

battle of ideas

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THE BOLSHEVIK FACTION and the fight for the Party

Introduction

THE HISTORY of the British revolutionary and Trotskyist left is deeply marked by sectarianism. Under cover of a distortion and falsification of the history of the struggle of Lenin and Trotsky, the Workers Revolutionary Party, the leadership of the International Socialists and others have claimed theoretical 'justifications' for their sectarian rejection of revolutionary regroupment and the suppression of internal democracy within their organisations [1]. Unfortunately some of the other groups of the Trotskyist left have also accepted these sectarian myths, and have believed that the political differences on the revolutionary left in Britain today justify, on the basis of the principles of Lenin and Trotsky, a separation into different organisations [2].

It was to dispel this sectarian falsification that *Red Weekly* ran a series earlier this year entitled 'Faction and Party' [3]. This showed clearly that the political differences which Lenin and Trotsky considered could be contained within a united organisation were vastly greater than those which divide the organisations of the revolutionary left in Britain today. It is quite clear that any serious application of Leninist organisational principles demands not the division of most of the organisations of the revolutionary left but instead their unification.

Only one real attempt has been made to refute the account of the positions of Lenin and Trotsky given in the *Red Weekly* articles. This was made in an article entitled 'IMG attacks Bolshevism' in *Socialist Press*, the newspaper of the Workers Socialist League, on 24 March 1976 [4]. This article contained grave errors. Not merely did it not have one single paragraph on the 17 year struggle of Trotsky inside and outside the Communist International but it contained elementary

errors not merely of theory but even of fact on the one issue it did deal with — the development of Bolshevism in Russia [5]. Nevertheless *Socialist Press* had the great merit of attempting to deal seriously with an important question of revolutionary theory and principle and to raise the discussion of sectarianism to a serious political level [6]. To clarify the issues further, and to show again the errors of sections of the revolutionary left in Britain, we devote this issue of

The Battle of Ideas to the organisational principles involved in the building of the Bolshevik faction and the Bolshevik Party in Russia.

By the end of 1903 we already had two clear-cut groups, two organisations, and two parties.
Zinoviev — History of the Bolshevik Party, p.96.

The mode of action of each of the sides corresponded to its fundamental trend. The Party majority [Bolsheviks], anxious at all costs to preserve the Party's unity and organisational cohesion, fought only by loyal Party means, and more than once made concessions for the sake of reaching a reconciliation. The minority [Mensheviks], following an anarchistic trend, showed no concern for peace and unity in the Party. They turned every concession into a weapon with which to continue the fight.

Lenin — To the Party [August 1904] Collected Works, Vol. 7, p.457.



ZINOVIEV

The Struggle Against Menshevism

THE IMMEDIATE HISTORICAL origins of Bolshevism, and therefore of Leninism, are to be found at the time of the creation of the Russian Social Democratic and Labour Party. Although the RSDLP had been formally founded in 1898, its first Congress amounted to very little — almost all the participants were immediately arrested and the whole organisation broken up. Until the Second Congress of 1903, Russian Marxism remained rather like British Trotskyism today, split up into a number of individual groups or 'circles'.

The real foundation of the RSDLP in 1903 however, while a gigantic step forward, had brought into existence a Party very far removed from one with a correct Marxist position on every question. Lenin had been involved with Plekhanov in a long struggle over the Party programme in which by no means all of Lenin's positions had been accepted [7]; Lenin had been engaged in a fight before the Congress with Martov on the organisation of working class self-defence [8]; an opportunist resolution on relations with bourgeois forces proposed by Potresov (Starover) was passed by the Congress itself [9]; and finally Lenin was defeated by Martov on the famous question of the Party rules [10].

Despite these differences, however, Lenin was emphatic that all the positions defended at the Second Congress were trends within the political camp of the working class and therefore within the Party. He stated that the factions:

'are only divided by shades, about which we may and should argue, but over which it would be absurd and childish to part company ... a struggle of shades ...'

consent of all comrades and Party members. And our struggle against the Right Wing of the Party at the Congress, against Akimov and Axelrod, Martynov and Martov, in no way exceeded these bounds. [11] Thus the representatives of every position which had emerged in the groups before the Second Congress were included in the Party. Thus far from being excluded from the RSDLP through a split by Lenin even the most outspoken Economists, Akimov and Martynov, were explicitly members of the newly created Party. Lenin analysed the differences within the RSDLP at that time as being inevitably due to its rapid expansion, and that positions of calling for splits and expulsions reflected hangovers from the sectarian 'circle spirit' [12].

While the founding of the Party was a great step forward, it therefore gave rise to faction struggles. Out of the disputes over the composition of the Central Committee of the Party and the Editorial Board of *Iskra* the two factions of Bolsheviks and Mensheviks crystallised [13].



Lenin with Martov (front right)

Lenin had been defeated at the Second Congress on the Party Rules, but he had gained a majority on the question of the composition of the Central Committee and Editorial Board. However, while he and the Bolsheviks, acting on party principles, accepted discipline on their defeat on the Party Rules, the Mensheviks refused to accept discipline on their defeat on the composition of the leading bodies. Starting with Martov, the Mensheviks began a policy of boycotts and resignations which rapidly brought the Party to the verge of a split [14].

the fight against circle sectarianism. He rejected under any circumstances giving up the fight for Bolshevik political positions [15]. At the same time however he rejected the concept that political events, and the struggle over organisation, had already definitively demonstrated the need for a split. Whereas Lenin declared in 1914 that the gigantic event of the reaction of the Second International to the First World War had proved conclusively that not merely Russian but international Menshevism were enemies of socialism, in 1905 he was clear that no such decisive historic test had occurred. He stated unambiguously:

'Are the new-Iskrists [Mensheviks] traitors to the proletarian cause? No. But they are inconsistent, wavering, opportunist champions of that cause [and of the organisational and tactical principles illuminating that cause]. That is why their position is opposed by the revolutionary social-democracy.' [16]

In consequence Lenin rejected the position that there was a principled basis for a split into two different parties:

'The differences in principle between Vperyod [the

Bolshevik paper] and the new *Iskra* are essentially the same as those between the old *Iskra* and *Rabochy Deyelo* [the paper of the Economists]. We consider these differences important, but, given the opportunity fully to defend our views, the views of the old *Iskra*, we would not consider these differences of themselves to be a bar to working together in one Party.' [17]

Faced with such a situation the task was not to split but to continue the fight for proletarian

fastly, scorning the philistine methods of circle wrangling, doing our utmost to preserve the hard-won single Party tie linking all Russian Social Democrats.' [18]

Indeed, far from advocating a split himself, Lenin considered that the Mensheviks' split moves revealed clearly the contrast between their anarchistic acts and the proletarian discipline of the Bolsheviks:

'The mode of action of each of the sides corresponded to its fundamental trend. The Party majority [Bolsheviks], anxious at all costs to preserve the Party's unity and organisational cohesion, fought only by loyal Party means, and more than once made concessions for the sake of reaching a reconciliation. The minority [Mensheviks], following an anarchistic trend, showed no concern for peace and unity in the Party. They turned every concession into a weapon with which to continue the fight.' [19]

The culmination of this attempt of the Bolsheviks to carry on the struggle against the Mensheviks within the confines of a united party was the call for the Third Party Congress. As Lenin put it:

'I think that precisely with a view to the free clarification of principle it is necessary to eliminate the crisis, to clear the atmosphere of squabbles, and for that we need a congress. Not in order to cut short the struggle, but in order to bring it within normal bounds.' [20]

Majority

He considered that a new congress, the real alternative to the policy of boycotts and splits of the Mensheviks, was the only way to safeguard the unity of the Party:

'We must try to find the framework within which the ideological struggle can proceed more or less normally; a new congress is needed ... To think that a congress could only lead to a split would mean to admit that we haven't got a Party at all, that Party feeling is so poorly developed among all of us that it cannot overcome the old circle spirit ... The majority, at any rate, does not want a split.' [21]

By the beginning of 1905 the Bolsheviks had gained the support of the majority of the local party committees for a congress, and under the constitution of the Party the leading bodies controlled by the Mensheviks should have been compelled to call one. It was at this point that the Mensheviks took the initiative to overturn the Party Constitution altogether

1905 and the Struggle for Unity

THE ORGANISATIONAL SITUATION which confronted the RSDLP in the spring of 1905 was therefore clear. Not merely did Lenin not call for a split following the Second Congress but, far from creating a Bolshevik Party in 1903, he had fought bitterly and consistently for Party unity against the splittist activities of the Mensheviks. Now however the Mensheviks, right at the very beginning of the 1905 revolution, had completely overturned the statutes of the Party. If there had been the slightest element of sectarianism in Lenin's position, if he had in the slightest favoured a split in the Party, there is no doubt that the Third Congress, finally summoned in Spring, 1905, would have broken definitely with the Mensheviks. However, far from doing this, every single section and faction of the RSDLP, including the Mensheviks, were invited.

Even when the Mensheviks held their own conference alongside the Third Congress, and thereby a *de facto* split in the Party was created, Lenin clearly came out in favour of the reunification of the Party. The sole condition for that unification was acceptance of the organisational framework and discipline of the Party. The Third Congress made a number of revisions to the Party Rules — guaranteeing the right of distribution of minority literature, increasing the power of local committees — which created constitutional guarantees for the right of the Mensheviks to fight for their positions [22]. There was no split on political grounds with the Mensheviks — as shown clearly by the fact that the sole condition for membership of the Party imposed on the Mensheviks was the acceptance of discipline:

'While recognising the need for an ideological struggle against the survivals of 'Economism', the Third Congress ruled that adherents of the minority may be admitted to membership in Party organisations, provided they recognise the congresses of the Party and submit to Party discipline.' (23)

Unity

In summarising the results of the Congress Lenin wrote:

'Despite the absence of the minority, the Third Congress took every measure to enable the minority to work with the majority in one party. The Congress held the reversion to the antiquated and superseded views of the Economists discernible in our Party to be incorrect; at the same time, it provided precise and definite guarantees of the rights of every minority, guarantees embodied in the Rules of the Party and binding on all its members. The minority now has the unconditional right, guaranteed by the Party Rules, to advocate its views and to carry on an ideological struggle.' (24)

Far from the Congress rounding off a split with the Mensheviks, Lenin spoke of 'the inevitable future restoration of the Party's unity.' (25) The congress also adopted a resolution drafted by Lenin stating:

'The Third Congress of the RSDLP authorises the Central Committee to take all measures to prepare and work out conditions for a merger with the splinter



Barricades! St. Petersburg 1905

sections of the RSDLP.' (26)

The work which was to culminate in the restoration of the unity of the RSDLP a year later was already being prepared by the Bolsheviks at the Third Congress [27]. Far from being a 'manoeuvre' on Lenin's part, this restoration of unity was the culmination of the fight for party unity combined with the fight for his political ideas which he had been waging since 1903.

Discipline

The 'inevitable unification' of the Party which Lenin had fought for in April 1905 came into existence at the Fourth (Unity) Party Congress in April 1906. Lenin acclaimed this unification, to which the Bolsheviks had oriented since 1903, as a tremendous achievement. He stated:

'... both at the Congress and at the Conference we created the 'drab unity' of party unity. Comrade workers, help us transform this drab unity into living reality! ... Join with us in settling this practical question of fusion: let this question be the exception [it is an exception that proves the opposite rule!] in which we shall have one-tenth theory and nine-tenths practice. Such a wish is surely legitimate, historically necessary and psychologically comprehensible ... Let us then unite to make this revolution!' (28)

He violently attacked all those who declared that unification in one party with the Mensheviks was a manoeuvre — stating at the Congress itself for example, to make an authoritative record, that:

'It is not true that I 'supported' Comrade Vorob'yov's statement that the Bolsheviks and Mensheviks cannot work together in one party. I did not in any way support such an assertion, and do not share that opinion at all.' (29)

Once again the dialectical relation of Lenin's struggle for political clarification and organisational unity is clear. He posed the political struggle in the sharpest possible terms [30] and simultaneously called for strict party discipline on the part of the Bolsheviks even though they were now a minority.

