

I. The Revolutionary Party and Its Role in the Class Struggle

One of the most fundamental distinctions between authentic Marxism and its various caricatures propagated by petty-bourgeois intellectuals is whether it is primarily a *Weltanschauung*, or world view, which serves the proletariat as a “*guideline to action*” or if it is merely a sociological theory which is confined to analyze developments in the class society. As is well-known, Marx, Engels, Lenin, and Trotsky were ardent supporters of the viewpoint that Marxism is a method – the materialistic dialectic – a scientific instrument for understanding all phenomena in society as well as nature and for serving humanity by allowing it to intervene and model the world in its own interests.

Marx and Engels expressed this viewpoint in numerous writings. Probably the most famous formulation is the Marx’s 11th thesis on Feuerbach:

*“Philosophers have hitherto only interpreted the world in various ways; the point is to change it.”*³

Engels expressed this fundamental thought in the following way:

*„And Communism now no longer meant the concoction, by means of the imagination, of an ideal society as perfect as possible, but insight into the nature, the conditions and the consequent general aims of the struggle waged by the proletariat.”*⁴

From this follows that Marxism can never be a “neutral” theory standing above the classes and their parties but can only be a theory which explains the reality from a partisan point of view, i.e., from the standpoint of proletarian interests, or in a more general sense, of historical and social progress. Hence *partisanship* (“*partiinnost*” in the Bolshevik terminology) is a fundamental requirement for Marxists, as Lenin pointed out already in his early writings:

*„On the other hand, materialism includes partisanship, so to speak, and enjoins the direct and open adoption of the standpoint of a definite social group in any assessment of events.”*⁵

3 Karl Marx: Theses on Feuerbach (1845), in: MECW Vol. 5, p. 5 (Emphasis in the original). Many of the works of the Marxist classics as well as of the Communist International quoted in this document are available at the Marxist Internet Archive www.marxists.org

4 Friedrich Engels: On The History of the Communist League, in: MECW Vol. 26, p. 318

5 V. I. Lenin: The Economic Content of Narodism and the Criticism of it in Mr. Struve’s Book. (The Reflection of Marxism in Bourgeois Literature.) (1894); in: LCW Vol. 1, p. 401.

In a later article Lenin expressed this understanding trenchantly: *“Throughout the civilised world the teachings of Marx evoke the utmost hostility and hatred of all bourgeois science (both official and liberal), which regards Marxism as a kind of “pernicious sect”. And no other attitude is to be expected, for there can be no “impartial” social science in a society based on class struggle. In one way or another, all official and liberal science defends wage-slavery, whereas Marxism has declared relentless war on that slavery. To expect science to be impartial in a wage-slave society is as foolishly naïve as to expect impartiality from manufacturers on the*

This is why Marxism – invariably – is a guide to action as Engels, and later, Lenin and Trotsky stressed repeatedly. Lenin, taking up Engels statement, explained: „*Our doctrine – said Engels, referring to himself and his famous friend – is not a dogma, but a guide to action. This classical statement stresses with remarkable force and expressiveness that aspect of Marxism which is very often lost sight of. And by losing sight of it, we turn Marxism into something one-sided, distorted and lifeless; we deprive it of its life blood; we undermine its basic theoretical foundations – dialectics, the doctrine of historical development, all-embracing and full of contradictions; we undermine its connection with the definite practical tasks of the epoch, which may change with every new turn of history.*“⁶

Class Independence through Class War

The prerequisite for a correct political orientation of the proletarian liberation struggle is the most fundamental principle of the Bolshevik program which is – if one has to condense it as concisely as possible – *class independence*. Class independence of the proletariat means that it frees itself from the political, organizational and ideological fetters which chain it to the ruling class.

These comprehensive chains include the ideological manipulation by the capitalist media, schools, religious institutions, the control of the workers' movement (trade unions, reformist parties, etc.) by the labor bureaucracy, etc. Add to this what Marx called *commodity fetishism*, i.e., capitalism's inherent tendency to hide the inner mechanism of the capitalist value creation and exploitation process and to create a false, confused consciousness in the society (including the working class). Marx and Engels already observed in the *Communist Manifesto* that „*the ruling ideas of each age have ever been the ideas of its*

question of whether workers' wages ought not to be increased by decreasing the profits of capital.“ (V.I.Lenin: The Three Sources and Three Component Parts of Marxism (1913), in: LCW Vol. 19, p. 23, emphasis in the original)

Ivan K. Luppol, one of the leading Marxist philosophers in the USSR in the 1920s, affiliated with the Deborin school which was crushed by Stalin in 1930/31, formulated this thought well: „*Partisanship, taking side is necessary and unavoidable in philosophy.*“ and „*Partisanship in science obligates also to partisanship in practical activities. Theoretical partisanship provides the rationale for practical activities.*“ (Iwan K. Luppol: Die materialistische Dialektik und die Arbeiterbewegung (1928); in: Unter dem Banner des Marxismus, II. Jahrgang (1928), p. 229 respectively 231; our translation)

6 V.I.Lenin: Certain Features of the Historical Development of Marxism (1910), in: LCW Vol. 17, p. 39.

Engels original statement is from a letter he wrote in 1886, when he criticized dogmatic socialists: „*To them it is a credo, not a guide to action.*“ (Friedrich Engels: Letter to Friedrich Adolph Sorge, 29 November 1886, in: MECW Vol. 47, p. 532)

Trotsky expressed his agreement with this thinking in numerous statements such as the following: „*The revolutionary worker must, before all else, understand that Marxism, the only scientific theory of the proletarian revolution, has nothing in common with the fatalistic hope for the “final” crisis. Marxism is, in its very essence, a set of directives for revolutionary action. Marxism does not overlook will and courage, but rather aids them to find the right road.*“ (Leon Trotsky: Once Again, Whither France? Part I (1935), in: Leon Trotsky: On France, Monad Press, New Your 1979, pp. 70-71)

ruling class."⁷

From this follows that class independence can only be achieved via the relentless class struggle of the working class against the bourgeoisie and their lackeys in all spheres. This means that the proletariat has to wage its struggle in the economic sphere (for higher wages, against unemployment, against price rises, etc.), the political sphere (for democratic rights, against national oppression, etc.) as well as the theoretical-ideological sphere (against the ideas of the reformists, centrists, nationalists, Islamists, etc.). In other words, Marxism can only exist as a current if it transforms the existing objective antagonism between the classes in all spheres of social life into a subjective antagonism where the leadership of the proletariat wages war against all its enemies in all spheres. That's why Trotsky emphasized the militant character of Bolshevism in his book *The New Course* and other writings: „*Leninism is warlike from head to foot*“⁸ Similarly, Gregory Zinoviev, another Bolshevik leader who collaborated closely with Lenin during WWI, wrote in 1916: „*Socialism is not pacifism. Socialism is militant Marxism.*“⁹ In other words, a Marxism which is not militant and militaristic against the proletariats' enemies can hardly be called Marxism.¹⁰

Related to this, Marxists have to wage a constant, educational battle against the false consciousness created by commodity fetishism. This requires collective scientific work – since insight into the inner mechanism of capitalism and the conditions for its overthrow do not appear spontaneously – and systematic propaganda of the party in the ranks of the working class.¹¹

Class War as the Organized Struggle Led by the Revolutionary Party

From all this follows that, in the political sphere, Marxism can only become an animated *Weltanschauung* if it is adhered to by a collective of people who utilize it for the revolutionary liberation struggle of the working class and all oppressed. In other words, Marxism is the world view of a class and exists only as the ideology of a collective of this class. This is why the Marxist *Weltanschauung* necessitates the formation of a revolutionary party (or its pre-party organization) – not as a luxury but as a *conditio sine qua non*. As Lenin once remarked: „*For*

