

Party and Programme: Bolshevism Versus Opportunism 1903 - 1912 - Part 2

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This article is devoted to the debate on the political and organisational heritage of Trotskyism and Leninism to which the Workers' Socialist League, the International Marxist Group and the International-Communist League contributed in the 1970s

What is being debated?

The IMG have centred the debate around their own current 'unity offensive'. In the series of articles on 'Party and Faction' they have developed the thesis that 'neither Lenin nor Trotsky launched a new party until both the social democrats and the Stalinists had passed definitively into the camp of the counter-revolution' in 1914 and 1933 and that such 'historic betrayals' are the only 'principled basis for a split'.

The WSL on the other hand have nailed their flag to the mast of Zinoviev's pushing back the Communist/Social Democrat split to 1903. This latter method, allowing its practitioners all the cocksureness and infallibility of hindsight, is a bad guide to practice in the here and now. Because seen in retrospect, Martov's formulation on membership is related to the whole subsequent development of Menshevism. It does not, therefore, follow that one must effect a pre-emptive split with anyone who defends a weak or erroneous formulation.

It should be no surprise that this debate - what is the basis for a unification of the shattered fragments of Trotskyism - should generate considerable attention at the moment. Not only have the last two years in Britain been a dramatic decline in the combativity of workers within the context of a sharp economic crisis, but the far left has fragmented even further.

In this situation the recipe of the IMG and the United Secretariat of the Fourth International may seem an attractive proposition. Their very heterogeneity, multiplicity of tendencies happily existing under the FI umbrella and that of its national sections is offered as a haven from the horrors of 'sectarianism'. The defence meetings organised to answer the slanderous accusations of Healy and the WRP have been used by the United Secretariat spokesmen to hammer home the message - the alternative to the USFI is Healyite degeneration.

The IMG theorists have decided to re-interpret the whole revolutionary tradition since 1903 in the light of their 'new' organisational discoveries. We choose to reply to this revision, not because of its inherent ideological strength, but because on a world scale the USFI 'involves' the largest number of subjectively revolutionary cadres and because the issues involved are central to a rediscovery of the Marxist method and a re-elaboration of revolutionary strategy and tactics.

Our series will include articles on Bolshevism, 1903-1914: the Russian experience and the Third International, 1914-1923; from the Third to the Fourth International, 1923-1940; the disintegration of the

Fourth International, 1940 to the present day (The Fourth International article was actually published as a book - [Death Agony of the Fourth international](#) ^[1])

In the first article of this series, we will look at the development of Lenin's organisational theory and practice in the context of the programmatic and tactical development of Bolshevism. This development occurred in the class struggle and in battle against the opportunist currents in the workers' movement.

We will see that Lenin was not some sort of organisational fetishist. Indeed, he neither fetishised one particular form of organisation - as the German Social Democrats undoubtedly did - nor was he the wild eclectic that Tony Cliff conjures up in the pages of his three-volume biography. Commentators often - falsely - contrast Lenin, the organiser to Marx, the theorist.

The essence of Lenin's Leninism was the organising of a cadre in the struggles of the working class around clear concrete strategy and tactics. Not only was Lenin a better party organiser than any of his contemporaries (including Luxembourge and Trotsky) in his grasp of tactics, and strategy, he was more ruthlessly relentlessly precise than any of them - a precision that many of the best of them mistook for dogmatism and sectarianism, and which the petty-bourgeois moralists and philistines took for ambition or amoralism.

The IMG have revolted against the picture of Lenin as a fanatical splitter cultivated by Healy. They have however, simply turned this erroneous conception on its head to show us Lenin, the unity fetishist.

Lenin's one consistent aim was to organise a solid and disciplined party around a consistent revolutionary programme and tactics, and to make that party the leadership of the Russian working class - questions of size, democratism, factions, norms of election or selection were means in given historical conditions - as were the relations Lenin maintained with the various opportunist currents: Economism, Menshevism, Liquidationism. The IMG reduce the whole history of Bolshevism to a question of organisation in the most crass sense of the word.

The 1903-1906 period of open factional split is explained and reduced to a problem of Menshevik indiscipline. The 1906-1908 unity perspective of Bolshevism is turned into a series of timeless and abstract organisational principles not viewed in the light of Bolshevism's political perspective, strategy and tactics. Only in 1914 do the IMG recognise any political base for a split in the party four years after the last joint plenum had taken place.

This split was political, they say, because it placed one faction in the camp of the world bourgeoisie, the other at the head of the international workers' movement! On the 1912 expulsion of the Menshevik Liquidators, they say, "Furthermore, the actual split into two different parties through the expulsion of various elements did not take place because of the Mensheviks political views, but because of a rejection and violation of the organisational principles of the party.

The carrying out of acts incompatible with party membership by these particular elements." (1)

At each stage the IMG strip Bolshevism and the inner party conflict of its political and programmatic content.

We therefore, make no apology for having to re-examine in outline the political evolution of Bolshevism and its opponents. Only thus can we discover the organisational method of Lenin and his attitude to unity and splits.

In order to put across our arguments against the tendencies involved in the Faction and Party argument it

is necessary to present a serious account of the history and evolution of Bolshevism. Such a historical account will reveal the distortions, omissions and fundamental revisions of Bolshevism that have been perpetrated in the debate so far.

The origins of old Bolshevism

The traditions of Bolshevism have their roots in the work and struggle of Iskra prior to the Second Congress of the Russian Social-Democratic Party. Before the Second Congress of 1903, there did not exist a united party organisation or party programme in Russia. The movement was politically and organisationally divided and disparate. Lenin from 1900 sought to forge an organisational and political unity in Russian Social-Democracy. His weapon was the paper, Iskra, a paper that sought to rally the forces of Russian socialism ideologically and programmatically into a coherent unified political party. From this early period, Lenin made no mistake of confusing organisational unity with ideological clarity and heterogeneity.

While not prescribing in advance who could and who would not be in the party, Lenin, from 1901 to 1903 waged a relentless war to ensure that the political line of Russian Social Democracy was free of all opportunism. The central core of the arguments of Lenin and Iskra lay in premising the real unification of the party on solid, principled revolutionary social democratic politics. It is on this context it is in this context that we can understand the battle with 'the economists', with their paper Rabochee Dyelo, in the period up to 1903. Writing later Lenin was to trace the origins of Leninism to the fight with the economists, a fight that he waged alongside Martov, Plekhanov and Dan.

'The origin of Bolshevism is inseparably linked with the struggle of what is known as economism (opportunism which rejected the political struggle of the working class and denied the latter's leading role) against revolutionary social-democracy in 1897-1902. (2)

The economists' opportunism rested in their argument that Russian social-democrats should not raise, agitate or propagandise for political demands in the working class movement. Instead, Russian socialists should aid and assist the Russian working class to wage its economic struggle with the employers and the Tsarist autocracy. The economists argued that, as the working class developed its economic, industrial strength, so it would spontaneously develop political ideas and forms of struggle. Until that day the question of 'politics' - of the Russian autocracy, of the repression of the nationalities in the Russian empire, etc. should be left to the liberals and bourgeois constitutionalists. (3)

Against this tendency in Russian social-democracy, Lenin replied both programmatically and organisationally.

From the pages of Iskra, and in the pamphlet 'What is to be Done?' Lenin (supported by his future opponents, Martov and Plekhanov) argued that a revolutionary programme is not spontaneously and gradually generated by the masses themselves. Instead, revolutionary social democrats, constituting a conscious vanguard of the working class and intelligentsia, would have to fight to inject their demands and programme into the mass struggle. To the spontaneous economism of Rabochee Dyelo Lenin counterposed a conscious revolutionary vanguard armed with its own programme and tactics, struggling for leadership in the working class movement.

