

V.P. FILATOV

LENIN'S

**"WHAT IS
TO BE DONE?"**



PROGRESS PUBLISHERS

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MOSCOW

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О работе В.И. Ленина
„Что делать?“
На английском языке

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INTRODUCTION

What Is To Be Done?, written by Lenin at the beginning of this century, is a remarkable revolutionary Marxist study.

The book clarifies why Russia, at the beginning of the 20th century, became the centre of the world revolutionary movement, why it gave birth to a socialist society and why it was here that a genuinely revolutionary Marxist party of the working class was organised, a new kind of party that led the working class of Russia to victory in the Great October Socialist Revolution, united and guided the efforts of all the peoples of Russia to create a socialist society. Lenin's *What Is To Be Done?* came out in March 1902. Russia was on the verge of its first revolution and had reached, in Lenin's words, "a moment in history when we might have been able to say, varying a well-known statement: 'Give us an organisation of revolutionaries, and we will overturn Russia!'"¹ The Social-Democratic movement

¹ V.I. Lenin, "What Is To Be Done?", *Collected Works*, Vol. 5, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1977, p. 467. (All the quotations from Lenin's works in this book are taken from V.I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, an English-language 45-volume

in the country had serious difficulties. And it was the “burning questions”, in Lenin’s words, of the Social-Democratic movement in Russia that the book dealt with. Lenin made a comprehensive examination of these questions, and advised the Russian revolutionary Marxists what had to be done in that period when the working-class movement was growing. Lenin substantiated the need for militant revolutionary Marxist party of the working class — a substantiation which took full account of the new historical situation — and put forward a scientific theory of a new kind of party, one of revolutionary action, capable of leading the working class and, along with it, the broad masses of the working people, through all the difficulties they would face during the revolutionary transformation of society and social progress towards socialism and communism.

The theory of a new kind of party which was based on sound reasoning—a theory which dealt with the party’s ideological, political and organisational principles, exerted a decisive influence on the revolutionary Marxists in Russia, determined the subsequent development of the party, the methods of its work and the character of its membership. It formulated the party’s goals and the means for attaining them. This theory had a decisive influence on the emergence and development of Communist parties in the 20th century.

edition put out and republished several times by Progress Publishers, Moscow. Henceforth we do not cite the year of publication, since all the editions beginning with 1977 are identical.—Ed.)

The Bolshevik party, set up in 1903 by Lenin and his followers on the basis of this theory, was able to carry out the historical task it had set itself, the task of leading the working class and the non-proletarian working masses of the country to a socialist revolution, and later in building a developed socialist society in the USSR despite the tremendous difficulties involved.

Today, too, this party, the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, is preserving and developing the fundamental principles and features laid down when it was founded, enabling it to politically lead the Soviet people, and organise all their achievements.

Lenin’s *What Is To Be Done?* gives a thorough explanation of the nature and goals of the ruling political party in the USSR, of the ultimate reasons for its peaceable foreign policy and its solidarity with all fighting against imperialism for freedom and independence, peace and social progress.

I. THE HISTORICAL CONDITIONS WHEN *WHAT IS TO BE DONE?* APPEARED

In order to understand the depth of Lenin's ideas set out in *What Is To Be Done?* and appreciate their significance in the revolutionary process, both past and present, and in the activities of Marxist-Leninist and revolutionary-democratic parties, one must know something about the historical conditions when the book was written.

Russia Enters the Age of Imperialism

At the turn of the century, humankind entered a new age. Old capitalism, the capitalism of free competition, made way for new, monopoly capitalism—imperialism.

Even in the previous period, which had seen the rise of capitalism, bourgeois society had been repeatedly shaken by class actions on the part of the workers. The class struggle between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie was fundamental to the historical process.

In the new era, all the contradictions of capitalism intensified to the extreme. New, imperialist contradictions appeared: between

colonies and monopolies, and between imperialist powers for a redivision of the already divided world. These contradictions caused world crises and imperialist wars of plunder.

The class battles of the proletariat assumed an unprecedented scale. The peoples of the colonies and dependent countries rose up to end colonial oppression. All this showed that the new era was one of the collapse of capitalism, the triumph of socialist revolutions and the transition to socialism.

What was Russia like at the time? What was the status of the working class and the broad working masses? Which contradictions determined society's development? What role did the Russian working class play?

Lenin made a comprehensive and profound analysis of the economic, social and political development of Russia at the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century.

He explained that Russia's productive forces were characterised, on the one hand, by rapid development of large-scale industry and, on the other, by backward and slowly developing agriculture. The specific features of industrial development were its high degree of concentration and a large number of new enterprises.

Almost half the factories in Russia had been built in the last decade of the 19th century. They were equipped with modern machinery and required skilled labour. By the beginning of the present century, half the workers in larger factories were born into proletarian

families. Pointing this out, Lenin emphasised the connection between the development of large-scale machine-based industry and the spread and development of the working-class movement.

The high concentration of industrial production meant that the larger factories were responsible for most industrial output. As Lenin noted, the largest factories in Russia were, as early as the mid-1890s, larger than their German counterparts.¹ Huge factories with over 5,000 workers were more numerous in Russia than in Germany at the beginning of this century.

Lenin gives a convincing example that provides a clear idea of the rapid development of heavy industry. From 1886 to 1896, the amount of pig iron produced in Russia tripled. To achieve this France needed 28 years, the United States—23, Britain—22 and Germany—12.²

At the beginning of the 20th century, according to some indices of industrial production—the extraction of oil and iron ore, and the production of pig iron and steel—Russia almost caught up with the developed capitalist countries.

As a result of its industrial rise, Russia became a country with average capitalist development, though far from all branches of the Russian economy had reached this level.

The most revolutionary class, the proletar-

¹See V.I. Lenin, "The Development of Capitalism in Russia", *Collected Works*, Vol. 3, p. 516.

²*Ibid.*, p. 490.

iat, grew in step with the development of industry and the establishment of the capitalist mode of production in Russia.

The formation of the working class in Russia was marked by a number of specific features, which provide the key to understanding the nature of the proletarian class struggle and the revolutionary character of the Russian proletariat. These features included the rapid growth of the working class, especially at the end of the last century, the uneven distribution of industrial workers within the enormous country, the high concentration of the working class and the influence on it by feudal survivals.

In the last decade of the 19th century the number of workers doubled, as it had over the previous twenty-five years (1865-1890).

The total number of wage earners employed in industry, railway transport, forestry, etc., was about ten million according to the 1897 census.

When it came to the size of the Russian working class in that period, Lenin noted that Russia's industrial population was considerably greater than the urban population, since about sixty per cent of the factories were located in the suburbs and the countryside.¹

The uneven distribution of the productive forces in the country was reflected in the uneven distribution of industrial workers. The vast majority of the working class—about

¹See V.I. Lenin, "The Development of Capitalism in Russia", p. 523; V. I. Lenin, "Strike Statistics in Russia", *Collected Works*, Vol. 16, p. 401.

ninety per cent, lived in the European part of Russia. This was the reason for the leading role of the Russian-speaking proletariat in the class struggle.

The location of factories largely in rural localities because of feudal survivals, such as restrictions on the peasants' freedom of movement, meant that part of the peasantry was drawn into the system of capitalist relations, industrial capitalism exerted a direct influence on a substantial part of the peasantry through those factory workers who had not yet broken away from agriculture as members of rural communes, and peasants were involved in proletarian forms of struggle.

Although the working class in Russia was smaller than in the major capitalist countries, it was much more concentrated, even more so than in Germany and the United States.

The higher concentration of the working class in Russia in larger factories than in the West also explained why it was so revolutionary. This factor helped to make the working class cohesive, well-organised, and develop militant revolutionary qualities and the skills needed for persistent collective struggle. Lenin noted several times that the strength of the working-class movement was mainly in the organisation of the proletarians in larger factories, because that was where the most revolutionary section of the proletariat was concentrated.

Although the end of the 19th century saw rapid industrial development, the status of the Russian working class had not changed

since the early stages of capitalist development which was characterised by especially ruthless exploitation in all countries. The working day lasted up to twelve hours and at textile mills up to thirteen and even fifteen hours, and the wages of the Russian workers were among the lowest: the Russian worker earned a quarter of what the British worker made and one-fifth of what the American worker brought home, which was not even enough to meet his basic needs. Women received two-thirds or half of what men were paid for the same work.

The workers were not allowed to form trade unions or hold meetings or strikes. The slightest protest on their part against regulations was mercilessly suppressed by the tsarist autocracy; the police and troops were brought in to crush strikes.

High growth rates in some industries were due to the merciless exploitation of workers and peasants. The nature of exploitation, its degree and forms, and the ruthless suppression of the protest actions of the working class provoked the latter to wage a more resolute and persistent struggle against the exploiters, as was attested by the growing number of strikes. The first half of the 1880s saw about 100 strikes and more than 50 disturbances, while the corresponding figures for the first half of the 1890s were 181 and 83 respectively.

The characteristic features of strikes were the staunchness of the strikers, their comradely cohesion, the forcible liberation of arrested fellow-workers, clashes with the police

and troops, the offensive nature of struggle and co-ordinated efforts of workers from several factories during strikes and their organisation.

In the early part of the 20th century the working-class movement advanced to a new and higher stage. The workers proceeded from economic strikes, which involved ever more people, to political action and evolved a new form of proletarian struggle—mass street demonstrations. From strikes confined to individual factories workers began organising strikes involving entire industrial centres and then whole economic regions. Characterising the revolutionary action of the working class in 1902, Lenin wrote: “For the first time the proletariat stood as a class against all other classes and against the tsarist government”.¹

After the abolition of serfdom in Russia in 1861 both wealthy peasants and large landlords adopted capitalist farming methods. This ruined small-scale producers, turning them into rural proletarians and semi-proletarians. In 1897 the rural population of Russia amounted to 97,000,000; according to Lenin’s estimates, the proletarians and semi-proletarians accounted for fifty per cent. Property and social inequality became exacerbated among the peasants, engendering struggle between the poorer peasants and the rural bourgeoisie called kulaks. That led to joint actions by the working class and the semi-

¹V. I. Lenin, “The First Lessons”, *Collected Works*, Vol. 8, p. 140.

proletarian strata in the countryside against capitalist exploitation.

The development of capitalist relations in agriculture was impeded by the survivals of serfdom. Peasants continued to have the same obligations. For instance, they had to pay for the land they leased from the landlords either by working on the landlords’ estates or by giving part (often half) of the harvest in payment. For decades the peasants had to pay redemption dues for the land received upon their “emancipation” from serfdom. These payments amounted to 867,000,000 roubles, which was 323,000,000 more than the actual cost of their land. In addition, the landlords kept better land for themselves, including the land used by the peasants prior to their “emancipation”. As a result, the entire peasantry, including the wealthy peasants, the kulaks, were short of land and wanted some of the manorial land.

Having too little land and being oppressed by the landlords, the peasants often rebelled, but were ruthlessly suppressed. The early 20th century ushered in a new stage in the peasant struggle: uprisings became so massive they could only be stopped by tens of thousands of soldiers.

Russia was a multi-ethnic country, in which the autocracy and the ruling classes pursued a policy of great-power chauvinism and kindled ethnic enmity. The contradiction between the autocratic policy and the interests of the oppressed peoples stimulated their struggle against tsarism.

Lenin argued that the capitalist evolution of Russia was part of the world historical process and was governed by the laws which had been explained by Marx and which were also in force in the West. This evolution was primarily characterised by the growth and development of capitalist ownership and capitalist production relations, the growing numbers of the working class and its mounting struggle against exploitation and tyranny.

Lenin described the capitalist evolution of Russia and its results by the beginning of the 20th century as "the most backward system of landownership and the most ignorant peasantry on the one hand, and the most advanced industrial and finance capitalism on the other!"¹

This description lays bare the essence of the main contradiction of the Russian economy, which accounted for the causes and nature of the nation's working-class and revolutionary movement.

The Working-Class Movement, Marxism and Revolutionary Organisations

The emergence and development of the proletariat, its increasing struggle against the autocracy and capitalists, and the possibility of uniting the struggle of the working class with that of the peasants were the objective historical factors that made Russia a centre

¹ V. I. Lenin, "Political Notes", *Collected Works*, Vol. 13, p. 442.

of contradictions in the world imperialist system and set the groundwork for Russia to become the centre of the international working-class movement.

The growing working-class and peasant movement and the tumultuous actions of students attested to a general democratic upsurge, a deepening national revolutionary crisis and approaching revolution. "The approach of a great storm was sensed everywhere," wrote Lenin about this period. "All classes were in a state of ferment and preparation."¹

What were the ideas that affected the mounting working-class movement in Russia and other countries and what political parties guided or sought to guide the working-class movement?

In order to understand the specific features of the development of the Russian and international working-class movements it is necessary to know at least the more obvious facts about its preceding history.

By the 1880s Marxism had become the dominant trend in the West European working-class movement. Proletarian parties were formed in Western countries. "Marx's doctrine gained a complete victory and *began to spread*. The selection and mustering of the forces of the proletariat and its preparation for the coming battles made slow but steady progress,"¹ wrote Lenin.

Russia, just like any country where exploi-

¹ V. I. Lenin, "'Left-Wing' Communism—an Infantile Disorder", *Collected Works*, Vol. 31, p. 26.

tation and oppression existed, had selfless fighters against tyranny and for the people's happiness. These fighters were the nation's finest people.

Revolutionary organisations whose members came to be called Narodniks (Populists) were set up in the 1860s and 1870s in Russia. They involved progressive revolutionary-minded intellectuals, in particular students, teachers and doctors.

The members of these clandestine organisations worked among peasants persuading them to fight against the autocracy. They put on peasant clothing and went "to the people" in villages, hence the name of Narodniks (from *narod*, the people).