7 Karl Marx: Manifesto of the Communist Party (1848), in: MECW Vol. 6, p. 503

8 Leon Trotsky: *The New Course* (1923), in: *The Challenge of the Left Opposition* (1923-25), p. 99

9 Grigori Sinowjew: *Der Krieg und die Krise des Sozialismus* (1916/1924), p. 585 (Our translation. Emphasis in the original)

10 On this, see also some informative articles from bourgeois academics like: Jacob W. Kipp: Lenin and Clausewitz: The Militarization of Marxism, 1914-1921, in: *Military Affairs* Vol. 49, 1985, pp. 184-191; James Ryan: 'Revolution is War': The Development of the Thought of V. I. Lenin on Violence, 1899-1907, in: *The Slavonic and East European Review*, Vol. 89, No. 2 (April 2011), pp. 248-273

11 Marx once remarked rightly that „*all science would be superfluous if the outward appearance and the essence of things directly coincided.*“ (Karl Marx: *Capital*, Vol. III, MECW Vol. 37, p. 804)

*“revolutionary Marxism” outside the Social-Democratic Party is simply a parlour phrase of the legalminded windbag”*¹²

A revolutionary party is indispensable under all circumstance. Only such a party can lead the workers both in periods of retreat as well as progress. Only such a party can draw the lessons and generalize them to programmatic conclusions in periods of ups and downs of the class struggle. Only such a party can educate militants in the revolutionary programmatic and organizational methods and hence prepare the proletariat for the future struggles. At the beginning of building the Russian Marxist party, Lenin rightly stated:

*„It is ridiculous to plead different circumstances and a change of periods: the building of a fighting organisation and the conduct of political agitation are essential under any “drab, peaceful” circumstances, in any period, no matter how marked by a “declining revolutionary spirit”; moreover, it is precisely in such periods and under such circumstances that work of this kind is particularly necessary, since it is too late to form the organisation in times of explosion and outbursts; the party must be in a state of readiness to launch activity at a moment’s notice.”*¹³

The revolutionary party represents the highest form of class consciousness and organization of the proletariat as Lenin emphasized.¹⁴ The Bolsheviks – as the revolutionary Marxists in Russia were called – were the first to understand the type of party necessary for the victory of the proletarian revolution and developed such a *“party of the new type”* from 1903 onwards.¹⁵ Later – after the victory of the October Revolution – many revolutionaries in other countries followed the Russian example and founded Communist Parties. When they joined forces and founded the Communist International in March 1919, they generalized the Bolsheviks’ experience and assimilated its lessons. Lenin himself pointed out that Bolshevism had become an internationally applicable program: *„Bolshevism has become the worldwide theory and tactics of the international proletariat!”*¹⁶

The most fundamental of these lessons was that a revolutionary party is the

12 V.I. Lenin: Notes of a Publicist (1910), in: LCW Vol. 16, p. 237

13 V. I. Lenin: Where To Begin (1901), in: LCW Vol. 5, p. 18

14 *„The revolutionary party of the proletariat, the highest form of proletarian class organisation”* (V.I. Lenin: ‘Left-Wing’ Communism— An Infantile Disorder, in: LCW Vol. 31, p. 50)

15 Contrary to the currently fashionable myth spread by Lars Lih and other left-wing academics, Lenin and the Bolsheviks effectively saw themselves and operated as an independent revolutionary from 1903 onwards: *“As a current of political thought and as a political party, Bolshevism has existed since 1903.”* (V.I. Lenin: ‘Left-Wing’ Communism— An Infantile Disorder, in: LCW Vol. 31, p. 24). Trotsky too stressed this point too at the end of his life: *„The Bolshevik faction led an independent existence. (...) In essence, the question so far as Lenin was concerned was whether it was possible to remain with Bogdanov in one and the same organization which although called a “faction” bore all the traits of a party. (...) The Bolshevik faction-party carried out a struggle against Menshevism which at that time had already revealed itself completely as a petty-bourgeois agency of the liberal bourgeoisie.”* (Leon Trotsky: From a Scratch – To the Danger of Gangrene (1940); in: Leon Trotsky: In Defense of Marxism, New York 1990, p. 138)

16 V.I.Lenin: Report at a joint Session of the All-Russia Central Executive Committee, the Moscow Soviet, Factory Committees and Trade Unions, October 22, 1918, in: LCW 28, p. 116

most important precondition for a successful liberation struggle of the working class:

*“The Communist Party is the principal and fundamental weapon for the emancipation of the working class. From now on, every country must have not just groups or currents, but a Communist Party.”*¹⁷

*“The Communist International decisively rejects the view that the proletariat can accomplish its revolution without having an independent political party of its own. Every class struggle is a political struggle. The goal of this struggle, which is inevitably transformed into civil war, is the conquest of political power. Political power cannot be seized, organized, and operated except through a political party. (...) The same class struggle likewise demands the centralization and unified direction of the most varied forms of the proletarian movement (trade unions, co-operatives, factory councils, educational work, elections, etc.). Only a political party can be such a co-ordinating and guiding centre. The refusal to create and to strengthen such a party and to subordinate oneself to it implies the rejection of unity in the direction of the different fighting forces of the proletariat acting on the various fields of battle. The class struggle of the proletariat needs concentrated agitation which illuminates the various stages of the struggle from a single standpoint and directs the attention of the proletariat whenever the occasion demands to definite tasks common to the whole class. That cannot be done without centralized political machinery, i.e. without a political party.”*¹⁸

Leon Trotsky summarized this conclusion in 1924 in one of his fundamental documents, *The Lessons of October*, with the following trenchant words: *„Without a party, apart from a party, over the head of a party, or with a substitute for a party, the proletarian revolution cannot conquer. That is the principal lesson of the past decade.“*¹⁹

The need to build a revolutionary party always exists—irrespective of the concrete conditions in the class struggle or the actual strength of the revolutionaries. Trotsky once wrote that even if there are only three revolutionaries throughout the entire world, they have to organize and fight for the formation of a Bolshevik party:

*„Let there remain in exile not three hundred and fifty who are true to our banner, but thirty-five or even three; the banner will remain, the strategic line will remain, and the future will remain.“*²⁰

The party is the leader and strategist of the class war waged against the exploitive capitalist system. Hence, the whole work of the party or the pre-

17 Communist International: Theses on the Role of the Communist Party in the Proletarian Revolution, approved by the Second Comintern Congress (1920); in: John Riddell (Ed.): *Workers of the World and Oppressed Peoples, Unite!* (Volume 1), Proceedings and Documents of the Second Congress of the Communist International, 1920, p. 200

18 Communist International: Theses on the Role of the Communist Party in the Proletarian Revolution, pp. 129-130

19 Leon Trotsky: *The Lessons of October* (1924); in: Leon Trotsky: *The Challenge of the Left Opposition* (1923-25), Pathfinder Press, New York 1975, p. 252

20 Leon Trotsky: *How to help the Centrists?* (1929); in: *Writings 1929*, p. 398

party organization is orientated towards preparing for and organizing the class struggle. The Communist International stressed this point:

*“Our entire party work consists of practical or theoretical struggle or preparation for struggle.”*²¹

Therefore, the revolutionary organization is – as Lenin stressed in *What Is To Be Done?* and many other works – a *“combat organization”*, i.e., an organization whose members are all militants waging permanent war against the capitalist system and its lackeys at the top of the workers’ movement. In a short article in 1922, Nikolai Bukharin, one of the key Bolshevik leaders, gave an excellent description of the thoroughly fighting character of the party and the total dedication of its members. He rightly called the party *“the iron cohort of the proletarian revolution.”*²²

In his *Notebooks 1933-35*, Leon Trotsky once equated the Bolshevik party to the personified formula *„Lenin + Kamo.“*²³ Kamo was the famous Armenian leader of a Bolshevik fighting squad who organized a number of armed raids to raise funds for the party and to attack the enemy forces.²⁴ In combining Lenin and Kamo, Trotsky expressed the Bolshevik unity of theory and practice – the theoretical and propagandist fighter as well as the military fighter.

