

1921 ★ 2021



KRONSTADT

Attempt To Break Off With
The Capitalist State In Russia

Comrades,

The present material is no one's property, it is part of the experience accumulated by a class, which lives and struggles to abolish its own salaried condition and hence all classes and all exploitation.

Use then this material, spread it, discuss it, reproduce it...

We address our warmest communist salute, our unconditional support to all proletarians who struggle to affirm our worldwide and autonomous class interests, against capitalism, against its State, against the pseudo-workers' parties and trade-unions, which perpetuate its survival.

Let us contribute to the organization of our class as a worldwide force for the abolition of all classes, for the destruction of the world of commodity, for communism, for the human community.

Content

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KRONSTADT – ATTEMPT TO BREAK OFF WITH THE CAPITALIST STATE IN RUSSIA
(INTERNATIONALIST COMMUNIST GROUP – ICG)

CHAPTER ONE
GENERAL BACKGROUND

- Strengthening of the capitalist State in Russia
- Wave of struggles

CHAPTER TWO
KRONSTADT: A FAILED INSURRECTION

- Turmoil in Kronstadt
- Resolution of General Assembly on March 1st, 1921
- Formation of the Provisional Revolutionary Committee
- First reactions of the State
- Hesitations of the insurgents
- Arrogance of the State
- Challenge to the State and rallying

CHAPTER THREE
THE LAST REVOLUTIONARY BURST IN THE RESISTANCE TO THE CRUSHING

- Radicalization of the struggle
- Revolutionary defeatism in the ranks of the Red Army
- Final assault

CHAPTER FOUR
THE BOURGEOIS IDEOLOGY WEIGHT AMONG THE INSURGENTS

- Historic importance of the insurrection
- Need to criticize the weaknesses of the movement
- Fetishism of the Soviets
- Free labor and democracy

CHAPTER FIVE
THE BOLSHEVIK PARTY FIRMLY HOLDS THE REINS OF THE BOURGEOIS STATE

- Myth of the Workers' State
- Kronstadt, the last gasp of a declining revolution

CHAPTER SIX
CONCLUSION

- Kronstadt, a moment in the historic affirmation of the communist program

1921★2021.

It is exactly 100 years ago. On March 18th, 1921, the social power of the capitalist State painted in red in Russia crushed the proletarian revolt in Kronstadt. The way was thus clear for the Bolshevik Party/State to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Paris Commune with great pomp. The inherent cynicism of these somewhat “radical” social democrats (who were “radical” only in form, but never in substance) was matched only by their alleged rupture with the society of Capital.

Already in October 1917, this same Bolshevik Party had succeeded in channeling the hate of the proletariat against private property and its State (and its misery, and its wars, and the world that goes with it!). It thus succeeded in appropriating the insurrectional energy developed by our class, in order to finally pass off as a revolution what is merely the replacement of a provisional government by a new caste of ministers called “commissaries”. The whole thing was sprinkled with some economic, social and political measures that had the taste and the colour of revolution (that “smells terribly of revolution” if we take the expression used by Lenin, according to Trotsky when forming the Soviet of People’s Commissaries) but that turned to be only a facade restoration of the vile social dictatorship of Capital in the name of socialism and communism.

The “October insurrection”, or more prosaically the events of October 24th/25th, 1917, which culminated in the “capture of the Winter Palace”, seat of the provisional government, was a “coup” organized by a faction of the Bolshevik Party, the so-called “Lenin/Trotsky faction”. Not a “coup d’état”, as all the chapels of the historical social democracy like to denounce it for a hundred years: from the socialists of the Second International to the partisans of ideological anarchism and to the supporters of workers’ democracy and its councilist form. But it was indeed a (temporary!) curb to the real insurrectional process of the proletariat that lasted for several months during 1917 and that didn’t stop spreading like wildfire all over the country, through cities and countryside.

As the “anarchist” militant Piotr Arshinov said quite rightly in October 1927 in an article that was to draw lessons from these events for their tenth anniversary, there were two opposing Octobers: on the one hand, “the October of the workers and peasants” which attacked private property and expropriated the capitalist class; and on the other hand, the “Bol-

shevik October” which overthrew the provisional government incapable of controlling the proletarian outburst, and which imposed a mere political revolution, therefore a bourgeois one.

But let’s be quite clear: we do not oppose democracy, gradual and peaceful process, soviet assemblyism to the Bolshevik insurrection of October, as our detractors could accuse us to do, but on the contrary we want to emphasize the genuine insurrectional process of the proletariat. The problem is that some sectors of our class, and among them the most radical ones, those that history will remember under the name of “Kronstadt sailors”, oscillated between “proletarian October” and “Bolshevik October” to be finally co-opted by the latter and to put themselves at the service of the Bolshevik Party, bolstered by its organizational prestige, in its quest for political power. The whole hiatus is that on October 25th, 1917, and the following months, the “Kronstadt sailors” turned from “spearhead of the revolution” into the armed wing of the Bolshevik counter-revolution to come...



The control over our class, the political supervision of the process of social revolution, this is the fundamental mission of all the factions of the historical social democracy, with which the Bolshevik Party has never fundamentally broken, and in this including the Lenin faction in spite of its changes of direction which never attacked the basis of the bourgeois politics for the workers. In formal opposition to the parliamentary and pacifist circus of the soviets, advocated by a majority of the Bolshevik Party apparatus, the Lenin faction will push on the contrary, not to the proletarian insurrection (in spite of his struggle within the party and the central committee in order to affirm the necessity of a violent action, of a “coup”), but more prosaically to the technical organization of an insurrectionary-type “counter-fire”. Indeed, when a fire grows (in this case, a social fire), when it is out of control and when it threatens to spread and consume everything in its path, then the technique of the intentional and under control lighting of a counter-fire stands out as the only alternative aiming at the prompt extinguishing of the main (revolutionary) hearth.

The purpose of this “counter-fire” (October 1917) is the control of the subversive dynamics developed by the movement of our class through the transformation of the attempts to overthrow the bourgeois order as

well as the attempts of social revolution into a mere political revolution by the overthrow of the provisional government, without touching anything fundamentally to the social relations, to the existing state of things. To overthrow everything so that nothing changes, in conformity with the way the Bolsheviks grasped the social matter, the capitalism, and therefore also its overthrow by the imposition of a vulgar “State capitalism” baptized “socialism”, in conformity with its incomprehension of the real nature of the social democracy. There is therefore nothing surprising or extraordinary that the Bolshevik “State-Party”, from the day after the “insurrection” and the seizure of power, participates in the reconstruction and the development of capitalism and the State in Russia and in the world...



We therefore commemorate here, through this small contribution, the 100th anniversary of the Kronstadt uprising by publishing the translation of a text that the Internationalist Communist Group (ICG) had originally written in the mid-1980s. We have taken as a basis an “improved version” from 2004, which differs from the concessions made at the time to the myth of the Bolshevik Party regarded as an expression of the revolutionary proletariat and leader of the October insurrection, regarded as “the party of armed insurrection” while fundamentally it has never really broke with its genuine essence as a “party of progressive conquest of the (bourgeois) power”...

Nevertheless, while rereading this “new version”, discussing it and translating it into English and Czech, we felt that there were still important remnants of this myth: October is still considered as a “victorious” insurrection, even as THE immanent revolution, the Bolshevik Party will lose its “proletarian nature” only after the seizure of power, and the Third International, in spite of its limits and weaknesses, would be nevertheless a materialization of proletarian internationalism... All affirmations which we can only disagree with!

We erased in the text all these drosses which participate in the myth of the revolutionary Bolshevik Party (admittedly while having “degenerated” afterwards), in the myth of a homogeneous October, in the myth of the international organization around and under the direction of the Bolshevik Party, and we replaced them by three suspension points in brack-

ets. In other places, where it was necessary, we rephrased (still in brackets) certain affirmations that were problematic. We also added comments to passages that were probably less problematic but that nevertheless needed some clarification.

Good reading, comrades.

May the next revolutionary wave finally put an end to the nightmare that constitutes for humanity a social relation based on private property, money and exploitation, and therefore based on the expropriation of the vast majority of human beings from their means of existence...

Let's expropriate the expropriators!

Long live communism!



KRONSTADT

Attempt to break off with the capitalist State in Russia

(Internationalist Communist Group – ICG)

CHAPTER ONE

GENERAL BACKGROUND

Strengthening of the capitalist State in Russia

We are at the end of 1920, three years after the proletarian insurrections in Petrograd and Moscow. After the insurrectionary defeats in Germany, in Ukraine, in Italy... the world revolution is on the rocks. The world State of Capital mobilized its energy in order to prevent the spreading of the revolution, to isolate and to quell the stirrings of the revolution. In Russia, the shock troops of the international bourgeoisie isolate the proletariat and strike it with the consequence to weaken it. The world capitalism uses the white armies in order to accentuate the military pressures, to terrorize the proletarians. But the counterrevolutionary danger doesn't only come from the white armies, but also from the restoration of the forces of the bourgeois State in Russia. In fact, the government of the Soviet Republic of Russia actively contributed itself to the weakening of the revolutionary vanguards.

As capitalist social relation reproduced in Russia the forces of the State, the world capitalism abandoned to their fate the white armies and entrusted the "red" repressive corps with the role of watchdog of the bourgeois order. In the autumn of 1920, what remained of the Kaledin's, Denikin's, and Wrangel's white armies were forced to surrender but proletarians very quickly measured the costs of this "victory". Far from being defeated, the capitalist State repainted in red returned stability, and restored a homogeneous and credible bourgeois class. The bourgeois State had not been destroyed by the Bolshevik Party and the soviets, but they had been completely integrated into it [...]. The insurgent proletariat didn't impose its dictatorship, but the bourgeois State in Russia did it with its Red Army, its Soviet government (Council of People's Commissars), its

trade-unions and their labor armies [*Trudarmii*], transforming social war into imperialist war.

