

A Letter to a Comrade on Our Organizational Tasks



N. Lenin



V. I. Lenin

Preface from Lenin

A Letter to a Comrade, here reprinted, was written over a year ago—in September 1902, if my memory does not deceive me. At first it passed from hand to hand in manuscript copies and circulated in Russia as a statement of *Iskra*'s views on organization. Then, last June, the Siberian League printed and distributed it in quite a large number of copies. It is thus already fully a matter of public knowledge and there are no longer any grounds for withholding its publication. The reason I had for not publishing it before—its very unfinished literary form, it being only a “rough draft” in the fullest sense of the term—now lapses, for it is in this rough state that many practical workers in Russia have read it. Furthermore, an even weightier reason for reprinting it in its rough form (I have made only the most essential stylistic corrections) is that it has now acquired the significance of a “document.”¹ As we know, the new editorial

¹My opponents having repeatedly expressed the wish to avail themselves of this letter as a docu-

board of *Iskra* already announced in No. 53 the existence of differences over questions of *organization*. Unfortunately, the editors are in no hurry to specify just what these differences are, confining themselves for the most part to hinting at things unknown.

Something must be done to help the new editorial board in its difficult task. Let the old organizational views of *Iskra* be made known in all their details, down even to rough drafts; perhaps the new editorial board will then finally reveal its *new* organizational views to the Party under its “ideological direction.” Perhaps it will then finally confide to us the *precise formulation* of the fundamental changes it would like to have made in our Party’s Rules of Organization. For, indeed, who does not understand that it is these Rules of Organization that embody the organizational plans we have always had?

If the reader compares *What Is To Be Done?* and the *Iskra* articles on organizational matters with the *Letter to a Comrade*, and the latter with the Rules adopted at the Second Congress, he

ment, I would consider it positively—how shall I put it mildly?—awkward to introduce any changes when reprinting it.

will be able to form a clear idea of how consistently we, the majority of the *Iskra*-ists and the majority at the Party Congress, have pursued our organizational "line." As to the new editorial board of *Iskra*, we shall be waiting, and with the greatest impatience, for a statement of its new organizational views; we shall be waiting for it to indicate just what it has been disillusioned in, and since when, and why it has begun to "burn the idols it worshiped."

N. Lenin,

January 1904.

Preface from Progress Publishers

A Letter to a Comrade on Our Organizational Tasks was a reply to a letter from the St. Petersburg Social-Democrat A. A. Shneyerson (Yeryoma) criticizing the way Social-Democratic work was organized in that city.

After the arrest of V. I. Lenin and his close associates in December 1895, the “economists” gradually gained control of the League of Struggle for the Emancipation of the Working Class. Unlike the revolutionary Marxists, who fought for the creation of an underground and centralized organization of revolutionaries, the “economists” derogated the significance of political struggle and came out for creation of a broad working-class organization based on the elective principle and pursuing the primary aim of immediate defense of the workers’ economic interests, formation of mutual aid banks, and the like. The “economists” long control of the League of Struggle left an imprint on its or-

ganizational structure too: its working-class membership (the so-called Workers' Organization) was artificially separated from the intellectual members. The League's clumsy organization was more adapted for a trade-union form of struggle than for leadership of the workers' mass revolutionary struggle against the autocracy and the bourgeoisie. The struggle between the *Iskra*-ists and the "economists" which developed in the St. Petersburg organization culminated in the St. Petersburg Committee of the R.S.D.L.P. going over to the *Iskra* stand in the summer of 1902.

"Two questions were raised," it was reported in *Iskra*'s No. 30 of December 15th, 1902, "at a meeting held in the outskirts of St. Petersburg in June, which was attended by *workers representing all five wards of the Workers' Organization* (who comprised the highest body of the then Workers' Organization). These questions were: 1) the two trends in Russian Social-Democracy: the old 'economist' trend, which hitherto obtained in St. Petersburg, and the revolutionary, as represented by *Iskra* and *Zarya*, and 2) principles of organization (so-called 'democratism' or an 'organization of rev-

olutionaries'). On both issues *all the workers came out unanimously against* 'economism' and 'democratism' and in favor of the *Iskra* trend."

To reconstruct the St. Petersburg League of Struggle in the spirit of *Iskra* organizational principles, a committee was set up composed of representatives of the *Iskra* organization, the Workers' Organization, and the St. Petersburg Committee. However, the "economists," headed by Tokarev, stated that they disagreed with the St. Petersburg Committee's decision on support for the *Iskra* stand, formed the so-called Workers' Organization's Committee, and launched a struggle against the *Iskra*-ists. The latter, with the support of the workers, were able to retain their positions and fortify their standing in the St. Petersburg organization.

A Letter to a Comrade, in which Lenin developed and gave concrete shape to his plan for the Party's organization, was received in St. Petersburg at the height of the struggle against the "economists." It was hectographed, copied by hand, and distributed among St. Petersburg Social-Democrats. In June 1903 it was illegally published by the Siberian Social-Democratic League under the title of *On Rev-*

olutionary Work in the Organizations of the R.S.D.L.P. (A Letter to a Comrade). This *Letter* was published by the R.S.D.L.P.'s Central Committee as a separate pamphlet, with a preface and postscript by Lenin, who also prepared the pamphlet for the press. The *Letter* was widely distributed in Social-Democratic organizations, police archives for 1902-05 revealing that it was found during police raids in Moscow, Riga, Rostov-on-Don, Nakhichevan, Nikolayev, Krasnoyarsk, Irkutsk, and elsewhere.

- Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1964.

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First Edition, April 2024.

A Letter to a Comrade on Our Organizational Tasks

**To the St. Petersburg Committee in general
and to Comrade Yeryoma in particular:**

Dear Comrade,

It is with pleasure that I accede to your request for a criticism of your draft for the "Organization of the St. Petersburg Revolutionary Party." (Most likely you meant the organization of the work of the Russian Social-Democratic Labor Party in St. Petersburg.) The question you have raised is so important that all members of the St. Petersburg Committee, and even all Russian Social-Democrats in general, should take part in its discussion.

