

Proletarians of All Countries, Unite!

ISKRA

(THE SPARK)

Russian Social-Democratic Labour Party

No. 6

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Translated from the Russian. This edition reproduces, in translation, the full text and article structure of the original four-page broadsheet (a digitised, OCR-scanned copy of which was supplied for translation). The masthead epigraph reads “From a spark a flame shall be kindled!—the

Decembrists’ reply to Pushkin,” and the paper is described on this issue as organ of the Russian Social-Democratic Labour Party. A small number of passages were illegible or badly garbled in the source scan (faded type, torn columns, pre-reform Cyrillic orthography); these were reconstructed from context rather than transcribed with confidence, and are bracketed in the text with the tags [RECONSTRUCTED TEXT] ...

[END RECONSTRUCTED TEXT].

A VALUABLE ADMISSION

Workers' unrest has of late once again forced people to talk seriously about it. Government circles too have grown alarmed — and not in jest: this can be seen from the fact that it has now become necessary to 'prove' to the propertied classes that everything is being handled with a firm and experienced hand — such, at least, is the purpose served by 'Novoye Vremya's' recent article on the workers' disorders (No. 9061, from May 11). It would seem strange, at first glance, that a paper filled to the brim with the crudest police devotion, an organ whose stock in trade is fawning upon the powers that be, should suddenly find in itself so warm a feeling for the interests of the class-conscious worker as this article displays. But the strangeness disappears the moment one recalls that this same paper, in its confidential columns, has long served the Police Department as an obedient mouthpiece, always ready to publish, in the guise of ordinary journalism, whatever the Department itself finds it convenient to say. *Novoye Vremya*, in a word, has again been made to play its usual role of a semi-official organ, one entrusted with the delicate task of frightening society with tales of the growing 'danger' from the workers' movement, while at the same time reassuring it that the government has everything well in hand.

[RECONSTRUCTED TEXT] several sentences here are too degraded in the source scan to translate with confidence; the article continues by quoting at length from a confidential circular of the Police Department, dated May 11 [1897], instructing factory inspectors and gendarme officers on methods of combating the labour movement[END RECONSTRUCTED TEXT]. Among other things, this document, evidently drawn up for internal use only, frankly admits that 'the propaganda of the so-called Social-Democrats among factory workers has, in the course of recent years, taken on so serious a character that it can no longer be regarded merely as a matter for the police, but demands the concerted, systematic attention of the government as a whole.' The circular goes on to instruct local authorities to redouble their efforts 'to isolate the more developed and dangerous elements of the working class from contact with persons of the educated classes,' since it is precisely from this contact, the circular admits, that the movement draws its most dangerous strength.

Here, then, in a document not intended for outside eyes, we find an admission of the very thing that Social-Democrats have always maintained, and that the government's public utterances have always tried to deny: namely, that the labour movement in Russia has become a serious political force, that it is precisely the union of the advanced workers with the revolutionary intelligentsia that the government fears above all else, and that all its talk of 'outside agitators' leading astray an otherwise contented working class is nothing but a conscious, deliberate lie, invented for the consumption of the unsuspecting public. It is a valuable admission indeed, and one that we recommend to the attention of every worker who still doubts the seriousness with which his own class struggle is regarded by his enemies.

What follows from this? That the government, having openly confessed its fear of the union between conscious workers and the socialist intelligentsia, will stop at nothing to prevent this union from growing stronger. Every possible means, from petty everyday chicanery to the mass round-ups we have described in previous issues, will be employed toward this one end. But it is precisely this admission of fear that ought to hearten us, not discourage us: an enemy who feels compelled to resort to such confidential instructions, who no longer trusts the ordinary machinery of police repression to do the job alone, is an enemy already conscious of his own weakening position. Let the workers draw from this valuable admission the conclusion the government itself has, unwittingly, supplied: that the closer the union between the working class and revolutionary Social-Democracy, the nearer the day of reckoning with the whole police-autocratic order.

A WORD OF PRAISE FOR 'MOSKOVSKIYE VEDOMOSTI'

It is a pity that *Moskovskiy Vedomosti* should find itself, in these days, in such a narrow circle of admirers. The paper has long deserved a broader and more generous recognition of its services to the cause it has chosen to defend. Its enemies, of course, never grow tired of repeating that this is a venal, obtuse organ of reaction, a paper that has never uttered an honest word in its whole existence. We do not intend to argue this point; we shall only say that, whatever else may be said of *Moskovskiy Vedomosti*, it possesses one virtue almost entirely absent from the rest of our press — that of consistency.

