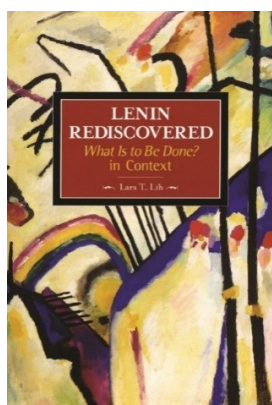
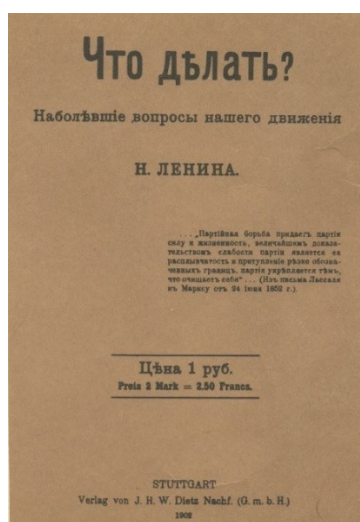


Lenin

What is to be Done?

Burning Questions of Our Movement (1902)

Education guide (second edition)



Aims

This guide is designed to help understand the central ideas in Lenin's book, *What is to be done?* (WITBD) and how they relate to the politics of the Alliance for Workers' Liberty (AWL). By the end of this course, comrades should better understand:

- how revolutionary parties have been built
- the importance of the ideological front of the class struggle
- why socialist consciousness does not grow automatically out of workplace struggles
- the distinction between propaganda and agitation
- what a "professional revolutionary" is
- the necessity of revolutionary socialist publications
- the place of *What is to be Done?* in Lenin's works.

Methods

- Seven sessions, lasting no more than two hours each
- Before each session, do the required reading. Annotate your copy of WITBD
- During each session, listen to the introduction and presentation. Make notes
- Discuss the questions provided. Ask your own questions and contribute to the discussion
- Read further to extend your knowledge and understanding
- Teach this course and other courses.

Sessions

Session 1: Models and adversaries

Reading: Extracts – German SPD model, Bernstein's revisionism and Russian socialism before WITBD

Session 2: Revolutionary theory and the class struggle

Reading: Preface and Chapter I

Session 3: Spontaneity and consciousness

Reading: Chapter II

Session 4: Propaganda and agitation

Reading: Chapter III

Session 5: Professional revolutionaries

Reading: Chapter IV

Session 6: Newspapers and party building

Reading: Chapter V and Conclusion.

Session 7: What was done with WITBD

Reading: Extracts – Lenin, Martynov, Plekhanov, Trotsky, Zinoviev, Gramsci, Shachtman, Stalin, Wolfe, Draper

Session 1: Models and adversaries

Key ideas

- German SPD model
- Revisionism
- Russian social democracy c1900
- Economism

Questions

- 1) Why was the German SPD a model for international socialists in the early 20th century?
- 2) Why was Bernstein a threat?
- 3) Who are Lenin's allies and opponents in WITBD?
- 4) Why do these debates still matter today?

Key passages

"Considering, that against this collective power of the propertied classes the working class cannot act, as a class, except by constituting itself into a political party, distinct from, and opposed to, all old parties formed by the propertied classes; That this constitution of the working class into a political party is indispensable in order to insure the triumph of the social revolution and its ultimate end – the abolition of classes..."

Marx and Engels (23 September 1871) IWMA London Conference. MECW 22: 427

"The task of Social Democracy is to make the class struggle of the proletariat aware of its aim and capable of choosing the best means to attain this aim."

Kautsky (1892) *Das Erfurter Programm*.

"I frankly admit that I have extraordinarily little feeling for, or interest in, what is usually termed 'the final goal of socialism'. This goal, whatever it may be, is nothing to me, the movement is everything."

Bernstein (19 January 1898) *The Struggle of Social Democracy and the Social Revolution*

"If Social Democracy could find the courage to emancipate itself from phraseology that is in fact, obsolete and to make up its mind to appear what it is in reality today: a democratic socialist party of reform."

Bernstein (1899) *The Preconditions of Socialism*, 1993: 186

"He who pronounces himself in favour of the method of legal reforms in place of and as opposed to the conquest of political power and social revolution does not really choose a more tranquil, surer and slower road to the same goal. He chooses a different goal."

Luxemburg, (1899) *Social Reform or Revolution*. Howard 1971: 115-16

"Social-Democracy in Russia was founded by the Emancipation of Labour group, which was formed abroad in 1883 [by Georgi Plekhanov, Vera Zasluch, Pavel Axelrod...]"

Lenin (22 April 1914) *From the History of the Workers' Press in Russia*. LCW 20: 247-250

Session 2: Revolutionary theory and the class struggle

Key ideas

- Criticism
- Opportunism
- Revolutionary theory
- Ideological front of the class struggle

Questions

- 1) Why does the working class movement need revolutionary theory?
- 2) Why does Lenin elevate the ideological front of the class struggle?
- 3) Why does Lenin seem so hostile towards 'criticism'?
- 4) What does Lenin's metaphor of the swamp signify about his opponents?

Key passages

"Without revolutionary theory there can be no revolutionary movement."
Lenin (1902) *What is to be Done?* LCW 5: 369

"Let us quote what Engels said in 1874 concerning the significance of theory in the Social-Democratic movement. Engels recognises, not two forms of the great struggle of Social Democracy (political and economic), as is the fashion among us, but three, placing the theoretical struggle on a par with the first two."

Lenin (1902) *What is to be Done?* LCW 5: 370

"For the first time since a workers' movement has existed, the struggle is being conducted pursuant to its three sides – the theoretical, the political, and the practical-economic (resistance to the capitalists) – in harmony and in its interconnections, and in a systematic way."

Engels (1874) Addendum to *The Peasant War in Germany* MECW 23, 1988: 630-31

"He who does not deliberately close his eyes cannot fail to see that the new "critical" trend in socialism is nothing more nor less than a new variety of opportunism. And if we judge people, not by the glittering uniforms they don or by the high-sounding appellations they give themselves, but by their actions and by what they actually advocate, it will be clear that "freedom of criticism" means' freedom for an opportunist trend in Social-Democracy, freedom to convert Social-Democracy into a democratic party of reform, freedom to introduce bourgeois ideas and bourgeois elements into socialism."

Lenin (1902) *What is to be Done?* LCW 5: 354-55

"We are marching in a compact group along a precipitous and difficult path, firmly holding each other by the hand. We are surrounded on all sides by enemies, and we have to advance almost constantly under their fire. We have combined, by a freely adopted decision, for the purpose of fighting the enemy, and not of retreating into the neighbouring **marsh [swamp]**, the inhabitants of which, from the very outset, have reproached us with having separated ourselves into an exclusive group and with having chosen the path of struggle instead of the path of conciliation."

Lenin (1902) *What is to be Done?* LCW 5: 355

Session 3: Spontaneity and consciousness

Key ideas

- socialist consciousness
- trade union consciousness
- spontaneity
- bourgeois ideology
- tailism

Questions

- 1) What does Lenin mean by the expression, socialist consciousness comes "from without"?
- 2) How does bourgeois ideology act on the labour movement?
- 3) Why is Lenin concerned about socialists bowing to spontaneity?
- 4) What does Lenin mean by tailism?

Key passages

"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."

Lenin (1902) *What is to be Done?* LCW 5: 375

"[Note] 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; it is necessary that the workers do not confine themselves to the artificially restricted limits of "literature for workers" but that they learn to an increasing degree to master general literature. It would be even truer to say "are not confined", instead of "do not confine themselves", because the workers themselves wish to read and do read all that is written for the intelligentsia, and only a few (bad) intellectuals believe that it is enough "for workers" to be told a few things about factory conditions and to have repeated to them over and over again what has long been known."

Lenin (1902) *What is to be Done?* LCW 5: 384

"Hence, our task... is to combat spontaneity, to divert the working-class movement from this spontaneous, trade-unionist striving to come under the wing of the bourgeoisie..."

Lenin (1902) *What is to be Done?* LCW 5: 384-85

"Since there can be no talk of an independent ideology formulated by the working masses themselves in the process of their movement, the only choice is – either bourgeois or socialist ideology."

Lenin (1902) *What is to be Done?* LCW 5: 384

"Surely it is not its function [social democracy] to drag at the tail of the movement... it would be more correct to describe its tendency [*Rabocheye Dyelo*] not as opportunism, but as tail-ism."

Lenin (1902) *What is to be Done?* LCW 5: 395-96

Session 4: Propaganda and agitation

Key ideas

- propaganda
- agitation
- tribunes
- support every revolutionary movement

Questions

- 1) How does Lenin distinguish between propaganda and agitation?
- 2) Why does Lenin believe socialists should be tribunes of the people, championing the fight against all exploitation and oppression?
- 3) How does Lenin explain the relationship between economic struggles and political struggle?

Key passages

“Hitherto we thought (with Plekhanov, and with all the leaders of the international working class movement) that the **propagandist**, dealing with, say, the question of unemployment, must explain the capitalistic nature of crises, the cause of their inevitability in modern society, the necessity for the transformation of this society into a socialist society, etc. In a word, he must present “many ideas”, so many, indeed, that they will be understood as an integral whole only by a (comparatively) few persons. The **agitator**, however, speaking on the same subject, will take as an illustration a fact that is most glaring and most widely known to his audience, say, the death of an unemployed worker’s family from starvation, the growing impoverishment, etc., and, utilising this fact, known to all, will direct his efforts to presenting a single idea to the “masses”, e.g., the senselessness of the contradiction between the increase of wealth and the increase of poverty; he will strive to rouse discontent and indignation among the masses against this crying injustice, leaving a more complete explanation of this contradiction to the propagandist. Consequently, the propagandist operates chiefly by means of the printed word; the agitator by means of the spoken word. The propagandist requires qualities different from those of the agitator. Kautsky and Lafargue, for example, we term propagandists; Bebel and Guesde we term agitators.”

Lenin (1902) *What is to be Done?* LCW 5: 409-10

“Working-class consciousness cannot be genuine political consciousness unless the workers are trained to respond to all cases of tyranny, oppression, violence, and abuse, no matter what class is affected — unless they are trained, moreover, to respond from a Social-Democratic point of view and no other.”

Lenin (1902) *What is to be Done?* LCW 5: 412

“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. Compare, for example, a leader like Robert Knight (the well-known secretary and leader of the Boilermakers’ Society, one of the most powerful trade unions in England), with Wilhelm Liebknecht..

“He is no Social-Democrat who forgets in practice his obligation to be ahead of all in raising, accentuating, and solving every general democratic question.”

Lenin (1902) *What is to be Done?* LCW 5: 423, 425

Session 5: Professional revolutionaries

Key ideas

- amateurism
- professional revolutionary
- demagogues
- conspiracy

Questions

- 1) What failures does Lenin identify among the revolutionary socialists?
- 2) What does Lenin mean by a “professional revolutionary”?
- 3) Did Lenin believe the socialist movement should be led by intellectuals?
- 4) Was Lenin in favour of conspiracy?
- 5) How does underground work limit democratic procedures?

Key passages

“Our worst sin with regard to organisation consists in the fact that by our primitiveness we have lowered the prestige of revolutionaries in Russia. A person who is flabby and shaky on questions of theory, who has a narrow outlook, who pleads the spontaneity of the masses as an excuse for his own sluggishness, who resembles a trade union secretary more than a spokesman of the people, who is unable to conceive of a broad and bold plan that would command the respect even of opponents, and who is inexperienced and clumsy in his own professional art — the art of combating the political police — such a man is not a revolutionary, but a wretched amateur!”

Lenin (1902) *What is to be Done?* LCW 5: 466

“Such workers, average people of the masses, are capable of displaying enormous energy and self-sacrifice in strikes and in street, battles with the police and the troops, and are capable (in fact, are alone capable) of determining the outcome of our entire movement — but the struggle against the political police requires special qualities; it requires **professional revolutionaries**. And we must see to it, not only that the masses “advance” concrete demands, but that the masses of the workers “advance” an increasing number of such professional revolutionaries. Thus, we have reached the question of the relation between an organisation of professional revolutionaries and the labour movement pure and simple.”

Lenin (1902) *What is to be Done?* LCW 5: 450

“demagogues are the worst enemies of the working class.”

Lenin (1902) *What is to be Done?* LCW 5: 463

“A worker-agitator who is at all gifted and “promising” must not be left to work eleven hours a day in a factory.”

Lenin (1902) *What is to be Done?* LCW 5: 472

“It would be extremely naive indeed, therefore, to fear the charge that we Social-Democrats desire to create a conspiratorial organisation.”

Lenin (1902) *What is to be Done?* LCW 5: 476

Session 6: Newspapers and party building

Key ideas

- Revolutionary newspaper
- Collective propagandist, agitator and organiser
- Worker intellectuals

Questions

- 1) Why does Lenin put such emphasis on the role of a newspaper?
- 2) What functions does the revolutionary socialist paper have?
- 3) What does Lenin mean by "enlightened workers"?
- 4) At what stage was the Russian socialist movement when Lenin wrote WITBD?

Key passages

"But the whole point is that there is no other way of training strong political organisations except through the medium of an all-Russia newspaper."

Lenin (1902) *What is to be Done?* LCW 5: 499

"Another comparison: 'A newspaper is not only a collective propagandist and a collective agitator, it is also a collective organiser. In this respect it may be compared to the scaffolding erected round a building under construction; it marks the contours of the structure and facilitates communication between the builders, permitting them to distribute the work and to view the common results achieved by their organised labour.' Does this sound anything like the attempt of an armchair author to exaggerate his role? The scaffolding is not required at all for the dwelling; it is made of cheaper material, is put up only temporarily, and is scrapped for firewood as soon as the shell of the structure is completed. As for the building of revolutionary organisations, experience shows that sometimes they may be built without scaffolding, as the seventies showed. But at the present time we cannot even imagine the possibility of erecting the building we require without scaffolding."

Lenin (1902) *What is to be Done?* LCW 5: 502-03

"The mere function of distributing a newspaper would help to establish actual contacts (if it is a newspaper worthy of the name, i.e., if it is issued regularly, not once a month like a magazine, but at least four times a month)."

Lenin (1902) *What is to be Done?* LCW 5: 507

"enlightened workers"

Lenin (1902) *What is to be Done?* LCW 5: 500

"The history of Russian Social-Democracy can be distinctly divided into three periods:

"The first period embraces about ten years, approximately from 1884 to 1894. This was the period of the rise and consolidation of the theory and programme of Social-Democracy...

"The second period embraces three or four years—1894-99. In this period Social-Democracy appeared on the scene as a social movement, as the upsurge of the masses of the people, as a political party. This is the period of its childhood and adolescence... The formation of the Party in the spring of 1898 was the most striking and at the same time the last act of the Social-Democrats...

"The third period, as we have seen, was prepared in 1897 and it definitely cut off the second period in 1898 (1898-?). This was a period of disunity, dissolution, and vacillation... "

Lenin (1902) *What is to be Done?* LCW 5: 517-18

Session 7: What was done with WITBD?

Key ideas

- Bolshevism
- Menshevism
- substitutionism
- Stalinism

Questions

- 1) How did Lenin's party building views develop after 1902?
- 2) What criticisms were subsequently made of WITBD?
- 3) How did the Stalinists canonise WITBD?
- 4) Does Lenin have a special theory of the party in WITBD?

Key passages

"The basic mistake made by people who polemicise with *What is to be Done?* at the present time is that they tear this production completely out of specific historical context, out of a specific and by now long-past period in the development of our party... *What Is To Be Done?* is a summary of *Iskra* tactics and *Iskra* organisational policy in 1901 and 1902. Precisely a 'summary', no more and no less. Lenin (September 1907) Preface to the Collection Twelve Years. LCW 13: 102

"But if you eliminate the 'bacillus', then you are left with a uniform unconscious mass, into which consciousness has to be injected from without... [Lenin] develops that very idea that broad socialist consciousness can be introduced only from outside the limits of the direct struggle for improving the conditions which govern the sale of labour-power."

Plekhanov (22 July 1903) Pearce, Russian Social-Democratic Labour Party Second Congress. 1978: 158-159

"In the internal politics of the Party these methods lead, as we shall see below, to the Party organisation "substituting" itself for the Party, the Central Committee substituting itself for the Party organisation, and finally the dictator substituting himself for the Central Committee."

Trotsky (1904) Our Political Tasks. 1978: 77

"The historic significance of this celebrated book [*What Is To Be Done*] lies in the fact that in it Lenin:

- 1) For the first time in the history of Marxist thought, laid bare the ideological roots of opportunism, showing that they principally consisted in worshipping the spontaneous working-class movement and belittling the role of Socialist consciousness in the working-class movement;
- 2) Brought out the great importance of theory, of consciousness, and of the Party as a revolutionising and guiding force of the spontaneous working-class movement;
- 3) Brilliantly substantiated the fundamental Marxist thesis that a Marxist party is a union of the working-class movement with Socialism;
- 4) Gave a brilliant exposition of the ideological foundations of a Marxist party.

"The theoretical theses expounded in *What is To Be Done?* later became the foundation of the ideology of the Bolshevik Party."

Stalin, History of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. 1938: 37-38

Glossary

Agitation: conveying only one or a few ideas, but to a whole mass of people.

Amateurism: *Kustarnichestvo* meant amateur revolutionary. The *kustar* was an artisan or a craftsman who worked in a very small establishment and for a very restricted market. The *kustar* may have been very skilled, but the work was inefficient, time-consuming, costly and liable to disruption, due mainly to the small scale of his activities. Lih's translation 'artisanal limitations'.

Bolshevism: Lenin's majority faction of the RSDLP after the 1903 conference.

Consciousness: Usual translation of *soznanie*. Lih prefers 'awareness'.

Conspiracy: *Konspiratsiia* meant inculcating secrecy, the art of not getting arrested. Russian Social Democracy defined itself against the earlier *Narodnaia volia* strategy of a conspiracy aimed at government overthrow. Instead of focusing on a conspiracy, a one-time event carried out by a few individuals, Social Democracy focused on the long-term project of raising the awareness and purposiveness of the working class. *Konspiratsiia* was needed in order to protect the integrity of this project under autocratic repression.

Economism: elevation of agitation around workplace struggles.

Menshevism: minority faction after the 1903 RSDLP conference.

Millerandism: Alexander Millerand (1859-1943) French reformist socialist, who, in 1899, entered the bourgeois government of General Galiffet, the butcher of the Paris Commune.

Professional revolutionary: *professional 'nyi revoliutsioner*. Lih translates as revolutionary by trade. Advocates a fully rounded Marxist politics, integrating the three fronts of the class struggle, utilises propaganda and agitation, and fights for political power.

Propaganda: intense study and conveying many big ideas to a small number of people.

Spontaneity: Usual translation of *stikhiinost (stikhiinyi)* Lih prefers the adjective form 'elemental'.

Revisionism: Trend within social democracy, epitomised by Eduard Bernstein, intent on revising Marxism, to turn the mass working class parties away from workers' power towards social reform.

Tailism: *khvostism*, meant following in the wake of the bourgeois intelligentsia or bourgeois politicians.

Trade-unionism: *tred-iunionizm*. Lenin strongly supported socialists building and leading trade unions. However he opposed the ideology that urges workers to limit themselves to trade unions. In German, *Nur-Gewerkschaftlerei* "only-trade unionism", or in the United States, "pure and simple unionism", opposed to political action.

Worker intellectuals: socialist workers, educated Marxist cadres able to lead on all fronts of the class struggle.

Lenin's allies in WITBD

Georgii Plekhanov (1856-1918), **Vera Zasulich** (1849-1919) and **Pavel Axelrod** (1850-1928) were the pioneers of Marxism in Russia; founders of Emancipation of Labour group 1883; supported the Mensheviks after 1903; opposed the October Revolution 1917.

