

STUDY MARXISM

Since our founding congress over two years ago, the Communist Workers Party has grown and matured at a rapid pace. Our work has expanded into many different areas and spheres of society as we become increasingly "well-shod on all four feet." In the course of this preparation for socialist revolution we have recruited new Party members and have been asked many questions about the CWP.

Why do we need a disciplined party? Why isn't it enough to just work in a union or community organization? How is the Communist workers Party different from other political parties? Revolutionary-

minded people — both veteran and new activists — are asking these and other questions as they decide what organization or organizations to join.

Over the next several issues, the Workers Viewpoint will run a series to acquaint our readers with the nature of a vanguard communist party, why one is necessary (especially in such times as these) and why we need to build up the Communist Workers Party.

Below are excerpts from three articles by V.I. Lenin, the leader of the Russian Revolution. In them he discusses in general terms the importance of an organization of professional revolutionaries. The ab-

solute necessity for this type of organization cannot be overstressed. As Lenin demonstrated in Russia, and as we are showing here, a tight core of revolutionaries with the proper understanding of society and how to change it gives us the flexibility we need. With this flexibility, we can work under all conditions to overthrow the capitalist system. Lenin also discusses the role of a vanguard party in mobilizing and educating the masses to make revolution and why only a vanguard party can carry out this job.

WHAT IS TO BE DONE? Chapter IV

And the Organization Of the Revolutionaries

C. Organization of Workers And Organization of Revolutionaries

It is only natural to expect that for a Social-Democrat whose conception of the political struggle coincides with the conception of the "economic struggle against the employers and the government," the "organization of revolutionaries" will more or less coincide with the "organization of workers." This, in fact, is what actually happens; so that when we speak of organization, we literally speak in different tongues. I vividly recall, for example, a conversation I once had with a fairly consistent Economist, with whom I had not been previously acquainted. We were discussing the pamphlet, *Who Will Bring About the Political Revolution?*, and were soon of a mind that its principal defect was its ignoring of the question of organization. We had begun to assume full agreement between us; but, as the conversation proceeded, it became evident that we were talking of different things. My interlocutor accused the author of ignoring strike funds, mutual benefit societies, etc., whereas I had in mind an organization of revolutionaries as an essential factor in "bringing about" the political revolution. As soon as the disagreement became clear, there was hardly, as I remember, a single question upon which I was in agreement with the Economist!

What was the source of our disagreement? It was the fact that on questions both of organization and of politics the Economists are forever lapsing from Social-Democracy into trade-unionism. The political struggle of Social-Democracy is far more extensive and complex than the economic struggle of the workers against the employers and the government. Similarly (indeed for that reason), the organization of the revolutionary Social-Democratic Party must inevitably be of a kind different from the organization of the workers designed for this struggle. The workers' organization must in the first place be a trade-union organization; secondly, it must be as broad as possible; and thirdly, it must be as public as conditions will allow (here, and further on, of course, I refer only to absolutist Russia). On the other hand, the organization of the revolutionaries must consist first and foremost of people who make revolutionary activity their profession (for which reason I speak of the organization of *revolutionaries*, meaning revolutionary Social-Democrats). In view of this common characteristic of the members of such an organization, *all distinctions as between workers and intellectuals*, not to speak of distinctions of trade and profession, in both categories, *must be effaced*. Such an organization must perforce not be very extensive and must be as secret as possible. Let us examine this threefold distinction.

In countries where political liberty exists the distinction between a trade-union and a political organization is clear enough, as is the distinction between trade unions and Social-Democracy. The relations between the latter and the former will naturally vary in each country according to historical, legal and other conditions; they may be more or less close, complex, etc. (in our opinion they should be as close and as little complicated as possible); but there can be no question in free countries of the organization of trade unions coinciding with the organization of the Social-Democratic Party. In Russia, however, the yoke of the autocracy appears at first glance to obliterate all distinctions between the Social-Democratic organization and the workers' associations, since *all workers' associations and all study circles are prohibited and since the principal manifestation and weapon of the workers' economic struggle — the strike — is regarded as a criminal (and sometimes even as a political!) of-*

