

## Chapter Five

### FROM THE LEAGUES OF STRUGGLE TO THE FOUNDATION OF THE RUSSIAN SOCIALIST-DEMOCRATIC LABOUR PARTY

Both objective and subjective prerequisites for the establishment of a Marxist Party of the working class had in the main taken shape in Russia by the mid-1890s. On the one hand the mass workers' movement had been gaining in strength and, on the other, Marxist ideas had become widespread and had decisively overpowered the Narodnik ideology, winning over progressively-minded workers. It was the time when, to quote Lenin, the spontaneous popular movement within the working class and the movement of social thought in direction of the theory of Marx and Engels, the theory of Social-Democracy, converged and began merging to form a single whole.\* The Russian revolutionary movement concluded its transition "from peasant and conspiratorial socialism to working-class socialism".†

This formation of the Leagues of Struggle and the emergence of the mass workers' movement was a qualitatively new stage in the history of the liberation movement in Russia. The period of the "embryonic development" of Russian Social-Democracy was definitely a thing of the past. In the course of large-scale strike action by the workers of St. Petersburg, Moscow, Ivanovo-Voznesensk, Ekaterinoslav, and other cities, it cast away the strait jacket of the study circle period, became closely connected with the workers' movement in practice and ceased to be merely an ideological movement. Social-Democracy became a political party which had the support of the mass workers' movement. In the mid-1890s the Social-Democrats throughout Russia arrived at the idea that the disconnected forces must be united, centralised and brought together into a single party.

The idea of forming a Marxist party in Russia was most completely substantiated by Lenin. That was the main goal to which all his theoretical and practical activities in St. Petersburg were subordinated. He summarised the enormous experience accumulated by the Russian and international workers' movement, urged that all the forces of the revolutionary Social-Democrats and advanced workers should be united

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\* V. I. Lenin, "A Retrograde Trend in Russian Social-Democracy", *Collected Works*, Vol. 4, p. 260. — *Ed.*

† *Ibid.* — *Ed.*

into a single political organisation, worked out the programme and policy of the future party and charted ways of forming it.

He suggested that the future party should be built to the model of the St. Petersburg League of Struggle. Characterising the activities of the League as a political leader of the fighting workers, Lenin wrote: "Can it be denied that an organisation like this, if it united, at least, the biggest centres of the working-class movement in Russia (the St. Petersburg, Moscow-Vladimir, and the southern areas, and also the most important towns like Odessa, Kiev, Saratov, etc.), if it had a revolutionary organ at its disposal and enjoyed as much prestige among the Russian workers generally as the League of Struggle does among the St. Petersburg workers – can it be denied that such an organisation would be a tremendous political factor in contemporary Russia, a factor that the government would have to reckon with in its entire home and foreign policy? ...Such an organisation would at one and the same time be a workers' party organisation adapted to our conditions, and a powerful revolutionary party directed against the autocracy."\*

Lenin concluded his pamphlet "The Tasks of the Russian Social-Democrats" with a passionate appeal not to lose precious time and to direct all the forces to the implementation of the main task facing the revolutionary Marxists, that of uniting the workers' study circles and the Social-Democratic groups scattered throughout Russia into a single proletarian party. Together with the book *What the "Friends of the People" Are...* and other works by Lenin, this pamphlet was widely known among the country's Social-Democrats and stimulated their work towards setting up a party.

## THE SOCIAL-DEMOCRATIC MOVEMENT GAINS SCOPE IN RUSSIA

The St. Petersburg League of Struggle for the Emancipation of the Working Class formed by Lenin provided a powerful impetus to the development of the Social-Democratic workers' movement throughout the country. Following the St. Petersburg example, Leagues of Struggle were formed in major industrial centres, including Moscow, Ivanovo-Voznesensk, Ekaterinoslav, and Kiev. Moreover, in the second half of the 1890s Marxist study circles and groups existed in more than

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\* V. I. Lenin, "The Tasks of the Russian Social-Democrats", *Collected Works*, Vol. 2, pp. 341-42. – *Ed.*

80 towns and workers' settlements. Almost all of them were to some extent under the influence of Lenin's League which was the incipient proletarian party of a new type. By expanding its links with the mass of the people, it became a political and organisational centre of the Marxist Social-Democratic movement in Russia.

The leaders of the St. Petersburg League of Struggle were connected in various ways with their associates in different regions of the country, assisted them and enriched them with their experience. Lenin did a great deal in this respect. He personally maintained contacts with Marxists in Moscow, Novgorod, Samara, Vladimir, Ivanovo-Voznesensk, Orekhovo-Zuyevo, and other towns.

Following Lenin's example and on his request, many members of the St. Petersburg League of Struggle established contacts with the Social-Democrats in different cities: for example, the brothers Anatoly and Vassily Vaneyev, the sisters Zinaida and Sofya Nevzorova, and Mikhail Silvin with the Nizhny Novgorod Marxists; Pyotr Zaporozhets with the Social-Democrats in Kiev, Poltava and Ekaterinoslav; Sofya Nevzorova with Ivanovo-Voznesensk and Vladimir Social-Democrats, and A. A. Ganshin with Moscow's. Members of the St. Petersburg League of Struggle also made regular visits to other towns and cities. N. K. Krupskaya visited Poltava, M. A. Silvin, Ivanovo-Voznesensk and Moscow, G. M. Fisher, Narva, P. K. Zaporozhets, Ekaterinoslav, and A. M. Malchenko, Moscow.

All in all, they had links with more than 30 Social-Democratic study circles and groups in other cities, including Moscow, Ivanovo-Voznesensk, Kiev, Ekaterinoslav, Nizhny Novgorod, Vilna, Yaroslavl, Vladimir, Tver, Tula, Oryol, Samara, and Saratov. The St. Petersburg League of Struggle became the recognised centre of Russian Social-Democracy and influenced the nationwide mustering of the forces of the Social-Democrats, who consolidated their relations with the mass of the people.

The Social-Democratic workers' movement was developing tempestuously, not only in the central regions of the country but in the south, too. There, in Ekaterinoslav, Rostov-on-Don and Krivoi Rog regions, new mines, pits and metal works were put into operation and large-scale capitalist industry was feverishly being built up. The speedy numerical growth of the proletariat accompanied by stepped up exploitation provided favourable conditions for Social-Democratic activities. In 1895, under the influence of the St. Petersburg League of

Struggle, Rostov's Social-Democratic study circles united and formed a leading Social-Democratic centre.

The Transcaucasian Social-Democrats were also well-informed about the activities of Lenin's League of Struggle. Its individual publications were disseminated among Transcaucasian Marxist study circles. Georgian Social-Democrats knew Lenin's works, *What the "Friends of the People", Are and How They Fight the Social-Democrats*, *The Economic Essence of Narodism and its Criticism in Mr. Struve's Book*, and others. Some Marxist study circles in Georgia regarded themselves as local branches of the St. Petersburg League of Struggle. For example, the Rules of the Batumi workers' Marxist study circle envisaged the allocation of part of the money from the workers' fund to the St. Petersburg League of Struggle for the Emancipation of the Working Class. Local police authorities reported to the central police department that, in their opinion, the activities of the Social-Democrats in Transcaucasia were united by a single centre in St. Petersburg and that the experience of the St. Petersburg League of Struggle was being widely used in Georgia, too.

The St. Petersburg League of Struggle also exercised its influence in the Urals. Considerable success was scored by the Social-Democrats in the western and north-western areas of Russia. Way back in 1893 the Social-Democratic Party of Poland was formed. It established close relations with workers in Warsaw, Lodz, Bialystok, Dabrowa and other cities and guided the Polish proletariat's strike action and May Day activities. The Polish Social-Democrats sought to maintain brotherly unity with the Russian workers' movement. For example, in the 1897 May Day leaflet they wrote about the community of interests of the Polish, Lithuanian and Russian proletariat. "Throughout the tsarist empire," it said, "the idea of the proletariat has found a joyful response and brother has found brother."

In the mid-1890s the early Marxist study circles appeared at Latvian enterprises. The St. Petersburg Marxists maintained contacts with their associates in Latvia through students in the capital who took part in the revolutionary movement. Lenin's League of Struggle supplied the Latvian Social-Democrats with literature and shared its experience in work. Publications by St. Petersburg Marxists, including Lenin's works, leaflets and other documents of the League of Struggle were distributed among the Riga and Libawa workers attending Marxist study circles.

The influence of the St. Petersburg League of Struggle was also

felt in Lithuania and Byelorussia. Its illegal publications, among them Lenin's works, were disseminated among workers in Vilna, Minsk, Vitebsk, Smorgon, Pinsk, and elsewhere. They regarded the selfless activities of the St. Petersburg League of Struggle to be for them "the best example of conscious struggle for the interests of the working class".

