

Leon Trotsky

Our Political Tasks

(1904)

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Translated by: New Park Publications

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On-Line Edition's Forward by the Transcriber

Our Political Tasks is Trotsky's response to the 1903 split in Russian Social Democracy and a spirited reply to Lenin's **What Is To Be Done?** and **One Step Forwards, Two Steps Back**. A passionate, insightful attack on Lenin's theory of party organisation and an outline of Trotsky's own views on party structure, this controversial work was later disowned by Trotsky after he joined the Bolsheviks. Though it is far from Trotsky's best work on a literary level (the young Trotsky tends to be repetitive, excessively sarcastic, overly verbose and generally in need of a good editor), the work is, nevertheless, a remarkable insight into the young Trotsky's thinking and a vibrant expression of his commitment to revolution. It is, at times, hauntingly prophetic in its predictions of where the Leninist conception of democratic centralism may lead. For example, in the chapter *Down With Substitutionism* in Part II of the book, Trotsky writes in what could be a description of Stalinism:

In the internal politics of the Party these methods lead, as we shall see below, to the Party organisation "substituting" itself for the Party, the Central Committee substituting itself for the Party organisation, and finally the dictator substituting himself for the Central Committee

It is very difficult to find an edition of this work in any language, as the book's line on the party is not consistent with that of most Trotskyist organisations. **Our Political Tasks** fell into obscurity after the 1917 Revolution only to be used and misrepresented by Trotsky's enemies during the leadership struggle, which followed Lenin's death. The book (and, implicitly, the Marxist tradition of spirited debate and critical thought) was used to attack Trotsky for being insufficiently Leninist and to smear him with the accusation of Menshivism (for an especially vicious example see Stalin's 1927 speech *The Trotskyist Opposition Then and Now*). In fact, **Our Political Tasks** outlines a political position which, while critical of Lenin's, is also clearly revolutionary and distinct from what would become Menshevism.

This version is based on the English language translation published by New Park Publications in the early 1970s. Spelling and typographical errors have been corrected (and hopefully not replaced with new spelling and typographical errors) and several of the translation's more egregious grammatical errors have also been corrected.

For another criticism of Lenin's position on party organisation from a left wing perspective, see Rosa Luxemburg's

*Organisational
Questions of the
Russian Social
Democracy*

later republished as **Leninism or Marxism?**

For Lenin's views, see **What Is To Be Done?** and **One Step Forward,
Two Steps Back**. For Trotsky's later views on the 1903 split see [chapter 12](#),
*The Party Congress
and the Split* in [My Life](#).



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Leon Trotsky

Our Political Tasks

Preface

*To my dear teacher
Pavel Borisovich*

Axelrod

The year which has just passed has been a year which has weighed heavily in the life of our Party.

It need only be recalled that at a time when the revolutionary proletariat of the whole world was looking hopefully towards our Party – our Party, to which history offers the great task of cutting the Gordian knot of world reaction – we Russian Social Democrats were apparently unacquainted with problems other than internal party squabbles about areas of competence, as though our only perspective was the likelihood of a split ... it really is a nightmare.

Tragically and heart-rendingly, we see many sections of our Party content to sink into organisational pettiness (while in the distance thunderclaps announce an imminent historical tempest). They begin to suspect the best and the oldest of our comrades, those in the front ranks of Social Democracy internationally; they accuse them of sinning against theory (though the accusers are quite incapable of defining these 'sins' concretely); they call for a crusade against one half of the party; they dissociate themselves from their political friends when the later propose conciliation with the 'oppositional' wing, and in short they are ready to declare implacable war, not only on the active 'conciliators,' but also on all those who, without taking up this role, move among the 'conciliators'.

It is in this truly nightmarish atmosphere that we have spent the whole year.

The split several times appeared inevitable. We all felt the horror of the situation; almost all of us were aware of the criminal nature of such a split. But which of us could escape from the steel grip of History?

The sharpest phase is over. Now the partisans of Party unity can look forward with assurance. The few fanatical splitters who not long since made an impression with their 'intransigence' are today meeting with marked opposition among their allies of yesterday.

It is clear that our Party is at a turn in its internal evolution, a turn which we believe involves its revolutionary action as a whole. This turn should bring sufficient calm to create favourable conditions for a concentration of all our working capacity on tasks common to the whole Party. This calm, to which all healthy elements in the Party aspire, means the death as an organisational force of what has come to be known as the 'minority'.

We, as representatives of this 'minority', view this perspective without regret; for this death, strange as it may at first seem, is an integral part of our plans. Not for a single instant has our object been to swing the Party onto the side of its 'minority'. Such an operation would have stood in contradiction to the very meaning of the word (a party in its entirety cannot belong to its own 'minority'), and more importantly still, to the tasks which required the formation of this 'minority'.

What has just been said may at first glance – but only at first glance – seem paradoxical.

In fact, the 'minority', the non-official part of an official party, has fought against a very definite regime within the Party; a regime produced by absolutely fantastic views about how to develop an organisation like ours. According to this position, the Party cannot develop just by eliminating the most progressive currents and tendencies tactically and organisationally, but must go by the following method: the Central Committee (or the Central Organ or the Party Council), which is given the responsibility of leading and co-ordinating the Party of the proletariat, logically draws new tactical and organisational deductions from known premises. This purely rationalist conception engenders a rigidity which provides it with its own sanctification, along the lines that all interference by elements thinking 'otherwise' is a pathological phenomenon, a sort of abscess on the organisation which requires operation by a skillful surgeon and the use of a scalpel.

Neither in this preface nor in the book which follows will I go into the various episodes of this organisational muddle which has been going on now for almost a year. There is already on this subject a whole literature of which we have no need, and which has dulled the senses of the whole Party. For us, in the present situation, only one thing matters: for the 'minority' to gain the freedom of the city; and as the campaign has been waged in the name of principles, that the same should apply to all future organisational tendencies. The latest statement to date from the Central Committee seems to draw a balance sheet of the upheaval which has taken place in the Party's thinking and (if we have understood the authors' intentions aright) to represent the decisive step towards a real unification. Let us hope that this statement will really consign the behaviour and method of the 'state of siege' to the archives.

But the end of this regime in the Party at the same time means the organisational death of our 'minority' – or to be more precise, a small section of it, placed in particularly favourable circumstances – has subjected the Party's political practice to a re-examination, in the search for new tactical roads. Its organisational demise does not signal the liquidation of the discoveries it has been able to make in this field. Quite the contrary. We are convinced that the destruction of the historical wall which separated the two halves of the Party will permit us to concentrate all our forces on re-founding our Party practice and will lead to a common solution to the new problems of tactics which are posed today and will certainly arise as we grow politically.

This book is presented as an attempt to draw comrades' attention (which has been almost completely blunted by scholastic debates on the organisational questions) to the problems of political tactics on which the whole fate of our Party depends.

But these problems do not constitute the sole content of this book.

The painful internal frictions of the year which has just passed only exposed certain *practices* of 'internal policy' which have not stood the test; but *basic prejudices* – related to and arising out of these practices – still dominate many sectors of our Party's thinking. We do not doubt that these prejudices will in the end die away, but our duty is to work actively for their disappearance.

This is why I thought it right to devote a section of this book to Comrade Lenin's latest opus, **One Step Forward, Two Steps Back**, in which some of these prejudices are to some extent systematised. Let me admit that I carried out this part of my work without the least pleasure. Up until the appearance of this opus, Comrade Lenin could say nothing worthwhile to defend his position, since the position adopted was altogether desperate. Having said that, we were not expecting such a poverty of thinking. My first reaction, after reading it, was to say: let us just carry on with the problems we have on the agenda. But on reflection – and the essential part of this reflection is explained above – I believed it was indispensable to make our position more explicit; it is impossible to leap over the aggravating state of consciousness in the Party.

Naturally the reader who considers himself completely free from bureaucratic and 'Jacobin' organisational prejudices can limit himself to the first two parts of this book.

In the months during which it was written (and it was written bit by bit) the thought that this was not the right moment stayed my hand more than once.

At a time when Tsarism in its death agony endeavors to appease the bourgeois Nemesis – Japan – burning on its altar the wealth and living forces of the martyred Russian nation; when below, in the depths of the people, is invisibly but irreversibly unleashed the molecular process by which there accumulates the revolutionary anger that will, perhaps tomorrow, burst forth into the light of day in all its initial elemental vigour, bearing off where it passes, as spring torrents bear away all dikes, not only the police barriers but also all the constructions of our ant-like organisational work; at this time when only one science seems correct to us, the science of insurrection; when one art alone finds its *raison d'être*, and that is the art of the barricades – at such a time, what is the point in fighting organisational prejudices? Or in unravelling theoretical sophisms, writing about new tactical questions, or looking for new forms in which the autonomous action of the proletariat can develop, at such an unprecedented time in history? Spontaneous revolutionary sentiment indignantly protests:

'This is not the moment!'

'Yes it is,' replies the confident voice of social-democratic consciousness.

And this is the voice that carries the day.

It is the right moment, it is always the right moment!

We know not the day nor the hour; and every day, every hour, every minute which separates us from the decisive day, it is our duty to use. We must subject ourselves to self-criticism, prepare ourselves politically so that our part in the coming decisive events will be worth of the great class to which we have linked our fate as revolutionaries: the proletarian class. We know not the day nor the hour. And if, against all attacks, the autocracy manages to put off the hour of its death; if a new period of 'calm' is established, sweeping from the political scene the oppositionist and revolutionary groups which appeared during the period of upsurge, we, the Social Democrats, will remain at our posts in the ranks of the proletariat and carry out our great task. And neither the reaction nor the revolution will be able to turn us away from our historic tasks.

Of course, when these decisive events come – even if they come tomorrow – we, as communists, as pioneers of the new socialist world, will know how to carry out our revolutionary duty towards the old bourgeois world. We will fight on the barricades. We will conquer for it the freedom which it is impotent to gain without us.

But, even when these events arrive, we as communists neither wish to nor can forget or reject our proletarian tasks. It is to these tasks that we must subordinate our revolutionary tactics, not only on the checker-board of everyday politics, but also on the eve of the explosion of the revolution and during the storm of revolution itself. We have to look forward, not only beyond the criminal head of Tsarism, but further still, over the top of the revolutionary barricades, beyond the smoking ruins of the Peter and Paul fortress, towards our own destiny; the irreconcilable fight of the proletariat against the whole bourgeois world.

[Part I](#)



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Leon Trotsky

Our Political Tasks

PART I: INTRODUCTION

The criteria of Party development and the methods of evaluating it

E pur si muove!

– “It”s still moving!”

Under a hail of terrible blows from an enemy armed to the teeth, right in the midst of political difficulties against which no other detachment of our international army has had to fight, constantly pulled away from its course by powerful undercurrents, Russian Social Democracy “is still moving,” progressing, going forward, not just as the party of Russia’s liberation, but also as the Party of the proletariat.

The principled conciliation of revolutionary-democratic and socialist tasks – expressing two independent historical currents – and the tactical coordination of these tasks on the basis of their reconciliation: this is the enigma which the destiny of Russian society has placed before our Party.

The Russian revolutionary movement as a whole has never abandoned the field of struggle between these two tendencies. They are the direct cause for

the first serious organisation, *Zemlya y Volya*, splitting in two. The thinking of revolutionary populism flailed desperately about in the grip of the fundamental contradiction. It never emerged from it. Only Marxism was able to do so while it took up the revolutionary task on which populism had come to grief.

"The Russian revolutionary movement will triumph as a workers' movement or it will not triumph at all." We understood this idea at the outset, and we have made it the content of our revolutionary practice. But this exhausts only one side of the question. The other can be formulated as follows: the Russian revolutionary movement must, when it has triumphed as a workers movement, be transformed without delay into a process of political self-determination of the proletariat: otherwise Russian Social Democracy *as such* is an historical aberration.

Putting the workers forward as the main revolutionary force, and making the revolution their political schooling: here lies the source of all differences, the focus of all the internal troubles which up to now have so seriously wracked our Party. The first publication of the first Social Democratic group, **Socialism and Political Struggle**, already raised this problem, and resolved it, in this way giving Russian Social Democracy its theoretical right to existence.

The first document advocating the idea of a single Social Democratic force in Russia, the *Manifesto of the First Congress*, endeavored to give a programmatic formulation to the Marxist reconciliation of the basic "antinomy" of the Russian revolutionary movement. "Taking as the supreme task for the whole Party," says the *Manifesto*, "the conquest of political freedom", Social Democracy marches towards the goal which the first leaders of Narodnaya Volya had already clearly set themselves. But the ways and means chosen by Social Democracy are different. This choice is determined by the fact that it wishes consciously to be and to remain *the class movement of the organised working masses*." It could not have been better put. Social democracy "wishes

consciously
class movement of
the proletariat

to be and to remain *the*

”; this subjective ambition, not yet carried out politically, gives it the starting point from which it can evaluate and criticise, judge and condemn, adopt or reject “all means and all paths” of struggle for political freedom. Social Democracy is still far from having taken the road of independent proletarian politics: the content of its work, yesterday and today, is still totally determined by the “supreme task” among the immediate tasks of the Party, the “conquest of political freedom.” But both yesterday and today, Social Democracy consciously wishes “to be and to remain” the class party of the proletariat, that is, to be and to remain precisely a Social Democratic Party.

This is the tribute which a section of the Russian revolutionary intelligentsia has paid and continues to pay to the class doctrine of the international revolutionary proletariat, to Marxism, which for them answers above all the “democratic” and not the “proletarian” question, namely, “where are the forces to be found which are capable of taking up the struggle against the autocracy”; to Marxism which has however already placed its political consciousness under the control of the class interests of the proletariat by thrusting the intelligentsia towards the proletariat, the champion of the fight for political freedom.

If we recall the past and consider the changes of currents and tendencies and the bitter struggle between them, in which some “revolutionary” observers have tried to discern a symptom of the “decomposition of our Party,” it can be noted with a profound feeling of moral and political satisfaction that the alternating of mutually exclusive tendencies has, in general, *always* been dominated by the same directing idea: Social Democracy “consciously wishes to be and to remain the class movement of the organised working masses.” Without any doubt, Social Democracy has more than once moved away from this goal in some of its statements; but in general these indisputably heretical statements have been the result of the aspirations of a young, as yet unconsolidated Party, to resolve the contradiction between the colossal importance of the revolutionary goal and the limitations of the revolutionary means, even if this meant that the problematic of basic tasks had to suffer.

The existence of the objective conditions for this “self-limiting” behaviour, which potentially implies giving in politically, was indisputably to result in the

development of its own internal logic, leading those who were yesterday partisans of the proletarian cause to detach themselves from it today and go over to the enemy camp: this phenomenon is precisely the result of the simplifying methodology of "Economism" (of which we shall speak again further on). But what we wish to establish immediately is: that the decisive criterion in our internal party struggles has been *the class struggle of the proletariat*, and the *leitmotif* of those internal struggles has always been to reproach various adversaries with "objectively betraying the proletariat to the advantage of bourgeois democracy."

Starting from just this standpoint, the pamphlet **On Agitation** (which in our literature inaugurated the period of "Economism") accuses the propagandists of Social Democracy of limiting their action to separating conscious workers from the mass: "European history," this pamphlet says, "shows that when the conditions of a mass workers' movement come to maturity, but the real representatives of their interests keep away, the masses of workers find themselves *other leaders*, not theoreticians but practitioners who will lead them *at the expense of constituting themselves as a class*."

The **Iskra** tendency, which replaced "Economism," marched under the following banner: "... Every cult of spontaneity in the workers movement," writes for example the author of **What Is To Be Done?** popularising the theses of Axelrod and Plehkanov, "means thereby *a strengthening of the ideology of the bourgeoisie over the workers*." The same author mentions that **Iskra** has more than once accused **Rabocheye Dyelo** "indirectly preparing the ground for the transformation of the workers' movement into an instrument of bourgeois democracy." Finally, Comrade Axelrod, giving in his two "pamphlets" his evaluation of the political situation of our Party, states that if Comrade Lenin's so-called "plans" were carried out, we would at best have a revolutionary political organisation of the democratic bourgeoisie trailing behind it the working masses of Russia. (**Iskra** No.57)

Moreover, it must be borne in mind that in each case similar accusations come from *both* sides. The "propagandists" accuse the "Economists" of limiting themselves to arousing the workers without giving them socialist consciousness, and so of just turning them into cannon fodder for the interests of the bourgeoisie. The "Economists" accuse **Iskra** of trying to detach the "political" dimension from the "economic" situation, and thus of taking the class character away from the workers' struggle. Finally, Lenin finds no other way of compromising his present adversaries (Axelrod and his political friends) in the eyes of the Party, than to accuse them of "*opportunism*" on organisational questions, an opportunism which cannot be reconciled with the class interests of the proletariat and signifies the introduction into our Party of the seeds of bourgeois individualism.

It would nonetheless be completely mistaken to think that these "stereotyped" accusations simply neutralise each other, or worse still, that they represent only an expression of agreed Party phraseology. In the absence of such a "stereotype", the struggle between the two currents would inevitably have led to a split in our Party. As Bakunin wrote: "It is absurd to worry about whether communion should be carried out in two kinds or not, when what is at issue is throwing Christianity as a whole out of the window." Only the possibility of appealing to a superior authority recognised by both sides, the class interests of the proletariat, makes it impossible to regulate all conflicts "by internal means."

If therefore the fundamental *criterion* by which all tendencies operate in our Party has always been basically all the same, that is, the class interests of the proletariat, on the other hand the *method* of evaluation does not always correspond to this criterion, far from it, and its primitivism, better than anything else, characterises the primitivism of our political experience. Each new tendency casts the previous one into anathema. For the bearers of new ideas, each preceding period seems no more than a gross deviation from the correct path, an historical aberration, a sum of errors, the result of a fortuitous combination of theoretical mystifications.

The author of the pamphlet **On Agitation** considers that the "first steps of the Russian Social Democrats were wrong." His aim is to liquidate this period of tactical errors. The author of **What Is To Be Done?** goes back precisely

to the period of "Economism" seems to him to be only the index of a temporary and accidental decline, in relation to the situation which would have existed if the intervention of the police had not stopped the work of the group of Comrade Lenin's friends.

Of course, certain people such as Comrade Axelrod, have always been able to see things from the *historical* point of view, even in what concerns the complex question of the internal development of the Party. But they have always been isolated. Whole tendencies have behaved towards each other in an almost "metaphysical" way, mutually excommunicating each other. The so-called "minority" in fact represents the first case in which the spokesman of a new tendency have tried consciously to establish themselves, not on the corpses, but on the shoulders of their predecessors, by considering themselves in the perspective of the whole development of the Party. And this is a good sign: both for the "minority" and for the whole Party. And the representatives of the "minority" are the spokesmen of the progressive tendencies of this maturation.

Naturally it is pointless to stress that the historical standpoint of Marxists has nothing to do with the "historicist-conservative" standpoint to which, according to Marx, History, like the God of Israel to his servant Moses, shows only its posterior. This outlook as a whole gets entangled totally in the problematic of empirical-casual necessity, the logical consequence of which is political quietism. Marxists, on the other hand, adopt the standpoint of *dialectic* necessity which is always active and revolutionary, which explains not only every new situation in relation to the previous one, but is also able to show, in each of them, on the one hand the elements of development and movement, on the other the elements of immobilisation and reaction. This standpoint of dialectical materialism as against the historicist-conservative standpoint, does not deprive us of the right to judge and to take sides, but contrary to the idealist standpoint, demands that our judgement be based on the internal tendencies of development itself, and find in it forces capable of overcoming the internal contradictions, and of supplying the theoretical "evaluation" which sees us into the future.

It is just as necessary to apply this method to the development of the internal tendencies in the Party as to the development of bourgeois society as a whole. It is necessary to be a Marxist not only in "external politics" but also in "internal politics." In the first case the general conclusions of Marxism are

already worked out and can be taken as models. In the second case they can be worked out by the constant application of the dialectical method...

This is very difficult for a young Party like ours. We do not mean by this that in old Parties, like the German party, all the leaders are philosophically developed politicians – far from it – but controversies, struggles, mistakes, and disillusionment have there subjected the *collective thinking* to a dialectical polishing. This wisdom, which has grown up to some extent spontaneously, often hinders the elaboration of new political methods, but at the same time preserves the Party from the application of tactical procedures which represent a “violation” of its Party traditions.

Our Party has for almost a year now been in a period of stagnation. The question “What Is To Be Done?” is posed to all thinking comrades. For all those concerned with this problem, it is clear that the causes of the stagnation are very deep, that the Party has to overcome a sort of organic malady. But the question “What Is To Be Done?” cannot be resolved “by abstract reason,” It can only be posed and resolved in a given historical perspective. What do we represent? What have we inherited from the past? We must give a reply to these questions. But this means that before resolving the questions of our immediate future, we must glance back over the recent past: the period of “Economism” and the old **Iskra**.

The evolution of the “Marxist” intelligentsia

“ *Economism* ” ,
“ *Criticism* ” ,
“ *Idealism* ” ,
“ *Social-
Revolutionism* ”

The “Economists” found themselves faced with a *politically virgin* proletariat, and this determined their simplified political methodology. The Western socialist parties had had to liberate the proletariat from its political subjugation to the left wing of the bourgeoisie under whose leadership it had already fought more than once: but the many political tasks relating to such

a situation did not exist at all for our "Economists". When the revolutionary wing of our bourgeoisie had, under the influence of the complete historical decomposition of purely democratic ideology, lost the ability to reply to the prophetic question: What is to be done now? They were obliged, given the historical situation in Russia, to adopt socialism as the starting point in the struggle for democracy. But it is precisely because socialism had absorbed all the elements of revolutionary democracy that it lost the capacity for opposing these elements, and thus developing its real political nature. The absence of competition from the radical bourgeoisie for influence over the proletariat, for a time enabled it to rest content with the crudest tactical methods, and fostered twisted, simplified ideas about the perspective of the political development of the working class, to which was opposed the notion of a "single reacting mass." In this view the working class would develop gradually, methodically, with mathematical regularity, day after day, from the simple to the complex, and starting with the demand for boiling water to make tea, reach the demand for the transfer of all factories into the hands of productive workers.

Such a simplistic system of ideas, and the tactics in keeping with it, were incapable of strengthening class consciousness, either in the Marxist intelligentsia or among the revolutionary elements of the proletariat. Such a system was unable to supply them with the means of political counter-pressure to radical democracy. And if, at the beginning of the century, during the upsurge, a radical-democratic movement full of initiative had existed alongside Social Democracy, it would have had every chance of unseating our Party. Attention has several times been drawn to this. A second fact is also beyond dispute. A bourgeois-radical organisation cannot rise up all at once just by revolutionary inspiration alone. To show itself to be armed at the critical moment, it would have to have armed itself in the preceding period: but it could only do so by fighting, directly or indirectly, against Social Democracy. The existence of a bourgeois-revolutionary party, influencing the intelligentsia and the proletariat at the same time (or at least actively endeavoring to do so), would have made any simplification of the tasks of a socialist party – a simplification bearing the hallmark of Economism – completely *impossible*. If Russian Marxism had not found a proletariat lying politically fallow, with no-one having staked a claim to it, it could not have resolved the question so easily, by demanding this fallow without further ado as its own domain; it would have had to show, and *show* *politically*, that this really was *its* field; it would have been obliged, by the very logic of political

competition, to oppose its socialist class policy to democratic policy.

In this sense, history has more than once facilitated our Party's first steps. But as nothing is given free, even the "ease" of our first gains has become the cause of political fragility. The "Economists", by their political practice, themselves gave rise to and provoked their own political adversaries; but as a result of what we have explained above, they made not the slightest effort to put the masses on their guard against them. Still more, they did not even believe they could possibly come into existence. Nonetheless they did emerge. However primitive the tactical methods of "Economism" may have been, however inadequate was the action it undertook for the objective of opposing the proletarian masses to the State in all its aspects (that is, all its class aspects as well as all aspects "above class"), it all the same proved to be a powerful weapon for leading the masses to confront the domination of the colossal apparatus of police repression. Awakening broad layers of the proletariat, the "Economists" made it the main reservoir of revolutionary energy.

This could not fail to bring about a whole string of consequences. Bourgeois "society" is politically linked to the revolutionary masses through the revolutionary intelligentsia, the most sensitive layer within it. It is the barometer of the degree of political awakening of "the people." And the wave of student movements has never been so high. On its crest appeared some heroic, audacious figures in whom society, gripped by mixed feelings of hurt and pride, recognised its own children. The democratic movement began its march, and in successive waves, from left to right, poured into the political river. The right wing of the democratic movement at once revealed what it was based on: the influential elements in the *zemstvo* opposition. Riding the waves of the *zemstvo* intelligentsia appeared a figure who was not in the least heroic. Society's feelings towards him were ambivalent, made up of self-satisfaction ("That's our man!") and the congenital mistrust of the shop-keeping class.

This political process, in which some went to extremes – one section on the gallows at Schlüsselberg, another in the quiet provincial streets of Stuttgart ("far from the field of action of the Tsarist police and censors") – this political process did not of course take place mechanically, but required and engendered a whole series of *ideological* developments in and through which the political groupings of the intelligentsia involved took shape and were consolidated. This feverish

changing of philosophical doctriness and theoretical conceptions, which has taken place during the last fifteen years, is subject to the general *logic of human thought and knowledge*. But alongside this logic is another, much more dominating and intransigent, *the logic of political interest*. This last subjects the former to itself and imposes its will and its law on it.

The starting point for the ideological awakening of broad layers of the intelligentsia, after the lethargy of the 1880s, was marked by the introduction of the idea of "economic materialism" into our legal literature. Marxism arrived, acquired letters after its name and took possession of a vast territory to which in reality it had no historical right. But finally, since Marxism was the irreplaceable weapon for struggling against populism, which had become totally reactionary, and also gave an overall theoretical justification for their natural penchant for Europeanising Russian social life, the intelligentsia, and in particular its increasingly strong right wing, freed itself, at first timidly and then with more and more assurance, from the proletarian-revolutionary conclusions of Marxism. "Self-liberation" appeared in the form of "a pitiless re-examination of dogma" and the "pulverisation of Marxism," as the late Mikhailovsky maliciously put it. But this effective process of "pulverisation," whatever the idealists of the positivist or "metaphysical" schools think of it, was in fact determined not by the theoretical incapacity of the doctrine, but by social reasons which Marxism alone can explain.

