LENINISM

OR

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BY ROSA LUXEMBURG.

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ANTI-PARLIAMENTARY COMMUNIST
:: FEDERATION, GLASGOW. ::

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The first English translation of the following pamphlet appeared in the "Council Correspondence," theoretical organ of the United Workers' Party of America. A few isolated pages of the pamphlet have been published but the whole criticism is here presented for the first time in this country

FOREWORD.

The collapse of the Third International and the disintegration of the Bolshevik Party throughout the world renders timely and imperative a presentation of the theoretical struggle, waged between Rosa Luxemburg and Lenin, on the role and formation of the party.

In the following pages British socialists are shown the first English translation of Rosa Luxemburg's criticism of the opportunistic principles of Lenin, and although the criticism may be added to, and is necessarily tinctured with the outlook of Social Democracy, it nevertheless counters the bourgeois prejudices of Lenin with a solid Marxian understanding and analysis.

Thirty years ago the dispute began: to-day, the end is in sight. History has decided in favour of Rosa Luxemburg and now gives greater value to her contributions than when they were first written. But the legend of Leninism dies hard. Supported by the glamorous achievement of the Russian Revolution and the subsequent enthusiasm of the militant Proletariat, it remains a strong tradition in the working class movement, delaying the development of revolutionary working class understanding. To destroy this tradition, along with the traditions of the Second International, is the immediate and urgent task of the Communist movement.

The contradictory and counter-revolutionary theories and activities of the Leninist party are not the result of strayings from the real teachings of Lenin, as Trotsky and other apologists unconsciously, but clearly, prove.

Lenin consistently denied that the working class could be the active and conscious agents of revolutionary change and his works teem with arguments that a revolutionary policy could only be thought out and imposed upon the working class by the "intellectuals," who must have unrestricted control of the party machine, and the unquestioning loyalty of the party member, whose sole duty is to carry out the orders of his self-elected superiors. In his much-quoted pamphlet,

"What Is To Be Done," Lenin scornfully rejects the realisation of class-consciousness in the class struggle and forcibly expresses his contempt for the understanding of the working class:—

"The history of all countries bears witness that the working class, of itself, is only capable of developing a trade unionist consciousness . . . that is, the conviction of the necessity of joining together in unions, of conducting a struggle against the employer, of demanding from the government this or that legislative measure in the interests of the workers, etc. **The Socialist doctrine, however, has proceeded from the philosophical, historical, and economic theories which originated with educated representatives of the owning classes the intellectuals.**"

The investing of a party leadership with absolute powers over the movement, which follows from the bourgeois conspiratorial concept of Lenin, is ably dealt with from the standpoint of proletarian democracy, by Rosa Luxemburg.

With the advent of the Russian Revolution her criticisms, although fortified by the developments of the revolution, were temporarily overshadowed by the popular elation at the success of the Bolsheviks. Her work was never completed. The smashing of the German revolutionary movement and the assassination of Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Leibknecht by the capitalist gunmen of social democracy in 1919 decreed that the work of collecting and reconstructing theoretical criticism and revolutionary organisation should be reviewed by a generation with experience of the defeats and disasters attendant on the false theories of the Communist International—the product of Leninist ideology.

MAY, 1935.

LENINISM OR MARXISM

PART I.

Organizational Questions of the Proletarian Revolution.

In the Social Democracy, organization too is a different thing from that of the earlier, utopian attempts at Socialism; being not an artificial product of propaganda but an historical product of the class struggle, a product into which the Social Democracy brings nothing more than the political consciousness. Under normal conditions, that is, where the class rule of the bourgeoisie precedes the social-democratic movement, the first political welding together of the workers has in large measure been the work of the bourgeoisie itself. "On this plane," says the Communist Manifesto, "the drawing together of workers in mass is not yet the consequence of their own union, but the consequence of the union of the bourgeoisie." In Russia there has fallen to the Social Democracy the task of consciously stepping in and taking over a part of the historical process and of leading the proletariat, as a fighting class which is conscious of its goal, from political authoritarianism, which forms the foundation of the absolutist regime, direct to the highest form of organization. Thus the organizational question is especially difficult to the Social Democracy of Russia not merely because its work must be done without any previous experience of bourgeois democracy, but especially because it has to create, in a sense, like the good Lord himself, "out of nothing," without the political raw material which is elsewhere ready prepared by bourgeois society.

The problem on which the Russian Social Democracy has been working the last few years is precisely the transition from the dispersed, quite independent circles and local organizations, which corresponded to the preparatory and primarily propagandistic phase of the movement, to a form of organization such as is required for a unified political action of the masses throughout the nation.