'The split no longer exists We must and shall fight ideologically against the decisions of the Congress which we regard as erroneous But at the

same time we declare to the whole party that we are opposed to a split of any kind. We stand for submission to the decisions of the Congress.' (31)

The first real test of 'party unity' followed soon after the 1906 Congress when the RSDLP turned its attention to the elections for the Duma. The Mensheviks, convinced of the leading role of the bourgeoisie in the revolution, advocated an electoral agreement with the capitalist Cadet Party. Lenin stated on this:

'The sanction of blocs with the Cadets is the finishing touch that definitely marks the Mensheviks as the opportunist wing of the workers' party.' (32)

Did Lenin now propose a split? On the contrary, he posed the question entirely as a principled faction struggle in which he demanded of the Bolsheviks strict observance of the Party's discipline even when they were in a minority. He wrote:

'We are waging a ruthless ideological struggle against the formation of blocs with the Cadets, and this struggle must be developed to the widest possible extent The question is how to combine this ruthless ideological struggle with proletarian party discipline.' (33)

Lenin came out absolutely against any moves to a split:

'Does the sanction by Social Democrats of blocs with the Cadets necessitate a complete severance of organisational relations, i.e. a split. We think not and all the Bolsheviks think the same way Therefore, our duty at the present time is to avoid intellectualist hysteria and preserve Party unity.' (34)

Splitters

We could not wish for a clearer definition of Leninist principles on organisation. Not for Lenin the split at the drop of a revisionist hat, or the split based on 'logically' projected results of present positions. What was necessary was to struggle against such thoroughly wrong positions within the party until either the comrades had been won from their incorrect positions or the working out of this line definitively placed them outside the camp of the proletariat altogether — as in 1914. It was the line which Trotsky was to follow later in relation to the Communist International [35]. It demanded political struggle within the

party but simultaneously absolute discipline in action to preserve party unity:

'After the competent bodies have decided, all of us, as members of the party, must act as one man. A Bolshevik in Odessa must cast into the ballot box a ballot paper bearing a Cadet's name even if it sickens him.' (36)

What was involved was not the intellectualist hysteria which would split the party but 'trusting to the staunchness and sound class instinct of the revolutionary proletariat.' (37)

Disciplined proletarian policy triumphed. At the Fifth Party Congress in 1907 the Bolsheviks gained the majority from the Mensheviks. Then, as it became clear that the Bolsheviks were gaining a majority, it was the Mensheviks who began to split. Once again, just as after 1903, Lenin contrasted the Bolsheviks' proletarian discipline and acceptance of party unity with the splittist activities of the Mensheviks:

'The only organisation of our Party in which there is a split at present — and a very bad split — is the St Petersburg organisation. Who split this organisation? The Mensheviks split it, did so against the will of the organised workers and to the gratification of the Cadets

'The Bolsheviks fought with might and main against election agreements with the Cadets being regarded as permissible. But agreements were recognised as permissible at the November Party Conference. At this conference the Bolsheviks bound themselves to abide by the decisions of the local organisations [the congress voted to leave the determination of blocs to local organisations]; and in every case where the local organisations deemed it necessary to enter into election agreements with the Cadets, the Bolsheviks kept their promise as a 'sacred and inviolable' duty to the Party. The Mensheviks undertook the same obligation; but when they found that the organised workers of St Petersburg would not agree to follow them in the Cadet leading strings, they split the organisation.' (38)

Far from Lenin being the splitter, far from posing merely 'formal unity', the Bolsheviks were the chief fighters for the unity of the Party. It was by this means that the Bolsheviks won the support of many workers. It was the Mensheviks in this period who were the splitters and not Lenin.

Reaction and Liquidationism

THE DISPUTE OVER ELECTIONS which broke out in 1906 was the prelude to the final great struggle which was to culminate in the real split of the Bolsheviks and Mensheviks into separate parties. The background to this struggle was the terrible period of reaction in Russia which was inaugurated by the Stolypin 'coup d'état' of 3 June 1907 — a blow which dissolved the Duma, arrested the Social Democratic deputies on conspiracy charges and established a totally reactionary electoral law. Labour organisations were dispersed, anti-semitic pogroms unleashed, the press stifled and a mass wave of arrests and torture launched. Terrible demoralisation set in among the working class and the revolutionaries (39).

The attitude to take to this situation was first debated at the Fifth RSDLP Congress in July 1907. While the Bolsheviks had by now a clear majority for their fundamental positions within the party — analysis of the leading role of the working class in the revolution, rejection of electoral blocs with the Cadets, call for a revolutionary provisional government, etc. — nevertheless an important tactical difference emerged among them on the question of whether to participate in elections for the new Third Duma. The Congress voted finally to participate in the elections, but this was carried on the basis of a bloc of the Mensheviks, the Jewish Bund, the Poles, one of the Lettish votes, and one Bolshevik vote — Lenin (40). While at the time it was not yet clear what the scope of this difference among the Bolsheviks was going to be, nevertheless Lenin came out clearly against those Bolsheviks led by Bogdanov who called for a boycott of the elections:

'The boycott is a declaration of war against the old



Lenin plays chess with the 'boycotter' Bogdanov in happier days. Gorky looks on.

talk of the boycott's success.' (41)

Following the Party Congress it became clearer and clearer that the division among the Bolsheviks represented not a minor tactical difference, which could be contained within a faction in a principled fashion, but a fundamental, essentially different

of the Party. Although such differences were containable within a party, they were impermissible in a faction. In the course of the struggle Lenin outlined with classic precision the difference between a party and a faction.

