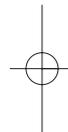
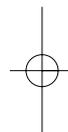
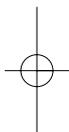




Part Three

The World of *What Is to Be Done?*





Chapter Seven

Lenin's Erfurtian Drama

One of the very first readers of *WITBD* was Lenin's editorial colleague Aleksandr Potresov. After looking at the book in proofs, Potresov wrote Lenin that while he was a little uneasy about some of Lenin's generalisations concerning the *stikhiinyi* worker movement, he very much liked the book. Indeed, he felt that many passages were genuine poetry.¹

In 1905, looking back at *WITBD* at a period when he opposed Lenin, it was precisely the poetry that repelled Potresov. Now, he felt that *WITBD* was the perfect expression of the unrealistic self-glorifying dreams of the revolutionary *praktiki*. Potresov was repelled by the exalted rhetoric that invoked the 'proletariat awakening in *stikhiinyi* fashion', whose allegedly enthusiastic support allows the underground *praktik* to accomplish miracles. *WITBD*'s grandiosely utopian optimism, its 'romantic' dreams 'foreign to any scepticism' – this is the heart of Potresov's case against *WITBD*.²

Poetry – whether good or bad, romantic or otherwise – is not a word often used for describing Lenin's book.³ *WITBD* is a book of angry polemics and

¹ Potresov's letter to Lenin was written in March 1902; it can be found in Lenin 1926–35, 4, p. 599.

² Potresov in *Iskra*, No. 107 (29 July 1905), reprinted in Potresov 2002, pp. 67–120.

³ But see Marie 2004, p. 72: 'Lénine évoque avec lyrisme les perspectives radieuses' of a underground newspaper regularly produced on a weekly basis.

nuts-and-bolts practical proposals, and it takes historical empathy and contextual knowledge to see the poetry lurking between the angry rejoinders. And, yet, digging out this poetry is necessary if we want to grasp the impact the book made on its intended audience. This is true whether we agree with the Potresov of 1902 that the poetry was impressive or with the Potresov of 1905 that the poetry was meretricious.

A would-be leader always situates his recommendation for action in the framework of a broader *definition of the situation*. This definition locates both problems that need to be overcome and opportunities for an effective solution to these problems. Once the leader gets people to accept his definition of the situation, his work is two-thirds done.⁴ The political poetry of *WITBD* is located in this larger definition of the situation in which the polemics and the proposals are embedded.

Given Lenin's Erfurtian loyalties, we would expect this definition to include such things as the fundamental relevance of the SPD model, the workers' eagerness to hear and understand the Social-Democratic message, the willingness of other social forces to accept the Social-Democratic worker movement as a leader in the fight for democratic rights and political freedom. And we do find all of these things. What is less predictable is the excitement and intensity with which Lenin portrays Russia's ongoing revolutionary crisis and the exalted vistas he presents to the Social-Democratic *praktiki*.

Lenin's definition of the situation is, in fact, a heroic Erfurtian drama. *WITBD* invited the young Social-Democratic revolutionaries to think of themselves as inspiring leaders, indeed as heroes. It told these aspiring heroes that they could accomplish great things because they had available to them the tidal force of a great popular movement. The *praktiki* inspire the workers and the workers inspire the rest of society. Despite police-state repression, the proletariat was on the move, the mass of the people were ready to follow the workers, and even educated society was riddled with anti-tsarist indignation. Yet this vast army could not accomplish its great deed of bringing political freedom to Russia unless the Social-Democratic revolutionaries got their act together and applied used the SPD model in a creative way so as to provide an effective organisation for all this bubbling protest.

⁴ On a leader's definition of the situation, see Tucker 1981.

The political poetry of *WITBD* is thus the spark set off by the contact of the highly charged SPD model with Lenin's highly charged definition of the revolutionary situation in Russia. Together, these two create an intense political drama that portrays a volcanic spread of awareness sweeping over Russia. The heroes of this drama are the Social-Democratic activists and workers who are inspired by the socialist message and inspire others in turn.

In order to perceive this drama, we need to look past the polemics and proposals to the Erfurtian assumptions that sustain them. The present chapter is devoted to this task. We will start by pushing aside a veil that has effectively hidden Lenin's political poetry from view: his famous pronouncements on 'consciousness from without' and 'combating spontaneity'. We will then examine the motivation of the actors in Lenin's political drama. Lenin inhabits a rational political universe where people always act for good reasons – but this rationality is a highly dramatic one.

We will then follow Lenin's picture of the spread of awareness from its source in Germany to its final incarnation in the Russian revolutionary crisis. German Social Democracy was Lenin's own inspiration and *WITBD* is permeated with invocations of the success of the SPD in inspiring the workers. We then look briefly at the Social-Democratic activist, the *praktik* whom Lenin wishes to raise up to be a *vozhd* or inspiring leader. Lenin assigns an exalted role not only to the Social-Democratic leader/guide but also to the worker follower. Perhaps nowhere else is Lenin's confidence in the spread of awareness so clearly revealed as in his portrait of the worker rank-and-file that strives to receive and pass on the message.

The spread of awareness rolls on and becomes an enormous *stikhiinyi* upsurge enveloping all of Russian society. This vision of the *stikhiinyi* upsurge is what unites the definition of the situation found in *WITBD* to Lenin's outlook expressed during later revolutionary crises, as we will see by a brief look beyond *WITBD* to 1905 and 1912. Only this wider view will enable us to understand the full meaning of Lenin's famous Archimedean cry: 'give us an organisation of revolutionaries – and we will turn Russia around!'.⁵

⁵ Lenin *PSS*, 6, p. 127 [000]. The usual translation is 'and we will overturn Russia!'

Raising the curtain

A curtain stands before most readers and the Erfurtian drama displayed on the pages of *WITBD*. This curtain consists of the two most famous passages in the book, the ones that are endlessly recycled in secondary accounts on the essence of Lenin's outlook (I cite these in the standard English translation because some of the scandal caused by these passages is a direct result of translation decisions). In one passage Lenin says that

Social-Democratic consciousness could only have been brought to the workers 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.⁶

In the other, Lenin announces that

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.⁷

The implications of these statements *seem* clear. Do not they show that Lenin stood Western Marxism and Social Democracy on its head? Marx and his Social-Democratic followers believed that the proletariat was a naturally revolutionary class that could be, must be, entrusted with the task of introducing socialism. Lenin did not believe that the workers were capable of even understanding this task, since all they wanted was material improvements. Instead of leading the workers, any self-respecting group of revolutionaries must *combat* their spontaneous strivings and *divert* them from their actual inclinations. From this position, it logically follows that a narrow, élite and conspiratorial band of revolutionaries recruited from the intellectuals must substitute themselves for the revolutionary class. A remarkable argument for a self-professed Marxist! Probably the only way we can account for such an aberration is to point to the similarly élitist and conspiratorial tradition of Russian populism.

There have been two approaches to these passages since *WITBD* was published. One is to see these couple of paragraphs as the key to understanding

⁶ Lenin *PSS*, 6, pp. 30–1 [000]; Lenin 1988, p. 98.

⁷ Lenin *PSS*, 6, p. 40 [000]; Lenin 1988, p. 107.

Lenin. All other Lenin material should be seen through the prism of what these passages seem at first sight to be saying. The other approach is to dismiss these passages as polemical formulations that are unlikely to shed much light on Lenin's outlook. In 1904, the Bolshevik Mikhail Olminskii put the case in the following terms:

The immediate historical circumstances determined the general content of the literary productions of *Iskra* and *Zaria*. (The pamphlet *What Is to Be Done?* obviously falls in this category. One therefore mustn't look on this pamphlet as a complete catechism for Social Democrats nor as a full expression of the opinions of its author.) For example, it would have been pointless to talk about the enlistment [*vovlechenie*] of the masses into the political movement at a time when it was precisely the masses who were enlisting their intelligentsia leaders into politics. It was unnecessary to defend the role of *stikhiinost*, because it was fully acknowledged anyway. It *was* imperative to concentrate on the issue of organisers and purposive tactical leaders at a time when the lack of both of these things was the sore spot of the movement.⁸

The textbook interpretation is built on the first of these two approaches. As a curtain-raiser to Lenin's Erfurtian drama, I will briefly sketch out an aggressive version of the second approach. A more exhaustive analysis can be found in Annotations Part Two.

Why did Lenin pen these two passages? Lenin's original intention in writing *WITBD* was to set forth in a relatively non-polemical way a package of practical proposals concerning political agitation, organisational professionalism, and the use of a party newspaper as an aid to party unification. These were the themes announced in his *Iskra* article of spring 1901. He changed his mind and made the book intensely because of the squabble with *Rabochee delo* that broke out in autumn 1901. *Rabochee delo's* full-scale attack on *Iskra's* claim to leadership in Russian Social Democracy caused Lenin to tack on at the last minute two new polemical chapters at the beginning of the book.

⁸ Olminskii 1904b, p. 7 (the parenthetical comment on *WITBD* is a footnote in the original). In an article in 1924, Olminskii recalled that Lenin's clumsy [*neudachnaia*] phrase led to confusion even among Bolsheviks, but Lenin scornfully refused to clear it up. And, Olminskii adds, this was understandable, since none of his accusers had a conscious theory that took more account of the elemental force of the proletarian movement than did Lenin's (*Proletarskaia revoliutsiia*, 1924, No. 3, pp. 28–30).

The second of these two tacked-on chapters is devoted to Boris Krichevskii's article in *Rabochee delo*, No. 10 (September 1901), entitled 'Principles, Tactics and Struggle'. As we saw in Chapter Five, this article mounted a pseudo-theoretical critique of *Iskra's* 'underestimation of the *stikhiinyi* element'. In response, Lenin wrote Chapter II entitled 'The *Stikhiinnost* of the Masses and the Purposiveness of Social Democracy'. The two scandalous passages are both in this chapter.

Stikhiinyi is a rich Russian word with a variety of meanings arising from a root metaphor of an unstoppable natural force. Any minimally coherent theoretical dispute would require some sorting out of the various definitions and conflicting connotations. No one involved in the *Iskra/Rabochee delo* dispute made the slightest effort to do this. On the contrary, the angry polemics only made the word more unfocused and confusing. In Annotations Part Two, I list six distinct meanings of *stikhiinyi* that emerge from this debate, plus a couple more from *WITBD*. Clarity was further dimmed by the shift of attention from the relatively concrete and vivid adjective *stikhiinyi* to the nebulous abstract noun *stikhiinnost*.

The polemical waters were further muddied by the *Joint Letter* that arrived in *Iskra* offices soon after the fall-out with *Rabochee delo* (see Chapter Six). This letter asserted a thesis very close to the Prokopovich/Kuskova 'line of least resistance', namely, that material elements determine the path from which no leaders can cause the movement to stray. For the most part, Lenin's critique of the *Joint Letter* is substantive and based on genuinely disputed issues. But Lenin also decided to use the out-and-out economism of the *Joint Letter* as a stick with which to beat Krichevskii. Thus, he tried his hardest to mix together Krichevskii's vocabulary [*stikhiinnost*] and the *Joint Letter's* vocabulary ('stray from the path') as a way of demonstrating to his own satisfaction that the two were really saying the same thing – which they were not.

One more item from autumn 1901 was thrown into this polemical stew. As Lenin was working on *WITBD*, the latest issue of Kautsky's *Neue Zeit* arrived with an article by Kautsky on some proposed changes in the party programme of the Austrian Social-Democratic Party. One passage in particular seemed to Lenin to support the accusation he was making against *Rabochee delo* and the *Joint Letter*, namely, that they ignored the fundamental mission of Social Democracy to bring the socialist message to the workers. (This accusation had some justification in the case of the *Joint Letter* and very little in the case

of *Rabochee delo*.) The Kautsky passage reiterated the canonical merger narrative by saying that the socialist message comes to the worker movement 'from without' (just as the message about worker militancy comes to the socialist movement from without). Lenin was so taken with this phrase as ammunition against his polemical targets that (as I argue in the Annotations) he inserted the passage and the terminology into an already existing draft.

