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**Kronstadt in the Russian
Revolution**

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EFIM YARTCHUK

KRONSTADT IN THE RUSSIAN
REVOLUTION

I dedicate this text:

To the sailors of Kronstadt.

To those who gave of their blood during the 1905 revolution for the complete emancipation of the Proletariat from the yoke of Capital and Authority.

To those shot in batches during the days of the reaction.

To those who fought in February and in July 1917 against the masters of the world.

To those who stood by the Revolution as one man during the Kornilov backlash.

To those who proudly and boldly played their part in the triumph of the Social Revolution in October.

To those who, having been taken in by the slogans of the "proletarian State", promptly took up arms against the new masters - the Bolsheviks - in the name of the Third Revolution, the authentic Proletarian Revolution.

It may well be that the ideal for which you have fought has been trampled in the mire by the barbarous new authorities.

It may well be that fighters are rotting away in the prisons, in the dungeons of the Cheka, or as deportees.

But the light will come, and it draws near, amid the blinding light of victorious battle, when the creators of life will cast off the yoke of Authority, when the name of Liberty will echo in commemoration of those who perished along the road leading to the society of free men: Anarchy.

E. YARTCHUK

FROM THE BEGINNING OF THE REVOLUTION UP TO THE JULY DAYS

The events of February were very tumultuous in Kronstadt. Kronstadters took their revenge on their persecutors in the savage repressions that had come in the wake of the failed revolution of February 1905.

They claimed justice by demanding atonement from those who had shot them down in their hundreds and consigned whole boatloads of them to the Totleben fort at the time of the abortive revolution of 1910.

The regime enforced in Kronstadt in the wake of the savage crack-down in 1910 had become increasingly ferocious. Admiral Viren's word was law in the fortress. Sailors and soldiers were dispatched by hundreds into the disciplinary battalions, aboard barges, where they were cruelly treated and where flogging was particularly commonplace. All of the threads of a monstrous espionage web led to Admiral Viren's office.

"Viren's grave-diggers" as they were called, had a foothold in every regiment, every battalion, every company, every battery, every ship and even inside the port, in every single workshop.

Kronstadt groaned under Viren's yoke.

Whenever Viren took it into his head to stroll through the town in all his pomp, woe betide the sailor upon whom his eyes lighted. He would survey him from top to toes, poking him and invariably finding something to upbraid: his salute had not been up to regulation, some button was undone, his cap was not at the regulation angle of tilt. Right then and there, he would undo the victim's trousers and point out that there was a name sewn into the lining.

"It was a lucky man", the sailors used to say, "who was only sent to the brig for a few days. Otherwise, it sometimes happened that he, personally, right then and there would flog the offending seaman and only then order that he be placed on a charge."

Let me quote a typical example: the town was encircled, ever since the days of Peter the Great it was said, by a rampart running from North to West, which had been erected for the purposes of defence. To the North, extending the whole length of the town, there was a sprawl of huge red-bricked barracks. Around a bend in the West, the barracks disappeared from view and a sort of wasps' nest loomed: the fortress's high command, the Sappers' administration, the commanding officer's mansion with a splendid park, the officers' quarters and clubs. From 1905 on, this officers' mini-village was surrounded by a wooden stockade, with cast-iron gates, and this stockade rose to the height of the first floor of the stone buildings. It was kept under a strong guard: thus, rank and file seamen were denied access to the poetic rampart and the seashore.

It so happened once that a sailor who had come to visit a friend who was a valet to the officers of the Sappers barracks, made up his mind, with that rashness that is typical of sailors, to risk clambering up the rampart. An officer promptly appeared who was reputedly one of Viren's spies: there was nowhere to hide, so the sailor shouted: "You'll never take me alive!" and threw himself off the rampart, such was the terror inspired by Viren's goons.

Admiral Viren so relished his role as turnkey in charge of the sailors that he had a mirror device installed in the windows of his office so that he could keep an eye on the ordinary seamen (his mansion being so situated that many sailors had to pass it by).

Viren saw subversion everywhere. Thus, on one occasion, a 15 year old high school pupil, known for his short-sightedness, crossed his path but failed to salute: he was declared a subversive and expelled from the school.

Sailors were particularly incensed by memories of the park stretching right along Soviet Street (formerly Catherine Street). A placard had been posted at its entrance, announcing: 1- No dogs. 2- No other ranks. After the revolution, when the soviet went to remove the sign, the sailors protested that it should "remain in memory of the savagery of the old discipline". Is it perhaps there to this day?

In a report to his superiors in September 1916, Admiral Viren stated that "extreme repressions notwithstanding, the state of mind of the fleet in his care was menacing. It was becoming a volcano liable to erupt at any moment, spewing floods of burning lava.."

The storm broke on the night of 28 February. All of the simmering fury boiled over. No less than 180 officers paid with their lives for the sadistic old regime. Sailors and soldiers forced their way into their officers' quarters, dragged them outside and shot them down on the edge of the ravine, heedless of their pleas. Long afterwards, those involved would speak contemptuously of their victims, recalling how most of these officers, hitherto inflexible over punishments, grovelled at their feet and begged for mercy. On the other hand, they remembered their main and most cruel enemy, Admiral Viren, with a respect and indeed an esteem that arose out the heroic and courageous way he faced his death.

One of those involved told me that Viren had been placed under arrest in his home and taken to Anchor Square.

When told that his life was forfeit for all his acts of savagery, Viren replied: "I have lived, acted and served the Tsar and the Country faithfully and loyally. I am ready. Run your own lives now." He was ordered to face the monument to Admiral Makaroff: he refused, announcing that he could die with his eyes open and he met his death like that.

Amid the noise, chaos and blood, the masses expressed their gratitude to respected officers and those who had not stood out on account of their viciousness. The sailors searched for them for hours through the length and breadth of the fortress, insisting that the groups who had placed them under arrest set them free and hand them over into their custody. Whereupon they escorted them to safety on board their ships or in the barracks.

Viren's two sons, young officers themselves, were spared: sailors told them:

"Although you are whelps of the same breed as your father, you are still young, and we will see what will become of you.."

Better still, the sailors dressed officers up in their uniforms and escorted them to their family or friends.

But there was yet another class of officer who, although not numbered among Viren's marks, had a record of cruelty and harassment in their dealings with sailors and who deserved no consideration. These officers were arrested.

After a night of bloodshed, the committee of public safety declared itself in charge. No one had elected it, and for that reason alongside socialists, there were cadets from professional families, doctors, etc. on the committee.

Several days later, the first soviet met. Its majority was made up of Social Revolutionaries. The Menshevik Social Democrats were also strongly represented: the Bolsheviks accounted for only a very tiny fraction. As yet the soviet had no anarchist or Maximalist delegates.

The relatively moderate soviet, under the sway of the revolutionary masses, promptly clashed with the Provisional Government, by refusing to welcome to Kronstadt a commissar appointed by the authorities: indeed, it pronounced him undesirable. The government threatened to cut the flow of supplies and funding to Kronstadt. The chairman of the executive committee of the Petrograd soviet, Chkheidze, as well as Skoblev, turned up to smooth over the friction. They brought the executive committee of the Kronstadt soviet to the following compromise: the government would appoint the commissar, but his appointment would be put to the local soviet of sailors, soldiers and citizens for ratification.

The soviet's dithering behaviour arouse widespread mistrust. The masses set about campaigning for fresh

elections to the soviet.

There was a second clash between the masses and the soviet. Kronstadt refused to surrender officers arrested in February for trial in Petrograd. The government was insistent: the soviet gave an undertaking. But the sailors, upon learning of the soviet's decision, posted detachments outside the prisons, threatening to shoot the officers should any attempt be made to evacuate them. The sailors were very acutely aware of the value of these elite representatives of the old regime, many of whom still had on their hands the blood of the sailors and soldiers shot down in 1905. The sailors had their suspicions that in Piter (1) the officers would, without doubt, be released, and would then set about actively organising counter-revolutionary elements.

So, as far as the sailors were concerned, there was no way they were about to be handed over to Piter.

In order to explode bourgeois myths about the "horrors" of Kronstadt's prisons, the Kronstadters called for a government commission of inquiry. The latter toured all the prisons, took note of the conditions of detention, sampled the quality and quantity of food rations and was in fact compelled to refute the lying calumnies of the bourgeois press.

At meetings in Kronstadt, the issue of letting all detainees roam free within the town limits began to be debated.

However, the misinformation did not cease. There was no end to the concoctions and mythology. Day after day the bourgeois newspapers carried, under screaming headlines, sensationalised "correspondence from Kronstadt":

- "Kronstadt secedes from Russia. Declared itself an independent Republic!"
- "Kronstadt printing its own currency. We have samples."
- "Kronstadt preparing for peace talks with the enemies of the Motherland!"
- "Kronstadt on the verge of concluding a separate peace with the Germans!"

All sorts of fantastic reports teemed down in a never-ending avalanche, all cooked up in bourgeois kitchens. The Menshevik SDs (2) and the SRs (3) began to mouth similar suspicions. The government, a spokesman for the wishes of "democracy", was on very hostile terms with Kronstadt.

Its reply to the anxieties of the sailors was this menacing ultimatum:

"The officers must be handed over to Petrograd forthwith, within 24 hours: in the event of a refusal to implement the government's injunction, Kronstadt will be declared in a state of siege and military operations launched against her."

The accumulation of all this so incensed the Kronstadters that, by way of a reply to this government ultimatum, certain ships made ready for combat.

A mass rally was speedily organised. The Navy College was packed. Every window, every step, even the aisles were all black with people, an edgy crowd.

"Through the open doors came the hum from the streets: alongside the college, careless of the rain and bad weather, the crowd of those who had not been able to get into the building was huddled together, some of them relaying to the rest the progress of the debate underway indoors. The meeting dragged on amid great tension from 7.00 pm. until 4.00 am. The matter of relations with the government was resolved. In the end, the meeting came to this conclusion:

It agreed to avoid armed conflict, in view of the current situation, and, of the fact that most of Russia's toilers were oblivious of the grounds of the Kronstadters' opposition to the government and of the aspirations underpinning their appreciation of the objectives of the revolution."

In its final resolution, the meeting gave its consent to handing over the officers to Piter, but at the same time it spelled out its view of the current situation and its unbending attitude vis a vis the provisional government.

The resolution was addressed to whom it might concern, and was published in the press.

Fresh elections to the soviet were held. On this second soviet, the Bolsheviks, the ACSs (4) and the Maximalists, factions within the soviet, gained ground at the expense of the SRs and Mensheviks. There was also a considerable number of non-partisan members, the bulk of whom had very distinct beliefs but identified with none of the formally existing tendencies, in that some hoped for a unite front embracing all revolutionaries, whilst others were in no hurry, as they put it, to "pin on a party label: which would necessarily imply some curtailment of their liberty".

The factional contest within the soviet mirrored the Kronstadters' mental state and degree of political awareness, but of itself meant nothing, when set alongside the titanic work being carried out in the very ranks of the masses, on board ships, in the barracks and workshops, on Anchor Square (5):

There, the supporters of the various schools of thought competed ferociously with one another to demonstrate the correctness of their respective ideas. The Kronstadters drank deeply of all this.

The sore point of this period was the matter of the war.

The sailors had an exceptionally well-informed attitude on this point. Which was readily understandable, because, for one thing, they could all read and write (6): political literature published around then was read collectively: for another thing, the sea and its dangers and the violence of their life forced sailors to look death often in the face, and all of this generated a strong feeling of fraternity among them.

The discussions that took place between the supporters of the various groupings, though stormy, were nevertheless amicable: speakers listened to the contending arguments with profound attention, consideration and respect: in this way they arrived at an all-round grasp of the matter under discussion.

At the meetings, most Kronstadters argued that the peasants should first seize the land, and the workers the factories and workshops: if the energy of revolution then failed to infect and trigger insurrections among the Western European proletariat, and if the West's unenlightened workers carried on with the war, in accordance with the wishes of their governments and ventured even to mount an attack, then, - "we will all, as one man, march to the front to defend the revolution".

Some voices were heard calling for immediate abandonment of the front. This whole school of thought was based on the slogan: "Down with the war!"

The first congress of soviets ended, leaving the masses profoundly discontented.

The Bolsheviks seized the opportunity to call an armed demonstration for 10 June, a demonstration that they themselves subsequently called off. However, the overwrought masses could not calm themselves.

In order to provide an outlet for the masses' state of mind, the executive committee of the soviets in its turn decided to call a demonstration for 18 June, under the slogan; "Unity of revolutionary forces under the leadership of the central executive committee of soviets". Only a few dozen people came from Kronstadt to participate in that demonstration, "as a learning experience", as the Kronstadters humorously put it.

Discontent with the coalition government and the policy of the central executive committee of soviets was forever increasing. On 18 June, news of the offensive on the south-west front abruptly altered the situation in Kronstadt. In the space of one or two weeks, the SR party was whittled away to nothing: the SR delegates were recalled from the soviet by their electors. At rallies in Anchor Square, the SRs had only to show up for an incredible brouhaha and whistling to erupt. Every attempt by the leftwing factions to secure a hearing for the speakers proved futile. Because of its equivocal stance, the leftwing tendency of the SRs were now without influence also: it was lumped with the rightwing faction. When representatives from the leftwing tendency arrived in Kronstadt, led by Kamkov and Maria Spiridonova, it proved - in spite of the efforts of the rally chairman (an anarcho-syndicalist) - impossible to persuade the audience to give them a hearing, and from every side there were cries of:

- "You are to blame for our army's offensive on the front!"
- "You cannot sit on the fence!"
- "We do not trust you people!"
- "If you do not see eye to eye with those who back national defence, then you must quit the party!"

And so the representatives of the leftwing of the SRs were obliged to leave Kronstadt, without having spoken. It was later learned that this rally by 25,000 people had made such an impact upon the SRs that it tipped the balance in a split within the party.

The "defencist" SDs were also unable to speak at any meeting, especially on matters then hotly debated in Kronstadt:

- "Is this revolution of ours bourgeois or social?"
- "Constituent Assembly, or soviets of workers', peasants' and soldiers' delegates?"

The influence of the "internationalist" SDs also began to nose-dive. Hitherto, they had enjoyed a certain prestige, for, unlike the "defencists", they were for peace and against our army's offensive. Around this time, the ACS organisation was carrying out intensive propaganda, attracting the sympathy of the masses.

3 JULY 1917

After 18 June, the bourgeoisie, which had cast aside its mask, did not rest in its harassment of leftwing elements. It was particularly venomous towards Kronstadt. The government of Kerensky, who sought to harness the revolution in the name of a "war until victory", striving to steer the toilers one way or

another in the direction of militarism, also embarked upon persecution.

In Petrograd, not to mention the province, Kronstadters began to be arrested for their anti-war propaganda, and to be imprisoned and occasionally lynched outright. Kronstadt sent a delegation to the minister of Justice to insist that those imprisoned be freed. The minister informed it that those detained were accused of "undermining the foundations of the security of the State", and that they would have to appear in court to answer for this.

All of which outraged the Kronstadters. They gathered daily on Anchor Square, calling meetings and calling upon representatives of the executive committee of the soviet to analyse the day's events. More and more voices were heard to cry:

"The revolution is in jeopardy! The counter-revolution is firmly ensconced in Petrograd and this mortal peril must be crushed and thereby removed from the revolution."

Kronstadt was feverishly making preparations. AS yet it was unaware of what was later to come to pass.

At the rallies that were held, sometimes twice a day, representatives of the right were also denied a hearing. the watchword: "To Piter! To Piter!" was increasingly chanted by the masses. The agitation spread also to the forts.

Telegraphic messages arrived from Krasnaya Gorka and from the Ino, Konstantin, Shantz and southern and northern forts: they asked that speakers be sent out to them to discuss the situation and they wanted to hear only ACSs or Bolsheviks. Most of the time, representatives of both these tendencies spoke together, but soon serious disagreements emerged between them.

In fact, the Bolsheviks supported the Constituent Assembly and in their posture on the soviets, it transpired that they saw these being turned into mere adjuncts of a central authority.

Kerensky's government, anticipating an imminent threat from the left and seeking to undermine the revolutionary forces in Petrograd, decided to send several revolutionary regiments up to the front, but the soldiers refused to go, well aware of why they were being redeployed from Petrograd.

On 3 July, the 1st Machine-Gunner regiment, under the sway of militant propaganda from anarchists (comrade Bleikhman and others) marched in battle order on the Tauride Palace, carrying placards reading "Down with the war!" and "All power to the local soviets!"

At the Tauride Palace, the matter of the government crisis triggered by the departure from the government of the Cadets came up for discussion. Cossacks intercepted the demonstrators, barring their way: there was a confrontation. The Cossacks scattered after they suffered heavy losses in terms of dead and wounded.