Never during the years of the stirrings of the revolution preceding this winter of 1920-21, have the living conditions of the proletarians (including rural workers) been so hard. To the millions of deaths on the battles during the war are added a few other millions who died from starvation, cold and disease. The capitalist economy is in a state of collapse never seen before. Agricultural production plummeted: the lands have been sparsely seeded and grain reserves are depleted, either because they have been robbed for the purpose of the armies or because agricultural landowners as well as small peasants hide their reserves as a resistance to requisitions. Scarce foodstuffs are rationed.

Industry and transport are nearly annihilated. At the end of 1920 workers' real wages in Petrograd represents only 8.6% of what it was in pre-war times, according to the official estimates. Food ration ultimately became the basis of the worker's salary who additionally receives shoes and clothes, or even a fraction of his production, which he generally exchanges for food. In January 1921, foundry and smelter workers in Petrograd receive a daily ration of 800 grams of black bread compared to 500 grams for "shock workers" and 400, or even 200 grams for the lower categories. Armed bands of demobilized soldiers and unemployed workers travel all over the countryside in search of food. The black market has largely replaced the official distribution channels. It's where proletarians buy or exchange their livelihoods. Tools, machines, recovery products are stolen in factories, in buildings and serve as means of exchange. Millions of proletarians flowed back and are still flowing back to the countryside looking for means of subsistence; between October 1917 and August 1920, the population in Petrograd decreased of two thirds and in Moscow about 50%. To combat the theft and absenteeism of workers, labor discipline has been reinforced, special detachments of "red guards" occupy factories, and they set up checkpoints along the roads and at the entrance of the cities.

These extremely miserable survival conditions don't come from the difficulties to organize "the proletarian economy", to establish "socialist criteria of production and distribution", but they result from the existence and strengthening of the capitalist social relation, of the private property of the means of production that the Soviet government supported since the overthrow of Kerensky. This misery is the expression

of the counterrevolution, of its force and absolutely not of the so-called strengthening of the proletarian camp.

Wave of struggles

The end of 1920 and early 1921 are marked by a general social turmoil, challenging the foundations of the Soviet State. After Wrangel's defeat, which followed Kolchak's and Denikin's defeats early 1920, the movement of demobilization increased and produced a beginning of disintegration of the Red Army as well as the armies of labor. When demobilized proletarians are not integrated in armies of labor, they go back to the cities and villages where unemployment is generalized and where they are threatened to starve of deprivation because of shortages. Waves of rural uprisings sweep then over the countryside. The Tambov province, the Middle Volga region, the Ukraine, the Northern Caucasus and Western Siberia are particularly affected. During the winter 1920-21 revolts are growing rapidly; about 2,500,000 men, almost half the size of the Red Army, have been demobilized in this climate of social turmoil. As Lenin pointed out, *"tens and hundreds of thousands of demobilized soldiers"* returned to their village to join the ranks of the guerrilla warfare, "looking for food" and to challenge this "Workers' State". In February 1921 a report from the Cheka counted 118 rural insurrections. On the black land of Tambov province, the struggle led by Antonov – a former Socialist-Revolutionary – has been raging for over a year. At its apogee the Antonov movement gathered about 50,000 insurgents, while in only one district in Siberia they were no less than 60,000. Government soldiers deserted in such large numbers during the fighting with these insurgents, farm workers, and demobilized soldiers, that the government is compelled to call in Cheka's special units and communist cadets whose loyalty is fool-proof. In spite of the strength of their mottos, which claim *"Down with requisitioning"*, *"Away with food detachments"*, *"Down with raiding communists, commissars and officials"*, the insurgents failed to sufficiently centralize their forces, to develop a revolutionary program and overall coherence. Their demands are taken up and diverted by the kulaks.

On January 22nd 1921, the government announces that the bread ration will again be reduced of a third... It's the last straw that breaks the camel's back; a wave of workers' strikes traversed then the two biggest workers' centers: Moscow and Petrograd. The first serious unrests broke out in Moscow about mid-February. Strikes and demonstrations demanding food rations to be increased and grain requisitions to be abolished are repressed by regular troops and Kadets (Kursanty). A wave of much

harder strikes sweeps Petrograd a few time after order has been restored in Moscow. On February 23rd the movement of strike is launched in the factory “Trubochny”, one of the main steelworks in Petrograd. Workers require the food rations to be increased and all the winter shoes and clothes to be distributed. The 24th, a demonstration on Vasili island is dispersed by the troop which fires shots across the bows. The 25th, a new workers’ demonstration succeeds in pushing numerous factories to go on strike, among which Admiralty Shipyards. Once again, the Kursanties receive the order to disperse demonstrators. By the 24th, the Petrograd Soviet under the presidency of Zinoviev declares martial law for the whole city. The curfew comes into force at 11 p.m. and any gathering is forbidden in the streets. Trade-unions, the Soviet and the committee of the Party condemn the “agitators”, the “egoists” responsible for the disturbance and they urge “Red Petrograd workers” to remain at work. The 26th, while strikes and demonstrations get stronger, the Soviet orders to lock out the workers of both main centers of struggles, the factories Trubochny and Laferme.

But this endeavor to starve the strikers only heightened tensions and factories are forced to stop one after the other. The 28th, the immense metallurgic company Putilov, with no less than 6,000 workers, is affected in turn. With the strengthening of the movement, the workers’ demands became more detailed. In addition to better rations, they call for withdrawal of the special detachments of armed Bolsheviks, which perform police functions in factories, and the demobilization of labor armies lately assigned to the largest enterprises in Petrograd. The immediately repressive reaction and the fact that strikes are condemned by the Bolshevik Party, trade-unions and the Soviet leave the entire place to the development of Mensheviks’ and Socialists-Revolutionaries’ propaganda. But despite that, none of these parties succeed in controlling the movement... Menshevik propaganda called for timeout as well as to exercise all legal means of pressure to achieve reforms. With skillful doses of direct repression and by the granting of some concessions, the Petrograd Soviet ends up regaining control over the situation after one week of strike. The garrison that was affected by the whirlwind of protests is disarmed and confined to barracks. Communist cadets and members of the Party replace these untrustworthy troops.

Overnight, Petrograd is turned into an entrenched camp: armed detachments travel all over the city; curfew is complete. Simultaneously, the Cheka launches a campaign of arrests against all agitators and striking workers are locked out. Any gathering is banned and whoever resists the

dispersal orders risks being shot on the spot (decree of the Defense Committee on March 3rd). Convoys of supplies and coal are routed in a hurry in order to distribute extra rations to soldiers and factory workers still on the job. On March 1st, roadblocks are removed and soldiers of the labor armies are demobilized. On March 2nd and 3rd, most of the factories started running again whereas Kronstadt sailors rise up in their turn.

CHAPTER TWO

KRONSTADT: A FAILED INSURRECTION

Turmoil in Kronstadt

Since several months a wind of rebellion blew on the fleet in Kronstadt. The opposition of sailors to strengthening discipline, to the abolition of ship committees, to the introduction of commissars and former czarist officers, to the extremely hard living conditions on ships, quickly reached threatening proportions. About the end of 1920, a “fleet opposition” organized itself as a counterpart of the “workers’ opposition” in factories and the “military opposition” in the Red Army. In December 1920, the sailors send a delegation to demand better living conditions; when they arrived, delegates are locked up. But this “fleet opposition” is quickly overwhelmed by the extent of the rebellion movement. Morale is so low that during the winter 1920-21, the number of desertions grows increasingly and, in order to see the end about it, all shore leaves are limited by the military authorities as a precaution. Several hundreds of sailors who didn’t resign are transferred to the Black Sea and Caspian Sea fleets. In January 1921 alone, 5,000 sailors of the Baltic Sea leave the party, tearing up their card. In early December, a big number of sailors leave the general assembly of the 5th Congress of Soviets that takes place at the Petrograd naval base, in order to protest against skulduggery in elections of delegates, and the crew of the “Sebastopol” rises up against restrictions of leaves.

When sailors in Kronstadt heard that strikes broke out in Petrograd, a delegation is sent there in order to appreciate the situation as well as to disrupt the Bolshevik propaganda, which suggests to workers in Petrograd that sailors in “Red Kronstadt” are willing to intervene in order to restore order against “strikers who play into the hands of the whites”. After witnessing the extension of strikes during two days in spite of the lock-out and the repression of demonstrations, the sailors gather together

in general assembly and decree a resolution in solidarity with the workers' strikes, resolutions which a large number of proletarians will identify with. The very next day, a rally of more than 15,000 sailors and proletarians from Kronstadt adopts the resolution of the sailors after having expelled from the tribune Bolshevik high rank leaders, Kalinin, Chairman of the Supreme Soviet of the Republic, and Kuzmin who was sent from Petrograd in order to try and bring proletarians back to order. Members of the Bolshevik Party in Kronstadt, in their big majority, join the resolution after many orators have denounced the government for the shortage of food and fuel as well as for the catastrophic living conditions that persist months after the end of the civil war¹. The assembly immediately decides to send 30 of its members to Petrograd, in order to make the resolution known to workers in struggle. But upon their arrival, they are arrested and will give no sign of life anymore.

Resolution of General Assembly on March 1st, 1921

Proletarians in Kronstadt immediately tried their discontent to prolong Petrograd workers' struggles; they didn't wait for the elections to the Soviets and considered themselves as an important part of the workers' agitation, strikes, demonstrations, riots that erupted a bit everywhere early this year. The resolution which will serve as a platform for the struggle stands up against the miserable living conditions affecting proletarians and against the repression suppressing the stirrings of the revolution: meetings, discussions, collective assumption of responsibility for revolutionary tasks, mobilizations of proletarians for direct action, distribution of the workers' press, etc., nearly disappeared or have been obliged to go underground. Here is what the resolution puts forward:

“Having heard the report of the crew representatives, sent to Petrograd by the General Meeting of ships' crews for clarification of the situation there, we resolve:

1. In view of the fact that the present Soviets do not express the will of the workers and peasants, to immediately hold new elections to the Soviets by secret ballot, with freedom of pre-election agitation for all workers and peasants.

2. Freedom of speech and press for workers and peasants, anarchists and left socialist parties.

¹ [ICG's note 2004] We use the terms “civil war” in the sense in which Marx and the Left communists grasped them, i.e. as a class war, proletariat against bourgeoisie.

