agents of international imperialism. They were to be written and air-brushed out of the history of the revolution. Yet to-day his followers, the last surviving Leninists use the same tactics against their political opponents.

The intention of this article is to provoke a much needed debate on the Irish left about the nature of Leninism and where the Russian revolution went bad. The collapse of the Eastern European regimes makes it all the more urgent that this debate goes beyond trotting out the same old lies. If Leninism lies at the heart of Stalinism then those organisations that follow Lenin's teaching stand to make the same mistakes again. Anybody in a Leninist organisation who does not take this debate seriously is every bit as blind and misled as all those Communist Party members who thought the Soviet Union was a socialist country until the day it collapsed.

Andrew Flood

1. V.I. Lenin "Left wing childishness and petty-bourgeois mentality", **2.** V.I. Lenin "The threatening catastrophe and how to fight it", **3.** M. Brinton "The Bolsheviks and Workers Control" page 38, **4.** M. Brinton page 38, **5.** Brinton, page 39, **6.** Brinton, page 40, **7.** D. Guerin "Anarchism", page 101, **8.** Brinton, page 78, **9.** Guerin, page 91, **10.** Brinton, page 41, **11.** Brinton, page 43, **12.** Brinton, page 61, **13.** Brinton, page 63, **14.** Brinton, page 65, **15.** Brinton, page 6, **16.** I. Deutscher, "The Prophet Armed" pages 500-07, **17.** Ida Mett, "The Kronstadt Uprising", page 38, **18.** A. Berkman, "Nestor Makhno", page 25, **19.** quoted by Voline "The Unknown Revolution", page 572, **20.** P. Berland, "Mharkno", *Le Temps*, 28 Aug, 1934, **21.** Lenin, Selected Works, vol IX, p. 98, **22.** Deutscher, The Prophet Armed, page 511. **23.** Labour Review, vol V, No. 3. **24.** I. Mett, page 51.

Further reading

- The Bolsheviks and Workers control by Maurice Brinton.
- The Kronstadt Uprising by Ida Mett.
- Anarchism by Daniel Guerin.
- History of the Makhnovist movement (1918-21) by Piotr Arshinov.

October 1917 : A lost opportunity for socialism?
<http://flag.blackened.net/revolt/russia.html>

Anarchism and the Russian Revolution
http://flag.blackened.net/revolt/russia_wsm.html

Review

HISTORY OF THE MAKHNOVIST MOVEMENT

by Peter Arshinov. (Freedom Press) £5.50

THE TREATY OF Brest-Litovsk concluded by the Bolsheviks in March 1918, which saw Russia get out of the bloodbath of World War 1, handed most of the Ukraine over to the German and Austro-Hungarian empires. Needless to say, the inhabitants were not consulted. Neither were they too pleased. Various insurgent movements arose and gradually consolidated. The Revolutionary Insurgent Army of the Ukraine led by Nester Makhno, an anarchist-communist from the village of Gulyai Polye, quickly won the support of the South for its daring attacks on the Austro-Hungarian puppet, Hetman Skoropadsky and the Nationalist Petliurists.

This book is an extremely valuable eyewitness account from Peter Arshinov - one of the main participants and editor of their paper *Put'k Svobode* (*The Road to Freedom*). Arshinov and Makhno were later to draw up the **Platform of the Libertarian Communists** in during their Paris exile in 1926 (see *Workers Solidarity* 34).

It may seem strange that the Revolutionary Insurgent Army of the Ukraine (its proper title) is constantly referred to as the "Makhnovists". Anarchists are the last people to engage in blind hero-worship. At its height it had 30,000 volunteer combatants under arms. While all were inspired by anarchist ideas, only a small minority had worked-out anarchist views. Through the army's cultural-educational section political discussion and learning was encouraged but the majority of combatants and supporters continued to call themselves "Makhnovists" and to this day the name has stuck.

ENEMIES ON ALL SIDES

Arshinov's book mainly consists of a blow-by-blow account of the movement along with some consideration of nationalism and anti-semitism, and short biographies of some of the main

Makhnovists. It's an easy non-academic read. However the book is an almost exclusively military account of the movement. Arshinov makes no apologies for this. Of necessity the Makhnovists spent most of their time in military engagements. Over the three years 1918-1921 they had to fight the forces of the Hetman, White Generals Denikin and Wrangel, nationalists like Petliura and Grigor'ev and, of course, the Bolsheviks.

