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**Kronstadt 1917–1921: The Fate of a Soviet Democracy**, Israel Getzler, Cambridge University Press, ISBN: 0-521-89442-5

Originally published in 1983, this excellent study of revolutionary Kronstadt has been reprinted. While most accounts of Kronstadt tend to concentrate on the 1921 revolt against the Bolshevik dictatorship, Getzler's book spans the whole period of "red" Kronstadt. Starting in February 1917, he discusses the ups and downs of the revolution. By focusing attention on Kronstadt between March 1917 and July 1918, when actual soviet power and democracy flourished there, he presents important context with which to evaluate the Kronstadter's ***"Third Revolution"*** of March 1921.

Getzler's analysis of the continuity in terms of politics, institutions and personnel between the 1917 revolution and the 1921 revolt effectively demolishes the Bolshevik myths about Kronstadt. It confirms the anarchist accounts of the uprising, showing that the 1921 revolt was not a counter-revolutionary revolt by newly arrived peasant conscripts (the standard Leninist view). Rather, it was in solidarity with the general strike in Petrograd and quickly became an attempt to restore the soviet democracy which had been practiced in the city in 1917. He proves conclusively (using *"hard*

*statistical data"*) that the sailors of 1921 had been there since 1917 (if not before). In fact, less that 7% of the sailors on the two battleships (the ***Petropavlovsk*** and the ***Sevastopol***) who initiated the revolt had arrived there in or after 1918.

Getzler stresses that it was *"certainly the case"* that the *"activists of the 1921 uprising had been participants of the 1917 revolutions"* for the *"1,900 veteran sailors … who spearheaded it. It was certainly true of a majority of the Revolutionary Committee and of the intellectuals … Likewise, at least three-quarters of the 10,000 to 12,000 sailors — the mainstay of the uprising — were old hands who had served in the navy through war and revolution."* For example, the Maximalist Anatolii Lamanov, chairman of the Kronstadt Soviet in 1917, was also the chief editor of its newspaper (***Izvestiia***) during the 1921 revolt. He was executed as a "counter-revolutionary" by the real counter-revolutionaries, the Bolsheviks.

Equally importantly, Getzler shows that rather than being a bastion of Bolshevism in 1917 and early 18, Kronstadt regularly returned a soviet with a populist majority: a *"radical populist coalition of Maximalists and Left SRs held sway, albeit precariously,* ***within*** *Kronstadt and its Soviet."* The Bolsheviks, while often the largest single party, did not dominate Kronstadt. During the October revolution, for example, the soviet majority was made up of Left SRs and Maximalists. It was only in the January elections in 1918 that the Bolsheviks improved their position, gaining their highest ever vote during the era of multi-party soviets. This accounted for only 46% of seats in the soviet. The SRs got 21%, the SR-Maximalists 19%, non-party delegates 7%, anarchists 5% and the Mensheviks 2%. The soviet elected a Left SR as its chairman. By the April 1918 elections, as in most of Russia, the Bolsheviks found their support had decreased. The Bolshevik share of the vote dropped to 29% as compared to 22% for the SR-Maximalists, 21% for the Left SRs, 8% for the Menshevik Internationalists, 5% for the anarchists and 13% for non-party delegates.



Indeed, Bolshevik influence at Kronstadt was so weak that on April 18th, the Kronstadt soviet denounced the Bolshevik attack against the anarchists in Moscow six days previously by a vote of 81 to 57. As the author notes, the *"Bolshevisation"* of Kronstadt *"and the destruction of its multi-party democracy was not due to internal developments and local Bolshevik strength, but decreed from outside and imposed by force."* Politically Kronstadt in 1917, as in 1921, can best be summed up by the SR-Maximalists, a split from the Left SRs who were close to anarchism. The aim was "sovietism," best expressed by the slogan raised in the 1921 uprising: ***"All power to the soviets and not to parties."***

Getzler's book is essential reading for all those interested in the Russian Revolution and Kronstadt. He invokes a feel of the events of the time, presenting an engaging picture of the new, vibrant, social and political system constructed by the Kronstadters after the February revolution and the hope it provoked. As Yarchuk, an influential anarchist activist in Kronstadt, put it in 1917, *"all one has to do is take what is here in Kronstadt on a small scale in our Soviet … and built it on a large scale, and it will work there too."* This was not to be. The hope of a genuine soviet system was strangled by the Bolsheviks in 1918 before being briefly resurrected, by many of the same people, in the 1921 revolt. This book is a fitting testimony to that system and the hopes it inspired.