Organisational differences necessarily flowed from the political differences between the Iskraists and the economists. The conscious vanguard of revolutionary social-democrats operating in conditions of repression and secrecy required military organisation and discipline. Against the call of the economists for a flabby and undisciplined party, Lenin, writing in the specific situation of repression, exile and illegality, argued for an organisation structured from above, on clear social-democratic politics, able to mobilise and direct every individual party cadre.

In the period before the 1903 conference, we also see developing another key element in the heritage of the Bolsheviks their argument as to the specific nature of the coming revolution in Russia, and of the programme of Russian Social Democracy. The Bolshevik programme for revolution certainly did not exist by 1903. It was not, in fact, to be formally clarified until April 1917. Until that date, Bolshevism developed a perspective of workers' revolution in Russia, in the light of their specific analysis of Russian capitalism in a national and international context the specific experience of the workers' movement in Russia (most importantly the 1905 revolution) and argument with their opportunist opponents in Russian social-democracy)

Plekhanov's draft

In the period before the second Congress, the debate on the coming revolution, on the perspectives and tactics of Russian Social-Democracy, centred on the party programme presented by Plekhanov. Now Plekhanov's draft was an attempt to outline the general laws of capitalism as 'The principal economic feature of present day society'. (4)

It explained the general contradictions of capitalism as an important points, and are only divided by shades about which we may and should argue, but over which it would be absurd and childish to part company'. (10)

Two points must be understood if we are to understand the development of the split in Russian social democracy from such beginnings. Lenin was not himself immediately aware of the political implications of the differences. This is not to excuse the IMG who have not understood the political implications to this day. Within six months of the conference, Lenin was arguing in 'One Step Forward, Two Steps Back' that the argument on Rules had a political and social relevance. He talks of 'the individualism of the intellectual, which already manifested itself in the controversy over Paragraph I, revealing its tendency to opportunist argument and anarchistic phrase-mongering...' (11) The 'broad party' arguments used by Martov to support his rule proposals implied a softness on the radical intelligentsia and its milieu that was in direct contradiction to Lenin's view of proletarian independence and political discipline.

The implications of this orientation within Menshevism become clearer during 1904. Now under their control Iskra took a line on the campaigns and activities of the liberals (particularly the autumn 1904 campaign of banqueting organised around the Zemstvo focal government organs), which sharpened the differences. Iskra argued a position of subordinating the workers' movement to the liberal campaigners rallying around the Zemstvos to party members they declared:

'We should be making a fundamental mistake if we tried by strong measures of intimidation to force the Zemstvos or other organs of the bourgeois opposition to give here and now, under the influence of panic, a formal promise to present our demands to the government, such a tactic would discredit the social democrats, because it would make our entire political campaign a lever for reaction.' (12)

On the other hand, Lenin and the Bolsheviks argued that clear warning of the cowardice and reactionary nature of the liberal bourgeoisie should be the major task of revolutionary social democrats. They should seek to ensure the organised political independence of the working class from the middle class campaigners - within one year, crystallising around the Zemstvo campaign, 'tactical differences became the most important' (13) Vital differences of programme and tactics were hiding behind the organisational disputes of the Third Congress they were to be brought to the surface, made clear and public in the year following.

The 1903 Split

The actual split was deepened and provoked by the Mensheviks themselves. Martov refused to serve on

the editorial board of Iskra unless three of his supporters, Axelrod, Zasulich and Potresov were co-opted. When Plekhanov yielded to Martov in the Autumn of 1903 Lenin refused to serve on Iskra any longer, leaving it in the hands of the Mensheviks. (14)

Now the IMG take this as ample evidence for their view that it was the Mensheviks who were the real splitters, arguing that Lenin's campaign for a new party congress shows his credentials as a unifier at all costs. Unfortunately for them they distort the history and nature of Lenin's campaign for a new conference and against the Mensheviks. The campaign against the Mensheviks during 1904 concentrated sharply on the political differences that emerged.

Lenin's campaign for a new conference is argued for on formal grounds by the IMG the Mensheviks had usurped power on the editorial board. In fact the Party Central Committee (with a Bolshevik majority) denounced Lenin's call and called on him to rejoin the editorial board. Rather than submit to formal discipline and thus subordinate revolutionary politics to opportunism, Lenin went ahead organising outside the Central Committee.

The object of a new conference for Lenin was simple. It was not to reaffirm organisational unity. It was to reassert revolutionary politics against the opportunism of the New Iskra. Lenin organised for it through those local party committees, which sided with the Bolsheviks, establishing in December 1904 the Bureau of Majority Committees as an alternative leadership to the conciliation and wavering Central Committee. It was from this body that the call came for a Third Congress of the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party. Before that Congress met the Bureau of Majority Committees launched their own newspaper - Vperyod, quite rightly called by Zinoviev 'the first Bolshevik newspaper'.

By early 1905 the RSDLP was publicly and openly split. The two major factions were organised separately with their own organs - in the spring of 1905, they both held Congresses claiming to be the RSDLP. That the split was political, was programmatic, is quite clear if look at the two open factions' response to the year 1905.

The Bolsheviks, the Mensheviks and 1905

The response of the two factions, their agitation and propaganda flowed from clearly distinct views of the nature of the coming revolution and of the tasks of the proletariat in it.

Trailblazing for the Menshevik Iskra board, Axelrod in late 1903 and early 1904 had begun to question the wisdom of the pro-Iskra centralising bloc at the Third Congress. By their Spring 1905 conference, again at the prompting of Axelrod, the Mensheviks were discussing the proposal to build a workers' congress, embracing the entire working class, regardless of political allegiance to speak in the name of the working class within the movement for liberal reform, the future bourgeois revolution.

Martov likewise outlined a clear position of subordination of the working class in the coming period of the working class preventing the bourgeois from compromise in their own revolution by pressure and organisation from below.

'Under the leadership of social democracy, the Russia proletariat will save the bourgeois revolution from all attempts to wreck it by timely compromises.' (15)

Martynov now a Menshevik, but an ex-economist formulated the tasks in the following way:

'We are on the eve of the political self liberation of Russian bourgeois society, on the eve of a bourgeois revolution. Anyone who takes stock of the condition involved in bringing about a revolutionary dictatorship will see that to advise Social Democracy to prepare for revolutionary dictatorship or 'even for a 'temporary

seizure of power? in that kind of revolution is to advise it to prepare for its own bankruptcy and to discredit the socialist flag in the eyes of the proletariat for a very long time... It means, moreover, betraying the true business of the revolution, for in attracting the proletariat onto the road of fantastic adventures we distract it from its real revolutionary task ... ?(16)

Martynov saw the task for socialists as being to prepare the proletariat as ?the party of extreme opposition? ... (17) not to deter the successful bourgeois revolution.

The logic is clear, if Russia is going through its prelude to bourgeois revolution its own 1847, as the Mensheviks chose to call it then the proletariat?s role was to push that revolution from below ready to organise independently against the bourgeois after their revolution.

The polemics of the Bolshevik paper **Vperyyod** in the early months of 1905 were openly directed against the Menshevik formulations. The Third Party Congress, convened by the Bolshevik supporters against the political opportunism of **Iskra** and the Mensheviks. The IMG choose to view the April 1905 London Congress as a unity congress, their discussions of it do not even examine the political content of that congress and the fight for it.