Hence, if we speak about *“militants”* and *“fighters”* we don’t use these words in a necessarily military sense. Bolsheviks are fighters against the bourgeois order and they fight against it by all means necessary and politically appropriate. While under some circumstances this will also include military means, it will first and foremost involve practical, organizational, propagandistic, and other means to win the hearts and minds of the working class.

To summarize, building the revolutionary party respectively the pre-party organization is always and under all conditions the most important task – in favorable as well as unfavorable circumstances and with numerically weak or strong forces. Such a party must be built as a *combat organization* or it is no revolutionary force.

21 Communist International: Guidelines on the Organizational Structure of Communist Parties, on the Methods and Content of their Work; Adopted at the 24th Session of the Third Congress of the Communist International, 12 July 1921, in: The Communist International 1919-1943. Documents Selected and Edited by Jane Degras, Vol. I 1919-1922, p. 260

22 See Nikolai Bucharin: Die eiserne Kohorte der Revolution (1922), reprinted in Karl-Heinz Neumann (Hrsg.), Marxismus Archiv, Bd.I, Marxismus und Politik, Frankfurt/M. 1971, pp. 319-323

23 Leon Trotsky: Notebooks 1933-35. Writings on Lenin, Dialectics and Evolutionism, New York 1986, p. 85

24 For a biographical overview of Kamo – whose real name was Ter-Petrosya – see: David Shub: Kamo – the Legendary Old Bolshevik of the Caucasus, in: Russian Review, Vol. 19, No. 3 (1960), pp. 227-247. See also: Boris Souvarine: Stalin - Anmerkungen zur Geschichte des Bolschewismus-, München Bernard & Graefe 1980, pp. 108-115.

The Proletariat as a Homogenous but Multi-Layered Class

Marxism insists that the proletariat is the class in bourgeois society which is more homogenous than other classes – the bourgeoisie or the petty-bourgeoisie, for example. The modus operandi of the latter classes is characterized by constant rivalry against their competitors. The working class, on the other hand, is united by its working and living conditions as a class which owns no means of production and is exploited by the capitalists. This forms the objective precondition for a united struggle against the exploitive capitalist class.

However, Marxism starts by recognizing that the working class is not a fully homogenous class. It is divided both socially as well as politically. Socially it is divided not only between blue-collar and white-collar workers, workers of big and small enterprises, more and less qualified workers, etc., but also – and more importantly – along specific lines of special oppression: workers in imperialist countries and workers in semi-colonial countries, female workers, nationally oppressed and migrant workers, proletarian youth, etc. Furthermore, the bourgeoisie in the imperialist countries is capable, through its exploitation of the (semi-)colonial world, to expropriate huge surplus profits with which it is able to bribe the upper strata of the proletariat – the labor aristocracy. Through such bribery, monopoly capital can integrate these most privileged sectors of the working class and transform them into supporters of bourgeois rule. While this aristocratic layer is rather small in numbers – compared with the entire proletariat – it plays a dominant role in the trade unions and reformist parties. Hence, the revolutionary party – in contrast to the reformists and most centrists – must be oriented not towards the labor aristocracy but rather towards the middle and lower strata of the proletariat. This was also the understanding of the Communist International in the times of Lenin and Trotsky:

„One of the chief causes hampering the revolutionary working-class movement in the developed capitalist countries is the fact that because of their colonial possessions and the super-profits gained by finance capital, etc., the capitalists of these countries have been able to create a relatively larger and more stable labour aristocracy, a section which comprises a small minority of the working class. This minority enjoys better terms of employment and is most-imbued with a narrow-minded craft spirit and with petty-bourgeois and imperialist prejudices. It forms the real social pillar of the Second International, of the reformists and the centrists. At present it might even be called the social mainstay of the bourgeoisie. No preparation of the proletariat for the overthrow of the bourgeoisie is possible, even in the preliminary sense, unless an immediate, systematic, extensive and open struggle is waged against this stratum, which, as experience has already fully shown, will no doubt provide the bourgeois White guards with many a recruit after the victory of the proletariat. All parties affiliated to the Third International must at all costs give effect to the slogans: “Deeper into the heart of the masses”, “Closer links with the masses” — meaning by the masses all those who toil and are exploited by capital, particularly those who are least organized and educated, who

are most oppressed and least amenable to organisation."²⁵

As we have shown in *The Great Robbery of the South* and other documents, the diversification of the world proletariat has increased tremendously since the time of Lenin and Trotsky.²⁶ Since then the working class has grown enormously in the semi-colonial countries so that today about ¾ of the international working class are living in the South. Therefore we state that the focus of the world proletariat has shifted to the workers in the semi-colonial world, China, and Russia, who are often super-exploited. In addition, important developments have taken place in the imperialist countries: the share of the wage-dependent middle class has grown substantially (while the old urban petty-bourgeoisie and the peasantry have declined substantially). Furthermore, the diversification inside the working class has increased tremendously: precarious and migrant layers of the proletariat have become important sectors while the labor aristocracy has increased its privileges. Thus, the role of the revolutionary party – nationally and internationally – to unite an increasingly diversified world proletariat and to rally, in particular, the lower and middle strata of the working class has become more important than ever.

These challenges for the revolutionary party in the old imperialist countries has become even greater since the proletariat there – particularly the native, non-migrant sectors – are strongly bound to the culture and traditions of their ruling classes. Lenin and Trotsky repeatedly pointed out these challenges:

„The proletariat is a powerful social unity which, in periods of hard revolutionary fighting for aims which are those of the whole class, comes completely into line. But in this unity we can see an extreme diversity and even a good few incompatibilities – from the illiterate shepherd to the highly skilled mechanic. Without this diversity the Communist task of unification and education would be the simplest thing in the world. One might say that the greater the history of a country, the greater is that of its working class, the richer it is in memories, traditions, habits, old groupings of forces – and the more difficult it is to form from it a revolutionary unity. Our Russian proletariat has little history or tradition behind it and this certainly facilitated its preparation for revolution in the Red October. But the same fact has since hindered its work of economic construction. Most of our workers lack the simplest habits and abilities of culture (the power to read, to write, to keep healthy, to be punctual). The European worker has had a long time in which to acquire these habits in bourgeois society; that is why the higher grades of European Labour hold so tightly to the bourgeois order, to democracy, to the capitalist free Press, and other benefits of this sort. Our backward Russian bourgeoisie has scarcely given anything of this sort to the workers; that is why

²⁵ Communist International: Theses on the Basic Tasks of the Communist International (1920). Resolution of the Second Congress of the Communist International; in: John Riddell (Ed.): *Workers of the World and Oppressed People, Unite! Proceedings and Documents of the Second Congress, 1920*, New York 1991, p. 755

²⁶ See Michael Pröbsting: *The Great Robbery of the South. Continuity and Changes in the Super-Exploitation of the Semi-Colonial World by Monopoly Capital. Consequences for the Marxist Theory of Imperialism*, Vienna 2013, pp. 69-80 and 228-240

the Russian proletariat has more easily broken with the bourgeoisie and overthrown it. But for the same reason it is forced for the most part to win and accumulate only now (i.e., on the basis of the workers' Socialist State) the simplest habits of culture."²⁷

Furthermore, these challenges are increased by the thoroughly degenerate and bourgeois character of the old reformist leaderships of the workers movements'. The revolutionary party in the South faces different but also important challenges. Here, the proletariat often has a new, raw character since many workers have recent origins in the peasantry and are thus affected with rural, patriarchal cultures.