Vladimir Lenin (1869-1924) became active in Russian Social-Democratic movement 1892-93; founded *Iskra* 1900; central leader of Bolsheviks from 1903; called for new International 1914; organised Zimmerwald Left to fight for this goal 1915-17; leader of October Revolution; chair of Soviet government 1917-24; founder and leader of Comintern.

Iurii Martov (1873-1923) joined Russian social-democratic movement early 1890s; a key figure in the editorial board of *Iskra*; leader of Mensheviks from 1903; opposed the First World War; left Menshevik during 1917 revolution; opposed the October Revolution; left Russia 1920.

Alexander Potresov (1869-1934) 'Starover' = old believer, participated in Social-Democratic circles whilst a student in St. Petersburg during the early 1890s and subsequently in the 'Union of Struggle'. He became a right-wing Menshevik, supporting Russia's participation in World War I. Opposed the October Revolution, supported the counter-revolution.

Emancipation of Labour group, founded in Geneva in 1883 by Plekhanov, Zasulich, Axelrod, Lev Deutsch (1855-1941) and Vasilii Ignatov (1854-84). All members of this group had previously been members of 'Land and Freedom' and had opposed the 'political' turn of the 'People's Will' tendency. The Emancipation of Labour group engaged in the translation and publication of the works of Marx and Engels, while also publishing theoretical works of their own, especially by Plekhanov and Axelrod. The Emancipation of Labour group survived until 1903, when it was formally dissolved at the Second Congress of the RSDLP.

***Iskra* The Spark**, edited by Plekhanov, Zasulich, Axelrod, Lenin, Martov and Potresov. Fifteen issues of *Iskra* had appeared by the time WITBD was completed in early 1902. If printed in book form they would take up 774 pages (the 51 issues brought out by Lenin would run to 2,200 pages). Lih (2005: 160-61) argues that "it was dense, difficult and not meant for the faint of heart or the newly literate". The Russian *Iskra* organisation was the network of supporters of the *Iskra* newspaper who helped distribute the publication around the local organisations of the RSDLP, whilst at the same time trying to win influence in these organisations and to gain admittance to their leading circles ('committees'). According to Zinoviev, (*History of the Bolshevik Party*, 1973: 75) the *Iskra* organisation contained between 100 and 150 members.

***Zaria* The Dawn**, was a theoretical journal that was nominally edited by the three members of the Emancipation of Labour group: Plekhanov, Zasulich and Axelrod and which was intended to serve as a venue for debates around the programme of the RSDLP. However, unlike *Iskra*, it sought to abide by German law, which was often hostile to Russian revolutionaries, and was put together by a sufficiently well-known publisher of Social-Democratic literature, Dietz of Stuttgart.

Rabotnik* Worker**, three 'double issues' (Nos. 1-2, Nos. 3-4, Nos. 5-6) published by the Emancipation of Labour group between 1896-99, the first two in the name of the Union of Russian Social Democrats, the last one in the name of the RSDLP. Ten issues of ***Listok Rabotnika were published by the Union of Russian Social Democrats from 1896-98. Issues 1-8 were edited by the Emancipation of Labour group, the last two (a double issue following the First Congress of the Union in November 1898) by the grouping in the Union that went on to found *Rabochee Delo*.

Lenin's opponents in WITBD

Ekaterina Kuskova (1869-1958), 'Mr. M.M.' was the author of the Credo. Kuskova spent 1895-97 in Belgium following her marriage to Prokopovich. She joined the Union of Russian Social Democrats in 1897 in Berlin and became a member of the St. Petersburg Union of Struggle in 1899. She broke with the RSDLP following the publication of the Credo. Kuskova helped create the liberal-democratic journal, *Osvobozhdenie*, the 'Union of Liberation' and was a founder of the Kadet Party. She was elected to the pro-Kerensky Democratic Conference and pre-Parliament in August-September 1917. She was expelled from the Soviet Union in 1922.

Sergei Prokopovich (1871-1955), 'Mr. N.N.'. Prokopovich came to support the revisionists during a period spent abroad in Belgium and Germany (1895-99). In October 1917 he was a minister in the Kerensky cabinet and he narrowly escaped capture in the Winter Palace, subsequently opposing the Bolshevik-led government.

Zemah Koppelson (1869-1933), 'Mr. G.', Bundist politically active in the early 1890s, along with Martov and Kremer. Koppelson was secretary to the Union of Russian Social Democrats Abroad following the *Rabochee Delo* faction takeover. During this time, he stayed in Berlin and was close to Prokopovich and Kuskova. Koppelson attempted to mediate in the Economist controversy.

Rabochee delo (*Rabocheye Dyelo*) *Worker Cause*, organ of the Union of Russian Social-Democrats Abroad. It was published in Geneva from April 1899 to February 1902, edited by Krichevskii, Martynov and Ivanshin. Altogether 12 numbers appeared in nine issues. ***Listok Rabochevo Dyela*** (*Rabocheye Dyelo* Supplement) – eight numbers issued in Geneva, June 1900 and July 1901.

Boris Krichevskii (1866-1919), was an editor of *Rabochee Delo*. A former associate of Leo Jogiches and Rosa Luxemburg. His articles are criticised in WITBD.

Vladimir Ivanshin (1869-1904) was an editor of *Rabochee Delo* and the Union of Russian Social Democrats Abroad. Previously active in the St. Petersburg Union of Struggle and *Rabochaia Mysl'*.

Aleksandr Martynov (1865-1935) joined 'People's Will' in 1884 at St. Petersburg University. He joined the RSDLP and from summer 1901 opposed the Emancipation of Labour group. He attended the 1903 RSDLP Congress. Subsequently a Menshevik. Played no role in 1917. Became a Stalinist.

Pavel Teplov (1867-1908), 'Sibiriak' or 'Markov', was an editor of *Rabochee Delo*. A leading member of the Union of Russian Social Democrats Abroad involved in the factional struggle 1898-1900.

Vladimir Akimov (1872-1921), [Vladimir Makhnovets] was a leading supporter of *Rabochee Delo*, mainly involved in the co-operative movement. Later a Menshevik.

Rabochaia mysl (*Rabochaya Mysl*) *Worker Thought*, edited by Takhtarev. Sixteen issues published from October 1897 to December 1902. Numbers 3 to 11 and number 16 were published in Berlin, the remaining numbers in St. Petersburg.

Konstantin Takhtarev (1872-1925) editor of *Rabochaia mysl'*. By 1902, Takhtarev and his partner **Apollinaria Iakubova** (1870-1917) supported *Iskra* and wrote a public letter to that effect.

Evgenii Zelenskii (1877-1905), 'Nadezhdin', who published No. 16 of *Rabochaia Mysl'*, supposedly the local newspaper of the St. Petersburg 'Union of Struggle', in Geneva in November 1902. His name is also associated with the Geneva-based journal ***Svoboda*** (Freedom) from 1901-03.

Timeline

1893	Axelrod had proposed the new organisation, Union of Russian Social Democrats Abroad, to provide some formal structure to the Emancipation of Labour group's sympathisers. At the meeting attended by twenty people from various cities, Boris Krichevskii (under Jogiches' influence) led a group of critics against the old guard. (Ascher, Axelrod. 1973: 114-15)
1894	After breaking with Plekhanov and Axelrod, Jogiches organised a rival enterprise for the publication of Social Democratic literature in the Russian language, with his friend Krichevskii in charge... In the course of 1894, however, Jogiches withdrew from the Library... (Baron, Plekhanov. 1963: 153)
1894	<i>"We have come to the conclusion that the first steps taken by the Russian Social Democrats were wrong ones and that, in the interests of the cause, their tactics must be changed."</i> Kremer, On Agitation. Harding 1983: 192
1897 October	<i>"Politics always obediently follows after economics, and, in the final analysis... the struggle for [one's] economic position, the struggle with capital on the field of everyday essential needs and strikes as the means of this struggle - this is the watchword of the worker movement."</i> Editorial, <i>Intelligentsia, Rabochaia mysl</i> , No. 1. Lih 2005: 278
1897-98	The Berlin section of the union (composed, in part of Zemah Koppelson, the official representative of the Jewish Bund, Bukhgoalts, Prokopovich, Kuskova and Somov-Peskin) tried to oust the secretary of the organisation, Kol'tsov, who was ideologically close to Plekhanov. (Ascher 1973: 151-52)
1897 December	<i>"If there is no possibility of assigning to the Russian proletariat an independent, pre-eminent role in the struggle against police Tsarism, autocracy and arbitrariness, then Russian Social Democracy has no historical right to exist."</i> Axelrod, On the Question of the Present Tasks and Tactics of the Russian Social Democrats (Draft Programme), in Harding 1983: 237
1898	Prokopovich, Response to Axelrod's brochure: 'On the question of the contemporary tasks and tactics'... Axelrod's position, based on the GEL's draft programme of 1885, was irretrievably outdated. (Ascher 1973: 153) <i>"Of course, this [1885 Emancipation of Labour] programme was written for intelligents who wanted to be involved with the worker-question; it was not suitable for actual workers defending their own interests."</i> Prokopovich, Reply to Axelrod (Mullin 2016: 153)
1898 March	The Russian Social-Democratic Labour Party (RSDLP) was founded in Minsk. Boris Eidelman and Natan Vigdorichik from the Kiev group convened the gathering. The congress took place over three days, where nine delegates approved a centralised party structure and central committee. The party newspaper <i>Rabochaia Gazeta</i> would be edited by Petr Struve. They recognised the Union of Russian Social Democrats Abroad as the sole foreign organisation. Plekhanov was unanimously acclaimed the chief ideologist. The Bund was granted autonomy within the party in all matters pertaining to Jewish workers. Almost immediately after the first congress, hundreds of social-democrats were arrested, including seven of the nine delegates. Only two out of three members of the central committee, Stepan Radchenko and Arkadi Kremer, remained free and managed to publish the party manifesto written by Struve. (Medish 1963)

1898 Spring	<p>"After Belgium I became ashamed to speak of social revolution...</p> <p>"I do not think that revolution can enter into any programme... The abstract preaching of socialism and solidarity can be of little help here...</p> <p>"If the [Communist Manifesto] is taken as gospel, then this point of view is heresy."</p> <p>Kuskova, Letter to Axelrod. Mullin 2016: 127, 129, 133</p>
1898 Spring	<p>[Prokopovich] "completely agrees with the view of Bernstein..."</p> <p>"The ambition of many Social Democrats to seize political power in the immediate future... will manage to elect a Social Democratic majority to parliament, is a utopia..."</p> <p>"Therefore, to speak now about 'the death agony of capitalism', as many now habitually put it, is at best merely funny..."</p> <p>"the only significant means of political struggle remains tireless broad, mass economic struggle... I simply cannot see another way."</p> <p>Koppelson, Letter to Editorial board of <i>Rabotnik</i>. Mullin 2016: 134-137</p>
1898 October	First Congress of the Union of Russian Social Democrats Abroad. The opposition defeated Plekhanov's supporters, succeeding to publish <i>Rabochee Delo</i> paper.
1899	<p>"The fundamental law that can be discerned by studying the working-class movement is that of the line of least resistance...</p> <p>"For the Russian Marxist there is only one course: participation in, i.e., assistance to, the economic struggle of the proletariat, and participation in liberal opposition activity."</p> <p>Kuskova. Credo: LCW 4: 171-74</p>
1899 April	<i>Rabochee Delo</i> , No.1. Includes a positive review of Lenin's Tasks of the Social Democrats, criticises Axelrod's foreword (Mullin 2016: 67-70)
1899	Axelrod, Open letter to <i>Rabochee Delo</i> , published in Geneva.
1899 September	<p>"The application of such a programme [Credo] would be tantamount to the political suicide of Russian Social-Democracy."</p> <p>Lenin, A Protest by Russian Social-Democrats. LCW 4: 178</p>
1899 September-December	Announcement in <i>Rabochee Delo</i> , No.5 of its intention to publish a collection of articles reflecting the various opinions expressed during the revisionist controversy (Mullin 2016: 71-75)
1900 February	<p>"narrow-minded pedants and political castrates made sophisticated by Marxism..."</p> <p>"The realisation of such a programme would be equivalent to the political suicide of Russian Social Democracy..."</p> <p>Plekhanov, Vademecum for the Editorial Board of '<i>Rabochee Delo</i>'. Mullin 2016: 107, 123</p>
1900 April	<p>In Switzerland a conference of the members of the Union of Russian Social-Democrats Abroad (Mullin 2016: 164-)</p> <p>Steklov... accused the youngsters of "political opportunism"... "I am deeply disturbed when urchins, who have not looked in the eyes of a police officer, dare to abuse old, honoured revolutionaries"... Bukhgoalts threw himself at Steklov. (Ascher 1973: 163)</p>
1900 Summer	<p>"We said that the independent workers of all countries starts with economic struggles".</p> <p>Krichevskii, Economics and Politics in the Russian Workers' Movement. Mullin 2016: 191</p>
1900 August	<p>An explosive first meeting between Lenin and Plekhanov in August, the latter severely criticised the former's openness towards the anti-'Emancipation of Labour' group tendencies in the RSDLP, thus directly challenging <i>Rabochee Delo</i>'s ambition of drawing Lenin over to their side. (Mullin 2016: 185)</p>

1900 December	Plekhanov, Axelrod and Lenin began publishing <i>Iskra (The Spark)</i> newspaper “ Open polemics ”
1901 June	An émigré RSDLP conference in Geneva attempts to reunify the exile organisation. Geneva (June 1901). The Geneva Conference adopted a resolution containing fundamental principles for agreement and joint action. This apparent initial rapprochement was to have been officially constituted at the “Unity” Conference; but articles by the leaders of the Union Abroad, published in <i>Rabocheye Dyelo</i> , No. 10 (September 1901), as well as amendments and addenda to the resolution of the Geneva Conference, submitted by the Union Abroad during the “Unity” Conference, showed that the Union Abroad still adhered to its opportunist position. The representatives of <i>Iskra</i> and <i>Sotsial-Demokrat</i> read a declaration and withdrew from the Conference
1901 September	“The ‘Emancipation of Labour’ group gave us a substantiation of the ideas of scientific socialism adapted to Russia; it, following the example of the Western-European Social Democracy, correctly formulated the basic programmatic principles – this constitutes its incontrovertible historical service. But it did not give us and could not give us tactics. ” Krichevskii, Principles, Tactics and Struggle, <i>Rabochee Delo</i> , No.10. Mullin 2016: 248
1901 September	“the differences between agitation and propaganda now have to be defined in a manner different to that of Plekhanov”. Martynov, Exposure Literature and Proletarian Struggle, <i>Rabochee Delo</i> , No.10. Mullin 2016: 261-62
1901 September 21-22	Zurich “Unity” Conference of <i>Iskra</i> and <i>Sotsial-Demokrat</i> organisations, the Union of Russian Social-Democrats Abroad, the Bund, and the <i>Borba</i> group, and exposes the opportunism of the leaders of the Union Abroad. A second meeting, dedicated to the reunification of the Social-Democratic émigré circles. This meeting was much larger than the Geneva event in June, drawing 33 attendees, the greater part of the entire Russian Social-Democratic emigration. The 10th issue of <i>Rabochee Delo</i> had appeared just a few days before this meeting and contained two articles that directed broad criticism against <i>Iskra</i> and <i>Zaria</i> , consequently serving as a new obstacle to the reunification of the Social-Democratic emigration. (Mullin 2016: 224)
1902 January	<i>Iskra</i> became the centre for the unification of Party forces, for the gathering and training of Party workers. In a number of Russian cities (St. Petersburg, Moscow, Samara, and others) groups and committees of the RSDLP were organised on <i>Iskra</i> lines and a conference of <i>Iskra</i> supporters held in Samara in January 1902 founded the Russian <i>Iskra</i> organisation. <i>Iskra</i> organisations grew up and worked under the direct leadership of Lenin’s disciples and comrades-in-arms: Bauman, Babushkin, Gusev, Kalinin, Krasikov, Krzhizhanovsky, Lengnik, Lepeshinsky, Radchenko, and others. LCW 4: 451
1902 January	Debate on the Draft Programme of the RSDLP
1902 March	Belostock meeting of March 1902, another ill-fated attempt on the part of the ‘Economists’ to organise a Party Congress. The proposed Congress did not take place owing to arrests. A meeting was arranged in Smolensk in April [1902], but in the event, only Koppelson and two representatives of the Bund’s Central Committee attended.
1902 March	<i>What is to be Done</i> published in Stuttgart

Session 1 reading: The German SPD model

By the beginning of the twentieth century, the world's largest working class political party had been built in Germany. For Russian Marxists, the SPD provided ideological guidance, material support as well as an unrivalled example of how to build a party.

Marx and Engels

Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels were members of working class parties from their beginning of their political activities. They were members of the Communist League from 1847 and authors of its programme, *The Communist Manifesto* just before the 1848 revolution. After the revolution was defeated, they continued to argue that working class self-emancipation depended upon the organisation of an independent workers' party – for example in the First International:

"But [the workers] themselves must do the utmost for their final victory by making it clear to themselves what their class interests are, by taking up their position as an independent party as soon as possible and by not allowing themselves to be misled for a single moment by the hypocritical phrases of the democratic petty bourgeois into refraining from the independent organisation of the party of the proletariat."

Marx and Engels (March 1850) Address of the Central Authority to the League. MECW 10: 287

"Everywhere experience has shown that the best means of freeing the workers from this domination by the old parties is to found in each country a proletarian party with a political programme of its own, a political programme that is very clearly distinguished from those of the other parties since it must express the conditions for the emancipation of the working class."

Engels (13 February 1871) To the Spanish Federal Council of the IWMA. MECW 22: 278

"Considering, that against this collective power of the propertied classes the working class cannot act, as a class, except by constituting itself into a political party, distinct from, and opposed to, all old parties formed by the propertied classes; That this constitution of the working class into a political party is indispensable in order to insure the triumph of the social revolution and its ultimate end—the abolition of classes..."

Marx and Engels (23 September 1871) Resolutions of IWMA London Conference. MECW 22: 427

Bebel, Liebknecht, Lassalle

Independent working class political representation in Germany emerged from the Workers' Education Associations (*Arbeiterbildungsvereine*). On 17 May 1863, the *Verband deutscher Arbeitervereine* (Union of German Workers' Leagues, VDAV) was formed. The organisation included August Bebel, who would become the central leader of social democracy until his death in 1913. Wilhelm Liebknecht, a former Communist League member who spent 12 years in exile with Marx and Engels, also worked within it. In 1866 the VDAV severed ties with the liberals and merged with the People's Party (*Volkspartei*).

Around the time the VDAV was formed, another organisation split away to form the *Allgemeiner deutscher Arbeiterverein* (General German Workers' Association, ADAV). It was the first working class political party in German history. The ADAV invited Ferdinand Lassalle to lead them. In the year or so he built the ADAV, Lassalle emphasised that workers should maintain unconditional ideological and organisational independence vis-à-vis the liberal bourgeoisie. Despite many political mistakes, Lassalle made a significant contribution to the pre-history of the SPD. He wrote:

*"In like manner you workingmen of Germany must organise as a universal workingmen's association, peaceful but untiringly demanding continual **agitation** for the introduction of the universal and direct right of suffrage throughout all German countries—And mark my words: at the moment this combined movement reaches 100,000 members, it will be an acknowledged power in the land and already a factor affecting the legislative bodies. Raise this cry in every workshop, in every village, in every hut...*

"By debate and discussion, daily, and without cessation, was the great English agitation a success; by the same means alone will universal suffrage be gained in Germany. The more the echo of your voices is heard, the less will be the opposition to the pressure. And as auxiliary to your movement, found treasuries to which every member of the association must contribute to defray expenses of plans of organisation.