Ripples from this gun battle reached Kronstadt the same day. At lectures laid on by the ACS in the Army Academy, delegates from the 1st Machine-Gunner regiment showed up, accompanied by anarchists from Petrograd. They angrily asked those present: "Why are you bothering with matters of theory when blood is flowing in Petrograd?" Everybody made for Anchor Square, calling a meeting of workers, soldiers and sailors: representatives from the soviet came along too. The demonstration in Petrograd was spoken about. In their heart of hearts Kronstadters longed to join with the workers of Petrograd so that, together, they might demand of the central executive committee of soviets that the coalition government be swept away and a general congress of the Soviets of Russia convened immediately. The latter could embark on the struggle to make a reality of the watchword:

"All power to the local soviets of deputies, workers, soldiers and peasants!"

In this way, the general congress of soviets might espouse a firm stance on the matter of the war and peace. Kronstadters also thought that on day one of the insurrection a start had to be made to "remove the families of Petrograd workers from their basements and slums and house them in the masters' mansions where there is room for everybody".

The ACS organisation took the line that the armed demonstration should be turned into an insurrection, and a powerful, decisive blow thereby dealt to the authorities, after which it would no longer be able to govern, and local soviets would annihilate them completely in the latter stages of the struggle.

The rally refused to hear from the representative of the Left SRs: in his address, he had espoused an equivocal position.

The Mensheviks did not make an address. The Bolsheviks adopted a bizarre attitude: whilst the Bolshevik Roshal spoke of an armed demonstration with this as its slogan: "All power to the local soviets and to the centre", other party members like Raskolnikoff, were impatiently waiting for the decision of the party central committee sitting in Piter.

When Raskolnikoff put the question: "What are we to do if the party decides not to demonstrate?", Roshal replied: "That won't happen. We'll force their hand from here."

The rally dragged on until midnight. After stormy and heated exchanges, it was decided that an armed

demonstration be organised in Petrograd on 4 July, with the watchword: "All power to the local soviets of workers', peasants' and soldiers' delegates." A technical commission was appointed to lead the demonstration.

Early in the morning, almost 12,000 working men and women, sailors and soldiers came ashore on the banks of the Neva, before setting off on a march, with red and black banners unfurled, towards the Tauride Palace.

When the crowd reached the Kshcheginsky, occupied by the Bolsheviks' central committee, Lenin appeared on the balcony, delivered a short speech, saying that he was ill, wished them all success and disappeared.

The banner of the party's central committee draped across an armoured car, the Bolsheviks marched at the head of the procession, but Kronstadters abruptly informed them: "We are marching, not behind the Bolshevik colours, but behind the colours of our soviet". And forced them to retreat into the body of the procession.



The Kronstadters marched at the front in serried ranks, to the sound of their band. The Nevsky Prospekt was wholly covered by posters announcing:

- "The price of freedom."

- "That man is worthy of freedom who is not only a citizen, but also a warrior."

The whole gaudy spectacle grabbed the attention. Banners covered in very worthy bourgeois—proclamations were suspended from the bank premises, bedecked the windows of the elegant restaurants and filled the windows of the stores, and there were huge banners reading "recruitment office for volunteers for the front".

That day was "Liberty Loan" day, an occasion of some excitement in the bourgeois camp. Kerensky's revolutionary government was sounding the alarm, calling upon all democrats to "sacrifice themselves" on the altar of the Motherland: everybody should donate to the Liberty Loan drive so as to build up a fund for successful prosecution of the war.

But the war-mongering celebrations were marred by the marching Kronstadters, crying:

- "Down with power and capital."

- "Down with the world slaughter."

- "There is nothing for us to defend at the front as long as the economic helm is in the hands of the bourgeoisie."

- "The world revolution is on the move everywhere."

- "Town and country, freely united, are the guarantee of the Revolution's victory."

- "All power to the local soviets of workers', peasants' and soldiers' delegates."

- "The factory belongs to the workers — the land to the peasants."

The banners were unfurled. They called upon the proletariat to flex its muscles and tighten its ranks even further. On every side, a buzz spread the latest news: the toiling masses had arisen and were embarked upon a course of their own.

4 July 1917 forced the bourgeoisie to query the success of its revolution.

The toilers were on the road to the break-down of society. The bourgeois camp lost patience and prepared to take revenge on the Kronstadters. On the Liteyny Prospekt, the demonstrators suddenly came under a hail of machine-gun fire. Counter-revolutionary gangs had mounted a hellish ambush from the upper storeys and attics of bourgeois homes. Dead bodies piled up immediately: among them, there were a few anarchists, particularly the fellow who had been carrying the banner for the ACS organisation. Bewilderment reigned, then frantic gunfire erupted.

Once the provocateurs had been disposed of, the demonstrators, albeit a lot fewer in number and less compact than before in their array, resumed their march. Seething with fury, they arrived at the Tauride Palace, where they linked up with the Petrograd workers.

A band of sailors entered the Palace and emerged with the SR, Chernov, having placed him under arrest as a member of the government.

Chernov declared that he was a socialist minister and he demanded to be released. But the sailors wanted to know why he, who had written so much about socialisation of the land, was now doing so little to see that put into practical effect. Chernov heaped all of the blame upon the government for turning down his proposals. Whereupon the sailors told the "socialist minister" that, had he and his like not joined the government, but stuck with the people in their struggle for bread and for freedom, then the peasants would long since have seen to the communalisation of the land. Just then, Trotsky showed up: he managed to talk the sailors into releasing Chernov.

The Kronstadters decided to split into groups of 2-3,00 strong, and to head for the garrisons and the working class districts by way of bolstering and adding to the demonstration.

One of these groups, along with the ACS group, arranged to rendezvous at the Kshesinsky mansion. There, the Bolsheviks' central committee was debating the matter of the demonstration. After the October revolution, Raskolnikoff was to relate that it had been decided at that sitting of the central committee that they should assume the leadership of the movement: they had even allocated their roles: he himself had been appointed as commander of the Peter and Paul fortress. But why did "our heroes" then decide to go into hiding and await the outcome of the toilers' spontaneous direct action? That remains shrouded in mystery.

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On 5 July, learning that access routes to Kronstadt had been taken over by government troops, the commission appointed by the detachment went to the central executive committee of the soviets where it demanded assurances that the demonstrators be allowed to return to Kronstadt without let or hindrance. Whilst talks were in progress with the central executive committee of soviets' military commission, a telephone call announced that, in response to a government summons, front-line troops had arrived in Piter to break the counter-revolutionary mutiny of the Kronstadt sailors.

When the Volhynsky regiment approached the Tauride Palace, the Menshevik Liber, who had earlier been in agreement with all of the Kronstadters' proposals and findings, abruptly interrupted the whole proceedings to insist, as a prior condition for any further talks, that the demonstrators should be disarmed: he even suggested that they take ten minutes to reflect and, in the event of their refusing, threatened to disarm them by force.

Zioviev and Trotsky happened to be in Tauride Palace just then. Trotsky offered the Kronstadters the use of his office as a meeting-place. But not one of these "guides of the proletariat" took part in the worried debate on the fate of the revolution and of the 12,000 revolutionaries under sentence of death.

The commission resolved to leave the Palace at its own risk and to contact all the other parts of the procession so that, together, they could analyse the situation and set about putting things straight.

All of the members of the commission vanished en route to the nearest detachment - all except one anarcho-syndicalist who arrived at the Kshesinsky home alone.

At 6.00 am., the sailors were woken, over 3,000 of them. A meeting was held. By the end, it looked that there was no way of reaching the other parts of the detachment and that there were no more Bolsheviks left. Raskolnikoff (as an appointed member of the Kronstadt-detachment's technical commission) had vanished. During the night, Podvoisky (representing the Bolsheviks' central committee) had also made himself scarce. Later, though, both held the posts of people's commissar for marine affairs and military affairs, respectively.

During the meeting, a warning was received by telephone from the commander of the Petrograd garrison: if the premises were not evacuated by 7.00 am., military operations would be set in motion. The anarchists suggested that they move to the Peter and Paul fortress, dig in there and take a more leisurely look at the situation. This suggestion proved acceptable. En route to the fortress, numerous columns of government troops were sighted, preparing to encircle the Kshesinsky mansion. It was discovered that cycle-mounted troops especially were being deployed against us: on arrival at the Nilolaevsk railway station, these had been attacked as treacherously as we had by provocateurs who promptly made themselves scarce. Government agents had explained to their "splendid troops" that the ambush had been the handiwork of mutinous sailors from Kronstadt, whom they had to thwart. In order to avert fratricidal fighting, which might, against this backdrop have proved very bloody, the meeting resolved to seek talks.

After lengthy discussions with the commanding officer of the Piter garrison, the executive committee of the Piter soviet and government representatives, the Kronstadters decided that they would give up their weapons only to the Petrograd soviet, in exchange for charges against the delegates from the Kronstadt soviet being dropped. It was on that decision that the meeting in the Peter and Paul fortress closed: the other parts of the detachment would likewise have to hand over their weapons, except for the ones who were on the banks of the Neva and could leave Petrograd on barges. On 6 July the demonstrators made their way back to Kronstadt.

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With the detachment not yet out of Petrograd, rumours began to circulate in Kronstadt regarding the government's having crackeed down viciously on the demonstrators. The Kronstadt soviet met in urgent session. Whilst the Mensheviks seized this chance to settle a few scores with the Bolsheviks, their party rivals, whom they held to blame for the crackdown, the meeting stood by to launch an armed strike against Petrograd.

Ships quit the port, machine-guns were piled up in the Anchor Square and entire ships' companies arrived, ready for battle. This turn of events forced the soviet to settle its internal differences and spring into action. A commission was set up, comprising representatives from every faction. This commission went to Anchor Square to explain to the assembled crowds that it was due to travel to Piter immediately aboard a launch to secure permission from the government for the Kronstadter demonstrators to return. Thus, for the time being, the initiation of military hostilities had to be avoided.

We must assume that the cautionary words from the commission proved effective and helped dampen the government's and soviets' central executive committee appetite for battle. Thus, thanks to the comparative moderation of the "masters of the fate of the Russian revolution", in their handling of the Kronstadter demonstrators, the whole episode passed off without bloodshed.

AFTER 3 JULY - THE KORNILOV CONSPIRACY

A few days after the demonstrators' return to Petrograd, Anchor Square was packed in a protest against the arrest and harassment of anarchists and Bolsheviks. It was discovered that Raskolnikoff had been sent to the Kresty prison on the instructions of the minister of Justice.

A commission of inquiry visited Kronstadt, accusing the Bolsheviks Deyshev and Bregman, as well as the anarchist Yartchuk, of having orchestrated an insurrection with a view to overthrowing the established order. The sailors declared that no Kronstadter would be given up and they advised the commission, in order to "avoid any sort of friction", to get out of Kronstadt without delay, a piece of advice that the commission wasted no time in heeding.

The bourgeois press began again to vilify Kronstadt with unbelievable hatred and lack of restraint.

Rumours were circulated to the effect that: the insurrection on 3 July had been organised on the basis of "German money". Every sailor had received 25 gold roubles a day and therefore could only be described now as "hirelings" and "traitors to the Motherland". As even the remotest corners of Russia were awash in the "liberal" press, this barbarous misinformation at first bore fruit. It transpired that some sailors on leave were chased by relatives who had been poisoned against them the hysterical falsehoods peddled by the "saviours of the Motherland and the State".

A part of the socialist press even joined in this misinformation, pronouncing the events of 3 to 6 July to be counter-revolutionary, and peddling the rumour that they had been the handiwork of "trouble-makers".

The Kronstadt set feverishly to work. It was not content merely to make propaganda on the spot and began to dispatch agitators to the whole of Russia. The essential watchword then became "All power to the delegates of the local soviets of workers, peasants and soldiers." Dozens of Kronstadters were arrested out-in provinces, but Kronstadt sent out more and more propagandists to replace them. Kronstadt firmly believed in the correctness of its stance and knew that the day was approaching when the broad masses of Russia would understand at last that Kronstadt's aspirations and objectives were in fact their own, encapsulating the faith and revolutionary might of all of the country's workers and peasants.

The first to signal agreement were the Black Sea sailors. At first, only the unshakable spirit of brotherhood in the sailors led them to query the sinister and shameful role being credited to their northern colleagues and to themselves seek out the "roots of evil". However, they took a different line from the Kronstadters, backing the coalition government and the call for a Constituent Assembly, so they had a tendency to believe all the "usually reliable" sources depicting Kronstadt as counter-revolutionary. Once on the spot, they understood the reasoning behind the violent tension in Kronstadt. Delegates from the Black Sea sailors stayed with the Baltic fleet to handle liaison, and the Baltic sailors in turn sent them their delegates.

From then on, gradually, Kronstadt began to earn itself a crucial position in the revolutionary camp in Russia.



Kronstadt was in full battle-readiness. The sailors, soldiers and workers were prepared for the worst. A rumour swept the town that heavily armed cyclist-troops had been brought in from the front. Kronstadt received reports that their vessels were awash with machine-guns and light artillery. The Kronstadt soviet met in urgent session.

The curious flotilla, having dropped anchor not far from the town, sent out its delegates by rowing boats. The latter came ashore very guardedly, in military fashion, as if there was an enemy patrol at large in the port. They advanced gradually, expecting the Kronstadters to open fire on them, for the legend of the "Independent Republic of Kronstadt" died hard. Then, directed by residents of Kronstadt, the delegates reached the port proper and the Kronstadt soviet which was meeting in plenary session. They were invited to take some of the front-row seats. They conveyed to the soviet greetings from

those serving on the front and reported on how things were going on the front, asking others to relieve them there.

The soviet spelled out to them its basic stance on the war, adding that, until such time as the land was handed over to the peasants and the revolution was successful, there was nothing for the toilers to defend.

Meanwhile, the sailors had boarded the ships and engaged the cyclists in peaceful conversation and had begun to look with some alarm at their military gear - cannons, machine-guns, cartridge belts and rifles littered the deck. One hour later, the "flotilla" was moored in the port. In the company of the sailors and soldiers, the cyclists visited the ships where the Kronstadters briefed their visitors on their revolutionary experience, analysing the lessons of the past as they bivouacked together. As it took its leave of the soviet, the delegation was very warmly welcomed by some sailors who invited it for a meal. That evening, to the sound of bands playing, cheering and cries of "All power to the local soviets", the cyclists left Kronstadt, urging the Kronstadters to take up their friendly invitation and send a delegation of their own.



These glimmers of light heartened the Kronstadters. The broad masses were being alerted to the darker side of the situation, leading to discontent and anger. Sailors and soldiers returning from leave told of the repression being suffered by the peasants who had shared out the land off their own bat, and of how the kulaks were exploiting the poor peasants, and how the government's emissaries were backing these kulak moneybags. Those returning from the front told of even more harrowing scenes. They reported the discipline being restored in the army by General Kornilov, the attempts by the Kornilov high command to destroy the army committees and impose the death penalty on the front. One legend particularly impressed the Kronstadters: a legend which had it that a soldier on the southwest front had been shot because he had, during a march, helped himself to a few apples from a rich landowner's orchard. Animosity was growing, not just towards the government, but also against the central executive committee of the soviets which was letting all this happen without a murmur of protest and indeed offering its encouragement. The speeches made (at a cabinet meeting in Moscow) by Kaledin and Kornilov on the topic of "iron discipline", on the officer's rights as commander, on the introduction of the death penalty behind the front lines, all of this exhausted the patience of the Kronstadters once and for all.

Indignation was starting to turn into a strong penchant for armed insurrection. At this point, a further clash erupted between the Kronstadters and the government.

On the pretext of reinforcing the Riga front where an enemy push was expected, the government was preparing to strip Kronstadt and its surrounding ports of all their heavy guns. The intention on the part of this "Saviour of the Motherland" government to disarm Kronstadt just when the Baltic Fleet sailors were themselves getting ready to confront the onslaught of the enemy fleet, defied explanation, in the eyes of the sailors and gunners. There was no accusing the government of "idiocy", for it had at its disposal several of the best and most brilliant Staff generals and other "brass-hats" who were among the finest specialists in the world, and it could not have been ignorant of the strategic importance of Kronstadt's location, yet it was about to strip it of all means of defence.

The Kronstadters racked their brains and readily made this deduction: the government was quite simply betraying the revolution: it had in fact made up its mind to stifle hostile voices, regardless of the cost, and planned to hand Petrograd and Kronstadt, the strongholds of the revolution, to the Germans.

On board the ships, among the companies and in the workshops meetings were held, even though these were illegal in that the representatives of the soviets had not been invited. Day by day, dozens of sailors travelled into Piter, touring the factories and workshops there, openly calling for insurrection.

The government eventually dithered, made concessions and the whole affair ended with a small detachment of sailors being seconded to the land front.

As far as Kronstadters were concerned, this arrangement was not a proper compromise: they were happy to avail of the opportunity to spread the "contagion" from Kronstadt on at government's expense. Otherwise, it was virtually impossible for agitators to get into the trenches, for the officers' committees prevented them.

Six weeks passed like that in the search for new ways of prosecuting the revolution. Along came 28 August, the six-month anniversary of the liberation from the tsarist yoke: a great commemorative celebration was scheduled for that date. Nearly 30,000 sailors, soldiers, workers and working women gathered on Anchor Square with banners bearing the watchwords:

- "Long live the social revolution".

