

Chapter Nine

After the Second Congress

The *Iskra* editors came into the Second Congress as a united team, they left it bitterly and permanently divided. For over a year, the two sides exchanged barbed polemics, sometimes claiming that deep issues of principle were at the bottom of the dispute, sometimes reducing the scandalous split to the personal failings of their opponents. Only toward the end of 1904 did the impending revolution impose new and more substantial controversies on the factional contenders. Although various issues came and went in the years that followed, the top leaders usually split along the lines of the original 1903–4 schism.

According to the textbook interpretation, *WITBD* was at the centre of the split. Lenin tried to put into effect the vision of the Party put forth in his book by means of a restrictive definition of party membership, by a hyper-centralised organisational scheme, and by a dictatorial purge of all who disagreed. Their eyes finally opened, Lenin's former colleagues on the *Iskra* editorial board saw the dangerous consequences of Lenin's innovations. In response, they reaffirmed the democratic nature of the party and made worker 'self-activity [*samodeiatel'nost*]' the centre of their platform. Or, as the activist tradition would have it, they reverted to the standard Social-Democratic confusion of Party and class and in this way rejected a vanguard role for the Party.

Two outstanding revolutionaries, Rosa Luxemburg and Lev Trotsky, immediately saw the evil consequences of *WITBD* (continues the standard story, complimenting Luxemburg and Trotsky in view of their anti-Lenin stance). Their words are prophetic. In Luxemburg's stirring words, 'the mistakes made by a truly revolutionary worker movement are historically immeasurably more fruitful and more valuable than the infallibility of the best possible Central Committee'.¹ Trotsky's prophecy is intensely ironic, given his own later fate: 'The party organisation "substitutes" itself for the Party, the Central Committee substitutes for the party organisation, and finally, a "dictator" substitutes himself for the Central Committee.'²

I had not originally intended to carry my story beyond the Second Congress. Yet I began to realise that the story I have just told – a powerful and attractive narrative, with its ironies, prophecies and reversals – is an essential prop of the 'worry about workers' interpretation. If *WITBD* was not a charter document of a party of a new type or an innovative vanguard party, then why the dramatic rejection of it by all shades of Social-Democratic opinion, from Akimov on the Right to Luxemburg on the Left? If *WITBD* was not the first step toward Stalin, then how do we account for the insightful prophecies of Luxemburg and Trotsky?

How is it possible, I also asked myself, that anyone who had actually read *WITBD* could write the following: 'How could Martov and Trotsky who wholeheartedly supported Lenin's *What is to be Done?*, which proposed that absolute authority should be given to the Central Committee of the party, reject Lenin's definition of party membership?'³ *WITBD* has absolutely nothing to say about the (as yet non-existent) central institutions of the Party. It offers no opinions about their make-up or their powers vis-à-vis local committees. Lenin has a plan for attaining a national unified party structure and he addresses himself to people who share the same goal. The question of degrees of centralism in the make-up of the yet-to-be-created party simply does not arise in *WITBD*.

¹ Luxemburg 1970, p. 444.

² Trotskii 1904, p. 54.

³ Cliff 1975, p. 110. See also Haimson 2004, p. 62: 'Lenin's highly centralized scheme for the party's underground organisations outlined in *What Is to Be Done?*'. The debate over party membership is discussed below.

Lenin never even mentions the party Central Committee in *WITBD*. Or rather, he does, once, in a revealing passage. He asks, what would be the best way to prepare for the national uprising that we see looming in the near future? Should the Central Committee appoint agents to mastermind the uprising? Well, we do not even have a Central Committee yet, but even if we did, that procedure is obviously not the answer. We need to build up local organisations who are so politically sophisticated and so aware of national developments – thanks to their participation in a national underground party newspaper such as, say, *Iskra* – that they will not have to wait for orders when choosing the right moment for an uprising.⁴

So where does the idea come from that *WITBD* is all about the ‘absolute authority’ of the Central Committee? Not from Lenin’s writings, but from Luxemburg’s. Every page of her attack on Lenin pounds away on the accusation that Lenin wants an all-powerful Central Committee to do the thinking for the Party as a whole. She never gives the least documentation for this description of Lenin’s views. She does not even mention *WITBD*. Her description of his views was denied directly by Lenin himself. Once we think about it, her account is highly implausible. Yet such is the power of her rhetoric and such is her stature as a revolutionary martyr that her version of Lenin takes precedence over the most glaring textual evidence to the contrary.

The polemical attacks on Lenin in 1904 and their status as a critique of *WITBD* can only be assessed in the context of the actual issues in dispute. But there exists no adequate account of what those issues actually were. Indeed, both the main Bolshevik charge against the Mensheviks and the main Menshevik charge against the Bolsheviks have been almost forgotten – because they are so counter-intuitive in terms of the standard story. The main Bolshevik charge was based on the democratic principle of the sovereignty of an elected party congress. The main Menshevik charge was based on the vanguardist principle of vigorous, centrally-directed mobilisation campaigns both inside and outside the Party.

The first aim of the present chapter, then, is to explain what the real issues of 1904 were. The Bolshevik case will be documented using an unmined source, namely, the Bolshevik pamphlets of 1904. The Menshevik case will

⁴ Lenin *PSS*, 6, pp. 178–9 [000].

be documented mainly by Trotsky's *Our Political Tasks*. I then turn to Menshevik attempts to find a smoking gun in support of their portrait of Lenin as a hyper-centralist and demagogic dictator-in-waiting. This partisan portrait, whatever its merits, was not based on *WITBD*, but mainly on various ad hoc comments made by Lenin and his supporters. A closer examination of Luxemburg's article comes in this section.

The always contentious issue of intellectuals and workers within the party was prominent in 1904 and so a section of the present chapter is devoted to this topic. Here, again, the results are counter-intuitive, with Lenin indulging in anti-intellectual rhetoric and insisting on worker representation on the committees, while the Mensheviks defend the role of the intellectuals as teachers of the workers.

In much of this chapter, I shall be documenting *WITBD*'s relative absence from the disputes of 1904. The inflated role that the standard story of the party split gives to *WITBD* is one of the barriers to an accurate account of Lenin's book. But the polemics of 1904 do provide some valuable data about the impact of *WITBD*. As I argued in Chapter Eight, Lenin successfully made explicit the norms that had evolved over the years in the Social-Democratic underground. The authority of these norms is nowhere more evident than in the polemics directed with such passion against Lenin personally, as shown in the final section of this chapter.

Like any highly partisan debate, the Menshevik-Bolshevik split of 1904 poses challenges for the non-partisan historian. Yet there is a certain quality to the partisanship of this particular debate that makes it somewhat different from the earlier polemics we have examined. This quality was noticed early on by the Bolshevik Mikhail Olminskii. I will give Olminskii's own example, since it illuminates a difficulty I must still confront today.

Olminskii was struck when he came across the following summary by Martov of the issues at dispute:

A proletarian party or an organisation of intellectual leader/guides of the non-purposive proletarian masses – thus stands the question. . . . A diverse Social-Democratic tactic, developing the elements of *this kind* of party, or a simplistic tactic of 'enlisting the masses' into the common revolutionary struggle with the autocracy, on the immovable basis of the political passivity of the advanced stratum of the proletariat? The political self-activity of the proletarians or an eternal tutelage of a non-proletarian organisation over

them? Thus stands the question to which each member of the Party should give himself a definite and clear response.⁵

Olminskii praised Martov for clearing up the dispute. Of course, the labels 'Menshevik' and 'Bolshevik' were now obsolete, since the Mensheviks were obviously the 'heroes' and the Bolsheviks just as obviously the 'villains'. Adopting this more precise vocabulary, we can state the disputed issues as follows:

What do the 'heroes' want? A proletarian party. What do the 'villains' want? An organisation of intelligentsia leader/guides of the non-purposive proletarian masses.

The 'heroes' want a variegated Social-Democratic tactic that would develop elements of a proletarian party. The 'villains' want a simplistic tactic of enlisting the masses into the struggle against the autocracy on the immovable condition of the passivity of the advanced stratum of the proletariat.

The 'heroes' want the political self-activity of the proletariat. The 'villains' want eternal tutelage of a non-proletarian organisation over the proletarians.

The 'heroes' want parents to be respected, free and equal marriages and proper bringing-up of children. The 'villains' want people to scorn their parents, violate maidens and smash babies' heads against rocks.

Olminskii congratulated Martov for setting out the issues in a way that was bound to restore party unity. Obviously, everybody in the Party wanted a proletarian party, no one wanted eternal tutelage over the workers, and so on. And there was no reason to eliminate the final point – added by Olminsky and not by Martov – because it had exactly the same intellectual value as the first three. Besides, it added artistic verisimilitude to an otherwise bald and unconvincing narrative. After all, if you cast Lenin as a melodrama villain, do not spoil the effect by suggesting he is not utterly evil!⁶

Olminskii's mockery brings out the tinge of hero/villain melodrama that is still dominant in accounts of the party split. One sometimes gets the impression that the real split within the Party was between the faction of Decent And Attractive Individuals vs. the faction of Amoral and Fanatical

⁵ Martov in *Iskra*, No. 69 (10 July 1904), as cited by Olminskii in the pamphlet *Our Misunderstandings* (Shutskever 1925, p. 154) The meaning of the term 'self-activity [*samodeiatel'nost'*]' will be discussed later.

⁶ Shutskever 1925, pp. 155–6.

Thugs. Compare Martov's formulation to the way that Abraham Ascher sums up the controversial issues.

Axelrod's and Lenin's concept of the party could not have been more at variance with each other: Lenin favoured a small, restrictive membership, Axelrod the largest one possible; Lenin advocated a hierarchical structure with control exercised at the top, Axelrod decision making by the rank and file; Lenin stressed the importance of discipline in the organisation, Axelrod the development of the political initiative of the masses. Both distrusted spontaneity, and both looked to the intelligentsia to blunt it, but in Lenin's view it was the party professionals who were to be prepared for the revolution, whereas in Axelrod's it was the masses. In short, their conceptions were bound to come into conflict because one was an elitist and the other a democratic approach to politics.⁷

My account of the party split is intended to be non-partisan and based strictly on the sources. Given the previous climate, however, my account will surely be perceived as pro-Lenin, since I will be forced to bring out that the Bolshevik had a more defensible case than the usual 'villains' outlook attributed to them. I believe mine is the first scholarly account systematically to use sources other than Lenin to document the Bolshevik case. This adds to my perception of the strength of this case, since the other Bolshevik pamphleteers often made points more clearly and effectively than Lenin does himself. Particularly important are pamphlets by two Russia-based *praktiki*, Olminskii and Aleksandr Bogdanov. The readability of these pamphlets compares favourably with the émigré literature, all of which (including Lenin) is so wrapped up in clashing personalities that real issues get obscured. Olminskii and Bogdanov, while highly partisan, are detached enough to be genuinely witty rather than just angrily sarcastic.

I nevertheless believe that my non-partisan approach will also benefit the Mensheviks. Basing themselves on some polemical sallies by Lenin, writers in the activist tradition regularly portray the Mensheviks as hopelessly confused

⁷ Ascher 1972, p. 199. Every one of Ascher's contrasts is incorrect. Compare Wildman on the reaction to *WITBD*: 'Indeed, many disciples so fully assimilated the spirit of *Ch'to delat'* that they outdid their master in zeal for the cause, contempt for opponents, and fondness for manipulations' (Wildman 1967, pp. 234–5).

on the issue of class vs. Party. As I shall show, the Mensheviks had a very strong sense that the Party was not the class nor the representative of the class but rather a vanguard whose job was to fill up the class with socialist awareness. Furthermore, even present-day partisans of the various Menshevik spokesmen – Akselrod, Martov, Trotsky – have overlooked or thoroughly misunderstood the core of the Menshevik case.

After the Second Congress: the real issues

The oddity of the debate in 1903–4 was that each side overlooked or minimised the issue most important to the other side. The newly-minted Bolsheviks accused the Menshevik leaders of ‘organisational opportunism’, of ‘anarchist individualism’, of ‘intelligentsia indiscipline’. The Mensheviks laughed off these charges (‘What kind of opportunist is Martov? What kind of opportunist is Akselrod or Starover? When Kautsky heard that people are calling them opportunists, he laughed out loud’) and accused their opponents of letting relatively trivial issues blind them to the truly serious danger – the danger of ‘tactical opportunism’ that arose out of the old *Iskra*’s emphasis on the merely political revolution for political freedom.⁸ The Bolsheviks did not join battle on tactical issues until the end of 1904, when the Menshevik leaders proposed a specific campaign (the so-called ‘*zemstvo* plan’) that embodied their thinking. The debate that then erupted over the Menshevik plan was a sign that a new chapter in the history of Russian Social Democracy had commenced.

The somewhat frustrating debate in 1903–4 was not over the profound issues many people have wanted to read into it. On the other hand, it was not just a trivial squabble either. We can best call it a characteristic split over empirical questions. The ins and outs of the conflict among the émigré leaders were complicated and full of zigzags. At first, the Mensheviks posed as the defender of the newly-elected Central Committee, then they led a crusade against it. Lenin first had his base in the new *Iskra* editorial board, then in the new Central Committee, and finally turned against both. Without going

⁸ The parenthetical statement was made by Plekhanov at a meeting on 2 September 1904 (‘Starover’, Old Believer, was the pseudonym of Potresov) (Plekhanov 1923–7, vol. 13, p. 376). In later years, Plekhanov himself bitterly attacked all three.

into all these institutional details, we need to have an outline of events in order to make sense of the polemics.

When the Second Congress met in Brussels and later in London, a majority of delegates were representatives from committees that had declared their loyalty to *Iskra*. The main opposition was led by the delegation from *Rabochee delo* and from the Jewish Bund, and both of these groups abandoned the Congress midway. The *Iskra* majority stayed together on programmatic matters and (for the most part) on tactical matters. A serious split occurred over the clause in the party rules that defined the status of party member. We shall look at this famous clash later, but please note that the labels 'majority [*bol'shinstvo*]' and 'minority [*men'shinstvo*]' did not arise from this clash, since the Mensheviks led by Martov won on this issue.

Much the more important split came over the choice of editors for *Iskra*. The Congress had designated *Iskra* the official party newspaper, but this new status raised a delicate but fundamental question: did the Party, in the form of the Congress, have the right to name the editors of what had previously been solely the affair of the *Iskra* group itself? Lenin and Plekhanov thought so and, furthermore, proposed only a three-man editorial board: themselves plus Martov. Martov and the other three editors (Akselrod, Potresov and Zasluch) did not really deny the formal right of the Congress to name the editors, but they considered it politically disastrous not to appoint the old editorial board as a whole. Martov refused to serve on the newly elected three-man board and joined the other three (along with Trotsky and a few others) in declaring a boycott on their own participation in party institutions. It was 'the strike of the generals'.⁹

Thus, for the first three months, *Iskra* was run by the two-man board of Lenin and Plekhanov. During most of this period, Plekhanov was an uncompromising Bolshevik. Then, he developed into a compromising Bolshevik – he decided that, for the sake of peace, the old editors needed to be co-opted onto the editorial board, even though they might through misunderstanding or inertia have shown opportunist tendencies. But any such co-optation required a unanimous decision, and Lenin felt enough had already been conceded to the boycotters (offering them space in *Iskra* to state their objections or even

⁹ From the Menshevik point of view, it was Bolshevik intolerance and persecution of dissenters that led to their non-participation (see Dan 1964).

providing them their own newspaper). He therefore refused to co-opt the old editors. Plekhanov threatened to resign and Lenin, under pressure, was forced himself to resign. The new one-man editorial board then 'unanimously' decided to co-opt all the old editors. Thus, by the end of November, there had occurred something like a palace coup at *Iskra*. An editor selected by the Congress was out, the editors rejected by the Congress were in.

How would the new editorial board comport itself? Would it declare itself a representative of the congress majority and strive for party peace, as Plekhanov rather piously hoped? Or would it justify Lenin's gloomy prediction that peace would be further away than ever? The answer came with the very first issue of the new board, which featured a rewritten version of an anti-majority polemical broadside originally entitled 'Again in the Minority'. This article, now entitled 'Our Congress', argued that the decisions of the Congress had been mistaken in various sorts of ways. For the Bolsheviks, this article by Martov in *Iskra* No. 53 was the turning point of the dispute. The article signified that the Party's official 'central organ' had declared its freedom from and, indeed, its hostility to the will of the party congress.

