

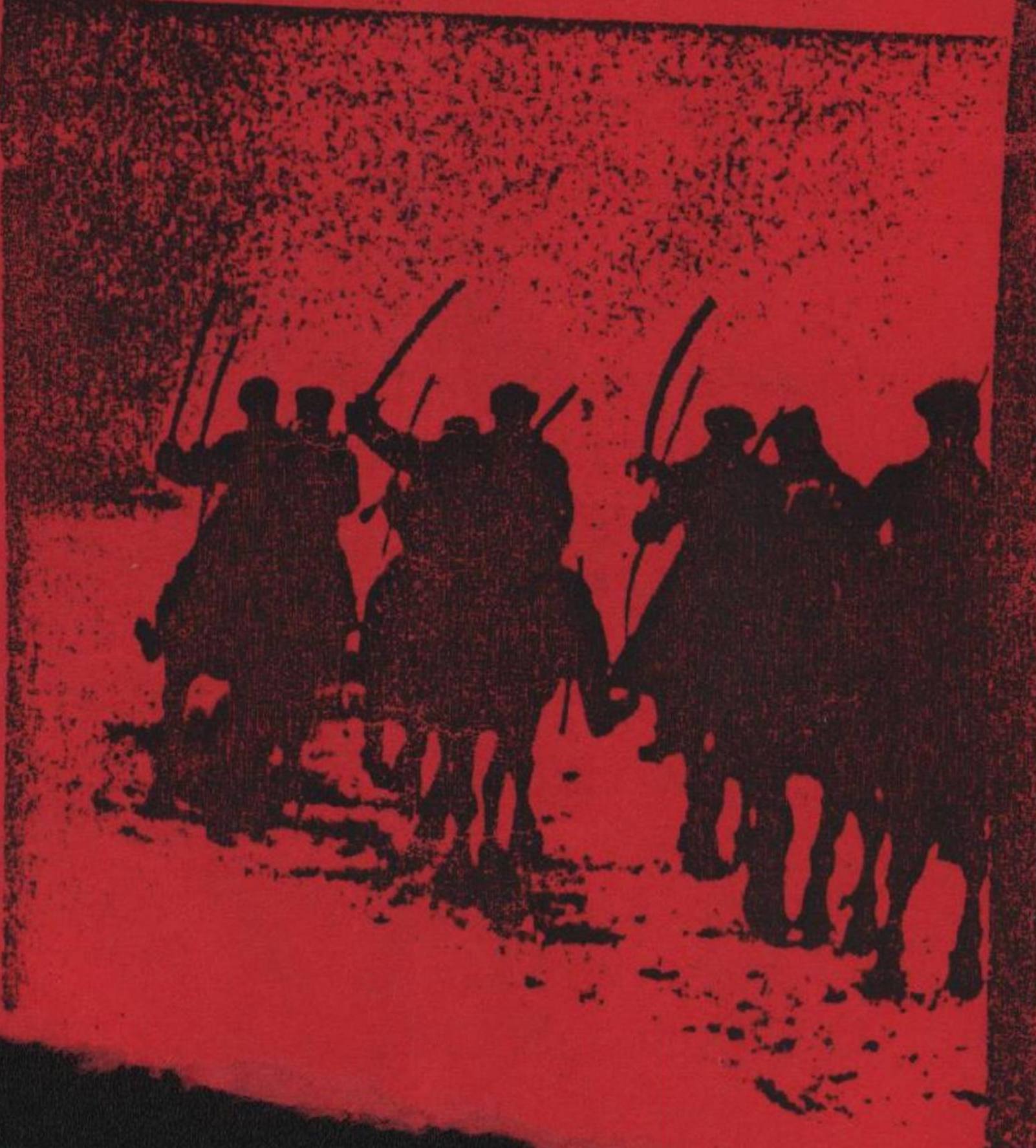
Cartoon from Golos Truda (Petrograd, 27 October 1917) by Robert Minor:
'At last I have found the ideal soldier who will keep quiet and carry out orders without arguing.'



SYNDICALIST BULLETIN



The quelling of the Kronstadt rising. Red army (below) launching their attack on Kronstadt



SYNDICALIST BULLETIN

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S y n d i c a l i s t B u l l e t i n

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future

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initial programme of the Kronstadt
commune

collectively written
signed by Petrichenko
& Perepelkin

This was a Transitional (or perhaps
only Left Reformist) Manifesto which
for the most part anarchists supported
at the time & have done since.