fence. Conditions in our country, therefore, on the one hand, strongly "impel" the workers engaged in economic struggle to concern themselves with political questions, and, on the other, they "impel" Social-Democrats to confound trade-unionism with Social-Democracy (and our Krichevskys, Martynovs, and Co., while diligently discussing the first kind of "impulsion," fail to notice the second). Indeed, picture to yourselves people who are immersed ninety-nine per cent in "economic struggle against the employers and the government." Some of them will never, during the *entire* course of their activity (from four to six months), be impelled to think of the need for a more complex organization of revolutionaries. Others, perhaps, will come across the fairly widely distributed Bernsteinian literature, from which they will become convinced of the profound importance of the forward movement of the "drab everyday struggle." Still others will be carried away, perhaps, by the seductive idea of showing the world a new example of "close and organic contact between the trade-union and the Social-Democratic movements. Such people may argue that the later a country enters the arena of capitalism and, consequently, of the working class movement, the more the socialists in that country may take part in, and support, the trade-union movement, and the less the reason for the existence of non-Social-Democratic trade unions. So far the argument is fully correct; unfortunately, however, some go beyond that and dream of a complete fusion of Social-Democracy with trade unionism. We shall soon see, from the example of the Rules of the St. Petersburg League of Struggle, what a harmful effect such dreams have upon our plans of organization.

The workers' organizations for the economic struggle should be trade-union organizations. Every Social-Democratic worker should as far as possible assist and actively work in these organizations. But, while this is true, it is certainly not in our interest to demand that only Social-Democrats should be eligible for membership in the "trade" unions, since that would only narrow the scope of our influence upon the

masses. Let every worker who understands the need to unite for the struggle against the employers and the government join the trade unions. The very aim of the trade unions would be impossible of achievement, if they did not unite all who have attained at least this elementary degree of understanding, if they were not very *broad* organizations. The broader these organizations, the broader will be our influence over them — an influence due, not only to the "spontaneous" development of the economic struggle, but to the direct and conscious effort of the socialist trade-union members to influence their comrades. But a broad organization cannot apply methods of strict secrecy (since this demands far greater training than is required for the economic struggle). How is the contradiction between the need for a large membership and the need for strictly secret methods to be reconciled? How are we to make the trade unions as public as possible? Generally speaking, there can be only two ways to this end: either the trade unions become legalized (in some countries this preceded the legalization of the socialist and political unions), or the organization is kept secret, but so "free" and amorphous, *lose* (loose — Ed.) as the Germans say, that the need for secret methods becomes almost negligible as far as the bulk of the members is concerned. (*What Is to Be Done?*, V.I. Lenin, Collected Works, Vol. 5, pp. 451-454, Progress Publishers)

It may be objected that an organization which is so *lose* that it is not even definitely formed, and which has not even an enrolled and registered membership, cannot be called an organization at all. Perhaps so. Not the name is important. What is important is that this "organization without members" shall do everything that is required, and from the very outset ensure a solid connection between our future trade unions and socialism. Only an incorrigible utopian would have a *broad* organization of workers, with elections, reports, universal suffrage, etc. under the autocracy.