First of all, let me express my complete agreement with your explanation of the unsuitableness of the former ("league type," as you term it) organization of the "League." You refer to the lack of serious training and revolutionary education among the progressive workers, to the so-called elective system, which *Rabocheye*

Dyelo supporters are championing so proudly and stubbornly on the grounds of “democratic” principles, and to the workers’ alienation from active work.

That precisely is the case: 1) the lack of serious training and revolutionary education (not only among the workers, but among the intellectuals as well), 2) the misplaced and immoderate application of the elective principle, and 3) the workers’ alienation from active *revolutionary* work—that is where the main shortcoming of the St. Petersburg organization and of many other local organizations of our Party really lies.

I fully share your basic view on the organizational tasks, and also subscribe to your organizational plan, so far as I understand its general outlines from your letter.

Specifically, I wholly agree with you that special stress should be laid on the tasks connected with the work on an all-Russian scale and with the work of the Party as a whole; in your draft this is expressed in Clause One, which reads: “The newspaper *Iskra*, which has permanent correspondents among the workers and close contact with the work within the organization, is the leading center of the Party

(and not only of a committee or a district).” I should merely like to remark that the newspaper can and should be the *ideological* leader of the Party, evolving theoretical truths, tactical principles, general organizational ideas, and the general tasks of the whole Party at any given moment. But only a special central group (let us call it the Central Committee, say) can be the direct *practical* leader of the movement, maintaining *personal* connections with all the committees, embracing all the best revolutionary forces among the Russian Social-Democrats, and *managing* all the general affairs of the Party, such as the distribution of literature, the issuing of leaflets, the allocation of forces, the appointment of individuals and groups to take charge of special undertakings, the preparation of demonstrations and an uprising on an all-Russian scale, etc. Since the strictest secrecy of organization and preservation of continuity of the movement is essential, our Party can and should have *two* leading centers: a C.O. (Central Organ) and a C.C. (Central Committee). The former should be responsible for ideological leadership, and the latter—for direct and practical leadership. Unity of action and

the necessary solidarity between these groups should be ensured, not only by a single Party program, but also by the *composition of the two groups* (both groups, the C.O. and the C.C., should be made up of people who are in complete harmony with one another), and by the institution of regular and systematic joint conferences. Only then will the C.O., on the one hand, be placed beyond the reach of the Russian gendarmes and assured of consistency and continuity, while, on the other hand, the C.C. will always be at one with the C.O. on all essential matters and have sufficient freedom to *take direct charge* of all the practical aspects of the movement.

For this reason it would be desirable that Clause One of the Rules (according to your draft) should not only indicate which Party organ is recognized as the leading organ (that, of course, is necessary), but should also state that the given local organization sets itself the task of working actively for the *creation*, support, and consolidation of those central institutions without which our Party cannot exist as a party.

Further, in Clause Two, you say that the committee should "direct the local organiza-

tion” (perhaps it would be better to say: “all local work and all the local organizations of the Party”; but I shall not dwell on details of formulation), and that it should consist of both workers and intellectuals, for to divide them into two committees is harmful. This is absolutely and indubitably correct. There should be only one committee of the Russian Social-Democratic Labor Party, and it should consist of fully convinced Social-Democrats who devote themselves entirely to Social-Democratic activities. We should particularly see to it that as many workers as possible become fully class-conscious and professional revolutionaries and members of the committee.² Once there is a *single* and not a dual committee, the matter of the committee members *personally* knowing many workers is of particular importance. In order to take the lead in whatever goes on in the workers’ midst, it is necessary to be able to have access to all quarters, to know very many workers, to have all sorts of channels, etc., etc. The committee should, therefore, include, as far as possible, all

²We must try to get on the committee revolutionary workers who have the greatest contacts and the best “reputation” among the mass of the workers.

the principal *leaders* of the working-class movement from among the workers themselves; it should direct *all* aspects of the local movement and take charge of *all* local institutions, forces and means of the Party. You do not say how the committee should be set up—most likely, here too we shall agree with you that it is scarcely necessary to have special regulations about this; how to set up the committee is a matter for the Social-Democrats on the spot to decide. However, it should perhaps be pointed out that new members should be added to the committee by decision of a majority (or two-thirds, etc.) of its members, and that the committee should see to it that its list of contacts is placed in hands that are reliable (from the revolutionary standpoint) and safe (in the political sense), and that it prepares candidate-members in advance. When we have the C.O. and the new committees should be set up only with their co-operation and their consent. As far as possible, the committees should not have very many members (so that they consist of well-educated people, each well versed in the technique of his particular branch of revolutionary activity), but at the same time they should include a sufficient number to take

charge of *all* aspects of the work, and to ensure full representation and binding decisions. Should it happen that the number of members is fairly large and that it is hazardous for them to meet frequently, it might then be necessary to select from the committee a special and very small *executive* group (consisting of, say, five, or even fewer persons), which should without fail include the secretary and those most capable of giving practical guidance to the work as a whole. It is *particularly important* that candidate-members be provided for this group so that the work should not have to stop in case of arrests. The activities of the executive group, its membership, etc., should be subject to approval by a general meeting of the committee.

Further, *alter* the committee, you propose the following institutions under it: 1) discussion meetings (conferences of the “best” revolutionaries), 2) district circles with 3) a propagandists’ circle attached to each of these, 4) factory circles, and 5) “meetings of representatives” of delegates from the factory circles of a given district. I fully agree with you that *all* further institutions (and of these there should be very many and extremely diversified ones, besides

those mentioned by you) should be subordinated to the committee, and that it is necessary to have district groups (for the very big cities) and factory groups (always and everywhere). But I do not quite agree with you, it seems, on several details. For instance, with regard to "discussion meetings" I think that these are *wholly unnecessary*. The "best revolutionaries" should all be on the committee, or engaged in special work (printing, transport, agitational tours, the organization, say, of a passport bureau, or of combat squads to deal with spies and *agents provocateurs*, or of groups in the army, etc.).