Vilna, a major trade and cultural centre in the north-western region, played an important part in the Lithuanian Social-Democratic movement. A Lithuanian Social-Democratic study group headed by A. Domašavičius and A. Moravsky was formed there in the first half of the 1890s. In 1895, in preparation for a congress of the Lithuanian Social-Democratic Party, they worked out its programme, which set forth separatist demands with regard to the Russian revolutionary movement under the influence of the nationalistically-minded PPS. However, consistent Marxists within the Lithuanian revolutionary movement rejected the separatist course. As a result of the acute struggle around the draft programme, the Lithuanian Social-Democrats split and two independent organisations – the Lithuanian Social-Democratic Party (LSDP) and Workers' Union of Lithuania headed by S. S. Trusevich and M. Yu. Kozlovsky were formed in 1896. Unlike the LSDP, the Workers' League adhered to proletarian internationalism. Together with the revolutionary wing of the Lithuanian Social-Democrats headed by F. E. Dzerzhinsky, the League advocated the united action of the Lithuanian and Russian proletariat. "Fighting together with workers throughout Russia," its programme said, "we shall gain the constitution we need which will mark a stage on the road towards socialism."

In the early 1890s, a Jewish Social-Democratic group led by A. Kremer took shape in Vilna. It formed workers' study circles, trained propagandists for them and established contacts with the Social-Democrats in other towns and Russian Marxists in exile. During the early years of its existence the Vilna group professed internationalist views. The group members propagandised Marxism among Jewish, Lithuanian and Polish workers; Jewish workers studied Russian in its circles to be able to read the literature published in Russian and to take part in the all-Russia workers' movement.

Later on, however, separatist tendencies and trends towards an organisationally independent Jewish workers' movement became manifest among Jewish Social-Democrats. Some of the representatives of the movement, including Yu. Martov, who was at that time in Vilna

under police surveillance, began insisting on the need for a separate Jewish workers' organisation in view of the allegedly specific interests of the Jewish proletariat. These nationalistic sentiments were only budding, but under the influence of the petty-bourgeois environment of the Jewish workers' movement they were increasingly taking root.

In September 1897, shortly before the First Congress of the Russian Social-Democratic Labour Party was held, Vilna hosted a congress of representatives of the Jewish Social-Democrats of Lithuania, Poland and Byelorussia. It was attended by eleven delegates from Vilna, Warsaw, Minsk, Bialystok and Vitebsk and by the workers' group that published the illegal newspaper *Arbeiter Stimme* (The Voice of the Workers).

The congress united the Jewish Social-Democratic groups into the nationalist Social-Democratic organisation – the General Jewish Workers' Union of Poland and Russia (the Bund).

The congress' resolution on the attitude towards the future workers' party in Russia emphasised that the Bund joined it "as an autonomous organisation independent only as far as questions affecting the Jewish proletariat are concerned". In this way the Bund officially sealed its special, autonomous position in the Russian Social-Democratic Labour Party which was fraught with the danger of separatism and of divorcing the Jewish workers' movement from the all-Russia movement.

The Bund primarily united workers in small-scale industry, artisans and other semi-proletarian elements. As distinct from other Social-Democratic organisations, it was built up on a nationality rather than a territorial principle. Its organisational and political platform reflected the views of the backward semi-proletarian population – craftsmen, artisans and the small town petty bourgeoisie. The leaders of Jewish Social-Democracy sought to adjust their organisation and tactics to the demands of small producers, artisans and urban poor. It is common knowledge that these demands did not go beyond the improved material situation of the working people under the existing bourgeois-landowners' system and the defence of "specific", that is, the national rights of the Jewish population. The idea of the revolutionary overthrow of tsarism and capitalism lacked the necessary social and class backing among these strata of the population. It was not fortuitous, therefore, that as early as 1896 the incipient programme of Economism censured by Lenin and his supporters in St. Petersburg, was first formulated in Vilna, the centre of the Jewish Social-Democratic movement.

Nevertheless, for all their shortcomings, the Social-Democratic organisations within the Bund initially had a positive role to play. They rallied the working people under the banner of Social-Democracy, urged them to fight the exploiters and carried on educational work among the working people. In September 1895 Lenin visited Vilna on his way back from Switzerland. He learnt about the activities of the local Social-Democrats and enlisted their aid in putting out abroad the non-periodic Marxist publication *Rabotnik*.

Lenin's visit to Vilna left its marks on the development of the Social-Democratic movement in north-western Russia. After his visit, the local Social-Democrats strengthened their contacts with the St. Petersburg League of Struggle and the Emancipation of Labour Group.

History shows that Lenin's League of Struggle did in fact become a stronghold and a powerful stimulus for the Social-Democratic workers' movement throughout the country and promoted not only the growth, but also the centralisation of the movement. By mid-1890s, Lenin pointed out, the Social-Democratic movement had become fairly well developed. "The seeds of Social-Democratic ideas have been broadcast throughout Russia, workers' leaflets – the earliest form of Social-Democratic literature – are known to all Russian workers from St. Petersburg to Krasnoyarsk, from the Caucasus to the Urals."\*

The mounting Social-Democratic movement in the country boosted the activities of Plekhanov's Emancipation of Labour group and breathed fresh strength into it. The police authorities pointed out that "in connection with the perceptible growth of the Social-Democratic movement in Russia over the past few years, emigrants belonging to that movement and grouping mainly in Switzerland round Axelrod and the notorious Plekhanov, who had at one time completely lost any sway, are also gaining in importance",

After Lenin met Plekhanov in 1895, Plekhanov's group maintained closer contacts with the St. Petersburg League of Struggle and other Social-Democratic organisations in Russia. Fresh impetus was given to the activities of the Union of Russian Social-Democrats Abroad founded on the initiative of the Emancipation of Labour group in 1894. In 1896-1899 the Geneva printing house of the Union put out six issues (in three books) of the Marxist *Rabotnik* publication founded

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\* V. I. Lenin, "Our Immediate Task" *Collected Works*, Vol. 4, p. 216. – Ed

on Lenin's initiative and also ten issues of the *Rabotnik Leaflet* intended for the workers.

As early as 1891, Plekhanov and Zasulich, on behalf of the Russian Social-Democrats, in the report of the *Sotsial-Demokrat* editorial board to the International Socialist-Congress in Brussels: "We deem it our duty to develop a network of workers' study circles in Russia and will take no part in your congresses until this task has been accomplished: until that moment and representation of Russian Social Democracy would be a fiction." No more than five years passed before Plekhanov and his group had the actual opportunity to address the Second International on the part of Russian Social-Democracy.

In the mid-1890s, the Russian Social-Democratic movement had grown to such an extent that it could emerge on the international scene. In July 1896, Russian Social-Democracy was first represented at the International Socialist Congress in London. The Russian delegation was headed by G. V. Plekhanov, who had received his mandate from the St. Petersburg League of Struggle. The delegation made a report that informed socialists of different nations about the activities of the Social-Democratic organisations in Russia, above all the St. Petersburg League of Struggle.

This was a major event in the development of the international socialist workers' movement. The London Congress pointed out the "extremely important and until then unheard-of fact of the presence of the representatives of the Russian workers' organisations at an international congress". It hailed the awakening of the Russian proletariat and, on behalf of the fighting workers of all countries, it wished their Russian brothers "courage and indomitable vigour in their hard struggle against political and economic tyranny".

In this way, in the second half of the 1890s Russian Social-Democracy was faced with the important historical task of uniting the Leagues of Struggle and all Marxist study circles and groups into a single revolutionary party of the Russian proletariat. As a result of the activities of the Leagues of Struggle led by the St. Petersburg League of Struggle, the groundwork had been laid for pooling the Marxist forces on a nationwide scale. Preparations for the First Party Congress were started in practice.

## WORKING TOWARDS THE FIRST CONGRESS OF THE RUSSIAN SOCIAL-DEMOCRATIC LABOUR PARTY



Lenin was the first to voice the idea of convening an all-Russia congress to form a party. He did that soon after his arrest in December 1895. According to Nadezhda Krupskaya, Lenin wrote from prison, urging the organisation of a party and insisting on preparations for a congress. In his *What the "Friends of the People" Are...* he substantiated theoretically the need to form an independent party of the working class, while now he spoke about the problem in practical terms.

The time was ripe for that. The struggle to merge socialism with the workers' movement in Russia started by the St. Petersburg and other Social-Democratic Leagues called for its organisational embodiment and centralisation. The Social-Democratic organisations that had emerged in many towns and industrial areas of Russia under the influence of Lenin's League experienced tremendous difficulties because of the disconnected nature of the movement and needed a single guiding centre. The isolated Social-Democratic study circles and groups that had come into being on the crest of the workers' movement were constantly being jeopardised. The tsarist government regularly suppressed and paralysed the activities of the local organisations, destroying the results of their strenuous work. It was only natural, therefore, that members of the Moscow, Kiev and other Leagues of Struggle followed the St. Petersburg Marxists in raising the question of a congress. In short, the idea of a congress was in the air and dominated the minds of many a Social-Democrat. Under these circumstances, it was not historically justified to procrastinate in preparing for the congress.

