

From the archives of the Revolution

From the Kronstadt Sailors, Soldiers, and Workers—To the Revolutionary People of Petrograd and All Russia

Leon Trotsky
13 June 2017

This declaration by the Kronstadt Soviet was written by Trotsky after he met with the Kronstadt sailors in June to discuss how to respond to the many attacks by the Provisional Government and the bourgeois press against the naval base. It was originally published in Pravda, No. 69, June 13 (May 31) 1917. [1]

Citizens, comrades, brothers!

The name Kronstadt, borne on the glorious pages of the history of the Russian revolution, is now vilified and defamed on the pages of all bourgeois newspapers. The malicious pens of counterrevolutionary slanderers write as if we, Kronstadters, invite the people to despotism, lynch law, and anarchy, as if we carry out the torture of the tyrants and servants of Tsarism arrested by us, and finally, as if we have refused to acknowledge the authority of the Provisional Government, seceded from Russia, and established the independent Kronstadt Republic.

What a senseless lie, such pitiful and disgraceful calumny!

In Kronstadt we have not anarchy, but a sincere and firm revolutionary order. Our Soviet of Workers and Soldiers Deputies has taken into its hands authority with regards to all local Kronstadt affairs.

We are against lynch law, against all forms of unwarranted vengeance inflicted on the captive servants of Tsarism. But we are for honest, free, impartially-organized revolutionary judgment of the criminal enemies of the people. The officers, gendarmes, and policemen arrested by us in the days of the revolution themselves declared to representatives of the Government that they cannot object to their treatment at the hands of the prison system. It is true, the Kronstadt prison buildings are awful. But these are the very same prisons that were built by Tsarism for us. We have no others. And if we have detained enemies of the people in these prisons, then this is not out of revenge, but considerations of revolutionary self-preservation. We arrived at an agreement

on a relatively swift and impartial trial of the Kronstadt prisoners with representatives of the Provisional Government, ministers Tsereteli and Skobelev. And this agreement remains in full force.

To say that we do not acknowledge the authority of the Provisional Government is a pitiful fabrication! Thus far, while this government is acknowledged by the will of the organized revolutionary people, we, Kronstadters, are unable to not acknowledge the authority of the Provisional government in all general state affairs. We have stated this firmly and clearly in our resolutions, in articles in our leading publications, and, finally, in the agreement with the ministry representatives. This agreement, in which we achieved important concessions to principles of democracy, popular self-rule (the election of local representatives of the civic authority and control of military leaders) remains in full force to this day.

Have we seceded from Russia? Here is the basest, most foul slander.

Have not in the name of Russia, we Kronstadters, revolted against the old authority?

Have not the Kronstadt fighters together with the fighters of Petrograd and all Russia spilled our blood in the name of the freedom and happiness of the entire Russian people? And now, when we have overthrown the power of the Tsar and embarked on the path of the overthrow of all oppression and all forms of violence, the brotherly tie of all peoples, of all the working masses of Russia, is dearer and nearer to the heart of the Kronstadters than it has ever been.

We are for the unity of revolutionary Russia, for the unity of the working people in the struggle with its oppressors. We think, however, and this is a firm conviction of our revolutionary conscience, that the current Provisional Government, its majority made up of representatives of the landlords, factory owners, and bankers, does not want and

cannot be a genuine representative of democracy, the authoritative will of the people's revolution, and that if in the country expressions of anarchy are indeed observed, then the guilt for this lies in the bourgeois policy of the Provisional Government, which in questions of production, land, workers, diplomacy and war does not serve the genuine interests of the people, but the cause of the possessing and exploiting classes. We feel that the Petrograd and several other provincial Soviets of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies are making a mistake in supporting this government.

We fight for this, our conviction, with the honest weapon of the revolutionary word. And the bourgeois cliques, feeling that the ground is more and more slipping from underneath their feet, foreseeing that power will have to pass from the hands of the landlords and capitalists into the hands of the people—these cliques—carry out dishonest counterrevolutionary agitation in the country, abusing, trampling on, and defaming all the leading forces of the revolution and, in particular, our red Kronstadt. For these cliques—our revolutionary scorn. We oppose their poisonous word with the word of truth. But we, at the same time, express our deepest regret that the minister-socialists, and together with them the majority of the Petrograd Soviet of Workers and Soldiers Deputies, have fallen under the influence of those slandering us and declared us, in their unjust and insulting resolution, to have broken with the Russian revolution. No, comrades, the Kronstadters have not betrayed and are not betraying the banners that wave on their forts and their courts. They accuse us of violating the agreement that we concluded with representatives of the Provisional Government. We can explain such a monstrous misunderstanding only as the product of an artificially created atmosphere of thick slander and malicious suspiciousness.

We clarified in the press that the agreement we reached on May 24 was not for us a rejection of the principles of revolutionary self-rule, but, on the contrary, a decisive step along the path to securing their victory. But this clarification, from our standpoint, did not have anything to do with a renunciation of the obligations we took upon ourselves. Only trouble-makers, who would benefit from tearing up the agreement reached with the representatives of the central authority in order to destroy Kronstadt as a revolutionary seat and facilitate the work of the counterrevolution, can accuse us of treachery. Comrades and brothers, no one dares throw insulting accusations of dishonorable actions at the Kronstadters. We are not breaking our word. We, revolutionaries, are honorable people, and we are firmly convinced that our current appeal completely dispels the lies, slander, and suspicion, and reestablishes between us an indestructible bond of mutual trust.

We, Kronstadters, remain at our post, on the left flank of the great army of the Russian revolution. We hope, we believe, we are convinced that every new day will ever more open the eyes of the most backward layers of the Russian people, the most shrouded in darkness, and that the hour is near, when the working masses are united, all power in the country will transfer into the hands of the Soviet of Workers and Soldiers Deputies. To you, brothers of the revolution in Petrograd and in all Russia, we extend our hand, we, sailors, soldiers, and workers of Kronstadt. Our bond is indissoluble. Our unity is indestructible. Our loyalty is unshakeable. Down with the slanderers and dividers of the revolutionary people! Long live the Russian revolution!

Chairman of the Executive Committee of the Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies D. Lomanov.

Secretary Priselkov.

June 9 (May 27) 1917.

Kronstadt Fortress

Notes:

[1]

From the editors of Trotsky's Works in the 1920s:

The fact that we attribute this declaration of the Kronstadt Soviet to comrade Trotsky is based on the following two indications: "The Declaration of the Kronstadt Soviet about events in Kronstadt," in which is expressed confidence that "the hour is near, when the working masses are united, all power in the country will transfer into the hands of the Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies," is according to the newspapers (unfortunately, we were not able to find the corresponding place in the newspapers. *Ed.*), authored by L.D. Trotsky. (Maksakov and Nelidov, "Chronicle of the Revolution." I, 1917., pg. 50.)

In Sukhanov's "Notes of the Revolution" we read: "This is an extraordinarily written, fiery and entirely worthy proclamation. I believe that it was written by Trotsky, who was closely involved in the Kronstadt affairs. It bears a very moderate style and expresses well the "conception" at that time of the Bolshevik groups around the Leninist periphery." ("Notes on the Revolution", book 4, pg. 164).



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