"Conferences" will be held in the committee and in *each* district, in each factory, propagandist, trade (weavers, mechanics, tanners. etc.), student, literary, etc., circle. Why should conferences be made a special institution?

Further. You quite justifiably demand that the opportunity to write to *Iskra* directly should be given to "everyone who wants it." Only "directly" should not be understood to mean that "everyone who wants it" should be given access to the editorial office or its address, but that it should be obligatory to hand over (or forward) to the editors letters from all who so desire. The

addresses should, of course, be made known to a *fairly wide circle*; however, they should not be given to everyone who wants them, but only to revolutionaries who are reliable and known for their ability to observe the conditions of secrecy—perhaps even not to one person in each district, as you suggest, but to several. It is also necessary that all who take part in our work, each and every circle, *should have the right* to bring their decisions, desires and requests to the attention of the *committee, as well as* of the C.O. and C.C. If we ensure this, then all conferences of Party functionaries will have the benefit of *full information*, without instituting anything so cumbersome and contrary to the rules of secrecy as “discussion meetings.” Of course, we should also endeavor to arrange *personal conferences* of the greatest possible number of all and sundry functionaries—but then here everything hinges on the observance of secrecy. General meetings and gatherings are possible in Russia only rarely and by way of exception, and it is necessary to be doubly wary about allowing the “best revolutionaries” to attend these meetings, since it is easier in general for *agents provocateurs* to get into them and for spies to

trail some participant of the meeting. I think that perhaps it would be better to do as follows: when it is possible to organize a big (say, 30 to 100 people) general meeting (for instance, in the summer-time in the woods, or in a secret apartment that has been specially secured for this purpose), the committee should send one or two of the “best revolutionaries” and *make sure* that the meeting is attended by the proper people, i.e., for example, that invitations should be extended to as many as possible of the reliable members of the factory circles, etc. But these meetings should not officially go on record; they should not be put in the Rules, or held regularly; matters should not be arranged in such a way that everyone who attends the meeting knows everyone else there, i.e., knows that everyone is a “representative” of a circle, etc.; that is why I am opposed, not only to “discussion meetings” but also to “meetings of representatives.” In place of these two institutions I would propose a rule to the following effect. The committee must see to the organization of big meetings of as many people as possible who are practical participants in the movement, and of the workers in general. The time, place, and

occasion for the meeting and its composition are to be determined by the committee, which is responsible for the secret arrangement of such affairs. It is self-evident that the organization of workers' gatherings of a less formal character at outings, in the woods, etc., is in no way restricted by this. Perhaps it would be even better not to say anything about this in the Rules.

Further, as regards the district groups, I fully agree with you that it is one of their most important tasks to organize the *distribution* of literature properly. I think the district groups should for the main part act as *intermediaries* between the committees and the factories, intermediaries and even mostly *couriers*. Their chief task should be the proper distribution of the literature received from the committee in accordance with the rules of secrecy. This is an extremely important task, for if we secure regular contact between a special district group of distributors *and all the factories* in that district, as well as the largest possible number of *workers' homes* in that district, it will be of enormous value, both for demonstrations and for an uprising. Arranging for and organizing the speedy and proper delivery of literature,

leaflets, proclamations, etc., training a network of agents for this purpose, means performing the *greater* part of the work of preparing for future demonstrations or an uprising. It is too late to start organizing the distribution of literature at a time of unrest, a strike, or turmoil; this work can be built up only gradually, by making distributions *obligatory* twice or three times a month. If no newspapers are available, leaflets may and should be distributed, but the distributive machine must in no case be allowed to remain idle. This machine should be brought to such a degree of perfection as to make it possible to inform and mobilize, so to speak, the whole working-class population of St. Petersburg overnight. Nor is this by any means a Utopian aim, provided there is a systematic transmission of leaflets from the center to the narrower intermediary circles and from them to the distributors. In my opinion, the functions of the district groups should not be extended beyond the bounds of purely intermediary and transmission work, or, to put it more accurately, they should be extended only with the utmost caution—otherwise this can only increase the risk of discovery and be injurious to

the integrity of the work. Of course, conferences to discuss all Party questions will take place in the district circles as well, but *decisions* on all general questions of the local movement should be made only by the committee. The district groups should be permitted to act independently only on questions concerning the technical aspect of transmission and distribution. The composition of the district groups should be determined by the committee, i.e., the committee *appoints* one or two of its members (or even comrades who are not on the committee) as delegates to this or that district and instructs them to *establish a district group*, all the members of which are likewise installed in office, so to speak, by the committee. The district group is a branch of the committee, deriving its powers only from the latter.

I now pass on to the question of propagandists' circles. It is hardly possible to organize such circles separately in every district owing to the scarcity of our propagandist forces, and it is hardly desirable. Propaganda must be carried on in one and the same spirit by the whole committee, and it should be strictly centralized. My idea of the matter is therefore as follows:

the committee instructs several of its members to organize a group of propagandists (which will be a branch of the committee or *one of the institutions of the committee*). This group, using for the sake of secrecy the *services* of the district groups, should conduct propaganda *throughout the town*, and in all localities “within the jurisdiction” of the committee. If necessary, this group may set up subgroups, and, so to say, entrust certain of its functions to the latter, but all this can be done only with the sanction of the committee, which must always and unconditionally possess the right of detailing its delegate to any group, subgroup, or circle which has any connection at all with the movement.