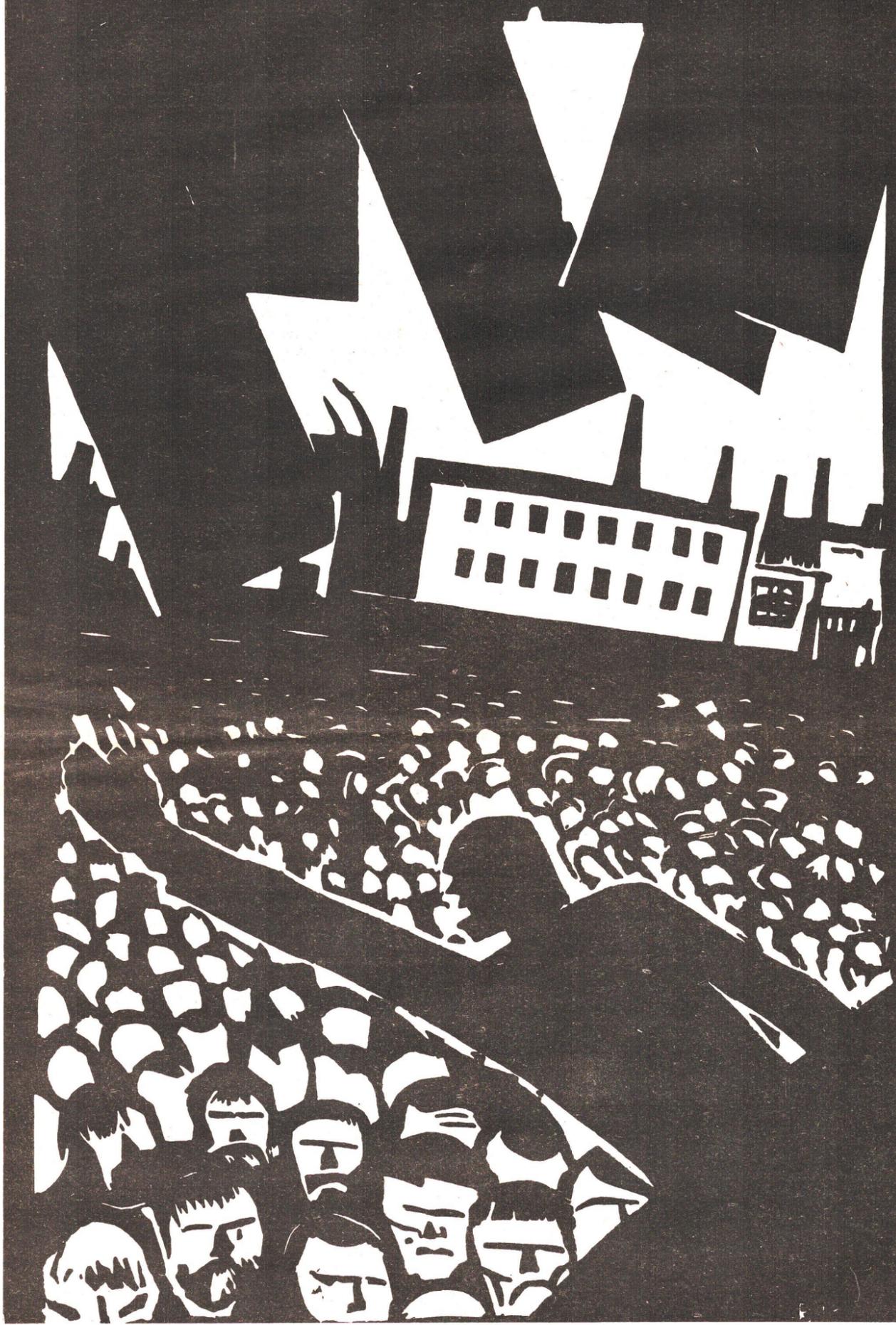
The moral to be drawn from this is simple. If we begin with the solid foundation of a strong organization of revolutionaries, we can ensure the stability of the movement as a whole and carry out the aims both of Social-Democracy and of trade unions proper. If, however, we begin with a broad workers' organization, which is supposedly most "accessible" to the masses (but which is actually most accessible to the gendarmes and makes revolutionaries most accessible to the police), we shall achieve neither the one aim nor the other; we shall not eliminate our rule-of-thumb methods, and, because we remain scattered and our forces are constantly broken up by the police, we shall only make trade unions of the Zubatov and Ozerov type the more accessible to the masses. (*Ibid*, pp. 459-460)

... I assert (1) that no revolutionary movement can endure without a stable organization of leaders maintaining continuity; (2) that the broader the popular mass drawn spontaneously into the struggle, which forms the basis of the movement and participates in it, the more urgent the need for such an organization, and the more solid this organization must be (for it is much easier for all sorts of demagogues to side-track the more backward sections of the masses); (3) that such an organization must consist chiefly of people professionally engaged in revolutionary activity; (4) that in an autocratic state, the more we *confine* the membership of such an organization to people who are professionally engaged in revolutionary activity and who have been professionally trained in the art of combating the political police, the more difficult it will be to unearth the organization; and (5) the *greater* will be the number of people from the working class and from the other social classes who will be able to join the movement and perform active work in it.