Thus, Lenin insists on making his point with a heterogeneous vocabulary taken from three distinct polemical formulations of other writers: Krichevskii [*stikhiinnost*], Joint Letter ('stray from the path'), Kautsky ('from without'). The resulting confusion is further compounded for English readers by the standard translation of the first two items: 'spontaneity' and 'divert'. 'Spontaneity' is a rich and powerful English word with only a tangential overlap with the Russian word 'stikhiinnost'. I cannot recall a single discussion of *WITBD* that makes an effort to define the English word 'spontaneity' or that allows for the possibility that the English word might not be a good guide to Lenin's meaning. The same holds true for 'divert'. On the contrary, for many writers these two English words taken in isolation sum up Lenin's outlook.⁹

The polemical argument Lenin is making with the help of this off-the-cuff vocabulary can be paraphrased as follows: right now the *stikhiinyi* upsurge of the Russian workers is galvanising all of Russian society and preparing the way for the imminent overthrow of tsarism. If this uprising were given adequate Social-Democratic leadership, it could carry out the revolution in a way most advantageous to Social Democracy, that is, achieving a maximum extension of political freedom. The potentiality for this kind of leadership exists, and so we must fight against any obstacle to realising this potential. One such obstacle is the confused attitude of *Iskra's* main rivals in the Russian movement, *Rabochee delo*. The accusation Boris Krichevskii has flung at *Iskra* – *Iskra* allegedly underestimates the *stikhiinyi* element – is a perfect example of this unfocused attitude. If we take it to its logical conclusion, is it not tantamount to denying the need for any active Social-Democratic leadership at all? Is Krichevskii not really saying the same thing as the *Joint Letter* when it asserts that active Social-Democratic leadership has no impact at all? What is

⁹ For example, Bertram Wolfe writes that, for Lenin, 'stikhijnost', spontaneity, the natural liberty of men and classes to be themselves, was the enemy and opposite of consciousness' (Wolfe 1984, p. 30).

Krichevskii's position but the parody of Marxism concocted by its Russian foes who accused it of passive fatalism?

From this paraphrase we learn the most important thing to keep in mind about the scandalous passages, namely, that Lenin's aim is not to assert a bold new proposition, but to make his opponents look marginal by claiming that they reject a universally accepted commonplace. His polemical strategy is a standard one: take your opponent's conclusions to their 'logical conclusion', that is, draw ridiculous conclusions from them. This is the same game that was played against Lenin with some success a couple of years later.

It is easy to show just how common is the commonplace affirmed by Lenin, because, as it happens, *Rabochee delo* also accused *Iskra* of exactly the same crime: remaining passive in the face of *stikhiinyi* developments, that is, refusing the primary Social-Democratic duty of providing enlightened leadership.

In late 1901, before *WITBD* appeared, Martynov accused *Iskra* of giving too much scope to *stikhiinost*:

Either Social Democracy takes upon itself the immediate guidance of the economic struggle of the proletariat and by so doing turns it into a revolutionary class struggle. . . . *Or* this perspective: Social Democracy distances itself from the guidance of the economic struggle of the workers and by so doing, on the one hand, clips its own wings, and on the other hand, gives scope to the *stikhiinost* of the worker movement, thereby making the movement less dangerous to the autocracy.¹⁰

Martynov explained in detail why Social Democracy had to combat the *stikhiinyi* character of the worker movement.

It could be objected that the economic struggle of the workers arose outside of the influence of Social Democracy and earlier than that influence [NB: Lenin argues precisely this in *WITBD*]. True; but this struggle has a *stikhiinyi* character. Often workers, aware of only their transitory and special interests, act in opposition to the interests of the whole worker class. There have been and there continue to be cases where the workers themselves demand longer shifts and non-compliance with factory laws. There have been and there continue to be times when their boiling rage unleashes itself against

¹⁰ Martynov 1902, pp. 18–20.

Jews . . . against foreigners, and so on. By taking into its hands the guidance of this struggle, Social Democracy significantly widens it and, most of all, brings into it light and awareness.¹¹

Martynov's article appeared in time for Lenin to respond to it in *WITBD*, although only in a tacked-on footnote. Lenin's whole rhetorical campaign against *Rabochee delo* was based on the charge of 'kow-towing to *stikhiinost*'. How could Lenin quote Martynov without undercutting his entire polemical framework? Simple: he ends his quotation right before the accusing words 'gives scope to the *stikhiinost* of the worker movement' and replaces them with an ellipsis.¹²

At the Second Congress, Martynov was the most vociferous critic of *WITBD*. Yet Martynov took for granted Social Democracy's responsibility to bring light and awareness to the *stikhiinyi* worker movement and he even accused *Iskra* of giving scope to *stikhiinost*. This highly revealing exchange shows that Lenin was trying to affirm something that was utterly non-controversial.

Unfortunately, he did not do it very well, for all the reasons I have just set out: hasty polemical improvisation, use of borrowed vocabulary, and an insistence of equating *Rabochee delo* with people holding quite different views. The sorry result is exemplified by the phrase 'the history of all countries shows', and so forth. We have encountered this phrase a number of times in our survey of Lenin's writings. It always introduces a refutation of Russian sceptics and pessimists. Lenin says to these sceptics: so what if the Russian worker movement does not at present equal the mighty German worker movement? So what if Russian Social Democracy is pitifully weak compared to the mighty German Party? The history of all countries shows that the worker movement *always* starts off small, weak, and disorganised. Our disappointing present is their past, and so we can be confident that their inspiring present is our future.

It would be strange if Lenin used the same words in *WITBD* in order to make a totally different argument. And, in fact, a close reading of this 'from

¹¹ Ibid. These statements also show that Haimson is mistaken to attribute to *Rabochee delo* and Martynov in particular the view that 'workers *by their own devices* would be able to set their own political objectives, rather than having them dictated to them by outside political actors' (Haimson 2004, p. 60; Haimson 1999, pp. 155–6).

¹² Lenin *PSS*, 6, p. 76 [000].

without' passage in *WITBD* shows that he was, indeed, making his usual point.¹³ Nevertheless, Lenin managed to convey the impression that he was refuting overconfidence and optimism rather than scepticism and pessimism. And it cannot be denied that the scandalous passages, taken in isolation without knowledge of the polemical context (and especially in the standard English translation), do seem to convey a pessimistic attitude about the socialist awareness of the workers. How, then, to proceed?

To defenders of the textbook interpretation, I suggest the following. Either Lenin's alleged 'worry about workers' is expressed elsewhere in his writings or it is not. If it is, then why not document your case without using the scandalous passages, since doubt has been thrown on the usefulness of these? Your case will be all the more convincing. If, on the contrary, Lenin's 'worry about workers' only finds expression here, then you might want to give us an explanation as to why Lenin revealed his real outlook only in a confused, last-minute, polemical improvisation.¹⁴

In any event, if you choose to adopt the intensive method of mining these couple of paragraphs for the heart of Lenin's outlook, then you need to do it right. You need to go into detail about the actual meaning of 'spontaneity' and 'divert', about the sources of this vocabulary and Lenin's polemical intentions in adopting it, and finally about what precisely these passages do say and what they do not say. I myself have gone into all this details and the results are set out at perhaps excruciating length in Annotations Part Two. My conclusions are unfavourable to the textbook interpretation, so you will need to refute the contentions contained therein.

To those interested in what *WITBD* can tell us about Lenin's outlook, I suggest that, for reasons given, the scandalous passages are just about the last place to look for something genuinely revealing about Lenin's outlook. So why not bracket these passages, at least for the time being? Why not examine *WITBD* as a whole to see what Lenin thinks about the Russian worker movement, the Russian socialists, and the chances of a merger of the two forces? Why not examine what Lenin actually says about the intellectuals, the revolutionary

¹³ See Annotations Part II.

¹⁴ In the Introduction, I gave some examples of the difficulties encountered by advocates of the textbook interpretation when they try to take into account a wider range of textual evidence.

by trade, and the need for *konspiratsiia*? We may find out why so many Russian *praktiki* found the book inspiring and exhilarating. After we are finished, we can, if we feel curious, delve into the detail necessary for understanding the scandalous passages.

And so, let us proceed to raise the curtain and become spectators of Lenin's Erfurtian drama.

Dramatic rationality

We now turn to the psychology and the motivations of the actors in Lenin's political drama. When we look at the way Lenin defines the current Russian situation, an unexpected fact emerges: Lenin inhabits a thoroughly rational political universe. Everybody in it acts for good reasons, on the basis, that is, of the information available to them. Everybody, especially the workers, is strongly motivated to search out information and arguments in order to better understand their true interest. Not everybody has a correct view of their true interest at present, but the teaching brought by the Social Democrats and still more by events will remedy this situation, and that very soon.

When I say that political actors are portrayed by Lenin as acting for rational reasons, I do not mean the individualistic utility calculations of 'rational-choice' theory. Lenin assumes a steady supply of heroic and self-sacrificing actions. But he also assumes that these heroic actions stem from a correct view of the interests of one's group or the group in whose name one is acting. Indeed, the more people realise their true interests, the more heroically they will act. I also do not mean that Lenin is necessarily correct about what constitute good reasons – only that what he himself regards as rational reasons are what he assumes motivated social actors.¹⁵

Lenin's views on this matter are worth exploring for a couple of reasons. Lenin's strong faith in the *stikhiinyi* upsurge may give the impression that he saw the workers themselves as akin to a natural force, that is, acting on instinct, without reflection. On this view, the job of the party is not to transform the outlook of the workers but simply to utilise their pent-up force, much as an engineer uses the *stikhiinyi* force of rivers to create electricity. Lenin is also

¹⁵ On the difference between 'rational-choice model' and a wider 'good reasons' model, see Boudon 2001.

sometimes associated with theories of 'false consciousness' and irrationalism, that is, theories that posit a studied rejection of one's true interest even when one is aware of the case for it.¹⁶ As we shall see, nothing could be more foreign to Lenin's outlook than any theory of false consciousness.

At one point, Lenin observes that bourgeois ideology is older, better worked out and more widely disseminated than the rival ideology of the socialists.¹⁷ No doubt some such observation is a constitutive part of any theory of 'false consciousness'. But that is not how Lenin uses it here. The workers are not acting irrationally when they rely on bourgeois explanations of social life, if these are the only explanations available to them. The indicated course for the socialists is, therefore, to put all their energy in making sure the workers are provided with a better explanation. Such is the power of a genuinely sound explanation that the German socialists won over the bulk of the workers despite the inferiority of their means of dissemination. The Russian Social Democrats are at an even greater disadvantage in this respect and, yet, Lenin's whole scenario depends on socialist success in convincing the workers.

When reading *WITBD*, we automatically tend to picture the vast state-sponsored propaganda campaigns of the Soviet Union and other Communist states. These states could also simply eliminate anyone with a competing message. Not only did Lenin face a diametrically opposite situation in 1902, but his central political goal at the time was political freedom, that is, open competition between clashing ideologies. Thus his pitch is barely comprehensible without a very strong assumption of the motivating power of good reasons.

Accordingly, it never occurs to Lenin to advocate anything but the use of good arguments. We saw in Chapter Two how one scholar accused Lenin of consciously resorting to 'propaganda', that is, distortion, simplifications and lies.¹⁸ This assertion rested on a simple misunderstanding of the meaning of 'propaganda' in the Social-Democratic discourse of the period, but the mistake is a revealing one. If Lenin really believed that the workers were innately reformist and thus (by his lights) irrational, how could he help advocating some way of using this irrationality in order to cajole them into a revolutionary

¹⁶ Meyer 1957.

¹⁷ Lenin *PSS*, 6, p. 41 [000].