What, then, was the positive programme of the new editors? The answer to this question came a few issues later in a signed article by Akselrod entitled 'The Unification of Russian Social Democracy and Its Tasks'. According to Akselrod, the most pressing task facing the Party was to work out a political tactic that was truly Social-Democratic and emphasised the class *distinctiveness* of the workers. The previous *Iskra* period had neglected this task because the merely anti-tsarist revolution had monopolised everyone's attention. The workers and the bourgeoisie both needed political freedom, but only the workers needed socialism – and the Party had to get the workers to appreciate this fact. For the Mensheviks, this article by Akselrod in *Iskra* Nos. 55 and 57 was the turning point in the dispute. It provided wise and instructive guidance from a founder of the Party about the urgent tasks now facing the Russian Social Democrats.

The lines were drawn, both sides had a healthy sense of grievance – let the polemics begin! Lenin no longer had a journalistic outlet for his views and expressed his frustration in two separate pamphlets. The first was an official publication of his influential article from 1902 entitled *Letter to a Comrade on Organisational Questions*. Lenin now accompanied the *Letter* was a postword bitterly attacking Akselrod's *Iskra* article.

Lenin's second pamphlet was *One Step Forward, Two Steps Back*. This book was a blow-by-blow account of the Second Congress (made possible by the publication of the congress records in early 1903). Its aim was to show that there was a solid *Iskra* majority led by Plekhanov and himself. The *Iskra* minority led by Martov and Akselrod owed what success it had to support from non-*Iskra* delegates – dubious allies that revealed the incipient opportunism of the *Iskra* minority. In fact, had *Rabochee delo* and the Bund not walked out midway, the *Iskra* minority would have been the congress majority. Thus, Lenin made the claim that the Bolsheviks deserved their name 'majority' not just because they represented a slim majority of the party Congress but also – what was politically more important – a solid majority of *Iskra*-ites.

Lenin's two broadsides absolutely infuriated his former colleagues. Their impact was overwhelmingly more important than *WITBD* in defining the context and the tone of the Menshevik case. The Menshevik writers were personally angry at Lenin, not only for portraying them as opportunists, but, more fundamentally, for undermining the legitimacy of the party leadership at a time when the Party needed to be even more united in the face of new challenges. Lenin seemed to them to be devoting all his energy to wrecking the Party he had helped to build up.

So, in response, they organised a vast literary anti-Lenin campaign. One front consisted of their own long and obsessive *Iskra* articles attacking Lenin's *Letter* and especially *One Step*. A second front called in heavy artillery from the West: prestigious party authorities such as Kautsky and Rosa Luxemburg, who were persuaded to weigh in with *Iskra* articles attacking Lenin. A third front was Trotsky's extensive pamphlet *Our Political Tasks*, published in summer 1904 with the official imprimatur of the *Iskra* editorial board.

The Bolsheviks fought back with committee resolutions and a few pamphlets (including the report to the Amsterdam International Congress examined in Chapter Three), but their literary response was quantitatively unimpressive, given their lack of a press outlet and their relative poverty of literary talent (Lenin himself was exhausted after *One Step* and contributed little). The more telling Bolshevik response was a campaign to convene an extraordinary party congress as a way of settling the dispute. The central party institutions (including the Central Committee which had turned against Lenin) claimed that a party congress would be a divisive diversion of scarce resources and even forbade any intra-party agitation in its favour.

Finally, in November 1904, the Mensheviks carried out their promise to come up with a new, truly Social-Democratic, political tactic. They proposed a campaign to stiffen the anti-government opposition of élite groups such as the *zemstvo*s (local bodies with mild self-governing powers). The Menshevik plan may have saved Lenin from terminal obsession with his own intra-party grievances. In any event, his blistering attack on the Menshevik plan opened up a new chapter in Menshevik-Bolshevik relations in which the sides argued about the actual balance of class forces in Russia and the crucial political choices facing revolutionary Social Democracy. Unfortunately, we must take our leave of the Menshevik-Bolshevik debate just as it enters this more instructive and substantive phase.

The Bolshevik case: *partiinost* vs. *kruzhkovshchina*

Looking back a few years later, the Bolshevik M. Liadov defined the heart of Bolshevism in 1904 as the defence of *partiinost*, a word that in this era can be defined as 'acting as befits a modern political party'.¹⁰ A historian of French socialism calls Jules Guesde's Marxist party 'the first modern political party' in France because it had the following characteristics: 'a large national base, an annual national congress, an executive committee, a programme, and an insistence on discipline'.¹¹ This also defines what the Bolsheviks meant by *partiinost*.

Kruzhkovshchina was the opposite of *partiinost*. The *kruzhok* ('little circle') was the basic unit of party organisation prior to the existence of a national organisational framework.¹² The *kruzhok* did not recognise a higher authority because there was no higher authority to recognise. It was essentially self-appointed and voluntary and it acted (had to act) only as it saw fit. Under the circumstances, this attitude was necessary and, indeed, praiseworthy. *Iskra* itself was such a *kruzhok* that took upon itself the task of giving the Party a common programme. It possessed no authority except its own persuasiveness and bowed to no authority except its own sense of mission.

Iskra's mission was to transcend its own status as a *kruzhok* contending against other *kruzhki*. The Second Congress ended – or should have ended –

¹⁰ Liadov 1911 (my definition of *partiinost*, a word with a considerably different meaning in the Soviet era).

¹¹ Derfler 1998, p. 3.

¹² For further discussion, see Chapter Eight.

the era of the *kruzhok*. Now, *Iskra* had acquired legitimate authority, namely, the status of the official central organ of the Party. By the same token, it now accepted authority – namely, the authority of the Party as an organised, institutional whole, as expressed by the decisions of the Second Congress and the institutional rules there adopted. The editors were now party spokesmen, chosen by the Party to carry out the programme and tactics adopted by the party Congress.

But old habits die hard, especially for individualistic intellectuals. The old *Iskra* editors felt that had a personal right to the editorial chairs of the party newspaper. They felt they had a right to advocate whatever policies they felt best, even if those run directly against the policies of the Congress. They were eager for the authority conferred by the Party, but had no time for the discipline that went with it.

This accusation was the heart of the Bolshevik case. When they talked about the ‘anarchistic individualism’ of the intellectuals, they were not referring to local intellectuals refusing to follow the orders of the local committees or of local committees refusing to follow the orders of an all-powerful Central Committee. Their paradigmatic example of intelligentsia indiscipline was the boycott followed by the take-over of the central organ by Martov, Akselrod, Potresov and Zasluch. Lenin stated the essence of the Bolshevik case when he responded to Luxemburg’s charge of hyper-centralism by wondering rhetorically ‘if the comrade finds it normal – can she allow – has she observed in *any* party – that central organs that call themselves *party* organs are dominated by the minority of the party congress?’¹³

Olminskii framed the issue using Western political systems as a source of metaphor. The party Congress was a sovereign parliament. The party rules were a constitution that should never be violated. Legality – abiding by agreed-upon formal rules – was henceforth a vital norm. The party leaders – including the editors of the central organ – should think of themselves as representatives of the Party.

The Menshevik editors, in contrast, were Bonapartists who, like Louis Napoleon, carried out a *coup d’état*, using methods of dubious legality. They were aristocrats who thought of themselves as irreplaceable and rejected

¹³ Lenin *PSS*, 9, pp. 42–3.

criticism as *lèse-majesté*. Since the old *Iskra* board had split five against one, the five were able to accuse the one of dictatorial ambitions – all the while acting as a compact oligarchy taking one high-handed action after another. The Menshevik editors were so imbued with the political culture of absolutism that they automatically reverted to the leadership style of the Russian conspirators of the 1870s. They had so little idea of how a loyal opposition operates that they panicked when not chosen as *Iskra* editors and could think of no better reaction than the typical *kruzhok* methods of boycott and threats of resignation.

Olminskii concluded with a plea for congress sovereignty as the best chance for democracy in the underground party:

A millionaire can easily waste roubles but a poor beggar must hoard every kopeck. The autocracy has deprived us of a great deal, of practically everything, that is essential to citizens of a free country. All the more is our responsibility to defend those aspects of democratism of the Party that are left to us or that have been achieved by us. It still remains possible for us to have congresses that express the will of the Party and we must give special value to this. We must employ all our sensitivity and all our attention to ensure that the central institutions do not destroy the will of the Party.¹⁴

The Bolshevik slogan of '*partiinnost* vs. *kruzhkovshchina*' implied that the Second Congress was a great turning point in party history. This implication had the surprising effect of making *WITBD* rather irrelevant to present concerns, since it was written in the days when the *kruzhok* reigned supreme. Olminskii made this point by looking at Lenin's 1901 article 'How to Begin', which contained a précis of the forthcoming *WITBD*. Olminskii directed attention to the title of this article: How to *Begin*. 'In it the author speaks only of how to begin the creation of an all-Russia organisation, and not about how that party should be organised'.¹⁵

What was the Menshevik response to the accusation of usurpation brought against them by the Bolsheviks? One response was to paint Lenin as a monster who needed to be removed from the leadership. We shall examine this part

¹⁴ Olminskii 1904b (reprinted in Shutskever 1925, here p. 236); see also Olminskii 1904a (reprinted in Shutskever 1925, see p. 210).

¹⁵ Olminsky 1904b, p. 8. A similar point is made by Lenin in *One Step Forward* (*PSS*, 8, pp. 354–5).

of the Menshevik case later. Less energetically and less explicitly, the Mensheviks also put forth a reasoned case against applying the principle of congress sovereignty in an underground party. Like Lenin's, this case was self-serving but, also like Lenin, it reflected a coherent and defensible view of how a vanguard party operated in a specific context. The Menshevik argument has to be pieced together from scattered remarks.¹⁶ After connecting the dots, I came up with the following.

A Social-Democratic Party is held together by two principles. One is, indeed, the ideal of a democratic national organisation as embodied in congress sovereignty. The other is the continuity and prestige of the top leaders – the Bebel, the Guesdes, the Akselrods. The best situation is when these two principles work together – as they could and should have worked together in Russia. But who is to blame for the fact that the Second Congress made the decision that split apart the existing leadership core and discarded some of the most prestigious *vozhdi*? Lenin and no one but Lenin. (Plekhanov's role in these events was consciously air-brushed out.)¹⁷

Thus Lenin created a highly unfortunate situation in which a choice had to be made between the two basic unifying principles. Under underground conditions, the only *real* guarantee of party unity was the cohesiveness of the top leaders. The anomalous situation created by the Second Congress was thus best repaired by having as much of the old editorial board as possible back at the old stand.

The principle of congress sovereignty was deficient for all the reasons set forth by Lenin in his polemic against 'playing with democratism' in *WITBD*.¹⁸ Open elections, the *glasnost* necessary to enable people to make an informed choice, wide discussion of principles and tactics – all of this was out of the question. The committees who chose representatives were themselves without democratic credentials, due to *konspiratsiia*, heavy turnover, local factionalism.

¹⁶ The most explicit statements on this subject can be found in Martov 1904b and in Kautsky's intervention published in *Iskra*, No. 66 (15 May 1904).

¹⁷ Evidently, the originally circulated version of Trotsky's *Report of the Siberian Delegation*, written immediately after the Second Congress, harped on the theme of Plekhanov as a tool in Lenin's hands. All such references were removed when the *Report* was published a few months later (Shutskever 1915, p. 25).

¹⁸ This point was made by Martov 1904b, pp. 1–9 and responded to by Olminsky 1904b.

A committee would declare itself for *Iskra* and then next week there would be a coup and the committee would reject *Iskra*.¹⁹ Given these problems, it was ludicrous to take a slim majority at the Second Congress (even Lenin admitted the outcome would have been entirely different had certain delegates not walked out) and use it to eliminate senior leaders.

Besides, there was the unpleasant fact that the *praktiki* themselves could hardly be trusted with final say. Unlike the Western parties, there was no solidly established proletarian vanguard – only revolutionary intellectuals and backward workers. Furthermore, the *Iskra* period immediately preceding the Second Congress had created a one-sided emphasis on the merely political revolution and, connected to this, unrealistic views on organisation. These problems needed to be corrected by the ‘progressive’ minority who pointed out the correct path to follow.

Thus Lenin’s invocation of the Western SPD model was simply too ‘optimistic’ for Russia.²⁰ As Akselrod stated sarcastically, the ideal of the majority – a ‘strictly centralised organisation’ headed by ‘authoritative political *vozhd*i and central leadership institutions’ and acting on the basis of a genuinely Social-Democratic programme – was much too ambitious for the primitive Russian Party: ‘it suits the political embryo [that is our party] no better than a uniform, a parade hat and an imposing staff suits a baby’.²¹

Since the principle of congress sovereignty was radically insufficient, the principle of united leadership was all the more necessary for carrying out the tasks of the Party. The party campaigns that the Mensheviks called for required a prestigious and united leadership. The Menshevik vision of how the Party worked is revealed by Martov’s description of what could have been, had Lenin not fissured the leadership core. The Party would have left the Congress as a united and energised organisation. The new Central Committee would have set itself the task of raising the qualitative level of local work both by its direct influence and sending out agitators and propagandists. From them, the committees would have learned new methods of influencing the masses. When the war with Japan broke out, the Central

¹⁹ Trotskii 1904, pp. 64–6.

²⁰ Luxemburg 1970 (see later discussion of centralism as a common value).

²¹ *Iskra*, No. 68 (25 June 1904), reprinted in *Iskra za dva goda* 1906 (here p. 151).

Committee would have undertaken the mobilisation of the Russian proletariat by sending a small group of agitators to all centres of the movement. And so on.²²

Emblematic of the Menshevik outlook is the name they chose for themselves: 'the minority'. I emphasise 'chose for themselves', because there exists a widespread opinion that Lenin cleverly foisted the label on the naïve Mensheviks. This opinion arose not on the basis of any facts but because, in the eyes of later observers, 'majority' is politically more prestigious than 'minority'. But the Mensheviks in 1903–4 thought differently. They retained from the pre-Congress period a feeling that 'minority' signified a progressive vanguard leading the way. This view of the matter was widespread and even comes out in a complaint by Akimov that the *Rabochee delo* group was unjustly accused of going along with the majority, with being conservative and in the tail of the movement, instead of acting as a minority that advanced new and broader tasks.²³

In 1901, Martov wrote an article entitled 'Always in the Minority' as a response to the accusation made by *Rabochee delo* that *Iskra* was arrogantly laying down the law to the rest of the Party. Martov explained why legally-permitted Marxism, economism and so forth had briefly attained majority status and why *Iskra*, even if alone, had a duty to combat them. He ended by announcing that

the socialist intelligentsia will find support in its scientific worldview that will allow it to purposefully break all the chains laid down by the ideology of bourgeois society. And then it will not be afraid if the 'whole world' regards them as 'sectarians'. And then it will understand the whole moral duty, in certain circumstances, or remaining *always in the minority*.²⁴

Immediately after the Second Congress, Martov wrote a pamphlet entitled 'Once More in the Minority'. As soon as 'the minority' took over the *Iskra* editorial board, a rewritten and retitled version of the pamphlet was printed in *Iskra* as a manifesto of the new editors. Thus, the Mensheviks were proud

²² Martov in *Iskra*, No. 69 (10 July 1904). For more on Mensheviks campaignism, see next section.

²³ *Vtoroi s"ezd*, p. 687.

²⁴ *Zaria*, No. 2–3 (December 1901), p. 203.

to be the progressive minority and they had a coherent view of the Party to back up their pride.

Yet they were in a false position and could never escape from it. Lenin was right about one thing: the status of 'progressive minority' and the status of 'editors of the official central organ of the Party' were hardly compatible. The false position of the Menshevik leaders created a polemical literature in which the rational case I have presented was drowned out by other elements.

The false position of the Mensheviks is the ultimate cause of another striking feature of their polemics: the constant and obsessive personal vilification of Lenin throughout the year. Lenin's views are not just attacked, his actions are not just criticised – his motives are impugned, his abilities mocked, his character blackened. Lenin is a power-hungry demagogue out to destroy the Party for his own dark and discreditable motives. The drumbeat of personal accusation starts the day after the Congress with Trotsky's *Report of the Siberian Delegation*, in which Lenin is called an egomaniacal Robespierre ready to execute fellow party members.²⁵ It continues throughout the year without let-up, with each of Lenin's former colleagues weighing in with their contribution.

There is no real counterpart to this in the Bolshevik polemics, angry and partisan as they are. This discrepancy requires explanation. For some (the majority of the academic tradition), the explanation is simple. Lenin *was* a power-hungry scoundrel and the Mensheviks were only being responsible when they pointed it out. For others (the majority of the activist tradition), there is also no particular mystery. Naturally, such a dedicated revolutionary would become the main target for enraged opportunists.

A more political explanation points to the underlying Menshevik feeling that a united, prestigious and authoritative leadership core should run the Party. In 1903–4, it seemed that the only reason this was not happening was because of Lenin. It also seemed that if the rest of the leadership core remained united against him, there was no force that could keep Lenin from being annihilated.

