

Kronstadt Rebellion*

A: tamarrud kronštadt. - G: Kronstädter Aufstand

F: révolte de Kronstadt. - R: Kronštadtskoe vosstanie.

S: levantamiento de Kronstadt.

C: kalangshitadepanluan 喀琅施塔得叛乱

>Third revolution< or >counterrevolutionary mutiny< - these are the two extremes between which verdicts on the KR, which shook Soviet Russia from 1 to 18 March 1921, are situated. The symptom of a comprehensive crisis whose causes lay in the disruption Russia had suffered during seven years of war and civil war, as well as in the system of war communism practiced by the Soviet government, the KR posed an acute threat to the power of the RCP(b), being led by the sailors of Kronstadt, the >pride and glory of the Russian Revolution< (**Trotsky**), who had once contributed decisively to the revolution's success, defending the Soviet government on numerous fronts. The country was destabilized not only by several peasant uprisings and the anarchist Makhno movement, but also, and for the first time since the revolution, by worker unrest in Petrograd and Moscow, while the question of trade unions sparked a crisis within the RCP(b); the opposition that emerged within the party in the course of this crisis could only be suppressed by abandoning intra-party democracy. Within this situation, the KR erupted >like a flash of lightning which threw more of a glare upon reality than anything else< (**Lenin**, CW 32, 272-284).

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1. *The Program of the Rebels.* - The core demand was for the creation of a >genuine< council democracy, different from the one that had been created with the Bolshevik-led soviets. While the Kronstadt rebels considered the freely elected soviets that had emerged in their city in 1905 to have been organs of grassroots democracy, of great value to the organization of post-revolutionary society, Lenin and his followers were always concerned with the >composition< (Stalin, *Works* 6, 209) of the councils, which they felt ought to serve the purpose of winning and maintaining power for the RCP(b). This already emerged in 1917, when the slogan >All power to the soviets< was handled in a purely tactical way, with the soviets of worker, soldier and peasant delegates being created or dissolved depending on how >appropriate< their composition was considered.

1.1. In a resolution passed by 16,000 sailors, soldiers and workers during a general assembly on 1 March, the rebels noted that >the existing soviets do not express the will of the workers and peasants< and demanded that >new soviets be elected immediately, by ballot and following free electoral agitation open to all workers and peasants< (qtd. in Kool/Oberländer 1967, *Dokumente*, 343). This corresponded to the original idea of the soviets and the constitution of the RSFSR, which had envisioned the dismissal of delegates who no longer acted in accordance with the wishes of the electorate. Additional political demands included: freedom of speech and of the press for workers, peasants, anarchists and left-socialist parties; freedom of assembly; freedom of trade unions and peasant associations; the holding of a non-party conference of workers, members of the Red Army and sailors from Petrograd, Kronstadt and the

Petrograd garrison; release of all political prisoners who were members of socialist parties or had been arrested in connection with worker and peasant movements; the election of a >commission for the review of the trial records of all those held in prisons and concentration camps< (ibid.).

What was not envisioned was freedom to engage in counterrevolutionary activities or freedom for right-wing parties. The convening of the constituent assembly that right-wing parties strove for was rejected by the majority of Kronstadt's Provisional Revolutionary Committee (PRC); the Kronstadt sailors had after all actively contributed to the dissolution of the constituent assembly. An article stating the basic principles of the KR included this statement: >The workers and peasants are marching forward inexorably, leaving behind both the constituent assembly with its bourgeois order and the dictatorship of the communist party with its Cheka and its state capitalism< (*Dok.*, 388).

In order to break with the CP's claim to be sole representative and leader of the Russian working class, the resolution called for the dissolution of the communist combat groups within the military and the communist control units at the workplace, arguing that >no single party may claim privileges in the propagation of its ideas and receive state funds for this purpose< (*Dok.*, 343). On 6 March, the slogan >All power to the soviets, and not to the parties< (365, 368) was issued. It was not directed against ordinary communists, whose exclusion from soviet elections was not envisioned and who participated in assemblies, at least initially. The slogan >For soviets without communists< was never formulated in Kronstadt; growing anti-communist agitation and measures taken against

communists who remained loyal to the party leadership could however be interpreted in this sense.

Economic demands - equal food rations for all working people; abolition of the blockades preventing the exchange of commodities between the country and the city; full peasant control over land and livestock, to the extent that peasants were able to maintain both without engaging in wage labor; permission to engage in free artisanal production based on one's own independent labor - corresponded to the immediate interests of peasants and artisans, and to a lesser extent of workers, and they reflected widespread egalitarian tendencies and outrage over the privileges enjoyed by the emerging soviet and party bureaucracy. Yet these demands were by no means oriented towards a restoration of capitalist relations. Differently from what **Lenin** claimed (CW 32, 358), there was no call for free trade.

This first catalog of demands was expanded upon during the days that followed. Thus, a call was formulated for transforming the >state-directed trade unions into free associations of workers, peasants and the toiling intelligentsia< (*Dok.*, 388). The >state socialism<, in which the worker had turned from a >slave to the capitalist< into a >slave to the state enterprise<, was to be replaced by a >different kind of socialism<, a >soviet republic of workers in which the producer will control and manage the products of his labor himself, without restrictions<. The system of worker control introduced in late 1917 and early 1918 was rejected, as it was claimed to have led to a deterioration of production (501 et sq.).