3. *Freedom of assembly of both trade unions and peasant associations.*
4. *To convene not later than March 10th, 1921 a non-party Conference of workers, soldiers and sailors of the city of Petrograd, of Kronstadt, and of Petrograd province.*
5. *To free all political prisoners of socialist parties, and also all workers and peasants, soldiers and sailors imprisoned in connection with worker and peasant movements.*
6. *To elect a Commission for the review of the cases of those held in prisons and concentration camps.*
7. *To abolish all Politotdels [Political Departments], since no single party should be able to have such privileges for the propaganda of its ideas and receive from the state the means for these ends. In their place must be established locally elected cultural-educational commissions, for which the state must provide resources.*
8. *To immediately remove all anti-smuggling roadblock detachments.*
9. *To equalize the rations of all laborers, with the exception of those in work injurious to health.*
10. *To abolish the Communist fighting detachments in all military units, and also the various guards kept in factories and plants by the communists, and if such guards or detachments are necessary, they can be chosen in military units from the companies, and in factories and plants by the discretion of the workers.*
11. *To give the peasants full control over their own land, to do as they wish, and also to keep cattle, which must be maintained and managed by their own strength, that is, without using hired labor.*
12. *We appeal to all military units, and also to the comrade cadets to endorse our resolution.*
13. *We demand that all resolutions be widely publicized in the press.*
14. *To appoint a travelling bureau for control.*
15. *To allow free handicraft manufacture by personal labor.”²*

² “Resolution of the general meeting of the crews of the 1st and 2nd battleship brigades, occurring 1st March, 1921”, published in “Kronstadt Izvestiia”, Number 1, Thursday, March 3rd, 1921. Translated by Scott Zenkatsu Parker, edited by Mary Huey as part of the translation of “The Truth About Kronstadt”. The complete edition of “Izvestiia of the Provisional Revolutionary Committee of Sailors, Soldiers and Workers of the town of Kronstadt” as well as “The Truth About Kronstadt” can be found on internet at the following address:

The sailors issued a call to fight against the black market and against the ever increasing importance of “individual solutions” (which gains ground in relation to the organization of the struggle), against the political repression and the permanent presence of police detachments in factories and working-class districts, against the bureaucratization of the Soviets and the “Communist” Party³. Despite all this, they didn’t have at this moment a global communist perspective and vision, but the interests and necessities of the working class are still diluted in a series of confused and particular demands, which are taken from ideologies of democratic opposition parties: [...]. For example, they decide freedom of speech and press for workers and peasants, anarchists and left socialist parties (point 2 of the resolution), freedom of assembly (point 3), the organization of elections (point 1), which are mottos that express the struggle for the elementary needs of the class, but using the terminology peculiar to the bourgeois opposition advocating a liberalization of the regime. In the same way, the resolution is in favor of a program of economic reform: removing roadblocks along the roads (point 8), allowing handicraft manufacture, freedom of the peasants (points 11 and 15), clearly democratic mottos which aim to the reorganization of a commodity society. But beside these demands, others are the necessary consequence of the struggle against the repression: to free all political prisoners and all workers, peasants, red soldiers and sailors jailed during the different workers’ and peasants’ movements (point 5) as well as the abolition of the communist guards occupying factories and plants (point 10).

Formation of the Provisional Revolutionary Committee

On March 2nd, a special conference of 200 delegates meets to implement the first point of the resolution: the organization of elections to the Kronstadt Soviet. This is a means to get rid of the Bolshevik Party, which repressed strikes and movements of struggle in Petrograd and in the fleet. The Bolshevik leaders present at this conference resolutely opposed this agenda and threatened the participants; the latter decide to exclude the Bolsheviks from the discussions and to arrest the leaders of the Party. The

<<http://www-personal.umich.edu/~mhuey/>> and also here: <<https://crimethinc.com/2021/03/03/the-kronstadt-uprising-a-full-chronology-and-archive-including-a-view-from-within-the-revolt/>>.

³ [ICG’s original note] It’s a genuine manifestation of the blossoming of democracy. Each of its manifestations generates the other, which produces the next one and strengthens the previous ones; thereby police is becoming stronger as private and privative appropriation is consolidating. Individual survival linked with private property prevails over the organs of struggle and the weakening of the latter is a hindrance to the struggle against the forces of bourgeois order that defend privative property, etc. And so everything is mutually determined.

assembly is henceforth menaced by a riposte of the Bolsheviks; and driven by the force of events, it decided to create a "Provisional Revolutionary Committee", which suspends the agenda and will organize occupation of the Telephone Exchange, arsenals, supply warehouses, etc. by armed detachments. At 9 p.m., the whole city fell into the insurgent's hands without any resistance, and all warships, forts and batteries of the fortress recognized the authority of the Revolutionary Committee.

If the resolution of the sailors is indeed a manifesto for the struggle, it is however not up to the irreconcilable class antagonism that exists between the Bolshevik government and the insurgent sailors and soldiers. The failure to affirm clearly that they get into an all-out war against the bourgeois State and the counterrevolutionary forces that support it is an expression of this weakness. In a moment of revolutionary retreat against a bourgeois State recovering from its knockdown of 1917, the proletarians of Kronstadt suffered the weight of a premature and uncontrolled insurrection, rather than to be driven by the latter to the vanguard of a burgeoning revolutionary assault.

First reactions of the State

Of course, the PRC succeeded in taking military control over the island, but the forces of the bourgeois order didn't oppose it. What mattered for the government was to prevent the extension of the struggles and the connection of the sailors and workers of Kronstadt with the proletarians of Petrograd. Facing this threat, the Bolshevik government sent regiments from March 2nd along the Baltic coasts in order to establish a real *cordon sanitaire* between the insurgents and the continent. On March 3rd in the morning, special troops of the Red Army stormed the air and naval base of Oranienbaum where the mutiny was spreading. Supplies are delivered by special trains to Petrograd in order to cheer up the garrison and to calm down the proletarians. Wherever movements of solidarity occur, they are crushed and nipped in the bud. If the Bolshevik government left Kronstadt into insurgent proletarians' hands, it's to better focus all its forces on the strategic point which until now nourished such a heart the Baltic sailors' and workers' mutiny.

Hesitations of the insurgents

The difference in revolutionary power between the events in 1917 and those in 1921 materializes in the inability of the insurgents in Kronstadt to overcome and break down the barriers that the State opposes them. In

1917, the moribund bourgeois State was incapable of opposing the sailors and soldiers in Kronstadt who moved in force to Petrograd in order to support the workers' struggles there. Moreover, these revolutionary sailors played an important role in the battle not only while taking part in the political meetings, in the workers' assemblies, but also while bringing their weapons with them, while generalizing workers' terrorism. For instance, when they executed 40 officers in February 1917 in Kronstadt and also the leading role played by the sailors during street demonstrations in Petrograd in April, June and especially in July, without mentioning the October days. But in March 1921, the situation is different; the class rupture is not so clear-cut towards the Bolshevik government, which is still considered as "loyal". The insurgents indeed still expected to avoid the yet unavoidable violent confrontation with the counterrevolutionary forces of the Bolshevik government, whereas the latter didn't hesitate a single moment to use white terror in order to nip the rebellion in the bud and to put an end to a renewal of workers' struggles. This is the reason why the insurgents are forced to barricade themselves in their "Commune" where the State reduces them to only accomplish some symbolic actions:

"The Provisional Committee is deeply concerned that there should not be spilled a single drop of blood. It has taken emergency measures for the establishment of revolutionary order in the town and fortress, and at the forts. [...]"

The Provisional Revolutionary Committee calls all workers' organizations, all naval and trade unions, and all naval and military units and individual citizens to give it universal support and aid. The task of the Provisional Revolutionary Committee is a general, comradely effort to organize in the town and fortress means for proper and fair elections to a new Soviet."⁴

The general weakness of the movement facing the reconstituted and reinforced State apparatus expresses itself in the insurgents' political direction. As the struggle is not getting larger, the PRC is confined to record the oscillations of the struggle, while refraining up any revolutionary initiative; and it even took measures going in a way opposed to the revolutionary reinforcement. No class force succeeds to impose the assumption of the elementary strategic principles. On March 2nd, military specialists of the fortress yet proposed to the PRC to take offensive action as soon as possible, in order to wrest the initiative and

⁴ "To the populace of the fortress and town of Kronstadt, comrades and citizens!", published in "Kronstadt Izvestia", Number 1, Thursday, March 3rd, 1921.

total control over the situation from the government forces. It is necessary to organize an immediate landing in Orianienbaum (8 km in the south on the continent) in order to seize there some military facilities and to get in touch with units in the army which sympathized with the insurgents. From there, it is necessary to march on Petrograd before the government has the time to take some efficient defensive measures. But the CRP does not listen to them and the directives it gives are in the opposite direction. One of the first resolutions adopted on March 3rd ordered the workers not to stop work and to be present at the workshops as well as the sailors and soldiers to stay at their post on ships and in forts. Moreover, the CRP didn't prepare a strong defense while for example breaking the ice that encloses the island, erecting barricades in the streets and at the gates, displacing warships in order to allow them to use their arms etc.

Whereas the insurgents in Kronstadt are confined in their fortress, the Bolshevik government works towards its objective to isolate Kronstadt and to prepare its elimination. On March 3rd, Radio Moscow issued the following call:

“To Battle With White Guard Conspiracy’.

That the mutiny by former General Kozlovsky and the ship Petropavlovsk was prepared by the spies of the Entente, like so many earlier White Guard rebellions, is visible [...].”⁵

In a few hours, the insurgents lost any hold over the development of the struggle of which they didn't measure the class dimension. What they simply considered as a retreat where they would be sheltered turned into a trap where there is no way out. Locked in Kronstadt where they thought to have built the foundations of the “New socialist construction”, the insurgents are in fact reduced to wait for the enemy's strokes.

Arrogance of the State

Feeling that the advantage of the situation already felt entirely into the government's hands, the Petrograd Soviet demanded on March 4th the complete surrender of the mutineers:

“Decide immediately, either you are with us against the common enemy, or you will perish shamefully and infamously together with the counterrevolutionaries.”⁶

⁵ “A broadcast from Moscow”, published in “Kronstadt Izvestia”, Number 2, Friday, March 4th, 1921.