Since, however, the most prominent trait of the old form of organization, now grown unbearable and politically surpassed, was dispersion and complete autonomy, or the self-sufficiency of the local organizations, it was quite natural that the watchword of the new phase, of the preparatory work for the great organization, should become—**centralism.** The emphasis on this thought was the leitmotif of **Iskra** in its brilliant three-year campaign for preparing the last and really constituent party congress, and the same thought dominated the entire young guard of the party. However, it was soon to appear at the Congress, and still more so after the Congress, that centralism is a slogan which is far from exhausting the historical content, the peculiarity of the social-democratic type of organization; it has been shown once more that the Marxist conception of Socialism is not susceptible of being fixed in formulas.

The present book of Comrade Lenin, one of the prominent leaders and debaters of **Iskra** in its campaign preliminary to the Russian Party Congress (*), is the systematic exposition of the views of the ultra-centralist wing of the party. The conception which has here found expression in penetrating and exhaustive form is that of a thorough-going centralism of which the vital principle is, on the one hand, the sharp separation of the organized bodies of outspoken and active revolutionists from the unorganized though revolutionary active masses surrounding them, and on the other hand, strict discipline and direct, decisive and determining intervention of the

(*) N. Lenin: "One Step Forward, Two Steps Backward." Geneva, 1904.

central authorities in all expressions of life in the party's local organizations. It suffices to note, for example, that the central committee, according to this conception, is authorized to organize all sub-committees of the party, hence also has power to determine the personal composition of every single local organization, from Geneva and Liege to Tomsk and Irkutsk, to give it a set of self-made local statutes, to completely dissolve it by a decree and create it anew, and finally in this manner to influence the composition of the highest party authority, the Party Congress. According to this, the central committee appears as the real active nucleus of the party, and all other organizations merely as its executive organs.

In the union of such a strict centralism in organization with the social-democratic mass movement, Lenin perceives a specific Marxist-revolutionary principle, and has succeeded in bringing into the field a large number of facts to support his conception. Still, let us look into the matter a bit more closely.

There can be no doubt that a strong capitalistic streak is native to the Social Democracy. Having sprung from the economic soil of capitalism, which is centralistic in its tendencies, and confined in its struggle to the political framework of a centralized great power under the dominance of the bourgeoisie, the Social Democracy is fundamentally opposed to any particularism or national federalism. Called upon to represent, in opposition to all partial and group interests of the proletariat, and within the framework of a given State, the total interests of the proletariat as a class, it reveals everywhere the natural striving to weld together all national, religious and professional groups of the working class into one unified party.

In this respect, there has been and is, for the Social Democracy also of Russia, no question but that it must form, not a federative conglomerate made up of a great number of special organizations on a national and provincial scale, but a unified, compact labour party of the Russian Empire. There is, however, a quite different question also to be considered: namely, the greater or

less degree of centralization and the detailed structure within a united and unified party.

From the standpoint of the formal tasks of the Social Democracy as a fighting party, centralism in its organization appears *a priori* as an indispensible condition upon the fulfillment of which the fighting qualities of the party stand in direct relation. More important here, however, than the consideration of the formal demands of any fighting organization are the specific historical conditions of the proletarian struggle.

The social-democratic movement is the first one in the history of class societies which in all its factors, throughout its course, is calculated upon the organization and the initiative of the masses. In this respect, the Social Democracy creates a quite different type of organization than did the earlier socialist movements; for example, those of the Jacobin and Blanquist type.

Lenin appears to underrate this fact when he states in his book that the revolutionary Social Democrat is, after all, simply "the Jacobin inseparably linked with the organization of the class-conscious proletariat." In the organization and class consciousness of the proletariat, Lenin perceives the only factors which differentiate the Social Democracy from Blanquism. He forgets that this difference involves also a complete transvaluation of organizational concepts, a quite new content of the many-sided relation between organization and struggle.

Up to this point we have regarded the question of centralism from the standpoint of the general bases of the Social Democracy and also in part from that of the present-day relations in Russia. But the night-watchman spirit of the ultra-centralism championed by Lenin and his friends is by no means, as concerns him personally, an accidental product of errors but is bound up with a thorough-going opposition to—opportunism.

"The question is," says Lenin, "by means of the rules of organization, to forge a more or less sharp weapon against opportunism. The deeper the sources of opportunism lie, the sharper must be this weapon."

Lenin perceives also in the absolute power of the central committee and in the strict hedging off of the party by statute the one effective dike against the opportunistic current, the specific earmarks of which he denotes as the inborn academic predilection for autonomism, for disorganization, and the wincing at strict party discipline and at any "bureaucratism" in the party life. Only the socialist "Literat," thanks to his innate instability and individualism, can, in Lenin's opinion, oppose such unlimited powers of the central committee; a genuine proletarian, on the other hand, must, even as a result of his revolutionary class instinct, experience a sort of rapture at all the stiffness, strictness and smartness of his highest party officials, and subjects himself to all the rude operation of party discipline with joyously closed eyes. "Bureaucratism as against democratism," says Lenin, "that is precisely the organizational principle of the Social Democracy as opposed to the organizational principle of the opportunists." He appeals insistently to the fact that the same opposition between the centralistic and the autonomistic conception in the Social Democracy is becoming noticeable in all countries where the revolutionary and the reformist or revisionist tendency stand facing each other.