1.2. Following the wholesale rejection of their demands by the Chairman of the All-Russian Central Executive

Committee, Mikhail **Kalinin**, on 1 March, the rebels made the resignation of the communist government their main goal. The more the Soviet government took steps to contain and quell the rebellion (by declaring the state of siege in Petrograd and environs, issuing leaflets with >final warnings< and calls to surrender, taking hostages, arresting some persons, shooting others, subjecting the rebels to artillery fire and aerial bombardment, as well as to infantry attacks), the more virulent became the propagandistic attacks on the >communist reign of terror< and the >rule of the commissars<. Three centuries under the yoke of monarchism paled by comparison to as many years of Cheka-assisted communist tyranny, it was claimed (*Dok.*, 387).

Particularly furious criticism was directed at the Chairman of the Revolutionary Military Council of the RSFSR, Leo **Trotsky**, a proponent of the >militarization< of Soviet society and the person responsible for the deployment of the Red Army against Kronstadt, and Gregory **Zinoviev**, the Chairman of the Petrograd Defense Committee. Antisemitic sentiment played a certain role in this; many sailors from Ukraine and Russia's western borderlands were traditionally prone to antisemitism (**Avrich** 1970, 155, 178 et sqq.). Calls for the expulsion of Jews and their resettlement in Palestine were formulated, although they lacked majority appeal (cf. *Kronštadtskaya* 1999, I, 119, 145). Faith in **Lenin** >had not yet been lost< until his speech at the X Party Congress. He was considered a >prisoner< of his communist associates, forced to >slander< the rebels >as much as they< (*Dok.*, 471 et sq.). This was a variant, according to Paul **Avrich**, of the traditional belief in the >good tsar< who is deceived by his clerks (1970, 177). When Lenin declared the principles of the NEP, which accorded

with the demands of the Kronstadt rebels on many points, government troops had already begun their siege of Kronstadt, and Lenin's speech was rejected as offering only >minor concessions<, with the sole purpose of >further tightening the vise of the party dictatorship< (*Dok.*, 487).

The rebels considered their activities the beginning of a >third revolution< (after the February and October revolutions) that would >free the working masses of the last of their chains< and >break a new, broad path towards creative activity in the spirit of socialism< while >stirring up the working masses of the East and the West< (*Dok.*, 387 et sq., 414). In a statement to the women workers of the world issued on the occasion of International Women's Day (8 March), the rebels invoked >social world revolution< (385). The international press was called upon to support the rebels and inspect the situation in situ, which some foreign correspondents went on to do (cf. *Kronštadtskaya* 1999, I, 448). Citing the revolutionary traditions of Kronstadt, the >vigilant custodian of the achievements of social revolution<, the rebels presented themselves as a vanguard fighting for the implementation of the Russian revolution's genuine goals (*Dok.*, 442). They were aware of the fact that their rebellion was welcomed by counterrevolutionary forces. Yet those forces were hoping to >renew the tsarist whip and the privileges of the generals<, which meant they could be >no allies< (360).

There is no evidence that the KR was organized by any single party, nor can the program be attributed to any one party. Some demands of the Left and Right Social Revolutionaries, the Mensheviks and the anarchists can be found in the program, but others are missing. In **Avrich's**

view, the program is a variant of the anarcho-populist current of the social revolutionary Maximalists, whose positions fell somewhere between those of the Left Social Revolutionaries and those of the anarchists. Hostility towards the central state and the ruling class, widespread since the peasant uprisings of the 17th and 18th centuries, also found its way into the program, according to **Avrich** (cf. 1970, 170 et sqq.). Naturally, the program could not be developed further, much less implemented, during the two weeks that the PRC held power in Kronstadt. The vagueness of some elements of the program is due to the differences of opinion among the various forces represented within the PRC, and to the fact that views were sometimes not openly expressed, when the general sentiment among the sailors made this seem inadvisable.

2. *The PRC as an Organ of Power.* The KR began spontaneously and developed extremely rapidly. It was probably directed, from the outset, by a small illegal group associated with the chairman of the PRC, Stepan **Petrichenko**, chief quartermaster on the battleship *Petropavlosk* (cf. **Avrich** 1970, 110). Delegates had been dispatched to Petrograd in order to obtain information about the worker unrest there. The reports sent by these delegates boosted the morale of the sailors. Petrichenko directed the first, decisive assemblies of ship crews and proposed the programmatic resolution during the plenary assembly on the anchoring berth on 1 March. He also chaired the assembly of delegates on 2 March, where the PRC, constituted by Petrichenko's supporters on the *Petropavlosk* the evening before, was elected the KR's supreme organ of power. On 4 March, the number of PRC members was increased from five to 15. The PRC consisted of sailors, workers, an engineer, a switchboard operator, a transport director and a medical

assistant (cf. *Dok.*, 445 et sq.). The PRC took over the administration of the city and the fortress of Kronstadt, removing the communists from all positions of authority and prohibiting them from leaving Kotlin Island. It also maintained order in the city and organized Kronstadt's defense. Revolutionary triumvirates were set up in government agencies, social organizations and military units, charged with implementing the decisions of the PRC. The communists in the city were called upon to hand over their weapons. Arrests of communists began as early as the delegate assembly on 2 March and were justified by claiming those arrested had resisted PRC measures, engaged in sabotage or attempted to flee. Those arrested included the Commissar of the Baltic Fleet, N. N. **Kuzmin**, the deposed chairman of the Kronstadt soviet P. D. **Vasiliev**, the chairman of the Kronstadt party committee L. A. **Bregman** and the head of the Baltic Fleet's political administration, E. I. **Batis**. None of the 320 persons arrested were executed (cf. **Ščetinov** 1999, 15).

