

SIXPENCE

**The EPIC
of the
BLACK
SEA**

Andre Marty

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THE EPIC OF THE BLACK SEA

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I. HE WHO SOWS THE WIND REAPS THE WHIRLWIND

Contrary to popular legend, the "Black Sea Revolt" was not confined to mutinies of the crews on the French warships sent to the Black Sea in 1919. It was a revolt of much larger proportions. It included the mutinies of the French troops stationed in the Southern Ukraine and the Crimea (February-May, 1919), the mutinies of the crews on the French warships in the Black Sea (April-August, 1919), the mutinies of French sailors on ships outside the Black Sea and in French ports (June-August, 1919). These revolts thus represented an immense movement against the military attack of French imperialism upon the great Socialist Soviet Republic.

Bourgeois and Social Democrats have often asserted that the primary cause of the mutinies in the Ukraine and on the Black Sea was the bad conditions which the troops and the crews had to endure. To be sure, the French soldiers and sailors on the Black Sea and in Russia were very ill-fed, badly housed, and scantily dressed for a cold country; leave was granted very seldom, and letters were a rare occurrence. Still, on the whole, they were much better off than under continuous bombardment in the trenches on the Vardar or in Champagne, or on the high seas constantly in danger of submarines and mines.

The causes of the mutinies were entirely different!

I. Against the Anti-Soviet War.

To every soldier, even the most simple, the armistice of November, 1918, had one definite and clear meaning: At last the imperialist war is over! But, then, on December 18, 1918, the 156th Division dispatched from Salonika, disembarked at Odessa; all day long the French soldiers were engaged in severe fighting, at the side of Russian White officers of the "Volunteer" Army, against Ukrainian soldiers; the shooting and the cannonade were distinctly heard on board the warships lying in the roadstead ready for battle. It was felt that this meant that the war was starting all over again! The continual skirmishes that followed the landing, and then the de-

parture for a new front and the first battles opened the eyes of the soldiers and sailors and set them thinking: "In France the war has ended, but here we are starting it all over again. And we are starting it against a people's republic!" That was the invariable comment of the soldiers and sailors.

2. The Tremendous Influence of the Socialist Revolution in Russia.

At the same time news filtered through to the soldiers and sailors about the powerful advance of the revolutionary movement in France and throughout the world. From men who had been on leave, from letters, and above all from the new recruits of the young classes, they learned about the situation in France: unemployment and high cost of living, a rising wave of strikes and huge demonstrations of workers for bread and progress, against Clemenceau's military dictatorship and against the military intervention in Russia. Similar news came from all parts of the world.

The workers of Germany, Austria and Hungary were waging an armed struggle, and revolutionary strikes were raging in Italy, Spain, Switzerland, all over Europe, even as far as the Argentine. The bourgeois newspapers were obliged to report the formation of "Soviets of workers and soldiers"—the expression of the will to fight against the bourgeois regime, which was responsible for the war; a confused expression, however, because the Social Democrats, who dominated these assemblies practically everywhere, were doing their utmost to save the bourgeoisie.

The prestige of the Socialist revolution in Russia was growing immensely. The martyred people, and above all the soldiers, saw in the Russian revolution the embodiment of the way out of the agony they had endured in the past months, the answer to the question: How to get rid, once and for all, of those responsible for our long sufferings and interminable misery, how to put an end for ever to abominable imperialist wars?

The French soldiers and sailors saw before them the revolution which was rousing the masses of the people in France.

3. Winning the Army for the Cause of the People.

It must be constantly borne in mind, however, that very little would have been accomplished had it not been for the fact that there existed in Russia a revolutionary working-class party of a new type, a party which knew how to approach the soldiers of the foreign invading armies, and always found the vital arguments that were convincing to these soldiers; a party which was able to organise

propaganda among the "enemy" troops despite the terrible conditions of the military dictatorship; a party, finally, whose members were selflessly devoted to the cause of the workers, the cause of the people, and always ready to sacrifice their lives for this cause.

It was the intelligence, the activity and the heroism of the Bolsheviks, and of the Russian workers led by them, that awakened the class-consciousness of the French toilers in military uniform.

2. HOW IT BEGAN

Towards the end of 1918, the Allied troops, by virtue of a special clause in the Armistice of November 11, had virtually replaced the German occupation troops in the Ukraine and in the Crimea. The Bolsheviks continued among the Allied troops the work by means of which they had succeeded in winning to the cause of the Russian people the Kaiser's divisions which had occupied the Ukraine and the Crimea since the beginning of the year. They naturally concentrated their efforts on the most decisive factor—the French army and navy. British finance-capital, as has always been its custom, let others do the fighting for it. The soldiers and sailors learned from the Bolshevik pamphlets and newspapers published in French that they had been assigned the role of counter-revolutionary gendarmes. These publications displayed a remarkable knowledge of the situation and of the everyday needs and demands of the French soldiers and sailors. That was why they were eagerly accepted and read. The French soldiers and sailors thus came to realise that the Bolsheviks were actually defending their interests. They became, at first, sympathisers and then friends. French headquarters employed every means "to maintain morale." It spread fantastic stories about devoured children and quartered prisoners. The Bolsheviks replied in their illegal leaflets, showing who were the real murderers, who were the butchers of the people. They explained what the October Socialist Revolution really was, what it stood for, and what it meant for the workers of the whole world.

The French Command instituted a regime of terror and murder. In the night of March 1, the heroic Jeanne Labourbe, a French teacher, and ten other comrades, five of them women, were executed without a trial—shot with revolvers by French and Russian White officers. But other heroes took their place, and the work continued.

The Military Police of the Army of the Orient, directed by the sinister Benoist, multiplied its acts of provocation, committing the worst crimes and torturing and murdering prisoners, as was the case with Ivan Smirnov, known as Lastochkin, a leading member

of the Bolshevik Party in Odessa. The French warships bombarded Kherson at close range, killing women and children. The Bolsheviks kept up their activity, and the grumbling among the troops became louder and louder. Ever more often French soldiers in Odessa could be seen protesting vehemently when Russian workers were being led to prison.

At the beginning of February, 1919, there was serious agitation in the ranks of the army; towards the end of March it became quite profound and affected even the subaltern officers. The French Army was thus partially neutralised.

We will March no more !

By the end of January the ring had closed around the southern part of Russia. The occupied zone extended from Tiraspol, in the Ukraine, and skirted the entire coast of the Black Sea. The troops protecting the rear of the Whites in the Ukraine and in the Crimea were made up of French, Greeks, Poles, Serbians and Russian Whites. The French imperialists did everything to secure a decree for general mobilisation in Rumania.

The movement developed in three principal stages :

It began with the soldiers refusing to march. That was the first form of resistance. On January 30, a battalion of the 58th Infantry (Avignon), supported by two batteries of the 2nd Mountain Artillery (Nice), was marched from Bender in Bessarabia with the object of seizing Tiraspol. At the first rat-a-tat of the machine-guns the 58th abandoned the battle and fell back, taking the artillery with them and cutting its telephone communications. The 58th went to Tiraspol, which had been captured on February 7 by the Poles supported by the 301st Armoured Car Regiment, but only after the men had been promised that there would be no fighting. The regiment was disarmed and evacuated to Morocco.

On March 7, 1919, two companies of the 176th Infantry refused to march to Kherson. They disorganised the front which was held by the Greek regiments and thereby rendered it easier for the Red detachments to capture the city. Similar incidents took place nearly everywhere. Thus, for example, the 1st Zouave Route Regiment of Africa and the 19th Artillery refused to harness the horses for their pieces at the time of the attack upon Odessa on April 5.

But the soldiers no longer confined themselves to refusing to march. A company of the 7th Pioneers, influenced by militant trade union members connected with the Bolsheviks, drove away their officers and handed over their material to the workers. It was with

great difficulty that they were prevailed upon to follow the army on its retreat to Ackerman.

On April 5, Odessa was evacuated. Whole units left the city singing the *Internationale*. Greek units often encircled the rebellious French battalions. The superior officers and the generals left the city by sea, or fled post-haste in automobiles. The French army had turned into a mob with every trace of military discipline gone. It became necessary to send it back to France.

On the Bessarabian Front, at Bender, the units of the 4th and 37th Colonial regiments again refused to fire on the Red Army.

The Revolt.

The sailors witnessed the frightful disorder that attended the evacuation of Odessa. There was hardly any discipline left on board the ships. On practically all the men-of-war the lower officers in the engine rooms made common cause with the crews. The lower officers on deck remained neutral.