Lenin's theoretical and practical activities during the St. Petersburg period offered an important prerequisite for the formation of the party. His works during that period dealt the final blow at the ideology of Narodism and illuminated the road towards a revolutionary Marxist workers' party in Russia. While in prison, Lenin worked on the first draft of the future party programme and wrote an explanatory note about it. In this explanation to the *Draft Programme* he formulated the content of its three components – the first part of the programme elucidated the situation of the working class in a bourgeois society, the second set forth the basic tasks facing the party, and the third put forward the specific demands of the proletariat and the entire working people in combating the autocracy.

In the *Draft Programme* Lenin clearly outlined the class essence of Russian Social-Democracy and defined its immediate and final aims. Briefly, they boiled down to two main demands: first, to the overthrow of the tsarist autocracy and gaining democratic freedoms

and, second, to seizing power by the proletariat and building a new society. "...This struggle of the working class against the capitalist class," Lenin's *Draft Programme* stated, "is a struggle against all classes who live by the labour of others, and against all exploitation. It can only end in the passage of political power into the hands of the working class, the transfer of all the land, instruments, factories, machines and mines to the whole of society for the organisation of socialist production under which all that is produced by the workers and all improvements in production must benefit the working people themselves."\*

The Party's first programme document, which Lenin completed by the summer of 1896, differed favourably from the draft programmes of Plekhanov's Emancipation of Labour group. It was free from any influence by Narodism or Lassalle's ideas† and gave the fullest possible expression to the outstanding demands of the Social-Democratic movement in the country. Lenin's manuscript *Draft and Explanation of a Programme for the Social-Democratic Party* found its way out of the prison and was read by some members of the St. Petersburg League of Struggle. Members of the Emancipation of Labour group also knew the content of the draft programme. , Successes scored in practice by the St. Petersburg Social-Democrats led by Lenin served as a point of departure in working towards forming a party and convening its first congress. It is only natural, therefore, that the St. Petersburg Social-Democrats were the first to set about following Lenin's advice and drawing up instructions with regard to the organisation of the party.

Nadezhda Krupskaya was asked by those members of the St. Petersburg League of Struggle who remained free first to discuss the problem of convening a congress with the Kiev Social-Democrats, and she left for the Ukraine. "In the summer of 1896," she wrote, "I went to Kiev to discuss the publication of a common illegal newspaper and preparations for a party congress. I was to see Vera Kryzhanovskaya

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\* V. I. Lenin, "Draft and Explanation of a Programme for the Social-Democratic Party", *Collected Works*, Vol. 2, pp. 95-96. – *Ed.*

† The first draft programme of the Emancipation of Labour group recognised the "need for terrorist struggle against the absolute government", while the second contained Lassalle's demand for "state aid to production associations". – *Ed.*

and Tuchapsky. But I went first to Poltava and met Tuchapsky, Rummyantsev, Aron Lurye and Sammer there. We had come to an agreement on everything in Poltava.”

Unfortunately, no more specific information about the content and results of the Poltava conference are available. Krupskaya hurried away from Poltava and back to St. Petersburg where a general strike of textile workers was coming to a head and vigorously joined the strike action together with other League members. Then new arrests followed that further weakened the Petersburg League of Struggle.

But Lenin’s idea of convening a party congress had already firmly implanted itself in the minds of the Russian Marxists, and one after another the Social-Democratic organisations undertook to put it into effect. In the spring of 1896 the congress issue was discussed at the Moscow Workers’ League. A draft plan for the work of the congress was drawn up and circulated among Social-Democratic organisations in some other towns. The Moscow Marxists did, nevertheless, fail in their attempts to take the initiative in convening the congress. They were prevented by another exposure of the Workers’ League, as a result of which the police arrested the majority of its activists.

A conference of the representatives of the St. Petersburg, Kiev and Vilna organisations and the Union of Russian Social-Democrats Abroad was held in Zurich (Switzerland) in 1897. Its participants also raised the question of the need to pool forces and form a party. Other organisations, according to some data, the Ekaterinoslav Marxists, for example, also arrived at the idea of convening a congress, but failed to implement it. Preparations for the First Party Congress were made in difficult circumstances when leaders and activists of the Social-Democratic movement were being arrested one after another. The St. Petersburg and Moscow Leagues were dealt especially severe blows.

Some modern Western historiographers distort the historic truth by asserting that the Bund was “the chief organiser of the First Congress of the Russian Social-Democratic Labour Party”. These allegations are absolutely groundless. It has already been shown before that Lenin was the initiator of the Congress, while the Kiev Social-Democrats who were familiar with Lenin’s works and maintained close contacts with the St. Petersburg League of Struggle became its immediate organisers, owing to historical conditions

According to Eidelman, the Kiev Social-Democrats, who formed the Rabocheye Dyelo group, from the very beginning set themselves the task of uniting the Social-Democratic organisations “both on a lo-

cal, city and inter-city scale". Beginning with the spring of 1897 that group launched direct preparations for convening a party congress. Its leaders visited certain cities (St. Petersburg, Moscow, Vilna and Ivanovo-Voznesensk), familiarised themselves with the state of affairs in the local Social-Democratic movement and enlisted support in convening a unifying congress in Kiev. After completing those preparations, N. A. Vigdorichik went to deliver invitations to the congress. The St. Petersburg League of Struggle, the Moscow Workers' League, the Ivanovo-Voznesensk Workers' League, and the Vilna Social-Democratic organisation were among those invited.

The first attempt proved to be abortive, however. In actual fact, only one delegate from the St. Petersburg League of Struggle came to Kiev. Then B. Gorev (Goldman), the St. Petersburg delegate, N. A. Vigdorichik and K. A. Petrusевич, who represented two Kiev groups, held a conference in Kiev on March 17-18 (29-30), which went down in history as the pre-congress conference. It passed a resolution to change the name of all Social Democratic organisations to Leagues of Struggle for the Emancipation of the Working Class, following the St. Petersburg's example. This action showed both the recognition accorded to Lenin's League and the higher level of the Social-Democratic movement in general. Besides, it was decided to found an all-Russia newspaper in Kiev and, in order to carry out practical preparations for the congress, to set up a special group, which was given the name of the *Rabochaya Gazeta* group. It spearheaded all the practical activities towards convening the First Party Congress. It was a well-organised group which operated in strict conspiracy, headed by the experienced and active professional revolutionary B. L. Eidelman.\*

The group started preparations for the congress by founding the *Rabochaya Gazeta*. That was an exceptionally difficult problem not only as far as ideology and politics were concerned but also with regard to organisation and equipment. Working as yet on the scale of study circles, the *Rabochaya Gazeta* editors had to go far beyond the level of local Social-Democratic organisations and to reflect the general interests of the party, to prepare the necessary materials for unit-

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\* Tuchapsky recalled that Eidelman "was distinguished in those years for his willpower, untiring energy and great exactingness to himself and others in what had to do with our work. He was extremely devoted to our cause and lived solely for its sake. It is not surprising, therefore, that he exercised tremendous influence on the group". – *Ed.*

ing in a party, to find the type and to equip an illegal printing press. It took almost the entire summer of 1897 to accomplish the task.

Members of the *Rabochaya Gazeta* group gathered and prepared the material to be published in the newspaper and maintained contacts with Social-Democratic organisations in other towns in a bid to cover the key events occurring in the workers' movement as far as possible. By the summer of 1897 work on establishing an underground printing press had been completed.

The first issue of *Rabochaya Gazeta* came out on August 22. "I remember the feeling of triumph," Tuchapsky recalled, "that seized us when we saw that first issue of what was no longer a local but a Social-Democratic newspaper, which had come into being through our efforts and which laid the foundations for our future party."

The quotation from the *Communist Manifesto*, "Working Men of All Countries, Unite!", was chosen as an epigraph to the newspaper. The contents of the issue did, on the whole, correspond to the purpose of the newspaper as the mouthpiece of all-Russia's Social-Democrats. It carried fairly extensive information for that period about the workers' movement in the country's main centres. Apart from individual reports from St. Petersburg, Kharkov, Kiev, Riga, Warsaw, and Vilna, the editorial headlined "The Importance of Workers' Newspaper to the Russian Workers' Movement" contained vast data on strike action in 1895-1897. The survey described disturbances, strikes, and other development in the workers' movement in St. Petersburg, Moscow, Kiev, Odessa, Vilna, Bialystok, Nizhny Novgorod, Ivanovo-Voznesensk, Yaroslavl, and Kostroma.

The newspaper laid special emphasis on covering the St. Petersburg workers' movement and the activities of the St. Petersburg League of Struggle. For example, the *Rabochaya Gazeta* said in an editorial that "the Russian workers' movement has proved to the entire world that it not only exists, but already has considerable potential" and stressed that nobody could doubt it after the famous strikes by St. Petersburg workers in 1896-1897. "St. Petersburg workers with their glorious League form a formidable vanguard in the army of Russian workers. Their heroic struggle accompanied by a host of sacrifices sets an example for workers throughout the rest of Russia..."