First of all, it must be noted that the strong emphasis laid on the inborn capacities of the proletarians for social-democratic organization and the contempt heaped upon the "academic" elements of the social-democratic movement, is not in itself to be appraised as anything "Marxist-revolutionary." All that sort of thing can equally well be regarded as bearing a relationship to opportunistic views.

There can, to be sure, be noted in what has hitherto been the practice of the Social Democracy of western Europe an undeniable connection between opportunism and the academic element, and also between opportunism and decentralist tendencies in questions of organization. But when these phenomena, which arose upon a concrete historical soil, are released from this connection, and converted into abstract patterns with general and

absolute validity,—such a procedure is the greatest sin against the "Holy Ghost" of Marxism, namely, against his historic-dialectical method of thought.

Taken in the abstract, only so much may be definitely stated: that the "intellectual," as an element stemming from the bourgeoisie and hence by nature foreign to the proletariat, can arrive at socialism not in accordance with his own class feeling but only through overcoming that feeling and by way of the socialist ideology, and is accordingly more predisposed to opportunistic strayings than is the enlightened proletarian, who, insofar as he has not lost the connection with his social origin, the proletarian mass, is provided with a sure revolutionary handhold in virtue of his immediate class instinct. As to the concrete form, however, in which this academic tendency to opportunism appears, particularly in matters of organization—that depends in each case on the concrete social milieu in question.

The phenomena in the life of the German as well as of the French and Italian Social Democracy to which Lenin appeals were the outgrowth of a quite determinate social basis, namely, bourgeois parliamentarianism. Just as this latter is in general the specific soil of the present opportunistic current in the socialist movement of western Europe, so also have sprung from it the special tendencies of opportunism toward disorganization.

Parliamentarianism supports not only all the illusions of present-day opportunism, as we have come to know them in France, Italy and Germany, but also the over-estimation of reform work, of the co-operation of classes and parties, of peaceful development, etc. It forms at the same time the soil on which these illusions can be confirmed in practice, in that the intellectuals, who as parliamentarians even in the Social Democracy are still separated from the proletarian mass, are thus in a sense elevated over that mass. Finally, with the growth of the labour movement, the same parliamentarianism makes of this movement a springboard for political upstarts, and accordingly easily converts it into a refuge for ambitious and bankrupt bourgeois existences.

From all these factors results also the definite inclination of the opportunistic intellectual of Western European Social Democracy to disorganization and lack of discipline. The second definite presupposition of the present-day opportunistic current is, of course, the presence of an already high stage of development of the social-democratic movement, hence also of an influential social-democratic party organization. The latter then appears as that bulwark of the revolutionary movement against bourgeois-parliamentarian tendencies—a bulwark which has to be worn down and pulled apart so as to dissolve the compact and active kernel of the proletariat back into the amorphous mass of electors. In this way arise the historically well-grounded and determinate political aims of admirably adapted "automatic" and decentralistic tendencies of modern opportunism; tendencies which, accordingly, are not to be traced back to the inborn slovenliness and looseness of the "intellectual," as Lenin assumes, but to the needs of the bourgeois parliamentarian—not to the psychology of the academic element, but to the politics of the opportunist.

But all these relations have a considerably different aspect in absolutist Russia, where the opportunism in the labour movement is by no means a product of the vigorous growth of the Social Democracy, of the decomposition of bourgeois society, but inversely a product of its political backwardness.

The Russian intelligentsia, from which the socialist intellectual is recruited, has naturally a much more indeterminate class character, is much more declassed in the exact sense of the word, than the intelligentsia of Western Europe. From this there results—in combination, to be sure, with the youthfulness of the proletarian movement in Russia—in general a much wider field for theoretical instability and opportunistic meanderings, which at one time take the form of a complete negation of the political side of the labour movement, and at another time turn toward the opposite belief in the exclusive blessedness of terrorism, and finally rest up in the "philosophic" swamps of liberalism or of Kantian idealism.

But for the specific active tendency to disorganization, the social-democratic intellectual of Russia lacks, in our opinion, not only the positive hold in bourgeois parliamentarism but also the corresponding social-psychical milieu. The modern writer of western Europe who devotes himself to the cult of his alleged "ego" and drags this "master morality" even into the socialist world of struggle and thought, is not the type of bourgeois existence; he is in fact the product of a decadent, corrupted bourgeoisie already hidebound in the worst circle of its class rule. The utopian and opportunistic vagaries of the socialist intellectual of Russia incline inversely, as is readily understandable, rather to assume the inverted theoretical form of self-mortification, of self-flagellation. In fact, that erstwhile "going to the people," that is, among the populists the obligatory masquerade of the intellectual as a peasant, was nothing other than a despairing invention of the same intellectual, just as is nowadays the clumsy cult of the "horny hand" on the part on the pure "Economists."