Were we/are we right?

Sorry, sorry to all who wrote to me & received no reply; & to those who received their June 1988 S.B. & then silence.

Personal poverty, the lack of financial or active support for S.B. and the erosion of political hope, to which we are all prey, after ten years of Mrs Thatcher's remorseless offensive are my attempts at justifying an inexcusable failure to try and puff some more life into the ailing group round S.B.

So, what's new?

The nearness of a national dock strike, & having had the time to analyze the short-comings of the S.B. venture are the two reasons that I want to have another go.

Syndicalist Bulletin was founded in May 87 by Hull Syndicalists & Laurens Otter, with the purpose of attracting syndicalists who rejected the vanguardism of the D.A.M., & who wanted to promote a modern vigorous syndicalism which would intervene in the struggles of the late 1980s. It was not envisaged as an agitational paper; the need to draw retired or dissatisfied syndicalists into activity was all it set itself to achieve.

In this it failed; for example attempts to organize a Syndicalist presence in the strike Solidarity Networks of 1987, through the pages of S.B. met with no success, likewise participation in the Victoria 6 Solidarity Campaign did not come from S.B. readers but from outside.

Apart from Hull Syndicalists and individuals in York, Salop., & Liverpool, the journal had a passive readership, who subscribed because of nostalgic reasons, not because of present commitment.

This is harsh but true. Worse, the modern syndicalism we tried to promote was made a mockery, by a preponderance of historical articles, of a theoretical nature, which were too technical to be read by most comrades. (Only half of the Hull group bothered reading S.B. after the

first couple of issues.)

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Where we can go from now

It is always easier to maintain political activity when there are large scale industrial struggles taking place, & when the dockers go out on what will probably soon turn out to be an unofficial strike, once the T&GWU is threatened with sequestration, we will be duty bound to aid the dockers as effectively as possible.

Many dockers already embrace a crude syndicalism, & it would be a crime if we were not in place with some form of newssheet & organization to boost this tendency.

What I propose

An A3 newssheet; agitational & basic; no theory beyond the syndicalist slant to news articles, no history, & no attacks, (indeed no mention of) on other libertarian groups. To be printed, & with a print run of at least a 1,000. (Does anyone know of a sympathetic printer.) To be edited and produced by the York comrades, who always ensured that S.B. looked attractive.

A duplicated theoretical bulletin, again less history, but still with theoretical pieces, on our situation and the world to be produced by Laurens.

Organization

I wrote in the May 87 issue of S.B. against creating a syndicalist propaganda organization, due to our lack of numbers. Two years later our numbers are no more, but I do feel we now need a name, an identity.

What I don't want is a L.A.M. mark 2, with rules, regulations and an inflated sense of its own importance. What I envisage is a means to facilitate joint interventions in various struggles with minimal aims & principles, & no correct party line.

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This would be the only means to participating in & gaining any advantage from the European & World syndicalist movements.

I propose the name Syndicalist Alliance, - not as grand as Federation, old fashioned as League, or unusual as Faction, etc.

If comrades have any views on what I have said, write to S.B., c/o Laurens Otter, College Fm. Ho., Mill Lane, Wellington, Salop., T.F.L.-I.P.R.

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Some thoughts on a projected Syndicalist
Newsletter by Sue Samuel

Syndicalist Bulletin was not a conspicuous success, running to only seven issues in all before packing up, when money & enthusiasm ran out. In spite of this some gluttons for punishment still want to publish some kind of material on a regular basis, to keep alive syndicalist ideas if not a syndicalist organization.

In my view it would be desirable for such a publication to be produced by a group who from the outset were basically in agreement, not necessarily about the finer political points, but about the scale, scope & intentions of such a venture.

I believe it is unrealistic attempt anything but the most modest scale of production. No pretensions, just a straight A 4 newsletter, typed and photocopied or duplicated. One colour, length determined by available material, & costs. To appear when it says it will, (in present circumstances no more often than every month.)

No laborious re-printing of back-numbers. When it's gone it's gone. Not too many free issues for dead subscribers, or exchange publications.

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As a title, either "Syndicalist Bulletin" or "Syndicalist Alliance Newsletter" might be suitable.