I invite our Economists, terrorists, and "Economists-terrorists"* to confute these propositions. At the moment, I shall deal only with the last two points. The question as to whether it is easier to wipe out "a dozen wise men" or "a hundred fools" reduces itself to the question, above considered, whether it is possible to have a mass organization when the maintenance of strict secrecy is essential. We can



LENIN ON PARTY BUILDING



never give a mass organization that degree of secrecy without which there can be no question of persistent and continuous struggle against the government. To concentrate all secret functions in the hands of as small a number of professional revolutionaries as possible does not mean that the latter will "do the thinking for all" and that the rank and file will not take an active part in the *movement*. On the contrary, the membership will promote increasing numbers of the professional revolutionaries from its ranks; for it will know that it is not enough for a few students and for a few working men waging the economic struggle to gather in order to form a "committee," but that it takes years to train oneself to be a professional revolutionary; and the rank and file will "think," not only of amateurish methods, but of such training. Centralization of the secret functions of the *organization* by no means implies centralization of all the functions of the *movement*. Active participation of the widest masses in the illegal press will not diminish because a "dozen" professional revolutionaries centralize the secret functions

connected with this work; on the contrary, it will *increase* tenfold. In this way, and in this way alone, shall we ensure that reading the illegal press, writing for it, and to some extent even distributing it, will *almost cease to be secret work*, for the police will soon come to realize the folly and impossibility of judicial and administrative red-tape procedure over every copy of a publication that is being distributed in the thousands. This holds not only for the press, but for every function of the movement, even for demonstrations. The active and widespread participation of the masses will not suffer; on the contrary, it will benefit by the fact that a "dozen" experienced revolutionaries, trained professionally no less than the police, will centralize all the secret aspects of the work — the drawing up of leaflets, the working out of approximate plans; and the appointing of bodies of leaders for each urban district, for each factory district, and for each educational institution, etc. (I know that exception will be taken to my "undemocratic" views, but I shall reply below fully to this anything but intelligent objection.)

Centralization of the most secret functions in an organization of revolutionaries will not diminish, but rather increase the extent and enhance the quality of the activity of a large number of other organizations, that are intended for a broad public and are therefore as loose and as non-secret as possible, such as workers' trade unions; workers' self-education circles and circles for reading illegal literature; and socialist, as well as democratic, circles among *all* other sections of the population; etc., etc. We must have such circles, trade unions, and organizations everywhere in *as large a number as possible* and with the widest variety of functions; but it would be absurd and harmful to *confound* them with the organization of *revolutionaries*, to efface the border-line between them, to make still more hazy the all too faint recognition of the fact that in order to "serve" the mass movement we must have people who will devote themselves exclusively to Social-Democratic activities, and that such people must *train* themselves patiently and steadfastly to be professional revolutionaries. (*Ibid*, pp. 464-466)

Preface to the Collection TWELVE YEARS

... *What Is To Be Done?*, was published abroad early in 1902. It is a criticism of the Right wing, which was no longer a literary trend but existed within the Social-Democratic organization. The first Social-Democratic congress was held in 1898. It founded the Russian Social-Democratic Labour Party, represented by the Union of Russian Social-Democrats Abroad, which incorporated the Emancipation of Labor group. The central Party bodies, however, were suppressed by the police and could not be re-established. There was, in fact, no united party; unity was still only an idea, a directive. The infatuation with the strike movement and economic struggles gave rise to a peculiar form of Social-Democratic opportunism, known as "Economism." When the *Iskra* group began to function abroad *at the very end* of 1900, the split over this issue was already an accomplished fact. In the *spring* of 1900, Plekhanov resigned from the Union of Russian Social-Democrats Abroad, and set up an organization of his own — *Sotsial-Demokrat*.

Officially, *Iskra* began its work independently of the two groups, but for all practical purposes it sided with Plekhanov's group against the Union. An attempt to merge the two (at the Congress of the Union and the *Sotsial-Demokrat* in Zurich, June 1901) failed. *What Is To Be Done?* gives a systematic account of the reasons for the divergence of views and of the nature of *Iskra* tactics and organizational activity.