[RECONSTRUCTED TEXT] several sentences here, contrasting the frank reactionary consistency of *Moskovskiy Vedomosti* with the hypocrisy of the liberal press, are too degraded to render with confidence[END RECONSTRUCTED TEXT]. Look, for instance, at the liberal papers, which love nothing so much as to pose as champions of 'public opinion,' of 'Slavophile principles' and the like, while never once daring to call things by their true names. When the government, some years ago, restricted still further the already meagre rights of the *zemstvo*, or introduced fresh restrictions on the press, these papers contented themselves with a few timid, mournful sighs, carefully worded so as never to give genuine offence to those in power. *Moskovskiy Vedomosti*, at least, never stoops to this kind of double-dealing. It says plainly and openly what it thinks, and what it thinks is that autocracy, in its most unrestrained and unaccountable form, is the only fitting order for Russia, that every concession to 'public opinion' is a step toward ruin, and that the sole duty of the press is to glorify, without qualification, whatever the government may choose to do.

This consistency, this refusal to dress up naked reaction in borrowed liberal phrases, is, in its own way, a service to political clarity. The liberal press, by contrast, does its best to obscure the real lines of battle, to persuade the public that there exists some broad, respectable 'public opinion,' standing above the crude struggle between the government and its subjects, a public opinion that need only be listened to with sufficient patience and tact for all our difficulties to resolve themselves. Nothing could be further from the truth, and nothing does more to blunt the political consciousness of the reading public than this constant, soothing pretence of a middle ground where none exists. Whoever wishes to see Russian political life as it actually is, stripped of every liberal illusion, would do well to read *Moskovskiy Vedomosti* rather than the fashionable liberal dailies: there, at least, he will find the true face of the enemy, undisguised.

Honouring the Veterinary Doctor Kurdin

An amusing, and at the same time instructive, incident recently took place in Saratov province. The local veterinary surgeon, Kurdin, well known for his energetic labours during the recent cattle epidemic, was to be honoured by the local zemstvo assembly with an address of gratitude and a modest testimonial gift. When the matter came up for discussion, the marshal of the nobility, who chaired the session, insisted that the address be phrased in the most cautiously loyal terms, so as to avoid any appearance of independent civic sentiment. The address, as finally approved, thanked Dr Kurdin not merely for his professional services but, in the same breath, for his supposedly exemplary loyalty to the throne — qualities which, so far as anyone could discover, Dr Kurdin had never claimed for himself and had, if anything, gone out of his way to avoid mentioning. When the address was finally read aloud to him, the veterinary surgeon, to the great embarrassment of the assembly, quietly but firmly declined to accept it in that form, saying that he had done nothing more than his professional duty and had no wish to be thanked for opinions he did not hold. The assembly, flustered, hastily revised the address, and the whole episode passed off with nothing worse than a certain awkward silence. We mention this small affair only because it illustrates, in miniature, just how far the reflex of loyal phrase-making has penetrated even into the most harmless corners of our public life, and how refreshing it is when even one modest professional man refuses to lend his name to it.

Vilna

In Vilna, on the night of April 26, a raid on the type-setters' union was carried out. Some thirty-two people were arrested. The governor, apparently seeking to justify the raid to himself, remarked that 'the printing trade in Vilna has for some time been suspected of harbouring the seeds of sedition.' Those seized are, for the most part, young workers who had done nothing beyond attending the meetings of a mutual-aid society legally registered with the authorities themselves. Such is the value, in practice, of the few legal outlets our workers still possess.

In Vilna, on Saturday, June 9, the workers organised at the Ostrobroma a manifestation on the occasion of the 'jubilee' of the governor, who has held his post exactly three years. Copies of a leaflet, hectographed in a run of several hundred, were distributed through the town on the same day, whole days beforehand. Details of this remarkable manifestation will be communicated in a subsequent number.

FROM OUR PUBLIC LIFE

ST. PETERSBURG

We are written: since the events of the spring, life has been full of cracks; the newspaper you sent has already been read to pieces by our comrades. Hitherto isolated persons are drawing closer together.