With an eye to securing closer ties with workers, a decision was taken to hold new elections, within three days, for the leadership of all trade unions, as well as of the Council of Trade Unions, which was to work closely with the PRC (*Dok.*, 354). The garrison's political department was dissolved, as was the Worker's and Peasant's Inspection, which consisted mainly of communists; the supervisory function of the Inspection was assigned to the Soviet of Trade Unions (cf. 506). Workers sympathetic to the PRC were provided with arms and charged with securing order within the city. The planned new election of soviets could not be held, due to the beginning of military hostilities.

3. *Social and Political Composition of the Rebels.* The number of active rebels is estimated to have been between 9,000 and 10,000, no higher than 12,000. This means that a considerable share of the 18,000 soldiers and 8,000 to 9,000 adult men in the city did not participate in the armed struggle (cf. **Ščetinov** 1999, 23). The social base of the KR was constituted by the sailors and Red Army soldiers of the garrison, in particular by the crews of the battleships *Petropavlosk* and *Sevastopol*. Eighty percent of the sailors had a peasant background and maintained close ties with their regions of origin, mainly Ukraine and South Russia. Visits home and letters from relatives ensured they were well informed about the peasants' disaffection with war communism, as well as with the peasant uprisings in many areas of Soviet Russia, and in particular with the Makhno movement. The sailors also had close ties to the workers of Petrograd. The majority of Kronstadt's civilian population viewed the rebels with indifference. Some workers, including women, expressed their sympathy by donating food, clothing and shoes to the defenders of the fortress, whom they did not consider White Guards.

From the start, assessments of the Kronstadt sailors' social background have seen two views pitted against each other. RCP(b) and Soviet historians claimed the Kronstadt sailors of 1921 had nothing in common with the participants in the October Revolution. Those opposing this view emphasized the continuities with 1917. The truth lies somewhere in between. The social composition of the sailors had indeed changed. In 1917, most of the sailors had come from Petrograd and other cities; now, most of them were peasants. In **Trotsky's** pointed assessment: >If in 1917–18

the Kronstadt sailor stood considerably higher than the average level of the Red Army and formed the framework [...] of the Soviet regime in many districts, those sailors who remained in ^peaceful^^ Kronstadt until the beginning of 1921 [...] stood by this time on a level considerably lower, in general, than the average level of the Red Army, and included a great percentage of completely demoralized elements (104). In fact, Kronstadt sailors had been deployed on numerous fronts during the civil war, or they had been given responsibilities within the party; the ensuing gaps had been stopped with young recruits. Nevertheless, a core group of experienced sailors remained in place. In late 1920, the difficult political and ideological situation in the Baltic Fleet had even led to the reactivation of more than 700 veteran communist sailors (cf. **Elizarov** 2004, 167).

The revolutionary traditions of Kronstadt, which were passed on to the new arrivals in spite of all the changes undergone by the ships and the garrison, played a role in prompting the rebellion, as did the traditional inclination of sailors towards insurrection and insurgency. Yet it was not the young, but rather the more experienced sailors who organized the rebellion. Thirty-year-old **Petrichenko** had served in the fleet since 1912, and on board the battleship *Petropavlosk* since 1918. His deputy Vasiliy **Yakovenko** had fought on the barricades in 1917 (cf. **Avrich** 1970, 91). The share of sailors who had experience of battle and had fought on the side of the Soviet government during the civil war was far larger than Soviet party historians were willing to concede, making up as many as four fifths of the crew on both battleships (cf. **Elizarov** 2004, 168). Of the 1,300 men on board the *Petropavlosk*, one sixth were communists (cf. **Semanov** 1971, 28).

The political composition of the rebels comprised forces left of the RCP(b) (Maximalists, Left Social Revolutionaries) as well as disenchanted communists and members of parties situated further to the right, such as the Popular Socialists and the Mensheviks. The popularity of the anarchists is evident in the fact that they are explicitly mentioned in the resolution passed on 1 March. The PRC was however wary of rash action and wished to save the rebels' strength >until we can deal the final, decisive blow to the enemy< (*Dok.*, 412).

The PRC made successful efforts to win the support of as many ordinary communists as possible. A provisional office of the Kronstadt RCP(b) organization urged that >the measures of the Provisional Revolutionary Committee be in no way obstructed< (*Dok.*, 348). Eight-hundred-and-forty-five of the 2,093 persons organized within the RCP(b) announced their resignation from the party during the rebellion (cf. *Kronštadtskaya* 1999, II, 160 et sq.). Those resigning were mainly party members and candidates who had joined the party in 1919/20. About 40 percent of the communists took a neutral stance (cf. **Avrich** 1970, 183). Some of the communists who remained loyal to the Soviet government left the island in an orderly fashion, and bearing arms, on 2 March. Others managed to escape during the first days of the rebellion, while still others remained and sought to support the government troops during the attack on Kronstadt.

General A. N. **Kozlovsky**, in command of the fortress' artillery since December 1920, was one of several former officers of the tsarist army who had served in the Soviet army in Kronstadt. These officers were not among the organizers of the KR, but immediately sided with the

rebels, providing advice and coordinating the city's military defense from 3 March onward, at the request of the PRC (cf. **Ščetinov** 1999, 13). Communist commentators exaggerated the role played by former tsarist generals and officers, whereas the rebels denied there had been any. The name of the head of defense, the former chief of staff of the fortress, Lieutenant Colonel E. N. **Solovyanov**, was not made public until 12 March (cf. *Dok.*, 440). If military staff had indeed coordinated the movement, they would not have limited themselves to defending the city and the fortress, but would have proceeded immediately to launch an attack on the mainland. The PRC rejected such acts of aggression, as it felt they would not be condoned by the sailors.