They regarded themselves socialists, denied that capitalism dominated the Russian economy and believed the peasants rather than the working class constituted the main revolutionary force. They rejected political revolution, preaching a transition to socialism directly from the peasant commune. They did not understand the laws of social development and saw no motive forces of the revolution, believing that only "heroes" made history and turned the mob into the people. Their views were popular among the revolutionary-minded intelligentsia and some advanced workers. Theirs was utopian peasant rather than scientific socialism and their practice was, accordingly, unscientific and erroneous, as it centred on direct propaganda

¹V. I. Lenin, "The Historical Destiny of the Doctrine of Karl Marx", *Collected Works*, Vol. 18, p. 583.

among peasants and called for rebellion irrespective of the situation. But the peasants did not understand or trust them so that the police found it easy to arrest the "trouble-makers". When their attempts failed the Narodniks adopted terrorist tactics.

The secret society Narodnaya Volya (People's Will) undertook to assassinate the tsar. On March 1, 1881, Narodnaya Volya people assassinated Tsar Alexander II. The act, however, brought no relief to the peasants or workers. Nor did the assassination of the tsar stir the peasants to rise up against the autocracy, as the Narodniks had hoped it would. The secret organisation of the Narodniks was destroyed but their views persisted for quite a while among the revolutionary-minded intelligentsia. Advanced revolutionary workers, too, were influenced greatly by the erroneous ideas of the Narodniks.

The 1880s produced objective and subjective conditions for the spread of Marxism in Russia. By that time the proletariat not only grew numerically but also asserted itself as a growing social force paving its own way towards revolutionary struggle. A section of the revolutionary intelligentsia broke away from the Narodniks, studied Marxism, thoroughly learned about the West European working-class movement, and critically analysed the Russian revolutionary movement, the significance of workers' strikes in Russia and their own experience among advanced Russian workers. One such member of the revolutionary intelligentsia was Georgi Plekhanov, a

recognised theoretician and leader of the Narodnik movement, and talented Marxist propagandist. In 1883, when he was abroad, he founded the Social-Democratic Emancipation of Labour group.

The group declared that its main tasks were to spread the ideas of scientific socialism in Russia, criticise the fallacious ideas of the Narodniks and investigate the key problems of Russian society from the positions of Marxism and with regard to the interests of the working class. The organisation translated into Russian works by Marx and Engels, among them the *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, *Wage Labour and Capital*, *The Poverty of Philosophy*, and *Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy*, and secretly circulated them in Russia. Marx and Engels wrote special forewords to some of the Russian editions of their works. The group also published a series of popular pamphlets for advanced workers.

Plekhanov wrote several books and articles, which contained an indepth criticism of the erroneous theories of the Narodniks, and brilliantly advocated and propagandised Marxist ideas.

The Emancipation of Labour worked out a programme of action for the Russian Marxists which was basically correct for that period. Nevertheless, the programme was in many respects abstract and vague: it still lacked a clear picture of the alignment of class forces in the forthcoming Russian bourgeois revolution, the role that would be played in it by

the bourgeoisie and peasantry. Consequently, the position of Plekhanov and his group on these issues was inconsistent and controversial.

Nevertheless, the Emancipation of Labour played a big role in spreading Marxism in Russia and in clearing the way for the foundation of a Marxist party. At the same time the group was not connected with the working-class movement but made only the first step in that direction.

In addition to the Emancipation of Labour group abroad, Marxist groups emerged and operated in various Russian towns, primarily industrial centres. When he was still a student of Kazan University, Lenin joined one of such groups. With the emergence of the early Marxist groups Russian Social-Democracy became part of the international socialist workers' movement.

The period from 1883 to 1894 saw the nascent Social-Democratic movement in Russia.

The advocates of Marxism were still few and far between. Lenin wrote about that period: "... Social-Democracy existed without a working-class movement, and as a political party it was at the embryonic stage of development."¹

The Beginning of the Leninist Stage of the Development of Marxism

During those years Lenin, the founder and leader of the Communist Party of the Soviet

¹V. I. Lenin, "What Is To Be Done?", p. 517.

Union, started his revolutionary activity. Vladimir Ulyanov (Lenin) was born on April 22, 1870, in Simbirsk (now Ulyanovsk). Still a student of Kazan University, he took part in the revolutionary movement, as a result of which he was arrested and deported. As a young man he read Marxist writings which he studied thoroughly both in a Marxist group and on his own. Then he conducted classes in illegal Marxist groups. In August 1893 Lenin arrived in St. Petersburg (now Leningrad), capital of the Russian Empire and a major centre of the Russian working-class movement, where he engaged in extensive theoretical and organisational activities. His early speeches to Marxist groups produced an indelible impression on members who saw the young Lenin as a man of vast erudition, thoroughness and acumen, and the ability to use Marxism not as a dogma but as a scientific method of understanding the reality in all its manifestations. Lenin made a comprehensive and detailed study of the workers' life, devoted much attention and energy to work among advanced workers and involved in those activities members of the Marxist groups.

His profound knowledge of Marxism, ability to analyse phenomena and draw Marxist conclusions from them, and his vigorous organisational activity soon made Lenin the recognised leader of the St. Petersburg Marxists.

He became politically active at a turning point in world history when a comparatively peaceful period of capitalist development was coming to an end, inaugurating revolu-

tionary battles and upheavals, when a revolutionary transition from capitalism to socialism became vitally necessary for social development. The growing working-class and general democratic liberation movement in Russia made it imperative that the proletariat be prepared for its historic mission—the overthrow of the autocracy and elimination of capitalism. This preparation had to be both theoretical and practical or organisational. On the one hand, it was necessary to finally expose and do away with the petty-bourgeois ideas of the Narodniks that were alien to the proletariat and attempts by the liberal bourgeoisie to influence the working class and to use its struggle for its own purposes, to evolve further revolutionary theory and to outline the immediate tasks for the final goals of the proletariat's struggle. On the other hand, it was also necessary to prepare the Russian proletariat to lead the general democratic movement and help it become an organised and powerful political force.

Lenin was the first Russian Marxist to understand that conditions were ripe for socialism to merge with the working-class movement, that is, for the foundation of a revolutionary Marxist proletarian party. The Narodniks still posed the main ideological obstacle to the formation of such a party in Russia. Though in the 1880s Plekhanov dealt a serious blow to the ideology of the Narodniks, it was not completely defeated. Their views still evoked sympathy among some revolutionary youth. Furthermore, seeking

to disseminate their views, the Narodniks began criticising the ideas of Russian Marxists and tried to prove the inapplicability of Marxism to Russia.

Lenin's *What the 'Friends of the People' Are and How They Fight the Social-Democrats* published in 1894 played an outstanding role in exposing the unscientific ideas of the Narodniks and in formulating the tasks of Russian Social-Democracy. The philosophical and economic views of the Narodniks, their political programme and tactics were subjected in it to in-depth Marxist criticism.

Lenin showed the fundamental difference between the Narodnik ideas in the 1890s and those in the 1870s, provided a comprehensive analysis of the Narodnik movement and laid bare its class origins for the first time in Marxist literature. He revealed the reasons behind the evolution of the Narodism and the transition of the theory of the revolutionary Narodniks into a philistine reformist Utopia.

The Narodniks of the 1870s were revolutionaries who believed in a peasant socialist revolution and waged a heroic struggle against the autocracy. The revolutionary democratic Narodniks expressed the interests and aspirations of all the peasantry which had not yet stratified distinctly.

The Narodniks of the 1890s were moderate liberals who renounced the revolutionary transformation of society and objectively reflected the interests of the rural bourgeoisie, the kulaks. Lenin dispelled their claims to having inherited the traditions of the revolu-

tionary Narodniks. He showed that the Russian Marxists alone were the true heirs of the best revolutionary traditions.

In *What the 'Friends of the People' Are and How They Fight the Social-Democrats* Lenin posed the task of forming an independent socialist workers' party, as it was indispensable for transforming the unco-ordinated economic struggle of individual groups of workers into the conscious and organised class struggle of the proletariat as a whole. The party was to be the proletariat's ideological leader and organiser.

That kind of party could not confine itself to work among the workers alone. As the working class was meant to lead all the democratic elements, it had to ensure that those elements and above all, the peasants, gave their support. For this reason the party had to rely on the mass working-class movement and also disseminate its ideas among the other classes and strata of the population and work among the peasants, the urban and rural intelligentsia and the craftsmen.

Such a party had to be built on the sound foundation of Marxism, being organically, strictly and uncompromisingly scientific and revolutionary and maintaining inseparable unity of theory and practice in its activity.

Lenin's conclusion that only guided by a Marxist party the Russian working class heading all the democratic elements would be able to overthrow absolutism and that such a party would "...lead the Russian PROLETARIAT (side by side with the proletariat of

ALL COUNTRIES) *along the straight road of open political struggle to THE VICTORIOUS COMMUNIST REVOLUTION*;¹ was essential to the foundation of such a party in Russia.

Through the efforts of Lenin and other Marxists the ideas of the Narodniks were defeated.

Another obstacle to the formation of a Marxist party in Russia was posed by the ideas of the so-called "legal Marxists".

They were a group of bourgeois intellectuals, moderate liberals, who expounded their views under the banner of Marxism in newspapers and journals allowed by the tsarist government. Upholding the interests of the nation's capitalist development, "legal Marxists" in their own way criticised the Narodniks as the advocates of small-scale production. It was for similar criticism that they sought to adjust Marxism, stripping it of any revolutionary content. Pyotr Struve, leader of the "legal Marxists", praised capitalism and urged learning in the school of capitalism, instead of waging revolutionary struggle against the bourgeois system. Therefore, the "legal Marxists" were the spokesmen of bourgeois ideology and sought to subordinate the working-class movement to the interests of the bourgeoisie. They were opposed to revolutionary Marxism and rejected the fundamental tenets of Marxist doctrine. At the same time they came

¹V. I. Lenin, "What the 'Friends of the People' Are and How They Fight the Social-Democrats", *Collected Works*, Vol. 1, p. 300.

out against the autocracy, if only cautiously, and advocated bourgeois democratic freedoms.

In fighting the Narodniks, the revolutionary Marxists came to a temporary understanding with the "legal Marxists" and published their works in journals edited by the latter.

The Social-Democrats and the "legal Marxists" jointly published in 1895 a collection of articles, among them those by Lenin, Plekhanov and other Social-Democrats, alongside those written by "legal Marxists". In his article "The Economic Content of Narodism and the Criticism of It in Mr. Struve's Book" Lenin subjected to serious criticism not only the erroneous views of the liberal Narodniks but also those of the "legal Marxists". He exposed the main drawback of Struve's book, namely, the desire to emaciate Marxism of any revolutionary content. Struve's book was written from the standpoint of bourgeois objectivism rather than Marxism, the latter being expounded by him in a vague and abstract form so that it was completely void of revolutionary content. Struve avoided analysing the class contradictions of capitalism and the socialist tasks of the proletariat. He tried to "correct" Marx's theory of the state and substitute the liberal doctrine of reforming bourgeois society for the Marxist theory of the revolutionary overthrow of capitalism. Lenin's criticism of the liberal bourgeois interpretation of Marxism in Struve's book was an extension of the heated debates that the group of St. Petersburg Marxists led by Lenin

conducted with the "legal Marxists" as early as autumn 1894.

The joint endeavours of different elements holding different ideological positions is interesting from the point of view of the admissibility and nature of compromise for revolutionaries.

Lenin contributed articles to a joint publication being well aware of the bourgeois goals of the "legal Marxists" and their aspirations to subordinate the working-class movement to the ideology and interests of the bourgeoisie.

He believed that this literary understanding with the "legal Marxists" was a temporary political alliance. Not only must such an alliance be temporary but it is necessary to maintain complete ideological, political and organisational independence and complete freedom to criticise one's temporary and unreliable ally.

Owing to this temporary understanding "...an astonishingly rapid victory was obtained over Narodism, and Marxist ideas ... became very widespread".¹ At the same time the revisionist views of the liberal bourgeois exponents of Marxism were exposed so that this temporary understanding did a good service to the cause of the revolutionary Social Democrats.

This, however, did not bring Lenin's struggle against "legal Marxism" to a close: he was to continue it in his Siberian exile. He responded

¹V. I. Lenin, "What Is To Be Done?", p. 362.

ed to every publication by the "legal Marxists" and criticised their revisionist statements. In the articles he wrote in exile, Lenin exposed the un-Marxist views of Struve and his followers, and showed the evolution undergone by the leaders of "legal Marxism" who openly took the side of the bourgeoisie and consistently expressed its class interests. By the beginning of 1901, "legal Marxism" virtually ceased to exist as an ideological trend. Subsequently, its former leaders formed the nucleus of the bourgeois Constitutional-Democratic Party and became enemies of Bolshevism and the October Revolution.

"Legal Marxism" was not a purely Russian phenomenon. It expressed, as Lenin wrote later on, "an international striving on the part of the bourgeois theoreticians to kill Marxism with 'kindness' ... take from Marxism all that is acceptable to the liberal bourgeoisie, ... cast aside 'only' the living soul of Marxism, 'only' its revolutionary content".¹

Lenin's fight against "legal Marxism" was of international significance, for "legal Marxism" was a variety of international opportunism and theoretical basis of Economism. It was an example of ideological irreconcilability with distortions of the Marxist doctrine.

As a true Marxist, Lenin not only engaged in theoretical problems but was also a revolutionary in practice.

¹V.I. Lenin, "The Collapse of the Second International", *Collected Works*, Vol. 21, p. 222.

Upon arriving in St. Petersburg in August 1893, he made a study of the state of affairs in the Social-Democratic groups of the city and came to the conclusion that the nature and trend of their activities should be drastically changed. He persistently worked to pool all the available revolutionary Marxist forces and establish contacts with Marxists in other towns, and directed the attention of his own group to the work at factories. Apart from propagandising Marxism in workers' groups, Lenin suggested that the Social-Democrats should extend their propaganda among broad sections of the proletariat. He sought to ensure that the study of Marxism in the workers' groups themselves be conducted in close contact with reality and the requirements of the working-class struggle.

