

I.B. PROGRAM

The Russian Revolution
1917-1921

A Short History

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Oppositions

The Trade-Union Debate

The Reds achieved military victory in the Civil War, but at a great cost both in terms of loss of life, and of placing enormous strains on the country's economy and society. As long as the Civil War continued, these tensions were contained, but as the war came to an end they began to erupt in a wave of discontent which swept the country. In the countryside there were peasant uprisings as a response to the government's requisition policies and the attempts to impose collectivist forms of agriculture. In August the provinces of Tambov and Voronezh were engulfed by the peasant rebellion led by A. S. Antonov. There were similar uprisings in the Ukraine and in the Volga region. These manifestations of peasant discontent were declared by the Soviet authorities to be inspired by *kulaks* or 'White Guards' and put down by military force.

Even sympathetic visitors to Soviet Russia in 1920 were struck by the harshness of the regime and its unwillingness to countenance any kind of opposition. It had become bureaucratic, enmeshed in red tape, and involved in corruption and privilege. Members of the Bolshevik Central Committee had now given themselves the entitlement to a special 'Kremlin ration' so that they could enjoy white bread, rice, butter, meat and wine. Bukharin and Chicherin were among those who retained a Spartan life style. Delegations of foreign socialists were treated to sumptuous banquets, well aware that in the Moscow streets people died of hunger.¹ During the Civil War the Communist Party's power had grown enormously. The actions of the Socialist Revolutionaries and the Mensheviks in taking up arms against the Soviet regime allowed the Bolsheviks to class them as counter-revolutionary and exclude them in the middle of 1918 from the Soviets. The further political activity of these parties was on Communist terms. The elimination of any competition from other socialist parties established the monopoly of political power by the Communist Party and completed the process begun in October 1917.²

By the spring of 1919, the CEC had lost all power to the Central Committee of the Communist Party. At the Eighth Party Congress the process of political centralization was carried further by the delegation of some of the Central

¹ V. Brovkin, ed. and trans., *Dear Comrades: Menshevik Reports on the Bolshevik Revolution and Civil War* (Stanford, CA, 1991), p. 210.

² L. Schapiro, *The Origin of the Communist Autocracy* (2nd edn), (London, 1977), pp. 151-52.

Committee's functions to the Political Bureau (Politburo) Secretariat. In this way the Politburo became the highest decision-making body. According to Osipov, 'the Politburo dealt with the most important questions, but it was not for general conversation'.

The Orgburo also dealt with the appointment and removal of party members. The approval of the Politburo was required for the Politburo as the important decisions. The Politburo was the highest body in which party members were elected. The Politburo was presided over by the Secretariat was presided over by the Politburo. It was replaced by N. N. Krestinskiy in 1920. In 1921 it was replaced by L. P. Serebriakov and in 1922 by the Politburo of Trotsky.

As a measure against the growth of the Party Congress created a Peasants' Inspection (Rabotnikovskaya Inspeksiya) according to Trotsky, it was a measure to improve the rate, it made insufficient progress to improve the rate, it made insufficient progress to impress the oppositionists.

The proletariat, whom the Bolsheviks had freed from the Civil War in a part of the country, remained in industry were particularly frequent victims of the type of exploitation which were more likely to be found in the country during the Civil War and less with the Communist Party.

The trade unions, however, were not interested in production than the interests of the workers. The Congress of Trade Unions in 1920 created committees with the trade unions in the factory branch of the trade unions. The Trade Unions resolved to improve the trade union, and to strengthen the trade union.

During the Civil War the number of industrial workers was decreasing number of industrial workers. The Congress of Trade Unions had to deal with the fact that the unions had become responsible for the welfare of every worker should be a trade union. The trade unions had obtained a foothold in the trade unions of the State and the trade unions of independence.

The close association between

³ L. Trotsky, *Stalin ii* (London, 1957), p. 152-33.

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 152-33.

Committee's functions to three bodies appointed by it. These were the Political Bureau (Politburo), the Organization Bureau (Orgburo) and the Secretariat. In this way the Politburo became the effective decision-making body. According to Osinskii, the Politburo of five people decided all the most important questions, while the plenary session of the Central Committee met for general conversation.³

The Orgburo also consisted of five people, its function being the appointment and removal of party members from important posts, initially with the approval of the Politburo. The Secretariat, which was later to supersede the Politburo as the important seat of power, had the function of keeping track of which party members were actual or potential oppositionists and replacing them with those willing to carry through the official policies of the day. The Secretariat was presided over by Sverdlov until his death in 1919. He was replaced by N. N. Krestinskii, who proved unequal to the task of rooting out oppositionists, and in 1920 the Secretariat was reinforced by the addition of L. P. Serebriakov and Preobrazhenskii, who, like Krestinskii, were supporters of Trotsky.