The nationwide significance of the first issue of the *Rabochaya Gazeta* was reflected not only in its copious information about the workers' movement in the country, but also in its formulation of the general tasks facing the movement. "The Russian workers' movement

has now grown to such an extent," the editorial read, "that it is necessary to think about the Russian workers' constant communication with each other, about their mutual assistance in their struggle and about their close fraternal alliance. Only when they are united into a single powerful party will the Russian workers defeat the factory owners and the government." The newspaper exposed the tsarist government as a force that supported "the factory owners and the landowners against the workers". The article "Russian Capitalism and the Workers' Movement in Russia" said that the overthrow of tsarism was the immediate task of the workers' movement, after which there would be a period of struggle for its final goals. "The autocratic government of the Russian tsar should be the first to fall. With the downfall of the Russian autocracy the fetters that restrain Russian workers on all sides will disappear, and Russian workers will come face to face with their closest enemy – the bourgeoisie." The column "Life Abroad" informed Russian workers about the situation of workers and the peasants in West-European countries.

The first issue of the *Rabochaya Gazeta* did, however, have its shortcomings. Its articles and reports, with the exception of the editorial, which stated that, organised in a party, the workers would defeat the factory owners and the government, were not forceful enough in mirroring the principled policy of Russian Social-Democracy and its political programme. Among others, Plekhanov pointed out this shortcoming in the first issue and recommended that the editors make greater effort to spread "in our ranks correct views on the political tasks of our party in Russia".

Although the members of the *Rabochaya Gazeta* group thought that they did not "really deserve" to be rebuked by Plekhanov for "ignoring political struggle", they also admitted that the first issue was somewhat restricted in its scope. The editors had to do a good deal to ensure that the articles in the next issue were more profound and outspoken in their political pronouncements.

The second issue of *Rabochaya Gazeta* was published in mid-December 1897 and became another landmark in the activities of the Kiev Social-Democrats. Thorough work had been carried out on the basis of what were now wider and stronger contacts maintained by the Kiev Social-Democrats with the Social-Democratic organisations in the country's most important centres. When work on the issue was nearing completion, the leaders of the publishing group got acquainted with the latest issue of the *Petersburg Workers' News-Sheet* and what

was most important, with Lenin's work "The Tasks of the Russian Social-Democrats". It was, beyond doubt under the influence of these publications that they deemed it necessary to revise and make amendments to the second issue of the newspaper, its editorial in particular; which had already been sent to the printer's. Eidelman who headed the group wrote about it later on: "I persuaded one of my colleagues to revise the second issue, offering the desirable alterations for the editorial, in fact changing the topic itself."

As a result, the second issue, especially editorial "The Immediate Tasks of the Russian Workers' Movement" had a clear-cut political message. The ample information about the workers' struggle against the employers to improve their situation brimmed with diverse exposures of the tsarist autocracy as an advocate of capitalist exploitation and a strangler of the freedom of the workers and the entire working population in the country. The workers' struggle against the tsarist autocracy and for political freedom was substantiated and propagandised as the immediate task facing the workers' movement, and the need to unite the Social-Democratic workers' organisations in Russia into a single political party of the all-Russia proletariat was given as the main prerequisite in accomplishing this task. "It is time," the editorial said, "for individual workers' study circles and leagues scattered all over the country to form a single all-embracing union or a single common party. This party will facilitate the unification of the Russian workers and promote the growth of the Russian workers' movement; it will channel the forces and the money from where they are in excess to where they are in demand; it will lead the Russian workers' struggle and strive to make this struggle coherent and organised."

Later, in *A Protest by Russian Social-Democrats* Lenin wrote that, following the St. Petersburg workers' newspaper (*St. Petersburg Workers' News-Sheet* No. 2, September 1897) which called on the workers to unite into a "strong party", the same idea was expounded in the second issue of the *Rabochaya Gazeta*. He underlined the following idea of its editorial: "The fight against the autocratic government for political liberty is the immediate task of the Russian working-class movement." "The Russian working-class movement will increase its forces tenfold if it comes out as a single harmonious whole, with a common name and a well-knit organisation..." "The separate workers' circles should combine into one common party." "The Russian workers' party will be a Social-Democratic Party." "...These views of *Rab-*

*ochaya Gazeta* were fully shared by the vast majority of Russian Social-Democrats...”\*

AS you can see, Lenin observed the community and continuity in the St. Petersburg and Kiev Social-Democrats’ formulation of the immediate tasks of the Social-Democratic workers’ movement and their bringing of “broad political demands” to the fore.<sup>†</sup> The *Rabochaya Gazeta* did in fact elaborate Lenin’s line pursued by the St. Petersburg League of Struggle. “What banner is going to fly as the banner of the Russian workers’ movement?” the newspaper asked and replied: “Of course, that very banner on which the great teachers of the workers Marx and Engels inscribed the words ‘Working Men of All Countries, Unite!’; that banner under which the advanced workers of all countries of the globe fight and round which nearly all the workers’ circles, funds and leagues rally in Russia. It is the red banner of international Social-Democracy.”

An analysis of the contents of the two issues of *Rabochaya Gazeta* shows that the organisers of the congress did, on the whole, keep abreast of the contemporary tasks of Russian Social-Democracy and intended to form the future party on the basis of revolutionary Marxism and proletarian internationalism. The publication and circulation of the newspaper helped Russian Social-Democrats to arrive at the idea of a unifying party congress. This was not sufficient, however. The results of the agitational and propaganda activities of the *Rabochaya Gazeta* had to be consolidated organisationally: to begin with, the Leagues of Struggle and the largest Social-Democratic study groups had to be given an idea of the draft agenda of the congress and to guarantee their representation at the congress.

The Colloquium Rules (that was how the agenda of the congress was called for reasons of conspiracy), worked out by the Kiev Social-Democrats, set forth the unification of disconnected Social-Democratic organisations into a single party as the chief aim of the First Party Congress. It could be attended solely by those leagues and groups that recognised the timeliness of such a unification. Each organisation had the right to send two delegates to the congress, one rep-

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\* V. I. Lenin, “A Protest by Russian Social-Democrats”, *Collected Works*, Vol. 4, pp. 179-80. – *Ed.*

† V. I. Lenin, “A Retrograde Trend in Russian Social-Democracy”, *Collected Works*, Vol. p. 259. – *Ed.*



representing the intelligentsia, the other the workers. The Rules insisted on furnishing of delegates with broad powers enabling them to actively participate in the work of the congress. At the same time, local organisations were to provide their delegates with the right to take certain decisions on the most important issues.

Further, the Rules of the congress named the main problems to be discussed – the form of the association, a Central Committee with permanent powers or some other type of an institution; the name of the party; the powers and functions of the Central Committee; party publications (*Rabochaya Gazeta*, the publication of pamphlets and books); finances; relations with other revolutionary organisations, etc.

The organisers of the congress came up against serious difficulties. Mounting repressions forced many active Social-Democrats to go deep underground, which restricted their activity and weakened their contacts with the workers at large. Frequent arrests of the more experienced functionaries adversely affected the proletariat's strike action and promoted the growth of spontaneous element in it. Social-Democrats who remained free at the time became increasingly infected with opportunism, whose advocates persuaded workers to renounce political struggle.

Later on, this opportunist trend became known as Economism. In 1897, its representatives in St. Petersburg (Takhtarev, Chernyshev and others) formed an independent group, published the newspaper *Rabochaya Mysl* (Workers' Thought) and sought to transform the activities of the League of Struggle along trade union lines. The early or, as they called themselves "young" Economists, became especially active abroad and ousted Plekhanov's Emancipation of Labour group from the leadership of the Union of Russian Social-Democrats. "The 'young comrades'," Plekhanov wrote of them, considered themselves representatives of a new trend in Russian Social-Democracy, whereas ... there is neither socialism nor democracy in this trend."\* The "young" Social-Democrats, who voiced the sentiments of the backward sections of the proletariat, obstructed the convocation of the unifying congress and the formation of a centralised party. They advocated spontaneity in the workers' movement and organisational disunity among the Social-Democrats.

The organisers of the First RSDLP Congress should be credited with adhering to the principled line of Social-Democracy in 1894-

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\* G. V. Plekhanov, *Works*, Vol. 12, p. 25 (in Russian). – *Ed.*

1896 charted by Lenin's League of Struggle and with resisting the opportunist wavering of the Economists. Only those Social-Democratic organisations that were quite mature politically and had shown they were capable of guiding the proletariat's class struggle were invited to the congress. The St. Petersburg, Kiev, Moscow and Ekaterinoslav Leagues of Struggle and also the *Rabochaya Gazeta* group and the Bund were the first to receive invitations. For various reasons the representatives of the Ivanovo-Voznesensk League and the Lithuanian Social-Democratic Party,\* though invited to the congress, were unable to attend it, while the Kharkov Social-Democratic organisation refused to take part in the congress, believing it to be premature.