It has already been said above that our Party, after absorbing all the active elements of the democratic movement, had deprived itself of the possibility of coming into opposition with it, which predetermined its primitivism over a long period. But "chase nature away and it comes galloping back": this divisions between proletarian and bourgeois-democratic elements, which ought to have "concentrated" the class energy of the socialist movement, began to develop it along the lines of a single general doctrine: vulgar Marxism. Moreover, it was not as if the socialist elements had begun to separate from the bourgeois-democratic elements, but rather the latter who under the slogan of "criticism" began actively to purge their thinking of all the class elements of Marxism. Revolutionary doctrine lost its class edge. It was systematically, half-instinctively, half-consciously, blunted by socialist doctrinarism, either within the formal framework of Marxism, or in the form

of open "criticism," when this framework in turn became too cramped.

Marxism, we have said, took over sections of society to which it really had no claim: but was this the case? Is it not rather that these elements took over Marxism to serve their momentary goals? Today it is not necessary to be especially clear-sighted to reply to this question. What Marxism really meant for the objectives of the Russian democratic movement is clearly shown to us by our "idealists" of today, the "critics" of yesterday and the "Marxists" of the day before. Mr. P.G. [Struve – *ed.*], one of the authors of **Problems of Idealism**, recognises that Marxism has the merit of having "supplied a new popular programme which is clear and practical." The same author declares on the previous page that "socialism as such could not (in Chernyshevsky's time) and cannot now, give a clear popular programme." In other words, Marxism is recognised as having no merits except where it is not socialism. But what meaning does Marxism have without socialism?

Mr. P.G.'s answer is straight to the point: "The enormous *merit* [author's emphasis] of Russian Marxism" is "to have shown scientifically the historical necessity of capitalism in Russia," that is, to "justify it as an historical necessity." In other words, Marxism has freed the conscience of the intelligentsia from the duty of protecting anyone or anything from capitalism; Marxism has enabled them to fight for the Europeanisation of the social structure; *Marxism has given the intelligentsia the theoretical basis of its struggle for political emancipation.* Therein lies *all* its

"merit." One can then understand the following statement by the author about Struve, which at first sight is monstrous (and let it be said in passing that he has an indecent admiration for Struve): Struve, "abandoning positivism, has thereby abandoned Marxism *philosophically* speaking," (author's emphasis). Only philosophically? Yes, "because the scientifically determined results of Marxism and the previous gains of its programme for the masses are not affected by a metaphysical turn," (Struve's). Thus the editor of **Obvobozhdenie** finds himself a "Marxist" in the political sense of the word. It's the same thing for Mr. Bulgakov. He even rejects "the philosophical social doctrine of Marxism" and starts "from a quite different philosophical basis":

but he too remains loyal to Marxism "in all that concerns the basic questions of concrete social policy." (**From Marxism to Idealism**, p.315.)

In fact, Mr. P.G. gives a crude but nonetheless revealing idea of the relationship between Marxism and the Russian intelligentsia in the 1890s.

Today , now that many fires have been put out and many leaves have fallen, Mr. P.G. can, in the name of his past, pose the question of the value of Marxism, with the evident intention of making an apologia for the bourgeoisie: the meaning of Marxism is apparently to justify capitalism.

Previously , in the first half of the 1890s, Marxism was to the intelligentsia and even to the Hon. P.G., something other than the mere justification of capitalist exploitation. If Mr. P.G. is guilty of treating his own past in a cavalier fashion, though it did have traces of "romanticism" in it, this does not stop him giving a straightforward reply to the following question: what was it about Marxism that gained it admission to most of the literary salons? It is that, as we have just learned, it supplied a whole "popular programme" stripped of all socialism.

It is clear that people who put forward considerations of *this order* about Marxism were in no way Marxist, they were – and remain – the philosophical parasites of an aspect of Marxism which they have isolated and separated from the totality, the theoretical "justification," by means of the intrinsic laws of social development, of a whole given form of social relationships. Such a "justification," mechanically cut them off from the context of the dialectical conception of the world, may "sanction" extremely conservative conclusions; but in the real Marxist conception, not the falsified one, this "justification" is entirely subordinate to the revolutionary aspect of the materialist dialectic: every form of social relations itself engenders its own contradictions and finally becomes its own victim. "Criticism" then had to deprive Marxism of this second aspect, inherent in its doctrine. Moreover, as purging Marxism of all its "non-scientific" (that is, revolutionary) vestiges soon took on the form of the struggle against the revolutionary Marxists, very quickly all Marxism lost its attraction for Sir P.G.: it became an *alien* doctrine.

See how eloquently this moment is depicted by one who lived through it: "I felt the ground being gradually taken from under my feet. Of the edifice which even yesterday seemed so harmonious and complete, only a few walls remained. Of course, some demands of a social kind [we already know which – *T.*], laid down by reality itself, retain their practical value, apart from

all theory. Nonetheless, anyone who thinks about it naturally tends to conceive of these disparate demands in a scientific way, and to grasp them intellectually as a unified conception and idea of the world. And the unity which Marxism previously presented was lost." (Bulgakov, **From Marxism to Idealism**, *Preface* , p.XIII). Our scribbler things that in our eyes as Marxists, "all this is reduced to the fact that some illegitimate offshoots of Marxism have for one reason or another (essentially for practical reasons) capitulated to the shadow of idealism for the sake of a peaceful niche in which sweet sounds and prayers resound." (**From Marxism to Idealism**, *Preface* , pp.V and VI.)

This is all rubbish. In the "explanation" (or accusation) which Mr. Bulgakov puts in the mouths of Marxists in relation to himself, the motives of collective psychology are replaced by individual "practical" motivations, and the materialist explanation by an ethical judgement; and idealism, the Credo of broad layers of the intelligentsia, is joined by Messrs. Bulgakov and Berdeyaev, who for "reasons of a practical nature" move towards those peaceful pastures resounding with sweet sounds and prayers. The essentially *personal* , practical or "religious" "reasons" for which such and such a leader of idealism has moved from certain positions, is a question for the biographers, always presuming that the leaders of "idealism" are of any interest to them. But on the other hand the question of what social and political conditions have produced the psychological problems leading to the "change in ideological ties" of "some illegitimate offshoots of Marxism," is indisputably within the competence of historical materialism and can only be resolved by it.

We have already said that the doctrine of the proletariat, Marxism, had produced an effect not expected by its creators: it had given the Russian democratic movement the moral right to go with a pure heart and head held high, to "the school of capitalism"; after it took the road of "criticism," the consciousness of our democratic intelligentsia, which had been awakened to political life by the proletariat, was purified of all respect for sociological doctrine in general and scientific socialism in particular – and this was the consciousness into which Marxism had been injected as the means of struggle against reactionary populism.

Ideological parasitism alone, in the form of a ruthless *criticism* of Marxism, the doctrine of another social class, cannot on its own ensure the existence of broad layers of the

democratic movement in the period of rising opposition, when it is preparing to deploy the greatest political enthusiasm it can muster. We have just heard Bulgakov say that "anyone who thinks about it naturally tends to conceive of these disparate demands in a systematic way, and to grasp them intellectually as a unified conception and idea of the world." The liberal who "thinks," after saying goodbye to Marxism, "naturally tends" to build himself a new temple, where he can worship his Lord without being disturbed. But building this philosophical temple with the stones of realist thinking was something absolutely impossible for Mr. Bulgakov and all those who followed the same evolution: for the Russian traditions of realist thinking were inevitably based on Marxism. This was terrifyingly clear to all who had already experienced the struggle against sociological "subjectivism" and populism. Turning to philosophical "realism" meant encountering the Marxism which had just been so carefully and painfully purged of everything "non-scientific" in it – to the point where there was nothing left. *To reject Marxism, was to reject the traditions of realist thought in general.*

The ideologues of Russian liberalism, having passed fleetingly through the school of Marxism and been "ruined" theoretically by it, found themselves obliged to seek out a spiritual refuge in the clouds of idealist metaphysics, and, to take up Feuerbach's expression, "in the asylum of theology."

The liberal "who thinks" naturally tends to conceive the "disparate demands" of the democratic movement in a systematic way. But his class instinct separates him from the historical and social standpoint, which is monopolised by Marxism, the supreme stage of sociological thought. Marxism has transformed the historical and social standpoint into a class standpoint, and thus "includes" the "disparate demands" as the product of class interests. For the liberal or the "democrat who thinks," adopting such a standpoint would have meant political suicide; they would in effect become in their own eyes representatives of the ruling classes. This is why they necessarily had to look for crutches *outside* the historical process and class realities; they had to turn to a *supra* -historic world. From the changing, empirically perceptible "Being" they had to appeal to immutable, permanent "necessity." They appealed to the categorical imperative of morality to "systematically conceive" and philosophically elaborate these

same disparate demands, which the Stuttgart **Osvobozhdenie** took to formulate. Objectively as much as subjectively, it was absolutely *necessary* for the ideologues of liberalism to present their programme, not as the crude platform of a "progressive" bourgeoisie, but as the expression of the eternal laws of morality; and we have seen how idealism in response to this absolute necessity, does not abandon its supra-historical position on problems, but with the aid of wretched syllogisms explains that: "the formal principle of morality eliminates ethical conservatism as much as the ethical utopia of perfection on earth. It condemns... the very idea of the possibility of a universal harmony of interests and forces, to be reached by bringing about this ideal." (p288). To put it more briefly still: the categorical imperative, as a guiding principle in politics, "eliminates" intransigent conservatism and "approves" of liberalism. And Mr. Bulgakov, with his own logic, is entirely right to say: "This principle is sufficient to give a basis for the aspirations to liberation of our time." (**From Marxism to Idealism**, Pref. , p.XXXI)

The position is then consolidated. "The imprescriptible rights of Man and the Citizen," placed under the direct protection of the categorical imperative, must from now on be the basis for a fight on two fronts: today against the Tsarist police, tomorrow against the proletariat; today against absolutism, tomorrow against socialism.

While the moderate liberal wing of the intelligentsia was striving to entrench itself in its ivory towers of metaphysics, some intermediary elements of this intelligentsia, liberated by the same "criticism," decided that from now on *anything goes!* Revolutionary democracy in France did not celebrate the festival of the goddess Reason with such joy as our "Socialist-Revolutionary" intelligentsia celebrated its liberation from all its obligations towards theoretical reason. You only have to read the **Messenger of the Russian Revolution**, the organ of libertarian socialism: a sort of "Socialist-Revolutionary" **Decameron**, a collection of short stories, artistically inferior to Boccaccio's, but at the same time incarnating the fiery revolt, the vehement protest of bourgeois "flesh" on its awakening to the tyrannical chains which for a whole period the "orthodox" Church had imposed on it with no recourse to appeal.

In an atmosphere "freed" by "criticism" from the intellectual weight of Marxism, broad layers of the intelligentsia felt that they were, after their shattering entry into the sphere of revolutionary struggle, independent of all

rigorous "dogma." But these layers, exemplified by the "Socialist-Revolutionaries," did not reject Marxism as a whole. Such a rejection would have laid too big an obligation at their door. They contented themselves with exploiting it like bandits, to justify some act or another of political adventurism. The attitude to Marxism of the "Socialist-Revolutionaries" is only the reflection – on the theoretical level – of their attitude towards the proletariat. They did not recognise it as an independent political force, though they did not yet turn their backs on it; they agreed to exploit it politically.

What Europe gave painful birth to, and delivered itself of socially and politically, was easily appropriated by the Russian intelligentsia through books and papers, but alas! at the first change of circumstances, they as easily freed themselves of it. It only had to feel its own revolutionary strength and have an awareness, or at least a presentiment, of its future political importance, in order to immediately bring into play their faculty for ideological regression, not the least foreseen by the Marxists of the 1890s; a regression which took the form of populism masked by historical subjectivism and idealist metaphysics. The "Marxist" ranks diminished more and more. The title of "ex-Marxist" or "ex-Social Democrat" overnight became an entry ticket into the "best houses" of the literary "brothel," and no one outside a very small group saw that this "title" only signified the desertion of those who had gone over from the army of the proletariat to the enemy camp. Such a changing of camps could only be the act of a political renegade.

It was at this point that our companions of yesterday hastily did up their luggage as if they were afraid of missing the train; the majority of Party members, dedicated body and soul to the cause of the proletariat, were unable to understand the political meaning of the change in the intelligentsia which was taking place before their very eyes. The "Economist" Social Democrats did not put a very high price on Marxism two or three simplified theses which in their eyes, sanctioned their victorious tactics; they acted towards Marxism as a whole with an indifference equivalent to suicide. What is more they were themselves quite receptive to bourgeois "criticism." The Party did not have a "theoretical atmosphere" and the practices of "Economism" were steeped in the vitiated atmosphere of legal journalism, with its "Marxism" as apologia for the bourgeoisie, and its "criticism." It was as a whole the period of the massive flight of the intelligentsia from Marxism, while the massive flight of the intelligentsia from Marxism, while in the background the proletariat masses began to move. From an elementary,

evident *fact*, the Social Democratic Party became a very complicated *question*.

It is precisely as a complicated question that **Iskra** treated the question of our Party.

“In the name of Marxism”

The period of
Iskra

And God said: “Let there be light” and there was light. He separated the heavens from the earth, day from night, bourgeois democracy from proletarian democracy. Primitive chaos disappeared and the reign of revolutionary social democratic politics was installed. Such in biblical language would be the style of statements and addresses of acceptance of the **Iskra** committees, whose basic characteristic is the absence of all historical perspective. **Iskra** has not chosen its tasks “arbitrarily”. They have been imposed on it by conditions of the moment, such as we have described them above. The “Economists” had awakened new forces, but found themselves incapable of dominating them. They had aroused a mass movement but had failed in the task by not giving it an unequivocal class character. Through the intermediary of the workers movement, they had awakened the democratic intelligentsia; but they had not brought it under their control; on the contrary, they capitulated to it, when it launched a theoretical campaign against the principles of the independent class policy of the proletariat.

These two facts determined the basic tasks of the whole **Iskra** period. The second in particular (the rapid growth of the democratic movement) placed an indelible seal on the nature of our first political paper.

In so far as one had confidence in the political capacity of Social Democracy, it was absolutely necessary to push very actively for the political “differentiation” of the democratic intelligentsia, in order to win, in the name of Marxism, the greatest possible number of conscious partisans of the working class. “In the name of Marxism!” is the slogan which dominated all this period, and around it were grouped the revolutionary intelligentsia; it became as terrible a slogan as before it *Slovo y*

Dyelo , "word and deed."

Iskra has not accomplished miracles. It has not separated the heavens from the earth, nor the land from the sea. But with the support of *Zarya*, which again took up Marxism, **Iskra** contributed enormously to the political differentiation of the democratic intelligentsia. The "Economist" period had been one of direct and exclusive struggle for influence over the proletarian masses, a struggle not against other democratic parties, but against the lack of culture of the proletariat itself and against the barbarism of Russian political conditions. The period of **Iskra** was in its objective political meaning, the period of struggle for influence over the revolutionary intelligentsia with, in the background, a proletariat engaged in the democratic struggle. In this fundamental difference lay the historic "justification" of these two latest periods in the life of our Party. *This*

difference, that is the meaning of the whole Iskra period, is what must above all else be understood by anyone who wants to get even an approximate grasp of the problem of the present differences within our Party.

The period of **Iskra** was the period of struggle to influence the intelligentsia.

Iskra proclaimed that "*it is indispensable to differentiate yourself*

yourself ." And it delimited and differentiated itself. This

does not mean that **Iskra** worked out *tactical*

methods for differentiating the proletariat and the bourgeoisie immediately

(in this sense **Iskra** achieved extremely little); rather, it applied the

theoretical basis of Marxism (taken up by

Zarya) to "delimit," within the democratic intelligentsia, the main

partisans of the proletariat from the potential

partisans of the bourgeoisie. "You must delimit yourself." Of course, "in the

last analysis," this meant the self-determination of the proletariat in the form

of independent class politics. But this "final goal" existed only subjectively; to give it life is the task of the new, rich period which is already dawning for our Party.

The mission of the old **Iskra**, however, a mission it effectively carried out, consisted of using cutting-edge Marxist doctrine to hold all the elements of the democratic intelligentsia who were not definitively lost to the "idea of the fourth estate."

We have to make a qualification here. We are considering here the objective *mission* carried out by **Iskra**. When we speak of **Iskra**, we are not thinking of **Iskra** as it was projected or as it began but as it has *become*. Subjectively **Iskra** had fixed itself much broader goals: above all to raise the spontaneous workers movement to the level of a political movement, and then (in the name of the proletariat, the liberating class) to lead "all those to whom the name *liberty* is dear!" (no.3). A political paper should as a *social-democratic* paper act as a beacon to the revolutionary proletariat and, as a *democratic* paper, as a guide to the fighting forces of democracy. But as it has turned out since, it is impossible through literary means to attain political results which are not in line with the balance of political forces. Social Democracy could not fight in the place of the workers, nor a social democratic paper *in place of* Social Democracy. If Social Democracy, taking into account the extent of its influence over the proletarian masses, and the level of energy and efficiency of its political action, is incapable of carving out a decisive place for itself in the democratic struggle, it is in vain for a social democratic paper to try to drag the whole democratic movement along behind it, solely in the name of the liberating class. History does not allow "substitutions."

The democratic movement has not allowed itself to be fettered by purely literary means, for this activity is precisely the field in which the intelligentsia is the strangest and therefore the most independent. To bring out two papers like **Ozvozhdenie** and **Revolyutsionnaya Rossya**, following the living example of **Iskra**, and thus to eliminate all even "temporary" obligation towards the Party of the proletariat, was the work of one or at the most two years.

In as much as the democratic movement had supplied itself with its

“ideological” weaponry, the political retardation of the working class was expressed in the fact that its own Party at the time ran the risk of being, if not entirely at least partially, dissolved into the democratic movement. **Iskra**, wishing to remain faithful to the cause of the proletariat, found itself no longer constrained to rally the democratic movement “*in the name of the proletariat*” but to detach itself from it, “*in the name of Marxism*.” Willy-nilly, it was obliged to devote most of its work to the “delimitation” which originally Zarya alone was to have carried out. **Iskra** was *intended*, according to the original plan, to be the leadership of the general, common democratic struggle, under the hegemony of the party of the proletariat, but it was *in fact* transformed into a self-defence organ of the Social Democratic intelligentsia, by virtue of its objective task which was to bring the proletariat in the general democratic struggle behind its own banner. This turn, half-spontaneously carried out, gave the paper its bellicose and “furiously polemical” air, which one thinks of whenever the name **Iskra** is pronounced. In its issue no. 35, **Iskra** by means of an excellent article by Comrade Starover, established a balance sheet of the objective changes which had come about, and which had influenced the physiognomy of the journal. “The turnabout which has taken place at the top of the democratic movement,” Starover says, “is an accomplished fact. The idea that the proletariat was to lead the struggle for freedom has been replaced by another, giving the proletariat only a subordinate role.” (“The two faces of democracy”)

The critique of “Economism,” and of populist, terrorist and nationalist prejudices, took up the lion’s share of **Iskra**’s work. **Iskra**, as has been said, was not a *political* but a *polemical* paper. It has been accused of fighting, not so much against the autocracy as against other factions of the revolutionary movement. It would inevitably flow from such a reproach, were the argument to be consistent, that **Iskra** had no political ideas to propagate other than those shared by the democratic movement as a whole; in other words, that it should agree to dissolve the idea of class into democratic ideology. For Social Democrats that would have meant the abandonment of all perspective of their own. **Iskra**, luckily for the Party, did not do this. On the contrary, it devoted the greatest attention to the “factional differences of opinion *within the*

intelligentsia .” In fighting against populism, terrorism and nationalism, **Iskra** showed the *intelligentsia* the road of struggle for the historic interests of the proletariat. What was directly incumbent upon **Iskra** was not the task of politically delimiting the proletariat, but of clarifying the intelligentsia about the historic interests of this class.

When Lassalle was waging a bitter struggle against the “progressives,” he was fighting directly for the influence over workers already engaged in the democratic fight, among whom the “progressives” had organised partisans. But when we fight against populism and idealism, what we have directly in mind is not the workers, but the intelligentsia which will at first move away from us in order to go to the workers, with its petty-bourgeois populism or its bourgeois liberalism. **Iskra** did not bring the “Socialist-Revolutionaries” before the *political* tribunal of the proletariat as Lassalle had done with the “progressives” (and our committees only did it to an insignificant extent); it only condemned them *theoretically* from the standpoint of the class interests of the proletariat, and only in this sense indirectly, in the name of the proletariat.

If some caviling adversary went to great lengths to demonstrate that the old **Iskra** committed a whole series of theoretical mistakes, ruining a whole “generation” of Social Democrats in first flower, and that if these mistakes had been corrected along the lines suggested, the Party would at the present time be experiencing a powerful growth, all we could do is shrug our shoulders. This is not where the crux of the problem lies. It does not lie in the theoretical neglect (for example of the relation between “spontaneity” and “consciousness”); the basis of the problem is not so much in these questions as in the *politically limited* character of the mission imposed on a group of Social Democrats by the class interests of the proletariat in a given historical period. It concerns the rapid and feverish process of the transfer and regroupment of the democratic intelligentsia which dispersed without trace all elements which up until then had been tied together in an undifferentiated whole by the subjective aspiration towards “being and remaining” (the conscious instrument) of the “class movement of the revolutionary masses.”

It is not enough to recognise the historical merits of **Iskra**, still less to enumerate all its unfortunate or ambiguous statements. We have to go

further still: to understand the historically limited character of the role played by **Iskra**. It has contributed a lot to the process of differentiating the revolutionary intelligentsia; but it has also hampered its free development. The salon debates, the literary polemics, the intellectual disputes over a cup of tea, were all translated by it into the language of political programmes. In a materialist sense, it gave form to the multitude of theoretical and philosophical support for given class interests; and it was in using this "sectarian" method of differentiation that it *won to the cause of the proletariat a good part of the intelligentsia* ; finally it consolidated its "booty" with the various resolutions of the Second Congress on the questions of programme, tactics and organisation.

All this work is however only a prelude to real political work by Social Democracy. At present the question is posed as follows: what is the central task of the new movement? Must it continue differentiation – within the now limited framework of the intelligentsia, linked to Social Democracy by a common programme – or is it necessary to work out methods for bringing about the immediate political separation of the real (and not imaginary) proletariat from the (real) bourgeoisie?

We insist on the second answer. The Party to be created, for which the old **Iskra** brought together these few members of the intelligentsia, must see to the *immediate* resolution of this task, a task which consists of *politically detaching* the proletariat from the bourgeoisie. For us this task is basic, and alone gives an explanation and justification for the work of **Iskra**, but was scarcely envisioned by it or by the practitioners of that period.

It is true that the Party is now at least drawing closer to the proletariat for the first time. In the time of "Economism" the work was entirely directed towards the proletariat, but in the first place it was still not yet *Social Democratic* political work. During the period of **Iskra**, the work took on a Social Democratic character, but it was not directed straight *towards the proletariat* (and in so far as it was, it had only a "primitive-democratic" character which we will speak of

later). It is only now that Social Democracy as such turns towards the proletariat as such.

Defining the present situation in this way, we can understand by the very way the problem is posed, not only the possibility, but the very necessity of the present differences within the Party. Each period has its own routine and tends to impose its own tendencies on the movement as a whole. The "Economists," starting from mental confusion, identified the "trade union and professional movement" which they led with the Social Democratic movement; in the same way the "*Iskra* *ists*" too often identified the struggle for the recognition of the principle of the class politics of the proletariat with the actual practice of these politics, and this identification finally led them to neglect totally their immediate task; that is, the carrying into practice of the political principles of the proletariat, which were in fact generally accepted in terms of day-to-day politics. But we shall speak of this again below.

When Lenin took up Kautsky's absurd idea of the relationship between the "spontaneous" and the "conscious" elements of the revolutionary movement of the proletariat, he was only giving a crude definition of the tasks of his epoch. He spoke to the intelligentsia which – given the complexity of the problems raised – was the only public for **Zarya** (and **Iskra**), and which could provide the spark. He said to them: "First we will infuse you with Marxism, as a concentrated dose of consciousness, we will steep you in mistrust for bourgeois democracy, and then to work, into the attack on spontaneity!" This is precisely where the task lay: to "fill" the intelligentsia with Marxism, tie them hand and foot to stop them getting away, betraying, and openly attacking Marx – in other words, stop them from breathing! It was moreover an extremely urgent task, since the Marxist intelligentsia were melting away before our very eyes, slipping through our fingers to go... to the Socialist-Revolutionaries and the liberals.

We do not of course mean that **Iskra**, carried away by the work of "differentiating" the intelligentsia, went so far as to ignore its main tasks and fix its sights on "a different class of the population." Not at all! The intelligentsia which **Iskra** was running after was *in the first place* the Party itself. The instinct for political conservatism was the drive behind the struggle against "criticism" Bernsteinism, terrorism, populism and idealism, all the ideologies which involved an element of disturbance and break-up in the milieu in which **Iskra**

was hoping to build a united party. Between a small group of eminent Social Democrats and the awakened working class there was a layer of undecided members of the intelligentsia, among whom "our own" people could not be recognised in the "chaos." Our political paper was not an organ which *immediately* led the political struggle of the proletariat, but a principled political platform which served within the intelligentsia to delimit the Marxist section from that which was half-Marxist and from that which was scarcely influenced by Marxism at all.

Nonetheless, it must be borne in mind that **Iskra** received an appreciable and very precious inheritance from the "Economist" period: *the awakened masses of the urban proletariat*

On this historical basis, the struggle for influence over the intelligentsia was a profoundly different task from that facing the Emancipation of Labour Group in the 1880s and part of the 1890s. What was required then was to demonstrate the inevitable development of capitalism in Russia and deduce from it the historical legitimacy of the existence of Social Democracy in Russia. To complete this task what was needed was not a paper but a journal, not **Iskra** but the **Social Democrat** became *propagandists* of scientific socialism. The problem posed before **Iskra** was something quite different. It had to train not propagandists but *political leaders* for a mass movement which already existed. This aim could not be achieved just by the theoretical exposition of the methods of Marxism, but by demonstrating its validity from the "current" phenomena of social and political life. But the exposé of these methods, as well as the use made of them journalistically, was wholly and immediately to serve only one goal: to strengthen and politically train the Marxist intelligentsia.