As a measure against the growth of bureaucracy and red tape, the Eighth Party Congress created a new commissariat, that of the Workers' and Peasants' Inspection (Rabkrin). This was headed by Stalin under whom, according to Trotsky, it soon became 'a hotbed of political intrigue'. At any rate, it made insufficient headway in the campaign against bureaucracy to impress the oppositionists.⁴

The proletariat, whom the Soviet regime claimed to represent, emerged from the Civil War in a particularly enfeebled state. Those workers who remained in industry were poorly paid, under-nourished, poorly housed and frequent victims of the typhus and cholera epidemics which swept the country during the Civil War years. The workers identified themselves less and less with the Communist Party, seeing the trade unions as organizations which were more likely to represent their interests.

The trade unions, however, had evolved more towards safeguarding production than the interests of the workers. In January 1918 at the First Congress of Trade Unions, it had been decided to merge the factory committees with the trade unions. Henceforth the factory committee became the factory branch of the trade union. A year later the Second Congress of Trade Unions resolved to unite all workers in a given enterprise in a single trade union, and to strengthen the production principle of the unions.

During the Civil War, trade-union membership increased, despite the decreasing number of industrial workers. This was because the Second Congress of Trade Unions had made union membership compulsory. Since the unions had become responsible for labour discipline, it was essential that every worker should be a union member. The Mensheviks, who still maintained a foothold in the trade unions, deplored their tendency to become adjuncts of the State and the Bolshevik Party, and advocated trade-union independence.

The close association between the State and the trade unions, on the other

³ L. Trotsky, *Stalin* ii (London, 1969), p. 151.

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 152-33.

hand, had the effect of investing the trade unions with some State functions, not only at the centre but also at the factory-committee level. They were involved in appointing managers of enterprises and in some management functions. Often the trade unions' activities encroached on and duplicated the functions of factory management. Tensions and conflicts were apt to result.

On 25 August 1919, the question of the relations between the institutions of Vesenkha and the trade unions was discussed at a session of the Presidium of Vesenkha. This arose in connection with the fact that the Central Committee of the Union of Metal Workers, chaired by Shliapnikov, had attempted to appoint the management of some enterprises in the industry. Rejecting such claims as illegal, Vesenkha drew up a set of guidelines, reserving for itself all management functions. Some trade unions, however, continued to demand that trade unions be given the power to run industry. Shliapnikov, for one, believed that all the rights and functions in the sphere of production ought to belong to the trade unions.

Trotsky, on the other hand, thought that for the sake of efficiency the trade unions should not be divorced from the State but should be gradually merged with State institutions. This doctrine emerged following Trotsky's appointment to the Commissariat of Transport in March 1920. He had been charged with trying to remedy the desperate situation on the railways, as the transport system was threatened with complete breakdown, which in turn would have incalculable economic consequences.

In tackling the country's transport problems, Trotsky found that – as he had foreseen when elaborating his plans for the militarization of labour – one of the obstacles he confronted was the interference of the railwaymen's union. The People's Commissariat of Transport had modelled its institutions on those of the Red Army. They were run not by committees, as in other commissariats, but by individuals, who tended to be professional transport specialists. Each was shadowed by a commissar – exactly as military commanders were. And just as the Red Army had its Chief Political Administration of the Revolutionary Council of the Republic, so the Commissariat of Transport had its own Chief Political Administration – Glavpolitput. This institution was created by Trotsky in March 1920 and its function was to root out slackness and indiscipline on the railways by the imposition of harsh penalties on all who were found guilty. Trotsky did not enlist the services of the railwaymen's union in this campaign but by-passed it. When the railwaymen's union objected, the Central Committee of the Communist Party decided to depose the leadership of the railwaymen's union and replace it with a new committee, known as Tsektran.⁵

When the Fifth Conference of Trade Unions met in Moscow from 2–6 November 1920, Trotsky urged that the duplication of responsibility between the trade unions and the administrative organs, which had given rise to so much confusion, should be eliminated. This could only be done by the transformation of the trade unions into production unions. If the leaders of the unions objected, they would be 'shaken up' in the same way as the transport unions had been shaken up by the imposition of military methods.