The same pattern of organization, the same type of branches of the committee or its institutions, should be adopted for all the various groups serving the movement—students’ groups in the higher and secondary schools; groups, let us say, of supporters among government officials; transport, printing, and passport groups; groups for arranging secret meeting places; groups whose job it is to track down spies; groups among the military; groups for supplying arms; groups for the organization

of “financially profitable enterprises,” for example, etc. The whole art of running a secret organization should consist in making use of *everything possible*, in “giving everyone something to do,” at the same time retaining *leadership* of the whole movement, not by virtue of having the power, of course, but by virtue of authority, energy, greater experience, greater versatility, and greater talent. This remark is made to meet the possible and usual objection that strict centralization may all too easily ruin the movement if the center *happens* to include an *incapable* person invested with tremendous power. This is, of course, possible, but it cannot be obviated by the elective principle and decentralization, the application of which is absolutely impermissible to any wide degree and even altogether detrimental to revolutionary work carried on under an autocracy. Nor can any rules provide means against this; such means can be provided only by measures of “comradely influence,” beginning with the resolutions of each and every subgroup, followed up by their appeals to the C.O. and the C.C., and ending (if the worst comes to the worst) with the *removal* of the persons in authority who are absolutely incapable.

The committee should endeavor to achieve the greatest possible division of labor, bearing in mind that the various aspects of revolutionary work require various abilities, and that sometimes a person who is absolutely useless as an organizer may be invaluable as an agitator, or that a person who is not good at strictly secret work may be an excellent propagandist, etc.

Incidentally, while on the subject of propagandists, I should like to say a few words in criticism of the usual practice of *overloading* this profession with incapable people and thus lowering the level of propaganda. It is sometimes the habit among us to regard every student as a propagandist without discrimination, and every *youngster* demands that he should "be given a circle," etc. This must be countered, because it does a great deal of harm. There are *very few* propagandists whose principles are invariably consistent and who are really capable (and to become such one must put in a lot of study and amass experience); such people should therefore be specialized, put wholly on this kind of work, and be given the utmost care. Such persons should deliver several lectures a week and be sent to other towns when nec-

essary, and, in general, capable propagandists should make tours of various towns and cities. But the mass of young beginners should be given mainly practical assignments, which are somewhat neglected in comparison with the students' conduct of circles, which is optimistically called "propaganda." Of course, thorough training is also required for serious practical enterprises; nevertheless, work in this sphere can more easily be found for "beginners" too.

Now about the factory circles. These are particularly important to us: the main strength of the movement lies in the organization of the workers at the *large* factories, for the large factories (and mills) contain not only the predominant part of the working class, as regards numbers, but even more as regards influence, development, and fighting capacity. Every factory must be our fortress. For that every "factory" workers' organization should be as secret internally as "ramified" externally, i.e., in its outward relationships, it should stretch its feelers as far and in as many directions as any revolutionary organization. I emphasize that here, too, a group of revolutionary workers should necessarily be the core, the leader, the

“master.” We must break completely with the traditional type of purely labor or purely trade-union Social-Democratic organization, *including* the “factory” circles. The factory group, or the factory (mill) committee (to distinguish it from other groups of which there should be a great number) should consist of a very small number of *revolutionaries*, who take their instructions and receive their authority to carry on all Social-Democratic work in the factory *directly from the committee*. Every member of the factory committee should regard himself as an agent of the committee, obliged to submit to all its orders and to observe all the “laws and customs” of the “army in the field” which he has joined and from which in time of war he has no right to absent himself without official leave. The composition of the factory committee is therefore a matter of very great importance, and one of the chief duties of the committee should be to see to the proper organization of these subcommittees. This is how I picture it: the committee instructs certain of its members (plus, let us say, certain workers who for some reason or other have not been included in the committee, but who can be very

useful by reason of their experience, knowledge of people, intelligence, and connections) to organize factory subcommittees everywhere. This group consults with the district representatives, arranges for a number of meetings, thoroughly checks candidate-members of the factory subcommittees, subjects them to close cross-examination, where necessary puts them to the test, endeavoring personally to examine and verify the *largest possible* number of candidate-members of the subcommittee of the factory in question, and, finally, submits a list of members for each factory circle to the committee for approval, or proposes that authority be given to some designated worker to set up, nominate or select a complete subcommittee. In this way, the committee will also determine which of these agents is to maintain contact with it *and how* the contact is to be maintained (as a general rule, through the district representatives, but this rule may be supplemented and modified). In view of the importance of these factory subcommittees, we must see to it as far as possible that *every* subcommittee is in possession of an address to which it can direct its communication to the C.O. and of a *repository*

for its list of contacts in some safe place (i.e., that the information required for the immediate reestablishment of the subcommittee in the event of arrests is transmitted as regularly and as fully as possible to the Party center, for safekeeping in a place where the Russian gendarmes are unable to get at it). It is a matter of course that the transmission of addresses must be determined by the committee at its own discretion and on the basis of the facts at its disposal, and not on the basis of some non-existent right to a “democratic” allocation of these addresses. Finally, it is perhaps not superfluous to mention that it may sometimes be necessary, or *more convenient*, to confine ourselves to the appointment of one agent from the committee (and an alternate for him) instead of a factory subcommittee consisting of several members. As soon as the factory subcommittee has been formed it should proceed to organize a number of factory groups and circles with diverse tasks and varying degrees of secrecy and organizational form, as, for instance, circles for delivering and distributing literature (this is one of the most important functions, which must be organized so as to provide us with a real postal service

of our own, so as to possess tried and tested methods, not only for distributing literature, but also for delivering it to the homes, and so as to provide a definite knowledge of all the workers' addresses and ways of reaching them); circles for reading illegal literature; groups for tracking down spies³; circles for giving special guidance to the trade-union movement and the economic struggle; circles of agitators and propagandists who know how to initiate and to carry on long talks in an *absolutely legal* way (on machinery, inspectors, etc.) and so be able to speak safely and publicly, to get to know people and see how the land lies, etc.⁴ The fac-

³We must get the workers to understand that while the killing of spies, *agents provocateurs*, and traitors may sometimes, of course, be absolutely unavoidable, it is highly undesirable and mistaken to make a system of it, and that we must strive to create an organization which will be able to render spies *innocuous* by exposing them and tracking them down. It is impossible to do away with all spies, but to create an organization which will ferret them out and *educate* the working-class masses is *both possible and necessary*.