¹⁸ Meyer 1957, pp. 47–50.

attitude? Yet Lenin struck readers at the time as someone who considerably overestimated the power of rational argument. Strict economists such as Prokopovich and the authors of the *Joint Letter* scoffed at the idea that 'theories' and programmes could really influence events. Nadezhdin was nonplussed by *Iskra's* 'writerism', that is, an exaggerated sense of the importance of refuting bad arguments. Krichevskii's 'stages' theory gave considerably more active power to good reasons, and yet it too advocated keeping one's basic convictions under wraps for the duration. Many Social Democrats also felt that the workers should not be bothered with intelligentsia and émigré disputes, and they saw Lenin's attempts to get rank-and-file support for his sides in these disputes as demagogic. One historian has observed that, in the period after the 1917 revolution, Lenin's *Pravda*, in contrast to the *Pravda* of the Stalin era, was rationalistic to the point of being dry.¹⁹ A similar observation can be made about Lenin's approach throughout his career.

One reason that many people overlook Lenin's assumption of rationality is that they automatically assume that a rational actor should not require anything coming 'from without' in order to make a correct decision. Lenin combines a deep sense of the rationality of political actors with an equally deep sense of the urgency of providing effective leadership that will prevent the workers from making avoidable mistakes. Consequently, Lenin's assumption about the essential rationality of social actors does not make *WITBD* any less dramatic. Providing people with good reasons is a grave challenge that may or may not be met. To grasp the dramatic rationality of *WITBD* is therefore key to understanding Lenin's outlook.

To say that people act for good reasons is not to say they cannot make mistakes and very serious ones, since people act on the basis of the information available to them and acquiring this information (particularly in an absolutist environment) can be very costly indeed. It follows that the key task of the Party – the key battle – is to get information and arguments to the workers and indeed to all the subjects of the autocracy. Getting the word out under the autocracy is a highly dangerous, highly exciting, cat-and-mouse game against some very determined opponents. Thus, Lenin asks, why has the Russian worker not reacted in a revolutionary way to all the various outrages in Russian life. Because he simply does not care about any outrages that do

¹⁹ Brooks 2000.

not have a direct connection to his economic interests? Not at all – the reason is simply that he does not yet even know of the existence of these outrages. And whose fault is that? Put the blame on the Social Democrats who have fallen behind the mass movement and whose unprofessional carelessness helps the government suppress information.²⁰

The job of the Social Democrats is not only to get information to the workers. They must also, as it were, create some good reasons by providing effective leadership. One essential type of argument is the visible existence of inspired and inspiring leaders. Many 'less developed' workers start on the path to a Social-Democratic outlook when they realise that dedicated Social-Democratic activists as their natural guides and leaders. The Social Democrats make good arguments in their propaganda and agitation, but, thinks Lenin, probably their most compelling argument is their own tireless and effective leadership.

That is, if it *is* effective. If the Social Democrats fail to provide effective leadership, the workers will quite rationally seek elsewhere. Why does Lenin fear that the Social Democrats may lose the leadership of the workers to other parties? Because the Social Democrats are preaching a revolutionary message that falls on the deaf ears of the reformist workers? Precisely the opposite. The workers are searching for revolutionary leadership and the Social Democrats are failing to provide it.²¹

In the world of *WITBD*, 'the bourgeois democracy' is a revolutionary, anti-tsarist force that includes both the liberals and the Socialist Revolutionaries (both political camps *in statu nascendi* when *WITBD* was being written). If the non-Social-Democratic revolutionaries are providing the most energetic and flexible leadership available, then the workers will support them and not the Social Democrats. This outcome would of course be highly unfortunate, since the revolutionary energy of the workers would be exploited and the chance for a genuinely radical conquest of political freedom would be lost. But again, whose fault would that be? The Social Democrats, of course. As usual, the German Social Democrats show the way – *they* provide vigorous political leadership for democratic reform and are rewarded with prestige and support.²²

For workers to follow the most effective revolutionary leadership on offer is definitely rational. Yet Lenin also expresses fears that some workers will

²⁰ Lenin *PSS*, 6, pp. 70–1 [000].

²¹ Lenin *PSS*, 6, p. 182 [000].

²² Lenin *PSS*, 6, pp. 95, 97–8 [000].

be led astray by bad reasons and act mistakenly. In *WITBD*, for example, he asserts that the success of his Social-Democratic opponents, such as they were, had stemmed from their appeal to the 'less-developed' worker. His opponents were demagogues who tried to activate the base instincts in these workers by sowing suspicion of anyone who brought them knowledge and revolutionary experience. But 'it is not possible for less-developed workers to recognise these enemies who present themselves, sometimes quite sincerely, as their friends'.²³

This description of the less-developed worker occurs in the context of justifying intra-party polemics. Lenin does not suggest that these workers might be confused about whether, say, the employers are their friend or not. Nor does he suggest any special difficulty about demonstrating that the government is not a friend: the Social Democrats (all of them) and the gendarmes are working in tandem to get that point across. The person whom the less-developed worker might not recognise correctly is the Social Democrat whose opinions Lenin finds mistaken. In pointing out the danger of the less-developed worker being led astray, Lenin wants to justify breaking the taboo against harsh polemics between Social-Democratic comrades ('Oh yes! Don't rush to raise a howl about the "un-comrade-like methods" of my polemic!').²⁴ We *must* polemicise against the likes of *Rabochee delo* and Nadezhdin, says Lenin, so that the less-developed worker, unable to recognise his true Social-Democratic friends without such polemics, will see the light.

As usual, the template is the German experience. The German party also had demagogues who tried to evoke base instincts by flattering the 'horny-handed fists' of the rank-and file worker as against party leaders. German socialism grew strong by exposing such attempts, presumably by good arguments.²⁵

Mistaken fellow socialists do not consciously intend to lead the workers astray. In contrast, from Lenin's point of view, government attempts to set up police unions are deliberate attempts to deceive. Police officials such as

²³ Lenin *PSS*, 6, pp. 72, 121–3 [000]. In this connection, Lenin warns against the *razorashchenie* of the less-developed workers. This word is usually translated 'corruption', but I believe 'leading astray' is a more accurate one. For two discussions of Lenin that bring his fear of worker 'corruption' to the fore, see Mayer 1993b and Zelnik 2003b.

²⁴ Lenin *PSS*, 6, p. 123 [000].

²⁵ *Ibid.* [000].

Zubatov do have this intention (at least, as Lenin sees it) when they set up semi-legal police unions. During the *Iskra* period, Sergei Zubatov, the head of the Moscow security police, tried to convince workers that they could have effective economic unions if they only renounced the project of overthrowing the Tsar.

Lenin's attitude toward the *Zubatovshchina* is extremely revealing about his key assumptions. A crucial passage in *WITBD* displays his feelings on the subject.²⁶ The point of this passage is this: we Social Democrats should *welcome* tsarist attempts to trick the workers by legalising or at least tolerating loyalist and apolitical unions. Of course, we should expose such attempts as the fraud they are. Nevertheless, the gains to us are substantial. First, why not let the police unions take over the function of 'drawing the attention of ever broader worker strata, including the most backward, to social and political issues' – one less job for us revolutionaries to do. If the legalisers try to lead the workers astray with revisionist doctrines, we will expose them. While they try to use provocateurs to catch socialists, we will use the opportunity to recruit socialists. In sum, even the smallest room for manoeuvre for the workers, even the faintest whiff of political freedom, is real progress. The Social Democrats should say to Zubatov, 'please go right ahead – you're doing us a favour'.

As the American historian of the *Zubatovshchina* correctly observes, the events of 1905 were frequently cited by Lenin as confirmation of his 'optimistic view' of Zubatov's efforts to seduce the workers.²⁷ The worker demonstration on Bloody Sunday (9 January 1905) had been organised under the auspices of a Zubatov-type union led by Father Gapon in January 1905 (Zubatov himself had lost his job by this time). Lenin saw the revolutionary outcome of Bloody Sunday as a vindication of *WITBD*. Had he not predicted that 'even the most backward workers would be drawn into the [revolutionary] movement by the Zubatovists'?²⁸ Had he not assured his readers that 'once they are

²⁶ Lenin *PSS*, 6, pp. 114–16 [000]. This passage is somewhat opaque because of the way it mixes references to Gogol and to New Testament parables together with polemics with *Rabochee delo* and the specific case of Zubatov. The reading presented here is confirmed by Lenin's 1905 references to this passage (see the following footnote).

²⁷ Schneiderman 1976, p. 206. Schneiderman lists the following 1905 passages: Lenin *PSS*, 9, pp. 174–5, 210–11, 218, 220–1, 262, 300. On the Zubatov movement, see also Kavtorin 1992 and Pospelovsky 1971.

²⁸ Lenin *PSS*, 9, pp. 220–1.

brought into movement and become interested in the issues of their own fate, the workers will go further'?²⁹

A healthy respect for the ideological apparatus of bourgeois society was an essential part of the Erfurtian outlook. As Liebknecht said in 1875, 'Our most dangerous enemy is not the standing army of soldiers, but the standing army of the enemy press'.³⁰ Yet, as compared to other revolutionary currents, the Social Democrats were relatively confident in the power of good reasons. Lenin too shared the basic Erfurtian assumption that 'the socialist awareness of the worker masses' was 'the sole formulation that can guarantee us victory'.³¹ Indeed, so intense was Lenin's focus on awareness that he was regularly accused of 'writerism' – of being obsessed (as Nadezhdin put it) with fighting bad arguments rather than bad actions.

While Lenin assumes that social actors are motivated by good reasons, this assumption does *not* commit him to assuming that workers cannot have mistaken opinions or that the Social Democrats do not have to work very hard to ensure that the workers receive correct opinions. In fact, it commits Lenin to making every possible effort to ensure that the workers receive good reasons. What is characteristic of Lenin is his confidence that, if they try hard enough, the Social Democrats *can* get the good news to the workers, despite tsarist repression. They *can* build the effective organisation that will give the workers a good reason to accept Social-Democratic leadership. They *can* use vigorous polemics to thwart the efforts of mistaken socialists to lead astray the awareness of the more backward workers. And, finally, the Social Democrats can rest assured that the efforts of the government to seduce workers will certainly backfire.

'Look at the Germans'

'Look at the Germans'.³² 'Take the Germans'.³³ 'Take the example of Germany'.³⁴ 'Take German Social Democracy'.³⁵ Whenever Lenin wants to illustrate a point

²⁹ Lenin *PSS*, 9, pp. 174–7. xxx fn. on surprised by 1905 and continuity.

³⁰ Steenson 1981, p. 129.

³¹ Lenin *PSS*, 6, pp. 8–9 [000].

³² Lenin *PSS*, 6, p. 132 [000].

³³ Lenin *PSS*, 6, p. 121 [000].

³⁴ Lenin *PSS*, 6, p. 40 [000].

³⁵ Lenin *PSS*, 6, p. 97 [000].

or clinch an argument, he resorts to the SPD model. This model was authoritative for all of international Social Democracy, but probably nowhere else in the socialist literature is the SPD so exhaustively and so admiringly made the basis for argument as in Lenin's *WITBD*. To match it, we must look ahead to the use made of the Soviet or Chinese models by twentieth-century Communists in their internal polemics. It is therefore ironic that the one thing on which both Soviet and Western scholars agree is that *WITBD* contains Lenin's plea for 'a party of a new type'.

The SPD was not only the ultimate model but the original starting point of the heroic spread of awareness that Lenin wanted to see in Russia. The inspired and inspiring activists whom Lenin regarded as the heart of the process received their inspiration in the first place from the mighty German Party. The most important step toward putting *WITBD* in proper historical context is thus to see the full scope of Lenin's use of the SPD model in his polemics, in his practical proposals, and in his exalted definition of the current situation in Russia.