The prospect of the Tsektran model being extended to other trade unions

⁵ L. Kritsman, *Geroicheskii period velikoi russkoi revoliutsii* (Moscow, 1925), pp. 104–105.

alarmed Communist trade unionists, prompting them to dissociate themselves from Trotsky's ideas. The Latvian trade unionist, Janis Rudzutaks, led the campaign, saying that the military methods proposed by Trotsky were sheer nonsense and nothing more than a bureaucratic ploy. Rudzutaks condemned especially the attachment of political sections to the trade unions, arguing that these would either replace the trade unions entirely or be absorbed within the trade-union structure. The conference ended by endorsing the theses proposed by Rudzutaks, which formed the basis for the position of the Central Committee majority. The debate on the trade unions which followed threatened to create a serious split within the Bolshevik Party, and placed Lenin and Trotsky on opposite sides of a deep ideological divide.⁶ At the same time, Shliapnikov and other members of the Workers' Opposition were also putting forward a view on the subject of the trade unions. Trotsky and the Workers' Opposition represented the opposite ends of a political spectrum. Whereas Trotsky wanted the trade unions to become part of the State apparatus, Shliapnikov wanted the organs of the State to become part of the trade unions. The Workers' Opposition demanded that the ruling institution of the economy should be the 'All-Russian Congress of Producers'. Provincial, regional and district producers' councils would be elected from below. It also demanded that there should be a unified economic plan for the rational utilization of economic resources and the distribution of goods. It demanded that a plan be drawn up for achieving the productive levels of 1913 within a set number of years. On immediate practical issues, the Workers' Opposition sought the equalization of wages, free distribution of food and basic necessities to all workers, and the gradual replacement of money payments by payments in kind.⁷

Aleksandra Kollontai put the theoretical case for the Workers' Opposition in a pamphlet distributed to party members during the Tenth Party Congress in 1921. Kollontai's pamphlet, *The Workers' Opposition*, is significant as an early analysis of the bureaucratic degeneration of the Soviet state. The root causes of this she considered to be the influence of bourgeois specialists. This influence had stifled the workers' initiative and left them passive and apathetic. Kollontai called for a return to the elective principle, eliminating bureaucracy by making all officials answerable to the public at large. She advocated greater openness within the party, freedom of expression and greater democracy. She also called on the party to purge itself of non-proletarian elements, and make itself truly a workers' party. Kollontai reminded her readers of Marx's dictum that 'the liberation of the working class was the task of the working class itself', a principle which directly contradicted Lenin's conception of what the Communist Party ought to be.⁸

Like the Workers' Opposition, the Democratic Centralist group believed that greater rights should be given to the trade unions in the running of the economy. The Democratic Centralists consisted mainly of long-standing

⁶ P. A. Garvi, *Professional'nye soiuzy v Rossii v pervye gody revoliutsii (1917-1921)* (New York, 1981), pp. 86-87.

⁷ *O roli professional'nykh soiuзов v proizvodstve* (Moscow, 1921), pp. 59-61.

⁸ M. P. Kim, ed., *Lenin i kul'turnaia revoliutsiia: Khronika sobytii (1917-1923 gg.)* (Moscow, 1972), pp. 250-58; A. Kollontai, *Selected Writings of Aleksandra Kollontai*, trans. with an introduction and commentaries by A. Holt (London, 1977), p. 191.

members of the Bolshevik Party, such as Osinskii and Saprnov, who had been Left Communists in 1918. They thought that after it had come to power, the party had betrayed its own democratic ideals, as set out in Lenin's *State and Revolution*. They opposed the bureaucratic centralism of Lenin's Central Committee and advocated greater freedom within the party, insisting that every important question should be discussed by the party rank-and-file before decisions were taken. They believed that the Central Committee should not manage the party but should only give it general direction. Thus, while the Democratic Centralists upheld the Leninist principle of party organization and only criticized individual shortcomings, the Workers' Opposition questioned the very theoretical basis on which the Bolshevik Party was constructed.⁹

Lenin's position on the trade unions was an intermediate one between Trotsky's and Shliapnikov's. He argued that Trotsky was mistaken in thinking that the trade unions did not need to defend the workers because the State was a 'workers' State'. In Lenin's opinion, the existing Soviet State was such that the entire organized proletariat had to defend itself. 'We must,' Lenin stated 'use these workers' organizations for the defence of the workers from their state and for the defence by the workers of our state.' This position was set out in the 'Platform of the Ten' on 14 January 1921, signed by Lenin, Zinoviev, Stalin, M. P. Tomskii, Kalinin, Ruzdutsaks, S. A. Lozovskii, Petrovskii and Artem. This was to be the approach to the trade-union question adopted by the Tenth Party Congress in March 1921. Bukharin initially had held a position midway between Trotsky and Lenin, but latterly allied completely with Trotsky.