⁴We also need combat groups, in which Workers who have had military training or who are particularly strong and agile should be enrolled, to act in the event of demonstrations, in arranging escapes. from prison, etc.

tory subcommittee should endeavor to embrace the whole factory, the largest possible number of the workers, with a network of all kinds of circles (or agents). The success of the subcommittee's activities should be measured by the abundance of such circles, by their accessibility to touring propagandists and, above all, by the correctness of the regular work done in the *distribution of literature* and the collection of information and correspondence.

To sum up, the general type of organization, in my opinion, should be as follows: a committee should be at the head of the entire local movement, of all the local Social-Democratic activities. From it should stem the institutions and branches subordinate to it, such as, first, *the network of executive* agents embracing (as far as possible) the whole working-class mass and organized in the form of *district* groups and factory (mill) subcommittees. In times of peace this network will be engaged in distributing literature, leaflets, proclamations and the secret communications from the committee; in times of war it will organize demonstrations and similar collective activities. Secondly, the committee will also branch out into circles and groups of

all kinds serving the whole movement (propaganda, transport, all kinds of underground activities, etc.). All groups, circles, subcommittees, etc., should enjoy the status of committee institutions or branches of a committee. Some of them will openly declare their wish to join the Russian Social-Democratic Labor Party and, if endorsed by the committee, will join the Party, and will assume definite functions (on the instructions of, or in agreement with, the committee), will undertake to obey the orders of the Party organs, receive the same rights as all Party members, and be regarded as immediate candidates for membership of the committee, etc. Others will not join the Russian Social-Democratic Labor Party, and will have the status of circles formed by Party members, or associated with one Party group or another, etc.

In all *internal* matters, members of *all* these circles are of course on an equal footing, as are all members of a committee. The only exception will be that the right of *personal* contact with the local committee (as well as with the C.C. and the C.O.) will be reserved solely to the person (or persons) appointed for that pur-

pose by the committee. In all other respects, this person will be on an equal footing with the rest, who will also have the right to present statements (but not in person) to the local committee and to the C.C. and C.O. It follows that the exception indicated will not at all be an infraction of the principle of equality, but merely a necessary concession to the absolute demands of secrecy. A member of a committee who fails to transmit a communication of his "own" group to the committee, the C.C. or the C.O., will be guilty of a direct breach of Party duty. Further, the degree of secrecy and the organizational form of the various circles will depend upon the nature of the functions: accordingly, the organizations will be most varied (ranging from the "strictest," narrowest, and most restricted type of organization to the "freest," broadest, most loosely constituted, and open type). For instance, strictest secrecy and military discipline must be maintained in the distributing groups. The propagandists' groups must also maintain secrecy, but be under far less military discipline. Workers' groups for reading legal literature, or for organizing discussions on trade-union needs and demands call for still

less secrecy, and so on. The distributing groups should belong to the R.S.D.L.P. and know a certain number of its members and functionaries. The groups for studying labor conditions and drawing up trade-union demands need not necessarily belong to the R.S.D.L.P. Groups of students, officers, or office employees engaged in self-education *in conjunction with* one or two Party members should in some cases not even be aware that these belong to the Party, etc. But in one respect we must *absolutely* demand the *maximum degree of organization* in all these branch groups, namely, that every Party member belonging to such a group is formally responsible for the conduct of work in the group and is obliged to take *every* measure in order that the composition of each of these groups, the whole *mechanism* of its work, and the content of that work should be *known as fully as possible* to the C.C. and the C.O. That is necessary in order that the center may have a *complete* picture of the whole movement, that the selection for various Party posts may be made from the widest possible circle of people; that all groups of a similar nature throughout Russia may learn from one another (through

the medium of the center), and that warning may be given in the event of the appearance of *agents provocateurs* or suspicious characters—in a word, that is absolutely and vitally necessary in all cases.

How is it to be done? By submitting regular reports to the committee, by transmitting to the C.O. as much of the contents as possible of as large a number of reports as possible, by arranging that members of the C.C. and the local committee visit the various circles, and, finally, by making it *obligatory* to hand over the list of contacts with these circles, i.e., the names and addresses of several members of each circle, for safekeeping (and to the Party bureau of the C.O. and the C.C.). Only when reports are submitted and contacts transmitted will it be possible to say of a Party member belonging to a given circle that he has done his duty; only then will the Party as a whole be in a position *to learn* from every circle that is carrying on practical work; only then will arrests and dragnets lose their terror for us, for if contacts are maintained with the various circles it will always be easy for a delegate of our C.C. to find substitutes *immediately* and have the work resumed. The

arrest of a committee will then not destroy the whole machine, but only remove the leaders, who will always have candidates ready. And let it not be said that the transmission of reports and contacts is impossible because of the need to maintain secrecy: once there is the desire to do so, it is always, and *will always*, be possible to hand over (or forward) reports and contacts, so long as we have committees, a C.C. or a C.O.

This brings us to a highly important principle of all Party organization and all Party activity: while *the greatest possible centralization* is necessary with regard to the ideological and practical *leadership* of the movement and the revolutionary struggle of the proletariat, the *greatest possible decentralization* is necessary with regard to keeping the Party center (and therefore the Party as a whole) *informed* about the movement, and with regard to *responsibility* to the Party. The leadership of the movement should be entrusted to the smallest possible number of the most homogeneous possible groups of professional revolutionaries with great practical experience. Participation in the movement should extend to the greatest possible number of the most diverse and hetero-

geneous groups of the most varied sections of the proletariat (and other classes of the people). The Party center should always have before it, not only exact information regarding the activities of each of these groups, but also the *fullest possible information regarding their composition*. We must centralize the leadership of the movement. We must also (and *for that very reason*, since without information centralization is impossible) as far as possible *decentralize responsibility to the Party* on the part of its individual members, of every participant in its work, and of every circle belonging to or associated with the Party. This decentralization is an essential prerequisite of revolutionary centralization and an *essential corrective to it*. Only when centralization has been carried through to the end and when we have a C.O. and a C.C., will it be possible for every group, however small, to communicate with them—and not only communicate with them, but to do so *regularly* as a result of a system established by years of experience—only then will the possibility of grievous consequences resulting from an accidentally unfortunate composition of a local committee be eliminated. Now that we are coming close