As a result of the reorganisation of the work of Lenin's group and of the workers' groups the latter's number tripled in a year. They trained a whole generation of advanced working-class revolutionaries, leaders of the working-class movement, and active builders of the revolutionary proletarian party.

The unification of St. Petersburg's Marxist groups into a single clandestine political organisation—the League of Struggle for the Emancipation of the Working Class—in the autumn of 1895 constituted the next stage in the development of the Social-Democratic movement and in efforts to form the party. The main aim of the unification was to strengthen the Social-Democratic forces and extend their work among the masses.

The League had a clear-cut structure: its nucleus consisted of fifteen to seventeen people, who were distributed among the three districts into which the city had been split. The central guiding group also included workers' representatives. The base consisted of workers' groups at factories. Centralism was the principle of the League's activities, while, at the same time, democratism was also observed as much as possible under the circumstances.

League members had to observe permanent and strict conspiracy enabling the revolutionaries to evade arrests or delay them and use the time for extensive work.

Having constant contact with workers and being aware of their needs, Lenin knew how to write leaflets and pamphlets specially for them, choosing the right vein and understandable words to explain in simple terms the class essence of the autocratic political system, the irreconcilable contradictions between labour and capital, and the need for an organised and conscious struggle against the exploiters. Leaflets written by other League members were to meet the same requirements.

In spite of persecution, the League was the first organisation in Russia to introduce scientific socialism into the working-class movement. It conducted propaganda among workers and headed the well-known St. Petersburg strikes of 1895 and 1896, which brought the working class to the forefront of political affairs. The League was the embryo of a revo-

lutionary proletarian party relying on the working-class movement.

All its activities gave a powerful impulse to the development of the working-class movement throughout the country. By the spring of 1898, when the First Congress of the party was convened, there were Social-Democratic groups in more than 50 towns.

The uncompromising struggle waged by Lenin as a theoretician against Narodism, bourgeois distortions of Marxism and opportunism, his creative development and application of Marxism to the Russian conditions, and his practical organisational work as one of the leaders of St. Petersburg's Marxists all paved the way to a new, Leninist stage in the development of Marxism.

Attitude to Past Revolutionary Experience

Firmly convinced of the vital need for Russia to have a proletarian party and aware of the aims it was to attain, Lenin thoroughly elaborated its theoretical and ideological foundations, the principles of its organisation, and a plan for its formation, for this determined not only the destiny of the party, but also that of the entire revolutionary movement in Russia. The work of forming a revolutionary Marxist party in Russia was the key task in the period.

Lenin fully realised that a revolutionary proletarian party could not appear all of a sudden, like Minerva out of Jupiter's head,

and that such a party could not be formed in Russia without taking account of the entire experience of Europe and his country.

"The history of socialism and democracy in Western Europe, the history of the Russian revolutionary movement, the experience of our working-class movement—such is the *material* we must master to elaborate a purposeful organisation and purposeful tactics for our Party,"¹ Lenin wrote.

Lenin made a profound and comprehensive study and analysis of this experience, above all of the doctrine of Marx and Engels on the proletarian political party, and the activity of the Communist League and the First International.

Marx and Engels did not confine themselves to just giving a theoretical substantiation of the need for a proletarian party. Under their direct guidance, the Communist League was formed in 1847, the First International in 1864, mass Social-Democratic parties came into being in some countries (the late 1870s and the early 1880s) and the Second International organised in 1889. These organisations engaged in practical revolutionary work. Communist League members took an active part in the revolution of 1848-1849 in Germany. The First International helped the working-class movement in many countries, equipped it with theory, united various proletarian organisations and national contingents of the

¹V.I. Lenin, "Our Immediate Task", *Collected Works*, Vol. 4, p. 217.

working class for joint struggle, and strengthened the contacts between the working-class movement and the national liberation struggle of the oppressed peoples.

The Paris Commune, in which many members of the First International took part, was its offspring. After the downfall of the Paris Commune, the centre of the European proletarian movement shifted to Germany.

The socialist parties and organisations which had come into being in the late 1870s and early 1880s, especially the German Social-Democrats, scored certain success in guiding the economic and political struggle of the working class.

Though he thought highly of the previous European experience, Lenin nevertheless stressed that the Russian Social-Democrats should make an independent analysis of this experience, since there were "no ready-made models to be found anywhere".¹

European experience could not be simply transferred to Russia, for it was beyond doubt that the seeds of overt legal actions could not survive in soil poisoned by despotism. The autocracy ruthlessly suppressed the slightest attempt to modify the social and political system. There was no possibility whatsoever for a socialist party to exist legally in Russia under the circumstances. The party had to be formed despite merciless persecution, which made the task extremely difficult.

Another reason why European experience

¹V.I. Lenin, "Our Immediate Task", p. 217.

could not be transplanted into Russian soil without any alterations was that the European Social-Democratic movement was being increasingly eroded by revisionism in that period, which was the turning point of world history and was marked by the advent of imperialism and the imminence of giant class battles.

Reformist trends emerged and strengthened within the German, French, Italian, and other parties of the Second International. Its ideologists sought to gloss over the irreconcilable contradictions between the working class and the bourgeoisie, and denied the need for social revolution and the dictatorship of the proletariat.

From the late 1890s, the struggle against revolutionary Marxism was led by Eduard Bernstein, one of the leaders of the German Social-Democratic Party. He proclaimed the slogan of "the freedom to criticise" Marxism and demanded that Marx's doctrine should be revised, claiming that it was obsolete. His argument was that in the half-century that had passed since the *Manifesto of the Communist Party* was written, the nature of capitalism had changed considerably. According to his assertions, these changes affected the nature of the contradictions. Since the nature of capitalism and the contradictions between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie had changed, it was no longer necessary to overthrow the capitalist system by revolution and establish the political domination of the proletariat for the revolutionary transformation of society. Socialism, Bernstein claimed,

could be introduced by means of gradual reforms through bourgeois democratic institutions. Under the circumstances, the task of the proletarian party was to struggle for such reforms in the bourgeois parliament and through the bourgeois electoral system. Bernstein expressed the essence of his entire un-Marxist theory in his slogan: "The movement is everything, the final aim is nothing." This slogan virtually denied the inevitable collapse of capitalism and the validity of Marx's theory of changing a capitalist society into a communist society through revolution, rejected the struggle for socialism and socialist revolution, and advocated the replacement of the proletarian political class struggle for the revolutionary transformation of society with a movement for reforms. This constituted the essence of reformism and the aim of revising the basic principles of Marxism.

It is noteworthy that revisionists today also support the thesis that Marxism is obsolete, since the nature of capitalism has supposedly been changed because of the scientific and technological revolution.

Revisionism originated in Germany, and then spread to other countries. "At the present time..." Lenin wrote in *What Is To Be Done?*, "the English Fabians, the French Ministerialists, the German Bernsteinians, and the Russian Critics—all belong to the same family, all extol each other, learn from each other, and together take up arms against 'dogmatic' Marxism."¹

¹V.I. Lenin, "What Is To Be Done?", pp. 352-53.

In Russia, Bernstein's theory was supported by the "legal Marxists" and Economists.

Revisionism arose in the socialist movement because of objective and subjective reasons stemming from the nature of the development of capitalism and the class struggle.

First, by the end of the 19th century, Marxism had proved the futility of the petty-bourgeois theories hostile to it (Proudhonism, Blanquism, and others). Petty-bourgeois theories and trends began to look for other ways of asserting themselves. Lenin wrote in this connection: "The dialectics of history were such that the theoretical victory of Marxism compelled its enemies to *disguise themselves* as Marxists. Liberalism, rotten within, tried to revive itself in the form of socialist *opportunism*."² The struggle between the revolutionary and opportunist elements shifted inside Marxism. The trends hostile to Marxism that existed inside it opposed the basic tenets of Marxism and sought to disprove them.

Revisionism had social roots, too. Gaining super-profits through colonial plunder and its privileged status on the world market, the bourgeoisie allocated a small part of these super-profits to pay higher wages to a narrow high-skilled stratum of the working class. The bourgeoisie used money obtained in the same manner to foster in various ways some of the working-class MPs, the trade-union leadership and Social-Democratic party functionaries. By

¹V.I. Lenin, "The Historical Destiny of the Doctrine of Karl Marx", p. 584.

the beginning of the 20th century, this brought into being, in the imperialist countries of Europe and America, a fairly broad stratum called the "labour aristocracy"—people who were quite satisfied with their material and social status, and interested in consolidating it. They were, in fact, in the service of the bourgeoisie, and constituted a breeding-ground for and a source of reformism and revisionism. The petty-bourgeois who joined the ranks of the working class also supported revisionism.

Though revisionist tendencies in the Social-Democratic movement came to life in as early as the late 1880s, Engels's vigorous struggle against opportunism prevented its extensive spread in the Social-Democratic parties. After his death, the enemies of Marxism saw a chance to step up their activity.

Revisionism was dangerous because it could divert the working-class movement from revolutionary class struggle to reforms and liberal bourgeois labour policies. Therefore, struggle against opportunism was regarded as the main task of all true Marxists and the entire international working-class movement. This struggle was being waged by the revolutionary left wing of West-European Social-Democracy, including Rosa Luxemburg, Clara Zetkin, Franz Mehring, Paul Lafargue, Jules Guesde, Antonio Labriola, and Dimitar Blagoev. However this struggle was not always consistent enough, and was never carried as far as separating from the revisionists organisationally.

For example, the Hanover Congress of the

German Social-Democrats held in 1899 condemned revisionism, but the resolution it adopted failed to mention the name of the principal revisionist, Bernstein.

The leaders of Social-Democratic parties and the Second International pursued a conciliatory policy towards the revisionists.

Lenin's Fight Against Revisionism

Lenin read Bernstein's book *The Prerequisites of Socialism and the Tasks of Social-Democracy* in August 1899, in Siberia, where he had been exiled as one of the leaders of the League of Struggle for the Emancipation of the Working Class. This is how he expressed his attitude towards the views of Bernstein and his followers: "Not by a single step have they advanced the science which Marx and Engels enjoined us to develop; they have not taught the proletariat any new methods of struggle; they have only retreated, borrowing fragments of backward theories and preaching to the proletariat, not the theory of struggle, but the theory of concession...."¹

Lenin used every opportunity to expose revisionism. His articles and letters pointed to the tremendous harm that was being done by Bernsteinianism and called upon all honest Social-Democrats to put up a resolute fight against revisionism to ensure the triumph of Marxism and the revolutionary Marxist trend

¹V.I. Lenin, "Our Programme", *Collected Works*, Vol. 4, p. 211.

in Social-Democracy.

The virus of revisionism penetrated the Russian Social-Democratic movement, too. Apart from the "legal Marxists", Russia saw the emergence of the so-called Economists, who constituted an opportunist trend in the Russian Social-Democratic movement in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, and who virtually preached the views of the Bernsteinians—enemies of Marxism in the parties of the Second International.

The right wing of Economism included, among others, S. N. Prokopovich, Y. D. Kuskova, and V. P. Akimov, who were the most ardent admirers of Bernstein. *Credo*, written by Y. D. Kuskova, expounded the views of the group which were in complete solidarity with Bernstein's revisionist ideas.

The newspaper *Rabochaya mysl* (Labour Thought) was, in fact, the centre, a source and vehicle of Economist ideas. It was run by Social-Democratic intellectuals who sought to represent it as a workers' paper, but who held reformist and opportunist views.

The Economist views were also being advocated by the journal *Rabocheye dyelo* (The Workers' Cause), which was published by Russian Social-Democrats abroad and which aspired to the role of a theoretical journal. Its editors were Economist leaders, including B.N. Krichevsky, V.P. Ivanshin and A.S. Martynov.

Following Bernstein, the Economists preached ideas that essentially amounted to the negation of the need for social revolution

or the achievement of state power by the working class.

Like Bernstein, the Economists professed vulgar "economic materialism". Believing that the economy, the "economic factor" determined the character of politics, the Economists maintained that the political struggle should be subordinated to the economic struggle.

They claimed that the working-class movement in Russia was only in the making, had no experience or strength, and therefore was unable to comprehend its political aims or wage political struggle. The latter was supposed to be the prerogative of the liberal bourgeoisie. In the earlier stages of the struggle, the working class was to concern itself with the improvement of its economic status and its working conditions. The task of the Social Democrats, on the other hand, was to help the working class in this struggle, that is, promote the economic struggle of the proletariat.

The Economists denied the decisive influence of the theory of scientific socialism on the working-class movement. According to them the working-class movement was spontaneous—the theory which underlay their entire ideology and all their organisational principles. Maintaining that historical development was spontaneous, they viewed people in general and the working class in particular as a passive "element" of the productive forces, as a result of production relations. Hence, the actions of people, the class struggle, the level of political consciousness of the working class, and its political education were

of no importance. Failing to understand the part played by the subjective factor, they virtually sought to isolate the working-class movement from scientific socialism.

Their erroneous theory led to erroneous tactical principles. For example, the Economists believed that tactics and practical politics spontaneously emerged from the economic struggle and the daily requirements of the working-class movement. As a result, they denied the role of the proletariat as the foremost fighter for democracy, and against the autocracy and reaction.

In practice, they mainly advocated the organisation of people according to trade, and strike funds. A working-class party, in their opinion, was supposed to be a trade-unionist party. Their denial that the political party should be the leader of the working class and the organiser of its political class struggle virtually meant that the working-class movement should be guided by bourgeois ideology and liberal bourgeois labour policy.

Apart from the general causes of the emergence and spread of Economism as a variety of international revisionism, there were also specifically Russian reasons why it gained a foothold in Russian Social-Democracy.

One of them was the replenishment of the working class by non-proletarian, petty-bourgeois elements, first and foremost, peasants. The rapid growth of the Russian working class and the inflow of peasants, who were dominated by petty-bourgeois ideology and lacked proletarian experience, "diluted" the ideology

of the working class and created favourable conditions for the spread of opportunist ideas.