Kronstadt

Coinciding with the fourth anniversary of the February revolution of 1917, a rebellion broke out at the naval base in Kronstadt. The character of this uprising and the ruthlessness of its suppression gave a clear indication that the democratic ideals which had inspired the February revolution had been abandoned by the Communist government. In this sense the Kronstadt rebellion marks the end of what has been called 'the heroic period of the Russian revolution'.

To some degree the origins of the Kronstadt mutiny were analogous to the debate on the trade unions. Like the Red Army and the Commissariat of Transport, the navy had its political section – 'Pubalt'. This was felt by the sailors to be a bureaucratic and authoritarian organization, and at the Second Conference of Communist Sailors of the Baltic Fleet on 25 February 1921, several speakers demanded the abolition of political sections in the navy, a demand which was to re-emerge in the course of the Kronstadt rebellion.

In mid-February industrial unrest evoked by economic hardship broke out in Moscow. Factory meetings were succeeded by strikes and demonstrations, as workers took to the streets to demand 'free trade', higher rations and the

⁹ A. Ciliga, *The Russian Enigma* (London, 1979), pp. 274–77.

abolition of grain requisitions. The industrial unrest quickly spread to Petrograd, where a number of large factories, including the Putilov works, came out on strike between 23 and 28 February. The workers demanded winter clothing and a more regular issue of rations. Besides these economic demands, proclamations appeared putting forward more political ones, such as the liberation of all arrested socialists, freedom of speech, press and assembly for all workers and free election of factory committees.¹⁰

On 24 February, the Petrograd Committee of the Communist Party, headed by Zinoviev, organized a defence committee consisting of Lashevich, a member of the Military Revolutionary Council of the Republic, N. M. Antselovich, a member of the Council of Trade Unions, and D. N. Avrov, the commander of the Petrograd military district. The Defence Committee ordered every city district to set up its own 'revolutionary *troika*' to prevent the spread of disturbances. On the same day martial law was proclaimed throughout the city, with an 11 p.m. curfew imposed, and all gatherings on the streets prohibited at any time. Arrests of strikers multiplied, and several trade unions were dissolved, their members being turned over to the Cheka.

On 26 February the crews of the two battleships the *Petropavlovsk* and the *Sevastopol*, held an emergency meeting and decided to send a delegation to Petrograd to find out what was happening in the city. It visited a number of factories, at that time surrounded by troops and military cadets. On the 28th, the sailors returned to Kronstadt and reported what they had seen. In sympathy with the grievances of the Petrograd strikers, and aghast at how the latter were being treated by the authorities, the crew of the *Petropavlovsk*, presided over by the naval clerk S. M. Petrichenko, voted for a resolution containing a number of significant demands. There were as follows:

1. In view of the fact that the present Soviets no longer expressed the will of the workers and peasants, immediately to hold new elections by secret ballot, the pre-election campaign to have full freedom of agitation among the workers and peasants.
2. To establish freedom of speech and of the press for workers and peasants, for the Anarchists, and for left socialist parties.
3. To secure freedom of assembly for trade unions and peasant organizations.
4. To call a non-party conference of the workers, soldiers and sailors of Petrograd, Kronstadt and the Petrograd province no later than 10 March 1921.
5. To liberate all political prisoners of the socialist parties, as well as all workers, peasants, soldiers and sailors imprisoned in connection with the labour and peasant movements.
6. To elect a commission to review the cases of those held in prison and concentration camps.
7. To abolish all political sections in the armed forces, because no political party should be given special privileges for the propagation of its ideas, or receive the financial support of the government for such purposes.

¹⁰ P. Avrich, *Kronstadt 1921* (Princeton, NJ, 1970), pp. 37–45.

Instead of the political sections there should be established educational and cultural commissions, locally elected and financed by the government.

8. To abolish immediately all the road-blocks set up between town and countryside.
9. To equalize the rations of all workers, with the exception of those employed in trades injurious to health.
10. To abolish the Communist combat detachments in all units of the army, as well as the Communist guards kept on duty in factories. Should such guards be required, they should be appointed in the army from the ranks, and in the factories according to the judgement of the workers.
11. To give the peasants full freedom of action in regard to their land, and also the right to keep cattle, on condition that the peasants manage with their own means; that is, without employing hired labour.
12. To request all branches of the army, as well as military trainees, to concur in the resolutions.
13. To demand that the press give proper publicity to the resolution;
14. To appoint an itinerant bureau of control.
15. To permit free handicraft production by one's own efforts.¹¹

The resolution passed by the Kronstadt sailors constitutes an indictment of the Soviet regime at that time. It predicates a country in which there were not the most elementary civil rights. There was no freedom of assembly, speech or of the press. There was a political system in which one party had a monopoly of power and expression. It was a system which did not reflect the will of the people, and one which allowed imprisonment for political reasons without trial.

