
ON THE ROAD

A year of disintegration, a year of ideological and political disunity, a year of Party driftage lies behind us. The membership of all our Party organisations has dropped. Some of them—namely, those whose membership was least proletarian—have fallen to pieces. The Party's semi-legal institutions created by the revolution have been broken up time after time. Things reached a point when some elements within the Party, under the impact of the general break-up, began to ask whether it was necessary to preserve the old Social-Democratic Party, whether it was necessary to continue *its* work, whether it was necessary to go "underground" once more, and how this was to be done. And the extreme Right (the liquidationist trend, so called) answered this question in the sense that it was necessary to legalise ourselves at all costs, even at the price of an open renunciation of the Party programme, tactics and organisation. This was undoubtedly an ideological and political crisis as well as an organisational one.

The recent All-Russia Conference of the Russian Social-Democratic Labour Party has led the Party out on to the road, and evidently marks a turning-point in the development of the Russian working-class movement after the victory of the counter-revolution. The decisions of the conference, published in a special Report issued by the Central Committee of our Party, have been confirmed by the Central Committee, and therefore, pending the next Congress, stand as the decisions of the whole Party. These decisions give a very definite answer to the question of the causes and the significance of the crisis, as well as the

means of overcoming it. By working in the spirit of the conference resolutions, by striving to make *all* Party workers realise clearly and fully the present tasks of the Party, our organisations will be able to strengthen and consolidate their forces for united and effective revolutionary Social-Democratic work.

The main cause of the Party crisis is indicated in the preamble of the resolution on organisation. This main cause is the wavering intellectual and petty-bourgeois elements, of which the workers' party had to rid itself; elements who joined the working-class movement mainly in the hope of an early triumph of the bourgeois-democratic revolution and could not stand up to a period of reaction. Their instability was revealed both in theory ("retreat from revolutionary Marxism": the resolution on the present situation) and in tactics (the "whittling down of slogans"), as well as in Party organisation. The class-conscious workers repelled this instability, came out resolutely against the liquidators, began to take the management and guidance of the Party organisations into their own hands. If this hard core of our Party was unable at the outset to overcome the elements of disunity and crisis, this was not only because the task was a great and difficult one amidst the triumph of the counter-revolution, but also because a certain indifference towards the Party showed itself among those workers who, although revolutionary-minded, were not sufficiently socialist-minded. It is precisely to the class-conscious workers of Russia that the decisions of the conference are addressed in the first place—as the crystallised opinion of Social-Democracy concerning the means of combating disunity and vacillation.

A Marxist analysis of present-day class relations and of the new policy of tsarism; an indication of the immediate aim of the struggle which our Party continues as before to set itself; an appreciation of the lessons of the revolution as regards the correctness of the revolutionary Social-Democrats' tactics; elucidation of the causes of the Party crisis; pointing out the role in combating it of the proletarian elements of the Party; solution of the problem of relations between the illegal and legal organisations;

recognition of the necessity of utilising the Duma tribune and drawing up precise instructions for the guidance of our Duma group, linked with direct criticism of its mistakes—such was the principal content of the decisions of the conference, which provide a complete answer to the question of the party of the working class choosing a definite path in the present difficult period. Let us examine this answer more carefully.

The interrelation of classes in their political groupings remains the same as that which prevailed during the past period of direct revolutionary struggle of the masses.³¹ The overwhelming majority of the peasants cannot but strive for an agrarian revolution which would destroy semi-feudal landownership, and which cannot be achieved without the overthrow of tsarism. The triumph of reaction has borne down heavily on the democratic elements of the peasantry, which is incapable of forming a solid organisation; but despite all oppression, despite the Black-Hundred Duma, despite the extreme instability of the Trudoviks, the revolutionary mood of the peasant masses is clearly evidenced even by the debates in the Third Duma. The fundamental position of the proletariat in regard to the tasks of the bourgeois-democratic revolution in Russia remains unaltered: to guide the democratic peasantry and to wrest it from the influence of the liberal bourgeoisie, the Cadet Party—which continues to draw closer and closer to the Octobrists notwithstanding petty private squabbles, and which recently has been striving to establish national-liberalism and to support tsarism and reaction by chauvinist agitation. The struggle goes on as before—says the resolution—for the complete abolition of the monarchy and the conquest of political power by the proletariat and the revolutionary peasantry.

The autocracy, as hitherto, is the principal enemy of the proletariat and of all democratic trends. It would be a mistake, however, to imagine that it remains unchanged. The Stolypin “constitution” and Stolypin’s agrarian policy mark a new stage in the break-down of the old, semi-patriarchal, semi-feudal tsarism, a new step towards its transformation into a bourgeois monarchy. The delegates

from the Caucasus, who wished either to delete such a characterisation of the present situation altogether, or to substitute "plutocratic" for "bourgeois", were wrong. The autocracy has long been plutocratic; but it is only after the first stage of the revolution, under the impact of its blows, that the autocracy is becoming bourgeois, both in its agrarian policy and its direct, nationally-organised alliance with certain strata of the bourgeoisie. The autocracy has been nursing the bourgeoisie for a long time now; the bourgeoisie, by means of the ruble, has long been winning its way to "the top", securing influence on legislation and administration, and a place beside the noble aristocracy. But the peculiar feature of the present situation is that the autocracy has been forced to set up a representative assembly for certain strata of the bourgeoisie, to balance between them and the feudalist landlords, to form an alliance of these sections in the Duma; it has been forced to abandon all the hopes it had placed in the patriarchalism of the muzhik, and to seek support against the rural masses among the rich peasants, who are ruining the village commune.