But it depends on what, if any, name is chosen by the group responsible for it. Current favourite in Hull seems to be "Syndicalist Alliance" which is fine by me. How this group is constituted, - i.e. the sharing of tasks, chiefly, - is going to need discussion: the only thing that seems certain is that printing and despatch need to be undertaken by L.O. in Shropshire. No one in Hull even has access to a typewriter.

I feel the scope of the new publication, & the contents, should be significantly different from the old S.B. I would like to see a mixture of fairly brief notices, - giving factual information about campaigns, appeals, etc., etc., and rather longer articles of a more theoretical nature.

With regard to the former it is obvious that they must be accurate and up-to-date. As for the latter, I think they should be topical, relevant & lively. They should not be confined to purely industrial themes. They should not be too lengthy, & must avoid the use of jargon.

Historical material should be limited & ought not to include labyrinthine discussion of issues of only specialist interest.

These suggestions reflect the kind of readership I would like such a newsletter to appeal to. Of course numbers are always likely to be severely limited, especially at first, but presumably we will be aiming for growth.

It seems more likely that we will get this through readers personally recommending the newsletter to new subscribers, because of a genuine inter-

est in its contents, rather than through a sentimental attachment to anything with "Syndicalist" in its title (however incompetent or dull,) or any group West of Freedom.

It seems to me that, without attempting anything of a mass agitational nature, we can still be stimulating & accessible to ordinary, thoughtful people, who while unaligned to any group, - or disillusioned with them, - realise the need for big changes in things as they are.

If this aim is not fully shared by the participants in this project, I personally consider it unworthwhile. We are handicapped enough by problems of finance & distribution: we need not be so, by what we choose to print.

I look forward to the views of other comrades, who I hope will excuse the shortness, & sketchiness of this piece.

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Another Perspective Laurens Otter

I think Guy ignores the context of S.B. when he talks of the readership being passive. I would suspect that most, if not all, readers were active politically, whether in their unions, in the local Trades' Council, in student Left politics, in the Peace or anti-Imperialist movements, in Feminist matters or something of the sort.

We didn't set out to publish an agitational paper, nor a propagandist one; the published numbers were too few, to make it possible to sell S.B. even at the anarchist book fair, or at History Workshops, - where selling would have been easy. We set out on the contrary to publish a contact journal, which would keep non-vanguardist syndicalists in touch with each other until the political climate changed.

I would doubt moreover that the reasons of S.B. have for

the most part been much less active, merely because they have not had their copy of S.B. every third month. As Guy so rightly says, there is now an upsurge of very interesting industrial militancy, which all happened without our aid.

The fact that things go on without S.B. does not mean that S.B. served no useful purpose. Far from it. In the early days of its launching Guy asked me what I hoped for the paper, later he repeated the same question, both times I answered "survive".

Both times I said we had been launched at the bottom of a trough in radical consciousness and activity, that in consequence difficult years lay ahead; that even when mass consciousness changed, many established revolutionaries would fail to see this & will still be dropping out, turning to revisionism or despair.

I might have argued further that from every wave of radicalism a residue remains; that even at the worst times of reaction the working class retains something of socialist consciousness, to which - inter alia - past syndicalist actions have contributed. That this would spontaneously reassert itself; that the greatest need for syndicalist agitation would come after that reassertion.

I argued then, that only when the revival started would it be possible to work out a new strategy. Though I said then that I was hesitant about advocating an exclusively syndicalist organization. That I would prefer to work for an united front organization on the lines of the 1950s League for Workers' Control, or the later Industrial Rank & File Movement & the Industrial Sub-Committee of the Committee of 100.

I said that ideally I would like to see such an united movement publish an agitational paper, which

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would naturally not be exclusively syndicalist, & that the syndicalist paper would effectively be a factional one within such a front.

please bear with history again

I said work out a new strategy, for there is no one invariable strategy for syndicalists. In differing countries and at different times syndicalism has taken new forms.

When three years after the formation of the IWW in the USA the various political theorists who had shaped it left in disgust, because they weren't able to impose the finer details of their particular blueprints, their numbers included the Syndicalist League of North America.

The S.L.N.A. was trying to apply the French experience totally unaltered in the US; while I yield to none in my admiration for the C.G.T.'s founders, I am prepared to be dogmatic in saying that at that time in the States the I.W.W. was right and the S.L.N.A. was wrong.