- "Land to the peasants, factory to the workers."

- "Down with power and capital."

- "All power to the local soviets."

Everyone pledged to prosecute the revolution through to complete victory.

The next day, Kronstadt prepared to take on the reaction. The Piter soviet sent a telegramme reporting treachery on the part of the Kornilov Staff, and its push against Petrograd with an eye to restoring the monarchy: it asked that 3,000 sailors be sent to defend Petrograd.

A Bolshevik bigwig arrived in Kronstadt from Piter and reported that at a meeting of the central executive committee of the soviets, when one leader had moved that the defence and protection of the central executive committee be entrusted to the safest of hands, namely, Kronstadters' hands, Chkheidze had replied:

"Yes, they are the most dependable revolutionaries, but I fear that it may be hard to shake them off."

Facts subsequently proved him right.

A meeting was held that night on Anchor Square and the telegramme was read aloud. Kronstadters immediately expressed a willingness to stand guard, all rancour over the events of 3 to 6 July forgotten. The soviet let Petrograd know that a detachment was on its way, but, since the Kronstadters had been disarmed on 6 July, the Piter soviet would have to rearm them. A technical-military commission was set up: military experts were seconded to it: the commander of the fortress, the army engineer and a few others. Kronstadt was on a war footing.

This time the Revolution scored a bloodless victory. The headquarters was cut off front and rear thanks to vigorous, rapid and telling interceptions by the railwaymen and telegraphers. The rest was up to the soviets and army committees.

After the Kornilov revolt had been thwarted, the Kronstadt detachment insisted that those imprisoned on 3-6 July be freed: but when the Kronstadt soviet was told that the detachment was unwilling to leave Petrograd and threatening to free them by force, it dispatched a special delegation to it. At an enlarged sitting of the soviet, it had determined that time had to be given to Russia's toiling masses to "put paid" to the Kornilov adventure. Such an awakening by the masses would inevitably bring about a lurch to the left and preparations had to be made, without delay, for the new phase of the revolution.

The delegation carried out its mission. To the sound of bands playing and with banners reading:

- "We demand the release of those jailed."

- "All power to the local soviets."

The Kronstadters returned to Kronstadt, treated now by the Petrograd soviet's representatives as genuine revolutionaries.

THE ROAD TO OCTOBER

Kornilov's offensive, news of which had spread at lightning speed right across Russia, and the speedy liquidation of it by the local soviets and the far from negligible part played in that by Kronstadt earned Kronstadters a reputation among the toilers as hard-line revolutionaries. The ill-advised calumnies lately spread written and spoken bourgeois propaganda openly in support of Kornilov had also created the belief that Kerensky was in cahoots with General Kornilov. The direct involvement of the SR Savinkov in the reactionary schemes of the generals' command, all ensured that broad swathes of toilers began immediately to look to Kronstadt with great confidence, arguing that Kronstadt had been right on 3 and 6 July and that Kronstadt had forecast the reaction and tried to denounce it in its incipient phase.

Kronstadt scored a resounding moral victory. Delegations began to flood there from all over. In September, workers' delegations came in from the Urals and from Siberia, and there were representatives from the Kazan soviet. From now on, not only were Kronstadters not run out of the provinces but they were implored to come and visit. There, through their frantic endeavours, they heightened the revolutionary mentality of the masses, were delegated to the elections of the soviets and radicalised the worker and peasant organisations. At a crucial crossroads, where what was needed was action and not words, the Mensheviks and SRs persisted with the same old propaganda as before, biding their time until the "Constituent Assembly".

They really had to "bide their time" and quit the worker and peasant organisations that were starting out on the path of direct action on their own account.

Without exaggeration, it can be said that there was not one province or district that was not visited by Kronstadter propagandists and organisers. They called upon the peasants everywhere to seize the land without delay, defy the authorities, strengthen the soviets and demand a prompt conclusion to the war. What was happening in Kronstadt itself? By what means was revolutionary propaganda being prosecuted? What forms was the masses' autonomous activity assuming?

The Bolsheviks were still steering a course between the Constituent Assembly and the watchword "All power to the local soviets and to the centre", opposing the coalition government and calling for the formation of a government made up exclusively of the leftwing tendencies. They were very virulent in their opposition to the war, hoping that "fraternisation" in the trenches would lead to disarray in the enemy's camp and to an end to the war.

On the matter of the war, the anarchists proposed neither to leave the front nor to attack. Once the soviets had toppled the authorities and become the only force to be reckoned with, and once the land had passed to the peasants and the factories and workshops to the workers, then, if the proposals (designed to rid Russia of foreign troops) put to the imperialists on behalf of the revolutionary masses by their soviets were to be rejected, well, an offensive would have to be launched then, they argued.

A resolution passed at the congress of Baltic Fleet representatives on 5 October and broadcast over the radio to the oppressed all across the globe, and which superbly encapsulated the position of the Baltic sailors vis a vis the war, read:

"Brothers, in that deadly hour when the summons to battle, the signal of death is ringing out, we send you our greetings and our last wishes. Assailed by superior German forces, our fleet perished in an unequal struggle. Not one of our vessels will shun the fight, not a single sailor will return to shore defeated. We have an obligation to hold firm at the front and protect access routes to Petrograd. We will do our duty. We do so, not under orders from some Russian Bonaparte in the ascendant only through the grace and patience of the Revolution, and we shall go into battle, not for the sake of honouring our government's compacts with the allies, but in order to render effective the supreme will of our revolutionary consciousness. Our battle against the stinking patriotic cadavers affords us the sacred right to exhort you proletarians of every land, in a voice that does not tremble in the face of death, to rise up against your oppressors. At a time when the waves of the Baltic are stained with the blood of your brothers, when the dark waters enfold their corpses, we raise our voices."

From the internal front came unsettling news: sailors and soldiers, returning from the countryside, related in their reports that once again the red cockerel had put in an appearance there, just as he had after the failed revoltion of 1905, threatening to submerge Russia beneath a tidal wave. Disappointed in awaiting the boons from the future master of Russian soil, the Constituent Assembly, the peasants had by then lost hope of a future redistribution of wealth and of the advent of this new master that would understand and settle everything. Discerning no change in their lot in the wake of the revolution and seeing no other way out, they were starting to loot and burn the estates of the pomeshchiks and the State. The ACS organisation suggested to Kronstadters that, as they had earlier, they should fight this trend with all their might and main: it suggested that sailors enter all of the local peasant organisations and bring their influence to bear on the peasants to get them to shun such extremely desperate solutions, and to effect seizure of the land through peasant soviets, and then have these monitored and legitimised by the peasant organisations. The war had led to destruction of much of their horses and livestock and robbed the countryside of sturdy young men regimented for front-line service. So the land had to be worked on a collective basis, with livestock seized from the landowners. But the point was that there should be no immediate sharing out of the land, for most farmers were away at the front and the question of the definitive redistribution of the land could only be resolved according to the principles of collective ownership until such time as the war was at an end.



Meanwhile, Kronstadt was endeavouring to carry out constructive activity. The farmers' union, an organisation of workers in touch with the countryside, asked everyone who had scrap ironmongery to donate it for the manufacture of farming tools. The soviet's technical and military commission likewise handed over a quantity of scrap metal from old military equipment (lots of artillery pieces dated from the time of Peter the Great. A enormous dump of these had been built up.) Those workers belonging to the union set up a special workshop where they worked during their time off, each putting in several hours each day. Technical experts, soldiers and sailorsx helped them too. They manufactured scythes, ploughshares, nails and horse-shoes. Everything manufactured was catalogued in comprehensive lists carried by the Kronstadt soviet's Izvestia. Every item bore the stamp "Kronstadt Farmers' Union". As the opportunity arose, the soviet's propagandists, as they set out for the countryside, were issued with items and tools made by the union: these were then offered to the peasants through the good offices of their local soviets.

As a result of this, the Kronstadt soviet was deluged by letters of warm thanks promising help "for the town" in its struggle for bread and freedom.

It was at this juncture that the principle of the gardening communes was devised. This organisation was

formed as follows: a band of 10 to 60 citizens, linked by a place of work or by domicile, came to an arrangement to work the land in common.

It ought to be pointed out that Kronstadt is a tiny, narrow island about a dozen kilometres in length. The side facing Petrograd is occupied by the town, the ports and the jetties. The Northern, Southern and Western flanks are peppered with military fortifications: in between there is a 3 kilometre stretch of land. In fact, during the war, on strategic grounds, what few buildings there were there were levelled. This was the area where Kronstadters gardened. At general assemblies of gardeners' delegates, in the presence of all sorts of experts who included geometers and agronomists, the land was split up into little allotments allocated by means of a draw. Seeds were provided by the provisions committee. The gardening tools were obviously as primitive as could be: spades and watering cans, and then only in restricted numbers. The town provided these for the season's work. The rest was down to the personal initiative of the "Communards". Manure was provided by the town's horses: people took turns to work the allotments.

By 1918, the gardening communes were a great boon to Kronstadters in their battle against hunger. After the harvest, after the provisions committee had made its deductions on behalf of families, each "communard" got an average of 10 kilos of vegetables. In most communes, allocation was on the basis of number of days worked.

The communes thrived: they were still around in much the same form in 1921. This was the only organisation the Bolsheviks had not stamped out. This may be explicable in terms of Kronstadt's having strongly opposed the Bolsheviks' decrees and clung to their independence for a long time.

A watch was kept on the town by the people's militia, that is, the entire population, through house committees.

House committees were only in the embryonic stage. Their entire activity was restricted to these narrow confines. But propaganda was making mark. At ACS meetings and conferences, one of the items forever on the agenda was the elimination of private ownership of housing. They called for broadening of the purview of the house committees, and for them to amalgamate in order to achieve equal rights for all in the redistribution of accommodation. As ever, when particularly pressing matters were mooted — war and peace, the land, the workers' and peasants' organisations — many written questions were tabled to the speaker or rapporteur, in theoretical as well as in practical terms. Many people complained about dilapidated housing and defective water pipes: they described harrowing scenes: rain pouring through roofs peppered with holes and keeping the underground apartments persistently damp, leading to high infant mortality. The landlords had not carried out any repairs for several years.

There was only one solution: for everybody to move in together. Thus, when, in October, a tremendous scope opened up for creative, productive effort, the groundwork had already been laid in the consciousness of the masses and it was determined at a solemn meeting that housing stock should be socialised.

For Kronstadt however, the number one task remained to disseminate its ideas as widely as possible throughout Russia and stand by for a potential armed clash with the reaction at home and abroad. Technical agencies were entrusted with these tasks: two special commissions of the soviet, one of them tecnico-military, and the other handling agitational propaganda.

The tecnico-military commission, which had existed in embryo ever since 3 July, did sterling work during the Kornilov episode and stepped up its activities. It inspected the ports for combat potential and drew up a detailed inventory of armed forces. A general armament order was put into effect through the workshop and factory committees. The tecnico-military commission issued weapons to all the workshops: the workshop and factory committees saw to their distribution to the workers. For the purposes of military training, the workforce was split into several categories: those who already knew how to handle a rifle were organised into special squads for the training of gunners, machine-gunners and sappers: those who were greenhorns in matters military started with square-bashing twice a week in Anchor Square and were then introduced to the naval firing ranges. Every worker set himself the target of becoming adept in the handling of rifle and hand grenade.

Towards the end of 1917, workers' combat units had been set up. In addition, the commission drew up a list of the maritime transports, anything that might serve as transportation, and had them fixed up. The tecnico-military commission was made up of 14 members representing the soviet, the union of maritime transport workers, the naval vessels and the port. Commissars were sent off to the main ports to see to liaison with the tecnico-military commission and supervise the ports' battle readiness.

The agit-prop commission looked after the whole technical side of agitation and propaganda in Kronstadt and around the country. Every day, the forts were asking for lecturers and rapporteurs, for they were situated a fair distance (between 2 and 30 kms) outside Kronstadt and it was not feasible for the whole

company to come into town at the one time. Thus it was only very rarely that they attended the general assemblies in Kronstadt. Anarchist and socialist political writings and technical literature were widely read. Every soldier bought a personal library with his pay, with the intention of carrying it back home later. Even now it is nothing out of the ordinary to come upon propaganda pamphlets and books of general interest, all displaying the Kronstadt stamp, in the furthest flung corners of Russia: they have survived all the Cheka's raids and searches.

Propaganda cadres were appointed this way: every workshop, every company, every naval vessel was able to send its agitators into the provinces. Anybody who was keen to go indicated his willingness at a general assembly in his place of work. Unless there were objections to his candidacy, the workshop, factory, regimental or shipboard committee, etc. would then issue him with a mandate to be presented to the agit-prop commission on behalf of the Kronstadt soviet, and this served as his safe conduct in the provinces and on the railways.

As indicated earlier, so far as was possible, agitators were kitted out with farm tools manufactured by the Farmers' Union of Kronstadt. These tools were gifts to be offered to the peasants through their soviets. The financial wherewithal for agitational and propaganda work were drawn from the soviet's funds, itself made up of voluntary deductions from the workers' wages.

The technico-military commission and the agit-prop commission answered for their actions before a general meeting of the soviet and at rallies. There they were issued with their general guidelines.

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At the "centre" of things, everything hinged upon the question of power. The soviets' central executive committee decided to call a meeting of "all of the country's life forces". This "democratic" gathering was to have been made up of representatives from the municipalities, zemstvos, supply committees, etc., with a small share reserved for the soviets. Genuine "democracy" was insistently calling for a resolution of the matter of the coalition government.

This "democratic" assembly opened on 14 September: most of the delegates came from petit-bourgeois groupings or from the moderate democrats. One representative from the Petrograd proletariat told it: "We have to remember that we have borne the whole brunt of the Revolution upon our shoulders, so we warn you that broaching the question of a coalition means exposing the Revolution to the threat of a new Kornilov." However, in the "democratic" assembly, the workers' voice was a voice crying in the desert.

By 766 votes against 688, coalition with the bourgeois became adopted policy, with the sole proviso that the Cadets be excluded. Since the question of power had hardly been resolved in this fashion, the assembly appointed from among its members, a "pre-parliament" which was to join with the outgoing government line-up to form a new government answerable to the democratic assembly.

The Social Democrat Tseretelli declared that "in the event of the nomination of persons hostile to the government, the pre-parliament's line-up would have to be augmented with the help of delegates from the bourgeois groupings", among them, by implication, the Cadets. It was apparent that there was nothing useful to be expected from this pre-parliament. In response to "government scheming", Kronstadters started to make ready for battle against the reaction.

With the launching of military operations in the Baltic, the Kerensky government decided to move to Moscow. Which triggered a surge of indignation in the sailors who declared "that someone who was calling for out and out war ought to have been the first into battle and as long as Petrograd is threatened by the enemy they would not let the 'scolds' leave."

The sailors added that those who "reigned on only through the grace of the Revolution's tremendous patience" were failing to meet all of the demands of the people that they pursue an international policy aimed at a general peace. Instead of which they persisted in promoting the clash of arms, thereby ensuring that Western workers were bewildered as to the aims and character of the Russian revolution. Whereas this paved the way for the German imperialists' onslaught against Russia, they would not portray as victims the revolutionary sailors and soldiers perishing as a result of this renewed butchery that nobody wanted and which Kerensky and Co. had contrived, intentionally perhaps, in order to strangle the revolutionary movement. In these circumstances, they ought to be gambling with their own lives in the fighting.

The Kronstadt Soviet dispatched a delegation to Helsingfors and elsewhere, where the Baltic fleet lay at anchor. The delegates toured all vessels, ensuring that they had the complete agreement and support of the seamen in the event of revolutionary action.

At the start of October, a congress of the soviets of Petrograd province was held in Kronstadt, under the slogan: "All power to the local soviets." An Internationalist Menshevik, a delegate from the Petergovsk soviet, spoke up for a Constituent Assembly: yet again he rehearsed all the dreams about

the prospects for deferring all revolutionary action until the Constituent Assembly and living in hope of a resolution "from above" of all outstanding matters: he omitted to mention that the reaction, abetted by Kerensky, would stop at nothing to get into power. As for the Bolsheviks, they dabbled in "politics": they enthusiastically applauded the ACS's attacks on a Constituent Assembly, but themselves refrained from spelling out where they stood on either a Constituent Assembly or the problems of the day. They merely denied rumours in circulation to the effect that they were hatching a coup d'etat, by invoking the line adopted at the party's last conference in Petrograd.

In conclusion, the congress appointed two delegates to the regional congress of soviets, empowering them to support the watchword: "All power to the local soviets!"

At the congress of the soviets of the Northern Region, in the light of the threat posed in the Baltic by the reactionaries and the foreign imperialists, a revolutionary military committee was established. The Kronstadt delegate, a Maximalist SR, was one member. Its chief leader was the Bolshevik, Antonov-Ovseenko. The committee issued an appeal in these terms: "In the interests of the defence of the revolution, we appoint commissars to the military units deployed in strategic positions in the town and its environs. The government's orders and dispositions regarding these key points should not be heeded unless endorsed by the commissars. As representatives of the soviet, the commissars enjoy immunity vis a vis the government."