The same reflection also makes clear that centralism in the social-democratic sense is not at all an absolute concept which can be carried out equally well at any stage of the labour movement, but that it must rather be regarded as a tendency, the actualization of which proceeds in step with the enlightenment and political schooling of the working class in the course of its struggle.

The insufficiency of the most important presuppositions for the full realization of centralism in the Russian movement at the present time may, to be sure, have a very baneful effect. Nevertheless it is false, in our opinion, to think that the still impracticable majority rule of the enlightened workers within their party organization may be replaced "temporarily" by a "transferred" sole-mastery on the part of the central authority of the party and that the lacking public control on the part of the working masses over the acts and omissions of the party organs would be just as well replaced by the inverted control of a central committee over the activity of the revolutionary workers.

The history of the Russian movement itself furnishes many proofs for the dubious value of centralism in this latter sense. The central committee with its almost unlimited authority of interference and control according to Lenin's idea would evidently be an absurdity if it should limit its power to the purely technical side of social-democratic activity, to the outer means and accessories of agitation—say, to the supplying of party literature and suitable distribution of agitational and financial forces. It would have a comprehensible political purpose only in case it were to employ its power in the creation of a unified fighting tactic for Russia and in the release of a great political action. What do we see, however, in the phases through which the Russian movement has already passed? Its most important and most fruitful tactical turns of the last decade were not by any means "invented" by determinate leaders of the movement, and much less by leading organizations, but were in each case the spontaneous product of the unbound movement itself. So was the first stage of the genuine proletarian movement in Russia, which set in with the elemental outbreak of the great St. Petersburg strike in the year 1896 and which for the first time had inaugurated the economic mass action of the Russian proletariat. Likewise, the second phase—that of the political street demonstrations—was opened quite spontaneously as a result of the student unrests in St. Petersburg in March, 1901. The further significant turning point, by which new horizons were opened to tactics, was the mass strike which broke out "all of itself" in Rostov on the Don, with its *ad hoc* improvised street agitation, the popular meetings under the open sky, the public addresses—things of which the boldest blusterer among the Social Democrats would not have ventured to think a few years earlier. Of all these cases, we may say that in the beginning was "the deed." The initiative and conscious leadership of the social-democratic organizations played an exceedingly small role. This was not, however, so much the fault of defective preparation of these special organizations for their role—even though this factor may have been a considerable

contributing cause—and certainly not of the lack at that time, in the Russian Social Democracy, of an all-powerful central committee in accordance with Lenin's plan. Inversely, such a committee would in all probability only have worked to the purpose of making the indecision of the various party committees still greater, and brought about a division between the storming masses and the procrastinating Social Democracy.

The same phenomenon—the small part played by the conscious initiative of the party leadership in the shaping of tactics—is still more observable in Germany and elsewhere. The fighting tactics of the Social Democracy, at least as regards its main features, is absolutely not "invented," but is the result of a progressive series of great creative acts in the course of the experimenting and often elemental class struggle. Here also the unconscious precedes the conscious, the logic of the objective historical process goes before the subjective logic of its spokesmen. So that the role of the social-democratic leadership becomes one of an essentially conservative character, in that it leads to working out empirically to its ultimate conclusions the new experience acquired in the struggle and soon to converting it into a bulwark against a further innovation in the grand style. The present tactic of the German Social Democracy, for example, is generally admired for its remarkable manifoldness, flexibility and at the same time certainty. Such qualities simply mean, however, that our party has adapted itself wonderfully in its daily struggle to the present parliamentary basis, down to the least detail, that it knows how to exploit the whole field of battle offered by parliamentarism and to master it in accordance with given principles. At the same time, however, this specific formulation of tactics already serves so much to conceal the further horizons that one notes a strong inclination to eternalize that tactic and to regard the parliamentary tactic as the social-democratic tactic for all time. As illustrative of this mood, we may mention the vain efforts which Parvus has been making for years now to bring about a debate in the party press regarding an eventual reformulation of tactics in case of the abrogation of

universal suffrage, in spite of the fact that such an eventuality is viewed by the party leaders in full and bitter seriousness. This inertia is, however, largely explained by the difficulty of giving contour and palpable forms to a still inexistent, hence imaginary, political struggle, whatever its weight in the empty air of abstract speculation. To the Social Democracy also, the important thing each time is not the premonition and formulation of a ready-made recipe for the future tactic, but the preservation within the party of the correct historical appraisal for the then prevailing forms of struggle, a lively feeling for the relativity of the given phase and for the necessary intensification of the revolutionary factors from the standpoint of the final goal of the proletarian movement.