'In our Party, Bolshevism is represented by the

can contain a whole gamut of opinions and shades of opinion... A section in a party is a group of like-minded persons formed for the purpose primarily of influencing the party in a definite direction, for the purpose of securing acceptance of their principles in the party in the purest possible form. For this real unanimity of opinion is necessary. The different standards we set for party unity and sectional unity must be grasped by everyone who wants to know how the question of internal discord in the Bolshevik section stands.' (42)

Principles

The result was clear — the boycotter Bogdanov was expelled from the Bolshevik faction. But the expulsion clearly illustrated the difference between a party and a faction, and that there was no Bolshevik Party at this time. The Bolsheviks were absolutely clear that Bogdanov remained a member, with all his positions, in the RSDLP:

'We do not have a split in the Party, but in the faction. The writ of our conference does not run to Party posts.' (43)

Throughout this whole struggle the Bolsheviks, far from seeking to split the RSDLP, demanded an end to all attempts in that direction. The Bolshevik conference of June 1909 passed a resolution warning all its supporters 'against agitating for a special Bolshevik Congress, as such agitation would lead objectively to a Party split.' (44) Indeed one of the chief accusations made against Bogdanov was that he was seeking to split the Party. Lenin recalled the long history of struggle of the Bolsheviks against a split since 1903:

'In agitating for a special Bolshevik congress you [Bogdanov] show that you have lost faith in the Party principle. We have always stood for the Party principle, ever since the Second Congress, and are now continuing the same line, while you are preaching a split at the grass roots. There is also a pro-Party trend among the Mensheviks. We believe in the Party principle and stand up for it.' (45)

Lenin restated the principles of the Bolsheviks on factional struggle and the unity of the RSDLP:

'There is no question whatever of sinking our

fighting and shall continue to fight most strenuously against Menshevik deviations from the policy of revolutionary Social-Democracy. Nor, needless to say, is there any question of the Bolshevik section dissolving its identity in the Party... The Bolshevik section as a definite ideological trend in the Party must exist as before.' (46)

However, the Bolshevik conference stated that the main task of the hour was 'to preserve and consolidate the Russian Social Democratic and Labour Party and everything else must be subordinated to it.' (47). Far from urging a split with the Mensheviks, Lenin urged a bloc with all those Mensheviks prepared to support the Party. He called for Party members to support: 'rapprochement of pro-Party members of all faction and sections of the

Party, above all rapprochement between the Bolsheviks and pro-Party Mensheviks.' (48) This policy provided the axis for the Bolsheviks in the fight up to 1912.

The struggle against the boycotters was relatively limited in scope — by the spring of 1908 the boycotters had already become minorities in Moscow and St. Petersburg and thereafter declined rapidly. However taking place simultaneously, and much more seriously, was a fight concerning the trends among the Mensheviks themselves. While not at all differing on the chief political positions of Menshevism — such as belief in the leading role of the bourgeoisie in the revolution, and support for electoral alliances with the Cadets — the Mensheviks were divided over the question of the maintenance of the illegal Party. The

so-called 'pro-Party Mensheviks', led by Plekhanov, stood for the maintenance of the RSDLP. The so-called 'Menshevik liquidators' were for the winding up of the illegal RSDLP and the maintenance of legality at all costs.

Confronted with this division over the question of the very existence of the Party, Lenin acted on his distinction between party and faction. There could be no political rapprochement with any section of the Mensheviks — as we noted, he stated that there was 'no question whatever' of sinking the differences with the Mensheviks. However, organisationally, the pro-Party Mensheviks were within the Party and against the liquidators' threat to the existence of the RSDLP. Lenin fought for a principle bloc with them:

'Plekhanov was never a Bolshevik. We do not and

never will consider him a Bolshevik. But we do consider him a pro-Party Menshevik... we regard it as the absolute duty of all Bolsheviks... to exert every effort to arrive at a rapprochement with all such Social-Democrats.' (49)

Lenin summarised the situation when he said that the year 1910 was 'a year of joint work by the Bolsheviks and pro-Party Mensheviks in all the leading [official and unofficial, legal and illegal] bodies of the Party.' (50)

He also outlined their aims:

'Without renouncing anything, without forgetting anything, without making any promises about setting aside differences, we are working together for the common cause.' (51)



It was natural that, in view of such profound differences, the RSDLP proved in fact to be split into two parties, the party of the Bolsheviks and the party of the Mensheviks. Stalin — History of the CPSU(B) (Short Course) p. 95 1938.

A unified party existed until 1912 It is very difficult to understand what the Comintern tells us about the question — that is, its chronology. The Bolsheviks and Mensheviks were at a certain time two factions of the same party, not two totally antagonistic parties. Trotsky — The Case of Leon Trotsky, p.12 1937.



The Final Split Trotsky's Conclusion and Ours

THE TASK OF THE BOLSHEVIKS and the pro-Party Mensheviks in reconsolidating the illegal RSDLP had been accomplished by the end of 1911 — although by this time Plekhanov himself had deserted to the liquidators. This reconsolidation was finalised at the Sixth Party Congress held in Prague in January 1912. At this congress there was not a political split with Menshevism as such — on the contrary, as we have seen, Lenin worked for the Congress with a section of the Mensheviks. The split was not with those who defended Menshevik politics but with the liquidators who refused to accept the Party. The Resolution of the Congress proclaimed:

'The former members of the Central Committee, Mikhail, Yuri and Roman, refused not only to join the Central Committee in the spring of 1910, but even to attend a single meeting to co-opt new members, and bluntly declared that they considered the very existence of the Party Central Committee to be "harmful". It was precisely after the Plenary Meeting of 1910 that the above mentioned chief publications of the liquidators, *Nasha Zarya* and *Dyelo Zhizni* definitely turned to liquidationism all along the line, not only "belittling" [contrary to the decision of the Plenary Meeting] the importance of the illegal Party, but openly renouncing it, declaring that the Party was "extinct", that the Party was already liquidated, that the idea of reviving the illegal Party was "a reactionary utopia", using the columns of legally published magazines to heap slander and abuse on the illegal Party, calling the workers to regard the nuclei of the Party and its hierarchy as "dead". etc'

