

been trained to form columns of any sort, let alone assault columns.

In view of all this, it must be clear to anyone who is capable of appreciating the general conditions of our struggle and who is mindful of them at every “turn” in the historical course of events that at the present moment our slogan cannot be “To the assault”, but has to be, “Lay siege to the enemy fortress”. In other words, the immediate task of our Party is not to summon all available forces for the attack right now, but to call for the formation of a revolutionary organization capable of uniting all forces and guiding the movement in actual practice and not in name alone, that is, an organization ready at any time to support every protest and every outbreak and use it to build up and consolidate the fighting forces suitable for the decisive struggle.

The lesson of the February and March events⁵ has been so impressive that no disagreement in principle with this conclusion is now likely to be encountered. What we need at the present moment, however, is not a solution of the problem in principle but a practical solution. We should not only be clear on the nature of the organization that is needed and its precise purpose,

⁵This passage refers to the mass revolutionary actions of students and workers—political demonstrations, meetings, and strikes—that took place in February and March 1901, in St. Petersburg, Moscow, Kiev, Kharkov, Kazan, Yaroslavl, Warsaw, Belostok, Tomsk, Odessa, and other cities in Russia.

but we must elaborate a definite plan for an organization, so that its formation may be undertaken from all aspects. In view of the pressing importance of the question, we, on our part, take the liberty of submitting to the comrades a skeleton plan to be developed in greater detail in a pamphlet now in preparation for print⁶.

In our opinion, the starting-point of our activities, the first step towards creating the desired organization, or, let us say, the main thread which, if followed, would enable us steadily to develop, deepen, and extend that organization, should be the founding of an All-Russian political newspaper. A newspaper is what we most of all need; without it we cannot conduct that systematic, all-round propaganda and agitation, consistent in principle, which is the chief and permanent task of Social-Democracy in general and, in particular, the pressing task of the moment, when interest in politics and in questions of socialism has been aroused among the broadest strata of the population.

Never has the need been felt so acutely as today for reinforcing dispersed agitation in the form of individual action, local leaflets, pamphlets, etc., by means of generalized and systematic agitation that can only be conducted with the aid of the periodical press. It may be said without exaggeration that the frequency

⁶The pamphlet in preparation mentioned is Lenin’s masterful work *What Is To Be Done?*.

and regularity with which a newspaper is printed (and distributed) can serve as a precise criterion of how well this cardinal and most essential sector of our militant activities is built up. Furthermore, our newspaper must be All-Russian. If we fail, and as long as we fail, to combine our efforts to influence the people and the government by means of the printed word, it will be utopian to think of combining other means, more complex, more difficult, but also more decisive, for exerting influence.

Our movement suffers in the first place, ideologically, as well as in practical and organizational respects, from its state of fragmentation, from the almost complete immersion of the overwhelming majority of Social-Democrats in local work, which narrows their outlook, the scope of their activities, and their skill in the maintenance of secrecy and their preparedness. It is precisely in this state of fragmentation that one must look for the deepest roots of the instability and the waverings noted above. The first step towards eliminating this short-coming, towards transforming diverse local movements into a single, All-Russian movement, must be the founding of an All-Russian newspaper.

Lastly, what we need is definitely a political newspaper. Without a political organ, a political movement deserving that name is inconceivable in the Europe of today. Without such a newspaper we cannot possibly fulfill our task, that of concentrating all the elements

people” of the towns pressed forward in struggle, while the revolutionaries lacked a staff of leaders and organizers. Under such conditions, is there not the danger that, as the most energetic revolutionaries go over to terror, the fighting contingents, in whom alone it is possible to place serious reliance, will be weakened? Is there not the danger of rupturing the contact between the revolutionary organizations and the disunited masses of the discontented, the protesting, and the disposed to struggle, who are weak precisely because they are disunited?

Yet it is this contact that is the sole guarantee of our success. Far be it from us to deny the significance of heroic individual blows, but it is our duty to sound a vigorous warning against becoming infatuated with terror, against taking it to be the chief and basic means of struggle, as so many people strongly incline to do at present. Terror can never be a regular military operation; at best it can only serve as one of the methods employed in a decisive assault. But can we issue the call for such a decisive assault at the present moment? Rabocheye Dyelo apparently thinks we can.

At any rate, it exclaims: “Form assault columns!” But this, again, is more zeal than reason. The main body of our military forces consists of volunteers and insurgents. We possess only a few small units of regular troops, and these are not even mobilized; they are not connected with one another, nor have they

forgotten their principles holding forth on a radical change in tactics? Fortunately, Rabocheye Dyelo is in error. The question of terror is not a new question at all; it will suffice to recall briefly the established views of Russian Social-Democracy on the subject.

In principle we have never rejected, and cannot reject, terror. Terror is one of the forms of military action that may be perfectly suitable and even essential at a definite juncture in the battle, given a definite state of the troops and the existence of definite conditions. But the important point is that terror, at the present time, is by no means suggested as an operation for the army in the field, an operation closely connected with and integrated into the entire system of struggle, but as an independent form of occasional attack unrelated to any army.