4. *The Role of Anti-Soviet Émigrés.* There is no evidence that the KR was directly organized from abroad, as claimed by the RCP(b) and the Soviet government. The French press had however reported on plans for a rebellion in Kronstadt in great detail on 12 February 1921. A memorandum discovered by **Avrich** (1970, 235-40) in the Russian Archive of Columbia University, New York, deals with the question of how to organize a rebellion in Kronstadt. The memorandum, written by an agent of the National Center in Vyborg in early 1921, shows that serious thought was given to the organization of an insurrection in Kronstadt among émigrés. The author of the memorandum expected the rebellion to begin following the thaw, and proposed that émigrés and foreign powers, such as France, support it in a coordinated manner.

Anti-Soviet émigrés followed the development of the KR with great interest. The slogan >All power to the soviets and

not to the parties< was received skeptically, but farsighted émigrés such as the leader of the Constitutional Democratic Party, Pavel **Milyukov**, considered it a transitional demand. The formulation proposed by him - >For the soviets, but without communists< -, which had circulated in Siberia during the civil war and was seen on leaflets in Petrograd on the eve of the KR, was intended to promote the goal of re-instituting a bourgeois government.

Émigrés analyzed all statements by the rebels in light of their own goals. A declaration issued by the PRC on 15 March included the statement: >We are now fighting to topple the yoke of the party, for genuine soviet power, and then the free will of the people shall decide how the people are to be governed< (*Kronštadtskaya* 1999, I, 447).

This led the president of the dissolved constituent assembly and leader of the Social Revolutionaries, Viktor **Chernov**, to hope for a reconvening of the constituent assembly. His offer to visit Kronstadt was rejected as premature even by those members of the PRC who were in favor of the constituent assembly being reconvened (cf. **Ščetinov** 1999, 11, 17).

All émigré currents with the exception of the Mensheviks expressed their willingness to support the rebellion by providing food, medicine or money. Many also began to organize military support. Initially, the PRC rejected offers of support from abroad. On 8 March, it declared: >If however our struggle should continue longer than expected, we may be constrained, out of consideration for our wounded heroes, and for children and civilians, to request food aid from abroad< (*Dok.*, 414). Negotiations on food aid were held with a delegation of the Russian Red Cross (abroad); this food aid did not, however, reach Kronstadt. One member

of the delegation, the monarchist and former commander of the *Sevastopol*, Baron P. W. **Wilken**, remained in Kronstadt. His call for military support by the White Guard was rejected by majority vote within the PRC (cf. **Ščetinov** 1999, 21). A statement issued by the PRC on 15 March pointed out, however, that >military aid< might prove >necessary<. A PRC delegation was dispatched to Finland in order to conduct negotiations (cf. 25). Following the suppression of the rebellion, the leaders who had emigrated to Finland entered into secret agreements with White Guard émigrés, preparing for common armed struggle against the communists (cf. **Avrich** 1970, 127 et sqq.).

5. *The Question of a Peaceful Solution.* A peaceful solution was not seriously attempted, since the RCP(b) completely misjudged the situation. **Kalinin** had been successful in his dealings with Petrograd workers only a short time earlier, but in the Kronstadt assemblies, he, **Kuzmin** and **Vasiliev** only heightened tensions by their unwillingness to compromise. They did not even hint at the possibility of rescinding war communist measures, something that was envisaged within the framework of NEP. The attempt to arrange negotiations between the Petrograd soviet and the Kronstadt PRC failed due to the unfulfillable demands both sides formulated with regard to the composition of the delegations. The RCP(b) failed to play upon the sympathies for **Lenin** that were initially still in evidence among the sailors. The issuing of ultimatums merely reinforced the stance of the rebels. A mediation offer by the anarchists Alexander **Berkman** and Emma **Goldman** was rejected (cf. **Berkman** 1922, 23 et sq.).

From the outset, the Soviet government and the RCP(b) leadership considered the KR a White Guard mutiny of generals and Social Revolutionaries, coordinated from abroad and led by **Kozlovsky**. The Kronstadt party committee and **Kalinin** were caught in the logic of the civil war, which had recently ended, and the first measures that occurred to them were military. On 2 March, the rebels were declared counterrevolutionaries >outside the law<; the goal of the KR was interpreted, from the outset, as that of >Soviets without the Bolsheviks< (Lenin, CW 32, 358). Negotiations on the rebellion's political goals were never considered. As far as the RCP(b) was concerned, there were only two possibilities: unconditional surrender of the Kronstadt rebels or suppression of the KR by force of arms, as had already been the practice in the case of the peasant uprisings. The RCP(b) therefore bears the main responsibility for the KR's bloody conclusion. At the party congress on 9 March, Lenin declared: >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< (CW 32, 200).

The rebels began to prepare for armed struggle on 4 March; their slogan was >Victory or death< (*Dok.*, 353). They too rejected all compromises, >given the firm intention of the working people of Kronstadt to liberate Russia from communist rule forever< (474).

