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SOCIALISM
and the
**POLITICAL
STRUGGLE**



by
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Forgotten Books

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Socialism and the Political Struggle

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PREFACE

The present pamphlet may be an occasion for much misunderstanding and even dissatisfaction. People who sympathise with the trend of *Zemlya i Volya* and *Chorny Peredel* (publications in the editing of which I used to take part) may reproach me with having diverged from the theory of what is called Narodism. The supporters of other factions of our revolutionary party may be displeased with my criticism of outlooks which are dear to them. That is why I consider a short preliminary explanation necessary.

The desire to work *among the people* and for the people, the certitude that “the emancipation of the working classes must be conquered by the working classes themselves” – this *practical* tendency of our Narodism is just as dear to me as it used to be. But its *theoretical* propositions seem to me, indeed, erroneous in many respects. Years of life abroad and attentive study of the social question have convinced me that the triumph of a spontaneous popular movement similar to Stepan Razin’s revolt or the Peasant Wars in Germany cannot satisfy the social and political needs of modern Russia, that the old forms of our national life carried within them many germs of their disintegration and that they cannot “develop into a higher communist form” except under the immediate influence of a strong and well-organised *workers’* socialist party. For that reason I think that besides fighting absolutism the Russian revolutionaries must strive at least to work out the elements for the establishment of such a party in the future. In this creative work they will necessarily have to pass on to the basis of modern socialism, for the ideals of *Zemlya i Volya* do not correspond to the condition of the industrial workers. And that will be very opportune now that the theory of Russian exceptionalism is becoming synonymous with stagnation

and reaction and that the progressive elements of Russian society are grouping under the banner of judicious "Occidentalism".

I go on to another point of my explanation. Here I will first of all say in my defence that I have been concerned not with persons but with opinions, and that my personal differences with this or that socialist group do not in the least diminish my respect for all who sincerely fight for the emancipation of the people.

Moreover, the so-called terrorist movement has opened a new epoch in the development of our revolutionary party – the epoch of *conscious political struggle* against the government. This change in the direction of our revolutionaries' work makes it necessary for them to reconsider all views that they inherited from the preceding period. Life demands that we attentively reconsider all our intellectual stock-in-trade when we step on to new ground, and I consider my pamphlet as a contribution which I can make to this matter of criticism which started long ago in our revolutionary literature. The reader has probably not yet forgotten the biography of Andrei Ivanovich Zhelyabov which contained a severe and frequently very correct critical appraisal of the programme and activity of the Zemlya i Volya group. It is quite possible that my attempts at criticism will be less successful, but it would hardly be fair to consider them less timely.

G.P.

Geneva.

October 25, 1883

[Introduction]

Every class struggle is a political struggle.

Karl Marx

Since the Russian revolutionary movement finally took the path of open struggle against absolutism, the question of the socialists' political tasks has become the most vital and most burning question for our party. Because of it people have drifted apart who had been attached to each other by many years of joint practical work, because of it whole groups and organisations have fallen to pieces. It can even be said that all Russian socialists have temporarily been split into two camps supporting diametrically opposite views on "politics". Extremes were unavoidable in this matter, as always in such cases. Some considered the political struggle as almost tantamount to betrayal of the people's cause, as a manifestation of bourgeois instincts among our revolutionary intelligentsia and a defilement of socialist programme purity. Others not only recognised that struggle as necessary, they were even ready, for the sake of its imaginary interests, to compromise with the liberally-minded oppositional elements of our society. Some even went to the extent of considering any manifestation of class antagonism in Russia as harmful for the present. Such views were held, for instance, by Zhelyahov, who, as his biographer says, "imagined the Russian revolution not exclusively as the emancipation of the peasant or even (?) the workers' estate, but as the political regeneration of the whole Russian people generally". [1] In other words, the revolutionary movement against the absolute monarchy merged in his imagination with the working class's social-revolutionary movement for its economic emancipation; the particular, specially Russian task of the present hid from view the general task of the working class in all civilised countries.

The difference could not go any farther, a break became inevitable.

Time, however, smoothed out extremes and resolved a considerable number of the disputed questions to the satisfaction of both sides. Little by little all or nearly all recognised that the political struggle which had been taken up must be pursued until a broad emancipation movement in the people and society destroyed the edifice of absolutism as an earthquake destroys a poultry-house, if Marx's forceful expression can be used here. But to very many of our socialists this struggle still appears as some kind of forced compromise, some temporary triumph of "practice" over "theory", a mockery by life of the impotence of thought. Even the politicians, in justifying themselves against the reproaches showered on them, avoided all appeal to the basic propositions of socialism, and referred only to the incontestible demands of reality. At the bottom of their hearts they themselves apparently also believed that political tendencies were by no means suited to them, but they consoled themselves with the consideration that only in a free state could they let the dead bury the dead and, renouncing all political considerations, devote themselves wholly to the cause of socialism. This vague conviction sometimes led to misunderstandings that were not without their curious side. Analysing the speech of "the Russian guest" at the Chur Congress and attempting to justify itself against the allegation that it dabbled in politics, *Narodnaya Volya* noted, among other things, that its supporters were neither socialists nor political radicals, but simply, Narodovoltsi. The terrorist organ presumed that "in the West" the attention of the radicals was absorbed exclusively by political questions while the socialists would not have anything to do with politics. Anybody who knows the programmes of the West European socialists understands, of course, how erroneous such an idea is as far as the enormous

majority of them are concerned. It is well known that Social-Democracy in Europe and America never maintained the principle of political “abstention”. Its supporters do not ignore “politics”. Only they do not consider the task of the socialist revolution to be “the regeneration of the whole people generally”. They try to organise the workers into a separate party in order in order thus to segregate the exploited from the exploiters and give political expression to the economic antagonism. Where in our country did they get the certitude that socialism calls for political indifference – a certitude which is in glaring contradiction with reality? Schiller’s Wallenstein tells Max Piccolomini that human reason is broad, whereas the world is narrow, so that thoughts can live at ease together in the former while there are harsh clashes between things in the latter. Must we say that in our brain, on the contrary, concepts of things which in practice not only get on very well together, but are utterly unthinkable without their mutual connection, cannot live side by side? To answer that question we must first of all make clear the conceptions of socialism which our revolutionaries had during the epoch when political tendencies arose among them. Once convinced that these conceptions were erroneous or backward we shall consider what place is given to the political struggle by the doctrine which even its bourgeois opponents do not refuse to call scientific socialism. All that we shall have to do then will be to make in our general conclusions the corrections which are inevitable when we consider the various peculiarities of the contemporary state of affairs in Russia – and our subject will be exhausted; the political struggle of the working class against its enemies belonging to one historical formation or another will finally reveal to us its connection with the general tasks of socialism.

Footnote

[1] See the pamphlet *Andrei Ivanovich Zhelyabov*, p.10.

I

Socialist propaganda has enormously influenced the whole course of intellectual development in the civilised countries. There is hardly a single branch of sociology that has not felt its impact in one sense or another. It has in part destroyed old scientific prejudices and in part transformed them from a naive delusion into a sophism. It is understandable that the influence of socialist propaganda must have affected the supporters of the new teaching still more powerfully. All the traditions of previous “political” revolutionaries have been ruthlessly criticised, all methods of social activity have been analysed from the standpoint of the “new Gospel”. But as the scientific substantiation of socialism was complete only with the appearance of **Capital**, it is easy to understand that the results of this criticism have by no means always been satisfactory. And as, on the other hand, there were several schools in utopian socialism which had almost equal influence, little by little a kind of medium socialism, as it were, has been worked out, and this has been adhered to by people who did not claim to found a new school and were not among the particularly zealous supporters of previously existing schools. This eclectic socialism, as Frederick Engels says, is “a mish-mash of such critical statements, economic theories, pictures of future society by the founders of different sects, as excite a minimum of opposition; a mish-mash which is the more easily brewed the more the definite sharp edges of the individual constituents are rubbed down in the stream of debate, like rounded pebbles in a brook”. [2] This medium socialism, the same author notes, still reigns in the heads of most of the worker socialists in England and in France. [3] We Russians could add that exactly the same mish-mash reigned in the first half of the seventies in the minds of our socialists and represented the

general background against which two extreme trends stood out: the so-called Vperyod group and the Bakuninists. The former showed a tendency towards German Social-Democracy, the latter were a Russian version of the anarchist faction of the International. Differing very greatly from each other in almost all respects, the two trends were at one – strange as that is – in their negative attitude to “politics”. And it must be confessed that the anarchists were more consistent in this respect than the Russian Social-Democrats of the time.

From the anarchist point of view the political question is the touchstone of any working-class programme. The anarchists not only deny any deal with the modern state, they go so far as to exclude from their notions of “future society” anything that recalls the idea of state in one way or another. “Autonomy of the individual in an autonomous community” – such has been the motto of all consistent supporters of this trend. We know that its founder – Proudhon – in his publication *La Voix du peuple* set himself the not quite modest task “to do as regards the government” (which he confused with the state) “what Kant did as regards religion” [4] and carried his anti-state zeal so far as to declare that Aristotle himself was “a sceptic in matters of state”. [5] The accomplishment of the task he had set himself was very simple and followed, if you like, quite logically from the economic doctrines of the French Kant. Proudhon was never able to imagine the economic system of the future otherwise than in the form of commodity production, corrected and supplemented by a new, “just” form of exchange on the basis of “constituted value”. For all its “justice”, this new form of exchange does not, of course, preclude the purchase, sale or promissory notes which go with commodity production and circulation. All these transactions naturally presuppose various contracts and it is

these that determine the mutual relations between the transacting sides. But in modern society “contracts” are based on common legal standards compulsory for all citizens and safeguarded by the state. In the “future society” everything would supposedly proceed somewhat differently. Revolution, according to Proudhon, was to abolish “laws”, leaving only “contracts”. “There is no need for laws voted by a majority or unanimously,” he says in his **Idée générale de la Révolution au XIX siècle**, “every citizen, every commune and corporation will establish their own particular laws” (p.259). With such a view of the matter, the political programme of the proletariat was simplified to the extreme. The state, which recognises only general laws compulsory for all citizens, could not even be a means for attaining socialist ideals. Making use of it for their aims, the socialists only consolidate the evil by the rooting out of which “social liquidation” should begin. The state must “decline”, thus affording “every citizen, every commune and corporation” full freedom to decree “their own particular laws” and to conclude the “contracts” which they require. And if the anarchists do not waste time during the period preceding the “liquidation”, these “contracts” will be concluded in the spirit of the *System of Economic Contradictions* and the triumph of the *Revolution* will be assured.

The task of the Russian anarchists was simplified still more. “The destruction of the state” (which little by little replaced in the anarchist programme its “decline” recommended by Proudhon) was to clear the way for the development of the “ideals” of the Russian people. And as communal land tenure and organisation of crafts into artels occupy a very prominent place in these “ideals”, it was presumed that the “autonomous” Russians of democratic origin would conclude their “contracts” not in the spirit of Proudhon’s reciprocity but rather of agrarian communism. As a “born

socialist”, the Russian people would not be long in understanding that mere communal land tenure and communal ownership of the instruments of production do not guarantee the desired “equality” and would be forced to set about organising “autonomous communes” on completely communist foundations.

The Russian anarchists, however – at least those of the so-called rebel shade – bothered little about the economic consequences of the popular revolution they preached. They considered it their duty to remove those social conditions which, in their opinion, hindered the normal development of national life; but they did not ask themselves which road that development would take once it was freed from external hindrances. That this peculiar refashioning of the famous motto of the Manchester School, *laissez faire, laissez passer*, to make it look revolutionary, precluded all possibility of seriously appraising the contemporary condition of our social and economic life and did away with every criterion for determining even the concept of the “normal” course of its development – this did not occur either to “rebels” or to the “Narodniks” who appeared later. At the same time it would be utterly hopeless to attempt such an appraisal as long as Proudhon’s teachings remained the point of departure of our revolutionaries’ considerations. The weakest point of those teachings, the point in which they offend logic, is the concept of commodity and of exchange value, i.e., those very premises on which alone the correct conclusions about the mutual relations of the producers in the future economic organisation can be based. From the standpoint of Proudhon’s theories no special importance attaches to the circumstance that contemporary Russian communal land tenure by no means precludes commodity production. The Proudhonist has no inkling of the “inner, inevitable dialectics”, which transforms commodity

production at a definite stage of its development into ... capitalist production. [6] And that is why it did not occur to his Russian cousin to ask himself whether the divided efforts of “autonomous” persons, communes and corporations would suffice for the struggle against this tendency of commodity production which threatens one fine day to supply a certain proportion of the “born” Communists with “honourably acquired” capitals and to turn them into exploiters of the remaining masses of the population. The anarchist denies the creative role of the state in the socialist revolution for the very reason that he does not understand the tasks and the conditions of that revolution.

We cannot enter here into a detailed analysis of anarchism in general or of Bakuninism in particular. [7] We wish merely to point out to readers that both Proudhon and the Russian anarchists were completely right from their point of view when they raised “political non-interference” to the position of main dogma in their practical programme. The social and political composition of Russian life in particular, it seemed, justified the negation of “politics” which is compulsory for all anarchists. Before entering the field of political agitation the “*inhabitant*” of Russia has to become a *citizen*, i.e., to win for himself at least some political rights, and first of all, of course, the right to think as he pleases and to say what he thinks. Such a task amounts in practice to a “political revolution”, and the experience of Western Europe has clearly “shown” all anarchists that such revolutions have not brought, do not and cannot bring any benefit to the people. As for the consideration that the people must be educated politically by taking part in their country’s public life, that could not be put into practice, if only for the reason that the anarchists consider, as we have already seen, that such participation is not education, but perversion of the popular masses: it develops in them “belief in the state” and

therefore the tendency to statehood, or as the late M.A. Bakunin would have said, “infects them with its official and social venom, and, in any case, distracts them at least for a short time from what is now the only useful and salutary matter – from revolt.” [8] And at the same time, according to the philosophy of history of our “rebels”, it appeared that the Russian people had shown its anti-state tendency by a whole series of large and small movements and could therefore be considered mature enough politically. So down with all “dabbling in politics”! Let us help the people in its anti-state struggle. Let us unite its dispersed efforts in one revolutionary stream – and then the awkward edifice of the state will crash, opening by its fall a new era of social freedom and economic equality! These few words expressed the whole programme of our “rebels”.