?The culmination of this attempt of the Bolsheviks to carry on the struggle against the Mensheviks within the confines of a united party was the call for the Third Party Congress?:

?He considered that a new congress, the real alternative to the policy of boycotts and splits of the Mensheviks, was the only way to safeguard the unity of the Party.? (18)

A number of points need to be made against the formalism and apoliticism of the IMG. Firstly, Lenin did not lay the same formalistic claims to his rights for the Conference as do the IMG - he was not such a pedant. In fact, constitutionally it required three quarters of local committees to call a Congress Lenin failed to secure that proportion of local committees. Secondly, Lenin considered that the Bolshevik faction represented the party... its continuity of revolutionary social democratic politics. The Bolshevik fight was waged to reaffirm those politics and to uphold the party on the basis of those politics.

Only if we grasp this can we understand why Lenin urged the Petersburg Bolsheviks to split with the Mensheviks when they held back the independent action of the working class, sought to subordinate it to the reform movement. Only if we grasp this can we understand the political content of Lenin?s letter to Bogdanov and Gusev urging them on:

?We bring the split into the open, we call the Vperyyodists to a Congress, we want to organise a Vperyyodist party.? (19)

The third congress

Only if we grasp this can we understand both the call for unity under the banner of revolutionary social democracy raised at the Third Congress, and **Vperyyod?s** characterisation of the politics of **Iskra**:

?Both the old Rabocheye Dyelo and the new **Iskra** talk absolute nonsense with an air of profundity about the special significance of tangible and evident results, and about a concrete contraposition of bourgeoisie and proletariat, thereby diverting the attention of the proletariat from the increasingly pressing task of a direct onset upon the autocracy, at the head of a popular uprising, towards playing at parliamentarianism? We have had enough of this new revision that leads to the old rubbish!.? it is time in workers? demonstrations to accentuate and advance to the foreground those features that tend to bring them closer to the real, open struggle for freedom: (20)

What was the political content of the Third Party Congress? The IMG do not even ask themselves that question so infatuated are they with ferreting for quotes by Lenin on organisational unity and loyalty.

In the Draft Resolution for Congress we do find condemnation of Menshevik indiscipline and splitting. But more important we find a characterisation of, and condemnation of, the politics of them:

?The Congress considers it of imperative necessity to combat the theoretical position of the Mensheviks, or new Iskras, who have deviated from Revolutionary Social Democracy towards opportunism? (21)

When Lenin wrote to Greulich on February 3rd 1905 saying, - hence, in actual fact, there are now two RSDLP's? (22) this was a political as well as an organisational characterisation. The programmatic and tactical positions of Bolshevism were reformulated and further developed at the Congress. The political essence of Bolshevism became clearer, sharpened by the experience of mass struggle in 1905, by the experience of cowardice and retreat by the liberal bourgeoisie and the open fight with the other opportunist, social democratic party. There were two vital programmatic and tactical developments - (1) the Revolutionary Democratic Dictatorship of the Proletariat and Peasantry (2) the question of the armed uprising.

The democratic revolution

Lenin's position on the nature of the coming revolution changed and became more precise during 1905. Firstly, Lenin clearly characterised the spineless stillborn nature of bourgeois democracy. He condemned the opportunists who looked to the liberals to give a decisive lead. In this his position flowed from a clear analysis of objective conditions in Russia.

?The objective conditions differ from those in France as night differs from day. Objectively, the historical course of events has now posed before the Russian proletariat precisely the task of carrying through the democratic bourgeois revolution (the whole content of which, for brevity's sake, we sum up in the word Republic). (23)

It fell to the working class, the most energetic revolutionary class in the Russian nation leading the peasantry in an assault on the autocracy to lead the coming democratic revolution. That the coming revolution would be bourgeois Lenin did not doubt. This was spelt out in **Vperyod** issue number one:

?It is one of our most widespread and tenacious illusions in Russia that . . . the coming revolution is not a bourgeois revolution? (24)

But the leadership of the proletariat in the coming revolution necessitated certain tactics and meant a particular programmatic content for that revolution. For Lenin the tactics involved were clear. Absolute independence of the working class for it to put itself at the head of the mass struggle:

?No! You step aside you generals and magistrates, professors and capitalists! The proletariat is setting out to build your bourgeois revolution for you, and it will build it in a way that will make it easiest to rebuild on socialist lines when the longed for hour comes.? (25)

The democratic revolution was to be led by a revolutionary alliance of the workers and peasants establishing a revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry. At the Third Congress, this position was affirmed. The programmatic content of the revolutionary dictatorship was to be the minimum programme of social democracy. Lenin argued on the eve of the Congress in his article ?Social Democracy and the provisional Revolutionary Government? that:

?we shall succeed, standing as we do on the shoulders of a number of revolutionary generations of

Europe, in realising all the democratic transformations the whole of our minimum programme, with a thoroughness never equalled before.? (26)

Lenin clearly distinguished between the leading role of working class in the coming bourgeois revolution and the actual socialist transformation of society. Only Trotsky, with the theory of Permanent Revolution, argued that the working class at the head of the revolutionary nation would not limit itself to democratic changes, but would march immediately on to commence the socialist transformation of society. At the time he accused the Bolsheviks of being far better than the Mensheviks up to the seizure of power but of seeking to hold back the working class once power was in their hands. (27)

The 'Self limitation' of the proletariat, exercising its dictatorship with the peasantry, to democratic tasks was on occasions seen by him as only momentary.

Lenin's view was contradictory. He was able to talk in September, in the Bolshevik paper, *Proletarii*, of:

'From the democratic revolution we shall at once begin to go on . . . to a socialist revolution. We are for a continuous revolution. We shall not stop halfway.' On other occasions a clearer demarcation of stages is upheld. In October in the same paper:

'It is absurd to ignore the democratic, that is, the basically bourgeois, character of the present revolution. . . absurd to confuse the tasks and conditions of a democratic and a socialist revolution which are disparate both in their character and in the social forces participating in them.'

This contradiction was not resolved in Bolshevik politics until 1917. It was only then that the Bolsheviks, after an internal struggle, adopted a position that placed the construction of socialism immediately on the agenda for the working class having seized state power.

'...under the leadership of Comrade Lenin, the Bolsheviks changed their policy line on this most important matter (not without inner struggle) in the spring of 1917, that is, before the seizure of power.' (28)

Not only did the Third Congress break from the opportunist characterisation of the coming revolution, it clarified the vital question of the seizure of power - the armed insurrection. While the Mensheviks were at sea chasing the tail of the Russian liberals the Bolshevik Congress devoted considerable time to the question of the armed seizure of power.

'Therefore, the Third Congress of the RSDLP holds that the task of organising the proletariat for direct struggle against the autocracy by means of armed uprising is one of the major and most urgent tasks of the Party at the present revolutionary moment.' (29)

It was the armed insurrection, led by the working class that was to inaugurate the revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry. The Bolsheviks had concretised their programme and tactics for the coming revolution based on an analysis of Russian society, its contradictions and the period it was going through.

The call for unity issued from the Congress was a call for all social democrats to break with the opportunists, with the liberals and subordinate themselves to the discipline of Party politics, reaffirmed and concretised by the Third Congress the first unanimously Bolshevik conference.

The Bolsheviks and unity after the third congress

Lenin and the Bolsheviks began a vigorous campaign to unify the party after the Congress. This was particularly the case from the autumn of 1905. The IMG again view this period from the vantage point of

timeless organisational principles. Lenin the unifier. The period, in fact, is much more complex and demands a real understanding of the political method of Bolshevism.

For Lenin, party unity, unity with the Mensheviks was always conditional on the revolutionary line of the Party remaining intact. There were a number of reasons why in late 1905 Lenin saw that unity was possible under the banner of revolutionary social democracy. Firstly, we have to start with Lenin's assessment of the period that Russia was passing through.