To a certain extent, successful strike action also facilitated the rapid and extensive spread of opportunism in the Russian working-class movement. For example, between 1896 and 1900, 120 strikes out of a total of 166 brought victory to the workers. Though their gains were insignificant, they bred illusions that the economic struggle alone, without any political struggle, could achieve serious improvements in the status of the working class. This gave rise to preference for the propaganda of economic action to the detriment of the political education of the working class.

However, the revolutionary Marxists in Russia were by no means displeased with the growing strike movement or its achievements. Marxists always welcome successful strike action, for it shows that the working-class movement is well organised and powerful. But, unlike the Economists, they do not believe in limiting the class struggle of the proletariat to strike action, or confining the working-class movement to the framework of economic struggle. They seek to raise the working-class movement to the level of political struggle, and make it truly revolutionary through ideological guidance based on revolutionary theory.

Besides, Lenin believed that one reason why Economism gained in strength lay in increasing police reprisals against revolutionary Marxists. Thus, after the leaders of the St. Pe-

tersburg League of Struggle, including Lenin, had been arrested, the organisation came to be headed by the so-called "young". These people had gained their views from the revisionist literature of "legal Marxists" and had poor knowledge of theory, and therefore they, to quote Lenin, "capitulated before the breadth and power of the spontaneous upsurge" and lagged behind this movement, with regard to both theory and practice.¹ Thus, Economism gained ground not in an open struggle between the two opposite trends, in which one triumphed over the other, but because increasing numbers of "old" revolutionaries were being "torn away" by the gendarmes and ever more of the "young" came to the fore.²

Another reason why Economism became established in the Russian Social-Democratic movement was due to the movement's crisis, which began in 1898, following the First Congress of the Russian Social-Democratic Labour Party. Lenin described this period as one of disunity, disintegration, and vacillation. The party, in fact, did not exist as a united centralised organisation. It had no programme, rules, or single tactical line. The First Congress merely proclaimed the party's foundation. The Economists took advantage of the difficult situation, in which Russian Social-Democracy found itself, and were aggravating its crisis. They temporarily got the upper

¹V.I. Lenin, "What Is To Be Done?", p. 518.

²Ibid., p. 382.

hand over the revolutionary Marxist wing. To quote Lenin, Russian Social-Democracy "became a shapeless conglomeration of local Party organisations".¹

Lenin realised the grave danger posed by Economism. The latter's triumph in the working-class movement would spell the defeat of the revolutionary proletarian movement in Russia. An ideological defeat of Economism was necessary for the creation of a militant revolutionary Marxist party of the Russian working class.

Lenin's struggle against Economism was uncompromising, consistent and well grounded.

After making a study of the views of the Economists as expounded in *Credo*, Lenin wrote, in August 1899, *A Protest by Russian Social-Democrats*, in which he gave a clear-cut definition of Russian Economism as a variety of international revisionism.

Afterwards, he wrote a series of articles criticising the Economists, among them "A Retrograde Trend in Russian Social-Democracy" and "Apropos of the *Profession de Foi*", in which he not only exposed the revisionist views of the Russian Economists, but also explained the causes of the party crisis and outlined ways to overcome it.

After the newspaper *Iskra* was founded in December 1900, Lenin published in the first thirteen issues more than twenty articles extensively criticising the un-Marxist views of

¹V.I. Lenin, "One Step Forward, Two Steps Back", *Collected Works*, Vol. 7, p. 477.

the Economists, putting forward a plan for the formation of a revolutionary Marxist party in Russia, and explaining its role in guiding the working-class struggle. For example, in "A Talk with Defenders of Economism", published in *Iskra* in December 1901, Lenin gave a vigorous rebuff to the opportunists and expounded serious reasons for forming a closely united, centralised Marxist party, which would be able to lead the mounting working-class struggle and the mass movement against the autocracy.

Each of these articles reflected a definite period in the struggle against opportunism, and at the same time, was part of preparations for writing *What Is To Be Done?*

To sum up, the capitalist evolution of Russia was closely linked with the rapid growth of a new class—the proletariat, with the development of the working-class movement, and with the intensification of the class struggle. However, revolutionary democrats, Narodniks, were the ones who led the liberation struggle of the working people. Their ideology was based on utopian socialism, which reflected the protest of the masses of small-scale producers against their oppression by feudal survivals and the onslaught of capital. Though the earlier organisations of workers were under the strong influence of Narodnik ideas, the more advanced sections of the working-class movement were embarking on their own road, which was different from that of the Narodniks. Marxism alone was capable of freeing, once and for all, the Russian revolution-

nary movement from "the illusions of anarchism and Narodnik socialism, from contempt for politics, from the belief in the exceptional development of Russia, from the conviction that the people are ready for revolution, and from the theory of the seizure of power and the duel-like combat between the autocracy and the heroic intelligentsia".¹

Between 1883 and 1893, the Russian Social-Democratic movement was still in the making. "This was the period of the rise and consolidation of the theory and programme of Social-Democracy."²

In the mid-1890s the revolutionary struggle of the Russian proletariat entered a new stage in its development: a mass working-class movement began to take shape, in which Social-Democrats were taking part. The proletariat was becoming the main force in the liberation movement. Favourable conditions were emerging for introducing socialist ideology into the working-class movement and for unifying the scattered and isolated Marxist groups into a single Social-Democratic Party. Between 1894 and 1898, Russian Social-Democracy "appeared on the scene as a social movement, as the upsurge of the masses of the people, as a political party".³

The radical turning-point in the development of the Social-Democratic movement in

¹ V.I. Lenin, "The Persecutors of the Zemstvo and the Hannibals of Liberalism", *Collected Works*, Vol. 5, p. 80.

² V.I. Lenin, "What Is To Be Done?", p. 517.

³ *Ibid.*

Russia would have been impossible without the theoretical and practical work of Lenin.

In the course of his unrelenting struggle against Narodism, "legal Marxism", revisionism, and dogmatism, he defended the theory of Marx and Engels, and developed it to suit the new historical conditions. Through his theoretical and organisational work he paved the way to the creation of a proletarian party in Russia.

Lenin's revolutionary work in St. Petersburg was of international as well as national importance. It opened a new, Leninist stage in the development of the theory and practice of Marxism, and laid the groundwork for carrying out the historic task of creating a socialist labour party. "The formation of the Party in the spring of 1898," Lenin emphasised, "was the most striking and at the same time the *last* act of the Social-Democrats of this period."¹

As the country was heading for a revolution, and the organisation of the working class was becoming increasingly urgent, Russian Social-Democracy was in the grips of a deep crisis. Those were years of disunity and vacillation (1898-1900).

The crisis developed because the leadership of the working-class movement was unable to keep up with the people's spontaneous massive upsurge.

In order to overcome the crisis it was necessary to defeat the opportunists ideologically,

put an end to the disunity within the Russian Social-Democratic Labour Party, and unite the local Social-Democratic organisations into a single, centralised Marxist party.

The success of this work was mainly ensured by Lenin's *What Is To Be Done?*

¹Ibid., p. 518.

II. SCIENTIFIC SOCIALISM AND THE WORKING-CLASS MOVEMENT

In his book, Lenin begins the exposition of his theory of the revolutionary Marxist party of the working class by setting forth the theoretical principles for such a party, namely, by explaining the role of revolutionary theory—scientific socialism—in the working-class movement and the role of a party based on this theory in leading the movement. Lenin proved that in the new historical conditions Marxism was the only correct, scientific revolutionary theory, and that only a party based on this progressive theory could be the militant political leader of the working-class movement.

These matters are examined in the first two chapters of the book—"Dogmatism and 'Freedom of Criticism'" and "The Spontaneity of the Masses and the Consciousness of the Social-Democrats".

In Chapter I, Lenin exposes the attempts of European revisionists, mainly Bernstein, to replace the theory of scientific socialism, Marxism, with a revisionist distortion of it under the fashionable slogan of the "freedom of criticism". Lenin refutes the revisionists'

claims to defend the working-class movement and shows that their ideas constitute the basis for opportunism and could turn a working-class party of social revolution into a democratic party of social reforms.

He goes on to reveal the true face of the Russian advocates of the slogan of the "freedom of criticising Marxism", who virtually demanded the freedom of opportunism in Russian Social-Democracy on the basis of this slogan.

He continues by exposing the revisionist nature of the criticism of Marxism by the "legal Marxists" and Economists which amounted to complete solidarity with Bernstein's views, and denial of the importance of revolutionary theory for the working-class movement and submission to its spontaneity.

Chapter I ends with an explanation of the importance of theoretical struggle and revolutionary theory for the working-class movement and for Social-Democracy.

In Chapter II Lenin makes a comprehensive examination of the relationship between the spontaneous and the conscious elements in the working-class movement, analyses the causes of the emergence of the spontaneous working-class movement in Russia and explains the danger of bowing to spontaneity, which inevitably brings the working-class movement under the domination of bourgeois ideology. Lenin shows the way in which the spontaneous working-class movement can be turned into a class-conscious one, and emphasises the need to fight bourgeois ideology

and the importance of a revolutionary party in this effort.

On the Relationship Between the Objective and Subjective Factors in the Working-Class Movement

In discussing the importance of revolutionary theory for the working-class movement, Lenin devotes considerable space to the relationship between the spontaneous and the conscious elements in the working-class movement.

The spontaneous element is a natural result of historical development, a normal product of capitalism, and an objective factor in the working-class movement.

The conscious element constitutes the ideological and organisational work of Social-Democracy in the working-class movement, and is its subjective factor.

The Economists accused the revolutionary Social-Democrats of exaggerating the role of ideology and theory and "*belittling ... the significance of the objective or the spontaneous element of development*".¹ They pinned all their hopes on the spontaneous movement and the spontaneous struggle of the masses underestimating the subjective factor, that is, the role of the party and the significance of theory and ideology in the working-class movement.

¹ V.I. Lenin, "What Is To Be Done?", p. 374.

The Economists tried to justify their neglect or underestimation of theory by quoting Marx who said: "Every step of real movement is more important than a dozen programmes."¹ Distorting the meaning of this statement, which had been made about a definite period in the development of the working-class movement, the Economists used it to rationalise their opportunist stand.

Lenin explained the harm of exaggerating the spontaneous element in the working-class movement, emphasising that this makes Social-Democrats mere servants of the working-class movement. As a result, they find themselves lagging behind the working-class movement, forming its "tail", so Lenin aptly called this opportunist trend "tail-endism". He proves in his book that "the greater the spontaneous upsurge of the masses and the more widespread the movement, the more rapid, incomparably so, the demand for greater consciousness in the theoretical, political, and organisational work of Social-Democracy".²

On the Role of Marxist Theory in the Revolutionary Movement

Lenin points out that during the transition from capitalism to socialism the subjective

¹ Marx to Wilhelm Bracke in Brunswick, May 5, 1875, in: Marx, Engels, *Selected Correspondence*, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1982, p. 278.

² V.I. Lenin, "What Is To Be Done?", p. 396.

factor gains in importance. In this sense the influence of Marxist theory on the revolutionary process is extremely significant.

This is how Lenin formulates in *What Is To Be Done?* his fundamental conclusion explaining the significance of revolutionary theory for the working-class movement and his attitude to Marxism: "Without revolutionary theory there can be no revolutionary movement."¹ Marxism has always been such a theory for revolutionary Social-Democrats. It proves that socialism is a necessary and inevitable result of the development of modern society's productive forces, and is the ultimate aim of the proletariat's class struggle. For a party working to change capitalist society through revolution and then to build a socialist society, Marxism forms the theoretical basis for all its activities.

The significance of revolutionary theory for Russian Social-Democracy was enhanced by three important factors, which were pointed out by Lenin.

First, the party was still in the making, and had not yet finished its fight against various non-Social-Democratic trends in revolutionary thought that could lead the working-class movement astray, having grave consequences both for Social-Democracy and the working-class movement in the future.

Second, a national Social-Democratic movement can never be successful without assimilating international experience. In order

² Ibid., p. 369.

to make a critical appraisal of it and to borrow all the best that it contains, a vast theoretical potential was necessary.

Third, Russian Social-Democracy faced a task which was more revolutionary than any of the tasks facing any other socialist party. This task was to overthrow the autocracy. Russia became the centre of the world revolutionary movement, and the focal point of all contradictions of imperialism, while the Russian autocracy was the bulwark of European and Asian reaction. For this reason, these contradictions could not be resolved without the overthrow of the autocracy and a democratic revolution. The overthrow of the autocracy would, therefore, have dealt a heavy blow to imperialism, and a democratic anti-imperialist revolution would have been a prologue to a proletarian revolution in Russia. In order to cope with these tasks, the party not only had to have experience guiding the class struggle, but also be able to apply revolutionary theory, develop it, and be led by it in the complicated conditions of political struggle and the developing world revolutionary process. Lenin expressed it in a clear-cut formula: "... The role of vanguard fighter can be fulfilled only by a party that is guided by the most advanced theory."¹

He had to defend his conclusion on the decisive role of revolutionary theory in the Communist party in a persistent struggle against various kinds of enemies of Marxism

¹ Ibid., p. 370.

and the revolutionary Marxist party of the working class. Beginning with the "legal Marxists", all opponents of the revolutionary party of the working class in Russia impeded its formation and consolidation by undermining its theoretical basis. The "legal Marxists" and the Economists sought to pass off their liberal-bourgeois distortion of Marxism as a scientific theory, assigning Social-Democracy the role of being the vehicle of bourgeois policy in the working-class movement and virtual advocate of the capitalist system. Afterwards the Trotskyites sought to pass off their petty-bourgeois distortion of Marxism as an attempt to develop it and as a revolutionary theory; they would have isolated the party from the broad masses of the working people and turned it into a sect, essentially making it a political non-entity. All the intermediary groups, factions and alignments of Social-Democracy which opposed the party's revolutionary militancy did so by belittling or denying the role of revolutionary theory, Marxism, in the party's activity.