The first feeling was expressed by Akselrod in a letter to Kautsky:

Given this condition of our party [an 'intellectual regression' on the part of the majority], it is easy to carry out a policy of Bonapartist demagoguery

²⁵ Shutskever 1925, pp. 484, 493–4.

and put up obstacles to the concentration of all our forces for searching out new ways and means for lifting the Party up to a new level of development in a principled proletarian sense. . . . Lenin and Co., with their disorganising methods and their systematic casting of suspicion on our critical and positive explanations, are pushing the Party not only to a schism but to complete disintegration.²⁶

The second feeling was expressed by Plekhanov, as Zinoviev recalled many years later:

Let me recall my first conversation with Plekhanov . . . when he frightened us by saying: Who are you going along with? You should consider who is on our side: Martov, Zasulich, Akselrod and the rest; but over on your side is only Lenin. And you know, things will eventually turn out that in a few months all the sparrows will be laughing at your Lenin! And you go along with him!²⁷

Thus, the Mensheviks thought that Lenin could be easily disposed of and were unpleasantly surprised to discover differently. Lenin had a power base outside the leadership core and the Mensheviks glumly ascertained that Lenin was the 'idol' of the *praktiki*.²⁸ If Lenin managed to survive the onslaught against him, this had to be because he was a demagogue. But a demagogue requires an easily deluded audience. The Mensheviks were therefore compelled to widen their critique to include the majority of *praktiki*.

The bitterness and contempt toward the party *praktiki* is another striking feature of Menshevik polemics in 1904. While, officially, the abuse is directed at Lenin's supporters, it is not counterbalanced by any praise or encouraging words for Menshevik *praktiki*. One discerns a feeling of exasperation on the part of the educated and cosmopolitan émigrés toward the young, semi-educated and provincial *praktiki* in Russia. The most thorough-going expression of this attitude is a series of articles published in 1905 by Potresov. These

²⁶ This letter, with its virulent denunciation of 'Lenin and Co.' and the party majority, was published in *Iskra*, No. 68 (25 June 1904) and reprinted in *Iskra za dva goda 1906* (here p. 154). What Akselrod means by 'new level of development' is discussed in the following section.

²⁷ Zinoviev 1973, pp. 112–13.

²⁸ Akselrod so described Lenin in his letter to Kautsky, published in *Iskra*, No. 68 (25 June 1904) and reprinted in *Iskra za dva goda 1906* (here p. 149).

articles portray the history of the Russian revolutionary underground as a series of misadventures by the utterly provincial and comically self-absorbed *praktiki*. Lenin acquired influence among the *praktiki* because he shared and faithfully reflected these delusions.²⁹

There is nothing similar to this in Bolshevik polemics, which are directed solely against the *Iskra* editors and allies such as Trotsky. Olminskii and Bogdanov quickly picked up on this feature of Menshevik writings. Olminskii even took his pseudonym from a remark in this vein by Martov, who attributed Lenin's success to his pandering to the 'cheap seats [*galerka*]'. Thus Olminskii signed his pamphlets *Cheap Seats*, while Bogdanov adopted the pseudonym Rank-and-File [Riadovoi]. They portrayed the party split as a clash of the party aristocracy and of prestigious émigré writers on the one side and the party plebians and the rank and file on the other.³⁰

The sheer oddity of the position in which the Menshevik leaders now found themselves needs to be appreciated. *Iskra* was the central organ of a militant political party. Yet from its pages in 1904 (and from the pages of Trotsky's *Our Political Tasks*) can be drawn an absolutely devastating portrait of the RSDWP, its policies and its personnel – a portrait written in anger and hostility. Olminskii collected a number of typical passages and indignantly asked why people raised to leadership positions by precisely these despised *praktiki* should insult the Party in this way.

It is also characteristic that these sneers at the Party, this attempt to discredit the Party, are published in the central organ which we are compelled to distribute as a propaganda weapon in order to uphold the prestige of the Party, and risking our freedom while doing so.³¹

The original false position of the Mensheviks – their politically illegitimate control of the central organ – fatally undermined their case, and *Iskra* was eventually perceived to be – because it was – a factional newspaper rather than a party organ. In fact, Lenin won this debate. The principle of congress sovereignty was later accepted by both sides, as shown most graphically by

²⁹ Potresov 2002, pp. 67–120.

³⁰ Olminskii and Bogdanov 1904 (a better known pseudonym of Bogdanov is 'Maximov').

³¹ Shutskever 1925, p. 229; see also Shutskever 1925, pp. 149–50.

the Menshevik adoption in 1905 of Lenin's definition of party membership (as discussed below).

Lenin won this debate because, as the Mensheviks discovered, he had the stronger case. With all its difficulties, the principle of congress sovereignty proved indispensable, if for no other reason than the impossibility of winning a factional fight without winning a majority at a party congress. Furthermore, the unity and prestige of the original leadership core – the counter-principle of the Mensheviks – proved to be a will-of-the-wisp. In 1903–4, the troublemaker Lenin might plausibly be perceived as the only threat to unity. But, even by the end of 1904, the rest of the 'tight leadership nucleus' was fissuring. Eventually, from out of the top group of Menshevik spokesmen in 1904, there emerged at least four distinct tendencies: Plekhanov, Martov and Akselrod, Potresov and Zasluch, Trotsky.

Finally, the calculation that the prestige of the top leadership could provide unity in action proved misinformed. The émigrés learned that eventually it was they who were dependent on the *praktiki* and the participation of the Russian underground. So argued M. Liadov in 1911, claiming that both factions were forced, unexpectedly for themselves, to stop being obsessed about leadership positions in Geneva and to align themselves with the tactics advanced by their supporters in Russia.³²

The Mensheviks lost and the penalty for their defeat was that they were stuck with the name 'the minority'. This is not to say that they were incorrect when they pointed out the many difficulties of applying congress sovereignty in underground conditions (and, in fact, also in Western Europe). The frail and finally non-existent unity of the RSDWP shows that these difficulties were very real indeed.

The Menshevik case: campaignism vs. substitutionism

In the usual telling of the party split, Lenin is the focus of attention. It is he who makes innovations and imposes his organisational vision, while the others react to him and define themselves only as they begin to plumb the

³² Liadov 1911. 'Look at the proceedings of the Bolshevik Third Congress [spring 1905] and you will immediately see the extent to which the lower ranks [*nizy*] had overtaken their leader at that time'.

depths of his political and personal depravity – or, from the point of view of the activist tradition, only as they are forced by his revolutionary challenge to reveal their own opportunist assumptions.

At the time, both Lenin and the Mensheviks preferred to see the split the other way around: as Lenin reacting to the aggressive innovations of the Mensheviks. Lenin portrayed Bolshevism as the inheritor of *Iskra*-ism, protecting it against the attack of the Mensheviks. In turn, the Mensheviks accepted the label ‘the minority’ because they associated ‘minority’ with progressive leadership. They had a new message and a new set of tasks to set before the Party, in rather an effort to move the Party on to the necessary next stage of its development. This message and these tasks were not in reaction to Lenin. The progressive minority would have undertaken this mission, even had there been no split and no Lenin.³³ Lenin only entered the picture as the incarnation of hide-bound party conservatism and as an unscrupulous demagogue who prevented the progressive minority for carrying out its mission.

From this point of view, Akselrod rather than Lenin is the protagonist of the drama of 1904. At the beginning of the year, Akselrod set out the Party’s new tasks in two articles in *Iskra*, Nos. 55 and 57. These articles were constantly described in Menshevik literature as groundbreaking, insightful, inspiring. In mid-year, Trotsky penned *Our Political Tasks* as a popularisation of Akselrod’s message. At the end of the year, Akselrod’s message finally achieved concrete form in the plan for the so-called ‘*zemstvo* campaign’. A rationale for the plan penned by Akselrod was sent around by the *Iskra* editors to the local committees.³⁴ Thus, at each step, Akselrod and the Mensheviks took the initiative.

My name for the positive content of Akselrod’s message is ‘campaignism’. This word did not exist in 1904, but the need for a certain sort of party-directed political campaign was at the heart of Akselrod’s concerns. According to Akselrod, Russian Social Democracy had yet to become a genuine *class* party. A class party was one that received mass support – but not just any

³³ Akselrod already had begun to write of these concerns in an article drafted in summer 1902, although it was only published in 1905 (Akselrod 1905).

³⁴ Akselrod’s original defence and the rebuttal by the *Iskra* editors of Lenin’s criticism of the *zemstvo* campaign plan can be found in *Mensheviks* 1996, pp. 69–89.

support. Only support based on an understanding of specifically proletarian interests made a party a class party. Joining the revolutionary onslaught against the Tsar in order to obtain political freedom was, of course, in the interest of the Russian proletariat, but nevertheless not a distinctive proletarian interest. Rather, it was one shared with most of the rest of Russian society, including the exploiters. Support for Social Democracy as a *revolutionary* party was, therefore, insufficient for its mission as a *class* party. What was needed were campaigns that would set the proletariat in motion in such a way as to bring out the *clash* between proletarian interests and elite interests.

Our Political Tasks was consciously and explicitly meant to be the Menshevik *WITBD* and modelled itself on *WITBD* in a variety of ways. Just as Lenin coined an effective term for the besetting sin of the time ('artisanal limitations'), Trotsky coined a term for what he regarded as the basic fault inherited from the past, substitutionism [*zamestitel'stvo*]. Just as Lenin polemicised against *Rabochee delo*, Trotsky polemicised with Lenin. Trotsky's polemic with Lenin was meant both to destroy a leadership rival and to expose various more widespread theoretical misconceptions. But, as with *WITBD*, these polemics were meant to clear the way for the question: what is to be done?

Trotsky no doubt hoped that *Our Political Tasks* would take its place in party history alongside *On Agitation* and *WITBD* as a literary production marking and in part causing a major transformation in party outlook. No such luck – the book had little resonance even among Mensheviks, it did not win over the *praktiki* to the Menshevik position, 'substitutionism' did not catch on.

I have created the term 'campaignism' because the heart of the new Menshevik tactic is the insistence on a particular type of party-organised campaign. What Akselrod meant by *samodeiatel'nost* and what Trotsky meant by 'substitutionism' can best be appreciated when we have seen a concrete example of such a campaign. At the centre of Trotsky's pamphlet is an outline of just such a campaign in a section appropriately titled 'What, then, is to be done? [*Chto zhe delat'?*]'. The occasion for Trotsky's hypothetical campaign is a Congress for Activists in Technical Education that actually took place in St. Petersburg and gave rise to a clash between the government and the liberal opposition. After criticising the actions of the actual Petersburg Social-Democratic committee, Trotsky sets out the following scenario of what should have been done.

The committee issues a proclamation. It then summons its propagandists and makes sure they understand how this proclamation is related to the party

programme and to the resolutions passed by the Second Congress. The same message is passed on via channels of oral propaganda. The committee issues yet more proclamations. As the campaign unfolds, the workers – or, at least, the upper levels of the worker class – begin to take an interest.

The committee now prepares a resolution to be addressed to the technical congress. A member of the committee briefs the propagandists on the resolution and they take it to all the factory cells. When enough support has been expressed, ‘agitators by trade [*professionalnye agitatory*]’ start rounding up both signatures on petitions and endorsements by show of hands. The results are relayed back to the committee which then presents the resolution to the congress. Each worker feels that the demands expressed by the resolution are *his* demands.

One of two: either the congress of technical education activists will accede to the demands or it will not. The first outcome is not unlikely, since the ‘radical-democratic intelligentsia’ wants to preserve its prestige in the eyes of the workers. This outcome means that the workers will get a taste of being the actual ‘vanguard of the general democratic revolution’. If the congress refuses, the workers will receive a salutary lesson in the half-heartedness of the bourgeois opposition. They will be weaned away from bourgeois influence and won over to Social Democracy. Thus we have a win-win situation. However the congress reacts, the workers will receive a salutary class ‘political education’.³⁵

As a the result of the campaign, the decision of ‘an official group of Petersburg Marxist *intelligently*’ will be transformed into a genuine ‘formulation of the political will of the progressive Petersburg proletariat’. The same logic should be applied at the national level – say, in opposition to the war. All the local committees will push the same message and point to the same weaknesses of the liberal opposition. At the appropriate time, resolutions are prepared, accompanied where appropriate with mass demonstrations. If the Party could carry out one – just one – such militant campaign, it would ‘immediately grow by a whole head!’³⁶

According to Trotsky and Akselrod, this kind of campaign would represent a decisive step forward in Social-Democratic tactics. They base their claim on

³⁵ Martynov had already defended this ‘win-win’ logic in his article in *Rabochee delo*, No. 10, a forerunner of Menshevik campaignism.

³⁶ Trotskii 1904, pp. 39–42.

a double contrast with the typical activities undertaken by the Party during the recent *Iskra* period. In the past, the Party has tried to bring the *socialist* message to the workers, it has tried to inculcate a sense of class distinctiveness, of the clash between proletariat and bourgeoisie. But it did so only by means of the written or spoken *word*. It did not do so through *actions*, through *deeds*. But organised action is a much more effective way of raising awareness than reading a Social-Democratic newspaper. Words vs. deeds is thus the first contrast.

The central meaning of 'substitutionism' is this substitution of words for action.³⁷ After describing the hypothetical campaign aimed at the technical education congress, Trotsky looks at what the Party has actually done instead of undertaking such a campaign. Nothing but an editorial in *Iskra*, No. 55. What is this but 'substitutionism and substitutionism!'³⁸ Thus, substitutionism strongly recalls Nadezhdin's 'writerism', and Trotsky explicitly underscores Nadezhdin's role as a forerunner of Menshevism on this point.³⁹

'Words vs. action' is not the only contrast with the past. The Party did not completely confine itself to the word – political actions such as demonstrations, mass strikes and the like were undertaken with some success in the immediately preceding period. But these were *revolutionary* actions, not *Social-Democratic* actions. They aimed at overthrowing the Tsar in concert with other classes, not at preparing the workers to introduce socialism in opposition to other classes. 'Revolutionary vs. Social-Democratic' is the second contrast with the past. The title of Trotsky's pamphlet should thus be read with the emphasis on the first word: *Our Political Tasks*, the tasks of Social Democracy in particular.

For this reason, Trotsky grants that substitutionism of words for action is not such a problem for 'us as [merely] revolutionaries', since the Party has successfully organised anti-tsarist campaigns. But the 'class will' of the proletariat demands more specific expression.

³⁷ The meaning of substitutionism arises out of Trotsky's whole argument, but specific passages of interest include Trotskii 1904, pp. 16 (first use), 35–9, 41, 47, 50–1, 54–5, 59, 67–8.

³⁸ Trotskii 1904, p. 41. The same contrast is made by Martov after describing a hypothetical campaign in very similar terms: 'The political action [*deiatelnost*] of Social Democracy is now expressed not by isolated committee proclamations or articles in the central organ, it becomes the political action of a *class*' (*Iskra*, No. 69, 10 July 1904).

³⁹ Trotskii 1904, p. 47.

The guiding Social-Democratic groups do not understand that enlisting the proletariat for a 'demonstration' of its class will in opposition to the liberal and radical democracy is just as necessary for us as enlisting the proletariat for a demonstration of its revolutionary democratism against the autocracy.⁴⁰

The use of the word 'revolutionary' in this contrast can be confusing, yet I have adopted it because the word was used in this way by Akselrod and Trotsky to make their case. In this period, 'revolutionary' *tout court* in Russian Social-Democratic discourse referred only to the upcoming anti-tsarist revolution. The Mensheviks were not only intellectually but emotionally engaged in the anti-tsarist struggle and they fully shared in the growing revolutionary excitement. And yet – they did not want to get so carried away that they forgot their own Social-Democratic identity. After all, the Social Democrats were not the only ones who were revolutionary – so were the Socialist Revolutionaries, so were even the liberals, in their way.

In order not to be swallowed up in the anti-tsarist crusade, Social Democracy had to emphasise what made it distinct: the final goal of the dictatorship of the proletariat. Even in the hurly-burly of the present revolution, the Social Democrats had to remember their essential mission of preparing the workers for this ultimate class dictatorship. And this meant bringing out the *conflict* between the workers and élite classes *now*, even or especially while fighting together with these classes against tsarist absolutism. The essence of opportunism was to sacrifice the final goal for momentary successes. What was it, then, but tactical opportunism, if all party activity was dedicated exclusively to tsarist overthrow?⁴¹

The same double contrast is what Akselrod and Trotsky meant (at least in 1904) by the word *samodeiatel'nost*. This word is usually translated something like 'initiative' or 'self-reliance' and, indeed, this is how most speakers understood it even in 1904. When Akselrod and Trotsky called for worker *samodeiatel'nost* in the context of their tactical proposals, however, they meant something more specific and quite different. *Samodeiatel'nost* was part of a wider process of class self-definition [*samoopredelenie*]. This wider process is the familiar one of the spread of awareness, of the workers coming to

⁴⁰ Trotskii 1904, pp. 54, 51.