Makhno and his commanders won against odds of 30:1 and more on occasion. One example was on September 25th 1919 at the village of Peregonovka when the Makhnovists after retreating 400 miles found themselves surrounded by Denikin's army. They succeeded in turning Denikin flank with a tiny force of cavalry and in the ensuing panic Denikin's army were routed. This action probably saved Petrograd from the Whites and was one of the most massive defeats inflicted on them.

Of course Makhno's military skill, his use of cavalry and mounted infantry to cover huge distances, isn't directly of relevance to us. What is of interest is how the Makhnovists could fight and win as a revolutionary army with deep roots among the Ukrainian peasants and workers. The insurgent army was an entirely democratic military formation. It's recruits were volunteers drawn from peasants and workers. It elected it's officers and codes of discipline were worked out democratically. Officers could be, and were, recalled by their troops if they acted undemocratically.

Wherever they appeared they were welcomed by the local population who supplied food and lodging as well as information about enemy forces. The Bolsheviks and Whites were forced to rely on massive campaigns of terror against the peasantry, with thousands being killed and imprisoned.

The speed at which areas changed hands in the Ukraine made it virtually impossible for them to do engage in widescale constructive activity to further the social revolution.

"It seemed as though a giant grate composed of bayonets shuttled back and forth across the region, from North to South and back again, wiping out all traces of creative social construction".

This excellent metaphor of Arshinov's sums up the difficulty. However, unlike the Bolsheviks, the Makhnovists did not use the war as an excuse for generalised repression and counter-revolution. On the contrary they used every opportunity to drive the revolution forward.

THE SOCIAL REVOLUTION

The Makhnovist movement was almost exclusively poor peasant in origin. The very existence of a revolutionary peasant movement made a mockery of Trotsky's and Lenin's conception of the peasants as automatically reactionary. Peasants who made up the vast majority of the USSR's population were seen as a brutalised and unthinking mass who could not organise collectively. When not faced with bayonets and forced requisitions they related naturally towards the workers in the towns and cities. The Makhnovists provided a unifying force encouraging and protecting peasant expropriations of landlords and large farmers (kulaks). They spread the idea of voluntary collectives and tried to make links with urban workers. Their motto was "worker give us your hand".

Around Gulyai-Polye several communes sprang up. These include the originally named communes 1,2 and 3, as well as the "Rosa Luxembourg" commune with 300 members. Several regional congresses of peasants and workers were organised. A general statute supporting the creation of 'free soviets' (elected councils of workers', soldiers' and peasants' delegates) was passed though little could be done towards it's implementation in much of the Ukraine because of the constantly changing battlefield.

The Makhnovists held the cities of Ekaterinoslav and Aleksandrovsk for a few months after their September 1919 defeat of Denikin. In both cities full

political rights, freedom of association and press freedom were established. In Ekaterinoslav five political papers appeared, including a Bolshevik one. Several conferences of workers and peasants were held in Aleksandrovsk. Though workers liked the idea of running their own factories, the nearness of the front and the newness of the idea made them cautious. The railway workers did set up a committee which began investigating new systems of movement and payment but, again, military difficulties prevented further advances. Ekaterinoslav, for example, was under constant bombardment from the Whites just across the river.

IVORY TOWERS

Arshinov attacks the Russian anarchists for almost totally ignoring the Makhnovists. The Bolsheviks saw them as important enough to send in 15,000 troops in 1921 to wipe them out. Too many of the anarchists "slept through" events. It is absolutely vital that this be acknowledged and learnt from.

The only significant number of anarchists to participate as a group were those of the Nabat (Alarm) Confederation. These included the famous Russian anarchist Voline who wrote the preface for this book. They worked mainly in the cultural-educational section, though some fought in the army.

Unfortunately, more than few anarchists were content to remain in ivory towers of theoretical abstraction. Their sole contribution was to whine about the military nature of the movement. As we have seen the Makhnovists had no choice in this regard.

They constantly acknowledged that they were weak on theory, mainly due to lack of education. It was essential for all who called themselves anarchists to get stuck in. It is a sad reflection on the political and organisational weaknesses of Russian anarchism that they failed to do so. Though they were in a minority, well organised intervention in groups like Makhno's might have had an important influence on the course of events in the revolution. Arshinov rightly accuses them of total disorganisation and irresponsibility leading to "impoverished ideas and futile practice".