The Bolsheviks, from the Third Congress, right up until 1907 saw the period as one of mass struggle, where the armed insurrection was on the immediate agenda. In that period the opportunists and waverers would split and fragment under the pressure of mass struggle, seeing the Mensheviks as an uneven coalition of reformist and revolutionary social democrats, Lenin saw a clear imperative to win those elements who were moving back towards revolutionary position. The Mensheviks were in a state of advanced political disarray by the middle of 1905. Plekhanov maintained solidly the perspective of subordination of working class interests in the coming revolution. But this view was not shared by all Mensheviks. Trotsky is right to say that

?? the Mensheviks' view of the Russian revolution was never distinguished by great clarity.? (30)

Martynov and Martov flirted with ideas of 'revolution to the end' although never characterising the end or content.

By the autumn of 1905, the Menshevik paper, **Nachalo**, was being edited by Trotsky and Parvus, the theorists of 'Permanent Revolution' .

Viewing the Mensheviks in essence as 'centrists' Lenin believed that the pressure of events, most importantly the pressure of the masses, would propel many of them leftwards.

?'.. the tactics adopted in the period of 'whirlwind' did not further estrange the two wings of the social democratic party but brought them closer together?'. (31)

It was a unity Lenin argued based on the spontaneous instincts of the class. In a period of mass struggle, the prelude to armed insurrection, it was this mass pressure that would force the centrists to a clear choice between revolutionary and opportunist politics.

'The Menshevik comrades will . . . go through the purgatory of blocs with the bourgeois opportunists and return to Revolutionary Social Democracy?'. (32)

In this situation Lenin argued that a West European type Social Democratic party, with clearly defined right and left wings, could be built. . . under certain conditions. Firstly, the party would have to be open to spontaneously revolutionary social democratic workers:

'Therefore, our duty at the present time is to avoid intellectualist hysteria and preserve party unity, trusting to the staunchness and sound class instinct of the revolutionary proletariat?'. (33)

Organisationally the Bolsheviks were to fight to ensure that the party unity placed no restraints on the revolutionary pressure of the masses in a period of mass upheaval and armed insurrection.

At the Stockholm Unity Congress of 1906 the Mensheviks were in a majority on the Central Committee, and on the editorial board. The IMG claim Lenin called:

'for strict party discipline on the part of the Bolsheviks even though they were now in a minority?'. (34)

They quote Lenin on the decision of the conference, against the votes of the Bolsheviks to sanction electoral alliance with the Cadet party (a reforming capitalist party).

?Does the sanction by Social Democrats of blocs with the Cadets necessitate a complete severance of organisational relations, i.e. a split. We think not, and all the Bolsheviks, think the same way.? (35)

?At this conference the Bolsheviks bound themselves to abide by the decision official organisations.? But the significance of this totally evades the IMG In his report on the Unity Congress of the RSDLP workers of St. Petersburg, Lenin argues that there are clearly defined left and right wing in the party. He called on workers to join the party to support and strengthen the left ideological struggle, which will be necessary to defeat the right but this will be possible in the context of a united party.

?But in the united party, this ideological struggle must not split the organisations, must not hinder the unity of action of the proletariat. This is a new principle as yet in our party life and considerable effort will be needed to implement it properly.? (37)

Lenin and the Bolsheviks argued that unity with the Mensheviks must not be allowed to constitute a brake on the fighting spirit of the working class movement. For that reason they proposed exceptional and unprecedented organisational forms. Most importantly the line of the congress on electoral blocs with the Cadets was not to be binding on local organisations.

Such decisions should be left to the local committees where the Bolsheviks clearly expected advanced workers to reject such compromises. That is why Lenin and the Bolsheviks talked of abiding by the decisions of local committees. It was in the local committees. At that time in that specific period that the Bolsheviks expected revolutionary social democracy to be at its strongest. Lenin did say:

?A Bolshevik in Odessa must cast into the ballot box a ballot paper bearing a Cadet's name even if it sickens him.? (38)

The IMG make much of this. But he clearly understood that class conscious workers would not stomach for long the collaborationist line of the Menshevik majority. It was in this situation, where the official majority was tailing the class conscious sections of the class that Lenin advocated a reversal of the centralised organisational methods he had advocated up to 1905. Lenin's proposals are worth quoting at length.

?There remains an important, serious and extremely responsible task: really to apply the principles of democratic centralism in Party organisation to work tirelessly to make the local organisations the principle organisational units of the Party in fact, and not merely in name, and see to it that all the higher-standing bodies are elected, accountable, and subject to recall. We must work hard to build up an organisation that will include all the class conscious social-democratic workers, and will live its own independent political life. The autonomy of every party organisation, which hitherto has been largely a dead-letter, must become a reality.? (39)

"Plenty of scope"

No timeless organisational principles can be drawn from these proposals. We have to grasp their political significance. A right and left wing existed in social democracy. The right was characterised thus:

?The right wing of our party does not believe in the complete victory of the present, i.e. bourgeois democratic revolution.? (40)

The Left's perspective was based on imminent victory on preparing the class for that victory. Lenin's view was that the Congress had not closed the door to either the right or left.

?Thus we have a very wide field. The resolutions of the congress provide plenty of scope.? (41)

But one position - clause one of the Congress resolution defined the immediate line of the party:

?The Unity Congress of the Russian Social-Democratic Labour Party has recognised that the immediate task of the movement is to wrest power from the autocratic government. Whoever forgets about this immediate task, whoever attempts to push it into the background, will infringe the will of the congress; and we shall fight all who are guilty of this in the sternest fashion.? (42)

The party had embraced and accepted the essential strategic task of the particular period. That was the political basis of unity, which the IMG fail to comprehend, The organisational forms to be taken by unity were those that enabled the most effective fight for revolutionary social democracy by the class conscious vanguard. Hence decentralisation and local autonomy. Hence the secret formation of a Bolshevik organising centre in Stockholm during the Congress an organising centre that was to direct its own supporters, was to direct expropriations to raise funds for Bolshevik operations.

This period baffles most tendencies that try to explain it. For Tony Cliff it is a simple example of brilliant eclecticism, of inspired manoeuvre. For the IMG it is dissolved into a series of object lessons about the need ?for unity? - with whom and on what basis never being discussed. For the Stalinist tradition and their ?Trotskyist? descendants, the Bolshevik party was formed in 1903 and the 1905/6 unity drive is played down or simply ignored.

We can only understand it in the light of the development of the Bolshevik programme and tactics, their assessment of the tasks of the period and the direction of the mass struggle. On this political basis the unity drive was a fight for the ascendancy of revolutionary social democracy over the revolutionary masses and the waverers and centrists. Zinoviev describes the period thus:

?It was a situation where two parties were seemingly operating within the structure of one.? (43)

He was only half right. At the time the fight for the revolutionary party took the form of a battle with opportunism within a mass based social-democratic party - a party expanding rapidly under the pressure of the masses and the period of upheaval.

Unity and reaction

A period of dramatic downturn in class struggle followed the arrest of the St. Petersburg soviet in December 1905 and the defeat of the Moscow insurrection of January 1906. The Bolsheviks were in fact, slow to recognise the changing situation. A period of reaction and repression lasted until 1910, when the class struggle in Russia began to revive.

It was a period when the class struggle in Russia began to revive. It was a period when the mass membership secured by social democracy evaporated to a large degree. In March 1908 Lenin was writing:

?Wavering, disunity and disintegration - such have been the general feature of this half-year.? (44)

In mid-May 1906 the Moscow party organisation had 5,320 members, this number had dropped to 150 by the end of 1908.

In the period of mass repression of downturn in class struggle and party size, the immediate perspective of Bolshevism since 1905 - wrestling for power with the autocracy, was no longer on the agenda.