⁴¹ For an argument to this effect, see Martov in *Iskra*, No. 69 (10 July 1904).

understand and accept the great world-historical mission. *Samodeiatelnost* refers to the specific part played in this process by *action* [*deiatelnost*]. Thus *samodeiatelnost* is Trotsky and Akselrod's writings of 1904 is better translated 'distinctive action', or, unpacking the term, 'action that pits the workers against other classes and thus gives them a better sense of the distinctiveness of their own class interests'.

We can, therefore, state the double contrast as follows. In the past, Russian Social Democracy have organised *actions* – but they have not been *self-actions*, that is, actions that taught the workers what was distinctive about their class position. In the past, the Social Democrats have taught the workers about their distinctive class position, but they did so through propaganda and agitation, not through *self-action*.

The aim of *samodeiatelnost*, in this context, is not the 'encouragement of the development of a capacity of independent activity and self-organisation on the part of Russia's workers'.⁴² We can see this by returning to Trotsky's proposed campaign and observing *samodeiatelnost* at work.

We note, first of all, the Lassallean logic of the campaign. A campaign consists of focused mobilisation around a single slogan carried out by a dedicated and centrally directed corps of agitators. Trotsky is perfectly aware of his debt to Lassalle and, in fact, cites him at length, including some of the same passages cited earlier in this commentary.⁴³

Thus an effective campaign requires a party that is unified and directed from the top. In a formula Trotsky repeats more than once, a national campaign will be 'guided by a centre that thinks politically and that is politically inspiring'. The authority of this centre ensures that 'one and the same theme is brought up in all circles and groups, in closed discussion groups and open assemblies, in [all] proclamations'.⁴⁴ Campaignism is thus linked to the Menshevik view of the party we examined in the previous section.

The ultimate goal of the campaign is to turn the Party's official decisions into the purposive will of the workers. There is no hint in Trotsky's version of *samodeiatelnost* that the initiative for the campaign or the text of the resolutions will be a result of initiative from below. Nor does it appear that the widespread

⁴² Haimson 2004, p. 61.

⁴³ Trotskii 1904, pp. 87–8, cf. pp. 42, 85–6.

⁴⁴ Trotskii 1904, pp. 42 and 48 [*politicheski mysliashchim i politicheski bodrstvuiushchim*].

discussion of the proposed resolution will result even in any modification of the text (for one thing, the necessary unity of the campaign would be destroyed). No, the initiative comes from a centre that thinks politically and that is politically inspiring, and stays there.

Campaignism also governs Trotsky's vision of intra-party relations. Just as the workers need to be educated in Social Democratism, so do a large proportion, perhaps a majority, of the *praktiki*. The progressive minority that controls the centre thus has the additional responsibility of educating the *praktiki*. Once more, Trotsky provides us with a concrete example of what he has in mind, namely, the ongoing Menshevik campaign to unify the Party around new tasks. This campaign started even before the Second Congress at the top, with Akselrod conducting word-of-mouth propaganda for his vision of the Party's 'new tactical tasks'. Akselrod knew he had to prepare 'the necessary psychological foundation in the awareness of the comrades guiding the movement'. These comrades evidently did not include anyone who could not go abroad and meet Akselrod in person. Then, the real needs of the movement having been identified, 'the most valuable and influential elements of the Party' will be united around the task of meeting these needs (that is, conducting appropriate campaigns). As to the new recruits who make up the opposing wing of the Party – well, most of them will leave the Party anyway, and the sooner the better.⁴⁵

We saw earlier how Trotsky condemned the 'substitution' of an *Iskra* editorial for a full-blooded petition campaign. In similar fashion, substitutionism within the Party is revealed by a refusal to mount educational campaigns. When Trotsky says, in the oft-quoted passage, that 'the party organisation "substitutes" itself for the Party', he is not complaining that the party organisation is unresponsive to the will of the wider Party. On the contrary, he is angry at the demagogue Lenin for expressing the will of the less advanced outer circles of the Party. Trotsky's complaint is that the party organisation does not see it as its task to *shape the will* of the Party as a whole, to create 'politically thinking *Parteigenossen*' out of the present narrow party specialists.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ Trotskii 1904, pp. 49, 72, 95–6.

⁴⁶ Trotskii 1904, p. 64. See below for Menshevik dislike of Lenin's stress on division of labour.

The substitutionism of the Bolsheviks within the Party is not revealed by the actual content of their organisational schemes. Trotsky has very little to say on this score, either as criticism or as positive suggestion. At one point, he even grants that 'there is not a shade of bureaucratism' in an organisational blueprint proposed by some local Bolsheviks.⁴⁷ What *is* evidence of substitutionism is the very Bolshevik obsession with organisation. This obsession with organisational trivialities can only be explained as a semi-conscious evasion of the *real* task of the Party, namely, preparing educational mobilisation campaigns of an Akselrodian sort. Bolshevik organisational schemes may or may not have a shadow of bureaucratism, but they definitely do not have a shadow of reality. They remain paper utopias with no relation to the dismal realities. A majority of the *praktiki* were so obsessed about organisational trivialities that their thinking (in Trotsky's striking phrase) was caught like a mouse in a mousetrap.⁴⁸

Substitutionism, both within and without the Party, is the refusal to organise *actions* that involve both the workers and the *praktiki* aimed at getting them to act and think in truly Social-Democratic fashion. Trotsky does not want the Party to 'think for the proletariat' and he insists that party decisions become real decisions only when they express the purposive will of the factory circles. But as he truly remarks, 'the point here is not "democratic" fictions'.⁴⁹ Indeed: the point for Trotsky is not for the Party to be guided by the thinking of the workers or the *praktiki*, but, rather, to undertake the essential but neglected task of getting them to think like the guiding elements of the Party. Thus the principled choice set out by Trotsky is between substitutionism on one side vs. 'political education' and 'political mobilisation' on the other.⁵⁰

Trotsky does not seriously argue that the party majority does not *want* to have the workers and *praktiki* think and act in Social-Democratic fashion. He suggests that the majority deludes itself that this is already the case, thus evading the difficult task of educating and mobilising. The majority does not realise that there is a huge gap between *objective* class interests and the

⁴⁷ Trotskii 1904, p. 83.

⁴⁸ Trotskii 1904, p. 86. The charge of organisational fetishism was first advanced by Akselrod in *Iskra*, Nos. 55 and 57.

⁴⁹ Trotskii 1904, p. 68.

⁵⁰ Trotskii 1904, p. 50.

subjective understanding of them by empirical workers. It does not realise that there is a long and thorny path between objective interest and subjective assimilation – a path that can only be traversed under the guidance of Social-Democratic intellectuals.⁵¹

When we read this passage, we realise how distinct Trotsky's actual understanding of substitutionism is from the one we automatically assign to him. We understand substitutionism as a protest against pessimistic worry about workers, against intellectuals who wish to think for the workers. And, here, we see that Trotsky uses 'substitutionism' to condemn the reluctance of Social-Democratic intellectuals to educate and mobilise workers who are unaware of their own interests.

The term 'substitutionism' is unique to Trotsky. I do not recall any other writer, Bolshevik or Menshevik, even so much as using it. In all other respects, *Our Political Tasks* is a useful compendium of Menshevik arguments in 1903–4. The meaning of substitutionism can be grasped only in the context of Trotsky's concrete tactical proposals. Those proposals, as Trotsky himself insists, are taken straight from Akselrod's campaignism. They are the heart of Menshevism in 1904.

The case against Lenin

The Mensheviks wanted to show that Lenin had put himself out of the Social-Democratic mainstream, not only because of his irresponsible actions, but because he actually preached hyper-centralism, personal dictatorship within the Party, a narrow Party confined to conspirators, Jacobinism as a Social-Democratic ideal and the like. In the influential picture of Bolshevism in 1904 contained in Martov's history of Russian Social Democracy (written in 1918), the words 'dictator' and 'dictatorial' occur quite frequently – although, as we know, Lenin never had the chance to be an actual party dictator in this period.⁵² We have examined some real differences between the Mensheviks and the Bolsheviks. But, on the issues of centralism, personal dictatorship within the Party and so on, one is hard put to find principled differences between the two sides even with a microscope.

⁵¹ Trotsky 1904, p. 52, see also p. 74.

⁵² Martov 2000, pp. 70–82.

The Mensheviks did claim that Lenin openly and explicitly advocated the views attributed to him in *WITBD* or elsewhere – rather, they were inadvertently revealed by various off-the-cuff comments made by Lenin and his supporters in 1903–4. The Mensheviks cannot be blamed too severely for taking isolated phrases out of context, drawing absurd conclusions and then beating Lenin over the head with them. This was the way the game was played and Lenin was by no means averse to playing it himself. But a problem arises when scholars uncritically take these partisan sallies as accurate descriptions of Lenin's actual outlook, and then, to compound the confusion, assume that Lenin preached these views in *WITBD*.

In this section I will look briefly at the most influential of these allegedly revealing episodes: the debate over party membership, the report of the Bolshevik committees in the Urals, the factory metaphor, the Jacobin metaphor, and Luxemburg's accusation of hyper-centralism.

The rules debate

The real source of the party split at the Second Congress was the non-election of three members of the old *Iskra* board. Much more famous than this conflict is the clash over the definition of the party member in Paragraph One of the party rules. Admittedly, the actual difference between the formulations proposed by Lenin and Martov respectively seems rather thin. Lenin proposed that a member was someone who acknowledged the party programme and supported the Party in one of the party organisations. Martov defined a member as anyone who acknowledged the programme and gave the Party regular assistance under the guidance of one of its organisations.

Nevertheless (we are told), these seemingly insignificant differences in wording are symbolic of vast differences in political outlook. Lenin's definition points to a narrow party, fearful of contamination, confining itself to a closed band of intelligentsia conspirators, turning away from Western Social Democracy toward *Narodnaia volia* and other Russian populist revolutionaries. Martov's formulation points in the opposite direction: open, democratic, moving toward the Western idea of a party that genuinely represented the workers, and so forth. Two paths opened up during the rules debate – the vanguard party and the democratic party – and the fateful first steps were taken.

This is a pretty story, but without historical foundation. A few facts need to be kept in mind as we evaluate it. First, the clash over the rules was not

a cause of the party split. The Bolsheviks were a minority on this question. They lost and Martov's formulation became the official definition of a party member. The Bolsheviks did not think it was a good formulation, but the principle of congress sovereignty meant they had to live with it, and they had no problem doing so. It was a minor issue. The rules debate came up once or twice in the ensuing polemics, but it was far overshadowed by other concerns.

Second, from the point of view of people at the time, it was Martov's formulation that represented the spirit of *Narodnaia volia*, while Lenin's formulation that represented the spirit of Western Social-Democratic Parties. In his defence of Martov's formulation at the Second Congress, Akselrod explicitly brought up *Narodnaia volia* as a positive model that exemplified Martov's logic. Later on, Kautsky also sided with Martov – because of the special circumstances of the Russian underground. In the case of a party operating under political freedom, Lenin's formulation would be preferable.⁵³

Third, and most striking: the Mensheviks themselves decided that Lenin's formulation was superior. A Menshevik party conference in late 1905 passed a resolution defining a member according to Lenin's logic, as someone who was a member of a party organisation. At the Unity Congress in 1906, the Mensheviks had a majority. Nevertheless, a new set of rules containing Lenin's definition was passed unanimously and without debate. The only comment made on the shift was that time had erased all differences on this subject.⁵⁴

Finally, Lenin's definition – now accepted by the whole Party – did not have the dire practical consequences predicted by its opponents at the Second Congress. Membership was *not* restricted to committee members or to 'revolutionaries by trade', both of which categories remained small fractions of the total membership.⁵⁵ The membership definition was not a restrictive or exclusionary bottleneck that kept membership low. There were lots of other very good reasons why membership was low in repressive tsarist Russia. In

⁵³ *Iskra*, No. 66 (15 May 1904). A contemporary observer notes the norms of the SPD: 'the keynote of the Party is solidarity, which is a synonym for discipline. . . . The membership of the Party includes all those who pay party dues and will oblige themselves to party fealty, to do any drudgery demanded of them' (Orth 1913, pp. 176–7).

⁵⁴ *Chetvertyi s'ezd* 1959, p. 461.

⁵⁵ For figures, see Chapter Eight.

practice, the Social Democrats were desperate for members and anyone who wanted could join.⁵⁶

So what was all the fuss about? What was so objectionable about Lenin's formulation? I believe the whole row originated from a simple misunderstanding. Owing to the lack of a definite article in Russian, Lenin's formulation could be read as demanding that a party member be a member of 'the party organisation' or 'a party organisation'. Those who, in the congress debates, opposed Lenin's formulation assumed the first reading and used 'organisation' in the singular in their speeches. Those who supported Lenin's formulation (including Lenin himself) assumed that a party member could belong to one of many organisations and so talked of 'organisations' in the plural.

Behind these automatic grammatical assumptions were different experiences of the nature of the underground. Akselrod and Zasluch, who had last been in Russia in the days of *Narodnaia volia*, tended to think of the underground as a closed, secret organisation that was strictly walled off from the surrounding society. The *praktiki* with experience in the new Social-Democratic underground that had arisen since the mid-1890s thought in terms of the many 'threads' that connected the secret structure with the worker milieu (as discussed in Chapter Eight). For people with this concept of the underground, 'member of a party organisation' did not primarily mean members of the *konspirationnyi* parts of the structure, but, rather, members of the factory cells.

Akselrod wanted the secret *konspirationnyi* 'organisation' to be as protected and closed off as possible. Just for that reason, many members of the Party had to be *excluded* from 'the organisation'. Thus, for him and others of his generation such as Zasluch, when Lenin's definition demanded that a party member belonged to 'the organisation', it restricted the Party to a 'narrow band of conspirators'.⁵⁷ No wonder they thought it denied the core of Social Democracy, namely, the expanding circle of awareness.

Why did the Mensheviks so quickly change tack and adopt Lenin's definition? The record is thin on their rationale, but I should imagine there were three major reasons. First, the misunderstanding was cleared up and

⁵⁶ Elwood 1974.

⁵⁷ One of the few discussions of the dispute over membership is Vera Zasluch's article in *Iskra*, No. 70 (25 July 1904) in which she argues that Lenin restricts the Party to a narrow band of conspirators, a 'small little corner' of the Party.

people realised that Lenin did not mean to restrict party membership to revolutionaries by trade and to *komitetchiki*. Second, Martov's formulation was deficient for practical reasons. Already at the Second Congress, Takhtarev (the former editor of *Rabochaia mysl*) had insisted on the difficulty involved in supervision [*kontrol*] of an individual who was not a member of an actual party organisation.⁵⁸ Finally, the Mensheviks realised that if the words 'party minority' and 'party majority' were to make any sense, there had to be a fairly strict and unambiguous boundary between 'member' and 'non-member'. In other words, the democratic principle of congress sovereignty was incompatible with a vague membership definition.⁵⁹

Years later, in the strikingly different context of the Third International, when the Bolsheviks were a ruling party and when Lenin was highly suspicious of prominent European socialists who wanted to join the new Communist Parties, the criterion of membership proposed at the Second Congress seemed much too broad. Let anyone into the new parties who says he accepts the programme and is willing to work in a party organisation? What about all those who claimed to be orthodox Social Democrats, who even wrote eloquent books on the subject – and who then showed their true colours when the War broke out?

In 1903, Lenin proposed a membership definition that, by the end of 1905, was supported by a consensus of Mensheviks and Bolsheviks. After 1914, he proposed stringent membership tests – aimed not at the rank and file but at well-known members of the old parties – that were intended to split the Second International and did so. These two phases of Lenin's view of the Party should not be confounded.

Urals Committees

In late 1903, representatives of three party committees in the Urals (Ufa, Middle Urals, Perm) sent in a protest to *Iskra* about one of Plekhanov's articles. This protest contained several unfortunate phrases that were seized on by Menshevik polemicists. One passage in particular was used by Trotsky in the

⁵⁸ *Vtoroi s'ezd* 1959, pp. 266–7.