The meaning of the German model is brought out in *WITBD* by means of a continual contrast with the 'English' model.³⁶ The clash between these two models structures the overall rhetoric of *WITBD*. When Lenin contrasts, say, Social-Democratic politics to *tred-iunionist* politics, he is also contrasting, even on a linguistic level, the German model to the English model, since 'Social Democracy' in the relevant sense is a German coinage, while '*tred-iunionist*' flaunts its English-ness. Germany is the country where the worker class built up its own independent, class, political and socialist party as the centre of a wide-ranging movement seeking to embrace all manifestations of worker life. England is the country where the workers contented themselves with building up strong and effective trade unions that defended the interests of particular trades but where these same workers accepted a position of political dependence and refused to undertake the great historical mission of introducing socialism. To choose Germany over England was what it meant to *be* a Social Democrat, and so Lenin makes the most of the Germany/England contrast in his effort to reveal the heretical leanings of his opponents.

³⁶ I apologise for the inaccurate use of 'English' rather than 'British' but I am constrained to follow the usage of my texts.

In this section, we will list and paraphrase all the explicit references to the SPD model in *WITBD*. The only reference in *WITBD* to the SPD that contains even a hint of criticism is the very first one. We will save this one until the end but otherwise proceed in the order of the text. This procedure will bring out the sheer volume and weight of these references. They are detailed, they are passionate, and they are closely tied to the course of the argument. The SPD references create problems for the textbook interpretation on two central points. If Lenin rejected Western-style parties for a conspiratorial party in the populist tradition, then what are all these SPD references doing here and who do they outweigh the references to the populist revolutionaries by any measure? Furthermore, for Lenin and his readers, the SPD is the future of the RSDWP in the coming days of Russian political freedom. If Lenin was pessimistic and anxious about workers in general, we should expect these feelings to show up in his invocation of the accomplishments of the German workers.

SPD model in Chapter I (on 'freedom of criticism')

(i) *Engels on the German party.* In order to show the importance of a party's theoretical clarity, Lenin gives a long citation from Engels about the German workers. From Engels we learn that the German workers have a remarkable aptitude for theory (as opposed to the English workers among others). They have been able to benefit from the earlier experience of workers in other countries; they exploit the advantages of their own situation 'with rare ability'. The German workers were the first to build a co-ordinated movement that combined political, economic and theoretical aspects. If the German workers continue as they have done, they will meet the challenges ahead of them.

Lenin adds that, a few years after Engels wrote this passage, the German workers did indeed acquit themselves splendidly when they defeated Bismarck's anti-socialist laws. Lenin expresses the hope that the Russian workers will occupy a similar place of honour in the international movement when they overthrow the tsar.³⁷

³⁷ Lenin *PSS*, 6, pp. 25–8 [000].

Chapter II (attacking Rabochee delo as 'economist in a broad sense')

(ii) *Failure of tred-iunionizm in Germany.* *Raboचाia mysl* expresses ideas similar to the German bourgeois reformist Max Hirsch who tried to transplant English *tred-iunionizm* to German soil, that is, to convince the German workers to restrict themselves to trade-union battles and not to worry about future generations.³⁸

(iii) *Lassalle as paradigmatic leader.* Lassalle is a good example of how an inspiring leader can make a difference. In no way did he simply accept the given situation as the best that could be accomplished. He directly tackled the bourgeois reformers who were trying to entice the workers down a conservative path. The result of his impassioned struggle? The workers of Berlin moved from being supporters of the liberals to becoming a stronghold of Social Democracy. Even today, many workers are not yet Social Democrats, so the struggle must go on.³⁹

(Note that Lassalle's 'struggle' consisted entirely of eloquence and shrewd agitational techniques. Lenin's insistence that the Party can never relax in its effort to spread the word was close to the German Party's own self-image, as we see in a passage from Bebel's memoirs where he looks back to Lassalle's *Open Letter* and comments that 'if we remember that even today, after more than fifty years of intensive efforts to enlighten the worker classes as to their true interest, there are still millions of workers who follow the various bourgeois parties, it is not to be wondered at that the majority of the workers in the sixties regarded the new movement with sceptical eyes'.)⁴⁰

(iv) *Raboचाia mysl and English workers.* *Raboचाia mysl* can hardly be called Social-Democratic, since the kind of worker politics it advocates is common to *all* workers, including the English workers. (The fact that something is done by the English workers does not mean it is a bad thing in itself. On the contrary. But it *does* mean that it is not in and of itself Social-Democratic.)⁴¹

(v) *Legitimacy of having tactical plans.* Why does Boris Krichevskii reject the idea of tactical *plans*? Germany furnishes several examples of leaders defending competing plans. The outcome of these disputes was crucial to the history of the SPD.⁴²

³⁸ Lenin *PSS*, 6, p. 36 [000].

³⁹ Lenin *PSS*, 6, pp. 40-1 [000].

⁴⁰ Bebel 1912, p. 54.

⁴¹ Lenin *PSS*, 6, pp. 42-3 [000].

⁴² Lenin *PSS*, 6, pp. 48-9 [000].

Chapter III (on political agitation)

(vi) *Economic agitation*. Lenin introduces his discussion of political agitation by talking about the previous success of economic agitation and emphasises that economic agitation will always be required. To bring home the point, he states that socialists 'in the most advanced European countries' use the indictment of abuses in some forgotten sweatshop or cottage industry in order to awaken class awareness and to inspire resistance to employers.⁴³

(vii) *Example of a party campaign*. In order to show the absurdity of Martynov's attempt to equate propaganda with lack of action and agitation with calls to action, Lenin uses the example of the current struggle of the German Social Democrats against grain tariffs. The party theorists write treatises on the economic issues involved, propagandists popularise their conclusions in journals, and agitators do the same in public speeches. Workers make the rounds of the factories and homes to get signatures for the petition campaign. (What is striking about this description is the picture of the Party working together as a united whole on political issues of society-wide import.)⁴⁴

(viii) *Role of 'political indictments'*. Political indictments of the sort found in *Iskra* are one of the most important functions of international Social Democracy. 'For example, the German Party particularly strengthens its position and widens its influence due directly to the unremitting energy of its campaign of political indictments'.⁴⁵

(ix) *'Economistic' politics*. The economic struggle can become political – that is, aim at worker protection legislation and the like – without the slightest intervention of purposive Social Democracy, as the English example shows.⁴⁶

(x) *Liebkecht as ideal leader*. The immediate occasion for this crucial passage is to show that Martynov's suggested strategy is perfectly compatible with English *tred-iunionizm*. Like Hamlet showing his mother the portraits of her past and present husbands – 'look here upon this picture, and on this' – Lenin presents us Wilhelm Liebkecht, the Social-Democratic tribune of the people, vs. Robert Knight, the resourceful leader of the United Society of Boilermakers and Ironshipbuilders.

⁴³ Lenin *PSS*, 6, p. 55 [000].

⁴⁴ Lenin *PSS*, 6, p. 67 [000].

⁴⁵ Lenin *PSS*, 6, p. 69 [000].

⁴⁶ Lenin *PSS*, 6, p. 73 [000].

Lenin's source of information about Knight is *Industrial Democracy* by Sidney and Beatrice Webb, a book whose translation into Russian he had overseen. The Webbs tell us that the Boilermakers, established in 1832, remained 'one of the most powerful and best conducted of English trade societies'. Knight had been general secretary of the union since the late 1870s. He was 'a man of remarkable ability and strength of character, who has remained the permanent premier of this little kingdom'. The Webbs use him as an example of the way in which the rules of 'primitive democracy' do not prevent oligarchic rule, although in Knight's case they note that his 'upright and able government' worked well without the safeguards of democracy. He seems to have done very well for the 40,000 or so members of his union by an impressively disciplined and organised application of collective bargaining.⁴⁷

Knight is thus a strong example of an effective trade-union leader. Nevertheless, from a Social-Democratic point of view, his activities benefited only a small group of workers and not the class as a whole. It was no part of his job description to work for democratic reform of society, much less socialism. Liebknecht, in contrast, is the very type of an inspired and inspiring leader. He illuminates the real nature of the society as a whole, he provides leadership for the German democratic movement as a whole – for example, during the Franco-Prussian War – and he directs his journalistic activity toward wide-ranging political indictments.⁴⁸

(xi) *Social-Democratic hegemony in the democratic struggle in Germany*. The backwardness of the Russian Social Democrats will allow non-Social-Democratic revolutionaries to take over leadership of the liberation struggle. The German example should inspire us. Why is it that not a single major political event occurs in Germany without *strengthening* the authority of the SPD? Not because the Social-Democratic activists in that country sat around waiting for the economic struggle to revolutionise workers! They are always in the lead, awakening political dissatisfaction in all classes, rousing the torpid, dragging the backward, helping the proletariat develop its awareness and activeness. Thus they inspire the respect even of enemies, and 'it often happens that an

⁴⁷ Webb, Sidney and Beatrice Webb 1965, pp. 28–30, 204. Knight retired in 1899. A recent history of British trade unions notes that Knight was a pioneer in the imposition of national agreements on employers (Reid 2004, p. 172).

⁴⁸ Lenin *PSS*, 6, pp. 80–1 [000].

important document not only from bourgeois but even from bureaucratic and court circles ends up by some miracle in the editorial offices of *Vorwärts* [the central party newspaper]'.⁴⁹

Chapter IV (on organisational improvement)

(xii) *Party's relationship to trade unions*. Although the SPD is not mentioned in this passage by name it is clearly the main model for Lenin's description of the relationship between trade unions and party 'in countries with political freedom'. Even though the two types of organisation should always be kept separate, they must also be as closely linked as possible.⁵⁰

(xiii) *Continuity of leadership*. Lenin thinks Nadezhdin is imposing a false dilemma: *either* roots in the masses *or* reliance on leaders. Take the Germans. No one can deny that, in Germany, the Party organisation is based on the masses, that everything in the German Party comes from the masses and that the German worker movement has learned to walk on its own two feet. (Lenin is here repeating Nadezhdin's own list of good things.) And yet these masses also have faith in their leaders and put a high value on continuity of leadership. The Germans have enough political maturity to know that without talented and experienced leaders [*vozhdi*] who have learned to work together as a team, *no* class can fight effective battles in today's world. Various demagogues within the German Party tried to convince the workers otherwise, but they were exposed and discredited, thus strengthening the Party. (In other words, *Iskra* is justified in its campaign to expose and discredit fellow socialists.)⁵¹

(xiv) *Stable leadership*. Lenin asserts a five-part proposition about the importance of stable leadership. This passage is often quoted as Lenin's plea for a party of a new type. But, when we look closer, we note that Lenin meant the first three parts of the definition to be a description of revolutionary organisations under any circumstances while restricting the last two clauses to the situation in autocratic countries. Since the SPD is the paradigm of a revolutionary organisation in a non-autocratic country, the first three parts

⁴⁹ Lenin *PSS*, 6, pp. 97–8 [000].

⁵⁰ Lenin *PSS*, 6, pp. 112–13 [000].

⁵¹ Lenin *PSS*, 6, pp. 121–2 [000]. Lenin uses Nadezhdin's word *tolpa*, crowd, to refer to German workers in this passage.

must be understood as a description of the SPD. Indeed, these first three parts merely recapitulate the argument just made about demagogues.

