

Kazys Boruta, Lithuanian Poet and Maximalist

The Alexander Berkman archive at the International Institute for Social History contains three letters in Russian from “Audra (Riga).”¹ These letters were actually written to Berkman by the Lithuanian poet Kazys Boruta (1905–1965) on behalf of the publishing house “Audra” [Lithuanian for “Storm”]. The letters read as follows:

March 31 [1928]

Dear comrade A. Berkman!

Our Maximalist publishing house “Audra” has published your book “The Kronstadt Rebellion.” We translated it from “Der Syndikalist,” 1923.

We hope you won’t be upset about the fact that up to now we have not had the opportunity to ask you for permission to translate this work. We only just recently received your address from German comrades.

You’re well-acquainted with the Russian revolutionary movement, so you’re in a good position to understand our differences. We are Maximalists of the Russian type, which means we are close to anarchism. We would be delighted if you found it possible to contribute to our work in a literary sense. Besides individual books, our publishing house puts out the almanac “Audra.” We will await your answer!

Regards, comrade Kazys Boruta

P. S. Along with this letter we are sending you our book in the Lithuanian language “Kronstato sukilimas” [The Kronstadt uprising] and our almanac “Audra.” Our address: “Audra” bookstore, 35 Avotu Street, Riga, Latvia.



Kazys Boruta as a young man.

April 15 1928.

Dear Comrade!

Very glad to get your letter and comradely greetings. Also thanks a lot for the issues of the Bulletin.² Possibly you can keep sending it to us and we will use it in our press. We’re putting out a newsletter – “The Revolutionary.”

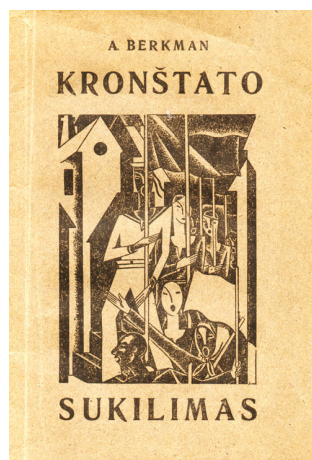
We would be delighted to receive your already published articles on anarchism and other topics. We are about to publish something by P. Kropotkin. It would be very nice to publish a popular book on anarchism in Lithuanian. We have

great need of such a book, which is why we eagerly await your work.

It’s best if we received your articles in German or Russian, but we can probably manage with other languages.

We look forward to your collaboration!

With comradely greetings, K. Boruta



Cover of the Audra translation of Alexander Berkman’s “The Kronstadt Uprising.”

April 30 1928.

Dear comrade A. Berkman!

I’m sending you a book and a letter by another comrade. He thinks you can help him.

Our publishing house is still not capable of satisfying demands for other languages.

By the way, I’m repeating my request: are you able to write something for our “Audra”?

With comradely greetings, K. Boruta

On the last letter is Berkman’s handwritten note: “Sent copy of V’s poetry to Paruta [sic].”³

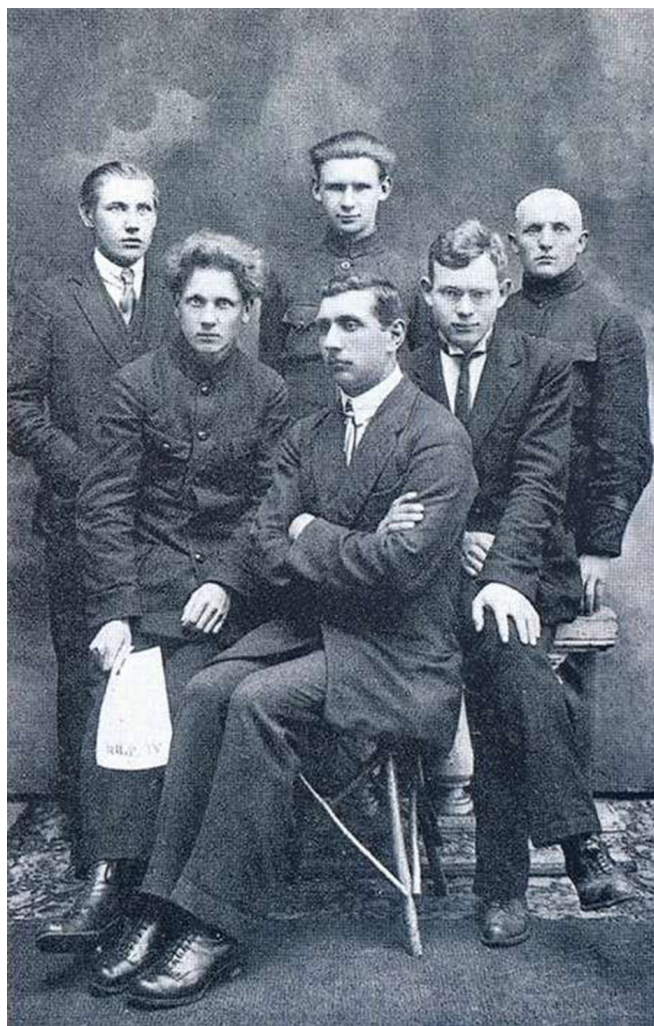
² Bulletin of the Joint Committee for the Defense of Revolutionists Imprisoned in Russia.