⁶ “Address to the workers, sailors, and soldiers of Kronstadt”, by the Petrograd Soviet, published in “Kronstadt

The 5th March, Trotsky, who came up in order to directly control the repressive operations, delivered an ultimatum to the insurgents:

*"I order all who have raised their hands against the Socialist Fatherland to immediately lay down their arms. [...] Simultaneously, I am giving the order to prepare for the defeat of the mutiny, and the mutineers, by armed force. Responsibility for the distress which this has brought down on a peaceful populace lies wholly on the heads of the White Guard mutineers."*⁷

In order to terrorize the insurgents, their parents who were in Petrograd are taken as hostages and the same day leaflets of the Petrograd Defense Committee, in which the rebellion is once again compared with a white guards' plot, are thrown by plane on Kronstadt; the leaflet ends with a last spit in the face of struggling proletarians: *"If you are stubborn, you will be shot down like grouse."*⁸

So the rebellion in Kronstadt was isolated above all by the deployment of military forces of the bourgeois State and its police propaganda, but also by the general weakness of the proletariat scattered, muzzled and terrorized by the Bolshevik Party, Soviets and trade-unions guided entirely by the interests of international capitalism:

*"Comrades, the picture is absolutely clear. The world press syndicate – over there they have a free press, which means that 99 per cent of the press is in the pay of the financial magnates, who have command of hundreds of millions of rubles – has launched a world-wide campaign on behalf of the imperialists with the prime object of disrupting the negotiations for a trade agreement with Britain, which Krasin has initiated, and the forthcoming trade agreement with America, which, as I have stated, we have been negotiating here, and reference to which was made at this Congress. This shows that the enemies around us, no longer able to wage their war of intervention, are now pinning their hopes on a rebellion. And the Kronstadt events revealed their connection with the international bourgeoisie. Moreover, we see that what they fear most, from the practical angle of international capital, is the resumption of proper trade relations. But they will fail in their attempts to disrupt them. There are some big businessmen here in Moscow, and they have stopped believing these false rumors."*⁹

Izvestiia", Number 4, Sunday, March 6th, 1921.

⁷ "Trotsky threatens defeat", published in "Kronstadt Izvestiia", Number 5, Monday, March 7th, 1921.

⁸ "You've gotten what you asked for", by the Petrograd Defense Committee, published in "Kronstadt Izvestiia", Number 4, Sunday, March 6th, 1921.

⁹ Lenin, "Speech In Closing The Congress", March 16th, in "Tenth Congress of the R.C.P.(B.)", Collected Works, 1st English Edition, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1965, Volume 32.

Challenge to the State and rallying

Undermined by the flourishing of the reign of the democratic dictatorship of commodity, to which the insurgent proletarians didn't succeed in opposing any destructive alternative [...], Kronstadt became isolated as an entrenched camp that can only depend on its poor means of defense and survival.

Yet, despite these terrible conditions, the insurgents in Kronstadt didn't yield to the fatalistic resignation, being able to recover and upgrade the practice and the life of the revolutionary class. As with all proletarians in struggle that Capital has to contend, the insurgents have nothing to lose but their common chains and are mobilized by the same objective, consolidating and boosting their power. The rebels don't give up before the day by day more perceptible deadline about the decisive confrontation with the bourgeois State. These anonymous revolutionaries understood this classist principle written in workers' blood: it's solely while always pushing more forward the struggle against the counterrevolution, while defending the global interests of the working class (that surpass the sum of the individual interests of the egoistic citizen, submitted and powerless, terrorized by the abstract idea to save his skin whereas he lost it for quite some time) that the only possibility of survival will emerge. In Kronstadt where the bourgeois State doesn't succeed in fully imposing its dictatorship and its terrorism, the insurgents don't stay isolated but on the contrary and in spite of the "common sense" of the bourgeois propaganda, which clamors that:

"The work of the counterrevolutionaries who have been planted in Kronstadt is hopeless. They are powerless in a dispute with Soviet Russia. [...]"

Comrades, immediately arrest the ringleaders of the counterrevolutionary conspiracy. Immediately reestablish the Kronstadt Soviet. Soviet power is able to distinguish unknowing, mistaken toilers from intentional counterrevolutionaries. [...]"

*Decide immediately, either you are with us against the common enemy, or you will perish shamefully and infamously together with the counterrevolutionaries."*¹⁰

<<https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1921/10thcong/ch04.htm>>

¹⁰ "Address to the workers, sailors and soldiers of Kronstadt", by the Petrograd Soviet of Workers', Peasants' and Soldiers' Deputies, published in "Kronstadt Izvestiia", Number 4, Sunday, March 6th, 1921.

The mutiny allies new elements (according to official historians, 780 communists left the organization of the Party and Ida Mett makes it clear that between August 1920 and March 1921, the organization of the Party in Kronstadt lost half of its 4,000 members), at the same time that the rupture with the counterrevolution asserts itself more distinctly:

“Comrade workers, soldiers, and sailors! We in Kronstadt [...] have overthrown the Communist Soviet here. [...]

Now, when the limit to the laborers’ patience has been reached, they want to shut your mouths with miserable pittance. [...] But we know that you cannot buy the Peter proletariat with these pittance. We extend the hand of fraternal aid to you from Revolutionary Kronstadt, past the heads of the Communists.”¹¹

CHAPTER THREE

THE LAST REVOLUTIONARY BURST IN THE RESISTANCE TO THE CRUSHING

Radicalization of the struggle

The dramatic conditions to which they were subjected clarified the anti-proletarian character of the Russian State in the eyes of the insurgents and led them to defend the world communist revolution.

When on March 7th, the gun batteries in the hands of the Red Army opened fire on Kronstadt in preparation for an infantry assault, the insurgent proletarians radicalize themselves. Their propaganda no longer blamed Bolsheviks’ “mistakes”, but denounced the [...] bourgeois nature of the “Communist” Party of Russia. At the same time proletarians don’t complain anymore about “usurping power”, but they issue a call to the world proletariat in order to destroy this bourgeois State by the revolutionary force.

“Laboring Russia, first to raise the red banner of labor’s liberation, is soaked through with the blood of those tortured for the glory of the Communist dominion. In this sea of the blood, the Communists drown all the great and light voices and slogans of the laboring revolution.

¹¹ “Broadcast by the Provisional Revolutionary Committee”, published in “Kronstadt Izvestiia”, Number 4, Sunday, March 6th, 1921.

It has become ever more sharply visible, and now is completely apparent, that the R.C.P. is not defender of the laborers, as it has presented itself. Rather, the interests of the laboring mass are foreign to it. Having achieved power, it fears only to lose it, and for this end all means are allowable: slander, violence, fraud, murder, and revenge on the families of rebels.

The long patience of the laborers has come to an end.

The country, in battle with oppression and violence, is lit here and there with the glow of uprisings. Worker stoppages have flared up, but the Bolshevik okhranniks have not slept, and have taken all measures to avoid and repress the unavoidable 3rd Revolution.

But it has arrived all the same, and is being carried out by the hands of laborers. [...]

The rebellious laboring mass has come to understand that in battle with the Communists, and with the renewed serfdom they have given, there can be no middle ground. [...]

No, there can be no middle ground. Victory or Death!

This is exemplified by Red Kronstadt, terror of counterrevolutionaries of right and left.

Here a great new revolutionary step has been taken. Here has been raised the banner of a rebellion for liberation from the three year violence and oppression of Communist dominion [...]. Here in Kronstadt has been laid the first stone of the Third Revolution [...]. This new revolution stirs the laboring masses of both East and West [...]. It convinces the laboring masses abroad, by the testimony of their own eyes, that everything created here until now by the will of workers and peasants was not socialism.”¹²

Even though this call didn't reach the ears of proletarians in Petrograd and soldiers of the “Red” army, the meaning of the revolt in Kronstadt expressed in this call is understood and came forward as the driving force of workers' solidarity actions on the shores of the Baltic, because it really corresponds with the interests of the proletariat.

Revolutionary defeatism in the ranks of the Red Army

In response to the government's cannons, workers of the factory “Arsenal” supported the sailors' resolution and tried to propagate the general strike in Petrograd; but the struggle didn't last long, the ringleaders were

¹² “What we are fighting for”, published in “Kronstadt Izvestiia”, Number 6, Tuesday, March 8th, 1921.

arrested and strikers massively dismissed. In the night of March 8th, 20,000 soldiers of the Red Army attacked the fortress but entire companies surrendered with their weapons to the insurgents without a fight. In spite of the machine guns installed in the back of the regiments, hundreds of soldiers deserted the ranks of the “Red” Army and joined Kronstadt on each new assault. Finally, the authorities ordered the withdrawal of the troops to avoid the rout:

*“At the beginning of the operation the second battalion had refused to march. With much difficulty and thanks to the presence of communists, it was persuaded to venture on the ice. As soon as it reached the first south battery, a company of the 2nd battalion surrendered. The officers had to return alone.”*¹³

*“I consider it my revolutionary duty to report on the morale of the troops. We had occupied Fort No. 7. But today we had to abandon it because of the dejection among the soldiers. I must report on their qualms: they want to know what the Kronstaders demand and they want to send their own delegates to them.”*¹⁴

Waves of workers’ struggles undermined the “Red” Army, traversed by class antagonisms. Kronstadt acted upon the latter as a revolutionary pole, as a destructive pole of the bourgeois army, but without control and in an indirect way. The insurgents tried to lead an active policy in order to impulse and spread the movements of mutinies, as they did in [...] 1917 on the fronts and towards Kornilov’s troops. They express the need of the proletariat for a “third revolution”.