'At a time when throughout Russia the members of the Party, irrespective of factions, united to promote the immediate task of convening a Party conference, the liquidators, banded together in entirely independent groups, split away from the local organisations even where the pro-Party Mensheviks predominated [Ekaterinoslav, Kiev] and definitely refused to maintain any Party relations with the local organisations of the RSDLP. The Conference declares that by its conduct the *Nasha Zarya* and *Dyelo Zhizni* group has definitely placed itself outside the Party.' (52)

Separation

It was politically permissible to defend Menshevik views within the Party provided its organisational structure was accepted:

'The Russian Organising Commission which called the present conference... notified all Social Democrats of its convocation and invited to the Conference all, without a single exception, organisations of our Party: such as all organisations, organisations of workers,

establishment of the situation whereby the defence of the political views of Menshevism was incompatible with Party membership, came in 1914 with Lenin's ringing declaration:

'The Second International is dead, overcome by opportunism. Down with opportunism, and long live the Third International.' (54)

The famous 21 conditions for admission into the Communist International codified the political break with Social Democracy. Whereas in 1912 opportunist Menshevik views were compatible with membership of the Party on the condition of acceptance of discipline, from 1914 onward, with the definitive betrayal of the working class by the Second International, Lenin demanded a complete organisational separation from all varieties of Menshevism. (55). With the founding of the Communist International this policy could be extended in practice on an international scale.

Although the conditions for the building of revolutionary parties were enormously changed following the Russian Revolution of 1917, the study of the history of Bolshevism nevertheless provided the great school from which all political forces drew conclusions. The question of whether Bolshevism had emerged as a Party in 1903 at the time of the Second Party Congress, or whether on the contrary it had been a faction of the RSDLP in the period prior to 1912, came to occupy a real role in the struggle between Trotsky and the rising Stalinist bureaucracy.

Myth

In order to carry on their campaign against 'Trotskyism', the bureaucracy had to portray Trotsky as the most pronounced possible opponent of Lenin. In addition to endlessly reprinting every criticism Lenin had made of Trotsky in the period prior to 1917, the bureaucracy invented the myth that, in the period following 1903, Lenin and Trotsky had been not merely members of different factions of the same party, the RSDLP, but that they had actually been members of different parties. Starting with the distortions of Zinoviev's *History of the Bolshevik Party*, and passing through the more straightforward falsifications of Stalin's *History of the CPSU (B)* [Short Course], the myth was invented that the Bolsheviks had already formed an independent party in 1903. To create this myth the entire history of Bolshevism had to be perverted and falsified in the campaign against Trotsky (see appendix).

For his part, Trotsky also turned to the history of Bolshevism for study for a dual purpose. In the first place he exposed, notably in his famous testimony to the Dewey Commission on the Moscow trials, the Stalinist falsifications of history. Secondly, however, and more importantly, he utilised the experience of Bolshevism to develop his own position in relation to the struggle with Stalinism within the Comintern and then in the building of the Fourth International. He made Lenin's method of simultaneous struggle for political position and for organisational unity and an understanding of the conditions under which Lenin did favour a split uniquely his own. The founding document of the first conference of the International Left Opposition codified the experience of Bolshevism as part of the organisational principles of Trotskyism. It stated:

'The International Left Opposition regards itself as a faction of the Comintern and its separate national sections as factions of the national Communist Parties... That such a policy is the only correct one under the given conditions is proven both by theoretical analysis and historical experience. Although the special conditions of Russian development had brought Bolshevism to a final break with Menshevism as early as 1912, the Bolshevik Party remained in the Second International until the end of the year 1914. The lesson of world war was necessary to pose the question of a new International: the



Such a historical catastrophe as the collapse of the Soviet state would, of course, sweep away with it the Third International too. Similarly the victory of fascism in Germany and the smashing of the German proletariat would hardly allow the Comintern to survive the consequences of its disastrous policies. But who in the camp of revolution will today dare to say that the collapse of the Soviet power or the victory of fascism in Germany cannot be avoided or prevented? Not the Left Opposition in any event Standing on the foundation of the October Revolution and of the Third International, the Left Opposition rejects the idea of parallel Communist Parties.' (54)

Betrayal

When in 1935 the Communist International did carry through its historic international betrayal of the working class in Germany, Trotsky — again following the example of Lenin of August 1914 — came out definitively for a split with the Comintern and the formation of a new International. The method

firmly afterwards, shows how he had absorbed the organisational lessons of Bolshevism.

It is of course impossible to mechanically apply the conclusions and positions of one situation to another. Nevertheless, historical analysis does provide one of the vital elements of the raw material on which revolutionary theory and practice is based. The very concrete analysis of the concrete situation is made through concepts which in part are forged from historical experience.

To show that the differences which separate revolutionaries in Britain today are qualitatively smaller than those which Lenin and Trotsky considered fully containable within a single organisation is to bring into focus the fact that those divisions are not signs of political strengths but of sectarian weaknesses. A study of the history of Bolshevism is a real part of the struggle to ensure that the revolutionary left overcomes its sectarianism and brings its practice into line with political reality and Marxist theory.

Adrian Yeeles and John Marshall

(We apologise for the fact that Battle of Ideas

Appendix The Confusions of Socialist Press

One of the most extraordinary of all the aspects of the article in *Socialist Press* is the sources on which it relies. *Socialist Press* stated that the IMG justified its position by 'snippets from Lenin's writings in the course of the faction battles with the Mensheviks and of Trotsky's writings against Stalinism, and later against revisionism in the Fourth International.' As we have demonstrated this is nonsense — we have utilised the most authoritative writings of Lenin; both resolutions passed at the Congresses of the RSDLP and those of the conferences of the Bolshevik faction show the incorrectness of the position taken by *Socialist Press*. There are literally hundreds of such resolutions and documents which totally refute their views.