The autocracy cloaks itself with pseudo-constitutional institutions, but at the same time its class essence is being exposed as never before, owing to the alliance concluded by the tsar with the Purishkeviches and the Guchkovs, and with no one else. The autocracy is attempting to take upon itself the fulfilment of those tasks of the bourgeois revolution which are objectively necessary—the setting-up of a representative assembly of the people which would really manage the affairs of bourgeois society, and the purging of the countryside of medieval, entangled and antiquated agrarian relations. But the practical results of these new steps taken by the autocracy are, so far, exactly nil, and this only shows more clearly than ever that other forces and other means are necessary for the fulfilment of the historical task. In the minds of millions of people inexperienced in politics, the autocracy was hitherto contrasted with popular representation in general; now, the struggle is narrowing its aims, and is more concretely defining its task as the struggle for power in the state, which deter-

mines the character and significance of representation itself. That is why the Third Duma marks a special stage in the break-down of the old tsarism, in the intensification of its adventurist character, in the deepening of the old revolutionary aims, in the widening of the field of struggle (and of the numbers taking part in the struggle) for these aims.

We must get over this stage. The present new conditions require new forms of struggle. The use of the Duma tribune is an absolute necessity. A prolonged effort to educate and organise the masses of the proletariat becomes particularly important. The combination of illegal and legal organisation raises special problems before the Party. The popularisation and clarification of the experience of the revolution, which the liberals and liquidationist intellectuals are seeking to discredit, are necessary both for theoretical and practical purposes. But the tactical line of the Party—which must be able to take the new conditions into account in its methods and means of struggle—remains unchanged. The correctness of revolutionary Social-Democratic tactics, states one of the resolutions of the conference, is confirmed by the experience of the mass struggle in 1905-07. The defeat of the revolution resulting from this first campaign revealed, not that the tasks were wrong, not that the immediate aims were “utopian”, not that the methods and means were mistaken, but that the forces were insufficiently prepared, that the revolutionary crisis was insufficiently wide and deep—and Stolypin and Co. are working to widen and deepen it with most praiseworthy zeal! Let the liberals and terrified intellectuals lose heart after the first genuinely mass battle for freedom, let them repeat like cowards: don't go where you have been beaten before, don't tread that fatal path again. The class-conscious proletariat will answer them: the great wars in history, the great problems of revolutions, were solved only by the advanced classes returning to the attack again and again—and they achieved victory after having learned the lessons of defeat. Defeated armies learn well. The revolutionary classes of Russia have been defeated in their first campaign, but the revolutionary situation re-

mains. In new forms and by other ways, sometimes much more slowly than we would wish, the revolutionary crisis is approaching, coming to a head again. We must carry on with the lengthy work of preparing larger masses for that crisis; this preparation must be more serious, taking account of higher and more concrete tasks; and the more successfully we do this work, the more certain will be our victory in the new struggle. The Russian proletariat can be proud of the fact that in 1905, under its leadership, a nation of slaves for the first time became a million-strong host, an army of the revolution, striking at tsarism. And now the same proletariat will know how to do persistently, staunchly and patiently the work of educating and training the new cadres of a still mightier revolutionary force.

As we have said, utilisation of the Duma tribune is an essential element of this work of education and training. The conference resolution on the Duma group indicates to our Party that road which comes nearest—if we are to seek instances in history—to the experience of German Social-Democracy at the time of the Anti-Socialist Law.³² The illegal Party must know how to use, it must learn how to use, the legal Duma group; it must train up the latter into a Party organisation equal to its tasks. The most mistaken tactics, the most regrettable deviation from consistent proletarian work, dictated by the conditions of the present period, would be to raise the question of recalling the group from the Duma (there were two “otzovists” at the conference, but they did not raise the question openly), or to refrain from directly and openly criticising its mistakes and from enumerating them in the resolution (as some delegates insisted at the conference). The resolution fully recognises that the group has committed mistakes for which it was not alone to blame, and which were quite similar to the inevitable mistakes of all our Party organisations. But there are other mistakes—departures from the *political line* of the Party. Since these departures occurred, since they were made by an organisation openly acting in the name of the whole Party, the Party was bound to declare clearly and definitely that these were

deviations. In the history of West-European socialist parties there have been a number of instances of abnormal relations between the parliamentary groups and the Party; to this day these relations are quite often abnormal in the Latin countries, where the groups do not display sufficient Party spirit. We must from the very outset organise Social-Democratic parliamentarism in Russia on a different basis; we must at once establish team-work in this field—so that every Social-Democratic deputy may really feel that he has the Party behind him, that the Party is deeply concerned over his mistakes and tries to straighten out his path—so that every Party worker may take part in the general Duma work of the Party, learning from the practical Marxist criticism of its steps, feeling it his duty to assist it, and striving to gear the special work of the group to the whole propaganda and agitation activity of the Party.