But to desire, as Lenin does, to deck out a party leadership with such absolute powers of a negative character would be only to multiply artificially and in a most dangerous measure the conservatism which is a necessary outgrowth of every such leadership. Just as the social-democratic tactic was formed, not by a central committee but by the whole party or, more correctly stated, by the whole movement, so the separate organizations of the party plainly require such elbow-room as alone enables complete utilization of all means offered by the situation of the moment, as well as the unfolding of revolutionary initiative. The ultra-centralism advocated by Lenin, however, appears to us as something which, in its whole essence, is not informed with the positive and creative spirit, but with the sterile spirit of the night-watchman. His thought is patterned mainly upon the CONTROL of party activity and not upon its promotion, upon narrowing and not upon unfolding, upon the hemming and not upon the drawing together of the movement.

Such an experiment seems doubly dangerous to the Russian Social Democracy at the present time. The party stands on the eve of great revolutionary struggles for the overthrow of absolutism, before or rather engaged in a period of most intense creative activity in the field of tactics and—a thing which is self-evident in revolutionary

epochs—of feverish extensions and shiftings of its sphere of influence. In such times, to insist on fettering the initiative of the party spirit and raising a barbed-wire fence around its capacity for leap-like expansion, would be to make the Social Democracy largely unfit in advance for the great tasks of the moment.

These general considerations on the peculiar content of social-democratic centralism do not, of course, permit of deducing the concrete provisions of the rules of organization for the Russian party. Those depend naturally, in the last instance, upon the concrete circumstances in which the activity unfolds in the given period, and—since we are concerned in Russia with what is, after all, the first attempt at a great proletarian party organization—can scarcely pretend to infallibility in advance, but must rather in each case first stand the test of practical life. What can be inferred, however, from the general conception of the social-democratic type of organization is the main outlines, the **spirit of the organization**; and this spirit prescribes, especially in the beginnings of the mass movement, co-ordination and drawing together instead of regimentation and exclusiveness. If this spirit of political liberty, combined with a sharp eye to stability of principles and to the unity of the movement, has secured a foothold in the ranks of the party, in such a case the defects of any rules of organization, even of those which are awkwardly worded, will soon undergo effective revision through practice itself. It is not the wording of the regulations but the spirit and meaning incorporated into that wording by the active fighters which decides concerning the value of a form of organization.

Blanquism was not calculated upon the direct class action of the working masses, and accordingly did not need a mass organization. On the contrary, since the great mass of the people was not to appear on the scene of action until the time for the revolution, while the preliminary action for the preparation of a revolutionary insurrection was performed by a small minority, a sharp separation of the persons entrusted with this action from the mass of the people was an indispensable condition to

the successful carrying out of their task. Such a separation was possible and practicable, since no inner connection existed between the daily life of the masses and the Blanquist conspiratorial activity, and likewise the tactic and the more immediate objects of activity—since these had no connection with the soil of the elemental class struggle, but were improvised out of the whole cloth—were worked out in full detail in advance, fixed and prescribed as a definite plan. For that reason the active members of the organizations were naturally transformed into pure executive organs of a previously determined will existing outside their own field of activity, into tools of a central committee. Thus we have also the second characteristic of conspiratorial centralism: the absolute, blind subordination of the different organs of the party to their central authority, and the extension of the decisive powers of this latter onto the outermost periphery of the party organization.

Fundamentally different are the conditions of social-democratic action. This action grows historically out of the elemental class struggle. In so doing, it works and moves in the dialectical contradiction that here the proletarian army is first recruited in the struggle itself, where it also first becomes clear regarding the tasks of the struggle. Organization, enlightenment and struggle are here not separate, mechanic and also temporarily disjointed factors, as in the case of a Blanquist movement, but are only different sides of the same process. On the one hand—apart from general principles of the struggle—there is no detailed, ready-made fighting tactic established in advance and in which the party membership could be drilled by a central committee. On the other hand, the process of struggle which shapes the organization leads to a constant fluctuation of the party's sphere of influence.

It follows that social-democratic centralization cannot be based on blind obedience, on mechanical subordination of the party fighters to their central authority; and, furthermore, that no absolute partition can be erected between the nucleus of the class conscious

proletariat already organized into fixed party cadres and the surrounding element engaged in the class struggle but still in process of class enlightenment. The setting up of the central organization on these two principles on the blind subordination of all party organizations, with their activity, down to the least detail, under a central authority which alone thinks, acts and decides for all, and on a sharp separation of the organized nucleus of the party from the surrounding revolutionary milieu, as championed by Lenin—appears to us for that reason as a mechanical carrying over of the organizational principles of the Blanquist movement of conspiratorial circles onto the social-democratic movement of the working masses. And Lenin himself has perhaps characterized his standpoint more keenly than any of his opponents could do, in that he defines his "revolutionary Social Democrat" as the "**Jacobin linked with the organization of the class-conscious workers.**" As a matter of fact, however, the Social Democracy is **not linked or connected** with the organization of the working class, but is the movement of the working class itself. Social-democratic centralism must therefore be of essentially different construction from the Blanquist. It can be nothing other than the imperious co-ordination of the will of the enlightened and fighting vanguard of the workers as contrasted with its different groups and individuals; this is, so to speak, a "self-centralism" of the leading element of the proletariat, the majority rule of that element within its own party organization.