6. *The Suppression of the Rebellion*. Militarily, the KR did not represent a serious threat to the Soviet government (cf. **Avrich** 1970, 218). The RCP(b) nevertheless wished to suppress it as swiftly as possible. The slogans of the Kronstadt rebels evoked the power of the soviets, making

them far more accessible and convincing to the masses than those of the White Guard, and so circulation of these slogans had to cease. According to **Lenin**, >petty-bourgeois anarchism< had come to the fore within the KR, and it had begun to influence the proletariat. In his view, this >petty-bourgeois counter-revolution< was >undoubtedly more dangerous than **Denikin**, **Yudenich** and **Kolchak** put together, because ours is a country where the proletariat is in a minority, where peasant property has gone to ruin and where, in addition, the demobilisation has set loose vast numbers of potentially mutinous elements< (CW 32, 184). The problem needed to be solved prior to the X Party Congress of the RCP(b). The Soviet government was negotiating the possibility of trade relations with the USA and England, and a continuation of the rebellion would have put these negotiations at risk. If the Kronstadt rebels had sustained their rebellion for an extended period of time, this would have increased the danger of the uprising spreading to other regions and receiving support from Russian émigrés and foreign powers. Another consideration was that it was easier to attack the well-secured fortress as long as the Gulf of Finland was still frozen. Following the thaw, Kronstadt's military defenses would have benefited from greater mobility, and foreign ships could have come to their aid. A rekindling of the civil war that had just ended did not seem out of the question.

The attack on heavily fortified Kronstadt turned out to be more difficult than expected. The first offensive was conducted on 8 March, the opening day of the X Party Congress. It failed due to the unreliability of the troops deployed, who were unwilling to take action against the rebels. There were hundreds of defectors (cf. *Dok.*, 405, 446, 510). Punitive measures ranged from disarming soldiers

and resettling them to having them executed by court martial. Having obtained new troops and the propagandistic support of 300 Party Congress delegates, of which 15 were killed in battle, the second offensive was initiated on the night of 16 March. Kronstadt's defenders were not able to ward off this offensive, given the sheer number of 50,000 attackers. Eight thousand rebels, including almost all members of the PRC and the defense staff, retreated to Finland across the frozen sea. This played into the hands of Bolshevik propaganda, which had predicted just such an outcome.

The exact number of victims on both sides has never been ascertained. The wounded and the dead on the government side are estimated to have numbered about 10,000. There were about 600 dead and more than 1,000 injured on the side of the Kronstadt rebels (cf. **Avrich** 1970, 211). Following the seizure of Kronstadt on 18 March, there ensued a bloody settling of accounts with the city's sailors, soldiers and workers. Persons not directly involved in the rebellion were arrested along with active fighters. At least 2,013 of them were sentenced to death, while 6,459 received lengthy prison sentences (cf. **Naumov/Kosakovsky** 1997, 15). In 1922, more than 2,500 residents of Kronstadt were resettled; 1,963 of them were described as >Kronstadt mutineers and their relatives< (367). In the course of a purge, 212 communists were excluded from the Kronstadt organization (*Kronštadtskaya* 1999, II, 163). Fifteen thousand sailors considered unreliable were removed from the navy (cf. **Avrich** 1970, 213 et sq.). The names of the battleships *Petropavlosk* and *Sevastopol* were changed to *Marat* and *Parizskhaya Kommuna*.

The KR remained isolated. The expectation that the workers of Petrograd would follow its example was disappointed. While some of these workers sympathized with the KR, the majority remained indifferent. This was due to the propaganda of the government, whose claims about a White Guard conspiracy played on the fact that the masses were not in favor of a restoration of the monarchy; it was also due to the general war-weariness and the Soviet government's economic concessions.

7. *Consequences of the Suppression.* In the view of the CPSU and other communist parties in power during the 20th century, the main lesson to be learned from the KR was that all attacks on their monopolization of power needed to be nipped in the bud. With reference to Kronstadt, **Lenin** declared: >The proletarian revolution in Russia again and again confirms this lesson of 1789-94 and 1848-49, and also what Frederick **Engels** said in his letter to **Bebel** of December 11, 1884. ... ^Pure democracy ... when the moment of revolution comes, acquires a temporary importance ... as the final sheet-anchor of the whole bourgeois and even feudal economy. [...]^^ In any case our sole adversary on the day of the crisis and on the day after the crisis will be the whole of the reaction which will group around pure democracy, and this, I think, should not be lost sight of< (CW 32, 461).

Kronstadt confirmed **Lenin** in his >[u]ncompromising struggle against Mensheviks, Socialist-Revolutionaries, anarchists<, which is what the >[e]xperience and lessons of Kronstadt< consisted of to him (CW 32, 324). This approach entailed the elimination of the last remaining representatives of non-Bolshevik left-wing parties within the soviets, and

hence the consolidation of the one-party state. It was on the X Party Congress, and with reference to the KR, that the ban on factionalism was issued, which was used for decades to crush all opposition within the party (cf. CW 32, 249). While Party Congress delegates from the opposition held views that were in many ways similar to those of the Kronstadt rebels, they too supported the suppression of the KR, as they did not want to challenge the party's authority. The decisions taken with regard to the NEP, which had not been prompted by the KR, but which were no doubt sped by it, were not combined with corresponding steps towards a broadening of democracy within the state, the party and the economy, as had been demanded by the oppositional groups within the party. Even the proposed formation of a Soviet Peasant Association under the leadership of the RCP(b), discussed in May/June of 1921, was rejected for fear of a >large-scale< Kronstadt (**Wehner** 1999, 255).

Thus the Leninist model of socialism was consolidated. While invoking a new form of democracy, this model in fact amounted to absolute power for the communist party, without any democratic participation on the part of the masses. Until the reforms introduced during the perestroika period, the soviets remained toothless, mere appendages of the party. The party's monopolization of power and its associated contempt for democracy entailed the failure of the various attempts at reform undertaken throughout the history of the USSR.