*"Along with these treasuries—which, despite the smallness of the contribution, will form a power for agitation purposes, enabling you to have the **daily papers** to repeat the same demands, proving the rightfulness of your claims to deliverance from our present social condition.*

"Spread with the same means pamphlets. Also pay agents to carry the same views into every corner of the nation that the cry may reach the heart of every workingman, every householder, every agricultural labourer. Pay out of these means to all such workingmen who may suffer persecution and injury because of their activity in the cause. Let your voices continually be heard; in season and out of season; perpetual, never tiring; in place and out of place: a continual presence, compelling men to listen. The more repeated the more it will spread, and become mighty in the land.

*"All the art of practical success is contained in the secret to concentrate force at one spot, the vital and important point. In your **propaganda** look neither to the left side nor to the right."*

Lassalle (1 March 1863) Open Letter to the National Labor Association of Germany, 1879: 30-31
Macklenburg and Stassen, *German Essays on Socialism in the Nineteenth Century*, 1990: 101-02

The SPD

The *Sozialdemokratische Arbeiterpartei* (SDAP) was founded in 1869 at a conference in Eisenach, which brought together Bebel and Liebknecht's supporters with some dissident Lassalleans around Wilhelm Bracke. In 1868, both the VDAV and the ADAV affiliated to the International Workingmen's Association (the First International), led by Marx in London. The SPD united with the ADAV at Gotha in 1875 to form the *Sozialistische Arbeiterpartei Deutschlands* (SAPD).

The growth of the party was rapid. The ADAV claimed 500 members when it was founded in 1863. The SDAP had around 10,000 members in 1869, and the SAPD claimed 25,000 when it was founded.

In 1878, the SPD was banned in Germany and forced underground for 12 years. Only its parliamentary fraction was allowed to function in public. The most famous and inspiring activity of the outlawed socialists during the heroic period 1878-90 was the distribution system set up to smuggle the *Sozialdemokrat* newspaper into Germany from Switzerland. Supervised by the "red postmaster", Julius Motteler, this system used trusted persons (*Vertrauensmänner*) to smuggle copies into the country by various means. In 1895, Motteler wrote a guide for Italian socialists on how to smuggle literature. The papers created the scaffolding for local organisation, education and the dissemination of the message to party members and new supporters.

After twelve years of illegality, the SPD emerged in 1890 with 290,000 members. By 1900 it would have perhaps half a million members. Its vote had increased massively. In the 1898 Reichstag elections, it won more than two million votes for the first time, 27% of those voting, winning 56 deputies. The SPD was instrumental in establishing the Second International in 1889 and its growth by the beginning of the twentieth century.

Erfurt programme

The SPD elaborated party programmes in 1869, 1875 and then 1891. It published its own central newspaper, with titles such as *Volksstaat* (*People's State*), *Sozialdemokrat* and *Vorwärts* (*Forwards*), as well as local (and factional) newspapers. It published large quantities of socialist books and a theoretical journal, *Die Neue Zeit* (*The New Times*). Karl Kautsky's commentary on the SPD's 1891 Erfurt programme concluded with a section on the relationship between the workers movement and socialism:

"Socialism is no message of woe for the proletariat but rather good news, a new gospel..."

"We see now the chief recruiting ground [of Social Democracy]... the bearer of the socialist movement is the fighting strata of the industrial proletariat that has attained political awareness..."

"In order for the socialist and the worker movements to become reconciled and to become fused into a single movement, socialism had to break out of the utopian way of thinking. This was the world-historical deed of Marx and Engels. In the Communist Manifesto of 1848 they laid the scientific foundations of a new modern socialism, or, as we say today, of Social Democracy. By so doing, they gave socialism solidity and turned what had hitherto been a beautiful dream of well-meaning enthusiasts into an earnest object of struggle and [also] showed this to be the necessary consequence of economic development. To the fighting proletariat they gave a clear awareness of its historical task and they placed it in a condition to speed to its great goal as quickly and with as few sacrifices as possible."

"The socialists no longer have the task of freely inventing a new society but rather of uncovering its elements in existing society. No more do they have to bring salvation from its misery to the proletariat from above, but rather they have to support its class struggle through increasing its insight and promoting its economic and political organisations and in so doing bring about as quickly and as painlessly as possible the day when the proletariat will be able to save itself. The task of Social Democracy is to make the class struggle of the proletariat aware of its aim and capable of choosing the best means to attain this aim [zielbewusst and zweckmässig]."

"To bring these masses into contact with one another, to awaken their awareness of their broad community of interests and to win them over for organisations capable of protecting their interests - this implies the possibility of speaking freely to the great masses, this implies freedom of assembly and the press... Without the help of the press, it is absolutely impossible to unite the huge masses of today's wage-labour into organisations and to get them to the level of unified action."

"Where the working class bestirs itself, where it makes the first attempts to elevate its economic position, it puts political demands next to purely economic ones - namely, demands for freedom of association, of assembly, of the press. These freedoms have the greatest significance for the working class: they are among the conditions that makes its life possible and to which it unconditionally owes its development. They are the light and air for the proletariat; he who lets them wither or withholds them - he who keeps the proletariat from the struggle to win these freedoms and to extend them - that person is one of the proletariat's worst enemies. It doesn't matter how great a love for the proletariat he feels or fakes, it doesn't matter whether he calls himself an anarchist or a Christian-Socialist or whatever. He harms the proletariat just as much as a declared foe; it is all the same whether he does this from evil will or simply from ignorance - he must be fought against in the same way as acknowledged opponents of the proletariat."

Thus Social Democracy encourages the proletariat to see itself as 'the sworn enemy of any exploitation or oppression, in whatever form they might take - it is the champion of all exploited and oppressed'.

Kautsky (1892) Das Erfurter Programm. Lih 2005: 80, 85, 88-89, 97

Session 1 reading: Bernstein's revisionism

The SPD faced a major strategic threat in 1896, when Eduard Bernstein, former editor of *Sozialdemokrat* and author of the practical section of the Erfurt programme, began to question the tenets of the party's world view. He wrote that "we will condemn and oppose certain methods of subjugating savages. But we will not condemn the idea that savages be subjugated and made to conform to the rules of a higher civilisation" (Bernstein, German Social Democracy and the Turkish Troubles, *Neue Zeit*, 14 October 1896. Tudor 1988: 52-53)

Bernstein went on to attack "utopianism" on the left and instead argued for "positive suggestions for reform" and engagement with the Fabians. (Bernstein, General Observations on Utopianism and Eclecticism, *Neue Zeit*, 28 October 1896. Tudor 1988: 74). Bernstein advocated "attempts to reshape the existing state... in order to make it the vehicle of social reform" and rejected "as absolutely utopian the idea that a socialist revolution could transform the state into an automatic welfare organisation" (Bernstein, The Social and Political Significance of Space and Number, *Neue Zeit*, 21 April 1897. Tudor 1988: 84-85)

In the summer of 1897, the Federation of Engineering Employers had declared a lock-out following strikes for an eight-hour day in five London plants. When the Amalgamated Society of Engineers called a national strike, the employers settled down to a trial of strength. The employers won. After thirty weeks, the men returned to work on very unfavourable terms.

Bernstein lauded Robert Knight, the leader of the United Society of Boilermakers, with whom the Federation of Engineering and Shipbuilding Employers had signed the agreement acknowledging the 'legitimate functions of trade unions'. (Bernstein, The Conflict in the English Engineering Industry, *Neue Zeit*, 28 December 1897. Tudor 1988: 123). Bernstein concluded that "For now that the conflict is over, nothing prevents us from depicting it as it really was. It was not an attack by capital on labour in which capital emerges victorious, but an unsuccessful attempt by organised labour to wrest from capital a reduction in working hours and rights of participation in factory management" (Bernstein, The Conflict in the English Engineering Industry, *Neue Zeit*, 19 January 1898. Tudor 1988: 127).

At the beginning of 1898, Bernstein came out with his famous formulation about the relationship between the labour movement and the socialist goal. He wrote:

"I frankly admit that I have extraordinarily little feeling for, or interest in, what is usually termed 'the final goal of socialism'. This goal, whatever it may be, is nothing to me, the movement is everything"

Bernstein (19 January 1898) *The Struggle of Social Democracy and the Social Revolution*, *Neue Zeit*. Tudor 1988: 168-69

This came in for a welter of criticism, notably by Parvus on the left. At the Stuttgart SPD Congress in October 1898, the left attacked Bernstein. Rosa Luxemburg argued:

"The conquest of political power remains the final goal and that final goal remains the soul of the struggle. The working class cannot take the decadent position of the philosophers: 'The final goal is nothing to me, the movement is everything'. No, on the contrary, without relating the movement to the final goal, the movement as an end in itself is nothing to me, the final goal is everything."

Luxemburg (4 October 1898) *Speech to Stuttgart Congress*. Howard 1971: 43

Plekhanov's response was sharp. Writing in German in the *Sächsische Arbeiterzeitung*, he started by arguing that "German Social Democracy has remained what it has been always and at all times: the true standard-bearer of the revolutionary thought of our times!" However Plekhanov warned of the threat posed by Bernstein:

"What is most important is that, in returning to the polemic with Bernstein, we must recall the words of [Wilhelm] Liebknecht, which I have already mentioned: were Bernstein right we could bury our programme and all our past. We must insist on that, and frankly explain to our readers that the matter can be worded as follows: who is to bury whom, whether Bernstein will bury Social Democracy or Social-Democracy will bury Bernstein. As for me, I do not doubt and have never doubted the outcome of this controversy, but, most esteemed and dear comrade, permit me. in closing my letter, again to ask you the following question: do we really owe a debt of gratitude to a man who has dealt such a savage blow at socialist theory and (consciously or unconsciously—that makes no difference) is out to bury that theory, to the delight of the concordant "reactionary mass"? No, and a thousand times no. It is not our gratitude that such a man deserves!"

Plekhanov (October 1898) *What Should We Thank Him For? An Open Letter to Karl Kautsky*, SPW 2, 1976: 340, 351

Bernstein's response was to publish a book, *The Preconditions of Socialism* (1899), where he rejected the philosophical and economic theories of Marx and Engels. He went on to directly propose full-blown reformism:

"I have my doubts as to whether the primary task of democracy is, as envisaged by Marx and Proudhon, necessarily to abolish the modern state system and completely transform its organisation..."

"If Social Democracy could find the courage to emancipate itself from phraseology that is in fact, obsolete and to make up its mind to appear what it is in reality today: a democratic socialist party of reform..."

"I still regard it [the working class] as being, even today, not yet sufficiently developed to take over political power."

Bernstein (1899) *The Preconditions of Socialism*, 1993: 155, 186, 206

Bernstein used the conclusion of his book to comment on Russian friends and critics. Bernstein lauded an article by Prokopovich, who he described as "a Russian socialist whose views are close to mine, for arguing that 'party tactics are determined much more by actual social conditions than by theoretical knowledge' (*The Preconditions of Socialism*, 1993: 195). This was a truism that avoided the row about assessments of those social conditions, which could be more or less theoretically informed and therefore more or less accurate as an appraisal of reality.

Bernstein also criticised Plekhanov's "comic rage", when he assumed the working class was already fit to rule. He used a footnote to claim:

In order to put Mr Plekhanov's style of disputation in its proper light, I must mention that a large, if not the largest, part of Russian Social Democrats active in Russia, including the editors of the Russian workers' paper, have declared themselves firmly in favour of a standpoint very similar to mine, and that various of my 'contentless' articles have been translated by them and distributed in special editions.

Bernstein (1899) *The Preconditions of Socialism*, 1993: 191

Luxemburg was swift to published her *Social Reform or Revolution* (1899), probably the most significant response to Bernstein's challenge. She wrote:

But since the final goal of socialism is the only decisive factor distinguishing the Social Democratic movement from bourgeois democracy and from bourgeois radicalism, the only factor transforming the entire labour movement from a vain effort to repair the capitalist order into a class struggle against this order, for the suppression of this order—the question "Reform or Revolution?" as it is posed by Bernstein is, for Social Democracy, the same as the question "To be or not to be?" In the controversy with Bernstein and his followers, everybody in the Party ought to understand clearly that it is not a question of this or that method of struggle, or of the use of this or that tactic, but of the very existence of the Social Democratic movement...

He who pronounces himself in favour of the method of legal reforms in place of and as opposed to the conquest of political power and social revolution does not really choose a more tranquil, surer and slower road to the same goal. He chooses a different goal. Instead of taking a stand for the establishment of a new social order, he takes a stand for surface modifications of the old order. Thus, the political views of revisionism lead to the same conclusion as the economic theories of revisionism: not to the realisation of the socialist order, but to the reform of capitalism, not to the suppression of the wage system, but to the diminution of exploitation; in a word, to the elimination of the abuses of capitalism instead of to that of capitalism itself.

Luxemburg, (1899) *Social Reform or Revolution*. Howard 1971: 53, 115-16

Plekhanov was also not finished with Bernstein. In 1901, Bernstein's *Preconditions of Socialism* was published in Russian in a second Russian edition under the title of *Historical Materialism*.

Plekhanov's response, which was not reproduced in the German or French socialist press, effectively called for Bernstein's expulsion from the SPD:

"Another and no less important matter is that only faint traces of socialism have survived in Herr Bernstein's views. In fact, he is far closer to the petty-bourgeois adherents of "social reform" than to revolutionary Social-Democracy. Yet he remains a "comrade", and has not been asked to leave the Party. This can be accounted for in part by the false view regarding freedom of opinion, now so widespread among Social-Democrats in all countries. "How can a man be expelled from the Party because of his views?" it is said. "That would mean persecuting him for heresy." People who think thus forget that freedom of opinion must necessarily be supplemented with freedom to draw closer together or part company, and that the latter freedom has no existence wherever some prejudice makes people march together who would do better to part because of their difference of views. But this erroneous reasoning is only part of the explanation (why Herr Bernstein has not been expelled from the German Social-Democratic Party. The main reason is that his new views are shared by a fairly considerable number of other Social-Democrats. For reasons we cannot go into in this article, opportunism has won many supporters in the ranks of Social-Democracy in various countries. This spread of opportunism presents the main danger threatening it today. Social-Democrats who have remained loyal to the revolutionary spirit of their programme – and they are fortunately still in the majority almost everywhere – will be making an irreparable mistake if they do not take timely and decisive action to counter the danger)...

"Leaving aside both the question of our personal sentiments and that of how our polemical devices can be characterised by the fact of Social-Democrats active in Russia drawing closer to Herr Bernstein – if that were true – we shall note that he is evidently referring to the so-called "economic" trend in Russian Social-Democracy. It is common knowledge that this trend, which met with some temporary success in Russia, has now been overcome by our fellow-thinkers, who see in Herr Bernstein nothing more than a renegade."

Plekhanov (August 1901) 'Cant Against Kant', SPW 2, 1976: 377-78

Vera Zasulich observed in 1902: "In the beginning of the movement the generally acknowledged model for Russian Social Democrats was German Social Democracy. In contrast, during the time of economism, the model that was set forth was that of the English trade unions and the Belgian party with its cooperatives." (Lih 2005: 254, N.96)

This was the context in which Lenin wrote *What is to be Done?*

Session 1 reading: The Russian socialist movement

Lenin (22 April 1914) *From the History of the Workers' Press in Russia* (abridged). LCW 20: 247-250

<https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1914/apr/22.htm>

Social-Democracy in Russia was founded by the **Emancipation of Labour group**, which was formed abroad in 1883 [by **Georgi Plekhanov, Vera Zasulich, Pavel Axelrod**, Vasily Ignatov and Leo Deutsch]. The writings of this group, which were printed abroad and uncensored, were the first systematically to expound and draw all the practical conclusions from the ideas of Marxism, which, as the experience of the entire world has shown, alone express the true essence of the working-class movement and its aims. For the twelve years between 1883 and 1895, practically the only attempt to establish a Social-Democratic workers' press in Russia was the publication in St. Petersburg in 1885 of the Social-Democratic newspaper *Rabochy*; it was of course illegal, but only two issues appeared. Owing to the absence of a mass working-class movement, there was no scope for the wide development of a workers' press.

The inception of a mass working-class movement, with the participation of Social-Democrats, dates from 1895-96, the time of the famous St. Petersburg strikes. It was then that a workers' press, in the real sense of the term, appeared in Russia. The chief publications in those days were illegal leaflets, most of them hectographed and devoted to "economic" (as well as non-economic) agitation, that is, to the needs and demands of the workers in different factories and industries. Obviously, this literature could not have existed without the advanced workers' most active participation in the task of compiling and circulating it.

Leaflets were published by Social-Democratic groups, circles and organisations, most of which, after the end of 1895, became known as "**Leagues of Struggle for the Emancipation of the Working Class**". The "**Russian Social-Democratic Labour Party**" (RSDLP) was founded in 1898 at a congress of representatives of local Social-Democratic organisations.¹

After the leaflets, illegal working-class newspapers began to appear; for example, in 1897 St. Petersburg *Rabochy Listok* appeared in St. Petersburg, followed by *Rabochaya Mysl*, which was shortly afterwards transferred abroad. Since then, almost right up to the revolution, local Social-Democratic newspapers came out illegally; true, they were regularly suppressed, but reappeared again and again all over Russia.

All in all, the workers' leaflets and Social-Democratic newspapers of the time – i.e., twenty years ago – were the direct forerunners of the present-day working-class press: the same factory "exposures", the same reports on the "economic" struggle, the same treatment of the tasks of the working-class movement from the standpoint of Marxist principles and consistent democracy, and finally, the same two main trends – the Marxist and the opportunist – in the working-class press.

¹ The reference is to the First Congress of the RSDLP held in Minsk on March 1-3 (13-15), 1898. The Congress was attended by **nine delegates from six organisations**: the St. Petersburg, Moscow, Ekaterinoslav and Kiev Leagues of Struggle for the Emancipation of the Working Class, from the Kiev *Rabochaya Gazeta* group and from the Bund. The Congress elected a Central Committee of the Party, confirmed *Rabochaya Gazeta* as the Party's official organ, published a Manifesto, and proclaimed the Union of Russian Social-Democrats Abroad the foreign representative of the Party. The Congress, however, did not adopt a Programme or draft Party Rules. The Central Committee elected at the Congress was soon arrested and the printing-press of *Rabochaya Gazeta* was seized, thus making it impossible for the Congress to unite and establish contact between the various Marxist circles and organisations. There was no single central leadership and no single line in the work of the local organisations.

It is a remarkable fact, one that has not been duly appreciated to this day, that as soon as the mass working-class movement arose in Russia (1895-96), there at once appeared the division into Marxist and opportunist trends—a division which has changed in form and features, etc., but which has remained essentially the same from 1894 to 1914. Apparently, this particular kind of division and inner struggle among Social-Democrats has deep social and class roots.

The *Rabochaya Mysl*, mentioned above, represented the opportunist trend of the day, known as **Economism**. This trend became apparent in the disputes among the local leaders of the working-class movement as early as 1894-95. And abroad, where the awakening of the Russian workers led to an efflorescence of Social-Democratic literature as early as 1896, the appearance and rallying of the Economists ended in a split in the spring of 1900 (that is, prior to the appearance of *Iskra*, the first issue of which came off the press at the very end of 1900).

The history of the working-class press during the twenty years 1894-1914 is the history of the two trends in Russian Marxism and Russian (or rather all-Russia) Social-Democracy. To understand the history of the working-class press in Russia, one must know, not only and not so much the names of the various organs of the press—names which convey nothing to the present-day reader and simply confuse him – as the content, nature and ideological line of the different sections of Social-Democracy.

The chief organs of the Economists were *Rabochaya Mysl* (1897-1900) and *Rabocheye Dyelo* (1898-1901). *Rabocheye Dyelo* was edited by **B. Krichevsky**, who later went over to the syndicalists, **A. Martynov**, a prominent Menshevik and now a liquidator, and **Akimov**, now an “independent Social-Democrat” who in all essentials agrees with the liquidators.