A new set of chains

Above all this book is a tragic indictment of Bolshevik leadership and misrule. The Bolsheviks clung to the theory that the masses couldn't handle socialism. Workers and peasants proved them wrong by continually throwing up their own organs of democratic economic control. If the facts didn't fit the theory then the facts had to be disposed off. Once again impoverished theory led to impoverished practice.

Arshinov documents the re-emergence of minority class rule. He describes the Bolshevik nationalisation of production as with uncanny accuracy as

"a new kind of production relations in which economic dependence of the working class is concentrated in a single fist, the State. In essence this in no way improves the situation of the working class".

The Bolsheviks did realise the political significance of the Makhnovists. Any autonomous movement posing the idea of direct economic control and management by workers and peasants was a political threat. From 1917 onwards the Bolsheviks responded to such threats in one way, physical annihilation.

This book explodes the long list of falsehoods and myths about the Makhnovists. It serves as further evidence (is any more needed!?) of the authoritarian role of the Bolsheviks in the Russian revolution. Most of all, it serves as an inspiration to all serious class struggle anarchists. It poses clearly the need for anarchists to organise and win the battle of ideas in the working class. This is how we can finally begin to fight to make anarchism a reality.

Conor McLoughlin

In defence of the truth

Originally published in *Workers Solidarity* No. 34 (1992)

The Kronstadt Uprising against the Bolsheviks

We have been insisting on the need for the far left to re-appraise the tradition of the Russian revolution and in particular the role the Bolsheviks played in destroying that revolution. One of the most detailed responses to the anarchists critique of Bolshevism was published in the winter issue of *International Socialism* the journal of the Socialist Workers Party (the largest Leninist group in England).

Unfortunately the article fails to seriously address the criticisms of Lenin, preferring instead to repeat more sophisticated versions of old slanders and distortions. Due to space considerations we cannot cover the entire article (80 pages) here, however in looking at John Rees (the author) treatment of the Kronstadt rising of 1921 a useful impression of the flaws in his approach can be gleaned.

The Kronstadt rising of 1921 represented the last major upsurge of working class resistance to the by then consolidated Bolshevik dictatorship. Kronstadt itself was a naval town on an island off the coast of Petrograd (St Petersburg). In 1917 it had been the heart of the Russian Revolution, although it had never been under Bolshevik party control.

Because of Kronstadt's leading role in the 1917 Revolutions Leninists have always insisted that the revolutionaries in Kronstadt in 1921 were not the same ones that had been there in 1917. The revolutionaries had been replaced at this stage with "Coarse peasants". The evidence Rees musters for this point is a useful indication of the general Leninist method when it comes to the Russian revolution. The quote below is in Rees article on page 61.

"In September and October 1920 the writer and the Bolshevik party lecturer Ieronymus Yasinsky went to Kronstadt to lecture 400 naval recruits. They were 'straight from the plough'. And he was shocked to find that many, 'including a few party members, were politically illiterate, worlds removed from the highly

politicised veteran Kronstadt sailors who had deeply impressed him'. Yasinsky worried that those steeled in the revolutionary fire' would be replaced by 'inexperienced freshly mobilised young sailors'.

This quote is referenced to a book called Kronstadt 1917-21 by Israel Getzler, an academic but useful look at Kronstadt throughout this period. Rees account is a fair version of the first half of Yasinskys report. The quote however continues exactly as reproduced below.

"Yasinsky was apprehensive about the future when, 'sooner or later, Kronstadt's veteran sailors, who were steeled in revolutionary fire and had acquired a clear revolutionary world-view would be replaced by inexperienced, freshly mobilised young sailors'. Still he comforted himself with the hope that Kronstadt's sailors would gradually infuse them with their 'noble spirit of revolutionary self-dedication' to which Soviet Russia owed so much. As for the present he felt reassured that 'in Kronstadt the red sailor still predominates'.¹

Rees handy 'editing' of this quote transforms it from one showing that three months before the rising that Kronstadt had retained its revolutionary spirit to one implying the garrison had indeed been replaced. Rees then goes on to contradict himself about the composition of the Bolshevik party at the time. On page 61 he says "The same figures for the Bolshevik party as a whole in 1921 are 28.7% peasants, 41% workers and 30.8% white collar and others". On page 66 however he says the figures at the end of the civil war (also 1921) were 10% factory workers, 25% army and 60% in "the government or party machine". A note at the back says even of those classed as factory workers "most were in administration".