In this sketchy review of the programmes of the different groups of Russian revolutionaries we must not forget that the views according to which “all constitutions” were only more or less unprofitable contracts with the devil, as old F. H. Jacobi put it – such views, we say, were typical not only of the Narodniks and anarchists. If the reader knows about Frederick Engels’ polemic with p.Titachov, [9] he will probably remember that the editor of **Nabat**, a who disagreed with the Bakuninists on the question of practical struggle, was in perfect agreement with them on their basic views about the social and political condition of our country. He looked at it through the same prism of Russian exceptionalism and the “inborn communist tendencies of the Russian people”. [10] Like a genuine Blanquist he did not deny “politics”, of course, but he understood it exclusively as a plot whose purpose is to seize state power. This purpose, it seems, occupied the whole field of vision of our Blanquists of that time and led them to many contradictions. To remain consistent they had to admit that their activity could be

useful to the cause of progress only in the exceptional case that the blow they dealt would not deviate a hair's breadth from its target. If their planned seizure of power is a failure, if their plot is discovered or the revolutionary government is overthrown by the liberal party, the Russian people, far from winning anything, will risk losing much. The last of the supposed cases is particularly disastrous. The liberals will establish a strong government which will be far more difficult to fight than modern "absolutely absurd" and "absurdly absolute" monarchy, while "the fire of economic progress" will destroy the radical bases of the people's life. Under its influence exchange will develop, capitalism will consolidate itself, the very principle of the village commune will be destroyed – in a word, the river of time will wash away the stone from which the communist heaven is within hand's reach. In cases of failure the Russian Blanquists would be bound to do terrible damage to the cause of popular emancipation and thus fall into the tragic position of William Tell, who had to risk the life of his own son. And as they have hardly distinguished themselves by the skill of the mythic Swiss "seditionary", the Russian people would not shout to them:

Shoot! I fear not!

if it adopted their view on the "radical bases" of its life and had been invited to give its opinion about their programme.

Such a narrow and hopeless philosophy of Russian history was bound to lead logically to the amazing conclusion that Russia's economic backwardness was a most reliable ally of the revolution and that stagnation was to be blazoned as the first and only paragraph of our "minimum programme". "Every day brings us new enemies, creates new social factors hostile to us," we read in the first, November, issue

of **Nabat** for 1875. "Fire is creeping up to our state forms, too. Now these are dead, lifeless. Economic progress will stir life in them, will breathe into them a new spirit, will give them the strength and the fortitude which they have so far lacked", and so forth. But if Joshua succeeded as the Bible relates, in stopping the sun "for ten degrees", the time of miracles has passed and there is not a single party which could shout: "Stop, productive forces! Do not move, capitalism!" History pays as little attention to the fears of revolutionaries as to the jeremiads of reaction. "Economic progress" does its work without waiting for the anarchists or the Blanquists to put their intentions into practice. Every factory founded in Petersburg, every new wage-worker employed by a Yaroslavl handicraftsman strengthens the "flame of progress", which is supposed to be fatal to the revolution, and consequently decreases the probability of popular victory. Can such a view of the mutual relations of the various social forces in Russia be called revolutionary? We do not think so. In order to make themselves revolutionary in substance and not in name alone, the Russian anarchists, Narodniks and Blanquists should first of all have revolutionised their own heads, and to do so they should have learned to understand the course of historical development and been able to lead it instead of asking old mother history to mark time while they laid new, straighter and better beaten roads for her. The Vperyod group understood the immaturity and erroneousness of the outlooks just expounded, and there was a time when it could have obtained dominating intellectual influence among our revolutionaries. That was the time when practical experience had shaken the foundations of the old anarchist Narodism and all its supporters felt that their programme needed to be seriously reconsidered. Then a consistent criticism of all its

theoretical and practical principles could have made the impending turn in the movement still more decisive and irrevocable. The Vperyod group could most conveniently have undertaken that criticism; maintaining almost entirely the standpoint of the Social-Democrats, they were completely free from all Narodnik traditions. But in order to be successful, their criticism *should not have condemned, but elucidated and generalised* the vital requirements of Russian life which were more and more driving our revolutionaries on to the road of political struggle. And yet the **Vperyod** group rejected “politics” just as resolutely as the anarchists. I admit that they did not think socialism to be incompatible with interference in the political life of the bourgeois state, and they fully approved of the programme of West European Social-Democracy. But they presumed that in the modern state “founded on law” the possibility of openly organising the working class into a political party of its own is bought at too high a price – by the final victory of the bourgeoisie and the deterioration of the workers’ condition corresponding to the epoch of capitalism. They forgot that in appraising this situation one must take into account not only the distribution of the national income, but also *the whole organisation of production and exchange*; not only the *average quantity* of products consumed by the workers, but also the *form* which those products take [11]; not only the *degree* of exploitation, but also, in particular, *its form*; not only *the fact of the enslavement* of the working masses, but also the *ideas and concepts* which emerge or may emerge in the head of the worker under the influence of this fact. [12] They would hardly have agreed that the factory worker was bound to be more receptive to socialism than the temporarily bound peasant; still less would they have admitted that the

transition, for instance, from natural economy to money economy increases the possibility of a conscious movement of the working masses for their own economic emancipation. The philosophical and historical parts of Marx's teaching remained for them an unread chapter in their favourite book; they believed too much in the omnipotent influence of their propaganda to seek support for it in the objective conditions of social life. And like the socialists of the utopian period, they held that the whole future of their country, including the social revolution, could be achieved by that propaganda. Posing the question in this way, they could have said with the anarchists, parodying Proudhon's well-known saying: *la révolution est au-dessus de la politique*. But that was just the reason why they could not get our movement out of the state of inertia it had got into at the end of the seventies owing to the rejection of all political struggle, on the one hand, and the impossibility, on the other, of creating a working-class party of any strength under contemporary political conditions.

The honour of giving new scope to our movement belongs beyond dispute to *Narodnaya Volya*. Everybody still recalls the attacks that the *Narodnaya Volya* trend drew upon itself. The writer of these lines himself belonged to the resolute opponents of this trend, and although he perfectly admits now that the struggle for political freedom has become a burning issue for modern Russia, he is still far from sharing all the views expressed in *Narodnaya Volya* publications. That does not prevent him, however, from acknowledging that in the disputes which took place in the *Zemlya i Volya* organisation about the time of its split, the *Narodnaya Volya* members were perfectly right as long as they did not go beyond our practical experience. That experience was already then leading to amazing and completely unexpected

conclusions, although we did not dare to draw them precisely because of their unexpectedness. Attempts at the practical struggle “against the state” should already then have led fundamentally to the thought that the Russian “rebel” was compelled by the insuperable force of circumstances to direct his agitation not against the state generally, but only against the *absolute* state, to fight not the idea of state, but the idea of bureaucracy, not for the full economic emancipation of the people, but for the removal of the burdens imposed on the people by the tsarist autocracy. Of course, the agrarian question lay at the root of all or nearly all manifestations of popular dissatisfaction. It could not be otherwise among an agricultural population, where the “power of the land” is felt in absolutely the whole make-up and needs of private and social life. This agrarian question kept crying out for a solution, but it did not rouse *political* discontent. The peasants waited calm and confident for this question to be solved from above: they “rebelled” not for a redistribution of the land, but against oppression by the administration, against the excessive burdens of the taxation system, against the Asiatic way in which arrears were collected, and so on and so forth. The formula which applied to a large number of the cases of active protest was the “legal state”, not “Land and Freedom” (*Zemlya i Volya*) as it seemed to everybody at the time. But if that was so, and if revolutionaries considered themselves obliged to take part in the scattered and ill-considered struggle of isolated communes against the absolute monarchy, was it not time they understood the meaning of their own efforts and directed them with greater purposefulness? Was it not time for them to call all the progressive virile forces of Russia to the struggle and, having found a more general expression for it, to attack absolutism in the very centre of its organisation? In answering these questions in the affirmative, the members of *Narodnaya*

Volya were only summing up the revolutionary experience of previous years; in raising the banner of political struggle, they only showed that they were not afraid of the conclusions and consciously continued to follow the road which we had taken although we had an erroneous idea of where it led to. "Terrorism" grew quite logically out of our "rebelliousness".

But with the appearance of Narodnaya Volya, the logical development of our revolutionary movement was already entering a phase in which it could no longer be satisfied with the Narodnik theories of the good old time, i.e., a time innocent of political interests. Examples of theory being outgrown by practice are not rare in the history of human thought in general and of revolutionary thought in particular. When revolutionaries introduce some change or other into their tactics or recast their programme one way or another, often they do not even suspect what a serious test they are giving the teachings generally acknowledged among them. Many of them indeed perish in prison or on the gallows, fully confident that they have worked in the spirit of those teachings, whereas in substance they represent new tendencies which took root in the old theories but have already outgrown them and are ready to find new theories to express them. So it has been with us since the Narodnaya Volya trend consolidated. From the standpoint of the old Narodnik theories, this trend could not stand criticism. Narodism had a sharply negative attitude to any idea of the state; Narodnaya Volya counted on putting its social-reform plans into practice with the help of the state machine. Narodism refused to have anything to do with "politics"; Narodnaya Volya saw in "democratic political revolution" the most reliable "means of social reform". Narodism based its programme on the so-called "ideals" and demands of the peasant population; Narodnaya Volya had to address itself

mainly to the urban and industrial population, and consequently to give an incomparably larger place in its programme to the interests of that population. Briefly, in reality, the Narodnaya Volya trend was the complete and all-round denial of Narodism, and as long as the disputing parties appealed to the fundamental propositions of the latter, the “innovators” were completely in the wrong: their practical work was in irreconcilable contradiction with their theoretical views. It was necessary completely to reconsider these views, so as to give Narodnaya Volya’s programme singleness of purpose and consistency; the practical revolutionary activity of its supporters had to be at least *accompanied* by a theoretical revolution in the minds of our socialists; in blowing up the Winter Palace we had at the same time to blow up our old anarchic and Narodnik traditions. But here, too, the “course of ideas” lagged behind the “course of things” and it is still difficult to foresee when it will catch up at last. Unable to make up their minds to break with Narodism, the new group was obliged to have recourse to fictions which brought with them at least a semblance of a solution of the contradictions inherent in their programme. The idea of Russian exceptionalism received a new elaboration, and whereas previously it had led to the complete rejection of politics, it now turned out that the exceptionalism of Russian social development consisted precisely in economic questions being and having to be solved in our country by means of state interference. The extremely widespread ignorance here in Russia of the economic history of the West provided the reason why nobody was amazed at “theories” of this kind. The period of capitalist accumulation in Russia was contrasted with the period of capitalist production in the West, and the inevitable dissimilarity between these two phases of economic development was cited as a most convincing proof of, first, our exceptionalism and, second, the

appropriateness of the “Narodnaya Volya programme” determined by that exceptionalism.

Need it be added that our revolutionary writers, like the majority of Russian writers generally, considered the “West” from the standpoint of the Jewish boy in Weinberg’s well-known story. To this poor schoolboy the whole world seemed as though it were divided into two equal parts: “Russia and abroad”, notable points of distinction existing for him only between these two “halves” of the globe, but “abroad” seemed to him a completely homogeneous whole. Russian writers, propagandists of “exceptionalism”, introduced only one new thing into that clever geographical classification: they divided “abroad” into East and West, and, not stopping long to think, began to compare the latter with our “glorious state”, which was ascribed the role of a kind of “Middle Empire”. The historical development of Italy was thus identified with that of France and no distinction was seen between England’s economic policy and Prussia’s; Colbert’s activity was lumped together with Richard Cobden’s and the peculiarly “patriotic” physiognomy of Friedrich List was lost in the crowd of “West European” political economists who followed Turgot’s advice and tried “to forget that in the world there are states separated by frontiers and organised in different ways”. Just as all cats appear grey and resemble one another perfectly in the dark, so the social relations of the various states in the “West” lost all distinction in the reflected light of our exceptionalism. One thing was evident: the “Franks” had already “gone bourgeois” long ago, whereas the “brave Russians” had preserved the “primitive” innocence and were advancing to their salvation as a chosen people along the road of exceptionalism. To reach the promised land they only had to keep unswervingly to that path of exceptionalism and not be surprised that the Russian socialists’ programmes

contradicted the scientific principles of West European socialism and sometimes their own premises!

A typical sample of the fictions quickly thought out to conform Narodnaya Volya's practical programme with Narodnik theories was the famous prophecy that if only we managed to achieve universal suffrage, 90 per cent of the deputies in the future Russian Constituent Assembly would be supporters of the social revolution. Here the theory of our exceptionalism reached the limit beyond which it was threatened with ruin by plain common sense. The Narodniks of the "old faith" firmly held to their dogma of exceptionalism but all the same admitted that this exceptionalism still needed some finishing touches. Some found that the Russian people still had a too embryonic bump ... sorry! – feeling of bravery and independence; others strove to put the exceptionalist sentiment of the Russian people into practice in the form of a no less original revolutionary organisation. But they all equally acknowledged the necessity for preliminary work among the people. Narodnaya Volya went further. In the leading articles of the very first issues of its journal it began to develop the thought that such work is, first, fruitless ("wasting our energy beating about the people like a fish on the ice") and, secondly, superfluous, because 90 per cent of the deputies sympathising with the social revolution are more than enough to carry out the aspirations of the Russian Narodniks. Narodnaya Volya's programme could not have given itself a Narodnik character otherwise than by carrying to absurd extremes all the typical features of the Narodnik world outlook.

This is what constitutes the negative service of the fictions of Narodnaya Volya. They aroused the critical thought of the Russian revolutionaries by presenting to them in an exaggerated form the "exceptional" features of their

Narodnik programme. But one can hardly say anything about the positive service of these fictions. They temporarily strengthened the energy of the fighters, who needed a theoretical foundation for their practical work, but, being strung hastily together, they did not stand the slightest impact of serious criticism, and by their fall they compromised the cause of the struggle waged under their banner. Having dealt the death-blow to all the traditions of orthodox Narodism by its practical activity and having done so much for the development of the revolutionary movement in Russia, Narodnaya Volya cannot find a justification for itself – nor should it seek one – outside modern scientific socialism. But to adopt this new standpoint it must make a thorough review of its programme, for the theoretical errors and gaps in that programme could not but give it a definite one-sidedness in practice.

Before saying in which sense this review must be undertaken, let us endeavour, according to our plan, to elucidate scientific socialism's attitude to the political movements of the working class.

Footnotes

[2] See **Entwicklung des Sozialismus**, S.18.

