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NEW TASKS
AND
NEW FORCES

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The development of a mass working-class movement in Russia in connection with the development of Social-Democracy is marked by three notable transitions. The first was the transition from narrow propagandist circles to wide economic agitation among the masses; the second was the transition to political agitation on a large scale and to open street demonstrations; the third was the transition, to actual civil war, to direct revolutionary struggle, to the armed popular uprising. Each of these transitions was prepared, on the one hand, by socialist thought working mainly in one direction, and on the other, by the profound changes that had taken place in the conditions of life and in the whole mentality of the working class, as well as by the fact that increasingly wider strata of the working class were roused to more conscious and active struggle. Sometimes these changes took place imperceptibly, the proletariat rallying its forces behind the scenes in an unsensational way, so that the intellectuals often doubted the lasting quality and the vital power of the mass movement. There would then be a turning-point, and the whole revolutionary movement would, suddenly, as it were, rise to a new and higher stage. The proletariat and its vanguard, Social-Democracy, would be confronted with new *practical* tasks, to deal with which, new forces would spring up, seemingly out of the ground, forces whose existence no one had suspected shortly before the turning-point. But all this did not take place at once, without vacillations, without a struggle of currents within the Social-Democratic movement, without relapses to outworn views long since thought dead and buried.

Social-Democracy in Russia is once again passing through such a period of vacillation. There was a time when political agitation had to break its way through opportunist theories, when it was feared that we would not be equal to the new tasks, when excessive repetition of the adjective “class”, or a tail-ender’s interpretation of the Party’s attitude to the class, was used to justify the fact that the Social-Democrats lagged behind the demands of the proletariat. The course of the movement has swept aside all these short-sighted fears and backward views. The new upsurge now is attended once more, although in a somewhat different form, by a struggle against obsolete circles and tendencies. The *Rabocheye Dyelo*-ists have come to life again in the new-Iskrists. To adapt our tactics and our organisation to the new tasks, we have to overcome the resistance of opportunist theories of “a higher type of demonstration” (the plan of the Zemstvo campaign), or of the “organisation-as-process”; we have to combat the reactionary fear of “timing” the uprising, or the fear of the revolutionary-democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry. Once again, excessive (and very often foolish) repetition of the word “class” and belittlement of the Party’s tasks in regard to the class are used to justify the fact that Social-Democracy is lagging behind the urgent needs of the proletariat. The slogan “workers’ independent activity” is again being misused by people who worship the lower forms of activity and ignore the higher forms of really Social-Democratic independent activity, the really revolutionary initiative of the proletariat itself.

There is not the slightest doubt that the movement, in its course, will once again sweep aside these survivals of obsolete and lifeless views. Such sweeping aside, however, should not be reduced to mere rejection of the old errors, but, what is incomparably more important, it should take the form of constructive revolutionary work towards fulfilling the new tasks, towards attracting into our Party and utilising the new forces that are now coming into the revolutionary field in such vast masses. It is these questions of constructive revolutionary work that should be the main subject in the deliberations of the forthcoming Third Congress; upon these questions all our Party members should concentrate in their local and general work. As to the new tasks that confront us, of this we have spoken in general terms on more than one occasion. They are: to extend our agitation to new strata of the urban and rural poor; to build up a broader, more flexible, and stronger organisation; to prepare the uprising and to arm the people; and, to these ends, to conclude agreements with the revolutionary democrats. That new forces have arisen for the fulfilment of these tasks is eloquently borne out by the reports of general strikes all over Russia, of the strikes and the revolutionary mood among the youth, among the democratic intelligentsia generally, and even among many sections of the bourgeoisie. The existence of these tremendous fresh forces and the positive assurance that only a small portion of the whole vast stock of inflammable material among the working class and the peasantry has so far been affected by the present unprecedented revolutionary ferment in Russia are a reliable pledge that the new tasks can and will be unfailingly fulfilled. The practical question confronting us now is, first, *how* to utilise, direct, unite, and organise these new forces; *how* to focus Social-Democratic work on the new, higher tasks of the day without for a moment forgetting the old, ordinary run of tasks that confront us, and will continue to confront us, so long as the world of capitalist exploitation continues to exist.