However, *Socialist Press* itself cannot even produce so-called 'snippets' to defend its position. Quite apart from many excellent secondary accounts (for example Brian Pearce's *Building the Bolshevik Party: Some Organisational Aspects*), there are two guides to the history of Communism which are of quite dazzling theoretical power — the 45 volumes of Lenin's *Collected Works* and the nearly 100 books and pamphlets of Trotsky which are in print. Any serious exposition of Lenin and Trotsky's views on splits and fusions has ample sources to draw on. Yet for all the attention which *Socialist Press* pays to them, they might as well not exist.

Ignore

Apparently for *Socialist Press*, Lenin's views on the Bolshevik Party aren't contained in the 45 volumes and over 8 million words of his *Collected Works*, but in half a sentence of *Left Wing Communism* — a type of argument rather like the attempt of Stalin to show that Lenin supported 'Socialism in One Country' on the basis of half an ambiguous paragraph of an article written in 1915 which is contradicted by hundreds of other passages in Lenin.

Footnotes

- (1) The most consistent exponents of organisational sectarianism and suppression of internal democracy are of course the Workers Revolutionary Party. For the 'theoretical' basis of their positions see the six volume series *Marxism versus Revisionism*. The most comprehensive theoretical expression of IS's sectarianism and opportunism is to be found in the two volumes of Tony Cliff's biography of Lenin.
- (2) See for example '1963: Why the International Split Took Place', in *Socialist Press*, 7 April 1976; the ICL and the Fourth International published by the ICL; and *Marxist Bulletin*, Winter 1975-76, published by the Bulletin Group.
- (3) These articles appeared in *Red Weekly*, issues 139-142 (26 February - 18 March 1976).
- (4) *Socialist Press* charged that *Red Weekly* had 'twisted', 'abused', 'distorted the history of the Bolsheviks from the very beginning', indulged in 'fraudulent rewriting' and 'conscious deception', not to mention 'hurting the continuity of Lenin's struggle for the Bolshevik Party out of the window and developing attacks on Marxism'.
- (5) The charges made by *Socialist Press* on the historical questions were clear and specific. They stated that the Bolshevik Party as opposed to merely the Bolshevik faction of the RSDLP was founded in 1903 and not 1912 as *Red Weekly* had stated — an assertion by *Socialist Press* designed to prove that Lenin stood for political splits on issues which had not been shown in practice to involve great historic betrayals: *Socialist Press* stated that when Lenin agreed to unification with the Mensheviks in 1906 this represented merely 'formal unity' and was a manoeuvre imposed by an unfavourable political situation — a position designed to refute any idea of Lenin as a real fighter for unity; and finally they asserted that when the final split in the RSDLP took place in 1912 this was over the political positions of Menshevism and not because a particular group of Mensheviks, the liquidators, refused to submit to the discipline of the Party — a position once more designed to show how Lenin justified splits before positions had been shown to entail historic betrayals of the working class.
- (6) Some of the factual errors committed by *Socialist Press* are so extraordinary that the only conclusion which can be drawn is that the comrades have not even read what Lenin actually said and fought for. For example the 24 March article states:
'In 1904 the Mensheviks took control of the paper *Iskra*, and Menshevik delegates replaced the Bolshevik Central Committee members who were arrested. Lenin was confronted by complete Menshevik domination of the RSDLP



IMG ATTACKS BOLSHEVISM

The editorial board of the *Workers Socialist League* has published a series of political articles outlining the political position of the Workers Socialist League. The articles are available for sale at 10p each or 50p for the complete set of 10 articles.

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Apart from this half a sentence of Lenin quoted out of context of everything else he wrote on the subject, the only other piece of writing by a communist leader which *Socialist Press* can dig out to support their position is a 1953 speech by James P Cannon (*Speeches to the Party*, p185). In relation to *Socialist Press*'s utilisation of this particular passage, it must be said that in any case it is a rather extraordinary procedure, to say the least, to regard as the most authoritative source on the history of Bolshevism not Lenin and Trotsky, who actually lived through the events they dealt with, but an American, writing forty years after the event and who would never even have dreamed of placing himself as an authority on the same level as the leaders of the Russian Revolution and the creators of modern Communism. The situation however becomes farcical when Cannon actually corrected his views later (see his *Letter to the Political Committee of the SWP*, 22 May 1961).

As for Trotsky, his writings on the question are never seriously examined by *Socialist Press*. His 17 year struggle inside and outside the Communist International and the explicit conclusions he drew from Lenin, do not even merit a paragraph. It is of course not in the slightest way accidental that *Socialist Press* so completely ignores Trotsky. Trotsky absolutely explicitly refuted the views advanced in *Socialist Press*. In addition to the documents of the founding conference of the

International Left Opposition already cited, we need only quote the evidence he gave to the Dewey Commission — his reply to the Moscow trials in a situation where he knew every word he uttered would have to stand before the world. He stated not merely the facts but also the distortions introduced by the Comintern. For example:

'The Party had a common printing establishment that was in January 1904. The split came in April 1905, but in December 1905 a new merger occurred between the Bolsheviks and Mensheviks, and a unified Party existed until 1912. The new split, the official split, came in 1912. It is very difficult to understand what the Comintern tells us about the question — that is, its chronology. The Bolsheviks and Mensheviks were at a certain time two factions of the same party, not two totally antagonistic parties.' (*The Case of Leon Trotsky*, p62).

Finally, even in his last work, the unfinished biography of Stalin, Trotsky wrote clearly in chronicling the future dictator's work in the RSDLP up to the Prague Conference of 1912:

'Having thus gone all the way in breaking with the Mensheviks, the Prague Conference opened up the era of the independent existence of the Bolshevik Party.' (Trotsky — Stalin, p204).

If the positions of Trotsky and the record of Lenin are ignored by *Socialist Press*, they rely instead on

leadership, under conditions where illegality made a recalled conference of appeal to the membership impossible.

But the entire campaign of Lenin in 1904 and early 1905 was waged under the slogan of convening a new Party Congress. In this dispute, *Socialist Press* actually comes out on the side of the Mensheviks against Lenin!