For its part, Kronstadt prepared for the All-Russian congress of soviets. Its chief demands were:

- "All power to the local soviets."
- "Down with the capitalist slaughter."
- "Freedom for all imprisoned revolutionaries."
- "The land to the peasant right away, and the factories to the workers."

At rallies, conferences and assemblies, most of those who spoke up laboured the point that Kerensky would never agree to these demands, that he was too tainted by power. At the beginning of the revolution, the Kronstadters had had a high opinion of him, but now, the sailors stated "already he is amassing dependable special forces: he surrounds himself with women's assault battalions (!) and presses for war 'to the bitter end'—Should Congress take up the toilers' demands, it will be inviting dispersal and Kerensky will crush all recalcitrants through the use of armed might: so it had to be ready for that eventuality. The members of the Petrograd military revolutionary committee came to Petrograd to lay the groundwork for joint organisation of an armed demonstration on the day of the congress's opening. The Kronstadt soviet agreed to that proposal and a mass rally endorsed it, adding merely that 'having learned from the bitter experience of 3 July, Kronstadters no longer intended to 'play at' armed demonstration, but, should the need arise, would instead parade in solid combat units, with artillery, machine-guns and warships."

The Kronstadt soviet sent a coded radio message to the Helsingfors soviet and to all units of the Baltic fleet, briefing them on the situation. It received a reply specifying that immediately upon being alerted, several torpedo boats would make for Kronstadt and a detachment of sailors would travel to Petrograd by train.

THE OCTOBER REVOLUTION

On 23 October, representatives of the Kronstadt soviet (one a Bolshevik and one from the ACS) attended the Pan-Russian Congress of Soviets. In Petrograd everything appeared, to an outsider, to be calm, except that the editorial offices of the newspaper The Worker had been ransacked and was under guard by Junkers. At the Smolny Institute, Antonov-Ovseenko, chairman of the revolutionary military committee, declared that Kerensky was amassing troops and might attempt to scatter the congress. It had not yet been determined when the congress would open. The Bolsheviks were afraid of exposing their leaders: Lenin, Zinoviev, Kamenev and others who had been outlawed. Furthermore, most of the demonstrators arrested on 3 July were still in custody. The revolutionary faction in the congress determined to take stock of its strength there and in the provinces. It met together, collated information from those coming in from the front and from the countryside. The delegates from Kronstadt, following an exchange of views with representatives of the military revolutionary committee, decided to return to Kronstadt and there make their report, given that the congress had not yet been formally inaugurated. Towards evening, the scene in Petrograd had lost the idyllic appearance of that morning. Columns of Junkers were marching along the Nevsky Prospekt, under the command of officers. For the time being, Junkers patrols were busy only checking automobiles. On the pavements, impromptu groups of passers-by gathered, swapping news. In the Vyborg district, workers were arming themselves and manning all the guard posts: they raised the Dvoretz bridge.

It was around midnight when the delegates made it back to Kronstadt. The soviet was in session. They made a report to it on the position in Petrograd, after which the soviet decided to assemble all of its units immediately in battle-readiness. By telegramme, the technico-military commission passed on the soviet's instruction to all military units and sailors. The workers were summoned urgently to their workshops by the sirens that normally called them to work and which, in times of alarm, served as a "battle stations" signal. The members of the soviet went their separate ways, to report back to their constituents.

Every fighting unit passed to the technico-military commission a list of the volunteers joining the detachment. The Marine Transport Union readied transport arrangements. The members of the technico-military commission toured the ports and urged the ships' companies to keep their boilers stoked up. Boats were sent to all the northern and southern batteries, inviting all registered volunteers to join come and the detachment.

In Krasnaya Gorka, the telegramme reached the Commissar of the Kronstadt Soviet direct, and he passed it on to the port's military committee. 'Action stations' was immediately called. Inside a minute, the fort was in a state of battle-readiness. After a few short comments, the meeting resolved to occupy fighting stations in anticipation of a possible attack on Krasnaya Gorka by White Guard detachments that might come from the front-lines.

Fort Ino, located on the opposite side of the Gulf of Finland, set up a detachment that boarded a train to await final instructions from Kronstadt before making for Piter.

By 3.00 am., everything was in readiness. After reporting back to the soviet, the delegates had set off again for Petrograd by launch. The thick fog covering the entire Gulf forced them to come in via the port at Totleben, on the shore opposite Petrograd, on the Finland side: with great difficulty they reached the next port, which had a naval railway connection to Kronstadt. Direct telgraph links broke down abruptly and the link with Petrograd was severed.

5.00 am.

Sirens wailing continually. Anchor Square was hiving, with fighting units of sailors, soldiers, gunners and workers pouring through: there were revolutionary combat banners reading "All power to the local soviets" - "Land to the peasants, factories to the workers". One last rally closed with an address from an anarchist who concluded by shouting "Long live the social revolution!" Bands played revolutionary marching tunes, as the Kronstadters moved off in serried ranks towards the port.

The technico-military commission oversaw the embarkation. It only remained for those torpedo boats from Helsingfors (8) to arrive: At 9.00 am., the 'Samson' and the 'Zabiaka' arrived. They reported that an initial detachment of 7,000 sailors had already set off for Piter by rail and was to be awaited at the Finland station.

At 11.00 am., mine-sweepers left Kronstadt to drag the sea lanes, for government torpedo boats might have laid mines under cover of the fog. The 'Amur' shipped anchor with the detachment's command aboard. In her wake the other vessels sailed out of the port.

In the afternoon of 24 October, the ships dropped anchor in front of the Winter Palace. The 'Amur' drew up alongside the 'Aurora' which had been moored in Piter since the time of the fighting against Kornilov. A procession of workers on the shore at Vassiliev Island greeted the Kronstadters.

On board a launch, the Kronstadt delegates called at the Smolny Institute to attend the Pan-Russian Congress of Soviets. But when the launch drew level with the Winter Palace a hellish machine-gun fire opened up on her. As quick as a flash, the 'Samson' and the 'Zabiaka' interposed themselves and stationed themselves there: within a second, their guns were primed and a hail of fire poured down on the Winter Palace. The launch backed off and the shooting stopped.

At 4.00 pm., representatives from the revolutionary military committee arrived from the Smolny to report that Kerensky had launched his offensive and was concentrating his forces at the Winter Palace and elsewhere. The Petrograd workers and most of the army troops were against the government and demanded that it be placed under arrest: several infantry regiments had declared that they would remain neutral. The Cossacks were wavering. Against this backdrop, the Congress was unable to proceed: so the Kronstadters suggested that the Winter Palace, where the government was ensconced, be stormed.

The Kronstadters declared their own readiness to stand by the Revolution, but they were not willing to attack alone: if Petrograd's workers advanced on the Winter Palace, they would then take it upon themselves to carry it off.

The command of the Kronstadt detachment drew up an action plan in conjunction with representatives from the revolutionary military committee. All of Kronstadt's infantry was then put ashore immediately

and the ships were made ready for action. For its part, the committee marshalled troops from the Petrograd garrison in the Peter and Paul fortress and sent workers (the Red Guard) to bolster the Kronstadters' infantry.

A demand that the government should surrender was sent from the 'Amur'. The agreement was that if no reply was forthcoming by 11.00 pm., the Peter and Paul fortress would loose off a single cannon salvo, which the 'Aurora' would answer with another single shot. Half an hour later, the Peter and Paul fortress would loose off another shot: if parliamentarians from the Winter Palace failed to show themselves within an hour of the second shot, military operations were to proceed.

11.00 pm. - From the Peter and Paul fortress the one and only salvo was fired. One after another, several shells flew - 20 shells in all. It was found later that just one of these struck the Palace, with the remainder falling into the Neva.

At midnight, the guns fell silent. The ships had not taken any part in this exchange of fire. Receiving no news, the command of the 'Amur' was left in complete ignorance: it dispatched patrols in the direction of the Winter Palace and the Peter and Paul fortress. En route, they noticed signal flags on the mast of the Naval Officers' School on the banks of the Neva. A detachment from the 'Amur' was sent out, along with one of the members of the command staff. In the School's enormous parade hall, armed naval guards (Navy Junkers) were arrayed, apparently making ready to rally to the government's defence. These were disarmed and left inside the building under guard. A sentry from the detachment took up position on the top of the signalling tower.

At 2.00 am., a delegate from the cycle-mounted troops reached the HQ of the Kronstadt detachment, bearing a message wherein the cyclists who had arrived from the front on 3 and 6 July to "crack down on" the Kronstadters, and who were now their surest allies in the fight for the complete emancipation of the toilers, declared: "Dear Kronstadters, the Winter Palace is not surrendering. Unless you take it this very night, our situation will become very critical: our guns are unprotected in the Peter and Paul fortress. As soon as daylight comes, we will not be able to hold on any more." A patrol returned from the town, reporting the current rumours: Kerensky had fled from Piter and made for the front before the Nikolaev station fell to the sailors. Now the "Winter Palace government" had to be liquidated and an opportunity created for the congress of soviets to get underway: the congress might then disarm Kerensky through a powerful appeal.

The command on the 'Amur' ordered the 'Aurora' to fire a single salvo. The booming guns could be heard.. Everything all around shook and the din of the shellburst echoed on and on.. There was no return fire: the white flag had not been hoisted over the Winter Palace. The 'Samson' and the 'Zabiaka' reached the Winter Palace. The 'Aurora' moved out into the middle of the Neva and shielded the 'Amur'. Over the communications channel, the detachments in the vicinity of the Winter Palace were asked to quit their positions and stand off, for the 'Aurora' and the 'Amur' were intending to open fire at 4.00 am. Just then, representatives from the SR faction from the Congress of soviets arrived by car. They were escorted to the command-post aboard the 'Amur'.

"Are you aware", began the Left SR, Spiro (who has since become a Communist), "that the government is even now being wiped out and cursing democracy as it perishes? Do you know that the shells from your 'Aurora' have destroyed the whole of the Nevsky Prospekt?"

Apparently, this pathos failed to touch anyone. In reply, Spiro was told that a curse was more easily borne than "reprisals by fire and sword, blood and iron", such as Kerensky had promised. In addition, the 'Aurora' had fired only one salvo, and, as for the provisional government, the SR delegation would be better employed going to the Winter Palace to suggest that it surrender: the command assured the members of the government, in that event, that they would be completely safe and guaranteed that it would escort them, safe and sound, to wheresoever the Congress of soviets might indicate.

Then the delegates tried to work on Kallis, the Left SR-member of the 'Amur' command. Addressing Kallis, Spiro declared: "Otherwise, you will be tried before the party and expelled." Kallis's answer was that he was obedient to the party and abided by party discipline but that, if there was a political shambles in the party's central committee, and if, thus far, they had not been able to secure a fulcrum and a firm policy line, "we shall see at the next party congress who sits in judgment of whom!" At which the explanations were at an end and the delegates were asked to remove themselves.

Around 4.00 am., an early report reached the 'Amur' to the effect that the Winter Palace had fallen to the Kronstadters. A little after that, a group of gunners and sailors arrived from the Winter Palace itself and informed us that the government had been placed under arrest - all except Kerensky, who had disappeared.

The arrested government figures were taken to the Peter and Paul fortress. Along the way, at the entrance to the Troitsky Bridge, shots were fired, apparently by some group of government defenders

who were hoping to panic the convoy and thereby afford the captives a chance to escape. Their escorts ordered them all to lie prone and wait for the fusillade to stop: then they all moved off again, making for the Peter and Paul fortress, where the "government" was handed over safe and sound to the safe-keeping of the cycle-troops.

At 5.00 am., Roshal and Raskolnikoff arrived. Since 5 July, they had been held in prison and had just been freed. They told us of the fighting at the Winter Palace. Two members of the high command from Kronstadt had arrived there. Near the Palace there was a detachment of sailors which had just arrived in from Helsingfors. Part of the Palace had been destroyed by cannon fire. The most utter chaos prevailed inside. The regiment charged with guarding the Palace had stumbled upon the imperial cellars below ground and got drunk. Capitalising upon the absence of the Palace guard, a crowd of the curious and petty looters had ventured inside.

The guards were replaced by the detachment of Helsingfors sailors, outraged by the dishonourable conduct of the troops. They remembered the disgraceful scenes in Kronstadt in 1905, when the sailors, right at the start of the insurrection, had descended upon the cabarets and inns to loot, got themselves drunk and thus spoiled the whole revolutionary project. The sailors now believed that that bitter but distant experience must not be repeated. At the outset of the February 1917 revolution, when they were holding orderly mass demonstrations on the streets, they had placed a heavy guard on all sites holding "the accursed poison", and not one of the insurgents had lost sight of the need to be worthy of the title 'revolutionary' and not drown one's honour in wine and spirits.

The Helsingfors sailors immediately swept the whole Palace clean of intoxicated sentries and sightseers, sealing off the cellars and blocking all access to the Palace.



The Congress of Soviets opened on 25 October: it proclaimed the socialisation of the land, "all power to the soviets, at the centre and on the spot" and the abolition of the death penalty. Soldiers' committees were set up inside the army and a resolution passed calling for a speedy end to the war. It also appointed the first people's commissars.

At the end of the Congress, the 'Amur' sailed for Kronstadt again. Along the way, a discussion erupted about the dangers that might emanate from the existence of the soviet of people's commissars. Some said that the "heads" were capable of rapidly betraying the ideals of the October Revolution, but all of the Kronstadters, cocka-hoop at the easy victory in October, declared, while brandishing their weapons: "In that event, cannons hit the Winter Palace and they can just as easily reach the Smolny."

IN THE WAKE OF OCTOBER

The counter-revolution launched its first armed adventure in Petrograd on 29 October. The Junkers, released after the capture of the Winter Palace, had regrouped in the Engineering School, withdrawn into the Artillery School and armed themselves. When sailors called upon them to give themselves up, they opened fire. A gun-battle erupted, costing lives on both sides. The Junkers were disarmed. The Petrograd Soviet wanted to send them to the prisons in Kronstadt, at which the sailors objected vociferously, declaring their intention to turn Kronstadt into a free town and not some sort of "Sakhalin" (9) - not even for counter-revolutionaries.

That very day, the Smolny informed Kronstadt that Kerensky had rallied his "terrifying" forces and was in the Dno station: his army comprised the "Wildcat Division" of cavalry and 20 divisions of gunners. 5,000 gunners plus artillery pieces were requested of Kronstadt.

All of the figures being bandied around indicated that unbelievable panic had seized the Smolny. It was questionable, especially, that there could have been 20 divisions of gunners, for morale at the front, given the counter-revolutionary policy of the coalition government and the availability of transport, in fact provided no basis for believing in any such success by Kerensky. Then again, Kronstadt had only 3,000 gunners and for that reason, only the report that Kerensky was on the offensive was taken seriously at the meeting. Practical decisions were held off until such time as a special delegation sent to the Smolny might return to report more detailed military intelligence.

In the Smolny, they were in complete disarray. The Bolsheviki were scarpering in every direction. As they entered the dimly lit vestibule of the Smolny, the delegates bumped into Kamenev and Zinoviev, their faces concealed under the turned up collars of their fur shapkas as they scuttled from the Institute in a panic. They could get nothing out of them.

With great difficulty, an agitation committee was set up, made up of anarcho-syndicalists and Bolsheviki. It set off on a tour of the town garrison, intent upon organising armed action against Kerensky.



In Petrograd, the sirens screamed without respite. Workers flooded out of their factories, plants and workshops. The factory and workshop committees and the Red Guard HQs armed themselves and set up workers' combat units: medical detachments made up of women were formed: some of the women went off to dig trenches..

Everybody rushed off to the front.

The delegates returned to Kronstadt. At a rally, it was determined that as large a force as possible be fielded against the armed counter-revolution. The forts sent some of their gunners along with heavy or light artillery: these were urgently loaded aboard trains: sailors set off on foot to fight Kerensky. The technico-military commission took charge of ensuring supplies to the Gatchin front, borrowing from stocks piled up in Kronstadt against the eventuality of a siege from the sea. Some of the produce was sent to Petrograd for the populace who were isolated and short of supplies due to Kerensky's offensive.

The clash came in Gatchin. for a time it looked as if the victory might go to Kerensky, but the Kronstadt artillery arrived and, having dug in, set about pounding the enemy's armoured train and armoured vehicles. The latter went to pieces, with some of the Cossacks, headed by the ones from the Wildcat Division, defecting to the revolutionary camp. Some armoured vehicles were destroyed: others were captured by the sailors in hand to hand fighting. The rest, including the armoured train, broke and ran from the battle-field: Kerensky himself fled to the Gatchin Palace. Hospital personnel told later how they had seen him scuttle away dressed in a nurse's uniform.