Just from looking into this true content of social-democratic centralism, it becomes clear that the necessary condition for such a thing are not yet fully realized in Russia. These conditions are, in the main, the presence of a considerable element of proletarians already schooled in the political struggle and the possibility of giving expression to its maturity through the direct exercise of influence (at public party congresses, in the party press, etc.).

It is clear that this latter condition can only be created with the advent of political freedom in Russia.

The former condition, however—the forming of a class-conscious, competent vanguard of the proletariat—is only in course of achievement and must be regarded as the primary purpose of the next agitational and also organizational work.

All the more surprising is the effect produced by the opposite assurance of Lenin, according to which all the preconditions for the carrying out of a great and highly centralized labour party are already present in Russia. And he betrays once more a much too mechanical conception of social-democratic organization in optimistically proclaiming that even now it is "not the proletariat but a great number of intellectuals in the Russian Social Democracy who lack self-training in the spirit of organization and discipline." The "discipline" which Lenin has in mind is impressed upon the proletariat not by any means merely by way of the factory, but also through the whole mechanism of the centralized bourgeois State. However, it is nothing short of an improper use of slogans to denote equally as "discipline" two such opposed concepts as the willessness and thoughtlessness of a four-legged and many-armed mass of flesh which performs mechanical movements to the accompaniment of the baton **and** the voluntary co-ordination of conscious political actions on the part of a certain social element; the lifeless obedience of a governed class **and** the organized rebellion of a class struggling for its liberation. It is not by adding on to the discipline impressed upon it by the capitalist State—with the mere transfer of the baton from the hand of the bourgeoisie into that of a social-democratic central committee—but by the breaking up and uprooting of this slavish spirit of discipline, that the proletariat can be prepared for the new discipline, the voluntary self-discipline of the Social Democracy.

If we seek to solve the question of forms of organization, not by way of the mechanical transfer to Russia of inert patterns from Western Europe but through the investigation of the given concrete relations in Russia itself, we arrive at a quite different conclusion. To say of opportunism. as Lenin implicitly does, that it goes in

for any one certain form of organization—say for decentralization—is at any rate to mistake its inner nature. Being opportunistic as it is, the only principle of opportunism, even in questions of organization, is—the lack of principles. It always selects its means according to circumstances, with reference to the degree to which those means promote its ends. But if, like Lenin, we define opportunism as the endeavour to paralyze the independent revolutionary movement of the proletariat in order to make it serviceable to the lust for ruling on the part of the bourgeois intelligentsia, one can only say that this purpose can be most readily attained, in the initial stages of the labour movement, not through decentralization but precisely by way of strict centralism, by which the proletarian movement, still unclear in its aims and methods, is turned over, bound hand and foot, to a handful of academic leaders.

Even from the standpoint of the fears entertained by Lenin, that is, the dangerous influence of the intellectuals upon the proletarian movement, his own conception of organization constitutes the greatest danger for the Russian Social Democracy.

As a matter of fact, there is nothing which so easily and so surely hands over a still youthful labour movement to the private ambitions of the intellectuals as forcing the movement into the straight-jacket of a bureaucratic centralism, which debases the fighting workers into a pliable tool in the hands of a "committee." And, inversely, nothing so surely preserves the labour movement from all opportunistic abuses on the part of an ambitious intelligentsia as the revolutionary self-activation of the working masses, the intensification of their feeling of political responsibility.

And, in fact, the very thing which Lenin sees as a spector to-day, may easily turn to-morrow into a palpable reality.

Let us not forget that the revolution which we see in the offing in Russia is not a proletarian but a bourgeois revolution, which will greatly change the entire scenery of the social-democratic struggle. Thereupon the Russian

intelligentsia also will quickly absorb a strongly pronounced bourgeois content. Whereas to-day the Social Democracy is the only leader of the Russian working masses, on the morning after the revolution the bourgeoisie, and in the first instance its intelligentsia, will seek to convert these masses into a pedestal for its parliamentary rule. Now the less scope there is given in the present period of the struggle to the self-activation, to the free initiative, to the political sense of the awakened element of the working class, and the more that element is politically bell-weathered and drilled by a social-democratic central committee, the easier will be the game of the bourgeois demagogues in the renovated Russia and the more will the results of the current efforts of the Social Democracy turn to the advantage of the bourgeoisie.