Bolsheviks however didn’t make the mistake to underestimate the importance of the defeatist movement and the troop’s reorganization became their main task. Bombardments and partial assaults continued to maintain the other side (i.e. the insurgents) on the watch, to tire it out. These actions also provide opportunities to test the state of mind of the few battalions which joined the battle and to repress the attempts of desertion without risk of general contagion. Some reliable troops were moved to the scene as well as additional supplies in order to raise the morale of soldiers. And 300 delegates of the 10th Congress of the RCP(b),

¹³ This is how Poukhov (a Stalinist historian) described the morale in Infantry Regiment 561 in an official communiqué, published in Ida Mett’s “The Kronstadt Commune”, available on internet at the following address: <<https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/ida-mett-the-kronstadt-commune>>.

¹⁴ Uglanov, Political Commissar, as he wrote on March 8th to the Petrograd Party Committee, quoted by Isaac Steinberg, in “The Workshop Of The Revolution”, Chapter XXI – The Rebellion of Kronstadt, 1953. <<https://www.marxists.org/archive/steinberg/1953/workshop/ch21.htm>>

of whom a great part adhered to the oppositional fractions, were dispatched in order to strengthen the political framework and to give credibility to the State propaganda's slanders: *"either with the White Guards against us, or with us against the White Guards."*

This is how a leaflet of this "workers' opposition" ends. What an exemplary loyalty! Not all the fractions of the "Workers' Opposition" supported this position; for instance, the Miasnikov's one, expelled from the RCP(b) in 1921. But above all, military tribunals and summary executions remained the decisive weapon used by the government in order to break the workers' combativeness. Bolsheviks reconstitute their troops with the terrorism of the bourgeois State.

"The Revolutionary Tribunals were working overtime. Poukhov described how "they would vigorously react to all unhealthy tendencies. Troublemakers and provocateurs were punished according to their deserts". The sentences would immediately be made known to the soldiers. [...]

Witnesses described how some units lost half their men before even entering the line of fire of the insurgents. They were being machined gunned from the rear "to prevent them surrendering to the rebels".¹⁵

During one week, the Bolsheviks strived to move away not very reliable regiments, to replace them by troops dispatched from the four corners of Russia, to eliminate "troublemakers". About 50,000 soldiers were regrouped to launch an attack on the 15,000 rebels (on a population of 50,000 inhabitants). These troops are commanded by the biggest rulers of men (Trotsky, the former sailor Dybenko, Fedko) and the best strategists (Tukhachevsky and Kamenev notably, former officers of the czarist army).

Final assault

In the morning of March 17th, the final assault is launched. Exhausted from being so much awake for days and days, demoralized by the course of events, suffering from hunger (their meagre food rations are exhausted since March 15th and they have refused propositions of help from the SRs), the Kronstadians quickly yielded under the force of the attackers. In the early hours of March 18th, except for some pockets of resistance, the last insurgents began to surrender. About 8,000 men, mostly sailors and soldiers escaped during the night of the 17th to 18th and were regrouped in refugee camps in Finland. How many proletarians were slaughtered? We don't know exactly, but Petrograd prisons were packed and during

¹⁵ Ida Mett, in "The Kronstadt Commune".

months there happened many summary executions. Most of the survivors were relegated in concentration camps.

What is important doesn't lie in the counting of proletarians murdered by the bourgeois State in Kronstadt; there is no particular account to be opened about the crimes of world capitalism, because we know that the extermination of the working-class forces doesn't have an end under the bourgeois regime. We don't blame Capital for its crimes because it would imply that the latter could exist without them. Too often the dominant ideology made from this episode of the workers' struggle a particular settling of accounts between "anarchists" and "communists", between "libertarian" communists and "statist" communists; concealing then the essential issues, what is subversive, that is to say that it is the bourgeois State that repressed in this way the proletarians who rose up against it.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE BOURGEOIS IDEOLOGY WEIGHT AMONG THE INSURGENTS

Historic importance of the insurrection

We have seen that in their efforts to assume the direction of the movement, the Kronstadt insurgents faced various problems that limited their action. Isolated because of the defeat of the fractions that didn't succeed in forming an alternative revolutionary direction against [...] the "Communist" Party, the insurgents were swimming in the murky waters of ideologies based on the myth of the socialist State in Russia, which strengthened with the decline of the revolution and the advance of the counterrevolution at the international level. The only fundamental conquest of the proletarian struggle in Kronstadt is, as we already demonstrated, to have exposed the myth of the Workers' State in Russia, condemning without possible refutation, the subsequent bourgeois polarizations between "vulgar" partisans of the Workers' State (the Stalinists) and those who will support it in a "critical" way (the Trotskyists).

The point of the sometimes virulent declarations of the insurgents against the "communist" regime, against the "communists", is to help us in grasping the real significance of the struggle movement. Indeed we don't evaluate the movement neither by the momentary ideas nor the flags raised by the proletarians, but on the basis of the purpose of the

struggle¹⁶. What really defines the struggle is what the proletariat is obliged to put forward and what it is historically forced to achieve in its struggle against the bourgeois State in order to abolish wage labor. Sticking to the flag waving on the movement and confusing them with the latter, as “anarchists” always did about Kronstadt, this means to reduce the dialectics of the movement to a new ideology based upon the apology of the insurgents’ weaknesses and the difficulties of the revolutionary movement to break the chains of the bourgeois society. Unfortunately the fact is that there was no convergence between the insurgents and “left communists”¹⁷, which would have allowed the movement to do an enormous qualitative jump thanks to the criticism of this ideology. The scathing reaction of the bourgeois State in order to crush the revolt contributed to prevent any political rapprochement, any clarification of the revolutionary positions. But the strike force of the bourgeois State doesn’t alone explain the weakness of the insurgents’ revolutionary surge. This weakness is the result of a process of international weakening of the “left communists” [...]. Only the KAPD (Kommunistische Arbeiter Partei Deutschlands) was able to echo at the 3rd Congress of the Comintern the struggles of the insurgents in Kronstadt, which were decreed as a “taboo issue”:

“After the proletariat rises in Kronstadt against you, communist party, and after you decree the state of siege against the proletariat in Petrograd...!”¹⁸

“The latter [the Russian comrades] must thus see and recognize that they are themselves more and more constrained, by the course of things – we say it one last time – to lead their Russian state policy towards the right; they

¹⁶ [ICG’s original note] Consciousness is a material force that is an integral part of the reality; humans are not determined externally and on a unilateral basis by the environment, what would imply to conceive consciousness as a mere contemplative container. The social practice creates and revolutionizes the environment as well as the consciousness of this environment.

¹⁷ For us, it is clear that the expression “left communist” is not correct. In fact, it would imply that there are right-wing, left-wing or center-wing communists, which is absurd and ridiculous since it is in essential opposition to the historical and programmatic uniqueness of communism. In fact, those who are usually called “left communists” are for most of them among the genuine and only real communists of this period. They have programmatically nothing in common with what the official history calls “communists”. It is the one hundred years of counter-revolution that, by materializing this ideological phenomenon, forces us to use sometimes pleonasm such as “left communists”, “revolutionary communists”, and “internationalist communists”. It is also in order to maintain the terminology used by our communist comrades at the time (stuck by the same need to distinguish themselves) and to emphasize the programmatic unity of the different militants, who throughout the world have claimed to be “left communists”, that in some of our publications we are forced to use this expression.

¹⁸ Interventions by members of the KAPD at the Third Congress of the Communist International in 1921 in reply to Karl Radek’s presentation on the tactics the CI should employ <<https://libcom.org/library/interventions-kapd-3rd-congress-communist-international-1921-parts-1-5-part-one-discussi>>

are no longer supermen, and they need a counterweight, and this counterweight must be a third international liquidating all tactics of compromise, parliamentarism and old trade unions.”¹⁹

Bordiga’s ICP (Partito Comunista d’Italia), for example, aligned with the dominant position defended by the Bolsheviks. Kollontai’s “Workers’ Opposition” which never did a fundamental criticism of the Bolsheviks, called for and collaborated to the repression of the struggles of the proletariat in Kronstadt and Petrograd. “Miasnikov’s Workers’ Group”, probably the most serious expression of a left opposition in Russia²⁰, is still in the making, on the basis of the criticisms developed against the weaknesses of the “Workers’ Opposition”.

Need to criticize the weaknesses of the movement

If it’s sure that the sailors in Kronstadt objectively stood on the side of the world proletariat’s struggle [...], it is nevertheless crucial to criticize their weaknesses because they were an obstacle and a brake to the centralization of the communists as a world party.

Today, we stand on the sides of the insurgents in Kronstadt to demonstrate the fallacy of the apparent contradiction between workers’ struggles and their communist outcome that the bourgeois from all sides try us to believe, either about the events in Kronstadt (as if the struggle happened between the proletariat and the State of the proletariat) or in respect of the workers’ struggles in Poland, Romania, Russia, in Berlin... Actually, proletarians have only one enemy: Capital and its State, although it is painted in red, in white or in blue.

What is interesting for us in this short criticism is perceive the relation between the ideologies carried by the proletariat and its inability to generalize the struggle, in order to understand why and which were the deficiencies that acted to obstruct the transformation of Kronstadt into a revolutionary pole.

In the same way as in 1917, the proletariat rose up against war and hunger, the insurgents of Kronstadt criticized the bourgeois domination

¹⁹ Interventions by delegates of the KAPD at the Third Congress of the Communist International in 1921 in response to Lenin’s report on the tactics of the Russian Communist Party
<<http://libcom.org/library/interventions-kapd-3rd-congress-communist-international-1921-parts-1-5-part-four-discuss>>

²⁰ The Manifesto of this group was first published in 1923 by the KAPD; an English translation have been published in January and February 1924 by Sylvia Pankhurst’s “Workers’ Dreadnought”. Available here: <<https://www.marxists.org/archive/miasnikov/1923/manifesto-workers-group/index.htm>>

by means of weapons when death became close to them. What they were historically determined to carry implied a complete rupture with the ideologies and flags they raised. If the insurgents had acted entirely in line with these flags, nobody could have referred to a revolutionary Kronstadt as we do now. However, as Petrichenko the leader of the PRC recognized it, the class instinct and the revolutionary will were not sufficient to confront the power of the bourgeois State.