The Kronstadt rebels were, however, not purists in the matter of political pluralism or civil rights. They championed only working people and socialist parties, not people as a whole or political parties in general. This was an attitude the Kronstadters shared with all those who had advocated a government of all the socialist parties back in the autumn of 1917. But the converse of this circumstance is that the Kronstadt resolution is a document embodying socialist assumptions. Many of the ideas it contained were ones earlier subscribed to by the Bolshevik Party. That it no longer did so was no doubt a reason why Communist leaders in the spring of 1921 found the Kronstadt uprising so subversive. The Kronstadt sailors, moreover, were a group of people who had been in the forefront of the Russian revolutionary movement in the tumultuous year of 1917.

It is also significant that the resolution so little reflects the sectional interests of the Kronstadt sailors but expresses the grievances of all the working people among Russia's population – the peasants and the workers especially. It was a condemnation of the 'war communist' system and the Communist Party's system of rule.

Some of the demands in the resolution could have been conceded by the Communist government, and in fact some key economic points were about to be conceded at the Tenth Party Congress, when the war communist system

¹¹ *Pravda o Kronshadtte* (Prague, 1921), p. 47.

was abandoned. But those demands which attacked the Communist monopoly of political power could not have been met without the collapse of the existing regime. This was an important factor in the way the Soviet government chose to deal with the Kronstadt rebels.

On 1 March a mass meeting of sailors, soldiers and workers took place on Kronstadt's Anchor Square. It was attended by 12,000–15,000 people. It was presided over by P. D. Vasiliev, the Communist chairman of the Kronstadt Soviet. Kalinin, the chairman of the CEC, and N. N. Kuzmin, the commissar of the Baltic Fleet, had been invited to speak. Kalinin, Kuzmin and others who tried to defend the Soviet regime, were heckled and shouted down. The officials were followed, however, by speakers from among the sailors, who were deeply critical of current economic policies. One sailor, P. Perepelkin from the *Sevastopol*, read the resolution adopted the day before on the *Petropavlovsk* and asked that it be voted upon. The resolution was carried by an overwhelming majority, only the small number of Communists present voting against. Perepelkin ended his speech by calling upon his audience to make arrangements for holding new elections to the Kronstadt Soviet, as advocated in the resolution. This suggestion of Perepelkin's was adopted, it being decided that the various military units and organizations should meet the next day to choose delegates to discuss the new elections.

On 2 March meetings took place throughout Kronstadt. With the exception of the Communists present, these meetings approved the *Petropavlovsk* resolution and elected their respective delegates. The delegates' meeting which took place in the School of Marine Engineering was again chaired by Petrichenko. Both Kuzmin and Vasiliev spoke in defence of the policies of the Soviet regime, warning that the Communist Party would not relinquish power without a fight. As there was a fear that Kronstadt might come under a military attack by the Soviet authorities, it was decided to establish a Provisional Revolutionary Committee with Petrichenko as chairman to administer the town and the fortress.

The Committee's first actions were to take precautions against Communist reprisals. This was done by arresting Kuzmin, Vasiliev, the ships' commissars and other leading figures in the local Communist party. Many other Communists fled from Kronstadt to avoid being captured, though the Provisional Revolutionary Committee only intended to hold some Communists in custody, not to threaten their lives. The fugitives, however, spread the rumour that a revolt was taking place in Kronstadt inspired by White Guards and led by a general, A. N. Kozlovskii. The Kozlovskii in question, an artillery specialist, along with other officers of the Kronstadt garrison, decided at this time to put their services at the disposal of the Provisional Revolutionary Committee.¹²

In its first proclamation the Provisional Revolutionary Committee stated that it was concerned to avoid bloodshed and that its aim was, through the joint efforts of town and fortress, to create the proper conditions for elections to the new Soviet. Later in the day the committee sent armed detachments to

¹² Kozlovskii's account, dated 13 October 1921, is reproduced in V. A. Smolin, ed., 'Kronshtadt v 1921 godu: Novye dokumenty', *Russkoe proshloe* (1991, no. 2), pp. 351–52.

occupy the arsenals, the telephone exchange, food depots, power plants, Cheka headquarters and other strategic points. By midnight the whole of Kronstadt had been secured for the rebels.

The Provisional Revolutionary Committee appreciated the value of publicity. Copies of the *Petropavlovsk* resolution were taken to the mainland and distributed in Oranienbaum, Petrograd, and other towns in the vicinity. On 3 March, the committee began to publish a daily newspaper, *Bulletin of the Provisional Revolutionary Committee of Sailors, Red Armymen and Workers of the Town of Kronstadt*,¹³ which was to appear without interruption until the 16th, the day preceding the final assault on Kronstadt.