⁵⁹ On the connection between the membership definition and party democracy, see Olminskii 1904b, the rules debate at the Bolshevik Third Congress, and the Menshevik resolutions of 1906 (*Men'sheviki* 1996, pp. 147–8).

very last section of *Our Political Tasks* as the crushing proof of the dictatorial ambitions of Lenin and his supporters. The Urals Bolsheviks are arguing that the party's organisation must help prepare the Party for its supreme task of leading the proletariat in power, that is, the dictatorship of the proletariat:

The preparation of the proletariat for dictatorship is such an important organisational task that all others must be subordinated to it. This preparation consists, among other things, in the creation of an attitude in favour of a strong and authoritative [*vlastnaia*] proletarian organisation, in the explanation of all its significance. The objection might be made that dictators have appeared and will appear by themselves. But that is not always the case, and a proletarian party should not act in a *stikhiinyi* or opportunistic fashion. Here we should combine the highest degree of purposiveness with unconditional obedience – one calls forth the other (the awareness of necessity is freedom of the will).⁶⁰

According to Trotsky and Martov, this passage calls for the Party itself to be run by individual dictators. Is this a plausible reading? I think not. The use of the word 'dictator' is unusual – a more practised party writer would have avoided it – but it clearly means 'the proletarians who are implementing the dictatorship of the proletariat'. One of the tasks of the Party is to prepare the workers to fulfill this role, and one mode of preparation is a disciplined political organisation. The underlying thought is the purest Erfurtian orthodoxy (despite the tactlessness of the phrase 'unconditional obedience').

Valentinov recalls in his memoirs how delighted Martynov was when the Urals report arrived in Geneva.⁶¹ The great attention given by the Mensheviks to this unsophisticated provincial report speaks very eloquently, it seems to me, of their inability to document Lenin's views with Lenin's own words.

Factory analogy

Lenin's major contribution to the 1904 polemics was his long *One Step Forward, Two Steps Back*. In his summary section at the end, Lenin made two remarks that were immediately used by his opponents. One of these was the claim

⁶⁰ *Iskra*, No. 63 (1 March 1904).

⁶¹ Valentinov 1968, The Urals committee report still makes an appearance in the party history of Menshevik Fyodor Dan (Dan 1964 [1945], pp. 253–4).

that workers understood discipline better than intellectuals because the workers had undergone the factory experience whereas intellectuals had not.

The factory, which seems only a bogey to some, represents that highest form of capitalist co-operation which has united and disciplined the proletariat, taught it organisation, and placed it at the head of all the other strata of the labouring and exploited population. And it is Marxism, the ideology of the proletariat schooled by capitalism, that has taught and is teaching unstable intellectuals the distinction between the exploitative side of the factory (discipline based on fear of starvation) and its organising side (discipline founded on collective work unified by conditions of production that are highly developed technically).⁶²

Both Rosa Luxemburg and Trotsky pounced on this remark and lectured Lenin about the evils of mind-numbing factory discipline.⁶³ In response, the Bolshevik Aleksandr Bogdanov penned a rejoinder in which, he said, he rose to the defence of his revolutionary colleague Karl Marx. After noting that the passage showed that Lenin was well aware of the bad side of factory discipline, Bogdanov asserted that if the factory really had the thoroughly evil consequences described by Trotsky and Luxemburg, then the whole Marxist project was a washout. Bogdanov was later the most prominent theorist of 'proletarian culture' as a higher type than individualist bourgeois culture.⁶⁴

I agree with Bogdanov. Anti-Lenin fervour incited Trotsky and Luxemburg to make arguments that from a Social-Democratic point of view were extremely peculiar. One of the deepest strands in Social-Democratic discourse was the claim that the industrial workers were capable of emancipating society in a way that other oppressed classes – the peasantry and the petty bourgeoisie – were not. Worker protest against exploitation was more effective than peasant protest because the workers had gone through the school of large-scale organisation.

The factory metaphor was behind Lenin's coinage 'artisanal limitations'. As I showed in Chapter Eight, the imagery behind this neologism was taken straight

⁶² Lenin *PSS*, 8, p. 379.

⁶³ Somewhat oddly, Trotsky rejects the 'barracks discipline' of the factory, but calls, instead, for 'one fighting army' of labour as a positive model of discipline (Trotsky 1904, pp. 74–5).

⁶⁴ Olminskii and Bogdanov 1904.

from the *Communist Manifesto* and the *Erfurt Programme*. Lenin's metaphor was accepted by Russian Social Democrats as a whole and even used in polemics against Lenin. For example, Parvus criticised Lenin's organisational plan because it merely unified a series of local 'artisans' and did not rally achieve the co-ordinated division of labour of a 'large-scale capitalist enterprise'.⁶⁵

Jacobin analogy

The other vulnerable remark from *One Step* was Lenin's assertion that the Bolsheviks were the Jacobins of Russian Social Democracy. Everybody rushed to inform Lenin that the Jacobins were bourgeois revolutionaries whose organisation was no model for Social Democracy. Trotsky added that the remark was further confirmation of Lenin's resemblance to Robespierre, a resemblance that accounted for Lenin's 'malicious and morally repulsive suspiciousness'.⁶⁶ Martynov devoted a whole pamphlet to the remark and displayed the results of impressive historical research on the Jacobins in the French revolution.⁶⁷ Lenin's comment is still cited by scholars today as a clue to his outlook.

A glance at the context shows us that Lenin had not given a single thought to a comparison with the historical Jacobins. He is thinking entirely of divisions within Social Democracy and particularly of the issues separating Bolsheviks and Mensheviks. As usual with Lenin's vulnerable remarks, he is making a pugnacious response to his opponent's polemics. In his *Iskra* articles setting out the Menshevik case about tactical opportunism, Akselrod made an allusion to Jacobins as an example of bourgeois revolutionaries. Lenin seized on this.

Comrade Akselrod is probably well aware that the division of present-day Social Democracy into revolutionary and opportunist has long since given rise – and not just in Russia – to 'historical analogies with the era of the great French revolution'. Comrade Akselrod is probably well aware that the *Girondists of present-day Social Democracy* everywhere and always resort to the terms 'Jacobinism', 'Blanquism', and so on to describe their opponents.⁶⁸

⁶⁵ *Iskra*, No. 111 (24 September 1905). As shown in the final section of this chapter, the Menshevik (including Trotsky) all accepted the term 'artisanal limitations'.

⁶⁶ Trotskii 1904, p. 98. In 1907, upset at the use by liberal journalists of the 'Jacobinism' label for Social Democracy, Trotsky indirectly retracted these remarks as exaggeration for polemical effect (Trotskii 1907).

⁶⁷ Martynov 1905.

⁶⁸ Lenin *PSS*, 8, pp. 368–9.

He then goes on to show that the anti-*Iskra*-ites used similar accusations against the *Iskra*-ites at the Second Congress. In particular, the people labelled as Jacobins supported party rules that favoured proletarian participation, while Akselrod joined with anti-*Iskra*-ites in his concern to make room for professor and high-school students.

Lenin sums up:

Absolutely nothing but opportunism is expressed by these 'fearsome words': Jacobinism and so forth. A Jacobin, inextricably linked with the *organisation* of the proletariat that *has become aware* of its class interests – this is a *revolutionary Social Democrat*. A Girondin, who sighs after professors and high-school students, who fears the dictatorship of the proletariat, who gets dewy-eyed about the absolute value of democratic demands – this is an *opportunist*.⁶⁹

The final sentence – never quoted – reveals quite clearly how we should read this passage. Obviously, he is not claiming that the historical Girondins had anything to say about high-school students. His real argument is as follows.

International Social Democracy is split into 'revolutionary Social Democrats' and 'opportunists'. These two groups are sometimes called 'Jacobins' and 'Girondins' – for instance, by Plekhanov in 1901.⁷⁰ At the Second Congress, the people who were called Jacobins by their opponents were revolutionary Social Democrats who wanted a truly proletarian organisation, as shown by their stand on the definition of a member. The people who opposed the revolutionary Social Democrats in the rules debate – that is, Akselrod himself – showed by their solicitude for professors that they were 'opportunists' and as such can also be called Girondins.

Centralism and the Central Committee

'Centralism' is not a prominent theme in Lenin's polemics, either in *WITBD* or in 1903–4. In *WITBD*, he sets forth a plan to establish the central national political organisation desired by all. In 1903–4, he protests that the actions of a handful of top leaders have been destructive of the principle of congress

⁶⁹ Lenin *PSS*, 8, p. 370. Lenin has just given examples of how 'opportunists' at the Second Congress did all the things here ascribed to Girondins.

⁷⁰ Lenin alluded to Plekhanov's comparison in *WITBD* (*PSS*, 6, p. 10 [000]). In the 1907 edition, he added a footnote underlining the fact that Plekhanov had used the comparison before he did himself.

sovereignty and thus of any effective national centre. In neither case does he focus on advocating one particular organisational scheme that is more or less 'centralised' in comparison to others. His thoughts on the specific powers of the party Central Committee take up a vanishingly small space in his output.

There exists a strong impression to the contrary and the reason is not far to seek. Rosa Luxemburg's 1904 attack on Lenin, still in print, still highly regarded, portrays Lenin as someone totally obsessed with an all-powerful Central Committee.⁷¹ Luxemburg's prestige as an icon of the Left has given her anti-Lenin broadside an uncriticised authority both among academic and activists. Given the damage done to historical understanding by her article, I feel it my duty as a historian to point out that it is not a perceptive or prophetic critique but an unscrupulous hatchet job.⁷²

Luxemburg's articles provides no evidence that she had even read *WITBD*. It purports to be a review of Lenin's *One Step Forward*. Lenin's book is a blow-by-blow, hour-by-hour account of the Second Congress. Every vote, every debate is analysed in terms of the emerging split. Two themes predominate. One is that the *Iskra*-ite minority tended more and more to end up voting with the anti-*Iskra*-ites. The other theme is the inexcusability of the actions of the *Iskra* minority, first in boycotting, then in taking over, the central organ. Luxemburg passes over all of this in total silence.

I believe that Luxemburg was handed *One Step* by the Mensheviks who were organising the literary campaign against Lenin and who pointed out to her the notorious passages about factory discipline and Jacobins. Luxemburg had better things to do than actually read Lenin's long, obsessive polemic but, instead, relied on the anti-*Iskra* critique earlier deployed by her friend and mentor Boris Krichevskii. Indeed, her article can be called 'Krichevskii's revenge'. Due to this article's prestige, Krichevskii's main charge – that *Iskra* was so obsessed with a rigid tactics/plan that it would miss the revolution – became inextricably attached to Lenin and to *WITBD*.⁷³

⁷¹ Luxemburg 1970 [1904]. The English translation in Luxemburg 1961 and Luxemburg 1970a is inadequate and politically tendentious. For a more accurate translation by Richard Taylor, see Harding 1983.

⁷² Even most of those who side with Lenin against Luxemburg do not dispute the basic accuracy of her account of his views. Two writers who have properly rejected this article are Hal Draper and Paul Le Blanc.

⁷³ Lenin saw the resemblance (Lenin, *PSS* 10: 16). Luxemburg's article was published

Throughout her article, Luxemburg keeps pounding away at one theme: Lenin wants a dictatorial Central Committee to reduce everyone else in the party to automata.

Ultracentralist tendency . . . the Central Committee is the only active nucleus in the Party and all the remaining organisations are merely its tools for implementation . . . absolute blind submission of the individual organs of the party to their central authority . . . mechanical submission of the Party's militants to their central authority . . . a central authority that alone thinks, acts and decides for everyone . . . the lack of will and thought in a mass of flesh with many arms and legs moving mechanically to the baton . . . zombie-like obedience [*Kadavergehorsam*] . . . absolute power and authority of a negative kind . . . sterile spirit of the night watchman . . . strict despotic centralism . . . the strait-jacket of a bureaucratic centralism that reduces the militant workers to a docile instrument of a committee . . . an all-knowing and ubiquitous Central Committee.⁷⁴

I find it surprising that this rhetorical overkill did not arouse anyone's suspicions. Do people really believe that Lenin desired and indeed openly advocated unthinking, zombie-like obedience? We may, if we wish, ascribe Luxemburg's melodramatic characterisation to exuberant polemics. A more direct proof of her article's lack of connection with reality is the exclusive focus on the power of the Central Committee.

If there is one issue that did *not* separate Mensheviks and Bolsheviks, it was the official definition of the functions of the Central Committee. In the rules accepted unanimously [xxx check] at the Second Congress, the Central Committee is given the power to organise committees, guide their activity and unite the entire activity of the Party. These basic powers, along with more specific ones such as administering party finances, remain unchanged in all later prewar versions of the party rules, including the Fourth Unity Congress

simultaneously in *Neue Zeit* and *Iskra*. Lenin wrote a reply and sent it to Karl Kautsky, editor of *Neue Zeit*, who refused to print it on grounds of lack of reader interest. Lenin's reply (unpublished at the time) can be highly recommended as the best short exposé of what was on his mind in 1904 (see the discussion in Le Blanc 1990, pp. 79–87).

⁷⁴ Luxemburg 1970. English is powerless to reproduce the rich rotundity of her rhetoric, for example, 'eines allwissenden und allgegenwärtigen Zentralkomitees' (p. 443).

(1906) at which the Mensheviks had a majority. At no time in 1904 did the Mensheviks demand a change in this definition.

The rules adopted at the Second Congress also specified that all party organisations were autonomous in regard to activities exclusively within their functions. The Bolsheviks supported these rules and did not demand that local committees leave all their thinking to the Central Committee.

What did change in the rules over time were the relations between the various central institutions. The positions taken on this issue are rather unexpected. Lenin had a scheme (one of his few concrete organisational proposals) which he persuaded the Congress to adopt. According to this scheme, the Party had three central institutions: a Central Committee, a Central Editorial Board, and a Party Council. Both the Central Editorial Board and Central Committee were elected directly by a party congress. The Central Editorial Board was given the task of 'ideological guidance', while the Central Committee was restricted to directing practical activity.

Thus the Central Editorial Board and the Central Committee were completely independent institutions with independent missions. In order to adjudicate the (inevitable?) conflicts, Lenin's scheme included a Party Council. The Central Editorial Board and the Central Committee would each name two members of this Council, with a fifth member elected directly by the Congress. Since this fifth member would cast the deciding vote, he would have the closest thing to dictatorial power within the Party. The Second Congress elected Plekhanov as fifth Council member.⁷⁵

The Mensheviks first defined their organisational position in opposition to this scheme – because it subordinated the Central Committee to the Central Editorial Board! They accused Lenin of using the Central Editorial Board to impose a 'theocracy' (Akselrod's term) over the Party. They therefore took up the cudgels for the Central Committee.⁷⁶ Of course, when they themselves took over the Central Editorial Board, they made no attempt to limit its power.

⁷⁵ A few years later, after he had broken with Lenin, Bogdanov described Plekhanov as the one real party dictator in this period (Bogdanov 1995).

⁷⁶ In Trotsky's anti-Lenin *Report of the Siberian Delegation*, written immediately after the Second Congress, he writes: 'We did all we could, comrades. . . . We defended the independence and autonomy of the militant leader [*vozhhd*] of the Party, the Central Committee, because we are centralists' (Shutskever 1925, p. 489). See also Dan, cited in Martov 1904b, p. 96 and Trotskii 1904, p. 31.

On the contrary, they opened up a campaign against the Central Committee because it appeared to be a bastion for Lenin and his supporters.

Meanwhile, many Bolsheviks were also having second thoughts. Bogdanov pointed out in 1904 that Lenin's scheme almost guaranteed destructive conflict when it set up two independent central institutions.⁷⁷ Consequently, the purely Bolshevik Third Congress in early 1905 changed the rules and subordinated the Central Editorial Board to the Central Committee. Lenin himself remained unconvinced by Bogdanov's reasoning and protested against the change.

The following picture results: in the name of more efficient centralism, the Bolsheviks defy Lenin and move in the direction of Menshevik complaints about the 'theocratic' Central Editorial Board.⁷⁸ All this shuffling and reshuffling of central party institutions are perhaps of minor significance in themselves. But they do reveal Rosa Luxemburg's picture of Lenin's devotion to an all-devouring Central Committee as the baseless nonsense it is.

Intelligently and workers

I have long advocated in my published works that workers should be recruited on to the committees in the greatest possible number. (Lenin, 1905)

The Bolsheviks are usually cast in the role of the defenders of intelligentsia hegemony in the Party. In *WITBD* (according to this scenario), Lenin demanded a party consisting of intelligentsia 'professional revolutionaries', since workers could not be trusted. In 1904, the Mensheviks rose up against this intelligentsia hegemony in the name of proletarian *samodeiatel'nost*. Some writers (particularly those in the activist tradition) add an ironic coda to this story. In 1905, Lenin was so carried away with the unexpected revolutionary actions of the workers that he reversed track and demanded that workers be recruited into party

⁷⁷ Bogdanov in Olminskii and Bogdanov 1904, pp. 64–8 ('A centralist organisation with two separate centres!').