Lenin asserts that (1) any revolutionary movement requires a stable organisation of leader/guides; (2) the broader the masses who are drawn in to support this organisation, the greater the need for stable continuity in order to combat demagogues within the Party (Lenin has just shown that the German Party does this successfully); (3) the organisation will be composed of people who do their jobs in a professional manner.⁵²

(xv) *Workers as revolutionaries by trade*. Lenin maintains that it is criminally wasteful not to use the talents of revolutionary workers to best advantage. Although the Germans have far greater personnel resources than do the Russians, they eagerly snap up workers who show talent for, say, agitation, and give them the opportunity to become thoroughly skilled at their new revolutionary trade. Thus, they obtain the Bebels and Auers needed to fight the good fight. While this process occurs more or less automatically in free countries, we Russians will have to set about it as a deliberate policy of encouraging talent.⁵³

(xvi) *Party democracy*. In order to show that full democratisation within the Party is impossible under autocratic conditions, Lenin cites the example of a truly democratic party, the SPD. One basic elements of its internal democracy is *glasnost*, full openness of all proceedings. Only *glasnost* turns the elective principle into the democratic weapon of control by the masses that it is. (Lenin is of course assuming that, come the anti-tsarist revolution and the achievement of political freedom, the RSDWP will operate on similar principles.)⁵⁴

(xvii) *Division of labour*. By way of exception, the English and German experience both confirm the same point, namely, that specialisation and division of labour are necessary for efficient organisation. Lenin cites the Webbs (authority on the English worker organisations) and Kautsky (authority on German Social Democracy) to show the naïveté of ‘primitive democracy’ (the Webbs’ term). Kautsky scorns those who demand that the people’s

⁵² Lenin *PSS*, 6, pp. 124–5 [000]. The last two parts of Lenin’s five-part proposition concern the underground party in an absolutist state and so are discussed in Chapter Eight.

⁵³ Lenin *PSS*, 6, pp. 132–3 [000] (for a full discussion of revolutionaries by trade, see Chapter Eight).

⁵⁴ Lenin *PSS*, 6, pp. 138–9 [000].

newspaper be edited directly by the people, who deny the need for professional journalists and parliamentarians and the like.⁵⁵

(xviii) *Local underground press*. In this passage, Lenin is arguing that an extensive local press is beyond the present powers of Russian Social Democracy so that exclusive attention should be given for the time being to a single central newspaper. The SPD is not mentioned, but its flourishing network of newspapers is the implicit point of comparison. Lenin states that the reader will search local Russian underground newspapers in vain for lively and interesting articles with indictments covering a wide range of abuses: diplomacy, military, church, city, financial, and so on. He notes that, if a Social-Democratic Party possesses a local press that is more flourishing than its central press, then this is a sign that the Party is either in a state of luxury or of poverty. Lenin assumes that his readers will understand that the extensive local press of the SPD is a sign of luxury while the relative preponderance of the local press in Russia is a sign of poverty.⁵⁶

(xix) *Condemning revisionism*. In only one case (in Chapter I) did Lenin have to respond to an invocation of the German model against *Iskra*. In order to show the dangers of *Iskra* intolerance, Krichevskii made a contrast between Germany and France. The SPD allows freedom of criticism within the Party – for example, it did not expel Bernstein – and it is strong and flourishing. French Marxists are obsessed with pure doctrine in the same way as are Plekhanov and *Iskra*. The result? Socialism in France lacks organisational unity and consumes its energy in internecine squabbles.

Lenin responds to this contention first by suggesting a multitude of other reasons why the Germany socialists were united and the French socialists were not. He then points out that, while the SPD did not actually expel Bernstein (he does not hide the fact that he wished Bernstein *had* been kicked out), it did officially condemn revisionism at two party congresses, warning Bernstein by name at one of them. (Although Lenin does not bring this out, it was the intellectuals in the German Party who wanted freedom of criticism and the worker rank-and-file who supported doctrinal purity.)⁵⁷

⁵⁵ Lenin *PSS*, 6, pp. 142–3 [000].

⁵⁶ Lenin *PSS*, 6, pp. 149–50 [000]. There are no SPD references in Chapter V, which is focused more than the others on a specifically Russian problem, namely, creating central institutions on the basis of pre-existing local committees (see Chapter Eight).

⁵⁷ On this topic, see Pierson 1993. For Plekhanov's strong argument in favour of

Finally, Lenin argues that in this one respect *Iskra* has to act differently from the German Party. The SPD has a long, solidly established revolutionary tradition and can afford to be somewhat easy-going about a few intellectual gadflies. In Russia, revisionist 'legally-permitted Marxism' is the only easily available theoretical literature, while economist theories and economist moods are still dominant among *praktiki*.⁵⁸ Thus, the German Party stands for the preservation of the existing situation while *Iskra* must attack the status quo. (Of course, Lenin is not saying that the Germans are conservative while the Russian are revolutionary, but the reverse: the Germans are *already* revolutionary, while the Russians have to fight to *become* revolutionary.)⁵⁹

Lenin generalises his point by arguing that a young Social-Democratic movement *must* be more intolerant than an established party.⁶⁰ In the early days of a Party, theoretical confusion is bound to exist, if only because the established 'bourgeois' outlook still reigns mostly unchallenged. Choices made at this point will establish the foundations of party life, with consequences down the years. (This passing comment in *WITBD* can be seen as the seed of a major development in Lenin's aims for the Party, one that bore full fruit in the Third International's effort to create simon-pure revolutionary parties. In *WITBD*, however, Lenin's remark is not a critique of the SPD model but a sigh of envy: the German are established, powerful and determined, while we are embryonic, weak and confused.)

In the midst of his polemics with Krichevskii in the first chapter of *WITBD*, Lenin mocks *Rabochee delo* for slavishly imitating the Germans. This stands in contrast with Lenin's own response a few years earlier to a similar charge, when he responded: what's wrong with imitating something excellent? It turns out that *Rabochee delo* only imitates the *weak* sides of SPD – presumably,

kicking Bernstein out of the Party, see his article 'Red Congress in a Red Country', in Plekhanov 1923-7, 12, pp. 451-60 (originally published in *Iskra*, No. 49 [1 September 1903]).

⁵⁸ 'Legally-permitted Marxism' (usually translated 'legal Marxism') refers to a number of writers, including Struve and Tugan-Baranovsky, who wrote Marxist articles in the mid-1890s that were abstract enough to be passed by the censor. As a group, these writers tended toward revisionist 'criticism' of orthodox Marxism as a way-station to leaving Social Democracy completely. On the history of this group, see Kindersley 1962.

⁵⁹ Lenin *PSS*, 6, pp. 11-12, 21-2 [000].

⁶⁰ Lenin *PSS*, 6, pp. 123-4 [000].

its over-tolerant side.⁶¹ This polemical thrust at *Rabochee delo* as slavish imitators, especially coming in the first chapter, gives a quite misleading impression of the role of the SPD model in Lenin's own outlook and rhetoric.

In the 1960s, Oxford University Press published an English translation of *WITBD* that systematically removed most of the passages in which Lenin evoked the SPD.⁶² What this English translation did explicitly has been done implicitly by the bulk of scholarly commentary on Lenin's book. Partly through not enough interest in the SPD model and partly through too much interest in Lenin's links with the Russian revolutionary tradition, the rhetorical as well as ideological centrality of the SPD model has been effaced. Scholars have thus condemned themselves and their readers to missing the heart of Lenin's vision.

The picture of the SPD painted in *WITBD* is what we should expect from this intensely Erfurtian Russian. The SPD is a democratic and worker-controlled party that nevertheless is genuinely revolutionary. It is led by talented, experienced leaders who have gained the justified confidence of the rank and file through devoted service. It understands the importance of theory. It is an energetic tribune of the people, tirelessly exposing abuses and acting as the leader of all democratic forces in Germany. What do I mean, says Lenin, when I advocate all-sided political agitation, political indictments, overcoming artisanal limitations, 'revolutionaries by trade', and the worker's role as the advanced fighter for democracy? If you want to know, just look at the Germans!

Inspired and inspiring activists

The German model was the original inspiration for the Social-Democratic activists who were at the heart of the spread of awareness in Russia. We will now see how Lenin portrays the way these inspired activists went on to inspire others.

Whether these would-be leader/guides come from the workers or the intelligentsia, the most striking feature of their role in Lenin's Erfurtian drama

⁶¹ Lenin *PSS*, 6, p. 97 [000].

⁶² The editor, S.V. Utechin, tells us that he omitted 'examples given by Lenin from the practice of German Social-Democracy in order to illustrate points he was making, examples which would now be more likely to obscure than to elucidate his reasoning' (Lenin 1963, p. v).

is that they enjoy the boundless confidence of the masses. This is Lenin's promise to *all* the *praktiki* who are willing to work at becoming true political leaders [*vozhdii*]: they will be able to inspire their followers. The image of the inspiring leader is central to the four purple-prose passages of *WITBD* that come close to the emotional heart of the book. These four passages contain Lenin's political poetry in its most concentrated form.

The first is the one in which Lenin contrasts the *tred-iunionist* secretary to the tribune of the people. The people's tribune – Lenin's ideal leader – responds to *all* instances of oppression, no matter which class they are directed against. He can take the smallest instances of abuse and use them to paint a single awe-inspiring picture of police violence and capitalist exploitation. He uses every chance to present to the world his socialist convictions and democratic demands, for he wants *all* to know about the world-historical significance of the liberation struggle of the proletariat.⁶³

The next passage arises out of the earlier polemical clash between the Emancipation of Labour group and *Rabochee delo*. Here, Lenin asserts that the revolutionary heroes of the 1870s were inspiring leaders – their impassioned preaching found an echo in the masses that were awakening in *stikhiinyi* fashion and they, in turn, were supported by the energy of the revolutionary class. So Plekhanov was a thousand times right, even back in 1885, to identify the workers as the revolutionary class, to assert the *inevitability* (my emphasis) of their *stikhiinyi* awakening, and to give great and grand political tasks to 'worker circles'.

Many years later (Lenin continues), in 1900, when the mass movement had begun in earnest, *Rabochee delo* still refused to enjoin the overthrow of the autocracy as a principal theme of Social-Democratic agitation. Thus, it underestimated the revolutionary potential of the masses. It also underestimated the Social-Democratic *praktiki*. 'You brag about your practicality and you don't see (a fact known to any Russian *praktik*) what miracles for the revolutionary cause can be brought about not only by a circle but by a lone individual.' If the *praktiki* diligently worked at it, they too could be as inspiring as the heroes of the 1870s and – given the existence of a genuine mass movement – could accomplish much greater things.

⁶³ Lenin *PSS*, 6, pp. 80–1 [000]. We have looked at this passage earlier in this chapter because it uses Wilhelm Liebknecht, one of the founding fathers of the SPD, as its paradigm of a people's tribune.

It is precisely at the present time that the Russian revolutionary – guided by a genuinely revolutionary theory and relying on the class that is genuinely revolutionary and that is undergoing a *stikhiinyi* awakening – can at last – at last! – draw himself up to his full stature and reveal all his heroic [*bogatyrskii*] strength.⁶⁴

The *bogatyri* were the giant marvellous heroes of the Russian folk epics. Lenin could have chosen no better word to evoke his romantic conception of the Social Democrat as people's hero.

Lenin evoked the heroes of the Russian revolutionary tradition much less often than he did the contemporaneous SPD, but, when he did, he pointed primarily to their ability to inspire (of their organisation he says little beyond that they had one, thus demonstrating that an effective nation-wide organisation is not an impossibility).⁶⁵ In the third of our purple-prose passages, Lenin again alludes to earlier revolutionaries as a way of shaming today's pitiful artisans. Someone who wavers in theoretical matters, who is apathetic and without energy, who is more like a secretary of a trade union than a people's tribune, and who is not even skilled enough to keep from getting arrested – such a person lowers the prestige of the revolutionary hero that was once so great in Rus' (this poetic name for Russia evokes the same heroic world as the *bogatyr*).⁶⁶

In our final passage, Lenin actually labels his vision a 'dream'. The dream starts small although not unambitiously: a newspaper published regularly on a weekly basis and distributed throughout Russia. But the newspaper becomes part of a Cyclopean forge blowing every spark of popular indignation into a massive fire of protest. The work in this forge toughens up a corps of experienced warriors. Lenin then brings together his two personal sources of inspiration: Russian revolutionary heroes in the person of Alexei Zheliabov, the leader of *Narodnaia volia*, and the SPD in the person of August Bebel. Lenin called on his reader to envision Social-Democratic Zheliabovs and Russian Bebel as part of a grand army of revolutionaries and workers who march at the head of the entire people to settle accounts with the shame and curse of Russia. 'That is what we must dream about!'⁶⁷

⁶⁴ Lenin *PSS*, 6, p. 107 [000].