The conference was the first authoritative meeting of delegates from the biggest Party organisations to discuss the work of the Duma Social-Democratic group during the whole session. And the decision of the conference shows very clearly how our Party will shape its Duma work, how very exacting it will be in this field both to itself and to the group, how undeviatingly and consistently it proposes to work on developing genuinely Social-Democratic parliamentarism.

The question of our attitude to the Duma group has a tactical and an organisational aspect. In the latter respect the resolution on the Duma group is only the application of our general principles of organisational policy to a particular case, principles laid down by the conference in the resolution giving instructions on the question of organisation. The conference has recorded that two main tendencies exist in the Russian Social-Democratic Labour Party on this question: one of them throws the weight of emphasis on the illegal Party organisation, the other—which is more or less akin to liquidationism—throws the weight of emphasis on the legal and semi-legal organisations. The point is that the present situation is characterised, as we have already pointed out, by a certain number of Party

workers leaving the Party—especially intellectuals, but also some proletarians. The liquidationist trend raises the question as to whether it is the best, the most active elements that are abandoning the Party and choosing the legal organisations as their field of activity, or whether it is the “vacillating intellectualist and petty-bourgeois elements” that are leaving the Party. Needless to say, by emphatically rejecting and condemning liquidationism, the conference replied that it was the latter elements. The most proletarian elements of the Party, and those elements of the intelligentsia that were most consistent in principle and most Social-Democratic, remained true to the Russian Social-Democratic Labour Party. The desertions from the Party mean its purification, they mean getting rid of its least stable element, of its unreliable friends, of its “fellow-travellers” (*Mitläufer*), who always joined the proletariat for a while and who were recruited from among the petty bourgeoisie or from among the “declassed”, i.e., people thrown out of the orbit of some definite class.

From this evaluation of the principle of Party organisation logically follows the line of organisational policy adopted by the conference. To strengthen the illegal Party organisation, to create Party cells in all spheres of work, to set up first of all “entirely Party committees consisting of workers, even if their number be small, in each industrial enterprise”, to concentrate the functions of leadership in the hands of leaders of the Social-Democratic movement from among the workers themselves—such is the task today. Needless to say, the task of these cells and committees must be to utilise all the semi-legal and, as far as possible, legal organisations, to maintain “close contact with the masses”, and to direct the work in such a way that Social-Democracy responds to all the needs of the masses. Every Party cell and workers’ committee must become a “base for agitation, propaganda and practical organising work among the masses”, i.e., they must go where the masses go, and try at every step to push the consciousness of the masses in the direction of socialism, to link up every specific question with the general tasks of the proletariat, to transform every act of organisation into

one of *class* consolidation, to win by dint of energy and ideological influence (not by their ranks and titles, of course) the leading role in all the proletarian legal organisations. Even if these cells and committees be very small at times, they will be linked together by Party tradition and Party organisation, by a definite class programme; and two or three Social-Democratic members of the Party will thus be able to avoid becoming submerged in an amorphous legal organisation and to pursue their *Party* line under all conditions, in all circumstances and in all kinds of situations, to influence their environment in the spirit of the whole Party, and not allow the environment to swallow them up.

Though mass organisations of one type or another may be dissolved, though the legal trade unions may be hounded out of existence, though every open act of workers' initiative under a regime of counter-revolution may be ruined by the police on one pretext or another—no power on earth can prevent the concentration of masses of workers in a capitalist country, such as Russia has already become. One way or another, legally or semi-legally, openly or covertly, the working class will find its own rallying points; the class-conscious Party Social-Democrats will everywhere and always march in front of the masses, everywhere and always act together in order to influence the masses in the spirit of the Party. And Social-Democracy, which has proved in open revolution that it is the party of the class, the party that succeeded in leading millions in strikes, in the uprising of 1905, as well as in the elections of 1906-07, will now also be able to remain the party of the class, the party of the masses, the vanguard, which in the hardest times will not lose touch with the bulk of the army, but will be able to help the latter overcome these hard times, consolidate its ranks once more, and train more and more new fighters.

Let the Black-Hundred diehards rejoice and howl inside the Duma and outside it, in the capital and in the remote provinces, let the reaction rage—the ever so wise Mr. Stolypin cannot take a single step without bringing the precariously balancing autocracy nearer its fall, without creat-

ing a new tangle of political impossibilities and absurdities, without adding new and fresh forces to the ranks of the proletariat and to the ranks of the revolutionary elements of the peasant masses. A party which succeeds in consolidating itself for persistent work in contact with the masses, a party of the advanced class, which succeeds in organising its vanguard, and which directs its forces in such a way as to influence in a Social-Democratic spirit every sign of life of the proletariat—such a party will win no matter what happens.

Sotsial-Demokrat No. 2,
January 28 (February 10), 1909

Collected Works,
Vol. 15, pp. 345-55