*“The Kronstadters acted without predetermined plans or programme, feeling their way according to circumstances and within the context of the resolutions they had adopted. We were cut off from the entire world. We didn’t know what was going on outside Kronstadt, either in Russia or abroad.”*²¹

Let’s leave aside all those who about Kronstadt only stress on the limitations due to its democratic and libertarian ideology, as well as those who pretend to be “communist”, who supported its crushing and who represent Kronstadt as an anti-communist struggle (libertarians and Marxist-Leninists are hand in hand to defend this thesis). Let’s rather concentrate our criticism on the ideological hindrances that undermined proletarians’ revolutionary power from within.

Fetishism of the Soviets

The motto “*All Power to Soviets, and not Parties*” that appeared as a directive in the “Izvestias” synthesized the limits of this movement that was dominated by the managementist and federalist ideology. The insurgents adopted the following objectives: “*reconstruction of the Soviet regime*”, “*restoration of the power and rights of the laborers*”, firstly by way of new elections and then by the violent overthrow of the Bolshevik government:

*“We stand for power of Soviets, and not parties. We stand for freely elected representatives of laborers. The current Soviets, seized and subverted by the Communists, have always been deaf to all our needs and demands.”*²²

Conceptions of the insurgents may be briefly summarized as follows: we don’t trust anymore the political parties, the Bolshevik party that governs us and that, while deceiving us and while giving us false illusions, monopolizes privileges as a good bureaucrat. It is from bottom, while

²¹ Petrichenko, quoted according to Ida Mett.

²² “Broadcast by the Provisional Revolutionary Committee”, published in “Kronstadt Izvestia”, Number 4, Sunday, March 6th, 1921.

taking ourselves the administration, the management of our life in hand – against all external authority – that the new socialist society will be forged. When all the soviets will follow our example, we will establish between everyone egalitarian and harmonious relations... The criticism made by the insurgents in Kronstadt towards the society lacked a real program of destruction of the latter, i.e. the destruction of generalized mercantilism. Their criticism was rather determined by a reformist, Proudhonian vision that thought to be able to destroy exploitation upon the basis of democracy, of the organization of production and distribution through “free” economic entities. Thus, they were induced to look for a revolutionary guarantee in the function of management and administration of “free” soviets. They didn’t perceive that this freedom of production units and the resulting democracy are producing and reproducing exploitation with all its atrocious impact on humans and are the very essence of the capitalist society. With this perspective to search for guarantees in workers’ democracy and in the organization of workers into soviets, the divergences between Kronstadians and Bolsheviks were almost non-existent and in spite of what both parties said, they completely remain prisoners of reformism. Thus the Bolsheviks were not only the champions of “workers’ control”, but they also declared:

*“The Soviets are the direct organization of the working and exploited people themselves, which helps them to organize and administer their own state in every possible way. [...] Proletarian democracy is a million times more democratic than any bourgeois democracy [...]”*²³

Many are those who mistake the form for the content. The “revolution” then becomes a simple problem of organization and the “revolutionary” guarantee comes down to loyalty towards the institutions where “the working masses”, the workers are represented. Although the Bolsheviks have more invested in the (formal) party and the insurgents more in the soviets and trade-unions, anyway they are deeply reformist. Not only for setting nothing strong against a social organization based upon independent units which exchange commodities while developing thus the exchange value. But also for having sought a guarantee into a sociologic and democratic criteria, which quite simply fails to relate that the dominant ideology is that of the ruling class – and even fundamentally – among the workers themselves! These criteria were predominant instead of seeking its own programmatic affirmations, its necessarily anti-

²³ Lenin, “The Proletarian Revolution and the Renegade Kautsky”, 1918, Lenin’s Collected Works, Progress Publishers, Moscow, Volume 28, 1974. <<https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1918/prrk/index.htm>>

democratic real ruptures with the capitalist society, instead of the despotic destruction of mercantile relations, instead of the dictatorship against Capital's valorization criteria, and finally instead of the violent coercion towards individual liberties (which are always commercial ones and inseparably bound to privative property), in order to promote production and distribution criteria exclusively based on the collective and centralized necessities of mankind.

When the insurgents finally denounced the "Communist" Party as representing the interests of the bourgeois State, it was solely insofar as they considered that the latter was corrupting the soviet institutions, that it had usurped the revolutionary power. And not, as we would do nowadays (while having understood which were the vital functions of any mercantile economy that had been attacked and almost completely disorganized by the [...] ²⁴insurrection in Russia), in criticizing its role of manager and reorganizer of capitalism and the degenerative function of democracy towards the attempt of the proletariat to constitute itself as a world party of revolution. It is not the "evil Bolsheviks" who corrupted the "good soviets", but the degeneration of class organs resulting from the defeats and the retreat of the revolutionary movement all over the world that only some left communist organizations perceived. Before this degeneration there were only two more and more antagonistic positions: either to abandon the political positions around which the revolutionaries prepared and organized the world insurrection – which means leaving the way open to concessions to the immediate popular successes of the management work, of economic recovery; or to break with the formal conquests, to withdraw in order to draw the lessons from a momentary defeat while preparing the next class assaults.

The motto "*All Power to Soviets, and not Parties*" clearly synthesizes the flagrant contradictions that existed about the tasks of the struggle. Indeed, an organ of direction was immediately set up in Kronstadt – the PRC – without waiting for neither the re-election of the soviet or the installation of the new soviet. The PRC emerged from the need to direct, to centralize, to organize the militant forces of the proletariat; and in this way, it

²⁴ In the original text, as well as in the "new version" of 2004, the text speaks about the "*victorious insurrection*" of October. For our part, as we have already mentioned in the presentation of this text, the "October insurrection" can be declared as "*victorious*" only on the part of the supporters of the restructuring of the capitalist State in Russia, against the genuine insurrectional surges of the proletariat which did not give itself the material and programmatic means to assume this dynamic until the end and in an autonomous way, that is to say outside and against all the bourgeois and social-democrat parties, including one of the most "radical" (more in the form than in the content!) as the Bolshevik Party.

objectively acted as a real party. But as soon as the PRC referred to soviet legitimacy, it abandoned its task to fall in the bourgeois ideology. The PRC was founded as an organ of direction when the insurgents broke with soviet legitimacy: imprisonment of Bolshevik leaders and taking control of the fortress; but it didn't anymore assume this task and contributed to the deterioration of the situation since it rivalled with the Bolsheviks for the formal right to rule the "free soviet" in Kronstadt.

This legalistic, democratic fetishism had immediate harmful consequences; it fed the loyalty of the insurgents towards the State institutions. Thus when the insurgents call for solidarity, it is not on the terrain of our class force, but on that of individual awareness, of proletarians' moral qualities, of their own free will:

*"The present Revolution gives the laborers the possibility of having, finally, their own freely elected Soviets, working without any and all violent party pressure [...]"*²⁵

As for it, the Bolshevik government never bothered to convince the proletarians of its legitimacy by demonstrating its loyalty²⁶; its legitimacy went without saying as long as it succeeded in imposing it by force, as long as it had the strength to stay top of the bourgeois State. Never mind that they are truthful or merely slanderous; what mattered was that its arguments reinforced its position. The fact that the insurgents stood on this terrain greatly facilitated the repression of the rebellion. Against "localist" and "egoistic" interests of the rebels in Kronstadt behind which Lenin and the government pretended to see the "white reaction", these were able to lean on the resources of the Soviet Republic as a whole and to champion the superior interests and the authority of the Soviet State.

Free labor and democracy

The "project" of radical reform of the society resulted from the fetishism of the Soviets. For the insurgents, the re-organization of the Soviet system referred to the mythical golden age of ancient communities – MIR – that exchanged their products with the mutual respect and harmony:

²⁵ "What we are fighting for", published in "Kronstadt Izvestiia", Number 6, Tuesday, March 8th, 1921.

²⁶ "Legitimacy" and "loyalty" are concepts that mark the separation and a form of acceptance of what is separated, in this case the State as an organ separated from the class and its interests. Is it not abusive to speak of "convincing" the proletarians of this, of "demonstrating" it to them? If there is irony, it introduces more confusion than clarification, and this entire paragraph seems to us confused, except perhaps the last sentence on Lenin.

*"[...] Revolutionary Kronstadt first broke the manacles, and broke the prison bars, fighting for Socialism of another kind. It is fighting for a laboring Soviet Republic, where the producer will find himself the fully empowered master and commander of the produce of his own labor."*²⁷

The so-called autonomy, freedom, independence of the craftsman, of the producer who becomes master and owner of his production, is just one of the ideologies that conceals the historic process of the development and autonomization of value throughout the different modes of exploitation of man by man until capitalism, which synthesizes the class antagonism, the contradiction between exchange value and use value. As we saw, it is in the countryside as well as in the large industrial centers that the discontent of proletarians changed into exasperation and revolt. The leitmotif spread by all the opposition parties is the appropriation of the "the working population's" products of labor by the State apparatus, civil servants, commissars and bureaucrats of the Party. Of course, commissars, bureaucrats used their situation in order to enjoy privileges, but this was only one of the consequences of the redevelopment of the capitalist accumulation, of wage labor. The insurgents saw in shortage and famines nothing but an unfair distribution of the wealth generated, an unequal and badly organized distribution (without grasping that like all good managers of Capital, bureaucrats overtly participate in exploitation, i.e. appropriation of surplus value). Their criticism was limited to accuse Bolsheviks to steal the assets of the "working class":

"There's a good exchange of products in the labor state: in exchange for bread, lead and bayonets. [...]"

The slogan, "he who doesn't work, doesn't eat," was turned inside out under the new, "Soviet" order to be, "all for the commissars." [...]"

The Communists exchanged the stolen power for the authority of commissars, and for arbitrary rule [...]."

*We have received bureaucratic socialism with Soviets full of bureaucrats, who obediently vote by the orders of a committee of the party of infallible commissars."*²⁸

The real inequality between owners of the means of production and proletarians, who are obliged to sell their labor force to survive, between the exploiting class and the always more exploited class, is based on the

²⁷ "Socialism in quotation marks", published in "Kronstadt Izvestiia", Number 14, Wednesday, March 16th, 1921.