[3] [Note to the 1905 edition.] Now Marxism has definitely triumphed in France; its basic propositions are acknowledged, in a more or less distorted form, even by “opportunists” of Jaurès' camp.

[4] See **Confessions d'un révolutionnaire**, *Preface*, p.4. 12

[5] To what extent Aristotle was “a sceptic in matters of state” is obvious from the first chapter of the first volume of his **Politics**, in which he says that “the state is the most accomplished form of community”, that its purpose is “the supreme good”, and that it is therefore a phenomenon “natural in the highest sense of the word, and man is an animal predestined by his very nature to the state form of community”. (Book I, Chap.1, #I-XI of the German Sussemil edition of 1879.) The author of **Politics** is just as much a “sceptic” in questions of state as Proudhon in questions of commodity production; the former could not imagine any

other, higher form of community, the latter did not suspect that products could be distributed among the members of society without taking the form of commodities.

[6] See **Das Kapital**, 2. Auflage, S.607-08.

[7] Let us simply remind our reader of the objection made to Proudhon by Rittinghausen. "Power, government and all its forms," said the tireless propagandist of the theory of direct popular legislation, "are only *varieties of the species that is called: interference by society in people's relations with things and, consequently, with one another ...* I call on M. Proudhon to throw into my face, as the result of his intellectual labour, the following conclusion: 'No, there must be no such interference by society in people's relations with things and, consequently, with one another!' " See **Legislation directe par le peuple et ses adversaires**, pp.194-95. Rittinghausen thought that "to pose the question in this way means to solve it", for "M. Proudhon himself admits the *necessity for such interference*". But he did not foresee that the pupils would go much further than the teacher and that the theory of anarchy would degenerate, finally, into a theory of "social amorphism". The anarchists of today recognise no interference by society in the relations of individuals, as they have repeatedly stated in certain of their publications.

[8] See M.A. Bakunin's extremely interesting and typical pamphlet **Science and the Vital Cause of the Revolution**.

[9] See "Offener Brief an Herm Fr. Engels".

[10] To be persuaded of this one needs but to compare the "Letter to Frederick Engels" just referred to with Bakunin's pamphlet quoted above.

[11] i.e., whether they appear as commodities or are directly consumed by the producer's family, his master, and finally, the state, without ever reaching the market.

[12] We request that it be borne in mind that we are talking not of the editorial board of the journal **Vperyod**, but of the supporters of that publication working in Russia.

II

But what is scientific socialism? Under that name we understand the communist teaching which began to take shape at the beginning of the forties out of utopian socialism under the strong influence of Hegelian philosophy on the one side, and of classical economics on the other; the teaching which first really explained the whole course of human cultural development, pitilessly shattered the bourgeois theoreticians' sophisms and, "armed with all the knowledge of its age", came out in defence of the proletariat. This teaching not only showed with complete clarity how unsound scientifically are the opponents of socialism, but pointing out the errors, it at the same time explained them historically and thus, as Haym once said of Hegel's philosophy, "tied to its triumphal chariot every opinion it had defeated". As Darwin enriched biology with his amazingly simple and yet strictly scientific theory of the origin of species, so also the founders of scientific socialism showed us in the development of the productive forces and their struggle against backward "social conditions of production" the great principle of the variation of *species of social organisation*. We hardly need to say whom we consider as the founders of this socialism. This merit belongs indisputably to Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, whose doctrine stands in exactly the same relation to the modern revolutionary movement in civilised humanity as, in the words of one of them, advanced German philosophy stood in its time to the emancipation movement in Germany; it is its *head*, and the proletariat is its *heart*. But it goes without saying that the development of scientific socialism is not complete and can no more stop at the works of Engels and Marx than the theory of the origin of species could be considered as finally elaborated with the publication of the

principal works of the English biologist. The establishment of the basic propositions of the new teaching must be followed by the detailed elaboration of questions pertaining to it, an elaboration which will supplement and complete the revolution carried out in science by the authors of the **Manifesto of the Communist Party**. [13] There is not a single branch of sociology which would not acquire a new and extraordinarily vast field of vision by adopting their philosophical and historical views. The beneficial influence of those views is already beginning to be felt in the fields of history, law and so-called primitive culture. But this philosophical and historical aspect of modern socialism is still too little known in Russia, and therefore we do not consider it superfluous to quote a few excerpts here, in order to acquaint our readers with it in Marx's own words.

Incidentally, although scientific socialism traces its genealogy "from Kant and Hegel", it is nevertheless the most deadly and resolute opponent of idealism. It drives it out of its last refuge – sociology – in which it was received with such delight by the positivists. Scientific socialism presupposes the "materialist conception of history", i.e., it explains the spiritual history of humanity by the development of social relations (among other things under the influence of surrounding nature). From this point of view, as also from that of Vico, "the course of ideas corresponds to the course of things", and not inversely. The principal cause of this or that make-up of social relations, this or that direction in their development, is the condition of the productive forces and the economic structure of society corresponding to them. "In the social production of their life," says Marx, [14] "men enter into definite relations that are indispensable and independent of their will, relations of production which correspond to a definite stage of development Of their material productive forces. The

sum-total of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real foundation on which rises a legal and political super-structure and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness. The mode of production of material life conditions the social, political and intellectual life process in general. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but, on the contrary, their social being that determines their consciousness.... Legal relations as well as forms of state are to be grasped neither from themselves nor from the so-called general development of the human mind, but rather have their roots in the material conditions of life, the sum-total of which Hegel, following the example of the Englishmen and Frenchmen of the eighteenth century, combines under the name of 'civil society', that, however, the anatomy of civil society is to be sought in political economy.... At a certain stage of their development, the material productive forces of society come in conflict with the existing relations of production, or – what is but a legal expression for the same thing – with the property relations within which they have been at work hitherto. From forms of development of the productive forces these relations turn into their fetters. Then begins an epoch of social revolution. With the change of the economic foundation the entire immense superstructure is more or less rapidly transformed.... No social order ever perishes before all the productive forces for which there is room in it have developed; and new, higher relations of production never appear before the material conditions of their existence have matured in the womb of the old society itself.

“Therefore mankind always sets itself only such tasks as it can solve; since, looking at the matter more closely, it will always be found that the task itself arises only when the

material conditions for its solution already exist or are at least in the process of formation.”

It is now understandable why Marx and Engels reacted with such scornful derision to the “true socialists” in Germany at the end of the forties, who adopted a negative attitude to the German bourgeoisie’s struggle against absolutism, “preaching to the masses that they had nothing to gain, and everything to lose, by this bourgeois movement”. The historical teaching of Marx and Engels is the genuine “algebra of the revolution”, as Herzen once called Hegel’s philosophy. That is why Marx and Engels sympathised with “every revolutionary movement against the existing social and political order of things”; and for the same reason they warmly sympathised with the Russian movement, which made Russia, as they said, the vanguard of the revolution in Europe. But despite all their clarity and unambiguousness, Marx’s views gave occasion for many misunderstandings in the field of revolutionary theory and practice. Thus, it is often said in our country that the theories of scientific socialism, are inapplicable to Russia because they have their root in West European economic relations. To Marx’s teaching is attributed the absurd conclusion that Russia must go through exactly the same phases of historical and economic development as the West. Influenced by the conviction that this conclusion is inevitable, more than one Russian philosopher, familiar neither with Marx nor with the history of Western Europe, entered the lists against the author of **Capital** and accused him of narrow and stereotyped views. This, of course, was tilting at windmills. Our Don Quixotes did not understand that the history of West European relations was used by Marx only as the basis of the *history of capitalist production*, which emerged and developed precisely in that part of the world. Marx’s general philosophical and historical views stand in exactly the same

relation to modern Western Europe as to Greece and Rome, India and Egypt. They embrace the entire cultural history of humanity and can be inapplicable to Russia only if they are generally untenable. It goes without saying that neither the author of **Capital** nor his famous friend and colleague lost sight of the economic peculiarities of any particular country; only in those peculiarities do they seek the explanation of all a country's social, political and intellectual movements. That they do not ignore the significance of our village commune is revealed by the fact that as recently as January 1882 they did not consider it possible to make any decisive forecast concerning its destiny. In the preface to our translation of the **Manifesto of the Communist Party** (Geneva, 1882) they even say explicitly that under certain conditions the Russian village commune may "pass directly to the higher form of communist common ownership". These circumstances are, in their opinion, closely connected with the course of the revolutionary movement in the west of Europe and in Russia. "If the Russian revolution," they say, "becomes the signal for a proletarian revolution in the West, so that both complement each other, the present Russian common ownership of land may serve as the starting-point for a communist development." (**Manifesto of the Communist Party**, VIII.) It will hardly occur to a single Narodnik to deny that the solution of the village commune question depends on such a condition. Hardly anybody will assert that the oppression by the modern state is favourable to the development or even to the mere maintenance of the commune. And in exactly the same way hardly anyone who understands the significance of international relations in the economic life of modern civilised societies can deny that the development of the Russian village commune "into a higher form of communist common ownership" is closely linked with the destiny of the working-class movement in the West. It thus turns out that nothing in Marx's views on Russia

contradicts the most obvious reality, and the absurd prejudices concerning his extreme “Occidentalism” have not the slightest trace of reasonable foundation.

But there is another misunderstanding which directly concerns a question interesting us – the significance of political struggle in the reorganisation of social relations – and takes root in an erroneous understanding of Marx’s view of the role of the economic factor in the human cultural development. This view has often been interpreted by many in the sense that the author of **Capital** attributes only the slightest importance to the political structure of society, considering it as a secondary detail not worth attention and which, far from being the aim, cannot even be a means of fruitful activity. Even now, one not infrequently meets “Marxists” who ignore the political tasks of socialism on these very grounds. Economic relations, they say, are the basis of all social organisation. Changes in these relations are the cause of all political reorganisation. In order to free itself from capitalist oppression, the working class must bear in mind not the effect, but the cause, not the political, but the economic organisation of society. Political organisation will not bring the workers nearer to their goal, since political enslavement will continue as long as their economic dependence on the propertied classes is not removed. The *means* of struggle which the workers use must be brought into line with the *aim* of the struggle. An economic revolution can be achieved only by struggle on economic ground.

With a certain amount of consistency, “Marxism” understood in that way should have changed the socialists’ views of the aims and the means of the social revolution and brought them back to Proudhon’s famous formula: “political revolution is the aim, economic revolution, the means”. In exactly the same way it should have brought the socialist-

revolutionaries considerably nearer – at least in theory – to the followers of “conservative socialism” which so resolutely opposes independent political action on the part of the working class. Rodbertus, the last honest and intelligent representative of this socialism, was unable to agree with Lassalle precisely because that celebrated agitator endeavoured to advance the German workers along the path of independent political activity. Not Marx, but Rodbertus, not *revolutionary*, but *conservative*, *monarchist* socialism denies the significance of “political admixtures to the economic aims” of the working class. And the conservatives know full well why they do so; but those who wish to conciliate the revolutionary movement of the working class with the rejection of “politics”, those who attribute to Marx the practical tendencies of Proudhon or even of Rodbertus, show clearly that they do not understand the author of **Capital** or that they deliberately distort his teaching. We speak of deliberate distortion because a certain book by the Moscow Professor Ivanyukov is nothing but such a deliberate distortion of the consequences following from the basic propositions of scientific socialism. This book shows that our Russian *police* socialists are not averse to exploiting for their reactionary aims even a theory under whose banner the most revolutionary movement of our age is proceeding. This alone could make a detailed elucidation of modern socialism’s *political* programme indispensable. We will now begin that elucidation, without, however, entering into a controversy with Messrs. Ivanyukov, for it is sufficient to bring out the true sense of a given theory in order to refute deliberate distortions of it. And besides, we are far more interested here in those revolutionaries who, for all the sincerity of their aspirations, are still permeated, although perhaps unconsciously, with anarchist teachings and are therefore prepared to see in Marx’s works thoughts which are in place only in *The General Idea of the Revolution in the*

Nineteenth Century. The criticism of the conclusions they draw from Marx's philosophical and historical views will logically take us on to the question of the so-called *seizure of power* and will show us how far they are right who see in that act a crime against the idea of human liberty, and also those who, on the contrary, see it as the Alpha and the Omega of the whole social-revolutionary movement.

Let us first consider what the concepts of cause and effect signify when applied to social relations.

If we push a billiard ball with the hand or a cue, it is set in motion; if we strike steel against a flint, a spark appears. In each of these cases it is very easy to determine which phenomenon acts as the cause and which is the effect. But the task is easy only because it is extremely simple. If instead of two isolated phenomena we take a process in which several phenomena or even several series of phenomena are observed simultaneously, the matter is more complicated. Thus, the burning of a candle is, relatively speaking, a fairly complicated process as a result of which light and heat are produced. Hence it would seem that we run no risk of error if we call the heat given off by the flame one of the effects of this chemical process. That is, indeed, the case to a certain extent. But if we contrived in some way to deprive the flame of the heat which it gives off, the combustion would immediately cease, for the process we are considering cannot take place at the ordinary temperature. Therefore, it would also be right to a certain extent to say that heat is the cause of combustion. In order not to deviate from the truth in one direction or the other we should say that heat, while it is the *effect* of combustion at a particular moment, is its cause the moment following. This means that when we speak of a combustion process lasting a certain time we must say that heat is *both* its *effect* and its *cause*, or, in other words, *neither effect nor cause*, but simply one of the

phenomena arising from that process and constituting, in turn, a necessary condition for it. Let us take another example. Everybody, “even if he has not been trained in a seminary”, knows that what are called the vegetative processes of the human organism exert great influence on psychic phenomena. One mental disposition or other proves to be the effect of a particular physical condition of the organism. But once a certain mental disposition exists, the same vegetative processes are often influenced by it, and it thus becomes the cause of the particular changes in the physical condition of the organism. In order not to go wrong here in one direction or the other, we should say that the psychic phenomena and the vegetative life of the organism constitute two series of coexisting processes, each of which is influenced by the other. If a doctor were to ignore psychic influences on the grounds that man’s mental disposition is the effect of the physical condition of his organism, we would infer that schoolboy logic had made him unfit for rational medical practice.

