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# Leninism or Marxism?

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## **FOREWORD**

This pamphlet is a translation of two articles entitled 'Organisational Questions of Russian Social Democracy', written by Rosa Luxemburg in 1904. The translation was made by the United Workers' Party of America and first published in Britain in pamphlet form in 1935 by the Anti-Parliamentary Communist Federation. In the 1935 edition, several of the paragraphs in the original article were transposed, and this pamphlet follows the 1935 edition except for a few grammatical amendments.

We are publishing this pamphlet because we believe that the ideas of Rosa Luxemburg should be more widely known to the British Socialist Movement.

# **Leninism or Marxism?**

## ORGANISATIONAL QUESTIONS OF THE RUSSIAN REVOLUTION\*

In Social Democracy, organisation is also a different thing from that of the earlier, Utopian attempts at Socialism. It is not an artificial product of propaganda but an historical product of the class struggle, into which Social Democracy simply brings the political consciousness. Under normal conditions, i.e. 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 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, immediately to the highest form of organisation. Thus the organisational question is particularly difficult to Russian Social Democracy not merely because its work must be done without any previous experience of bourgeois democracy, but because it has to create—in a sense, like the good Lord himself—"out of nothing", without the political raw material which has elsewhere already been prepared by bourgeois society.

The problem on which Russian Social Democracy has been working during the last few years is, to be precise, the transition from the dispersed, quite independent circles and local organisations, which corresponded to the preparatory and primarily propagandist phase of the movement, to a form of organisation

\* *Die Neue Zeit*, Vol. 22 (2), pp. 484-92, 529-35 (Stuttgart, 1904).

such as is required for a unified political action of the masses throughout the whole nation.

Since, however, the most prominent trait of the old form of organisation, now grown unbearable and politically outmoded, was dispersion and complete autonomy, or the self-sufficiency of the local organisations, it was quite natural that the watchword of the new phase, of the preparatory work for the great organisation, 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 organisation; it has been shown once more that the Marxist conception of Socialism is not susceptible of being fixed in formulae.

The present book of Comrade Lenin,\* one of the prominent leaders and debaters of *Iskra* in its campaign prior 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 organised bodies of outspoken and active revolutionists from the unorganised though revolutionary active masses surrounding them, and on the other hand, strict discipline and direct, decisive and determining intervention of the central authorities in all expressions of life in the party's local organisations. It suffices to note, for example, that the central committee, according to this conception, is authorised to organise all sub-committees of the party, hence also has power to determine the personal composition of every single local organisation, from Geneva and Liège 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 organisations are merely its executive organs.

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

In the union of such a strict centralism in organisation 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. Let us, however, look into the matter a bit more closely.

There can be no doubt that a strong capitalistic streak is native to 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 centralised great power under the dominance of the bourgeoisie, Social Democracy is fundamentally opposed to any particularism or national federalism. Called upon to represent the total interests of the proletariat as a class within the framework of a given State in opposition to all partial and group interests, it reveals everywhere a 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 Russian Social Democracy also—no question but that it must form, not a federative conglomerate made up of a great number of special organisations 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 lesser degree of centralisation and the detailed structure within a united and unified party.

From the standpoint of the formal tasks of Social Democracy as a fighting party, centralism in its organisation appears *a priori* as an indispensable condition, the fulfilment of which is directly related to the fighting qualities of the party. More important here, however, than the consideration of the formal demands of any fighting organisation are the specific historical conditions of the proletarian struggle.

The social-democratic movement is the first in the history of class societies which, in all its factors and throughout its course, is calculated upon the organisation and the initiative of the masses. In this respect, Social Democracy creates a quite different type of organisation 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 organisation of the class-conscious proletariat". In the organisation and class consciousness of the proletariat, Lenin perceives the only factors which differentiate Social Democracy from Blanquism. He forgets that this difference involves also a complete transvaluation of organisational concepts, a quite new content of the many-sided relation between organisation and struggle.

Up to this point we have regarded the question of centralism from the standpoint of the general bases of Social Democracy and also in art 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 organisation, to forge a weapon against opportunism. The deeper the sources of opportunism lie, the sharper must be this weapon."