(Most of the S.L.N.A. leading militants later joined the C.P., & they claim for their tradition the credit for the launch in the mid-30s of the CIO unions. That upsurge was assuredly comparable for a brief time with the greatest syndicalist movements, & if the claim were justified, then the S.L.N.A. case might have to be conceded. But given the rapid changes of line of the early C.P., which were accepted by former S.L.N.A. members, they cannot claim they consistently applied any strategy.)

In Britain there were attempts both to launch equivalents of the IWW, & groups advocating Continental syndicalist concepts. But what is called the Syndicalist revolt by Libertarian historians - the Shop Stewards' Movement, the South Wales Socialist Societies that organized the miners, the Clyde Workers' Council, etc., - conformed neither to the American nor the French model.

Just as it is no criticism of CGT or IWW to say that once

British workers chose a form of syndicalism that differed from the earlier models; so it is no critique of past British syndicalists to say that in the future workers may choose other aspects of the syndicalist tradition, as being more fitted to current needs.

For instance it is very likely that a Kinnock Government will not repeal Thatcherite anti-union laws. Trade Unions will still fear that their funds will be sequestered if they strike. Already tube strikers have shewn a tendency to build parallel organizations, geared purely to striking, deliberately not having large funds, & not engaging in welfare schemes, education or the other roles of trade unions.

In this there is a spontaneous movement towards the early forms of French syndicalism. There used to be a syndicalist pamphlet, produced very long ago, on the London "French Cooks" Strike", the methods then used were those of the present tube strikers taken much further. A reprint of that bit of history would be very useful now.

not total spontaneity

This is not to argue for total spontaneity. Syndicalists, unlike Malatestan Anarchists or Councilists, do believe that it is necessary to offer workers a revolutionary perspective; that failure to do this makes for airey-fairey Utopianism.

We do believe that industrial unionism provides a consistently libertarian form of revolutionary strategy, that starts with the mutual aid & solidarity inherent in working class life, & with the basic need of the working class to resist, as essential to survival, & elevates this to give a vision of social change & victory.

We do believe that syndicalist forms of organization & act on avoid the elitism of the vanguard-

ists, but still engage syndicalist group members in united revolutionary action. While we concede the councillist (& ultra-anarchist) argument that syndicalism can degenerate either into reformism or vanguardism, our observation is that their "structureless" groups are just as likely so to do.

We do believe that the dimension of industrial struggle which syndicalists contribute to other libertarian struggles, makes the difference between revolutionary & merely liberal struggle. (The latter, sometimes in its direct actionist form called meliorism, sets out to cure one or more of the grosser evils of class society but leaves the structure intact.)

The difference between syndicalists & councillists then is that though both set out to try and convert people to the idea that the workers without leaders can totally transform society, and abolish class differentials, the syndicalist starts by portraying a picture of what he/she sees as the most likely means.

But that said they do not adopt this as an invariable blueprint; the most a syndicalist can say is that workers in what seem to us comparable situations have acted in such and such a manner; that these syndicalist examples appear to have taken the class nearer to victory than any alternatives; that they have failed, it seems to us, because people have fallen short of full libertarianism, not because of too much.

No mass syndicalist movement - anywhere in the world - has ever been made up, exclusively, (perhaps not even mainly,) of conscious syndicalists. So there is no necessary clear line of demarcation between us & non-syndicalists purely because they do not use our label.

Divisions are on other grounds: vanguardism, compromises with parliamentarianism, tail-ending stalinism, softness towards militarism, racism or sexism, failure to denounce imperialism or nationalism.

So to practical proposals

Guy mentions the failure to make an impression within the strike solidarity networks. These were not by & large spontaneously produced groups of workers, but were artificially created by hard left groups, (already split into two rival campaigns before the birth of S.B.,) not even hoping to pick up striking workers so much as parts of the fall-out of the break-up of the W.R.P.

The main lesson we have to learn from them is to be careful with whom to enter an united front. I do not think however that we should over-react and say never do we seek such unity.

Presumably in that Guy wants a syndicalist agitation-al paper with no theory, he too wants a de facto united front. He thinks that by cutting out the hard bits we will attract workers; but you can say too little as well as too much to workers. Direct Action in the mid-Sixties pursued that policy. So much so that workers in Cowley remarking on the total lack of theoretical discussion decided that the paper must be a student spoof. (The lack of political debate also left the S.W.F. open to the rise within it of factions supporting the Vietnamese Stalinists, who eventually destroyed the group.)