Social life is distinguished by still greater intricacy than the life of the individual organism. That is why the relativity of the concepts of cause and effect is more noticeable here. According to the teaching of classical economics, the size of wages is determined, on the average, by the level of the worker’s primary requirements. This means that a given size of wages is the *effect* of a given condition of the worker’s requirements. But these requirements, in turn, can grow only if there is a rise in wages, because otherwise there would not be sufficient cause to change their level. Consequently, a given size of wages is the *cause* of a given condition of the worker’s requirements. One cannot get out of this logical circle by means of the schoolboy categories of cause and effect. We shall fall into it at every step in our sociological considerations if we forget that “cause and effect

are conceptions which only hold good in their application to individual cases; but as soon as we consider the individual cases in their general connection with the universe as a whole, they run into each other, and they become confounded when we contemplate that universal action and reaction in which causes and effects are eternally changing places, so that what is effect here and now will be cause there and then, and vice versa". (Frederick Engels.) [15]

Having made this reservation, let us endeavour to determine in what sense the causal connection between the economic relations and the political structure of a given society must be understood.

What does history teach us in this respect? It shows that whenever and wherever the process of economic development gave rise to a splitting of society into classes, the contradictions between the interests of those classes invariably led them to struggle for political domination. This struggle arose not only between the various strata of the dominating classes, but also between those classes, on the one hand, and the people, on the other, provided the latter was given conditions at all favourable to intellectual development. In the states of the ancient Orient we see the struggle between the soldiers and the priests; all the drama in the history of the ancient world is in the struggle between the aristocracy and the *demos*, the patricians and the plebeians; the Middle Ages bring forth the burghers, who strive to conquer political mastery within the bounds of their communes; finally, the present-day working class wages a political struggle against the bourgeoisie, which has achieved complete domination in the modern state. Always and everywhere, political power has been the lever by which a class, having achieved domination, has carried out the social upheaval necessary for its welfare and development. So as not to go too far afield, let us consider the history of the

“third estate”, the class that can look with pride at its past, full of brilliant achievements in all branches of life and thought. It will hardly occur to anybody to reproach the bourgeoisie with lack of tact or ability to attain its aims by the most appropriate means. Nor will anybody deny that its strivings have always had a quite definite economic character. But that did not prevent it from following the path of political struggle and political gains. Now by arms, now by peace treaties, sometimes for the republican independence of its towns, sometimes for the strengthening of royal power, the rising bourgeoisie waged a hard, uninterrupted struggle against feudalism for whole centuries, and long before the French Revolution it could proudly draw its enemies’ attention to its successes. “The chances were different and the success varying in the great struggle of the burghers against the feudal lords,” the historian says, [16] “and not only was the sum of privileges wrested from them by force or obtained by agreement not the same everywhere, but even when the political forms were the same there were different degrees of liberty and independence for the towns.” Nevertheless, the sense of the movement was identical everywhere – it meant the beginning of the social emancipation of the third estate and the decline of the aristocracy, secular and ecclesiastical. [17] In general this movement brought the burghers “municipal independence, the right to elect all the local authorities, the exact fixing of duties”, guaranteed the rights of the individual inside the town communes, [18] gave the bourgeoisie a more elevated position in the estate-based states of the “ancien regime”, and finally, by a series of continuous gains, brought it to complete domination in modern society. Setting itself social and economic aims which were perfectly defined although they changed with time, and drawing means to continue the struggle from the advantages of the economic position which it had already attained, the bourgeoisie did not miss an

opportunity of giving legal expression to the stages in economic progress which it had reached; on the contrary, it made just as skilful a use of each political gain for new conquests in the economic field. No further back than in the middle forties of this century the English Anti-Corn Law League, following Richard Cobden's clever plan, aimed at increasing its *political* influence in the shires in order to secure the abolition of the "monopoly" it hated and which, apparently, was exclusively *economic*.

History is the greatest of dialecticians. If in the course of its progress, reason, as Mephistopheles says, is changed into irrationality and blessings become a plague, not less often in the historical process does an effect become a cause and a cause prove to be an effect. Arising from the economic relations of its time, the political might of the bourgeoisie in its turn served, and still serves, as an indispensable factor for the further development of those relations.

Now that the bourgeoisie is nearing the end of its historical role and that the proletariat is becoming the only representative of progressive strivings in society, we can observe a phenomenon similar to the one referred to above, but taking place in changed conditions. In all the advanced states of the civilised world, in Europe as well as America, the working class is entering the arena of political struggle and the more it is conscious of its economic tasks, the more resolutely it separates into a political party of its own. "As the existing political parties have always acted only in the interests of property-owners for the preservation of their economic privileges," we read in the programme of the North American Socialist Workers' Party, "the working class must organise into a big workers' party to *achieve political power in the state* and gain economic independence; for the emancipation of the working class can be effected only by the workers themselves." [19] The French Workers' Party

expresses itself in the same spirit and in complete agreement with the programme of German Social-Democracy, acknowledging that the proletariat must aspire to an economic revolution “by all means in its power, including universal franchise, thus transformed from a weapon of deceit, which it has been up to now, into a *weapon of emancipation*”. The Spanish Workers’ Party also strives to “conquer political power” in order to remove the obstacles in the way of the emancipation of the working class. [20]

In England, where, with the ending of the chartist movement, the struggle of the proletariat has been concentrated exclusively on the economic field, the political aspirations of the workers have begun to revive of late. Only a few years ago, the German economist Lujo Brentano noted with triumph in his book **Das Arbeitsverhältniss, etc.** the complete disappearance of the Social-Democratic trends in England, and philosophised profoundly and with true bourgeois self-satisfaction on the subject that “at present England again constitutes a *single nation*”, that “the English workers of our time again form part of the great Liberal Party” and do not strive to seize state power in order, by means of it, “to reorganise society in their own interests” (p.110). The recently published **Manifesto** of the British Democratic Federation shows that the bourgeois economist’s joy was somewhat premature. The Democratic Federation aims at causing the exploited to break away politically from the exploiters and calls from the first of these “nations” precisely to seize state power for the purpose of reconstructing society in the interests of the workers. “The time has come,” says the **Manifesto**, “when the mass of the people must necessarily take the management of matters which concern it in its own hands; at present, political and social power is the monopoly of people who live by the labour of their fellow-citizens. The landowners and

capitalists who have control of the Upper House and have filled the Lower House aspire only to safeguard their own interests. Take your fate in your own hands, remove the rich parasites of these two groups and rely only on yourselves! “The **Manifesto** demands “*full franchise for all adult men and women*” in the United Kingdom, and other political reforms which “would only show that the men and women of this country have become the masters at home” Then comes a list – representing the immediate demands of the British Democratic Federation – of measures necessary for the development of a “healthy, independent and soundly educated generation, ready to organise the labour of each for the good of all and to *take control, ultimately, Of the entire social and political machine of the state, in which class differences and privileges will then cease to exist*”.

Thus, the British proletariat, too, is again entering on the path which the workers of other civilised states entered upon long ago.

But, as the bourgeoisie not only fought the aristocracy on the basis of already existing political relations, but aspired to reshape those relations in its own interests, so also the proletariat does not restrict its political programme to the seizure of the modern state machine. The conviction is more and more spreading among its members that “every order of things which determines the relations of citizens to one another and governs their labour and property relations corresponds to a particular form of government which is at the same time the means of implementing and preserving that order”. [21] While the representative (monarchic or republican) system was the progeny of the bourgeoisie, the proletariat demands *direct popular legislation* as the only political form under which its social aspirations can be put into effect. This demand of the working class is among the first in the programme of Social-Democracy in all countries

and is very closely related to all the other points in its programme. [22] In spite of Proudhon, the proletariat continues to see in the “political revolution” the most powerful means of achieving an economic revolution.

This testimony of history alone should incline us to think that the political tendencies of the various social classes are based on a correct practical instinct, and not on an erroneous theory. If, despite the complete dissimilarity in all other respects, all classes which wage a conscious struggle against their opponents begin at a definite stage in their development to strive to ensure for themselves political influence and later domination, it is clear that the political structure of society is a far from indifferent condition for their development. If, moreover, we see that not a single class which has achieved political domination has had cause to regret its interest in “politics”, but on the contrary, that each one of them attained the highest, the culminating point of its development only after it had acquired political domination, then we must admit that the political struggle is an instrument of social reconstruction whose effectiveness is proved by history. Every teaching which runs counter to this historical induction loses a considerable part of its power of conviction, and if modern socialism were in fact to condemn the political striving of the working class as inexpedient, that would be sufficient reason not to call it scientific.

Let us now check our induction by the deductive method, taking Marx’s philosophical and historical views as the premises for our conclusions.

Imagine a society in which a particular class is completely dominant. It secured this domination thanks to the advantages of its economic position which, according to our premises, open before it the path to all other successes in social life. In its capacity as the *ruling* class it naturally reshapes social organisation to provide the most favourable

conditions for its own existence and carefully removes from it all that can in any way weaken its influence. "Those in power, the mighty, in every period," Schäffle correctly notes, "are also the ones who create law and morality. They only apply the urge of self-preservation inherent in all when they exploit the consequences of their victory, install themselves as rulers at the top and endeavour to maintain domination hereditary as long as possible, as the means to a privileged situation and the exploitation and subjection of those who are not free.... There is hardly another section of positive law for which the dominating estates in every period have such great respect and for which they vindicate so much the character of 'eternal' institutions or even 'sacred' foundations of society as that which has consolidated and safeguards the right of their estate and the domination of their class." [23] And as long as the dominating class is the vehicle of the most progressive social ideals, the system it has set up will satisfy all the demands of social development. But as soon as the economic history of a particular society brings forward new elements of a progressive movement, as soon as the "productive forces of society come in conflict with the existing relations of production, or – what is but a legal expression for the same thing – with the property relations within which they have been at work hitherto", the progressive role of the ruling class in question will be over. From a representative of progress it will become its sworn enemy and, of course, it will make use of the state machine for self-defence. In its hands political power will become the most powerful weapon of reaction. To free the road for the development of the productive forces of society it is necessary to remove the property relations which hinder that development, i.e., as Marx says, to carry out a social revolution. But that is impossible as long as legislative power is in the hands of the old order, in other words, as long as it safeguards the interests of the ruling class. It is therefore not

astonishing that innovators, i.e., representatives of the oppressed class or classes, will strive to wrest this terrible weapon out of the hands of their opponents and turn it against them. The very logic of things will bring them out on to the road of political struggle and seizure of state power, although they set themselves the task of an economic revolution. Lassalle uttered a profound truth when he said in the preface to his **System of Acquired Rights**: “...where juridical right as private right seems to become entirely detached from the political element, *it is far more political than the political element*, for there it is the *social element*”. [24]

In practical life, of course, things are far from going as fast as one might suppose, judging *a priori*. Only gradually does the oppressed class become clear about the connection between its economic position and its *political* role in the state. For a long time it does not understand even its economic task to the full. The individuals composing it wage a hard struggle for their daily subsistence without even thinking which aspects of the social organisation they owe their wretched condition to. They try to avoid the blows aimed at them without asking where they come from or by whom, in the final analysis, they are aimed. As yet they have no class consciousness and there is no guiding idea in their struggle against individual oppressors. The oppressed class does not yet exist *for itself*; in time it *will* be the advanced class in society, but it is not yet *becoming* such. Facing the consciously organised power of the ruling class are separate individual strivings of isolated individuals or isolated groups of individuals. Even now, for example, we frequently enough meet a worker who hates the particularly intensive exploiter but does not yet suspect that the whole class of exploiters must be fought and the very possibility of exploitation of man by man removed.

Little by little, however, the process of generalisation takes effect, and the oppressed begin to be conscious of themselves as a class. But their understanding of the specific features of their class position still remains too one-sided: the springs and motive forces of the social mechanism as a whole are still hidden from their mind's eye. The class of exploiters appears to them as the simple sum of individual employers, not connected by the threads of political organisation. At this stage of development it is not yet clear in the minds of the oppressed – any more than in Professor Lorenz von Stein's – what connection exists between “society” and “state”. State power is presumed to stand above the antagonisms of the classes; its representatives appear to be the natural judges and conciliators of the hostile sides. The oppressed class has complete trust in them and is extremely surprised when its requests for help remain unanswered by them. Without dwelling on particular examples, we will merely note that such confusion of concepts was displayed even recently by the British workers, who waged quite an energetic struggle in the economic field and yet considered it possible to belong to one of the bourgeois political parties.

Only in the next and last stage of development does the oppressed class come to a thorough realisation of its position. It now realises the connection between society and state, and it does not appeal for the curbing of its exploiters to those who constitute the political organ of that exploitation. It knows that the state is a fortress serving as the bulwark and defence of its oppressors, a fortress which the oppressed can and must capture and reorganise for their own defence and which they cannot bypass, counting on its neutrality. Relying only on themselves, the oppressed begin to understand that “*political self-help*”, as Lange says, “is the most important of all forms of *social self-help*”. They then

fight for political domination in order to help themselves by changing the existing social relations and adapting the social system to the conditions of their own development and welfare. Neither do they, of course, achieve domination immediately; they only gradually become a formidable power precluding all thought of resistance by their opponents. For a long time they fight only for concessions, demand only such reforms as would give them not domination, but merely the possibility to develop and mature for future domination; reforms which would satisfy the most urgent and immediate of their demands and extend, if only slightly, the sphere of their influence over the country's social life. Only by going through the hard school of the struggle for separate little pieces of enemy territory does the oppressed class acquire the persistence, the daring, and the development necessary for the decisive battle. But once it has acquired those qualities it can look at its opponents as at a class finally condemned by history; it need have no doubt about its victory. What is called the revolution is only the last act in the long drama of revolutionary class struggle which becomes conscious only insofar as it becomes a *political* struggle. [25]

The question is now: would it be expedient for the socialists to hold the workers back from "politics" on the grounds that the Political structure of society is determined by its economic relations? Of course not! They would be depriving the workers of a fulcrum in their struggle, they would be depriving them of the possibility of concentrating their efforts and aiming their blows at the social organisation set up by the exploiters. Instead, the workers would have to wage guerrilla warfare against individual exploiters, or at most separate groups of those exploiters, who would always have on their side, the organised power of the state. This was the kind of mistake the Russian socialists from among the

so-called intelligentsia made when they censured the Northern Union of Russian Workers (in No.4 of **Zemlya i Volya**) for having included certain political demands in its programme. The same mistake was repeated by Zerno when it recommended that the workers should wage the struggle on economic ground, fight for a shorter working day, higher wages, etc., that they should kill spies and particularly hated foremen and employers, but did not say a word about the *political* tasks of the Russian workers. This lack of synthesis in our socialists' revolutionary views and programmes could not fail to have the most damaging effect on the results of their work. By preserving the political indifference of the workers as a most important sign of the radical nature of their economic demands, we gave indirect support to modern absolutism. Moreover, by cutting short our programmes at the very point where we should have summed up politically the social demands of the working class, we were diminishing the practical significance of those programmes in the eyes of the workers, who understood better than we did the utter futility of the divided struggle against individual exploiters. Fortunately, our working-class movement very soon outgrew this first phase of its development. The answer given by the Northern Union of Russian Workers to the editors of **Zemlya i Volya** (see No. 5 of that publication) showed that at least the members of the Union had understood earlier than our "intelligentsia" how inappropriate was this "political non-interference" of the working class.