While preparing for the congress, the Kiev Social-Democrats got to know the state of affairs in the Social-Democratic activities in some cities. As a result of their knowledge, the right of representation at the congress was denied to the St. Petersburg group of the Young and also to the Odessa and Nikolayev organisations because of their inadequate conspiracy. The *Rabocheye Znamya* (Workers' Banner) group, still lacking any definite stand, was not invited to the congress either. "Our connections throughout Russia," Eidelman pointed out, "were much broader than the organisations whose representatives attended the congress; we knew of towns where the workers' movement existed, and these towns might have been represented at the congress but for the need for conspiracy."

The Union of Russian Social-Democrats Abroad did not get an invitation to send a delegate to the congress either. The reason for this was the *Rabochaya Gazeta* group's poor contacts with Plekhanov's Emancipation of Labour group. Tuchapsky, who had visited Geneva, said that Plekhanov, Axelrod and Zasulich were not "particularly enthusiastic about our undertakings".

At first, the congress was to be convened in Kiev, but the vigorous activity of the *Rabochaya Gazeta* group had attracted the attention of the

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\* The Ivanovo-Voznesensk League took no part in the congress because it had been raided by the police. The Lithuanian Social-Democratic Party agreed to send a representative to the congress, but failed to do so, pleading arrests. Later, F. E. Dzerzhinsky, an active member of Lithuanian Social-Democratic Party, explained the absence of its delegate at the congress by nationalistic sentiments. He regretted that in 1898, while he was in prison, the Lithuanian Social-Democrats did not join the united Russian Social-Democratic Labour Party. – *Ed.*

police to it. That was why Minsk, a quiet provincial town at the time that did not evoke the suspicion of the tsarist secret police, was chosen as the venue of the congress. Social-Democrats with reliable connections in Minsk undertook to make arrangements for holding the congress.

### THE FIRST CONGRESS: A MILESTONE SETTING UP THE PARTY

The First RSDLP Congress was held at the house of the Social-Democrat P. V. Rumyantsev, on the outskirts of Minsk, on March 1-3 (13-15), 1898. It was conducted in strict secrecy, and workers' pickets were posted in case of police surveillance. No minutes were taken and only resolutions were recorded. Other documents of the congress could be destroyed immediately in the continuously heated stove.

All in all, the congress was attended by nine delegates from six organisations: S. I. Radchenko, from the St. Petersburg League of Struggle, A. A. Vannovsky, from the Moscow League of Struggle, K. A. Petrusevich, from the Ekaterinoslav League of Struggle, P. L. Tuchapsky, from the Kiev League of Struggle and the Workers' Committee, B. L. Eidelman and N. A. Vigdorichik, from the *Rabochaya Gazeta* group, A. I. Kremer, A. Munich and Sh. Katz, from the Bund.

Eidelman presided at the congress, while Vigdorichik and Tuchapsky were elected secretaries. The aforementioned Colloquium Rules which had been brought to the knowledge of all the Social-Democratic organisations served as the agenda for the congress.

The main issue at the congress was the formation of the party. The delegates unanimously decided to unite all the Social-Democratic organisations into a single party. The congress resolution read: "The organisations of the Leagues of Struggle for the Emancipation of the Working Class, the *Rabochaya Gazeta* group and the Jewish General Workers' Union of Russia and Poland are merging to form a single organisation called the Russian Social-Democratic Labour Party." A dispute has arisen only with regard to the name of the party. In keeping with the Colloquium Rules, the delegates were given the following variants for consideration: the Russian Social-Democratic Party, the Russian Workers' Party and the Russian Workers' League. The debates resulted in a consensus opinion that the future organisation should be Social-Democratic and called *Rossiiskaya* rather than *Russ-*

*kaya*.<sup>\*</sup> Some delegates, however, objected to calling the party Labour under the pretext that there were as yet few workers in the Social-Democratic organisations at the time. The name the *Rossiiskaya* Social-Democratic Party was carried by the congress by five votes to four. The word Labour was included in the name after the congress with the consent of two Central Committee members, when the RSDLP Manifesto was written.

The decision of the congress to call the party "*Rossiiskaya*" was a matter of principle. It emphasised that the party meant to unite in its ranks workers of all the nationalities inhabiting Russia. "To dispel any idea of its being national in character," Lenin wrote, "the Party called itself '*Rossiiskaya*' and not '*Russkaya*'."<sup>†</sup>

After they had founded the party, the participants in the congress discussed the question of attitude to the Polish Socialist Party (PPS). Because of its petty-bourgeois, nationalist programme, this organisation was not invited to the congress, but it fought for the overthrow of tsarism and was regarded as a "friendly foreign power". Therefore, after protracted debates in connection with the Polish Socialist Party, the congress formulated its general attitude to the organisations of that type and passed the following resolution: "Through its Central Committee the Party establishes relations with other revolutionary organisations, as this does not violate its programme principles nor its tactical methods. The Party recognises the right of every nationality to self-determination."

It should be pointed out that, in discussing the specific question of attitude to the PPS, the congress adopted a correct approach to one of the principles of our party's future programme. The programme principle of national self-determination endorsed by the First Congress was yet another confirmation of the internationalist nature of the RSDLP and favourably influenced the further development of the proletariat's revolutionary struggle.

The congress heard delegates' reports on the situation in different towns and passed a resolution on the Party's organisational framework. The resolution, which contained 11 points, dealt with the for-

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<sup>\*</sup> *Rossiiskaya* means in Russian pertaining to all Russia as a multi-national state, while *Russkaya* denotes ethnic Russian. – *Ed.*

<sup>†</sup> V. I. Lenin, "To the Jewish Workers", *Collected Works*, Vol. 8, p. 496. – *Ed.*

mation of the Party, its name, Party congresses and the procedure for their convocation, the duties of the Central Committee and the local committees, the Party funds, its newspaper and representation abroad. It was resolved that the congress of the local committee delegates was the highest body of the Party, which elected the Central Committee – the Party’s executive body. It was to be concerned with the Party’s regular activities, to publish literature and supply the local committees with it, to carry on campaigns of nationwide importance, e. g., May Day celebrations, issuing leaflets in connection with outstanding events, and organising help to strikers.

When urgent decisions were called for, the Central Committee was to make them on its own, reporting to the forthcoming congress. In tackling especially important, but not pressing problems, the Central Committee was to refer to the Party congress. The Central Committee had the right to swell its ranks with new members not elected by the congress. Relations with other revolutionary organisations at home and abroad were the responsibility of the Central Committee alone. It was also to be in charge of the Party funds made up of voluntary lump sums paid by the local committees, when the Party was formed, of voluntary regular assignments by the local committees and of special party fund-raising campaigns.

The Union of Russian Social-Democrats abroad was declared to be part of the RSDLP and its representative abroad.

In settling organisational problems, the question arose of the relationship between autonomy and centralism. The organisers of the congress, according to Eidelman, advocated a strong central organisation, aware that the aim of the congress was to rally Social-Democratic elements round one centre and to create an efficient centre for the organisations.... But the customs and traditions of study circle work were still very strong. Delegates’ speeches evinced fear lest the Rules should be of too centralised a nature. These were the sentiments that Eidelman had in mind when he wrote: “Party spirit had to be instilled. This could not be accomplished merely by decrees. Nothing but the practical, prolonged and fruitful work of the Central Committee could gradually do away with parochialism and supplant it by party spirit.”

For these reasons, the congress was unable to consistently adhere to the principle of centralism. The local committees were given extensive authority and could implement the Central Committee resolutions in any form they might find suitable to local conditions. In extreme cases, they could even refuse to meet the demands of the Central

Committee, informing it about the causes of their refusal. “In all other cases,” the congress resolution said, “the local committees act quite on their own, guided exclusively by the party programme.”

The Bund was accorded even greater autonomy. It could act entirely independently as far as problems pertaining specifically to the Jewish proletariat were concerned. This enabled it to carry out propaganda in the vernacular, to publish literature, to convene congresses and to meet the local needs and demands stemming from the peculiarities of the Jewish way of life. Nevertheless, after the congress the Bund leaders were not satisfied with autonomy and insisted on the federative structure of the RSDLP. “Instead of carrying on the work begun by the First Congress of the Russian Social-Democratic Party towards still closer unity between the Bund and the Party,” Lenin wrote, “the Bund moved a step away from the Party.”\*

When assessing the congress decision to give broad autonomy to the local committees today, one comes to the inevitable conclusion that this was historically justified. Autonomy not only hindered the federalism advocated by the Bund to a certain extent. The Social-Democratic study circles and groups had long since existed in isolation from each other and could not reject their customs and traditions of the circle period right away. The weak points of the RSDLP organisational statute, as defined by the resolutions of the First Congress, reflected the inadequate level of maturity of the Social-Democratic movement of the time and the insufficient understanding of the need to subordinate local interests to the general tasks of the Party. Nevertheless, the Minsk Congress made the first step in establishing the principle of centralism in the Russian Social-Democratic movement. “These first Party Rules were in fact a mere chart to be filled with specific content by practice,” stated the Report to the Amsterdam International Socialist Congress compiled in the autumn of 1904 with the participation of Lenin, who was also its editor. “But already this chart clearly showed that even in that early period of our struggle ... the Central Committee was given great authority. Anything outside the bounds of local activities and anything which was within the bounds of local activities but was of a general nature was to be relegated to the competence of the Central Committee, responsible only to the party congress.”