²⁸ "Socialism in quotation marks", published in "Kronstadt Izvestiia", Number 14, Wednesday, March 16th, 1921.

equalization of private labor equating as social labor, as abstract labor. The products of labor acquire, as value, the social form of commodity, that is to say that the relation of exploitation of one class over the other is reproduced and produces itself with the help of the process of equalization of the products of labor, in which things must appear as exchangeable commodities, as a contradictory unit of use value and exchange value. Thereby, the bourgeois buy the proletarian's labor power at its value as an exchange relation of equality, since the proletarian is only (equalizing it) exchanging it for products that must permit him to reproduce his labor power. Value is a social relation in which private appropriation, domination of the class that owns the means of production, interdependence of capitalist enterprises... take the appearance of a relation of equality between individuals as owners, of freedom to buy and sell, of common interests between producers and exploiters. That is to say that in this society ruled by the value, democracy fully asserts itself as the essence of the dictatorship of Capital. However if some demands of the insurgents attacked this relation of exploitation, this real inequality, including through asking for an egalitarian distribution of rations and through removing the preferential rations in Kronstadt (which corresponded to the necessity to gather and unify proletarians around the needs of the struggle), these measures didn't provide as such any revolutionary guarantee, as the insurgents thought. On the contrary, since the principle of equality, freedom, and autonomy is ideologized... democracy got the upper hand, leading the proletarians on the umpteenth attempt to reform this mode of production around its unaltered essence: the capitalist relations, democracy. Thus, as we have seen previously, the lack of clarity regarding the program and its formulation leads to confusion with serious consequences for the future of the struggle, not only for the sailors of Kronstadt but also for the generations of militants to come and who will try to reappropriate the lessons of this insurrection.

"It seemed that the time of free labor on the land and in the factories had come. It seemed that all power had passed into the laborers' hands. [...]"

Instead of a free development of personality and a free laboring life, there arose a completely unprecedented slavery. [...]"

*Contrary to common sense, and in defiance of the will of the laborers, there began the persistent construction of bureaucratic socialism with its slaves, instead of a free kingdom of labor."*²⁹

²⁹ "Socialism in quotation marks", published in "Kronstadt Izvestiia", Number 14, Wednesday, March 16th, 1921.

The insurgents in Kronstadt didn't attack the free labor or, with other words, wage labor, but the obligatory labor, labor under the shape of slavery generalized by that the labor armies during the period of "war communism". The ideologies of the insurgents reproduced the ideal of capitalism without bourgeoisie, a "Republic of labor" expurgated of all the "parasitic" elements, civil servants and bureaucrats (without understanding that they grow like mushrooms in their privileged milieu: i.e. capitalism). The domination of Capital, i.e. wage labor, is quite merely reduced to one of its forms, the domination over the oppressed by the State oppressors. Thus instead of promoting the class rupture in relation to revolutionary positions and the tasks of the struggle, the insurgents endorsed sociological divisions between "peasants" and "workers", between "craftsmen" and salaried workers, by unreservedly supporting the demand of land ownership for "small peasants", the freedom of work for "craftsmen", the management of factories by workers' trade-unions:

*"The entire laboring peasantry was counted with the kulaks, declared an enemy of the people. The enterprising Communists occupied themselves with destruction, and took to setting up Soviet farms, the estates of a new land owner, the state. That is what the peasantry received under Bolshevik socialism instead of free labor with liberated land."*³⁰

"[...] our trade unions had no chance to be purely class organizations. This situation came about not by their fault, but purely thanks to the policy of the ruling party, which strived for a centralized, "Communist" development of the masses. Therefore, the work of the trade unions came down to nothing but completely unnecessary correspondence, for the compilation of information about the number of members of one or another industrial union, specialization, party status and so on.

*Relative to the economic-cooperative construction of the Republic and the cultural development of the trade union workers, nothing was undertaken."*³¹

All these weaknesses have facilitated the victory of the repression over the rebellion. Bolshevik government responded to some of the demands of the "peasants", granting the free movement of commodities between the city and the countryside, removing customs barriers around the big cities. The first measures of the NEP, announced in February 1921 (during 10th Congress of the RCP(b)) agreed thus with a certain number of demands in

³⁰ "Socialism in quotation marks", published in "Kronstadt Izvestiia", Number 14, Wednesday, March 16th, 1921.

³¹ "Reconstruction of the unions", published in "Kronstadt Izvestiia", Number 7, Wednesday, March 9th, 1921.

the “Petrovavlosk Resolution”, which aimed to allow a greater freedom of action to trade.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE BOLSHEVIK PARTY FIRMLY HOLDS THE REINS OF THE BOURGEOIS STATE

Myth of the Workers’ State

“[...] the Kronstadt events revealed their connection with the international bourgeoisie. Moreover, we see that what they [the enemies around us] fear most, from the practical angle of international capital, is the resumption of proper trade relations. But they will fail in their attempts to disrupt them. There are some big businessmen here in Moscow, and they have stopped believing these false rumors.”³²

Through this phraseology Lenin gave an end to the revolt in Kronstadt. Ever since then, it must be said that “socialist” and “revolutionary” governments treat in the same way the proletarians who don’t submit to the interests of global Capital: “Agent of imperialism, agent provocateur of the CIA”. By identifying the consolidation of the State in Russia with the so-called imperatives of the proletarian revolution, Trotsky as well as Stalin and their followers settled the problem of crushing Kronstadt. There is no difference between the Trotskyist position (i.e. Kronstadt is a tragic necessity) and the Stalinist one according to which the crushing of the rebellion was nothing less than “a duty of revolutionists”, because both are based on the myth of a Workers’ State to be defended in Russia.

The Bolsheviks achieved the reconstitution of the bourgeois State organs by consolidating the “socialist homeland”. The “construction of socialism in Russia” was presented as a matter of organization of the economy, about learning the science of work, allegedly a-classist etc. But in March 1921, it is overtly in order to normalize economic relations with other bourgeois States that the Bolsheviks repressed the workers’ revolts. Yuri Lutinov, leader of the “Workers’ Opposition” at the head of a commercial delegation in Berlin, made publicly a speech in order to denounce, following Lenin, the so-called white plot of which Kronstadt was the

³² Lenin, “Speech In Closing The Congress”, March 16th, in “Tenth Congress of the R.C.P.(B.)”, Collected Works, 1st English Edition, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1965, Volume 32.

result: “the liquidation of the adventure in Kronstadt won’t take a long time”, he stated.

From the very beginning of the movement, the government’s policy explicitly proclaimed its objective: to terrorize the proletariat in Russia, in order to put a stop to a revival of workers’ struggles. We saw how the strikes in Moscow and Petrograd had been repressed by force of arms. When sailors and soldiers kicked out the Bolshevik leaders from the rally on March 2nd, the government’s response clearly points out that it acted to end this once and for all: against the proletarians in Russia, the Politburo of the party issued a warning where the mutiny is equated with a white guards’ plot. The Bolsheviks defended this thesis throughout the duration of the events.

“Red Petrograd laughs at the pathetic labors of a little bunch of SRs and White Guards. [...]

Surrender now, not losing a single minute! [...]

Disarm and arrest the criminal ringleaders, and especially the tsarist generals!”³³

The possibility of a white guards’ plot was simply imaginary rather than real. Bolsheviks were not fooled by the real inability of the white guards to restart the war, whereas international Capital withdrew its support preferring the “red” government, worthwhile interlocutor in order to set up diplomatic and economic links. The government also knew the conditions of deprivation in the fortress, which prevented the organization of a plot: food stocks were completely ran out, the two main warships were icebound and lacked fuel, icebreakers and ships of the Kronstadt fleet were removed by order from the very beginning of the unrest and moored alongside the quays in Petrograd. The white guards’ danger promoted by the Bolsheviks was only the argument allowing them to justify the liquidation of workers’ struggle. At the Third Comintern Congress, Bukharin confessed:

“Who says that the Kronstadt rising was White? No. For the sake of the idea, for the sake of our task, we were forced to suppress the revolt of our erring brothers. We cannot look upon Kronstadt sailors as our enemies. We love them as our true brothers, our own flesh and blood...”³⁴

³³ “You’ve gotten what you asked for”, by the Petrograd Defense Committee, published in “Kronstadt Izvestiia”, Number 4, Sunday, March 6th, 1921.

³⁴ Quoted by Raphael Abramovitch, in “The Soviet Revolution 1917-1939”, New York, 1962.

Slander as well as declarations of good intentions made *a posteriori* have been guided by the fundamental preoccupation of the bourgeois State in Russia to suppress any proletarian opposition, to liquidate the slightest sign of workers' resistance. The events in Kronstadt settled once and for all this question: the impossibility for any workers' autonomy to develop within the "Soviet Republic" as well as in the "Communist Party of Russia":

"The peculiar feature of this counter-revolution is that it is petty-bourgeois and anarchistic. I insist that there is a connection between its ideas and slogans and those of the Workers' Opposition. [...]"

We have repeatedly said, and I have, in particular, that our task is to separate the wheat from the chaff in the Workers' Opposition, because it has spread to some extent, and has damaged our work in Moscow. [...]"

When we hear complaints about inadequate democracy, we say: it is absolutely true. Indeed, it is not being practiced sufficiently. We need assistance and advice in this matter. We need real democracy, and not just talk. We even accept those who call themselves the Workers' Opposition, or something worse, although I think that for members of the Communist Party no name can be worse or more disreputable. But even if they had adopted a much worse title, we say to ourselves: since this is a malaise that has affected a section of the workers we must pay the closest attention to it. [...]"

If there is anything at all sound in that opposition, we must make every effort to sift it from the rest. [...]"

We have spent quite a lot of time in discussion, and I must say that the point is now being driven farther home with "rifles" than with the opposition's theses. Comrades, this is no time to have an opposition. [...]" We want no more oppositions!"³⁵

Definitively guided by the economic recovery of Russia, the Bolsheviks fulfilled the role of the white counterrevolution by crushing one of the workers' centers of October [...] [insurrectional process] and by finalizing the repression of the last left oppositions. A new death blow is stricken to the world communist revolution! This bourgeois State repainted red its face with the blood of workers who had rebelled against the latter. [...]"