Without a central body and with the weakness of local revolutionary organizations, this, in fact, is all that terror can be. We, therefore, declare emphatically that under the present conditions such a means of struggle is inopportune and unsuitable; that it diverts the most active fighters from their real task, the task which is most important from the standpoint of the interests of the movement as a whole; and that it disorganizes the forces, not of the government, but of the revolution.

We need but recall the recent events. With our own eyes we saw that the mass of workers and “common

of political discontent and protest, of vitalizing thereby the revolutionary movement of the proletariat. We have taken the first step, we have aroused in the working class a passion for “economic”, factory exposures; we must now take the next step, that of arousing in every section of the population that is at all politically conscious a passion for political exposure.

We must not be discouraged by the fact that the voice of political exposure is today so feeble, timid, and infrequent. This is not because of a wholesale submission to police despotism, but because those who are able and ready to make exposures have no tribune from which to speak, no eager and encouraging audience, they do not see anywhere among the people that force to which it would be worth while directing their complaint against the “omnipotent” Russian Government.

But today all this is rapidly changing. There is such a force, it is the revolutionary proletariat, which has demonstrated its readiness, not only to listen to and support the summons to political struggle, but boldly to engage in battle. We are now in a position to provide a tribune for the nationwide exposure of the Tsarist government, and it is our duty to do this. That tribune must be a Social-Democratic newspaper. The Russian working class, as distinct from the other classes and strata of Russian society, displays a constant interest in political knowledge and manifests a constant and

extensive demand (not only in periods of intensive unrest) for illegal literature.

When such a mass demand is evident, when the training of experienced revolutionary leaders has already begun, and when the concentration of the working class makes it virtual master in the working class districts of the big cities and in the factory settlements and communities, it is quite feasible for the proletariat to found a political newspaper. Through the proletariat the newspaper will reach the urban petty bourgeoisie, the rural handicraftsmen, and the peasants, thereby becoming a real people's political newspaper.

The role of a newspaper, however, is not limited solely to the dissemination of ideas, to political education, and to the enlistment of political allies. A newspaper is not only a collective propagandist and a collective agitator, it is also a collective organizer. In this last respect it may be likened to the scaffolding round a building under construction, which marks the contours of the structure and facilitates communication between the builders, enabling them to distribute the work and to view the common results achieved by their organized labor. With the aid of the newspaper, and through it, a permanent organization will naturally take shape that will engage, not only in local activities, but in regular general work, and will train its members to follow political events carefully, appraise their significance and their effect on the various strata

for that matter, in twenty-four months, their view on the necessity—in general, constantly, and absolutely—of an organization of struggle and of political agitation among the masses. It is ridiculous to plead different circumstances and a change of periods: the building of a fighting organization and the conduct of political agitation are essential under any “drab, peaceful” circumstances, in any period, no matter how marked by a “declining revolutionary spirit”; moreover, it is precisely in such periods and under such circumstances that work of this kind is particularly necessary, since it is too late to form the organization in times of explosion and outbursts; the Party must be in a state of readiness to launch activity at a moment's notice.

“Change the tactics within twenty-four hours”! But in order to change tactics it is first necessary to have tactics; without a strong organization skilled in waging political struggle under all circumstances and at all times, there can be no question of that systematic plan of action, illumined by firm principles and steadfastly carried out, which alone is worthy of the name of tactics.

Let us, indeed, consider the matter; we are now being told that the “historic moment” has presented our Party with a “completely new” question—the question of terror. Yesterday the “completely new” question was political organization and agitation; today it is terror. Is it not strange to hear people who have so grossly

within twenty-four hours.” There is talk of a “strong fighting organization for direct attack, for storming, the autocracy; of “broad revolutionary political agitation among the masses” (how energetic we are now—both revolutionary and political!); of “ceaseless calls for street protests”; of “street demonstrations of a pronounced [sic!] political character”; and so on, and so forth.

We might perhaps declare ourselves happy at Rabocheye Dyelo’s quick grasp of the programme we put forward in the first issue of Iskra⁴, calling for the formation of a strong and well-organized party, whose aim is not only to win isolated concessions but to storm the fortress of the autocracy itself; but the lack of any set point of view in these individuals can only dampen our happiness.

Rabocheye Dyelo, of course, mentions Liebknecht’s name in vain. The tactics of agitation in relation to some special question, or the tactics with regard to some detail of party organization may be changed in twenty-four hours; but only people devoid of all principle are capable of changing, in twenty-four hours, or,

⁴The reference is to the article “The Urgent Tasks of Our Movement”, which was published as the leading article in Iskra, No. 1, December 1900 (see present edition, Vol. 4, pp. 366-71). Iskra (The Spark)—the first All-Russian illegal Marxist newspaper, founded by Lenin in 1900. The foundation of a militant organ of revolutionary Marxism was the main task confronting Russian Social-Democrats at the time.

of the population, and develop effective means for the revolutionary Party to influence these events.