At first only Plekhanov and the whole Emancipation of Labour group (the journal *Rabotnik*, etc) fought the Economists, and then *Iskra* joined the fight (from 1900 to August 1903, up to the time of the Second Congress of the RLDLP). What, exactly, was the essence of Economism?

In word, the Economists were all for a mass type of working-class movement and independent action by the workers, emphasising the paramount significance of “economic” agitation and urging moderation or gradualness in passing over to political agitation. As the reader sees, these are exactly the same catchwords that the liquidators flaunt today. In practice, however, the Economists pursued a liberal-labour policy, the gist of which was tersely expressed by **S. N. Prokopovich**, one of the Economist leaders at that time, in the words: “economic struggle is for the workers, political struggle is for the liberals”. The Economists, who made the most noise about the workers’ independent activity and the mass movement, were in practice an opportunist and petty-bourgeois intellectual wing of the working-class movement.

The overwhelming majority of the class-conscious workers, who in 1901-03 accounted for 46 out of every 100 persons charged with state crimes, as against 37 for the intelligentsia, sided with the old *Iskra*, against the opportunists. *Iskra*’s three years of activity (1901-03) saw the elaboration of the Social-Democratic Party’s Programme, its main tactics, and the forms in which the workers’ economic and political struggle could be combined on the basis of consistent Marxism. During the pre-revolutionary years, the growth of the workers’ press around *Iskra* and under its ideological leadership assumed enormous proportions. The number of illegal leaflets and unlicensed printing-presses was exceedingly great, and increased rapidly all over Russia.²

² Approximately 3,500 people had participated in social-democratic organisations in the years prior to the second RSDLP congress in 1903 (Lane 1969: 12; Lih 2005: 443). Lane suggests at the turn of the century, active membership of the RSDLP was St Petersburg (50-100); Moscow (100); Ivanovo-Voznesensk (200); Tver (40-100); Ekaterinoslav (500); Caucasus (250) and Siberia (100). Others were in prison, exile or scattered.

Session 2: Key passages and further background

Epigram

“Party struggles lend a party strength and vitality; the greatest proof of a party’s weakness is its diffuseness and the blurring of clear demarcations; a party becomes stronger by purging itself....”

(From a letter of Lassalle to Marx, of June 24, 1852)

Lenin (1902) *What is to be Done?* LCW 5: 346

“Before we can unite, and in order that we may unite, we must first of all draw firm and definite lines of demarcation. Otherwise, our unity will be purely fictitious, it will conceal the prevailing confusion and hinder its radical elimination.”

Lenin (September 1900) Declaration of the Editorial Board of *Iskra*. LCW 4: 354

Economism

“we employ the term Economism in the broad sense, as explained in *Iskra*, No. 12 (December 1901), in the article entitled “A Talk with Defenders of Economism”, which was a synopsis, so to speak, of the present pamphlet).”

Lenin (1902) *What is to be Done?* LCW 5: 350

“It meant the emergence of a separate trend, which is usually designated as Economism (in the broad sense of the word), the principal feature of which is its incomprehension, even defence, of lagging, i.e., as we have explained, the lagging of the conscious leaders behind the spontaneous awakening of the masses. The characteristic features of this trend express themselves in the following: with respect to principles, in a vulgarisation of Marxism and in helplessness in the face of modern “criticism”, that up-to-date species of opportunism; with respect to politics, in the striving to restrict political agitation and political struggle or to reduce them to petty activities, in the failure to understand that unless Social-Democrats take the leadership of the general democratic movement in their own hands, they will never be able to overthrow the autocracy; with respect to tactics, in utter instability... and with respect to organisation, in the failure to understand that the mass character of the movement does not diminish, but increases, our obligation to establish a strong and centralised organisation of revolutionaries capable of leading the preparatory struggle, every unexpected outbreak, and, finally, the decisive assault.”

Lenin (6 December 1901) A Talk with Defenders of Economism. LCW 5: 317-18

Main questions

“Its main theme was to have been the three questions raised in the article “Where To Begin” – the character and main content of our political agitation; our organisational tasks; and the plan for building, simultaneously and from various sides, a militant, all-Russia organisation.”

Lenin (1902) *What is to be Done?* LCW 5: 349

“The examination of the above three questions still constitutes the main theme of this pamphlet, but I found it necessary to begin with two questions of a more general nature – why such an “innocent” and “natural” slogan as “freedom of criticism” should be for us a veritable war-cry, and why we cannot come to an understanding even on the fundamental question of the role of Social-Democrats in relation to the spontaneous mass movement.”

Lenin (1902) *What is to be Done?* LCW 5: 350-51

'Freedom of criticism'

“‘Freedom of criticism’ is undoubtedly the most fashionable slogan at the present time, and the one most frequently employed in the controversies between socialists and democrats in all countries.”

Lenin (1902) What is to be Done? LCW 5: 352

*In the first place, it is necessary to develop a common Party literature—common, not only in the sense that it must serve the whole of the Russian movement rather than separate districts, that it must discuss the questions of the movement as a whole and assist the class-conscious proletarians in their struggle instead of dealing merely with local questions, but common also in the sense that it must unite all the available literary forces, that it **must express all shades of opinion and views** prevailing among Russian Social-Democrats, not as isolated workers, but as comrades united in the ranks of a single organisation by a common programme and a common struggle. Secondly, we must work to achieve an organisation especially for the purpose of establishing and maintaining contact among all the centres of the movement, of supplying complete and timely information about the movement, and of delivering our newspapers and periodicals regularly to all parts of Russia.*

Lenin (1900) Draft of a Declaration of the Editorial Board of Iskra and Zarya. LCW 4: 323

*It is understandable, therefore, that **we do not intend to make our publication a mere storehouse of various views**. On the contrary, we shall conduct it in **the spirit of a strictly defined tendency**. This tendency can be expressed by the word Marxism, and there is hardly need to add that we stand for the consistent development of the ideas of Marx and Engels and emphatically reject the equivocating, vague, and opportunist “corrections” for which Eduard Bernstein, P. Struve, and many others have set the fashion. But although we shall discuss all questions from our own definite point of view, we shall give space in our columns to polemics between comrades. **Open polemics**, conducted in full view of all Russian Social-Democrats and class-conscious workers, are necessary and desirable in order to clarify the depth of existing differences, in order to afford discussion of disputed questions from all angles, in order to combat the extremes into which representatives, not only of various views, but even of various localities, or various “specialities” of the revolutionary movement, inevitably fall. Indeed, as noted above, we regard one of the drawbacks of the present-day movement to be the absence of open polemics between avowedly differing views, the effort to conceal differences on fundamental questions.*

Lenin (September 1900) Declaration of the Editorial Board of Iskra. LCW 4: 354-55

‘Criticism’ was a codeword in both Russian and German Social Democracy for revisionist criticism of Marxism. ‘Freedom of criticism’ was a slogan put forward specifically by revisionists within the Party. It thus brought up the issue of the proper limits of tolerance for ideological heterodoxy in a Social-Democratic Party. Lenin makes clear he is talking only about intra-party affairs, not society at large. For Russian Social Democrats, the concrete question was not whether they should expel the ‘critics’, since the Party was not yet institutionalised to do this...

Lih 2005: 566

Opportunism

“He who does not deliberately close his eyes cannot fail to see that the new “critical” trend in socialism is nothing more nor less than a new variety of opportunism. And if we judge people, not by the glittering uniforms they don or by the high-sounding appellations they give themselves, but by their actions and by what they actually advocate, it will be clear that “freedom of criticism” means’ freedom for an opportunist trend in Social-Democracy, freedom to convert Social-Democracy into a democratic party of reform, freedom to introduce bourgeois ideas and bourgeois elements into socialism.

Lenin (1902) What is to be Done? LCW 5: 354-55

Against the swamp

"We are marching in a compact group along a precipitous and difficult path, firmly holding each other by the hand. We are surrounded on all sides by enemies, and we have to advance almost constantly under their fire. We have combined, by a freely adopted decision, for the purpose of fighting the enemy, and not of retreating into the neighbouring **marsh [swamp]**, the inhabitants of which, from the very outset, have reproached us with having separated ourselves into an exclusive group and with having chosen the path of struggle instead of the path of conciliation."
 Lenin (1902) *What is to be Done?* LCW 5: 355

Marsh = swamp – allusion to a well-known German SPD put-down, often used by the left.

"August Bebel: It is forever the same old struggle – the left here, the right there, and between them the swamp. These are the elements who never know what they want, or rather, never say what they want. They are the 'wise guys' who always ask: what's going on here, what's happening there? They always feel where the majority is, and then go with them... We have to denounce these comrades. Yes! Denounce them... the lazy elements who always suppress themselves and go out of the way of every clear decision, and always say that we are all united and are all brothers – these elements are the worst of all! These are the ones I combat the most."

Rosa Luxemburg: *Selected Political and Literary Writings*, Revolutionary History, 10, 1, 2009.

Model = SPD

"recall that 'the unexampled growth of German Social-Democracy' was accompanied by a strenuous struggle, unique in the history of socialism, not only against erroneous theories (Mühlberger, Dühring, the Katheder-Socialists), but also against erroneous tactics (Lassalle), etc."

Lenin (1902) *What is to be Done?* LCW 5: 357-58

"The Russian revolutionaries must adopt the standpoint of Western Social-Democracy and break with 'rebel' theories just as a few years ago they renounced 'rebel' practice, introducing a new, political element into their programme."

Plekhanov (1883) *Socialism and Political Struggle*, SPW I, 1961: 102

"Without revolutionary theory there can be no revolutionary movement"

"Without revolutionary theory there can be no revolutionary movement."

Lenin (1902) *What is to be Done?* LCW 5: 369

*There can be no strong socialist party without a **revolutionary theory** which unites all socialists, from which they draw all their convictions, and which they apply in their methods of struggle and means of action.*

Lenin (1899) *Our Programme*. (*Rabochaya Gazeta*). LCW 4: 211

*"**For without revolutionary theory there is no revolutionary movement** in the true sense of the word. Any class which strives for its emancipation, any political party which aims at dominance, is revolutionary only insofar as it represents the most progressive social trends and consequently is a vehicle of the most progressive ideas of its time. An idea which is inherently revolutionary is a kind of dynamite which no other explosive in the world can replace."*

Plekhanov (1883) *Socialism and Political Struggle*, SPW I, 1961: 103-04

*"**The revolutionary movement in Russia can triumph only as the revolutionary movement of the workers.** There is not and cannot be any other way out for us."*

Plekhanov (1889) *Speech at the Second International Socialist Congress*, SPW I, 1961: 452

Vanguard fighter

“At this point, we wish to state only that the role of vanguard fighter can be fulfilled only by a party that is guided by the most advanced theory. To have a concrete understanding of what this means, let the reader recall such predecessors of Russian Social Democracy as Herzen, Belinsky, Chernyshevsky, and the brilliant galaxy of revolutionaries of the seventies.”

Lenin (1902) What is to be Done? LCW 5: 370

*The proletariat alone can be the **vanguard fighter** for political liberty and for democratic institutions. Firstly, this is because political tyranny bears most heavily upon the proletariat whose position gives it no opportunity to secure a modification of that tyranny—it has no access to the higher authorities, not even to the officials, and it has no influence on public opinion. Secondly, the proletariat alone is capable of bringing about the complete democratisation of the political and social system, since this would place the system in the hands of the workers. That is why the merging of the democratic activities of the working class with the democratic aspirations of other classes and groups would weaken the democratic movement, would weaken the political struggle, would make it less determined, less consistent, more likely to compromise. On the other hand, if the working class stands out as the vanguard fighter for democratic institutions, this will strength the democratic movement, will strengthen the struggle for political liberty, because the working class will spur on all the other democratic and political opposition elements, will push the liberals towards the political radicals, will push the radicals towards an irrevocable rupture with the whole of the political and social structure of present society. We said above that all socialists in Russia should become Social-Democrats. We now add: all true and **consistent democrats** in Russia should become Social-Democrats.*

Lenin (end of 1897) The Tasks of the Russian Social-Democrats. LCW 2: 333

Three fronts of the class struggle

“Let us quote what Engels said in 1874 concerning the significance of theory in the Social-Democratic movement. Engels recognises, not two forms of the great struggle of Social Democracy (political and economic), as is the fashion among us, but three, placing the theoretical struggle on a par with the first two.”

Lenin (1902) What is to be Done? LCW 5: 370

“It must be said to the credit of the German workers that they have exploited the advantages of their situation with rare understanding. For the first time since a workers’ movement has existed, the struggle is being conducted pursuant to its three sides – the theoretical, the political, and the practical-economic (resistance to the capitalists) – in harmony and in its interconnections, and in a systematic way. It is precisely in this, as it were, concentric attack, that the strength and invincibility of the German movement lies.”

Engels (1874) Addendum to The Peasant War in Germany MECW 23, 1988: 630-31

Lenin (1902) What is to be Done? LCW 5: 372

“Engels’s words proved prophetic. Within a few years the German workers were subjected to unexpectedly grave trials in the form of the Exceptional Law Against the Socialists. And they met those trials armed for battle and succeeded in emerging from them victorious.

The Russian proletariat will have to undergo trials immeasurably graver... History has now confronted us with an immediate task which is the most revolutionary of all the immediate tasks confronting the proletariat of any country. The fulfilment of this task, the destruction of the most powerful bulwark, not only of European, but (it may now be said) of Asiatic reaction, would make the Russian proletariat the vanguard of the international revolutionary proletariat.”

Lenin (1902) What is to be Done? LCW 5: 372-73

Session 3: Key passages and further background

“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.”

Lenin (1902) *What is to be Done?* LCW 5: 375

“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... 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.”

Lenin (1902) *What is to be Done?* LCW 5: 422

“[Note] 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; it is necessary that the workers do not confine themselves to the artificially restricted limits of “literature for workers” but that they learn to an increasing degree to master general literature. It would be even truer to say “are not confined”, instead of “do not confine themselves”, because the workers themselves wish to read and do read all that is written for the intelligentsia, and only a few (bad) intellectuals believe that it is enough “for workers” to be told a few things about factory conditions and to have repeated to them over and over again what has long been known.”

Lenin (1902) *What is to be Done?* LCW 5: 384

“We shall quote the following profoundly true and important words of Karl Kautsky on the new draft programme of the Austrian Social-Democratic Party:

“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...”

*“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.”*

Kautsky, *Das Programm der Sozialdemokratie in Österreich*, Neue Zeit, 1901-02, XX, I, No. 3: 79-80

Lenin (1902) *What is to be Done?* LCW 5: 383-84

Kautsky made his contribution at the Vienna Congress of the Socialist Party of Austria (SPO). Its leader Viktor Adler directly contradicted Kautsky during the debate. Adler's contribution was quoted by the Economist Vladimir Akimov, writing in 1904. Adler said:

"In his criticism, Kautsky asserted, among other things, that the draft contains a contradiction, since it says in one place that Socialist Democracy must seek the emancipation of the entire people from the shackles of economic slavery, etc, and, in another, that this consciousness, this striving, arises in the proletariat spontaneously... I consider the text of the draft entirely correct, and find no contradiction in it. It says here that the proletariat arrives at an understanding of this entire development, that it becomes aware of that the goal of the struggle for the liberation of the working class must be communism. The vehicle of this development, as the draft goes on to say, can be none other than the organised proletariat itself. As for awakening the proletariat – this, in turn, can only be the task of Social Democracy... I believe that the socialist idea is the product of the working class... Social Democracy is its brain... The birthplace of Social Democratic thought is the proletariat; Social Democracy is the product of this thought, and it brings the proletariat to self-knowledge."

Frankel 1969: 117-18

1. It is a curious fact that no one has ever found this alleged theory anywhere else in Lenin's voluminous writings, not before and not after WITBD. It **never appeared** in Lenin again.
 2. There it is – the whole theory laid out, the devilish crux of "Leninism"; and it turns out to be the product of **Kautsky's pen!**
 3. Did Lenin, in WITBD, adopt Kautsky's theory? Again, not exactly...
The first footnote... **Proudhon's and Weitling's.**
Second footnote: "The working class spontaneously gravitates towards socialism; nevertheless, ... **bourgeois ideology** spontaneously imposes itself upon the working class to a still greater degree."
 4. Kautsky was not so ignorant or dull-witted as to believe (as so many Leninologists apparently do) that if it can be shown that intellectuals historically played a certain **initiatory role**, they must and should **continue** to play the same role now and forever.
 5. No one in the international movement was more forceful or frequent than Lenin in decrying and **combating the spread of intellectuals'** influence in the movement.
- Draper (1963) The Myth of Lenin's "Concept of The Party"

The 'from without' passage is a digression, a parenthetical remark that breaks the flow of the narrative...

The 'from without' formula only makes sense within the framework of the **merger narrative**, which informs us that socialism and the worker movement are both originally exterior to each other and have to be brought to each other.

The Russian revolutionaries were committed to bringing to the Russian worker 'from without' the inspiring news about the accomplishments of the **German workers**. They were at best, intermediaries. The ['from without'] passage was a last-minute addition inspired by some remarks of Kautsky published after Lenin had already started serious work on WITBD. Most probably the 'from without' passage and the Kautsky quote itself were inserted into an already existing draft.

Why is this passage so unsettling? Because it is one thing to say that the worker movement needs Social Democracy in order to understand its proper final goal, but quite another thing to suggest that the worker movement is actively and 'spontaneously' moving away from socialism towards bourgeois ideology.

Lih 2005: 645, 649, 653, 655, 659

On Agitation

“the early Social-Democrats of that period zealously carried on economic agitation (being guided in this activity by the truly useful indications contained in the pamphlet *On Agitation*, then still in manuscript)...”

Lenin (1902) *What is to be Done?* LCW 5: 376

*“The achievement of **political power** is the principal task of the struggling proletariat... As Social Democrats, we set ourselves the task of leading the proletariat to an awareness of the need for political freedom as the preliminary condition for the possibility of its broad development... The popular mass is drawn into struggle not by reasoning, but by the **objective logic of things**, by the very course of events which drives them to struggle...*

*Thus the task of the Social Democrats is to conduct constant agitation among the factory workers on the **basis of existing petty needs and demands**. The struggle aroused by such agitation will train the workers to defend their own interests... As a result of the fact that social democracy can only become the real people's party when it bases its programme of activity on the needs that are actually felt by the working class, and of the fact that to achieve this goal – the organisation of the working class – it must begin on the basis of the most vital demands... **“To immerse himself in the mass, to listen, to pick on the most appropriate point, to take the pulse of the crowd – this is what the agitator must strive for.** “But at the same time the agitator himself should not lose sight of the **final goal**...*

“In its turn, practical activity will reveal which questions should be more thoroughly based in theory, and by similar extension, the man will know how to make sure of the foundation of the theory itself and of its application to particular conditions. For this reason we identify with neither of the extremes, neither losing touch with the practical basis and only studying, nor agitating among the mass, without at the same time concerning ourselves with theory.”

Arkadii Kremer (1894) *On Agitation*. Harding 1983: 194-195, 199-201

On Agitation... was written in 1894 by A. Kramer with additions by Martov. It signalled a change in focus within Russian Social Democracy from ‘propaganda’ (intense study with a few individuals) to ‘agitation’ (enlisting support from the workers at large, mostly on the basis of economic struggle).
Lih 2005: 574

Spontaneity

“There is much talk of spontaneity. But the spontaneous development of the working-class movement leads to its subordination to bourgeois ideology, to its development along the lines of the *Credo* programme; for the spontaneous working-class movement is trade-unionism, is **Nur-Gewerkschaftlerei**, and trade unionism means the ideological enslavement of the workers by the bourgeoisie. Hence, our task, the task of Social-Democracy, is to combat spontaneity, to **divert** the working-class movement from this spontaneous, trade-unionist striving to come under the wing of the bourgeoisie, and to bring it under the wing of revolutionary Social Democracy.”