The Communists, for their part, tried to discredit the Kronstadt mutiny in every way possible. They called it a White Guard plot, inspired by foreign powers. It was alleged that Kuzmin had been brutally handled during his captivity in Kronstadt, and had been lucky to escape summary execution. Although the Russian émigrés were delighted when they received news of the Kronstadt rebellion, there is no evidence whatever that they had been involved in its organization. And, as Victor Serge verified in a conversation with Kuzmin himself, no harm had come to Kuzmin while in custody on the *Petropavlovsk*. He and the other Communist captives were treated absolutely correctly.¹⁴ The official press studiously avoided making any examination of what the causes of the rebellion were and concealed any criticisms that were made of the Soviet regime.

On 3 March, the Soviet government issued an ultimatum calling on the Kronstaders to end their rebellion, free the arrested Communists and surrender the ringleaders to the government. A government aeroplane dropped leaflets on Kronstadt stating that Zinoviev's Defence Committee had arrested and imprisoned the families of Kronstadt sailors as hostages for the safety of Kuzmin and Vasiliev. The leaflet threatened that if any harm came to the two officials, the hostages would pay for it with their lives. The Provisional Revolutionary Committee replied with a radio message insisting on the liberation of the hostages, and announcing that the committee itself would not take reprisals against the families of Communists in Kronstadt, as it considered such methods shameful and degrading.

This exchange was followed on the 5th by an ultimatum from Trotsky demanding that the arrested commissars and other representatives of the government be released forthwith. Only those who surrendered unconditionally might count on the mercy of the Soviet Republic. At the same time Trotsky announced that he was issuing orders to prepare to quell the mutiny and subdue the mutineers by force of arms.¹⁵

If this declaration had little chance of calming passions in Kronstadt, the ultimatum issued by Zinoviev's Defence Committee on the same day had even less. It reminded its readers what had happened to Wrangel's forces, who were dying like flies of hunger and disease, and threatened that the same fate awaited the Kronstadt mutineers as well unless they surrendered within

¹³ *Izvestiia Vremennogo Revoliutsionnogo Komiteta Matrosov, Krasnoarmitssev i Rabochikh gor. Kronshadta.*

¹⁴ V. Serge, *Memoirs of a Revolutionary 1901-1941*, trans. and ed. P. Sedgwick, (Oxford, 1963), pp. 126-27.

¹⁵ *Pravda o Kronshadte*, p. 73.

24 hours. If they did, they would be pardoned; but if they resisted, they would 'be shot like partridges'.¹⁶

Alarmed at the prospect of military action being taken against the Kronstadt rebels, some Russian and foreign Anarchists in Moscow, including Victor Serge, Emma Goldman and Alexander Berkman, offered to mediate in the conflict. The offer was received indulgently by Zinoviev, but the mediation attempt ended in failure. The Petrograd Soviet proposed to send representatives to Kronstadt to look into the differences between the Kronstaders and the Soviet government. The Kronstaders, however, suspected this to be a trap, and put forward their own counter-proposal. This agreed to receive a Soviet delegation but suggested that this delegation should be supplemented by delegates freely elected by the factories and military units of Petrograd in elections monitored by representatives from Kronstadt. This response effectively undermined the only attempt at mediation between the two sides.

On 5 March, Tukhachevskii was put in charge of the military forces in Petrograd, replacing Avrov on Zinoviev's defence committee. On the evening of 7 March he began military operations against Kronstadt. Artillery battles preceded the Red Army's attempts to storm Kronstadt across the ice. This first attack, however, was beaten back by the artillery and machine-gun fire of the Kronstadt rebels.

In the days that followed, Tukhachevskii brought up reinforcements of infantry and artillery. Attacks on Kronstadt were kept up day and night, exhausting the defenders, of whom there were only some 3,800. There was great urgency on Tukhachevskii's part to capture the naval base before the ice melted, which would make an infantry attack on Kronstadt impossible. Through constant firing, the Kronstadt artillery became unusable. Both food and ammunition ran out, as no help from outside was given to the Kronstadt defenders. Contrary to the rebels' expectations, the movement did not spread to Petrograd and other working-class centres. The authorities had foreseen this danger and made sufficient economic concessions to prevent it. On 16-17 March, Tukhachevskii launched his final assault and through superiority in numbers and armaments, was able to take Kronstadt after bitter fighting.