Kronstadt, the last gasp of a declining revolution

³⁵ Lenin, "Summing-Up Speech On The Report Of The C.C. of the R.C.P.(B.)", March 9th, in "Tenth Congress of the RCP(b)", *Collected Works*, 1st English Edition, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1965, Volume 32.

<https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1921/10thcong/ch02.htm>

Proletarians in Kronstadt didn't have among their purposes to become martyrs and they didn't fight for an ideal of socialism; they revolted against the oppression of the bourgeois State to destroy this monster that ended up pretending to be "communist", and they paid a high price for the weaknesses of their struggle and for the general debacle of the revolutionary movement they belonged to. The stinging defeat in Kronstadt indeed opened up the royal road to the counterrevolution that under the rule of Stalin and his successors shall definitively wipe out communists, workers' militants and generations of proletarians contaminated by the virus of the proletarian revolution.

Sailors and soldiers in Kronstadt didn't stand up for posterity but for the communist revolution [...] [when they became shock troops of the insurrectional process between July and October 1917]. [...] The Kronstadt uprising [in March 1921] is the last gasp of a declining revolution. Far from being a new "October", [...] the Kronstadt uprising is a failed attempt to push the revolutionary movement more forward. In this way Kronstadt was not only its own gravedigger but also that of the proletariat in Russia. The insurgents made an essential observation: the revolution failed, but they didn't draw any lesson from it, and they collapsed with it, [...]:

*"From a slave of the capitalist, the worker became a slave of the bureaucratic institutions. Even that became too little. They planned to bring in the Taylor sweatshop system."*³⁶

*"This is a new kind of concentration camp for the proletariat."*³⁷

*"The current Soviets, [...], have always been deaf to all our needs and demands. In answer we received only executions."*³⁸

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION

Kronstadt, a moment in the historic affirmation of the communist program

³⁶ "Socialism in quotation marks", published in "Kronstadt Izvestiia", Number 14, Wednesday, March 16th, 1921.

³⁷ "Lend a hand, brothers, and forward for freedom!", published in "Kronstadt Izvestiia", Number 14, Wednesday, March 16th, 1921.

³⁸ "Broadcast by the Provisional Revolutionary Committee", published in "Kronstadt Izvestiia", Number 4, Sunday, March 6th, 1921.

To stand on the side of the insurgents in Kronstadt doesn't have anything to do with to worship Kronstadt and the workers who made Capital pay a high price for their skin; those who fell into this trap barely succeeded in strengthening the task of the counterrevolution by erecting one more mausoleum before which to make proletarians kneel.

The salient feature of the revolutionary events in Kronstadt as well as in [...] [the insurrectional process of 1917] doesn't lie in their immediate results (either defeat or victory), but in the impact they had on the international revolutionary movement, in the role they played towards the extension/resorption of the world revolution. In spite of thousands of kilometers that separated the revolutionary struggles in 1917-21 (partially victorious in some places and partially defeated elsewhere), and despite time shifts in the various revolutionary surges, what marked the great revolutionary battles of this time is the fact that communist organizations arose everywhere in the world, trying to bring together their experiences of struggles. These organizations tried, thanks to a work of international centralization, to develop/reinforce the communist program inherited from revolutionaries of the past that years of social-democrat practice (Marxist as well as libertarian) had nearly eliminated as a material force. In a few months, a movement that was so far confined to some "left communist" and "anarchist" circles and sects has expanded to threaten the world State of capitalism, [...].

To place Kronstadt in the totality of the revolutionary movement [...], this is the class rupture imposed by the insurgents that we completely embrace. Our understanding has nothing to do with a scientific analysis, an impartial description from historical commentators (i.e. historiographers) who reduce the historic reality to definitively concluded events, while isolating them from any historic perspective of which we are a part. These historians describe the idea of social struggles through individuals directly competing, without showing that the struggles of the proletariat through time are the products of world class antagonisms and not of the will, the courage of such or such individuals.

The class rupture proclaimed by the insurgents themselves pushed aside all the devotees of Kronstadt who concealed the inseparable revolutionary content of Kronstadt and [...] [the insurrectional process in 1917]. But for the bourgeois common sense, the same "individuals" cannot take sides once with the revolution and another time with the reaction; the "revolution" having no other meaning but to celebrate this bourgeois individual in his citizen's new suit. On the contrary, the common essence

of Kronstadt 1921 and [...] [the insurrectional process that led to October 1917] defines the communist revolution not as the acts of brilliant individuals, but as a process of social disruption taking place and exacerbating under the pressure of class contradictions, until the resolution of the contradiction of class societies into Communism. It is an idealist introspection to understand the insurrection in Kronstadt as a “pure explosion of freedom”, as well as to imagine “October 1917” in Russia as “le Grand soir” [translator’s note: “the Great Day”, the Day of the Revolution] where the world would have been shocked overnight by the establishment of the dictatorship of the proletariat. To put it this way, as it seems to be necessary to polarize them while excluding them, this means to confine the revolutionary movement to a succession of events, which are isolated from each other, good or bad, victorious or defeated, that follow a progressive timetable where the movement takes place in a regular and linear way, either in a revolutionary or in a counterrevolutionary course. In the reality, the revolutionary movement goes ahead on the contrary by bounds. Facing the pressure of the counterrevolution and facing the resulting exacerbation of social antagonisms, the proletariat is obliged to criticize past struggles, in order to succeed in defining better its strategy, in correcting its weaknesses. The class constitutes itself as a party through the age-old struggles that the communists criticize in order to not reproduce the defeats of the past anymore. It’s the global character of the capitalist State, the universality of commodity and its incessant metamorphosis that determine the communists to push this criticism of the revolutionary movement until the universal resolution of class contradictions. For the communists who constitute the revolutionary vanguard, there is therefore no victory that cannot turn into a defeat and *vice versa*. There is no place where Capital has been abolished and that would constitute a “red” sanctuary, without the destruction of the world State of Capital thanks to the victory of the international revolution. There is no antagonism between a partial struggle and the historical goal, because although the revolutionary movement necessarily appears as partial, each assertion contains and really sets out the development of the international centralization, the world interests of the proletarian class. The revolutionary movement, destructive of the society, is necessarily based on ruptures (rupture of the proletarians in Kronstadt with the so-called “Workers’ State in Russia”) and the latter are expressed through the revolutionary movement self-criticism. Criticism, then, becomes material force, an integral part of the revolutionary action of the proletariat.

Radical criticism made by the insurgents in Kronstadt of the so-called “proletarian State in Russia” agrees and match with, and reinforces, all the practical/critical action of the “left communists” who formed, in spite of their weaknesses, the vanguard of the revolutionary movement in 1917-21. But the defeat of the rebellion in Kronstadt as well as that of the “left communists” in the Comintern doesn’t mean the burial of the revolution. The fact that the insurgents in Kronstadt didn’t surrender, and didn’t disown the world revolution even when the bourgeoisie managed to strike a decisive blow, is organically connected with a practice of party, with the revolutionary party whose representatives are nearly excluded from the Comintern at the same time (June 1921) because they also didn’t disown the international revolution and because they tried to constitute a communist direction to endow the class movement. An organization like the KAPD [...] met up [although belatedly]³⁹ with the insurgents in Kronstadt through its factional struggle within the Comintern against the majority social democratic tendencies and the bourgeois positions adopted by the “Communist” Parties in favor of parliamentarianism and trade-unionism... and especially through its active and leading role in the workers’ struggles in March 1921 in Germany. Similarly, some groups of the internationalist communist left such as the Italian Fraction around the review “Bilan” and the Belgian Fraction, on the basis of a critical work of the revolutionary movement, defended the revolutionary interests of the proletarians in Spain in 1936 and 1937 against the repression carried out by the “antifascist republican front and its anarchist ministers”, repression which is identical (as to its bourgeois nature) to that of the Bolshevik government against Kronstadt. These communists didn’t cling to communism as to a dogma, they didn’t create a new religion with its bible and its saints; their practical/critical attitude, which was faithful to the revolutionary movement of the proletariat, didn’t have the objective of acquiring a position as guardian of “the Marxist orthodoxy”. Furthermore, the insurgents in Kronstadt didn’t turn October 1917 into a sacred monument. Everywhere, the ones and the others built the foundations for a clarification and a development of the historical program of the

³⁹ In fact, at first the KAPD supported the official thesis of a plot against Soviet Russia; the action of the insurgents was defined as anti-communist and counter-revolutionary. It took the account of the delegates of the KAPD in Moscow, at the time of the third congress of the CI, congress of rupture, to change the attitude of the “left communists”: “*The antagonism between the proletariat and the Soviet government has been sharpened since the outbreak of food riots of Moscow and Petrograd: the Soviet government took very severe measures, which were no different from those adopted by a capitalist state.*” On the other hand, a militant like Gorter found the measures taken by the Bolsheviks with regard to Kronstadt “*necessary*”. They had crushed the “*counter-revolution*” and Gorter implicitly envisaged that “left communists” would be lead to take such measures in the West if the “*counter-revolution*” in the part of the proletariat was to be as strong.

revolution, thanks to their essential criticism of the movement, although not fully developed.

Only the action of the communists, who draw lessons from the revolutionary experiences of the proletariat, allowed that Kronstadt is nowadays useful for the world proletariat as a reference together with October 1917, Berlin 1918-19, Barcelona 1937, etc. Without this militant activity of Left communist groups, we would still flounder in the social-democrat swamp (including the libertarian one) where [the insurrectional process of] October 1917 is confused with the formation of a government by the Left, for whom the Kronstadt uprising is used as a leitmotif for the setting up of anarchist ministries, as in 1936 in Spain, or “free unions” [...]!

Kronstadt illustrates how, thanks to the (radical) revolutionary criticism that the abyss of class contradictions obliges the communist movement to constantly carry on; the latter manages to reemerge from the most severe defeats and to revitalize itself until the moment of a new decisive confrontation. The revolutionary movement indeed draws power from defeats, thanks to the militant activity of its communist fractions which draw the lessons of the struggles, against the current, and make them rise again, after a long and difficult way, more compact, sharper and more powerful.



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