Lenin (1902) *What is to be Done?* LCW 5: 384-85

“*Rabochaya Mysl* does not so much deny the political struggle, as it bows to its spontaneity.”

Lenin (1902) *What is to be Done?* LCW 5: 387

The terms “stikhiinost” and “stikhiinyi” are usually translated as “spontaneous” in English. For Lenin the central problem was that, “The leader/guides have fallen behind this stikhiinyi upsurge of the masses and they have turned out to be unprepared to carry out their responsibilities as leader/guides.” The reason that Lenin used stikhiinost so much on WITBD is... simply because Boris Krichevskii used the word at length in an attack on Iskra in September 1901.

Lih 2005: 423, 555

“labour movement pure and simple”

Secondly, in the very first literary expression of Economism we observe the exceedingly curious phenomenon—highly characteristic for an understanding of all the differences prevailing among present-day Social-Democrats—that the adherents of the “**labour movement pure and simple**”, worshippers of the closest “organic” contacts (*Rabocheye Dyelo*’s term) with the proletarian struggle, opponents of any non-worker intelligentsia (even a socialist intelligentsia), are compelled, in order to defend their positions, to resort to the arguments of the bourgeois “pure trade-unionists”.

Lenin (1902) *What is to be Done?* LCW 5: 382-83

*“Those who regard Social-Democracy as an organisation serving exclusively the spontaneous struggle of the proletariat may be content with merely local agitation and working-class literature ‘**pure and simple**’. We do not understand Social-Democracy in this way; we regard it as a revolutionary party, inseparably connected with the working-class movement and directed against absolutism. Only when organised in such a party will the proletariat—the most revolutionary class in Russia today—be in a position to fulfil the historical task that confronts it—to unite under its banner all the democratic elements in the country and to crown the tenacious struggle in which so many generations have fallen with the final triumph over the hated regime.*

Lenin (September 1900) Declaration of the Editorial Board of *Iskra*. LCW 4: 356

*“The class character of the Social-Democratic movement must not be expressed in the restriction of our tasks to the direct and immediate needs of the ‘labour movement **pure and simple**’.”*

Lenin (1 February 1902) Political Agitation and “The Class Point of View”. LCW 5: 342

*At the AFL convention of 1890, Sam Gompers had flatly announced his opposition to socialism and to political action by labor. “The trade unions **pure and simple**,” Gompers declared, “are the natural organisations of the wageworkers to secure their present material and practical improvement and to achieve their final emancipation.”*

Ray Ginger (1947) *The Bending Cross: A Biography of Eugene Victor Debs*. 2007: 99

Either bourgeois or socialist ideology

“Since there can be no talk of an independent ideology formulated by the working masses themselves in the process of their movement, the only choice is — either bourgeois or socialist ideology. There is no middle course (for mankind has not created a “third” ideology, and, moreover, in a society torn by class antagonisms there can never be a non-class or an above-class ideology). Hence, to belittle the socialist ideology in any way, to turn aside from it in the slightest degree means to strengthen bourgeois ideology.”

Lenin (1902) *What is to be Done?* LCW 5: 384

Tailism

“All that is needed to frame such a resolution is an ability to keep at the **tail-end** of the movement... Surely it is not its function [social democracy] to drag at the tail of the movement... *Rabocheye Dyelo*, however, not only follows this “tactics-as-process”, but elevates it to a principle, so that it would be more correct to describe its tendency not as opportunism, but as **tail-ism** (from the word tail)... Revolutionaries, however, lagged behind this upsurge, both in their ‘theories’ and in their activity; they failed to establish a constant and continuous organisation capable of leading the whole movement.”

Lenin (1902) *What is to be Done?* LCW 5: 395-97

Session 4: Key passages and further background

Propaganda and agitation

“Hitherto we thought (with Plekhanov, and with all the leaders of the international working class movement) that the **propagandist**, dealing with, say, the question of unemployment, must explain the capitalistic nature of crises, the cause of their inevitability in modern society, the necessity for the transformation of this society into a socialist society, etc. In a word, he must present “many ideas”, so many, indeed, that they will be understood as an integral whole only by a (comparatively) few persons. The **agitator**, however, speaking on the same subject, will take as an illustration a fact that is most glaring and most widely known to his audience, say, the death of an unemployed worker’s family from starvation, the growing impoverishment, etc., and, utilising this fact, known to all, will direct his efforts to presenting a single idea to the “masses”, e.g., the senselessness of the contradiction between the increase of wealth and the increase of poverty; he will strive to rouse discontent and indignation among the masses against this crying injustice, leaving a more complete explanation of this contradiction to the propagandist. Consequently, the propagandist operates chiefly by means of the printed word; the agitator by means of the spoken word. The propagandist requires qualities different from those of the agitator. Kautsky and Lafargue, for example, we term propagandists; Bebel and Guesde we term agitators.”
 Lenin (1902) What is to be Done? LCW 5: 409-10

“In general it is not easy to draw the line between agitation and what is usually called propaganda. Agitation is also propaganda, but propaganda that takes place under particular circumstances, that is in circumstances in which even those who would not normally pay any attention are forced to listen to the propagandist’s words. Propaganda is agitation that is conducted in the normal everyday course of the life of a particular country. Agitation is propaganda occasioned by events that are not entirely ordinary and that provoke a certain upsurge in the public mood. Socialists would be very bad politicians if they were not to use such notable events for their own ends...”

“Propaganda, in the strict sense of the word, would lose all historical significance if it were not accompanied by agitation. Propaganda conveys the correct views to dozens, hundreds, thousands of people. But people holding the correct views only become historical activists when they exert a direct influence on public life. And influence on the public life of contemporary civilised countries is unthinkable without influence on the mass i.e. without agitation... Consequently agitation is essential for any party that wishes to have historical meaning. A sect may be content with propaganda in the narrow sense of the word, but a political party never.

“If I had to clarify further the relationship between agitation and propaganda I should add that the propagandist conveys many ideas to a single person or to a few people, whereas the agitator conveys only one or a few ideas, but he conveys them to a whole mass of people, sometimes to almost the entire population of a particular locality. But history is made by the mass. Consequently agitation is the aim of propaganda. I conduct propaganda so that I shall have the opportunity to transfer to agitation...”

“This means that, while our propaganda is training revolutionaries, history creates the revolutionary milieu essentially for their activity; while we are preparing the leaders of the revolutionary mass, they are only its leaders in theory. If they are to become leaders in reality they will have to influence them in the revolutionary sense. That is where agitation comes in...”

“If the Russian Socialists want to play an active role in the coming Russian revolution, they must know how to become agitators.

“This is essential, but it not easy. The task of the agitator involves putting into circulation in each particular case the maximum possible number of revolutionary ideas in a form accessible to the mass.”

Plekhanov (1891) The Tasks of the Social Democrats in the Struggle against the Famine in Russia. Harding and Taylor 1983: 103-105

“We rebel not against agitation on an economic basis, but against those agitators who do not know how to take advantage of economic clashes of the workers with the entrepreneurs for the development of the political consciousness of the workers.”

Plekhanov (1897) In Baron, Plekhanov: The Father of Russian Marxism. 1963: 203

*“Propaganda is only one of the factors developing the workers’ consciousness of their interests... The consciousness of workers is not **dough** that we (the intelligentsia) are called upon to fashion in our own likeness. ‘We’ and ‘our’ forces can only complete that which life teaches the worker...*

*“Just as the task of the propagandist is to bring people to a consciousness of their interests, the task of the agitator is to show people a way of **satisfying needs** of which they are already conscious.”*

Prokopovich (1898) Reply to Axelrod’s ‘On the Question of the Present Tasks’, Mullin 2016: 147-8

*Accordingly, the tasks of agitation have grown more complex, the differences between agitation and propaganda now have to be defined in a manner different to that of Plekhanov. By propaganda we would understand the **revolutionary illumination** of the whole of the present system or of its partial manifestations – it does not matter whether this is done in a form accessible to individuals or to the general public. By agitation, in the strict sense of the word, we would understand the calling of the masses to some definite concrete activities conducive to an **immediate revolutionary intervention** of the proletariat in the life of society.*

Martynov, (October 1901) ‘Exposure Literature and Proletarian Struggle’. Mullin 2016: 261-62

*“The distribution of these themes and questions between the magazine and the newspaper will be determined exclusively by differences in the size and character of the two publications—**the magazine should serve mainly for propaganda, the newspaper mainly for agitation.**”*

Lenin (1900) Draft of a Declaration of the Editorial Board of Iskra and Zarya. LCW 4: 326

*“Extend the bounds and broaden the content of our **propagandist, agitational, and organisational** activity - these words of P. B. Axelrod must serve as a slogan defining the activities of Russian Social-Democrats in the immediate future, and we adopt this slogan in the programme of our publication.*

Lenin (September 1900) Declaration of the Editorial Board of Iskra. LCW 4: 355

*“The socialist activities of Russian Social-Democrats consist in spreading by **propaganda** the teachings of scientific socialism, in spreading among the workers a proper understanding of the present social and economic system, its basis and its development, an understanding of the various classes in Russian society, of their interrelations, of the struggle between these classes, of the role of the working class in this struggle, of its attitude towards the declining and the developing classes, towards the past and the future of capitalism, an understanding of the historical task of international Social-Democracy and of the Russian working class. Inseparably connected with propaganda is **agitation** among the workers, which naturally comes to the forefront in the present political conditions of Russia and at the present level of development of the masses of workers. Agitation among the workers means that the Social-Democrats take part in all the spontaneous manifestations of the working-class struggle, in all the conflicts between the workers and the capitalists over the working day, wages, working conditions, etc., etc. Our task is to merge our activities with the practical, everyday questions of working-class life, to help the workers understand these questions, to draw the workers’ attention to the most important abuses, to help them formulate their demands to the employers more precisely and practically, to develop among the workers consciousness of their solidarity, consciousness of the common interests and common cause of all the Russian workers as a united working class that is part of the international army of the proletariat. To **organise** study circles among workers, to establish proper and secret connections between them and the central group of Social-Democrats, to publish and distribute working-class literature, to organise the receipt of correspondence from all centres of the working-class movement, to publish agitational leaflets and manifestos and to distribute them, and to train a body of experienced agitators—such, in broad outline, are the manifestations of the socialist activities of Russian Social-Democracy.”*

Lenin (1897) The Tasks of the Russian Social-Democrats. LCW 2: 329-330

*“**Tactics and agitation** must not be confused,” says Kautsky in his book against Bernstein. “Agitational methods must be adapted to individual and local conditions. Every agitator must be allowed to select those methods of agitation that he has at his disposal. One agitator may create the greatest impression by his enthusiasm, another by his biting sarcasm, a third by his ability to adduce a large number of instances, etc. While being adapted to the agitator, agitation must also be adapted to the public. The agitator must speak so that he will be understood; he must take as a starting-point something well known to his listeners. All this is self-evident and is not merely applicable to agitation conducted among the peasantry. **One has to talk to cabmen differently than to sailors, and to sailors differently than to printers. Agitation must be individualised, but our tactics, our political activity must be uniform**” (S. 2-3)*

Lenin (end of 1899) A Retrograde Trend in Russian Social-Democracy. LCW 4: 282

*“The position is altogether different when the task of the socialists is to be the ideological leaders of the proletariat in its actual struggle against actual and real enemies who stand in the actual path of social and economic development. Under these circumstances, theoretical and practical work merge into one aptly described by the veteran German Social-Democrat, Liebknecht, as: **Studieren, Propagandieren, Organisieren**. (Study, propaganda, organisation.)”*

Lenin, (1894) What the “Friends of the People” Are and How They Fight the Social-Democrats. LCW 1: 298

*“the words of Liebknecht, veteran of German Social-Democracy, serve as the watchword of our activities: **“Studieren, propagandieren, organisieren”**— Learn, propagandise, organise— and the pivot of this activity can and must be only the organ of the Party.”*

Lenin (1899) Our Immediate Task. (*Rabochaya Gazeta*). LCW 4: 220

Wilhelm Liebknecht popularised the motto “Studieren, Propagandieren, Organisieren” (Learn, propagandise, organise) in the German SPD from the late 1880s.

*“Under present circumstances – and this has to be emphasised as strongly as possible – it is inconceivable that Social-Democracy might obtain a majority in parliament. The conditions for that have as yet to be created; and we can create them only by winning over the masses to our point of view through **agitation** and **propaganda**, and through **organisation** make our forces effective. For us parliamentary activity is not an end, but only the means to an end – it must assist us outside the Reichstag, to win such influence with the people that Legislation will not be able to turn away the justified demands of the working class.”*

Wilhelm Liebknecht (1889) On the Political Position of Social-Democracy. Pelz 2016: 174

The first image of the slogan was designed by the artist Walter Crane for the cover of William Morris’ Socialist League book Chants for Socialists (1885). The earliest use of “educate, agitate, organise” seems to have been the SDF in Britain: “Success can only be achieved by organised effort:

Educate. We shall need all our intelligence.

Agitate. We shall need all our enthusiasm.

Organise. We shall need all our force.”

SDF, Socialism Made Plain, 1883: 8

Revolutionaries struggle for reforms

“Revolutionary Social-Democracy has always included the struggle for reforms as part of its activities. But it utilises “economic” agitation for the purpose of presenting to the government, not only demands for all sorts of measures, but also (and primarily) the demand that it cease to be an autocratic government. Moreover, it considers it its duty to present this demand to the government on the basis, not of the economic struggle alone, but of all manifestations in general of public and political life.”

Lenin (1902) *What is to be Done?* LCW 5: 405

“respond to all cases of tyranny, oppression, violence, and abuse”

“Working-class consciousness cannot be genuine political consciousness unless the workers are trained to respond to all cases of tyranny, oppression, violence, and abuse, no matter what class is affected — unless they are trained, moreover, to respond from a Social-Democratic point of view and no other.”

Lenin (1902) *What is to be Done?* LCW 5: 412

The thin gruel of ‘economic’ politics alone

“we are not children to be fed on the thin gruel of ‘economic’ politics alone; we want to know everything that others know, we want to learn the details of all aspects of political life and to take part actively in every single political event.”

Lenin (1902) *What is to be Done?* LCW 5: 416

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...”

“Compare, for example, a leader like Robert Knight (the well-known secretary and leader of the Boilermakers’ Society, one of the most powerful trade unions in England), with Wilhelm Liebknecht”

Lenin (1902) *What is to be Done?* LCW 5: 423

“the Communists support every revolutionary movement”

“for he is no Social-Democrat who forgets in practice that ‘the Communists support every revolutionary movement’, that we are obliged for that reason to expound and emphasise general democratic tasks before the whole people, without for a moment concealing our socialist convictions. He is no Social-Democrat who forgets in practice his obligation to be ahead of all in raising, accentuating, and solving every general democratic question.”

Lenin (1902) *What is to be Done?* LCW 5: 425

“In short, the Communists everywhere support every revolutionary movement against the existing social and political order of things. In all these movements, they bring to the front, as the leading question in each, the property question, no matter what its degree of development at the time.”

Karl Marx (1848) *The Communist Manifesto*. MECW 6: 519

“working-class trade-unionist politics is precisely working-class bourgeois politics”

“And yet, with only a little reflection it would have understood why any subservience to the spontaneity of the mass movement and any degrading of Social-Democratic politics to the level of trade-unionist politics mean preparing the ground for converting the working-class movement into an instrument of bourgeois democracy. The spontaneous working-class movement is by itself able to create (and inevitably does create) only trade-unionism, and working-class trade-unionist politics is precisely working-class bourgeois politics. The fact that the working class participates in the political struggle, and even in the political revolution, does not in itself make its politics Social-Democratic politics.”

Lenin (1902) *What is to be Done?* LCW 5: 437

Session 5: Key passages and further background

“wretched amateur”

“It is particularly necessary to arouse in all who participate in practical work, or are preparing to take up that work, discontent with the **amateurism** prevailing among us and an unshakable determination to rid ourselves of it.”

Lenin (1902) *What is to be Done?* LCW 5: 440

“Our worst sin with regard to organisation consists in the fact that by our primitiveness we have lowered the prestige of revolutionaries in Russia. A person who is flabby and shaky on questions of theory, who has a narrow outlook, who pleads the spontaneity of the masses as an excuse for his own sluggishness, who resembles a trade union secretary more than a spokesman of the people, who is unable to conceive of a broad and bold plan that would command the respect even of opponents, and who is inexperienced and clumsy in his own professional art — the art of combating the political police — such a man is not a revolutionary, but a **wretched amateur!**”

Lenin (1902) *What is to be Done?* LCW 5: 466

“Local Social-Democratic activity has attained a fairly high level in our country. The seeds of Social-Democratic ideas have been broadcast throughout Russia; workers’ leaflets—the earliest form of Social-Democratic literature—are known to all Russian workers from St. Petersburg to Krasnoyarsk, from the Caucasus to the Urals. All that is now lacking is the unification of all this local work into the work of a single party. Our chief drawback, to the overcoming of which we must devote all our energy, is the narrow “Amateurish” character of local work...

*“Enough of our **Amateurishness!** We have attained sufficient maturity to go over to common action, to the elaboration of a common Party programme, to the joint discussion of our Party tactics and organisation.”*

Lenin (1899) *Our Immediate Task*. (Rabochaya Gazeta). LCW 4: 216-17

Kustarichestvo was a Lenin coinage. Translators have had difficulty with the term, rendering it variously as ‘primitive methods’, ‘primitiveness’, ‘amateurism’ and Utechin’s rather charming ‘rustic craftsmanship’. I have decided to translate kustarichestvo as ‘artisanal limitations’... The key themes in the kustar metaphor were fragmentation, isolation and narrow horizons of local party organisations...

Lih 2005: 453

Primitiveness and Economism

“Can a connection be established between primitiveness as growing pains that affect the whole movement, and Economism, which is one of the currents in Russian Social-Democracy? We think that it can.”

Lenin (1902) *What is to be Done?* LCW 5: 444

“But the term ‘primitiveness’ embraces something more than lack of training; it denotes a narrow scope of revolutionary work generally, failure to understand that a good organisation of revolutionaries cannot be built on the basis of such narrow activity, and lastly — and this is the main thing — attempts to justify this narrowness and to elevate it to a special ‘theory’, i.e., subservience to spontaneity on this question too. Once such attempts were revealed, it became clear that primitiveness is connected with Economism and that we shall never rid ourselves of this narrowness of our organisational activity until we rid ourselves of Economism generally (i.e., the narrow conception of Marxist theory, as well as of the role of Social-Democracy and of its political tasks).”

Lenin (1902) *What is to be Done?* LCW 5: 445

Professional revolutionaries

“Such workers, average people of the masses, are capable of displaying enormous energy and self-sacrifice in strikes and in street, battles with the police and the troops, and are capable (in fact, are alone capable) of determining the outcome of our entire movement — but the struggle against the political police requires special qualities; it requires **professional revolutionaries**. And we must see to it, not only that the masses “advance” concrete demands, but that the masses of the workers “advance” an increasing number of such professional revolutionaries. Thus, we have reached the question of the relation between an organisation of professional revolutionaries and the labour movement pure and simple...

“And we will succeed in doing this, because the spontaneously awakening masses will also produce increasing, numbers of “professional revolutionaries” from their own ranks.”

Lenin (1902) What is to be Done? LCW 5: 450-51

“We must train people who will devote the whole of their lives, not only their spare evenings, to the revolution; we must build up an organisation large enough to permit the introduction of a strict division of labour in the various forms of our work. Finally, with regard to questions of tactics, we shall confine ourselves to the following: social-democracy does not tie its hands, it does not restrict its activities to someone preconceived plan or method of political struggle; it recognises all methods of struggle, provided they correspond to the forces at the disposal of the party and facilitate the achievement of the best results possible under the given conditions. If we have a strongly organised party, a single strike may turn into a political demonstration, into a political victory over the government. If we have a strongly organised party, a revolt in a single locality may grow into a victorious revolution. We must bear in mind that the struggles with the government for partial demands and the gain of certain concessions are merely light skirmishes with the enemy, encounters between outposts, whereas the decisive battle is still to come.”