The battle was over. The Kronstadters returned to Petrograd, leaving lots of their comrades, staunch revolutionaries fallen on the battle field. (The sappers' training detachment, for example, lost half of its strength.) However, conscious of their glorious success, they are persuaded that the bloody phase of the struggle was drawing towards a close and that a new revolutionary era of free creativity was opening up before the toiling masses.

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At the same time as in Petrograd and Kronstadt, there was an uprising on the Volga, in Kazan. Some Kronstadters were involved with the local soviet there and whenever the struggle in Kazan assumed a military character, the Kazan soviet requested help from Kronstadt, which dispatched a detachment of sailors.

There was bitter fighting in Moscow too. Officers and Junkers, ensconced in the Kremlin, bombarded the city. Kronstadters travelled there to fight alongside the workers and were in the front ranks in decisive clashes..

Wheresoever there was fighting with the old regime, which was making a last effort to block the path to the victorious advance of the October revolution, Kronstadters were in the van of the fighting. The Bolsheviks profited greatly and without restraint from the revolutionary zeal of Kronstadters.

When, after October, the revictualling of the workers became critical, the Bolsheviks turned to the Kronstadt soviet, asking it to send sailors' propaganda detachments out into the villages, basing this request upon the argument that Kronstadt's revolutionary clout would help its propaganda succeed among the peasants in terms of the collection and shipment of cereals to the starving urban workers. Kronstadters were recruited for all dangerous or risky positions of responsibility. Out of Kronstadt came the commanders of fighting units, armoured units, station commanders, locksmiths, lathe-operators, clerical workers... Kronstadt gave of itself unstintingly.

Meanwhile, the Right SRs and the Menshevik SDs were busily organising the "democracy" in the country so as to oppose the October revolution. The Menshevik SDs thus tried out their policy in Kronstadt. Their local cell was very weak and counted for little. For that reason, reinforcements - headed by Ermansky - were sent in from Piter. But their endeavours were not crowned with success. Their tone when they spoke of October was openly hostile and they sought to denigrate it.

In his address to the sitting of the Soviet, comrade Ermansky attacked those who had had a hand in the October revolution, declaring that they "would later be too ashamed to look us Menshevik SDs in the eyes." On account of his penchant for making forecasts, the sailors nicknamed him "the prophet Ermansky". The conduct of this Menshevik "prophet" was telling. According to the rules of the Kronstadt soviet, every speaker was afforded half an hour to begin with, plus a further quarter of an hour to conclude the debate.

When the chairman reminded Ermansky that his time was up, the latter railed angrily against "such a breach of freedom of speech", alluding to the fact that speakers of no consequence, unknown to all, would stand on the soapbox in Anchor Square for several hours at a time, whereas he, "a genuine representative of the proletariat", who had been banished as a convict for several years for having penned learned books about socialism, was being denied the right to express himself in full.

Now this habit on the part of the Mensheviks and Right SRs who, at that time, always reckoned that there was a need in their addresses to rehearse the story of their life as their chief argument, fooled nobody. In fact, what did a present revolutionary care for past life history? Besides that, the bulk of the workers and sailors of Kronstadt had sampled the harshness of tsarist prisons every bit as much as anyone else. Not for nothing was Kronstadt called "the second Sakhalin": it was no coincidence either that the Kronstadters had been the first to hoist the colours of the fight for the complete emancipation of the toilers, for the creation of a new world without oppressors or oppressed, and had stuck doggedly to the pursuit of that goal.

The corpses of all the really unknown "nameless" revolutionaries, the ones who were never spoken of and whose struggle-filled lives will never be described by "impartial" historians, who will focus in a special way upon the "heroes" and breathe not one word about the "crowd" which is the real history-maker, were scarcely cold before leaders purporting to be "authentic representatives of the proletariat" were setting themselves up as severe judges and infallible prophets and calling the Revolution to heel. Their watchword was: "Heel, Revolution!" Passionately, they called upon all "democrats" to campaign for the Constituent Assembly. Such appeals went unheeded by the toilers. The revolution was well past the democracy stage. It had dealt that a mortal blow and was striking out now towards the abolition of wage-slavery and the State. The Mensheviks and Right SRs, who persisted in viewing the revolution as a bourgeois revolution, lost ground here. The broad toiling masses parted from them. The toilers had learned a lot from the ground covered since October.

Henceforth, when the age-old mainstays of slavery crumbled, when the patience contained through a lengthy, silent oppression under heavy chains, was finally exhausted, and when the summons from the Revolution rang out in February, a terrifically challenging explosion let rip. The masses' consciousness (long repressed by the dead weight of sterile inertia) broke free: whereupon the masses' energies, thoughts and actions in all their intensity were deployed in sweeping their professed enemies - the autocracy and all its cohorts, generals, officers, gendarmes.. - from their path.

The leaden clouds of the reaction were scattered by the mighty hand of the mass, rising up in the name of the creation of a new life, incensed by the notion of a free world. That, though, was to be short-lived: before long the horizon had clouded over once more. It was as if the trail to emancipation had been lost sight of.

New enemies, in friends' clothing, loomed before the masses. The rightwing socialist camp strove with all its might to hold back the revolutionary mass's victorious progress. It held up the threat of the abyss if the process of tearing down the old foundations were to carry on. These "saviours of culture and liberty" were playing an evil double game. Whenever they were addressing the masses, their speeches rang with calls for a Constituent Assembly: they summoned the working class to concentrate all its efforts upon that miserable task. The workers ought to have refused to focus upon their problems and aspirations. Their organisations should have been, not flourishing, but on the wane. On the other hand, the "bearers of culture and liberty", the bourgeoisie and the Cadets were deemed quite deserving of this sacrifice. The socialists, the Right SRs and the Mensheviks participated in the coalition government, collaborated with the bourgeoisie and sought to show the workers and peasants who placed their trust in them that they were leading them on to victory. Meanwhile, militarism and the military clique raised their ugly heads and contrived their first success: the army committees, making a practical reality of self-management in the mass of the soldiery, had to be eliminated, for they were an impediment to the onward march of the blood-stained Moloch and opposed the government's orders, by trying to banish from the front lines the deadly notion of 'a war to the bitter end'.

The workers' organisations and factory committees that had emerged from February were bound hand and foot: in this situation, they could create nothing, they could not embark upon the normalisation of production, if the bourgeoisie was abandoning or sabotaging its factories and food supplies.

The bourgeoisie was cock-a-hoop. The Mensheviks and the Right SRs were arguing, ever more stridently, that there was no way out but capitalism now. The SRs, who had monopolised the agrarian question, invaded the peasants' committees and "pacified" the peasant movement: they strove to smother any real thinking going on inside the peasant organisations, stressing the fact that they had long been struggling for agrarian reforms and that, being now in government, they would make a reality of all of the peasantry's hopes.

The Mensheviks and the SRs flooded the soviets, styling themselves "the authentic representatives of the proletariat" and set their sights on turning the Soviets into agencies answerable to the government, in the hope that the call for a Constituent Assembly would out-paid to the soviets' existence.

Mensheviks and SRs made up a majority on the central executive committee of the soviets and it was upon them that the responsibility fell for having organised the backlash in the "very bosom of the

Revolution" - Petrograd. Loyal to the notion of "democracy", they set up a military commission attached to the CEC of soviets: its chairman was the socialist Liber and it was a motley assembly of bemedalled counter-revolutionaries, sword-wavers and other wearers of the gilded epaulettes of the general. The delegates coming in from all parts of the front to consult with the commission on all sorts of burning issues began to realise, once they laid eyes on the commission, that these socialist "guides" were betraying the Revolution.

The direct appeal of the Revolution, the revolt by the generals from Kornilov's Staff, who had set themselves the task of marching on Petrograd to restore the monarchy - all of this compelled the soviets and the factory committees to spring back to life with renewed vigour.

From then on, the socialists were no longer able to dull the thinking and vigour of the workers and peasant masses. All illusions and all hopes of some compact with the bourgeoisie died in the wake of such a terrible object lesson. The workers and popular masses purged their combat organisations on the spot - the soviets, factory and workshop committees and peasants' committees - of all the foot-dragging socialists and embarked upon a direct struggle in pursuit of their right to life, for a freely-created life and for the resolution of all essential economic and cultural problems, through their own organisations.

That road led to October.

Kerensky, blinded by power and carrying out the wishes of the reaction, did not pause when gangs of officers and Junkers threatened to crush the Pan-Russian Congress of Soviets - which had taken up the Social Revolution as its banner - by force of arms. The alarm was sounded.

The workers and peasant masses lined up behind the banner of their local soviets, took up arms and rose up to sweep away, in the wake of tsarist power, the "revolutionary" authorities, lest the latter strengthen the yoke of slavery.

Kazan, Kronstadt, Petrograd, Moscow - and after them the local soviets - broke the cycle of reaction. The October Revolution was carried out. The main thoroughfare was cleared. The often bloody struggle seemed to the proletariat like an inevitable fellow-traveller in its progress towards free creation.

The methods of revolutionary creativity were painstakingly forged in the consciousness of the masses over many a long year between 1905 and 1917. Henceforth, through their organisations, the workers and peasants had to set about shifting their lives on to new foundations.

In the din of the struggle, Kronstadt attempted to inject the creative issues of an authentic proletarian revolution into life. - With the victory in October, Kronstadt had grown used to the notion that the revolution's first successful day comes only when the foundations of sacred and inviolate property rights crumble, and sent out its propagandists to every part of Russia to call upon the workers and peasants to take it upon themselves to organise the seizure of the land, workshops, factories and housing.

The watchword "All power to the local soviets" was construed by them as meaning: henceforth, there can be no central agency any more to order or require any soviet, any organisation, to do such and such: instead, every soviet, every local workers' or peasants' organisation should seek to enter into voluntary union with kindred bodies. In this way, the federation of free soviets and the federation of factory and workshop committees represented a powerful organisational force for the successful defence of the Revolution as well as for the harmonious regulation of production and consumption.

Hampered by its geographical location when it came to bringing its creative potential to bear, Kronstadt invested all of its energies into the socialisation of housing. At one of the mass meetings, the anarchists were charged with raising before the soviet the matter of a harmonious redistribution of accommodation as well as the removals question. At the following session of the soviet, a scheme for the socialisation of housing was presented: it had been drafted by the soviet's anarchist and Left SR faction.

Item One declared that "henceforth, private ownership of housing and of the land is abolished". Later, it was stated that the management of housing would be entrusted to housing committees and that business would henceforth be handled at general assemblies of all residents: business concerning an entire district would be handled by the General Assembly of all residents, which would appoint a ward committee to look after the technical side. Finally, a general executive bureau of housing committees was set up, composed of representatives from the ward committees. In this way, housing became the collective property of the population.

The Bolsheviks, invoking the importance of the matter and the need for a thorough exploration of it, asked that discussion of the housing socialisation scheme be put back for one week. In the interim, they travelled to Petrograd and, equipped with instructions from the centre, they requested at the following sitting of the soviet that the scheme be stricken from the agenda, on the grounds, they said, that a matter of such gravity could only be resolved on an All-Russia scale, and that Lenin was already working on such a decree: for that reason, and for the proper handling of the matter, the Kronstadt

soviet should await instructions from the centre.

The anarchists, Left SRs and Maximalists were insistent that the scheme should be dealt with without delay. In the course of the debate it emerged that the soviet's left wing was in favour of immediate implementation of the scheme. The Bolsheviks and Menshevik SDs at that time formed a "common front" and walked out of the Assembly hall. To the accompaniment of noisy applause and cat-calls of "They've got the message at last!"

As the discussion of the scheme proceeded, the Maximalist Rivkin suggested that it be voted item by item, so that the Bolsheviks might have their chance to "rehabilitate themselves" in the eyes of the toilers, who might otherwise be left with the impression that the Bolsheviks were opposed to the abolition of private ownership.

The Bolsheviks, having realised their error, returned to the meeting and Item One - abolishing private ownership of housing and land - was passed unanimously, in principle. However, when the other items in the scheme came up for scrutiny, and particularly when consideration was given to immediate implementation, the Bolsheviks again walked out of the hall. A few Bolsheviks, finding it impossible on this occasion to bow to party discipline, especially since - as they later explained - they had been mandated by their electors to vote in favour of immediate activation of the scheme, stayed behind at the proceedings of the soviet: they were hit with a "severe reprimand", Exclusion from the party for "anarcho-syndicalist deviationism".

Long after this tumultuous session of the soviet, there was a bitter struggle over the scheme. In the workshops, on board the ships, among the companies, meetings were held. The soviet's representatives were invited along to make their report on the matter. Several Bolsheviks were recalled from the soviet by their mandators on account of their having opposed the scheme. In connection with this matter, the Bolsheviks launched a campaign of denigration against the anarchists.

In the end, despite sabotage from the Bolsheviks, housing committees, ward committees and other committees were set up throughout Kronstadt. When it came to an equitable allocation of accommodation, it transpired that, alongside the squalor of toilers living in ghastly basements, there were some people who had the use of up to 10 or 15 rooms. The unmarried director of the Engineering School even had a suite of 20 rooms, and when some of these were commandeered, he regarded that as an act of outright banditry.

The scheme was put into effect. Those who were living in filthy, damp basements, in squalid hovels, in attics moved into decent apartments: the precept that "everybody should have decent accommodation" was acted upon. Similarly, there were even several hotels planned for travellers.

In every ward committee, workshops were set up to work on the conversion and rehabilitation of housing.

It was only a long time afterwards, when the Bolsheviks' chief arguments against their leftist adversaries had become the prison cell, the bayonet and the bullet, that the Bolsheviks did away with this organisation along with its creative foundations. Housing management was handed over to the central accommodation and land office attached to the national economic soviet, which placed its official in every block - the starost who was also to function as a policeman, ensuring that no one moved in without the proper authorisation and seeing to it that no outsiders were harboured, reporting "dubious cases" as they arose.

In 1920, a new decree came out, doing away with the position of "starost". Officials from the accommodation and land office set about reviving the housing committees, urging the masses to organise themselves independently, under threat, usually, of the Cheka being called in. But no one heeded the appeal, for harsh reality had shown that autonomous organisation by the masses was incompatible with the "dictatorship of the proletariat", with the ascendancy of a party, even if that party had once been revolutionary. The post of secretary on the housing committees was allocated to the ex-starosts who had accommodated themselves to the "new regime", whereupon housing slid progressively into utter disorganisation. And so perished one of the great conquests of October.

THE STRUGGLE ON THE KALÉDIN FRONT

Alarming news arrived from the South. In December, a delegation of workers showed up from the Donetz basin. They informed us that the workers' and peasants' organisations were being persecuted everywhere in those parts. Kaledin's bands were looting, destroying, burning and butchering. Wherever they were successfully, if with great difficulty, driven off, these White Guardists would blow up the mines before leaving. The situation was becoming worrisome. The coal industry was in decline and its annihilation would bring about the stagnation of all production, unemployment, hunger and cold. What was needed was a daring and decisive offensive to finish off Kaledin and afford the Donetz workers

the chance to organise and step up production. The miners urged the Kronstadters to take on these White gangs.

At the same time, alarming news arrived also from Antonov-Ovseenko, the chief commander of the volunteer detachments fighting Kaledin. He wrote that the enemy was growing in strength and threatening Kharkov, destroying everything in his path.

The Kronstadt soviet appointed a commission to investigate the situation on the Southern front and determine what measure of assistance was needed. This commission was made up of 2 anarchists and one Left SR. From its on the spot inquiry, the commission concluded that the main failing on the front was the absence of gunners and experienced machine-gunners, as well as the extraordinarily exhausted state of the fighting detachments. It was vital that fresh forces be deployed.

Upon its return to Kronstadt, the commission set about raising a mixed detachment, at the suggestion of the soviet. It was made up of workers, sailors, machine-gunners and artillerymen. A staff was selected to head it: it included 2 Left SRs, an anarchist, a Bolshevik and someone with no party affiliation.

We set off from Kronstadt on 20 January. The weather was unreliable: following snow and storms, a sudden thaw set in. Water showed through the ice and the detachment had to march 7 kilometres across the Gulf, wading knee-deep through water. We boarded a train in Petrograd and after three days' travelling (at a speed unbelievable for those days) we reached Kharkov. There we unexpectedly received a huge number of machine-guns, the very thing that the detachment needed.

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In the middle of the night, two after our arrival, the aide to the station commander hastened to the HQ (it was Tafelberg, the anarchist sailor from Kronstadt) to report an incident to us. The Bolshevik command, completely drunk, had accosted a convoy of soldiers demobbed from the Rumanian front, passing themselves off "as the 'authorities'", insulting them and had declared that they were to hand over their weapons immediately: otherwise, they would have every man jack of them shot with the help of the Kronstadt detachment": the troops had chased them off the train and they were now setting up machine-guns and encircling the railway station.

A bugler sounded the order to assemble. The Kronstadters scurried out of their train. After a brief meeting, we quickly appointed a delegation to approach the demobbed front line troops. The latter greeted the delegates angrily, in the light of the threats from the drunken commander to the effect that our detachment would deal with them.