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\* V. I. Lenin, “To the Jewish Workers”, *Collected Works*, Vol. 8, p. 496. – *Ed.*

The congress outlined the organisational statute of the Party but failed to give it a scientifically substantiated programme. Work on it was supposed to be undertaken in the near future. The participants in the congress hoped that the party programme would be discussed by the second congress they planned to hold at the very latest six months after the first one.

This is not to say, however, that the organisers and the participants in the congress in general ignored the issue of the programme. On the eve of the congress it was discussed by the St. Petersburg, Moscow and Kiev Social-Democrats. For instance, the latter had prepared for the congress the so-called Kiev Rules (draft resolutions of the congress), which said: "The delegates have the right to consider and approve a programme, if presented, or otherwise work out and make public a manifesto." The draft manifesto had been written by Tuchapsky and simultaneously served as a draft programme. It was, however, rejected by the *Rabochaya Gazeta* group even before the congress, firstly, because it ignored the agrarian problem and, secondly, because, while it was being discussed, the organisers of the congress did, according to Eidelman, still hope to get a more circumstantial document. They had apparently been awaiting a draft programme from Lenin or Plekhanov.

This is corroborated by the fact that the St. Petersburg Social-Democrats in their draft programme of the work of the congress (the St. Petersburg Rules) also envisaged working out a general party programme and gave assurances that the St. Petersburg League of Struggle would submit a motivated draft programme. There can be no doubt that the authors of the St. Petersburg Rules had in mind Lenin's *Draft Programme of the Social-Democratic Party and Explanations to It*, all the more so since the key propositions of the "motivated draft" these Rules contained accorded with the spirit and meaning of Lenin's draft programme. When, at the close of the congress, Tuchapsky declared that "G. V. Plekhanov should be asked to work out a party programme together with the solemn declaration of its establishment", Radchenko proposed that the task be entrusted to the St. Petersburg organisation. Appreciative of the activities of the St. Petersburg League of Struggle, the congress agreed to the proposal of the St. Petersburg delegate and pointed out that such a programme would be made public after it had been considered by local committees.

For reasons that remained so far obscure (apparently, arrests and the declining activities of the St Petersburg League of Struggle inter-

ferred with it), Lenin's draft was never submitted to the participants in the congress as a programme document. Eidelman wrote subsequently that they lacked "both the time and strength" to compose a programme. The situation was aggravated by wholesale police repressions against the Social-Democrats. The following events showed that it took great effort on the part of the entire *Iskra* editorial board headed by Lenin to work out a truly Marxist party programme.

The Congress elected a Central Committee of three people: S. I. Radchenko, B. L. Eidelman, and A. I. Kremer.\* Even before the con-

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\* *S. I. Radchenko* (1868-1911) had been active in the Social-Democratic movement since the early 1890s, when, as a student at the St. Petersburg Technological Institute, he disseminated revolutionary propaganda in the workers' study circles under M. I. Brusnev's group. After the group was broken up in 1892, he escaped arrest and joined an associated Marxist study circle of technology students (the so-called group of the Old, which Lenin contacted somewhat later); beginning with the mid-1890s, he was active in Lenin's League of Struggle for the Emancipation of the Working Class, a member of its leading nucleus in charge of the League's connections and conspiratorial equipment; in late February 1898 he represented the St. Petersburg League of Struggle at the First RSDLP Congress, and, later on, played an important part in establishing links between the St. Petersburg Social-Democrats and the editorial board of Lenin's *Iskra*; in 1902, he was arrested and banished to the Vologda Gubernia; on his return he took part in the October 1905 political strike in Moscow; gravely ill, he withdrew from active political work in subsequent years.

*B. L. Eidelman* (1867-1939), a professional revolutionary who started his Social-Democratic activity in Kiev study circles: in 1895, together with Yu. D. Melnikov, he organised, the first Workers' Committee, which disseminated Marxist ideas among Kiev's revolutionary-minded intelligentsia and advanced workers. B. L. Eidelman was a prominent leader of the Ukrainian Social-Democratic movement in the 1890s who organised and took part in the activities of the Marxist Rabocheye Dyelo and Rabochaya Gazeta groups; after the First Congress he was arrested and exiled to the Yakutsk Gubernia. He came from exile to St. Petersburg where he participated in the revolutionary events of 1905, got arrested again and imprisoned. After the October Revolution he worked in the People's Commissariat of Labour, taught at the VTsIK military school in the period from 1919 to 1925 and remained a Bolshevik to his dying day.



gress finished its work, the newly formed Central Committee managed to hold several meetings in Minsk, and discuss some pending problems. For instance, it roughly estimated the Party's budget and decided to contact the Union of Russian Social-Democrats abroad, informing it of the resolutions of the congress. The congress closed its work on March 3 (15). In the evening, the delegates assembled for the last time before their departure. They expressed their wish that more workers attend the next congress and decided to send a message of greetings to Plekhanov in connection with the fifteenth anniversary of the Emancipation of Labour group's publishing activities and also to send a message of greetings to the German Social-Democrats.

The delegates went home greatly inspired and firmly believing in the triumph of the working class' cause, ready to start implementing the decisions of the First RSDLP Congress. For instance, after his return to Kiev, Tuchapsky made reports on the work of the congress at the Kiev League of Struggle and Workers' Committee. The resolutions of the congress were approved. "It seemed," he recalled, "that our work will be better and even more successful than before. A mere week after my return, however, the Kiev organisation was routed."

In the early hours of March 12, wholesale arrests were carried out in 27 towns of European Russia, and 500 people, including the Central Committee member Eidelman, were detained by the police. The *Rabochaya Gazeta* printing press together with the materials for its third issue were seized in Ekaterinoslav.

Besides Kremer, who was, however, arrested soon afterwards, Radchenko also remained free. He returned to St. Petersburg and began preparing the RSDLP Manifesto, which the Central Committee

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A.I. Kremer (1865-1935) engaged in revolutionary activities in Riga where he attended a polytechnic; in 1889, he was impleaded during the investigation of the Proletariat Party case; after serving a prison sentence in the St. Petersburg Kresty, he was exiled to Vilna under secret police surveillance, joined the Vilna Social-Democratic group, wrote the pamphlet "On Agitation" and was one of the Bund's founders and leaders; in the summer of 1898, after the First Party Congress, he was arrested; he attended the Second RSDLP Congress as a delegate with a consultative voice; was a member of the RSDLP Central Committee from the Bund after the Fourth (Unifying) Congress, withdrew from the Bund Central Committee after the Fifth RSDLP Congress and refrained from political activities.— Ed.

was asked to compose by the congress. Radchenko found himself in a fix: the best of the literary people and theoreticians among the St. Petersburg League of Struggle with Lenin at the head had been arrested by the police. He had to turn to P. B. Struve, who was an experienced writer, then regarded as an ally of Social-Democracy, who participated in publishing literature together with revolutionary Marxists. It is worth noting here that under the impact of Lenin's criticism Struve shifted considerably to the left for a while and still cherished his contacts with the Social-Democratic movement. This is why he willingly accepted Radchenko's proposal and wrote the text of the document that, edited by the two Central Committee members Radchenko and Kremer, has gone down in history as the Manifesto of the Russian Social-Democratic Labour Party.

In his article "My Contacts and Conflicts with Lenin" published in 1934, Struve described his stand, when composing the Manifesto in the following way: "...Manifesto ... still expressed the official or orthodox conception – I did my best to avoid putting into it any of my personal views, which would have either seemed heretical or been incomprehensible to an average Social-Democrat. Therefore the Manifesto which, though written by me in its elementary and drastic statement of Marxism, did not in the least correspond to my personal and more complex views of that period..."\*

This is his own confession, and indeed there is nothing fallacious or "heretical" in the Manifesto, nothing that went beyond the Social-Democratic world outlook. It should also be added that the RSDLP Manifesto was not the party programme, which was still to be worked out, but an official document that expounded in popular form the need to rally the proletariat into an independent party and outlined in general form the immediate task in its revolutionary activity.

The content of the Manifesto did, of course, bear the imprint of Struve's authorship. Its level was inferior to that of the draft party programmes written by Lenin and Plekhanov by that time. Notwithstanding the fact, composed under the supervision of the Central Committee members, the Manifesto was the first official RSDLP programme statement that on the whole correctly pictured the Social-Democratic movement of the 1890s and mapped out its tasks.

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\* *The Slavonic and East European Review*, London, Vol. XIII, No. 37, July, 1934, p. 75. – *Ed.*

The Manifesto opened with a statement concerning the historic role of the West-European proletariat awakened to life by the 1848 revolutions. Capitalist relations meanwhile developed in Russia, and along with them the working class emerged and grew. "The Russian factory workers, serfs and freemen, have always fought covertly or overtly against their exploiters. As capitalism developed the scope of that fighting grew, encompassing ever wider sections of the working population. The awakening of class consciousness among the Russian proletariat and the growth of the spontaneous workers' movement coincided with the consummate development of international Social-Democracy as the bearer of the class struggle and the class ideal of conscious workers throughout the world."