Lenin (November 1900) The Urgent Tasks of Our Movement, LCW 4: 370-71

*Lenin’s most famous coinage in WITBD is *revoliutsioner po professii* or professional’nyi *revoliutsioner*. This is always translated, naturally enough, as ‘professional revolutionary’, but this rendition creates difficulties. In Russian, at least when Lenin wrote, *professiia* meant ‘trade’, that is, a specialised branch of economic activity.*

‘By trade’ connotes a skill which can be learnt and is both a source of respect and pride. Those with this skill would make no distinction between those of a worker or intelligentsia background. The ultimate aim of the metaphor is to portray the revolutionary as part of the workers’ world, ‘a fellow skilled labourer in the great factory of revolution.

Lenin had never used ‘revolutionary by trade’ previously... ‘revolutionary by trade’ as an evocative metaphor but not as a fully thought-out or even partially thought-out conception. In fact the term seems to have been a last-minute improvisation prompted by Nadezhdin.

‘Revolutionary by trade’ was thus a rhetorical reinforcement of Lenin’s various organisational arguments and not a new conception in itself... the term is not the centrepiece of a ‘party of a new type’.

*What else does the term ‘revolutionary by trade’ not mean? The term is not used to imply any new conception of the tasks of the underground. The broad tasks remain the same: propaganda and agitation that spread enlightenment and organisation, guidance in the class struggle... Lenin’s message to the *praktiki* is: you can increase the efficiency of what you are doing, if you take *konspiritsiia* skills more seriously and if you become part of a nation-wide organisation that can provide support services... Lenin is not proposing any monopoly of decision-making by the revolutionaries by trade. In general, WITBD has little to say about party governance...*

Certainly there is not the slightest hint that the trade of revolutionary is restricted to intellectuals – on the contrary, the recruitment of workers to this trade is treated as a goal of the highest priority.

Lih 2005: 459-65

At its 1871 Dresden congress, the SDAP established the institution of the Vertrauensmann ("trusted person") to maintain a regular channel between local and regional branches and the central party organisations...

In 1873 the SDAP had 170 locals [branches] with Vertrauensmänner, up from 100 the year before; by 1874 this figure had grown to 226...

Supervised and elaborated by the man who came to be called the "red postmaster", Julius Motteler (1836-1908), this system used some 110 Vertrauensmänner to receive and distribute packets of issues smuggled into the country by various means... By the last years of the antisocialist law, as many as eleven thousand copies of the paper penetrated Germany...

*So many of these women's agitation committees, as they were called, were dissolved by the authorities that the 1894 party congress replaced them with a **Vertrauenspersonen** system as the basis of representation at congresses. Eventually sufficient numbers of women were well enough organised to justify a national conference of social-democratic women. Called by Zetkin and Ottilie Baader, then leader of the female Vertrauenspersonen, the first conference met in 1900...*

Gary Steenson, 'Not One Man! Not One Penny!' German Social Democracy, 1863-1914. 1981: 27-28, 39, 151

*The answer, surprisingly enough, is that Lenin seems to have acquired the language of professionalism from Sidney and Beatrice Webb's **Industrial Democracy**, published in late 1897. Lenin was intimately familiar with this work because he and Krupskaja translated the original into Russian...*

*The issue examined in the first two chapters of that work ('Primitive Democracy' and 'Representative Institutions') is 'the manner in which the working man copes with the problem of combining administrative efficiency with popular control'. In the early days of the trade-union movement, the Webbs explained, the workers themselves performed all administrative functions in turn. The local union was a complete '**primitive democracy**'... As the division of labour increased within the organisation there emerged the 'brain-working official' or 'professional civil servant'. 'Spending all day at office work, he soon acquired a professional expertness quite out of the reach of his fellow-members at the bench or forge.' 'The work could no longer be efficiently performed by an ordinary artisan, and some preliminary office training became almost indispensable.' The Webbs lauded this development, for their brand of Fabian socialism placed great trust in the ability of 'professional experts' to solve social problems. They argued that the 'average sensual man' or 'crude' worker lacked the requisite knowledge to propose effective solutions or administer government, and ought to defer to the 'permanent trained professional' who had the expertise...*

The Webbs recognised, however, that professionalisation of trade-union government also created problems, for it opened up social distance between the worker and the professional administrator. 'The very apartness of his life . . . deprives him of close acquaintance with the actual grievances of the mass of the people. Immersed in office routine, he is apt to fail to understand from their inconsistent complaints and impractical suggestions what it is they really desire.' At a certain stage the unions therefore faced 'the difficult and delicate task of controlling the professional experts'. This could be achieved, the Webbs argued, not by giving the rank-and-file more control but by creating a new kind of expert to counter the professional officials: 'To balance the professional civil servant we have... the professional representative.' The latter 'has mastered the technical details of all the business ... his whole life has been one long training for the duties which he has to discharge... in short, he has become a professional expert in ascertaining and representing the desires of his constituents'.

*I believe that it was the Webbs' book which suggested to Lenin the unexpected language of professionalism in *What Is To Be Done?*, and that his 'professional revolutionary' was a variation of the 'professional administrator' and the 'professional representative' lauded by the Webbs...*

Robert Mayer, Lenin and the concept of the professional revolutionary, *History of Political Thought*, 14, 2, 1993: 253-254

Social-Democratic organisation: workers and intellectuals

“The political struggle of Social-Democracy is far more extensive and complex than the economic struggle of the workers against the employers and the government. Similarly (indeed for that reason), the organisation of the revolutionary Social-Democratic Party must inevitably be of a kind different from the organisation of the workers designed for this struggle. The workers' organisation must in the first place be a trade union organisation; secondly, it must be as broad as possible; and thirdly, it must be as public as conditions will allow (here, and further on, of course, I refer only to absolutist Russia). On the other hand, the organisation of the revolutionaries must consist first and foremost of people who make revolutionary activity their profession (for which reason I speak of the organisation of revolutionaries, meaning revolutionary Social-Democrats). In view of this common characteristic of the members of such an organisation, all distinctions as between workers and intellectuals, not to speak of distinctions of trade and profession, in both categories, must be effaced. Such an organisation must perforce not be very extensive and must be as secret as possible. Let us examine this threefold distinction.”

Lenin (1902) *What is to be Done?* LCW 5: 452

Lenin's remark that 'all distinctions between workers and intelligency must be completely eliminated' is usually understood as creating a place for workers in the revolutionary organisation. On the standards reading, Lenin is saying in effect: 'we intelligentsia revolutionaries must make room for workers and make them feel at home'. Lenin's remark perhaps reads more naturally in context as making room for the intelligency. Lenin insists that they have a legitimate role to play in a revolutionary organisation, so that their social origin should not be held against them.

Lih 2005: 594-95

Social-Democrats work in and assist trade unions

“The workers' organisations for the economic struggle should be trade union organisations. Every Social-Democratic worker should as far as possible assist and actively work in these organisations.”

Lenin (1902) *What is to be Done?* LCW 5: 454

Value of trade union organisations

“Trade union organisations, not only can be of tremendous value in developing and consolidating the economic struggle, but can also become a very important auxiliary to political agitation and revolutionary organisation.”

Lenin (1902) *What is to be Done?* LCW 5: 456-57

Social-Democratic trade union movement

“A small, compact core of the most reliable, experienced, and hardened workers, with responsible representatives in the principal districts and connected by all the rules of strict secrecy with the organisation of revolutionaries, can, with the widest support of the masses and without any formal organisation, perform all the functions of a trade union organisation, in a manner, moreover, desirable to Social-Democracy. Only in this way can we secure the consolidation and development of a Social-Democratic trade union movement, despite all the gendarmes.”

Lenin (1902) *What is to be Done?* LCW 5: 459

SPD as a model

“Take the Germans. It will not be denied, I hope, that theirs is a mass organisation, that in Germany everything proceeds from the masses, that the working-class movement there has learned to walk. Yet observe how these millions value their “dozen” tried political leaders, how firmly they cling to them... Political thinking is sufficiently developed among the Germans, and they have accumulated sufficient political experience to understand that without the “dozen” tried and talented leaders (and talented men are not born by the hundreds), professionally trained, schooled by long experience, and working in perfect harmony, no class in modern society can wage a determined struggle.”

Lenin (1902) *What is to be Done?* LCW 5: 461

“The Germans too have had demagogues in their ranks who have flattered the “hundred fools”, exalted them above the “dozen wise men”, extolled the “horny hand” of the masses, and (like Most and Hasselmann) have spurred them on to reckless “revolutionary” action and sown distrust towards the firm and steadfast leaders. It was only by stubbornly and relentlessly combating all demagogic elements within the socialist movement that German socialism has managed to grow and become as strong as it is. Our wiseacres, however, at a time when Russian Social-Democracy is passing through a crisis entirely due to the lack of sufficiently trained, developed, and experienced leaders to guide the spontaneously awakening masses...”

Lenin (1902) *What is to be Done?* LCW 5: 462

*“Here a few words are in order on our attitude to the Erfurt Programme. From what has been said above it is clear to everyone that we consider it necessary to make changes in the draft of the Emancipation of Labour group that will bring the programme of the Russian Social-Democrats closer to that of the German. **We are not in the least afraid to say that we want to imitate the Erfurt Programme: there is nothing bad in imitating what is good, and precisely to day, when we so often hear opportunist and equivocal criticism of that programme, we consider it our duty to speak openly in its favour.** Imitating, however, must under no circumstances be simply copying. Imitation and borrowing are quite legitimate insofar as in Russia we see the same basic processes of the development of capitalism, the same basic tasks for the socialists and the working class; but they must not, under any circumstances, lead to our forgetting the specific features of Russia which must find full expression in the specific features of our programme. Running ahead somewhat, let us say here that among these specific features are, first, our political tasks and means of struggle; and, secondly, our struggle against all remnants of the patriarchal, pre-capitalist regime and the specific posing of the peasant question arising out of that struggle.”*

Lenin (1899) *A Draft of Our Party Programme*. LCW 4: 235

Demagogues

“demagogues are the worst enemies of the working class.”

Lenin (1902) *What is to be Done?* LCW 5: 463

Worker-agitator

“A **worker-agitator** who is at all gifted and “promising” must not be left to work eleven hours a day in a factory.”

Lenin (1902) *What is to be Done?* LCW 5: 472

Conspiratorial organisation

"It would be extremely naive indeed, therefore, to fear the charge that we Social-Democrats desire to create a conspiratorial organisation."

Lenin (1902) What is to be Done? LCW 5: 476

In WITBD Lenin gave a particularly clear expression to a number of the basic norms that animated the underground... Lenin did not invent these norms but, rather, gave forceful expression to what 'oft was thought' by the praktiki on the ground. The norms were common to both factions of the Social Democrats...

Among these norms could be found a commitment to preserving roots in the worker milieu, to recruiting workers into party structures, to maintaining high standards of konspiritsiia, to according high status to full-time illegals, to creating an efficient division of labour, to overcoming local horizons and seeing oneself as part of a larger whole, and, finally, to using party newspapers to give concrete content to this sense of unity...

Lenin uses the term konspiritsiia and allied forms often enough in WITBD (forty times, to be precise). Yet his usage of the term is effectively concealed from readers of English translations. The first translator, Joe Fineberg, occasionally translated, say, 'principles of konspiritsiia' as 'principles of conspiracy', but later translators correctly felt that this was seriously misleading. They therefore substituted 'secrecy' or some such term...

A concise definition of konspiratsiia was "the fine art of not getting arrested"

Both populist conspiracies and Social-Democratic konspiritsiia set out to achieve political freedom that would make conspiracies and konspiritsiia unnecessary, but konspiritsiia did so by creating a space for open politics even under police-state conditions...

Lenin also argues that formal democratic institutions such as elections within local organisations are dangerous because they violate konspiritsiia. Elections and other kinds of formal rules allow the police to infiltrate and to locate its leaders...

Lenin also used konspiritsiia considerations as an additional argument against wasting time and resources on local underground newspapers.

Lih 2005: 434-36, 447-450

Conditions for party democracy

"Everyone will probably agree that "the broad democratic principle" presupposes the two following conditions: first, full publicity, and secondly, election to all offices. It would be absurd to speak of democracy without publicity, moreover, without a publicity that is not limited to the membership of the organisation. We call the German Socialist Party a democratic organisation because all its activities are carried out publicly; even its party congresses are held in public. But no one would call an organisation democratic that is hidden from everyone but its members by a veil of secrecy. What is the use, then, of advancing "the broad democratic principle" when the fundamental condition for this principle cannot be fulfilled by a secret organisation? "The broad principle" proves itself simply to be a resounding but hollow phrase...

"In politically free countries, this condition [the principle of election] is taken for granted. 'They are members of the Party who accept the principles of the Party programme and render the Party all possible support', reads Clause 1 of the Rules of the German Social-Democratic Party...

"It is a harmful toy because any attempt to practise "the broad democratic principle" will simply facilitate the work of the police in carrying out large-scale raids, will perpetuate the prevailing primitiveness, and will divert the thoughts of the practical workers from the serious and pressing task of training themselves to become professional revolutionaries to that of drawing up detailed "paper" rules for election systems."

Lenin (1902) What is to be Done? LCW 5; 477-79

Session 6: Key passages and further background

There is no other way of training strong political organisations except a newspaper

“Unless we train strong political organisations in the localities, even an excellently organised all-Russia newspaper will be of no avail. This is incontrovertible. But the whole point is that there is no other way of training strong political organisations except through the medium of an all-Russia newspaper.”

Lenin (1902) *What is to be Done?* LCW 5: 499

The paper as bricklaying

“*Iskra* wrote: The publication of an all-Russia political newspaper must be the main line by which we may unswervingly develop, deepen, and expand the organisation (viz., the revolutionary organisation that is ever ready to support every protest and every outbreak). Pray tell me, when bricklayers lay bricks in, various parts of an enormous, unprecedentedly large structure, is it “paper” work to use a line to help them find the correct place for the bricklaying; to indicate to them the ultimate goal of the common work; to enable them to use, not only every brick, but even every piece of brick which, cemented to the bricks laid before and after it, forms a finished, continuous line? And are we not now passing through precisely such a period in our Party life when we have bricks and bricklayers, but lack the guide line for all to see and follow?”

Lenin (1902) *What is to be Done?* LCW 5: 501

The paper as scaffolding

“Another comparison: ‘A newspaper is not only a collective propagandist and a collective agitator, it is also a collective organiser. In this respect it may be compared to the scaffolding erected round a building under construction; it marks the contours of the structure and facilitates communication between the builders, permitting them to distribute the work and to view the common results achieved by their organised labour.’ Does this sound anything like the attempt of an armchair author to exaggerate his role? The scaffolding is not required at all for the dwelling; it is made of cheaper material, is put up only temporarily, and is scrapped for firewood as soon as the shell of the structure is completed. As for the building of revolutionary organisations, experience shows that sometimes they may be built without scaffolding, as the seventies showed. But at the present time we cannot even imagine the possibility of erecting the building we require without scaffolding.”

Lenin (1902) *What is to be Done?* LCW 5: 502-03

The paper and contacts

“The mere function of distributing a newspaper would help to establish actual contacts (if it is a newspaper worthy of the name, i.e., if it is issued regularly, not once a month like a magazine, but at least four times a month).”

Lenin (1902) *What is to be Done?* LCW 5: 507

“The organisation, which will form round this newspaper, the organisation of its collaborators (in the broad sense of the word, i.e., all those working for it), will be ready for everything, from upholding the honour, the prestige, and the continuity of the Party in periods of acute revolutionary ‘depression’ to preparing for, appointing the time for, and carrying out the nation-wide armed uprising.”

Lenin (1902) *What is to be Done?* LCW 5: 514-15

“In our opinion, the starting-point of our activities, the first step towards creating the desired organisation, or, let us say, the main thread which, if followed, would enable us steadily to develop, deepen, and extend that organisation, should be the founding of an All-Russian political news-paper. A newspaper is what we most of all need; without it we cannot conduct that systematic, all-round propaganda and agitation, consistent in principle, which is the chief and permanent task of Social-Democracy in general and, in particular, the pressing task of the moment, when interest in politics and in questions of socialism has been aroused among the broadest strata of population.”
 Lenin (May 1901) Where to Begin, LCW 5: 20-21

*“The role of a newspaper, however, is not limited solely to the dissemination of ideas, to political education, and to the enlistment of political allies. **A newspaper is not only a collective propagandist and a collective agitator, it is also a collective organiser.** In this last respect it may be likened to the scaffolding round a building under construction, which marks the contours of the structure and facilitates communication between the builders, enabling them to distribute the work and to view the common results achieved by their organised labour. With the aid of the newspaper, and through it, a permanent organisation will naturally take shape that will engage, not only in local activities, but in regular general work, and will train its members to follow political events carefully, appraise their significance and their effect on the various strata of the population, and develop effective means for the revolutionary party to influence these events. The mere technical task of regularly supplying the newspaper with copy and of promoting regular distribution will necessitate a network of local agents of the united party, who will maintain constant contact with one another, know the general state of affairs, get accustomed to performing regularly their detailed functions in the All-Russian work, and test their strength in the organisation of various revolutionary actions. This network of agents[1] will form the skeleton of precisely the kind of organisation we need—one that is sufficiently large to embrace the whole country; sufficiently broad and many-sided to effect a strict and detailed division of labour; sufficiently well tempered to be able to conduct steadily its own work under any circumstances, at all “sudden turns”, and in face of all contingencies; sufficiently flexible to be able, on the one hand, to avoid an open battle against an overwhelming enemy, when the enemy has concentrated all his forces at one spot, and yet, on the other, to take advantage of his unwieldiness and to attack him when and where he least expects it.”*
 Lenin, (May 1901) Where to Begin, LCW 5: 22-23

Note: the scaffolding analogy doesn't hold: i.e. you can construct a building without scaffolding, but you can't build a proper party without a publication.

*At the time of the Exceptional Law against the Socialists (1878-90) the German political police did not function worse, but probably better, than the Russian police; nevertheless, the German workers, thanks to their organisation and discipline, were able to ensure the regular transport across the frontiers of a weekly illegal newspaper and to deliver it to the houses of all subscribers, so that even the ministers could not refrain from admiring the Social-Democratic post (“**the red mail**”). We do not, of course, dream of such successes, but we can, if we bend our efforts towards it, ensure that our Party newspaper appears no less than twelve times a year and is regularly delivered in all the main centres of the movement to all groups of workers that can be reached by socialism.*
 Lenin (1899) An Urgent Question. (*Rabochaya Gazeta*). LCW 4: 224

Worker intellectuals

“enlightened workers”

Lenin (1902) What is to be Done? LCW 5: 500

*“The task of the ‘Workers’ Library’ ... amounts principally to explaining to the **worker intelligentsia** its tasks and the conditions through which they can best be accomplished.”*

Plekhanov and Axelrod (1884) ‘From the Publishers of the ‘Workers’ Library’’, Harding 1983: 71

*“For this it was enough to have two or three facts proving that you – the workers socialists and **worker ‘intellectuals’** – exist and that you are preparing to take into your own hands the political awakening of the oppressed and deprived masses of Russia.”*

Axelrod (1893) ‘The Tasks of the Worker Intelligentsia in Russia’, Harding 1983: 115

*“At a time when educated society is losing interest in honest, illegal literature, an impassioned desire for knowledge and for socialism is growing among the workers, real heroes are coming to the fore from amongst the workers, who, despite their wretched living conditions, despite the stultifying penal servitude of factory labour, possess so much character and will-power that they study, study, study, and turn themselves into conscious Social-Democrats – “**the working class intelligentsia**”. This “working-class intelligentsia” already exists in Russia, and we must make every effort to ensure that its ranks are regularly reinforced, that its lofty mental requirements are met and that leaders of the Russian Social-Democratic Labour Party come from its ranks.”*

Lenin (end of 1899) A Retrograde Trend in Russian Social-Democracy. LCW 4: 280-81

“Without such organisation the proletariat will never rise to the class-conscious struggle; without such organisation the working-class movement is doomed to impotency...”