On the other hand, it is a thoroughly unhistorical illusion to think that the social-democratic tactic in the revolutionary sense can be established in advance once for all time, that the labour movement can be preserved once for all from opportunistic side-leaps. To be sure, the Marxian doctrine provides effective weapons against all basic types of opportunistic thought. Since, however, the social-democratic movement is in fact a mass movement and the dangers by which it is menaced do not spring from human heads but from the social conditions, opportunistic strayings cannot be guarded against in advance; they must be overcome through the movement itself—of course, with the aid of the weapons supplied by Marxism—after they have assumed a definite shape in the course of experience. Regarded from this point of view, opportunism too appears as a product of the labour movement itself, as an unavoidable factor of its historical development. Precisely in Russia, where the Social Democracy is still young, and the political conditions of the labour movement are so abnormal, opportunism might very well at present spring largely from this source, from the unavoidable groping and experimenting in matters of tactics, from the necessity of bringing the present struggle into harmony with socialist principles in quite peculiar and unexampled relations.

But if that is so, one must marvel all the more at the idea that the rise of opportunistic tendencies can be forbidden in the very beginnings of a labour movement by means of this or that form of rules of organization. The attempt to ward off opportunism by such scraps of paper can, as a matter of fact, do no harm to opportunism but only to the Social Democracy itself, and, by restraining within the party the pulsing of a healthy blood, weakens its power of resistance not only against opportunistic currents, but also—a thing which after all might be of some importance—against the existing social order. The means turns against the end.

In this frightened effort of a part of the Russian Social Democracy to preserve from false steps the aspiring labour movement of Russia through the guardianship of an omniscient and omnipresent central committee we seem to see also the same subjectivism involved by which socialist thought in Russia has frequently been imposed upon in the past. Amusing, in truth, are the somersaults which the revered human subject of history loves to perform at times in his own historical process. The ego which has been beaten down by Russian absolutism takes revenge by setting itself on the throne in its revolutionary thought-world and declaring itself omnipotent—as a conspiratorial committee in the name of a non-existent "popular will." The "object" shows itself stronger, however: the knout soon triumphs, in that it proves itself to be the "legitimate" expression of the given stage of the historical process. Finally there appears on the scene, as a more legitimate child of the historical process—the Russian labour movement, which makes a splendid beginning to shape, for the first time in Russian history, a real popular will. Now, however, the ego of the Russian revolutionary quickly stands on its head and declares itself once more to be an almighty ruler of history—this time, in the direction of the social-democratic working masses. In so doing, the bold acrobat overlooks the fact that the only subject to which this role has now fallen is the mass-ego of the working class, which everywhere insists on venturing to make its own mistakes and

learning historical dialectic for itself. And by way of conclusion, let us say openly just to ourselves: Mistakes which a truly revolutionary labour movement commits are, in historical perspective, immeasurably more fruitful and valuable than the infallibility of the very best "central committee."

II.

Dictatorship of the Party or Dictatorship of the Proletariat. (*)

The implicit presupposition of the dictatorship theory in the Lenin-Trotskyist sense is that the socialist overthrow is a matter for which there is a ready-made recipe in the pocket of the revolutionary party, which has only to put it into practice vigorously. That is unfortunately —or otherwise, if you will—not so. Far from being a sum of ready-made prescriptions which have only to be applied, the practical realization of socialism as an economic, social and legal system is a matter which lies completely veiled in the fog of the future. What we have in our programme is only a few big sign-posts which show the direction in which the measure must be sought, and mainly of a negative character. Thus we have an idea as to what must be shoved aside in the very first instance in order to clear the way for the socialist economy; but as regards the nature of the thousand concrete practical matters to be dealt with in order to introduce the socialist principles into economics, law and all social relations—on those points no enlightenment is furnished by any socialist party programme or by any socialist textbook. That is no defect, but the superiority of scientific socialism over the utopian brand: the socialist

(*) Extract from Rosa Luxemburg's "The Russian Revolution."

system of society can only be an historical product, arising from its own school of experience, in the hour of fulfillment, from the course of living history which, in precisely the same way as organic nature, of which in the last instance it is a part, has the lovely caprice of bringing forth, together with the genuine social need, also the means for its satisfaction, and with the problem also the solution. If that is so, however, then it is clear that socialism, from its very nature, is not susceptible of being imposed, or introduced by decree. It has as a prerequisite a series of violent measures—against property, etc. The negative part, the work of tearing down, can be decreed; the building up, the positive part, can not. This is new territory, with a thousand problems. Only experience is capable of correcting mistakes and opening new paths. Only unrestrictedly flowing life hits upon a thousand new forms, makes improvisations, contains creative power, itself corrects all blunders. The public life of the nations with limited freedom is so needy, so poor, so schematic, so unfruitful for the very reason that by excluding democracy it bars the living springs of all spiritual wealth and progress. **The whole mass of the people must participate; otherwise, socialism is decreed, imposed from the green table of a handful of intellectuals.**