Lenin's defence of Marxism against its bourgeois falsifiers, the "legal Marxists", the Economists—right-wing revisionists, and later on against petty-bourgeois adventurists, such as Trotsky, was of historic significance for the revolutionary theory and revolutionary movement, not only in Russia, but throughout the world. *What Is To Be Done?* is a splendid example of defending the principles of Marxism.

Of paramount importance in Lenin's defence

of Marxism was, first, his ability to show the nature of the distortion of Marxist theory and expose the true aims of any kind of attempt to "criticise" or "improve" Marxism, no matter how skillful the disguise, or what "natural" reasons and arguments were used, second, his explanation of the danger of turning Marxist tenets into ossified dogmas and, third, his application of Marxist principles to the changing reality.

Repelling the attacks of revisionists and their charges against the revolutionary Social-Democrats of intolerance to the opinions of others, Lenin formulated the principle defending revolutionary theory, which also included the need to develop it. "To defend such a theory, which to the best of your knowledge you consider to be true, against unfounded attacks and attempts to corrupt it is not to imply that you are an enemy of *all* criticism. We do not regard Marx's theory as something completed and inviolable; on the contrary, we are convinced that it has only laid the foundation stone of the science which socialists *must* develop in all directions if they wish to keep pace with life."¹

The treatment of Marxist conclusions and formulas as ossified dogma kills the very soul of Marxism, revolutionary dialectics. Lenin repeatedly emphasised that Marxism was not a dogma, but a guide to action. And Marxism cannot be such a guide unless, as an advanced science, it constantly develops, making it

¹ V.I. Lenin, "Our Programme", pp. 211-12.

possible to comprehend the meaning and significance of new phenomena.

In developing revolutionary theory, Lenin points out such principles as the need for the independent development of Marxism by each revolutionary party, the need to take into account and make use of the experience of other countries, and also to find the specific features of the development of the revolutionary process in each country, within the framework of its general development and its general features all over the world.

The urgent and highly important task of guiding the class struggle of the working people cannot be carried out without developing revolutionary theory independently. This means that no one can offer a Marxist party that is being formed ready-made recipes to guide the working-class movement and the country's social development in general. Such recipes cannot be offered either to an emerging or to an already formed and operating Communist party, because each country and revolutionary struggle has developed in specific historical conditions.

The need for each revolutionary party to develop theory independently means, above all, its responsibility before the revolutionary movement in its country. This responsibility is reflected in the party's elaboration of a scientifically based programme and the formulation of the strategic aims for the working-class struggle.

However, the need for independent devel-

opment of revolutionary theory by each Marxist-Leninist party in no way means that each party alone, in isolation from other parties, should make a theoretical analysis of the given period in the country's development, class contradictions and the class struggle. No country can develop isolated from the overall world processes, nor can the revolutionary movement in one country be separated from the international revolutionary working-class movement. Likewise, the development of revolutionary theory is only possible if based on the efforts of all Communist parties and all previous theoretical work.

Some bourgeois Sovietologists try to represent Lenin's struggle against efforts to distort Marxism by bourgeois and petty-bourgeois ideologists as an attempt to impose upon the Russian Social-Democrats his own interpretation of Marxism, which, they claim, was a revision of it.

For instance, Professor Bertram Wolfe, widely acclaimed by the Western press as an "expert" on Leninism and Russia sought to prove in most of his works and speeches that Lenin's doctrine was not a development of Marxism, but a Russian modification of true Marxism. The following statement of Lenin is often quoted: "...An *independent* elaboration of Marx's theory is especially essential for Russian socialists; for this theory provides only general *guiding* principles, which, *in particular*, are applied in England differently than in France, in France differently than in Germany, and in Germany differently than

in Russia.”¹ Distorting the true meaning of Lenin’s approach, the bourgeois falsifiers seek to ascribe to Lenin the initiative in revising Marxism, and to justify their revision of it by the allegation that he believed that revision of it was necessary. An American Professor, John S. Reshetar, Jr., saw this statement by Lenin as nothing short of a “substantiation” of the irrelevancy of Marxism and of the need for the Russian revolutionary movement to evolve a special, “purely Russian”, doctrine.² Whereas Lenin always said, as, indeed, can be seen from his statement quoted above, that development of Marx’s theory should leave the “general *guiding* principles” intact.

Lenin viewed the independent development of revolutionary theory as the application of the basic Marxist principles to definite conditions and a definite historical situation.

It is especially necessary to develop revolutionary theory at a time when revolution is imminent. In *What Is To Be Done?*, Lenin puts forward and explains the thesis of the need to elaborate theory in a revolutionary period, arguing against the so-called “eve-of-revolution point of view”. The latter was held by the Economists, who believed that it was too late to engage in discussion or in scholarly research on the eve of revolution because otherwise one could fail to notice the revolution itself. Lenin proves that such views

¹ V.I. Lenin, “Our Programme”, p. 212.

² John S. Reshetar, Jr., *A Concise History of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union*, Praeger, New York, 1960, p. 23.

lead to political adventurism. Revolution was not an isolated act, but a process in which periods of outburst give way to quiet ones. And it is theory alone that can ensure the “Party’s readiness to be at its post and fulfil its duty in every contingency whenever the march of events is accelerated.”¹ Theoretical impotence and the avoidance of urgent issues raised by the circumstances are fraught with extremely grave consequences for the party and for the working class, and also for the revolution. “Now, in the epoch of revolution, evasiveness or lack of principle in theoretical questions is tantamount to utter ideological bankruptcy; for now of all times a socialist requires a well-thought-out and consistent world outlook, so that he may control the events and not the events him.”² Lenin wrote as early as 1905, at the height of the first Russian revolution. He proved that not only the outcome of the revolution as a whole, but also the outcome of individual battles depended on the state of theory, on the study of all the factors which make it possible to make a correct appraisal of the course and outcome of the revolution.

There is an even greater need to develop revolutionary theory today, in the age of transition from capitalism to socialism, when the pace of historical development is quickening, when the entire many-faceted process of

¹ V.I. Lenin, “What Is To Be Done? ”, p. 514.

² V.I. Lenin, “The Agrarian Programme of the Liberals”, *Collected Works*, Vol. 8, p. 316.

social development is becoming ever more complex, when the general crisis of capitalism is escalating and when revolutionary sentiments are increasingly gaining ground among the working class and the masses of the working people in general.

Only the continuous analysis of all processes on the basis of the achievements of modern science and regular discussion by each party of the results of this analysis and conclusions drawn from it will enable the party always to keep its theory up to date and ready for use. Then no political change in the country and no aggravation of the contradictions and the struggle between classes will take the party unawares. The latter will be ready to offer clear and correct solutions and to orient the revolutionary masses in the most difficult and gravest situation.

The Party's Role in Introducing Scientific Socialism in the Working-Class Movement

Lenin fully agreed with Marx and Engels that theory does not become a material force before it gets hold of the masses. His works are based on this conclusion; he elaborated on it with regard to conditions in Russia, and at the time he headed the St. Petersburg League of Struggle, he sought to translate it into practice, and to introduce the ideas of scientific socialism in the working-class movement.

The Economists, who bowed to the sponta-

neous element of the working-class movement, believed that capitalism would be reformed and destroyed by the spontaneous activity of the working class and the masses of the working people, because this factor, the spontaneous movement, was brought into being by the development of the productive forces of capitalist society, and would keep growing. Underestimating the role of the conscious element, the Economists denounced any step taken by the party to introduce socialist consciousness and the ideas of scientific socialism in the spontaneous movement as coercion with regard to this movement. In so doing, they argued that the conscious element and socialism emerged from the spontaneous movement regardless of the party's efforts.

In his book, Lenin proves the utter fallacy of the assertions of the Economists and other opportunists to the effect that socialism and socialist ideology can arise spontaneously within the working-class movement, in the course of this movement, and spread as spontaneously in the midst of the working class. These assertions amount to the deception of the workers, because the socialist ideology of the proletariat does not emerge spontaneously out of the actual process of class struggle. Historical experience shows that the working class by itself produces merely trade-unionist consciousness, i.e., the realisation of the need to unite in trade unions, and fight the capitalists for higher wages, better working conditions, etc. But this is only the embryo of the conscious element.

This is explained by the fact that socialist consciousness and socialist ideology are based on the conclusions of scientific socialism, which does not emerge spontaneously, but is developed by educated members of society who share the views of the working class, regardless of whether they come from the intelligentsia or from the working class. Scientific socialism comes into being outside the working-class movement. It cannot arise within the working-class movement or be developed by workers participating in this movement, because in capitalist society research is inaccessible to workers. Workers do participate in the elaboration of socialist ideology, but, as Lenin points out, "not as workers, but as socialist theoreticians, as Proudhons and Weitlings; in other words, they take part only when they are able, and to the extent that they are able, more or less, to acquire the knowledge of their age and develop that knowledge".¹

Marxism as a science arose on the basis of the class struggle of the proletariat against the bourgeoisie as an expression of the requirement of this struggle. Having mastered the bulk of knowledge accumulated by humankind, Marx and Engels created scientific socialism by drawing general conclusions from the experience of the working-class movement in all countries.

Since the working-class movement is only capable of developing trade-unionist consciousness, it falls under the influence of bourgeois

¹ V.I. Lenin, "What Is To Be Done? ", p. 384.

ideology that is alien and hostile to it, because trade-unionism spontaneously tends to get, in Lenin's words, "under the wing of the bourgeoisie".¹ This happens because bourgeois ideology originated much earlier than socialist ideology, and has much more effective means of promulgation. It has at its disposal the entire state machinery of capitalist society. It is being spread among the masses in the schools, the armed forces, through the media, the arts, literature, religion; in short it permeates the entire society. Bourgeois academics and bourgeois propaganda are constantly searching for new and sophisticated ways to spread this ideology. Thus if the working-class movement is left on its own, it is bound to fall under the influence of bourgeois ideology.

Lenin writes in his book: "...The *only* choice is—either bourgeois or socialist ideology. There is no middle course (for mankind has not created a 'third' ideology, and, moreover, in a society torn by class antagonisms there can never be a non-class or an above-class ideology). Hence, to belittle the socialist ideology *in any way, to turn aside from it in the slightest degree* means to strengthen bourgeois ideology."² This conclusion is as valid today as it ever was.

Lenin developed the Marxist proposition on the three basic forms of class struggle of

¹ Ibid., p. 385.

² Ibid., p. 384.

the proletariat: political, economic, and theoretical, or ideological. He proved that ideological struggle is just as indispensable as the other two forms. It is essential to freeing the working class from the sway of bourgeois ideology, and helping the proletariat understand its status in capitalist society and its historical mission. The irreconcilable struggle of the supporters of scientific socialism against bourgeois ideology is not only struggle against bourgeois theories and ideas, but also against opportunism, which serves to spread bourgeois influence in the working-class movement. That the ideas developed by Lenin in *What Is To Be Done?* are still valid is borne out by the fact that, at present, considerable sections of the working people in the capitalist world are under the influence of bourgeois ideology and support opportunists. This shows how extremely difficult it is to free the working class from the influence of bourgeois ideology and how strong the resistance of the bourgeoisie is to the spread of proletarian ideology.

Today's bourgeois critics of Marxism-Leninism make extensive use of the arguments that the Economists once used in seeking to disprove Lenin's ideas.

Economist ideas can also be traced in the writings of the British historian John Keep, a modern critic of Leninism. He maintains that Lenin's conclusion that the spontaneous working-class movement is bound to fall prey to bourgeois ideology shows that Lenin "had little or no faith in the traditional Marxist concept of

an inherent proletarian class consciousness".¹

Lenin's conclusion that "*all* worship of the spontaneity of the working-class movement, all belittling of the role of 'the conscious element', of the role of Social-Democracy, means, quite independently of whether he who belittles that role desires it or not, a strengthening of the influence of bourgeois ideology upon the workers"² has retained its validity up to the present day. Lenin was against the underestimation of ideological work and emphasises the need for irreconcilable struggle against bourgeois ideas, which are being constantly and intensively spread among the working class, and against the influence of bourgeois ideology upon the working-class movement.

Another basic conclusion of Lenin's that "class political consciousness can be brought to the workers *only from without*, that is, only from outside the economic struggle, from outside the sphere of relations between workers and employers"³ is also still essential to the Marxist-Leninist parties.

Socialist consciousness is introduced in the working-class movement by the Marxist party of the working class which is a well-organised, close-knit body of people who adhere to the same ideological, tactical, and organisational principles and act on their basis.

In order to introduce socialist conscious-

¹ J.L.H. Keep, *The Rise of Social Democracy in Russia*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1963, pp. 89-90.

² V.I. Lenin, "What Is To Be Done?", pp. 382-83.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 422.

ness and the ideas of scientific socialism in the working-class movement, the Marxist party should itself be an embodiment of the unity of socialism and the working-class movement. The Marxist party is the vanguard and the conscious part of the working class, which brings socialist consciousness into the working-class movement.

The assimilation of socialism by the working-class movement by no means implies that the whole of the working class should join the party. The latter is only part of the working class, its vanguard. To be the vanguard of the class means to represent, educate it, and lead it in its work to carry out its immediate tasks, and to attain its ultimate aim, communism. The party's purpose is to inspire and organise the working-class movement.

This is the essence of Lenin's famous proposition that a Marxist party should embody the unity of scientific socialism and the working-class movement. Each party should elaborate its own way to achieve this unity in accordance with the conditions of its country and keeping pace with the times.

The introduction of socialism into the working-class movement is being impeded today, as it has been in the past, by the ideological struggle, the intertwining of the various political interests of the working-class and petty-bourgeois parties and by various factors operating in the working-class movement. As a rule, this process is not smooth, and by no means follows a straight line. It is not only important to recognise the need to introduce

scientific socialism in the working-class movement as a general aim to be achieved by any Marxist party but also to become aware of this need in time, and be able to meet any requirements of revolutionary practice. This brings to light the great importance of a revolutionary party, a close-knit body of staunch Marxists-Leninists, which determines the extent to which revolutionary theory is embraced by the working-class movement, and to which this theory guides the struggle of the broad masses of working people.