The unity of the party remained, formally, organisational. But the party split once again into open, public warring factions. Never from reading the material of the IMG would. ?one grasp the notion of a party

openly split between factions with their own organs, their own organisation and discipline.

This was actually the case for considerable periods in the history of 'united' Russian Social Democracy.

Writing in 1912 to Polish workers, Lenin explained the priorities of the period from 1908-1911:

'The task of the RSDLP was to preserve the revolutionary social-democratic party of the working class by adapting itself to the new conditions of work.' (45)

The new conditions of work opened up from 1907 new and sharp differences both between and within the Bolsheviks and Mensheviks. On June 3rd the Stolypin coup d'état dissolved the Duma, which had been wrung from the autocracy by the mass struggle of 1905. Social democratic deputies to the Duma were arrested. Anti-semitic 'Black Hundred' pogroms were unleashed.

Meeting in June 1907, the 5th Party Congress addressed itself to the new problems. The Mensheviks had generally responded to the downturn of 1906, the possibilities of circumscribed but legal work in the Duma by a turn towards 'legalism' towards Parliamentary (Duma) and legal work. Writing in 1906 Lenin publicly signalled the new swing of Menshevism to opportunism. In a pamphlet **A Broad Labour Party and a Labour Congress**, he revived Axelrod's demands for a mass workers' party open to all tendencies based on mass and passive membership. The Mensheviks focused their perspective on legal work and participation in the Duma.

When the mass struggle had been on a high level, in 1905 and 1906 the Bolsheviks were for a boycott of the Duma counterposing to it the task of organising the working class for the armed insurrection. But 'A Marxist must base his arguments on tactics on an analysis of the objective course of the revolution.' (46)

As the tide of revolution ebbed so Lenin, by the Fifth Congress, was in favour of revolutionaries participating in the Duma as a platform for the programme of revolutionary social-democracy. The Bolsheviks, with the support of the Bund, Latvian and Polish social democrats, had a tenuous majority at the congress, but Lenin voted with the Mensheviks against the majority of the Bolsheviks on the question of participation in the Duma. The question of participation in the Duma, of legal opportunities for work, opened up splits within the Menshevik bloc and the Bolshevik faction. Significant sections among the Mensheviks were to argue that the Party should concentrate itself entirely on these legal openings for work. This position that of the Liquidators, meant restricting the agitation and propaganda of the party to demands acceptable to the autocracy and their police. It meant liquidating the revolutionary programme of social democracy.

The expulsion of the Bogdanovites

A significant proportion of the Bolsheviks insisted on boycotting the Duma and other forms of legal work. Legal work with no compromise on programme, no hampering of illegal party work was the formula adopted by the Leninists. The new situation called for new tactics opened up new differences and called for new conceptions of unity. While winning a majority at the 1907 London Congress, the Bolsheviks maintained their independent organising centre. And the paper, *Proletary*, as their own public factional voice although a united party organ, **Sotsial Demokrat**, was also maintained.

The essential thrust of Bolshevism in the years 1908-1910 was to defend the principles of revolutionary social democracy against the opportunism of the ultra-left in Bolshevism, and the majority of the Mensheviks. **Proletarii** conducted a merciless constant and absolutely public struggle against the Liquidators of the right who wished to dissolve the party as a revolutionary vanguard organisation of the class and the ultra-left boycotters. The organisational form of this struggle was an open faction fight which publicly divided the party. In 1909 the Bolsheviks expelled from their ranks Bogdanov and the ultra-left

grouping. This was seen as perfectly legitimate by the Leninists. The Bolsheviks were a faction to defend the politics of revolutionary social democracy:

‘The fact is that right from the beginning we declared we are not creating a special ‘Bolshevik’ trend, always and everywhere we merely uphold the point of view of revolutionary social democracy: (47)

In such a faction there was no room for disunity on essential questions of perspective and tactics. Lenin explained the expulsion of the Bogdanovites thus:

‘We have exhausted all possibilities and all means of convincing the dissenting comrades we have worked at this for over eighteen months. However, as a faction, as an association of like-minded people in the Party, we cannot work without unity on fundamental issues. Splitting away from a faction is not the same as splitting away from the Party. Those who have split away from our faction are not all deprived of the opportunity of working in the Party. Either they will be ‘free lancers’. The members of no faction, and will have to be drawn in by the general circumstances of the Party work, or they will try to form a new faction - that is their legitimate right, if they want to uphold and develop their particular shade of views and tactics.’ (48)

The Bogdanovites did form their own faction around the paper, *Vperyod*. The fight between them and the Bolsheviks, within the fragmented RSDLP, was to be open - revolving around fundamental questions of perspectives and tactics.

The Liquidators

A far more obdurate and lasting deviation from the politics of revolutionary social democracy, from Party politics, was posed by the Liquidators, and their open factional organ. The IMG pose the problems of the fight between the liquidators and the Bolsheviks as fundamentally a split between indiscipline and unity:

‘so clearly did this split not arise from the political grounds of the incompatibility of Menshevism with the Party, but instead on the organisational basis, of the refusal of various elements to submit to the discipline of the party...’ (49)

Who were the liquidators, what did they stand for? The politics of the liquidators were the predominant politics of the journal *Golos Sotsial-Demokrata* - a paper under Menshevik tutelage. Except for a brief (by Russian Social-democratic standards... only six days) Congress in 1908, Party life primarily centred around the editorial boards of the factional papers - it was around the editorial board of *Proletarii* that Lenin built the Bolshevik organisation. The Golosists put over politics that were increasingly incompatible with revolutionary social-democracy. (50) These politics are never examined by the IMG. The ‘extreme’ liquidators opposed the entire existence of the illegal party apparatus; it was this that they wished to ‘liquidate’ all the better to carry out legal work. These political ideas, liquidating as they did the revolutionary programme of social-democracy, were argued openly in *Golos Sotsial Demokrata* which argued for the dissolution of the illegal organisation.

By 1912 the liquidators were clearly advocating the opportunist politics of the economists defeated by the Iskraités at the Third Party Congress. As the mass strike wage developed this was the position of one of their papers, *Nevsky Golos*:

‘A period of economic strikes is ahead of us. It would be an irreparable mistake to allow them to become intertwined with political actions of the workers. Such a combination would have a harmful effect on both the economic and the political struggle.’ (51)

These are the positions adopted by those that the IMG characterise as having ‘organisational’ differences

with Bolshevism. The Menshevik old guard, Martov, Dan, Axelrod, under the pressure of the period of reaction, gave protective cover, implicit and explicitly support to the liquidators. In no way did Lenin see this as a discipline problem.

?Liquidationism is a deep-seated social phenomenon, indissolubly connected with the counter-revolutionary mood of the liberal bourgeoisie, with disintegration and break up in the democratic petty-bourgeoisie: (52)

He invited the Martovites to join with the Bolsheviks in a fight with the liquidators, a fight to defend the programme of the party.

?.The Golosists (from whom the Party asks no more than an honest, straight fight, without reservation against the liquidators) by their prevaricating are doing the liquidators a service. Menshevism is put in difficulty by the history of counter-revolution: it must either fight liquidationism or become its accomplice.? (53)

Unity

Lenin was prepared to campaign for unity once again in Russian Social Democracy. But his fight for unity, against the liquidators, was conditional on the reaffirmation of the revolutionary tasks of the proletariat, as the line of the party, as the basis of the party's discipline. Against those who refused to recognise the illegal RSDLP he waged a campaign to reassert the revolutionary mission of social democracy. Certain Mensheviks, Plekhanov most notably sided with Lenin, seeing the position adopted by the liquidators as being a question of organisation and discipline. Lenin blocked with Plekhanov and these pro-party Mensheviks while totally disagreeing with their characterisation of the problem.