To indicate several methods for dealing with this practical question we shall begin with an individual, but to our mind very characteristic, instance. A short time ago, on the very eve of the outbreak of the revolution, the liberal-bourgeois *Osvobozhdeniye* (No. 63) touched on the question of the organisational work of the Social-Democrats. Closely following the struggle between the two trends in Social-Democracy, *Osvobozhdeniye* lost no opportunity again and again to take advantage of the new *Iskra's* reversion to Economism, in order to emphasise (in connection with the demagogic pamphlet by "A Worker") its own profound sympathy with the principles of Economism. This liberal publication correctly pointed out that the pamphlet (see *Vperyod*, No. 2, on the subject) implies inevitable negation, or belittlement, of the role of revolutionary Social-Democracy. Referring to "A Worker's" absolutely incorrect assertions that since the victory of the orthodox Marxists the economic struggle has been ignored, *Osvobozhdeniye* says:

"The illusion of present-day Russian Social-Democracy lies in its fear of educational work, of legal ways, of Economism, of so-called non-political forms of the labour movement, and in its failure to understand that only educational work, legal and non-political forms, can create a sufficiently strong and broad foundation for a working-class movement that will really be worthy of the name revolutionary." *Osvobozhdeniye* urges its adherents "to take upon themselves the initiative in building a trade union movement", not in opposition to Social-Democracy, but hand in hand with it; and it draws a parallel between this situation and that which prevailed in the German labour movement during the operation of the Exceptional Law Against the Socialists.¹

This is not the place to deal with this analogy, a totally erroneous one. In the first place, it is necessary to reassert the truth about the attitude of the Social-Democrats towards the legal forms of the working-class movement. "The legalisation of non-socialist and non-political labour unions in Russia has begun," we wrote in 1902 in *What Is To Be Done?* "Henceforth, we cannot but reckon with this tendency." How shall we reckon with it?—the

question is raised there and answered by a reference to the need of exposing, not only the Zubatov theories, but also all liberal harmony speeches about “class collaboration”. (In inviting the collaboration of the Social-Democrats, *Osvobozhdeniye* fully acknowledges the first task, but ignores the second.) “Doing this,” the pamphlet goes on to say, “does not at all mean forgetting that in the long run the legalisation of the working-class movement will be to our advantage, and not to that of the Zubatovs.” In exposing Zubatovism and liberalism at legal meetings we are separating the tares from the wheat. “By the wheat we mean attracting the attention of ever larger numbers, including the most backward sections, of the workers to social and political questions, and freeing ourselves, the revolutionaries, from functions that are essentially legal (the distribution of legal books, mutual aid, etc.), the development of which will inevitably provide us with an increasing quantity of material for agitation.”

It follows clearly from this that if anyone is suffering from an “*illusion*” with regard to the question of “*fearing*” the legal forms of the movement, it is *Osvobozhdeniye*. Far from fearing these forms, the revolutionary Social-Democrats clearly point to the existence within them of *tares* as well as *wheat*. *Osvobozhdeniye*’s arguments, consequently, only cover up the liberals’ real (and founded) *fear* that revolutionary Social-Democracy will expose the *class essence of liberalism*.

But what interests us most, from the point of view of present-day tasks, is the question of relieving the revolutionaries of some of their functions. The very fact that we are now experiencing the beginning of the revolution makes this a particularly topical and widely significant question. “The more energetically we carry on our revolutionary struggle, the more the government will be compelled to legalise part of the trade union work, thereby relieving us of part of our burden,” we said in *What Is To Be Done?* But the energetic revolutionary struggle relieves us of “part of our burden” in many other ways besides this. The present situation has done more than merely “legalise” much of what was formerly banned. It has widened the movement to such an extent that, regardless of government legalisation, many things that were considered and actually were within reach only of revolutionaries have now entered the sphere of practice, have become customary and accessible to the masses. The whole course of Social-Democracy’s historical development is characterised by the fact that in face of all obstacles it has been winning for itself increased freedom of action, despite tsarist laws and police measures. The revolutionary proletariat surrounds itself, as it were, with a certain atmosphere, unthinkable for the government, of sympathy and support both within the working class and within other classes (which, of course, agree with only a small part of the demands of the working-class democrats). In the initial stages of the movement a Social-Democrat had to carry on a great deal of what almost amounted to cultural work, or to concentrate almost exclusively on economic agitation. Now these functions, one after another, are passing into the hands of new forces, of wider sections that are being enlisted in the movement. The revolutionary organisations have concentrated more and more on carrying out the function of real *political* leadership, the function of drawing *Social-Democratic* conclusions from the workers’ protest and the popular discontent. In the beginning we had to teach the workers the ABC, both in the literal and in the figurative senses. Now the standard of political literacy has risen so gigantically that we can and should concentrate all our efforts on the more direct Social-Democratic objectives aimed at giving an organised direction to the revolutionary stream. Now the liberals and the legal press are doing a great deal of the “preparatory” work upon which we have hitherto had to expend so much effort. Now the open propaganda of democratic ideas and demands, no longer persecuted by the weakened government; has spread so widely that we must learn to adjust ourselves to this entirely new scope of the movement. Naturally, in this preparatory work there are both tares and wheat. Naturally, Social-Democrats will now have to pay greater attention to combating the influence of the