We have still not exhausted the whole content of the last period. The urban masses, spontaneously awakened (the inheritance of "Economist" agitation), by their very existence not only determined the methods of getting a hold on the intelligentsia, but above all demanded that direct attention be paid to them. "Unknown to its leaders," No.3 of **Iskra** wrote, "the proletariat charged into battle when it observed that the radical section of society was seriously ready for a trial of strength with the regime... Russian Social Democracy will have to consider as the *basis of*

its practical activity to participate actively in the struggle for liberation undertaken by the whole of the Russian democratic movement

this obvious aspiration of the working masses

; it will have to, if it doesn't want to miss the boat, if it doesn't want to abandon its right to the leadership of the proletarian movement and turn it over to other political forces." And Russian Social Democracy effectively made this "aspiration of the working masses" the basis of its political activity.

The practice of the Party has in a sense been completely transformed during the **Iskra** period, but not, of course, only under the influence of **Iskra**: in place of the movement of "trade" strikes, scarcely going beyond the limits of the separate trades, has come a systematic political agitation among the proletariat by means of generalised political "denunciations." This difference is so sharp that it can be conceived – and is – as a difference between trade unionism and the class politics of the proletariat. In this perspective the relationship between **Iskra**'s work and the Party's, and therefore the role of **Iskra**, are presented in an extremely simplistic way: the revolutionary social-democratic paper directly leads the revolutionary social-democratic policy of the proletariat. Such a view is as false as it is seductive.

It was absolutely impossible for the Party, in the field of political practice, to carry out all the tasks proposed by **Iskra** and **Zarya**. You cannot simply "turn on" social democratic tactics anywhere at any time. Even the mere fact of the existence of the proletariat would not be enough. It is absolutely, qualitatively necessary that broad layers of the proletariat be engaged *in democratic*

politics. But such a proletariat did not exist. Russian Social Democracy had first to create this state of class politics by carrying out the historical tasks of the bourgeois democratic movement: that is, the spontaneous awakening of the proletariat (the "political" period). The method of political "denunciations" was to serve to give these awakened instincts the character of a conscious *civic protest*.

Therefore, however different from each other was the content of the two

preceding periods, they were nonetheless alike in objectively representing the result of bourgeois-democratic work – carried out in the name of the principles of socialism and undertaken, subjectively, for purely socialist motives.

If the theoreticians and publicists of "Economism" ruthlessly furlled in the banner of socialism, the **Zarya-Iskra** group on the other hand is completely innocent of this sin against the Holy Spirit: they set for themselves, and for the whole Party, a task which is common to the whole of international Social Democracy: the unification of the workers' movement and of socialism (**Iskra** no.1); they developed this theme theoretically and polemically in their publications and assembled their supporters around this task and the need to understand it. But the work which they carried out among the proletariat (not only their work, but also that of their "adversaries," for all were moved by the same objective requirements), was completely consumed with the task of freeing the consciousness of the working masses "from the yoke of secular political prejudices, from blind faith in the government, in the mercy of the Tsar, and the mistaken belief that proletarians are *equal citizens with the*

rest , in a society which lives off their labour." (No.1) **Zarya** in the field of theory, **Iskra** in the field of journalism and programmatic polemics, showed the direct relationship between an "equal citizen under the law" and a proletarian, and once this relationship was established, they taught their audience socialist politics. But the political life of the awakened masses was not imbued with the consciousness of this relationship; it was completely taken up with the slogans of emancipation in general "(If I like **Iskra** so much," a worker from Petersburg writes, "it is because they consider the worker as a citizen. That's very important!" (**Iskra** No.14)

To claim that **Iskra** had directly led the political life of the proletariat in the sense of drawing on the immediate experiences of the movement and giving immediate answers to immediate needs, would be historically quite wrong. In the work of "differentiation" among the intelligentsia, **Iskra** has effectively played a leading role: it was theoretically armed to the teeth, and in this type of struggle theoretical armoury was everything. But this struggle itself was not everything. *The proletarian theory of political development cannot substitute for a politically*

*developed
proletariat.*

This truth manifested itself not only in **Iskra**'s unfortunate attempt to its earlier period to subject all tendencies of the democratic movement to the hegemony of social democracy "in the name of the proletariat"; it was also evident in the total inability of **Iskra** to fertilise the movement of the proletariat itself by the intellectual contribution it had made to the thinking of the revolutionary intelligentsia.

Iskra did indeed influence this rebirth of practice, directly or indirectly, in the course of the past three or four years. But only to give directives which are evaluated in terms of practice and slogans taken up in practice. **Iskra** –

considered abstractly – did not need to be **Iskra**: it could just have been a revolutionary paper. As for the complex political ideas **Iskra** contributed in the capacity of a "spark," they were less important for the present than for the future. These ideas, which were not directly transformed into practice, prepared, in the consciousness of leading elements in the Party, the intellectual premises for fixing the tactical tasks of proletarian revolutionary politics, on the "*material*" basis created by the efforts of the preceding "generations" in the Party.

We have said that for the reactivation of practice which took place during the last period revolutionary democratic ideology *in abstracto* was insufficient. But if the "entry" of the proletariat into the sphere of "man and citizen" was to lead to the process of *self-determination* of the proletariat as a class, it was absolutely indispensable to create the vast and complex ideological armoury of scientific socialism, the only armoury capable of opposing the different forms of bourgeois-democratic ideology and irrevocably linking to the historic cause of the proletariat, the leading personnel of the movement, that is, the elements coming from the democratic intelligentsia.

Some specific but extremely significant examples show to what extent **Iskra** operated *unequally* in the ideological "differentiation" of the intelligentsia and the political self-determination of the proletariat. **Iskra**, with ruthless severity towards all "hesitation" on the part of intellectuals, gave proof of considerable and even inadmissible indulgence towards any statements by the proletarian elements awakened to politics.

Iskra maintained an almost approving silence when a Petersburg worker showed his extreme joy at the complete ending of talks on surplus-value (and therefore also on socialism); at the same time, it fell with all the weight of its theoretical wrath on the Socialist-Revolutionaries who had suddenly decided on a "not too doctrinaire" definition of the class, as a category defined by distribution and not by production. **Iskra** freely quoted workers asking to be taught without delay "how to go into battle"; at the same time it poured out the most biting irony against the "historic turn" in which workers were advised to form into "assault battalions." In fact, the war-cry "form battalions!" was an abstract response to an abstract question: "How do we go into battle?"

This is to be explained above all by the fact that **Iskra**, basically, due to the imbalance between its "theory" and its "practice," had two types of criteria. It was necessary to fetter the intelligentsia without delay with the seven times tied knot of socialist doctrine; but on the other hand the proletariat, "freed from surplus-value" and becoming aware of the "rights of man and of the citizen," was not mentioned for itself, but so that by its revolutionary qualities, it might march – if I may put it this way – behind the "tailist" intellectuals (Khvostites).

At the present time, we are responsible, not only for what will happen in the future, but also to some extent for what has happened in the past. On our future "behaviour" depends not only the fate of Russian Social Democracy in the coming years but also the value of the work *in the direction of socialism* which is carried out up to today.

So that all the preceding work should not be lost from a socialist point of view (therefore not only from a revolutionary point of view), it is above all necessary that we should appreciate the two main conditions of our activity latterly; below are the masses politically awakened and linked to us by traditions now ten years old; above, is absolute respect for Marxism, as a method of political thinking; on the one hand out of fear, on the other for reasons of conscious choice. These two elements must become the essential elements for further work. The appeals heard here and there purely and simply to "liquidate" one or the other of these premises, must be rejected decisively, once and for all, as an absurd attempt to abandon all that political culture which we have won at the cost of great efforts, and without which we would find ourselves as poor and naked as Job.

Iskra and **Zarya** have accomplished no miracle; in history, in effect, there are no miracles. But every member of the Party who is sufficiently a Marxist not to demand that Marxist writings accomplish miracles, can view with pride the polemical campaign of the preceding period.

The work of restoring Marxism from its coating of "criticism" was carried out by **Zarya** with Comrade Plekhanov, of course, at its head. Vera Zasulich showed the intelligentsia all the idealism which was to be found in our Russian materialist socialism, directing her gentle but mortal irony against the new idols of the intelligentsia; and she brought the intelligentsia back to the service of the proletariat. Starover won over the declassé intellectual, showing him his own image, finely idealised, in the way Marx did. Martov, the Dobrolyubov of **Iskra**, was to cast on our poor, unformed, inexpressive social life such a clear and direct light that the political, i.e. class structures of this social life stood out with piercing clarity. And where it was necessary to decide, consolidate, tie down, or fix a running know, where "fluctuations" had to be prevented, it was Comrade Lenin who stepped in, with resolution and talent.

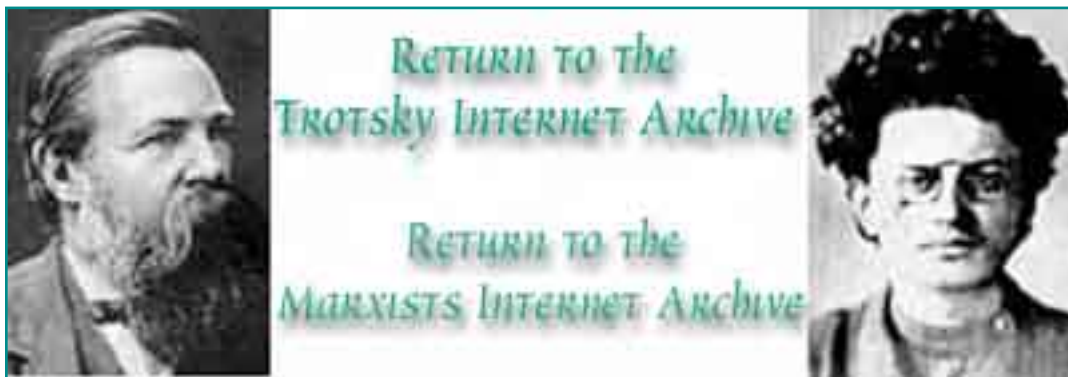
And Comrade Axelrod?" you will ask. This is what is so interesting: during the whole of this period Comrade Axelrod did not play a very active role, for it was not *his* period. The faithful, farsighted guardian of the interests of the proletarian movement, he was the first to sound the alarm on the threshold of the period on which **Iskra** has left its exact and brilliant mark.

By the very structure of his thought, and not only by his conception of the world, by his political "state of mind" rather than by conformity to the "programme," Axelrod is a genuine proletarian ideologue, in the sense in which they are to be found only in Germany. He is not capable of acting subjectively towards the intelligentsia, but only objectively. He does not speak with the intelligentsia, only about them. The intelligentsia is not for him the audience to whose feelings he must appeal, it is only a political force whose weight he must measure. This is why during this period, which hinged entirely around the evaporating Marxist intelligentsia, P.B. Axelrod could play no active role, not only because of the large number of his "articles" (Axelrod in general does not express himself in articles so much as in condensed mathematical formulae from which others, Lenin included, write many articles), but due to the place occupied in **Iskra's** literary campaign by the use of Axelrod's tactical "formulae." The direct search for tactical methods

for the political self-determination of the proletariat in the historical and social context of absolutism, a search which was Comrade Axelrod's "own line" throughout this period, was never so to speak placed on the agenda, for it was work to do with "internal differentiation." Comrade Axelrod intervened again at the end of the "Iskraist period to say: "That is enough! Now it is necessary to radically change the centre of gravity of our work; it is indispensable to politically put into circulation, in a living way, the potential force which **Iskra** has won to the cause of the proletariat!" Axelrod's "notes" in Nos.56 and 57 of **Iskra** announce the beginning of a new period in our movement.

It may seem strange to hear me speaking about **Iskra** in terms of an obituary: **Iskra** lives, works and is fighting. I think nonetheless that I am right to speak of *two Iskras*, one of them in the past tense. The new **Iskra** is a direct offshoot of the old **Iskra** (and to some degree the object of my pamphlet is to make this explicit). But they are separated by an abyss. And this is not because anyone was misled, made a mistake and was corrected, and still less because anyone left, but because there have been three years of conflict which have left deep traces on the political physiognomy of all the protagonists – three interesting years full of life, which will not be repeated, and so much the better, since we have before us a whole stretch of still more lively and interesting years.

[Part II](#)



Last updated on: 19.4.2007

Leon Trotsky

Our Political Tasks

PART II: TACTICAL TASKS

The content of our activity in the proletariat

Beyond any doubt, interesting years of struggle await us and unprecedented events are preparing. But at the present time it is at all costs indispensable to get ourselves out of the impasse in which our Party has now been struggling for a year. The work of the committees is being carried out in lamentable conditions. There is almost no political "contact" with the masses and the organisational links with them are weak. This is why to speak of the proletariat as the vanguard of the general struggle makes our ears burn at this point in time. For every Social Democrat capable of thinking politically, it must be clear that our work suffers from a profound disorder, be it passed on from "Economism" or "caught" during the **Iskra** period, and that this "disorder" prevents us rising to our full height. It would be naïve to think that internal frictions are the cause of the atrophy. They are only the symptoms of it.

If we set aside the internal differences, organisational conflicts, mutual "boycotts" etc, and only consider the content of our party work, we shall be surprised by its quantitative and qualitative poverty. Every field of our activity

is covered by sheets of white paper of varying dimensions, on which are printed generalities about the need to overthrow the autocracy "in the name of socialism." These sheets of paper are called "proclamations" and the sum of these proclamations, for unknown reasons, is called the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party. Is this not the case?

The pivot of the work of the "Economists" was the *strike* . In the following period, the *demonstration* played more or less the same role. Without such "pivots," our work in the masses would be absolutely impossible. In the West, apart from the fact that in recent times the pace of the movement there is incomparably more "measured," the "critical moments" in the revolutionary "production process" are the periodical election campaigns. Strikes and demonstrations represent a whole series of complex practices of mass resistance, strengthen the feeling of solidarity, and develop a fighting outlook – and do so on a scale that neither agitation nor written propaganda could achieve. It would be totally utopian to believe – as the first Lavrists did – that it is possible to develop political class strength in the proletariat while remaining content to explain to it about the struggles of workers in other countries, or showing the need to struggle without at the same time showing what forms of struggle are possible at the given time, and calling on it to apply them. The strike and the demonstration, the two high points of struggle during the two preceding periods, not only gave practical reality to the feelings of protest which had emerged in the proletariat due to written and oral agitation, but also abruptly and rapidly widened the field of this agitation and qualitatively raised the receptivity of the masses to ideas of new forms of struggle, of greater importance and complexity.

According to the place occupied in the general context of our revolutionary struggle by a particular form developed by our practice in the independent action and activity of the masses, the organisation oscillated between two types: it was either conceived of as a technical apparatus for massive diffusion of published literature, be it within the country or abroad; or as a revolutionary "lever" to involve the masses in an intended movement, that is, to develop in them pre-existing capacities for autonomous activity. The "craft" organisation of the "Economists" was particularly close to the second type. Good or bad, this type of organisation was adapted to given forms of "practical resistance to capitalists by the workers." Good or bad, it directly contributed to uniting and disciplining the workers in the "economic struggle," that is, essentially, strike movements.

To find the virtually pure incarnation of the first type of organisation, we must turn to the Polish Socialist Party (PSP). Endeavouring to reduce to a minimum the sphere of reciprocal contact with the masses, the PSP went so far in its conference resolutions as to forbid, for conspirative reasons, all circle propaganda, and ended by entrusting the whole task of mobilising the masses to written activity alone: in part to its newspapers, but above all its proclamations.

“Conscious of the negative aspects of such a mode of work (the organisation of the Party in small propaganda circles), the Second Congress of the PSP in 1894, “the Party has directed all its efforts towards agitation by means of the press and has limited the work of the circles to the training of agitators.

*Publishing and mass
distribution of
socialist*

literature are the

main (only? – T.) methods the PSP will use to fight for the mobilisation of the working masses in struggle against the government and the capitalists.”

“Such a conception of the Party’s tasks,” according to the author of the **Brief History of the Socialist Movement in Russian Poland** (p.129),

“determined the whole activity of the PSP and gave it a specific character, far removed from the ideal of a genuinely proletarian party.” The same writer says further that the strikes, which broke out spontaneously, generally subsided without results. The PSP having no contact with the masses

*because of the
considerable
distance separating
the organisation
from them*

, was not only unable to lead and methodically orientate struggles, but did not even know how to make sensible use of them for political agitation (p. 190). The apparatus, extremely well adapted to the distribution of revolutionary literature, proved completely unusable in the role of regulator of the living revolutionary energy of the masses.

Far be it from us to want to take the Party back to the craft organisation of the “Economists.” But the organisation of the PSP – and here we are entirely

in agreement with the author of this interesting **Brief History** – is also infinitely “far removed from the ideal of a genuinely proletarian party.” This seems indisputable to me. In fact (and I try to explain this below) even if we Social Democrats distributed our literature to perfection, we would not thereby constitute a Social Democratic Party. The organisational ideal which we have forged in the course of the struggle against “Economist” craft organisation, which was and still is imposed on us by a whole series of objective conditions, great and small, takes us closer and closer to the PSP, that is, to a party which as we have just seen considers “the massive diffusion of socialist literature” as the basic or, more accurately, the only means for “preparing the working masses for the fight against the government and the capitalists.” (!)

In reality, our organisation long since ceased to subject itself to the requirements and needs of the “trade union” struggle, in particular of the form the fight most frequently takes on: the strike. In the course of our struggle against “Economism,” to which we have opposed the practice of “political denunciations” on every occasion, not only have we completely unlearned the art of leading strikes, but we have even begun to suspect all “trade” struggles in general, considering that they are not “politically sound.”

At the beginning of the new century, announced in Russia by such noisy events, the demonstration had already replaced the strike as a central means of struggle of local work. In a whole series of towns the activity of the committees began to be limited to preparing a street demonstration, in the course of which very often all – or nearly all – the forces of the committees began to be limited to preparing a street demonstration, in the course of which very often all – or nearly all – the forces of the committees were involved in organising an action which in fact was not always all that flamboyant. But the demonstration without a precise objective, the demonstration against the existing regime “in general,” the demonstration for its own sake lost all its power of attraction once it ceased to be a novelty. The surplus of effervescence gained by the demonstration no longer compensated for the expense in terms of material and human forces. In the towns where demonstrations had already taken place, the masses were not so keep on facing the bayonets, bullets and *nagaika* (the cossack lash) just to sing revolutionary songs and wave the red flag. Demonstrations will only rise up again (I am saying this now to avoid all misunderstandings) if they come out of the application of richer and more complex methods for integrating the masses into the sphere of matters of

living political interest.

Loosening or even directly breaking their solely "trade-union" relations with the masses, with the intention of making their organisation more "conspiratorial" and flexible and adapting it more definitely to the revolutionary direction of mass demonstrations, our committees cut the ground from under them; they were moreover obliged to convince themselves that the demonstrations were more and more rarely successful. Then the committees began to follow the line of least resistance and took the "mass demonstration" beyond its proper limits; this is why there were increasing attempts to adapt the local organisation to the tasks of street-fighting. In what committee can you still hear the speeches which were so common two years ago, about "armed resistance," "military detachments" and "combat groups"? In none. What does this mean? The committee has no links with the masses; it does not lead strikes; it no longer calls demonstrations, or takes the lead in them.

The work of the committees, deprived of immediate revolutionary stimulus, is increasingly reduced to printing and distributing leaflets. The organisation is increasingly turned into an apparatus adapted to this technical function alone. Even the distribution of leaflets follows the line of least resistance, and because the organisation is far away from the masses, even neglects the *workers* (cf. the interesting letter from an Odessa worker in no.64 of **Iskra**).

The organisation is still, unlike the PSP – and this is a huge difference – distributing *Social Democratic* literature. But it would be a great mistake to believe that, in limiting the work to the distribution of Social Democratic *literature*, we are still building a Social Democratic *Party*. Of course – who denies it?—we necessarily need a working conspiratorial organisation. It is doubly, trebly necessary – but *to do what?* Exclusively, or mainly, successfully to distribute Social Democratic literature to a given section of the masses? The task, taken by itself, should not determine the structure of our organisation and the forms of its apparatus. No, a thousand times no! It is not enough to distribute literature bearing the emblem of such and such a Party institution. It must also be read by the working masses and that requires that the political attention of the masses be constantly kept on the alert. But this goal cannot be limited to the distribution of leaflets. And

the more difficult this technical function becomes, the more we will dedicate ourselves to it. Literature will not penetrate all the depths and will only touch the masses superficially if the organisation is not adapted to its basic task: the working out or selection of tactical forms which arise spontaneously and thanks to which the workers can *react* collectively to all the events of social life which our party literature has the task of clarifying. It is precisely the task to which we must devote the main effort of the creative thinking of the leading politicians of our Party. It is precisely to this objective that the form of the Party's organisation will be subordinated. Otherwise what will happen is that the Central Organ will write about everything, the Central Committee – in the ideal case – will see to it that the upper layers of the proletariat will read a little, from time to time.

If the Party is the *consciousness* of the organised class and the *will* of the organised class (and it is right to define it in this way), then the systematic perfecting of these two categories logically constitutes the conditioning of its development. To act fairly regularly on the consciousness of the proletariat, by a "massive" distribution of Social Democratic literature, does still not mean building a proletarian Party. In fact, the Party is not only the *consciousness* of the organised class, but also its organised *will*. The Party begins to exist where, on the basis of a given level of consciousness, we organise the political will of the class by using tactical methods corresponding to the general goal. The Party is only able to grow and progress continually by means of the interdependence of "will" and "consciousness" if every tactical step, carried out in the form of some manifestation of the political "will" of the most conscious elements of the class, inevitably raises the political sensitivity of these elements which yesterday were not involved, and thus prepares the material and ideological basis for new tactical steps, which will be more resolute, and of greater political weight and a more decided class character.

We are using general psychological terms here, because we do not now want to complicate the exposé by translating these basic ideas into the language of concrete examples and illustrations as long as we only raise the problems without putting forward the means of resolving them. But if the reader tries to get a clear picture of the role played by the *strike* in the practice of the "Economists," and by the *demonstration* in the practice the period which followed, and if he is struck by the fact that the present practice lacks

all these elements which gave life to the work at that time, making a careful examination of the ground we have covered and looking politically at all this "raw material" – then these arguments will not seem abstract to him, and he, along with us, will ask himself the following question: where are the tactical forms in which the conscious elements of the proletariat would appear not only as objects of policy, but also as its subjects: not only as a political audience, but also as the "collective actor"; not just readers of *Iskra*, but also as active participants in the political events?

Whoever even asks himself this question will surely see that the Party is more than just a political field under the direct influence of the paper; that the Party is not just composed of assiduous readers of *Iskra*, but of active elements of the proletariat who are engaged in their collective practice each day. Let us repeat, it is to arouse this collective activity, take it forward, co-ordinate it and give it shape (and just for that) that we need a supple, flexible organisation capable of initiatives, an "organisation of professional revolutionaries," not of peddlers of literature, but of party political leaders.

Neglect of the tasks of autonomous activity of the proletariat: the heritage of the *Iskra* period

Many, far too many comrades remain deaf and blind to the questions we have just raised. This deafness and blindness are not individual, chance faults, but characteristics arising as tendencies during the period of ideological liquidation, of "Economism" and "craft dilletantism." Many *Iskra*-ists must become clearly conscious of these faults and "eliminate" them, and the sooner the better.

We, the *Iskra*-ists, have always been inclined to view the Party as the technical agency of the paper, and to identify the content of all the political works of our Party, with the content of our press alone.

Without taking stock of the "minority"s" energetic attempts to put an end to this narrow outlook, Comrade Lenin, in his latest pamphlet, attempts once more to reduce the problem of the content of our Party's work to that of the content of its programme, or even of a few issues of *Iskra* (see **One Step**

Forward). In this Comrade Lenin remains formally loyal to the traditions of **What Is To Be Done?** And in part to the traditions of the old **Iskra**. But *Vernunft wird Unsinn* (Reason becomes Unreason). This identification of the Party with its paper – which made some sense organisationally in relation to the given tasks of the preceding period) today turns into an extremely reactionary residue.

The problematic of the new period is defined by the *contradiction* between, on the one hand, the theoretical foundations of the Party, worked out in its writings in the course of the past period and formulated in its programme, and on the other hand the political content of the impact of the Party on the proletariat, and the influence of the proletariat on all the political groupings of society. To overcome this contradiction is the task placed on the agenda in Axelrod's "notes," and this is what gives meaning to the struggle of the "minority" against the narrow-mindedness, limitations and political formalism of the "majority." To say as Lenin does that we are in the Social Democratic Party because we have a social democratic programme is to take a purely bureaucratic way out of a problem which may become *fatal* for our Party. Our programme, in theory, has not progressed one step in relation to that of the "Emancipation of Labour" Group worked out twenty years ago; but the forms of action in which our Party operates within society have become both richer and more complex.

Vernunft wird Unsinn! The extremely primitive organisational "plans" put forward by the author of **What Is To Be Done?** which occupied an insignificant place in the whole realm of ideas, but which, as propagated by **Iskra** and **Zarya** were nonetheless an undeniable factor for progress, reappear three years later in the work of their "epigone," the author of **One Step Forward, Two Steps Back**, as a furious attempt to prevent Social Democracy from being fully itself.