?Plekhanov depicts the split within the Menshevik ranks over liquidationism as a split over an organisational question. At the same time, however, he provides data which show that the matter is far from being confined to a question of organisation.? (54)

?The question here is not at all one of present day organisational problems. . . it is a question of the fundamental ideas of the social democratic programme and tactics, which are being ?liquidated? by the collective Menshevik ?work? issued under the collective Menshevik editorship of Martov, Maslov, Potresov.? (55)

Only a political fight could lay the basis for unity, could draw the lines between Party and non-Party positions. From the editorial board of the all-party organ Sotsial Demokrat, Lenin sketched out a resolution on the prerequisites for Party unity. His argument has nothing in common with the organisational, apolitical explanation advanced by the IMG.

?The editorial board of the Central Organ recognises that the consolidation of our Party and of its unity may at the present time be achieved only by the rapprochement which has already begun, between definite factions that are strong and influential in the practical workers movements, and not by moralising, whining for their abolition. Moreover, this rapprochement must take place and develop on the basis of revolutionary social democratic tactics and an organisational policy aiming at a determined struggle against liquidationism both of the ?left?, and of the ?right?, especially against the latter, since ?left? liquidationism, being already routed, is a lesser danger.? (56)

The 1910 plenum

In January 1910 the plenum of the Central Committee took place. It set itself the task of achieving party

unity. . . on certain clear political conditions. Lenin considered that the plenum did lay down a basis for Party unity and the Bolshevik faction were prepared to commit themselves to close down Proletary, if Galas Sotsial Demokrata was closed, and on the guarantee of a speedy convocation of a Party Conference. But if we look at Lenin's written report of the plenum - the last united plenum to take place we find that Lenin's argument depends on certain political positions having reaffirmed at the plenum. These positions were outlined in **Sotsial-Demokrat** in February 1910.

Firstly, Lenin stressed that the plenum had arrived at agreement that the character of the coming period could not be calculated precisely. The Party must prepare either for 'a relatively unchanging situation' or 'rapid break up'. (57) The plenum underlined clearly against the politics of the liquidationists that the 'Party's tasks must prepare the proletariat for a new, open, revolutionary struggle (without this we should close the right to belong to revolutionary social democracy.)' (58)

Against the boycotters, the plenum resolved to: 'Offer the proletariat the possibility of utilising for itself all the contradictions of the unstable regime of counter-revolution (without this our revolutionary character would become a mere phrase) (59)

To Lenin the plenum laid the basis for unity precisely because it designated the politics of the liquidators and the ultra left outside the politics of the party. It was this that 'put the work on such a footing as to make impossible any vacillation to one side for the other.' (60)

A conference could, therefore, be convened of all pro-Party organisations and groups 'actually engaged in local work.' (56) The Bolshevik approach to the unity plenum shows a ruthless subordination of unity arrangements, organisational terms to political principle and to a concrete assessment of tasks, and tactics in the coming period.

The Unity plenums called for conference never took place. In 1912 a Bolshevik dominated conference declared the Mensheviks to be outside the party. For the IMG this decision was based on organisational crimes by the Mensheviks.

'In 1912 he (Lenin) supported expelling Mensheviks from the party - but because they refused to submit to party discipline. At this point in time advocacy of the political line of Menshevism within the party was perfectly permissible provided it accepted organisation and discipline.' (62)

If we actually examine the total rupture, we find it took place on the basis of the clear political chasm that opened between the Bolsheviks and the Mensheviks, the Mensheviks reduced 'unity to naught' by openly condoning politics that had been condemned by the unity plenum of the Central Committee. In the Spring of 1910 an article by Martov (63) was turned down by the Sotsial Demokrat editorial board, and submitted instead to the party's internal bulletin. Diskussiony Listok. It argued for the equality of legal and illegal party bodies clearly against the line of the plenum of the political terms for unity accepted by the Bolshevik faction. Even at this stage we find Lenin declaring that the legalists are politically outside the party:

'They are being called back to the party on the definitely expressed condition that they break with liquidationism (i.e. legalism at all costs), and come over to the Party standpoint, to the 'party way of Life', (64). The Menshevik leaders placed themselves in the camp of the liquidators, politically outside the party, by their continuation to produce Golos Sotsial Oemokrata as an organ of pro-liquidator politics.

A small section of the Mensheviks, the party Mensheviks, sided with the Bolsheviks. The Menshevik faction in fact split during 1910. Plekhanov designated the legalists to be liquidators, for this he was attacked by the Menshevik Centre not that the Party-Mensheviks, or the IMG understood this to be the case. Trotsky and the Viennese Pravda likewise saw the conflict as organisational, explaining that it would

not intervene in the dispute;

?because organisational conflicts require organisational and not literary intervention...? (65)

Lenin roundly opposed Trotsky's non-intervention and characterisation:

?the principle is correct. But the pro-Party Mensheviks ?intervened? as any Party member should, in the appraisal of an ideological and not an organisational conflict.? (66)

And when did this argument take place? After 1914 when many Mensheviks had lined up with the autocracy and Martov and Trotsky wavered. No! It took place in 1910 and had a principled programmatic content. The Bolsheviks protected the programme and organisation of the party by refusing any compromise or leeway on the programme and tactics of the Party.

The split in 1910

From the Spring of 1910, the Bolsheviks refused to work any longer on a joint editorial board with the Liquidators of their patrons on ***Golos Sotsial Demokrata***. The Bolsheviks considered that they had compromised at the January plenum. They had accepted resolutions, which they considered not forceful enough so as to ensure that there was a clear demarcation on points of political principle. (67) The sharpest political clarification, rather than coalitional unity, had been the object of the Bolsheviks at the plenum. The continued cover to liquidationism proffered by the Mensheviks in ***Golos Sotsial Demokrata*** placed them outside the party, outside the revolutionary line affirmed at the plenum. In refusing to work any longer with the Golosites,

?We for our part declare that we are definitely not in a position to conduct the Party organ in collaboration with the Golosists, for it is impossible to carry out work exclusively by means of a mechanical majority over people with whom we have no common Party ground.? (68)

The Leninists saw their tasks as drawing together all those elements who stood against liquidationism - who saw it as outside the politics of the party - and of fighting the conciliators who refused to countenance a break. Lenin did not see the question of unity with those Mensheviks who had split with the majority of their bloc - the party Mensheviks as a purely organisational question. While they stood with the Bolsheviks in the fight against the ?legalists?, the Plekhanovites had no immediate or coherent political alternative. Lenin brought this out in a letter to Kamenev, written in April 1911:

?What is the purpose of our policy now, at this precise moment? To build the Party core not on the cheap phrases of Trotsky and co, but on genuine ideological rapprochement between the Plekhanovites and the Bolsheviks. Whether this will work out, I do not know. If it doesn't, then back to the Bolshevik Centre. If it does, it will be a substantial step forward?. (69)

The Party Mensheviks, in fact, were drawn in to cooperate on the Bolshevik based paper produced from October 1910, Rabochay Gazeta. The paper specifically broke with undertakings of the January plenum. But it was produced because neither Trotsky's Vienna-based Pravda or the ultra left Vperyod were arguing the positions and the policy of the Party.