Before Kronstadt fell, Petrichenko and other members of the Provisional Revolutionary Committee escaped to Terijoki in Finland. Kozlovskii and other military specialists who had co-operated with the committee also fled. On 20 March, 13 of the rebels were tried and shot. Several hundred more were shot without trial in Kronstadt. The remainder were transferred to other prisons on the mainland, where they were shot in small batches over the succeeding months.¹⁸

To the Anarchists Berkman, Goldman and Serge, the suppression of the Kronstadt rebellion marked a turning-point in the Russian revolution which they had originally been extremely sympathetic. It seemed to them that the great ideas of 1917, which had enabled the Bolshevik Party to bring the peasant masses, the army, the working class, as well as the bourgeoisie and gentry, were quite clearly dead. Serge believed that while the revolution was

¹⁶ Avrich, *Kronstadt 1921*, p. 146.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 149-54.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 215.

right on its side, the Soviet government had no choice but to suppress the insurrection. His reasoning was that victory for the Kronstadters would mean disaster for the country. If the Bolshevik dictatorship fell, it would be a short step to chaos, and through chaos to a peasant rising, the massacre of the Communists, the return of the émigrés and the establishment of an anti-proletarian dictatorship. For Serge the choice was between two evils.¹⁹

The Tenth Party Congress

The Tenth Party Congress, which took place from 8 to 16 March, proceeded under the shadow of the Kronstadt mutiny. Many delegates from the congress were mobilized to take part in the assault on the island fortress. Prominent among these were members of the oppositions, the Workers' Opposition and the Democratic Centralists, who were anxious to demonstrate their loyalty to the regime.²⁰

Despite their efforts to dissociate themselves from the events at Kronstadt, at the congress the oppositions were linked to the Kronstadt mutiny. Both in their different ways had challenged the legitimacy of the Communist regime by their denial that the ruling Communist Party expressed the interests of the working class. The Communist leaders' response was not to examine how it was that the interests of the party and those of the workers had parted company but to assert that neither the Kronstadt rebels nor the Workers' Opposition were authentic working-class movements.

This tactic had already been employed with regard to the Kronstadt rebellion. From the outset it had been classed as a White Guard plot, a conspiracy by the interventionist powers, a scheme by the Mensheviks and SRs – everything except what it was – a rebellion by ordinary sailors against the Communist Party's policies. The tactic had prompted the Kronstadt rebels to publish in their *Bulletin* the names of all the members of the Provisional Revolutionary Committee, together with their occupations, to demonstrate the plebeian character of their movement.²¹

In his speech at the congress on 9 March, Shliapnikov cast doubt on the proletarian composition of the Communist Party. He claimed that it was degenerating, that recently its social composition had changed radically, that there had been an influx into it of an alien petty-bourgeois element. The proportion of workers in the party had sharply declined. Shliapnikov pointed out that in the Petrograd party, iron and steel workers constituted only 2 per cent of the membership; for Moscow the corresponding figure was 4 per cent. This indicated, he said, a massive exodus of the working class from the party, which was becoming increasingly alienated from the proletariat.

At the congress session on 11 March, Bukharin denied that the Workers' Opposition was indeed an opposition by the workers; it was, he asserted, in reality a peasants' opposition. It was precisely peasant ideology which

¹⁹ Serge, *Memoirs*, p. 129.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 130.

²¹ *Pravda o Kronshtadte*, pp. 131, 158.

accounted for the erroneous views of the Workers' Opposition. This ideology did not take into account the differences in outlook that existed between the peasantry and the working class and between different strata within the working class. It overlooked the differences between the advanced elements in the working class and the mass of workers who were barely distinguished from peasants. The principle of absolute democracy advocated by both the Workers' Opposition and the Democratic Centralist group would ensure the domination of peasant interests over those of the most advanced sections of the working class. This, Bukharin contended, was what would be achieved by the Workers' Opposition's conception of a general 'Congress of Producers'. He thought that the Kronstadt uprising inspired by General Kozlovskii and the SRs was a lesser danger to the Soviet State than the petty-bourgeois infection that had manifested itself like gangrene in the strikes that had preceded the rebellion in Moscow and Petrograd.²²

Bukharin's argument was rather ingenious. It was able to discount the manifestations of worker discontent with the Soviet regime by classing them as 'petty-bourgeois'. The advanced workers – the true proletarians – supported the Soviet regime. (Because they supported the Soviet regime they showed themselves to be advanced.) Pure democracy was, therefore, undesirable because it could only drown the minority of advanced workers in the mass of petty-bourgeois workers influenced by peasant ideology.

The degree of democracy one could permit, Bukharin argued, depended on how advanced a given section of the population was. Thus, the maximum degree of democracy was found in the Communist Party, as the organization of the most advanced elements within the most advanced class. The extent of democracy diminished in less advanced organizations and was permitted least of all in the army. In this argument a special role was attributed to the working class, one in keeping with the case Lenin had made in *What Is To Be Done?* back in 1902.