The old **Iskra**, as we said above, fought directly for influence over the revolutionary intelligentsia, so as to subjugate it to the political programme of the proletariat, which it had drawn up in a very vigorous way. Such a struggle has its own methods. Its only arm is literary polemics; for literary life is the specific milieu in which the Russian intelligentsia not only *learns* but also *lives*. It is in and through literature that the professionally "intelligent" intelligentsia adheres to the

political principles of a given class. The plan of **Iskra** was to create a theoretical and political organ and group around it the revolutionary elements to be won to the cause of the proletariat. **Iskra** was a political platform and at the same time a weapon – essentially for struggle against the political “prejudices” of the intelligentsia. The content of the Party’s work was effectively identified with the content of **Iskra** – if you abstract from (and indeed everything was made in abstract) the immediate work in the proletariat, work which anyway was moving further and further away from the basic tasks and duties of the Party. Lenin’s “organisational plan” was not of course a revelation but – if one tries not to see his

Letter to a

Petersburg Comrade

article *Where to Begin?*

book **What is to be Done?** as exercises of a bureaucratic pen – a good answer to the following question: *where to*

begin, what is to

be done

is to assemble the scattered members of the future organisation of the Party and thus make it possible to establish broader political tasks? The way in which this organisation, once built, would acquit itself of its basic tasks, was of course evaded. I repeat, the so-called “organisational plan” concerned not so much the edifice of the Party itself, as the “scaffolding” necessary to build it (cf. **What is to be Done**, p.221).

The Second Congress, during which the “minority” could only put forward certain tactical questions very hastily (and in any case they attracted little serious attention, because the “main” thing had been done: **Iskra** was consolidated and the Central Committee subordinated to it), the Second Congress, with its plan of “orthodox theocracy” was a reactionary attempt to extend to the whole of the Party – in saecula saeculorum – the methods of work and forms of relationship which has shown their utility in the limited field of struggle against “Economism” and “craft dilettantism,” in order to create a centralised organisation of professional Social Democratic revolutionaries. But congresses, however sovereign they may be, are no better able to halt the unfolding of history than absolute monarchs.

Against its will the Second Congress has become the instrument of new pretensions. It wished only to consolidate the gains of the period of “liquidation,” in fact, it has opened a new period, and has made us discover a whole universe of new tasks. And demonstrating the internal logic of the succession of these periods, the new tasks only flow specifically from our old

basic problematic, which only now, thanks above all to the work of the old **Iskra**, is presented to us in a *genuine, immediate consciousness* form: the development of the *autonomous activity* and of the class of the proletariat.

This is however something more than we have done up to now. To resolve this problematic immediately, it is not enough to oppose in theory the *principles* of the proletarian class to the *principles* of the bourgeoisie. It is indispensable *politically* to oppose the *proletariat* to the *bourgeoisie*.

BUT HOW? AND BY WHAT MEANS? Social Democratic politics or the politics of the *Credo* ?

How, and by what means? Before finding a reply to this question, I shall quote some passages from the unpublished memoir of a comrade from Odessa, so as to show how the "Economists" organised the "trade union" will (otherwise referred to as the "*un* willingness") of the proletariat. It concerns the strike of the cigarette workers at the beginning of 1896:

The strike had been in preparation for a long time. A fund had been set up for an imminent conflict with the bosses (thought in fact strike payments were made only in cases of extreme need). For the factories to stop, it was enough for the workers in shops producing superior and medium quality cigarettes to come out. The strike was in spite of everything very difficult to organise. It concerned almost exclusively families of quite old workers who because of their situation were more "reticent" to come out on strike. We held several preparatory meetings, where the question of the demands were analysed, and above all the question of when the reserves of cigarettes in the hands of manufacturers would have run so low that a one-week strike would have a chance of success. The month of January 1896 was found to be the most likely. The strike therefore began on wage demands. To economise on

the fund, and above all to rally undecided workers, we organised collective meals. The workers spread out in such a way that convinced strikers were mixed with undecided ones at every group as they ate. It was due to this action of the "resolute" in relation to the "weak," and in general due to the permanent contract among us that the strike was able to last so long. It was interrupted by the sudden arrest of many of the strikers in February 1896.

This gives us a picture of collective work worked out in great detail. A fund is set up. The demands are decided on jointly. The tobacco stocks are counted. Collective meals are organised for the strikers because of complex psychological considerations. If it is taken into account that the strike spread to most of the factories in Odessa, it becomes clear that an action on this scale required of the participants a feeling for organisation, perseverance, discipline, and knowledge of the circumstances – required all these qualities and at the same time shaped them.

Are we at present carrying out anything similar? In forms adapted to the broader tasks our organisations are now setting themselves? Who dares answer yes?

It is well known that the bosses have often made immediate concessions to the workers, without waiting for the strike, as soon as some leaflet appears denouncing some injustice or other. But the concessions have always been granted under the threat of an eventual strike. It is easily understood how the committee of "Economists" never arrived at the idea or at the practice of carrying out the struggle at work by means of leaflets for the workers, without needing to resort to such a serious weapons as the strike. The committees could not resolve on such a serious weapon as the strike. The committees could not resolve on such a simple policy, because the consequences would have been immediate: the manufacturers would have stopped making concessions, and the denunciatory leaflets of the Committee, which would no longer have been unable to draw on the "trade union" will of the workers, would have lost all effect.

But if this kind of simplification is already unthinkable in the work struggle, where every action is so to speak judged on immediate results, we can see that in the political field, where the relation between methods of struggle and results are infinitely more complex and much more difficult to evaluate – the surreptitious substitution of the "professional revolutionary" will of a committee (by means of resolutions) for the organised political will of he

conscious elements of the proletariat, finds its widest application. It is not even necessary to show this – we can point straight to it.

A Petersburg propagandist tells me in a letter of a minor but significant episode: "Once I had recounted what had happened at the Congress with Pronin and Stepanov, a worker stood up and asked, very moved:

But what are we going to do now? and the others said they were sorry that *all this happened without them*, that they had seen nothing and taken no part in it ..."

I must confess that when I read this, I too rose up like that worker and, seized by emotion, I asked myself: *What are we going to do now?* ...

because this is fatal: an extremely important political event takes place, and moves the whole town and the whole country. The workers learn about it in passing, in the report of a propagandist, and are moved to ask: "What are we going to do now?" The propagandist does not know how to answer them. Nor does the committee. And what is worse still, the committee does not even pose the question, "What is to be done?"

At the same time we ask another question which follows directly from the first: Is there a very big difference between the "Economists" and us? Is there a *basic* difference in the content of the work? Alas, alas! The proletariat, in the period of "Economism," was in a political ghetto, and it is still not out of it.

The radical democratic movement confronts the reaction, but the revolutionary proletariat stands on the sidelines and asks in bewilderment: "What is to be done now?" This episode in Petersburg, at first sight of slight importance, is symbolic: it sums up the typical features of all our party work. The revolutionary proletariat takes no part in the "action" in political events. There is not even an attempt to involve it. Of course, they are informed *afterwards*, by proclamation, of what has taken place, leaving them no option but to start and ask, bewildered: "What is to be done?" without getting a reply. This is the kind of practice which dominates the Party at the present time. *Only pharisees will deny it. Any honest*

*Social Democrat
will recognise it,
and will make the
question of the
Petersburg worker
the business of his
own political
conscience.*

I repeat, what difference is there between the practice of "Economism" and this "economism," which we have so pitilessly condemned? And what's more, has our political work not brought us much closer than the "Economists" themselves to the programme of this *Credo* which we had vowed to anathema?

The more closely you look at the four following figures: The "programmist" Stepanov, the legal democrat, the Marxist propagandist from the committee and the "economist," the more you distinguish their individual features, the more you see that each and every one of them "represents" his own political group and personifies the respective role of each of these groups in the political life of the country. And the more you feel obliged to answer in the affirmative the question posed above: yes, we have taken a long detour... carry out the programme of the *Credo*.

"For the Russian Marxist," this programme said, "there is only one way: to participate, that is, to support the economic struggle of the proletariat and to collaborate in the activity of the liberal opposition." In other words: on the one hand to lead the primitive manifestations of the class struggle of the proletariat and limit it to its embryonic forms; and on the other, to intervene actively in the ranks of the radical and liberal bourgeoisie.

If we consider the content of our *work* – and not only the content of our heads, our programme, or our Central Organ – we have the spectacle of a "Party" placed above the proletariat (at least as Comrade Lenin and his supporters understand the term Party), and more precisely we see three quarters of an organisation, if not nine-tenths, built of Marxist intellectuals, leading the primitive manifestations of the class struggle of the proletariat (both economic and political) and then leaving from time to time to campaign "among all classes of the population," that is, taking part in the political struggles of the radical bourgeoisie. It will be retorted that this is a joke, or at

least, a literary exaggeration.

Unfortunately, the practice of the committees corresponds perfectly with this "exaggeration." The committees, although as we have said they are unlearning the art, lead the primitive forms of economic struggle (strikes) or political struggle (semi-spontaneous demonstrations of the proletariat, with vague revolutionary slogans), and they also "go among all classes of society" in one form or another (most often in the form of proclamations). And that's all!

Some comrades have proudly pointed out that the expulsion of Pronin and Stepanov from the "Congress on questions of technical and professional training" had been prepared by the Petersburg Committee of the Party. I freely admit this. But this alone stresses the validity of the analysis put forward here. The Petersburg Committee, without the conscious proletariat participating or even being informed, found itself in agreement with the radical intelligentsia, which with its help united under a given slogan, showed its strength and took a step forward in its political development. Supporting the democratic intelligentsia with its initiative and with practical help, the Petersburg Committee thereby rendered assistance to the cause of the democratic fight against absolutism. But it should not be forgotten that the proletariat, the actual proletariat of Petersburg, remained completely outside these events, and was only *afterwards* able to ask the Party's envoy: "What are we going to do now?" The group of "professional revolutionaries" was not marching *at the head* of the conscious proletariat, it was acting (in so far as it acted) *in the place* of the proletariat.

This practice of *politically substituting* for the class is evidently far removed from a local democratic practice. It is much closer to the programme of the *Credo* than the practice of economism itself. Economism deliberately limited itself to raising the primary (trade union) demands of the workers movement when it was in the lead of it. The theoreticians of the *Credo*, who considered the lack of autonomous politics of the proletariat an inevitable fact, taking social and political conditions in Russia into account, were logically consistent in demanding that the Social Democratic intelligentsia carry out their civic duties, that is, take an active part in political life. But in the absence of independent proletarian politics that could mean only one thing: to take part in the opposition politics of the

liberal elements of society. Here the reluctance of Marxists to liquidate themselves into the bourgeois opposition was only doctrinaire obstinacy and thus "essentially harmed all those who are obliged to fight for legal forms, without the collaboration of the working class which has not yet resolved its political tasks" (the *Credo*). The "Economists" were therefore inconsistent and for the most part they proved to be in this sense "obstinate."

But what did the "political" elements do when their turn came? They went back to the practice of "Economism." They completed the practice of "Economism" – making it worse in one sense and better in another – by fulfilling the second task set by the *Credo* which is basically a bourgeois task.

And however astonishing it seems, a people who cannot listen to a word of the *Credo* are able to say: "They have come not to destroy but to do."

So what is to be done?

The Petersburg Committee would have acted in a qualitatively different way if, every hour and every minute, it had felt it was not a *substitute* for the proletariat, but its political *leader* . There is an enormous difference, and it would have been reflected in the whole conduct of the Committee.

If the "Congress on technical and professional training" had political meaning, it was certainly to be made use of. We agree on that. But how? *By remaining in the proletariat and not by leaving it.*

I think that if the Petersburg Social Democrats had not been afflicted by the malady which drives "professional revolutionaries" to emancipate themselves *from* the proletariat, they would not have reacted by turning their gaze towards the Congress, and their backs on the Petersburg workers. It would have been quite different. The Committee would have had to bring together all its propagandists and instruct them (not in passing, but by presenting things to them thoughtfully and in detail, relating this task to the sections of the programme concerning support for opposition and revolutionary movements, and to the relevant resolutions of the Second Party

Congress) – instruct them to acquaint the advanced workers with the political features of the forthcoming Congress and the relationship of Social Democracy to it. The Congress would naturally have become the theme of discussion in special meetings. Perhaps too new discussions would have been necessary in the propaganda circles.

The campaign would have developed; interest in the Congress – at least in the most advanced layers – would have been aroused. After this the Committee would have had to draw up a resolution presenting the demands of the workers of Petersburg to the Congress. The resolution would have been debated in detail by one of the members of the Committee with the propagandists and agitators. They, in turn, would have circulated it throughout the cells of the organisation and collected signatures. Once there were 100 or 200, the resolution would have been printed and circulated for signatures. It would, of course, be signed with crosses. Workers attending the propaganda circles – above all the professional agitators – would have put everything into collecting the greatest possible number of signatures, attracting workers' interest in the Committee's campaign by every possible means. In dozens of cases it would have been possible, without great effort, to replace the laborious collection of signatures by reading the resolution aloud and counting the vote by show of hands. The lists with crosses and numbers of hands voting, would have all been handed over to the Committee. And in so far as the campaign developed in breadth and depth, turning the "decision" of the official group of representatives of the Marxist intelligentsia of Petersburg into a formulation of the will of the conscious proletariat of Petersburg, the Committee would have gently begun to emerge from its state of "professional revolutionary" hibernation, and tried to feel like the leader of the revolutionary proletariat; it is an extremely strong feeling, but one we unfortunately have too little.

The Congress would have begun. The Petersburg Committee would have put forward its resolution, presenting the demands of 500, 1,000, 5,000 Petersburg workers. The resolution would have proposed, among other things, the expulsion of Pronin and Stepanov, as being indispensable. Each worker who had signed would have known that it was *his own resolution* being presented to the Congress, and that the Congress had to answer *to him*. If it had agreed to expel Pronin and Stepanov, the revolutionary worker would not have been asking "Miss," the propagandist, voicing his emotion and bitter feeling of discontent and impotence: "What must we do know?" He would

already have done what had to be done

Presentation of the resolution to the Congress would have offered two possibilities: the Congress would have acquiesced to the demands of the Petersburg workers, expelled the reactionary gangsters from its midst, and put forward in its own name the demands for the eight-hour day, freedom of assembly and of expression, etc. It was quite possible, because the radical-democratic intelligentsia has every interest in guarding its prestige in the eyes of the revolutionary proletariat. If the Congress had agreed, the proletariat would then have intervened actively as the *vanguard* of the democratic struggle in general, drawing in, by its political initiative and influence, the non-proletarian sectors of the democratic movement, to act more boldly and put forward more resolute demands. But if, on the other hand, the Congress had been more concerned to preserve its legal, moderate character than its democratic reputation, and had in some way shown its disdain for the demands of the Petersburg workers, they would have had a concrete, unforgettable lesson in the tendency to compromise and the lack of decisiveness which are typical of the bourgeois opposition. In a word, whatever the reaction of the Congress to the voice of the conscious proletariat, the efforts of the Committee would not have been in vain. The workers affected by the "pressure campaign" on the radical-democratic movement would thus have *detached* themselves from it. They would be concerned with developing their own role and would have acquired the habit – if it can be put like this – of being politically aware of their own (class) selves.

Of course, this Congress was not the centre of everything. It is only an example. However wretched out social life, it does provide a number of occasions on which the Party of the proletariat can intervene politically in an active way.

Did the Petersburg Committee make use of the recent elections to the *duma* which, because of the lowering of electoral qualifications, took place in such a lively atmosphere?

Last year, on the initiative of the Minister of the Interior, the *zemstvos* debated the question of electoral qualifications for election to these institutions. The *zemstvo* members testified to their modest inclination to "admit" some participation by the people in the political life of the future free Russia. The liberal press raged,

proposed with the greatest radicalism compatible with its nature to lower the financial qualification and introduce the franchise based on "education" and residence. But did the proletariat raise its voice to protest against these two latter forms of franchise? No. Did the leading organisations even once try to attract the proletariat's attention to this question? In no way! All the Party did in this respect was publish an editorial in **Iskra** No.55 ("With the people or against the people?") The Central Organ was, so to speak, commissioned by the Congress to sign in the place of the politically immature proletariat. In such a case do we have even the slightest reason to hope that this proletariat which has kept so silent will be able to intervene actively to defend the interests of the people when the liberals assembled in the *Zemsky Sobor* (*zemstvo* assembly) begin to politically usurp the people? Or is it to be hoped that **Iskra**, mandated by a special congress, will at the decisive moment take the initiative and push the liberals to demand *universal suffrage* ?

Substitutionism, always substitutionism!

This half-year of war has done nothing for the political education of the proletariat. But the war does give our Party irreplaceable material for all-Russia political campaigns, precisely because it affects the consciousness of the lowest layers in society. For example, the Party has set itself the task of devoting two or three months to concentrating the revolutionary forces around the slogan: *Not a penny for the war!*

All agitation, carried out under the direction of a politically vigilant centre, develops along the same line. In all the circles and groups, in closed "discussions" and broader gatherings, and in published proclamations, the same theme always comes up. The servile or ambiguous behaviour of the liberal press, be it in Moscow or Stuttgart, the perfidy of the *dumas* and *zemstvos*, wasting the inexhaustible material for developing intensive oral and written committees – under the direction of a politically vigilant centre – organise an all-Russia protest against the scandalous behaviour of the bodies of self-administration (the *duma*, *zemstvos*, etc.) and against the press, redoubling the protest resolution and, where possible, organising mass demonstrations.

If our Party had even carried out one single campaign on the lines we are

proposing, it would have been well on its way, and the (stupid) complaints against "internal enemies" would have stopped. The Party would have come out of it bigger!

A word about propaganda

With the political activity of our Party growing in depth and breadth, important changes are also to be made in the sphere of propaganda. The question of the place of propaganda in our work has always been a delicate point. We are carrying out an unprecedented historical experiment: we have to create the Party of the proletariat within the framework of absolutism (not only its police framework, but its socio-historic framework). This is why the whole history of our Party is, as has been said, the history of various attempts (following one on another by an inner logic) to *simplify* social democratic tasks, taking into account our political poverty. Propagandising the ideas of scientific socialism within small circles has always been a corrective to this spontaneous simplification. Still, propaganda has often been brought in "by stealth"; in reality, neither in the practice of "Economism" nor in Comrade Lenin's so-called "plan" was circle propaganda basically considered to be a normal component of our activity. It was almost always considered to be a necessary tribute our Party had to pay to its Social Democratic nature. "Circle propaganda," observes a Polish comrade in a polemic with the PSP, "is and will remain, in conditions where social democratic activity is illegal, the chief means for socialist organisation to produce the greatest possible quantity of intelligent, experienced agitators and leaders out of the workers' movement." (**Sketch of a history of the socialist movement in Russian Poland**, p.188.) If, during the period of organisational fetishism, we could not, like the PSP, through circle work overboard in favour of centralist, conspiratorial Party building, it is in large part to it that we owe the "little weaknesses" in the mechanism of our organisation, which has often left us without any publication and which has thus obliged us to resort to the "craft" methods of circle propaganda.

The task imposed on us by the new period in the Party is the following: to make our propaganda lose its abstract and often scholastic nature, and give it a living political content; to leave behind the "vestiges" of craft dilettantism, and make it *an organic element of our broadening,*

deepening political

work . Circle propaganda among us is usually organised – in so far as it is – on the lines of some programme drawn up by the committee, a very complex programme which is never really kept to. Slavery, feudalism, wage-workers. Or else: emancipation of the peasantry, populism, *Noradnaya Volya* , the development of industry, Social Democracy, etc. The propagandists, at least the sincere ones, complain that the workers are asleep. The attendance has already turned over by the time one reaches Social Democracy. And when it is reached, painfully, it is spoken of in dreadful abstractions, and there it ends. The propagandist does not understand that his business is politics, not pedagogy, and in politics more than anywhere else, “everything in its own good time.”

He does not feel, much less is he conscious, that his task consists of ideologically arming the workers of his circle, of transmitting to them the baggage of ideas and experience which will enable them to find their way immediately in all the events taking place in the town, the country, the whole world; that he must teach them not only to find their way on their own, but also to be able to use all events as live material for agitation. The propagandist, however, has only one thing on his mind: he has been asked to give the workers a “course.” And if the industrial crisis, the international socialist Congress, or the war with Japan surprise him during the lesson on the emancipation of the peasantry, he will sweep aside the question of the war and will continue, as before, to explain the history of the agrarian reform. As if the workers were pupils who have to prepare for an examination by following a course and not politically active people! Is it surprising, then, if the workers openly yawn? They would not do so if the propaganda were part and parcel of a *political campaign* which they can directly understand, or have to carry out.

But first, to show how propaganda is seen, let us quote a few passages from a pamphlet written by a number of “circle practitioners and leaders.” After first presenting their “programme,” which is neither better nor worse than dozens of other “programmes,” the authors of the pamphlet write:

These courses take a long time, extending over 20 evenings. So for every circle of 10 workers, the intellectual is taking five or six months. Now practice shows that the majority of the audience are not capable of completely assimilating the content of these courses. When the intellectual dwells on any

question, the attention and receptiveness of the workers is lowered; it is clear that all the details of the lesson are without effect, that as little as possible should be said, in short, that the course should virtually be turned into an agitational speeches. We aren't children any more and we have been steeped in propaganda quite long enough. There have even been cases of workers asking to have the first book of **Capital** discussed in the circle.

*(Letter to the
Comrade Propagandist
1902, p.6)*

Here is the account of another propagandist, who also has his own personal "programme":

The first two or three lessons were quite lively. They understood me, asked me questions, and visibly expected from me something new and powerful. But, after some time, interest began to wane. Absences became more numerous. Those who stayed became passive. I often see boredom on their faces, and in their eyes the silent question: "Why is he telling us all that?" I tried to change the tone of my talks and often, in relation to a particularly crying injustice on the part of the administration or the government, I tried to stress the crying failings of the whole system and the absolute necessity of struggle against it. I let myself go, spoke at length and passionately. I lifted my eyes to the audience and what did I see? They were there in front of me, quite indifferent and looking tired. And yet our working class is a profoundly revolutionary force. It demands action, and seeks it out. What a transformation in these same workers, when I happened to talk to them about the present struggles of their comrades, of the most notable strikes and demonstrations! How passionately those who had already taken part in such movements recounted their impressions! The accumulated revolutionary energy must be given a way forward. Our workers want action, real, live action: words only send them to sleep. They know, even without our sermons, that the capitalists and the government are their enemy, and must be fought; we have to show them the means of struggle and push them forward.

This is how the propagandists debate over the agitational and propaganda nature of their lessons, but without awakening the interest of their listeners. And they come quite close to recognising the root of evil:

*thought sleeps
where the will is*

lacking . How is this to be overcome? How is our propaganda to be infused with life?

We have spoken above of the Congress on technical and professional training. Let us take this example once more. The Committee organises the complex political campaign sketched above. After fixing the main outlines of the plan of the campaign, one of the members of the Committee explains the plan to the propagandist and recommends them to give a basic explanation in the propaganda circles. You can be sure that at the resulting circle meetings no worker will go to sleep. At a stroke the propagandist will no longer feel like a teacher, but a political agent: he will feel that he is actively and directly taking part in a complex political job. His course will be on the political fight for which he has in advance carefully brought together all his knowledge on this subject. He reports on the planned Congress, explaining its political meaning and possibilities. After this he outlines the plan: to unite all the conscious elements of the proletariat around presenting an address to this Congress; he explains the role of the democratic intelligentsia and our relations with the opposition and revolutionary tendencies. All these questions must be discussed from the standpoint of principle, and thus related to the relevant passages of our programme. If the campaign extends over several weeks, the workers will certainly come to the following meetings with a whole series of problems which arise directly out of their practice as agitators. The answers one would give to these questions would not go in one ear and out the other, but would be engraved on their minds because they would not simply be laid down in the "course," but would, on the contrary, be present and directly indispensable in order to bring a good, fascinating undertaking to a satisfactory conclusion.

If propaganda is carried out in this way, the resolutions of the Second Congress on the liberals, and the paragraph of the programme relating to it, take on flesh and blood; the workers will notice that the programmes and resolutions are not a trap, but a means of leading political battles great and small. So from one campaign to the next, the whole of the Party's programme would be "kept under review" in the propaganda circles. True, in this case the logical order would not be followed; but in any case, whatever the system of propaganda, it is impossible to keep to such an order: either the circles disappear, or there is a turnover in attendance, or else the propagandists are arrested, etc.

When the local organisation is very weak and has only a limited sphere of

influence, that is, when the committee does not have the strength to plan complex political operations – or even in the case of bigger and more powerful committees in periods of political quiet – then propaganda can be organised following the logical sequence of a course. But a committee would have difficulty finding a better logical order for the courses than that followed by our Party programme. In so far as propaganda work must absolutely follow a model, our programme is the one to be chosen: courses can be adapted to the successive paragraphs of the programme. The aim of such a course is to make every person attending the circle a conscious member of the Party, that is, someone who must “recognise” and therefore, above all, understand the Party programme.

But, let us repeat, the best method of studying the programme of the Party is to take live examples, analyse the events one after the other, always with a “utilitarian” political aim. Only then will propaganda cease to appear to be a *concession* (to the class, socialist character of the Party) – as it was for the “Economists” and their heirs. Propaganda conceived in this way gives our organisation not only executives for technical functions, but active members, who are not at a loss anywhere.

From pedagogy to tactics

In the *Letter to the Comrade*

Propagandists

quoted above, written at the end of 1901, published in 1902, and without the slightest repercussions at the time, when the problem posed was not on the agenda, we find these interesting lines:

The workers at every moment show their discontent with this state of things; day after day, month after month, they do nothing but listen, without being able to show anything of their own revolutionary attitude; then they begin to get into fights with informers and argue with their foreman; it is necessary to provide some outlet for their strength and energy; so the Committee has to integrate them into the system of messages of solidarity and protest. For example, the government is keeping quiet about the famine problem. A number of leaflets can be published on this, denouncing the diabolical job it does in “metamorphosing” famine into bad harvests; then after publishing a proclamation to inviting workers to protest in writing, the text of the protest

is drawn up and read out to all in the circles, and passed from hand to hand among the workers to collect signatures (anonymously, of course) and, finally, it is to be published in the name of the Committee, indicating the number of workers protesting. This easy, simple work will restore the workers' morale a little and, if often repeated, will prepare them to carry out more serious tasks. In the same way, if a strike breaks out somewhere, solidarity messages can be written, distributed widely on the basis of news about the development of the strike, collections, even small ones, can be taken among the workers, etc. In short, protest on every occasion which may justify it, be the echo of everything which may arouse workers' solidarity. In fact, why not try to boycott a hated foreman, or organise a strike over some trifle on which the factory owner or manager will easily give way?