What Is To Be Done? is frequently mentioned by the Mensheviks, the present opponents of the Bolsheviks, as well as by writers belonging to the bourgeois-liberal camp (Cadets, Bezzaglavsti in the newspaper *Tovarishch*, etc.). I have, therefore, decided to reprint the pamphlet here, slightly abridged, omitting only the details of organizational relations and minor polemical remarks. Concerning the essential content of this pamphlet it is necessary to draw the attention of the modern reader to the following.

The basic mistake made by those who now criticize *What Is To Be Done?* is to treat the pamphlet apart from its connection with the concrete historical situation of a definite, and now long past, period in the development of our Party. This mistake was strikingly demonstrated, for instance, by Parvus (not to mention numerous Mensheviks), who, many years after the pamphlet appeared, wrote about its incorrect or exaggerated ideas on the subject of an organization of professional revolutionaries.

Today these statements look ridiculous, as if their authors want to dismiss a whole period in the development of our Party, to dismiss gains which, in their time, had to be fought for, but which have long ago been consolidated and have served their purpose.

To maintain today that *Iskra* exaggerated (*in 1901 and 1902!*) the idea of an organization of professional revolutionaries, is like reproaching the Japanese, *after* the Russo-Japanese War, for having exaggerated the strength of Russia's armed forces, for having prior to the war exaggerated the need to prepare for fighting these forces. To win victory the Japanese had to marshal all their forces against the probable maximum of Russian forces. Unfortunately, many of those who judge our Party are outsiders, who do not know the subject, who do not realize that *today* the idea of an organization of professional revolutionaries has *already* scored a complete victory. That victory would have been impossible if this idea had not been pushed

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to the *forefront* at the time, if we had not "exaggerated" so as to drive it home to people who were trying to prevent it from being realized.

What Is To Be Done? is a summary of *Iskra* tactics and *Iskra* organizational policy in 1901 and 1902. Precisely a "summary," no more and no less. That will be clear to anyone who takes the trouble to go through the file of *Iskra* for 1901 and 1902. But to pass judgement on that summary without knowing *Iskra's* struggle against the then *dominant* trend of Economism, without understanding that struggle, is sheer idle talk. *Iskra* fought for an organization of professional revolutionaries. It fought with especial vigour in 1901 and 1902, vanquished Economism, the then dominant trend, and finally *created* this organization in 1902. It preserved it in face of the subsequent split in the *Iskrist* ranks and all the convulsions of the period of storm and stress; it preserved it throughout the Russian revolution; it preserved it intact from 1901-02 to 1907.

And now, when the fight for this organization has long been won, when the seed has ripened, and the harvest gathered, people come along and tell us: "You exaggerated the idea of an organization of professional revolutionaries!" Is this not ridiculous?

Take the whole pre-revolutionary period and the first two and a half years of the revolution (1905-07). Compare our Social-Democratic Party during this whole period with the other parties in respect of unity, organization, and continuity of policy. You will have to admit that *in this* respect our Party is *unquestionably* superior to *all* the others — the Cadets, the Socialist-Revolutionaries, etc. Before the revolution it drew up a programme which was formally accepted by all Social-Democrats, and when changes were made in it there was no split over the programme. From 1903 to 1907 (formally from 1905 to 1906), the Social-Democratic Party, despite the split in its ranks, gave the fullest information on the inner-party situation (minutes of the Second General Congress, the Third Bolshevik, and the Fourth General, or Stockholm, congresses). Despite the split, the Social-Democratic Party earlier than any of the other parties was able to take advantage of the temporary spell of freedom to build a legal organization with an ideal democratic structure, an electoral system, and representation at congresses according to the number of organized members. You will not find this, even today, either in the Socialist-Revolutionary or the Cadet parties, though the latter is practically legal, is the best organized bourgeois party, and has incomparably greater funds, scope for using the press, and opportunities for legal activities than our Party. And take the elections in the Second Duma, in which all parties participated — did they not clearly show the superior organizational unity of our Party and Duma group?