In fact a long term rapprochement between the Party Mensheviks and the Bolsheviks proved impossible. Politically Plekhanov was to ?cross class lines? far more dramatically than many of those around Golos with his chauvinist support for the Russian war effort in 1914. However, lasting political cooperation broke down by 1912 between the Bolsheviks and the Party Mensheviks. The IMG dust-up Party Menshevism, using it as a prop to prove that only discipline and organisational questions split the party until 1914. They revive the explanations and arguments of the Party Mensheviks. They do not mention that Lenin fought against those arguments and that long-term political cooperation between the Bolshevik and the party Mensheviks proved impossible in the accelerating class struggles of 1912 to 1914.

Lenin's arguments with the 'conciliators' with those who fought against a split are an object lesson to those who see 'unity' as a question of a-political alliances and diplomacy. The Viennese based paper, Pravda, edited by Trotsky, refused to take sides in the dispute campaigning instead for the maintenance of unity in the ranks of Russian Social Democracy. We make no apologies for attacking the position put forward by Trotsky at this time. He was later to admit that it was a wavering conciliationist line (70).

Trotsky called for the 'conciliation' of 'persons, institutions and groups', ignoring, and avoiding, the political differences dividing the Russian Social Democrats. Lenin attacked this position in the Discussiony Listok article, Notes of a Publicist.

'There is another view on this unity, namely, that long ago a number of profound objective causes, independently of the particular composition of the 'given persons, groups and institutions' (submitted to the plenum and at the plenum) began to bring about and are steadily continuing to bring about in the two old and principle factions of social democracy changes that create sometimes undesired and even unperceived by some of the 'given persons, groups and institutions', ideological and organisational bases for unity. These objective conditions are rooted in the specific features of the present period of bourgeois development in Russia. (71)

Unity was possible then only on the basis of shared political line and only on the basis of 'objective conditions' breaking up the old factions (obviously Lenin here is referring to the fragmenting of the Mensheviks in 1905-1910) and thus opening up the possibility of winning party of old factions back to the revolutionary line of the party. That revolutionary line, its maintenance, defence and development, was, in fact, the basis of Bolshevism. It represented the continuity of revolutionary social democracy's fight with opportunism. In particular, objective circumstances sections of ex-opportunists could be won back to the line of the party. This conception lies at the heart of Lenin's understanding of, and tactics towards, unity in Russian social democracy.

Two factions

In November 1910, the Bolsheviks published in *Rabochaya Gazeta* 'an open letter to all pro-party social democrats'. There is a new situation in the class struggle and the party is hopelessly weak and divided. That was the starting point of the article?... we must do away with hypocrisy and frankly say what actually exists, frankly admit the conduct of party work by two factions' (72). This factional division opened up two possibilities: either the party would be built by the Bolsheviks and Party Mensheviks who represented the line of the party, or by a bloc of *Golosists Vperyodists* (ultra-left ex-Bolsheviks) and Trotsky. There was no in-between path. By November 1910 the Bolsheviks clearly saw themselves and their supporters within the RSDLP as the party, and, resolved to build independent of the conciliators, ultra left and liquidators. The choice for all party members was to stand with the Bolsheviks or to see the party disintegrate. Bolshevik groups were now urged to break all links with the ultra-left, to build the party around *Rabochaya Gazeta* to set about preparing those meetings and Conferences which are essential for restoring party and which, owing to the present state of affairs, must inevitably begin with modest, unofficial and informal attempts.' (73)

Lenin's struggle against the Liquidators was not, as the IMG suggest, over organisational matters divorced from political issues. Lenin in no way regarded the Liquidators' views as legitimate social-democratic opinions providing they accepted discipline. For him their refusal to recognise or abide by conference decisions, their refusal to work within the illegal party organisations, their advocacy of a 'broad' 'European' Labour Party was inseparably tied to their rejection of the programme and tactical positions of revolutionary social democracy. This because a legal, 'Stolypin Labour Party', one which accepted the limits of Tsarist legality would, of a necessity, be a non-revolutionary party. Lenin could thus write in an

introduction to a pamphlet by the man who was to oversee the party's work in St. Petersburg until the outbreak of war.

‘Kamenev has proved conclusively that, in point of fact the liquidationist group represents a separate party, not the RSDLP ...That ‘amorphous legally existing, federation of Potresov, Larin, Levitsky and co. (with Mr. Martov and the Golos group abroad, trailing behind) has now fully revealed itself. It is a group of literary men who have nothing in common with the RSDLP and who pursue, not a social-democratic, but a liberal labour policy. They are the leading lights of a ‘Stolypin Labour Party?. (74)

Again, writing in August 1911, Lenin could conclude, ‘Membership of the party means fighting for the party. All talk about ‘agreement? with the liquidators who are building a non-social-democratic party, is a violation of the duty deriving from party membership.?’ (15)

The sixth congress

In the autumn of 1911, Lenin stepped up the campaign against the Bolshevik conciliators and began preparations for a party conference, a decision he had no ‘legal? or ‘constitutional? right to take.

In January 1912 the ‘Sixth All-Russia Conference of the RSDLP? met in Prague. The meeting of delegates of Bolsheviks except two Plekhanovites, was denounced by all the other fractions and trends of the old party. The Conciliators, the Liquidators and the Vperyodists. Even Plekhanov refused to attend. The conference, therefore ‘had to justify its ‘usurpation? of the party. It did so in view of ‘the extremely urgent practical tasks of the working class ‘movement? the vital need to revive the illegal organisation in preparation for the revolutionary upheavals ahead.?’

The Prague conference expelled the Liquidators. Was this, as the IMG claim, an organisational split? Or was it, as the Healeyite tradition maintains, doctrinal? The folly of such a distinction should now be obvious. As early as 1908 the party conference had denounced Liquidationism as, ‘renunciation, of the programme, traditions and tactics of the party?. To so divide programme and tactics, politics and organisation tells us nothing about Lenin's method, though it may tell us a lot about those of the IMG and USFI.

As for the IMG contention that the Mensheviks had not, ‘crossed the class-line? in 1912, were still, ‘on the side of the working class? this likewise has no foundation whatsoever in Lenin's actual tactics. He clearly characterised Liquidationism (not Menshevism because this tendency had split into pro- and anti- party wings) as having, ‘nothing to do with a working class party or a working class policy? and as, ‘preaching by Liberal publicists who take a Liberals attitude to the workers?. (76) Sociologically, Lenin explained the trend as due to the defection of the intelligentsia under the blows of the reaction.

The struggle against Liquidationism was pursued relentlessly by Lenin over the succeeding two years. He continued to flay all those who sought to ‘conciliate? between the Liquidators and the Bolshevik centred party. The ‘conciliators?, including most prominently Trotsky, organised the famous ‘August Bloc? conference in Vienna in 1912 - a motley collection of Liquidators and conciliators brought together only by their hostility to Bolshevism. Other vacillators were some right-wing Bolsheviks, the **Vperyodists** and most of the non-Russian nationalities. Most conciliators were ‘politically? in agreement with Lenin, yet refused absolutely to fight Liquidationism to the finish. Thus, Lenin characterised them Trotsky in particular, as ‘phrase-mongers? and ‘windbags? etc. Their bloc against the Prague conference was politically unprincipled, hence the particular venom of Lenin's denunciation of them. As a tendency, Lenin characterised them as what he would later dub, ‘centrists?, When there is a split and in general when there is a bitter struggle between trends, it is inevitable that groups should appear which base their existence on a continuous darting from one side to the other and on petty intrigue.?’ Lenin characterised these centrists thus, ‘I condemn Liquidationism - but I don't say plainly who are the overt and consistent

Liquidators. I admit that Liquidationism endangers the very existence of the party - but I don't say plainly whether or not such and such a group ought to be in the party! (77)

Against "Unity"