Solidarity, the feeling of comradeship, mutual aid and all the other good qualities of which the workers are tired of hearing and which can only be developed in practice, must be exercised as much as possible in order to unite the workers of the separate workshops and factories, into a single solidarised mass, answering the call of distress of the oppressed like an echo. This is why we propose the committees involve the workers as often as possible in active protests, strikes and solidarity with their comrades; we are convinced that this corresponds to the present state of mind of the masses, and will be very fruitful, if they are made accustomed to reacting to all the events of the day. (**Ibid.**, p.15)

In these instructive lines, *tactical problems*, in the real sense of the term, are not yet posed: the author recommends without distinction both protest against the government's famine measures and the boycott of a hated foreman, or a strike over any "trifle." But the basic task, standing out in filigree from his chance remarks, may in general be formulated as consisting of the development of the self-activity of the proletariat. We have already indicated that this idea had passed without notice at the time; self-activity of the workers, if not actually suspect on grounds of syndicalism, was at that time only a word to everyone, undoubtedly very important and precious for many people, but all the same only a word. Hauptmann says somewhere that "words take on life only at moments ... and in daily life remain a dead letter." It is the same with the political slogans and watchwords of the Party. It took the Second Congress, an infinitude of palace revolutions in the Party organisation, and a whole series of bitter frictions in all fields – before the cry (the howl almost) "*Towards the masses! Into the masses!*" burst out from the Party, and the watchword "

*self-activity of
the proletariat*

” became a living

and, let us hope, life-giving slogan.

The questions of *social
democratic tactics*

based

totally on politically conscious and active masses, are today placed on the agenda by the whole of the previous development of our Party, a development which, as we pointed out in the Introduction, has created all the necessary material and ideological conditions; and one can be assured that now, all publishing or practical work concerned to develop the political self-activity of the working class, will not be without issue and will not be crushed.

The author of the *Letter to the
Comrade Propagandist*

quoted above has aims which we have expressed in psychological terms: to trade the *consciousness* and *will*

of the proletariat. I repeat – these are still not problems of tactics in the real sense of the word: boycotting a hated foreman, striking over trifles, protesting against the government’s diabolical conduct over the famine – all these “opportunities” must, according to the author, be used equally for the tasks facing social democratic organisations which, he says, are more pedagogic than political. He evaluates the rallying of the workers behind some slogan or other solely from the point of view of the subjective, psychological results, and not the objective political results. This is quite understandable.

In the phase of transition from circle (“craft”) life to the life of a political party, the basically new tactical methods which some revolutionaries are thinking about are still considered from the old, pedagogic, “craft” standpoint, not politically. This narrow standpoint only corresponds to the limited material and ideological resources of the Party organisations during this transitional period. But in the present case, what is important for us is that thinking which is not content with *circle*

propaganda

and the

distribution of

literature

looks in the masses for forms of action

which contain within them the possibility of further developing them and transforming them from educative methods into tactical methods. In some of the pedagogical, “craft” proposals of the author of the *Letter*

are hidden, like the grain in an ear of corn, some new methods of political tactics. Quantity here too is transformed into quality. And in fact the workers' protest against the government's attitude at a time of famine will remain a purely "educational" measure if it only involves 100 or 200 workers in some town or another, but will acquire political meaning if it is carried out in growing waves throughout Russia, rallying thousands and tens of thousands of protesting voices in the proletariat. Calling on the students and all "decent citizens" to join the mass protest, will be the next step of the politically vigilant centre, which has rallied around it all the lively elements in the Party. The next step then will be silence of the liberal press, which even when the people are suffering greatly does not dare transgress the censor's veto. Then, appeal can be made to all social institutions of the ruling class, both permanent and temporary, to take a stand one way or another on the government's position, where these public institutions, above all the *zemstvos* and *dumas*, remain silent. This is also how *the most conscious layers of the proletariat are led to confront politically the institutions of the ruling classes in the process of the general democratic struggle against Tsarism itself*. This is precisely how we give our political struggle its class character.

In trade union and professional struggles some groups of workers clash with individual capitalists. In the political struggle the proletariat clashes with the autocracy. But broad layers of the bourgeoisie, which still does not appear in Russia as the ruling class, also oppose the autocracy. The government still does not represent the executive committee of the bourgeoisie as it does in parliamentary countries. This is why it is still not yet possible for us to carry out a generalised struggle against it at a political level. But it is precisely this struggle which gives the movement of the proletariat a class character. Only the free Russia of the future, in which we (and not, for example, Messrs. Socialist-Revolutionaries) will obviously be obliged to play the role of opposition party and not government, will enable the class struggle of the proletariat to develop to its full extent. But so that the struggle of the

proletariat for this "free Russia," under the leadership of Social Democracy, may prepare the struggle for the dictatorship of the class, we must even today, be an opposition to all institutions, permanent and temporary, for the class which tomorrow will take the helm of the state. To oppose solely at the level of theoretical principles, in our programme, or on the purely literary level in our press, is not enough; it is indispensable that the opposition be a living fact, part of political reality. This is the "novelty" we want to introduce into our Party's life.

P.B. Axelrod for some years has been carrying out propaganda by word of mouth for new tactics, thus preparing the indispensable psychological ground in the consciousness of comrades at the head of the movement. Comrade Axelrod has understood that to be able to take on these tasks directly, the Party should be organised, that is, should have created the necessary conditions for the concerted activity of all its components. During the whole period of **Iskra**, Comrade Axelrod never interrupted his propaganda in favour of non-craft methods of work, and in this sense he had great hopes of the Congress, but "sufficient to the day is the evil thereof," and the comrades with whom Axelrod had discussed the problems of political tactics were either only formally in agreement with him, for they had not understood the real meaning of his proposals, or else made various objections to him, stressing that such a conception of things was "too new and too complicated," and moreover incompatible with policing conditions in Russia; they stressed that the *zemstvos* and *dumas* (which Axelrod's tactic aimed at) had "too insignificant" a political role, etc. All these considerations, whatever truth there was in them, are not viable objections to the tactical tasks worked out by Axelrod.

1. The conditions of conspiracy can no more present the organisation of complex political campaigns than of strikes and demonstrations. It is enough to recall that the first propagandists thought they could stop their agitation in the masses by appeal to policing conditions, and that the "Economists" always used this argument to oppose the "senseless idea" of political demonstrations.
2. The new methods of work do not either mean a "risk" of breaking with old, tired and trusted methods of struggle, but only a *more complex combination of these old methods:* propaganda, oral and written agitation, the

direction of mass "actions."

3. The *zemstvos* and *dumas*, especially the *zemstvos*, will play an increasingly important role during the revolutionary period. The liberal-franchise party will most likely see the *zemstvos* as "the rock on which the Church of the future will be built." The struggle for universal suffrage – during and after the period of liquidation of the autocracy – can then easily be transformed into direct struggle against the application of the franchise in elections to the *zemstvos* and *dumas*. Our duty is to prepare for this struggle.

However insignificant the role of the *zemstvos* and congresses, the liberal press and all the other institutions of the bourgeois classes in the active struggle against Tsarism, it is all we have in terms of direct organisation of the will of the bourgeoisie. It would be a crime to neglect all that, within the existing regime, constitutes a real starting point for the self-determination of the proletariat. It would be refusing to do the least, because one cannot do the most.

In any case, it is quite sterile to want to establish in advance the results of the tactics we are constrained to resort to, both by the internal development of the Party and the general political situation in the country. When the revolutionary period comes at the point when all the political forces draw up their accounts, history itself will make the balance-sheet of our results. It will neither subtract nor add anything in advance. There is no doubt that it will take into account, in one way or another, the least pocket of class consciousness and self-activity of the proletariat which we introduce into the proletarian movement.

TO WORK THEN!

***LONG LIVE THE
SELF-ACTIVITY OF
THE PROLETARIAT!***

***DOWN WITH
POLITICAL
SUBSTITUTIONALISM!***

By giving a detailed exposition of different examples it has been my intention to draw attention to the difference in principle which separates two opposing methods of work. And this difference, in essence, is decisive, if we are to define the character of all work carried out by our Party. In the one case we have a party which *thinks for* the proletariat, which *substitutes itself* politically for it, and in the other we have a party which politically *educates* and *mobilises* the proletariat to exercise rational pressure on the will of all political groups and parties. These two systems give objectively quite different results.

When Social Democracy tries on its own initiative to "push forward" the liberal opposition, its very success is only based on the political mentality of this opposition, and determines in advance the slight value of its eventual "success." Its initiative, whether in the form of a proclamation or a "conspiratorial" meeting in the wings of the political stage, will only be taken into consideration in so far as it corresponds to the state of mind and thinking of the liberal audience. In other words, the Social Democrat, in the eyes of the liberals, will just appear as a democrat with "Marxist" prejudices.

The picture is thoroughly modified if the liberal is obliged to see in the person of the Social Democrat the representative of a real force, even if he is only acting for a few thousand workers. When a political event no longer follows the path laid down by logic and the political mentality of liberalism, then it is turned in a new direction in which the trump card is in the hands of another force; the political logic and outlook of the conscious proletariat. When the Social Democrat takes such an initiative, he does not base himself on the mentality of his "collaborator" of the moment – *he will only take this into account* : he bases himself on the organised opinion of the proletariat. He will appear to the liberals not as a democrat with Marxist leanings, but as a representative of the democratic demands of the proletariat.

The tactic of our committees, which consists of from time to time sending out (behind the backs of the proletariat) appeals or proclamations to the students, the *zemstvos*, the *dumas* and the various congresses, is very similar to that of the liberals in the *zemstvos* "interceding" with the autocracy on behalf of

the people. Substituting themselves for the proletariat, the leading Social Democratic groups do not understand that it is just as necessary to lead the proletariat to "show" its class will in relation to the liberal and radical democratic movement as to lead it to demonstrate its revolutionary-democratic will against the autocracy.

Substituting themselves for the proletariat, our committees, instead of organising the proletariat into becoming socially aware, intercede with the bourgeois-democratic movement with their proclamations to favour "their" proletariat. Should we then be surprised if these impotent petitions take the "severe" form of condescending rebukes, denouncing "half-measures" and "lack of resolution"? Rebukes which provoke no reaction bar an ironic shrug from Messrs. cultivated liberals.

The supposed *pressure* we bring to bear on the liberals will be still less like a petition (even if it is an intercession in the form of a bold request) if we learn to assemble the proletariat in a real activity (a petition, a resolution, a protest, a meeting or a demonstration), not only around the general democratic aims but also on their own slogans, clearly formulated from a class standpoint and directed, at a given moment, not only against the police and the autocracy but also against the "irresolution" and "lack of conviction" of the liberals. Our real, not fictitious, influence on the policy of the liberals will be all the greater if we go less "into all classes of the population," *turning our back on the proletariat* – which is what all our "political" committees end up doing.

However simple this at first appears, it is necessary to understand that the only way for us to have influence on political life is to act through the proletariat, and not in its name; that we must not ourselves "go among all classes of the population," but that – to use a lapidary expression – *the proletariat itself must go among all the classes of the population.*

Comrade Axelrod stressed this idea in his 1897 articles. "To gain influence over these layers (the layers which suffer from the present disorganisation)," he says, "it is not at all necessary that the social democrats go in their midst,

into the milieu of these layers. The task for the Russian Social Democrats of winning supporters and direct or indirect allies in the non-proletarian classes will be resolved mainly by the nature of the agitational and propaganda activity *within the*

proletariat

itself

question of the

present tasks and

tactics of the

Russian Social

Democrats

.” (Axelrod, *On the*

, p.16, author’s emphasis.)

The system of political substitutionism, exactly like the system of simplification of the “Economists,” proceeds – consciously or not – from a false and “sophistical” understanding of the relationship between the objective interests of the proletariat and its consciousness. Marxism teaches that the interests of the proletariat are determined by the objective conditions of its existence. These interests are so powerful and so inescapable that they finally oblige the proletariat to allow them into the realm of its consciousness, that is, to make the attainment of its

objective

interests and its

subjective

concern. Between these two factors –

the objective fact of its class interest and its subjective consciousness – lies the realm inherent in life, that of clashes and blows, mistakes and disillusionment, vicissitudes and defeats. The tactical farsightedness of the Party of the proletariat is located entirely between these two factors and consists of shortening and easing the road from one to the other.

The class interests of the proletariat – independently of the present political conjuncture “in general” and, in particular, of the level of consciousness of the working masses at a given moment – can nonetheless only exert pressure on this conjuncture via the consciousness of the proletariat. In other words, in the political reckoning, the Party cannot count on the objective interest of the proletariat which are brought out by theory, but only on the conscious organised will of the proletariat.

Leaving aside the “prehistoric,” sectarian circle period which every Social Democratic Party goes through and in which its methods are much closer to *educational utopian* socialism than to *political*

*revolutionary
socialism,*

in which it knows only socialist pedagogy, but not yet political tactics; if one considers a Party already past this infantile period, the essentials of its political work are expressed, in our opinion, in the following outline: the Party bases itself on the given level of consciousness of the proletariat; it will involve itself in every important political event by making an effort to orient the general direction towards the immediate interests of the proletariat, and, what is still more important, by making an effort to imbed itself in the proletariat *by raising* the level of consciousness, to base itself on this level and use it for this dual purpose. Decisive victory will come the day we overcome the distance separating the objective interests of the proletariat from its subjective consciousness, when, to be more concrete, such an important section of the proletariat will have gained an understanding of its objective of social revolution, that it will be powerful enough to remove from its path, by its own politically organised strength, every counter-revolutionary obstacle.

The greater the distance separating the objective and subjective factors, that is, the weaker the political culture of the proletariat, the more naturally there appear in the Party those "methods" which, in one form or another, only show a kind of passivity in the face of the colossal difficulties of the task incumbent upon us. The political abdication of the "Economists," like the "political substitutionism" of their opposites, are nothing but an attempt by the young Social Democratic Party to "cheat" history.

Of course, the "Economists" and the "politicians" are much less consistent in reality than in our scheme – and this inconsistency has enabled all of them to play a very progressive role in the development of our Party. When we describe the "basic error" of "Economism" or of "political substitutionism" we must in large part speak of the *possibility* which might have become *reality*, if it had not encountered opposition. Taking this limitation into account, we can now establish the following comparison.

The "Economists" started from the *subjective interests* of the proletariat, as they existed at each moment of its development, they based themselves on this and considered it their sole task to *register* them scrupulously. As for the duties, which constitute the content of our tactics, they left them to the

natural course of things – from which for the moment they excluded themselves.

By contrast with the "Economists," the "political" elements took at their starting point the *objective* class interests of the proletariat, established by the Marxist method. But they too, with the same apprehension as the "Economists," drew back before the "gap" separating the objective from the subjective interests of the class which they are supposed to "represent." And for them, questions of political tactics – in the true sense of the term – exist as little as for the "Economists." Once one has at one's disposal an historico-philosophical analysis revealing the tendencies of social development, when the results of it are made "our" chief patrimony, and we think *substitutionally*, then there is nothing to do but to cash in at the bank of history, as one cashes a cheque, the conclusions we have reached. So, if the "Economists" do not lead the proletariat, because they are merely *tail-ending it*, the "political" elements do no better for the good reason that *they themselves are carrying out duties in its place*. If the "Economists" are disarmed in the face of the enormity of their task, contenting themselves with the humble role of marching *at the tail-end of history*, the "politicians" on the other hand, have resolved the problem by trying to transform history *into their own tail*.

The following reservation must however be made: the accusation of "substitutionism" applies much less to us as revolutionaries than as revolutionary social democrats.

In the first case, it is more difficult to "cheat": history, having placed a definite task on the agenda, is observing us sharply. For good or ill (more for ill), we are leading the masses to revolution, awakening in them the most elementary political instincts. But in so far as we have to deal with a more complex task – transforming these "instincts" into conscious aspirations of a working class which is determining itself politically – we tend to resort to the short-cuts and over-simplifications of "thinking-for-others" and "substitutionism."

In the internal politics of the Party these methods lead, as we shall see below, to the Party organisation "substituting" itself for the Party, the Central Committee substituting itself for the Party organisation, and finally the dictator substituting himself for the Central Committee; on the other hand, this leads the committees to supply an "orientation" – and to change it – while "the people keep silent"; in "external" politics these methods are manifested in attempts to bring pressure to bear on other social organisations, by using the abstract strength of the class interests of the proletariat, and not the real strength of the proletariat conscious of its class interests. These "methods," as adopted by us and the content of our Party work. All in all, *these " methods " lead to the complete disappearance of questions of political tactics in Social Democracy.*

Comrade Lenin has expressly confirmed this in a certain thesis, which cannot be passed over in silence. Replying to Comrade Nadezhdin, who had complained of the lack of "deep roots," Lenin wrote: "This is the high point of illogicity, for the writer confuses the philosophical, historical and social questions of the "deep roots" of the movement with the technical organisational problem of a more effective struggle against the police." Comrade Lenin so cherishes this idea, that he takes it up again in his latest pamphlet: "To allege that we are the Party of the class," Lenin says in reply to Axelrod, "in order to justify negligence on organisational questions, to justify the confusion of organisation and disorganisation, is to repeat the error of Nadezhdin, who confused "the philosophical, historical and social question of the deep roots of the movement," with the problem of technical organisation." (**One Step Forward ...**) So for Comrade Lenin, the question of "deep roots" is not a question of *political tactics* but a question of *philosophical doctrine*; if our doctrine, Marxism, supplies us with the "deep roots," all that is left then is to carry out the technical-organisational task. Between the "philosophical" problem and the "technical-organisational" problem, there is one small link missing in the case of Comrade Lenin: *the content of our*

Party work . Having dissolved the tactical aspect of the question into the "philosophical" aspect, Lenin has acquired the right to identify the content of the Party's practice with the content of the programme. He deliberately ignores the fact that we imperatively need, not deep "philosophical" roots (how stupid! As though the imam of any sect does not, from a "philosophical" point of view, have some deep root or another!), but real *political* roots, a living contact with the masses, enabling us at each decisive moment to mobilise this mass around a flag which is recognised as *their* flag.

This is why, in our view, organisational questions are totally subordinate to the methods of our political tactics, and, for us, the identification of the question of the organisation of the proletarian Party with the technical question of "improving the struggle against the police" is total bankruptcy. Total – for, if this identification "is based on the conspiratorial character of our present methods of work (as Parvus says in the few energetic lines he devotes to Lenin's system), it is because the struggle against spies eclipses the struggle against absolutism and the other, much greater struggle, for the emancipation of the working class."

Organisational tasks are for us totally subordinate to methods of political tactics.

This is why this pamphlet too, arising from differences on "organisational questions" takes tactical questions as its starting point. *To understand the difference on the organisational questions one must go beyond them,* otherwise you asphyxiate in a surfeit of scholasticism and logic-chopping!

[Part III](#)



Last updated on: 29.8.2006

Leon Trotsky

Our Political Tasks

PART III: ORGANISATIONAL QUESTIONS

A dialogue in the manner of Socrates

'Tell me,' asks our questioner, either compassionately or (more frequently) with a haughty and ironic air – 'are you against Lenin's organisational plan?'

'What do you mean by Lenin's organisational plan?'

(embarrassed silence)

'The rules?'

'No, why?' he replies a little ruffled – 'Only the "minority" considers us to be "bureaucratic centralist," thinking that the rule is everything to us. It's not a question of the rule, but of the whole plan ...'

'Are you talking about Lenin's *Letter to a Petersburg Comrade*?'

'We can certainly talk about the *Letter* . But it is above all in **What Is To Be Done?** that one can say the organisational plan is revealed.'

'What does it consist of then?'

'But for goodness sake ... what is the matter with you? (Our questioner ends up quite exasperated.) What do you mean? Consists of? ... The organisational plan – Lenin's plan?'

'Well, yes, the plan, Lenin's plan!'

'Fantastic! All they do is repeat, all of them, all the time: organisational plan, Lenin has a plan ... And now you are asking us what it consists of?'

'Well, everyone also said about General Trouchu (during the siege of Paris):
il a un plan,

Trouchu a un plan ... And his whole plan was to hand over Paris to the Prussians. So you define for me what Lenin's organisational plan consists of.'

'But it's impossible, straight off like that. You have to read **What Is To Be Done.**'

'I already have ... Don't tell me about the whole plan, just about its basic principles.'

'The basic principles – that's a different matter ... For example the division of labour – conspiratorial action – discipline – centralism in general, so that the Central Committee can have control; and yes, what is called an organisation of professional revolutionaries ... against democratism – these are the principles.'

'Magnificent. You say for example: the division of labour. Agreed: this is something entirely respectable, it has done great service to social progress. But was it really Lenin who proclaimed the principle? – Pardon me – all the economists of the manufacturing period had already explained the advantages of the division of labour. Take Adam Smith. What tremendous perspectives he opens for manufacturing pins! So I cannot agree with you that Lenin invented the division of labour, as some mythological persons invented agriculture, husbandry, trade etc. I understand: you are going to say that Lenin proclaimed the application of this principle on the threshold of the "Fourth Period." This is possible. But do you really think that the "minority" denies the 'principle' of division of labour? Or the "principle" of

conspiracy?’

‘I don’t know ...But Axelrod speaks of “ruses” and “resorts” ... And I think that Lenin is right to say that the minority shows its petty-bourgeois nature, when it makes a tragi-comic fuss against the division of labour under the direction of the Centre ...’

‘I shall come on to the “minority’s” “fuss” in a minute, no doubt. But before concerning myself with this, I shall ask a question: can the division of labour be – and can it be considered to be – the principle of a particular organisation, of the organisation of the Social Democratic Party? The division of labour is technically advantageous, but advantageous only for *Social Democracy*, but for any other party, any office, shop, etc. If the division of labour can be considered as an *organisational principle*, it can only be in a factory, but never in a political party of any kind, still less in ours – is it not obvious to us that the “principle” of the division of labour is in no way characteristic of the organisation which has made it its task to develop the class consciousness of the proletariat? Taken by itself, abstractly, this “principle” depersonalises our Party and leaves it simply as a complex co-operative.’

‘Let us now go on to *conspiratorial action*. This is a narrower principle, of an exclusively *political* meaning. But conspiracy too is in no way intrinsic to the Social Democratic Party. It is above all the bourgeois-revolutionary parties which have had and still do have to work conspiratorially. So it must be affirmed that conspiracy cannot either be the organising principle of our party, *as such*.

‘The same must also be said of *centralism*. A centralised factory, a centralised State, a centralised plot. What is “orthodox” about centralism? You have not mentioned in your desiderata the Leninist “principles” of *centralisation of leadership* and *decentralisation of responsibility*.

(*Letter ...*, p.20) I shall not dwell on them either. I shall simply say that they seem to me to express the same ideas as that which the late Abbot Sieyes took as the basis of his institution:

"Confidence must come from below (decentralisation of responsibility) and power from above (centralisation of leadership)." That is to say, the proletariat does not see itself in these "principles." Briefly, bringing together everything that you call Lenin's "organisational principles," the only result is centralised, complex co-operation working conspiratorially for some political aim.

'But that will still not in itself produce a social democratic organisation. In the best possible case this definition does not mean its negation as a Social Democratic Party, but only constitutes one possibility. What we have before us, then, is an algebraic organisational formula which may take on a social democratic content if certain concrete numerical values are put in the place of letters. But the "plan" does not include such concrete numerical values ... One comrade has carried out an interesting experiment: throughout the *Letter to a Petersburg Comrade* he replaced the word *social democratic socialist-revolutionary* with the term *socialist-revolutionary*. And not once did it produce a wrong meaning. But try to do the same thing with the programme of our Party or with resolutions on tactics – you will get your fingers burned ... This is why a scheme such as that expounded in the *Letter to a Petersburg Comrade* inevitably gives rise to the question: what has become of Social Democracy in all this? It is an implicit premise, you will say. Perhaps *subjectively*, but not *objectively*. But this is what gives it all its strength!"

The division of labour

To print social-democratic proclamations, you do not need to be a Social Democrat. Nor to distribute or put them up. Of course, taking Russian

conditions into account, only a person dedicated to the cause of revolution will carry out such work. But the purely technical nature of the work does not demand any political ability on the part of those who carry it out, and in itself is incapable of developing and stimulating social democratic consciousness. This means that there must be another sphere of the Party's life, in which the printer, circulation man, archivist, and organiser stand in relation to each other, not as detail workers of the *technical* apparatus of the Party, but as workers fully integrated into the *politics* of the Party. In the practice of organisation, this postulate is ignored most of the time, and the *content of the Party's work is conceived of as the total of the different technical functions carried out "under the direction of the Centre."*

The cause of this aberration is obvious. The work which in every European party, socialist parties included, of course, is carried out in the backrooms of the Party (printing, distribution, postering etc) is in our case projected to the foreground, uses up an enormous quantity of materials and personnel, and, as a result, has concentrated on it the greater and better part of our attention and our creative capacities. In so far as we are permanently fighting against the police repression, which can in a few hours destroy the product of months and months of difficult work, and in constant struggle against the poverty of our illegal techniques – a stone age oasis in this century of steam and electricity – in short, taking this into account, *the technical conditions of political work* tend to cover the whole field of the Party's political tasks. Should we be surprised if thought which works so intensively in such a sphere is able to raise the division of labour to the level of an organising principle of ("orthodox"!) social democracy? xxx This is the 'mr' reao that in our Party tasks of organisational technique are substituted for tasks of proletarian politics, that the problems of clandestine struggle with the political police are substituted for the problem of struggle against the autocracy. To which it must be added that the new "political"

orientation has been developed in the case of the struggle against the former "Economist" orientation, organisationally expressed in so-called "craft dilettantism."

In the consciousness of the craftsman, whose mind had suddenly been "enlightened" and who blushed to the ears at his (theoretical, political, organisational etc.) nudity, the division of labour must have appeared as a saving principle to resolve everything, and manufacture a brilliant ideal; manufacture, not factory production already mentioned in polemical literature; for the factory presupposes highly developed technology, reducing to the minimum the role of the division of labour, while manufacture, based on the low level of technology of "craft" work, makes the division of labour the object of a theoretical cult.