The task of the revolutionary party is to fight against all forms of oppression and to unite the proletariat on the basis of the joint struggle for the liberation of the proletariat and all oppressed. This is only possible if the Bolshevik-Communists understand that the historical interests of the working class are not limited to the economic sphere (wages, jobs, etc.) but also include the political (democratic rights, foreign oppression, etc.) as well as ideological-cultural sphere (religion, bourgeois media, tradition, etc.). Hence, Lenin explained that the revolutionary party must act as a "*tribune of the people*":

„It cannot be too strongly maintained that this is still not Social-Democracy, that the Social-Democrat's ideal should not be the trade-union secretary, but the tribune of the people, who is able to react to every manifestation of tyranny and oppression, no matter where it appears, no matter what stratum or class of the people it affects; who is able to generalise all these manifestations and produce a single picture of police violence and capitalist exploitation; who is able to take advantage of every event, however small, in order to set forth before all his socialist convictions and his democratic demands, in order to clarify for all and everyone the world-historic significance of the struggle for the emancipation of the proletariat."²⁸

Naturally, the revolutionary working class movement will be not dominated by its upper, aristocratic sectors – as is the case with the reformist workers' movement – but rather by the most conscious and active sectors from the lower and middle proletarian strata.

In addition to these social divisions, the proletariat is also politically divided as well between workers who are revolutionaries, reformists, religious, conservatives, right-wing chauvinists, and a-political in their outlook.

From this follows that the revolutionary party can only lead the working class when it first wins over and organizes the most advanced and militant minority – the proletarian vanguard. Hence, the revolutionary party is not a mass party but a vanguard party.²⁹ The revolutionary party can only become a mass party

²⁷ Leo Trotzki: *Fragen des Alltagslebens* (1923), Berlin 1973, pp. 23-24; in English: Leon Trotsky: *Man Does Not Live by Politics Alone* (1923)

²⁸ V. I. Lenin: *What Is To Be Done?* (1902), in: LCW Vol. 5, p. 423 (Emphasis in the original)

²⁹ The Comintern summarized the role of the vanguard party in this way: "*The Communist Party should be the vanguard, the front-line troops of the proletariat, leading in all phases of its revolutionary class struggle and the subsequent transitional period toward the realization of socialism, the first stage of communist society.*" (Communist International: *Guidelines on the Organizational Structure of*

in a revolutionary situation when the working class becomes overwhelmingly radicalized.

The task of the communist pre-party organization is to build such a party of the vanguard. Its main orientation, therefore, is the vanguard sectors of the working class and the oppressed – i.e., the most conscious and militant elements.

Marxism, Fatalistic Objectivism, and Voluntary Subjectivism

Another foundation of the Marxist understanding of the vanguard party is its conception of the role of the subjective factor in history. The whole school of revisionism is based on a kind of *fatalistic objectivism*, which portrays progress in history as an irreversible process. Depending on the current mood among the petty-bourgeoisie and the labor bureaucracy, the revisionists declare “optimistically” that the working class will irreversibly march towards victory. By this they justify their refusal to energetically intervene in the class struggle and transform it to a higher level through systematic agitation for more militant forms of the struggle and organization as well as against the foot-dragging bureaucrats. The refusal of reformists to agitate for more militant forms of strikes; their opposition to the formation of mass action committees during struggles; their hysterical warnings not to take up armed struggle against fascists or the police in periods of heightened confrontation (e.g., social democratic and Stalinist parties); the centrists’ assertion that the huge social weight of the proletariat will allow it to march peacefully towards socialism and, therefore, it doesn’t need a workers’ militia and an armed insurrection to take power (as, for example, the CWI and IMT maintain); their refusal to warn the workers of the betrayal of the labor bureaucracy because “*the workers wouldn’t understand*” (as, for example, the IST, CWI, and IMT claim) – all these are variations of such revisionist fatalistic objectivism.

An “ultra-left” variation of such fatalistic objectivism is the permanent reference to the “*final crisis*” of capitalism and, as a consequence, the refusal to elaborate and implement a series of tactics to intervene in the ongoing class struggle. These revisionists are all incapable of understanding “*the importance of class-conscious revolutionary activity in history*,” which can only be organized by a revolutionary party.³⁰

Voluntary subjectivism, i.e., the pursuing of radical tactics without taking into account the concrete objective relation of forces between the classes, is the other side of the same coin. Such a policy is usually propounded by ultra-leftists (including anarchists) and can find expression in the boycotting of elections (in periods of low class struggle), refusal to work inside reformist trade unions, etc.³¹ They fail to understand Marxism as the correctly weighted combination

Communist Parties, on the Methods and Content of their Work (1921)

30 Leon Trotsky: Centrist Alchemy or Marxism? (1935); in: Writings 1934/35, pp. 262-263

31 An excellent study on Lenin and the Bolsheviks’ approach to work in bourgeois parliaments has

of science and revolutionary will.

*„The revolutionary worker must, before all else, understand that Marxism, the only scientific theory of the proletarian revolution, has nothing in common with the fatalistic hope for the “final” crisis. Marxism is, in its very essence, a set of directives for revolutionary action. Marxism does not overlook will and courage, but rather aids them to find the right road.“*³²

Related to this is Lenin’s mastering of the dialectic and its application to politics in form of a highly flexible conception of revolutionary maneuvers including abrupt turns. This *Gibkost* – as Lenin called it – is an essential characteristic for revolutionary policy because it enables the party to react quickly to important changes in the relationship of forces between the classes or in the consciousness of the working class. Trotsky pointed this out as a central strength of Bolshevism: *„Leninism is the application of this method in the conditions of an exceptional historical epoch. It is precisely this union of the peculiarities of the epoch and the method that determines that courageous, self-assured policy of brusque turns of which Lenin gave us the finest models, and which he illuminated theoretically and generalized on more than one occasion.“*³³

The Party as Vanguard

From the beginning, the conception of the vanguard party was one of the cornerstones of Bolshevism – Lenin most famously developed it in his book *What Is To Be Done?* – and was later generalized by the Communist International as an alternative to the reformist, ideologically loose “mass party” type of the Second International. These lessons were summarized at the Second Congress of the Communist International (Comintern) in 1920 in its *Theses on the Role of the Communist Party in the Proletarian Revolution*.

“The communist party is a part of the working class, the most advanced, most class-conscious, and hence most revolutionary part. By a process of natural selection the communist party is formed of the best, most class-conscious, most devoted and far-sighted workers. The communist party has no interests other than the interests of the working class as a whole. The communist party is differentiated from the working class as a whole by the fact that it has a clear view of the entire historical path of the

recently been published by August H. Nimtz in two volumes: *Lenin’s Electoral Strategy from Marx and Engels through the Revolution of 1905. The Ballot, the Streets—or Both* and *Lenin’s Electoral Strategy from 1907 to the October Revolution of 1917. The Ballot, the Streets—or Both*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York 2014.

32 Leon Trotsky: *Once Again, Whither France?* Part I (1935), in: Leon Trotsky: *On France*, Monad Press, New York 1979, pp. 70-71

33 Leon Trotsky: *The New Course* (1923), in: *The Challenge of the Left Opposition* (1923-25), p. 96. In his *Philosophical Notebooks* Lenin emphasized this side of Hegel’s dialectic: *„All-sided, universal flexibility of concepts, a flexibility reaching to the identity of opposites, — that is the essence of the matter. (...) Flexibility, applied objectively, i.e., reflecting the all-sidedness of the material process and its unity, is dialectics, is the correct reflection of the eternal development of the world.“* (V.I.Lenin: *Conspectus of Hegel’s Science of Logic* (1914); in: *LCW* Vol. 38, p. 110)

*working class in its totality and is concerned, at every bend in this road, to defend the interests not of separate groups or occupations, but of the working class in its totality. The communist party is the organizational and political lever which the most advanced section of the working class uses to direct the entire mass of the proletariat and the semi-proletariat along the right road.”*³⁴

The Comintern warned against blurring the conception of the party and class, and emphasized the need to constitute the vanguard as a separate party which fights against bourgeois and petty-bourgeois influences inside the working class and which does not adapt to consciousness of backward workers.