Rees also attempts blame the decline in the number of Bolshevik party members in Kronstadt to the Civil war but in fact the fall in numbers in 1920 was due to purges and resignations from the party. The attitude of the remaining party members is demonstrated by the fact that during the rising three veteran Kronstadt Bolsheviks formed a Preparatory Committee of the Russian Communist party which called upon local communists not to sabotage the efforts of the Revolutionary committee. A further 497 members of the party resigned from the party².

Getzler also demonstrates that the crew

of the battleships Petropavlovsk and Sevastopol which formed the core of the rising, were recruited into the navy before 1917, only 6.9% having been recruited between 1918 and 1921. These figures are on the same page as the earlier quotes Rees uses but are ignored by him. The remainder of the section on Kronstadt relies on more traditional smear tactics. Much is placed on the fact that the whites thought they might be able to gain from the rebellion. The fact that Petrochenko an ex-Bolshevik and chair of the Revolutionary committee was later to join the whites and attempted to contact them at the time of the rising is mentioned, the fact that the Revolutionary Committee itself constantly warned against any idea of an alliance with the whites is not.

Any real examination of what happened at Kronstadt has look at what the real balance of forces were at the time and what the actual demands of Kronstadt were. The work of academics like Israel Getzler in uncovering Soviet records of the period have demonstrated that of those serving in the Baltic fleet at the time at least 75.5% were recruited before the 1917 revolution. The majority of the revolutionary committee were veterans of the Kronstadt Soviet and the October revolution.

So why did these revolutionaries who were the backbone of the 1917 revolution rise against the Bolsheviks in 1921. At the time Lenin said "White general, you all know played a great part in this. This is fully proved"³. Later day Leninists are more subtle and try to place the root of the rising at discontent with the economic policies of the day. As far as I am aware no Leninist publication has ever reproduced the Kronstadt programme. This is probably because only 3 of the 15 demands are economic the rest are political demands designed to replace Bolshevik dictatorship over the working class with the direct rule of the working class⁴.

In any case the New Economic Plan intro-

duced by the Bolsheviks in 1921 went far beyond the granting of the economic demands of Kronstadt. The crushing of Kronstadt was followed by what the SWP has referred to as "unilateral killings" ⁵ie executions of many revolutionaries and the expelling of over 15,000 sailors from the fleet. Thousands more were sent to the Black sea, the Caspian and Siberia. Even the Kronstadt soviet was never re-established. This demonstrates that even after the rising the Bolsheviks feared the political demands that had been raised in its course.

The real danger of Kronstadt was not a military one, it was a political one. Kronstadt had to be brutally suppressed in case its call for a third revolution had succeeded in mobilising the workers of Russia. The Bolshevik party by 1921 was a counter revolutionary one composed even by their own figures of more bureaucrats than workers. Leninism was not the sole cause of the defeat of the October revolution, the whites played a major part as well. Whether or not Kronstadt could have led to a successful revolution is one of the 'What if's' of history. It did however represent the last hope of setting the revolution back on course.

It is unfortunate that the SWP has chosen to continue the Leninist tradition of lying, even to their own members about the Bolsheviks role in defeating the Russian revolution. Rather than learning from a critical look at the mistakes of the Bolsheviks they have chosen to do a crude plastering job and are hoping no-body examines it too closely. Similar methods aided the western communist parties to build a castle, but the events of the last couple of years demonstrate what happens when you build on sand.

1. Kronstadt 1917-21, Israel Getzler, p. 207.
2. Ibid, p218-219.
3. Lenin, report to 10th congress of the RCP, 1921. Selected works, Vol IX, p98.
4. Ida Mett, The Kronstadt uprising, p37-38.
5. Abbie Bakan, Socialist Worker Review, Issue 136, page 58.

Find Out More!

Interested in Anarchism and our ideas?

Then get in contact by writing to



W.S.M., P.O. Box 1528

Dublin 8, Ireland

<http://surf.to/anarchism>

wsm_ireland@yahoo.com