³ “V” is probably Voltairine de Cleyre.

¹ Alexander Berkman Papers. International Institute for Social History, Folder 8, pp. 92-95.

Kazys Boruta was born to a Lithuanian peasant family living near the industrial city of Marijampolė, then part of the Russian empire. It was in Marijampolė that he received his gymnasium (high school) education, and became active in revolutionary politics with a group of friends. For some reason, they chose to identify with the Maximalists, an anarchistic faction which split from the Russian Socialist-Revolutionary Party in 1906. But at the time the group formed, the Maximalists had ceased to exist as an organized group, the core of its members having defected to either the Bolshevik Party or the Left Socialist-Revolutionary Party. Nevertheless, the Marijampolė radicals took their Maximalism seriously: one of the group, Martynas Kudelis, translated “The Diary of a Maximalist”, a 1910 tract by the Maximalist theoretician Grigory Nestryov, into Lithuanian; and three members of the group, including Kudelis, organized an attempt on the life of the ultra-reactionary Lithuanian prime minister in 1929.

After gymnasium, Boruta moved on to Kaunas University, but was soon expelled for publicly opposing the death penalty. He and other Maximalists moved to the Latvian capital of Riga, and established the Audra publishing house (1927-1928), which issued various political and literary works, among them Boruta’s experimental novel “House No. 13” and a collection of poetry “Crosses of Lithuania.” Although not overtly political, both books were banned in Lithuania; violators of this ban were threatened with a £5,000 fine. Boruta and his friends were soon ordered to leave Latvia, and that was the end of Audra. He continued his studies, first



Young revolutionary Maximalists of Marijampolė. Kazys Boruta is the first sitting on the right; Martynas Kudelis is in the middle, standing.

in Vienna, then Berlin, before returning to Lithuania in 1932. In 1933 Boruta was arrested for illegal political activities and served two years in prison. After his release, he immersed himself in literary work and avoided political action. But when Lithuania was occupied by the Nazis during World War II, he helped his friend Ona Šimaitė save the lives of Jews by providing sanctuary for Jewish children in his apartment.

After World War II, Boruta soon got in trouble with the new communist regime, and spent 1946–1949 in prison. Although he was a prolific writer, much of his work could not be published under his own name during the Soviet era. In an effort to avoid persecution, he concentrated on translations and children’s literature before his premature death in 1965. A pariah throughout his lifetime under various authoritarian regimes, Boruta has gained some



Covers of Kazys Boruta’s books published by Audra: “House No. 13” and “Crosses of Lithuania.”

posthumous recognition in Lithuania. A school in Marijampolė is named after him, and in 2006 he was honoured with a postage stamp. But accounts of his life and work tend to gloss over his revolutionary activities, putting it down to “nonconformism.”



Lithuanian postage stamp honouring Kazys Boruta in 2006.

Text and translations by Malcolm Archibald, who is indebted to the Lithuanian anarchist website

<http://www.anarchija.lt/>

for much of the information contained in this article.