*„A sharp distinction must be made between the concepts of party and class. The members of the ‘Christian’ and liberal trade unions of Germany, England, and other countries are undoubtedly parts of the working class. The more or less numerous groups of workers who still follow Scheidemann, Gompers, and their like, are undoubtedly part of the working class. In certain historical circumstances it is even quite possible for the working class to include very numerous reactionary elements. It is the task of communism not to adapt itself to these backward sections of the working class but to raise the entire working class to the level of the communist vanguard. Confusion of these two concepts — party and class — can lead to the greatest mistakes and bewilderment. It is for example clear that in spite of the sentiments and prejudices of a certain section of the working class during the imperialist war, the workers’ party had at all costs to combat those sentiments and prejudices by standing for the historical interests of the proletariat which required the proletarian party to declare war on the war. Thus, on the outbreak of the imperialist war in 1914 the parties of the social-traitors in all countries, when they supported the bourgeoisie of their ‘own’ countries, always and consistently explained that they were acting in accordance with the will of the working class. But they forgot that, even if that were true, it must be the task of the proletarian party in such a state of affairs to come out against the sentiments of the majority of the workers and, in defiance of them, to represent the historical interests of the proletariat. In the same way, at the beginning of this century, the Russian Mensheviks of that time (the so-called Economists) rejected open political struggle against Tsarism on the ground that the working class as a whole had not yet reached an understanding of the political struggle. In the same way the right wing of the German Independents always insist, when acting irresolutely and inadequately, on ‘the will of the masses’, without understanding that the party is there to lead the masses and show them the way.”*³⁵

It is equally important to recognize that the vanguard, and hence the vanguard party, can only act as a vanguard if it is rooted in the masses. Without an understanding of the actual, often confused consciousness of the masses, without building strong bridgeheads among the workers and oppressed, without gaining their trust, the vanguard party cannot possibly lead the masses.

³⁴ Communist International: Theses on the Role of the Communist Party in the Proletarian Revolution, approved by the Second Comintern Congress (1920); in: The Communist International 1919-1943. Documents. Selected and edited by Jane Degras, Volume I 1919-1922, p. 128

³⁵ Communist International: Theses on the Role of the Communist Party in the Proletarian Revolution (1920), p. 129

In a note, Lenin once summarized the character of the vanguard party such:

„Party = Vanguard

(1) revolutionary part

(2) connected with the masses“³⁶

The Bolshevik conception of the party is not a purely organizational question as many post-modernist critics of Leninism claim. In fact, it is a cornerstone of the Marxist theory in the field of politics as Trotsky pointed out:

*“Whereas the theoretical structure of the political economy of Marxism rests entirely upon the conception of value as materialized labor, the revolutionary policy of Marxism rests upon the conception of the party as the vanguard of the proletariat. Whatever may be the social sources and political causes of opportunistic mistakes and deviations, they are always reduced ideologically to an erroneous understanding of the revolutionary party, of its relation to other proletarian organizations and to the class as a whole.”*³⁷

Leadership, Party, and Class

The workers’ vanguard provides leadership to the working class, just as the party provides leadership to the workers’ vanguard and the party’s leading core provides leadership to its membership.³⁸ This leading role is based on the revolutionary program, the organized roots of the party in the class, and the iron discipline and complete devotion of the party’s members to the cause.

Lenin summarized the experience of the Bolsheviks in his book ‘Left-Wing’ Communism on the role of the leadership:

„The first questions to arise are: how is the discipline of the proletariat’s revolutionary party maintained? How is it tested? How is it reinforced? First, by the class-consciousness of the proletarian vanguard and by its devotion to the revolution, by its tenacity, self-sacrifice and heroism. Second, by its ability to link up, maintain the closest contact, and — if you wish — merge, in certain measure, with the broadest masses of the working people — primarily with the proletariat, but also with the non-proletarian masses of working people. Third, by the correctness of the political leadership exercised by this vanguard, by the correctness of its political strategy and tactics, provided the broad masses have seen, from their own experience, that they are correct. Without these conditions, discipline in a revolutionary party really capable of being the party of the advanced class, whose mission it is to overthrow the bourgeoisie and transform the

36 W. I. Lenin: Materialien zum II. Kongreß der Kommunistischen International (1920); in: LW EB 1917-23, p. 193 (our translation)

37 Leon Trotsky: The Mistakes of Rightist Elements of the Communist League on the Trade Union Question. Some Preliminary Remarks (1931), (Emphasis in the original), in: Leon Trotsky: Trade Unions in the Epoch of Imperialist Decay, Pathfinder, New York 1990, pp. 130-131

38 Trotsky drew attention to this relationship in one his last articles before he was killed by a Stalinist agent in August 1940: *“The vital mainspring in this [revolutionary, Ed.] process is the party, just as the vital mainspring in the mechanism of the party is its leadership. The role and the responsibility of the leadership in a revolutionary epoch is colossal.”* (Leon Trotsky: The Class, the Party and the Leadership. Why Was the Spanish Proletariat Defeated? (Questions of Marxist Theory), in: Fourth International, Vol.1, No.7 (1940), p.193)

*whole of society, cannot be achieved. Without these conditions, all attempts to establish discipline inevitably fall flat and end up in phrase-mongering and clowning. On the other hand, these conditions cannot emerge at once. They are created only by prolonged effort and hard-won experience. Their creation is facilitated by a correct revolutionary theory, which, in its turn, is not a dogma, but assumes final shape only in close connection with the practical activity of a truly mass and truly revolutionary movement.”*³⁹

The relationship between the working class, the party and its leadership can be characterized as one of *concentric circles*. The working class rallies around the party's organization, while these organizations are led by the party's cadres and, finally, the party's central core leads the party as a whole. Nikolai Bukharin, one of the leading Bolsheviki, very well elaborated the party's understanding of this relationship in an article in 1922 in which he characterized the Bolshevik party as an *“iron cohort”* – a phrase which according to Victor Serge became popular among the Bolshevik cadre.

„For five years the Russian proletariat has maintained its power. (...) Undoubtedly the first factor which is to “blame” is the historical circumstances under which the toil-stained battalions of labour have advanced with mighty strides. (...) But there was yet another cause. The existence of an iron cohort absolutely devoted to the revolution; the existence of a party, unexampled in the whole history of great class struggles. This party had passed through the hard school of illegal action, its class will had been developed in the stress of conflict, it had won and trained its comrades in suffering and deprivation. The very hardness of the school evolved admirable workers, whose task it is to transform and conquer the world. In order to gain a clear idea of how this party has been formed, let us cast a glance at the main features of its development.

First a few words regarding the general staff. Our opponents do not deny of we have excellent leaders. (...) What is the truth in this respect? The main point is the careful choice of leaders, a choice ensuring a combination of competence, cohesion and absolute unity of will, With this watchword the leadership of the party was formed. It, this respect the party owes much to Lenin. That which narrow-minded opportunists call anti-democracy, mania for conspiracy, or personal dictatorship, in reality one of the most important principles of the organisation. The selection of a group of persons possessing absolute unity of thought, and filled with the same revolutionary flame, this was the first pre-requisite for successful action. And this pre-requisite was fulfilled by merciless combat against any deviation from orthodox Bolshevism. This utter rejection of compromise, this constant self-purging, welded the leading group so firmly together that no power on earth could divide it.