All that is very well, some readers may say, but your arguments are not to the point. We do not deny, they may argue, that it would be *useful* for the working class to gain political influence and take state power in its own hands; we only maintain that at present that is *impossible* for many reasons. Your reference to the history of the bourgeoisie

proves nothing, for the position of the proletariat in bourgeois society is nothing like that of the third estate in the states of the “ancien regime”! Even Marx admits the difference and formulates it as follows in the **Manifesto of the Communist Party**: “The serf, in the period of serfdom, raised himself to membership in the commune, just as the petty bourgeois, under the yoke of feudal absolutism, managed to develop into a bourgeois. The modern labourer, on the contrary, instead of rising with the progress of industry, sinks deeper and deeper below the conditions of existence of his own class. He becomes a pauper, and pauperism develops more rapidly than population and wealth in bourgeois countries.” There is nothing surprising in the fact that every progressive step made by the bourgeoisie in the domain of production and exchange was accompanied by the “corresponding political conquests”; everybody knows that improvement in the material welfare of any particular class is accompanied by the growth of its political influence. But the very fact that the political gains of the bourgeoisie presupposed an increase in its wealth makes us abandon any hopes in the political movements of the working class. Falling deeper and deeper into “pauperism”, the workers apparently must lose even the little influence which they won in the struggle for the interests of the bourgeoisie, “fighting the enemies of their enemies – the remnants of absolute monarchy, the landowners, the non-industrial bourgeois”, and so on. The political struggle of the working class is purposeless because it is doomed to failure by virtue of the economic position of the workers.

For all its inner untenability, this objection seems at first glance so decisive as not to be passed over in silence. It is the last argument of those supporters of the theory of political non-interference who consider themselves followers of

Marx. [26] Therefore, if it is disposed of, the theory of non-interference falls away altogether and the political tasks of modern socialism stand out in their true light.

The working class's share in the national product is constantly diminishing – there is not a shade of doubt about that. The working class is becoming poorer not only relatively, but absolutely too; its income, far from increasing in the same progression as those of other classes in society, is falling; the real wages of the modern proletarian (the quantity of consumer goods falling to his share) are less than the worker's pay was five hundred years ago – this has been proved by the studies of Rogers, Du Chatelet and others. [27] But it by no means follows from this that the economic conditions are at present less favourable to the political movement of the working class than they were in the fourteenth century. We have already said that in thus appraising the economic conditions in a particular country one must take into account not only the distribution of the national income, but mainly the organisation of production and the mode of exchange of products. The strength of the rising bourgeoisie lay not so much in its wealth as in the social and economic progress of which it was once the vehicle. It was not the increase in its income that impelled it to take the path of revolutionary struggle and guaranteed the growth of its political influence; it was the contradiction between the productive forces it brought into existence and the conditions under which the production and exchange of products took place in feudal society. Having once become the representative of progressive demands in that society, the bourgeoisie rallied all the dissatisfied elements under its banner and led them to fight against a regime which the overwhelming majority of the people hated. Not money, but the immaturity of the working class gave the bourgeoisie the leading role in that emancipation movement. Its wealth and

its already fairly high social position were naturally indispensable for the fulfilment of this role; but what was that indispensability determined by? First of all by the fact that the bourgeoisie could not destroy the old order without assistance from the lower strata of the population. In this its wealth helped it by giving it influence over the masses which were to fight for its domination. Had the bourgeoisie not been rich it would have had no influence, and without influence over the people it would not have defeated the aristocracy; for the bourgeoisie was strong not of itself, but by virtue of the power which it had already mastered and which it commanded thanks to its capital. The question now arises, *is it possible* for the proletariat to have such influence over another class of the population, and *does it need* such influence to be victorious? It is enough to ask the question and we hear a resolute “No!” from everybody who understands the present position of the working class. It is *impossible* for the proletariat to influence lower classes in the way the bourgeoisie once influenced it, for the simple reason that there are no classes below it; the proletariat itself is the very lowest economic group in modern society. *Nor is there any need* for it to aim at such influence, because it is at the same time the *most numerous* section in society, because precisely the proletariat, with other sections of the working population, has always been the agent whose intervention has decided political issues. We say the most numerous class because all “the other classes decay and finally disappear in the face of modern industry; the proletariat is its special and essential product. The lower middle class, the small manufacturer, the shopkeeper, the artisan, the peasant, all these fight against the bourgeoisie, to save from extinction their existence as fractions of the middle class. They are therefore ... conservative. Nay more, they are reactionary, for they try to roll back the wheel of history. If by chance they are revolutionary, they are so only in view of their

impending transfer into the proletariat, they thus defend not their present, but their future interests, they desert their own standpoint to place themselves at that of the proletariat”.

Formerly the working class was victorious under the command of the bourgeoisie, and it only naively wondered at the strange fact that nearly all the difficulties in the struggle fell to its lot while nearly all the advantages and honours of victory went to its ally. Now it is not satisfied with this auxiliary role and it turns against the bourgeoisie the very strength which once secured the latter's victory. But that strength is now much greater. It has grown and is continuing to grow in the same measure as the concentration of capital and the spread of large-scale production. Besides, it has grown in the same measure as the political experience of the working class, which the bourgeoisie itself brought into the social arena. Can there be any doubt that the proletariat, which, when led by the bourgeoisie, was once strong enough to destroy feudal absolutism, will in time be strong enough to smash the political domination of the bourgeoisie on its own initiative? The bourgeoisie was able to defeat feudalism only thanks to its wealth, the proletariat will defeat the bourgeoisie for the very reason that its lot – “pauperism” – is becoming the lot of an ever-increasing portion of modern society.

But in the history of its development the bourgeoisie received from its wealth another and indeed extremely “*productive service*”, as its economists would say. It received knowledge and became the most advanced and educated section of society at that time. Can the proletariat acquire that knowledge, can it be at the same time the poorest and the most advanced of all classes in society? Without this condition political domination is out of the question for the proletariat, for without knowledge there is no strength.

We have already said that the bourgeoisie itself began the political education of the proletariat. It took care of the education of the proletariat as much as this was necessary for the struggle against its own enemies. It shattered the proletariat's religious beliefs whenever this was required to weaken the political significance of the clergy; it broadened the proletariat's legal outlook wherever it needed to oppose "natural" law to the written law of the estate-based state. Now the economic question is on the agenda and political economy now plays – as a very clever German [28] said – just as important a role as natural law played in the eighteenth century. Will the bourgeoisie agree to be the working class's leader in the investigation of the relations between labour and capital, that question of questions of the whole of social economy? It is reluctant to take upon itself even that role, advantageous as it is to itself, because merely to raise that question means to threaten the bourgeoisie's domination. But *can* it fulfil that role, if only in the way it once did in regard to religion and law? No, it cannot. Blinded by their class interests, its representatives in science lost long ago all ability to investigate social questions objectively, scientifically. Therein lies the whole secret of the present decay of bourgeois economics. Ricardo was the last economist who, though still a bourgeois in heart and soul, was intelligent enough to understand the diametrical opposition of interests between labour and capital. Sismondi was the last bourgeois economist who had enough feeling to deplore that antagonism sincerely. After them, the *general* theoretical studies of bourgeois economists in the main lost all scientific significance. To convince oneself of this it is sufficient to recall the history of political economy since Ricardo and to look through the works of Bastiat, Carey, Leroy-Beaulieu or the modern Katheder Sozialisten. From peaceful and objective thinkers the bourgeois economists have become militant guardians and watchdogs

of capital who devote all their efforts to reconstructing the very edifice of science for the purpose of war. But in spite of these warlike exertions, they continually retreat and leave in their enemies' hands the scientific territory over which they once had uncontrolled sway. Nowadays people who display no "demagogic" strivings whatever try to assure us that the workers are "better able than any Smith or Faucher to master the most abstract concepts" in the science of economics. Such was the opinion, for instance, of a man who has the highest authority among German economists but who, for his part, had the deepest scorn for them. "We look upon the workers as children," this man added, "whereas they are already head and shoulders above us." [29]

But is there no exaggeration in what he says? Can the working class understand "abstract" questions of social economics and socialism at least as well as, if not better than, people who have spent years and years on their education?

What are the principles of modern scientific socialism founded on? Are they the concoctions of some leisurely benefactor of humanity, or are they the summing up of those very phenomena which we all come up against, one way or another, in our daily life, the explanation of the very laws which determine our participation in the production, the exchange, or simply the distribution of products? Whoever answers this question will agree that the working class has many chances of understanding correctly the "most abstract" laws of social economics and of mastering the most abstract principles of scientific socialism. The difficulty in understanding the laws of some particular science is caused by incomplete knowledge of the data underlying those laws. Wherever it is only a question of everyday phenomena in which the scientific law only generalises facts that everybody knows, people in the practical field not only understand

perfectly the theoretical principles, they can sometimes even teach the theoreticians themselves. Ask the farmer about the influence that the distance to the market has on the price of his products or the effect the fertility of the soil has on the size of the land rent. Ask the manufacturer how the expansion of the market influences the cheapening of production. Or ask the worker where the employer gets his profits from.... You will see that all these people know Ricardo, although they have never even seen the cover of his works. Yet these questions are reputed to be very intricate and “abstract”, whole seas of ink have been used upon them and such a tremendous number of volumes have been written about them that they are enough to terrify you when you begin to study economics. The same in each and every part of social economics. Take the theory of exchange value. You can explain to the worker in a couple of words what it is determined by and how but many of Messrs. the bourgeois economists are still unwilling or unable to understand this perfectly simple theory, and in their disputes about it they fall into gross errors of logic for which no teacher of arithmetic would hesitate to give an elementary school pupil a bad mark. That is why we think that the writer we quoted was correct and that the only understanding audience today on urgent social problems is one of proletarians or of people who have adopted the proletarian stand point. Once the fundamental principles of social economics are mastered, the understanding of scientific socialism no longer presents any difficulty: here too the worker will only follow the directions of his practical experience. This aspect of the question was magnificently explained by Marx. “By heralding the dissolution of the *hitherto existing world order*,” we read in **A Contribution to the Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Law**, “the proletariat merely proclaims the secret of its own existence, for it is the *factual dissolution* of that world order. By demanding the *negation of private*

property, the proletariat merely raises to the rank of a *principle of society* what society has raised to the rank of *its principle*, what is already embodied in it as the negative result of society without its own participation.” [30] So we see that the proletariat needs no material wealth to attain to an understanding of the conditions of its emancipation. Its pauperism, determined *not by the poverty of the barbarism of society, but by defects in the social organisation* – this pauperism, far from making the understanding of these conditions more difficult, makes it easier.

The laws governing the distribution of products in capitalist society are extremely unfavourable to the working class. But the organisation of production and the form of exchange characteristic of capitalism provide for the first time both the objective and the subjective possibility for the emancipation of the working people. Capitalism broadens the worker’s outlook and removes all the prejudices he inherited from the old society; it impels him to fight and at the same time ensures his victory by increasing his numbers and putting at his disposal the economic possibility of organising the kingdom of labour. Technical progress increases man’s power over nature and raises labour productivity to such a degree that the necessity of labour cannot become a hindrance, but, on the contrary, will be an indispensable condition for the all-round development of the members of socialist society. At the same time, the socialisation of *production* characteristic of capitalism paves the way for the conversion of its *instruments and products* into common property. The joint-stock company, the highest form of organisation for industrial enterprises at the present time, excludes the capitalists from any active role in the economic life of society and turns them into drones whose disappearance cannot cause the slightest disorganisation in the course of that life. “If the energetic race of major-demos

once succeeded without difficulty in deposing a royal dynasty which had grown indolent,” the conservative Rodbertus says, “why should a living and energetic organisation of workers (the staff of companies is composed of qualified workers), why should not such an organisation in time remove owners who have become mere *rentiers*? ... And yet capital cannot turn off this road! Having outlived its period of prosperity, capital is becoming its own grave-digger!

” Why, we ask, in our turn, should not the same organisation of workers which will be in a position “to remove owners who have become mere *rentiers*” – why should not such an organisation be in a position to seize state power and thus achieve political domination? For the former presumes the latter: only such an organisation can “remove” the owners as can overcome their *political* resistance.

But that is not all: there are other social phenomena which also increase the probability of the proletariat’s *political* victory.

“... Entire sections of the ruling classes are, by the advance of industry, precipitated into the proletariat, or are at least threatened in their conditions of existence. These also supply the proletariat with fresh elements of enlightenment and progress.

“Finally, in times when the class struggle nears the decisive hour, the process of dissolution going on within the ruling class, in fact within the whole range of old society, assumes such a violent, glaring character, that a small section of the ruling class cuts itself adrift, and joins the revolutionary class, the class that holds the future in its hands. Just as, therefore, at an earlier period, a section of the nobility went over to the bourgeoisie, so now a portion of the bourgeoisie goes over to the proletariat, and in particular, a portion of

the bourgeois ideologists, who have raised themselves to the level of comprehending theoretically the historical movement as a whole.”

There is a very remarkable legend among the Negroes of North Guinea. “One day,” it says, “God summoned the two sons of the first human couple. One of them was white, the other dark-skinned. Placing before them a heap of gold and a book, God ordered the dark-skinned brother, as being the elder, to choose one of the two. He chose the gold, so the younger brother received the book. An unknown force immediately transported the younger one with the book to a cold, distant country. But thanks to his book he became learned, terrifying and strong. As for the elder brother, he remained in his native country and lived long enough to see how superior science is to wealth.”