The Russian Economists opposed the formation of a revolutionary party of the working class, and wanted the working-class movement to be guided by reformism and opportunism rather than by Marxism. This would only have led the working class into subjection to bourgeois ideology.

All enemies of the revolutionary movement of the working class have always based their attempts to undermine and weaken it on their striving to disarm the working-class movement ideologically, that is, to discredit Marxism-Leninism. They are continuing to do so today. They contrast Marxism-Leninism to scientific socialism and replace Marxism-Leninism with all sorts of "new" regional theories of socialism, such as Euro-communism, or nationalistic Marxism.

Lenin's *What Is To Be Done?* is one of the mightiest weapons in fighting such ideas.

III. REVOLUTIONARY AND REFORMIST POLICIES

Proceeding from the historical mission of the proletariat as the grave-digger of the bourgeoisie, and the special tasks facing the Russian working class in its preparations for the overthrow of the reactionary autocratic regime, Lenin outlined the political tasks of the party and its political line. This is discussed in Chapter III of *What Is To Be Done?*, entitled "Trade-Unionist Politics and Social-Democratic Politics".

The chapter deals with the role of the revolutionary party in shaping the class political consciousness of the proletariat, exposes the erroneous and harmful ideas of the Economists about the political struggle of the proletariat, and explains the fundamental difference between revolutionary and reformist policies.

The Essence of Revolutionary Policies

Lenin examines the policies of the proletariat from the point of view of its historical mission and its great historical objective.

Bowing to spontaneity inevitably led the Russian revisionists—the Economists—to belittle not only Marxist theory, but also the political tasks of the working class and its party.

The Economists believed that since political struggle against tsarism had to be waged by all classes of Russian society, first and foremost the bourgeoisie, the task of the working-class was to engage in economic struggle against their employers and the government for improvements in industrial legislation and working conditions, and for higher wages.

Formally, the Economists did not deny the need for political struggle but viewed it merely as struggle for reforms, and believed that it should be confined to the legal opportunities existing for it in Russia. They gave the concept of "political struggle" reformist content. Their political demands included freedom of strikes, unions, assembly, and the press and improvements in industrial legislation. At the same time, they believed that political freedoms were needed to facilitate the struggle for reforms and legalise it in the European style. Such struggle did not threaten either the existence of capitalism or that of the autocracy. It was natural, too, that the Economists failed to demand the overthrow of the autocracy. Citing the Marxist tenet that "every class struggle is a political struggle",¹ the Economists regarded every

¹ Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, "Manifesto of the Communist Party", in: Karl Marx, Frederick Engels, *Collected Works*, Vol. 6, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1976, p. 493.

instance of class confrontation for economic demands as political struggle. In their opinion, the task of the Social-Democrats was to politicise the economic struggle. This was a pseudo-revolutionary slogan, put forward under the pressure of the proletariat's political action. In *What Is To Be Done?* Lenin exposes the true aim of this slogan as an attempt to turn Social-Democracy into a reformist party, making it an appendage of the spontaneous working-class movement. "The demand 'to lend the economic struggle itself a political character'," he writes, "most strikingly expresses *subservience to spontaneity* in the sphere of political activity. Very often the economic struggle *spontaneously* assumes a political character, that is to say, without the intervention of the 'revolutionary bacilli—the intelligentsia', without the intervention of the class-conscious Social-Democrats. The economic struggle of the English workers, for instance, also assumed a political character without any intervention on the part of the socialists. The task of the Social-Democrats, however, is not exhausted by political agitation on an economic basis; their task is *to convert* trade-unionist politics into Social-Democratic political struggle, *to utilise* the sparks of political consciousness which the economic struggle generates among the workers, for the purpose of *raising* the workers to the level of *Social-Democratic* political consciousness." ¹

¹ V.I. Lenin, "What Is To Be Done?", pp. 415-16.

Lenin proves that the Economist slogan "to lend the economic struggle itself a political character" cloaks a typically opportunist policy, which is, essentially, a bourgeois policy. The opportunists seek to substitute the economic struggle against the employers and the government for the revolutionary struggle of the working class for radical political change, which can only be effected through social revolution. This would leave the capitalist system and exploitation intact. "Social-Democracy," Lenin stresses in his book, "leads the struggle of the working class, not only for better terms for the sale of labour-power, but for the abolition of the social system that compels the propertyless to sell themselves to the rich. Social-Democracy represents the working class, not in its relation to a given group of employers alone, but in its relation to all classes of modern society and to the state as an organised political force."¹

In exposing the reformist essence of the policy pursued by the Economists, Lenin formulates the fundamental principles of the tactics of revolutionary Social-Democracy, and its attitude to the daily requirements of the workers, the economic struggle, reforms, and terrorism.

The Economists accused the revolutionary Social-Democrats of neglecting the economic needs of the working class and their daily requirements. Present-day bourgeois Sovietologists repeat and exploit this accusation in

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 400.

their writings. However, Lenin always attached great importance to the economic struggle of the workers and to leading this struggle. He deemed it essential that the Social-Democrats take part in all spontaneous manifestations of the working-class struggle, and in all clashes between workers and capitalists, without forgetting, at the same time, about political tasks or limiting them for the sake of this, but using their leadership to enrich the political knowledge and experience of the workers.

By fighting for the daily needs of the workers and backing their demands, revolutionary Social-Democracy sought to explain the inevitable link between unemployment, starvation, and other tribulations assailing the working class, on the one hand, and the entire capitalist system, on the other.

In supporting the economic demands of the workers, revolutionary Social-Democracy never denied the importance of reforms. Marxists have never opposed every kind of reforms. "Revolutionary Social-Democracy," Lenin repeated, "has always included the struggle for reforms as part of its activities."¹

However, while the Economists viewed reforms as the main purpose of their policies, and regarded their work to attain this purpose as fundamental, revolutionary Social-Democracy "subordinates the struggle for reforms, as the part to the whole, to the revolutionary struggle for freedom and for socialism".²

¹ Ibid., p. 405.

² Ibid., p. 406.

Lenin said more than once that no reforms would bring class peace, for they were incapable of putting an end to the exploitation of labour by capital. The contradictions between labour and capital, between the exploited and the exploiter, could only be resolved by social revolution. Reforms that the bourgeoisie is forced to carry out under the pressure of the proletariat are nothing but forced concessions on its part. The bourgeoisie needs them to weaken the class struggle, and seeks to compensate for every such concession with ever more sophisticated forms of exploitation. For this reason, the economic status of the working class can only be radically improved through social revolution rather than reforms. Lenin wrote that "the most essential, the 'decisive' interests of classes can be satisfied *only* by radical *political* changes in general. In particular the fundamental economic interests of the proletariat can be satisfied only by a political revolution that will replace the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie by the dictatorship of the proletariat".¹ Such is the Marxist-Leninist view of reforms. Hence Marxists regard reforms in capitalist society as a by-product of the class struggle and one of the factors in preparing the masses for revolution.

In his book, Lenin also formulates the attitude of revolutionary Social-Democracy to terrorism. This was prompted, on the one hand, by the erroneous advocacy of terrorist

¹ Ibid., pp. 390-91.

tactics by the so-called Socialist-Revolutionaries, a Russian petty-bourgeois party and, on the other, by the support given to these tactics by the Economists.

The Socialist-Revolutionaries regarded themselves as heirs of the revolutionary Narodniks, but their theoretical postulates and political demands contradicted the objective conditions and the aims of bourgeois-democratic revolution. They laid claims to the role of the leaders of the revolutionary movement in Russia, though in fact they had no support among the masses.

They believed that terrorism could arouse the masses, providing a powerful impulse for action. Lenin proved that the tactics of the Socialist-Revolutionaries were, in fact, pseudo-revolutionary, and represented a spontaneous revolt of intellectuals severed from the mass working-class and democratic movements, and unable to blend their activities with the class struggle of the proletariat.

Lenin exposed the intrinsic link between terrorism and Economism, and revealed the common ideological source of this link, which was their common "*subservience to spontaneity*". "The Economists and the terrorists," Lenin stressed, "merely bow to different poles of spontaneity; the Economists bow to the spontaneity of 'the labour movement pure and simple', while the terrorists bow to the spontaneity of the passionate indignation of intellectuals, who lack the ability or opportunity to connect the revolutionary struggle and the working-class movement into an

integral whole."¹

It was, therefore, no accident that the Economists deemed it possible and even recommended using individual acts of terrorism to develop the political consciousness of the proletariat, warned their organisations against ignoring terrorism, and in no way opposed terrorist sentiments.

Lenin emphasises that Economism organically leads to terrorism, for the latter is the implementation of the Economist programme: "Let the workers wage their 'economic struggle against the employers and the government' ... and let the intellectuals conduct the political struggle by their own efforts—with the aid of terror, of course!"²

With regard to terrorism as a means of "arousing the working-class movement", Lenin says that reality itself is full of outrages that can give rise to indignation, and that there is no need to invent any special means of arousing it. Artificial stimulants are sought for when there is no faith in the revolutionary activity of the masses.

The intrinsic connection between Economism and terrorism was rooted precisely in the lack of understanding of the genuine role of the masses in history and in the underestimation of the revolutionary potential of the working class.

It is common knowledge that some leftist organisations today are reviving and popular-

¹ Ibid., p. 418.

² *ibid.*

ising terrorist tactics, to one degree or another. Revolutionary practice has confirmed the correctness of Lenin's appraisal of these tactics. It is impossible to score any success in the struggle for the vital interests of the working people without involving the broad masses in this struggle, without developing their consciousness and organisation, and without pursuing a class policy based on firm principles.

Political Education of the Working Class as the Foremost Fighter for Democracy

Lenin explained the leading role of the working class in the democratic movement and in the coming bourgeois-democratic revolution in Russia, and outlined the tasks of revolutionary Social-Democracy in educating the proletariat as the foremost fighter for democracy.

The role of the proletariat in the democratic movement was determined by the new relationship between a bourgeois-democratic and a socialist revolution in the age of imperialism, and the new relationship between democratic and socialist problems, the solution of which was a matter of concern not only to the working class, but to the bulk of the country's population. A bourgeois-democratic revolution in Russia was an indispensable prerequisite for a socialist revolution. The success of the future bourgeois democratic revolution in Russia and the

prospects for a socialist revolution depended on whether the general democratic movement for the overthrow of tsarism and the establishment of a democratic republic were brought together into an integral whole with the socialist struggle of the working class. This unification could be effected by the proletariat alone, which, like no other class, was interested in it and which had the greatest potential for translating it into life. As the most exploited and oppressed class, it was more interested in gaining the democratic rights and freedoms in their fullest form than the liberal bourgeoisie. It could use these freedoms to the greatest extent in the interests of the bulk of the population, in the interests of the peasants, in its own class interests, and in the interests of the further development of the bourgeois democratic revolution into a socialist one. With this aim in view, the proletariat had to spearhead all the democratic elements as the foremost fighter for democracy. Social-Democracy could only prepare the proletariat for its role of the foremost fighter for democracy and socialism through political propaganda and political education. In his book, Lenin pays special attention to political propaganda.

To educate the proletariat politically means to develop above all its political consciousness. Lenin regards political consciousness as truly class consciousness, and a worker's ability to see the actions and interests of other classes, strata, and groups of the population in concrete political developments, their in-

terrelationships, and the alignment of class forces. "In order to become a Social-Democrat," Lenin writes, "the worker must have a clear picture in his mind of the economic nature and the social and political features of the landlord and the priest, the high state official and the peasant, the student and the vagabond; he must know their strong and weak points; he must grasp the meaning of all the catchwords and sophisms by which each class and each stratum *camouflages* its selfish strivings and its real 'inner workings'; he must understand what interests are reflected by certain institutions and certain laws and how they are reflected."¹

Lenin exposes the Economists' belief that the economic struggle is the best way to involve the masses in the political movement as erroneous and essentially reactionary.

Bringing the economic struggle to the foreground, the Economists claimed that political propaganda had to follow economic propaganda. This idea stemmed from the so-called "theory of stages" according to which, at the first stage, the working class waged economic struggle, and economic propaganda—"economic exposures"—should be the method used by Social-Democracy most extensively. The Economists maintained that in economic struggle the workers would rise to the level of political struggle, after which Social-Democracy would be able to conduct political propaganda through "political exposures".

¹ V.I. Lenin, "What Is To Be Done?", p. 413.

Lenin criticised the Economists not for their belief that Social-Democracy should lead the economic struggle and conduct economic propaganda by exposing all sorts of abuses at factories, but for the neglect of political struggle and the political preparation of the proletariat for this struggle at a time when a revolution was approaching. For example, *Rabochaya mysl* declared that any, even the most insignificant, rise in the workers' wages "was worth more than any socialism or politics".¹ Lenin showed that such ideas fostered a negative attitude to political struggle among the working class. The exposure of abuses at factories could not make the proletariat understand its role as society's vanguard revolutionary class. The exposure of factory practices pertains, in fact, only to the relations between the workers of a particular trade, on the one hand, and their employers, on the other, and its only result is that those who sell their labour learn to sell it at a greater profit and to struggle against the capitalist-buyers only within the framework of a purely commercial deal. The Economists tried in this way to limit the working class to narrow parochial interests. With Social-Democracy's subservience to spontaneity, such exposure could only lead to trade-unionist struggle rather than to the revolutionary struggle of the working class against the social system based on the exploitation of man by man.

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 381.

It has already been said that Social-Democracy represents the working class not in its relationships to a particular capitalist or group of capitalists, but in its relations to all classes of modern society, and to the state as an organised political force. For this reason, Social-Democrats cannot confine themselves to economic struggle or allow economic exposures to dominate their activities.

Lenin thought it necessary to organise the political education of the working class as the foremost fighter on the basis of the all-round political exposure of the autocracy and the bourgeoisie and of all the aspects of the existing reactionary system. The working class can only acquire political knowledge in relations between all classes, that is to say, in political activities.