'The more perfect the working of each cog (my emphasis – T.),'
Lenin wrote in inspiring vein, 'the greater will be the number of
individual members (my
emphasis – T.) working on the common tasks, and ... the denser our
network, the less the inevitable arrests will cause problems in our
ranks.' (*What Is To Be
Done?*)

In these lines there is a very clear counterposing of the primitive "craftsman," combining in his person all the branches of craft activity, to the "detail workers" (*Teilarbeiter*) of manufacture – the integral individual, to the "cog" in a complex mechanism. In such a system the faults of the craftsman of yesterday, his ignorance, his lack of a spirit of initiative, his political primitivism, are turned into an advantage, because 'the one-sidedness and the deficiencies of the detail labourer become perfections when he is a part of the collective labourer.' (**Capital**, Vol.I, p.349)

'Reflection and fancy are subject to err.' Says Ferguson, quoted by Marx, 'but a habit of moving the hand or the foot is independent of either.

*Manufacturers,
accordingly, prosper
most where the mind
is least
consulted ...*

' (p.361)

Against Lenin's views, fixed in his head since the period of struggle against
populism – namely, that the intelligentsia is afraid of the

factory, that the clamour against the divisions of labour “under the direction of the Centre” only betrays the “bourgeois” nature of the intellectual – against these views, we can oppose, with at least equally good grounds, Marx’s words on the ‘bourgeois mind which praises division of labour in the workshop, life-long annexation of the labourer to a partial operation, and his complete subjection to capital, as being an organisation of labour that increases its productiveness.’ (p.356)

But won’t our questioner, whom we left at the beginning of the chapter, and who is distinguished more by his stubborn-headedness than by his clear-sightedness, won’t he draw the automatic conclusion that the “minority” is *against* the division of labour and *for* the restoration of “craft dilettantism”? We would like the reader to draw a quite different conclusion. We would like him to understand that the division of labour, however useful, is in principle purely technical, that is, that for whoever does not place an equals sign between technical work and party life, the division of labour cannot be considered a principled basis of our organisation of the Party; such a person must draw the conclusion that *the life of the Party is what is left when you take away the division of labour.* ”

If the requirements of the economy of forces obliges us – given the deplorable technique at our disposal – to make a purely craft division of labour in a given field of our activity, we must devote all our forces first to reducing, so far as possible, the extension of this technical sphere and then not transposing the ideal of the detail worker, however expert – the ideal of the smoothly-running “cog” – from the technical sphere into the sphere of political work (in the real meaning of the term). In this field, our ideal must not be the “detail” man who can, “in the interests of revolutionary Social Democracy,” correctly, rapidly and obediently “move hand and foot under the direction of the Centre,” but the overall political personality, the Party member, actively reacting to all the questions of Party life and making its will respected in relation to all “centres,” in every possible way – up to – well! – in the worst case, even boycott!

‘This is all very well, very correct, but doesn’t everyone know that?’ the “majority” reader will ask, who barely ten minutes ago was absolutely sure

and certain that the "minority" *condemns* the division of labour. 'So who doesn't know that? It goes without saying.'

This reply will not make any better sense just because all the supporters of the opposing tendency start repeating it – from the smallest to the biggest, from the Tver Committee up to Comrade Lenin. We are speaking of the need to make *Party members,*

conscious Social

Democrats

, and not just expert "detail workers" and we are given the reply: "It goes without saying." "It's evident!" What does this mean? For whom is it evident? What does the "evidence" consist of? Is this implicit in the content of our Party work, that is, does the making of *Parteigenossen* thinking politically, at the present time, constitute a fundamental and necessary aspect of our work? Or is it that this task is just "implicit" in Lenin's so-called organisational plan? Or rather, is it not subjectively "implicit" for every Social Democrat?

The last hypothesis is the easiest to check out: a breeze of reproaches and accusations is enough to awake this "evidence" which is sleeping so lightly. But that is not enough. It is indispensable that this task which "goes without saying" is seen as a clearly conceived objective and that the problems it poses are resolved practically in the work of the Party. So far nothing or less than nothing has been done in this direction. What is more: the fetishism or organisation which presently dominates in the Party, drives many comrades directly to resist every attempt to pose correctly this "problem which goes without saying." This is understandable.

The thinking which raises this technical principle of the division of labour into a principle of social democratic organisation, is drawn – consciously or not – to this inevitable result: separating conscious activity from executive activity, social democratic thinking from the technical functions by means of which it must necessarily be put into practice. The "organisation of professional revolutionaries," or more precisely the leadership, then appears as the centre of social democratic consciousness, and underneath them, only the disciplined carriers-out of technical functions.

Comrade Lenin supplied the classical expression of the organisational ideal: 'In order to group all these tiny fractions into a whole, in order not to fragment the movement itself at the same time as its functions are fragmented, in order to inspire (please note – *T.*) those who carry out

minor functions with faith, without which they will do nothing, in the necessity and importance of their work – for all this precisely what is needed is a strong organisation, proven revolutionaries.’ (**What Is To Be Done?**)

Comrade Lenin does not – for it does not even enter his head – pose the problem which “goes without saying”: how to compensate for the negative aspects of the division of labour, how to make every member participate in the total work of the Party. No, to the army of individual “carriers-out” of functions he opposes the central general staff, which personally monopolises consciousness, far-sightedness, initiative, perseverance and firmness, imbuing all these “tiny fractions” with faith in their necessity in the common work. What do we have, in that case? A Party or a “social democratic” workshop?

Compare the following: ‘The knowledge, the judgement and the will which, though in ever so small a degree, are practiced by the independent peasant or handicraftsman ... (and, we may add, by our “craftsman” who himself carries out all the functions of his primitive “Economist” labour – T.) – are now required only for the workshop (the Party) as a whole. Intelligence in production expands in one direction, because it vanishes in many others. What is lost by the detail labourers, is concentrated in the capital (the Centre – T.) that employs them. It is a result of the division of labour in manufacturing, that the labourer (the “carrier out of minor functions” – T.) is brought face to face with the intelligent potencies of the material process of production, as the property of another (as a centralist function), and as a ruling power.’ (**Capital**, Vol.I, p.361)

This ideal plan, constructed by means of an almost geometrical method – the plan laid out in the *Letter to a Petersburg Comrade* – in no way poses the question: but when will the social democrat members, the future “professional revolutionaries,” be trained? According to the plan, the engineers, printers, secretaries ... “the popes, the generals, the women, the masses, the birds and the bees, all form a powerful co-operative,” directed by the social democratic professional revolutionaries.

But how will this caste of ephemeral members be renewed? Where is the “reservoir” for them? ... The craftsman’s apprentice almost always becomes a master-craftsman; but the detail worker almost never becomes boss of the workshop. Where, one may ask, is the bridge which will enable the

"individual member" not just to pass into the category of political activist and not to be content as such to carry out his detailed function in the "faith" that the professional revolutionary is there, watching over the role he is given but also to orient himself on his own in political life, find a slogan, propose an initiative ...

In quite a number of committees the practice of "discussions" has been established, that is, of meetings during which the treasurer, distributor and printer meet, not as treasurer, distributor and printer but as Party members, debating Party questions as well as more general political problems. Of course, this is only a *partial* compensation for the *weaknesses* involved in the division of labour in the conditions in which our technique employs it today. In this respect, one can only stress the mediocre and limited nature of these "discussions." But it is only in this way that the education of the Party members can begin. With the present state of the work, this is the only means of securing the fragile bridge by which the "tiny fragments" pass over into the caste of the "first (category)" (among whom many zeros pass for "firsts").

Now, what do we find? Comrade Lenin in his "plan" suppresses "discussions" by virtue of an enviable logic: they do not correspond to the requirements of conspiracy and disturb the unity and harmony of the plan! So what are these "discussions" for? The results these discussions tend to reach can be reached by much less costly means: it is enough simply 'that all participants in the work, all the circles, without exception, *have the right* to bring their decisions, their wishes, their questions, to the attention of both the local committee and the Central Organ and Central Committee. Such a procedure will make it possible to *consult all members sufficiently*, without having to create such cumbersome and non-conspiratorial institutions and the "discussions".' (Letter) How suspiciously Lenin then alludes to the "dilettante" committees, to the workers' and students' circles, composed of "non-specialised" members, who waste their time in "interminable discussions *about everything*" instead of working over "professional experience." To think and deliberate "about everything" should be the prerogative of the "Centre"; and the circles, groups and isolated agents must think and deliberate according to their estate, workshop by workshop. The Party's consciousness is centralised – there is nothing left for it but to make

the individual experience of the individual member the patrimony of the Centre ('to bring to the knowledge of the Centre'); that will be enough to enrich the practice of all individual members who will steep themselves in the consciousness of the Centre – which is conscious by profession.

The practical workers, who adopted this scheme like a dogma, must have ended up wondering where to find any Social Democrats, when all around there are nothing but "tiny fragments" "believing" in the Centre. And what incredible, in fact tragic, conclusions some of these members draw is to be seen in a letter from Comrade Severyanin (a very well-known member in the Party) published in **Iskra** No. 51 (at the time when the paper's editors were Lenin and Plekhanov). 'Have you noticed,' Severyanin writes, 'that nowadays experienced and capable comrades abandon committee work and give themselves over to specialised functions. It is a bad symptom. A

*particular,
specialised
organisation must
be created for the
preparation of
those new to social
democratic work.*

It will be under the direct leadership of the Central Committee, because in their work the committees do not always touch on the important points for a revolutionary school; the distribution of forces must of course be placed in the hands of the Central Committee; it is indispensable to make the clearest separation between the *militant* activity of the committees and the preparatory work of the new organisation.'

This is the situation. There are no longer any social democratic members, all of them go off to attend to individual functions, and as the work of the Party does not resolve the problem ("which goes without saying") of the education of active Social Democrats capable of taking initiatives, there is nothing left for it but to construct, *outside the*

work of the Party, a school for social democratic training, placed "under the direct leadership of the Central Committee." The *Social Democratic* Party, in the actual process of its political practice, neither produces nor educates *Social Democrats*. They must be forged in a place apart.

"Active" work is cut off from *educational* work,

which means, more precisely, that

revolutionary

socialist

activity is separated from

activity. Is there any more striking way to

illustrate the bankruptcy of "manufacturing" ideals on the organisational questions?

Democratism

The committees, in struggling against the old cumbersome, quasi-democratic forms of organisation, have increasingly tended to restrict the meaning of centralism: finally it became a matter of freeing oneself from all obligations towards those dependent on the committees. The three or four members of the committee alone represent "the unity and will of the social organism of the workers." They take the decisions, "give" the Party its new orientation, consign "Economism" to the museum, they get "centralism" going, they either recognise or condemn **Iskra**; in short, they carry out all the internal politics of the Party. Below them there stretches the world of the "individual members" who print the proclamations, collect the money, distribute the pamphlets – though obviously only in so far as the committee, which "gives" the orientation, is able to supply them. In the last three or four years, with intense differences of opinion within the Party, within many committees there has been a series of "coup d'état" in the style of the palace revolutions of the 18th century. Somewhere at the top, someone is proscribing someone else, someone is giving himself or herself some title; and at the end of it all, floating from the committee's belfry one sees a triumphant standard bearing the legend; 'Orthodoxy, centralism, political struggle ...'

I permit myself to doubt if there is a single committee which, before "recognising" **Iskra** as its leading organ, or later "rejecting" it, has thought itself obliged to present its resolution to all the groups of "individual participants" subordinate to it – not to get it through quickly, for form's sake, but to make it *really* enter the *consciousness* of the distributors, treasurers, organisers, propagandists, agitators, and other varieties of "ruses" and "resorts." Such a complicated "democratic" process has been replaced by a single "centralist" decree. And if the groups placed under the orders of the committee are refractory and refuse to accept the new "orientation" given by the mufti? Well, they are dissolved, and often, along with them, the whole of the local workers' movement is dissolved.

This for example is how one activist of the past period describes the ideological victory of **Iskra** in letters sent abroad:

'November 6, 1902 ... This is what happened in the committee here: a resolution had been proposed, expressing total solidarity with **Iskra** and declaring it the organ the Party wanted. The committee adopted the resolution ...but with a small reservation on the vigour of the polemics. Naturally those who had put the resolution forward wanted to withdraw it; only then was the resolution adopted without amendment ... But then the same thing happened as in Petersburg, almost word for word: the discontented aroused the more ambitious elements of the "despotic intelligentsia." *It turned out* (sic!)

that agitation and propaganda had until now been carried out almost exclusively by these discontented elements: thanks to this their influence turned out to be very strong.

Now the struggle raged. Finally

almost all the former agitators were sent back

(where?).

There are few people able to replace them,

which is why things aren't

going too well (I can't believe it!); but victory *must be* ours.'

A month later, the same intrepid fighter writes:

'December 4, 1902. This is how things are: the Rabochedyelists are visibly paying us redoubled attention. On Sunday, November 24 the committee enthusiastically adopted the Organisation Committee's proposal and promised its full collaboration. But the following day five fellows who support *Rabocheye Dyelo* took advantage of the

absence of a number of comrades to carry out a virtual coup d'état within the committee. It was proposed to expel those absent and send a letter to **Iskra** not to print the circular declaring it the Party organ. You will certainly have received it, but I have been told to tell you that the leaflet must anyway be *printed*. It will be a signal for the fight with the blockheads here. All this has happened *quite unexpected by anyone*, although it appeared that *they had had time to disturb the ideas of many workers and notably of the most influential among them*.

A bitter fight is now being prepared. Things will reach the point of a split, at least; more and more people are becoming convinced of it. Things in general are going badly. Everywhere it turns out (!!!) that in the end local work is being carried out above all by the Economists and that is the reason for all these *rückschläge* (setbacks) everywhere: here, in Petersburg and as I have heard, in Kharkov.'

Obviously, this activist cannot be described as a tail-ender lagging behind the masses and bowing to their spontaneous practice. He is not marching at the tail-end but, unfortunately, he has no tail behind him! He is gesticulating in empty space. The comrade – who later played a leading role in the practice of the "state of siege" – is certainly above average but all he does is to take to the point of absurdity and caricature the basic trait of the whole period, which as we see in these very letters, prevailed "absolutely everywhere," 'here, in Petersburg and, they say, in Kharkov.' This typical trait is the emancipation of the "professional revolutionaries" from all obligations, not only of a moral kind ("phisitinism") but also of a political kind ("tail-ending"), towards the conscious elements of the class to whose service we have decided to devote our lives. The committees have lost the need to base themselves on the workers in so far as they have found a base in the "principles" of centralism.

One only has to see: the new orientation is already adopted, the fourth period is "triumphantly" acclaimed, **Iskra** is already being called on to lead, when all at once, "unexpected by everyone" it turns out that agitation and propaganda are "almost exclusively" carried on by those dissatisfied with **Iskra**, that there is no one to replace them, that they have organised the

especially "ambitious" workers against **Iskra** – workers who are also, by some strange chance, the most influential. And the moral of this story: it is very difficult to concern yourself with high politics when the freedom of your movements is hampered by "blockheads."

But how is it to be explained that the "substitutional" method of thought – substituting for the proletariat – practiced in the most varied forms (from the most barbaric to those which would be acceptable in Parliament) throughout the whole period of **Iskra**, did not arouse self-criticism in the ranks of the **Iskraists** themselves? The reader has already found the explanation in the preceding pages. Hanging over all **Iskra's** work was the task of fighting *for* the proletariat, *for* its principles, *for* its final goal – in the milieu of the revolutionary intelligentsia.

This work, which has laid in the consciousness of the "**Iskra-ists**" the psychological foundations of political substitutionism, was, as I have several times explained, historically inevitable. But it was nonetheless limited for historical reasons, for it was only a secondary process in the general development of the movement of the proletariat, which was only just beginning. But every *partial* process in the general class struggle of the proletariat – even when it is more developed than in our country – develops its own inner tendencies, its own thinking and tactics, its own slogans and its own specific psychology. Each partial process tends to go beyond its bounds (imposed by its nature) and impress its tactics, its thinking, its slogans and morals on the whole historical movement it unleashes. The means turn against the end, the form against the content.

These methods of "substitutionism" of which we have seen the model above in the sphere of "external politics," and in the above-quoted letters of the bellicose **Iskra-ist**, blinding flashes of the sphere of "internal politics," are a general phenomenon of the whole period. In one form or another, open or covert, these methods were inevitable in so far as it was necessary to chase after the rapidly-dispersing social-democratic intelligentsia and not chiefly to take up the cudgels against the "blockheads" of the moment; in other words, in so far as the unification of the revolutionary intelligentsia around the political principles of Social Democracy was being accomplished incomparably faster than the revolutionary proletariat was being rallied around political class slogans. But to impose the malady of "substitutionism" on the movement as a whole, albeit in the interests of the purity of its principles and its "orthodoxy," is obviously to undermine the whole movement.

Our task is in so far as possible to secure the Party against surprise. And, obviously, the most fateful surprise of all would be if at the decisive moment the "blockheads" (the proletariat) "unexpected by anyone," turned its back on us. It is indispensable, in order to prevent such a fateful perspective from really occurring, to strengthen our political, moral and organisational ties with the conscious elements of the working class, whatever the cost. It is indispensable that every one of our basic decisions should be their decision.

In What Is To Be Done?

the "Economists" are severely condemned for having tried to build the local organisation on principles stipulating that 'decisions of the committee must have already been passed in all the circles before becoming viable decisions.' We are not at all for the legalistic ritual of committee referenda. We do not want "democratic" fictions. But the committees must recall that their decisions will only really become "viable" when they formulate the conscious will of all the groups and circles dependent on them. This is what we must constantly strive towards – not out of some "democratic" prejudice but for the sake of the stability and viability of our Party.

I shall not dwell on the technical aspect of the question but simply refer the reader to Cherevanin's pamphlet, **The Question of Organisation**, the basis of which, in my view, is not some organisational plan or other nor the principle of "autonomy" of the committees, which is highly conditional but the simple, almost banal thought, which has nonetheless been energetically "liquidated" among us: the close ties of collective thinking which can alone really unite the leading organisation and the "individual" personnel of the technical apparatus must be developed and strengthened. For – and I repeat what has been said elsewhere – 'The guarantee of the Party's stability must be sought in its base, in the actively, autonomously-acting proletariat and not in the organisational summit which the revolution may unexpectedly sweep aside as an historical misunderstanding without the proletariat even noticing.' (**Iskra** No. 62)

*Das war also der
langen Rede kurzer*

Sinn?

(Is this all that long speech means?) The "minority," it is retorted, may not condemn the "division of labour," but by considering it an evil, attempts to cure it with another much worse evil. The "minority" quite simply goes back to "democratism," even if in disguised form: it demands

that the committees put their decisions through all the lower groups, makes the "professional revolutionaries" dependent on the least conscious elements in the movement, thus impeding the initiative and enthusiastic work of the committees and it therefore opens the door wide to "Economism," syndicalism, tail-ending and opportunism and in the last analysis hands the proletariat over to bourgeois democracy.

I must confess I repeat this jumble of words with a certain aversion. We have to become used to it! I should in no way be astonished if, as time goes on, Comrade Lenin in his next work – which he may already be writing – made it his aim to prove that the "minority" is headed for armchair (university) socialism. You think this unlikely? Not at all!

'Does the minority (pardon me if for a moment I take up dear Comrade Lenin's polemical broom) not spend its days and night lamenting that the principle of the division of labour proclaimed by me, Lenin, mutilates the Party members, turns them into ruses and retorts and that the system created by me deprives the revolutionary of self-activity and independence, qualities needed by the poor intellectuals I have thrown out of the central organs? Poor them! You can see at a glance that they have been cramming with the German Professor Schmoller, who also, in one of his latest articles – just like the unlucky candidates of the minority – weeps over the division of labour, which increasingly splits men up and only offers many of them (that is, many Party members, in Comrade Martov's opportunistic formula) an empty, specialised, lifeless activity, in which the soul and the understanding and the body perish. Keep developing your principles, gentlemen of the minority and you will soon fall into the arms of Professor Schmoller!'

Unfortunately, Comrade Lenin is not sufficiently supple-minded; otherwise he could, with his method, and drawing on the wealth and variety of modern world literature, "prove" things more curious still.

Of course, we should not stay silent in the face of Comrade Lenin. We only have to open his latest pamphlet on any page. For example, on one page he discusses the anarchistic practice of the "minority," adding in parentheses: 'Practice is always (N.B.) in advance of theory.' "Always?" we clamor, not sparing the italics. Really, *always*, Comrade Lenin? And we thought that theory, which represents the generalisation of the experience of past centuries, is capable of *also being ahead* of tomorrow's practice and perhaps

even that of decades to come. But, according to Comrade Lenin's "theory," which one supposes reflects his own practice; theory always (always!) lags behind the tail of history. Is that not a *quasi-Marxist apologia for theoretical tail ending?*

May we be allowed to think that, for a start, that's not so bad?

Discipline and centralism

'Party discipline' is one of the most warlike slogans of the "majority." It is a matter of regret for mankind as a whole that all considerations of discipline which our ears were battered with as members of the "minority" should disappear for good before we come out of clandestinity. Now one can hardly find in the remotest depths of the Urals or the Siberian taiga the representatives of the noble but soon to be extinct race of "hard **Iskra**-ists" of the first rank, "*Jacobins as pure as the rays of the sun.*"

" Obviously the dissolving agent of doubt and criticism has been at work even on them. But they fight it off valiantly, attempting to reject it on this side of the Urals, and thus save social democratic Asia led by the Siberian Union which is close to me. Of course, all these efforts are condemned by history in advance; but the valiant Urals comrades involuntarily inspire respect for their coherence and their courage. For these qualities the future historian of the Party will save them from oblivion: he will devote a few lines to their *Manifesto* which boldly and honestly puts the position of the "majority." We shall have to deal further on this *Credo* of the pure Leninists. Meanwhile, we shall dwell on the sections of this *Manifesto* which relate directly to the question of "discipline."

'To foresee (?) the proletarian political struggle,' say the representatives of the three Ural committees, 'and prepare to march at the head of the masses, can only be done by a centralised pan-Russian organisation of professional revolutionaries, *local committees being entirely under their orders* ... The committees as well as

the isolated Party members can receive very broad powers, but this must be decided by the Central Committee. On the other hand the Central Committee may – if it considers it necessary and useful – use its power to dissolve a committee or any other organisation, and deprive any member of the Party of his rights. *Otherwise it is impossible to organise the work of the proletariat struggle efficiently.*

(Supplement to No 63 of

Iskra, my emphasis – T.)

Up until the Second Congress, isolated and quite independent committees existed as both real and formal entities; around them was formed and developed the whole life of the Party. As a result of such simple actions as a show of hands and casting of papers in the ballot box, it turns out that there is already a "centralised organisation" in the Party and that the "local committees are wholly at its disposal." Centralism is not apparently conceived of as a complex *task* of political organisation and technique, but a simple antithesis of the familiar "craft dilettantism." It is thought it will be made real (developing in and through work carried out in common, a feeling of moral and political responsibility among the members of the Party) by giving the Central Committee the right to dissolve every obstacle in its path. It is therefore indispensable, in order to carry out the ideal of "centralism," that all the real elements which nobody and nothing has yet disciplined should offer no resistance to the Central Committee in its attempt to disorganise them. 'Otherwise,' the Urals comrades say, 'it is impossible to organise the cause of the proletarian fight.' There is nothing left but to wonder if, in this case, the "cause of the proletarian fight" really can be organised. We are forced to say no.

Well! The authors of the document quoted undoubtedly suppose that the only people who could oppose the work organised by the Central Committee are "Economists," "opportunists," and, in general, to use their expressing, "representatives of other classes of the population." Let us accept that the differing tendencies will always be so described. But where can you find a tendency so foolish, even if it is "opportunist," that it will let itself be "dissolved," admit that its supporters are "deprived of their rights," without first putting up *all the resistance* it is capable of? Is it really so difficult

to understand that any serious, important tendency (for it is not even worth fighting against a tendency which is not serious and important) placed before the alternative of *dissolving itself* (without a word) through its spirit of discipline or fighting for its existence, *without regard to any discipline* – will certainly choose the second eventuality? For discipline has meaning only when it gives the possibility of fighting for what one thinks just and it is for this that one imposes discipline on oneself. But when a given tendency finds itself faced with being “deprived of its rights” (that is, no longer having the possibility of fighting for ideological influence), the question of its existence is turned from *Rechtsfrage* into *Machtsfrage*, that is, it is no longer a question of right but of the relationship of forces.

Depending on the situation and the degree of the crisis, the representatives of the dissident current either split, putting real discipline towards their principles higher than the “principles” of formal discipline, or they remain in the Party and attempt, by pressure, to reduce to the minimum the limitations placed on them by party discipline, in order to ensure the maximum freedom of action (and of resistance towards the interfering tendencies). The choice depends on the sharpness of the contradictions which are set in opposition to the rest of the Party. It is in so far as they act *consciously* to free themselves from the constraints of the Party for the sake of the Party’s interests as they see them and so far as their influence enables them to do so, that all attempts by the opposing faction to hold them back by repeating the word “discipline” will show itself to be sadly illusory. Nothing produces less respect than the figure of a political “leader” resorting at the decisive moment to such reproofs. This should be understood once and for all.

Of course, an internal situation in which discipline is only a burden in the eyes of some and a threat in the mouth of others cannot be considered normal. On the contrary, it testifies to a profound crisis in the Party. But it is impossible to jump over a crisis by shouting loud, even if there are people ready to shout themselves hoarse to this end. What then is to be done? Leave the field of disintegrating discipline and find out the real needs and demands of the movement which are common to all and which, by the care they require, are likely to rally the most courageous and influential elements

in the Party. To the extent that these forces are rallied around living slogans of the movement, the wounds inflicted by both sides on Party unity will heal; there will be no more talk of discipline because there will be no more violations of it. Anyone who tries to look at the work of the two tendencies in our Party from this standpoint will not find it difficult to answer the question: which of the two currents will lead the Party to a *real* unification?

If on the road to this objective the "minority" has had to damage what the "majority" calls discipline, all that remains is to draw the conclusion: perish this "discipline" which crushes the vital interests of the movement! In any case, "history" will take care of it. For unlike the Yekaterinoslav Committee, she does not hold to the idealist principle: "Perish the world – so long as discipline survives!" On the contrary, as a good dialectician, she always, in inner-party conflicts, ends by putting in the right the one who has the victory – because victory is always, *in the last analysis*, on the side of he who has the best, most profound understanding of the tasks of the revolutionary cause. This is why we view the future with confidence.