⁶⁵ Lenin *PSS*, 6, pp. 25, 28 [000].

⁶⁶ Lenin *PSS*, 6, pp. 126–7 [000].

⁶⁷ Lenin *PSS*, 6, p. 171 [000].

Workers as followers

The mass of workers are already roused and they are ready to follow socialist leaders. (Lenin, 1900)

If the Social-Democratic activists are cast in the role of inspiring leaders, then the workers at large are cast in the role of inspired followers. Much attention has been paid to Lenin's concept of leadership, but very little to his conception of followership. Yet, given his overall insistence on dramatic rationality, we should not be surprised to discover that this concept is a complex and exalted one.

Lenin's *WITBD* portrait of the Social-Democratic workers is not addressed to the workers themselves; that is, he is not exhorting them to live up to his exalted picture. Rather, it is addressed to the *praktiki*: look, this is how the workers really are at this point in time, so you had better deal with it in your strategies and goals. If the 'worry about workers' approach were correct, we would expect Lenin to say to his polemical opponents: you are overestimating the workers, you cannot count on them, trim down your plans. But, in actuality, his consistent argument is: you are underestimating the workers, they demand more than you are giving them, you need to learn to think big and be more ambitious. In fact, the workers play many roles in Lenin's drama. They appear as dedicated *fighters*, as *organisers* of their own economic struggle, as an eager and appreciative *audience*, and as diligent *students*. They are also expected to actively *push forward* leaders from their own midst. We shall examine these roles in turn.

The workers are assigned the central role in the coming revolutionary drama because, first of all, they are *fighters*. Like the proverbial British tar, their fists are ever ready for a knock-down blow. The workers can be counted on to take to the streets and provide the muscle power without which the anti-autocratic revolution will dwindle away into mere grumbling.⁶⁸ Some writers claim that this is *all* Lenin expects of the worker majority – all fists and no brains.⁶⁹ And it is true that Lenin, like Social Democrats in general, views the

⁶⁸ Lenin *PSS*, 6, p. 109 [000].

⁶⁹ 'Destructive mass action on the streets, if *What is to be Done?* is to be taken as having represented [Lenin's] current viewpoint, seemed to be the limit of working-class potentiality' (Service 1988, p. 40).

workers as the rank and file of the revolutionary army. In May 1901, he proudly announced that the workers were making it evident to everybody that a mass anti-tsarist force was now in existence. 'There *is* such a force and it is the revolutionary proletariat. It has already proven its readiness not only to hear and support the call to political struggle, but to audaciously throw itself into battle'.⁷⁰ But, as a good Erfurtian, he also expects that the proletarian class army will be effective fighters because they understand the reasons for the conflict better than other class armies, because they have greater organisational capacity than other classes, and because they are energetic participants in the ongoing spread of awareness. Their effectiveness as fighters thus depends on their ability to fulfil the other roles assigned to them.

Workers, then, are also *organisers* who can be counted on to mount their own economic struggle. At one point, Lenin defines '*tred-iunionist* politics' as the common aspiration of all workers to obtain state measures to improve their position, protect themselves against disaster, limit exploitation and so forth, but without hitting at the roots of the capitalist system. This kind of activity, he says, is common to all workers, including members of organisations hostile to socialism, such as English *tred-iunionists*, German Catholic workers, and members of Russian police-sponsored unions.⁷¹ This sort of remark, coupled with the opprobrious epithet '*tred-iunionist*', has caused many readers to assume (incorrectly) that Lenin looks down on the workers as irredeemably addicted to trivial reformism. At the very least, he seems to be setting limits to what workers can do without Social-Democratic inspiration. But let us look at Lenin's remarks from the other direction, not as setting limits, but as praise for what the workers can do without any help from anybody.

This polemical point is driven home by Lenin's fictional Social-Democratic worker who reproaches the intellectuals for wasting their time doing what the workers are fully capable of doing themselves. Look, he says, even out in the Russian boondocks, the workers are doing what comes naturally, that is, resisting the employers with strikes. They are perfectly capable of figuring out for themselves whose side the gendarmes are on. But what no one has yet told them is what socialism is or even that there is such a thing – and that is where you Social-Democratic intellectuals come in. Do not treat us

⁷⁰ Lenin *PSS*, 5, p. 10.

⁷¹ Lenin *PSS*, 6, p. 42 [000].

workers like children who cannot handle our daily economic affairs – rather, satisfy our desire to learn about *all* aspects of Russian life.⁷²

Lenin's desire to make this point leads him to minimise the role of intellectuals in conducting the economic struggle. In the Petersburg strikes of the mid-1890s, for example, Social-Democratic intellectuals played a significant role in putting together an organisational framework, preparing demands, and so forth. But, in *WITBD*, Lenin wants to picture the mid-1890s as a time when the workers, on one side, and Social-Democratic intellectuals, on the other, were moving toward each other in order to merge. He therefore passes over in complete silence the role of the Social-Democratic intellectuals in the Petersburg strikes and ascribes all advances in purposiveness solely to the workers.⁷³

As we saw earlier, the English trade unions, usually a rather negative image in *WITBD*, are cited at one point as authorities on the subject of purposive organisation. Lenin points to the experience of the English trade unions who (according to the Webbs) learned through bitter experience the imperative of a specialised division of labour. Lenin then cites Kautsky's *Parliamentarism* to the same effect and observes that the learned Marxist arrives at the same conclusion as the English workers who united 'in *stikhiinyi* fashion'.⁷⁴ Thus, the Russian *praktiki* can learn something from non-Social-Democratic English workers. The workers – all of them, not just the Social-Democratic ones – can handle the economic struggle.

In a metaphor that, as far as I can tell, is unique to Lenin, the workers also fulfill the crucial role of providing a great *audience*. The workers are not just motivated by good reasons – they are greedily eager for knowledge. They are avid to hear the Social-Democratic message and they applaud vigorously when they hear it, thus stimulating propagandists and agitators to greater heights. The workers are an ideal audience for political indictments because they feel they need political knowledge and because they are capable of turning political knowledge into active struggle. For this reason, the underground press was already a power in Russia even a generation ago.

⁷² Lenin *PSS*, 6, pp. 72–3, see also 6, pp. 109, 112–13.

⁷³ Lenin *PSS*, 6, p. 30 [000].

⁷⁴ Lenin *PSS*, 6, pp. 142–3 [000].

And, today, in comparison, the strata of the people ready to read the non-censored press and take rules for living from it are several times broader and deeper than before.⁷⁵

The potential enthusiasm of the worker audience for political indictments is revealed by the way it reacted earlier to economic indictments. As soon as leaflets exposing factory abuses started to appear, a positive passion for such indictments exploded among the workers. When the workers saw the Social Democrats telling the truth about their life, they flooded the *praktiki* with descriptions and reports. *Rabochaia mysl* was part of this popular urge to tell the real story. This declaration of war against existing society had both moral and practical significance, and similar economic exposés continue to play an awakening role even in the most advanced European countries.⁷⁶

One of the accusations Lenin needed to counter was that political indictments of the type Lenin was churning out for *Iskra* – denouncing abuses perpetrated by the autocracy against *all* classes of society – were inappropriate for a class-based worker newspaper. He therefore wants to show that the workers are ready and, indeed, eager to move on from economic to political indictments. Accordingly, Lenin cites Savinkov and Nadezhdin to document his claim that not only the advanced workers but also the mass of workers are very interested in political life.⁷⁷ The economists are wrong to treat the workers as if they were children who are unable to respond to any issue except those promising immediate tangible results.⁷⁸

The terrorists reveal the same underestimation of the workers' readiness to respond to outrages when they advocate 'excitative terror', since anyone who is not stirred to his depths by the outrages of the Russian autocracy is unshakable. In fact, the workers are already highly indignant about all that is going on, as shown by their 'greediness' for illegal political literature.⁷⁹

In a striking image, Lenin claims that all that needs to be done is simply to *throw* journalistic indictments to the worker mass. Just do this, and even

⁷⁵ Lenin *PSS*, 6, p. 89 [000]. The original use of the audience metaphor in *Iskra*, No. 4 (May 1901) is revealing (Lenin *PSS*, 5, pp. 5–13).

⁷⁶ Lenin *PSS*, 6, pp. 54–6 [000].

⁷⁷ Lenin *PSS*, 6, pp. 73–4 [000].

⁷⁸ Lenin *PSS*, 6, p. 91 [000].

⁷⁹ Lenin *PSS*, 6, p. 77 [000]. The theme of the workers' greed for illegal literature recurs throughout Lenin's writings in this period.

a completely unenlightened [*seryi*] worker ‘will understand or will *feel*’ that the same evil force that is crushing him is also crushing other Russians. In other words, although the less-developed worker may not be able to articulate his case or be able to back it up with wide-ranging information, he will certainly draw the right conclusions about the connection between his own life and the outrages perpetrated by the autocracy. And, once the less-developed worker feels this, he will experience an overpowering desire to respond in some way and will himself find ways to do so – and, here, Lenin indulges in a fantasy list of possible popular protests, for example, against censorship.⁸⁰

Iskra’s political indictments were needed not simply to stir up indignation but to bring understanding – Social-Democratic awareness – to the worker mass. Thus, the workers are also expected to act as *students*. Lenin’s description of what this entails is almost unbelievably ambitious. The worker masses – not just the worker élite, mind you – must be able to apply a materialist analysis to *all* aspects of the life of *all* classes of society. The worker has to grasp the social and political profile of everybody from the tramp to the landowner, know their strong and weak sides, see through their deceptive slogans, expose the ways in which legislation serves particular economic interests.⁸¹

For the more diligent worker-student, Lenin urges the *praktiki* to provide lectures and talks on the history of the revolutionary movement, the internal and external policies of the government, on the current economic position in Europe and Russia, and the present situation of Russian social classes.⁸²

One final reason why the temptation to dumb down ‘writings for workers’ should be resisted is the hope of preparing the way for outstanding worker theoreticians. Broad horizons are required for original contributions of this kind, and these are hardly encouraged by artificially limited ‘writing for workers’. Workers wish to read and in fact are now reading everything written for educated society, and only some poor quality intellectuals think otherwise.⁸³

This assertion brings us to Lenin’s portrayal of the workers as actively pushing forward those among them with leadership abilities in order to build

⁸⁰ Lenin *PSS*, 6, p. 71 [000].

⁸¹ Lenin *PSS*, 6, pp. 69–70 [000]. This passage sounds like a prospectus for the imaginary book *Political Agitation* discussed in Chapter Three.

⁸² Lenin *PSS*, 6, p. 80 [000].

⁸³ Lenin *PSS*, 6, p. 39 fn. [000].

up a national party organisation. The word he uses to express this process – *vydvigat'*, to push forward – had a future in Soviet culture. Later, during the 1930s, the *vydvizhentsy* were workers who experienced rapid promotion to leadership roles.⁸⁴ But Lenin consistently uses the word to show the workers creating and sending forth their own leaders. In 1899, he writes:

Not a single class in history has achieved a position of dominance if it did not push forward its own political leaders [*vozhd'i*] and its own advanced representatives who were capable of organising the movement and guiding it. The Russian worker class has already shown that it is capable of pushing forward such people: the overflowing struggle of the last five or six years has shown what a mass of revolutionary forces are hidden in the worker class.⁸⁵

In 1901, he argues that common work will push forward leaders:

If we unite our forces in producing a newspaper common to all, then this work will prepare and push forward not only the most able propagandists, but the most expert organisers, the most talented political leaders of the party, capable at the right time to give the watchword for the decisive battle and to guide it.⁸⁶

In *WITBD*, he again uses the 'push forward' image as one more way to make his ambitious plans sound plausible. 'We *will* be able to do these things precisely because the mass that is awakening in *stikhiinyi* fashion will push forward from its own milieu a greater and greater number of "revolutionaries by trade"'.⁸⁷ The deeper and wider is this vast awakening, the more the worker masses will push forward talented agitators, propagandists and *praktiki* in the best sense of the word. No political police in the world will be able to cope with a party based on such a corps of worker revolutionaries, since these revolutionaries will be entirely devoted to the cause and they will also enjoy the unlimited confidence of the worker masses.⁸⁸

⁸⁴ See Mokienko and Nikitina 1998 for a sense of the Soviet connotations of *vydvigat'*.