The peaceable appearance of the delegation led them to query the Kronstadters' "warlike"-intent. Gradually a conversation struck up with the regimental committee, and then it was proposed that a joint meeting be held. There the machine-gunners were told the reasons behind the Kronstadters' presence, and where they were bound. Warm grins and cries of encouragement then from the soldiers. The soldiers explained that everybody from the front was bringing his weapon home with him, for they realised that it would be necessary to defend "the land and the revolution". But as the Kronstadters were doing likewise, they readily agreed to hand over their arms and munitions to the latter, retaining only their rifles. And so the whole episode ended peacefully.

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Kaledin's main forces were deployed near Novocherkassk. Facing him was a detachment of some several thousands of men: a detachment of Black Sea sailors, headed by the anarchist S. Mokrousoff, a detachment of workers from Briansk, from the workshops in Kursk, Kharkov, etc.

However, there was no overall plan of military operations and there were no guard posts: all of the detachments were frighteningly overstretched. Kaledin, being well briefed as to his adversaries' circumstances, decided to capitalise upon this defective military organisation and launched an attack. Horsemen and workers poured in from the township of "Grosnoye" to report that the Whites had attacked and that the area must assuredly be in their grasp by now. Some of the Kronstadters set off for Grosnoye. This all took place a half an hour after the Kronstadt detachment arrived from Kharkov.

Several hours later, the Kronstadters returned, having driven the Whites out of Grosnoye. It was night by then. A pale and exhausted Mokrousoff, not having slept for several nights, assured us that the next station was in reliable hands and strengthened by an artillery battery.

There was indeed an battery there, but that was the sum total of its defences. The deployment there was not more than 25 men. All that they could do when the enemy attack came was to remove the firing mechanisms from the guns and, fending the enemy off with rifle fire, make a miraculous escape. Only a kilometre and a half separated the main station and that little outpost, and there was no liaison. When the guns fell silent, everybody assumed that the Whites had quit, but in fact the opposite was the case.

It was a points operator on the railways that warned us about the attack. At that very moment bullets

were whizzing over the carriages. There was no time to consider setting up machine-guns and artillery pieces. The Kronstadters and the Black Sea sailors hurried out of the carriages and launched a bayonet attack. The fighting was horrific, and 87 enemy dead littered the white fields. Kaledin's people fled. The deep snow and murk of the night made pursuit difficult. Having set up guard posts, our detachments, exhausted and worn out by this unexpected fighting took until 3.00 am. to return to snatch some sleep in the carriages.

Chastened by bitter experience, we set about organising the front properly. A general staff was chosen by all of the detachments. A precise inventory of troops and weaponry was made: the field hospital accompanying the Kronstadt detachment was beefed up and a plan was drawn up for an attack on Novocherkassk, the capital of Kaledin's kingdom.

There were two regiments of Cossacks returning from the Don front stationed in the Liski station at the time, along with all their weapons. The revolutionary detachments kept them under close surveillance, fearing that they might throw in their lot with the ataman Kaledin. The Kronstadters and the Black Sea sailors bombarded them with propaganda to get them to join in the fight against the White backlash. In the end, the Cossacks sent a delegation to our federated HQ indicating their readiness to participate in the attack on Novocherkassk. A delegation of Kronstadters and Black Sea sailors called at the Liski station and held a meeting in the main hall of the town school.

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It was extremely difficult to get the meeting underway and start talking about one's hopes and expectations in the presence of these same Cossacks who, with cruel devotion, had been the faithful guardians of tsarist rule and whose nagaikis (10) had left scars aplenty on the backs of opponents of the old regime.

But the meeting opened anyway. The wind of revolution was blowing through the Cossack ranks. They were told how, in the past, tsarism had made verbal promises to them of all sorts of freedoms, but had in fact turned them into goons and ruffians and earned them the hatred and contempt of the toiling masses. They were also told that Cossack freedoms could only be secured through the toiling people's struggle for emancipation. It was apparent from their simple, open faces how deeply they had been touched by this invitation to join with the common struggle of all of Russia's toiling masses. Cossacks, young and old, spoke up to indicate their willingness to fight alongside the labouring people and to take the first step along that road by attacking Novocherkassk along with the Kronstadters and Black Sea sailors. And so the Cossacks threw in their lot with us.

A Latvian regiment showed up as well. Putting the finishing touches to the front. Now the only thing missing was the armoured train of the Black Sea sailors, which had gone to Lugansk, about 80 kms from the rendezvous point, and had not returned as scheduled. The Kronstadters sent a delegation to Lugansk to look into the reasons for the delay.

The Black Sea sailors, having repaired the train, had been about to leave Lugansk when an anarchist called to see them and told them that the local group had been rounded up on the orders of the soviet and had been tossed into prison. The sailors sought an explanation from the soviet, whose response - that the anarchists had been conducting propaganda against the soviet - was found sorely wanting. They then set about inquiring into the detailed circumstances of the arrest of the group and thus stumbled upon the background to the episode.

After the October revolution, a lot of vodka had been discovered in Lugansk in warehouses, and the soviet had wasted no time in hiding it. Then, having determined that it could all be turned into ready cash, and explaining that this was all "for the workers' good", the soviet had ordered that every citizen, from "children of 5" upwards, might obtain a bottle of the vodka on presentation of his work pass-book. The anarchists had vehemently condemned this novel means of pursuing the interests of the toilers. Whereupon the soviet had ordered them arrested. Having discovered the truth, the sailors threatened the members of the soviet that they would make them pay for this trespass against the liberty of genuine revolutionaries. The soviet, in turn, threatened to send an armed force against them. The delegation managed to smooth things over. The anarchists were freed, with the consent of the soviet.

The Kronstadt delegates set off again. Several hours later, the sailors' armoured train arrived, carrying the freed anarchists who had been keen to set off for the front, as well as the chairman and several members of the Lugansk soviet, whom the sailors had brought along to "participate" in the attack, by way of a sanction for their having encouraged drunkenness among the workers.

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Finally, everything stood ready. The offensive was launched. Away on the outer left flank were the two Cossack regiments: their task was to by-pass Novocherkassk on that side. The Latvian regiment took the right flank position. The Kronstadters, Black Sea sailors and the workers, along with the armoured train

and artillery batteries, were to advance along the railway track, bombarding and then storming the stations as they went. An exact rendezvous point had been arranged for everyone to meet up. However, plans are drawn up on paper and only rarely do things work out that way in practice.

At daybreak, the detachments moved off on the attack, leaving the armoured train to lead the way and fanning out in attack waves. There were almost 30 kms between them and Novochoerkassk: they first had to occupy a hamlet, then a station and then press on directly to Novochoerkassk.

Endless snowfields stretched ahead of us. Progress was difficult. The enemy had noticed movements in the revolutionary camp and proceeded to pour down a hail of fire from his guns, armoured train and machine-guns. The detachments of Kronstadters, sailors and workers, although wading through snow, made rapid progress under cover of the armoured train and artillery, winking out the Kaledin troops, storming the village and pressing on, forcing the enemy to flee in utter panic. Among other trophies, we took their field kitchens, complete with a ready to serve dinner, which just goes to show the utter disarray in the enemy camp.

Around 4.00 pm., we arrived in Medvedevka village where we were supposed to link up with the troops from the right flank at 5.00 or 6.00 pm. In Because the speed of the advance and the absence of enemy resistance, once he had been dislodged from the hamlet, the liaison team had lost sight of the Latvian regiment.

All of a sudden, artillery roared from beyond the village... The Kronstadters loosed off a few rounds in reply... then it all went quiet. Darkness was falling. The Latvians had still not shown up. We ensconced ourselves in the military school to pass the night. Once settled in, we all fell asleep, weary from the icy march through the snow. Sentries encircled the building: the gunners gave their artillery the once-over. Given the indecisive nature of the progress of the push and the losses on our left flank, we had to be on our guard.

Serried ranks of grey or black faces covered the cold, hard floor of the great hall and packed every one of the many empty rooms.- In the narrow corridors, volunteer sentries, fighting against the temptations of sleep, chatted with one another, alert for any signal of alarm from outside. Among the sleeping, a few were talking in their sleep. Even in the sleeping mind, the obsession of combat was still present. Hands stirred, clutching rifles, clutching bedrolls. "Forward!"... "Fire!"... "Stand to attention!"

1.00 am. Heated conversation near the entrance, audible throughout the building. What was going on? A patrol from the left flank had just arrived. Medvedevka village had been occupied in the course of the day. The sparse ranks of Kaledin's men, having lost many dead and wounded in the fighting in the hamlet had not been able to rally and had scurried back to Novochoerkassk: the Latvians had taken the village without firing a shot, meeting with no resistance and had not waited for the vanguard.

Vain hopes undermine our energies. In the minds of the fighting men, this news failed as yet to create complete certainty that the end of our undertaking was nigh.

Courage returns, however, and the mental tension of the masses eases as they await the fray. The encampment slipped into a clam and peaceable doze. Such luxurious tranquillity even allowed for the freeing of feet imprisoned in saturated, swollen, cumbersome boots.

Everyone slept...

2.00 am. The sleep was a short one. Again, at the gate the sentries were discreetly being briefed: "Novocherkassk has been taken by the Cossacks!" - "Victory, comrades!" The encampment sprang awake with a moan. The text of the telegramme received from Novocherkassk was passed from hand to hand.

Novocherkassk had surrendered without resistance to the two Cossack regiments who had made an extraordinarily rapid breakthrough and overrun the town, whilst the rest of the detachment was fighting near Medvedevka. Kaledin had died by his own hand.

Morning came. The miraculous news of the night awaited confirmation. Everything stood ready for a continuation of fighting. Spearhead groups were already in marching order. Suddenly, a track car appeared, flying a white flag. At last a delegation from Novocherkassk had arrived: it was made up of members of the soviet and of Cossacks.

The impossible had happened. With utter sincerity, the Cossacks had come over to the camp of Revolution. However alarming reports were coming in: "The Germans are marching on Petrograd".

Already they had occupied the Vologoye station (mid-way between Moscow and Petrograd).

The wildest rumours regarding the make-up of the enemy's forces were circulating. There was a rumour, for instance, that it was not the enemy's regulars but small volunteer detachments, mainly officers acting in the hope of helping the Russian White Guards.

At a general meeting it was decided that the Black Sea sailors and the other detachments would travel on to Novocherkassk; whilst the Kronstadters would head for home with their machine-guns and artillery pieces, ready to fight should they indeed run across the Germans on the way.

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The Kronstadters left the South that very same day. The organisation of the Donetz basin workers offered them, through the good offices of their soviet, a train loaded up with coal and a train-load of wheat.

At the end of February, the detachment returned to Kronstadt, having encountered no German along the way, and having sustained several dozen fatalities. Some of the bodies were brought back and these fighters found a final resting place in Anchor Square.

THE SCATTERING OF KRONSTADT

But already Kronstadt was a changed place. When the detachment returned from the Kaledin front arrived at the terminal station affording sight of the entire Gulf, the whole snow-covered road was blackened with long queues of people carrying bundles on their shoulders. They were sailors, leaving Kronstadt.

The Soviet of People's Commissars could not rest easy with a staunch bulwark of the authentic revolution on their doorstep. Seizing upon the temporary weakness of Kronstadt, when its forces were scattered all over Russia, fighting the old reactionaries, the Bolsheviks set in train their manoeuvres against Kronstadt.

The first blow they struck was to disband the fleet. After October and in accordance with instructions received from their electors through the delegates, the All-Russian Sailors' Soviet had decreed that the fleet had not been demobilised, but instead retained its revolutionary fighting strength in all its integrity.

At the start of February 1918 there came the famous decree from the Soviet of People's Commissars: the fleet was declared disbanded. A Red fleet was set up, on new foundations, crucial among them appetising rates of pay and a personal undertaking by every sailor that his enlistment in the fleet was "voluntary". At first, the sailors refused to heed the decree. The reaction of the Smolny Institute was an ultimatum: rations would be cut off within 24 hours. Kronstadt did not feel strong enough to resist and the sailors, turning against the new "revolutionary" authorities, gathered up their belongings and, weapons in hand, wended their way home. "Rifles and machine-guns will serve us well in the countryside" — they decided — "while the Bolsheviks try to hire themselves mercenaries here."

It was only later, once the initial fury had abated somewhat, and when the detachments began to return, that some of the sailors regrouped in Kronstadt, but the majority of them had by then scattered to all corners of Russia.

Russia was getting ready for the Third Congress of Soviets. It was due to decide upon the Brest-Litovsk peace with the Germans. Inside the Kronstadt soviet, this question was debated twice. To begin with, the soviet passed a resolution against the peace. The Bolsheviks, however, raised the matter a second time and, in spite of resolutions passed at rallies against the peace, they managed to impose on the soviet a resolution in favour of the treaty.

After the conclusion of a peace with the German imperialists, and having rid themselves of compact revolutionary forces concentrated in certain places in Russia, like in Kronstadt, the Black Sea fleet and elsewhere, the Bolsheviks embarked upon a quest for real power, for a real "dictatorship over the proletariat".

In April 1918, the hirelings of Sovnarkom - the Soviet of People's Commissars - crushed all of the anarchist clubs in Moscow, banning the anarchist press and tossing hundreds of fighters into the dungeons of the Kremlin.

Kronstadt was the first to voice any objection, but its voice was by then weakened by the disbandment of the fleet, by the thousands who had perished in the struggle against the reaction: no more was Kronstadt in a position to "point its cannons" at these new oppressors, against the new masters, the stranglers of the Revolution. In any case, the latter were far from Kronstadt: they had taken refuge, not in the Smolny, from where it would have been easier for Kronstadters to winkle them out, but in the Kremlin in Moscow. Kronstadt merely issued two very clear cut resolutions hostile to the barbarous attack upon the Revolution's fighters and defenders. One of these was passed at a monster rally, the other by the soviet.

Then it was Kronstadt's turn to suffer repression. For a start, the Bolsheviks drove out the soviet, on which they were in a minority. Then they imposed restrictions on freedom of speech, press and assembly. They organised a Cheka. A desperate struggle was waged against the Kronstadters' oppositionist mentality, on the pretext of destroying the counter-revolution root and branch. Yet, just a short time before, the Bolsheviks had been eulogising Kronstadt as "the pride and joy of the Russian Revolution." In all of the workshops, regiments and ships' companies, Communist cells appeared - which is to say, cadres of government narks. In popular parlance, these organs were simply described as "commu-narks".

At the slightest criticism of Bolshevik activities, the "culprits" were seized and shipped off to the Petrograd Cheka for trial. Only the 'Petropavlovsk' offered any organised resistance. When the Bolsheviks demanded that Skurikhin be handed over to them, the entire crew protested as one man and stood by him.

Kronstadt groaned beneath the yoke of the "dictatorship of the proletariat". Those coming back off furlough related how police monitors were cracking down on the workers on board trains, stripping them of the last few kilos of flour they had obtained with such difficulty and were bringing back to their families and starving children. Those same monitors failed to "notice" the dozens of kilos carried by a speculator among the same passengers: the sailors coming off leave told how armed detachments of Chekists in the countryside were seizing the peasants' last remaining livestock, their last sack of rye, and even books, whilst daring on occasion to flog the recalcitrant.

Kronstadt was fuming with anger at these new oppressors posing as revolutionaries. Yet, even in those dark and harrowing days, it only required for the forces of reaction to return to the fray and Kronstadt - setting aside its differences with the authorities - threw itself, as one man, into the fight. That was the story in 1919, when White Guard gangs, having seized the Red Hill (Krasnaya Gorka), threatened Petrograd, and it was repeated at the time of the Yudenitch offensive too.

Kronstadters left hundreds of their dead behind in the fields and forests of battle.

Russia groaned beneath the Bolshevik yoke. Having expended her strength in the endlessly protracted fight against the White backlash, she was left in tatters, exhausted, famished and unable to stand up to her Bolshevik exploiters.

How come the masses wound up shackled and defeated? How come the Bolsheviks turned out to be the stranglers of the Revolution? Why did they do all in their power to crush the toiling masses' revolutionary vigour, squander their whole revolutionary ardour and go so far as to enter into a compact with the bourgeois governments, on the pretext that this was one of the "transitional phases" in the progress towards the world revolution and a socialist world?

At a time when the toiling masses' revolutionary vigour was at its highest pitch, when they were striding firmly ahead after October, when the fighting vanguard of the workers and peasants was on the march against the countless White fronts, fighting and dying there with implicit faith in the imminence of world liberation, when every hand to hand skirmish with the defenders of the old world was crucial, when every victory over these must have boosted the courage and revolutionary spirit of

the Western proletariat – at that very moment, the Bolsheviks were already forging fresh chains for the proletariat, concealing their counter-revolutionary intent behind extremist slogans. The Bolsheviks would never have managed to climb into the saddle of the Revolution had they not let themselves be swept along by the revolutionary option of the masses. At the start of the revolution, when the masses issued the summons – "Down with the war", "Long live the international brotherhood of peoples" – the Bolsheviks too set about calling upon the army at the front to plant their bayonets in the dirt and "fraternise with enemy". They omitted at that point to stipulate that they sought to destroy the tsarist army the better to substitute a "Red Army" of their own.