⁷⁸ The Menshevik-dominated Fourth Congress (1906) returned to direct election of the Central Editorial Board. Administrative convenience was the stated rationale for this decision. Unlike Lenin's earlier 'dual centrism', the Central Editorial Board was given no independent mission and the Central Committee was given the job of uniting all, not just 'practical', activity. The Bolshevik faction nevertheless protested against 'the old dual centrism. . . . We all remember its unfortunate and gloomy features' (*Chetvertyi s"ezd* 1959, pp. 461–3). Recall that the originator and main defender of this dual centrism was Lenin himself.

committees. This shocked the Bolsheviks, who had grown up on the *WITBD* philosophy of excluding workers. At the Bolshevik Third Congress in 1905, the Bolshevik faction defeated their own leader's resolution on the subject.

At earlier points in this commentary we have touched on the various profound difficulties of this story. In Chapter Four we looked at the Social-Democratic consensus on the subject – a consensus that was neither 'worker-phile' nor 'worker-phobe', neither anti-intellectual nor anti-worker. In Chapter Seven, we looked at the role assigned to workers in *WITBD*. In Chapter Eight, we saw that party members was not restricted to 'revolutionaries by trade' and that 'revolutionaries by trade' were not restricted to intellectuals. We also looked at figures on the actual composition of the Party by social origin. In this chapter, we will wrap things up by taking the story through the party debates of 1904 and the Bolshevik Third Congress in 1905.

In 1904, neither Mensheviks nor Bolsheviks stepped outside the earlier consensus on this issue. No one wanted to exclude workers as such from the Party or from local and central leadership. On the contrary, everyone saw the purposive worker (or '*intelligentye* workers') as the key to the party's future. Everyone wanted to increase the number of purposive workers and to encourage them in every way. All would have agree with Lenin when he wrote xxx?

Everyone realised that *intelligenty* had played the major role in bringing the Social-Democratic message to Russia and laying the foundations of party organisation. Everyone thought that this was an inevitable anomaly in the course of being corrected. Again, all would have agreed with Lenin's statement that 'the role of the "intelligentsia" comes to this: to make it unnecessary to have special leader/guides from the intelligentsia'.⁷⁹

On the other hand, all opposed the slogan of a 'purely worker movement [*chisto rabochee dvizhenie*]' . Social Democracy wanted to convert the workers, not reflect their views, democratically or otherwise. In order to join the Party and even more to be placed in a position of leadership, a worker had to be 'purposive', that is, someone who understood what Social Democracy was all about and who was fully committed to it. The 'purely worker movement'

⁷⁹ This statement occurs in Lenin's first major writing *Friends of the People* (Lenin *PSS*, 1: 309). Note: not 'eliminate intellectuals from leadership positions', but 'eliminate the special reliance on them necessary in the early stages of the movement'.

slogan had anti-intellectual implications that were roundly rejected, especially since the anti-intellectual card was also played by police socialists such as Zubatov, who told workers they were being politically exploited by revolutionary intellectuals.

Within the Party, workers and intellectuals were comrades, for whom distinction of social origin should be effaced. Connected to this ideal was the complete rejection of any institutional separation between intellectuals and workers within the Party. There should be no two-tier newspaper system, with one aimed at intellectuals and the other at workers. There should be no separate worker organisations within the Party, but, rather, a single party committee on which both workers and intellectuals served.

When this last demand was put into practice during the *Iskra* period (1901–3), it meant disbanding the existing worker organisations in the expectation of increasing worker representation directly on party committees. The bitterness caused by the break-up of separate worker organisations was not assuaged by the poor record of the committees in recruiting workers – although the percentage of workers on party committees did go up during this period.⁸⁰

Finally, all agreed that democratic control by party members of local committees was an excellent ideal but impossible to put into practice under present Russian conditions. The resulting difficulties in the relations between the committees and the ‘subcommittee world’ or ‘party periphery’ – the factory circles and other ground-level party organisations – were sometimes interpreted as antagonism between intellectuals and workers. Nevertheless, the consensus was that these difficulties, however painful, did not represent real or fundamental antagonisms.

These views constituted the strong consensus of Russian Social Democracy. No doubt, personal interaction gave rise to tensions and resentments that did not always reflect the official democratic ideal. No doubt, party policies did not always succeed in advancing the goal of worker participation. Yet the ideal of Social Democracy as a genuine worker party was held by all.

Within this consensus, there could be different emphases, different priorities. During the pre-Congress *Iskra* period and after, there was one prominent Social Democrat who insisted with particular vehemence on the need to recruit workers into the leadership. This Social Democrat was Lenin. During the 1904

⁸⁰ See Chapter Eight for figures.

debate, one faction was particularly insistent on the leadership role of the intellectuals both in the past and present. This faction was the Mensheviks.

Lenin's pre-Congress views on this issue were expressed in *WITBD* and the *Letter to a Comrade on Organisational Questions* written later in 1902. *WITBD* takes up a number of topics: political agitation, organisational questions, the role of a party newspaper. One topic the book does *not* take up is the role of the intelligentsia. All the book contains is a number of isolated remarks, almost all parenthetical to the topic at hand. Even if we gather all the comments together, views that Lenin expressed with some vehemence before and after *WITBD* will not be found.

The lack of systematic attention is reflected in the profusion of undefined terms. Lenin makes no effort to tell us what exactly the following locutions – all found in *WITBD* – mean or how they relate to each: Marxist intelligentsia, revolutionary intelligentsia, socialist intelligentsia, revolutionary-socialist intelligentsia, non-worker intelligentsia, *intelligentnyi* worker, liberal intelligentsia, *zemstvo* intelligentsia, 'intelligentsia in general'. Terms that are *not* used include 'Social-Democratic intelligentsia' and 'Social-Democratic *intelligentny*'. The overall portrait of the party *intelligentny* that emerges from these various offhand remarks is not a particularly flattering one. Running through the book is a contrast between the revolutionary workers and the party *intelligentny*, who have failed to fulfil their own responsibilities.⁸¹

Lenin argues that one of the Social Democracy's urgent priorities must be to encourage and push forward as many worker leaders as possible. This is partly because intelligentsia forces are thin on the ground, partly because Russian *intelligentny* are often sloppy and impractical, but mainly because Social Democracy as a merger of socialism and the worker movement will succeed only when it is embodied in a corps of inspired and inspiring worker activists. In his most eloquent passage on this theme, he says that the *stikhiinyi* upsurge of the worker mass will lead to more and more workers being pushed forward as genuine *praktiki*. When the Party has a corps of workers who have learned the skills of the revolutionary trade, it will be unbeatable, because these activists will be completely dedicated to the revolution and also enjoy

⁸¹ Robert Himmer argues that Stalin may have been surprised to discover that Lenin himself was an *intelligent*, such was the animus against *intelligentny* in *WITBD* (Himmer 2001).

the utmost trust of the wide worker masses. And, Lenin adds, it is the direct fault of present party members that they do not urge the workers to acquire revolutionary skills in the same way as *intelligenty*.⁸²

In *WITBD*, Lenin is talking about underground revolutionary activists in general. The *Letter to a Comrade* is focused more on institutional details, including the membership of the local party committees. On this subject, he gives the following advice:

The [local party] committee should include, to the extent possible, all the chief leaders [*vozhaki*] of the worker movement from among the workers themselves. . . . It is especially necessary to try to ensure that as many workers as possible become completely purposive revolutionaries by trade and end up on the committee.⁸³

At the end of 1904, Lenin quoted these words and issued a challenge: show me any statement in the Russian Social-Democratic literature that calls for worker recruitment on the committees as clearly and urgently as I did in 1902. Nobody responded to this challenge, which still stands for advocates of the textbook interpretation.⁸⁴

In 1903–4, Lenin's rhetoric took on a more stridently anti-intellectual tone. As we have seen, the central Bolshevik accusation was that the *Iskra* editors refused to submit to the authority of the party congress and regarded *Iskra* as their personal property. Lenin accompanied this accusation with much rhetoric about 'intelligentsia indiscipline' and 'intelligentsia anarchism' as opposed to a proletarian sense of discipline and collectivism. This new emphasis in his polemics was not inconsistent with his remarks in *WITBD* and elsewhere.

Lenin's contrast between worker aptitude and intelligentsia lack of aptitude for organisation was something of a Social-Democratic commonplace and Lenin was able to cite Kautsky on the issue.⁸⁵ This did not prevent some Social Democrats from concluding that Lenin's aggressive use of this theme

⁸² Lenin *PSS*, 6, pp. 132–4 [000].

⁸³ Lenin, *PSS*, 7, p. 9 (order of sentences reversed).

⁸⁴ In *Iskra*, No. 86 (3 February 1905), a correspondent with the pseudonym 'A Worker As Well' said he would respond to the challenge but did not even try to produce any statements.

⁸⁵ Lenin, *PSS*, 8, pp. 309–11. The basic thought about proletarian aptitude for disciplined organisation can be found in *Parliamentarism* (Kautsky 1893).

strayed close to impermissible intelligentsia-baiting. One such Social Democrat was Rosa Luxemburg. What, she asked in her 1904 critique of Lenin, is Lenin's greatest fear? Answer: the fear that the worker movement will be turned into 'a tool of the bourgeois intelligentsia's lust for power'. She speaks of a 'Lenin-type fear of the catastrophic influence of the intelligentsia on the proletarian movement'. She warns Lenin that he is outside the Social-Democratic consensus on this point: 'an intense emphasis on the innate propensity of proletarians for Social-Democratic organisation and a suspicion of the "intelligentsia" elements in the Social-Democratic movement is in and of itself no expression of "revolutionary Marxism".' As examples of Lenin-style worker worship, she points to French syndicalists, English trade-unionists and even 'the pure "economism" of the former Petersburg paper *Rabochaia Mysl* with its transfer of *tred-iunionist* narrowness into autocratic Russia'. Thus – amazingly – Luxemburg underlines the similarity of Lenin's outlook to *Rabochaia Mysl*.⁸⁶

Combatting what they considered to be Lenin's anti-intellectual demagoguery was not the only Menshevik motive for stressing the positive role of the intellectuals. The central Menshevik proposal of 1904 was the tactic of organising campaigns with true Social-Democratic content (as discussed in the previous section). This proposal was grounded in a historical narrative about Russian Social Democracy. Owing to a variety of factors (went this narrative), Russian Social Democracy was built up completely by intellectuals. This intelligentsia party had scored some success in awakening the workers to economic struggle and (merely) revolutionary struggle. This party had also been preparing itself for its culminating task: bringing Social-Democratic content to the workers, creating the 'purposeful proletarian vanguard' as yet missing in Russia. But at the present time, Russian Social Democracy was still an 'intelligentsia' party, a worker party only in name and aspiration.

Many people, at the time and at the present day, seized on the Menshevik description of Social Democracy as a 'intelligentsia party' as a de-legitimising critique. But the Menshevik leaders did not mean it that way. They saw the intelligentsia path to a worker party as historically inevitable in Russia and,

⁸⁶ Rosa Luxemburg in *Iskra* No. 69 (10 July 1904). ('*Tred-iunionist* narrowness' in German is 'trade-unionistischen Borniertheit' [Luxemburg 1970, p. 436]). Looking back in 1927, Miliukov also saw Lenin as anti-intellectual, affirming that at the Second Congress Lenin stood for 'the removal of wavering "*intelligenty*" and for the promotion [*vydvizhenie*] of workers ready to submit to discipline' (Miliukov 1927, p. 125).

therefore, as perfectly justifiable. They did not see the Social-Democratic intellectuals as motivated by lust for power or imbued with an alien class interest, but, rather, as dedicated activists laying the necessary groundwork for true Social Democracy. Of course, the time had come to turn potential Social-Democratic energy to actual energy by enlisting the workers in appropriate campaigns. And, now, in 1904, it seemed as if one faction of the Party was intent on throwing a spanner into the works by hindering the proposed Menshevik tactics. Nevertheless, the intelligentsia had played and were still playing an absolutely essential role in turning workers into Social Democrats. Trotsky made the point in a sarcastic riposte to Lenin:

Without fear of revealing my 'bourgeois intellectual psychology', I affirm . . . that between the objective conditions [of proletarian life] and the purposive discipline of political action, there is a long road of struggle, errors, education [in] the school of political life. The Russian proletariat enters into this school only under the leadership – good or bad – of the Social-Democratic intelligentsia. I affirm that the Russian proletariat, in whom we [sic] have barely begun to develop political *samodeiatel'nost*, is not yet able . . . to give lessons in discipline to its 'intelligentsia'.⁸⁷

When they looked back at the history of Russian Social Democracy, the Menshevik and Bolshevik polemicists of 1904 saw things differently. The Mensheviks tended to give an initiatory role to the intellectuals. Thus Akselrod described Social Democracy as 'a revolutionary movement of the intelligentsia' that 'called the worker movement to life'.⁸⁸ Similar remarks can be found in other Menshevik writings.

Bolshevik accounts relied on a more interactive version of the merger narrative in which the worker movement had a more independent existence and often influenced and inspired the socialists. Olminskii and Bogdanov presented a much different picture of the history of the Party:

[According to the Menshevik version of events], it is the intelligentsia which thinks up tactics, the intelligentsia which criticises and changes them, the intelligentsia which draws the worker into the movement – in a word, it is

⁸⁷ Trotskii 1904, p. 74. Trotsky criticised the old *Iskra* for its double standard: hard on intellectuals, easy on workers (p. 23).

⁸⁸ *Iskra*, 68, 25 June 1904 (in the letter to Kautsky reprinted in *Iskra za dva goda* 1906, here p. 153).

the navel of the universe. [In reality,] when the underground worker movement [in the latter half of the 1890s] revealed itself to the world, it shone with a bright flame that illuminated the path for the intelligentsia and awoke its desires for liberation from autocratic oppression: the sunflower/intelligentsia strained toward the worker sun.⁸⁹

In the pamphlet by Panin published by the minority, you will find a concrete picture of how the proletarian vanguard [actively] *adjusted* the intelligentsia and its tactics to the needs of the worker movement.⁹⁰

The Bolsheviks also disputed 'intelligentsia party' as an appropriate label for Russian Social Democracy in 1904. Bogdanov granted that the intelligentsia played a relatively larger role in Russia than in other countries, and also that the party committees – the key link in the local hierarchy – were mostly staffed by intellectuals. Nevertheless, he insists that only someone unacquainted with the realities of the Russian underground would deny its essentially proletarian character.

Our party is a proletarian party even in regards to its quantitative make-up. Its foundation is not a couple of dozen committees each containing just a few people, but the numerous worker groups and organisations standing behind those committees. According to available data, each of 27 organisations represented at the Second Congress has behind it hundreds, and some of them thousands, of organised workers. In actuality, for every Social Democrat/*intelligent* there are *dozens* of organised workers – and these are in no way passive, non-purposive political neophytes who allow themselves to be led down any road. From among their number are recruited many members of the committees, many more of them stand at the head of city sections [*raion*] and factory organisations, they work as professional agitators, and so forth.

Do you think that all of this is not a 'vanguard' but a non-purposive mass? Do you think that they slavishly follow after the '*intelligenty*'?⁹¹

⁸⁹ Olminskii in Olminskii and Bogdanov 1904, pp. 14–15 (order of passages changed).

⁹⁰ Bogdanov in Olminskii and Bogdanov 1904, p. 57. Panin was a second-tier Menshevik writer. Note the way the Bolshevik writer seizes on the discrepancy between Panin and the leaders of the Menshevik faction.

⁹¹ Bogdanov in Olminskii and Bogdanov 1904, p. 56. As we shall see, Akselrod and Trotsky both had occasion to retract the 'intelligentsia party' label and essentially endorse Bogdanov's picture.

The label 'intelligentsia party' came out of Akselrod's long-standing views (*not* out of a horrified reaction to Lenin) and was also used to respond to Lenin's anti-intelligentsia rhetoric (the Bolsheviks flail the *intelligently* but they themselves prolong the existence of the intelligentsia party). I have the impression the Menshevik leaders were somewhat taken aback when the label was used to de-legitimise Social Democracy as a whole. It was bad enough that liberal and conservatives made use of the Menshevik 'admission'. Even more upsetting were Social-Democratic voices who declared themselves fervent Mensheviks but used Menshevik rhetoric to justify an anti-intelligentsia crusade within the Party. Such a voice was an anonymous pamphlet signed Rabochii (*A Worker*), published under *Iskra* auspices in later 1904.⁹²

This pamphlet is the most full-bodied literary expression of the anti-intelligentsia feelings among many workers. Rabochii was not content with saying 'we need more workers on party committees'. He wanted an energetic purge of most *intelligently* and their replacement by 'true proletarians'. The intellectuals were led by their 'class instinct' to despise the workers and to exclude them systematically from party life. All ills of party life were due to this alien class influence. Did frequent arrests of *praktiki* lead to lower quality replacements? It was the fault of the intellectuals. Did stringent *konspiratsiia* intended to prevent arrests lead to difficulties in the relationships between committees and lower-level organisations? It was the fault of the intellectuals. And writers such as Bogdanov, who painted a different picture of committee life, were demagogic liars.