to actual unity in the Party and to the creation of a real leading center, we must well remember that *this center will be powerless* if we do not at the same time introduce the *maximum of decentralization* both with regard to responsibility to the center and with regard to keeping it informed of all the cogs and wheels of the Party machine. This decentralization is nothing but the reverse side of the *division of labor* which is generally recognized to be one of the most urgent practical needs of our movement. No official recognition of a given organization as the leading body, no setting-up of a formal C.C. will make our movement really united, or create an enduring militant Party, if the Party center continues to be *cut off* from direct practical work by the local committees of the old type, i.e., by committees such as are, on the one hand, made up of a regular jumble of persons, each of whom carries on all and every kind of work, without devoting himself to some definite type of revolutionary work, without assuming responsibility for some special duty, without carrying through a piece of work to the end, once it has been undertaken, thoroughly considered and prepared, wasting an enormous amount

of time and energy in radicalist noise-making, while, on the other hand, there is a great mass of students' and workers' circles, half of which are altogether unknown to the committee, while the other half are just as cumbersome, just as lacking in specialization, just as little given to acquiring the experience of professional revolutionaries or to benefiting from the experience of others, just as taken up with endless conferences "about everything," with elections and with drafting rules, as the committee itself. For the center to be able to work properly, the local committees *must reorganize themselves*; they must become specialized and more "business-like" organizations, achieving real "perfection" in one or another practical sphere. For the center not only to advise, persuade, and argue (as has been the case hitherto), but really conduct the orchestra, it is necessary to know exactly who is playing which fiddle, and where and how; where and how instruction has been or is being received in playing each instrument; who is playing out of tune (when the music begins to jar on the ear), and where and why; and who should be transferred, and how and where to, so that the discord may be remedied, etc. At the

present time—this must be said openly—we either know nothing about the *real internal* work of a committee, except from its proclamations and general correspondence, or we know about it from friends or good acquaintances. But it is ridiculous to think that a huge Party, which is capable of leading the Russian working-class movement and which is preparing a general onslaught upon the autocracy, can limit itself to this. The number of committee members should be cut down; each of them, wherever possible, should be entrusted with a definite, special and, important function, for which he will be held to account; a special, very small, directing center must be set up; a network of executive agents must be developed, linking the committee with every large factory, carrying on the regular distribution of literature and giving the center an exact picture of this distribution and of the entire mechanism of the work; lastly, numerous groups and circles must be formed, which will undertake various functions or unite persons who are close to the Social-Democrats, who help them and are preparing to become Social-Democrats, so that the committee and the center may be constantly informed of the

activities (and the composition) of these circles—these are the lines along which the St. Petersburg, and all the other committees of the Party, should be reorganized; and this is why the question of Rules is of so little importance.

I have begun with an analysis of the draft Rules in order to bring out the drift of my proposals more clearly. And as a result it will, I hope, have become clear to the reader that in fact it would perhaps be possible to get along *without Rules*, substituting for them regular reports about each circle and every aspect of the work. What can one put in the Rules? The committee guides the work of everyone (this is clear as it is). The committee elects an executive group (this is not always necessary, and when it is necessary it is not a matter of Rules but of *informing* the center of the composition of this group and of the candidate-members to it). The committee distributes the various fields of work among its members, charging every member to make regular reports to the committee and to keep the C.O. and C.C. informed about the progress of the work (here, too, it is more important to inform the center of whatever assignments have been made than to include in

the Rules a regulation which *more frequently than not* will go by the board because of scarcity of our forces). The committee must specify exactly who its members are. New members are added to the committee by co-optation. The committee appoints the district groups, factory subcommittees and certain groups (if you wish to enumerate them you will never be done, and there is no point approximately in enumerating them in the Rules; it is sufficient to inform the center about their organization). The district groups and subcommittees organize the following circles... It would be all the less useful to draw up such Rules at present since we have practically no general Party experience (and in many places none whatever) with regard to the activities of the various groups and subgroups of this sort, and in order to acquire such experience what is needed is not Rules but the organization of Party information, if I may put it in this way. Each of our local organizations now spends at least a few evenings on discussing Rules. If instead, each member would devote this time to making a detailed and well-prepared report *to the entire Party* on his particular function, the work would gain a hundredfold.

And it is not merely because revolutionary work does not always lend itself to definite organizational form that Rules are useless. No, definite organizational form is necessary, and we must endeavor to *give such form* to all our work as far as possible. That is permissible to a much greater extent than is generally thought, and achievable not through Rules but solely and exclusively (we must keep on reiterating this) through transmitting exact information to the Party center; it is only then that we shall have real organizational form connected with real responsibility and (inner-Party) publicity. For who of us does not know that *serious* conflicts and differences of opinion among us are actually decided not by vote "in accordance with the Rules," but by struggle and threats to "resign"? During the last three or four years of Party life the history of most of our committees has been replete with such internal strife. It is a great pity that this strife has not assumed definite form: it would then have been much more instructive for the Party and would have contributed much more to the experience of our successors. But no Rules can create such useful and essential definiteness of organizational form; this can be

done solely through *inner-Party publicity*. Under the autocracy we can have no other means or weapon of inner-Party publicity than keeping the Party center regularly informed of Party events.

And only after we have learned to apply this inner-Party publicity on a wide scale shall we actually be able to amass experience in the functioning of the various organizations; only on the basis of such extensive experience over a period of many years shall we be able to draw up Rules that will *not be mere paper Rules*.