It was no longer a question of merely refusing to march. Feeling was running so high that the least incident was bound to precipitate an open revolt with a demand to the General Staff to order the ships back to France. That was the second stage of the rebellion.

On April 16, at midnight, I was arrested at Galatz (Rumania), together with three other sailors, on returning on board the destroyer *Protet*, where I served as first engineer (*chef-mécanicien*). Together with several other seamen, who had left Odessa a few days before, I had worked out a plan for seizing the ship soon after she weighed anchor, taking her to Odessa and passing over to the side of the revolution. Since numerous revolutionary connections had been established on all the ships for quite some time, it was expected that the entire fleet would join the revolt. But just when the plan was on the point of execution it was denounced by three spies.

Hardly three days passed, however, when, on April 19, in the evening, the revolt broke out on board the dreadnought *France* in the Sevastopol roadstead, from where the battleships had, for two days (April 16 and 17), shelled the Red Army troops approaching the city. The next day, April 20, in the morning, the crews of the sister ships, the *France* and the *Jean-Bart*—the latter the flagship of the Admiral—gathered on deck singing the *Internationale*, and hoisted the red flag on the bowsprit. Great agitation reigned on all the other warships. Meetings were held by the crews on all the ships. In the afternoon a huge demonstration was held in the principal streets of Sevastopol, the French seamen fraternising with

the Russian workers. The enthusiasm was indescribable. Almost at the moment when the red flag was hoisted on the main mast of the *France*, the troops which had been landed from the ships left the forts and made their way to the shore. When they arrived at the quay, the sailors, singing "Down with the tyrants and the war!" flung their ammunition boxes into the sea. In the days that followed they forced the squadron to depart from Sevastopol. Before April 28 all the warships sailed for France, except the *Jean-Bart*—the Admiral's flagship—which stayed at Constantinople for about a month, during which the crew demonstrated practically every day in the streets of the city, singing the *Young Guard*.

From my prison at Galatz I succeeded in establishing contact with the soldiers (of the 4th Colonial) who guarded me, and through them with workers of the Left-wing group of the Social-Democratic Party of Rumania. On April 23 I was transferred to the heavy cruiser *Waldeck-Rousseau* which was menacing Odessa, then already in the hands of the Soviets. I succeeded in getting in touch with the crew, and on April 27 the latter, too, mutinied and hoisted the red flag.

The revolt had been prepared very carefully. The officers were driven to the stern of the ship, where they were guarded by armed members of the crew. The sailors took over the radio. Landry, the Minister of the Navy, admitted later that this had been the most serious of all the revolts. Unfortunately, a few minutes before the mutiny started, the rear-admiral, forewarned by a spy, managed to get me transferred to a torpedo-boat. I was taken to Constantinople where I was kept in a Turkish prison attached to the French embassy.

The destroyer *Fauconneau* joined the movement. On the *Waldeck-Rousseau*, a quartermaster of the engine room presented the Admiral with the ultimatum: "Either we return to France at once, or we take the cruiser to the quay in the port of Odessa." The Admiral complied with the request of the men. The warship left Odessa for France.

Similar demonstrations and mutinies succeeded one another on all the warships in the Black Sea. They continued for three months. The last mutiny took place on August 7, on the *Touareg*, which was lying outside Odessa harbour. The blockade was broken.

In France and on all the Seas.

One after the other, the warships returned to France. The mutineers, who suspected nothing amiss, were "given leave." Once

they were without arms, the "ringleaders" were arrested. Still, in spite of the rigorous government censorship, detailed information about the Russian Revolution and about the mutinies began to spread. After that, it was no longer a question of isolated revolts but of a widespread insurrectionary movement. Almost everywhere larger or smaller committees of sailors were formed, more or less secretly.

The agitation was most serious in Toulon. Despite the state of siege, the sailors held meetings on the glacis of the ramparts, having driven out the commandant (*préfet-maritime*) of the naval fortress, Vice-Admiral Lacaze. On June 11, demonstrations of sailors and soldiers took place in the city. The crew of the dreadnought *Provence*, the flagship of the First Admiral, refused to set sail for the Black Sea. The demands were: "Liberation of all the mutineers of the Black Sea, cessation of the war of intervention in Russia, immediate demobilisation."

A committee of sailors took upon itself the functions of a revolutionary committee and invited delegates of the soldiers and the arsenal workers to join it. The mounted gendarmerie and the cavalry succeeded in preventing an attack upon the naval prison, but only after a regular battle with the seamen.

Demonstrations of similar violence took place in Brest. Later, demonstrations on a somewhat smaller scale took place in other ports. On June 19 the battleship *Voltaire*, at Bizerte, refused to set sail for the Black Sea. Some of its sailors tried to spread the movement to the rest of the squadron. Upon receipt of the news of the events in Russia, demonstrations were held on all the warships—always under the same slogans. I would mention particularly the demonstration on board the cruiser *Guichen* at Itea (Greece) on June 26, and on the cruiser *d'Estrées* at Vladivostok on August 14.

In France the sailors demonstrated everywhere. Often they were joined by soldiers, as was the case in Toulouse (the 117th Heavy Artillery) on May 20.

The government could not stem this vast movement except by a mass demobilisation, by hastening to disarm many warships, and by recalling from Russia all the ships and the forces of intervention.

Thus it was that the French imperialists, who had sown the wind, reaped the whirlwind.

Following are a few episodes out of hundreds of that great epic.

3. HOW THE ARMY WAS WON OVER TO THE PEOPLE

“ . . . We must not imagine that the troops will come over to our side at one stroke, as it were, as a result of persuasion or their own conviction. . . . As a matter of fact, the wavering of the troops, which is inevitable in every really popular movement, leads to a real *fight for the troops* whenever the revolutionary struggle becomes more acute.” (Lenin, *Selected Works*, Vol. II, p. 349.)

During the first years of the propaganda for the liberation of the sailors of the Black Sea, a legend was created, which tended to represent the revolt on the Black Sea in a dangerously oversimplified and inexact light. According to this legend the French soldiers and sailors, placed in the midst of the Russian proletarians, were carried away by the general enthusiasm, threw away their arms and fraternised with the revolutionary workers. Such a conception is entirely at variance with the truth.

In a detailed study of the Moscow uprising of December, 1905, Lenin shows clearly that fraternisation is the climax of the struggle which the conscious working-class party must wage in order to win the army for the cause of the people.

Actually, the fraternisation and the revolt on the Black Sea were the result of a fierce struggle. On the one hand, the French General Staff tried hard to maintain discipline—in other words, to make sure that the mobilised workers and peasants remained at the service of the insatiable appetites of French imperialism. On the other hand, the Bolshevik Party spared no effort to awaken the class consciousness of the working people clad in soldiers' and sailors' uniforms, and to show them that their true interests demanded that they support the proletarian revolution.

To be sure, the objective situation favoured the work of the Bolsheviks: there were the bad material conditions of the soldiers and sailors, the tremendous rise of the revolutionary wave in France and throughout Europe, news of which penetrated into the army “through all pores” (letters, men on leave, etc.), and, finally, the growing prestige of the great Socialist October Revolution. But, without the systematic activity of the Bolshevik Party, without the heroic sacrifices on the part of the Communists and other revolutionary workers of Odessa, Kherson, Sevastopol, as well as of groups of class-conscious French soldiers and sailors, the French imperialists would have had sufficient time to replace their “unreliable” military forces before there was a chance for the revolt to break out. That must never be forgotten.

Even before the departure for Russia, the High Command of the Army of the Orient was worried about this revolutionary activity. In the middle of November, 1918, General Franchet d'Esperey, the commander-in-chief, warned all the commanders of the army corps and of the other units of the army and the navy that

“the moment military operations are shifted to Russian territory, there will be the danger that active revolutionary propaganda may be attempted among the troops.”

He instructed

“all the commanders of units and all the officers to take serious care of the feeding, the cantonment, and everything that can ameliorate the material conditions of the troops.”

But he wound up with the following:

“The officers must watch attentively the temper of their men; every violation of discipline must be dealt with ruthlessly and brought immediately to my attention.”

On December 8, Colonel Charpy, Chief of the Staff, himself came to explain to the soldiers of the 156th division the reason for their departure for Russia. He insisted at length that the occupation would be temporary, and that the soldiers would be excellently housed in the big towns. The next day, the 156th division was assembled at Varría. Its commander, General Borius came to speak to the men in person.