bourgeois democrats on the workers. But this very work will have much more real Social-Democratic content than our former activity, which aimed mainly at rousing the politically unconscious masses.

The more the popular movement spreads, the more clearly will the true nature of the different classes stand revealed and the more pressing will the *Party's* task be in leading the class, in becoming its organiser, instead of dragging at the tail-end of events. The more the revolutionary independent activity of all kinds develops everywhere, the more obvious will be the hollowness and inanity of the *Rabocheye Dyelo* catchwords, so eagerly taken up by the new-Iskrists, about independent activity in general, the more significant will become the meaning of *Social-Democratic* independent activity, and the greater will be the demands which events make on our *revolutionary initiative*. The wider the new streams of the social movement become, the greater becomes the importance of a strong Social-Democratic organisation capable of creating new channels for these streams. The more the democratic propaganda and agitation conducted independently of us works to our advantage, the greater becomes the importance of an organised Social-Democratic leadership to safeguard the independence of the working class from the bourgeois democrats.

A revolutionary epoch is to the Social-Democrats what war-time is to an army. We must broaden the cadres of our army, we must advance them from peace strength to war strength, we must mobilise the reservists, recall the furloughed, and form new auxiliary corps, units, and services. We must not forget that in war we necessarily and inevitably have to put up with less trained replacements, very often to replace officers with rank-and-file soldiers, and to speed up and simplify the promotion of soldiers to officers' rank.

To drop metaphor, we must considerably increase the membership of all Party and Party-connected organisations in order to be able to keep up to some extent with the stream of popular revolutionary energy which has been a hundred fold strengthened. This, it goes without saying, does not mean that consistent training and systematic instruction in the Marxist truths are to be left in the shade. We must, however, remember that at the present time far greater significance in the matter of training and education attaches to the military operations, which *teach* the untrained precisely and entirely in *our* sense. We must remember that our "doctrinaire" faithfulness to Marxism is now being reinforced by the march of revolutionary events, which is everywhere furnishing *object lessons to the masses* and that all these lessons confirm precisely our dogma. Hence, we do not speak about abandoning the dogma, or relaxing our distrustful and suspicious attitude towards the woolly intellectuals and the arid-minded revolutionaries. Quite the contrary. We speak about new methods of teaching dogma, which it would be unpardonable for a Social-Democrat to forget. We speak of the importance for our day of using the object lessons of the great revolutionary events in order to convey—not to study circles, as in the past, but to the masses—our old, "dogmatic" lessons that, for example, it is necessary in practice to combine terror with the uprising of the masses, or that behind the liberalism of the educated Russian society one must be able to discern the class interests of our bourgeoisie (cf. our polemics with the Socialists-Revolutionaries on this question in *Vperyod*, No. 3).

Thus, it is not a question of relaxing our Social-Democratic exactingness and our orthodox intransigence, but of strengthening both in *new* ways, by new methods of training. In war-time, recruits should get their training lessons directly from military operations. So tackle the new methods of training more boldly, comrades! Forward, and organise more and more squads, send them into battle, recruit more young workers, extend the normal framework of all Party organisations, from committees to factory groups, craft unions, and student circles! Remember that every moment of delay in this task will play into the hands