(6) In addition to the serious attempt at rebuttal made by *Socialist Press* an objection has been made in various quarters that the organisational principles of Lenin and Trotsky were only concerned with mass parties and not small propaganda groups such as exist in Britain today. But the *Red Weekly* series in fact selected a very wide range of examples precisely in order to demonstrate the continuity of organisational principles which Lenin and Trotsky fought for regardless of the size of the groups concerned.

To give some idea of the range of sizes involved, we may note that in 1903 the RSDLP had no more than a few thousand members — 25,000 being the best estimate, in 1906, at the time of the Unity Congress, it had roughly 31,000 members; and by 1907 it had around 150,000 (figures in Lane, *The Roots of Russian Communism* and also cited in Cliff — *Lenin: Building the Party*, p. 179). The Communist International at its height had over 850,000 members, excluding the Russian Party, and of course had the support of many millions of workers (for figures see Claudin — *The Communist Movement: From Comintern to Cominform*, p. 112). Of the 1,000 members of the SWP in 1940, approximately 500 supported the positions of Trotsky/Cannon.

To find Lenin defending the same organisational principles in an organisation of a few thousand and in one of 150,000, and to find Trotsky fighting against a break until a definitive crossing of class lines in an organisation of 800,000 members and one of 1,000 members is to reject once and for all the view that Lenin's and Trotsky's action were determined not by principles, but by size. We see instead that they were dictated by fundamental considerations of Marxist theory.

- (7) Lenin — *Collected Works*, vol 6, p. 17-79.
- (8) Trotsky — *On Lenin*, p. 42.
- (9) Lenin — *CW* 7, p. 330.
- (10) Lenin defined a Party member as one 'who recognises the party's programme and supports it by material means and personal participation in one of the party organisations'. Martov substituted for the last condition and by regular personal association under the direction of one of the party organisations'.
- (11) Lenin — *CW* 7, p. 347.

(12) Lenin stated: 'The growth and spread of the revolutionary movement, its constantly deeper penetration among the various classes and strata of the people, will inevitably give rise (all to the good) to constantly newer trends and shades.' (*CW* 8, p. 185)

This resolution that tendencies or factions are not necessarily representatives of another class but can reflect unevenness within the proletariat was stressed, against Stalinist fictions, by Trotsky also:

'The appearance of factions is unavoidable

again contrasted the proletarian fight for unity and discipline of the Bolsheviks with the opportunism and splitism of the Mensheviks:

'Was it an accident that the most extreme representatives of the Right and not of the Left wing of our Party were the ones to withdraw? Was it an accident that it was opportunists who withdrew and not consistent revolutionary Social-Democrats?' (*CW* 7, p. 343).

The answer was clear:

'The Iskra-ists of the firm line had submitted without a murmur when Martov set out to beat and did beat them in collaboration with the Bund. But the Martovites were so unbridled that instead of submitting they set out to cause a row and a split' (*CW* 7, p. 30).

The Bolsheviks in contrast fought by Party methods.

'We [i.e. the Bolsheviks] did not fight by hysteria and rows, of course, but by methods which were quite loyal and quite legitimate, perceiving that we were in the minority (as on the question of Paragraph 1), we appealed to the Congress to protect the rights of the minority. Greater strictness as regards the majority required for adoption of members [four-fifths instead of two-thirds], the requirement of unanimity for co-optation, mutual control over co-optation to the central bodies — all this we began to advocate when we found ourselves in the minority on the question of the personal composition of the central bodies' (*CW* 7, p. 298).

How ironic that those such as the Stalinists and Holyites who claim that in 1903 the Bolshevik Party, as opposed to a Bolshevik faction, was created should clearly stand with the anarchistic Menshevik splitters against the fight of Lenin for proletarian discipline and party unity!

(20) Lenin — *CW* 7, p. 179.

(21) Lenin — *CW* 34, p. 246.

(22) 'The right to publish Party literature is now guaranteed by the Rules to every qualified Party organisation. It has now been made incumbent on the CC of the Party to transport all kinds of Party literature upon the demand of live qualified committees, or one-sixth of all such committees in the Party. The autonomy of the committees has been defined more precisely and their membership declared inviolable....'

'Every local committee has been accorded the right to nominate candidates for committee membership. The boundaries of the Party have been defined more precisely, in accordance with the wishes of the Party majority. A single centre has been set up instead of two or three. The comrades working in Russia have been guaranteed a decided preponderance over the Party's section abroad.'

'In a word, the Third Congress has done everything to remove all possibility of charging the Majority with abuses of numerical superiority, with mechanical suppression, with despotism of the central bodies of the Party, and so on and so forth' (Lenin — *CW* 8, p. 457).

(23) Lenin — *CW* 8, p. 544.

(24) Lenin — *CW* 8, p. 437.

(25) Lenin — *CW* 8, p. 444.

(26) Lenin — *CW* 41, p. 161. 'Full opportunity has been provided for all Social-Democrats to work in full cooperation, to join confidently the ranks of a single party, broad and viable enough, strong and welded enough to let loose from the old traditions of the study circle days and to wipe out all traces of past friction and petty conflicts. Let all members of the Social-Democratic Party who really cherish the Party spirit now respond to the call of the Third Congress; let its decisions serve as the starting point for restoring the unity of the Party' (Lenin — *CW* 8, p. 437).

These were not 'snippets', uttered in the 'heat of the moment', as *Socialist Press* claims, but the most authoritative votes of the Party Congress!

(27) Here *Socialist Press* makes one of its typical errors even of fact. It states: 'It was not until the end of the revolution, after 1905 and increasing mass pressure from working class supporters towards "unity" that the joint unification Congress at Stockholm was convened in 1906.' However the resolutions on Party unity of the Third Congress were passed in 1905 and as the revolution was on the upswing.