The bourgeoisie once had both knowledge and wealth. Unlike the dark-skinned brother in the Negro legend, it obtained possession of both gold and book, because history, the god of human societies, does not recognise the right of classes which are under age, and commits them to the guardianship of their elder brothers. But the time came when the working class, slighted by history, grew out of childhood and the bourgeoisie had to share with it. The bourgeoisie kept the gold, while the younger brother received the “book”, thanks to which, despite the darkness and cold of his cellars, he has now become “strong and terrifying”. Little by little, scientific socialism is ousting the bourgeois theories from the pages of this magic book, and soon the proletariat will read in the book how they can gain material sufficiency. Then they will throw off the shameful yoke of capitalism and show the bourgeoisie “how superior science is to wealth”.

Footnotes

[13] [Note to the 1905 edition.] Later, Messrs. the “critics of Marx” reproached us, the “orthodox”, of revolting against every attempt to develop Marx’s views further. The reader sees that I showed no tendency to such a revolt. But it goes without saying that, as a pupil of Marx who understands the great significance of his theory, I had to revolt against every attempt to replace some propositions of Marxism by old, long obsolete bourgeois “dogmas”. And I fulfilled that obligation to the best of my ability.

[14] See *Zur Kritik der politischen Oekon.*, Vorwort, S.IV-VI.

[15] See *Herrn Eugen Dühring’s Umwälz. der Wissensch.*, S.6.

[16] See *Essai sur l’histoire du Tiers Etat*, par. Aug. Thierry, pp.33-34.

[17] The supporters of feudalism understood full well the aims of the burghers and the connection between their political and their economic demands. “Commune is a new and detestable word,” said Guibert, abbe de Nogent, “and here is what it means: those who have to pay tithes pay only once a year to their lord the rent they owe him. If they commit some offence, they are quit for the payment of a fine fixed by law, and as for the money levies usually made from serfs, they are entirely exempt from them.” Laurent, *La féodalité et l’église*, p.546.

[18] The Statute of Liege established the principle of the inviolability of the home in the following forceful expression: “*The poor man is king in his home.*” Laurent, *ibid.*, p.548.

[19] Von Studnitz, *Nordamerikanische Arbeitsverhältnisse*, S.353.

[20] We quote this from B. Melon’s *Le nouveau parti*, t.I, p.15.

[21] See *Sozialdemokratische Abhandlungen*, von M. Rittinghausen, drittes Heft, *Über die Nothwendigkeit der direkten Gesetzgebung durch das Volk*, S.3.

[22] See the programmes of the German and the North American Workers parties. The *Manifesto* of the British Democratic Federation also demands “direct voting on all important questions”.

[23] See Schäffle, *Bau und Leben des sozialen Körpers*, B.III, S.91 und 102.

[24] See *Das System der erworbenen Rechte*, Leipzig, 1880, erster Theil, *Vorrede*, S.VII.

[25] [Note to the 1905 edition.] These lines were written 15 years before Bernstein came forward as a “critic” of Marx. Let the reader judge for himself whether the “critic” and his numerous fellow-thinkers are right

when they reproach us, the “orthodox” with understanding the revolution of the proletariat as a simple and almost instantaneous “catastrophe”.

[26] [Note to the 1905 edition.] This will seem paradoxical, but in actual fact the theory of political non-interference of the working class was formulated by Bakunin *as a conclusion from the materialist explanation of history*. Bakunin, who was an ardent supporter of this explanation, reasoned as follows: if the political system of every given society is based on its economy, then *political* revolution is unnecessary, it will itself be the result of the *economic* revolution. This man, once a pupil of Hegel and who, it seems, should have refined his logic, just could not understand that not only every particular *ready-made* political system is a result of economics, but so is every new political movement which, springing from the given economic relations, serves in turn as a necessary *instrument* for their reconstruction. All the *most serious objections* of the *anarchists* against the *Social-Democrats* are still founded on this *misunderstanding*.

[27] [Note to the 1905 edition.] This concerns the “theory of impoverishment” which caused such a stir at the heyday of *Bernsteinians*. On this subject, see my *Criticism of Our Critics*, in Nos.2 and 3 of *Zarya*.

[28] [Note to the 1905 edition.] i.e., Rodbertus.

[29] [Note to the 1905 edition.] I again mean Rodbertus.

[30] See *Deutsch-Französische Jahrbücher*, 1. und 2. Lieferung, S.81-85.

III

In the first chapter we endeavoured to explain historically the origin of the conviction that socialism is incompatible with any “politics”. We saw that this conviction was based on Proudhon’s and Bakunin’s teaching on the state, on the one hand, and on a certain inconsistency in our Social-Democrats of the seventies, on the other. Moreover, it was supported by the general tone of the background against which both the tendencies mentioned above stood out. That background consisted, as we said quoting Engels, in a mish-mash of manifold theories of the founders of different socialist sects. The utopian socialists, we know, had an entirely negative attitude to the political movements of the working class, seeing in them nothing but “blind unbelief in the new Gospel”. This negative view of “politics” came to us with the teachings of the utopians. Long before revolutionary movement of any strength began in Russia, our socialists, like the “true” socialists in Germany at the end of the forties (see the **Manifesto of the Communist Party**, p.32), were ready “to hurl the traditional anathemas against liberalism, against representative government, against bourgeois competition, bourgeois freedom of the press, bourgeois legislation, bourgeois liberty and equality”, forgetting entirely that all these attacks “presupposed the existence of modern bourgeois society, with its corresponding economic conditions of existence, and the political constitution adapted thereto”, i.e., the very conditions that it should still have been a question of assuring in our country.[31]

As a result of all these influences there arose such a firm conviction of the inexpediency of any political struggle except the revolutionary struggle in the narrow and vulgar sense of the word, that we began to regard with prejudice the

socialist parties in Western Europe which saw electoral campaigns, for instance, as a powerful means of educating and organising the working masses. All the political and economic gains those campaigns brought seemed to us unpardonable opportunism, a ruinous deal with the demon of the bourgeois state, tantamount to renouncing bliss in future socialist life. We ourselves did not even notice that our theories were involving us in a vicious circle of insoluble contradictions. We regarded the village commune as the point of departure of Russia's social and economic development and, at the same time, renouncing political struggle, we voluntarily deprived ourselves of all possibility of safeguarding that commune against the present destructive influences by state interference. We were thus forced to remain indifferent spectators of a process which was destroying the very foundation on which we wished to erect the edifice of the future.

We saw, however, that the logic of events had led the Russian movement on to another road and forced the Russian revolutionaries, as represented by the Narodnaya Volya party, to fight for political influence and even dominance as one of the most powerfactors of economic revolution. We also saw that having entered upon that road our movement was growing to such an extent that the social and political theories of different varieties of Proudhonism were too narrow and cramping for it. The course of events peculiar to Russian social life clashed with the course of the ideas dominating among our revolutionaries and thus provoked a new trend of thought.

This trend, we said further, will not rid itself of its characteristic contradictions until it merges with the incomparably deeper and wider current of modern socialism. The Russian revolutionaries must adopt the standpoint of Western Social-Democracy and break with

“rebel” *theories* just as a few years ago they renounced “rebel” *practice*, introducing a new, *political* element into their programme. This will not be difficult for them to do if they endeavour to adopt the correct view of the political side of Marx’s teaching and are willing to reconsider the methods and immediate aims of their struggle by applying this new criterion to them.

We saw as early as in the second chapter what false conclusions were prompted by the philosophical and historical premises of modern socialism. **Narodnaya Volya** itself apparently did not notice the erroneousness of those conclusions and was inclined “even to defend Dühring’s sociological standpoint on the predominant influence of the political and legal element in the social structure over the economic”, as P.L. Lavrov put it in describing the most recent tendencies in the Russian revolutionary movement. [32] And it is only by this inclination that we can explain the polemic contained in the home review of *Narodnaya Volya* No. 6 against some kind of “immediate interpreters of Marx’s historical theory”, who, according to the author, based their views “mainly on Hegel’s famous triad”, not having “any other inductive material” for their conclusions and explaining “Hegel’s law in the sense evil, merely in its extreme development, will lead to good”. [33] It is sufficient to acquaint oneself with the programme of the German Social-Democrats or the French collectivists to see how “Marx’s historical theory” is understood by his West European followers and, if you like, by his “immediate interpreters”. We, for our part, can assure our Russian comrades that these “interpreters” understand “Hegel’s law” by no means “in the sense that evil, merely in its extreme development, will lead to good”, and, besides, that they use it as “*inductive* material” only when they study the history of German philosophy, in which this law has a

very prominent place and which, *in any case*, it cannot be left out of, just as, according to the popular saying, you cannot leave words out of a song. The passage we quoted is an almost word-for-word repetition of the reproach addressed by Dühring to Marx that in his historical scheme “the Hegelian negation of negation plays, for want of better and clearer means, the role of a midwife with whose help the future emerges from the womb of the present”. [34] But this trick has already received the punishment it deserved from Engels, who showed the utter scientific worthlessness of the former Berlin *Dozent’s* works. Why, then, repeat other people’s errors and adopt, on such shifting grounds, a negative attitude towards the greatest and most revolutionary social theory of the nineteenth century? For without revolutionary theory there is no revolutionary movement in the true sense of the word. Any class which strives for its emancipation, any political party which aims at dominance, is revolutionary only insofar as it represents the most progressive social trends and consequently is a vehicle of the most progressive ideas of its time. An idea which is inherently revolutionary is a kind of dynamite which no other explosive in the world can replace. And as long as our movement is under the banner of backward or erroneous theories it will have revolutionary significance only by some, but by no means all of its aspects. At the same time, without its members knowing it, it will bear in itself the germs of reaction which will deprive it even of that little significance in the more or less near future, because, as Heine said,

New time needs a new garment

For the new job it’s got to do.

And indeed that really new time will come at last – for our country too.

Incorrect understanding of some principles of modern socialism is not, however, the main obstacle preventing our

revolutionary movement from taking the road paved by the working class in the West. A closer acquaintance with the literature of "Marxism" will show our socialists what a powerful weapon they have deprived themselves of by refusing to understand and master the theory of the great teacher of the "workers of all countries". They will then see that our revolutionary movement, far from losing anything, will gain a lot if the Russian Narodniks and the Russian Narodnaya Volya at last become Russian Marxists and a new, higher standpoint reconciles all the groups existing among us, which are all right each in its own way, because despite their one-sidedness each of them expresses a definite vital need of Russian social life.

Another obstacle prevents our movement from developing in the direction just indicated. It consists in our lacking sense of proportion in politics. Since the very beginning of our movement this has prevented our revolutionaries from bringing their immediate tasks into line with their strength and it is due to nothing else than lack of political experience on the part of Russian public figures. Whether we went among the people to disseminate socialist publications, settled in the villages to organise the protesting elements of our peasantry or joined directly in the fight against the representatives of absolutism, we repeated one and the same mistake everywhere. We always overestimated our strength and never fully took account of the resistance that would be offered by the social environment, we hastened to raise a method of action temporarily favoured by circumstances into a universal principle precluding all other ways and means. As a result, all our programmes were in a state of absolutely unstable equilibrium which could be upset by the most insignificant change in the surrounding atmosphere. We changed those programmes almost every couple of years and could not keep to anything *lasting* because we always

kept to something *narrow* and *one-sided*. Just as, according to Belinsky's words, Russian society had experience of all literary trends even before it had any literature, so the Russian socialist movement managed to try out all possible shades of West European socialism despite the fact that it had not yet become a movement of our working class.

The struggle against absolutism that Narodnaya Volya has undertaken will undoubtedly help greatly to eliminate the onesidedness of the study *groups* by bringing our revolutionaries out on to a broader path and compelling them to strive to set up a real *party*. But in order to put a stop to the continual changing of programmes, to rid themselves of these habits of political nomads and to acquire intellectual stability at last, the Russian revolutionaries must complete the criticism which began with the rise of conscious political trends among them. They must adopt a critical attitude to the very programme which has made necessary the criticism of *all* previous programmes and theories. The "Narodnaya Volya party" is the child of a time of transition. Its programme is the last produced in the conditions which made our one-sidedness inevitable and therefore legitimate. Although it broadens the political horizon of the Russian socialists, this programme in itself is not yet free from one-sidedness. The lack of sense of proportion in politics, of the ability to line up the immediate aims of the party with its actual or potential strength is also still conspicuous in it. The Narodnaya Volya party reminds one of a man who is going along a real road but has no idea of distances and therefore feels sure that he can leave "miles and leagues behind – twenty thousand leagues, ere night, covered in a single flight". Practice will, of course, shatter his illusion, but that shattering may cost him a great deal. It would be better for him to ask himself whether seven-league strides do not belong to the realm of fantasy.

By seven-league strides we mean the element of fantasy whose existence in the programme referred to we have already pointed out and which was manifested in the second issue of **Narodnaya Volya** by assurances concerning the social-revolutionary (we do not say *socialist*) majority in the future Russian Constituent Assembly, 55 and in No.8-9 by considerations on “the seizure of power by the provisional revolutionary government”. We are profoundly convinced that this element of fantasy is highly dangerous for the “Narodnaya Volya party” itself. Dangerous to it as a socialist party because it diverts attention of the working class from the immediate tasks in Russia; dangerous to it as a party which has assumed the initiative of our emancipation movement because it will alienate from the party great resources and forces which, in other circumstances, would accrue to it out of the so-called society. Let us explain this in greater detail.

To whom does Narodnaya Volya appeal, to whom can it and should it appeal in fighting absolutism? “The enlistment in the organisation” – Narodnaya Volya – “of *individuals from the peasantry* capable of joining it,” we read in **Kalendar Narodnoi Voli**, [35] “has naturally always been acknowledged as very desirable.... But as for a mass peasant organisation at present, that was considered completely fantastic when our programme was drawn up, and, if we are not mistaken, subsequent practice was unable to change the opinion of our socialists on this subject.” Perhaps the “Narodnaya Volya party” intends to rely on the more progressive section of our labouring population, i.e., on the town workers? It does actually attach great importance to propaganda and organisation among them, it considers that “the urban working population must be the object of the party’s serious attention”. But the very reason on which it bases this necessity shows that in the party’s conception the

town workers must be only one of the elements in our revolutionary movement. They “are of particular significance for the revolution, both by their position and by their relatively greater maturity”, the same document explains; “the success of the first attack depends entirely on the conduct of the workers and the troops”. So the impending revolution will not be a working-class revolution in the full sense of the term, but the workers must take part in it because they “are of particular significance *for it*”. Which other elements, then, will be included in this movement? We have already seen that one of these elements will be the “troops”. but in the army “in present conditions propaganda among the men is so difficult that great hope can hardly be placed upon it. Action on *the officer corps* is far more convenient: being more educated and having greater liberty they are more susceptible to influence”! That is quite correct, of course, but we will not stop at that for the moment, we will go further. Besides the workers and “the officer corps”, the Narodnaya Volya party has in mind the liberals and “Europe”, in relation to which “the policy of the party must strive to ensure the sympathy of the peoples for the Russian revolution, to rouse sympathy for the revolution among the European public”. To attain this aim “the party must make known to Europe all the disastrous significance of Russian absolutism for European civilisation itself, and also the party’s true aims and the significance of our revolutionary movement as the expression of the protest of the whole nation”. As far as the “liberals” are concerned, “we must point out, without concealing our radicalism, that given the present setting of our party tasks, our interests and theirs compel us to act jointly against the government”.