“He announced that we would soon embark,” wrote Eugène R. of the 1st African Route Regiment. The General went on to explain:

“We are not going there to fight. Incidentally, we could not fight there, since we are not at war with Russia. But you must know that there are many brigands among the Bolsheviks, common criminals who have escaped from prison and who are terrorizing, pillaging and starving the entire population, including, naturally, the workers. It is to enable this population to get food that we are going there. We want to get them something to eat.”

However, feeling was already running high among the soldiers. Thus, Eugène R. writes further:

“Two days later we were at Salonika. We were to embark the following morning. I saw secret meetings held wherever I went. Everybody was determined to refuse to leave. I loaded my rifle, cocked it, and went to bed. I could not sleep all night, ruminating on what I was going to do. I had no intention of leaving. But how was I to act? I had loaded my rifle, evidently in the hope that I would avail myself of it. What was going to happen?”

“Alas, nothing happened. We embarked in the morning without any resistance.”

The promises of the General Staff, including the promise of an early demobilisation, had achieved their purpose. Nothing happened either during the embarkation or during the forcible landing at Odessa on December 18.

What was missing was the activity of the Bolshevik Party.

During the first days of the occupation, the Command, foreseeing that revolutionary activity would be carried on among the troops, distributed leaflets and newspapers—written in French—in which the Bolsheviks were represented as bandits. The officers spread stories systematically about the torture and murder of prisoners, about the “nationalisation of women,” about a “ferocious dictatorship of a few leaders like Lenin protected by Mongolian regiments,” etc., etc. The soldiers found the same stories retold in the French bourgeois and Social-patriot press—the only newspapers they could get. There was even a belief—and the officers did everything to maintain it—that the word “Bolshevik” was derived from the word “Boche,” and that Lenin was a German agent, which was the reason why Russia had signed a separate peace and had thus enabled the Central Powers to hurl all their armies against France.

Another factor that favoured the counter-revolutionary activity was the relaxation which the sojourn in the towns of the Ukraine and the Crimea provided the troops who had come from the mountains of Serbia and Macedonia, or from the French Front. When questioned, all the soldiers answered that “one is better off here than among the bursting shells in Monastir.” Everybody remembered the months and the years of suffering, of malaria and dysentery. After the losses and frightful difficulties attending the offensive and advance of September-October, 1918, in Macedonia and Serbia, the calm of the first days was welcomed with joy. All the soldiers had the physical and moral impression that the war was over, and that they would return to France within a few days.

The Bolsheviks at Work.

But once they were installed, they began to reflect. Their quarters were mediocre or bad; the food was of the most atrocious kind; letters took an impossibly long time—easily a month or even a month and a-half—to reach them from France. Soon the Russian winter arrived. It inflicted terrible suffering on the men dressed in their usual coats, their heads covered with caps or steel helmets, and without any effective protection against the cold.

Leave of absence was practically stopped owing to the sharp

reduction in the number of effectives. And the soldiers, who could not afford any extras to their food, owing to the tremendous rise in prices, saw their officers running from banquet to banquet and from one orgy to another.

As the days rolled by everybody waited with ever-increasing impatience for the demobilisation which was so extremely slow in coming. In order to mollify the mobilised men, the government, on February 25, 1919, announced that upon their discharge from the Army the soldiers would receive a demobilisation bonus of 250 francs and an additional 15 francs for every month of active service. But on March 21 a press communiqué specified that

“demobilization will depend on the signing of the preliminary peace terms.”

All these causes of discontent had existed during the whole of the imperialist war; they had existed in addition to the frightful carnage and the terrible sufferings in the trenches. And yet, with the exception of the great movements of 1917, they had stirred up but very few revolts.

But in the Ukraine, the Crimea and in Bessarabia there were the Bolsheviks who explained to the soldiers what was the concrete reason of their distress and sufferings: the war, from which only the rich profited. The propaganda of the Bolsheviks always had the effect of immediately showing the soldiers that their most modest demands depended in the long run on the solution of the great political problems of the hour, and above all on the end of the intervention. All this was explained in such simple terms and so clearly that even the least educated understood it.

But how much patience was needed, and what organisational efforts and sacrifices the militant Bolsheviks had to make in order to learn exactly what were the temper and the demands of the soldiers and sailors, to write and print the leaflets and papers and, finally, to distribute them!

* * *

In January the first shots were exchanged with the Red Army and with the Partisans.

“They lied to us, they deceived us!” the French soldiers and sailors could be heard saying everywhere. “We are starting the war here all over again!”

Then there would appear a leaflet, or a worker propagandist or a soldier propagandist. They would explain: “Yes, you are starting the war all over again! Because the French capitalists are not yet satisfied with the riches they have stolen with the blood of the

soldiers and through the misery of the workers and peasants! Look at the mines of the Donetz Basin—they are no longer the property of your exploiters—the French capitalists—but of the Russian workers. And you have to suffer and die in order to seize these mines for the 200 ruling families, while your family is waiting for you in misery!”

Simple ideas, such as everyone could understand. The arrival of reinforcements of men and of material of every sort confirmed them further every day. The soldiers and sailors now wanted to know against whom they were fighting. Who was the enemy, and where was he to be found? Who were the Bolsheviks? What did they want?

They found prompt and clear answers to these questions in the Bolshevik leaflets.

The nonsense and lies released every day in torrents by the entire bourgeois and Social-patriot press now reacted against their own authors. Henceforth the usual comment was: *bunk!*

This marked the collapse of the counter-revolutionary propaganda, while, at the same time, the sympathy for the Russian revolutionary people was constantly growing. With each day that passed the Bolshevik work won over ever larger sections of the French army. The ever more frequent arrests and executions no longer struck fear into the hearts of the men; on the contrary, they aroused their unanimous indignation.

French soldiers wrote ever more often for the newspaper *Le Communiste*, published (illegally, of course) in French. Here is one of the articles:

The Truth About Our So-Called Voluntary Sojourn in Odessa
(A letter by French soldiers to their Russian Comrades)

Several months ago, when victory was still in the balance, Clemenceau, the man who may be described as the big dictator, fearing the wavering among the soldiers and in the rear, declared in the Chamber of Deputies:

“We will fight until we attain final victory, but, once it is attained, we shall not continue the war a single hour.”

Despite these promises, however, we are continuing the war.

When we arrived in Odessa we did not realize what the plans of our government were, and we knew nothing about the political situation in the city. On December 18, blindly obeying our officers, the servants of capital, we insulted the people whom we did not as yet know and who stand for that just Constitution: *The Soviet Republic*. Forgive us, comrades and brothers! Don't regard us as murderers, for on the day of December 18 we did not understand why we opened fire.

Today we have the right to ask why is it that when Russia was headed by an emperor, by an autocratic despot, our government was on friendly terms with her. At present everything has changed. Russia is now undeniably a republic, a Soviet republic. Are not our two sister republics akin in their ideas and tendencies? Could not they unite and work for a common cause?

Perhaps the Soviet republic is too socialistic?

The trouble is that our rulers do not express the will of the people, but are concerned about their own interests. They are suppressing our own liberty when they are sending us to stifle the international movement for social liberation of which we stand so much in need.

Our place is not here. We have parents who are waiting for our return in the districts that have been liberated from the German militarists. At a time when the most urgent and necessary task of our government should be to restore normal life in the country, both morally and materially, it is busy hindering the liberation of the Russian people.

Our choice has been made. We are waiting impatiently for the day when we will be able to relate what is happening here, and to open the eyes of the French workers whose minds have been confused by the lies of the entire government press. We are anxious to come to the aid of the Soviet republic, the republic of workers and peasants, the only truly democratic and social republic.

With friendly greetings,

A GROUP OF FRENCH SOLDIERS.*

The propaganda was constantly intensified.

Its forms were well adapted to the French: It was spread by word of mouth and, above all, by means of songs. As usually, and as had been the custom all through the war, the soldiers and sailors took popular songs of the day and changed their words. One of the most popular was unquestionably the *Odessa Waltz*, sung to the tune of “Strong Men of the Moon.” Here are its last two stanzas:

III

After eight days on the high seas
We've arrived at last in Odessa town.
The Russians celebrated the event
With cannon and *vintovka*† shots.
We were made to join the Volunteers,
A corps made up of officers,
So that we would our brothers fight—
For the Bolsheviks are workers all.

* Despite the erroneous idea about “our two sister republics” being “akin in ideas and tendencies”—is not this letter an expression of a fine class spirit?

† Russian for rifle.

Refrain:

You who run the show
Because you've got the dough
And piles of stocks and bonds,
If you want the cash,
Make haste to embark,
Ye capitalists—
For the true poilus,
Those who fought in the war,
Are determined today
Not to fight any more,
Nor their brothers to kill
Or by them be kill'd.