The relentless and unrestrained suppression of the KR provoked disillusionment among communists abroad and non-communist sympathizers. The fact that Red Army soldiers had opened fire on their own people was a tragedy even Nikolai

Bukharin was moved by: >Who says 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 the Kronstadt sailors as our enemies. We love them as our true brothers, our own flesh and blood< (qtd. in **Avrich** 1970, 134). Rudiments of a similar sentiment can even be found in **Lenin** when he speaks of the >mistakes of the hapless Kronstadt mutineers of the spring of 1921< (CW 33, 27). In this passage, Lenin hints at what he was not willing to admit openly: that part of the October revolution's social base had risen up against communist party rule.

8. *The Debate on the KR.* Against his better knowledge, **Lenin** attempted, in a conversation with a correspondent of the *New York Herald*, to play down the KR as a >very petty incident< that >no more threatens to break up the Soviet state than the Irish disorders are threatening to break up the British Empire< (CW 36, 538). Nevertheless, an international debate on the events developed immediately after the suppression of the KR. As Frits **Kool** and Erwin **Oberländer** demonstrate in the introduction to their collection of source materials (1967, 283- 296), there were already a large number of reactions in the social democrat, left socialist and communist press as early as March of 1921. Russian anarchists were the first to defend the hypothesis of a third revolution abroad (**Berkman, Jartschuk, Volin**). In 1921, the Prague newspaper *Volia Rossii* published a report titled *Pravda o Kronshtadte* (The Truth About Kronstadt), fully documenting all issues of the *Izvestiia* (Notifications) the Provisional Revolutionary Committee of the Sailors, Red Army Soldiers and Workers of

the City of Kronstadt had published from 3 to 16 March (a German translation can be found in *Dok.*, 297–515). The authors of the report felt the significance of the KR lay in the fact that it had >forced the Communists to renounce their own economic policy, that is, the very Communism for which they supposedly carried out the October Revolution, spilled seas of blood, and destroyed Russia.< (*Dok.*, 338) However, the authors continue, the communists >would not agree to allow discussion of the question of power<, preferring instead to >eliminate food requisitioning, to restore trade, to make concessions to foreigners and to concede Russian land and Russian population to Poland, [rather] than to give, if even just to socialist parties, the right of free speech, press, assembly<. (339) The rebellion had shown, in the authors' verdict, that >in the people, and only in the people, there is a huge life-force, and that it and it alone may, in the center, shake loose and overturn the Bolsheviks< (*ibid.*).

In 1922, Alexander **Berkman** took the view that the KR had been the first step towards an >inevitable< third revolution. It had >proved that the Communist Party dictatorship and the Russian Revolution are opposites [...] and mutually exclusive<. **Berkman** describes the communist state as >itself the most potent and dangerous counter-revolution< (1922, 17, 26). Klaus **Gietinger** built on this assessment in 2011: Upon >the civil war having been concluded successfully<, the >revolution had been defeated as well<, as the Bolsheviks had >definitively transformed themselves into counterrevolutionaries< by virtue of >failing to reverse the disempowerment of the soviets in the army, at the workplace and in politics< (30).

Berkman believed the Kronstadt rebels had made a fatal mistake by not conducting an offensive on the mainland: >Rebellion should be vigorous, striking unexpectedly and determinedly. [...] A rebellion that localizes itself, plays the waiting policy, or puts itself on the defensive, is inevitably doomed to defeat.< According to this argument, the KR >repeated the fatal strategic errors of the Paris Communards< (1922, 25). In drawing these conclusions, **Berkman** was more or less in agreement with reflections Lenin had formulated on the eve of the October Revolution, in *Marxism and Insurrection* and *Advice of an Onlooker* (CW 26, 22-27, 179-181).

In *The Unknown Revolution*, published posthumously in 1948, **Volin** (i.e. Vsevolod Eikhenbaum) took the view that the KR had been >the first entirely independent attempt of the people to liberate itself from all yokes and achieve the Social Revolution, an attempt made directly, resolutely, and boldly by the working masses themselves without political shepherds, without leaders or tutors.< In **Volin's** view, >[i]t matters little< that the rebels >still spoke of power (the power of the soviets) instead of getting rid of the word and the idea altogether and speaking instead of co-ordination, organisation, administration.< The >triumph< of >State Socialism< over the KR >bore within itself the seed of its final destruction.< The communists, >caught by the logic of events<, had shown >that they were prepared to sacrifice the goal, to renounce all their principles, to deal with anyone, so as to preserve their domination and their privileges< (1954, 223). **Volin** considered the NEP a betrayal of socialism, a counterrevolution: **Lenin** had >applied exactly the programme< he had >attributed falsely to the men of Kronstadt<, and for which he and his

associates >claimed to have fought them<. In this way, >the true meaning of the ^freedom^^ demanded by the Kronstadt rebels was completely distorted. Instead of the free creative and constructive activity of the labouring masses, an activity which would have allowed the march towards their complete emancipation to continue and accelerate, which was what Kronstadt demanded, [the New Economic Policy] was ^freedom^^ for certain individuals to trade and do business, to get rich< (222).