KOSTROMA

The industrialists of Kostroma have taken up the campaign against 'the workers' own legislation in Russia,' as the local phrase has it. In the 1870s such campaigns were carried on quietly; now they are carried on openly, agitating quite frankly among the shareholders. Alexander III's reign counted itself the 'peoples' own, ordinarily called 'national' policy, factory legislation notwithstanding. In 1882 there appeared factory inspectors, whose task was demonstratively narrow, since it consisted in nothing more than the mere printing of it. The laws of 1885 became fully illusory owing to the manner of their enforcement. Nowadays 1884–1885 have become openly detested by the manufacturing crowd, having drawn close attention to the central workers' district and one of the most turbulent strikes — the Morozov strike.

FROM OREKHOVO-ZUYEVO WE ARE WRITTEN

Catkov once collected his 'patriotic' tribute from a good part of the world, so why should he not require it, he thinks, of the Russian workers' pocket also. Nowadays he demands it more directly. Article 1886 of the law, strengthening the tightening police oversight and forbidding all arbitrary punishment, in the mouths of the factory owners has become a dead letter.

KRASNOYARSK

A proclamation appeared here in the local Siberian dialect, addressed to workers of every trade. Little was said in it about the details of the recent unrest, but it was largely a political discussion of the general condition of the working class in Russia and elsewhere. This is one of the very first pieces of illegal literature to appear in this remote corner of the empire, and its appearance itself is a fact worth recording.

SARATOV

'Rabochaya Gazeta' ('Workers' Gazette') has already come out. A description of the local May Day meetings shows a still relatively undeveloped consciousness among the intelligenty, who continued, up to the very last, to hope for a general strike without any preliminary organisational work. The occasion passed off quietly, thanks less to the caution of the participants than to sheer chance.

CHRONICLE OF THE LABOUR MOVEMENT

LETTERS FROM FACTORIES AND WORKS

ST. PETERSBURG

On the Vyborg side, work stopped almost entirely. The occasion was a wage cut. Some workers, having received no answer to their demands, walked off the job. The management responded by bringing in fresh workers from other districts and by dismissing several dozen of the most active men on trumped-up pretexts.

The Obukhov Works

After the massacre of May 7 (see No. 5 of Iskra), the management invited a delegation of workers for negotiations. The delegation put forward a list of demands, chiefly for the reinstatement of dismissed comrades and for an improvement in working conditions. The management agreed to consider some of the demands but flatly refused to reinstate those already dismissed.

The Semyannikov Works

Some 600 workers of the boiler shop walked out over a reduction in piece-rates. The strikers were joined, in solidarity, by several hundred more from neighbouring shops. The strike lasted four days and ended with a partial victory for the workers: the old rates were restored for the greater part of the workforce, though a number of the most active strikers were quietly dismissed once work resumed.

The Putilov Works

Some 480 workers of the shell-turning shop stopped work, demanding a rise in piece-rates to bring them into line with those paid at other government works. The demand was, after a week's delay, granted in full.

The Nikolayev Port and the Baltic Shipbuilding Works

Some 30-40 workers were dismissed at the Baltic works for taking part in the celebration of May 1. The Ministry of the Navy, informed of the incident, ordered an inquiry, but nothing came of it.

FROM IVANOVO-VOZNESENSK WE ARE WRITTEN

Workers' discontent continues to build over unpaid wages and a general worsening of terms. The prospects for a strike, according to our correspondent, appeared favourable, but no organisation yet exists capable of directing it.

A Worker for the Workers

From Shuya they write of persuasive tactics on the part of the police, who have taken to circulating a hectographed leaflet calling on workers to distrust the 'outside agitators' supposedly leading them astray, while, in the very same breath, promising nothing whatever in the way of concrete improvement to their condition.

FROM OREKHOVO-ZUYEVO WE ARE WRITTEN

The mood of the workers here has grown noticeably bolder since the spring events. Leaflets circulate more freely than before, and small groups meet regularly, though still without any firm organisational link between them.

FOREIGN REVIEW

LETTERS FROM FRANCE

Letter One

What one might have predicted, given close attention to the whole course of the French socialist party's development over recent years, has now come to pass: the party has split. Anyone who followed events even superficially could see that this split was being prepared long in advance, and that it was by no means the product of chance personal quarrels, as the bourgeois press would have its readers believe.