IV

We are enduring our bad lot
Until the day of freedom comes;
We're suffering in silence now,
For soon we'll all be goin' home.
But before we leave for France
A present we shall take along
To give it on the day of reckoning
To our deputies, to Clemenceau.

Refrain:

We'll sing to them again
This little refrain,
Until we are hoarse.
In Russia, barons and sirs,
There was no money to be got,
And that's where you lost out.
All we've got there is socks,
And these we'll bring back.
Don't put on any airs,
For we're honest and square,
And we'll deliver these socks
On your jaw.

And on the warships, after the "*Song of the Beans*" and the "*Seaman's Complaint*" (sung in the French navy since the time of Colbert!), there already resounded the immortal song of revolt and struggle—" *Hymn to the 17th.*"

In their rage, the infamous police spies murdered Jeanne Labourbe, three young washerwomen, the fine militants Michael Shilikvert and Smirnov, both leading members of the Odessa Committee of the Bolshevik Party. But the raging of the Command was in vain! They were no longer in control of their troops.

Glory to the 58th.

"Your anger was legitimate. . . .
His parents no one wants to kill
For the sake of the rich who dominate!

Salute, salute and hail,
Brave soldiers of the 17th!"

(*Hymn to the 17th.*)

The honour of having been the first to refuse to fight the Socialist Soviet Revolution belongs to the 58th Infantry Regiment (Avignon).

In January the regiment was stationed at Bender, on the right bank of the Dniester. Facing Bender, on the other side of the river, is the town of Tiraspol, which was held by the Soviets.

Here are the facts as told by participants:

On the 1st of February some of us were sent to reconnoitre in Tiraspol. We had hardly entered the town when we were made prisoners and disarmed. We were questioned for quite some time. At the end the Bolsheviks told us:

"If you, comrades, had captured us, you would have shot us. But we say to you: You are free: we know the worth of your chiefs, who are our enemies as well as yours. Here are your weapons. You may go. But tell your comrades that we wish them no harm. We are even prepared to receive them as brothers, but on one condition—that they come without arms."

We left. It was my impression, as well as that of the other comrades, that we had been thus sent as a patrol in the hope that we would become involved in hostilities which would serve as a pretext for launching a battle. The level-headedness of the Reds had thwarted that manoeuvre.

When we returned, we naturally told the incident to the whole battalion. It made a considerable impression and aroused enthusiasm. People began to see how the war should be ended.

On the 4th of February, reveillé was sounded at 4 o'clock in the morning for the 2nd battalion. The battalion was in full kit, but its destination was unknown. A detachment of the 2nd Mountain Artillery Regiment (Nice) was also to set out. Many of us took the artillerymen aside and reproached them for coming along. Finally we marched. When we arrived at the stream, the discontent became loud. "That's what it is! We are to invade Russia! It's the war again! Enough! Enough!" the men shouted.

The officer in command made a speech:

"We are just going to garrison Tiraspol, where we are to secure

our food supplies. . . . The Russians borrowed money from us, which they refuse to pay us. We shall encounter revolutionary patrols; but since they are badly commanded and lack arms, the Bolsheviks will flee, and we shall enter the town without firing a shot."

Grumbling, we set out. As soon as we came in view of the town we were formed in battle array. Then the word was passed: "No firing."

At that moment there appeared a Russian bearing the flag of truce. He asked for the "chief," our commander. He pointed out to the latter that he was on Ukrainian territory and that he must withdraw from it. The officer answered brutally: "I have orders to take Tiraspol before noon, and take it I will." The Russian then declared that the town was open to him on condition that he came without arms. The commander repeated his previous reply. "Is this your last word?" the Russian asked. "Yes," the commander replied. The Russian then told the commander that we were given 48 hours to withdraw beyond the railway line, and he assured us that there would be no bloodshed. The commander refused. The Russian then withdrew.

We advanced. When we were within two kilometres of the town we deployed for firing. Suddenly a Red machine-gun opened fire. We dropped on our bellies and lay flat in the snow. Behind us our artillery opened fire. About 3 o'clock, when the shooting died down a little, carriages packed with non-combatants, women and children, began to leave the town from the other side. When they were noticed, our artillery again opened fire, shelling the carriages. In a quarter of an hour I counted nine carriages swept with grapeshot. Women and children were seen fleeing through the plain. Incidentally, the artillerymen did not see whom they were firing at. We were revolted by this cruelty. We packed up, cut the telephone wires of the artillery, and returned to Bender. Naturally, there remained nothing for our officers and the artillery to do but to beat a retreat in their turn.

On the 6th of February we were assembled again. We must set out. There was a general refusal: "No, no!" the soldiers shouted. "No war has been declared upon Russia! The armistice has been signed! We don't march!" These shouts were heard everywhere. The commander was furious, but he had to give in. The soldiers were armed, and he realized that it would be dangerous to insist. We were locked up in the citadel. A personal appeal was made to each of us to sign up as volunteers to fight the Bolsheviks. Everybody refused. For three days the whole regiment was under arrest. Every morning we read in the order of the day that "all the men are held for investigation to be tried by a court-martial."

On the 8th of February they wanted us to set out for Tiraspol again. The officers told us that the town had been captured and that there would be no fighting; but we did not believe them. Finally, we

declared that we would go only by rail (five kilometres) and on condition that the officers ride in the front cars. Machine-guns were mounted in the doorways of the cars following the officers', ready to go into action if it should turn out that we had been deceived again. When we arrived in the town we witnessed the last executions by Polish detachments; 59 workers had been shot; one, the sixtieth, was released so that he would tell what treatment was meted out to Bolsheviks. . . ."

The 58th was evacuated and returned to France.

Glory to the 58th! Glory to the 175th Infantry and the 176th Infantry, to the 1st African Route Regiment, the 19th Artillery, the 7th Pioneers, and others, which continued the glorious revolutionary traditions of the French people, the tradition of the 17th Regiment in 1907, and that of the 217th and 152nd in 1917!

4. A SQUADRON IN REVOLT

"Marx summarized the lessons of all revolutions in respect to armed insurrection in the words of Danton, 'the greatest master of revolutionary tactics yet known': 'audacity, audacity, and once again audacity.'" Lenin, "Advice of an Onlooker" (Lenin-Stalin, 1917, p. 572.)

On April 15th the battleship *France* sailed from the harbour of Odessa. Its crew had been ardent revolutionaries for months. Upon their return on board the men of the landing parties had told about the disorder that had attended the evacuation. They had also brought with them Bolshevik leaflets. Discontent was rife: "Far from demobilising us, 'they' are forcing us to start the war again. And we, real slaves ourselves, will be made to massacre the very people who have risen against slavery worse than ours." The revolt was now a question of days, perhaps of hours.

. . . . When the ship put in at Sevastopol in the morning of April 16, a landing party was immediately sent to the Northern fort. Admiral Amet went there and delivered his usual speech: "You are faced with abominable bandits. They kill women, children and old people. We have been sent here to stop their crimes. I hope that you will do your duty," etc., etc.

On the 17th, in the morning, the ship took up position in the outer roadstead. At 4 o'clock in the evening the bugles sounded, calling the men to their battle posts. The majority of the crew failed to respond. They all took shelter in the latrines. The officers had a hard time manning the 6-inch guns which opened a barrage. The *Jean-Bart*—the Admiral's flagship—and the *Vergniaud* also opened fire. This lasted the whole night. The

bombardment stopped only at 5 o'clock in the morning of the 18th. The men began to talk openly of throwing the officers overboard. In a moment the protests became loud. The admiral was booed. At 6 o'clock in the evening the dreadnought returned to the inner roadstead. The sailors Vuillemin, Delarue, Coette and Seroux were arrested and locked up in cells on board ship.

The anger mounted. Sailors gathered in groups, asking one another: "What are we waiting for? Why don't we free our comrades!"

* * *

The Revolt.

Saturday, April 19th.

The *France*, as well as the *Jean-Bart*, *Vergniaud*, *Justice* and *Du Chayla*, was lying in the inner roadstead, ready for battle. About 3 o'clock in the afternoon the crew learned that the next day, which was Easter, they would have to load 700 tons of coal on the ship. At once there was great discontent. In fact, the men had counted on getting two days' rest to compensate them for their labours in coaling at Odessa. The sailors were seething with indignation. At 4.32 p.m. the usual ceremony of saluting the colours was held. When the flag was raised, eighteen sailors, among them Frachia, Doublier, Huret and Ricros, refused to salute. Then they passed the word: "All those who do not want to work at coaling tomorrow, come to the fore-castle deck after the *branle-bas*."*

All through the evening meal there was extreme excitement. The men grumbled and gibed. After the hammocks had been put up, 400 sailors gathered on the fore-castle deck. That was normal. The officer of the watch was not worried about it. The other officers began their dinner. The boatswains (*maitre et second-maitres*) and their assistants were at their posts on the deck and at the main store-room.