Menshevik intellectuals (continued Rabochii) were no better than Bolshevik ones. True, the top Mensheviks had issued a clarion call for the workers to take over. But they had addressed this call only to intellectuals. And Rabochii could assert through personal experience that Menshevik committees were no better than Bolshevik ones in allowing workers access to leadership positions.

Rabochii's pamphlet was sent in to the *Iskra* editorial board with a request that it be published, and *Iskra* duly did so. But Akselrod realised that Rabochii's politics of suspicion and purge would make party life impossible and he was deeply embarrassed by Rabochii's claim to be a faithful Menshevik. He

⁹² Rabochii 1904. According to Zinoviev 1975, p. 111, Rabochii was a St. Petersburg worker named Glebov-Putilovsky (although Zinoviev gives a very inaccurate picture of Akselrod's preface).

therefore accompanied Rabochii's pamphlet with an unrequested foreword almost one-half the size of Rabochii's own text in which he pointed out the dangers of Rabochii's 'one-sided' and 'formal/organisational' approach to the problem. 'Proletarian *samodeiatel'nost'* was not a question that could be solved by a crude comparison of the number of intellectuals vs. workers on the party committees.⁹³

Akselrod's foreword is a remarkable re-assertion of the Social-Democratic consensus that Rabochii had violated. At times, he sounds more like *WITBD* than *WITBD* does. If Rabochii's practical suggestion were adopted, Akselrod warned, the result would be the resurrection of the late unlamented slogan, a 'purely worker movement' – a slogan that led to 'the corruption of the workers and the disorganisation of the Party'. The English trade unions were 'purely' proletarian too, but that did not help them escape the 'political and moral tutelage' of bourgeois intellectuals.

Does not Rabochii remember how bad so-called 'democratism' was? Democratism – electoral control of local committees from below – is impossible under Russian conditions. Not only that, democratism 'served as a cover for ambitious intriguers and even provided clever provocateurs with a access to the organisation'. (This is a harsher critique of 'democratism' than can be found in *WITBD*.)

There should be no distinction between workers and intellectuals in today's Party. There is only one meaningful distinction: party member vs. non-member. A non-member worker has no rights, a non-worker member has full rights, in deciding on the questions of party life. If workers have not hitherto played the leadership role that one could hope, this is due to historical circumstances, not the individual qualities of workers or intellectuals, and certainly not to the class origin of the intellectuals, their evil will, or their alleged aspiration to exclude workers.

Akselrod does blame the Bolsheviks for the frustration felt by Rabochii and his peers – but not because he sees the Bolsheviks as defenders of 'intelligentsia hegemony'.⁹⁴ Rather, their factionalism has crippled local party life, so that

⁹³ Rabochii 1904, pp. 3–16 (the text in the pamphlet differs from the one published in *Iskra* No. 80 [15 December 1904] or reprinted in *Iskra za dva goda* 1906, pp. 155–66).

⁹⁴ Indeed, there is at least a hint that the unscrupulous Lenin would latch on to Rabochii's anti-intelligentsia crusade in order to make further trouble (*Iskra za dva goda* 1906, p. 160).

eager workers like Rabochii do not receive directives for action even as they observe the advancing revolutionary storm. The implication is that if Rabochii had been given something useful to do, he would stop worrying so much about whether or not he was on the committee.

Akselrod again reaffirms the historical role of the intellectual as the exclusive 'uniting and organising element in the process of the formation of our party'.⁹⁵ Back in the days when the Party was starting up, even the purposive workers were extremely backward compared to the intellectuals.⁹⁶ On the other hand, Akselrod seems to retract his label of 'intelligentsia party' for present-day Russian Social Democracy. In fact, he sounds much closer to the Bolshevik Bogdanov than he does to the Menshevik Rabochii. After reaffirming that the Party was a 'purely intelligentsia' one in the beginning, he goes on to say:

At the present time, purposively revolutionary workers make up the main detachments of the Social-Democratic Party, a party that has pushed into the background the purely intelligentsia revolutionary factions, that expresses the interests and aspirations of the proletariat, and that strives for an unbreakable fusion with its actively revolutionary elements.⁹⁷

Lenin wrote a review of Rabochii's pamphlet and Akselrod's foreword. Of course, much of what Rabochii said about the overt hostility of the *praktiki* toward the workers was misinformed (Lenin announced). Misled by his Menshevik mentors, Rabochii would be surprised to read in Lenin's *Letter to a Comrade* the only clear call in Russian Social-Democratic literature for worker recruitment onto the committees. But his demand for results and his exposé of the gap between Menshevik words and deeds showed proletarian good sense. As for Akselrod, his foreword showed that even the Mensheviks were aghast at the results of their demagoguery.⁹⁸

⁹⁵ *Iskra za dva goda* 1906, p. 165.

⁹⁶ *Iskra za dva goda* 1906, pp. 162–5.

⁹⁷ Rabochii 1904, pp. 15–16. This passage is not in the other published versions of Akselrod's preface. In 1907, Trotsky also retreated from the 'intelligentsia party' label: 'That Russian Social Democracy is a proletarian party not only because of its programme but because of its social composition is as difficult to prove as any other obvious fact' (Trotskii 1907, p. 89).

⁹⁸ Lenin, *PSS*, 9, pp. 161–5. At the Third Congress, Lenin cited Rabochii as authority for the claim that 'in the era of "economism", workers were the bearers of revolutionary ideas, not the intellectuals' (*PSS*, 10: 162).

Lenin's review of *Rabochii* (published at the end of 1904) forms the immediate background to Lenin's intervention on this issue at the Bolshevik Third Congress a few months later. While praising himself for the advice he had given on worker recruitment, Lenin was constrained to admit in his review that the advice had not been taken. The record on worker recruitment, especially since the Second Congress, was poor. No guarantee on this issue was possible, given the lack of feasibility of 'democratism'. But perhaps something stronger than just unofficial, private advice that he had already given – say, an official congress resolution?

The story of the consequent debate at the Bolshevik Third Congress (April 1905) has been told many times, especially by those in the activist tradition, and provides substantial support to the textbook interpretation. According to this story, *WITBD* had done such a good job in urging the *praktiki* to mistrust workers that, when Lenin himself changed his mind, he could not convince his own followers! The most elaborate modern retelling is by Tony Cliff, who gives substantial excerpts from the debate and concludes that

most of the delegates to the Congress were committee-men who were opposed to any move which would tend to weaken their authority over the rank and file. Buttressing themselves with quotations from *What is to be Done?*, they called for 'extreme caution' in admitting workers into the committees and condemned 'playing at democracy'. . . . The unfortunate Lenin had to persuade his supporters to oppose the line proposed in *What is to be Done?*.⁹⁹

All this is totally false. No one at the Congress was opposed to the idea of having as many workers as possible on the committees. In fact, one motive for opposition to the proposed resolution was that it stated a self-evident goal without saying how to achieve it. *WITBD* was not even mentioned in the debate, and everyone was well aware of Lenin's long-standing position in favour of workers.¹⁰⁰ The Congress majority had various objections to the text of the resolution drafted mainly by Bogdanov and supported by Lenin.¹⁰¹

⁹⁹ Cliff 1975, p. 175.

¹⁰⁰ 'In his *Letter to a Petersburg Comrade*, Comrade Lenin has also spoken about the necessity of introducing workers to the committees in the great possible number' (M.G. Tkhakaia, *Tretii s"ezd* 1959, p. 258); 'Comrade Lenin has shown the solution completely correctly, affirming the ideas that he spoke about in his well-known *Letter to a Petersburg Comrade*' (D.S. Postolovskii, *Tretii s"ezd* 1959, p. 263).

¹⁰¹ Among the objections: the resolution paid too much attention to 'Menshevik

Thus, while the Bogdanov/Lenin resolution was defeated, another resolution passed by the Congress emphasised the extreme importance of having as many workers as possible on the local committees. All in all, the debate as it actually transpired at the Third Congress does fatal damage to the textbook interpretation.

The case of the congress majority opposed to the Bogdanov/Lenin resolution might be paraphrased as follows: we all agree that there should be as many workers as possible on the committees and we all agree that the number of such workers at present is very unsatisfactory. The cause of this situation, however, is not the attitude of the present committee members or anything that can be fixed by passing a resolution. There are a host of objective problems that need to be addressed. To pass a resolution making worker recruitment *obligatory* would be ridiculous. To pass a resolution that repeats platitudes about worker recruitment without pointing out concrete means of improvement would also be useless. To pass a resolution that points out all the objective problems would also be counter-productive, since we would go on record as saying 'nothing much can be done immediately'. Better not to have a resolution at all. Or, preferably, we should state our commitment to worker recruitment in a resolution that points out a practical solution, such as the resolution on 'propaganda' (in the technical sense of intensive preparation of a few outstanding individuals).¹⁰²

The congress debate was thus about empirical ways and means rather than a clash in values. As a supporter of the resolution said,

we have always stood and stand now for the preparation of advanced worker Social Democrats and for the participation of all purposive leaders of the worker movement in our committees and other organisations, and this has been shown empirically in the organisation of committees and in recruitment to them.¹⁰³

demagoguery', it mixed up a variety of issues that should be handled separately, it did not give directives on how to achieve the stated goals, and, in general, it was too 'watery' (Aleksei Rykov).

¹⁰² In the English translation of her memoirs, Krupskaya is made to imply that the *komitetchiki* wanted a resolution that directly excluded workers (Krupskaya 1960, p. 126). This is a mistranslation of the original passage, which refers to the reasoning I have just summarised (Krupskaia 1969, p. 290).

¹⁰³ *Tretii s"ezd* 1959, p. 257, comment of Tkhakaia, who nonetheless believed there was a serious problem to be addressed.

What the Bogdanov/Lenin resolution essentially demanded was affirmative action to increase worker representation, and the opposing sides adopted attitudes familiar from other debates over affirmative action. One side resented the pious wishes of people with little hands-on experience being forced down the throats of the people out in the trenches. They resented the insulting implication that they were prejudiced, they insisted on unpleasant realities such as a paucity of acceptable worker candidates at the present time, and they worried about lowering standards. In contrast, the other side was also impatient with pious wishes about increasing worker recruitment without a firm commitment to improve the situation *now*, by means of quotas if necessary. They strongly suspected that the reference to objective conditions was indeed the excuse of people prejudiced for some reason against workers on the committees. They argued that inappropriate standards had artificially lowered the number of workers on the committees.

The clash about standards was revealing. The supporters of the resolution insisted that different standards should be applied to worker candidates, with popularity and influence among the mass of workers as the basic criterion.¹⁰⁴ Opponents warned of the dangers of making popularity more important than a purposive commitment to Social Democracy and of having too low expectations for workers.

The very distinction made between workers and *intelligenty* is in my view an incorrect one. When a new person arrives in town, no one asks whether he is a worker or an *intelligent*. They ask: where did he work, how long, and what function did he carry out. This information is what guides them in taking him into the organisation. If he is a worker, all the better, all the more ties will he be have [with workers] and all the better will the work go.¹⁰⁵

The back-and-forth in the debate about the presence or absence of objective conditions is very instructive about life in the underground. Here, I will only list the various concerns. Have we gone too far away from 'propaganda' aimed at creating worker leaders and toward 'agitation' aimed at awakening the mass of workers? Are we so rigid about *konspiratsiia* that the necessary contact and consultation between the committee and 'the periphery' (lower-

¹⁰⁴ *Tretii s"ezd* 1959, p. 263 (D.S. Postolovskii), p. 335 (P.A. Krasikov).

¹⁰⁵ *Tretii s"ezd* 1959, p. 266 (V.N. Losev).

level party organisations) is eroded? Can we overcome the difficulties created by the necessary absence of electoral 'democratism'? Have we allowed the party split to make us too timid about recruiting newcomers? Are we rising to the challenge presented by the rapid expansion of worker activity in the present (spring 1905) revolutionary atmosphere?

The overall impression of the debate is a group of people who are all committed to the same goal – increasing worker representation on the committees – and who are arguing about the empirical causes of and remedies for the present unsatisfactory situation. And, as usual in an empirical debate of this kind, Lenin is energetically on the side with the more optimistic assumptions. At one point, he observes 'Here's a strange thing. There are all of three *littérateurs* at the Congress and the rest are committee members, yet the *littérateurs* are for getting workers on the committees while the committee members are for some reason getting all upset'. Reading this comment, the thought might occur that perhaps the committee members had a more realistic understanding of conditions on the ground that émigré *littérateurs* such as Lenin.¹⁰⁶ In any event, Lenin's emotional commitment cannot be gainsaid. Constantly interrupting, shouting 'Bravo!' or 'Shame!' as the case required, he made his feelings perfectly known. As he truly said, 'I cannot sit here calmly when people say that there are no workers capable of committee work'.¹⁰⁷

Our long survey of Lenin's various intra-party disputes ends with the Third Congress in spring 1905. Perhaps the best picture of the hopes and expectations reflected in *WITBD* about worker participation in Russian Social Democracy comes from an earlier document. This is a letter written to him in summer 1902, right after the publication of *WITBD*, by I.I. Radchenko, a life-long Bolshevik. He wrote to Lenin from Petersburg and was full of unrealistic optimism about *Iskra's* chances for easy success in Petersburg. This circumstance only strengthens the interest of this not-for-publication document as an indication of what Lenin and the people close to him counted on from the workers.

Radchenko had some trouble locating workers to interview, but he finally tracked down 'some purposive metal workers'. He informed Lenin that 'you

¹⁰⁶ *Tretii s'ezd* 1959, p. 333 (Lenin's comment is misleading, since he was supported by a number of *praktiki* and the final vote was quite close). On later difficulties with worker recruitment to leadership positions, see Rozental 1994.

¹⁰⁷ *Tretii s'ezd* 1959, p. 333.

cannot imagine how disgusted the workers here are with the intelligentsia'. Radchenko puts the blame for this situation entirely on the intelligentsia. Radchenko reports that the workers took kindly to him personally partly because they were surprised, given the summer season, that he was not at his *dacha*. In his long conversation with these workers, he heard many complaints about sloppy and ineffective organisation of, for example, demonstrations.

In this conversation I heard citations from *What Is to Be Done?* – if not word for word, then in its spirit. I sat there and was happy for Lenin: this shows, I thought, what he was able to do. It was clear to me that the people talking with me had read him and there was no need for me to summarise his argument. I had only to touch on some points of principle and set out in concrete detail the plan for all-Russian work that Lenin recommended. So I mentioned to them: 'Well, you've read *What Is to Be Done?*, haven't you?' 'What's that? We haven't read any such book'.

'Maybe one of your comrades?'

'No', they answered in one voice, 'we haven't run across it'. (*Those jerks on the [present Social-Democratic] committee, they gobbled up 75 copies but didn't give any to the workers.*)

I was struck: before me sat the Lenin type – people longing for the revolutionary trade. I was happy for Lenin, who sits a million miles away, barricaded by bayonets, cannon, borders, border guards and other attributes of the autocracy – and he sees how people work here on the shop floor, what they need and what they will become. Believe it, my friends, soon we will see our Bebels. Genuine lathe turners/revolutionaries. Before me sat people longing to get down to business – not like the local intelligentsia, who treat [revolutionary work] like a desert after dinner, no, these people want to get down to business in the way you take up a chisel, a hammer, a saw, take it with your two hands and don't let it go until you've finished what you've started, doing everything for the cause with the profound faith 'I will do this'. I say it one more time: this was the happiest moment of my life.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁸ *Perepiska* 1969–70, 2, pp. 28–9 (letter of 6 June 1902).

Party norms and the party split

As we have seen, *WITBD* played a rather marginal role in the polemics of 1904. The issues that were closest to the heart of the two factions – the violation of congress sovereignty for the Bolsheviks and the demand for truly Social-Democratic campaigns for the Mensheviks – had no place in *WITBD* and would have arisen had Lenin not written the book. The Menshevik attack on Lenin did not focus on *WITBD*.¹⁰⁹ Of the two most famous ‘prophecies’, one (Luxemburg) did not even mention *WITBD*, and the other (Trotsky) only in passing. Insofar as the Mensheviks document their picture of Lenin’s views, they relied on various of his off-hand remarks from 1903–4. On the issue of worker-intelligentsia relations, the consensus is much more fundamental than any clash, but insofar as there is a factional clash on the issue of worker-intelligentsia relations, the Bolshevik downplayed the positive role of the intellectuals and the Mensheviks emphasised it.

And, yet, the party discussion of 1904 can hardly be understood without *WITBD*. *WITBD* provides an invaluable guide, not to what separated the two factions, but what united them, namely, the norms of the Russian socialist underground and the vocabulary used to describe them (I say ‘socialist underground’ in order to include the Socialist Revolutionaries). The evidence on this point is all the more compelling because the Mensheviks had every motivation to disown these norms or at least shed the Lenin-associated vocabulary of ‘revolutionary by trade’ and ‘artisanal limitations’.