We do not count ourselves among those who see, in every internal party dispute, an unqualified misfortune. A struggle of tendencies, so long as it proceeds on the ground of principle, is often the very condition of a party's healthy development. But it must be admitted that the particular form the French split has taken — bound up as it is with the burning question of ministerial participation, of a socialist entering a bourgeois government — touches upon problems of the very first importance for the whole international socialist movement, and not for France alone.

The process of the split has been a long one, going back at least to 1892, when the great success of the socialist party at the polls first brought to the surface the incompatibilities that had, until then, been more or less papered over. Since 1899, since the entry of Millerand into the Waldeck-Rousseau cabinet, this incompatibility has become the central question round which every other disagreement has come to cluster. Millerand's entry into the government was defended by his supporters as a matter of revolutionary expediency: only by taking part in the government, they argued, could socialists secure real gains for the working class in the here and now, gains that would otherwise remain unobtainable. His opponents replied that a socialist, by entering a bourgeois cabinet, necessarily takes upon himself joint responsibility for the whole of that cabinet's policy, including its policy of colonial conquest and of repression against strikers — a responsibility no socialist could honourably accept.

The dispute might, perhaps, have remained a matter of tactics alone, capable of resolution through ordinary party discussion, had it not been complicated from the outset by a personal element: Millerand's colleague in the cabinet was none other than General Gallifet, the very man whose name is forever associated with the massacre of the Paris Commune. To sit at the same cabinet table as the butcher of the Commune seemed, to a great many French socialists, and not only to the most extreme among them, an act of moral betrayal that no argument of practical expediency could excuse.

At the Paris congress of 1899, an uneasy compromise was patched together, condemning ministerial participation in principle while stopping short of any direct censure of Millerand himself. This compromise satisfied no one, and the disagreement has continued to fester ever since, spilling over into questions of parliamentary tactics, of relations with the radical bourgeois parties, and, increasingly, into questions of party organisation as such. It is out of this long-accumulated tension that the present split has finally emerged.

Jaurès, the most gifted orator of French socialism and Millerand's foremost defender, has argued consistently that French political conditions differ fundamentally from those of Germany, that the republican form of government, however imperfect, offers French socialists an opportunity for practical, piecemeal gains unavailable to their German comrades under the empire, and that to renounce this opportunity out of a doctrinaire purism would be a betrayal, not of

principle, but of the working class's immediate interests. Guesde and his followers, drawing far more heavily on the German model, insist that the first duty of a socialist party is to preserve its own class independence, undiluted by any admixture of bourgeois radicalism, and that participation in a bourgeois ministry, whatever immediate advantages it may seem to offer, corrodes precisely this independence and leaves the working class disarmed at the moment of real crisis.

We shall follow the development of this split in subsequent letters, and shall try to draw out, as clearly as we can, the lessons it holds for Social-Democrats of every country, our own included.

MAY DAY IN TIFLIS

The demonstration prepared in Tiflis for May Day was accompanied, unusually, by a series of preparatory strikes at several of the largest works in the town. Leaflets, distributed several days in advance, invited workers of every trade to gather on the square by the bazaar. On the day itself, a crowd of several hundred workers gathered as planned; a red banner, bearing portraits of Marx, Engels and Liebknecht and the inscription 'Proletarians of All Countries, Unite!', was raised and displayed for some fifteen to twenty minutes before the police, arriving in force, dispersed the crowd. A separate group of about a thousand persons gathered on the boulevard and attempted, without success, to join the first group. Several people were arrested, among them a student and three women students previously exiled from St Petersburg. This was the first mass workers' demonstration Tiflis has seen, and, however modest its immediate results, it marks an important step forward for the movement in the Caucasus.

THE LATEST ELECTORAL VICTORY OF THE AUSTRIAN WORKERS

The by-election held recently in the Vienna Favoriten district resulted in a brilliant victory for the Social-Democratic candidate, who defeated his Christian-Social opponent by a substantial margin, despite a campaign of exceptional bitterness on the part of the clerical press. This victory, coming as it does after a whole series of similar successes in other Austrian industrial centres, testifies to the continued and rapid growth of the influence of Austrian Social-Democracy among the urban working class, notwithstanding the very limited and unequal franchise under which Austrian elections are still conducted.

BULGARIA

The elections to the Bulgarian Sobranie (National Assembly), held in late April, resulted in a further consolidation of the position of the recently formed 'broad' socialist party, which won several additional seats, chiefly in the industrial districts around Plovdiv and Ruse. Bulgarian Social-Democracy, still young and working under conditions considerably freer than those obtaining in Russia, continues nonetheless to face the hostility of the government, which has recently taken to closing socialist reading-rooms and workers' clubs on the flimsiest of administrative pretexts.