⁸⁵ Lenin, *PSS*, 4, p. 375.

⁸⁶ Lenin *PSS*, 5, pp. 12–13.

⁸⁷ Lenin *PSS*, 6, p. 111 [000].

⁸⁸ Lenin *PSS*, 6, p. 133 [000]. Lenin adds here a parenthetical slam at Russian intellectuals who are sloppy and in fact not very practical.

In the 1930s, the term *vydvigat'* was redolent of the pathos of promotion. This pathos can be found in *WITBD* as well. Lenin promises the worker who becomes a full-time revolutionary that he will get a chance to apply his talents and improve himself in his chosen party speciality. He will expand his horizons and his knowledge, he will rub elbows with the leaders of other localities and of other parties, and, in general, see the world.⁸⁹ If one is looking for a direct link between *WITBD* and the Soviet Union, this appeal to the excitement of rising up in the world might be a good place to start.

All these aspects of worker followership – militancy, organisational ability, appreciative audience that is eager for knowledge, and participation in underground revolutionary organisations – are mobilised by Lenin in order to make his practical proposals sound plausible. For example, the project of a nation-wide underground newspaper is feasible only because the worker youth show 'a passionate and unstoppable striving towards the ideas of democracy and socialism'. The difficulties encountered in distributing the newspaper will be eased by worker support and worker cleverness.

The French workers under Napoleon III and the German workers under the exceptional laws against socialists were able to contrive all sorts of pretexts for their political and socialist meetings. The Russian workers will be able to match this feat.⁹⁰

In *WITBD*, Lenin expands on this theme by showing how a secret underground organisation can have strong roots in the worker milieu (a basic assumption of his organisational plan, as shown in Chapter Eight). There he presents a vision of a thriving, bustling underground Russia. The Social-Democratic organisation will flood the worker districts with illegal literature, the workers will greedily snap it up, with the result that reading and contributing to illegal literature will occur on such a scale that it will practically cease to be an underground activity. The same applies to 'worker trade unions, worker circles for self-education and the reading of illegal literature, socialist as well as democratic circles in *all* other strata of the population and so on and so on'.⁹¹

⁸⁹ Lenin *PSS*, 6, pp. 132–3 [000].

⁹⁰ Lenin *PSS*, 4, pp. 195–7 (1899).

⁹¹ Lenin *PSS*, 6, pp. 125–6 [000].

In relation to Social-Democratic leaders, the workers are cast as passionate followers. But the spread of awareness rolls on, and in relation to Russian society as a whole the worker movement acts as a leader. For Lenin, the growing revolutionary crisis in Russia is unthinkable without the *stikhiinyi* upsurge of the workers, as we shall see in the next section.

The *stikhiinyi* upsurge

The *stikhiinyi* upsurge of both the worker mass and (thanks to its influence) other social strata has occurred in recent years with striking swiftness. . . .

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. (Lenin, 1901)

The *stikhiinyi* upsurge of the workers is galvanising all of Russian society and creating the possibility of the imminent overthrow of tsarism and the conquest of political freedom. All that is lacking is for the natural leader/guides of the workers – the Social Democrats – to provide an effective organisational and ideological framework for the revolutionary onslaught. This is Lenin's basic definition of the situation. In order to understand what the *stikhiinyi* upsurge means to him, we have to put it in the context of *WITBD*'s Erfurtian drama and the volcanic spread of awareness Lenin thought was taking place in Russia.

The standard English translation 'spontaneous upsurge' is much too weak (and no doubt this is one reason the centrality of this concept has been completely overlooked). *Pod'em*, the word translated as 'upsurge', connotes a swelling of energy and enthusiasm, while *stikhiinyi* endows this upsurge with the unstoppable strength of a natural force. As we have seen, *stikhiinyi* was often used in a primarily negative sense in Social-Democratic rhetoric. '*Stikhiinyi* protest' was disorganised, violent, explosive and needed to be turned into 'purposive protest' as fast as possible. But the root metaphor of 'ungovernable natural force' could have positive connotations if it designated a force of nature moving with unstoppable force *in the right direction*. Within the framework of the merger narrative, the right direction meant, first, towards militant protest against the exploiters and the government, and, second, towards a merger with the revolutionary socialists who are themselves moving toward the workers.

As far as I have been able to trace, the earliest occurrence of the phrase 'stikhiinyi upsurge' is in late 1900.⁹² The concept itself emerges somewhat earlier and, in fact, cannot be separated from Lenin's package of practical proposals first put forth in 1899. Lenin's concept has three facets: the workers' rapid politicisation, worker leadership of the Russian people's struggle against the Tsar, and the bottleneck of inadequate Social-Democratic organisation.

These three facets are strikingly present in a piece written in late 1900, that is, before the first issue of *Iskra* was published. It is a preface to a pamphlet compiled by the local Kharkov Social-Democratic committee based on worker descriptions of May First events in Kharkov earlier in the year. The May First demonstrations had turned into a general strike, thus marking the opening of a new phase in the Russian worker movement. Lenin uses these descriptions to set forth his definition of the situation. First, rapid worker politicisation:

In the history of the Russian worker movement, an epoch of excitement and outbursts has commenced, occasioned by a very wide variety of causes. . . . There exists a fairy tale that says that the Russian workers have not yet grown up enough for political struggle, that their main cause is a pure economic struggle that will imperceptibly and bit by bit be supplemented by partial political agitation for individual political reforms and not by a struggle against the entire political system of Russia. This fairy tale is decisively refuted by the May First events in Kharkov.⁹³

This rapid politicisation shows the spread of awareness within the worker class. But central to Lenin's definition of the *stikhiinyi* upsurge is the spread of awareness *beyond* the boundaries of the worker class to all strata of the *narod* and even elite society. The following vivid scenario of worker leadership is, I think, one of the most revealing Lenin citations in this commentary:

They say that a certain individual who was passing through Kharkov during the May events asked a cabbie what it was that the workers wanted, and he answered, 'Well, they're demanding eight hours of work and their own

⁹² 'We must study . . . the forms and conditions of the awakening of the worker class, of its struggle that is now commencing, in order to link, in one indivisible whole, the Russian revolutionary movement and the *stikhiinyi* upsurge of the masses of the *narod*' (preliminary draft of the announcement of *Iskra*'s publication, Lenin PSS, 4, p. 328).

⁹³ Lenin PSS, 4, pp. 364-6.

newspaper'. That cabbie already understood that the workers will not be satisfied by petty concessions, that they want to feel that they are free human beings, that they want to freely and openly talk of their needs and fight for them.

But the cabbie's answer still does not reveal any awareness that the workers are fighting for the freedom of the whole people, for its right to participate in the workings of the state. When the demand that the Tsar call together representatives of the people is repeated with full purposiveness and invincible firmness by the worker masses in all the industrial towns and factory areas of Russia – when the workers arrive at the point where the entire urban population and all the village people near the towns understand what the socialists want and what the workers are fighting for, then we have not long to wait for the great day of the liberation of the people from police autocracy!⁹⁴

In the parable of the cabbie, Lenin gives most attention to the workers' impact on various sections of the *narod*. But he also believes that when 'the worker class lifts up the banner of struggle', *all* of the decent elements of Russian society will rally round. Lenin's whole political programme depends on this assertion of the power of the *stikhiinyi* upsurge. As he argued in 1899,

The Russian worker class is able to conduct its economic and political struggle all by itself, even if it receives no help from any other class. But in the political struggle the workers do *not* stand alone. The complete absence of rights for the people and the savage abuses of the bashibazouk bureaucrats infuriate all educated people who are the least bit decent and who cannot reconcile themselves with the harrying of free speech and free thought. They infuriate the persecuted Poles, the Finns, the Jews, the Russian sectarians – they infuriate the petty merchants, the industrialists, the peasants who cannot find any defence from anyone against the oppression of the bureaucrats and the police.

All these groups in the population, taken singly, are incapable of sustained political struggle, but when the worker class lifts up the banner of struggle like this, then from all sides come hands offering help. Russian Social Democracy will stand at the head of all fighters for the rights of the people, of all fighters for democracy – and when it does, it will be invincible!⁹⁵

⁹⁴ Lenin *PSS*, 4, pp. 369–70.

⁹⁵ Lenin *PSS*, 4, p. 186.

Thus, there exists a vast potential for immediate revolutionary change. But Lenin uses the May First events to underscore his constant motif: the 'political capabilities of the Russian workers' will be wasted if we Social Democrats do not get our act together:

While proving again and yet again the political capabilities of the Russian workers, the May First events in Kharkov at the same time show what is still lacking for the full development of those capacities. . . . If we do not wish to remain in the rear of the battle, we must direct all our efforts toward the creation of a nation-wide organisation that is capable of guiding all the separate outbursts and in this way ensure that the approaching storm . . . will not be a *stikhiinyi* storm but a purposive movement of the proletariat standing at the head of the whole people against the autocratic government.⁹⁶

In *WITBD*, the 'spring events' of February-March 1901 – when workers took to the streets to support student protests – are used as a metonymy for the *stikhiinyi* upsurge as a whole. But, as we have seen, these events did not surprise Lenin or provoke any change of outlook on his part (as is sometimes asserted). On the contrary, Lenin used the spring events to confirm his pre-existing definition of the ongoing *stikhiinyi* upsurge and the inadequate Social-Democratic response. In *Iskra*, No. 4 (May 1901), where he first sets forth his plan in public form, he asks his readers to

recall the recent events: before our eyes the broad masses of the workers of the cities and the ordinary people of the cities are straining at the bit to begin the struggle – and among the revolutionaries there is no staff of leader/guides and organisers.⁹⁷

In *WITBD*, the spring events are cited to point the same moral that Lenin derived from the May Day events in Kharkov. Moral Number One: the workers will undertake radical action even when no 'tangible' results' are forthcoming. Moral Number Two: 'the *stikhiinyi* striving of the workers to come to the defence of students who were beaten by the police and the Cossacks overtook the purposive activity of the Social-Democratic organisation'.⁹⁸

⁹⁶ Lenin *PSS*, 4, pp. 364–6.

⁹⁷ Lenin *PSS*, 5, p. 7. The word *rvat'sia*, 'straining at the bit', 'bursting to do something', often shows up in Lenin's writings of this period. See Lenin *PSS*, 4, pp. 327, 375 and (in *WITBD*) 6, p. 31 [000].