Let us start our documentation with *WITBD*’s most notorious terminological innovation: ‘revolutionary by trade’. The concept, if not the term itself, was endorsed by Akselrod in the *Iskra* articles of December 1904/January 1905 that quickly acquired the status of a Menshevik manifesto. There, he states that ‘a rather large corps has been formed of Social Democrat revolutionaries who have cut their ties with their legal positions and their regular jobs – a corps that under contemporary Russian conditions is so necessary for forming a political party’.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁹ See the discussion in the section ‘Lenin rediscovered’ in the Introduction.

¹¹⁰ *Iskra*, Nos. 55 and 57 (December 1903 and January 1904). Trotsky 1904 remarks on the necessity of revolutionaries by trade (pp. 32–3), but then uses the term to refer to the present-day *praktiki*, especially those of the majority, whom he despises.

An even stronger endorsement of both the concept and the vocabulary was penned by Plekhanov in an article for the German party paper *Vorwärts*. Perhaps Plekhanov felt less constraint in using Lenin's vocabulary because he was not writing for Russian readers. Plekhanov explains that only a mass movement can topple tsarism and that a mass movement requires revolutionaries by trade.

Our contemporary political system places an extremely high number of obstacles in the way of the influence of the purposive socialists on the mass of the people. Overcoming these obstacles requires the expenditure of a great deal of material means and moral effort. Life has created in our country a whole stratum of so-called *revolutionaries by trade*, that is, people who dedicate all their time and all their forces to revolutionary activity. These revolutionaries by trade serve as the central and hardly replaceable source of ferment in the masses. And if these people were to devote themselves to terror instead of agitation and propaganda in the worker masse, then the dissemination of revolutionary ideas in these masses would not of course stop, but it would undoubtedly become much *weaker and slower*.¹¹¹

The Menshevik writer Panin took for granted the role of the revolutionary by trade in local organisation. In an article mainly devoted to a critique of Lenin's organisational schemes, he writes that 'at the head of the worker movement of a town stands the committee of the Party, consisting as far as possible of revolutionaries by trade who give all their time and all their strength to the revolutionary cause'.¹¹² Thus Lenin was perfectly justified when he wrote in 1907 with some pride that the idea of the revolutionary by trade had been implemented by both Social-Democratic factions. If there was anything unique to Bolshevism, it was not the concept of the revolutionary by trade.¹¹³

¹¹¹ Plekhanov 1923-7, 13, pp. 143-4. Plekhanov reproduces *WITBD's* argument even more closely when he says that terrorists either do not understand the significance of the mass movement or have lost faith in it. This article is dated 11 August 1904, that is, exactly at the time when he was penning his anti-*WITBD* broadside for home consumption.

¹¹² Supplement to *Iskra*, No. 57 (15 January 1904), under the pseudonym *Praktik*. Panin emphasises that the local revolutionaries by trade should be personally acquainted with as many workers as possible and that as many worker-revolutionaries as possible should be on the committee.

¹¹³ Lenin *PSS*, 16, pp. 101-3 (1907 introduction to a collection of Lenin's earlier writings).

The obverse of the *revoliutsioner po professii* is *kustarnichestvo*, artisanal limitations. Lenin's coinage was taken up because it responded to a felt need, so much so that Mensheviks used it even to make their anti-Lenin points. Martov responded to the Bolshevik taunt that none of the *Iskra* editors had criticised Lenin's organisational plan until they fell out with him by saying, yes, we failed to give his detailed organisational proposals the proper critical analysis – but this was due to 'the "artisanal limitations" that reigned at that time and against which *Iskra* had fought'.¹¹⁴

Any new organisational proposal in 1904 had to show that it was not reinforcing artisanal limitations. Typical is Cherevanin's defence of his concept of committee autonomy.

But perhaps [this proposal will lead to] disorganisation, or, at the very least, to decentralisation and the artisanal limitations that flow from thence? Won't the 'autonomy' defended by the minority demolish first of all any kind of party discipline? Not in the least'.¹¹⁵

Centralism was another common value for the two factions. Martov affirmed that *WITBD*'s overall advocacy of centralism represented a collective *Iskra* position. Nevertheless, there was no reason to see 'all the detailed proposals of *WITBD* and especially of *Letter to a Comrade* [as] necessary consequences of "the old organisational views"'.¹¹⁶ The Menshevik attacked Lenin not for his centralism but for his bureaucratic centralism, barracks centralism, hyper-centralism, even ego-centrism (Trotsky's gibe). We will pass by the question of what content if any these phrases have and inquire into the good kind of centralism defended by the Mensheviks.

Akselrod continued to endorse the campaign of the old *Iskra* for a nationally centralised party based on rejecting 'economism, ideological wavering and organisational anarchy as elements incompatible with the historical tasks of our movement'.¹¹⁷ Trotsky went out of his way to show his centralist pedigree

¹¹⁴ Martov 1904a, pp. 3–4. The same anti-Lenin use of 'artisanal limitations' can also be found in Trotsky's writings; see Shutskever 1925, p. 489 (*Report of the Siberian Delegation*).

¹¹⁵ Cherevanin 1904, p. 29.

¹¹⁶ *Iskra*, No. 58 (25 January 1904). One wonders exactly what 'detailed proposals' in *WITBD* Martov had in mind, if any.

¹¹⁷ *Iskra*, Nos. 55 and 57, December 1903/January 1904.

by citing an unpublished work of his from 1901 – that is, as he himself took pains to point out, *before* the appearance of *WITBD*.

My report was written under the influence of fragmentary information about the spring massacre of 1901 [presumably the ‘Obukhov defense’]. The starting point of the report was as follows: ‘We appear (to use for a hundredth time this comparison) to be in the position of those inexperienced sorcerers who call to life an enormous force by stereotyped methods but who are revealed as bankrupts when it becomes necessary to control them’. The conclusion must be: an all-party organisation with a Central Committee to head it. A ad hoc congress called will not resolve the issue. The centre must be *created* before it is *proclaimed*. Such was the train of thought of this unpublished report.¹¹⁸

Rosa Luxemburg attacked Lenin for his ‘merciless centralism’, but her own centralism was fairly stern. In her anti-Lenin article, she advocates revising the rules of the German Party in the direction of tighter organisational discipline in order to ward off the opportunist danger. But what is possible in Germany is not possible in Russia. Luxemburg endorses a central thesis of the present commentary when she chides Lenin for thinking that ‘all the preliminary conditions for the creation of a large and highly centralised worker party already exist in Russia’ and for ‘optimistically’ assuming that the indiscipline of the intelligentsia is the source of all problems. Luxemburg tells Lenin that he needs to cast away ‘ready-made clichés’ from Western Europe and, instead, base his organisational prescriptions on conditions in Russia.¹¹⁹

The flip side of centralism was party discipline and the Mensheviks realised they could not afford to be perceived as anti-discipline. As the Menshevik writer Cherevanin announced:

Party discipline is necessary in general and needed at the present moment in particular, in view of the struggle against such a disciplined enemy as the autocracy. . . . Each member of the Party must be imbued with the conviction that in certain cases he can and must act against his convictions on this or that particular case’.¹²⁰

¹¹⁸ Shutskever 1925, pp. 492, 489. Note Trotsky’s assertion that ‘we’ called an enormous force to life.

¹¹⁹ The word ‘optimistically’ is dropped from the translation used by Bertram Wolfe and others (Luxemburg 1961).

¹²⁰ Cherevanin 1904, pp. 29–30.

Martov argued for greater autonomy for local committees, but he was careful to specify that any dependence on the local purposive workers would be 'factual' and 'political', that is, *not* based 'of course, on "playing at democratism", playing at elections'. And (somehow) this local autonomy 'must not weaken the dependence of committee policies on the will of the *entire* Party as a whole'.¹²¹ Thus Martov must be added to the comments cited in the previous section about the unacceptability of 'democratism' under conditions of absolutist repression. [also Trotsky]

Tied to the rejection of democratism was the endorsement of the norm of *konspiratsiia*. *Konspiratsiia* was a central value long before *WITBD* and Lenin's only contribution was to insist on a more professional commitment to learning the appropriate skills. If Lenin did put forth a specific organisational proposal on this subject, it was the idea of a small, centralised organisation of revolutionaries by trade with high *konspiratsiia* standards linked informally to mass organisations with a lesser degree of *konspiratsiia*. In this light, Kautsky's intervention into the debate on the Menshevik side takes on a certain interest. Kautsky endorsed the Menshevik stand on the definition of a party member – but only because of the repressive underground conditions faced by the Party in absolutist Russia. In the case of open societies such as England, Switzerland and France, announced Kautsky, Lenin's formulation would be the better one.

In justifying his opinion, Kautsky unwittingly and ironically paints a picture of the underground much like the one in *WITBD*. Kautsky remembered the period of the Bismarck anti-socialist laws when the German Party became something of a *Geheimbund* or secret society. 'We tried to include in our organisations only people actually needed – someone to work on publication, shipment and distribution of literature, someone whose job was acquiring and spending financial resources, or setting up demonstrations, etc.'. Such organisations could not go beyond certain minimal boundaries if they wanted to remain workable and secure from *provaly*. Attached to these narrow party organisations were wider peripheral organisations such as trade unions and singing societies.¹²²

¹²¹ Martov 1904a, p. 13.

¹²² *Iskra*, No. 66 (15 May 1904). *Provaly* is the Russian word used in the *Iskra* version of Kautsky's letter.

The dispute over whether members of these wider organisations should or should not be called ‘party members’ is a superficial one compared to the overlap between Kautsky and Lenin on actual underground institutions. Kautsky obviously was not familiar with *WITBD*, but had he been, he probably would have been *more* sympathetic to Lenin. No wonder that Bolshevik polemicists such as Bogdanov claimed that Kautsky really supported Bolshevik organisational principles.¹²³

To all of this favourable use of Lenin-associated vocabulary we must add Plekhanov’s defence both of the phrase and of the tactic ‘go to all classes’ – a defence mounted against Lenin himself. When Lenin attacked the Menshevik *zemstvo* campaign plan in late 1904, Plekhanov supported the plan by saying it was an implementation of Lenin’s *WITBD* slogan. This argument undoubtedly irritated Plekhanov’s fellow *Iskra* editors even more than it did Lenin.¹²⁴

There was *one* party norm for which Lenin made a strong case in *WITBD* that the Mensheviks openly rejected by the Mensheviks. This norm was division of labour and specialisation of functions. Without denying that some such arrangement was expedient, the Mensheviks were concerned lest people confined to a narrow speciality turn into soulless cogs in the machine. Cherevanin warned against assigning just one function to one individual. This was too restrictive – each individual should have two or three functions.¹²⁵ Trotsky also chided the Bolsheviks for leaving the local *praktiki* without wide political horizons.¹²⁶ This dislike of over-specialisation was a common theme in other Menshevik polemics.

The ubiquity of *WITBD*’s technical vocabulary is only a partial tribute to *WITBD*. Menshevik leaders adapted these norms because they made sense, which is unsurprising since they had evolved in practice before Lenin wrote them down.

Instead of providing support for the textbook interpretation, the factional polemics of 1904 undermine it. *WITBD* itself had a relatively low profile, especially in comparison with *Letter to a Comrade* and *One Step Forward, Two*

¹²³ Shutskever 1925, pp. 160–1.

¹²⁴ Plekhanov 1905 (reprinted in Plekhanov 1923–7, 13, pp. 169–87). Compare to Potresov 2002, pp. 67–120, articles written at the same time but attacking *WITBD* for its ‘go to all classes’ programme.

¹²⁵ Cherevanin 1904, p. 51, see p. 16.

¹²⁶ See Trotskii 1904, pp. 59–64 on division of labour. Trotsky seems to think that

Steps Back, both published in 1904. Even more revealing is the ragbag of offhand comments by Lenin and careless expressions by unsophisticated *praktiki* that the Mensheviks of 1904 felt compelled to use in documenting their anti-Lenin case. But at least the Mensheviks made an effort to provide documentation, which is more than can be said for Rosa Luxemburg's fantasies.

On close inspection, the famous prophecies of 1904 look somewhat tarnished. Luxemburg's prophecy seems to be that Lenin's hyper-centralism will cause the Party to be so conservatively suspicious of popular unrest that it will miss the revolution – a prediction hardly borne out by the events of 1917. Trotsky's prediction at first sight looks better: the party organisation will substitute itself for the Party, and so on. There are only two problems. The first is that the dynamics of substitution are hard at work in the most democratic of organisations, as shown by Robert Michels's study of 'the iron law of oligarchy' in the SPD. The existence of a similar process within Bolshevism proves nothing about the consequences of Lenin's particular vision.

The other problem is that Trotsky himself meant something quite different by his accusation. For him, 'substitutionism' is defined by the contrast with what I call Menshevik campaignism, since the heart of the positive Menshevik programme in 1904 was the call for a certain type of centrally-directed mobilisation campaign. *Our Political Tasks* can be considered a prophetic critique only if we believe that future Leninist parties did not undertake massive propaganda and mobilisation campaigns aimed at instigating the workers against the bourgeoisie. Thus, Trotsky's prophecy is either true but misleading, or false but based on Trotsky's actual argument.

Another Menshevik prophecy of 1904 specifically about Lenin has, unfortunately, been forgotten. In his programmatic articles in December 1903/January 1904, Akselrod predicted that Lenin would turn out to be another Struve in a somewhat different guise, that is, an orthodox Marxist who ended up doing more for the liberal cause of political freedom than for socialism. 'To complete its malicious irony, history will perhaps place at the head of this bourgeois revolutionary organisation, not just a Social Democrat, but the very one who by origin is the most "orthodox"'.¹²⁷ This prediction

Lenin defends division of labour as a specifically Social-Democratic principle, although *WITBD* clearly argues the opposite.

¹²⁷ Akselrod in *Iskra*, No. 57 (15 January 1904). Akselrod explicitly drew the parallel with Struve. Trotsky also predicts that people like Lenin would be reformists under conditions of political freedom (Trotskii 1904, pp. 77–8).

grew out of the Menshevik critique of Bolshevism in 1904 and tells us a lot about it. After the 1917 revolution, Martov still defended Akselrod's words as a brilliant prophecy.¹²⁸

On the other hand, the polemics of 1904 do provide support for the interpretation advanced in this commentary. I have depicted Lenin as a fervent Erfurtian who made optimistic (from the point of view of critics, over-optimistic) assumptions about the applicability of the SPD model to the underground conditions of tsarist Russia. Exactly this case is made against Lenin by Akselrod, Luxemburg, Kautsky, Potresov and even the Bolshevik *praktiki* who resented Lenin's over-sanguine demands for immediate worker recruitment. One way or another, they all accused Lenin of an over-optimistic unrealism about Russian conditions.

I argue that *WITBD* presents an Erfurtian drama which portrays a *stikhiinyi* upsurge that accelerates the spread of awareness and pushes forward both worker followers and worker leaders, while intelligentsia revolutionaries lag behind. This picture is confirmed by polemics in 1904 over the label 'intelligentsia party' and over worker recruitment. The Bolsheviks insisted that Russian Social Democracy had been and was now a genuine worker party in which the workers, along with the local *praktiki* in close contact with them, called the tune.

In *WITBD*, Lenin did not so much set forth an organisational plan as insist on the general norms needed for effective operation in the underground. Lenin did not invent these norms. Instead, he gave a name and a rationale to what had emerged from the experience of the *praktiki*. This accounts for the continued deployment of *WITBD* vocabulary in the polemics of people who were violently opposed to Lenin personally. It also helps to account for the Menshevik retreat on issues such as congress sovereignty, membership definition, and 'intelligentsia party'.

Lenin emerges from this commentary as a man whose urgent priority at this stage in his career was to bring political freedom to Russia. This picture is supported by the Menshevik complaint that the Bolsheviks were too obsessed with the anti-tsarist democratic revolution and paid too little attention to socialism and the class struggle with exploiters. As the Menshevik Fyodor

¹²⁸ Martov 2000, p. 81.

Dan wrote in his party history many years later, 'Bolshevism took shape as the bearer of predominantly *general-democratic* and *political* tendencies of the movement, and Menshevism as the bearer predominantly of its class and *socialist* tendencies'.¹²⁹

These words, first published in 1945, found no place in the emerging postwar scholarly consensus about Lenin, *WITBD*, and Russian Social Democracy. In fact, the issues closest to the heart of the two factions in 1904 have been forgotten. The aim of this chapter has been to show why the Bolsheviks were so upset with the organisational opportunism of the Mensheviks and why the Mensheviks were so upset with the tactical opportunism of the Bolsheviks.

¹²⁹ Dan 1964, p. 259.