Following Efim **Yartchuk**, who had spoken, in 1923, of the third revolution as the >true proletarian revolution< (3), Ida **Mett** 1938, Johannes **Agnoli** and Cajo **Brendel** 1971 and **Gietinger** 2011 described the KR as a >proletarian offshoot< of the Russian revolution, this last being defined by them as bourgeois; they also described the KR as a >second Paris Commune<. On **Brendel**'s view, Kronstadt saw >a modest beginning being made with the realization of a genuine worker's democracy<. Kronstadt had involved a >resolute rejection not only of Bolshevik claims to power, but also of traditional Bolshevik conceptions of the party, challenging the party as such< (1974, XX). Much as the insurrection of the Paris proletariat in June of 1848 had marked >the moment of truth for the radical French republic<, the sailors and workers of Kronstadt had forced the Bolshevik party to >show its true face: as an institution openly hostile to workers whose only purpose was the creation of state capitalism< (XXVIII). On this view, the KR marks >the moment at which the pendulum swings farthest to the left< (XXVI) and is comparable to **Babeuf**'s conspiracy in France (1796) or the developments in Catalonia in May of 1937, all of them having ended in defeat due to the absence of the preconditions for proletarian victory (XXI).

In making these claims, **Brendel** was also positioning himself in the debate, still ongoing today, over whether the program of the KR had any chance of being implemented given the international balance of power and the situation in Soviet Russia. Like most other authors, **Brendel** believes the answer is no: >What was described as the ^third revolution^^ was nothing but an illusion in the agrarian Russia of the time with its comparatively small population of workers and its primitive economy<. The significance of the KR lay in the notions of the >commune< and the >freely elected Soviet<, which had provided the >model for a proletarian revolution and worker power< (XXIX).

Avrich is also unwilling to entertain the possibility of >a rebel victory<. Its discontent notwithstanding, the people, exhausted by war, feared >a White restoration more than they hated the Communists< (1970, 218). **Kool** and **Oberländer** hold that the KR's program was >no doubt utopian under the circumstances<; the rebels had proclaimed the >watchwords of October<, but these had proven >impossible to implement in practice<. >Development of a modern industrial sector< had proven incompatible with a >combination of barter and local autonomy< (1967, 289). The statements of the Kronstadt rebels revealed an >irrational faith in the soviet idea, which was to renew Russia< (**Anweiler** 1974, 252). Karl-Heinz **Gräfe** takes a different view. To him, the question of whether the >outlines of an alternative to Soviet Russia's social conditions might have been realized< remains >open< (2011, 22).

The left Menshevik Julius **Martov** held that the KR's broad range of supporters presented the >possibility of a proletarian unity front< that could have advanced the revolution, as well as the possibility of struggling for

such revolutionary progress without playing into the hands of the counterrevolution (Ščetinov 1999, 25). **Lenin** responded to this by reminding **Martov** of **Milyukov's** tactic: >It does not matter whom we support, be they anarchists or any sort of Soviet government, as long as the Bolsheviks are overthrown, as long as there is a shift in power; it does not matter whether to the right or to the left, to the Mensheviks or to the anarchists, as long as it is away from the Bolsheviks. As for the rest - ^we^^, the Milyukovs, ^we^^, the capitalists and landowners, will do the rest ^ourselves^^; we shall slap down the anarchist pygmies, the Chernovs and the Martovs< (CW 32, 359 et sq.). Viktor **Serge** shared this view. In 1937, he wrote, in *Proletarian Revolution*: >Rebellious Kronstadt was not counterrevolutionary, but its victory would inevitably have entailed counterrevolution< (qtd. in **Mett** 1938/1974, 84).

Trotsky, who was criticized especially fiercely by the anarchists for his role in the suppression of the KR, continued to defend his assessment of the insurrection as late as 1938; this assessment corresponded to that of CPSU(b). **Trotsky** described the KR as >only an episode in the history of the relations between the proletarian city and the petty-bourgeois village<, one that differed from other petty-bourgeois movements and uprisings in Russia >only by its greater external effect< (103). On **Trotsky's** view, the KR was >an armed reaction of the petty bourgeoisie against the hardships of social revolution and the severity of the proletarian dictatorship< (105), as well as a >mortal danger< to said dictatorship, notwithstanding the participation of skilled workers and engineers, which had represented only a >negative selection< of sorts. **Trotsky** asked: >Simply because it had been guilty of a political error, should the proletarian

revolution really have committed suicide to punish itself?< (ibid.).

In 1970, **Avrich** situated the KR not only within the context of the larger crisis of 1921, but also within the tradition of spontaneous insurrections Russia has experienced throughout its history: >Yet Kronstadt presents a situation in which the historian can sympathize with the rebels and still concede that the Bolsheviks were justified in subduing them.< Nevertheless, no actions taken by émigré Whites could >excuse any atrocities which the Bolsheviks committed against the sailors< (5 et sq.).

In Western studies, parallels were often drawn to crises in other state socialist countries: from the KR in March 1921 >through June 17, 1953, in East Germany, and on through October 1956 in Hungary and Poland, the revolutionary rebirth of the councils in a struggle against Bolshevik dictatorship runs its course< (**Anweiler** 1974, xvi). In a discussion of the emergence of *Solidarność* in Poland, Iring **Fetscher** drew attention to the anarcho-syndicalist views of the Kronstadt rebels and the worker opposition within the RCP(b), seeing in them the beginnings of a genuine worker democracy within >actually existing socialism<. He commented: >If the reform is successful, the Polish party leadership could become the most firmly established within the entire ^socialist camp^^< (1980, 33). What was received in a fundamentally skeptical way was the fact that in their resolution, the Kronstadt rebels had demanded liberties only for socialist parties, just as they had only demanded the release of left-wing prisoners: >The resolution was not, however, democratic in our sense< (**Gosztony** 1982, 25). In the Soviet Union, and following **Lenin**, the KR was long perceived as a counterrevolutionary undertaking, and its