⁹⁸ Lenin *PSS*, 6, p. 93 [000]. This reading of the spring events as confirming the

The third moral Lenin derives from the *stikhiinyi* upsurge in *WITBD* is the potential created by the worker movement's ability to inspire all of Russian society. A truly revolutionary Social Democracy can count on sympathisers in all classes of society. The economists are still sceptical about the possibility of such support, but they overlook the 'gigantic step forward' taken during the years from 1894 to 1901. Under the influence of the worker movement, a wider and wider range of social strata are becoming dissatisfied and ready to help Social Democracy in its fight against absolutism in any way they can. Of course, the many millions of peasants and small artisans will always greedily hear the preaching of a competent Social Democrat. But (Lenin asks) is there really even a single class in society where contact cannot be made with individuals or groups who are disgusted with autocratic abuses?⁹⁹

The Social Democrats, therefore, have a positive duty to overcome their limitations and transform this potential energy into actual energy. An effective party organisation will 'go to all classes' and mobilise all this support, ranging from inside information sent in by whistle-blowers to small but needful services such as providing a roving revolutionary with a roof over his head for a night or two. Lenin instances a factory inspector who was frustrated because he could not hand over his valuable information to a 'revolutionary centre' that could put it to good use. Lenin insists that similar support could come from civil servants and bureaucrats of all shades: the postal service, the customs service, gentry organisations, indeed, even police and court circles.¹⁰⁰

These people should be used for information and small services without dragging them into the underground. But there are many impetuous people whose 'revolutionary instincts' must find satisfaction. If they perceive that Social Democracy is not adequately militant, they will turn to self-defeating and disruptive terrorist acts.¹⁰¹ Once again, the growing revolutionary excitement makes a strong party organisation possible and therefore necessary.

There are hints in *WITBD* that the *stikhiinyi* upsurge will have ripple effects even beyond Russian society. The upcoming Russian revolution will galvanise

existence of the *stikhiinyi* upsurge is not a self-evident one. Other Social-Democratic observers looked at the same events and concluded that revolutionary initiative still belonged to radical elements of élite society such as the students.

⁹⁹ Lenin *PSS*, 6, pp. 87–8, 128–9 [000].

¹⁰⁰ Lenin *PSS*, 6, pp. 129–30 [000].

¹⁰¹ Lenin *PSS*, 6, p. 137 [000].

all of international Social Democracy and perhaps lead to momentous events in Western Europe.¹⁰²

We have traced the progress of Lenin's Erfurtian drama, starting from the original inspiration provided by German Social Democracy and going on to the Social-Democratic activists in Russia, then to the workers and finally on to the Russian people and élite society. From Lenin's point of view, the course of events was stunning. Within a decade, the efforts of isolated *praktiki* to read and apply the *Erfurt Programme* had snowballed into an avalanche that promised to sweep away the autocracy. Lenin holds out an intoxicating perspective indeed to the underground *praktik*. As he claims in *WITBD*, the energy and initiative of the *praktik* will be given an enormous boost by the perspective of having at his disposal the combined strength of millions and millions of workers arising in *stikhiinyi* fashion in the proletarian class struggle.¹⁰³

The Archimedes of Social Democracy

One of the most famous lines from *WITBD* is the Archimedean boast 'give us an organisation of revolutionaries – and we will turn Russia around!'.¹⁰⁴ This phrase may look like a complete sentence and a summation of Lenin's message. If taken this way, it is a *proposition* about the ability of a revolutionary organisation – presumably all by itself – to turn Russia around. But, as presented in *WITBD*, it is not a complete sentence but a clause in a larger sentence. When we read the full sentence, we realise that it is a line of dialogue given to a character in a historical narrative, namely, to Lenin himself along with his comrades in St. Petersburg in the mid-1890s, just before their arrest on the eve of the great strikes of 1895–6. Following a tirade against the deficiencies of the 'artisanal' *praktik*, Lenin admits that he too has felt inadequate and unprepared. He then goes on to relate the circumstances:

I worked in a circle that took upon itself very broad and all-embracing tasks – and all we members of this circle had to suffer agonies to the point of illness from our awareness that we were showing ourselves to be [nothing

¹⁰² Lenin *PSS*, 6, pp. 27–8 [000].

¹⁰³ Lenin *PSS*, 6, p. 48 [000].

¹⁰⁴ Lenin *PSS*, 6, p. 127 [000]. The usual translation is 'and we will overturn Russia!'.

but] artisans at a historical moment such that it could have been said, modifying a well-known saying: give us an organisation of revolutionaries – and we will turn Russia around!¹⁰⁵

How does the meaning of Lenin's Archimedean boast change when we see it embedded in its narrative context? We see, first of all, that it is not a boast at all but, rather, a confession of failure – of 'the burning feeling of shame that I felt then'. Given the circumstances of a specific historical moment, there *could* have been an anti-tsarist revolution in Russia, since the people were already on the move – but Lenin and his friends were not up to the task. And, now, in 1901–2, when the *stikhiinyi* upsurge is electrifying all Russia, the lack of organisation is even more unforgivable.

What is the moral of this story, when seen in the context of *WITBD*'s overall argument? Archimedes's lever is a device able to give almost infinite power under the right circumstances to a single person: 'Give me a place to stand and I can move the earth!'. In Lenin's application, a properly organised party was the place to stand, but the lever itself was the cascading spread of awareness that will amplify the message of the Social Democrats and turn it into a revolutionary onslaught against the autocracy. The success of the revolution now depends on the revolutionaries, because, once they do their part, they can be sure the proletariat and *narod* will do theirs. Organisation must be the Russian Social Democrats' top priority because everything else – the enthusiasm of the masses, the universal hatred of the autocracy – is at hand.

The Archimedean lever thus sums up Lenin's Erfurtian drama. The power of the *stikhiinyi* upsurge and the speed of the spread of awareness means that Social Democracy itself is now the bottleneck. Russian Social Democracy has therefore a great responsibility and a great opportunity. This moral continues to be Lenin's message in the years to come. It is worth taking a look ahead to see this continuity.

The *stikhiinyi* upsurge – and in particular the revolutionary actions of the workers in 1905 and the strike movement that broke out in Russia after the massacre of striking workers in the Lena gold fields in 1912 – remained the centre of Lenin's message. The two upsurges of 1905 and 1912 are great historical landmarks for Lenin. His reaction to both can accordingly be predicted

¹⁰⁵ Ibid. [000].

from *WITBD* and his political agitation articles for *Iskra*. He instantly and instinctively reacted by putting events into the framework of the Erfurtian drama. In each case, he emphasises that the actions of the workers begins in *stikhiinyi* fashion, that is, without the instigation of Social-Democratic leaders. This proves that the revolutionising of the workers is as unstoppable as a force of nature, despite the nay-saying of intellectuals whose weak faith was shaken by intervening months and years of worker quiescence. In each case – 1905 and 1912 – the workers’ action sparks off effective widespread protest against the tsar, thus proving the essential correctness of the Social-Democratic wager on the proletariat’s ability to be the leader of the whole Russian liberation movement. The growing dimensions of these great *stikhiinyi* upsurges shows that Social-Democratic propaganda, agitation and guidance in the past has paid off – they have planted seeds of awareness that did their subterranean work unnoticed by many. Nevertheless, the *stikhiinyi* nature of the upsurge is a standing reproach to the Social Democrats and an urgent reminder of how much they have yet to do.¹⁰⁶

Lenin’s reaction to events following the massacre of workers in the Lena gold fields in 1912 reveal Lenin’s loyalty to his Erfurtian drama a decade after the publication of *WITBD*.¹⁰⁷ In an article entitled ‘Revolutionary Upsurge’, Lenin claimed that a living tradition of revolutionary mass strikes existed among the workers and gave rise to the present strikes. These mass strikes accomplished what no other force could accomplish: a huge country with a population of 150 millions, scattered and isolated over a huge expanse, oppressed and without rights, protected from dangerous influences by an army of police officials and spies – this *entire* country had been set into motion. Even the most backward workers and peasants came into direct or indirect

¹⁰⁶ Many writers both in the academic and activist wings of the textbook interpretation see Lenin’s 1905 writings as evidence that Lenin was now ‘intoxicated’ with the ‘spontaneous’ revolutionary actions of the Russian proletariat (Haimson 2004, p. 64). Indeed he was, but he was hardly sober before. In the very writings used to document Lenin’s new outlook, Lenin himself affirms continuity. See Lenin *PSS*, 9, pp. 174–5, 210–11, 218, 220–1, 262, 300 (reactions to Bloody Sunday); 12: 84 (the article on party reorganisation used by Haimson and others, who do not notice that Lenin here assumes the existence of political freedom in Russia and most predictably advocates new modes of party organisation).

¹⁰⁷ For contrasting views on the impact of the massacre in the Lena gold fields, see Haimson 2005 and the forthcoming study by Michael Melancon. Melancon shows the tremendous anti-tsarist impact of these events on all Russian society.

contact with the strikers. Immediately, there also appeared on the scene hundreds of thousands of revolutionary agitators whose immense influence derived from the fact that they were also fighting for the most urgent needs of the workers. The autocracy itself was sowing deep hatred toward itself and ensuring at least an elementary understanding of its real nature. And, now, the advanced workers in the capital shouted out the message – long live the democratic republic! – and this message went out by a thousand channels (a favourite image of Lenin's) into the depths of the Russian people.¹⁰⁸

The moral for the Social Democrats? We need organisation and more organisation, in order to support and widen the movement of the masses.¹⁰⁹ The masses have begun to move and they are all the more insistently asking the Social Democrats for guidance and leadership: where are we going? How do we get there? What should be our immediate aims? Even if the upsurge does not now turn into revolution, the seeds sown by bold revolutionary watchwords will go deep and bear fruit later. The target of Lenin's polemics, as usual, is intelligentsia scepticism.¹¹⁰

A year later, in 1913, after May First strikes and demonstrations in Petersburg, Lenin is ecstatic about the quarter of a million workers that he claims took part in the strikes. And even more inspiring are the street demonstrations.

Singing revolutionary songs, with loud calls for revolution in all suburbs of the capital and from one end of the city to another, with red banners waving, the worker crowds fought over the course of several hours against the police and the Okhrana [security police] that had been mobilised with extraordinary energy by the government.¹¹¹

Lenin takes the occasion to demonstrate the power of the Archimedean lever that arises out of the spread of awareness. He quotes a sarcastic Menshevik comment: 'If the party equals the underground, then how many members does it have? Two or three hundred?'. Lenin indignantly responds that, in fact, there were already thousands of workers in the Party by 1903 and that tens of thousands of workers do underground work even today. But suppose the critics were right. What then?

¹⁰⁸ Lenin *PSS*, 21, pp. 342–3.

¹⁰⁹ Lenin *PSS*, 21, pp. 339–46.

¹¹⁰ Lenin *PSS*, 22, p. 173.

¹¹¹ Lenin *PSS*, 23, p. 297 (1913).

'A miracle!' First, a decision made by five or six members of the executive group of the Central Committee. Next, a leaflet prepared and distributed by the two or three hundred workers in the party underground. The leaflets do not talk about this or that reform but about the anti-tsarist revolution and how political freedom is the only way out of the situation. Next the entire population of Petersburg – we are up to two million now – see and hear these calls for revolution. And, then, the message goes forth to all of Russia, with millions and tens of millions hearing the message. The message is conveyed through a thousand connections between workers and the rest of the population (not to mention by means of the bourgeois newspapers forced to carry news of the strike). The peasants – and the peasant army – hear of the workers' fight for a republic and for confiscation of gentry land.

Thus, owing to the initiative of the two or three hundred individuals at whom the Mensheviks scoffed, 'slowly but surely, the revolutionary strike shakes up, awakens, enlightens and organises the mass of the people *for revolution*'.¹¹² The strike brings the good news, and the power of the good news does the rest.

Let other historians assess the accuracy of Lenin's facts and analyses. My aim here is to show the continuity of Lenin's vision. The '*stikhiinyi* upsurge' of 1901 that forms the backdrop for *WITBD* is small potatoes compared to what came in 1902, 1903, 1905–7, 1912–14 (not to mention later events). Yet Lenin the Russian Erfurtian works all of them into the same ongoing story – the story in which Social-Democratic Zheliabovs from the revolutionaries and Russian Bebels from the workers take their place at the head of an outraged army of the whole people in order to settle accounts with the shame and curse of Russia.

¹¹² Lenin *PSS*, 23, pp. 303–4.