Looking around for potential allies:

There are anarchists, some round Freedom, some have moved into other groupings, some have fait de mieux gone into the Labour Party, the Green Party, or confined themselves to work in their local Trades' Councils, others in the Peace Movement, who while putting more stress than we would on life-style anarchism, retain an industrial dimension to their vision of social change; (some would still call themselves syndicalists.)

There are, in and beyond Solidarity libertar-ian (ex-)Marxists, approximating to Councillists, but not insisting (as councillors do) that workers now

leave the unions; (indeed they persist in believing this to be a syndicalist policy and rightly attack it.)

Though they don't share our eventual strategy, their position on struggles here & now is almost exactly the same as ours; & their theories add up to the same mixture of lifestyle and revolution.

There is the new Anarchist Workers' Group, which wants to create a rank & file movement on syndicalist lines, though retaining a belief in a vanguard ("Platformist") to guide the rank & file in a revolutionary direction. It remains to be seen how far these have moved from the DAM's elitism, & whether we could work with them.

There is a socialist industrial unionist current, people who would in the past have been associated with Larkin, Connolly, Mann, Maclean, Big Bill Haywood, or have been the less dogmatic followers of De Leon; many of which will be (ex)-Trotskyists; which while retaining a belief in the need for a party, nevertheless accept that industrial organizations must not be subordinated to such a party.

I believe that if we propose to these the re-creation of something on the lines of the League for Workers' Control, or its successors, saying that we think that it should produce an agitational paper, the editorship of which should revolve round local united front committees that we might well get a favourable response, we would certainly get a worthwhile dialogue.

But I do not think our objective should stop there. It is patronizing and elitist to assume that workers will not read anything more than an agitational paper. I would like to see crystalize within the broad movement, papers representing the various traditions, arguing the respective routes to social revolution, and eventually these published as supplements to the industrial paper.

Workers if they are to be won to revolution need to be offered a viable route, naturally they want to weigh differing ideas against each other. I believe they will be favourably impressed if we set out to involve them in the debate between sundry libertarian revolutionary traditions.

The Petropavlovsk Resolution

Having heard the report of the representatives sent by the general meeting of ships' crews to Petrograd to investigate the situation there, we resolve:

1. In view of the fact that the present soviets do not express the will of the workers & peasants, immediately to hold new elections by secret ballot, with freedom to carry on agitation beforehand for all workers & peasants;
2. To give freedom of speech & press to workers & peasants, to anarchists & left socialist parties;
3. To secure freedom of assembly for trade unions & peasant organizations;
4. To call a non-party conference of the workers, Red Army & sailors of Petrograd, Kronstadt & Petrograd Province, no later than 10th March 1921;
5. To liberate all political prisoners of socialist parties, as well as all workers, peasants, soldiers & sailors imprisoned in connection with the labour & peasant movements;
6. To elect a commission to review the cases of those being held in prisons & concentration camps;
7. To abolish all political departments, since no party should be given special privileges in the propagation of its ideas or receive the financial support of the state for such purposes. Instead cultural & educational commissions should be established, locally elected, & financed by the state;
8. To remove all "road-block" detachments (armed squads which confiscated food illegally purchased by city dwellers from the peasantry) immediately;
9. To equalize the rations of all working people, with the exception of those employed in trades detrimental to health;
10. To abolish the Communist fighting detachments in all branches of the army, as well as the Communist guards kept on duty in factories & mills; should such guards or detachments be found necessary, they are to be appointed in the army from the ranks, &

in the factories & mills at the discretion of the workers.

- 11. To give peasants full freedom of action in regard to the land, & also the right to keep cattle, on condition that the peasants manage with their own means, that is, without employing hired labour;
- 12. To request all branches of the army, as well as our comrades the military cadets, to endorse our resolution;
- 13. To demand that the press give all our publications wide publicity;
- 14. To appoint an itinerant bureau of control;
- 15. To permit free handicraft production by one's own labour.

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Many who have condemned Spanish Civil War Syndicalism as reformist, have uncritically applauded Kronstadt.

It is clear, however, that while the Kronstadt demands undoubtedly aimed to safeguard liberty, certainly aimed to attack bureaucracy, & did much to pose a policy which would provide rank & file control. It was not a policy that would abolish the state. Nor would it have guaranteed that no new ruling class arose.

It is perhaps time that the "Third Revolution" of Russia was subjected to the same critical gaze that is normally given the Spanish CNT.