*“Not a single class in history has achieved power without producing its **political leaders**, its prominent representatives able to organise a movement and lead it. And the Russian working class has already shown that it can produce such men and women.”*

Lenin (November 1900) The Urgent Tasks of Our Movement. LCW 4: 370

Nadezhdin’s term intelligentye rabochii... also called ‘advanced workers’ or purposive workers’.
Lih 2005: 606

The history of Russian Social-Democracy

“The history of Russian Social-Democracy can be distinctly divided into three periods:

“The first period embraces about ten years, approximately from 1884 to 1894. This was the period of the rise and consolidation of the theory and programme of Social-Democracy. The adherents of the new trend in Russia were very few in number. Social-Democracy existed without a working-class movement, and as a political party it was at the embryonic stage of development.

“The second period embraces three or four years—1894-99. In this period Social-Democracy appeared on the scene as a social movement, as the upsurge of the masses of the people, as a political party. This is the period of its childhood and adolescence... Trained in this struggle, Social-Democrats went into the working-class movement without “for a moment” forgetting either the theory of Marxism, which brightly illumined their path, or the task of overthrowing the autocracy. The formation of the Party in the spring of 1898 was the most striking and at the same time the last act of the Social-Democrats of this period.

“The third period, as we have seen, was prepared in 1897 and it definitely cut off the second period in 1898 (1898-?). This was a period of disunity, dissolution, and vacillation...”

Lenin (1902) What is to be Done? LCW 5: 517-18

Session 7 reading: Extracts after WITBD

At the second congress of the RSDLP in July-August 1903, the Iskra faction defeated its rivals, including the Economists and the Bund. However the Iskra supporters split over the issue of membership of the editorial board of the party paper (known as the central organ) and the composition of the central committee. The central committee in the constitution was not the supreme body between conferences (that was the party council). Rather it was a practical body charged with distributing literature, organising local committees and literature distribution.

Lenin's supporters wanted continuity between the Russian Iskra organisation and the new central committee. Martov insisted on the reappointment of the "old" editorial of six people, (himself, Plekhanov, Lenin, Axelrod, Zasulich and Potresov), while Lenin wanted the election of the first three alone. Lenin won the votes for the composition of the central organ and the central committee, but Martov refused to serve as an editor. This was the origin of the split into "Bolsheviks" (majority-ites) who won the vote on the leading bodies, and the "Mensheviks" (minority-ites) who lost those votes.

Lenin after *What is to be Done?*

Comrade Trotsky understood very incorrectly the fundamental idea of my book *What Is To Be Done?*, when he spoke about the Party not being a conspiratorial organisation (many others also raised this objection). He forgot that in my book I advocate a whole series of organisations of different types, from the most secret and exclusive to comparatively broad and 'loose' organisations. Lenin (2 August 1903). Pearce, Russian Social-Democratic Labour Party Second Congress. 1978: 327

The old board of six was so ineffectual that never once in all its three years did it meet in full force... Not one of the forty-five issues of *Iskra* was made up (in the editorial and technical sense) by anyone but Martov or Lenin. And never once was any major theoretical issue raised by anyone but Plekhanov. Axelrod did no work at all (he contributed literally nothing to *Zarya* and only three or four articles to all the forty-five issues of *Iskra*). Zasulich and Starover only contributed and advised... Lenin, [September 1903] 'Account of the Second Congress of the RSDLP'. LCW 7: 31

Every circle, even of *Rabocheye Dyelo*-ists, is entitled, on joining the Party, to demand the opportunity to express and advocate its views; but no circle, not even of generals, is entitled to demand representation on the Party's central bodies. Lenin (December 1903) Why I Resigned from the Iskra Editorial Board. LCW 7: 124

I already said at the Congress, and have since repeated it time and again, that "I by no means consider our difference [over Paragraph 1] so vital as to be a matter of life or death to the Party. We shall certainly not perish because of an unfortunate clause in the Rules!" Lenin (May 1904) One Step Forward, Two Steps Back. LCW 7: 255

In reality, "What Should Not Be Done" could only be understood, at the time it was written, by some dozen people living in two Geneva suburbs whose names both begin with the same letter. Comrade Plekhanov's misfortune was that he put into circulation among some ten thousand readers an agglomeration of hints, reproaches, algebraical symbols, and riddles which were intended only for these dozen or so people who had taken part in all the developments of the post-Congress struggle with the minority. This misfortune befell Comrade Plekhanov because he violated a basic principle of that dialectics to which he so unluckily referred, namely, that there is no abstract truth, that truth is always concrete. That is why it was out of place to lend an abstract form to the perfectly concrete idea of yielding to the Martovites after the League Congress.

Lenin (May 1904) One Step Forward, Two Steps Back. LCW 7: 370

We have no Party... we have ever more numerous young forces capable both of reinvigorating and of replacing decrepit literary bodies; we have revolutionaries, and their number is steadily growing, who prize the trend of the old *Iskra* that schooled them above any editorial circle. Our Party is coming into being, and no subterfuges or delays, no senile malicious vituperation of the new *Iskra* can hold back the decided and final verdict of this Party.

Lenin (July 1904) *What We Are Working For (To the Party)*. LCW 7: 453

The Rules to provide guarantees that Party struggles are conducted by Party methods. That this reform is essential is shown by the entire experience of the post-Congress struggle. It is necessary to include in the party rules guarantees of the rights of any minority, so that the disagreements, dissatisfactions, and irritations that will constantly and unavoidably arise may be diverted from the old, philistine, circle channels of rows and squabbling into the still unaccustomed channels of a constitutional and dignified struggle for one's convictions. Among the conditions needed for such a change we class the following. The minority should be allowed one or more writers' groups, with the right to be represented at congresses; the widest formal guarantees should be given as regards publication of Party literature criticising the activities of the central Party institutions.

Lenin (August 1904) *To the Party*. LCW 7: 460

Comrade Luxemburg says, for example, that my book is a clear and detailed expression of the point of view of "intransigent centralism". Comrade Luxemburg thus supposes that I defend one system of organisation against another. But actually that is not so. From the first to the last page of my book, I defend the elementary principles of any conceivable system of party organisation... Comrade Luxemburg fathers on me the idea that all the conditions already exist in Russia for forming a large and extremely centralised workers' party. Again an error of fact. Nowhere in my book did I voice such an idea, let alone advocate it.

Lenin (September 1904) *One Step Forward, Two Steps Back: (Reply by N. Lenin to Rosa Luxemburg)*. LCW 7: 474, 476

We must have as many Party workers as possible correspond with us, correspond in the ordinary, not the journalistic sense of the term.

Lenin (29 November 1904) *A Letter to the Comrades*. LCW 7: 526

The differences in principle between *Vperyod* and new *Iskra* are essentially the same as those between the old *Iskra* and *Rabocheye Dyelo*. We consider these differences important, but, given the opportunity fully to defend our views, the views of the old *Iskra*, we would not consider these differences of themselves to be a bar to working together in one Party.

Lenin (3 February 1905) *A Brief Outline of the Split in the RSDLP [Letter to Greulich]*. LCW 8: 131

Under conditions of political freedom, our Party can and will be built entirely on the elective principle. Under the autocracy this is impracticable for the collective thousands of workers that make up the Party.

Lenin (February 1905) *Resolution on the Relations between Workers and Intellectuals in the Social-Democratic Party: Draft Resolutions for the Third Congress of the RSDLP*. LCW 8: 196

I should be strongly in favour of having eight workers to every two intellectuals on our committees. Lenin (20 April 1905) *Speech on the Question of the Relations Between Workers and Intellectuals within the Social-Democratic Organisations: The Third Congress of the RSDLP*. LCW 8: 408

When and where did I ever claim to have created any sort of special trend in International Social-Democracy not identical with the trend of Bebel and Kautsky? When and where have there been brought to light differences between me, on the one hand, and Bebel and Kautsky, on the other—differences even slightly approximating in seriousness the differences between Bebel and Kautsky... Lenin (June-July 1905) *Two Tactics of Social-Democracy in the Democratic Revolution*. LCW 9: 65-66

Congresses of the German Social-Democrats have long become events whose importance goes far beyond the confines of the German labour movement. The German Social-Democratic movement ranks first in respect of organisation, integrality and coherence, and the extent and rich content of its Marxist literature.

Lenin (September 1905) *The Jena Congress of the German Social-Democratic Workers' Party*. LCW 9: 290

"[We must not be afraid of] "a sudden influx of large numbers of non-Social-Democrats into the Party... The working class is instinctively, spontaneously Social-Democratic, and more than ten years of work put in by Social-Democracy has done a great deal to transform this spontaneity into consciousness.

Lenin (10 November 1905) *The Reorganisation of the Party'*, *Novaya Zhizn*, No.13. LCW 10: 31-32

We must and shall fight ideologically against those decisions of the Congress which we regard as erroneous. But at the same time we declare to the whole Party that we are opposed to a split of any kind. We stand for submission to the decisions of the Congress.

Lenin (25-26 April 1906) *An Appeal to the Party by Delegates to the Unity Congress Who Belonged to the Former "Bolshevik" Group'*. LCW 10: 314

If we have really and seriously decided to introduce democratic centralism in our Party, and if we have resolved to draw the masses of the workers into intelligent decision of Party questions, we must have these questions discussed in the press, at meetings, in circles and at group meetings. 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.

Freedom of discussion, unity of action—this is what we must strive to achieve.

Lenin (May 1906) *Report on the Unity Congress of the RSDLP*. LCW 10: 380

The basic mistake made by people who polemicise with *What is to be Done?* at the present time is that they tear this production completely out of specific historical context, out of a specific and by now long-past period in the development of our party...

What Is To Be Done? is a summary of *Iskra* tactics and *Iskra* organisational policy in 1901 and 1902. Precisely a 'summary', no more and no less. That will be clear to anyone who takes the trouble to go through the file of *Iskra* for 1901 and 1902. But to pass judgement on that summary without knowing *Iskra's* struggle against the then dominant trend of Economism, without understanding that struggle, is sheer idle talk. *Iskra* fought for an organisation of professional revolutionaries. It fought with especial vigour in 1901 and 1902, vanquished Economism, the then dominant trend, and finally created this organisation in 1903. It preserved it in face of the subsequent split in the *Iskrist* ranks and all the convulsions of the period of storm and stress; it preserved it throughout the Russian revolution; it preserved it intact from 1901-02 to 1907.

And now, when the fight for this organisation has long been won, when the seed has ripened, and the harvest gathered, people come along and tell us: "You exaggerated the idea of an organisation of professional revolutionaries!" Is this not ridiculous?

Lenin (September 1907) *Preface to the Collection Twelve Years*. LCW 13: 102

Martynov at Second RSDLP Congress (1903)

Martynov: The section of *Iskra's* draft programme dealing with principles has one feature which distinguishes it from all the other Social-Democratic programmes in Europe. In all those programmes it is said, in one form or another, in strict conformity with the principles of Marxism, that the development of capitalist society necessarily creates not only the material but also the spiritual conditions for the realisation of socialism, that is, it contributes to the development of the class-consciousness of the proletariat, intensifying the struggle of the proletariat against the whole capitalist system. This proposition is nowhere to be found in *Iskra's* draft programme...

There is no such proposition in the draft programme of *Iskra*. In the place where, according to the sense of the programme, the spiritual pre-conditions for socialism, the active role of the proletariat should have been mentioned, all that is said is: 'The numbers and cohesion of the proletarians increase and their struggle against their exploiters intensifies.'...

How are we to account for the fact that in *Iskra's* draft programme we find no mention of a proposition of principle which is set forth, in one way or another, in all Social-Democratic programmes?

Undoubtedly we see here the influence of the recent fight against so-called economism, and in particular the influence of a basic theoretical argument which was advanced during that fight by Comrade Lenin, the author of the pamphlet *What Is To Be Done?*

Let us look and see what scientific value this thesis possesses. Comrade Lenin writes: 'The spontaneous development of the working-class movement leads to its becoming subordinated to bourgeois ideology... for the spontaneous working-class movement is trade-unionism, is *Nur-Gewerkschaftlerei*, and trade-unionism means the ideological enslavement of the workers by the bourgeoisie... The history of all countries shows that by its own efforts alone the working class is able to develop only trade-unionist consciousness, that is, conviction of the need to unite in trade unions, to wage a struggle against the employers, to obtain from the government various laws which the workers need,' and so on.

This is the modest, or, rather, the negative role which Comrade Lenin assigns to the proletariat in the elaboration of its own socialist ideology. In his view, 'there can be no question of an independent ideology being worked out by the mass of the workers in the process of their movement ...' 'Social-democratic consciousness can be introduced only from without ... The theory of socialism grew out of philosophical, historical and economic theories that were elaborated by educated representatives of the propertied classes, intellectuals. By their social status the founders of modern scientific socialism, Marx and Engels, belonged to the bourgeois intelligentsia...'

If this is true, if the proletariat spontaneously tends towards bourgeois ideology, if socialism is developed outside the proletariat, then the spreading of socialism among the workers must take the form of a struggle between the ideology of the proletariat and its own spontaneous tendencies, and Comrade Lenin draws that conclusion: 'Our task, the task of a Social-Democrat, consists in struggle against spontaneity, so as to divert the working-class movement from this spontaneous trade-unionist tendency to come under the wing of the bourgeoisie...'

Comrade Lenin sees antagonism between the ideology of the proletariat and the mission of the proletariat. I observe an antagonism between Lenin's thesis and that which was voiced on many occasions by Marx and Engels...

But Comrade Lenin assures us that 'the history of all countries shows', etc.

We must suppose, then, that one of two things is true. Either the experience of all countries testifies against the words I have quoted from Marx, or Comrade Lenin has failed to throw light on this experience from the standpoint of Marx. I incline towards the latter view. What the history of all countries tells me is that modern socialism has arisen as a product of the movement of the proletariat, and that 'the spontaneous development of the working-class movement leads to its becoming subordinated' not to bourgeois ideology but to modern scientific socialism. In order to find confirmation of this view of history it is above all necessary not to interpret it naively, not to suppose that the proletariat elaborates its ideology exclusively on the basis of experience of its own internal life, independently of the traditions it inherits or the contemporary social situation surrounding it, not to suppose that the proletariat develops its ideology like the spider drawing its web out of its own back...

And so we Marxists affirm that the proletariat has elaborated independently its own socialist ideology; but by that we mean that the proletariat has independently transformed the ideology borrowed by it from its surroundings, in accordance with its own class interests.

In becoming distinguished as a particular class, separated out from the mass of the 'democracy', the proletariat at the same time transformed the former struggle of the 'democracy' against the feudal system into a new struggle, that of the working class against the bourgeois system.

When we trace the history of the rise of modern socialism we can easily perceive how the proletariat converted the economic and political struggle, the social ideals and philosophical world-outlook of the 'democracy' of the early nineteenth century into the corresponding elements of the modern socialist movement...

Thus, history gives us the right to say: first, all modern socialism is the product of the working class, though materials for it had already been made ready by the bourgeois democrats; and, secondly, in the elaboration of modern socialism, sections of the working class which differed in their levels of consciousness arrived in practice, gropingly, at the separate tasks and solutions which their ideologists discovered, synthesised and grounded theoretically. These propositions are of enormous importance. They contradict the thesis put forward by Comrade Lenin in his pamphlet *What Is To Be Done?*, but they are derived from the foundations of Marxism, and they are formulated in one way or another in all Social-Democratic programmes. They ought to be given clear expression in our programme too...

Martynov (21 July 1903). Pearce, 1903: Russian Social-Democratic Labour Party Second Congress. Eighth session. 1978: 140-44, 148-149

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Plekhanov (1903)

But all the reproaches directed against this unfortunate phrase, and not by Comrade Martynov alone but by many others, are based on a misunderstanding. Comrade Martynov quotes Engels's words: 'Scientific socialism is the theoretical expression of the proletarian movement.' Comrade Lenin agrees with Engels, too, and, if he didn't, he ought indeed to be hanged. But Engels's words amount, after all, only to a general proposition. The question is: who first formulates this 'theoretical expression'? Lenin was writing not a treatise on the philosophy of history, but a polemical article against the economists who said: we must wait for the working class to catch up, without the help of the 'revolutionary bacillus'. The latter was forbidden to tell the workers anything, precisely because it was a 'revolutionary bacillus', that is, because it possessed theoretical consciousness. But if you eliminate the 'bacillus', then you are left with a uniform unconscious mass, into which consciousness has to be injected from without. If you were to be fair to Lenin and read the whole of his book with attention, you would see that that is just what he says in it. Thus, speaking of the trade-union struggle, he develops that very idea that broad socialist consciousness can be introduced only from outside the limits of the direct struggle for improving the conditions which govern the sale of labour-power.

Plekhanov (22 July 1903) Pearce, 1903: Russian Social-Democratic Labour Party Second Congress. Ninth session. 1978: 158-159

Plekhanov (1904)

According to Lenin, the working class, when left to itself, is only capable of fighting for the conditions of the sale of its efforts on the basis of capitalist relations of production. According to Marx and Engels, this class inevitably fights to eliminate these relations, to complete a socialist revolution...

Kautsky is true to Marxism: Lenin betrays it... Kautsky could say the same to Lenin regarding his own words 'heard with approval and admiration' and cited by the latter: 'You hear in them something quite different from what I want to say'...

Kautsky: "Thus, together with the proletariat, socialistic tendencies among proletarians and those who adopt the point of view of the proletariat emerge with the natural force of an inevitability."

Only clear consciousness, only learned theory is brought 'from without', but the historical movement beyond the bounds of trade unionism – together with the birth of socialist instinct – is provoked by the very position of the proletariat and emerges in this class's own midst...

When I read the manuscript of the pamphlet, *What Is To Be Done?*, I immediately said to Lenin and to other members of our Editorial Board that I saw quite enough theoretical mistakes in it. As regards 'spontaneity' and 'consciousness' in particular, I remarked to Lenin that the latter appeared in his work *wie aus der Pistol geschossen* [As if fired from a pistol] – to use the well-known expression of Hegel – and I insisted on the reworking of the passage, which seemed to me to be incorrect...

[Lenin] not only failed to let go of sticks bent by him in the polemic with the 'Economists', but sat on the top of that curved stick and revealed the most unmistakable intention to travel on it... I do not find it necessary to hide the fact that, in this critical work, I will start with a firm conviction of the need to liquidate the 'fourth' period of our Party's history, having thrown Lenin's 'over-bent stick' onto the rubbish heap.

Plekhanov (25 July-1 August 1904) *The Working Class and the Social-Democratic Intelligentsia*. Mullin 2016: 543, 546, 557, 559, 565, 571-72

Trotsky (1904)

When Lenin took up Kautsky's absurd idea of the relationship between the "spontaneous" and the "conscious" elements of the revolutionary movement of the proletariat, he was only giving a crude definition of the tasks of his epoch. He spoke to the intelligentsia which – given the complexity of the problems raised – was the only public for *Zarya* (and *Iskra*), and which could provide the spark. He said to them: "First we will infuse you with Marxism, as a concentrated dose of consciousness, we will steep you in mistrust for bourgeois democracy, and then to work, into the attack on spontaneity!" This is precisely where the task lay: to "fill" the intelligentsia with Marxism, tie them hand and foot to stop them getting away, betraying, and openly attacking Marx – in other words, stop them from breathing! It was moreover an extremely urgent task, since the Marxist intelligentsia were melting away before our very eyes, slipping through our fingers to go... to the Socialist-Revolutionaries and the liberals...