Thus we see that the Narodnaya Volya party relies not only, nor even mainly, on the working and peasant classes. It also has in mind society and the officer corps, which, in

substance, is the very flesh and bone” of that society. It wants to convince the liberal part of that society that “given the present setting of our party tasks” the interests of Russian liberalism coincide with those of the Russian social-revolutionary party. What, then, does it do to that conviction upon the Russian liberals? First of all it publishes the programme of the Executive Committee which Says that “the *people’s will* would be sufficiently well expressed and Implemented by a Constituent Assembly freely elected by universal suffrage and receiving instructions from the electors”. In its famous **Letter to Alexander III** the Executive Committee also demanded “the convocation of representatives of the whole Russian people to reconsider the existing forms of statehood and public life and to refashion them according to the desires of the people”. [36] That programme does indeed coincide with the interests of the Russian liberals, and in order to carry it out they would probably be reconciled even to universal suffrage, which the Executive Committee cannot fail to demand. In all this, the programme of the said Committee displays far greater maturity than all those which preceded it. But, not to mention such a huge blunder as to demand freedom of assembly, of speech, of the press and of electoral programmes only “as a temporary measure”, let us recall other statements of the Narodnaya Volya party. The party organ hastened to warn its readers that the majority of the deputies to the Constituent Assembly would be supporters of radical economic revolution. We have already said above that this assurance was no more than a fiction invented to conciliate incompatible elements in the Narodnaya Volya programme. Let us now consider the printed expression of that assurance from the stand-point of tactics. The question is: does an economic revolution suit the interests of Russian liberalism? Does our liberal society sympathise with the agrarian revolution which Narodnaya Volya says the peasant

deputies will aim at? West European history tells us most convincingly that whenever the “red spectre” took at all threatening forms the “liberals” were ready to seek protection in the embraces of the most unceremonious military dictatorship. Did the terrorist organ think that our Russian liberals would be an exception to this general rule? If so, on what did it base its conviction? Did it also think that contemporary “public opinion in Europe” was so imbued with socialist ideas that it would sympathise with the convocation of a social-revolutionary Constituent Assembly? Or did it think that although the European bourgeoisie trembled at the red spectre in their own countries they would cheer its appearance in Russia? It goes without saying that it thought nothing of the sort and forgot nothing of the sort. But why, in that case, make such a risky statement? Or was the *Narodnaya Volya* party organ so convinced of the inevitable realisation of its prophecy that it considered it necessary to rouse the members of the organisation to take steps corresponding to the importance of the anticipated event? Bearing in mind the fact that the same organ declared work among the people useless, we think the statement was intended rather to calm than to rouse: a social-revolutionary majority in the Constituent Assembly was expected *despite* the fact that the work referred to now recalls the “Danaides filling bottomless barrels”.

In itself the statement could have been regarded as unimportant, especially as **Narodnaya Volya** itself had apparently given up its exaggeratedly optimistic hopes about the future composition of the Russian Constituent. We think so, because the leading article in No. 8-9 speaks of the economic revolution which, in the absence of social-revolutionary initiative among the people themselves, must be accomplished by the “provisional revolutionary government” before the convocation of the Constituent

Assembly. The author of the article quite rightly sees such a revolution as the only guarantee that “the Zemsky Sobor which is convoked will be attended by true representatives of the people”. Thus, **Narodnaya Volya**’s former illusion has been shattered completely. But, unfortunately, it has only disappeared to give place to a new one, still more harmful for the cause of the Narodnaya Volya party. The element of fantasy in the programme has not been removed but has only assumed a new form, being now called that very “*seizure of power by the provisional revolutionary government*” which is supposed to give the party the possibility to carry out the economic revolution referred to. It is obvious that the new “setting of the party tasks” can on no account impress upon either Russian liberalism or bourgeois Europe the idea that they have common interests with the Russian revolutionary movement. However downtrodden and crushed Russian society may be it is by no means deprived of the instinct of self-preservation and in no case will it voluntarily meet the “red spectre” half-way; to point out to it such a formulation of the party tasks means to deprive oneself of its support and to rely only on one’s own strength. But is that strength great enough to warrant the risk of alienating such an ally? Can our revolutionaries really seize power and retain it, if only for a short time, or is all talk of this nothing else than cutting the skin of a bear that has not been killed and which, by force of circumstances, is not even going to be killed? That is a question which has recently become an urgent one for revolutionary Russia....

Let us hasten to make a reservation. The previous pages must already have convinced the reader that we do not belong to the opponents in principle of such an act as the seizure of power by a revolutionary party. In our opinion that is the last, and what is more, the absolutely inevitable conclusion to be drawn from the political struggle which

every class striving for emancipation must undertake at a definite stage in social development. Having gained political domination, a revolutionary class will retain that domination and be relatively secure against the blows of reaction only when it uses against reaction the mighty weapon of state power. "Den Teufel halte, wer ihn halt!" says Faust.

But there is no more difference between heaven and earth than between the dictatorship of a class and that of a group of revolutionary *raznochintsi*. This applies in particular to the dictatorship of the working class, whose present task is not only to overthrow the political domination of the unproductive classes in society, but also to do away with the anarchy now existing in production and consciously to organise all functions of social and economic life. The mere *understanding* of this task calls for an advanced working class with political experience and education, a working class free from bourgeois prejudices and able to discuss its situation by itself. In addition to this, its *solution* presupposes that socialist ideas are spread among the proletariat and that the proletariat is conscious of its own strength and confident in victory. But *such* a proletariat *will not allow* even the sincerest of its well-wishers to seize power. It will not allow it for the simple reason that it has been to the school of political education with the firm intention of finishing it at some time and coming forward as an independent figure in the arena of historical life, instead of passing eternally from one guardianship to another; it will not allow it because such a guardianship would be unnecessary, as the proletariat could then solve the problem of the socialist revolution itself; and finally it will not allow it because such a guardianship would be harmful, for the conscious participation of the producers in organising production cannot be replaced by any

conspiratorial skill, any daring or self-sacrifice on the part of the conspirators. The mere thought that the social problem can be solved in practice by anybody but the workers themselves shows complete misunderstanding of this problem, irrespective of whether the idea is held by an “Iron Chancellor” or a revolutionary organisation. Once the proletariat has understood the conditions of its emancipation and is mature to emancipate itself, it will take state power in its own hands in order to finish off its enemies and build up social life, not, of course, on the basis of *an*-archy, which would bring new disasters, but of *pan*-archy, which will give all adult members of society the possibility to take part in the discussion and settlement of social matters. And until the working class is sufficiently developed to be able to fulfil its great historical task, the duty of its supporters is to accelerate the process of its development, to remove the obstacles preventing its strength and its consciousness from growing, and not to invent social experiments and vivisection, the outcome of which is always more than doubtful.

That is how we understand the seizure of power in the socialist revolution. Applying this point of view to Russian reality we must admit that we by no means believe in the early possibility of a socialist government in Russia.

Narodnaya Volya considers the contemporary “relation of political and economic factors on Russian soil” particularly “advantageous” to the socialists. We agree that it is more advantageous for them in Russia than in India, Persia or Egypt, but it cannot be compared, of course, with the social relations in Western Europe. And if Narodnaya Volya arrives at its convictions by comparing our system not with the Egyptian or the Persian, but with the French or the English system, then it has made a very big mistake. The contemporary “relation” of social factors “on Russian soil” is

the cause of the ignorance and indifference of the popular masses; when were such qualities advantageous for their emancipation? Narodnaya Volya apparently presumes that this indifference has already begun to disappear because among the people “there is growing hatred of the privileged ruling estates and persistent striving for a radical change in economic relations”. But what comes of that striving? “Hatred of the privileged estates” proves nothing at all; it is often not accompanied by a single ray of political consciousness. Furthermore, at the present time we must clearly distinguish between *estate* consciousness and *class* consciousness, for the old division into estates no longer corresponds to the economic relations in Russia and is preparing to give place to formal equality of citizens in a “legal state” If Narodnaya Volya considers the contemporary outlook of our peasantry from the standpoint of the development of their *class* and *political* consciousness, it will hardly persist in saying that the relation between our social factors is advantageous to the cause of the social revolution. For it certainly cannot consider “advantageous” to that cause the rumours, for instance, circulating among the peasantry about their own struggle against the government. No matter how strongly “hatred of the ruling classes” is shown in these rumours, the fact that the revolutionary movement itself is attributed by the peasants to scheming by the serfdom-minded nobility and the officials is evidence that the “provisional revolutionary government” will be in great danger when the people begins “winning economic equality from those who have been exploiting and oppressing it for centuries”. Then the relation between the factors now interesting us will perhaps display rather disadvantageous qualities for the temporarily victorious conspirators. And then, what is meant by “winning economic equality”?

Is it enough for that to expropriate the big landowners, capitalists and businessmen? Does it not require production itself to be organised in a definite manner? If so, are Russia's present economic relations favourable to such organisation? In other words, does the "economic factor" offer us much chance of success? We do not think so, and for the following reason. Any organisation presupposes in what is to be organised certain qualities determined by the purpose and character of the organisation. The socialist organisation of production implies such a character of the economic relations as will make that organisation the logical conclusion of the entire previous development of the country and is therefore distinguished by an extremely significant definiteness. In other words socialist organisation, like any other, requires the appropriate basis. But that basis does not exist in Russia. The old foundations of national life are too narrow, heterogeneous and one-sided, and moreover too shaky, and new ones are as yet only being formed. The objective social conditions of production necessary for socialist organisation have not yet matured, and that is why the producers themselves have not yet either the striving or the ability for such organisation: our peasantry can yet neither understand nor fulfil this task. Therefore, the "provisional government" will have not to "sanction", but to *carry out* "the economic revolution", granted that it is not swept away by a wave of the popular movement, granted that the producers are obedient enough.

You cannot create by decrees conditions which are alien to the very character of the existing economic relations. The "provisional government" will have to reconcile itself to what exists, to take as the basis of its reforming activity what it is given by present Russian reality. And on that narrow and shaky foundation the edifice of socialist organisation will be built by a government which will include: first, town

workers, as yet little prepared for such a difficult task; second, representatives of our revolutionary youth, who have always kept aloof from practical life; third, the “officer corps”, whose knowledge of economics is certainly subject to doubt. We do not want to make the quite probable supposition that, besides all these elements, liberals will also find their way into the provisional government, and they will not sympathise with, but hinder the social-revolutionary “setting of the party tasks”. We suggest that the reader merely weigh up the circumstances we have just enumerated and then ask himself: has an “economic revolution” which begins in such circumstances much chance of success? Is it true that the present “relation of political and economic factors on Russian soil” is favourable to the cause of the socialist revolution? Is not the confidence that this relation is advantageous one of the fictions borrowed from the old anarchist and rebel outlook and carried to impossible extremes in the programme of the new *political* party? Yet it is this fiction that determines the most “immediate tasks” of the party and underlies the desire for the immediate “seizure of power” a striving that terrifies our society and makes the entire activity of our revolutionaries one-sided!

Perhaps it will be objected that *Narodnaya Volya* does not even think of undertaking the socialist organisation of society immediately after seizing power, that the “economic revolution” it plans is intended only to educate the people for a future socialist revolution. Let us see whether this supposition is possible, and if so, what conclusions follow from it.

The leading article of No.8-9 of ***Narodnaya Volya*** speaks of the economic equality which will be “won” by the people itself, or, if the people lacks initiative, created by the provisional government. We have already said that so-called economic equality is possible only with a socialist

organisation of production. But let us assume that **Narodnaya Volya** considers it possible under other circumstances too, that economic equality, in its opinion, will be sufficiently guaranteed by the transfer of the land and the instruments of production to the ownership of the working people. Such an opinion would be nothing but a return to the old Narodnik ideals of *Zemlya i Volya*, and from the economic standpoint it would show the same weaknesses that characterised those ideals. The mutual relations of individual village communes, the conversion of the product of the commune members' labour into commodities and the capitalist accumulation connected with it would threaten to make that "equality" extremely precarious! With the independence of the *mir* "as an economic and administrative unit", with "broad territorial self-government guaranteed by the electivity of all offices", and "the ownership of the land by the people" which the Executive Committee's programme demands, the central government *would not be able* to take steps to consolidate that equality, even if we assume that it would devise measures to abrogate not only the written laws of the Russian Empire, but the laws of commodity production itself. And anyhow, it would be reluctant to take such measures, for it would consist of representatives of the "economically and politically emancipated people" whose ideals would be expressed, at the best, by the words "Land and Freedom" and would leave no room for any organisation of national (let alone *international*) production.

Let us suppose that in view of this danger Narodnaya Volya's "provisional government" will not hand over the power it has seized to the representatives of the people but will become a permanent government. Then it will be faced with the following alternative: either it will have to remain an indifferent spectator of the slow decay of the "economic

equality” it has established, or it will be obliged to *organise* national production. It will have to fulfil this difficult task either in the spirit of modern socialism, in which it will be hindered by its own unpracticality as well as by the present stage of development of national labour and the workers’ own habits; or it will have to seek salvation in the ideals of patriarchal and authoritarian communism”, only modifying those ideals so that national production is managed not by the Peruvian “sons of the sun” and their officials but by a socialist caste. But even now the Russian people is too far developed for anybody to flatter himself with the hope that such experiments on it could be successful. Moreover, there is no doubt that under such a guardianship the people, far from being educated for socialism, would even lose all capacity for further progress or would retain that capacity only thanks to the appearance of the very economic *inequality* which it would be the revolutionary government’s immediate aim to abolish. Not to mention the influence of international relations or the impossibility of Peruvian communism even in Eastern Europe in the nineteenth or the twentieth century.