Whenever they yelled: "Down with war. General disarmament of the peoples" or "Let us swap our weapons for tools", they were intoxicated by the enthusiasm of the broad labouring masses and genuinely believed that fraternisation at the front would not only destroy the Russian, German, French and other imperialist armies, but would also entail, in the West, a general uprising against the war, an uprising that would turn into a social revolution. At the time, they could not have dreamed of the solid "enthronement" of the Soviet of People's Commissars, let alone have articulated it. Not a single worker or peasant would have heeded them. The great toiling masses of Russia, carried away by the prospect of the immediate spread of a worldwide conflagration and of the widespread imminent construction of a socialist world, pushed the Bolshevik party down the road of a direct revolutionary struggle.

Lest they find themselves trailing in the wake of the revolutionary movement, and lest they be thrown overboard from the Revolution by their Menshevik and SR colleagues, they mouthed the most revolutionary slogans and strode with the workers towards the realisation of those aims.

Things followed that course until October. The October Revolution unleashed a terrific explosion of hatred, on account both of the domestic backlash and the backlash from world imperialism. The blockade on Russia began. On the fringes of the country, counter-revolutionary forces, routed and scattered in October, were reconstituted. All rightwing elements found themselves on the other side of the barricades. The anarchists, Left SRs, Maximalists and Bolsheviks stood by the toilers.

The reactionaries threw a ring of steel around Russia: the Kaledin front, the German occupation, the ataman Dutov in the Urals, Denikin, Tchaikovsky with the British Expeditionary-Force in the North, the North-Western front, Yudenitch and countless other fronts strewn everywhere. The revolutionary ecstasy of October, it seemed, made the masses equal to the feat of destroying the reaction.

It was not the Red Army, that artificial creation of the Bolsheviks, that evil excrescence upon the body of the Revolution, that repelled and destroyed the reaction's military might, but primarily the toiling masses themselves, after they effected a general armament in October through their autonomous organisations. That was how the Kaledin front was reduced to ruins and Dutov defeated. When, seizing upon the Bolsheviks' reactionary policy, Denikin and after him Wrangel sought to abuse a part of the labouring people by promising them calm, order, peace and bread, the Red Army promptly fled. But after a short while, insurrections sprang up in the rear of the White generals, spreading like wildfire, overwhelming armies that crumbled and melted away as a result of desertions, the remains being wiped out by peasant partisans and, in part, by the very people who had deserted from the White and Red armies.

When the White generals were no more, the Bolsheviks showed up on their "Red steed".

What became of Yudenitch? Who can forget that revolutionary zeal, that devotion and spirit of organisation with which the Petrograd workers and Kronstadters sprang into action, smashing his army, equipped though it was with the latest war materials, in a bold and powerful offensive?

Who does not know by whom Kolchak – who had built up a colossal armed force on the behalf of British capitalism – was seen off? And who does not know how the military ardour of Trotsky, who, by seeking to incorporate the Czechs into the Red Army, dove them instead into Kolchak's embrace, thereby triggering their revolt, which offered that same Kolchak his chance to be enthroned in Samara as "supreme governor of all Russia" and to find himself on the verge of being acknowledge by the imperialist allies as the master of Russia's fate?

And who demolished the magnificent throne of this White "hero"? Kolchak's kingdom was thrown into disarray by the campaigns of the detachments of worker and peasant partisans. As soon as he realised that he had no more solid support in his rear, in the vastness of Siberia, he tried to fall back to the Chinese frontier, but the Czechs were encircled by partisan detachments and, under threat of the organised might of the workers and peasants, were forced to surrender Kolchak to them.

At which juncture, the mercenary Red Army returned to the now cleared battlefield. Tchaikovsky's government made futile overtures of the same sort, under the protection of the British Expeditionary Force in the North of Russia, occupying Archangel and part of the province of Vologodsk. Through the generosity of allied capital, North Russia received provisions in quantities considerable for that time:

beef, white flour, biscuits... Yet the toiling masses refused to be bought. They wanted no comfortable shackles. Tchaikovsky's allies, finding no support among the masses, no kow-towing and none of the hospitality that White Russia had assured awaited the foreigner, were forced to evacuate the region at some speed. Especially as allied capital was not feeling all that reassured at home, for the Western working class was against the intervention in Russia. Who can forget the strike wave in British ports, when British workers learned that the shells that they were being asked to load were destined for use in the crushing of revolutionary Russia?

Such a response and such fraternal assistance from proletarians forced the West's governments to tremble for their own fate. They hinted that, whilst Western workers had yet to rise in all-out revolt, their thinking was already tilting in the same direction as the Russian revolution.

Such solidarity bolstered the Russian proletariat's steadfastness and courage in its increasingly ferocious battle against the allied intervention and the White backlash.

Whereas the Russian toilers were side-tracked in the course of their movement, let themselves be taken in momentarily by the rightwing socialists' prophecies, briefly were lullabied by the promises of Kerensky, Chernov and the Mensheviks, sometimes clung to an alternative course, and, downcast by the conduct of the new Bolshevik masters, let Denikin and Wrangel enter their villages and countryside, and whereas the reactionaries' onslaughts caught them unawares, as happened in Siberia, they proved capable of quickly amending their ways, arming themselves, embarking upon open struggle and bringing down tyrants, be these great or small, weak or strong.

Unfortunately, the upshot of all this was that the workers' and peasants' organisations found themselves being bled of all their most dynamic, vigorous and revolutionary elements who perished in the fighting. In the same way, the voice of Kronstadt, the "vanguard of the Social Revolution" was silenced.

Once they were no longer prey to the ongoing and impetuous influences of the local workers' and peasants' organisations, and being statist by virtue of the very nature of their party, the Bolsheviks with great ease strayed from the straitened path of the October Revolution: then, in the name of the self-preservation and blindness of power, they passed into the ranks of the stranglers of the Revolution.

At which point the Bolsheviks demonstrated in full the insignificance of their creative potential. Even as the masses were fighting and dying in the struggle against the past, the Bolsheviks set about destroying the Russian revolution's creative principles: the free soviets, the factory and workshop committees, the housing committees and those organisations of the old regime that had undergone a positive transformation over the period of the revolution, like the free-consumers' and producers' cooperatives. And what they they create in their place? The Red Army, the famed Red Army. Why? - Because the general arming of the labouring masses, in the wake of the reaction's having been defeated, might have proved dangerous for the Bolsheviks' new policy which consisted of laying the groundwork for all sorts of transitional stages, the spirit and problems of which were not compatible with the authentic toilers' revolution.



General arming of the toilers is a threat not only to the counter-revolution, but also to all who stray from the straight and narrow path of Revolution. The danger to the Bolsheviks came from such general armament. "Long live the Red Army!" - that is, an army that is as unthinking as possible and obeys as blindly as possible, along the lines of the old tsarist army. Wrested away from the workshop and from his workmates, the worker is readily induced by means of fallacious slogans and indeed without those, to go wheresoever the Communist Party sees fit to send him.

The country's economy - industry! - needed rebuilding. But what use are workers' organisations, trade unions, factory and workshop committees for that? There is no need for them! The Bolsheviks' statist rationale alone could indicate how and by which speedy routes the nation might be reborn economically.

A huge central machine was created: the Supreme Soviet of the National Economy which was to look after the economic management of the whole of Russia.

It was articulated through huge sub-divisions, departments and agencies. It was invaded by countless "experts", psychologically and politically remote from the masses, prescribing development along the lines of the old bourgeois models and patterns. The creative impulses of the toiling masses were ruthlessly extinguished by the mailed fist of Bolshevik government. The factory and the workshop were turned into barracks. The workers left them, turning their hand to all sorts of other occupations, whilst the weakest among them even descended to speculating: a miserable existence awaited the others. The economy went into decline, spiralling towards ruination.



The peasant question hinges upon the principle of the mutual relations between town and countryside. At the beginning of the Revolution, after October, detachments of propagandists roved the countryside, but the peasants would not hand over their wheat. Can they not be forcibly compelled to do so? The grain-requisitioning patrol came on the scene. Armed gangs fanned out across the countryside, bringing charges and enforcing crackdowns against recalcitrant peasants. They had them flogged and shot and wiped out entire villages. There were uprisings: these were crushed even more ruthlessly by the Bolsheviks. The latter saw counter-revolution everywhere: as a result, they repressed and repressed without cease. The "dictatorship of the proletariat" sank ever lower in its negativity. Finally, the Bolshevik party, having defeated the Revolution, entered into an alliance with capitalism. Of course, is it a good thing for the proletariat that the Bolsheviks have proved to be the grave-diggers of the Revolution? The toiling masses the world over can now be convinced by the evidence that "they can emancipate themselves only by developing their own fighting organisations until they achieve a decisive potency: that political organisations, which is to say, parties, wage only a superficial struggle and, in the final analysis, cannot comprehend the creative potential of the toiling masses, seeking as they do merely to seize power on the backs of the working class's fighters, in pursuit of their narrow party interests and smothering the working class's revolutionary surges in the direction of emancipation from the yoke of Capital and the State."



THE KRONSTADT UPRISING ON BEHALF OF THE 3rd REVOLUTION

The Bolsheviks were cock-a-hoop. Moscow's Kremlin, which for centuries had served as a keep for tyrants, struck them as a secure refuge too.

Drunk with the intoxication of power, they believed they had successfully smothered the worker and peasant masses' yearning for freedom, equality and free labour, in the wake of a series of measures taken against the toilers' independence and freedom.

Kronstadt itself, that vanguard of the Revolution, seemed to have bowed docilely to the mailed fist of the Sovnarkom.

But, all unperceived by the oppressors, a revolutionary process was underway in the innermost depths of Kronstadt's oppressed proletarian masses. In Petrograd, towards the close of February 1921, there were strong stirrings of agitation among the workers. Among the proclamations disseminated and posted up in the city, there was one that read:

"We know who fears the Constituent Assembly. It is those who will no longer be able to loot and who will have to account before the people for their deceit, looting and all the crimes they have committed... Long live the Constituent Assembly!"

Kronstadt formally dispatched delegates into the workshops, plants and factories of Petrograd. These delegates told the workers that all of Kronstadt's efforts, all its might, its cannons and machine-guns, would be turned against the Constituent Assembly. But, should the workers, ground down by the "dictatorship of the proletariat", act against their new oppressors and on behalf of free soviets, freedom of speech and press freedom for workers, peasants, anarchists, and Left SRs, and for a third, authentically proletarian Revolution, on behalf of the watchwords of October, then Kronstadt would fight alongside them, firmly resolved on victory or death.

On 1 March, Kronstadt began once again to use its good old revolutionary language. 16,000 sailors, Red soldiers, working men and women came together into one fraternal mass and held a rally.

In the Anchor Square where, in the spring sunshine, the graves of those fighters who had perished in the 1905 and 1917 revolutions, en route to October, in the fight for the soviets and against Kaledin, Yudenitch and others were set out, the objections of the proletariat were voiced once more. Against Bolshevik tyranny this time. (11)

The following resolution, moved by the sailors from the Petropavlovsk, was passed during that mass meeting:

RESOLUTION OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE CREWS OF THE 1st AND 2nd SQUADRON OF THE BALTIC FLEET, HELD ON 1 MARCH 1921

Having listened to the reports from the delegates sent to Petrograd by the General Assembly of the crews to look into the situation, the assembly decides that we must:

- 1 - Given that the present soviets do not reflect the wishes of the workers and peasants, proceed immediately with re-election of the soviets by means of a secret ballot. The prior election campaign will have to proceed amid full freedom of speech and propaganda among the workers and peasants.
2. Establish freedom of speech and of the press for all workers and peasants, for anarchists and for all the socialist parties of the left.
3. Guarantee freedom of assembly for trade union and peasant organisations.
4. Summon, by 10 March at the latest, a non-party conference of workers, Red soldiers and sailors from Petrograd, Kronstadt and the province of Petrograd.
5. Release all socialist political prisoners, as well as all workers, peasants, Red soldiers and sailors imprisoned for pressing their demands.
6. Elect a commission to review the files of those detained in the prisons and concentration camps.
7. Abolish all "political departments", for no party ought to enjoy privileges in the propagation of its ideas, nor receive funding from the State for that purpose. In their place, we must establish information and cultural commissions elected in each locality and funded by the State.
8. Immediately abolish all road blocks and checkpoints.
9. Provide equal food rations for all toilers, with the exception of those employed in unhealthy or dangerous trades.
10. Abolish the Communist shock detachments in all army units, as well as all Communist monitors and guards within the factories and workshops. Should such units be required, let them be appointed by the companies inside the army and by the workers themselves in the factories and workshops.
11. Afford the peasants a completely free hand where their land is concerned, as well as the right to own livestock, on condition that they themselves work and employ no waged labour.
12. We ask all units of the army and the Kursanty comrades too to associate themselves with our resolution.
13. We insist that all resolutions be made widely available through the press.
14. Appoint a mobile monitoring commission.
15. Authorise free artisanal production that makes no use of waged labourers.

Resolution adopted unanimously by the assembled squadrons, with two abstentions.

The chairman of the assembled squadrons: **Petritchenko.**

Secretary: **Perepelkin.**

Resolution adopted by the overwhelming majority of the entire Kronstadt garrison:

Chairman: **Vassiliev.**

Vassiliev cast his vote against the resolution, as did comrade Kalinin.

Kronstadt demanded, first of all, the immediate release of all political prisoners from the leftist denominations, as well as the release of all peasants, workers, Red soldiers and sailors jailed for pressing their demands. In addition, it also insisted upon the election of a commission to review the files of all detainees in the concentration camps and prisons.

Jails filled to overflowing represented a shameful blot upon the Revolution. The Kronstadters announced "freedom of speech, of the press and of assembly for the workers, peasants, anarchists and parties of the Left". Anyone who knows Kronstadt will grasp the import of that apparently restricted freedom.



At the outset of the Revolution, after the first days of bloodshed, Kronstadt made a reality of the widest freedoms. True, the most atrocious supporters of tsarism were still behind bars, but once the initial tide of hatred began to recede, once revolutionary rationale gained the upper hand over the instinct for

grounds for the arrest of the Communists. Comrades Illin, Kabanoff and Pervushin, having applied to the PRC, were granted permission to visit those being held on board the Petropavlovsk and they later endorsed, in a personal capacity, the claim made above.

What was the reaction of the "Communist comrades"? It appears, judging by a leaflet dropped by them from an airplane that in Petrograd a number of people with absolutely no connection with the events in Kronstadt were arrested. As if that was not enough, their families too had been rounded up:

"The defence committee" - the leaflet reads - "looks upon all those arrested as hostages guaranteeing the Communists being held by the sailors in Kronstadt, particularly, the commissar of the Baltic Fleet, Kuzmin, and the Chairman of the Kronstadt Soviet, Vassiliev. If so much as one hair on the heads of the arrested comrades is touched, the afore-mentioned hostages will answer for it."

This foul stroke from the panicking dictators came as no surprise to Kronstadters. Recent years had persuaded Kronstadters that these "revolutionary dictators" were capable of anything. The sailors took the line that "the torture of innocent families would earn the Communists no new laurels, and, in any event, not by recourse to such methods would they cling to the power wrested from them by the workers, sailors and Red soldiers of Kronstadt".

The Bolsheviks, to borrow Bakunin's phrase, "always lie. That is their strength, their life, the very secret of their existence. They have made a system out of falsehood and there is no government in the world that can contest their supremacy in the falsification of truth." In the fight against Kronstadt, they resorted to the basest calumnies, as in this radio broadcast:

" Calling everone, everyone, everyone..

Support the struggle against the White Guard conspiracy.

The mutiny by former general Kozlovsky and the vessel Petropavlovsk has been hatched by the spies of the Entente, as in the many previous revolts of the White Guard-ists: that much is plain from the report in the bourgeois French newspaper Le Matin which published, two weeks in advance of Kozlovsky's rebellion, a telegramme from Helsingfors stating the following:

'From Petrograd we learn that in the wake of the Kronstadt revolt the Bolshevik military authorities have taken a number of steps to isolate Kronstadt, and deny the Red soldiers and sailors of the Kronstadt garrison access to Petrograd. "Supplies to Kronstadt have been suspended until further notice." It is apparent that the Kronstadt mutiny is run from Paris and that French counter-espionage is in it for some purpose. The age-old story is repeated. The SRs, remotely controlled from Paris itself have laid the groundwork for a rising against soviet power, and, as soon as all was ready, the real master has loomed up behind them: the "tsarist general".."

Yes, it was the same old story all over again. The Bolsheviks were turning out to be the worthy successors of the Kerensky government which had arrested the Kronstadters when they leapt to the defence of the Bolsheviks (at that time blackened by lies and calumnies and labelled as German spies). All of that was quickly forgotten by the "dictators of the moment", who were threatening Kronstadters that they would "shoot them down like partridges".. if they did not see the error of their ways.