The Manifesto listed the first successes scored by Russia's workers in strike action and demanded political freedom. This freedom, it declared, was as necessary to the Russian proletariat as fresh air; the workers needed it not only to improve their situation under capitalism but also for their struggle to attain the final goal – socialism.

The Manifesto was keynoted by the idea of the Russian working class' independent role in the revolutionary struggle. It said: "The farther one goes to the east of Europe, the weaker, more cowardly and ignoble is the bourgeoisie in politics, and the bigger are the cultural and political tasks the proletariat has to tackle. The Russian working class should and will shoulder the cause of winning political freedom. This is the necessary, though only initial, step towards fulfilling the proletariat's historic mission of building a social system, in which there will be no exploitation of man by man. The Russian proletariat will throw off the yoke of autocracy to continue fighting capitalism and the bourgeoisie more energetically until the final victory of socialism."

The Manifesto stressed in conclusion that with the unification of local Social-Democratic organisations into a single party the revolutionary movement of Russia's proletariat would enter a "new era of conscious class struggle". The RSDLP carried on the cause and traditions of its revolutionary predecessors, but chose different avenues and used different means of struggle. As a conscious exponent of the proletariat's class interests, it accords all its actions with the basic principles of international Social-Democracy.

The Manifesto and the decisions of the First RSDLP Congress were of great agitational, propaganda and organisational importance. They officially proclaimed the formation of the Social-Democratic

Labour Party in Russia and formulated the general aims of its struggle. Thus, the groundwork was laid for the actual unification of the disconnected Social-Democratic organisations into a single Marxist party of Russia's proletariat.

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The First RSDLP Congress was a landmark in the initial period of the Party's history. It gave the Party its name, charted the immediate goals of its struggle and greatly contributed to the merging of socialism with the workers' movement. Thus, even before the bourgeois parties emerged in Russia, the RSDLP proclaimed its independent existence.

As the first step towards the actual establishment of the party, the Congress played a major propaganda and organisational role. The news of it was enthusiastically received by all the revolutionary Social-Democrats. Reports about the work of the Congress were made at illegal meetings, and decisions were taken to join the RSDLP. Every local organisation that recognised the resolutions of the First Congress became a party component part.

On learning about the Congress, the Social-Democratic organisations of Moscow and Ivanovo-Voznesensk approved its resolutions and sided with them. A leaflet issued in this connection by the Moscow Social-Democrats said: "We can state with profound satisfaction that our hitherto disconnected Social-Democratic groups have united into a single common organisation set up by the Congress." The Moscow and Ivanovo-Voznesensk Leagues of Struggle have been transformed into the RSDLP committees, whose members were set the task of establishing contacts with the RSDLP Central Committee, of working towards the closer unity of local Marxist study circles, etc.

Soon after the First Congress the Ukrainian Social-Democrats responded to its resolutions. Copies of the RSDLP Manifesto were strewn in Kiev streets in May 1898. The Kiev and Ekaterinoslav Leagues of Struggle were transformed into the RSDLP committees. "...Early this year," the appeal "To All the Ekaterinoslav Workers" emphasised, "the workers' leagues of all Russian towns held out their hands to one another, like comrades, and at a joint congress of their representatives decided to unite in a single common alliance, which they called the Russian Social-Democratic Labour Party. This Party will promote the unification of all Russian workers, lead the workers' struggle and correctly distribute the funds among the workers' unions,

etc. United by the workers' party, the Russian workers' movement will make headway... Comrades, let us courageously fight for a better lot and wholeheartedly congratulate ourselves on the emergence of the workers' party, as a harbinger of a better future. The Ekaterinoslav League of Struggle for the Emancipation of the Working Class is happy to report that, following the example of the workers' leagues in other towns, it has joined the RSDLP and from now on will be called the Ekaterinoslav committee of the RSDLP."

The very fact of the convocation of the Congress and the formation of the RSDLP inspired the Social-Democrats and called for greater unity and solidarity and for a stepped up revolutionary struggle against oppression by tsarism and the bourgeoisie.

For the first time, the documents adopted by the Congress were published secretly in Russia in April 1898, and in June reprinted by the Geneva *Rabotnik Leaflet* edited by G. V. Plekhanov. The commentary to these documents stressed that the appearance of the RSDLP and its Manifesto was an impressive success of our working-class movement. "We are convinced," the journal editorial said, "that the common organisation of the Russian Social-Democrats will go on growing and being consolidated till the working-class movement becomes an enormous flow that ... will finally sweep away with its powerful current the political oppression hanging over Russia and clear the way for the free and extensive struggle for the complete and all-round emancipation of the working people at large."

Lenin, who was in exile in Siberia at that time, was heartened by the news of the congress. P. N. Lepeshinsky recalled that Lenin welcomed the First Party Congress as enthusiastically as anyone. According to him, Lenin was filled with profound pride when he told his closest friends in exile and associates that "from now on he was a member of the RSDLP. With great pleasure we, too, took up this tune so novel to us and seemed to have grown in our own eyes right away".

Despite the tsarist authorities' strict bans, the news of the First RSDLP Congress reached not only the most diverse regions of the country but also went beyond its borders, evoking lively interest among the Social-Democrats in all the major European countries. The Manifesto and the resolutions of the Congress were published by the Social-Democratic and workers' press in Berlin, Paris, and London. The advanced workers of Western Europe heartily welcomed the appearance of the socialist party of the Russian proletariat fighting in the difficult conditions of tsarism. Even the bourgeois press responded to

that event. For instance, the conservative German *Tagliche Rundschau* (Daily Review) wrote, without trying to conceal its surprise: “For the present-day world it remains a complete mystery and for the Russian government it is still, in all probability, not clear yet how this could happen so suddenly and with such tremendous success.”

The opportunists who sought to confine the Russian workers’ movement to the narrow framework of a purely economic, guild struggle did not like the resolutions of the First RSDLP Congress. The so-called “young” Social-Democrats leaning towards Economism, did, in fact, refuse to recognise the Congress, considering it premature and even harmful. On learning about the resolutions of the Congress and the release of the Manifesto, Ye. Kuskova, one of the ideologists of Economism, wrote to the secretary of the Union of Russian Social-Democrats Abroad: “Indeed I deny the existence of an acting political party in Russia at the given moment. Note: political... Let them write manifestoes. We’ll see how this is going to be implemented. If the Russian comrades take it into their heads now to lead the workers to political struggle, I will consider it a provocation and an end to the entire past.”

Lenin denounced the attempts of the opportunists and their supporters to distort or belittle the role of the First RSDLP Congress in the history of our Party. He thought the resolutions of the Congress were correct in officially formulating for the first time the idea of mustering Russia’s proletariat for the revolutionary struggle to overthrow tsarism and capitalism and for socialism. “...We Russian Social-Democrats,” Lenin pointed out, “must unite and direct all our efforts towards the formation of a strong party which must struggle under the single banner of revolutionary Social-Democracy. This is precisely the task laid down by the congress in 1898 at which the Russian Social-Democratic Labour Party was formed, and which published its Manifesto. We regard ourselves as members of this Party; we agree entirely with the fundamental ideas contained in the *Manifesto* and attach extreme importance to it as a public declaration of its aims.”\*

Acute ideological conflicts flared up with regard to the documents of the First RSDLP Congress. The Economists and the Bund members in their suit voiced displeasure with those resolutions of the Congress

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\* V. I. Lenin, “Declaration of the Editorial Board of *Iskra*”, *Collected Works*, Vol. 4, p. 353. – *Ed*

that emphasised the ideas of centralising the Social-Democratic movement and political struggle and in general sought to decry the First Congress, bringing its significance to nought.

Addressing the Second Party Congress, the Bund member Liber tried to persuade its delegates that the Minsk Congress of 1898 had brought no fruit for the Party allegedly did not exist thereafter neither *de facto* nor *de jure*.

In this case, Liber was expressing the official stand taken by the Bund demanding that the decisions of the First RSDLP Congress be renounced and autonomy be replaced by federation. He was supported in this by Akimov, Martynov and other representatives of the economic trend in the Party. Replying to them, Lenin said on the part of the *Iskra*-ites: "Formally, we stand by the Manifesto of 1898, but the Bund has expressed a desire for a radical change in our Party's organisation."\*

Lenin saw all too clearly the shortcomings of the First RSDLP Congress, but, at the same time, he assessed it as an historic event. The convocation of the congress and its decisions were for Lenin the natural outcome of the Social-Democratic movement of the 1890s, its consolidation and extension. He repeatedly stressed that the Party founded at its First Congress was deeply rooted in the mass workers' movement in Russia. By deciding to form the RSDLP, the Congress left a milestone on the path to fusing socialism with the workers' movement and creating a Marxist party of the Russian proletariat.