The mere technical task of regularly supplying the newspaper with copy and of promoting regular distribution will necessitate a network of local agents of the united Party, who will maintain constant contact with one another, know the general state of affairs, get accustomed to performing regularly their detailed functions in the All-Russian work, and test their strength in the organization of various revolutionary actions. This network of agents⁷ will form the skeleton of precisely the kind of organization we need—one that is sufficiently large to embrace the whole country; sufficiently broad and many-sided to effect a strict and detailed division of labor; sufficiently well tempered to be able to conduct steadily its own work under any circumstances, at all “sudden turns”, and in face of all contingencies; sufficiently flexible to be able, on the one hand, to avoid an open battle against an overwhelming enemy, when the enemy has concentrated all his forces at one spot, and yet, on the other, to take

⁷It will be understood, of course, that these agents could work successfully only in the closest contact with the local committees (groups, study circles) of our Party. In general, the entire plan we project can, of course, be implemented only with the most active support of the committees which have on repeated occasions attempted to unite the Party and which, we are sure, will achieve this unification—if not today, then tomorrow, if not in one way, then in another. — Lenin

advantage of his unwieldiness and to attack him when and where he least expects it.

Today we are faced with the relatively easy task of supporting student demonstrations in the streets of big cities; tomorrow we may, perhaps, have the more difficult task of supporting, for example, the unemployed movement in some particular area, and the day after to be at our posts in order to play a revolutionary part in a peasant uprising.

Today we must take advantage of the tense political situation arising out of the government's campaign against the Zemstvo; tomorrow we may have to support popular indignation against some Tsarist bashibazouk⁸ on the rampage and help, by means of boycott, indictment, demonstrations, etc., to make things so hot for him as to force him into open retreat. Such a degree of combat readiness can be developed only through the constant activity of regular troops. If we join forces to produce a common newspaper, this work will train and bring into the foreground, not only the most skillful propagandists, but the most capable organizers, the most talented political party leaders capable, at the right moment, of releasing the slogan for the decisive struggle and of taking the lead in that struggle.

⁸An irregular soldier of the Ottoman army, raised in times of war.

aping every new "trend", and is incapable of distinguishing immediate demands from the main tasks and permanent needs of the movement as a whole. This trend, as we know, has ensconced itself in Rabocheye Dyelo¹. This journal's latest statement of "programme", a bombastic article under the bombastic title "A Historic Turn" ("Listok", Rabochevo Dyela, No. 6[4]²), bears out with special emphasis the characterization we have given.

Only yesterday there was a flirtation with "Economism", a fury over the resolute condemnation of Rabochaya Mysl³, and Plekhanov's presentation of the question of the struggle against autocracy was being toned down. But today Liebknecht's words are being quoted: "If the circumstances change within twenty-four hours, then tactics must be changed

¹Rabocheye Dyelo (The Workers' Cause)—a journal with "Economist" views, organ of the Union of Russian Social-Democrats Abroad. It appeared irregularly and was published in Geneva from April 1899 to February 1902 under the editorship of B. N. Krichevsky, A. S. Martynov, and V. P. Ivanshin. Altogether 12 numbers appeared in nine issues.

²"Listok" Rabochevo Dyela (Rabocheye Dyelo Supplement)—of which eight numbers were issued in Geneva, at irregular intervals, between June 1900 and July 1901.

³Rabochaya Mysl (Workers' Thought)—an "Economist" newspaper, organ of the Union of Russian Social-Democrats Abroad, published from October 1897 to December 1902. Altogether 16 issues appeared: numbers 3 to 11 and number 16 were published in Berlin, the remaining numbers in St. Petersburg. It was edited by K. M. Takhtarev and others.

In this short article, originally published in Iskra, Lenin lays out his general understanding of the necessity of a country-wide newspaper as a central propagandist, agitator, and organizer, and its importance to the process by which the Communist Party is constituted, or, in our case, reconstituted.

Where To Begin?

In recent years the question of “what is to be done?” has confronted Russian Social-Democrats with particular insistence. It is not a question of what path we must choose (as was the case in the late eighties and early nineties), but of what practical steps we must take upon the known path and how they shall be taken. It is a question of a system and plan of practical work. And it must be admitted that we have not yet solved this question of the character and the methods of struggle, fundamental for a party of practical activity, that it still gives rise to serious differences of opinion which reveal a deplorable ideological instability and vacillation.

On the one hand, the “Economist” trend, far from being dead, is endeavoring to clip and narrow the work of political organization and agitation. On the other, unprincipled eclecticism is again rearing its head,

In conclusion, a few words to avoid possible misunderstanding. We have spoken continuously of systematic, planned preparation, yet it is by no means our intention to imply that the autocracy can be overthrown only by a regular siege or by organized assault. Such a view would be absurd and doctrinaire. On the contrary, it is quite possible, and historically much more probable, that the autocracy will collapse under the impact of one of the spontaneous outbursts or unforeseen political complications which constantly threaten it from all sides. But no political party that wishes to avoid adventurous gambles can base its activities on the anticipation of such outbursts and complications. We must go our own way, and we must steadfastly carry on our regular work, and the less our reliance on the unexpected, the less the chance of our being caught unawares by any “historic turns”.

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Where To Begin?

V.I. Lenin



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