

VI Lenin

What is to be done?

Burning Questions Of Our Movement

Preface

According to the author's original plan, the present pamphlet was to have been devoted to a detailed development of the ideas expressed in the article "Where To Begin" , (Iskra, No. 4, May 1901).[1] We must first apologise to the reader for the delay in fulfilling the promise made in that article (and repeated in response to many private inquiries and letters). One of the reasons for this delay was the attempt, undertaken in June of the past year (1901), to unite all the Social-Democratic organisations abroad. It was natural to wait for the results of this attempt, for, had the effort proved successful, it would perhaps have been necessary to expound Iskra's conceptions of organisation from a somewhat different approach; in any case, such a success promised to put an end very quickly to the existence of the two trends in the Russian Social-Democratic movement. As the reader knows, the attempt failed, and, as we propose to show, was bound to fail after the new swing, of Rabocheye Dyelo, in its issue No. 10, towards Economism. It was found to be absolutely essential to begin a determined struggle against this trend, diffuse and ill-defined, but for that reason the more persistent, the more capable of reasserting itself in diverse forms. Accordingly, the original plan of the pamphlet was altered and considerably enlarged.

Its main theme was to have been the three questions raised in the article "Where To Begin" - the character and main content of our political agitation; our organisational tasks; and the plan for building, simultaneously and from various sides, a militant, all-Russia organisation. These questions have long engaged the mind of the author, who tried to raise them in Rabochaya Gazeta[3] during one of the unsuccessful attempts to revive that paper (see Chapter V). But the original plan to confine the pamphlet to an analysis of only these three questions and to set forth our views as far as possible in a positive form, without, or almost without, entering into polemics, proved wholly impracticable, for two reasons. On the one hand, Economism proved to be much more tenacious than we

had supposed (we employ the term Economism in the broad sense, as explained in Iskra, No. 12 (December 1901), in the article entitled "A Talk With Defenders of Economism", which was a synopsis, so to speak, of the present pamphlet[2]). It became clear beyond doubt that the differences regarding the solution of the three questions mentioned were explainable to a far greater degree by the basic antithesis between the two trends in the Russian Social-Democratic movement than by differences over details. On the other hand, the perplexity of the Economists over the practical application of our views in Iskra clearly revealed that we often speak literally in different tongues and therefore cannot arrive at an understanding without beginning ab ovo, and that an attempt must be made, in the simplest possible style, illustrated by numerous and concrete examples, systematically to "clarify" all our basic points of difference with all the Economists. I resolved to make such an attempt at "clarification", fully realising that it would greatly increase the size of the pamphlet and delay its publication; I saw no other way of meeting my pledge I had made in the article "Where To Begin". Thus, to the apologies for the delay, I must add others for the serious literary shortcomings of the pamphlet. I had to work in great haste, with frequent interruptions by a variety of other tasks.

The examination of the above three questions still constitutes the main theme of this pamphlet, but I found it necessary to begin with two questions of a more general nature - why such an "innocent" and "natural" slogan as "freedom of criticism" should be for us a veritable war-cry, and why we cannot come to an understanding even on the fundamental question of the role of Social-Democrats in relation to the spontaneous mass movement. Further, the exposition of our views on the character and substance of political agitation developed into an explanation of the difference between trade-unionist politics and Social-Democratic politics, while the exposition of our views on organisational tasks developed into an explanation of the difference between the amateurish methods which satisfy the Economists,

and the organisation of revolutionaries which we hold to be indispensable. Further, I advance the "plan" for an all-Russia political newspaper with all the more insistence because the objections raised against it are untenable, and because no real answer has been given to the question I raised in the article "Where To Begin" as to how we can set to work from all sides simultaneously to create the organisation we need. Finally, in the concluding part, I hope to show that we did all we could to prevent a decisive break with the Economists, a break which nevertheless proved inevitable; that Rabocheye Dyelo acquired a special significance, a "historical" significance, if you will, because it expressed fully and

strikingly, not consistent Economism, but the confusion and vacillation which constitute the distinguishing feature of an entire period in the history of Russian Social-Democracy; and that therefore the polemic with Rabocheye Dyelo, which may upon first view seem excessively detailed, also acquires significance, for we can make no progress until we have completely put an end to this period.

N. Lenin

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Preface Notes

[1] See present volume [5], pp. 13–24.—Ed.

[2] See present volume [5], pp. 313–20.—Ed.

[3] Rabochaya Gazeta (Workers' Gazette)—an illegal newspaper issued by the Kiev group of Social-Democrats. Two issues appeared—No. 1 in August and No. 2 in December (dated November) 1897. The First Congress of the R.S.D.L.P. adopted Rabochaya Gazeta as the official organ of the Party, but the newspaper discontinued publication shortly after the Congress, as a result of a police raid on the printing-press and the arrest of the Central Committee.