Lenin perceives then in the absolute power of the central committee and in the strict hedging off of the party by statute, the one effective dyke against the opportunistic current, the specific earmarks of which he denotes as the inborn academic predilection for autonomism, for disorganisation, and the wincing at strict party discipline and at any 'bureaucratism' in the party life. In Lenin's opinion, only the socialist 'Literat', thanks to his innate instability and individualism, can 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 so subjects himself to all the rude operation of party discipline with joyously closed eyes. "Bureaucratism as against democratism," says Lenin, "that is precisely the organisational principle of Social Democracy as opposed to the organisational principle of the opportunists." He appeals insistently to the fact that the same opposition between the centralistic and the autonomistic conception in Social Democracy is becoming noticeable in all countries where the revolutionary and the reformist or revisionist tendency stand facing each other.

Firstly, it must be noted that the strong emphasis laid on the inborn capacities of the proletarians for social-democratic

organisation 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 being a relationship to opportunistic views.

To be sure, there can be observed in what has hitherto been the practice of Social Democracy of Western Europe an undeniable connection between opportunism and the academic element, and also between opportunism and decentralist tendencies in questions of organisation. 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 this 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, in so far 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 organisation—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 refers, were the outgrowth of a quite determined 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 towards disorganisation.

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 Social Democracy are still separated from the proletarian mass, are thus in the 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, arises also the definite inclination of the opportunistic intellectual of Western European Social Democracy to disorganisation and lack of discipline.

The second definite basis of the present-day opportunistic current is, of course, the presence of an already high stage of development of the social-democratic movement, and therefore of an influential social-democratic party organisation. The latter appears, then, as the 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-founded and determinate political aims of modern opportunism with its admirably adapted ‘automatic’ and decentralistic tendencies; tendencies which, therefore, 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 *declassé* in the exact sense of the word, than the intelligentsia of Western Europe. From this there results—in combination, of course, with the youthfulness of the proletarian movement in Russia—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 tendency towards disorganisation to be effective, the social-democratic intellectual of Russia lacks, in our opinion, not only the positive hold in bourgeois parliamentarism but also the corresponding socio-psychological 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 typical of bourgeois existence; he is in fact the product of a decadent, corrupted bourgeoisie already hidebound in the worst circle of its class rule. On the other hand, the Utopian and opportunistic vagaries of the socialist intellectual of Russia tend, as is understandable, rather to assume the inverted theoretical form of self-mortification, or self-flagellation. In fact, that erstwhile 'going to the people', that is, the obligatory masquerade of the Populist 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 of the pure 'Economists'.

The same reflection also makes it 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 realisation 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 realisation 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 believe that the majority rule of the enlightened workers within their party organisation although as yet unattainable, may be replaced 'temporarily' by a 'transferred' sole-mastery on the part of the central authority of the party, and that the as yet undeveloped 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 the 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 arousing 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 organisations, but were in each case the spontaneous product of the unfettered movement itself. So was the first stage of the genuine proletarian movement in Russia, which began 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-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 organisations played an exceedingly small role. This was not, however, so much the fault of defective preparation of these special organisations 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. On the contrary, such a committee would in all probability only have had the effect 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 Social Democracy, at least as regards its main features, are definitely not ‘invented’, but are the result of a progressive series of great creative acts in the course of the class struggle which is often elemental and always experimenting. 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 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 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 to its daily struggle on the present parliamentary basis, down to the last 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 too much to conceal the further horizons in that one notes a strong inclination to eternalise 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 re-formulation 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 political struggle which, whatever its weight in the emptiness of abstract speculation, is still non-existent and imaginary. To 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

prevailing forms of struggle, a sensitivity to 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 organisations of the party plainly require such elbow-room as alone enables complete utilisation 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 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 intensive 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 Social Democracy 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, allow us to deduce the actual rules of organisation for the Russian party. Those depend naturally, in the last instance, upon the concrete circumstances in which the activity develops in the given period, and—since we are concerned in Russia with what is, after all, the first attempt at a great proletarian party organisation—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 organisation are the main outlines, the *spirit of the organisation*; and this spirit prescribes, especially in the beginnings of the mass movement, co-ordination and drawing together rather than 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 organisation, 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 the value of a form of organisation.