Unconditional public control (according to Lenin's own words) is necessary. Otherwise the exchange of experiences remains only in the closed circle of the officials of the new regime. In place of the representative bodies arising from universal suffrage, Lenin and Trotsky have proposed the soviets as the only true representation of the working masses. But with the suppression of the political life throughout the land, the life of the soviets also must grow more and more paralyzed. Without general elections, unrestricted freedom of the press and of assembly, free conflict of opinion, life dies out in every public institution, becomes a mere semblance of life, in which the bureaucracy remains alone as the active element. No one can evade this law. The public life gradually falls asleep, a dozen party leaders of inexhaustible energy and boundless idealism direct and

govern. Among these, the actual leadership is exercised by a dozen pre-eminent brains, and a selected group of the workers is invited to meetings from time to time to applaud the speeches of the leaders, and to approve by unanimous vote the resolutions laid before them. What we have, then, at bottom, is a clique economy—a dictatorship, to be sure, but not the dictatorship of the proletariat. Rather, the dictatorship of a handful of politicians, that is, dictatorship in the bourgeois sense, in the sense of the Jacobins—in a word, ruling (increasing the interval between the soviet congresses from three to six months!). And what is more: such conditions must be a symptom of the barbarization of the public life.

The basic error of the Lenin-Trotskyist theory is simply this: that they set dictatorship, just as Kautsky does, over against democracy. "Dictatorship or democracy"—that is the question both for the Bolsheviks and for Kautsky. The latter decides, naturally, for democracy, and for bourgeois democracy at that, since he views it precisely as the alternative to the socialist overthrow. **Lenin and Trotsky decide, inversely, for dictatorship in opposition to democracy and, in so doing, for the dictatorship of a handful of individuals, that is, for dictatorship after the bourgeois fashion. Two opposite poles, both equally far removed from the true socialist policy. When the proletariat seizes power, it can never more follow Kautsky's advice and renounce the job of carrying through the socialist transformation under the pretext of the "unripeness of the country," and devote itself merely to democracy, without committing treason to itself, to the International and to the Revolution. It is bound to and must without delay, in the most vigorous, unwavering and thorough-going manner, take socialist measures in hand, hence exercise dictatorship—but dictatorship of the class, not of a party or clique; dictatorship of the class, i.e. in the broadest publicity, with the active participation of the masses, in unlimited democracy.** "As Marxists, we have never been idolaters of formal democracy," writes Trotsky Certainly we have never been idolaters of formal democracy. Nor have we ever been idolaters of socialism

or of Marxism. Does it follow that we are entitled to throw socialism, Marxism, onto the scrap-heap when we find it uncomfortable? Trotsky and Lenin are the living negations of this question. We have never been idolaters of formal democracy; which simply means that we have always distinguished the social kernel from the political form of bourgeois democracy; we have always uncovered the bitter kernel of social inequality and constraint under the sweet shell of formal equality and freedom—not in order to reject these latter, but in order to urge the working class not to content itself with the shell but rather to win the political power in order to fill it with new social content. **It is the historical task of the proletariat, when it comes to power, to create in the place of bourgeois democracy, socialist democracy, not to do away with democracy itself. Socialist democracy begins, however, not in the promised land after the substructure of socialist economy has been formed, as a ready-made Christmas present for the good people who in the meanwhile have loyally supported the handful of socialist dictators. Socialist democracy begins simultaneously with the tearing down of class rule and the building up of socialism. It begins with the seizure of power, it is nothing else than the dictatorship of the proletariat.**

Yes, dictatorship! But this dictatorship consists in the manner in which democracy is employed, not in its abolition; in vigorous, decided intrusions into the well-established rights and economic relations of bourgeois society, without which the socialist overturn cannot be actualized. This dictatorship must be the work of the class, and not of a small minority in the name of the class; that is, it must proceed at each step with the active participation of the masses, be subject to their direct influence, stand under the control of unlimited public opinion, proceed from the growing political education of the masses.

STATEMENT OF AIMS & OBJECTS OF THE A.P.C.F.

The Capitalistic complex of the working class movement with its multifarious Social-democratic prejudices hindering rather than developing the initiative of the masses in the struggle for Communism exposes the need for a working class party free from self-seeking and desire for Office under Capitalism. Parliamentarism leads to revisionism and betrayal, and must be expunged from the program of the revolutionary working class movement. To this end the Anti-Parliamentary Communist Federation describes the functions of a sincere and intelligent revolutionary organisation in that it:—

(1) Stands for the revolutionary overthrow of the Capitalist system of exploitation, and privilege, and advocates in its stead the Workers' Industrial Republic.

(2) Preaches the class war, recognising that the present struggle between the classes can only be solved permanently in the triumph of the working class.

(3) Advocates the overthrow of the present parliamentary system of government and urges the boycotting of the ballot box as the initial challenge of the workers in the fight for economic power.

(4) Declares that the permanent crisis of Capitalism has rendered obsolete the official trade and industrial union movements but recognising the inevitability of struggle, urges the General Strike as the only effective method of industrial action.

(5) Holds that unemployment is a chronic and expanding feature of Capitalist conditions and constitutes a real menace to Capitalism; therefore urges collaboration of employed and unemployed in the fight for emancipation, and supports all demands that further the class struggle.

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