Suddenly there was an outburst of song. The men sang the "Song of Odessa." Cries and hoots pierced the calm of the spring evening: "No coaling! Neither Sunday, nor Monday!"

The master-at-arms (*capitaine d'armes*), Louarn, came on the scene. He asked for silence and tried to tell the men that that was no way of making known their demands. In answer, the lights were extinguished, and the men began to sing the *Internationale*. The officers, infuriated, came out on the quarter-

* The signal to hang up the hammocks for the night, at 6.30 p.m.

deck. Just then the *Jean-Bart* responded with the same song. With shouts of "To arms! Chuck 'em overboard! * Get the rifles!" the sailors rushed towards the quarter-deck, knocking over the master-at-arms, who received a punch on his head and a kick in the small of his back.

On the middle deck the sailors encountered the second in command (*commandant en second*), Captain (*capitaine de frigate*) Lefèvre, who was accompanied by the master-at-arms. He ordered them to go to bed. The officers did not show up: at the order of the commander they were arming and assembling secretly. The sailors replied with shouts of "Death!" At this moment a sailor, whom the master-at-arms tried to seize and take to prison, hit the latter with his head full on the stomach. The sailor had covered his face with his hands so as not to be recognised. The demonstrators continued on their way to the quarter-deck. Captain Gauthier de Ker-moal came forward to ask them what it was the crew demanded. He assured them that he would transmit all their wishes to the commander. He was greeted with hoots and gibes, but finally succeeded in having the crew appoint their spokesmen. He gave his *word of honour* that no disciplinary measures would be taken against the delegates. The sailors Notta and Doublier then explained to him that the crew did not want to work at coaling either on Easter Sunday or Monday. And Notta added:

"What are we doing in Russia? We don't want to fight against the workers, who are our brothers. And we want leave."

The crowd shouted: "To arms! Get the rifles!" But Notta said: "Let's not take arms! That would be foolish—it would compromise our cause!" It was half past eight in the evening. The sailors listened to him. This was a grave error, which was to imperil the movement at its very inception.

Then the sailors marched to the bow, singing the *Internationale*. They went down to the prison and opened the cells, freeing the three arrested artificers: Delarue, Coette and Vuillemin—the latter held in solitary confinement. The demonstrators paraded on the main deck, crying all the time: "To arms!"† They returned to the fore-castle deck to elect delegates as requested by the lieutenant-commander. The men, with the released prisoners now in their midst, were wild with enthusiasm. Vuillemin and Doublier, artificers, and Notta, an ordinary sailor, were elected delegates.

* Meaning the officers.

† But not taking them.

Again the strains of the *Internationale* filled the air. The crew of the *Jean-Bart* joined in the song. It was 9.30 p.m.

Just then they learned that the landing party had refused to make preparations for fighting the Bolsheviks. Their representative was the quartermaster electrician Dubouloz.

The sailors decided to get in touch with the *Jean-Bart* and the *Du Chayla*, whose crews were also singing the *International*. A group of sailors, together with the delegates, embarked on a steam launch, despite the objections of the officer of the watch, Lieutenant Bès de Berc.

Many sailors had now joined in the singing of revolutionary songs aboard the *Jean-Bart*. The launch of the *France* stopped alongside of the *Jean-Bart*. The delegates asked the sailors of the *Jean-Bart* what were their demands. The answer was: "Back to Toulon! No more war against Russia!" The delegates of the *France* boarded the *Jean-Bart*, whose crew now assembled on the deck.

The delegates of the *France* asked the men of the *Jean-Bart* to elect delegates in their turn. They appealed to them to stand firm. "They must satisfy our demands and send us all back to France." The proposal was approved. The sailors of the *Jean-Bart* again started singing the *Internationale*.

* * *

Sailors and an Admiral.

In the meantime Vice-Admiral Amet, commander-in-chief of the Black Sea Fleet, arrived on board the *France*.

The mutineers came out to meet him astern. The sailors and the Admiral stood facing each other. The Admiral was accompanied by the commander, the second commander and the lieutenant-commander. The Admiral began his speech with an attempt at intimidation: "There are two hundred bad Frenchmen among the crew!" he said. But he was immediately interrupted with shouts of "Death to the tyrant! Get hold of him! Death!" The Admiral then changed his theme. He announced, to begin with, that Sevastopol would soon be evacuated. Then he started to describe, in his own fashion, what Bolshevism meant. When he said that the Bolsheviks were bandits, one of the mutineers interrupted him: "You're bandit number one yourself! For having the itch you let me rot in a dark cell! It was you who mercilessly condemned sailors to five and ten years' hard labour on the slightest pretext!"

Every phrase of the Admiral was interrupted with shouts and

hisses: "He lies! He is trying to sing us a lullaby! The cheek! Lies!"

The Admiral then realised his mistake and changed his tone. Now it was: "My children, I entreat you to maintain order." But he was interrupted again: "This is no time for saying mass!" and then: "Death to the tyrant! Bandit! Murderer! Back to Toulon! To Toulon!" Then the Admiral asked (somewhat belatedly): "What do you want?" Notta came forward and courteously laid before him the demands of the crew: (1) No coaling either on the 20th or on the 21st; (2) cessation of intervention in Russia and immediate return to France; (3) leaves; (4) relaxation of discipline; (5) improved food; (6) more frequent correspondence; (7) demobilisation of the old classes, etc. "The war in Russia is against the Constitution," he said. "Clemenceau has violated the Constitution." Admiral Amet rejoined by referring to the iron discipline in the Red Army. Notta then asked him how many soldiers had been executed in the French army, particularly after the mutinies of April, 1917. Another sailor interposed: "I spent four months in a cell on board, with only one hour of fresh air a day." Another sailor shouted: "Beat it, you tyrant!" The demonstrators then turned their backs on the Admiral and marched to the fore-castle deck singing the *Internationale* and shouting "To Toulon! To Toulon!"

The Admiral, furious, turned around to leave, threatening Notta: "To-morrow you'll repent this!"

The singing was continued on the fore-castle deck. Together with the crew of the *Jean-Bart* they sang the *Internationale*, the *Song of the Beans* and the *Song of Odessa*.

5. THE RED BATTLESHIP

"Never play with insurrection, but when beginning it firmly realize that you must go to the end." Lenin, "Advice of an Onlooker" (Lenin-Stalin, 1917, p. 571.)

Came the day of April 20, Easter, a general holiday. A splendid sun shone in the sky, and the weather was fine all day. On the battleships, the men got up late. On board the *France*, although reveille was delayed, nobody jumped from his hammock at the sound of the bugle; and the master-at-arms, who came around as usual to rouse the tardy ones, was met with a chorus of cries and the banging of sabots and shoes. The same happened on the *Jean-Bart*. Still, since it had been agreed on board the *France* that a big meeting would be held on the fore-castle deck at 8 a.m., the

men got up about 7 o'clock. The coffee had never tasted so good and so sweet as it did on that morning. Apparently the Command had supplied the best mocha for the cuisine of the crew on this occasion. Immediately after breakfast all the men went up on the forecandle deck. Several groups went to bring round the few sailors who had gone to work. Only the gangs of engine-room men taking care of the lighting and the pumps remained below deck. In point of fact, there was a great deal of excitement and very little work done on the other battleships as well.

At 8 a.m. the flag was to be raised. And here an unforgettable spectacle unfolded itself in the calm air of the morning. Practically all the sailors of the *France* and the *Jean-Bart* stood on the vast forecandle decks of the battleships, and, instead of saluting the tricolour that was being raised on the stern, they faced forward and sang the *Internationale* while the red flag was being hoisted on the bowsprit.

The officers on the *France* were dumbfounded. The movement, which they had hoped would calm down during the night, had taken on unexpected proportions.

At the same moment the three delegates, Vuillemin, Doublier and Notta went to the commander to lay before him the demands of the crew, as had been agreed with the second in command the night before. The lieutenant-commander, de Kermoal, at first refused to listen to them, claiming that he could accept only the complaints of individuals. A discussion ensued. In the end the officer agreed to receive the delegates. Vuillemin reiterated the desire of the crew to go back to France immediately and to stop the unconstitutional war against the Bolsheviks, because Parliament had never voted for it. The lieutenant-commander claimed that he had no right to discuss the subject, since he was "not posted on it." Finally, he accepted some of the demands. The delegates took the reply back to the forecandle deck, but before speaking they insisted that the red flag be removed.