Without taking stock of the "minority's" energetic attempts to put an end to this narrow outlook, Comrade Lenin, in his latest pamphlet, attempts once more to reduce the problem of the content of our Party's work to that of the content of its programme, or even of a few issues of *Iskra* (see *One Step Forward*). In this Comrade Lenin remains formally loyal to the traditions of *What Is To Be Done?* And in part to the traditions of the old *Iskra*. But *Vernunft wird Unsinn* (Reason becomes Unreason). This identification of the Party with its paper – which made some sense organisationally in relation to the given tasks of the preceding period) today turns into an extremely reactionary residue...

The extremely primitive organisational "plans" put forward by the author of *What Is To Be Done?* which occupied an insignificant place in the whole realm of ideas, but which, as propagated by *Iskra* and *Zarya* were nonetheless an undeniable factor for progress, reappear three years later in the work of their "epigone," the author of *One Step Forward, Two Steps Back*, as a furious attempt to prevent Social Democracy from being fully itself...

Lenin's "organisational plan" was not of course a revelation but – if one tries not to see his *Letter to a Petersburg Comrade*, his article *Where to Begin?* or even his book *What is to be Done?* as exercises of a bureaucratic pen – a good answer to the following question: where to begin, what is to be done is to assemble the scattered members of the future organisation of the Party and thus make it possible to establish broader political tasks? The way in which this organisation, once built, would acquit itself of its basic tasks, was of course evaded. I repeat, the so-called "organisational plan" concerned not so much the edifice of the Party itself, as the "scaffolding" necessary to build it (cf. *What is to be Done?*)...

In the internal politics of the Party these methods lead, as we shall see below, to the Party organisation "substituting" itself for the Party, the Central Committee substituting itself for the Party organisation, and finally the dictator substituting himself for the Central Committee.

Trotsky (1904) *Our Political Tasks*. 1978: 32, 49, 50-51, 77

Rosa Luxemburg (1904)

The book before us, *One Step Forward, Two Steps Back* by Comrade Lenin, one of the distinguished leaders and militants of Iskra in its campaign of preparation for the Russian party congress, is a systematic exposition of the views of the ultracentralist tendency in the Russian party. The point of view that finds forceful and exhaustive expression here is that of uncompromising centralism: its essential principle consists, on the one hand, in the rigid separation and isolation of the organized elements of outright and active revolutionaries from their, albeit unorganized, revolutionary activist milieu, and, on the other hand, in the strict discipline and the direct, decisive and definite intervention of the central authority in all the signs of life of local party organizations.

Suffice it to note that in this view the Central Committee has, for instance, the right to organize all the local committees of the party and thus also to determine the membership of every individual Russian local organization from Geneva and Liege to Tomsk and Irkutsk, to provide them with a readymade local statute, to dissolve and reconstitute them by fiat and hence also to exert indirect influence on the composition of the highest party organ, the congress. Thus the Central Committee emerges as the real active nucleus of the party; all the remaining organizations are merely its executive instruments.

Rosa Luxemburg (1904) *Organisational Questions of the Russian Social Democracy*. 2004: 250

The conditions for social democratic activity are radically different. This derives historically from the elemental class struggle. It operates within the dialectical contradiction that here it is only in the struggle itself that the proletarian army is itself recruited and only in the struggle that it becomes conscious of the purpose of the struggle. Organization, enlightenment and struggle are here not separate moments mechanically divided in time, as in a Blanquist movement, they are merely different facets of the same process. On the one hand, apart from the general basic principles of struggle, there is no ready-made predetermined and detailed tactic of struggle that the Central Committee could drill into the social democratic membership. On the other hand, the process of struggle that creates the organization stipulates a constant fluctuation in the sphere of influence of social democracy.

Rosa Luxemburg (1904) *Organisational Questions of the Russian Social Democracy*. 2004: 252

From this it follows that social democratic centralization cannot be based either on blind obedience or on the mechanical submission of the party's militants to their central authority and, further, that an impenetrable wall can never be erected between the nucleus of the class conscious proletariat that is already organized into tightly knit party cadres and those in the surrounding stratum who have already been caught up in the class struggle and are in the process of developing class consciousness. The establishment of centralisation in social democracy on these two principles-on the blind submission of all party organisations and their activity, down to the smallest detail, to a central authority that alone thinks, acts and decides for everyone, and also on the strict separation of the organised nucleus of the party from its surrounding revolutionary milieu, as Lenin advocates – therefore seems to us to be a mechanical transposition of the organisational principles of the Blanquist movement of conspiratorial circles to the social democratic movement of the working masses.

Rosa Luxemburg (1904) *Organisational Questions of the Russian Social Democracy*. *Die neue Zeit*. 2004: 252-53

Zinoviev (1918) Lenin

Already in this first article of Lenin [*Where to Begin* (1901)] you will practically find virtually the whole quintessence of Bolshevism. But this article served merely as a synopsis to the remarkable book of Lenin which was called *What Is to Be Done*.

Round everything that Lenin wrote there is always seething strife. Nobody can remain indifferent to his writings. You can hate Lenin, you can love Lenin to distraction, but you cannot remain neutral. In the book *What Is to Be Done*, Lenin stated and solved in a revolutionary spirit all the vexatious questions of the movement of that epoch. And for many months and years this book was challenging thought, was the centre of raging passions, was the subject of controversy, and ultimately led to the formation of a split into two irreconcilable camps.

The *Iskra* declared a fight to the finish against the so-called 'Economism.' It fought with every variety of opportunism, including Economism, i.e., future Menshevism.

Zinoviev (1918) Lenin. *Fourth International*, January, 1945: 8

Zinoviev (1923) History of the Bolshevik Party

Besides *Iskra*, an exceptional role was played by Comrade Lenin's book *What Is To Be Done?* which was published in the spring of 1902. This was not merely a book: it was a book marking an era. It drew up a two-year account of the work of *Iskra*. At the same time it was handbook and gospel for all revolutionary Marxist activists of the time. And it was only in 1903 that the Mensheviks, having seen the conclusions which had been drawn from this book, began, in retrospect and through a magnifying glass, to seek disagreements with it. The main ideas of *What is to be Done?* are the same as those of *Iskra*: that is, the self-same idea of the hegemony of the proletariat. But *What is to be Done?* above all posed with particular emphasis the question of so-called 'primitiveness' and professional revolutionaries.

Zinoviev, (1923) *History of the Bolshevik Party*. 1973: 77

Gramsci (1925)

The struggle of the proletariat against capitalism unfurls on three fronts: the economic, the political, and the ideological.

The economic struggle has three phases:

- i) Of resistance against capitalism – i.e. the phase of elemental trade unionism.
- ii) Of an offensive against capitalism to win workers' control over production.
- iii) Of the fight for the elimination of capitalism by means of socialisation.

The political struggle also has three principal phases:

- i) The fight to reign in the power of the bourgeois through a parliamentary state...
- ii) The fight for the conquest of power and for the creation of a workers' state...
- iii) The phase of the dictatorship of the proletariat...

The economic struggle cannot be separated from the political struggle, and neither one nor the other can be separated from the ideological struggle...

The element of 'spontaneity' is never enough for a revolutionary struggle. It will never take the working class beyond the limits of existing bourgeois democracy. For that to occur, a conscious 'ideological' element is necessary. This entails an understanding of the conditions in which the class is fighting, of the social relations in which workers live, of the fundamental tendencies that operate within these social relationships, and of the development of society (driven by the irreconcilable antagonisms at its heart), etcetera.

Antonio Gramsci (April-May 1925) An introduction to the first course of the party school.

Selections from *Political Writings, 1921-26*. 1978: 287-88

Shachtman (1938)

Lenin's much-disputed *What is to be Done?* held up, as is known, the German social-democracy and its leader, Bebel, as models for the Russian movement. When Kautsky wrote his famous article, after the 1905 revolution in Russia, on the Slavs and the world revolution, in which, Zinoviev writes, under Luxemburg's influence, he advanced substantially the Bolshevik conception, Lenin was highly elated. "Where and when," he wrote in July 1905, in a polemic against Parvus, "have I characterised the revolutionism of Bebel and Kautsky as 'opportunism'? Where and when have I presumed to call into existence in the international social-democracy a special tendency which was not identical with the tendency of Bebel and Kautsky?" A year and a half later, Lenin wrote that "the vanguard of the Russian working class knows Karl Kautsky for some time now as its writer", and a month later, in January 1907, he described Kautsky as "the leader of the German revolutionary social-democrats". In August 1908, Lenin cited Kautsky as his authority on the question of war and militarism as against Gustave Hervé, and as late as February 1914, he invoked him again as a Marxian authority in his dispute with Rosa Luxemburg on the national question. Finally, in one of his last pre-war articles, in April 1914, *Wherein the German Labour Movement Should Not Be Imitated*, speaking of the "undoubted sickness" of the German social-democracy, he referred exclusively to the trade union leaders (specifically to Karl Legien) and the parliamentary spokesmen, but did not even mention Kautsky and the centrists, much less raise the question of the left wing (also unmentioned) splitting with them...

Lenin's *What is to be Done?* was a merciless criticism of "Economism", which he identified with "pure-and-simple trade unionism", with *khovstism* (i.e., the policy of dragging at the tail of events, or of the masses), with opportunism. Social-democracy, he argued, is not a mere outgrowth of the spontaneous economic struggles of the proletariat, nor is it the passive servant of the workers; it is the union of the labour movement with revolutionary socialist theory which must be brought into the working class by the party, for the proletariat, by itself, can only attain a trade-union and not a socialist consciousness. In view of the dispersion of the movement in Russia, its primitive and localistic complexion, an all-Russian national party and newspaper had to be created immediately to infuse the labour movement with a socialist, political consciousness and unite it in a revolutionary struggle against Czarism. The artificers of the party, in contrast with the desultory agitators of the time, would be the professional revolutionists, intellectuals and educated workers devoting all their time and energy to revolutionary activity and functioning within an extremely centralised party organisation. The effective political leadership was to be the editorial board of the central organ, edited by the exiles abroad, and it would have the power to organise or reorganise party branches inside Russia, admit or reject members, and even appoint their local committees and other directing organs...

The ideas contained in *What is to be Done?* which should still be read by revolutionists everywhere – and it can be read with the greatest profit – cannot, therefore, be understood without bearing in mind the specific conditions and problems of the Russian movement of the time. That is why Lenin, in answer to a proposal to translate his brochure for the non-Russian parties, told Max Levien in 1921:

"That is not desirable; the translation must at least be issued with good commentaries, which would have to be written by a Russian comrade very well acquainted with the history of the Communist Party of Russia, in order to avoid false application."

Shachtman, Lenin and Rosa Luxemburg, *New International*, IV, 5, May 1938: 142-43

Stalin's Short Course (1938)

Although Lenin was cut off from direct, practical revolutionary work, he nevertheless managed to maintain some connections with those engaged in this work; he carried on a correspondence with them from exile, obtained information from them and gave them advice. At this time Lenin was very much preoccupied with the "Economists." He realised better than anybody else that "Economism" was the main nucleus of compromise and opportunism, and that if "Economism" were to gain the upper hand in the working-class movement, it would undermine the revolutionary movement of the proletariat and lead to the defeat of Marxism. Lenin therefore started a vigorous attack on the "Economists" as soon as they appeared on the scene...

In 1899 a group of "Economists" (Prokopovich, Kuskova and others, who later became Constitutional-Democrats) issued a manifesto in which they opposed revolutionary Marxism, and insisted that the idea of an independent political party of the proletariat and of independent political demands by the working class be renounced. The "Economists" held that the political struggle was a matter for the liberal bourgeoisie, and that as far as the workers were concerned, the economic struggle against the employers was enough for them...

Abroad, Lenin came to an arrangement with the "Emancipation of Labour" group, namely, with Plekhanov, Axelrod and V. Zasulich, for the publication of *Iskra* under joint auspices. The whole plan of publication from beginning to end had been worked out by Lenin...

In the columns of *Iskra*, and especially in his celebrated work *What is To Be Done?*, Lenin launched a vehement attack against this opportunist philosophy of the "Economists" and demolished it...

As a result of the wide circulation of this book, by the time of the Second Congress of the Russian Social-Democratic Party, that is, within a year after its publication (it appeared in March 1902), nothing but a distasteful memory remained of the ideological stand of "Economism," and to be called an "Economist" was regarded by the majority of the members of the Party as an insult. It was a complete ideological defeat for "Economism," for the ideology of opportunism, *khvostism* and spontaneity.

But this does not exhaust the significance of Lenin's *What is To Be Done?*

The historic significance of this celebrated book lies in the fact that in it Lenin:

- 1) For the first time in the history of Marxist thought, laid bare the ideological roots of opportunism, showing that they principally consisted in worshipping the spontaneous working-class movement and belittling the role of Socialist consciousness in the working-class movement;
- 2) Brought out the great importance of theory, of consciousness, and of the Party as a revolutionising and guiding force of the spontaneous working-class movement;
- 3) Brilliantly substantiated the fundamental Marxist thesis that a Marxist party is a union of the working-class movement with Socialism;
- 4) Gave a brilliant exposition of the ideological foundations of a Marxist party.

The theoretical theses expounded in *What is To Be Done?* later became the foundation of the ideology of the Bolshevik Party.

The Party strengthens itself by purging its ranks of opportunist elements—that is one of the maxims of the Bolshevik Party, which is a party of a new type fundamentally different from the Social-Democratic parties of the Second International. Although the parties of the Second International called themselves Marxist parties, in reality they tolerated foes of Marxism, avowed opportunists, in their ranks and allowed them to corrupt and to ruin the Second International. The Bolsheviks, on the contrary, waged a relentless struggle against the opportunists, purged the proletarian party of the filth of opportunism and succeeded in creating a party of a new type, a Leninist Party, the Party which later achieved the dictatorship of the proletariat.

Stalin, *History of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union*. 1938: 22-24, 35, 37-38, 142-43

Wolfe

The real issue [was] between 'Economists' and Marxists, then between Mensheviks and Bolsheviks, then between Workers Opposition and Lenin, between Tomsy and Stalin, changing forms of the protean battle between Westerniser and Slavophile. One path led closer to the parties and trade unions of the West, which were democratically organised, comfortably adapted to the sizeable legality permitted them, and long since devoid of insurrectionary spirit except as a banner for festal occasions. The other led to concentration on conspiracy and insurrection under the leadership of a self-selected, rigidly centralised, secret and conspirative band of revolutionary intellectuals under a self-appointed leader, formed on the pattern of the early 'professional revolutionaries' of the *Narodnaya Volya*.

Bertram Wolfe (1948) *Three Who Made a Revolution*. 1964: 160-61

In two pamphlets, and a number of articles published between 1902 and 1904, Lenin had been hammering away at his new organisation plan for a 'party of a new type', that is, one differing fundamentally from all previous Marxian parties, whether those founded while Marx and Engels were alive, or since...

Bertram Wolfe, 'Introduction', in Rosa Luxemburg, *The Russian Revolution and Leninism or Marxism*, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press. 1961: 11

"This is the earliest use of 'party of a new type' in English that I have found; Wolfe took it over from Soviet historians and implied, incorrectly, that Lenin himself used the term."

Lih, *Lenin Rediscovered: What Is To Be Done? in Context*. 2005: 17

Draper

In short, both the Western Leninologists and the Stalinists agree that Lenin's book [*What is to be Done?*] was a totalitarian bible: which is not surprising but does not settle the matter.

According to the myth, endlessly repeated from book to book, Lenin's "concept of the party" –

1. saw the party as consisting mainly of 'intellectuals', on the basis of a theory according to which workers cannot themselves develop to socialist consciousness; rather, the socialist idea is always and inevitably imported into the movement by bourgeois intellectuals;
2. posited that the party is simply a band of "professional revolutionaries" as distinct from a broad working-class party;
3. repudiated any element of spontaneity or spontaneous movement, in favour of engineered revolution only;
4. required that the party be organised not democratically but as a bureaucratic or semi-military hierarchy.

Three approaches to the party question:

- a. There were those who believed in *split at any cost*, that is, the revolutionary wing in a reformist party must split away at the most opportune moment, and organise its own sect...
- b. There were those, and they were legion, who believed in *unity at any cost*. The unity of the mass social-democratic party must never be breached; a break was the ultimate disaster...
- c. Lenin's distinctive approach was: unity, yes, but not at the cost of foiling the victory of the majority. Unity, yes, but on the same democratic basis as ever: the right wing could work to win out at the next congress if it could, but it would not do to demand political concessions as a reward for not splitting.

Draper (1963) *The Myth of Lenin's "Concept of The Party" or What They Did to What Is To Be Done?*

The text and translations

Lenin's work *What Is To Be Done?* (WITBD) was written in 1901 and 1902. The preface to the book is dated February 1902 and WITBD was published in Russian by the German Social Democratic Party (SPD) publishers Dietz in Stuttgart in March. An announcement of the book's publication was made in the Russian Marxist newspaper *Iskra*, No.18, 10 March 1902.

In *Where to Begin*, published in *Iskra*, No. 4 (May 1901), Lenin said that the article represented "a skeleton plan to be developed in greater detail in a pamphlet now in preparation for print" (LCW 5 p.20). In his "Preface to the Pamphlet Documents of the 'Unity' Conference", written in November 1901, Lenin said that the book was in preparation "to be published in the near future". In December 1901, Lenin published (in *Iskra*, No. 12) his article "A Talk with Defenders of Economism", which he later called a conspectus of WITBD.

WITBD was republished in 1907 as part of the collection *Twelve Years*. In the 1907 edition, Lenin omitted Section A of Chapter V, "Who Was Offended by the Article 'Where To Begin,'" stating in the Preface that the book was being published with slight abridgements, representing the omission solely of details of the organisational relationships and minor polemical remarks. Lenin added five footnotes to the new edition.

Lenin wrote the book in Russian while living in exile in Zurich, Switzerland. It was first published in English by Martin Lawrence in England and by International Publishers in the USA in 1929, translated by Joe Fineberg. It was subsequently published in the English language *Selected Works*, Volume 2, 1936: 27-192.

Page references in this guide refer to the edition found in *Lenin's Collected Works (LCW)*, Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1961, Volume 5: 347-530. The Fineberg translation was revised by George Hanna for this edition. This text can be downloaded from the Marxist Internet Archive: <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1901/witbd/index.htm>
<https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/cw/pdf/lenin-cw-vol-05.pdf>

There are three other English translations. The most recent, which rephrases many of the well-known passages, is in Lars T. Lih, *Lenin Rediscovered: What is to be done? in context* (2005 Haymarket). Lih says Robert Service's edition published by Penguin (1988) is an improvement on the Fineberg/Hanna version. The Oxford University Press edition (1962) by SV and Patricia Utechin is a better translation (according to Lih), but is abridged and leaves out many key passages.

Title

In 1862, Nikolai Chernyshevsky wrote his famous novel in prison, *What Is to Be Done?* The book was an inspiration to many later Russian revolutionaries, who sought to emulate the novel's hero, who was wholly dedicated to the revolution, ascetic in his habits and ruthlessly disciplined, to the point of sleeping on a bed of nails and eating only meat in order to build strength for the Revolution. Leo Tolstoy also wrote a book *What is to be Done?* (1883), based on moral responsibility.

The Russian title of WITBD was *Chto delat?* Lih points out that "a more literal and perhaps more vivid English translation is *What to Do?*". He states that the phrase *chto delat?* was commonly used by Russian radicals to demand concrete answers to practical questions. In the autumn of 1901 *Raboochee delo* and Martynov began criticising *Iskra* for failing to explain 'what needs to be done'. Lih (2005: 561-62) argues that this inspired Lenin's choice of title.

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