The most important elements of the party grouped themselves around these leaders. The strict discipline of Bolshevism, its iron cohesion, its uncompromising spirit, even during the period of joint work with the Mensheviks, its absolute unity of viewpoint, and its perfect centralisation—these have invariably been the characteristic features of our party. The comrades were blindly devoted to the party. “Party patriotism,” the passionate enthusiasm of struggle against all other groups, whether in workshop, public

39 V.I. Lenin: 'Left-Wing' Communism— An Infantile Disorder, in: LCW Vol. 31, pp. 24-25

meeting, or prison, converted our party into a sort of revolutionary religious order. For this reason Bolshevism aroused the abhorrence of all liberals, of all reformists, of all tolerant, vacillating, and weak-minded elements.

The party demanded real work among the masses from all its members, whatever the conditions and difficulties. It was precisely in this regard that our first differences with the Mensheviks arose. In order to carry out our purpose we formed fighting units. These were not composed of fine speakers, sympathising intellectuals, or migratory creatures here to-day and there to-morrow, but of men ready to give their all for the revolution, for the fight, and for the party; ready to face imprisonment and to fight at the barricades, to bear every deprivation and suffer constant persecution. Thus the second concentric circle was formed around our party, its fundamental proletarian working staff. But our party has never been narrowed or limited within any sectarian confines. It must be energetically emphasised that the party has never considered itself to be an aim in itself; it has invariably regarded itself as an instrument for the formation of the mind of the masses, for gathering together and leading the masses. (...)

In this way the third and the fourth ring are formed which already reach beyond the party: a ring of workers organizations which are under the influence of the party and a ring of the whole class and the masses who are led by the vanguard of the party thorough its organizations.”⁴⁰

It is indispensable that the revolutionary party or the pre-party organization observes this conception of concentric circles during its process of party building. A car can only work if the motor, the wheels, and the pedals are in the right place and correctly connected with each other. Otherwise we have only a useless wreck. Similarly, the party must carefully select its leadership; it must seriously build its party-affiliated organizations; etc. Otherwise it will become useless for the class struggle.

Naturally, such a conception is valid not only for the revolutionary party but also for the pre-party organization, albeit with certain modifications. The pre-party organization does not already lead and organize the vanguard and, hence, it cannot lead the working class. It can only provide a lead in exceptional cases and areas where it has some successes in building roots among the proletariat and the oppressed. However, the role of the leadership is no less important in the pre-party organization and similarly the role of the cadres is no less important in building party-affiliated organizations around the pre-party organization in order to organize workers and the oppressed for the revolutionary cause. Without such a leadership and party cadres, the pre-party organization will never find the correct road to become a party of the vanguard, but will rather be overpowered and disorientated by the huge obstacles along this road.

40 Nikolai Bukharin: A Great Marxian Party (1923), in: The Communist Review, May 1923, Vol. 4, No. 1. The article is an incomplete translation of Bukharin's article "The Iron Cohort" which was published in 1922. We have translated the last paragraph ourselves. (Source: Nikolai Bukharin: Die eiserne Kohorte der Revolution (1922), reprinted in Karl-Heinz Neumann (Hrsg.), Marxismus Archiv, Bd.I, Marxismus und Politik, Frankfurt/M. 1971, pp. 319-323)

The Revolutionary Party Brings Class Political Consciousness to the Proletariat

One of the most important – and disputed as well as misunderstood – elements of Lenin’s theory of the party is its role in bringing political class consciousness to the working class. In *What Is To Be Done?* Lenin explained that socialist consciousness – defined as a rounded understanding of capitalism’s mechanism of exploitation and oppression, the role of the classes and their political representatives, and the corresponding tasks of the program of proletarian revolution – cannot arise spontaneously from the struggle. Rather, it has to be discussed and developed in a scientific way by the party of revolutionary men and women and transmitted to the working class.

This idea was expressed by Lenin and his supporters in various writings:

„Class political consciousness can be brought to the workers only from without, that is, only from outside the economic struggle, from outside the sphere of relations between workers and employers. The sphere from which alone it is possible to obtain this knowledge is the sphere of relationships of all classes and strata to the state and the government, the sphere of the interrelations between all classes. For that reason, the reply to the question as to what must be done to bring political knowledge to the workers cannot be merely the answer with which, in the majority of cases, the practical workers, especially those inclined towards Economism, mostly content themselves, namely: “To go among the workers.” To bring political knowledge to the workers the Social Democrats must go among all classes of the population; they must dispatch units of their army in all directions.”⁴¹

“Social-Democracy is not confined to simple service to the working-class movement: it represents “the combination of socialism and the working-class movement” (to use Karl Kautsky’s definition which repeats the basic ideas of the Communist Manifesto); the task of Social-Democracy is to bring definite socialist ideals to the spontaneous working-class movement, to connect this movement with socialist convictions that should attain the level of contemporary science, to connect it with the regular political struggle for democracy as a means of achieving socialism—in a word, to fuse this spontaneous movement into one indestructible whole with the activity of the revolutionary party.”⁴²

„We are the party of a class, and therefore almost the entire class (and in times of war, in a period of civil war, the entire class) should act under the leadership of our Party, should adhere to our Party as closely as possible. But it would be Manilovism and “tail-ism” to think that the entire class, or almost the entire class, can ever rise, under capitalism, to the level of consciousness and activity of its vanguard, of its Social-Democratic Party. No sensible Social-Democrat has ever doubted that under capitalism even the trade union organisations (which are more primitive and more comprehensible

41 V. I. Lenin: *What Is To Be Done?* (1902), in: LCW Vol. 5, p. 422

42 V. I. Lenin: *Our Immediate Task* (1899), in: LCW Vol. 4, p. 217

*to the undeveloped sections) are incapable of embracing the entire, or almost the entire, working class. To forget the distinction between the vanguard and the whole of the masses gravitating towards it, to forget the vanguard's constant duty of raising ever wider sections to its own advanced level, means simply to deceive oneself, to shut one's eyes to the immensity of our tasks, and to narrow down these tasks."*⁴³

Contrary to the claims of various traditions like Tony Cliff's IST or the Grant/Taaffe/Woods CWI/IMT tradition, Lenin never renounced this basic insights developed in *What Is To Be Done?* Quite the contrary, he later repeated the idea that the majority of the working class cannot achieve a socialist consciousness as long as they are dominated and oppressed by the bourgeoisie.

*„On the other hand, the idea, common among the old parties and the old leaders of the Second International, that the majority of the exploited toilers can achieve complete clarity of socialist consciousness and firm socialist convictions and character under capitalist slavery, under the yoke of the bourgeoisie (which assumes an indefinite variety of forms that become more subtle and at the same time more brutal and ruthless the higher the cultural level in a given capitalist country) is also idealisation of capitalism and of bourgeois democracy, as well as deception of the workers. In fact, it is only after the vanguard of the proletariat, supported by the whole or the majority of this, the only revolutionary class, overthrows the exploiters, suppresses them, emancipates the exploited from their state of slavery and-immediately improves their conditions of life at the expense of the expropriated capitalists—it is only after this, and only in the actual process of an acute class struggle, that the masses of the toilers and exploited can be educated, trained and organised around the proletariat under whose influence and guidance, they can get rid of the selfishness, disunity, vices and weaknesses engendered by private property; only then will they be converted into a free union of free workers.“*⁴⁴

Lenin's thesis of bringing class political consciousness to the proletariat from outside has been repeatedly discredited and distorted as meaning that Lenin would attribute to the intelligentsia the role of leading the working class. This claim is justified by a quote from Lenin, as well one from Karl Kautsky, in the same book in which they pointed out that the socialist theory was developed by intellectuals coming from a bourgeois class background.⁴⁵