Of course, Bukharin admitted, the advanced ruling party ought on occasion to make concessions to the more backward sections of the population. And this it was now doing; it was going to replace the *prodrazverstka* with a tax in kind. Here Bukharin was referring to the most important economic change introduced at the Tenth Party Congress. It was in fact the end of war communism and the introduction of the New Economic Policy (NEP). Bukharin spoke of this measure as a concession to the more backward elements of the population who were demanding freedom of trade. He described it as 'a kind of peasant Brest-Litovsk'. Clearly, Lenin, Bukharin and other members of the Soviet government thought of NEP on its introduction as a retreat from the set of policies, which taken as a whole, they now began to characterize retrospectively as 'war communism'.

The replacement of the *prodrazverstka* by a tax in kind was a measure which had been proposed for some months, but until then strenuously resisted by the Soviet government. It meant that the peasants now had to pay a tax in grain or other agricultural produce to the State, but after payment of the tax they could do with any stocks they had left as they thought fit. They could use the grain to feed themselves, increase their cultivated area or to exchange for

²² *Desiatyi s"ezd RKP(b)* (Moscow, 1963), pp. 223–25.

industrial goods. They were also allowed to sell the additional grain on the free market.²³ This last concession prepared the ground for the return of the freedom of trade and the dismantling of the war communist system.²⁴

On the question of the trade unions, the Tenth Party Congress gave its overwhelming support to Lenin's 'Platform of the Ten'. During the congress, Lenin took steps to consolidate his victory by ensuring that supporters of the platform would be in control of the party apparatus. At that time, the secretariat was in the hands of Krestinskii, Serebriakov and Preobrazhenskii – all allies of Trotsky. On the evening of 9 March, therefore, Lenin assembled some trusted delegates and with them drew up a list of approved candidates for the Central Committee. He intended that two-thirds of the Central Committee should consist of supporters of the Platform of the Ten, while the remaining third of the places should be apportioned among the representatives of Trotsky's platform, the Workers' Opposition and the Democratic Centralists. Lenin mentioned in particular that Krestinskii, Serebriakov and Preobrazhenskii should not be elected to the Central Committee, but that he thought that Shliapnikov and I. I. Kutuzov from the Workers' Opposition and Saprnov from the Democratic Centralists ought to be elected. By including some oppositionists in the Central Committee Lenin hoped to ensure that these groups were not alienated from the regime, and that they would be bound by the collective decisions of the Central Committee. As they could always be out-voted, their presence would not constitute any danger.²⁵

But, as an additional safeguard, Lenin thought it prudent to pass a resolution at the congress condemning fractionalism, dissolve all existing fractions and declare fractional activity incompatible with party membership. He believed that provision should be made for expelling even a member of the Central Committee if that member was involved in fractional activities. This would, however, require a two-thirds majority of members and candidate members of the Central Committee.

On the last day of the congress, Lenin produced two resolutions – 'On party unity' and 'On the Syndicalist and Anarchist deviation in our party'. The first of these resolutions contained the proposal to outlaw fractionalism, as Lenin had planned previously. But as a concession to the opposition groups, it included in addition the undertaking that the party would in the future take measures to respond to the points these groups had made, such as purging the party of non-proletarian and unreliable elements, combating bureaucratic practices and developing democracy and workers' initiative. The second resolution echoed the arguments Bukharin had advanced against the Workers' Opposition, by pointing out that the concept of 'producer' confused proletarians with non-proletarians and small commodity producers. Lenin was emphatic that Marxism taught that only the Communist Party was capable of organizing a vanguard of the proletariat that would be able to withstand the vacillations of the petty-bourgeois element which predominated in Russian conditions. To deny this, Lenin considered, was a syndicalist and anarchist deviation.²⁶

²³ *Resheniia partii i pravitel'stva po khoziaistvennym voprosam* i (Moscow, 1967), pp. 200–202.

²⁴ A. Nove, *An Economic History of the USSR 1917–1991* (Harmondsworth, 1992), p. 79.

²⁵ A. I. Mikoian, *Mysli i vospominaniia o Lenine* (Moscow, 1970), pp. 136–38.

²⁶ V. I. Lenin, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii* xliii, pp. 98–111.

The resolutions, which were approved by the congress, had the effect of reinforcing Lenin's doctrine on the leading role of the party, lessening the scope for intra-party disagreements and setting in motion the practice of party purges. All of these consequences were destined to make a contribution to the emergence during the 1920s of the system which was to become associated with the name of Stalin.