Thus Social-Democratic propaganda should draw the attention of workers not only to individual facts of arbitrariness perpetrated by an individual capitalist, but to all and every manifestation of police oppression and autocratic outrages in various spheres of life, be it industrial, civic, scientific, or any other. Every conscious worker should react to the tyranny of landlords, corporal punishment of peasants, bribery among officials, harrassment by the police, the regimentation of soldiers, and the persecution of students.

In order to conduct political agitation the Social-Democrats had to be genuine political fighters. According to Lenin, the ideal Social-Democrat should be "*the tribune of the*

people, who is able to react to every manifestation of tyranny and oppression, no matter where it appears, no matter what stratum or class of the people it affects; who is able to generalise all these manifestations and produce a single picture of police violence and capitalist exploitation; who is able to take advantage of every event, however small, in order to set forth *before all* his socialist convictions and his democratic demands, in order to clarify for *all* and everyone the world-historic significance of the struggle for the emancipation of the proletariat."1

All-round political exposures educated not only the workers, but also the broad masses. They saw the working class reacting to tyranny and coercion as a powerful social force capable of leading the working people in the towns and countryside to eradicate the exploitative system.

It was not enough, however, for Social-Democracy to educate the working class politically in order to ensure that the proletariat as the foremost fighter for democracy could indeed spearhead all democratic elements and lead the bourgeois-democratic revolution. It should try to unite around the working class all those dissatisfied with the autocracy and interested in overthrowing it. With this aim in view, the Social-Democrats should work among all social classes as theorists, propagandists, and organisers, to conduct

1 *Ibid.*, p. 423.

propaganda "among all strata of the people".¹ They have to formulate and emphasise the general democratic tasks for all the people, without hiding their socialist convictions, and be in the front ranks to implement these tasks. The poorest peasants and small-scale handicraftsmen constituted a favourable field for socialist propaganda.

The success of uniting the broad masses around the proletariat and developing the democratic movement to engage in revolutionary political struggle is ensured by the leading role of a Marxist party, which is called upon to combine "into one inseparable whole the assault on the government in the name of the entire people, the revolutionary training of the proletariat, and the safeguarding of its political independence, the guidance of the economic struggle of the working class, and the utilisation of all its spontaneous conflicts with its exploiters which rouse and bring into our camp increasing numbers of the proletariat".²

¹Ibid., p. 425.

²Ibid., p. 432

IV. A NEW KIND OF PARTY. ORGANISATIONAL PRINCIPLES

A united militant revolutionary party was necessary for the proletariat to carry out its historical mission in the revolution that was imminent in Russia, and for the success of the political objectives of Social-Democracy. Lenin expressed this need in his famous statement: "Give us an organisation of revolutionaries, and we will overturn Russia!"¹

Lenin described in great detail the nature of such a party and the principles of its organisation and activities. In chapters IV and V, "The Primitiveness of the Economists and the Organisation of the Revolutionaries" and "The 'Plan' for an All-Russian Political Newspaper", he exposes the opportunism of the Economists in organisational matters, in their views of the nature and principles of the party's organisation. He also states and substantiates the organisational principles of the revolutionary proletarian party, whose objective is to overthrow the autocracy and carry out a socialist revolution. In these chapters, Lenin explains his plan to create a revolution-

¹ V.I. Lenin, "What Is To Be Done? ", p. 467.

ary Marxist party in Russia, where severe harrassment was the rule.

It was necessary to build the kind of party no other country at that time had—one free of opportunism, dogmatism, and sectarianism, the genuine vanguard of the proletariat. The scale of the working-class movement required good centralised leadership nationwide, but the organisational forms were inadequate.

Raising the Organisation's Efficiency

Russian Social-Democrats were usually organised in groups or committees, where the same people maintained ties with the workers, supplied literature, published local newspapers, and organised demonstrations. These were primitive methods.

As a result, activities were poorly co-ordinated, conspiracy was weak in the face of severe harrassment, and local party people were unable to fight the tsarist police. Local Social-Democratic organisations lacked any real consistency in their work. Agents had an easy time infiltrating such organisations, enabling the secret police to know everything they were doing, and thus cause tremendous damage. Failures were only natural; as Lenin noted, fighting the state with such methods was like using sticks against a modern army. These primitive methods were caused by the Economists' habit of following in the tail of events. It was not necessary to have a national

organisation for "an economic struggle with the bosses and government", therefore the Economists were fundamentally opposed to having a centralised working-class Marxist party.

The Economists preferred spontaneous forms of organisation. Believing that a mass spontaneous movement makes a party unnecessary, they did all they could to keep the same organisational forms and primitive methods in Social-Democratic groups.

Such primitive organisational forms were the result of not only Social-Democrats' lack of training. As Lenin said, "the term 'primitiveness' embraces something more than lack of training; it denotes a narrow scope of revolutionary work generally, failure to understand that a good organisation of revolutionaries cannot be built on the basis of such narrow activity, and lastly—and this is the main thing—attempts to justify this narrowness and to elevate it to a special 'theory', i.e., subservience to spontaneity on this question too".¹

Lenin explained that the spontaneous struggle of the proletariat would not turn into a genuine class struggle "until this struggle is led by a strong organisation of revolutionaries".²

Lenin criticised the Economists for failing to see the essential difference between a Social-Democratic party and trade unions, mu-

¹Ibid., p. 445.

²Ibid., p. 475.

tual assistance funds, and other mass organisations of workers. He explained that political struggle is much more extensive and complicated than economic struggle. Therefore, a revolutionary Social-Democratic party has to be organised differently than an organisation of workers fighting for economic gains. An organisation of workers must be, first, based on the workers' trade, not only their place of work; second, be as extensive as possible; and third, engage in as little conspiratorial activities as possible. By contrast, a revolutionary Social-Democratic party must involve mainly people who engage in revolutionary activities, and accept members of all occupations, regardless of their social status. Such an organisation cannot be very extensive, and in Russia's conditions, had to be as conspiratorial as possible.

The development of a working-class Marxist party in Russia took place in specific historical, social, economic, and political conditions. The fact that the party was illegal left its imprint on all aspects of its activities and its organisational structure. However, the type of party Lenin proposed and advocated remained the same, regardless of the conditions in which the party functioned, since its type was determined by the theoretical principles of the party's activities, its role in the working-class movement, and the principles of its policies and organisation. Therefore, when conditions changed in subsequent periods, when the party functioned legally, the forms of organisation and the forms and

methods of everyday activities changed, but its theoretical, political, and organisational principles as a new kind of party remained the same.

Lenin's definition of the party's nature and organisational principles was a fine example of dialectical approach and understanding of the laws of social development in their manifestation.

Lenin believed a revolutionary party should be an organisation of revolutionaries having close ties with the broad masses. He attached a great deal of importance to creating an efficient organisation of revolutionaries because only such an organisation could unite the scattered Social-Democratic groups and committees, and ensure stability and consistency in its activities. Because the spontaneous movement was rapidly growing, it was particularly important to have real experienced leaders in the movement.

The party's nucleus had to be made up of people devoting their lives to the revolution, to the welfare of the working class. Such selfless people, devoted to the working class, had to have extensive political outlook and knowledge of theory, be capable of fighting the police, and know how to conduct conspiratorial work in an illegal party. Such people had to always be among the working class, know the needs and sentiments of the masses, and educate and organise them. They also had to know the intentions and plans of the ruling classes and their government. Therefore, they had to be able to make

contacts everywhere, and find out whatever the ruling classes under no circumstances wanted the working people to know about their activities.

Lenin explained a revolutionary party's need for a strong and trusted leadership: "...Without the 'dozen' tried and talented leaders (and talented people are not born by the hundreds), professionally trained, schooled by long experience, and working in perfect harmony, no class in modern society can wage a determined struggle."¹ It is a long and complicated process to train such leaders. Real leaders are trained by struggle; in the course of struggle they get political experience, are tested not only for staunchness and loyalty, but also the ability to learn from the movement and teach it new ways of fighting. A true leader should not only have profound knowledge of revolutionary theory, but should also be able to apply it in revolutionary activities. Continuity of the leadership and continuity of the movement hinges largely on the leaders.

Lenin especially stressed the need to train revolutionaries among the workers. A worker who is a talented activist cannot hold down a factory job eleven hours a day. The party must have the funds for such a person to support himself, switch over to conspiratorial activities in time, and move to another area if necessary. Lenin wrote: "When we have forces of specially trained worker-revolution-

¹V. I. Lenin, "What Is To Be Done?", p. 461.

aries who have gone through extensive preparation ... no political police in the world will then be able to contend with them, for these forces, boundlessly devoted to the revolution, will enjoy the boundless confidence of the widest masses of the workers."¹

A revolutionary party must not have any kinds of demagogues to cause members to mistrust its staunch leaders. When the revolutionary movement is in difficult periods, it is very easy to lead politically inexperienced workers and unstable party members into incorrect action. Only hard and bitter experiences can prove how wrong such an action is. When demagogues undermine the prestige of the leaders, they undermine not only the continuity of the leadership in the party and the revolutionary movement, but the movement itself. That is why Lenin felt demagogues were the worst enemies of the working class, and urged they be exposed and stopped.

Modern bourgeois historians, like the Economists, claim that Lenin regarded the party as a narrow organisation of professional revolutionaries, and closed the door on those who did not put revolutionary activities first. This, they say, narrowed the party's base, diminished its influence among the masses, and could have weakened the movement.

For example, a West German historian, Iring Fetscher, has written: "Strict centralised leadership, harsh discipline, limitation of party membership to a tight-knit nucleus of

¹ Ibid., p. 473.

professional revolutionaries, and total devotion to the party's goals, to the extent of giving up one's personal life, are principles that can be used in training a shock officer corps for leading an army in civil war."¹ Essentially, Fetscher asserts that Lenin wanted to create a conspiratorial party. Actually, Lenin repeatedly stressed that the strength of a revolutionary party is in its ties with the masses, with the mass movement of the working class. That was the most important organisational principle of a Leninist party.

In applying his ideas about the nature of the party to Russia's conditions, Lenin believed that an underground revolutionary party had to consist of a small group of experienced revolutionaries—a leadership nucleus—and extensive network of local party organisations and factory party committees, closely linked with the masses of the working class and enjoying its support. In *What Is To Be Done?*, Lenin stated: "I assert: (1) that no revolutionary movement can endure without a stable organisation of leaders maintaining continuity; (2) that the broader the popular mass drawn spontaneously into the struggle, which forms the basis of the movement and participates in it, the more urgent the need for such an organisation, and the more solid this organisation must be (for it is much easier for all sorts of demagogues to side-track the

more backward sections of the masses); (3) that such an organisation must consist chiefly of people professionally engaged in revolutionary activity; (4) that in an autocratic state, the more we *confine* the membership of such an organisation to people who are professionally engaged in revolutionary activity and who have been professionally trained in the art of combating the political police, the more difficult will it be to unearth the organisation, and (5) the *greater* will be the number of people from the working class and from the other social classes who will be able to join the movement and perform active work in it."¹

As a means of maintaining the party's ties with the masses of workers, Lenin proposed creating an extensive network of groups and various organisations, mainly of workers. These would be trade unions, educational groups, and groups where illegal literature could be studied. Some of these groups would join the party, others would only be close to it. Through these organisations and groups, the party would be closely linked with the masses of workers. One or several party members were supposed to belong to groups that were not in the party. Their job was to direct the group, and take responsibility for all the group's activities.

Lenin believed that a revolutionary working-class Marxist party should be organised on the basis of territory and work place.

The revolutionary nucleus was to provide

¹ V.I. Lenin, "What Is To Be Done?", p. 464.

¹ Iring Fetscher, *Von Marx zur Sowjetideologie*, Verlag Moritz Diesterweg, Frankfurt am Main, Berlin, Bonn, 1957, S.82.

stable leadership and the continuity of the organisation's activities. Local organisations, groups, and committees linked the party with the broad masses.

Centralism and Democratism

The new tasks faced in the era of imperialism by the working-class movement and, for one, by the Russian working class, called for purposeful, determined, co-ordinated struggle, and the unity of all its efforts, that is, the centralised leadership of this struggle. This could only be ensured by a revolutionary centralised political organisation. Therefore, Lenin believed centralism to be the critical organisational principle.

The Economists accused Lenin of disregarding the party's democratic principles. Like the Economists and Mensheviks, modern defenders of the opportunists claim that, from its outset, the Leninist party underestimated and limited democracy in its activities, and that this is still the party's main feature.

Lenin's view of centralism had nothing to do with the Economists' view of it.

What Lenin meant by centralism in the party was that the organisation had a single goal, members abided by strict discipline, lower-level party organisations were subordinate to higher-level bodies, and local organisations to the national leadership, and decisions made by the national leadership had to be followed by all the party's organisations.

When Social-Democrats were being terribly harrassed by the police, centralism meant that local functionaries were to be assigned by the national leadership, individuals appointed committee members, and strict secrecy had to be kept. This did restrict democracy, but it was the only way the organisation could be held together.

At the same time, party members were to have the freedom to express their opinions and debate all issues until decisions were made final. As much as circumstances permitted, the party and its organisations were democratic and held elections.

After the Bolshevik Party was founded at the Second Congress of the RSDLP in 1903, it operated on the principle of democratic centralism, which was backed up by the party's Rules adopted at the RSDLP's Fourth Congress (1906).

Lenin felt that party discipline was of utmost importance. This was particularly necessary after the crisis of Social-Democracy in Russia reflected by lack of discipline and excessive intellectualising. Without discipline it was impossible to have a genuinely militant revolutionary Marxist party.

Plans for Building a Party. The Role of a Political Newspaper

Lenin took a concrete historical approach in his plans for building a revolutionary party in Russia.