The question arises, who accomplished, who brought into being this superior unity, solidarity, and stability of our Party? It was accomplished by the organization of professional revolutionaries, to the building of which *Iskra* made the greatest contribution. Anyone who knows our Party's history well, anyone who has had a hand in building the Party, has but to glance at the delegate list of any of the groups at, say, the London Congress, in order to be convinced of this and notice at once that it is a list of the old membership, the central core that had worked hardest of all to build up the Party and make it what it is. Basically, of course, their success was due to the fact that the working class, whose best representatives built the Social-Democratic Party, for objective economic reasons possesses a greater capacity for organization than any other class in capitalist society. Without this condition an organization of professional revolutionaries would be nothing more than a plaything, an adventure, a mere signboard. *What Is To Be Done?* repeatedly emphasizes this, pointing out that the organization it advocates has no meaning apart from its connection with the "genuine revolutionary class that is spontaneously rising to struggle." But the objective maximum ability of the proletariat to unite in a class is realized through living people, and only through definite forms of organization. In the historical conditions that prevailed in Russia in 1900-05, *no* organization other than *Iskra* could have created the Social-Democratic Labour Party we now have. The professional revolutionary has played his part in the history of Russian proletarian socialism. No power on earth can now undo this work, which has outgrown the narrow framework of the "circles" of 1902-05. Nor can the significance of the gains already won be shaken by belated complaints that the militant tasks of the movement were exaggerated by those who at that time had to fight to ensure the correct way of accomplishing these tasks. . . . (V.I. Lenin, *Preface to the Collection Twelve Years*, Collected Works, Vol. 13, pp. 100-104, Progress Publishers)

PARTY WORK IN THE MASSES On Confounding Politics with Pedagogics

. . . It is our duty always to intensify and broaden our work and influence among the masses. A Social-Democrat who does not do this is no Social-Democrat. No branch, group, or circle can be considered a Social-Democratic organization if it does not work to this end steadily and regularly. To a great extent, the purpose of our strict separation as a distinct and independent party of the proletariat consists in the fact that we always and undeviatingly conduct this Marxist work of raising the whole working class, as far as possible, to the level of Social-Democratic consciousness, allowing

no political gales, still less political changes of scenery, to turn us away from this urgent task. Without this work, political activity would inevitably degenerate into a game, because this activity acquires real importance for the proletariat only when and insofar as it arouses the mass of a definite class, wins its interest, and mobilizes to take an active, foremost part in events. This work, as we have said, is always necessary. After every reverse we should bring this to mind again, and emphasise it, for weakness in this work is *always* one of the causes of the proletariat's defeat. Similarly, we should always call attention to it and emphasize its importance after every victory, otherwise the victory will be only a seeming one, its fruits will not be assured, its real significance in the great struggle for our ultimate goal will be negligible and may even prove adverse (particularly if a partial victory should slacken our vigilance, lull our distrust of unreliable allies, and cause us to forgo the right moment for a renewed and more vigorous attack on the enemy).

But for the very reason that the work of intensifying and broadening our influence on the masses is always necessary, after each victory as after each defeat, in times of political quiescence as in the stormiest periods of revolution, we should not turn the emphasis upon this work into a special slogan or build upon it any special trend if we do not wish to court the risk of descending to demagogy and degrading the aims of the advanced and only truly revolutionary class. There is and always will be an element of pedagogics in the political activity of the Social-Democratic Party. We must educate the whole class of wage-workers to the role of fighters for the emancipation of mankind from all oppression. We must constantly teach more and more sections of this class; we must learn to approach the most backward, the most undeveloped members of this class, those who are least influenced by our science and the science of life, so as to be able to speak to them, to draw closer to them, to raise them steadily and patiently to the level of Social-Democratic consciousness, without making a dry dogma out of our doctrine — to teach them not only from books, but through participation in the daily struggle for existence of these backward and undeveloped strata of the proletariat. There is, we repeat, a certain element of pedagogics in this everyday activity. The Social-Democrat who lost sight of this activity would cease to be a Social-Democrat. That is true. But some of us often forget, these days, that a Social-Democrat who would reduce the tasks of politics to pedagogics would also, though for a different reason, cease to be a Social-Democrat. Whosoever might think of turning this "pedagogics" into a special slogan, of *contraposing* it to "politics," of building a special trend upon it, and of appealing to the masses under this slogan against the "politicians" of Social-Democracy, would instantly and unavoidably descend to demagogy. (V.I. Lenin, *Party Work in the Masses*, pp. 25-26, Progress Publishers)