significance downplayed. >Anti-Soviet Kronstadt mutiny< (*Sovietskaya Istoritseskaya Enziklopediya*, vol. 8, 1965, 178) and >counterrevolutionary action of part of the Kronstadt garrison and Baltic Fleet crews, organized by Social Revolutionaries, Mensheviks, anarchists and White Guards, with the support of foreign imperialists< (*Sovietskaya Voennaya Enziklopediya*, vol. 4, 1977, 479) – such were the basic patterns of interpretation. The very title of one of the few longer studies, *Liquidation of the Anti-Soviet Mutiny in Kronstadt* (**Semanov** 1973), underscores its fundamentally derogatory portrayal of the KR. During the period of Stalinist terror, the discontent of the Kronstadt rebels, which had led to the outbreak of the rebellion, and the failure of the first attack on Kronstadt were linked to Bolsheviks who had fallen from favor, such as **Trotsky**, **Zinoviev**, **F. F. Raskolnikov** and **M. N. Tukhachevsky** (cf. **Žakovščikov** 1941).

Tentative departures from this line of interpretation repeatedly met with immediate criticism. This was the case, for example, with **Semanov**'s statements on the composition of the two battleship crews (cf. **Ščetinov** 1973, 110 et sq.). As late as 1984, careful attempts at a more nuanced assessment – namely that the KR had represented a crisis of power brought about by the Bolsheviks' own failings, a position defended by **E. A. Ambarzumov** in an essay on **Lenin**'s analysis of the crisis of 1921 – were sharply rejected (**Bugayev** 1985).

It was only in the course of perestroika and glasnost that a new interpretation was able to assert itself. In January of 1994, this led to the rehabilitation of the Kronstadt rebels by **Boris Yeltsin**. The repression the rebels had been subjected to was declared unlawful, and it was decided to

raise a monument in their honor in the fortress city (cf. **Naumov/Kosakovsky** 1997, 6). Source editions (*Kronštadtskaya tragediya 1921 goda* and **Naumov/Kosakovsky**) made new materials available to scholars and allowed for a more nuanced view. Yet scholarly studies in the strict sense (e.g. **Elizarov** 2004) remained few and far between, as the Kronstadt rebels' goal of establishing a council democracy met with incomprehension or utter disapproval in post-1991 Russia: >If the dictatorship of the white generals had been successfully imposed in the country, it would, on balance, have caused far less harm, for the simple reason that the white generals did not proclaim the goal of realizing a ^grand utopia^^ that revolutionizes Russia's traditional economic, social, political and cultural foundations in their entirety< (**Ščetinov** 1999, 27).

9. The KR and its bloody suppression were, so to speak, the >original sin of the Bolshevik revolution< (**Bock** 2011, 6). The RCP(b)-led Soviet government fought part of its original social base with brutal violence, without considering the possibility of peaceful negotiations. Most of the rebels were not opposed to Soviet power and the prospect of Russia developing in a socialist direction. They thought of themselves as carrying forward the revolutionary intentions of 1917, as protagonists of the third revolution - a revolution within socialism and for socialism.

Had they been successful, the Kronstadt rebels would have had to wage a two-front war: against the Bolsheviks, who were not willing to relinquish their unlimited power, and against the counterrevolutionary forces that sought to restore the power of the bourgeoisie and the landowners.

Had the Bolsheviks been toppled, the divergent views within the PRC, which had remained under the surface during the common struggle against the communists, would have become apparent, and existing divisions would have been deliberately aggravated by party leaders in Russia and abroad. The renewed Soviets would hardly have been able to stand up to the counterrevolution, which would have enjoyed international military, financial and propagandistic support. This is what **Lenin** had in mind when he commented, in 1921: >I believe that there are only two kinds of government possible in Russia - a Government by the Soviets or a Government headed by a tsar< (CW 36, 538). By the former, he meant a government led by the RCP(b).

The KR became a >menacing portent< (**Bock** 2011, 5) of the failure of the state-socialist system introduced in the Soviet Union. The necessary lesson was not learned and suppression (tacitly) became the response of choice whenever this system faced opposition movements (East Germany in 1953, Hungary in 1956, Czechoslovakia in 1968, China in 1989).

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-->anarchism, anarcho-syndicalism, Bolshevization, civil war, class rule, coercion, commune, communism, council communism, councils/council system, counterrevolution, crisis, criticism of Soviet Union, democracy/dictatorship of the proletariat, glasnost, hegemony, insurrection, intra-party democracy, New Economic Policy, new type of party, October Revolution, Paris Commune, parties, perestroika, persecution of communists, power, relation of forces, revolution, socialism, socialist state of law, soviet, Soviet society, state, state monopoly capitalism, violence, war, war communism, worker control, worker state/worker and peasant state, working class

-->Anarchismus, Anarchosyndialismus, Arbeiterklasse, Arbeiterselbstverwaltung, Arbeiterstaat/ Arbeiter- und Bauernstaat, Aufstand, Bolschewisierung, Bürgerkrieg, Demokratie/Diktatur des Proletariats, Gewalt, Glasnost, Hegemonie, innerparteiliche Demokratie, Klassenherrschaft, Kommune, Kommunismus, Kommunistenverfolgung, Konterrevolution, Kräfteverhältnis, Krieg, Kriegskommunismus, Krise, Macht, Neue Ökonomische Politik, Oktoberrevolution, Pariser Kommune, Parteien, Partei neuen Typs, Perestrojka, Räte/Rätesystem, Rätekommunismus, Revolution, Sowjet, Sowjetische Gesellschaft, Sowjetkritik, Sozialismus, sozialistischer Rechtsstaat, Staat, staatsmonopolitischer Sozialismus, Zwang