Anyhow, why speak so much of the *results* of the seizure of power by our revolutionaries? Is that seizure itself probable or even possible? In our opinion the probability is very small, so small that the seizure of power may be considered as absolutely impossible. Our “thinking proletariat” has already done much for the emancipation of its motherland. It has shaken absolutism, aroused political interest among society, sown the seed of socialist propaganda among our working class. It is intermediary between the higher classes of society and the lower, having the education of the former and the democratic instincts of the latter. This position has eased for it the diversified work of propaganda and agitation. But this same position gives it very little hope of

success in a conspiracy to seize power. For such a conspiracy talent, energy and education are not enough: the conspirators need connections, wealth and an influential position in society. And that is what our revolutionary intelligentsia lacks. It can make good these deficiencies only by allying itself with other dissatisfied elements of Russian society. Let us suppose that its plans actually meet with the sympathy of those elements, that rich landowners, capitalists, officials, staff and senior officers join in the conspiracy. There will then be more probability of the conspiracy being a success, although that probability will still be very small – just remember the outcome of most of the famous conspiracies in history. But the main danger to the *socialist* conspiracy will come not from the existing government, but from the members of the conspiracy itself. The influential and high-placed personages who have joined it may be sincere socialists only by a “fortunate coincidence”. But as regards the majority of them, there can be no guarantee that they will not wish to use the power they have seized for purposes having nothing in common with the interests of the working class. And once the conspirators deviate from the socialist aim of the conspiracy it can be considered not only useless but even harmful for the social development of the country; for hatred of absolutism does not warrant sympathy for the successes of the “most modern Seyans”, as Stepnyak puts it in his well-known book, who would wish to use the conspiracy in their own interests. Thus, the more sympathy a conspiracy of the socialist intelligentsia to seize power in the immediate future meets among influential spheres, i.e., the greater the probability of its outward success, the more open to doubt its results will be; contrariwise, the more such a conspiracy is confined to our socialist “intelligentsia”, i.e., the less the probability of its success, the less doubt there will be about its results, as far as the conspirators’ intentions are concerned. Everything

leads us to think that at present a Russian socialist conspiracy would be threatened with a failure of the second kind rather than of the first.

Considering all that has been said we think that only one aim of the Russian socialists would not be fantastic now: to achieve free political institutions, on the one hand, and to create elements for the setting up of the future *workers' socialist party* of Russia, on the other. They must put forward the demand for a democratic constitution which shall guarantee the workers the "rights of citizen" as well as the "rights of man" and give them, by universal suffrage, the possibility to take an active part in the political life of the country. Without trying to scare anybody with the yet remote "red spectre", such a political programme would arouse sympathy for our revolutionary party among all those who are not systematic enemies of democracy; it could be subscribed to by very many representatives of our liberalism as well as by the socialists. [37] And whereas the seizure of power by some secret revolutionary organisation will always be the work only of that organisation and of those who are initiated in its plans, agitation for the programme mentioned would be a matter for the whole of Russian society, in which it would intensify the conscious striving for political emancipation. Then the interests of the liberals would indeed "force" them to "act jointly with the socialists against the government", because they would cease to meet in revolutionary publications the assurance that the overthrow of absolutism would be the signal for a social revolution in Russia. At the same time another less timid and more sober section of liberal society would no longer see revolutionaries as unpractical youths who set themselves unrealisable and fantastic plans. This view, which is disadvantageous for revolutionaries, would give place to the respect of society not only for their heroism but also for their

political maturity. This sympathy would gradually grow into active support, or more probably into an independent social movement, and then the hour of absolutism's fall would strike at last. The socialist party would play an extremely honourable and beneficial role in this emancipation movement. Its glorious past, its selflessness and energy would give weight to its demands and it would at least stand chances of thus winning *for the people* the possibility of political development and education, and *for itself* the right to address its propaganda openly to the people and to organise them openly into a separate party.

But that is not enough: Or more exactly, it is unachievable without simultaneous action of another kind and in another sphere. Without might there is no right. Every constitution – according to Lassalle's splendid expression – corresponds or strives to correspond to the “*real, factual relation of forces in the country*”. That is why our socialist intelligentsia must concern itself with changing the factual relations of Russian social forces in favour of the working class even in the pre-constitutional period. Otherwise the fall of absolutism will by no means justify the hopes placed in it by the Russian socialists or even democrats. Even in a constitutional Russia, the demands of the people may be left completely unattended to or satisfied only as far as is necessary to allow them to pay more taxes which they are now almost unable to do as a result of the rapacity of the state economic management. The socialist party itself, having won for the liberal bourgeoisie freedom of speech and action, may find itself in an “exceptional” position similar to that of German Social-Democracy today. In politics, only he may count on the gratitude of his allies of yesterday, now his enemies, who has nothing more serious to count on.

Fortunately, the Russian socialists can base their hopes on a firmer foundation. They can and must place their hopes first

and foremost in the working class. The strength of the working class – as of any other class – depends, among other things, on the clarity of its political consciousness, its cohesion and its degree of organisation. It is these elements of its strength that must be influenced by our socialist intelligentsia. The latter must become the leader of the working class in the impending emancipation movement, explain to it its political and economic interests and also the interdependence of those interests and must prepare it to play an independent role in the social life of Russia. They must exert all their energy so that in the very opening period of the constitutional life of Russia our working class will be able to come forward as a separate party with a definite social and political programme. The detailed elaboration of that programme must, of course, be left to the workers themselves, but the intelligentsia must elucidate for them its principal points, for instance, a radical review of the present agrarian relations, the taxation system and factory legislation, state help for producers' associations, and so forth. All this can be done only by intensive work among at least the most advanced sections of the working class, by oral and printed propaganda and the organisation of workers' socialist study groups. It is true that these tasks have always held a more or less prominent place in the programmes of our socialists, and **Kalendar Narodnoi Volican** convince us that they were not forgotten even in the heat of the bitterest fight against the government (see *Preparatory Work of the Party* in section C, *Urban Workers*). But we suggest that everybody who is acquainted with our revolutionary movement should recall and compare how much energy and money was wasted on destructive work and how much was devoted to training elements for the future *workers' socialist party*. We are not accusing anybody, but we think that the distribution of our revolutionary forces was too one-sided. Yet it would be vain

for us to try to explain this by the quality of the revolutionary forces themselves or of the elements of the working class which, according to their own programme, they should have influenced. The appearance and success of such publications as **Zerno** and **Rabochaya Gazeta** show that our revolutionaries have not lost their inclination for propaganda, and our working people are not indifferent to it. Of course these publications made mistakes, at times serious ones, but only he who does nothing makes no mistakes. The main trouble is that in their publications one does not see any of the energy with which printed propaganda is conducted among “intellectual” sections of society, that when a print-shop is closed by the police a new one is not opened in its stead, that when it is impossible to publish them in Russia they are not transferred abroad, and so forth. Of all the journals from abroad – and we had a fair number of them – **Rabotnik** alone wrote for the people and that was the great merit of its publishers. But **Rabotnik** has already been closed for a long time and we have heard nothing of new attempts of this kind, with, say, a new programme, better suited to the changed views of the Russian socialists. What has been published here, in Russia, for the workers besides **Zerno** and **Rabochaya Gazeta**? Absolutely nothing. Not a single booklet, not a single pamphlet. [38] And that at a time when the revolutionary movement has centred universal attention upon itself, and the people, grasping avidly at the rumours and opinions, have been wondering anxiously: What do these people want? Can one be astonished, after this, at the absurd answers to this question with which for lack of better ones, they are sometimes satisfied? We repeat: we are not accusing *anybody*, we advise *everybody* to pay attention to this aspect of the matter so as to make up for the omission in time. [39]

Thus, the struggle for political freedom, on the one hand, and the preparation of the working class for its future independent and offensive role, on the other, such, in our opinion, is the only possible “setting of party tasks” at present. To bind together in one two so fundamentally different matters as the overthrow of absolutism and the socialist revolution, to wage revolutionary struggle in the belief that these elements of social development will *coincide* in the history of our country *means to put off the advent of both*. But it depends on us to *bring* these two elements *closer together*. We must follow the splendid example of the German Communists who, as the **Manifesto** says, fight “with the bourgeoisie whenever it acts in a revolutionary way, against the absolute monarchy”, and yet “never cease, for a single instant, to instil into the working class the dearest possible recognition of the hostile antagonism between bourgeoisie and proletariat”. Acting thus, the Communists wanted “the bourgeois revolution in Germany” to “be but the prelude to an immediately following proletarian revolution”.

The present position of bourgeois societies and the influence of international relations on the social development of each civilised country entitle us to hope that the social emancipation of the Russian working class will follow very quickly upon the fall of absolutism. If the German bourgeoisie “*came too late*”, the Russian has come still later, and its domination cannot be a long one. Only the Russian revolutionaries should not, in their turn, begin “too late” the preparation of the working class, a matter which has now become of absolute urgency.

Let us make a reservation to avoid misunderstandings. We do not hold the view, which as we have seen was ascribed to Marx’s school rather than it existed in reality, and which alleges that the socialist movement cannot obtain support

from our peasantry until the peasant has been turned into a landless proletarian and the village commune has disintegrated under the influence of capitalism. We think that on the whole the Russian peasantry would show great sympathy for any measure aiming at the so-called “nationalisation of the land”. Given the possibility of any at all free agitation among the peasants, [40] they would also sympathise with the socialists, who naturally would not be slow in introducing into their programme the demand for a measure of that kind. But we do not exaggerate the strength of our socialists or ignore the obstacles, the opposition which they will inevitably encounter from that quarter in their work. For that reason, and *for that reason only*, we think that for the beginning they should concentrate their main attention on the industrial centres. The rural population of today, living in backward social conditions is not only less capable of conscious political *initiative* than the industrial workers, it is also less *responsive* to the movement which our revolutionary intelligentsia has begun. It has greater difficulty in mastering the socialist teachings, because its living conditions are too much unlike the conditions which gave birth to those teachings. And besides, the peasantry is now going through a difficult, critical period. The previous “ancestral foundations” of its economy are crumbling, “the ill-lated village commune itself is being discredited in its eyes”, as is admitted even by such “ancestral” organs of Narodism as **Nedelya** (see No. 39, the article by Mr. N.Z. *In Our Native Parts*); and the new forms of labour and life are only in the process of formation, and this creative process is more intensive in the industrial centres. Like water which washes away the soil in one place and forms new sediments and deposits in others, the process of Russian social development is creating new social formations by destroying the age-old forms of the peasants’ relation to the land and to one another. These new social formations contain the

embryo of a new social movement which alone can end the exploitation of Russia's working population. The industrial workers, who are more developed and have higher requirements and a broader outlook than the peasantry, will join our revolutionary intelligentsia in its struggle against absolutism, and when they have won political freedom they will organise into a workers' socialist party whose task will be to begin systematic propaganda of socialism among the peasantry. We say *systematic propaganda* because isolated opportunities of propaganda must not be missed even at present. It is hardly necessary to add that our socialists would have to change the distribution of their forces among the people if a strong independent movement made itself felt among the peasantry.

That is the "programme" which life itself suggests to the Russian revolutionary socialist party. Will the party be able to carry out of this programme? Will it be prepared to give up its fantastic plans and notions, which, it must be admitted, have a great appeal to sentiment and imagination? It is as yet difficult to answer that question with certitude. The *Announcement of the Publication of Vestnik Narodnoi Volya* speaks of the political tasks of the revolutionary party only in the most general terms. *Vestnik's* editorial board describes those aims as "absolutely definite" and apparently does not consider it necessary to define them again in its announcement. That is why there is ground for fear that it will not consider it necessary either to ask itself whether the "absolutely definite conditions" of present Russian actuality correspond to the "absolutely definite aims" of the Narodnaya Volya party. In that case the new publication will leave unsatisfied the most urgent need of our revolutionary literature, the need for a critical reconsideration of obsolete programmes and traditional methods of action. But we hope that the future

will dissipate our fears. We wish to hope that the new publication will take a sober view of our revolutionary party's tasks, on whose fulfilment the party's future depends. Social life will be just as pitiless to the party's present illusions as it was to those of our "rebels" and propagandists. *It is better to follow its directions now than to pay for its stern lessons later by splits and new disappointments.*

Footnotes

[31] What is said here does not apply, however, to the group which published *Narodnoye Dyelo* in Geneva, a group which repeatedly affirmed its negative attitude to the "theory of political non-interference".

[32] See the article *View of the Past and the Present of Russian Socialism*, *Kalendar Narodnoi Voli*, 1883, p.109.

[33] [Note to the 1905 edition.] Subsequently, our "legal" N. Mikhailovsky and Bros., repeated this nonsense in all keys. It must be noted in general that in their disputes with us these gentlemen could think of nothing new in comparison with what was written against us in *illegalliterature*. Let anybody who wants to convince himself of this read Tikhomirov's article *What Can We Expect from the Revolution?* in the second issue of *Vestnik Narodnoi Voli* and compare it with the arguments Beltov had to refute much later in his book. "Illegal" thought long ago outstripped "legal" thought in our country.

[34] See *Kritische Geschichte der Nationaloekonomie und des Sozialismus*, dritte Auflage, S.498.

[35] *Preparatory Work of the Party*, p.129, note. [Plekhanov's italics]

[36] See *Letter to Alexander III*, *Kalendar Narodnoi Voli*, p.14.

[37] [Note to the 1905 edition.] The sympathy of "society" is very important for us and we can – or more exactly we had many chances to – win it without changing one iota of our programme. But, of

course, it requires tact to make the possibility a reality, and that is what we have not always got. For instance, we sometimes allow ourselves to abuse “capital” about, though, or course, not because of, its “rebellion”. Marx would never have made such a gross tactical blunder. He would have considered it worthy of Karl Grün and other “true socialists”.

[38] [Note to the 1905 edition] From this we see that the idea of a popular Publication is by no means a novelty in our literature. But this did not prevent it from seeming a dangerous novelty to many comrades *no further back than on the eve of our Second Congress*, when I was almost its only supporter on the staff of *Iskra*. This idea has now been practically realised – with greater or lesser success. Better late than never. But if you could hear, reader, what amazing arguments were brought out against this idea in the not-far-off time just mentioned, you would exclaim, like Faust: *Wie weh, wie weh, wie weh!*

[39] “This year,” we read in the *Supplement to Listok of N. V.* No.1 (1883, p.61), “there was a whole series of strikes which, thanks to the workers’ lack of organisation, were mostly failures!”

[40] [Note to the 1905 edition.] i.e., under a constitution.