"Comrades," Notta said, "the lieutenant-commander wishes you to know that he is prepared to intervene on our behalf that no disciplinary measures should be taken against anyone, but he will do so only on condition that order and quiet are restored."

He was interrupted with shouts: "That won't do! We must have a rest! It's a holiday!"

The sailors, dissatisfied with the reply, hoisted the red flag again. Almost the whole crew was massed on the forecandle deck and sang the *Internationale*, the *Salute to the 17th* and the *Song of the Beans*.

The officer of the watch, Lieutenant Barbier, and Lieutenant Bès de Berc, assisted by the first gun-captain, tried in vain to pacify the crew. The sailors went on singing. Then Lieutenant Barbier, pointing to the red flag, shouted to the men: "You don't realise what this rag means! This is civil war!" Angry voices answered: "All the worse for you! You're getting what you wanted!" In impotent rage, the officer made a half turn and withdrew. At that moment 200 demonstrators formed a triple line in front of the red flag.

Fracchia brought a message from the *Jean-Bart*: "Let all the men on leave come ashore dressed any way at all." The message of the *Jean-Bart* further said that the civilian population was waiting for them. After some reflection, Vuillemin moved that they stay aboard; by going ashore they ran the risk of being shot at; they would go down at 2 p.m. to look for the landing party. This was adopted.

The delegation returned to the lieutenant-commander. But they got no answer. The crew, now highly discontented, again started to sing the *Internationale* and the *Song of Odessa*. At 9.15 a.m. Vice-Admiral Amet came on board and proceeded to the forecandle deck. This time his manner was much less brutal than the previous day. When he reached the first line that protected the red flag, he was warned by the sailors that if he advanced one step further he would be thrown into the sea. The Vice-Admiral was accompanied by the commander, the second in command and the lieutenant-commander.

The delegates asked for silence, and the Admiral was given a chance to speak.

"My children," he began, "I have not come to remove the red flag, but to tell you that you will regret what you have done, and that you will have cause to repent it."

"We shall never regret having stopped this unlawful and criminal war," the mutineers replied. "We would be outcasts from the ranks of the working class and of humanity if we were to obey your orders to kill our Russian brothers."

The Admiral retorted:

"It is thirty-five years since I lived among sailors. I know them. I am old enough not to be afraid of death."

His remarks were interrupted with cries:

"Old swine! Humbug! Bloodsucker! Be off, you tyrant! Death! Throw him overboard!"

The Admiral then made a half turn, the officers following him, and went back to the *Jean-Bart*.

At 10 o'clock the second in command came around with the proposal to the demonstrators that they disperse in good order, and that they would be given a bottle of champagne per plate (!). The answer was: "We are no fish, and you can't get us to bite your bait." The commander added that in two years he would become a monk (!!). This was met with general laughter: "Monk or parson, we don't give a damn!" "I have served fifteen months at the front with the Marine Riflemen," the officer went on. "Yes, ensconced in an office in Paris," came the reply. Upon which the second in command turned round and left.

Upon leaving the *France* the Admiral had ordered that the furnaces be fired. The first engine-room mate came to announce the order. He was told that there was not enough coal to take them to France, and that they would refuse to carry out an order to set sail before the ship had taken on coal. The sailors understood that once they were isolated it would be easier for the officers to deal with them en route.

After dinner the crew reassembled on the fore-castle deck in order to appoint those who were to go in search of the landing party at the Northern fort, for there were too many volunteers. The enthusiasm was growing incessantly. Almost all the sailors were animated by a powerful revolutionary spirit. The officers were nonplussed and did not know what to do.

It was half past twelve p.m. The Russian steamer *Kherson* was entering the roadstead. It carried about 150 men who were returning after a long leave in France. When the steamer was passing within twenty yards of the dreadnought, the red flag was hoisted on the main-mast and the sailors began to sing the *Internationale* at the top of their voices. The impression on board the *Kherson* was tremendous. The passengers—sailors and soldiers—joined in the singing. At that moment the demonstrators were gathered on the quarter-deck of the *France*, some of them even stood on the life-lines. A sailor of the *France*, standing in the longboat, waved a red flag; on the *Kherson*, a French sailor, perched on the shrouds, answered by waving a red waistband. The people on the *France*, the *Jean-Bart* and the *Kherson* sang the *Internationale* while the *Kherson* was dropping anchor inside the harbour. It was really an impressive moment. The commander rushed up to the bridge and pleaded with the delegates to remove the red flag. Vuillemin intervened on his behalf, and the red flag was removed.

At that moment the crew of the *Justice*, gathered on the fore-castle deck, began to sing the *Internationale* and raised a red pennant.

The commander and the second in command appeared on the scene.

"Who hoisted this rag?," the commander asked.

Silence.

"It wasn't hoisted all by itself, was it?" He insisted.

"The entire crew is in it," some of the sailors replied.

"So I have a crew of Bolsheviks, it seems?"

"We want to go back to France!"

The discussion between the commander and the crew lasted an hour.

"There is one point on which they are immovable," the commander stated in his report, "and that is: 'The war is over, we are not at war with the Russians, we want to go back to France.'"

* * *

Fraternisation and a Trap.

In the city the agitation grew from hour to hour. Since 9 a.m. the number of French sailors in the streets was constantly on the increase. Some wore red ribbons on their breast and carried on animated conversations with the workers whom they happened to meet. The streets were patrolled by French and Greeks, the former walking around with an air of nonchalance, while the latter were on their guard, ready to shoot. About 1.30 p.m. the boats with the men from the squadron who were given shore leave began to arrive at the Graftsky Quay. A biggish crowd gathered nearby.

When the longboats of the *Jean-Bart* arrived, followed by those of the *France*, on which the tricolour was so rolled up as to show only the red stripe, the sailors were greeted with cheers. A considerable group of sailors, singing the *Internationale*, went up the big Ekaterinskaya Street towards the city. The sailors accepted eagerly the banner of the metal workers' union which was presented to them by the workers. One of them marched at the head of the procession, holding aloft the unfurled banner. The demonstration was rapidly gaining in size as it was joined by ever larger numbers of sailors and civilians.

Led by French sailors, the demonstration moved very slowly. At times it halted, and some of the sailors, balanced on the shoulders of their comrades, or standing on the porches of houses, harangued the demonstrators.

There were about 3,000 demonstrators in the procession, including from 200 to 300 sailors. Each time a French patrol passed by near the demonstration, it was invited to join, and the sailors threw away their rifles and fraternised with the workers. Nobody was armed—neither the workers, nor the sailors. Those of the armed detachments ashore had thrown away everything: rifles, bayonets and even hangers.*

The demonstrators marched through Morskaya Street singing all the time. The enthusiasm was great. Many sailors tore the red pompoms from their caps and wore them as insignia on their jackets. Others waved little red flags made of red ties or pieces of cloth fastened to sticks.

A little after they had passed the square, an automobile moving at great speed up Morskaya Street broke into the crowd. It was stopped by the French sailors. The officer who was inside the car ordered the sailors to disperse, threatening them with dire consequences. In answer, several sailors jumped into the car and shook the officer roughly, pushing him back into the seat each time he tried to stick out his head. Fuming with rage he had to follow behind.

The demonstrators proceeded down Morskaya Street. When they reached the City Hall, the Chairman of the Revolutionary Committee, who spoke perfect French, since he had once worked in the Galeries Lafayette in Paris, delivered a short speech in which he thanked the French sailors for their support and wound up with the slogans of the Revolutionary Committee: "Evacuation of the military from the city and transfer of power to the Soviet." He was frequently interrupted by enthusiastic cheers. A sailor from the crowd made a speech in reply, assuring the Revolutionary Committee of the sympathy of the French sailors and of their support.

The procession resumed its march. By now it had been joined by sailors from all the warships lying in the roadstead. There were even some men from the landing parties, including those from the *Vergniaud* who had abandoned the semaphore and come down into the city. About 4 p.m., when they were near Maller's Pharmacy, they came across a lieutenant of one of the ships who tried to seize the red banner. An altercation ensued: shouts, threats. A sailor slapped the officer. The latter withdrew and, a few seconds later, suddenly, without warning, volleys of machine-guns and rifles rang out and bullets swept the street. What happened was that

* That was a grave mistake, as it turned out later.

several squads of Greek soldiers, crouched at a point where the street sloped down, about a hundred metres away, fired volley after volley into the crowd. They were supported by a section of the landing party from the *Jean-Bart*, commanded by a sub-lieutenant, who had given the order to machine-gun the demonstrators.