"In Petrograd, every sailor has turned against you upon discovering that General Kozlovsky and other generals were at their work among you.."

It is apparent from all such false reports that the Communists were still pulling the wool over the eyes, not only of the workers and Red soldiers, but also of members of the Petrograd soviet.

Over the radio, Kronstadt categorically refuted all these falsehoods and calumnies, declaring: "Comrade workers, Red soldiers and sailors! We in Kronstadt are only too well aware of how much your starving children and wives are suffering under the yoke of the Communists' dictatorship. We have overthrown the Communist soviet here: the PRC is even now proceeding with elections for a new soviet which, being freely elected, will reflect the wishes of the whole labouring population and of the garrison, and not just those of a tiny band of Communist nitwits: our cause is just, we stand for the power of soviets and not of parties, for freely elected representation of the toilers. The soviets rigged and manipulated by the Communist Party have always been deaf to all our demands and to our needs, and we have still not had any response save firing squads.

Now that the toilers' patience has run its course, they seek to silence your outrage with alms: under Zinoviev's decree, the road block detachments have been abolished in the province of Petrograd, Moscow is setting aside 10 million gold roubles for the purchase abroad of supplies and basic necessities, but we know that, with these alms, they will not be able to buy Piter's proletariat: so we reach out our hand to you over the heads of the Communists. We offer you the fraternal assistance of revolutionary Kronstadt. Comrades! Not only are they deceiving you, but they are deliberately concealing the truth from you and resorting to the most craven calumny.

Comrades! Do not let yourselves be taken in!

In Kronstadt, all power is in the hands of revolutionaries alone: sailors, Red soldiers and workers, and not in those of White Guard-ists with any General Kozlovsky at their head, as a lying Rado Moscow would have you believe."



Why did Kronstadt fight?

This is how Kronstadters themselves spelled out their aims and their problems:

"In carrying out the October Revolution, the working class hoped to attain its complete emancipation. The upshot of it has been that an even greater exploitation of the toilers has come about.

The gendarme- and police-based power of monarchism has passed into the hands of the Communist usurpers, who have brought the toilers, instead of freedom, the constant fear of falling into the jails of the Cheka, which far exceeds ~~the~~ in horror the tsarist police regime. Bayonets, bullets and the crass rebuffs of the Chekist - that is what the toiler of soviet Russia has won after such a long and murderous struggle. In fact, Bolshevik power has swapped the symbol of the workers' state - the hammer and the sickle - for the bayonet and the prison bars in order to secure a quiet, comfortable existence for the new bureaucracy of Bolshevik commissars and officials.

But the most ignoble and most criminal aspect of all this is the moral servitude that they have imposed: they have taken up possession of the toilers' innermost thoughts, forcing them to think only what suits their own purposes. To the protests of the peasants, in the form of spontaneous uprisings and to those of the workers, forced by circumstances to have recourse to strike action, they reply with mass shootings and a savagery on a par with that of the tsarist generals.

Labouring Russia, the Russia which was first to hoist the red banner of the emancipation of the proletariat, is awash in the blood of victims, all for the glory of Bolshevik rule. In that sea of blood, the Communists are drowning all of the great and radiant pledges and slogans of labour's revolution.

More and more, even before, though now more obviously, it was plain that the Russian Communist Party was not the champion of the toilers as it purported to be, for the interests of the labouring people are alien to it. Having gained power, it fears only losing it: that is why it will shrink from nothing in order to cling to it: calumny, violence, deceit, murder, reprisals against the families of insurgents.

The great patience of the toilers is exhausted. Here and there, the glow from the fires of insurrection has illuminated a country at war with oppression and violence. Workers' strikes have erupted, but the Bolshevik narks do not sleep and have taken every step to forestall and crush the imminent and inevitable 3rd Revolution.

It has come to pass all the same and is being carried out by the toilers' hands. The Bolshevik generals are well aware that it is the people that has risen up, persuaded of their having betrayed the ideals of socialism.

Trembling for their hides, and knowing that they will not be able to escape the wrath of the toilers, they are trying to scare the insurgents off with imprisonment, shootings and other atrocities. But life itself, under the yoke of the Communists' dictatorship, has become more terrible than death.

The insurgent toiling people has realised that in the fight against the Communists who have restored its serfdom, there can be no compromise. We have to see this through to the end. The Bolsheviks pretend to make concessions: they lift the road blocks in Petrograd province, assign 10 million gold roubles for the purchase of produce abroad. But we should not let ourselves be taken in: behind this sop lurks the mailed fist of the master, the dictator, whose aim, having waited for a lull, is to exact hundred-fold vengeance for these concessions.

No, there can be no compromise! It must be victory or death! Red Kronstadt sets the example here, threatening the counter-revolutionaries of Right and Left.

Here, a great new step forward has been taken in the revolution. Here has been hoisted the banner of the revolt to shrug off three years of oppression and violence, of Bolshevik rule, replacing three centuries of the monarchist yoke.

Here in Kronstadt the foundation stone of the Third Revolution has been laid, the Revolution that breaks the chains of the toiling masses and opens up a broad new route to socialist construction.

That new revolution will thus set in motion the toiling masses of East and West, becoming an example of new socialist construction, opposed to the bureaucratic "order" of the Bolsheviks, persuading toilers abroad conclusively that what has been achieved here thus far, in the name of the workers and peasants, was not socialism.

Without a shot fired, or a drop of blood spilled, the first step has been taken. The toilers need no bloodshed. Regardless of all the infamous actions of the Bolsheviks, we have enough self-control to confine ourselves merely to isolating them from social life, as long as they do not hinder the

revolutionary endeavour with futile and malicious agitation.

The workers and peasants must stride irreversibly forward, leaving behind them the Constituent Assembly and its bourgeois regime, the Communist Party's dictatorship, Chekas and State capitalism which are smothering the proletariat and threatening to strangle it once and for all.

The present Revolution offers the toilers the chance at last to have freely elected soviets, operating free of violent party pressures, and turn bureaucratized trade unions into free unions of workers, peasants and intellectual workers. The police machinery of the Bolshevik autocracy has been smashed at last." (Izvestia No 6, 8 March 1921).

REBEL KRONSTADT'S LAST DAYS

On 6 March, under the signature of "Field Marshal" Trotsky and chief commissar Kamenev, the following order was broadcast by radio:

"The worker and peasant government orders Kronstadt to hand Kronstadt and the mutinous vessels back to the soviet Republic without delay. Thus, I order all who have lifted a hand against the socialist fatherland to lay down their arms forthwith, to disarm those who persist and to hand them over to the soviet authorities, to release the arrested commissars and other representatives of the authorities immediately. Only those who surrender unconditionally can count upon clemency from the Soviet Republic. At the same time, I order preparations to be made for the crusing of the rebellion and the mutinies by force of arms. The responsibility for the misfortunes that will, as a result, batten upon the peaceful population will rest wholly on the heads of the insurgent White Guardists. This present warning is the final one."

At 6.45 pm. on 7 March the Bolsheviks opened fire on Kronstadt, then Sestroretsk, Lissy Noss and Krasnaya Gorka. They rained shells down upon the town, along with bombs and despicable leaflets dropped by airplane. Several times over, the "crows" assembled in Krasnaya Gorka - Trotsky, Dybenko and others - ordered that the besieged fortress be stormed. But all attempts were vigorously beaten off by free Kronstadt's defenders.

Yet the struggle was an unequal one. Enemy waves of attack were sent in without interruption, despite their losses: the attackers surrendered in their thousands to the Kronstadters or drowned by the hundreds beneath the ice broken in many places by the March thaw and falling shells. Endless batches of fresh reinforcements kept arriving to replace the defectors and fatalities. What could Kronstadt, free and solitary Kronstadt avail? With a limited number of fighters at its disposal, all of them in their battle-stations, scattered through the many forts, parrying the blows of the enemy day and night, without cease: the famished Kronstadters survived on a pound of oats, a half pound of bread and morsels of tinned foods. Worn out by endless all that sustained them was hope of a rising by the workers and Red soldiers in Petrograd, Moscow and elsewhere, heralding the start of the yearned for Third Revolution. From 16 March on, intense artillery bombardment of the town began. The heavy guns of Krasnaya Gorka pounded the mines laboratory, the port and the fortress high command non-stop. Shells started fires, houses collapsed, telephone lines were cut. Planes dropped numerous bombs. One of these fell on the hospital, despite the Red Cross flag it flew. The Kronstadters concentrated all their efforts on holding the approaches to the fortress.

On the morning of 17 March, under cover of artillery fire, the attackers reached Kronstadt from three sides simultaneously. In the west, near the gates of Kronstadt a few dozen metres from the town walls where bitter fighting was to persist for several hours. Endless machine-gun fire raked it from two sides. The enemy forces were partly decimated: the rest fled seawards: but the main force surrendered, following a determined attack by the Kronstadters. At 8.00 am., long lines of prisoners in white overalls passed through the town (all the enemy troops were in white: this camouflage made them all but invisible to Kronstadt's observers, when they attacked). They carried their wounded on makeshift stretchers made from the sleds that had been used to transport machine-guns. The seriously wounded were collected by medic detachments. All manner of weapons dumped by the attackers sprawled over a two-kilometre area - machine-guns, rifles, ammunition belts, cartridges. In the south, near the Forestry Service, the scene was also one of total victory, albeit one bought dearly.

Lots of women were busily collecting the wounded from both sides: they did not shrink from wandering away from the shoreline, forgetful of danger, carried away by the general enthusiasm, performing their task fearlessly. A field hospital was quickly set up inside the barracks.



Even as the latest batches of wounded were arriving on the bridge, there was a sudden whistling of bullets: causing further casualties. A fresh salvo left everyone sprawled on the ground. The lone

silhouette of a sailor rose, lighted by a bright sunshine, his rifle held on high, the very model of a determined and intrepid fighter.

In a calm and ringing voice he called out: "Get a grip, comrades! Call for help!" An intrepid fanaticism invaded the atmosphere. In the town, the call resounded: "To battle, comrades, and quick about it!" A few workers' units were quickly organised and made for the spot where the treacherous shots at the medics had come from. The problem was how to dislodge the enemy from the Forestry Service, which is to say, the port, strewn with barges, timber and girders. Even so, the detachment pulled it off successfully. It located the enemy, encircled him and took the snipers prisoner. The whole dock was mopped up.

But down on the Lenin Prospekt (previously Master Street) cavalry left from the Provisional Revolutionary Committee, fanning out in every direction. They summoned all armed groups to the aid of the "Hill" (during the high spring tides on the island, water covered the whole island, save for the place known as the "Hill", which stayed dry) and they urged everybody who was unarmed to take cover.

At 7.00 am., the attackers forced open the Petrograd gates (12) and mounted a push as far as the very centre of the town and the Anchor Square. Their progress was halted: their attempt to fortify one of the buildings on the square as a failure. They were dislodged and by artillery and fell back. Some of them surrendered. However, they could not be driven from the town entirely. They took shelter in the shafts and vast labyrinth of the Machine School. Now that the attack had been thwarted elsewhere in the fortress, the Kronstadters massed to retake the "Hill".

The situation was ominous. However, not one fighter reckoned that the battle was lost: the members of the PRC toured the threatened positions. The editors of Izvestia carried on with their work and prepared the next edition which - alas! - never saw the light of day.



A very fine day in Kronstadt: the whole blanket of snow covering the Gulf glistened like a thousand suns: it seemed to be offering encouragement to Kronstadt to hold out for just another week, just until the Gulf might break up the ice and wash it away: then the independence of the mighty cradle of revolution would be saved: then the Bolsheviks would be forced to enter into talks with the insurgent masses and employ quite a different tone. Had the Kronstadters revolted at a time when the fortress was surrounded by rippling waves, Kronstadt would have been impregnable. But the spontaneous revolutionary insurrection "knew neither the day nor the hour" when it would come to pass. It erupted upon completion of the psychological process of repudiation of all injustice and all oppression: had the masses been solid enough and inspired by the very same goals, the banner of revolt might have been raised high: and the summons to battle issued, the call to "victory or death" in the fight for the complete emancipation of labour, for a new world without slaves, without chains or masters. Kronstadt rose in revolt in response to the endless suffering of the peasants and workers - misrepresented by the Bolsheviks' rigid logic as the ravings of a Counter-Revolution in its death throes. The end of free Kronstadt drew near.

On the evening of 17 March, the sailors decided to scuttle all of the warships, refusing to let their giant vessels - the 'Petropavlovsk' and the 'Sebastopol', where the banner of the Third Revolution had been unfurled - fall into the hands of these "Red" executioners. Even as the enemy's attack waves neared the port, traitors from the Communist camp, some of whom had resigned from the Party following categorical denunciation of their "leaders", dismissing them as bureaucrats and autocrats, suddenly rediscovered their gumption and set to Cain's ignominious work, severing the pyroxylin lines. The sailors then abandoned their ships and turned their backs on Kronstadt. (13)

From 8.00 pm. onwards, units of Kronstadters were on the move through Kronstadt's gates and along the railway line. The whole town prepared to move out, fighting personnel and civilians alike. No one wanted to stay. Unfortunately, there was no transportation available and the insurgents' last plan - to leave a ghost town to the "Red executioners" - was thwarted.



As ever, Kronstadt had risen in revolt in answer to the call of the famished and oppressed masses of workers and peasants. It was to find itself alone in its endeavour and was undone. Yet no fighter heaved a sigh of regret for the strength that was expended to no avail.

Red Kronstadt was unable to live in chains any longer, rose in revolt and, alone in its fight, perished.

EFIM YARTCHUK

1923

Notes

1. Even today Petrograd is commonly called Piter. (AS note)
2. SDs = Social Democrats.
3. SRs = Social Revolutionaries (AS note)
4. Anarcho-communist-syndicalists: an organisation that existed in Kronstadt around this time. Anarcho-syndicalism is theoretically differentiated from anarcho-communism by its insistence upon the primary role of the trade unions in revolutionary activity. Whereas the anarcho-communist lays greater emphasis upon the radicalising role of the specific revolutionary organisation. In 1917, these two schools amalgamated in practical terms, both participating in the soviets. Anarcho-individualism, the third and latest historical trend in anarchism, on the other hand, represented a significant impediment to the spread of libertarian ideas, for all sorts of maverick elements laid claim to it, creating a confusion that greatly impaired the activities of the anarcho-syndicalists and anarcho-communists. The Bolsheviks were able to exploit this state of affairs to denigrate all constructive libertarian practices. (for greater ease in the reading of the text, we shall employ the term "anarchists" to mean the Kronstadt Anarcho-Communist-Syndicalist group.) (AS note).
5. A huge square in the town with capacity for up to 30,000 people, and where sailors and soldiers used to be paraded before: afterwards it was used for rallies.
6. A primary education was essential for service in the navy.
7. The infantry training school under the tsars. —
8. Helsingfors is the Russian name for Helsinki. At the time, both names were in current usage. (Finland had been part of the Russian Empire up to 1917.) (AS note)
9. The Sakhalin Islands were a place of banishment well known to political prisoners deported to Siberia. (AS note).
10. Nagaika = a sort of riding crop.
11. The resolution, as well as the quotations below regarding events in Kronstadt, have been lifted from the Provisional Revolutionary Committee's Izvestia, printed in Kronstadt during the days of insurrection from 3 to 16 March 1921 inclusive.
12. One of the entrances to the town and the nerve centre of Kronstadt's defences. (AS note)
13. After the repression of Kronstadt, the Bolsheviks renamed the Petropavlovsk as the "marat" and the Sebastopol as the "Paris Commune". Anchor Square became Revolution Square. (AS note).

EFIM YARTCHUK

Kh.-Z. Efim Yartchuk was a veteran revolutionary: after taking part in the 1905 revolution he was deported to Siberia for 5 years and then emigrated to the USA in 1913. There he was involved with the Union of Russian Workers and its newspaper Colos Truda. He went back to Russia after the February 1917 revolution and went to Kronstadt. There he was elected on to the Soviet of the fortress and became one of the leaders of the influential anarchist faction: he was one of the local leaders in the July events of 1917. His accounts are almost always eye-witness evidence. Once the Bolsheviks were in power, he was arrested by the Cheka six times. At the time of the rising he was still in prison in Moscow and thus could not participate. He was one of a batch of 10 anarchist hunger strikers freed and deported from Russia in January 1922, after lobbying by the French and Spanish anarcho-syndicalist delegates to the Congress of the Red International of Labour Unions (Profintern). He moved to Berlin and thence to Paris where he wrote this pamphlet (published in New York in 1923 by the Union of Russian Workers). Yartchuk based it on testimony from colleagues inside Russia and abroad. In 1925, he fell victim to the infamous "law of return", along with other Russian exiles disenchanted with life in the West. He returned apparently on the recommendation of Bukharin, with whom he was "purged" in 1937.

Information and pamphlet from A Skirda Kronstadt 1921. Proletariat contre Bolchevisme Paris 1971.