We can observe a very interesting phenomenon: already a growing number of metaphysicians and mystics of centralism find, for example, that the conflict with the League was a mistake, a blunder, neglect or, to put it better, a lack of tact on the part of the Central Committee representative and his mentor. But obviously, it is not the system which is responsible for this tactlessness, the system which knows no other method for "organising the struggle of the proletariat" than "deprivation of rights" and "dissolution." The consequences flowing logically from these premises seem chance accidents, mistakes by isolated people and this is how the routine of human thought acquires the right to keep its faith in its "premises." This is the road to ruin for some systems of thought – in big things as in small. The conclusions begin to founder because they are subjected to the blows of everyday experience. Consciousness rejected these conclusions, which are logically constructed but in reality absurd and with recourse to sophisms, draw correct conclusions from premises stripped of all meaning. But the sophistical method is, in itself, a sign of decadence. Thought becomes embroiled in its own contradictions and finally becomes a prisoner of them. It is precisely in a phase of struggle between conclusions and premises that the thought of our "majority" is to be found. And we would not be surprised if the Urals comrades were today ready to recognise that the crusade against the League was a regrettable "misunderstanding," although basically, "it is impossible (in

their opinion) to organise the cause of the proletarian fight in any other way.'

Nothing is more lamentable, as we said above, than the figure of a "leader" striving by the suggestive repetition of the word *discipline* to make the representatives of different opinions into adversaries for good. Lenin visibly felt the difficulties of the situation and strove to give his incantations a "philosophical" basis.

The result: the individualist intellectual, nervously changing about at impulse, flees rigorous discipline like the plague. 'The organisation of the Party is like a monstrous factory to him, subjection of the part to the whole and the minority to the majority seems to him like slavery (cf. Axelrod's notes). The division of labour under the direction of the centre brings forth from him tragicomic cries against the turning of men into administrative machinery.' (**One Step Forward**). Hence the

moral: ' So the
*proletarian, who
has been through
the schooling of
the factory, can
and must give a
lesson to
anarchical
individualism.*

According to Lenin's new philosophy, which has barely had time to wear out its shoe-leather since **What Is To Be Done?** the proletariat only needs to have been through the "schooling of the factory" in order to give the intelligentsia, which up till then had played the leading role in the Party, *lessons in political discipline!*

According to this new philosophy, anyone who does not see the Party as a "huge factory," who finds the idea "monstrous," or does not believe in the immediately (politically) educative strength of the machine, "at once betrays the psychology of the bourgeois intellectual," incapable by nature of distinguishing between the negative side of the factory ("discipline based on the fear of dying of hunger") and its positive side ("discipline based on common work resulting from highly developed technique")

Without fear of betraying my "bourgeois intellectual psychology," I affirm first-of-all that the conditions which impel the proletariat into concerted, collective struggle, are not to be found in the factory but in the general social conditions of its existence; and further, that the

objective conditions

and the *conscious*

discipline

of political action, there is a long road of struggle, errors, education – not the "school of the factory" but the school of political life, in which the Russian proletariat penetrates only under the leadership – good or bad – of the social democratic intelligentsia; and reaffirm that the Russian proletariat, in which we have barely begun to develop *political self-*

activity

, is not yet able – unfortunately for it and fortunately for Messrs. candidates for "dictatorship" – to give lessons in discipline to its "intelligentsia," whatever the training the factory gives him in "common work resulting from highly developed technique." Without the least fear of giving away my "bourgeois intellectual psychology," I even declare my complete solidarity with the idea that

'the technical submission of the worker to the uniform rhythm of the work tool ("discipline based on work in common resulting from highly developed technique") and the particular composition of the collective worker as individuals of both sexes and ages, creates a

barracks discipline

(barracks, not politically conscious discipline!) perfectly in line with the factory regime.' (**Capital**)

If Lenin believes in the discipline of the Russian proletariat as a real entity, in fact, to use his own formula, he confuses a "philosophical" question with a political one. Naturally, "highly technically developed production" creates the material *conditions*

for the political development and sense of discipline of the proletariat, just as in general capitalism, creates the *premises*

of socialism. But *factory*

discipline is as little identical with *political,*

revolutionary

discipline of the proletariat

as capitalism is to socialism.

The task of Social Democracy is precisely to rouse up the proletariat against this discipline, which replaces the work of human thought with the rhythm of physical movements; it consists of uniting it against this brutalising, mortal

discipline in a single army linked hand to hand and shoulder to shoulder by community of political consciousness and revolutionary enthusiasm. Such discipline does not yet exist in the Russian proletariat; the factory and the machine give it this quality much less spontaneously than union disputes or conflicts.

The barracks regime could never be the regime of our Party, no more than the factory could be its model. Poor Comrade "Practitioner" who admitted thinking this 'does not even suspect that the terrible word he cries out (the factory) at once gives away the psychology of the bourgeois intellectual,' (**One Step Forward ...**). Poor Comrade Lenin! Fate has decided to place him in an especially ridiculous position: he does not even suspect that the Comrade "Practitioner" is not a "bourgeois intellectual," but a proletarian who has been through the saving school of the factory ... The Russian proletariat, from whom Lenin's supporters so often *hide* the problems of the internal crisis of the Party, will tomorrow, on Lenin's orders, give a severe lesson in "anarchical individualism."

The indignation you feel on reading these nasty, unrestrainedly demagogic lines! The proletariat, the very proletariat you were told yesterday "spontaneously tends towards trade unionism," is today invited to give lessons in *political* discipline! And to whom? To the same intelligentsia which in yesterday's plan was given the role of bringing proletarian political consciousness to the proletariat from the outside! Yesterday, the proletariat was crawling in the dust; today it is raised to unimagined heights! Yesterday too the intelligentsia was the bearer of socialist consciousness; today it is required to go through the process of factory discipline! And this is supposed to be Marxism and Social Democratic thinking! Really, no greater cynicism can be shown towards the richest ideological heritage of the proletariat than by Comrade Lenin! For him, Marxism is not a method of scientific analysis, a method imposing enormous theoretical responsibilities; it is a rag which you can trample underfoot if you want; a blank screen on which to project things larger than life and a pliant rule when the state of party consciousness has to be taken into account.

Is the "minority" opposed to centralism? Throughout the world the "opportunists" of Social Democracy rise up against centralism; so the "minority" is opportunist! The syllogism – which is even formally false – is the basic fighting idea of Lenin's last book, once it is freed of the jumble of accusing constructions, based on the system of indirect proof. Lenin takes up

this syllogism in every way, trying to hypnotise the reader by centralist "swings." Axelrod in Zurich is against centralism. Heine in Berlin is against centralism. Heine and Jaurès are opportunists. So Axelrod stands with the "opportunists." Obviously he too is an "opportunist," and more than obviously the "minority" is also opportunist. On the other hand, Kautsky in Berlin is for centralism; a member of the Central Committee, Vassiliev, wanted to dissolve the League in the name of centralism; Comrade Lenin was the great inspirer of the campaign against centralism, so ...

Having by this typically "Uralian" procedure dissolved international Social Democracy (astounding that Comrade Lenin did not treat us to a diagram on the subject), the author considers he has given his reader all he needs: he has *duped him by a syllogism compromising his adversary*.

I think Lenin has a worse opinion of his supporters than they deserve. I hope that even the least exigent of Lenin's comrades cannot fail to ask themselves why in all the world, those who declare themselves against centralism at the present time, are the representatives of Social Democracy who have an opportunistic outlook in their *social and political conception of the world* : class collaboration *instead of* class struggle, social reform *instead of* social revolution? And, thinking about this question, they will in the end come up with the following reply: If it is agreed that organisational centralism is a powerful instrument for the *class* struggle of the proletariat, which is undoubtedly true, it becomes clear that Heine and Jaures clash with centralism as a system of organisational relations, a system they feel to be their enemy. Organisational centralism in the socialist movement goes hand in hand with the hegemony in the Party of the tendency which puts the general interests of the movement above individual interests and attempts to give the former control over the latter. Centralism is the *organisational form* which enables the Party to control all these elements. Opportunism, on the other hand, bases its action not on struggle for the *general* interests of the movement, for the class interests of the proletariat, conceived of in their full historical dimensions, but for temporary, individual tasks, of a

trade union, municipal and local kind. So centralism is hostile to the
political or
programmatically and
tactical position of opportunism.

Comrade Lenin, despite all his mettle – does not even go so far as to say that
the *programmatically and*
tactical views of the “minority” were opportunistic.
Why then is the “minority” against “centralism”? And what centralism? And
why do Comrades Kautsky, Parvus and Luxemburg irreconcilable adversaries
of Heine and Jaurès, declare themselves against Comrade Lenin’s
“centralism”? Repeating the same syllogism a thousand times, relying above
all on its cutting effect, does obviously not give any kind of answers to these
questions.

Kautsky relates the *organisational*
conceptions of the right wing of German Social
Democracy – struggle against centralism, against discipline, against the
“compact majority” – with the political mentality of the bourgeois
intelligentsia, even when it has adopted Marxist ideas. This precise, valuable
analysis, only completes what Kautsky had said about the European socialist
intelligentsia and its “organic” tendencies towards reformism and
opportunism on programme and tactics. Between the organisational and
socio-political conceptions of the intelligentsia there is a deep mutual inner
link, in so far as both flow from a single group mentality, determined in turn
by the social conditions of life of the intelligentsia. But it goes without saying
that the same psychological canvas can give rise to very varied – and even
sometimes quite dissimilar – political embroidery, depending on the
conditions of time and place.

In our case, what it is absolutely decisive to know is whether we have to do
with a *pre* - or a *post* -revolutionary intelligentsia. To make
an analogy between the organisational conceptions of the German and
French socialist intelligentsia on the one hand and the Russian on the other,
that is to ignore the “Rubicon” of the French Revolution which separates
them, is to fall into the most incurable formalism and give superficial
comparisons the appearance of a materialist analysis. Some organisational
conception or other does not represent a fundamental or even specific
moment inherent in the world view of the intelligentsia as such; they are in
no way given once and for all; on the contrary, they flow, by a whole series

of complex mediations, from their political mentality, which reacts in a changing way to a changing political milieu. The "Jacobin" intellectual of today may, in his politics and methods of thought, still correspond to the reformist intellectual of yesterday. What separates the Jacobin from the reformist is the conquest of a minimum of democratic guarantees.

If then the same social and psychological milieu gives rise to such different *political* "refractions," what is there to be said about its capacity infinitely to change around in the partial sphere of *organisational* forms! The intelligentsia can be federalist or centralist, can tend towards autonomy or autocracy, democracy or dictatorship, without in any way changing its essence, nor the nature of its political interests.

Comrade Lenin would easily have refrained from such mechanical analogies if he had paid attention to the following: according to his own formula (which we shall come back to later), the revolutionary Social Democrat is 'the Jacobin, indissolubly linked to the

organisation of the proletariat which has become *conscious* of its class interest,' (**One Step Forward**). So be it. Now the classical Jacobin (whom Comrade Lenin wants to translate into Marxist language) is, among other things, a revolutionary intellectual. Lenin can scarcely deny that, I hope, in relation to the French Revolution and *mutatis mutandis*

our *Narodnaya Volya*. The "centralism" and "discipline" of the Jacobins which Lenin so much admires were not borrowed by these "bourgeois-individualist" revolutionary intellectuals from the proletariat disciplined in the school of the factory but developed directly "out of themselves." Finally, within the framework of democracy, all these social elements belonging to the new "middle class" began to reflect all the colours of the rainbow from anarchism to Millerandism. The nature of the intelligentsia is so plastic and supple that no one can enclose it once and for all in the ready-made boxes of a diagram!

The same "qualities," we must remember, drive the pre-revolutionary intelligentsia to Jacobinism, towards centralised, conspiratorial organisations armed with dynamite – or with a "plan" for popular insurrection – as drive the post-revolutionary intelligentsia towards reformism, to blunting the sharp contours of the class struggle. Such is the dialectic of social evolution. But the dialectic and Comrade Lenin are two different things.

He handles Marxist "theses" like the inflexible articles of the Penal Code. First he tries to find the article which "suits," then he leafs through the charge-sheets and extracts the details of the crime which formally correspond to the content of the relevant article. The dialectic and Comrade Lenin are two different things. He knows that 'opportunism leads, not by chance, but by its very nature, not just in Russia but *throughout the world* (!) to Martov and Axelrod's "views" on organisation." (**One Step Forward ...**) He knows it perfectly well but as our intrepid polemicist still does not decide to put Axelrod and Martov in the category of opportunists in general (such an attractive idea from the standpoint of clarity and simplicity!), he creates for them the rubric "opportunist on organisational questions." *The concept of opportunism is then emptied of all political content.* It becomes a "bogeyman" for frightening little children.

To degrade the dialectic to the level of sophistry, empty all the living ideas of the edifice of Marxist theory of their content, transform socio-historic "types" into immutable supra-historic "types" into immutable supra-historical norms for measuring the extent of earthly sins; this is the price which is being paid for the struggle against the "minority."

Opportunism in organisational questions!

Girondism on the question of co-option by two thirds in the absence of a motivated vote! Jauresism on the right of the Central Committee to fix where the administrations of the League is to be!

It might seem one could go no further. But Comrade Lenin keeps on advancing. After writing a whole book to tell us that revolutionary methods ("insurrection" and "overthrow") were only acceptable during the circle period; that in a Party "one and indivisible" discipline must rule; and that elements who break discipline in the Party of the proletariat *by that alone* show their petty-bourgeois opportunism, Comrade Lenin, who in 500 pages has managed if not to convince his reader, at least to exhaust him with all this philosophy, suddenly throws at him this obscure aphorism:

'Insurrection is an excellent thing when the advanced elements rise up against the reactionary elements. When the revolutionary wing rises up against the opportunist wing, that is good. When the opportunist wing rises up against the revolutionary wing, it is bad.' (**One Step Forward ...**)

It would be useful for all Comrade Lenin's readers to pause over this "argument." The "minority" does not wish to conform to Party discipline. By the very fact (please note!) it exposes its "anarchism" and "Jaurèsism." Therefore, the "minority" is the opportunist wing of our Party. This is the *direct* theorem. Now the *reciprocal* one must be proved. The insurrection of the "minority" is a very bad thing, since the "minority" is the opportunist wing of our Party. It is quite different if it is the "majority" which "rises up," because the revolutionary nature of this "majority" is demonstrated by the fact that the opportunist "minority" fights it ... The "minority" for its part, as the direct theorem has shown, is opportunist because it breaks discipline. The Conclusion of the two theorems: Comrade Lenin has elbow-room on both sides. *Quod erat demonstrandum.*

The slightest effort will resolve the problem: how did Lenin come to decide, in the few lines we have just quoted, that he would with this proposition trample on his whole pamphlet? The situation obliged him to! The army of our generalissimo is dissolving, and "discipline" threatens to turn against him. And as Lenin, unlike the anarchistic intellectuals of the "minority" represents (I use a quotation he takes from an article by Kautsky) 'the ideal model of an intellectual, totally steeped in the proletarian outlook ... who without complaining marches in line, and works at each post he is given'; as Lenin, following Marx's example *never ingratiates himself into first place* and 'submits to Party discipline in an exemplary manner'; as Comrade Lenin possesses all these absolutely inestimable qualities as a disciplined Party member, who is not afraid to remain in a "minority," he judges it indispensable to "slip" into his work in advance *the philosophical justification for the split in the Party made to retain the*

*remnants of his
army.*

And he does it in a bare-faced way which is the reverse of his deep mistrust of his own supporters.

*If anyone rebels
against me, it is
very bad. If I
rebel, then it
good.*

Such is the brief and joyous moral of a long and boring book, abounding with quotations, "international" parallels, artificial diagrams and all the other means of mental anesthesia.

Some conclusions in the form of extracts from letters

I. March 1904 – Yesterday there was a meeting of the propagandists (11 members) with the organiser. The aim of the meeting was to become acquainted with the organisational plan in general and ours in particular. Before explaining the plan, the organiser said a few words about the "minority" and the "majority." He belongs to the "majority" and recognises the organisational plan proposed by Lenin and adopted at the Congress (sic!). 'The minority,' the organiser said, 'reproaches the majority for its formalism and bureaucratism. *As you will see*, this is completely unjustified. And then, the minority has no plan to replace Lenin's.' He stated after that a trace of the "Union" ("democratism") could be seen in the "minority." He regretted the indifference with which the question of the organisational plan was received when it was proposed by Lenin in *Letter to a Comrade* and *What Is To Be Done?* In this respect he recalled that Trotsky and Zaslulich approved the plan. 'A circle is not the organisation, nor even a cell. The cell is the factory committee (which, as of yet, exists nowhere). It is a vital necessity to create such a cell. *We totally lack information about life in the factories and businesses,* which nonetheless offer very rich material. Agitators often speak without anything to base themselves on. So – the factory committee to be headed by a worker-organiser. In the factory

committee there are five or six excellent organisers, influential men
(*since our work
lacks continuity
there are none such
to be found*)

. The functions of the factory committee are to circulate publications, collect funds, collect information, give out leaflets ...'

We were given a detailed explanation of how to organise groups to give out leaflets, which has never yet been done. Then: organisation of agitational meetings and of propaganda circles. The members of the factory committee to be: an organiser, a technician, a treasurer, a librarian, a publicist. The town is divided into seven sections, to which is added work among the intelligentsia. Organisation of the sections: a section organiser, propagandist, librarian, publicist, treasurer. The local committee is formed: a member of the collective (the first time this had been mentioned), a technician, a chief propagandist, an organiser, a journalist, a secretary. (Forgive the speed and confusion of this report; I have had so little time. If necessary, I shall write in more detail.)

The reporter dwelt at length on the *technical* details of all the work: how it must be organised in order to be *clandestine* and *productive*. On the mutual relations among the groups, and their relations with the local committee, nothing was said. Only the *external form* was explained. Finally, the reporter asked: where is the bureaucratism or the formalism in this plan? Nobody found anything to say in reply, but all are inclined to think there is no danger. The propagandists know nothing about the differences; there is no publication. Now a "reading corner" has been organised for them. In it you find the latest issues of *Osvodbozhdenie*, the first part (!) of the minutes of the Second Congress and Pavlovich's pamphlet. Recently there was a meeting of 25 technology students. *They too were told about the organisational plan.* Up until now there had never been a meeting with them: 'What can we do with you? Just study your medicine.'

I warmly shake your hand.

Reply. *March 1904* . – Dear friend, your last letter is extremely interesting and gives rise to various thoughts and reflections, so much so that I hardly know where to begin. The first thing we can establish is the undeniable fact that not only the organised workers of N, not only the propagandists but even the members of the N Committee knew nothing up until now about the meaning of the differences tearing the Party apart. At the present time we often hear it said that 'at the base (!) of our

work we must have the idea (!) of centralism,' (cf. The Batum Committee resolution). Everywhere there is talk of centralism: in the Mingrelian Committee and the Petersburg Committee, the Riga Committee and the Chita Committee. And people think that centralism is the Central Committee. If there is a Central Committee that means there is centralism. But the fact that an organisation like the N Committee does not know, either through lack of information or lack of interest – what the Central Organ of the Party is after, what the "League" wants, and what is wanted by the five or six committees supporting the Central Organ, this does not make the comrades of N think *that there is no centralism among us.*

Because "centralism," and this at least must be understood, does not mean the Central Committee, the Central Organ or the Council but something much bigger: above all, it requires *the active participation of all members in the whole life of the Party.*

Of course, I am speaking of "European" centralism and not autocratic-Asiatic centralism. This latter does not *require* but rather *excludes* any such participation.

The organisational "plan" (which was put to you) may be excellent "in itself," and I shall speak of it again below, but it must be seen that this plan has been in existence for two years already, that it has created a whole generation which literally "lives" by Lenin's *Letter to a Comrade* ; you would think centralism

should have flourished magnificently. But it turns out that the N Committee (not the Poltava or the Ufa Committee, but N) shrugs off questions which for almost a year have been divided the most influential members of the Party. Does this not mean that the N Committee is nothing but a little group of "craft dilettantes" just as it was three years ago, nothing more than a group of artisans who, as can be seen from your letter, are not able to complete a hundredth part of the local tasks; who, as in the past, are totally indifferent to the questions raised by the Party as a whole or even have a sovereign contempt for them. Where is the difference? How is it expressed? In the fact that people have revived a few terms of revolutionary jargon, can't say three words without swearing by centralism and in the fact that all hopes have been transferred from the "spontaneous growth of tasks" to "the idea of centralism" or the organisational plan, which will some day be put into action

(if the disorganisers do not prevent it); after which "forests and mountains will begin to dance" ...

Where is the difference? Social Democratic centralism necessarily requires the active participation of all members in the life of the Party. For that it is above all necessary for everyone to *be informed*.

But you have only the first section of the minutes of the Congress (who split these minutes into two? And why?) and Pavlovich's pamphlet. But you do not have the minutes of the League Congress, nor Martov's pamphlet, nor **Iskra**. So where are the positive results of the "idea of centralism" laid down in **What Is To Be Done?** as the basis of Party work?

Is it not clear that the Central Committee in no way means centralism, even in the narrowest technical meaning of the term? How can it not be seen that the N Committee, instead of explaining to you propagandists the organisational "plan" already put forward by three or four generations of "centralist" committee members to three or four generations of "centralist" propagandists, with no resulting growth in the party's understanding – instead of repeating this work for the fourth or fifth time and turning aside when it came to the question of the differences, your Committee should have stopped at a given point to look at what it is doing: what it has been, what it has become, what it has at its disposal. The Committee would have seen that, in all its swift and fantastic metamorphoses, it has kept only one characteristic: the old broken bucket of craft dilettantism ...

It would then have asked itself if the organisational "plan" really does have everything. Are we not permanently bogged down, even though the "idea of centralism" has been drummed into everyone's head to such a point that sometimes you see one end of Lenin's *Letter to a Comrade* sticking out of one of them?

The reasons for the atrophy may perhaps lie deeper here than in knowing how many treasures, accountants and other bearers of the "idea of centralism" to have, and where.

Once the Committee begins to think along these lines – and it is a very efficient direction – it will lose the desire to ask the "minority" (as your leader does): 'But where is your plan to replace Lenin's which you reject?' for he will understand that the "minority" rejects as a panacea, not so much a given plan of self-sufficient organisation, but the plan for having such a plan. You

write, in one of your earlier letters, that you rarely have meetings of propagandists: everyone keeps to themselves, all are left to their own resources, clandestine activity cuts short everything. But here one of these rare meetings was called. A leading comrade appeared. He told you that in the "minority" – which anyway, judging by what he said, he does not know – there is still a trace of "democratism"; then he explained the organisational "plan" to you, the propagandists. And then? What conclusions are to be drawn from this plan? What directions does he give you for your propaganda work? In what sense does he enrich your consciousness? Do you, after the meeting, start to put this plan to work? In what way? By what means? Or will the work be carried out by someone else, for example by the organiser who has initiated you into the mysteries of the plan? Has he also told you how he intends to carry out his "plan"? Will he dissolve all the existing groups and circles and having swept the ground clean, rebuild a new organisational edifice, with scarce resources, following the rules of centralised architecture? Or does he mean to gradually liquidate the rudimentary organs of the existing organisation? And how? Where will he start? What does this mean in terms of your organisational work as propagandists? Your letter shows that he has not said *a single word* about these "trifles." But in that case, all your talking was only the most sterile pastime.

The circle is not the organisation, not even the embryo of an organisation – the embryo is the factory committee. The plan is excellent, it does not contain a trace of bureaucratism. – But your organiser has not even bothered to think about the fact that on the one hand the plan exists, on its own, and on the other the Social Democracy of N lives quite independently. Your organisation is so bad that the proclamations circulated even more poorly than in the days of "democratism." And the plan, written by the town of N, published in its day by the N Committee, carefully and in great detail studied by the comrades of N, both new and old, continues as in the past to feed the sincere enthusiasm of the "centralists" of N. All this despite the fact that after two years of platonic centralism, the basic cell of Lenin's "plan," the factory committee, *still does not exist anywhere*. But the "circle," which according to the plan is only peripheral, occupies the whole of the foreground – and the circle is in fact still today the only "embryonic cell" in which our organiser can explain his organisational plans.

And you, the propagandists, after the meeting of your *circle*, go back to *your circles* and start discussing

with the workers – perhaps on the lines that a day will come when the whole of the town of N will be covered with factory committees; in each committee there will be an organiser, a branch propagandist, a branch treasurer, a “publicist,” and above them, there will be branch committees, each with a branch organiser, a branch propagandist, a branch treasurer, a publicist, and above them a local committee of the Party and above all these committees our Committee of committees, the Central Committee, which at the right time will call to order all the local committees, which will call to order the branch committees, and they in turn the factory committees and the factory committees the workers – and the revolutionary pan-Russian proletariat will begin to correspond ... It will do so, if only the “disorganisers” do not prevent it!

I ask myself once more: why, to what end, did the organiser expound his “plan” to you? I try to explain his behaviour psychologically. I recall the time of “primitive” circle propaganda. At that time, the propagandist aimed to give the worker of the Pahl factory or the Maxwell factory a clear idea of his place in the universe. We began with the cosmology. We happily traced the descent of man from the ape. We covered as well as we could the history of civilisation and (occasionally!) got as far as capitalism and then socialism. At the basis of this work was the idea that the average proletarian had to be transformed into a Social Democrat equipped with a materialist conception of the world. Today, such respectable doctrinairism is out of date and even forgotten – only to reappear, as we see today, in the form of the most wretched caricature.

Those elements of our Party trained during the period of the collapse of “dilettantism” have come to the astonishingly meagre conclusion that *at the basis of our work there must be the idea of centralism.*

The idea of a materialist explanation of the world has been replaced by the idea of a centrally constructed “plan.” The immense but doctrinaire task of explaining to a member of the circle his place in the divine macrocosm, is transformed into the abrupt bureaucratic idea of explaining to the member of the organisation his place in the Leninist microcosm.