It was a gruesome scene. On all sides people fell dead; the air was rent with cries and groans. The demonstrators ran for cover into the side streets. The banner-bearer—a steersman from the *Vergniaud*—collapsed as he was mortally wounded by a bullet and remained lying covered with the red banner. A quartermaster, an intrepid man, who continued shouting "Forward! Death to the dogs!" also fell mortally wounded alongside a young girl of 16 who was killed outright.

. . . The news of the ambush spread quickly in the cantonments and on the battleships, rousing a storm of anger among the men.

A section of the landing party from the *Jean-Bart*, which remained at the semaphore after the latter had been abandoned by the men from the *Vergniaud*, even wanted to come down into the city in order to open fire on the Greeks. It was only at the point of revolvers that the officers held them back.

On the *France*, the news of the shooting was brought by the men who came back from shore-leave. A crowd of mutineers, headed by Vuillemin, then rushed towards the stern. Some of them wanted to retaliate by shelling the Greek battleship *Kilkis*. They signalled the proposal to the other battleships. When they came upon the officer of the watch, Vuillemin demanded that he call the commander. "What for?" the officer asked. Amid tense silence Vuillemin told him the story of the shooting that had taken place ashore. He delivered a sentimental speech, winding up with the demand . . . for an investigation and severe punishment of those responsible for the shooting.* The officer promised to transmit the request.† It was decided that on the following morning two letters should be sent to the Admiral, one by Vuillemin on behalf of the crew, and another by the commander along the same lines.

The rattling of the machine-guns and the volleys of rifle shots excited the same feelings of anger on board the *Justice*. The men on shore-leave returned and told the story in detail. One of the sailors of the ship had been wounded. Feeling was running high. The commander came around to talk to the sailors. He had heard the news, which had been brought to Admiral Amet while the commander had been in conference with him in the afternoon.

* What naïveté!

† Why not!

The commander exerted every effort to assuage the anger of his crew. But a group of sailors tried to prevail upon their comrades to load the guns and to open fire upon the Greek battleship *Kilkis*, instead of dealing with the principal culprits—the French Headquarters, naval and military. Officers and mates then made a rush to get hold of the small arms and rifles; the locks (*blocs des pièces*) of the big guns were removed to a store-room.

The temper of the men was the same on board the *Vergniaud*. Comrade L., who took part in the demonstration, describes the situation aboard the ship in the following terms:

“We came on board in a rage at what had happened ashore, and distributed among the rest of the crew the leaflets which the Russian comrades had given us. A group of sailors then rushed to the armoury to seize rifles and bayonets so that we might take revenge. But the arms had disappeared. Even the percussion locks of the guns had been removed. We were weaponless! It was then that, furious with rage, we went up to the fore-castle deck and hoisted the red flag to the top of the mast. The command remained unruffled when the strains of the *Internationale* rose in the air.”

The moment had obviously come when it was necessary to pass to an armed revolt and to put an end to the interminable discussions between the delegates and the command. But the opportunity was not made use of. Here again, what was lacking was revolutionary perspective and organisation; in a word, what was lacking was groups of the Communist Party—the indispensable guide of the whole struggle.

The Admiral, who had undoubtedly hoped to quell the revolt with the machine-guns on Morskaya Street, now realised that the effect was the exact reverse. The revolt was assuming menacing proportions. He therefore resorted to his usual subterfuges.

That same evening, the officer who had given the order to fire committed suicide—undoubtedly upon orders from above. By his death he thus took upon himself the blame for something for which he was not entirely responsible.

The Admiral also decided that the section of the *Jean-Bart* which had taken part in the shooting should not return on board. In fact, an announcement was posted in the battery that “if the quartermaster rifleman X . . . returns on board he will be hanged.” His men had not followed his example, but fired into the air. Actually, the section never returned on the Admiral’s ship and went back to France aboard the hospital ship *Vinh-Long*.

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Sailors and Soldiers—Masters of their own Destiny.

In any event, at that moment the crews were fully in control on all the battleships! The soldiers now followed their example.

At 7 o’clock that evening a delegation of the army ashore came on board the *France*. It was made up of an adjutant, a sergeant, two corporals and two soldiers of the 175th Infantry. The delegates congratulated the sailors and asked them to stand with the soldiers, because the latter feared the colonial troops. They asked the sailors not to sail without them. The sailors assured them that they would not leave them on Russian soil. They told them that there was a sufficient number of merchant ships to take them all to France. The delegation left the ship telling the sailors that they were confident of their assistance.*

At 9 p.m. the commander sent for Vuillemin. An exciting conversation took place in the presence of a sub-lieutenant. When Vuillemin entered the commander’s cabin he was offered a chair, but he refused to take it. The commander then offered him a cigarette, which he again refused to accept. The conversation lasted till midnight. Vuillemin discussed the demands of the crew. When the commander asked him to persuade the sailors to maintain calm, Vuillemin replied that he could do nothing with an unruly crowd, but that he would try his best to avoid a clash.

The commander, greatly impressed, gave his word of honour that no disciplinary measures or any measures of repression would be taken against the crew. To Vuillemin’s remark that there were superiors, the commander replied that in case there was a court-martial he would himself be put in the dock, as the best defender of his men. He went on to specify:

“If I bring my ship back to French waters in good order, with my officers, my mates and all the men, I shall forget everything. However, I shall never forgive those who hoisted the red flag, nor those who went to search for the landing party.”

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One o’clock in the morning. The night is very calm, the weather fine. But the red battleship is awake. Every quarter of an hour her searchlights sweep the roadstead, scanning the ships and, above all, the shore. The delegates have taken charge of the service, in order to make sure that they are not surprised by the colonial troops. Below deck, the sailors stand watch over the munition rooms.

* But without having taken any measures to establish regular connections and to co-ordinate the work.

Artificers, stokers, electricians ensure the regular functioning of the boilers, dynamos, pumps, the lighting system.

The delegates have assigned the duties for the day, and they are the only ones whom the men obey. The searchlights are manned by two electricians and a quarter-master. They are relieved every two hours.

There are no sentinels on the bridge, but the electricians sound the signal "all men on deck" at the least sign of alarm.

On that night the eye of the revolution kept watch over the slumbering roadstead.

Imagine what would have happened—as it might have but for an accident—if that afternoon or the next day the *Protet*, on which the men knew what they wanted, had arrived ready for battle, red flag aloft, the officers arrested. . . . The whole squadron would have followed. . . .

Several days later all the French men-of-war left Sevastopol for France. On May 1, 1919, the city celebrated its liberation.

Naturally, the solemn promises were not kept. The sailors of the *France*, as well as of the other ships, paid dearly for their magnanimity. Once the big battleship entered the dry dock (*cale sèche*) at Bizerte, where they had agreed to go, the men were given official leave, and therefore landed without arms. After that it was easy to arrest the "ringleaders."

But the whole Sevastopol fleet had quit the Black Sea.

6. THE LESSONS OF THE REVOLT

"At all events, the history of the Russian revolution, like the history of the Paris Commune of 1871, unfailingly teaches that militarism can never, under any circumstances, be vanquished and destroyed except by a victorious struggle of one section of the national army against the other section. It is not sufficient simply to denounce, revile and to 'repudiate' militarism, to criticise and to argue that it is harmful; it is foolish peacefully to refuse to perform military service; the task is to keep the revolutionary consciousness of the proletariat in a state of high tension and to train its best elements, not only in a general way, but concretely, so that when popular unrest reaches the highest pitch, they will put themselves at the head of the revolutionary army." (Lenin, *Collected Works*, Russ. ed., Vol. XIX, p. 351.)

One fact is beyond dispute. As a result of the Black Sea Revolt, *French imperialism was compelled to relinquish its stranglehold on the October Revolution.*

That was the most important, the most vital result for the Russian Revolution.

Clemenceau, Millerand, etc., had to content themselves with the services of their mercenaries—Denikin, Wrangel and others—in their attempt to overthrow the October Revolution. Later it was the Polish gentry and colonels. However, all these troops—the "Russian Volunteers," the Poles and Serbs, were inferior, from every standpoint, to the French army, which, by the end of 1918, had reached its greatest might and the highest degree of technical efficiency. The White Guards, even though abundantly supplied with material, and even when commanded by French officers, did not rate as a formidable instrument in the war directed by Franchet d'Esperey, Berthelot and Foch. That was the great importance of the Black Sea Revolt. It contributed tremendously to the triumph of the Great Socialist Revolution in Russia.