of the enemies of Social-Democracy; for the new streams are seeking an immediate outlet, and if they do not find a Social-Democratic channel they will rush into a non-Social-Democratic channel. Remember that every practical step in the revolutionary movement will decidedly, inevitably give the young recruits a lesson in Social-Democratic science; for this science is based on an objectively correct estimation of the forces and tendencies of the various classes, while the revolution itself is nothing but the break-up of old superstructures and the independent action of the various classes, each striving to erect the new superstructure in its own way. But do not debase our revolutionary science to the level of mere book dogma, do not vulgarise it with wretched phrases about tactics-as-process and organisation-as-process, with phrases that seek to justify confusion, vacillation, and lack of initiative. Give more scope to all the diverse kinds of enterprise on the part of the most varied groups and circles, bearing in mind that, apart from our counsel and regardless of it, the relentless exigencies of the march of revolutionary events will keep them upon the correct course. It is an old maxim that in politics one often has to learn from the enemy. And at revolutionary moments the enemy always forces correct conclusions upon us in a particularly instructive and speedy manner.

To sum up, we must reckon with the growing movement, which has increased a hundredfold, with the new tempo of the work, with the freer atmosphere and the wider field of activity. The work must be given an entirely different scope. Methods of training should be refocussed from peaceful instruction to military operations. Young fighters should be recruited more boldly, widely, and rapidly into the ranks *of all and every kind* of our organisations. *Hundreds* of new organisations should be set up for the purpose without a moment's delay. Yes, hundreds; this is no hyperbole, and let no one tell me that it is "too late" now to tackle such a broad organisational job. No, it is never too late to organise. We must use the freedom we are getting by law and the freedom we are taking despite the law to strengthen and multiply the number of Party organisations of all varieties. Whatever the course or the outcome of the revolution may be, however early it may be checked by one or other circumstance, all its real gains will be rendered secure and reliable only insofar as the proletariat is organised.

The slogan "Organise!" which the adherents of the majority wanted to issue, fully formulated, at the Second Congress must now be put into effect immediately. If we fail to show bold initiative in setting up new organisations, we shall have to give up as groundless all pretensions to the role of vanguard. If we stop helplessly at the achieved boundaries, forms, and confines of the committees, groups, meetings, and circles, we shall merely prove our own incapacity. Thou sands of circles are now springing up everywhere without our aid, without any definite programme or aim, simply under the impact of events. The Social-Democrats must make it their task to establish and strengthen direct contacts with the greatest possible number of these circles, to assist them, to give them the benefit of their own knowledge and experience, to stimulate them with their own revolutionary initiative. Let all such circles, except those that are avowedly non-Social-Democratic, either directly join the Party or *align themselves with the Party*. In the latter event we must not demand that they accept our programme or that they necessarily enter into organisational relations with us. Their mood of protest and their sympathy for the cause of international revolutionary Social-Democracy in themselves suffice, provided the Social-Democrats work effectively among them, for these circles of *sympathisers* under the impact of events to be transformed at first into democratic assistants and then into convinced members of the Social-Democratic working-class party.

There are masses of people, and we are short of people; this contradictory formula has long expressed the contradictions between the organisational life and the organisational needs of the Social-Democratic Party. Today this contradiction is more salient than ever before;

we often hear from all sides passionate appeals for new forces, complaints about the shortage of forces in the organisations, while at the same time we have everywhere countless offers of service, a growth of young forces, especially among the working class. The practical organiser who complains of a shortage of people under such circumstances becomes the victim of the illusion from which Madame Roland suffered, when she wrote in 1793, at the peak of the Great French Revolution, that France had no men, that there were only dwarfs. People who talk in this manner do not see the wood for the trees; they admit that they are blinded by events, that it is not they, the revolutionaries, who control events in mind and deed, but events that control them and have overwhelmed them. Such organisers *had better retire* and leave the field clear for younger forces who often make up with verve what they lack in experience.

There is no dearth of people; never has revolutionary Russia had such a multitude of people as now. Never has a revolutionary class been so well off for temporary allies, conscious friends, and unconscious supporters as the Russian proletariat is today. There are masses of people; all we need do is get rid of tail-ist ideas and precepts, give full scope to initiative and enterprise, to “plans” and “undertakings”, and thus show ourselves to be worthy representatives of the great revolutionary class. Then the proletariat of Russia will carry through *the whole great Russian revolution* as heroically as it has begun it.

- 1 *The Exceptional Law Against the Socialists* was promulgated in Germany in 1878. The law suppressed all organisations of the Social-Democratic Party, mass working-class organisations, and the labour press; socialist literature was confiscated; and the banishing of socialists began. The law was annulled in 1890 under pressure of the mass working-class movement.