Postscript from Lenin

The editors of *Iskra* state in its 55th issue that the Central Committee and the opposition “agreed to consign to oblivion” the facts mentioned in my *Letter to the Editors of Iskra (Why I Resigned from the Iskra Editorial Board)*. This statement of the editors is an evasion which (to use Comrade Axelrod’s admirable style) really is formalistic, official and bureaucratic. In reality there was *no* such agreement, as the Central Committee’s foreign representative has plainly stated in a leaflet published immediately following the appearance of the 55th issue of *Iskra*. And there *could not have been* any such agreement, as should be clear to anyone who reads my letter attentively; for the opposition *rejected* the “peace and good will” offered by the Central Committee, one condition of which would *certainly* have been to consign to oblivion everything that deserved it. When the editors rejected the peace offer and *declared war on the famous bureaucracy in No. 63*, can they have been so naive as to hope that the other side would keep

quiet about the *real* origin of these fables about bureaucracy?

The editors were very much displeased when I described the real origin of these fables as *squabbling* (*Literatenge zäink*—writers’ squabbling). And no wonder! But, after all, you cannot dispose of this truly unpleasant fact by mouthing sorry phrases about it.

We will take the liberty of asking our worthy editors two questions.

First question. Why is *one person merely amused* by the most violent charges of being an autocrat, of instituting a Robespierre regime, of staging a coup, and so on and so forth, while *others* are mortally *offended* by a calm statement reciting the facts and telling of a demand for generals’ posts that actually was put forward—so offended as to indulge in absolutely “rubbishy” talk about “personalities,” “moral aspersions,” and even “low” (where did they get that from??) “motives”? Why this difference, my good friends? Not because the “post” of general is “lower” than that of autocrat, surely?

Second question. Why don’t the editors explain to the reader *why* (in that remote past when they belonged to the opposition and re-

ally were “in the minority”) they expressed the desire to have certain facts *consigned to oblivion*? Do not the editors think that the very idea of desiring to “consign to oblivion” differences of *principle* is absurd and could not have occurred to any right-minded person?

So you see how clumsy you are, my dear “political opponents”! You wanted to annihilate me with the charge that it was I who was reducing a dispute over principles to the level of a squabble; instead, you have only *confirmed* my contention as to the real origin of some of your “differences of opinion.”

Further, while admitting, out of clumsiness, that there were squabbles, the editors do not trouble to explain to the reader where, in their opinion, the difference of principle ends and the squabbling begins. They pass over the fact that in my letter I endeavour to draw a *perfectly clear* line between the two. I show there that the difference of principle (which was by no means so profound as to cause a real *divergence*) arose over Paragraph I of the Rules and was widened by the *Iskra*-ist minority joining forces with the *non-Iskra*-ist elements towards the end of the Congress. I further show that the

talk about bureaucracy, formalism and the rest is chiefly just an *echo* of squabbles that occurred *after the Congress*.

The editors probably do not agree with this demarcation between what relates to “principle” and what should be “consigned to oblivion.” Then why have they not troubled to give *their own* opinion as to what a “correct” demarcation between them would be? Is it not because they have not yet drawn (and cannot draw) any line between the two things in their own minds?

From the article by our esteemed Comrade Axelrod in this same 55th issue of *Iskra* the reader may judge what this... inability to discriminate leads to and what our Central Party Organ is turning into. Comrade Axelrod does not say *a single word* about the substance of our controversy over Paragraph I of the Rules, but confines himself to hints about “peripheral societies” that mean absolutely nothing to anyone who was not at the Congress. Comrade Axelrod has probably forgotten how long and closely we argued over Paragraph I!—but, on the other hand, he has evolved a “theory” to the effect that “the majority of the *Iskra*-ists at

the Congress were convinced that their main task was... to fight the internal enemy.” “In the face of this mission,” our esteemed Comrade Axelrod is firmly convinced, “the immediate positive task became overshadowed” in the eyes of the majority. “The prospects of positive work were relegated to the dim remoteness of an indefinite future”; the Party was faced with the more urgent “military task of pacifying the internal enemy.” And Comrade Axelrod cannot find words severe enough to brand this “bureaucratic⁵ [or mechanical] centralism,” these “Jacobin” (!!?) plans, these “disrupters” who “repress and persecute” people as “mutineers.”

In order to demonstrate the true worth of this theory—or, rather, of these accusations against the Congress majority of a disruptive tendency to repress mutiny (*imaginary* mutiny, it is to be supposed) and of ignoring positive work, I have only to remind the forgetful Com-

⁵By the way, I should like the editors to note that my pamphlet is appearing with the “established imprint.” As a convinced centralist, I obey the “principles” laid down by our Central Organ, which in its 55th issue has instituted a section where Party publications are reviewed from the standpoint of their “imprints” (as a contribution to the fight against formalism).

rade Axelrod of *one* (to begin with) little fact. On October 6, 1903, after repeatedly pleading with the members of the minority on account of the stupidity and disruptiveness of their boycott, Plekhanov and I *officially* invited the "mutinous" writers (Comrade Axelrod among them) to get down to positive work; we officially told them that it was unreasonable to withdraw from this work, whether because of personal irritation or of differences of opinion (for an exposition of which we were *throwing open* the columns of our publications).

Comrade Axelrod has forgotten this. He has forgotten that his reply then was a flat refusal, without any reasons stated. He has forgotten that in his view at that time, in those distant days, "positive work was relegated to the dim remoteness of an indefinite future," which future became a much-desired present only on November 26, 1903.

Comrade Axelrod has not only "forgotten" this, but generally would like, would he not, to have such "personalities" "consigned to oblivion."

To point out to the minority that *for months on end* they have been disrupting the Party, ne-

glecting positive work, and taking up *an immense amount of the energies* of the Central Committee by their squabbling is to indulge in “personalities,” cast moral aspersions, and reduce a struggle between trends to the level of a squabble. There is no place in the columns of the Central Organ for that.

But to accuse the Party Congress majority of having dared to waste time by pleading with the “mutineers,” of having disrupted the Party by their fight against (*imaginary*) disrupters—that is a difference of principle, for which the columns of *Iskra* should be “reserved.” Isn’t that your view, most esteemed Comrade Axelrod?