Blanquism was not based upon the direct class action of the working masses, and accordingly did not need a mass organisation. 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. Likewise, since the tactic and the more immediate objects of activity had no connection with the elemental class struggle, but were improvised out of the whole cloth, these were worked out in full detail in advance, fixed and prescribed as a definite plan. For that reason the active members of the organisations were naturally transformed into pure executive organs of a previously determined will existing outside their own field of activity, i.e. 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 organisation.

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 the proletarian army is first recruited in the struggle itself, where it also becomes clear regarding the tasks of the struggle. Organisation, enlightenment and struggle are not separate, mechanical and also temporarily disconnected 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 organisation leads to a constant fluctuation of the party's sphere of influence.

It follows that social-democratic centralisation 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 organised 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 organisation on these two principles—on the blind subordination of all party organisations and their activity, down to the least detail, to a central authority which alone thinks, acts and decides for all, and on a sharp separation of the organised 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 organisational principles of the Blanquist movement of conspiratorial circles onto to social-democratic movement of the working masses. And Lenin himself has perhaps characterised his standpoint more keenly than any of his opponents could do, in that he defines his “revolutionary Social Democrat” as the “Jacobin indissolubly linked with the organisation of the class-conscious workers”. As a matter of fact, however, Social Democracy is not linked or connected with the organisation of the working class, but is the movement of the working class itself. Social-democratic centralism must therefore be of an 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 organisation.

Simply from looking into this true content of social-democratic centralism, it becomes clear that the necessary conditions for it are not yet fully realised 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 their 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 organisational 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 large and highly centralised labour party are already present in Russia. And he betrays once more a much too mechanical conception of social-democratic organisation 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 organisation and discipline". The 'discipline' which Lenin has in mind is impressed upon the proletariat not merely by way of the factory, but also through the whole mechanism of the centralised bourgeois State. And it is nothing short of an improper use of slogans to denote equally as 'discipline' two such opposed concepts as the lack of will and thought 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 organised rebellion of a class struggling for its liberation. It is not by adding 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 Social Democracy.

If we seek to solve the question of forms of organisation, 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 organisation—say for decentralisation—is at any rate to mistake its inner nature. Being opportunistic as it is, the only principle of opportunism, even in questions of organisation, is—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 paralyse 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 decentralisation 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—i.e., the dangerous influence of the intellectuals upon the proletarian movement—his own conception of organisation constitutes the greatest danger for 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 spectre today, may easily turn tomorrow into a palpable reality.

\* In England the Fabians are the most zealous supporters of bureaucratic centralism and enemies of democratic forms of organisation, particularly the Webbs.—The Editor (*Die Neue Zeit*).

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 background of the social-democratic struggle. Thereupon the Russian intelligentsia will also quickly absorb a strongly pronounced bourgeois content. Whereas today 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. Thus, 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 sideleaps. 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 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 organisation. 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 Social Democracy itself. By restraining within the party the pulsing of healthy blood, such an attempt 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 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 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 form, 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 directing 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, mistakes made by a really revolutionary working-class movement are infinitely, in historical perspective, more fruitful and valuable than the infallibility of the most excellent 'central committee'.

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An I.L.P. Publication

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Harrison  
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## **FOREWORD**

This pamphlet is a translation of two articles entitled 'Organisational Questions of Russian Social Democracy', written by Rosa Luxemburg in 1904. The translation was made by the United Workers' Party of America and first published in Britain in pamphlet form in 1935 by the Anti-Parliamentary Communist Federation. In the 1935 edition, several of the paragraphs in the original article were transposed, and this pamphlet follows the 1935 edition except for a few grammatical amendments.

We are publishing this pamphlet because we believe that the ideas of Rosa Luxemburg should be more widely known to the British Socialist Movement.