Although it may have been fairly rare for one of the objects of this primitive propaganda to survive in the circle long enough for it to be decided what the

worker of the Pahl or Maxwell factory represents, he all the same learned that mankind had been through a phase of polyandry ... All this amounts to a useful and correct sum of knowledge for understanding what is and what has been. But the world system of N which rests on 130 worker-treasurers, 130 accountants and 130 "publicists" – must simply have been thought out by Lenin in an hour of bureaucratic vision. In any case you can see that it does not exist. And when you explain to the worker his place in such a universal system, you are only telling him of "what is not and what has never been" ...

Is it obvious, dear friend, that the reproaches the "minority" makes to certain elements in the Party concerning their bureaucratism and formalism "are quite baseless"?

'A cordial handshake ...'

II. July 1904 – Dear comrade: is now the time to concern ourselves with a detailed examination of the organisational question? Great events steal up on us unawares, and the Revolution may arrive much more swiftly than we dare to expect. And we are reckoning that only a third of Social Democrats are able to do committee work. When the masses, resolute and revolutionary, take to the streets, will we then understand that this is the Revolution? Will the masses find the slogans they need? And the soldiers? Because on their attitude will depend the outcome of the street battles ... Should we try to bring them closer to the revolutionary masses? It really is a high time to prepare for the Revolution, which will come "like a thief in the night." In my opinion, this is how things stand: we must prepare as though the Revolution were to start at the end of the summer; we must use every "delay" in the interests of our Party. It is time, it is high time!

Reply – I agree with you, dear comrade, that the Revolution is perhaps much nearer than it seems, that we must develop the most intensive and extensive political agitation possible, that it is necessary to popularise the immediate fighting slogans among the broadest masses, so that they can take to the streets with them. I agree with you: there is no longer time to probe the organisational question in detail ... But I should not agree if you put this idea forward as an objection to the work being carried out by the "minority."

You do not say this directly but it can be taken that way. If the Revolution, which will certainly come "like a thief in the night," is not to find us asleep, it is indispensable to be *politically on our guard*.

Unfortunately, our Party is asleep, politically speaking. In its sleep it dreams fantastic organisational dreams which at times turn into painful nightmares. It is essential to wake the Party up at all costs. Otherwise its political sleep could well be turned into its political death.

When you say: *we must prepare for the Revolution,*

the whole Party will agree with you, but three-quarters will think you are talking about technical, organisational preparation. The Riga Committee will say: 'It is absolutely necessary to build a strictly centralised organisation of professional revolutionaries.' And a dozen other committees will say the same thing. For them, preparing for the Revolution means, if not actually distributing the passwords and slogans and fixing the time and date of the so-called "call" to the so-called "insurrection," at least carrying our internal organisational work (which should in any case more correctly be called "disorganising" work, since it begins with the destruction of already existing organisational forms). However, *the task*

which we have to

carry out at the

present decisive

moment

, which will not wait and will not be repeated,

lies in taking all

the existing

elements of

organisation and

uniting them in

systematically

centralised work,

without dispersal

or divergence

. The aim of this work is through adequate tactical methods, to maintain the masses in a state of political tension, rising ever higher to be finally discharged in a revolutionary period or else in a period of temporary reaction – which is less likely.

As a whole our task at the present time lies in the field of political tactics. We, the so-called "minority" are not creating independent organisational

tasks for ourselves; we think that the most urgent of these tasks is imposed on us in the process of the political struggle itself. In this specific meaning we are in fact "opportunists on organisational questions." It must only be kept in mind that the rigour on organisational questions which is opposed to our opportunism is nothing but the other side of the coin of political myopia. As long as the thinking of the majority of comrades (and here I only repeat what I have said elsewhere) continues to jump about like a mouse caught in a mouse-trap on the few square centimetres formed by the trifles and bits and pieces of organisation and statutes, *it will*

be impossible even

to pose the real

political tasks.

The "polemical" work of the minority has basically nothing in common with the "detailed" working out of the "organisational questions"; it consists only of destroying organisational fetishism and clearing the ground so that questions of political tactics can be raised: this is the practical solution to be given to these questions on which depends the whole fate of Russian Social Democracy, and the Party of the Revolution, and the Party of the proletariat.

Sapienti sat!

(who knows.)

(This is sufficient for he

The starting point of the campaign we must at once open up, basing ourselves on all the forces we have, both individuals and organised groups, must be the war. The slogan we put out is obvious: *Peace*

and Freedom

. The slogan which we are putting forward must be not only the formulation of our principled stand on the war but also the formulation of the aim we wish without delay to attain. Not only do we not simply pronounce in favour of peace but we hope to obtain an end to the war, along with an "end" to autocracy. We *must* go for that – and it must make itself felt in the tone and content of our agitation.

We have not learned to all to give fighting slogans to the masses. What corresponds to the formalism of our political thinking is not effective slogans but a number of hackneyed sayings which are always and everywhere valid, because even to us they are often only phrases. The proclamation by the Riga Committee *On the war* put forward the

following slogan: 'To all attempts by the

autocratic clique

to awaken the beast in us and drive us to fight our Japanese brothers, let our answer be the cry: Down with the bourgeoisie! Down with the war! Long live peace and

the fraternal union of peoples! Long live socialism!’ Obviously, this proclamation gives us no fighting slogan, no watchword to drive people to struggle. You cannot take an exclamation such as ‘Down with the bourgeoisie!’ to be a serious slogan in reply to the adventurism of the “autocratic clique”! The fate of the present war is linked in this proclamation to the fate of the bourgeoisie. The Yekaterinoslav Committee says:

‘We are against the war, because the war is against the working class. We cannot actually stop the war but we strongly protest against this pointless, destructive, adventurist war!’

This attitude can considerably weaken our revolutionary position. It is the fate of Tsarism which is presently tied to the war, and this is what we must understand; if it is true that we are entering the period of the definitive collapse of the autocracy, then the conclusion we must draw is that we must not only protest against the war, but demand its immediate end.

‘Peace at any price!’ This is the slogan which begins and ends every proclamation, every agitational speech. It is indispensable to evaluate all the results of the war and to make the masses conscious of them. Simple, clear and so far as possible short proclamations should cover all Russia. They must all, in the present period, have the same orientation. *Peace at any price!* This is the slogan to which

everyone must be called: let your appeal reach every workshop, every village, every home. Let the workers in the towns pass on to those in the countryside their superior understanding and training! Talk, discuss everywhere, every day, tirelessly and unceasingly ... The more millions of mouths there are to repeat our demand, the more loudly it will sound in the ears of those to whom it is addressed.’ (Lasalle, *Open Letter to the Central Committee*)

It is necessary to carry out the most intense agitation among the unemployed, on the basis of the same slogan: Down with the war, which brings the people only poverty, unemployment and death! At a certain point, the agitation must take on a more complex character; the aim must become for the social institutions of the ruling classes to reveal their attitude towards the war. The workers must demand that the *zemstvos*, *dumas*, universities, the learned societies and the press raise their

influential voices against the war. The further course of the campaign will to a great extent be determined by the way in which these institutions react to the demands of the revolutionary proletariat.

State aid to the hungry peasants and unemployed and the victims of the war!

This second slogan must be put forward at the opportune moment, with all the necessary energy. Agitation on this basis must lead to demonstrations of the proletariat and especially the unemployed, against the *dumas* and *zemstvos* which waste the people's money on the needs of war. The broader and deeper the movement against the war, the greater will be the difficulty of the autocracy, caught in the crossfire. The slogan

Long live the Constituent Assembly!

must sound throughout all Russia, as the decisive solution to the difficulties. The connection of this slogan with the two preceding one is obvious: the Constituent Assembly must end the war and the rule of the Romanovs in general.

A "call" from the representatives of the *zemstvos*, *dumas* and universities must not catch us unawares. Such a call seems likely to arouse in many comrades' minds a feeling of fear: "We are late." (But why? Because we have not called an insurrection before the other?) But some "constitutional" reform decreed from above does not exclude the movement of the masses, on the contrary, it can serve as prologue to it. Turgot's reforms marked the threshold of the French Revolution. To the call "from above" from the *dumas* and the *zemstvos* we must reply with the slogan:

Universal, direct, secret suffrage!

For the masses to support this slogan, it is indispensable – as I have shown just now – that in their mobilisation around other slogans we in one way or another lead them to oppose the *zemstvos* and *dumas*, social institutions based on a property franchise.

Of course, it would be inept to fix at once the order in which slogans will be advanced or the ways the masses will mobilise around them. I can only give an outline to indicate the revolutionary work which awaits us. But whatever

the changes undergone by our tactics, whatever combinations they enter into, the *method* of our tactics must remain unchanged: to oppose the proletariat in political action to the autocracy and to all the social institutions of the ruling classes, especially to those which – like the *zemstvos* and *dumas* – may perhaps be “called on” to decide the fate of freedom in Russia.

In pursuing this complex pre-revolutionary campaign we must recall the rule Lasalle proposed in 1863 to the German workers:

‘The whole secret of practical successes lies in the art of always concentrating all your forces at a single point, the most important point, without turning your glance aside. Do not waste energy looking to right or to left; be your glance aside. Do not waste energy looking to right or to left; be deaf to everything but universal, direct suffrage, everything which is not related to it or cannot lead to it!’ (Open Letter)

Whatever the stage of our campaign in which the revolution surprises us, the proletariat, united on precise slogans, will have its say. And in such conditions the revolution itself will give a colossal impetus to its further political unification. So, *mobilise the proletariat around the basic slogans of the revolution!* This is

the content of our immediate preparation for the decisive events being prepared. If, by the will of history, these events are delayed for an indefinite time, none of our efforts will be lost. They will be an integral part of our immense historical task, which is to develop the class consciousness of the proletariat.

At the present time I know of no other preparation than that. On the other hand, I see all *this* preparation in all its complexity, all its difficulty, all its immensity. To be more exact: all other preparation must be added to it. *Da stehe ich,*

*anders kann ich
nicht.*

(Here I stand, I can do no other.) That is, after all, what every conscious partisan of the "minority" will say. If he is ever crucified for his organisational "opportunism" he will not admit defeat. Even on the cross he must be ready to cry: 'You are blind! You see the mote in your neighbour's eye and not the beam in your own!'

[Part IV](#)



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Leon Trotsky

Our Political Tasks

PART IV: JACOBINISM AND SOCIAL DEMOCRACY

The Jacobin indissolubly linked to the *organisation* of the proletariat *now* conscious of its class interests, is precisely the *social democratic revolutionary.* **Forward, Two Steps Back)** **Ð (One Step**

This formula sanctions all the political and theoretical conquests of the Leninist wing of our Party. In this apparently insignificant formula is hidden the theoretical root of the differences on the unfortunate Paragraph I of the statutes, and on all questions of tactics. We must dwell on it.

When Lenin in his definition speaks deliberately and seriously (and not for effect) of *the organisation of the proletariat now conscious of its class interests* **Ð** there is nothing heretical in this; it is simply a pleonasm. It goes without

saying that one who is linked to the proletariat which has become conscious of its class interests is a social democrat. But then in Lenin's definition one can put, instead of *Jacobin* : liberal, populist, Tolstoyan or anything you want. For once the Jacobin, Tolstoyan or whatever link their fate to the organisation of the proletariat now conscious of its class interests, they cease to be Jacobins, Tolstoyans, Mennonites etc., and become revolutionary Social Democrats. But if Lenin intended something more profound by his definition than that a Social Democrat is a Social Democrat, then it must be taken as follows: *without ceasing to be a Jacobin in the general methodology of his political thinking and by his organisational conceptions in particular* , the Jacobin becomes a revolutionary Social Democrat once he links himself to the revolutionary proletariat.

In the struggle between the revolutionary and opportunistic wings of international socialism, the analogy of the struggle between the Montagne and the Gironde has often been used. But, of course, this was not to establish an equation between Jacobinism and revolutionary socialism. Anyone who think not in terms of external words and analogies, but in living concepts, will of course understand that Social Democracy is at least as far removed from Jacobinism as from reformism. Robespierre is at least as far removed from Bebel as Jaures. In what sense can we be Jacobins? By conviction, by doctrine, by our methods of political struggle or internal politics? In our phrases? Jacobinism is not a supra-social revolutionary category, but an historical product. It is the apogee of the tension of revolutionary energy in the period of self-emancipation of bourgeois society. It is the high point of radicalism that could be produced by bourgeois society, not through developing its own contradictions but by they stifled appeal to the rights of the abstract man and citizen; in practice, the guillotine. History had to halt for the Jacobins to keep power, for every forward movement opposed to each other the various elements supporting them and thus undermined the revolutionary will at the head of which stood the Montagne. The Jacobins did not and could not believe that their Truth would gain ground increasingly as time went on. Facts showed that everywhere, from all the crevices of society, came the intriguers, hypocrites, aristocrats, and

imoderates. Those who yesterday were true patriots and real Jacobins today appeared hesitant. To preserve the high point of revolutionary élan by instituting the state of siege and drawing the dividing lines with the guillotine was the tactic dictated to the Jacobins by their instinct for political preservation. The Jacobins were utopians. They set themselves the task of founding a republic based on reason and equality. They wanted an egalitarian republic based on reason and equality. They wanted an egalitarian republic based on private property; a republic of reason and virtue in the framework of the exploitation of one class by another. They straddled a gigantic contradiction and called the blade of the guillotine to their aid.

The Jacobins were pure idealists they were the first to recognise the principles of universal morality. They believed in the absolute strength of the Idea, of Truth. I know only two parties, Maximilien Robespierre said in one of his last great speeches, on the 8th Thermidor, that of good citizens and that of bad. Along with absolute faith in the metaphysical idea went total distrust towards real men. Suspicion was the inevitable method for serving Truth.

History would have had to stop for the Jacobins to be able to keep their position longer; but it did not stop. All that was left was to fight mercilessly against the movement of nature to the point of total exhaustion. Any pause, any concession, spelt death. This sense of irreparable historical tragedy filled the speech Robespierre gave on 8th Thermidor to the Convention and took up again at the Jacobin club: On our present course, to stop before the end is to perish, and we are shamefully late ... Let go the reins of the revolution for one moment and you will see them seized by military despotism and national representation of the people overthrown by factional leaders; a century of civil war and calamity will desolate our party, and we shall perish for not having seized a moment marked out in the history of men for the founding of liberty; we give our people over to a century of calamities, and the curses people will bring down in our memory, which should have been dear to the human race!

How different is this career from that of Social Democracy, the most optimistic of parties! The future *guarantees* it the growth of supporters of its truth, for this truth is not a sudden revelation but just the theoretical expression of the growing class struggle of the proletariat. Revolutionary Social Democracy is persuaded, not just by the inevitable growth of the political party of the proletariat but also of the inevitable

victory of the ideas of *revolutionary*

socialism within the Party. The first certainty is based on the fact that the development of bourgeois society leads the proletariat spontaneously to take shape politically; the second on the fact that the objective tendencies of this process become clearest in revolutionary, that is Marxist, socialism. We can define the *formal* frontiers of the Party as wider or narrower, softer or harder, depending on a whole series of objective causes, considerations of tact and political reasons. But whatever its dimensions, it is clear that our Party will always form a series of concentric circles, from the centre outwards, increasing in number but decreasing in level of consciousness. The most conscious and therefore the most revolutionary elements will always be a minority in our Party. And this can only be explained by our faith in the fate of the working class as being social revolution, and revolutionary ideas as being those corresponding best to the historical movement of the proletariat. We believe that the practice of the class will, thanks to Marxism, raise the level of the less conscious elements. This is what separates us from the Jacobins. *Our*

attitude towards the elemental social forces, and therefore towards the future, is one of revolutionary confidence.

For the Jacobins, these forces were rightly suspect because they also engendered the formation of the proletariat into a class.

Two worlds, two doctrines, two tactics, and two outlooks, separated by an abyss: in what sense are we Jacobins? It is true that they were intransigent, as are we. Among the Jacobins the dreadful accusation was

moderation
opportunism

. We have the accusation of . But our intransigence is qualitatively different. We separate ourselves from opportunism with the armoury of the class consciousness of the proletariat; and the opportunists either leave us to join the political camp of the other class or submit to the revolutionary (*not opportunist*) logic of the class movement of the proletariat. All such purges strengthen us and often swell our ranks. The Jacobins inserted between themselves and moderation only the blade of the guillotine. The logic of the class movement was going against them, and they tried to behead it. It was folly; this was a

many-headed hydra, and the heads devoted to the ideals of virtue and truth became increasingly rare. The Jacobins purged and weakened them. The guillotine was only the mechanical instrument of their political suicide but this suicide was only the fatal way out of a hopeless historical situation.

Two worlds, separated by an abyss ... There is no doubt that the whole of the international movement of the proletariat would have been accused of moderation before the revolutionary tribunal and Marx's lion like head would have been the first to fall under the guillotine. Nor is there any doubt that to introduce the methods of the Jacobins into the class movement of the proletariat is and always will be the sign of the purest *opportunism*, sacrificing the historical interests of the proletariat for the fiction of a temporary benefit. In relation to the class struggle, which draws up its strength only as it develops, the guillotine seems as absurd as the consumers' co-operative and Jacobinism as opportunistic as Bernsteinism.

Of course, if one tries to transpose the methods and tactics of Jacobinism into the field of class struggle of the proletariat, one ends up only with a pitiful caricature of Jacobinism, but not with Social Democracy. Social Democracy is not Jacobinism, much less a caricature of it. It is to be hoped that the Jacobin, linked to the organisation of the proletariat, now conscious of its class interests, will in the end detach himself from it. But in so far as he keeps his Jacobin mentality of distrust and suspicion towards the unorganised forces and the future, he will show total inability to evaluate the development of the Party. I know only two parties, that of the good citizens and that of the bad. The good citizens are those who today show favour to my plan whether their political consciousness is advanced or not doesn't matter.

I know only two parties, that of the good citizens and that of the bad. This political aphorism is engraved on the forehead of Maximilien Lenin and, in a gross way, sums up the political wisdom of the former **Iskra**. The practice of mistrust certainly was the basic trait of the **Iskra** team: the milieu in which they worked was that of the intelligentsia which showed its anti-proletarian nature in various ways. The old **Iskra** took it as its task not to enlighten the political consciousness of the intelligentsia, but to *theoretically*

terrorise it. For the social democrats trained in this school, orthodoxy is something very close to the absolute Truth of the Jacobins. Orthodox Truth ruled everywhere, even in the matter of co-optation.

Whoever challenged it was removed; whoever questioned it came under doubt.

Lenin's speech to the Congress of the League provides the classic expression of his Jacobin views in this respect. Lenin knows the absolute organisational Truth; he has a plan and is trying to carry it out. The Party would be flourishing if he, Lenin, were not surrounded on all sides by intrigues and traps, as though everything was in league against him and his plan. And Lenin reaches the conclusion that to make the work more efficient it is necessary to remove *the*

troublesome elements and make them unable to harm the Party.

In other words, it has become necessary, for the good of the Party, to institute a state of siege at its head there had to be, as the Romans said, a *dictator*

seditionis sedendae et rei gerundae causa

(a dictator to put down sedition and govern affairs). But the regime of terror was from the outset and impotent. The *dictator seditionis*

sedendae could not subject the disrupters, nor expel them, nor lock them up in the straightjacket of discipline. He was not able to intimidate the backward elements who continued to take new positions. And all our Robespierre had left was to repeat his namesake's pessimistic words.

Lenin and his supporters will not understand the reasons for their failure as long as they refuse to realise that you cannot outlaw the path of development of either society as a whole or the Party. The political rationalists and metaphysicians think it is enough to think, as a substitution for the development of the Party and arm oneself with the emblems of official power, in order to move outwards. But when all conditions for success are present, new obstacles and new resistances arise. The period of intrigues begins. Some do not understand what is happening and ask why. Others argue there is a better way. Still others take account of this and look for tactics which will enable the Party to go forward. The political metaphysician is incapable of making any distinction between them. He sees only a single reactionary mass opposing the advance he imagines he is achieving in the Party. The rationalist logic of his thought removes our Jacobin further and further from the historical logic of the development of our Party, and finally

concludes that the whole Party is intriguing against him. The totality of individuals, with their different levels of development and conceptions and temperaments, in short, the *material body of the Party itself* turns out to be a *brake on development* rationally planned out beforehand. This is the secret of Lenin's failures and the cause of his petty distrust. The distrust is only the heritage of the tactics of the former **Iskra**. But these methods and practices, which had their justification at a certain historical period, must today be wiped out of all costs, before they threaten our Party with total political, moral and theoretical decomposition.

It is no accident, but a characteristic position, that the head of the reactionary wing of our Party, Comrade Lenin, believed himself psychologically obliged, by keeping up the tactics of a caricature of Jacobinism, to define Social Democracy in a way which is a *theoretical attack against the class character of our Party*. Yes, a *theoretical attack*, no less dangerous than the *critical* ideas of some Bernstein. For what was the theoretical operation Bernstein carried out in relation to liberalism and socialism? Mainly he tried to wipe out their marked class character and turn them into systems of political thought located above classes and related to one another by internal logic. It is the operation Jaures and his faithful friend Millerand are carrying out in relation to the principles of democracy and of socialism. It is no good pointing out that along with this *high-level* theoretical speculation there are speculations of a quite practical nature involving ministerial portfolios; or more broadly, that to deduce socialism logically from liberal and democratic principles means, in practice, turning the proletariat into a political appendage of bourgeois democracy. The same operation too is being carried out by the ex-Marxist idealist *critics*. They send socialism to the school of liberalism but with this difference, that they first make it go through the purgatory of idealist philosophy.

The political tendency of bourgeois democracy (which consists of subjecting the proletariat to its tutelage) requires that in the ideological *sphere* liberalism and socialism appear, not as principles of two irreconcilable worlds – capitalism and collectivism, bourgeois and

proletariat – but as two abstract systems of which one (liberalism) incorporates the other (socialism) as the whole includes the part, or more correctly, as the algebraic formula has its own arithmetical sign. There is no doubt that Bernstein, Juarez and Millerand, and tomorrow, in free Russia, Messrs. Berdeyaev, Bulgakov and perhaps even Struve, will agree on the following definition: ‘The Social Democrat is a liberal (or democrat) linked to the organisation of the proletariat, now conscious of its class interests.’

What will Comrade Lenin say? He will say that it is logically absurd and politically shows the tendency to try and pin an alien ideology, tactics and even a political outlook onto the proletariat. But what is Comrade Lenin doing himself? He is carrying out an operation similar to them: with the difference that in line with his revolutionary position he chooses not

liberalism but its extreme revolutionary offshoot, flesh of its flesh and blood of its blood, *Jacobinism*

But then Comrade Lenin must adopt the other formula, that of **Osvobozhdenie**, but replacing liberalism with its left-wing variety, Jacobinism. It will then read: ‘In no way can Jacobinism and Social Democracy be separated from each other, much less opposed to each other; their basic ideal makes them identical and inseparable.’ So the balance can be drawn: Jacobinism is a particular variety of liberalism; Social Democracy is a particular variant of Jacobinism. If Comrade Lenin does not want to take two steps back – from the only principled slogan he has issued – a shameless (if not blameless) principle, he will be *forced* to take one step forward – along the lines of his own definition, accept all the conclusions flowing from it, and send the Party comrades his new visiting card.

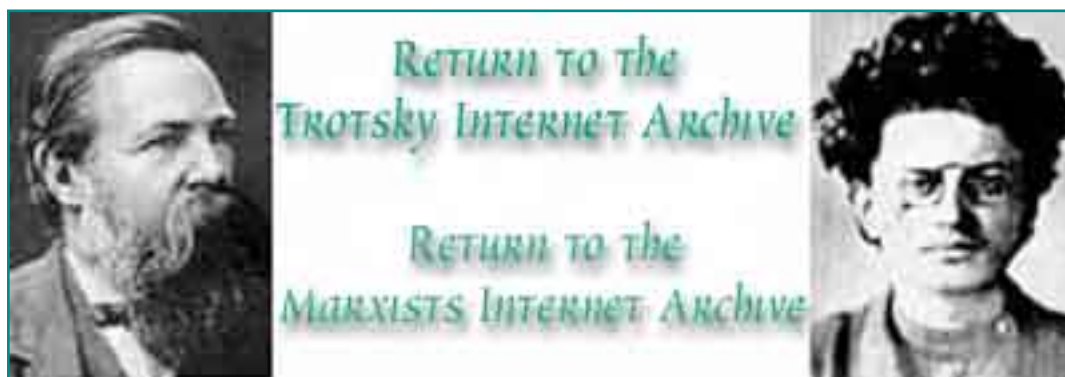
Either ... or!

Either, you end up making your theoretical ‘bridge’ between bourgeois-revolutionary democracy (Jacobinism) and proletarian democracy, like the liberals who, having abandoned Marxism, raise a ‘bridge’ between bourgeois liberalism and proletarian socialism, or you give up the practice which leads you into such a theoretical attack. *Either* Jacobinism, or proletarian socialism!

Either you abandon the only really principled position you have taken in the fight against the ‘minority’ or you abandon the field of Marxism which you have *apparently* been defending against them.

Either/or, Comrade Lenin!

Only a *Jacobin revolutionary* can become a leader of the bourgeois democracy. Marxism may appear to be an ideological cover for the revolutionary intelligentsia to carry out its limited, bourgeois revolutionary role. Comrade Axelrod, Lenin asserts, has found *nothing at all* to demonstrate the existence of given tendencies (bourgeois revolutionary or Jacobin tendencies *É T.*) among representatives of the Orthodox wing of the Party, which he detests (sic). **(One Step Forward ...)** Axelrod has *improved nothing* neither to the Economists, whom he was the first to attack, nor to our Jacobin administrators when he described them politically in his historic resolution to the Congress of the League. Axelrod has *found nothing*. He has not drawn clever diagrams or repeated banal statistics, which is why he has *improved nothing*. He did something different: he defined a *tendency* which has emerged in the Party. For the first kind of work you need an able statistician or lawyer. For the second, you have to be a Marxist and a perceptive politician. As for documentary proof, others will see to this. There are plenty in the Party practice of our Jacobins, in the resolutions of our committees, especially the famous Urals Manifesto. And all these attacks against Marxism have acquired a special importance since Lenin, himself, *centralised* them in his pamphlet crowned by the immortal *formula* of the Jacobin-Social Democrat!



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