

# Letter to V I Lenin

*August 4, 1918*

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The situation in the South is no easy one. The Military Council inherited a state of utter disruption, caused partly by the inertness of the former commander, and partly by a conspiracy on the part of persons appointed by him to the various divisions of the Military Area. Everything had to be started afresh: we got the supply services properly organized, instituted an operations division, established contact with all sectors of the front, rescinded the old and, in my opinion, criminal orders, and only after this launched an offensive on Kalach and southward towards Tikhoretskaya. We launched the offensive in the hope that Mironov's and Kikvidze's sectors in the North, including the Povorino sector, were securely guaranteed against defeat. But it turned out that these sectors were the weakest and the least secure. You know of the retreat of Mironov and the others to the North-East, of the capture of the whole railway line from Lipki to Alexikovo by the Cossacks, and of the dispatch of Cossack guerilla groups to the Volga and their attempts to cut communication along the Volga between Kamyshin and Tsaritsyn.

Furthermore, the Rostov Front and Kalnin's groups generally lost their stamina owing to lack of shells and cartridges and have surrendered Tikhoretskaya and Torgovaya, and are apparently in process of complete disintegration (I say "apparently," because we have still been unable to receive accurate information about the Kalnin group).

I say nothing about the critical position of Kiz-lyar, Bryanskoye and Baku. The pro-British orientation is definitely discredited, but the situation on that front is anything but favourable. Kizlyar, Prokhladnaya, Novo-Georgievskoye and Stavropol are in the hands of Cossack insurgents. Only Bryanskoye, Petrovsk, Mineral-niye Vody, Vladikavkaz, Pyatigorsk and, I believe, Yekaterinodar are still holding out.

Thus, a situation has been created in which communications with the food areas of the South have been severed, and the Tsaritsyn area itself, which connects the centre with the North Caucasus, has in its turn been cut off, or practically cut off, from the centre.

It was in view of this that we decided to call off the offensive in the direction of Tikhoretskaya, to take up a defensive position, withdraw the combat units from the Tsaritsyn Front and from them form a northern striking force of about six thousand men, and direct them along the left bank of the Don as far as the Khoper River. The aim of this move is to clear the Tsaritsyn-Povorino line, turn the enemy's flank, disorganize him and hurl him back. We have every reason to believe that we shall be able to execute this plan in the very near future.

The unfavourable situation described above is to be attributed :

- 1) To the fact that the front-line soldier, the "competent muzhik," who in October fought for the Soviet power, has now turned against it (he heartily detests the grain monopoly, the fixed prices, the requisitions and the measures against bag-trading).

2) To the Cossack make-up of Mironov's troops (the Cossack units which call themselves Soviet are unable and unwilling to wage a resolute fight against the Cossack counter-revolutionaries; the Cossacks came over in whole regiments to Mironov in order to receive weapons, acquaint themselves with the disposition of our forces on the spot, and then desert to Krasnov, carrying whole regiments along with them; the Cossacks surrounded Mironov three times, because they knew every inch of his sector, and, of course, utterly routed him).

3) To the fact that Kikvidze's units are built on the detachment principle, which makes liaison and coordinated action impossible.

4) To the isolation, because of all these reasons, of Sievers' forces, which have lost their support on the left flank.

One favourable factor on the Tsaritsyn-Gashun Front is the complete elimination of the middle due to the detachment principle, and the timely removal of the so-called experts (staunch supporters either of the Cossacks or of the British and French), which has made it possible to win the sympathy of the military units and establish iron discipline in them.

Now that communications with the North Caucasus have been cut, the position as regards food has become hopeless. Over seven hundred wagon-loads are standing on rail in the North Caucasus, and over a million and a half poods are ready for dispatch, but it is quite impossible to get the freight out because of the interruption of communications both by rail and by sea (Kizlyar and Bryan-skoye are no longer in our hands). There is quite a lot of grain in the Tsaritsyn, Kotelnikovo and Gashun districts, but it has to be harvested, and Chokprod <sup>1</sup> is not adapted for this work, and has been unable to adapt itself to this day. The crop must be gathered and hay must be pressed and accumulated in one spot, but Chok-prod has no presses. The grain harvest must be organized on a large scale, but Chokprod's organizers are utterly incompetent. The result is that food deliveries are in a bad way.

With the capture of Kalach we secured several tens of thousands of poods of grain. I have sent twelve lorries to Kalach, and as soon as we can get it to the railway I shall send it to Moscow. Good or bad, harvesting is proceeding. I hope to secure several tens of thousands of poods of grain in the next few days and send it to you also. We have more cattle here than we need, but there is very little hay, and without hay dispatch of cattle in large quantities is impossible. It would be well to organize at least one canning factory, establish a slaughterhouse, etc. But, unfortunately, so far I have been unable to find men of knowledge and initiative. I ordered the Kotelnikovo agent to arrange for the salting of meat on a large scale; the work has begun and there are already results, and if the business develops there will be enough meat for the winter (40,000 head of cattle have accumulated in the Kotelnikovo district alone). There is no less cattle in Astrakhan than in Kotelnikovo, but the local food commissariat is doing nothing. The representatives of the Perishable Foods Procurements Board are fast asleep, and it may be confidently prophesied that they will procure no meat. I have sent an agent named Zalmayev there to procure meat and fish, but I have had no word from him yet.

The Saratov and Samara gubernias are far more promising as far as food is concerned: there is plenty of grain there, and I believe Yakubov's expedition will be able to get out half a million poods or even more.

In general, it should be said that until communications with the North Caucasus are restored, we cannot count (very much) on the Tsaritsyn area (as far as food is concerned).

Yours,

**J. Stalin**

Tsaritsyn, August 4, 1918

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### Notes

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<sup>1</sup>.Chokprod — Extraordinary Regional Food Committee in South Russia.

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