It is possible that even today, if Comrade Axelrod looks around him, he will find plenty of examples of the minority’s practical workers, too, relegating “positive work” to the dim remoteness of an also desirable but still indefinite future.

No, it would have been wiser for you not to say anything about the attitude of the majority and the minority to positive work! It would have been wiser not to bring up a subject about which, for instance, a factory worker

in the town of [REDACTED] writes to me as follows:

Dear Comrade,

We have been informed lately, that is, since the Second Party Congress, that the Central Committee was not elected by the Congress unanimously, that the Congress split in two over the relations between the Central Organ and the Central Committee, and that a so-called majority and minority arose. This came down on our heads as a terrible crushing blow, because this whole question of the relations between the Central Organ and the Central Committee was something absolutely new and unexpected for us: before the Congress it had never been raised, not only at any circles or meetings, but, as far as I can remember, in the literature either. This fact of nothing being said about it before the Congress is what I cannot

understand. If we are to assume that the issue did not exist at all, then it has to be admitted that the comrades who worked so hard to unite the Party did not have a clear idea as to its organization, that is, its structure. But that is quite out of the question, because the issue which has now split the Party shows clearly that opinions as to the Party structure did exist, and were not unanimous. But if that was so, why was the fact concealed? That is the first thing I want to say. The second is that when it comes to the question itself, I ask myself: what structure of the Party will ensure its trend being orthodox? And at once it strikes me that another important thing, besides the Party's structure, is the personnel of its leadership; that is, if the leaders are orthodox, then the Party trend will be orthodox, but if they are opportunists, then the Party will be op-

portunist too. Now, with that in mind, and knowing the personnel of the Party leadership, I am definitely in favour of the Central Organ predominating over the Central Committee in the ideological direction of the Party. What makes me all the more positive about it is the conditions in Russia: however orthodox the Central Committee may be, since it functions in Russia it cannot be secure against arrests, and hence against losing its orthodoxy regardless of its own wishes, because successors don't always resemble the people they succeed. Any comrade who has worked on the committees for any time at all will know of cases when even the best committee is replaced, through one of the many possible chance circumstances, by a bad committee, and vice versa. But with the Central Organ it's quite another matter: it functions under different conditions (since

it will be located abroad), which ensure it a longer existence, and hence an opportunity of preparing worthy successors. But I don't know, comrade, if this question can be decided once and for all, that is, by having the Central Organ always predominate over the Central Committee, or the Central Committee over the Central Organ. I don't think it is possible. Take a case like this: suppose the personnel of the Central Organ changes and from being orthodox becomes opportunist, as in the case of the *Vorwärts*⁶ in Germany;

⁶Progress Publishers: *Vorwärts* (Forward)—the daily Central Organ of the German Social-Democratic Party. Originally founded in 1876 in Leipzig, it was banned under the Anti-Socialist Law, but in January 1891 resumed publication in Berlin as successor to the *Berliner Volksblatt* (Berlin People's Gazette, founded in 1884), under the editorship of Wilhelm Liebknecht. Engels fought in the columns of the *Vorwärts* against every manifestation of opportunism; but in the late nineties, after Engels's death, the paper fell into the hands of the Right wing of the party and from then on regularly printed the

could it be allowed to predominate in the ideological leadership? What would we who have been schooled in the orthodox spirit do if that happened, would we have to agree with it? No, it would be our duty to take away its right to predominate and give that right to a different body; and if that were not done for any reason, whether a sense of Party discipline or anything else, we would all deserve to be called traitors to the Social-Democratic workers' movement. That's how I see it, and I can't agree at all to a decision being

writings of the opportunists who dominated in the German Social-Democratic movement and the Second International. The *Vor wirts* gave a tendentious picture of the fight against opportunism and revisionism in the R.S.D.L.P., supporting the Economists and later, after the split in the Party, the Mensheviks. In the years of reaction that followed the defeat of the Russian Revolution of 1905-07 it published slanderous articles by Trotsky while denying Lenin and the Bolsheviks the opportunity to controvert him and give an objective account of the state of affairs in the Party.

made once and for all, as some comrades do.

Now, what I cannot understand at all is the fight that's going on now between the majority and the minority, and to a great many of us it seems wrong. Look, comrade, is it a natural state of affairs when all energies are spent on travelling around the committees for the one purpose of talking about the majority and minority? Really, I don't know. Is this issue really so important that all energies should be devoted to it and because of it people should look on each other practically as enemies? For that's what it comes down to: if a committee is, let's say, made up of followers of one camp, then nobody from the other camp will ever get into it, no matter how fit he may be for the work; in fact, he won't get in even if he is essential to the work and it suffers badly without him. I don't mean to say,

of course, that the struggle over this issue should be given up altogether, no, only I think it should be of a different kind and should not lead us to forget our principal duty, which is to propagate Social-Democratic ideas among the masses; for if we forget that we shall rob our Party of its strength. I don't know if it is fair or not, but when I see people trampling the interests of the work in the mud and completely forgetting them, I call them all political intriguers. It really hurts and fills you with alarm for the work when you see the people at the head of it spending their time on something else. When you see that, you ask yourself: is our Party doomed to perpetual splits over such trifles, are we incapable of waging the internal and the external struggle at the same time? What's the use of having congresses if their decisions are ignored and everybody does just

what he pleases, saying that the Congress decision is wrong, that the Central Committee is ineffectual, and so on. And this is being done by people who before the Congress were always clamoring for centralization, Party discipline and so on, but who now want to show, it seems, that discipline is only meant for ordinary mortals, and not for them at the top. They seem to forget that their example has a terrible demoralising effect on inexperienced comrades; already we hear the workers complaining again that the intellectuals are forgetting them because of their own dissensions; already the more impulsive are dropping their hands in despair, not knowing what to do. So far all this centralization has turned out to be nothing but words. All one can hope is that the future will bring a change for the better.

N. Lenin,
January 1904.