Needless to say, the First RSDLP Congress could not go beyond its time. "Congresses," Lenin wrote, "do not so much create something new as consolidate results already achieved."† The resolutions of the First Congress recorded only those results that the Social-Democratic movement achieved in the 1890s and mirrored both its first successes and its extremely weak points.

Although the Congress played a certain part in uniting the Social-Democratic organisations, its influence on the subsequent formation of the Party was limited from an historical point of view. For certain objective and subjective reasons it could not work out the guiding principles of the RSDLP as a proletarian party of a new type nor define the

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\* V. I. Lenin "First Speech on the Agenda-of the Congress, July 18 (31)", *Collected Works*, Vol. 6, p. 480. – *Ed.*

\* V. I. Lenin, "The Third Congress", *Collected Works*, Vol. 8, p. 445. – *Ed.*

scientific foundations of its revolutionary activity. Its resolutions gave the most general chart of the party organisation to be supplied with specific content. Although the congress had been convened, actual party unity had not been achieved: "...unity was still only an idea, a directive."\*

The standard of the congress was adversely affected by the fact that it was carried out at a time of severe repressions by tsarism when the main theoreticians were isolated from the Social-Democratic movement, for Lenin was in exile and Plekhanov in emigration. Lenin's draft programme was not known to the majority of the congress delegates and even the so-called "St. Petersburg Rules" based on that draft was not submitted to the congress. With its main forces broken by the police, Lenin's League of Struggle, the major organiser of the congress, could not adequately influence its decisions. All this hindered the working out of the scientific principles that could have formed the necessary foundation for a militant Marxist party of the Russian proletariat capable of operating successfully in the new historical epoch.

The main reason for the uncertain correlation between the resolutions of the First Congress and the prospective development of the RSDLP as a party of a new type was that the conditions necessary for the formation of such a party in the given period (1894-98) had only just begun to take shape. Both the objective conditions, aggravated social antagonisms connected with the setting in of imperialism, and the subjective ones, the delimitation of the opposite camps in Russian and international Social-Democracy and the evolution of Lenin's teaching of the party had not fully developed by that time; their characteristic features became pronounced and started to exercise a decisive influence on the formation of a party of a new type only in the subsequent period between the First and Second Congresses of the RSDLP. These new factors first found their expression in Lenin's plan to form the party with the help of an all-Russia political newspaper.

Right after its First Congress, the RSDLP came under a storm of police repressions. Wholesale arrests paralysed the activity of the Central Committee elected by the Congress and also of many a Social-Democratic organisation. "...All outstanding leaders of the Party,"

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\* V. I. Lenin, "Preface to the Collection *Twelve Years*", *Collected Works*, Vol. 13, p. 101. – *Ed.*



Lenin wrote, “were swept from the battlefield...”<sup>\*</sup> The difficulties caused by the arrests were aggravated by the demoralising activities of the Economists, representatives of the Russian variety of international opportunism who pushed the workers’ movement in Russia to the path of political apathy and reformism.

Owing to the Economists, the RSDLP entered a period of “confusion and wavering”, ideological discordance and organisational amateurishness and was thrown back, abandoning the positions already gained. It seemed to have exhausted its potential, returned to its former disunity and “became a shapeless conglomeration of local Party organisations”.<sup>†</sup>

The cause of the First Congress was not lost, however. The idea of centralism had already become deeply rooted and was winning supporters in growing numbers. “The Party,” Lenin wrote, “has not ceased to exist, it has only withdrawn into itself in order to gather strength and put the unification of all Russian Social-Democrats on a sound footing.”<sup>‡</sup> Lenin was again the one to point out the way to achieve this. Still in exile, he contributed to *Rabochaya Gazeta*, as attempts were being made to resume its publication, three articles (“Our Programme”, “Our Immediate Task” and “The Urgent Problem”). In these articles he first expounded his famous plan for uniting the disconnected Social-Democratic organisations into a centralised Marxist party. The plan was based on the idea of founding an all-Russia political newspaper as a means of not only ideological and political, but also organisational unification of Social-Democracy. *Iskra* founded by Lenin became such a newspaper. Lenin’s plan was innovative and exemplified a creative approach to building a party that would meet the requirements of the revolutionary epoch. It has accumulated the enormous historical experience of the international and Russian emancipation movement and became creatively assimilated in keeping with the new tendencies of social development, both in Russia and the rest of the world.

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<sup>\*</sup> V. I. Lenin, “To Nadezhda Krupskaya”, *Collected Works*, Vol. 34, p. 46. – *Ed.*

<sup>†</sup> V. I. Lenin, “One Step Forward, Two Steps Back”, *Collected Works*, Vol. 7, p. 479 – *Ed.*

<sup>‡</sup> V. I. Lenin, “Our Immediate Task”, *Collected Works*, Vol. 4, p. 215. – *Ed.*

Lenin warned that we had nobody to turn to for ready-made models. “The history of socialism and democracy in Western Europe, the history of the Russian revolutionary movement, the experience of our working-class movement,” he wrote, “such is the *material* we must master to elaborate a purposeful organisation and purposeful tactics for our Party.” “‘The analysis’ of this material,” he emphasised, “must, however, be done independently...”\*

History showed that the principles underlying the party of a new type were worked out by the newspaper *Iskra* when it was headed by Lenin. It was during the *Iskra* period that Lenin developed a coherent theory of the party and elaborated its ideological, political and organisational principles. An extension of Marx’s and Engels’ ideas on the political organisation of the working class, these principles determined the radical shift from the old Social-Democratic parties of the Second International to the Bolshevik party as a model proletarian party of a new type, a shift which was of historic importance.

The work carried out by Lenin’s *Iskra* aimed at forming a party of social revolution and the dictatorship of the proletariat. Resolutely combating the opportunists, *Iskra* ensured the preparations for the Second RSDLP Congress, which completed the unification of the revolutionary Marxist organisations on Lenin’s ideological, political and organisational principles. The party of a new type, the Bolshevik Party, came into being. “As a current of political thought and as a political party,” Lenin wrote, “Bolshevism has existed since 1903.”†

As you can see, the Second RSDLP Congress was prepared much better from an ideological, theoretical and organisational point of view than the previous congress. It laid a firm foundation enabling our Party to become an invincible force. In its resolutions the Congress summed up the invaluable experience of *Iskra*’s three years of struggle to rehabilitate the party, which had been destroyed by the Economists, and to work out its theoretical, political and organisational principles. The St. Petersburg League of Struggle was such a party in embryo but its major characteristics could develop and actually developed only against

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\* V. I. Lenin, “Our Immediate Task”, *Collected Works*, Vol. 4, p. 217. – *Ed.*

† V. I. Lenin, “‘Left-Wing’ Communism – an Infantile Disorder”, *Collected Works*, Vol. 31, p. 147 – *Ed.*

the historical background at the turn of the century, as a result of principled opposition to Russian and international opportunism.

When surveying this complicated and long road of struggle for the formation of the RSDLP as a party of a new type, Lenin regarded the First and Second Congresses as two stages in its historical evolution. He wrote: “Our Party began to constitute itself quite some time ago, immediately following the broad working-class movement of 1895 and 1896. The year of 1898 saw the convocation of its First Congress, which founded the Russian Social-Democratic Labour Party and outlined its aims. The Second Congress was held in 1903. It gave the Party a programme, adopted a series of resolutions on tactics, and endeavoured, for the first time, to build an integral Party organisation.”\*

The resolutions of the Second Congress reflected the qualitatively new stage in building a Marxist Party of the proletariat. The Congress became a turning point in the development of the Russian and international workers’ movement. It founded the Leninist Party of the Bolsheviks which radically differed from the Social-Democratic parties of the Second International, which had lost their former revolutionary traditions and degenerated to the positions of reformism. It adopted the Marxist-Leninist programme of struggle to overthrow the government of the landowners and capitalists and to establish the dictatorship of the proletariat as a weapon in the socialist transformation of society. During the elections to the leading party bodies Lenin’s supporters received the majority vote (*bolshinstvo*), while the opportunists found themselves in the minority (*menshinstvo*). Hence, the names of the Bolsheviks and the Mensheviks. In this way, the congress sealed the victory of Bolshevism over opportunism in the RSDLP ranks and dealt a severe blow at its advocates in international Social-Democracy.

The emergence of the Bolshevik Party in Russia raised the revolutionary movement of the working class against the exploiters to an historically new level. For the first time the proletariat was given an organisation capable of successfully guiding its struggle for its social emancipation, for socialism and communism in new historical conditions.

The Bolshevik Party developed on the basis of Lenin’s ideological, political and organisational principles to become a powerful force transforming the world. During the many years of class battles it con-

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\* V. I. Lenin, “Report on the Third Congress of the RSDLP”, *Collected Works*, Vol. 8, pp. 433-34. – *Ed.*

stantly improved its organisation, strategy and tactics, educated and steeled the proletariat as the predominant element in the emancipation movement, rallied round it the mass of the working people and led them through the crucible of three revolutions to the victory of the Great October Socialist Revolution, which ushered in a new era in human history.