However at this point we might ask why, if

quite incorrect sources. In particular, Zinoviev's *History of the Bolshevik Party* is continually utilised. Under any circumstances Zinoviev would be an extraordinary source to quote on organisational questions of Bolshevism. He was the person who actually pioneered the organisational methods later perfected by Stalin — among his great 'accomplishments' were the 'Bolshevisation' of the Comintern against Trotskyism, and the construction of a Leninist organisation which at the Fourteenth CPSU Congress voted unanimously for Zinoviev's positions against Stalin and then, following his removal, voted unanimously for Stalin against Zinoviev!

However, to quote of all things his *History of the Bolshevik Party* is almost beyond belief. Doesn't *Socialist Press* know what historical role that book served? A mere look at its date of writing should indicate that. As even the forward to the WRP version reminds us: 'Zinoviev's work was published in 1923 when the struggle in the Russian Communist Party was beginning to assume intense proportions and when the alliance between Zinoviev, Kamenev and Stalin was beginning to take shape.' In fact, the WRP are much too reticent — no doubt because Healy would like, for his own purposes, to accuse Zinoviev's conclusions.

Lies

Zinoviev's *History of the Bolshevik Party* was the first shot in the campaign of the *triumvirate* of Stalin, Zinoviev and Kamenev against Trotsky. As the WRP is forced to admit: 'Zinoviev's lectures represent perhaps the first attempt to "rewrite" the Party's history to meet the needs of immediate factional struggles, in particular the struggle against Trotsky and his supporters.'

This book systematically falsifies and lies about the history of the Bolshevik Party. It is not a work, innocently written to educate young workers in the history of the Party, but a poisoned weapon designed to smear Trotsky. No wonder *Socialist Press* comes up with so much confusion. Why not quote from Stalin himself? There you will find literally hundreds of quotations which will reject the views of the 'Party and Faction' series and support those of *Socialist Press*. The only trouble is that they bear no relation to the actual history of Bolshevism.

It is tragic and ironic that in attempting to come to grips with the history of Bolshevism the WSL and *Socialist Press* have come to the defence not of Trotsky's positions and practice and the record of Lenin, but those of Zinoviev and Stalin's falsifications against Trotsky. This is the price to be paid for a failure to make a complete break with Healyism and their origins in the WRP.

the Bolshevik Party had been formed in 1903, as *Socialist Press* claims, Lenin was leading this Party to unification with the Mensheviks? *Socialist Press* provides the answer: 'All round political conditions were unfavourable for an open division at this point.'

But weren't the 'all-round political conditions' totally unfavourable for Trotsky when he split from the Comintern in 1933? Weren't the 'all-round political conditions' totally unfavourable when Lenin split with the Second International in 1914? The author of the article attempts to avoid the central political question posed by the 'Unity Congress' — was there a principled basis for unity or not? If not, the questions of 'all-round political conditions' are absolutely irrelevant.

- (28) Lenin — *CW* 10, p. 38. This completely refutes the view that the unification was for Lenin some sort of variant of enbyam. Imagine what Trotsky would have said of anyone who, when the French Trotskyists attend the Socialist Party in the 1930s, had written: 'Let us unite with Leon Blum to make the revolution!'
- (29) Lenin — *CW* 10, p. 309.
- (30) He stated this must be 'a most determined, open and ruthless ideological struggle.' (*CW* 10, p. 380)
- (31) Lenin — *CW* 10, p. 314.
- (32) Lenin — *CW* 11, p. 320.
- (33) Lenin — *CW* 11, p. 320.
- (34) Lenin — *CW* 11, p. 321.

Naturally today such an action would mean a split, as it now has a clear historically defined political meaning.

(35) It is highly symptomatic that *Socialist Press* does not make one single reference to Trotsky's position on the Communist International.

- (36) Lenin — *CW* 11, p. 323.
- (37) Lenin — *CW* 11, p. 321.
- (38) Lenin — *CW* 12, p. 171.
- (39) Trotsky recalled: 'More frightful than the outward blows was the internal reaction. Desertions assumed a mass character. Intellectuals abandoned politics for science, art, religion, and erotic mysticism. The finishing touch was the epidemic of suicides' (Trotsky — Stalin, p. 146).
- (40) This is once again a complete refutation of the position that at that time there was a Bolshevik Party as opposed to merely a Bolshevik faction. Would *Socialist Press* have us believe that the same man who had called for adherence to the party line 'as a sacred and inviolable duty to the party' was now breaking the line and discipline of the Bolshevik Party, and was abandoning democratic centralism because of unfavourable political conditions? One and only one explanation justifies Lenin's action — the explanation which is the truth that there was no Bolshevik Party, but only the Bolshevik faction of the RSDLP.

- (41) Lenin — *CW* 14, p. 24.
- (42) Lenin — *CW* 15, p. 430.
- (43) Lenin — *CW* 41, p. 226.
- (44) Lenin — *CW* 15, p. 449.
- (45) Lenin — *CW* 41, p. 222.
- (46) Lenin — *CW* 15, p. 433.
- (47) Lenin — *CW* 15, p. 436.
- (48) Lenin — *CW* 15, p. 101.
- (49) Lenin — *CW* 18, p. 258.
- (50) Lenin — *CW* 17, p. 346.
- (51) Lenin — *CW* 18, p. 258. In short, far from politically splitting with the Mensheviks as *Socialist Press* claims, Lenin insisted on working with the pro-Party Mensheviks in order to build the RSDLP!
- (52) Lenin — *CW* 17, p. 481.
- (53) Lenin — *CW* 17, p. 453.
- (54) Lenin — *CW* 21, p. 40.
- (55) Unlike *Socialist Press*, the Communist International was very clear on what constituted the point of qualitative transformation of opportunism. The resolution of the First Congress stated:

'At the first shot in the mass slaughter the chief parties of the Second International betrayed the working class, and each of them, on the pretext of "defence of the fatherland", went over to the side of "its" bourgeoisie.... It was at that moment that the Second International finally reached bankruptcy and perished.'

- (56) Trotsky — 'The International Left Opposition, Its Tasks and Methods' in *Writings 1932-33*, p. 54, and *Documents of the Fourth International 1933-40*, p. 19.