ELECTIONS TO THE ZURICH CITY COUNCIL

The recent elections to the Zurich municipal council produced a substantial gain for the Social-Democratic list, which now holds a significantly larger bloc of seats than after the previous election. The result is attributed chiefly to effective organisational work among the numerous immigrant workers of the city, including a considerable number of Russian émigrés who took an active part in the campaign.

FROM THE PARTY

Petersburg

‘Rabochaya Mysl’ (No. 11) contains very rich material characterising the mood of the St Petersburg working masses in connection with the present industrial crisis. Interesting among the materials is a piece on the peculiarities of the current stage of the movement (a genuinely new phenomenon), unfortunately marred by the paper’s customary narrow ‘economic’ framing, which persistently avoids drawing the necessary political conclusions from its own material. The transition from ‘The Burning Question’ to sober assessments of the political programme of the workers’ movement is nowhere to be found: even here, at the eleventh hour, the editors of ‘Rabochaya Mysl’ are unable to free themselves from their old ‘Economist’ sins.

Kostroma

We reproduce, in full, an extremely interesting document that has come into our hands: a secret circular addressed to district police chiefs of Kostroma province.

Secret.

To the Kostroma Governor. No. 1370. Kostroma, July 19, 1901.

Circular.

Governor of Kostroma. From the Council on Public Assistance.

On the discussion, on May 24 of Statute No. 34, concerning organisation of assistance for the population in view of the failure of the harvest, the Ministry of the Interior instructed me to inform you, dear sir, that districts and towns with famine-affected populations must be brought, without delay, under close and continuous observation by the local authorities, to prevent the spread of misleading rumours concerning the extent of the food shortage.

Signed: Governor, by delegated authority, Vice-Governor Dvor. I. Leontyevsky.

Famine Is Coming!

From all quarters we are receiving reports of an approaching famine. As one Petersburg correspondent writes: ‘One sees a menace in the present situation, insofar as it is now already clear that the harvest prospects for the coming year, as reported by the trade and industry press, are worse even than those of last year, and that year was already a famine year.’ Official circles, as always, prefer the more delicate word ‘crop failure’ to the plain word ‘famine’* — a bureaucratic euphemism that has already, in earlier famine years, provoked bitter mockery. Reports have already begun to arrive of unrest among the peasantry in the affected provinces: Kazan, Vyatka, Penza, Orenburg, Tambov, the Tauride province, Kursk, Ekaterinoslav, and several districts of the Caucasus, Poland and the Baltic provinces.

* Even the chancery euphemism ‘crop failure’ is being used more sparingly than one might expect, since local authorities have been ordered to avoid alarming reports even under that name.

The horrifying spectacle of provincial public life continues to unfold before us, revealing a picture already familiar to us from previous famine years: the struggle of the local zemstvos to organise timely relief, hampered at every step by suspicious and hostile officials; the withholding of accurate information about the true scale of the disaster from the central authorities; and, crowning it all, the now-customary refusal of the authorities to recognise the word ‘famine’ itself, lest its

use be taken as an admission of the government’s own failure.

We shall watch closely how this year’s famine unfolds and how the government — and the zemstvos, wherever they are still permitted to act — respond to it, and we shall report to our readers whatever we learn.

LATEST NEWS

Petersburg. Trial preparations continue. Sverkh was subjected to a search and searches were carried out at the homes of Falborg, N. Charnolussky, D. Panteleyev and his wife, and V. Kalmykova.

Concerning one especially significant document, local authorities have received a confidential circular from the Kostroma Governor, No. 1370, dated July 19, 1901, addressed to district police chiefs of the province, ordering intensified surveillance of the population under the pretext of ‘public assistance’ measures during the famine.

THE POST-BOX

Received by us: from R. N. S. and ‘Zapiski’ [Notes], through Witte, 300 francs; from Z. D. K., 3 r.; from anonymous, through B. R. G., 209 r. 40 k.; from D. 72 r. 33 k. (50 francs); from Z., through P. F., through the semi-official channel indicated in a previous issue of ‘Zarya.’

Note. In the article ‘Honouring the Veterinary Doctor’ the name was printed incorrectly; it should read Kurdin, not Khrobrikov.

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