The working class, the labouring peasantry, the peoples of Russia, led in a titanic effort by the Bolshevik Party of Lenin and Stalin, and their young Red Army, with Frunze, Voroshilov and Budyonny, finally cleared the Ukraine and Southern Russia of the counter-revolutionary forces.

The importance of the Black Sea Revolt also consisted in the fact that, under the influence of the Great Socialist Revolution, the masses of sailors, soldiers and workers rose in France—not only against the criminal designs of the French imperialists, but also against the official Social-Democratic leaders who had prostituted themselves to the bourgeoisie since 1914: the "Right" Socialists of the type of Renaudel, the "Centre" as exemplified by Blum, and the "Lefts" of the type of Paul Faure, as well as the trade union traitors of the "*Union sacrée*" like Jouhaux and Georges Dumoulin.

It was Landry, the Minister of the Navy, who, in a speech delivered on July 22, 1920, admitted:

"The events were of an extremely grave nature, the red flag raised aloft, delegates in charge on board the battleships, the authority of the officers abolished—that was a revolt, there is no other word for it. To be sure, this revolt was short-lived everywhere; it brought no irreparable consequences in its wake; but one cannot help shuddering at the thought of the results it might have had."

For the proletariat and the people of France and for the international proletariat, the Black Sea Revolt remains an example of what has to be done should the imperialists again attempt to attack the Union of Socialist Soviet Republics.

Winning the Army for the Cause of the People.

But it must never be forgotten that this great victory of the proletariat and the people of France, and of the international proletariat, was really the victory of the Bolshevik Party, which succeeded in winning the army for the cause of the people; it achieved this decisive task, for which innumerable heroes gave their lives.

That is the second great lesson which the workers of France and of the whole world draw from the Black Sea Revolt. True, many of the mutineers hesitated, wavered, failed to realise their own power. Their attitude resembled to a large extent that of the Russian soldiers during the Revolution of 1905, about which Lenin said the following in his speech at the end of January, 1917:

"The revolutionary ferment among the people could not but spread to the armed forces. It is characteristic that the leaders of the movement came from *those elements* in the army and the navy which had been recruited mainly from among the industrial workers and possessed most technical training, for instance, the sappers. The broad masses, however, were still too naive, their mood was too passive, too good natured, too Christian. They flared up rather quickly; any case of injustice, excessively harsh conduct on the part of the officers, bad food, etc., was enough to call forth revolt. But there was no persistence in their protest; they lacked a clear perception of aim; they lacked a clear understanding of the fact that only the most vigorous continuation of the armed struggle, only a victory over all the military and civil authorities, only the overthrow of the government and the seizure of power over the whole state could guarantee the success of the revolution.

The broad masses of the sailors and soldiers readily rose in revolt. But with foolish naiveté they as readily released the arrested officers. They allowed themselves to be pacified by promises and persuasion on the part of their officers; in this way the officers gained precious time, obtained reinforcements, broke the ranks of the rebels, and then the most brutal suppression of the movement and the execution of the leaders followed." (Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. XIX; pp. 350-51.)

But the Black Sea Revolt lends even more value to Lenin's presentation of the problem of winning the army for the cause of the people. In the *Proletarii* of August 26, 1906, he wrote:

"The other lesson refers to the character of the insurrection, the methods by which it is carried out, and the conditions under which the troops come over to the side of the people. On this, an extremely one-sided view prevails in the Right wing of our Party. It is alleged that it is impossible to fight modern troops, that the troops must first become revolutionary. Of course, unless the revolution assumes a mass character and also affects the troops, serious fighting is out of

the question. It is necessary, of course, to carry on work among the troops. But we must not imagine that the troops will come over to our side at one stroke, as it were, as a result of persuasion or their own convictions. The Moscow insurrection clearly proved how stereotyped and lifeless this view is. As a matter of fact, the wavering of the troops, which is inevitable in every really popular movement, leads to a real *fight for the troops* whenever the revolutionary struggle becomes more acute." (Lenin, *Selected Works*, English edition, Vol. III, p. 349.)

"December confirmed another of Marx's profound propositions, which the opportunists have forgotten, namely, that rebellion is an art, and that the principal rule of this art is that a desperately bold, irrevocable and determined *offensive* must be waged. We have not sufficiently assimilated this truth. We have not sufficiently learned, nor have we taught the masses this art and this rule of attacking under all circumstances. We must make up for this with all our energy. It is not enough to take sides in the question of political slogans; we must take sides also on the question of armed insurrection. Those who are opposed to armed insurrection, those who do not prepare for it, must be ruthlessly cast out of the ranks of the supporters of the revolution and sent back to the ranks of its enemies, of the traitors or cowards; for the day is approaching when the force of events and conditions of the struggle will compel us to separate enemies from friends according to this principle. We must not preach passivity nor advocate 'waiting' until the troops 'come over.' No! We must proclaim from the house-tops the need for a bold offensive and armed attack, the necessity at such times of exterminating the persons in command of the enemy and of a most energetic fight for the wavering troops. (Lenin, *Selected Works*, Vol. III, p. 351.)

Such is the great lesson which the Communist Party, the workers and all toilers must draw in order to win their children and brothers, the soldiers, sailors and airmen, for the cause of the people.

At the present time; the leading sections of the French finance oligarchy and the cannon merchants, as well as the principal leaders of the Socialist Party—with Blum and Paul Faure at their head—dream of turning the present war against the Soviet Union. The example of the French sailors on the Black Sea and of the soldiers in the Ukraine must therefore again be studied by the working class and by all people of France, so that this time, thanks to the experience gained, an aggression of that sort, if it does materialise, should cost the criminal war-makers their class domination.

* * *

ROLL OF HONOUR

*The principal Regiments and Warships Which Refused to Fight
Against Soviet Russia in 1919*

Infantry

58th Infantry (30th Division);
Tiraspol; February 2-8.
176th Infantry (156th Division);
Kherson; March 8-10.
1st African Route Regiment
(Zouaves) (156th Division).
21st Colonial Infantry; Archangel; April 7.
175th Infantry (156th Division);
Sevastopol; April.
4th Colonial Infantry; Bender;
May 27-28.
37th Colonial Infantry; Bender;
May 27-28.

Artillery

19th Artillery; Odessa; April 5.
117th Heavy Artillery; Toulouse;
May 20.
7th Pioneers (Company 15/2);
Odessa; April 5-8.

Naval Troops

Toulon. June 11-12.
111th Infantry.
4th Colonial Dépôt.
Brest. June 17-18.
2nd Dépôt Marines.
Rochefort.
4th Dépôt Marines.
Cherbourg. June 3.
1st Dépôt Marines.

Warships

Battleship *France*; Sevastopol;
April 19-May 3.
Battleship *Jean-Bart*, Flagship of
the Admiral; Sevastopol; April
19-23.
Battleship *Provence*, Flagship of
the First Admiral; Toulon;
June 11-12.
Battleship *Vergniaud*; Sevasto-
pol; April 21-22.
Battleship *Justice*; Sevastopol;
April 21-22.
Battleship *Mirabeau*; Sevastopol;
April.
Battleship *Condorcet*; Bizerte;
June 11-12.
Battleship *Patrie*; Constantinople;
June.
Battleship *Voltaire*; Bizerte; June
19-22.
Battleship *Diderot*; Beyrouth;
August 2-3.
Armoured Cruiser *Waldeck-
Rousseau*; Odessa; April 27-28.
Armoured Cruiser *Ernest Renan*;
Constantinople; May 3-5.
Cruiser *Bruix*; Odessa; April
28-29.
Cruiser *Du Chavla*; Sevastopol;
April 20-21.
Cruiser *Guichen*; Itea (Greece);
June 26-27.

Warships (continued)

Cruiser *D'Estrée*; Vladivostok;
August 14.
Destroyer *Dunois*; Baltic Sea;
June 21.
Gunboat *Algol*; Sevastopol; April
21-22.
Gunboat *Escaut*; Sevastopol;
April 21-22.
Gunboat *Scarpe*; Sevastopol;
April 22-23.
Destroyer *Protet*; Galatz; April
16-17.
Destroyer *Dehorter*; Kerch; May
1-10.
Destroyer *Fauconneau*; Odessa;
April 27-28.
Destroyer *Mameluck*; Odessa;
August 28.
Destroyer *Touareg*; Odessa;
April 7-8.
Armed yacht *Atmah*; Venice;
June.

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