Lenin's plans for creating a Marxist party were innovative and simple: it was necessary to first determine the party's ideological platform, organise all those who agreed with such a platform, formulate the organisational principles in building the party, and then call together a congress of supporters to work out the party's fundamental strategy and tactics, and forms and methods of its activity.

These plans were meant to overcome the ideological and organisational disunity of the Russian Social-Democrats.

It was felt that the publication of an all-Russia underground political newspaper could and should help implement these plans.

The plans were realistic, because they took into account the conditions in Russia, where no bourgeois-democratic freedoms existed, and where autocratic tyranny and fierce reaction prevailed. The revolutionary newspaper was supposed to replace legalised means of propaganda, and was intended to both ideologically and organisationally unite the Social-Democrats. Lenin formulated the newspaper's objectives as follows: "A newspaper is not only a collective propagandist and a collective agitator, it is also a collective organiser."¹

Effective political propaganda is impossible without a national newspaper that comes out regularly, and is properly circulated. When a national party did not exist, only a national newspaper could provide communi-

¹ V.I. Lenin, "Where to Begin", *Collected Works*, Vol. 5, p. 22.

cation between towns and committees on the basis of routine work. The newspaper would have reported on the diverse activities taking place all over Russia, thus inspiring revolutionaries to continue moving ahead. Just the function of distributing the paper would provide communication between Social-Democratic groups. Newspaper reporters and distributors were to be the nucleus of the future party. Lenin compared such a paper to a fragment of huge bellows blowing every spark of the class struggle and popular discontent into a big fire. Lenin felt that this work would help in the selection and training of experienced people who would constitute a party and lead the people in the ousting of tsarism. Lenin wrote: "The organisation, which will form round this newspaper, the organisation of its *collaborators* (in the broad sense of the word, i.e., all those working for it), will be ready *for everything*, from upholding the honour, the prestige, and the continuity of the Party in periods of acute revolutionary 'depression' to preparing for, appointing the time for, and carrying out the *nation-wide armed uprising*."¹

The Leninist *Iskra* (The Spark) was such a collective propagandist, agitator, and organiser. Run by Lenin, the paper managed, in extremely difficult conditions, to do a great deal of ideological, political, and organisational work to unite party forces, and make preparations for the Second Congress of the

¹ V.I. Lenin, "What Is To Be Done?", pp.514-15.

Russian Social-Democratic Labour Party, which became the first congress of the new party, the Bolshevik Party. The newspaper was a school in ideology and politics for the party's revolutionary nucleus. It was able to put together a cohesive organisation of revolutionaries who were totally committed to the cause of the proletariat.

Iskra provided the working class with political knowledge, put forth consistently revolutionary slogans, and guided the activities of Social-Democratic organisations. Lenin's plans expounded in *What Is To Be Done?* were put into practice.

V. THE HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF LENIN'S *WHAT IS TO BE DONE?*

The historical significance of each outstanding Marxist-Leninist book can be measured by the extent to which the ideas it puts forth influenced revolutionaries then and later. In the final analysis, its significance is gauged by the results of the activities of the social and political forces that are guided by these ideas.

Having boldly put before the revolutionary Social-Democrats of Russia the question: what is to be done?, Lenin gave a comprehensive and well-substantiated reply, showing his understanding of the essence of events and phenomena of the time, and his belief in the revolutionary possibilities of the working class and all labouring masses. Lenin's reply was clear and indisputable: defend Marxism against any attempts to revise or distort it, develop and apply it as a guide for action in the struggle for the basic interests of the working people, and work persistently to build a militant united Marxist party of the working class, the political leader and organiser of the masses in this struggle. This was a difficult and important task facing the Rus

sian Social-Democrats. There was no other way to liberate the working class and all working people from exploitation and oppression.

Lenin's ideas about new kind of revolutionary Marxist party and its theoretical, political, and organisational principles provided the groundwork for the theory of such a party. This is one of the fundamental theories of Marxism-Leninism. Lenin's ideas had a tremendous influence on revolutionary Social-Democrats in Russia, their view of their party and its methods of work. It was stated at the Party's Second Congress that *What Is To Be Done?* was having a big influence on Russian Social-Democrats, and, as a result, a whole number of people, by their own admission, were becoming *Iskra* supporters. *What Is To Be Done?* played an outstanding role in ideologically uniting Russia's Social-Democrats and clearing the way for creating a working-class Marxist party.

A distributor of *Iskra*, I.I. Radchenko, once wrote: "I always use Lenin's plough as the best one for working the land. It breaks the crust of stagnation and loosens soil which promises good harvest. Whenever it runs into weeds sown by *Rabocheye Dyelo*, it pulls them out by the root. It's terrific!"¹

Lenin's *What Is To Be Done?* was the ideological and theoretical basis for creating a new kind of party.

The new party formed at the Second

¹ *Second Congress of the RSDLP. Minutes*, Moscow, 1959, p. 579 (in Russian).

Congress of the RSDLP on the basis of Lenin's theory was a party of revolutionary action. The great historical credit for creating such a party, embodying the unity of theory and revolutionary practice goes to Lenin and his supporters.

The Bolshevik Party was not created in isolation of the international Social-Democratic and working-class movement, but as an integral part of it. By that time, there were two distinct trends in the movement: revolutionary and opportunistic. The revolutionary trend materialised in the creation in Russia of a Leninist party; this was of decisive importance for the future of the international working-class movement and world revolutionary process. The centre of the world revolutionary movement had shifted to Russia.

The substance of the new kind of party and its distinguishing features not only fitted Russia's conditions, but also reflected the requirements for struggle among the international working class in the era of imperialism.

Naturally, as changes took place in the conditions of struggle and the historical conditions in which Communists worked, the Marxist-Leninist party also developed and changed form. Because of the new objectives, it changed its ideological and political platform and organisation, while maintaining its basic features as a new kind of party. Lenin summed up the first ten years of the party's existence by noting: "This organisation, while preserving its basic type, has been able to

adapt *its form* to the changing conditions..."¹

As Communist parties were formed in other countries, the international nature of Lenin's theory of the new kind of party became more evident.

Nowadays, individual revolutionaries, including Communists, claim Lenin's ideas as expressed in *What Is To Be Done?* can not be applied to the activities and development of mass working-class parties. They believe that, in countries with mature parliamentary systems, as well as in developing countries, a party is needed that is radically different from Lenin's Bolshevik Party.

The class nature of the proletariat, however, does not and cannot change. The same is true of its historical mission and the general historical trend of development of capitalist society, a trend which inevitably creates the objective and subjective prerequisites for the transition to socialism. Since the objective prerequisites for the transition to socialism are constantly growing, the role of the subjective factor—the organisation of the working class and all labouring people and their awareness of their aims—steadily grows. Therefore, the fundamental principles of the Marxist-Leninist theory of a working-class party are still the same. Naturally, as the Communist movement grows and gains more experience, the Marxist-Leninist theory on

¹ V.I. Lenin, "How Vera Zasulich Demolishes Liquidationism", *Collected Works*, Vol. 19, p. 401.

the party develops accordingly.

This theory consists of the following basic parts:

—definition of the historical place and role of the party as a genuinely revolutionary vanguard of the working class and all working people, substantiation of the dialectical interaction of the party and proletarian masses, all labouring people at various stages of revolutionary struggle, and the constructive and transforming activities of the working class;

—explanation of the party's ideological and theoretical base and the introduction of Marxism into the working-class movement;

—the organisational principles of the party's internal affairs.

What Is To Be Done? is significant because in it Lenin gave a comprehensive explanation of the historical role of the Communist party in the great movements of our time, the social and political principles of its organisation and activities, and its place in the system of all working-class organisations.

Lenin's theory of the party, which experience has enriched and proved to be correct, determines the distinguishing features of the new kind of party.

This party:

—constitutes the assimilation of Marxism by the mass working-class movement; its activities are based on Marxism-Leninism, which it develops, ensuring the organic unity of revolutionary theory and revolutionary practice. This imparts the movement with the ability to make long-term forecasts and en-

hance the effectiveness of the creative activities of the labouring masses;

—is the collective political leader of the working class, the highest form of its organisation, the vanguard of all working people, organising and leading their revolutionary activities in all periods;

—is the advanced, organised contingent of the working class and the embodiment of its ties with the vast masses of workers and all labouring people;

—has the historical obligation to ensure that working-class government is established, in one form or another, and to organise the revolutionary restructuring of a capitalist society into a socialist society;

—is able to attain its objectives because of the ideological and political unity of its members, its organisational cohesion on the basis of democratic centralism, the conscious discipline and activity of each member;

—critically analyses the results of its revolutionary activities and policies, constantly studies, assesses and uses the experience gained by the international Communist movement, and is irreconcilable when it comes to revisionism, opportunism, dogmatism, and any kind of factionalism;

—consistently follows the principles of proletarian internationalism.

Since its outset, the Communist Party of the Soviet Union has invariably been guided by the principles of proletarian internationalism. Its entire history has been the example of the inseparable combination of the nation-

al and international. Today, the Communist Party of the Soviet Union consistently pursues a dual international objective: to successfully build a new society in its own country, thus affecting the course of the world liberation movement, and to give assistance and support to revolutionary, progressive movements.

The world socialist system has become the decisive factor in social progress. The socialist community countries, under the leadership of their Communist and workers' parties, have achieved a great deal in building socialism. The experience of the national liberation and socialist revolutions, and the construction of socialist societies shows that Communist parties have the greatest success in leading the masses in revolution and in building socialism when they made the most complete and flexible use of Lenin's theory of the party. And, on the contrary, when Communist parties took a dogmatic approach to this theory, or forgot or disregarded any of its aspects, they lost their prestige and vanguard role, the revolutionary movement failed, and socialist gains were in danger of being lost.

It follows from Lenin's theory of the party that work among the masses is the main sphere of its activity. "Whether, when, and under what circumstances the revolution materialises," writes Lenin, "does not depend on the will of a particular class; but revolutionary work carried on among the masses is never wasted. This is the only kind of activity which prepares

the masses for the victory of socialism.”¹

This revolutionary work among the masses first of all entails promoting the activity of the masses and their awareness of their aims, using various forms of struggle which any popular movement may develop. Movements and initiatives spawn a powerful revolutionary torrent, that cannot be stopped by even the strongest forces of state-monopoly capitalism.

Lenin devoted particular attention to the party's work among the masses, and strengthening ties with the masses after the working class gained power. Lenin believed that the increasing scope and complexity of society's revolutionary change and the involvement of ever greater numbers of people in these efforts make the party's political, organisational and ideological role ever more important. Lenin asserted that, "the greater the scope and extent of historical events, the greater is the number of people participating in them, and, contrariwise, the more profound the change we wish to bring about, the more must we rouse an interest and an intelligent attitude towards it, and convince more millions and tens of millions of people that it is necessary".²

Lenin's book exposed revisionism in West

¹ V.I. Lenin, "Reformism in the Russian Social-Democratic Movement", *Collected Works*, Vol. 17, p. 239.

² V. I. Lenin, "The Eighth All-Russia Congress of Soviets. Report on the Work of the Council of People's Commissars, December 22", *Collected Works*, Vol. 31, p. 498.

European Social-Democratic parties and among Russian Social-Democrats, laid bare the opportunism of all those who tried to refute Marxism and their betrayal of the interests of the working class. Lenin pointed to the ideological sources of opportunism—the influence of bourgeois ideology on the working class, reliance on the spontaneity of the working-class movement, and underestimation of the role of socialist consciousness in the working-class movement.

Lenin discredited the revisionist theory and opportunist policy of the Russian Economists, and explained that it was a variety of West European opportunism. Having declared war on international opportunism, Lenin and his supporters ideologically and organisationally disassociated themselves from the Economists. This struggle was inseparable from their practical activities to create a new kind of party, a party of revolutionary action.

Since the social base for opportunism continues to exist in the capitalist countries—opportunism is helpful to state-monopoly capitalism—the roots of revisionism likewise remain. Therefore, attempts continue to be made to revise the revolutionary principles of Marxism and to substitute various regional doctrines for Marxism-Leninism or "supplement" it with nationalistic or hegemonistic theories. The same holds true for attempts to instil reformism or bourgeois nationalism into the working-class movement.

Lenin's *What Is To Be Done?* is of tremendous significance for the struggle against

modern revisionism. It not only shows the need for a consistent and firm approach in defending the basic principles of Marxism against any opportunistic distortions, but is a combat weapon in this struggle today, too. All those today who criticise and seek to "refute" Marxism-Leninism hold the same ideological and class positions as their precursors did at the beginning of the century. They also maintain that Marxism-Leninism is obsolete, that it is not necessary to have a socialist revolution, political power in the hands of the working class, and a militant revolutionary Marxist-Leninist party. All that is really new about their revisionism are their attacks on the socialist community countries.

Lenin believed the necessary condition for the successful work of the Communist party and the development and triumph of the working-class movement was a struggle on two fronts—against right-wing and "left"-wing opportunism.

In defending Marxism-Leninism as the only scientific revolutionary theory, a theory of the working class and all labouring people, its advocates today continue to fight on two fronts—against dogmatism and against revisionism.

The Communist Party of the Soviet Union strongly rebuffs the ideological opponents of Marxism-Leninism and their attacks on the socialist community countries. Along with other Marxist-Leninist parties, the Soviet Communist Party continues to actively oppose revisionism and opportunism, which belit-

tle the leadership role of Communist parties in the struggles of the working class and the building of socialism, and which try to undermine their unity. The Communist Party of the Soviet Union feels that defending the Marxist-Leninist theory of the party is the internationalist duty of all Communists.

The significance of Lenin's *What Is To Be Done?* is indicated by its popularity among revolutionaries and progressive people in general. The book has been widely read around the world. It has been published in 244 editions in 60 languages of the Soviet Union and other countries, the total number of copies being 13,558,000. The book has been published in 37 other countries 199 times in 41 languages.

Lenin's *What Is To Be Done?* continues to serve the international Communist, working-class, and national liberation movements as a source of revolutionary thought and revolutionary action.

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