43 V. I. Lenin: *One Step Forward, Two Steps Back* (1904); in: LCW Vol. 7, pp. 258-259

44 V. I. Lenin: *Theses on Fundamental Tasks of The Second Congress Of The Communist International* (1920)

45 *"We have said that there could not have been Social-Democratic consciousness among the workers. It would have to be brought to them from without. The history of all countries shows that the working class, exclusively by its own effort, is able to develop only trade-union consciousness, i.e., the conviction that it is necessary to combine in unions, fight the employers, and strive to compel the government to pass necessary labour legislation, etc.* The theory of socialism, however, grew out of the philosophic, historical, and economic theories elaborated by educated representatives of the propertied classes, by intellectuals. By their social status the founders of modern scientific socialism, Marx and Engels, themselves belonged to the bourgeois intelligentsia. In the very same way, in Russia, the theoretical doctrine of Social-Democracy arose altogether independently of the spontaneous growth of the working-class movement; it arose as a natural and inevitable outcome of the development of thought among the revolutionary socialist intelligentsia. In the period under*

However, Lenin wrote in the very same book and on the same page – commenting on Kautsky – that workers also take part in elaborating the socialist theory:

*“This does not mean, of course, that the workers have no part in creating such an ideology. They take part, however, not as workers, but as socialist theoreticians, as Proudhons and Weitlings; in other words, they take part only when they are able, and to the extent that they are able, more or less, to acquire the knowledge of their age and develop that knowledge. But in order that working men may succeed in this more often, every effort must be made to raise the level of the consciousness of the workers in general;”*⁴⁶

We shall add that this is even truer today when – compared with Lenin’s and Kautsky’s time a century ago – the level of education of the working class has risen tremendously and hence workers are much better situated to play a central role in writing articles and developing theoretical positions. In addition, it should also be noted that, at the same time, sectors of the intelligentsia have become proletarianized.

In addition to this, Lenin and the Bolsheviks fought strongly against the view that intellectuals should play a dominant role in the revolutionary party. Quite the contrary, they stressed again and again that intellectuals *must not dominate*

discussion, the middle nineties, this doctrine not only represented the completely formulated programme of the Emancipation of Labour group, but had already won over to its side the majority of the revolutionary youth in Russia.” (V. I. Lenin: What Is To Be Done? (1902), in: LCW Vol. 5, pp. 375-376)

“Many of our revisionist critics believe that Marx asserted that economic development and the class struggle create, not only the conditions for socialist production, but also, and directly, the consciousness of its necessity. And these critics assert that England, the country most highly developed capitalistically, is more remote than any other from this consciousness. Judging by the draft, one might assume that this allegedly orthodox- Marxist view, which is thus refuted, was shared by the committee that drafted the Austrian programme. In the draft programme it is stated: ‘The more capitalist development increases the numbers of the proletariat, the more the proletariat is compelled and becomes fit to fight against capitalism. The proletariat becomes conscious’ of the possibility and of the necessity for socialism.’ In this connection socialist consciousness appears to be a necessary and direct result of the proletarian class struggle. But this is absolutely untrue. Of course, socialism, as a doctrine, has its roots in modern economic relationships just as the class struggle of the proletariat has, and, like the latter, emerges from the struggle against the capitalist-created poverty and misery of the masses. But socialism and the class struggle arise side by side and not one out of the other; each arises under different conditions. Modern socialist consciousness can arise only on the basis of profound scientific knowledge. Indeed, modern economic science is as much a condition for socialist production as, say, modern technology, and the proletariat can create neither the one nor the other, no matter how much it may desire to do so; both arise out of the modern social process. The vehicle of science is not the proletariat, but the bourgeois intelligentsia: it was in the minds of individual members of this stratum that modern socialism originated, and it was they who communicated it to the more intellectually developed proletarians who, in their turn, introduce it into the proletarian class struggle where conditions allow that to be done. Thus, socialist consciousness is something introduced into the proletarian class struggle from without [von Aussen Hineingetragenes] and not something that arose within it spontaneously [urwüchsig]. Accordingly, the old Hainfeld programme quite rightly stated that the task of Social-Democracy is to imbue the proletariat [literally: saturate the proletariat] with the consciousness of its position and the consciousness of its task. There would be no need for this if consciousness arose of itself from the class struggle. The new draft copied this proposition from the old programme, and attached it to the proposition mentioned above. But this completely broke the line of thought....” (Karl Kautsky, quoted in V. I. Lenin: What Is To Be Done? (1902), in: LCW Vol. 5, pp. 383-384)

46 V. I. Lenin: What Is To Be Done? (1902), in: LCW Vol. 5, p. 384

a Marxist organization and only those should be admitted to membership who break with the (petty-)bourgeois class and habits and subordinate themselves to the proletarian cause. This was already one of the main differences between the Bolsheviks and the Mensheviks at the time of the split in 1903/04.

*„Under the name of the Party “minority” there have united a variety of elements who are linked by a conscious or unconscious desire to preserve circle relationships, pre-party forms of organisation. (...) Lastly, the opposition cadres have in general been drawn chiefly from those elements in our Party which consist primarily of intellectuals. The intelligentsia is always more individualistic than the proletariat, owing to its very conditions of life and work, which do not directly involve a large-scale combination of efforts, do not directly educate it through organised collective labour. The intellectual elements therefore find it harder to adapt themselves to the discipline of Party life, and those of them who are not equal to it naturally raise the standard of revolt against the necessary organisational limitations, and elevate their instinctive anarchism to a principle of struggle, misnaming it a desire for “autonomy”, a demand for “tolerance”, etc. The section of the Party abroad, where the circles are comparatively long-lived, where theoreticians of various shades are gathered, and where the intelligentsia decidedly predominates, was bound to be most inclined to the views of the “minority”, which there as a result soon proved to be the actual majority. Russia, on the other hand, where the voice of the organised proletarians is louder, where the Party intelligentsia too, being in closer and more direct contact with them, is trained in a more proletarian spirit, and where the exigencies of the immediate struggle make the need for organised unity more strongly felt, came out in vigorous opposition to the circle spirit and the disruptive anarchistic tendencies. It gave quite clear expression to this attitude in numerous statements by committees and other Party organisations.“*⁴⁷

47 V. I. Lenin: To The Party 1904); in: LCW Vol. 7, pp. 453-454. Lenin also repeated this idea many times in this book which gave a balance sheet of the reason for the split between the Bolsheviks and the Mensheviks.

„In a word, Comrade Martov’s formula will either remain a dead letter, an empty phrase, or it will be of benefit mainly and almost exclusively to “intellectuals who are thoroughly imbued with bourgeois individualism” and do not wish to join an organisation. In words, Martov’s formulation defends the interests of the broad strata of the proletariat, but in fact it serves the interests of the bourgeois intellectuals, who fight shy of proletarian discipline and organisation. No one will venture to deny that the intelligentsia, as a special stratum of modern capitalist society, is characterised, by and large, precisely by individualism and incapacity for discipline and organisation (cf., for example, Kautsky’s well-known articles on the intelligentsia). This, incidentally is a feature which unfavourably distinguishes this social stratum from the proletariat; it is one of the reasons for the flabbiness and instability of the intellectual, which the proletariat so often feels; and this trait of the intelligentsia is intimately bound up with its customary mode of life, its mode of earning a livelihood, which in a great many respects approximates to the petty-bourgeois mode of existence (working in isolation or in very small groups, etc.). Nor is it fortuitous, lastly, that the defenders of Comrade Martov’s formulation were the ones who had to cite the example of professors and high-school students! It was not champions of a broad proletarian struggle who, in the controversy over Paragraph 1, took the field against champions of a radically conspiratorial organisation, as Comrades Martynov and Axelrod thought, but the supporters of bourgeois-intellectual individualism who clashed with the supporters of proletarian organisation and discipline.“

(V. I. Lenin: One Step Forward, Two Steps Back (1904); in: LCW Vol. 7, p. 267)

„For the factory, which seems only a bogey to some, represents that highest form of capitalist co-operation which has united and disciplined the proletariat, taught it to organise, and placed it at the head of all the

Thus while a revolutionary party of a Bolshevik pre-party organization welcomes wholeheartedly all sincere intellectuals who break with their non-proletarian class background and willingly serve the cause of the working class' liberation struggle, it should not become dominated by petty-bourgeois intellectuals.