The Liquidators and conciliationists rushed to the International Socialist Bureau, the highest body of the Second International. There Lenin fought a two year war against them, a battle against one form of unity, the cobbling together of opportunist (i.e. non-Marxist tendencies) with the revolutionaries to the destruction of a clear revolutionary line (programme and tactics) and a disciplined party. However, Lenin never ceased to point out that this battle, this split, was essential to the really vital unity, the unity of the class-conscious workers around this programme and party. This split and this unity he was prepared to defend against nearly all the recognised leaders of International Social-Democracy. Kautsky, and Rosa Luxemburg included, arguing tirelessly that they were wrong in imagining that all that was needed was an agreement to differ within a "united" Russian Social Democracy. Such an agreement would have been politically unprincipled and also practically disastrous. By June 1914 a powerful alliance of the various Russian fragments and the nationalities, with the sponsorship of Camille Huysmans, Kautsky and Luxemburg called a conference in Brussels to "unify" the Russians. Lenin, who refused to attend in person, gave strict instructions to the Bolshevik representative, Inessa Armand to make no concessions and agree to nothing. Unity from below with the Menshevik workers was the only unity Lenin would countenance. Lenin's verdict on the Brussels meeting was uncompromising:

"Huysmans and Vandervelde have unleashed all threats. Wretched diplomats! They thought they could scare us (or you). Of course, they have failed. Grigory and I agreed it would have been wiser not to go at all, but the Russian workers "would not have understood this, now they have a living example to teach them." (78)

The intervention of the ISB was to be cut short by the out-break of the war and the collapse of the Second International. Lenin and the Bolsheviks, by ruthless political struggles, had built a party rooted in the working class which survived the debacle as an instrument of revolution. It did this because, as Lenin wrote during the war;

"The Russian Social-Democratic Labour Party has long parted company with its opportunists." (79)

Conclusion

The history of Bolshevism can be understood neither in terms of its emergence, fully-fledged, in 1903 nor in terms of it being "merely a faction" until 1912 (the organisational split) or 1914 (the historic crossing of class lines by Menshevism). Bolshevism cannot be defined in terms of "faction" or "party?". As we have shown what was involved was a struggle to build a party around a common programme and tactics - a disciplined cadre party. From 1903 there was a split in the ranks of the Iskra grouping. The non-*Iskrists* (the Economists, the non-Russian nationalities etc) tended to gravitate towards the Martov, Potresov, Axelrod grouping, forming the heterogenous alliance that was Menshevism. Lenin and the Bolsheviks, though formally a "faction" were the only disciplined framework the "party" had. They alone steadfastly defended the programme and developed tactics consistent with it. Lenin's attitude to his faction was not that it was just a "trend within the party?". He was clear that it represented the core of the RSDLP. He made certain that the working class could always hear the clear, unfalsified voice of the party by keeping in existence a Bolshevik organ, or a "party" organ that was dominated by or for that voice.

From 1910 onwards Lenin became increasingly certain that not only would the party be built around the Bolshevik faction, a position he held from the outset, but that it would have to be built against the opportunists - the great majority of the former Menshevik faction who had become Liquidators. This was, as we have seen, not a purely organisational question. It centrally involved the very ideological nature of

the party.

In the course of this struggle Lenin was obliged to extend his attack to the conciliators, those willing to pass motions against liquidationism but not to take action against it, i.e. exclude the Liquidators from the party. He counter posed the principled unity with Plekhanov to defend the old programme and the old party to the rotten bloc around Trotsky. Plekhanov also proved to be what Lenin called a 'wobbler'. The real unity of a really revolutionary party was achieved between 1912 and 1914 when 80% of the organised Russian workers were rallied around the illegal network of the party and its legal representatives, the six Duma deputies, and the daily newspaper *Pravda*.

The Zinovievite/Healyite interpretation of Bolshevism is based on hindsight. The IMG approach, however, relies on forgetting or obscuring all the lessons Lenin learned from:

From this struggle, lessons which 1914 confirmed and generalised. To attempt to derive 'rules' or 'norms' of party life from the situation of a party that was openly split, that existed only as public factions, or temporary coalitions is to collapse Lenin back into a conciliator with Menshevism to unlearn the lessons which Trotsky learnt in 1917.

We say this not merely in the interests of abstract fidelity to the revolutionary tradition. The IMG's method may well bring Lenin into line with the 'more profound' organisational discoveries of the IMG and USFI, but it obscures the vital lessons the struggle of Bolshevism against opportunism has to reach us about how to unite a cadre internationally around a consistent programme and tactics.

These lessons are that the heart of revolutionary practice is a programme that outlines a concrete strategy for working class power - not in timeless abstraction but for a given period, comprehending its major features and distinguishing this strategy from those of the misleaders of the class. That a disciplined cadre capable of carrying out the tactics of the party is vital and that serious and persistent (uncorrected) errors of tactics lead to liquidation of the programme. The programme is thus not a set of general principles with tactics a quite separate matter, as the IMG maintain. The prerequisites for unity are a concrete programme and agreement on fundamental tactical questions. Co-operation on specific issues, on the basis of the united front principle of marching separately but striking together has to be clearly distinguished from forming coalitions of factions and calling them parties, or an International.

In the next article in this series we will deal with the experience of the process of splits and fusions, which created the Comintern as a revolutionary democratic-centralist International.

Endnotes

1. Faction and Party. R.W. 26.2.76. RW's emphasis.
2. Lenin CW Vol 18. p. 48&.
3. The closest British equivalent to Economism is SWP (IS)
4. CW 6 p. 19.
10. *ibid.* p; 2&7
11. *ibid.* p.37
12. *ibid.*
13. CW 1 p. 488
14. Hence the development of Iska into a Menshevik paper. Manovism No. 79
16. Martynov. 'Two Dictatorships'
17. *ibid.*
18. 'The Battle for Ideas?.'

19. CW8. p. 144.
20. Ibid. p. 34.
21. Ibid. p. 191.
22. Ibid. p. 130.
- 23, ibid. p. 298.
24. ibid. p. 24.
25. Vperyod No. 10 - no signature.
26. CW 8 p. 287.
27. See "Our Differences" L. Trotsky. 1905.
28. ibid.
29. Trotsky, 1905 p. 317
30. CW8 p. 373.
31. Trotsky 1905 p. 311
32. CW 10. p. 251
33. CW 11 p. 325.
34. ibid. p. 321.
35. SLNC for Ideas. p. 2
36. CW. 9. p 321
37. CW 12 p. 171.
38. CW 10 p. 380.
39. CW 11 p. 323.
40. CW 10 p. 376.
43. ibid.
44. Zinoviev, "History of the Bolshevik Party" p. 143.
45. CW 11 p. 17.
- 46 CW 18 p. 151.
47. CW 11 p. 341.
48. ibid. p. 361.
49. CW 15 p. 422.
50. Red Weekly, 26.2.76
51. Meaning as we have said the tailoring down of the demands of the programme to legally acceptable demands.
52. CW 18 p. 116.
53. CW 16 p. 100.
54. ibid.
55. ibid. p. 19.
56. Ibid.
57. Ibid. p. 77.
58. Ibid. p. 150.
59. ibid.
60. Ibid.
63. Red Weekly., 4.3.76
61. ibid.
64. "On the Right Path" (sic!).
62. Ibid.
60. ibid. p. 11)0.
65. CW 16 p. 157.

67. Ibid P. 224
68. Ibid. 11. 194.
69. CW 43. P. 243.
70. See L. Trotsky. ?Our Differences Struggle of the Left opposition
71. CW 11. p. 211.
72. ibid. 11
73. ibid. p. 344
74. CW 17. p. 225
75. ibid. p. 328
76. ibid
77. CW 18. p. 408
78. CW 43. p. 423
79. CW 21. p. 329

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