On the Bolsheviks, Their Membership, and Their Leadership

The Bolsheviks did not only proclaim such a conception of the revolutionary party but also undertook strong and successful efforts to implement it. Out of a population of 126 million (1897) only about 10 million were industrial workers and another 20 million were poor peasants who were forced to look for an additional (often proletarian) job.⁴⁸ If one takes into account the tremendous repression of the Tsarist regime, the terrible working and living conditions which hardly left time for political activity, and the widespread backward popular consciousness at the beginning of the 20th century, it is easy to imagine the huge challenges which Marxists faced in building a revolutionary workers' party.

Nevertheless, the Bolsheviks were clearly more successful than the centrist Mensheviks in recruiting workers to their organization. In a sociological study about Russian Marxism between 1898 and 1907, the historian David Lane documented that the Bolsheviks were already an organization dominated by the working class in 1905. Out of 8,400 members 61.9% were workers (peasants:

other sections of the toiling and exploited population. And Marxism, the ideology of the proletariat trained by capitalism, has been and is teaching unstable intellectuals to distinguish between the factory as a means of exploitation (discipline based on fear of starvation) and the factory as a means of organisation (discipline based on collective work united by the conditions of a technically highly developed form of production). The discipline and organisation which come so hard to the bourgeois intellectual are very easily acquired by the proletariat just because of this factory "schooling". Mortal fear of this school and utter failure to understand its importance as an organising factor are characteristic of the ways of thinking which reflect the petty-bourgeois mode of life and which give rise to the species of anarchism that the German Social-Democrats call Edelanarchismus, that is, the anarchism of the "noble" gentleman, or aristocratic anarchism, as I would call it." (V. I. Lenin: One Step Forward, Two Steps Back (1904); in: LCW Vol. 7, p. 389)

„This is, where the proletarian who has been through the school of the "factory" can and should teach a lesson to anarchistic individualism. The class-conscious worker has long since emerged from the state of infancy when he used to fight shy of the intellectual as such. The class-conscious worker appreciates the richer store of knowledge and the wider political outlook which he finds among Social-Democratic intellectuals. But as we proceed with the building of a real party, the class-conscious worker must learn to distinguish the mentality of the soldier of the proletarian army from the mentality of the bourgeois intellectual who parades anarchistic phrases; he must learn to insist that the duties of a Party member be fulfilled not only by the rank and file, but by the "people at the top" as well; he must learn to treat tail-ism in matters of organisation with the same contempt as he used, in days gone by, to treat tail-ism in matters of tactics! " (V. I. Lenin: One Step Forward, Two Steps Back (1904); in: LCW Vol. 7, pp. 392-393)

⁴⁸ These are the figures given by the outstanding Russian Marxist historian of the 1920s M.N. Pokrovsky and which have been broadly confirmed by other historic-economic studies on Tsarist Russia. (See M. Pokrovski: Russische Geschichte, Berlin 1930, p. 244)

4.8%, white collar: 27.4%, others: 5.9%).⁴⁹

He also shows that the Bolsheviks had substantially more workers in their ranks than their social democratic competitors. Thus, for example the Bolsheviks had among their rank and file members more than five times as many activists with primary education as the Mensheviks.⁵⁰ Lane concludes from this: *"It seems probable that the Mensheviks had comparatively more 'petty-bourgeois' members, and fewer working-class supporters at the lower levels. (...) If judged by the bottom levels of the party and particularly by its popular support, it may be said that the Bolsheviks were a 'workers' party'. Middle strata or the 'petty-bourgeoisie' were important as supporters of the Mensheviks."*⁵¹

*"Bolshevism at the grass roots was supported mainly by the urban proletariat, including those uprooted and new to the town. The Mensheviks had supporters across the class lines. On the whole, the Mensheviks recruited more from among the better-paid and more skilled workers and less from among the poorer peasant urban newcomers."*⁵²

While the proportion of workers among the leadership was less than among the general members, the Bolsheviks' leadership in 1917-23 had 43% workers, 19% full-time professional revolutionaries, and another 38% from the middle class.⁵³ Another study puts the workers' share at 60%.⁵⁴ In addition, the Bolshevik cadres coming from the middle class were all battle-hardened militants with years of underground work, prison, and exile behind them. In short, the Bolshevik party was the party of the militant workers and those intellectuals who proved capable of breaking with their class background and serve the proletarian liberation struggle.

We shall add to this that the Bolsheviks also succeeded in translating their consistent struggle for the liberation of the oppressed nations into a thoroughly multi-national composition of its membership and leadership. As a side-note, we remark that this was quite an achievement since the proletariat was largely concentrated in the Russian-speaking areas of the empire (except areas like Poland which however had its own Marxist party). The leadership of the Bolshevik party had a share of between 30- 42% Russians (which constituted 44% in the Tsarist Empire), i.e., they had in their leadership between 56-70% non-Russians.⁵⁵ This is another proof that the Bolshevik were a tribune of the oppressed people.

49 David Lane: *The Roots of Russian Communism*, Martin Robertson 1969, p. 26. Another study, analyzing the Party's 24,000 members in 1917, gave similar figures: 60.2% of the members were of working-class origin, 7.5% peasant, and 32.2% white collar or "other". (See T.H. Rigby: *Communist Party Membership in the USSR, 1917-1967*, Princeton University Press, Princeton 1968, pp. 85-87)

50 David Lane: *The Roots of Russian Communism*, p. 47

51 David Lane: *The Roots of Russian Communism*, p. 50

52 David Lane: *The Roots of Russian Communism*, p. 213

53 Liliana Riga: *The Bolsheviks and the Russian Empire*, University of Edinburgh, Cambridge 2012, p 279

54 Evan Mawdsley: *Makers of the Soviet Union Revisited: The Bolshevik Central Committee Elite in the Revolutionary Period*, in: *Revolutionary Russia Vol. 8* (1995), No. 2, pp. 195 – 211

55 Liliana Riga: *The Bolsheviks and the Russian Empire*, p 16

The Bolsheviks achieved all this despite the fact that the working class constituted only a small sector of the total population and were living under working and educational conditions which made regular participation in revolutionary activities extremely difficult and dangerous.

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Founder of the Communist Movement:
Karl Marx (left) and Friedrich Engels (right)



Workers during the Uprising of the Paris Commune 1871



Leaders of the October Revolution 1917 and Marxist Theoreticians:
V.I. Lenin (left) and Leon Trotsky (right)



Armoured Train "Trotsky" during the Russian Civil War



Revolutionary Women of the First Hour: Jenny Marx (von Westphalen, top left) and Eleanor Marx (top right), Jenny Marx (below left) and Laura Marx (below right). Jenny von Westphalen was Marx's wife and the other three women were their daughters. They were all active socialists and played a key role in spreading communist ideas in the workers movement in Britain and France.



Bolshevik Women who played a key role in leading the Revolutionary Party and the Russian Revolution: Nadeshda Krupskaja (top left), Inessa Armand (top right), Alexandra Kollontai (below left) and Larissa Reissner (below right).