

V. I. LENIN

WHAT IS TO BE DONE?



FOREIGN LANGUAGES PUBLISHING HOUSE

WORKERS OF ALL COUNTRIES, UNITE!

V. I. LENIN

WHAT IS TO BE DONE?

BURNING QUESTIONS
OF OUR MOVEMENT¹

FOREIGN LANGUAGES PUBLISHING HOUSE
M o s c o w

PUBLISHER'S NOTE

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CONTENTS

PREFACE	5
I. DOGMATISM AND "FREEDOM OF CRITICISM"	10
A. What Is "Freedom of Criticism"?	10
B. The New Advocates of "Freedom of Criticism"	16
C. Criticism in Russia	25
D. Engels on the Importance of the Theoretical Struggle	37
II. THE SPONTANEITY OF THE MASSES AND THE CONSCIOUSNESS OF THE SOCIAL-DEMOCRATS	47
A. The Beginning of the Spontaneous Upsurge	48
B. Bowing to Spontaneity. The <i>Rabochaya Mysl</i>	56
C. The Self-Emancipation Group and the <i>Rabocheye Dyelo</i>	72
III. TRADE-UNIONIST POLITICS AND SOCIAL-DEMOCRATIC POLITICS	90
A. Political Agitation and Its Restriction by the Economists	91
B. A Tale of How Martynov Rendered Plekhanov More Profound	108
C. Political Exposures and "Training in Revolutionary Activity"	115

D. What Is There in Common Between Economism and Terrorism?	125
E. The Working Class as Vanguard Fighter for Democracy	131
F. Again "Slanderers," Again "Mystifiers"	159
IV. THE AMATEURISHNESS OF THE ECONOMISTS AND AN ORGANIZATION OF REVOLUTIONARIES	165
A. What Is Amateurishness?	166
B. Amateurishness and Economism	172
C. Organization of Workers and Organization of Revolutionaries	184
D. The Scope of Organizational Work	211
E. A "Conspiratorial" Organization and "Democracy"	222
F. Local and All-Russian Work	237
V. THE "PLAN" FOR AN ALL-RUSSIAN POLITICAL NEWSPAPER	255
A. Who Was Offended by the Article "Where To Begin?"	256
B. Can a Newspaper Be a Collective Organizer?	266
C. What Type of Organization Do We Require?	285
CONCLUSION	297
A P P E N D I X:	
THE ATTEMPT TO UNITE THE "ISKRA" WITH THE "RABOCHEYE DYELO"	302
CORRECTION TO "WHAT IS TO BE DONE?"	315
NOTES	317

“... Party struggles lend a party strength and vitality; the greatest proof of the weakness of a party is diffuseness and the blurring of clearly defined boundaries; a party becomes strong by purging itself....”

(From a letter by Lassale to Marx, June 24, 1852.)

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*,² No. 4, May 1901).^{*} And we must first of all apologize to the reader for the delay in fulfilling the promise made in that article (and repeated in reply to many private inquiries and letters). One of the reasons for this delay was the attempt made last June (1901) to unite all the Social-Democratic organizations abroad. It was natural to wait for the results of this attempt, for if it were

^{*} V. I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, 4th Russ. ed., Vol. 5, pp. 1-12.—*Ed.*

successful it would perhaps have been necessary to expound the *Iskra's* views on organization from a somewhat different angle; and in any case, such a success promised to put a very early end to the existence of the two trends in the Russian Social-Democratic movement. As the reader knows, the attempt failed, and, as we shall try to show here, was bound to fail after the new swing of the *Rabocheye Dyelo*,³ in its issue No. 10, towards Economism. It proved absolutely essential to commence a determined fight against this diffuse and ill-defined, but very persistent trend, one capable of appearing again in diverse forms. Accordingly, the original plan of the pamphlet was altered and very considerably enlarged.

Its main theme was to have been the three questions raised in the article "Where To Begin?" —viz., the character and principal content of our political agitation, our organizational tasks; and the plan for building, simultaneously and from various ends, a militant, all-Russian organization. These questions have long engaged the mind of the author, who already tried to raise them in the *Rabochaya Gazeta*⁴ during one of the unsuccessful attempts to revive that paper (see Chap. V). But the original plan to confine this pamphlet to an analysis of only these three questions and to set forth our views as far as possible in a positive form, without en-

tering, or almost without entering, into polemics, proved quite impracticable for two reasons. One was that Economism proved to be much more tenacious than we had supposed (we employ the term Economism in the broad sense, as explained in the *Iskra*, No. 12 [December 1901], in an article entitled "A Conversation With the Advocates of Economism," which was a synopsis, so to speak, of the present pamphlet*). It became clear beyond doubt that the differences as to how these three questions should be answered were due much more to the fundamental antithesis between the two trends in the Russian Social-Democratic movement than to differences over details. The second reason was that the perplexity displayed by the Economists over the practical application of our views in the *Iskra* revealed quite clearly that we often speak literally different languages, that therefore we *cannot* come to any understanding without beginning ab ovo,** and that an attempt must be made, in the simplest possible style and illustrated by numerous and concrete examples, *systematically* to "*thrash out*" *all* our fundamental points of difference with *all* the Economists. I resolved to make such an attempt to "thrash

* V. I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, 4th Russ. ed., Vol. 5, pp. 287-93.—*Ed.*

** Ab ovo—from the very beginning.—*Tr.*

out" the differences, fully realizing that it would greatly increase the size of the pamphlet and delay its publication, but at the same time I saw *no other way* of fulfilling the promise I made in the article "Where To Begin?". Thus, in addition to apologizing for the delay, I must apologize for the numerous literary shortcomings of the pamphlet. I had to work in the *greatest of haste*, and was moreover frequently interrupted by other work.

The examination of the three questions mentioned above still constitutes the main theme of this pamphlet, but I found it necessary to begin with two questions of a more general nature, viz., why an "innocent" and "natural" slogan like "freedom of criticism" should be a real fighting challenge for us, 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 a trade-unionist policy and Social-Democratic policy, while the exposition of our views on organizational tasks developed into an explanation of the difference between the amateurish methods which satisfy the Economists, and an organization of revolutionaries which in our opinion is indispensable. Further, I advance the

“plan” for an all-Russian political newspaper with all the more insistence because of the flimsiness of the objections raised against it, 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 erect the organization we need. Finally, in the concluding part of this pamphlet, I hope to show that we did all we could to prevent a decisive rupture with the Economists, which nevertheless proved inevitable; that the *Rabocheye Dyelo* has acquired a special significance, a “historical” significance, if you will, because it most fully and most graphically expressed, not consistent Economism, but the confusion and vacillation which constitute the distinguishing feature of *a whole period* in the history of the Russian Social-Democratic movement; and that therefore the controversy with the *Rabocheye Dyelo*, which may at first sight seem to be waged in too excessive detail, also acquires significance, for we can make no progress until we finally put an end to this period.

N. Lenin

February 1902

I

DOGMATISM AND "FREEDOM OF CRITICISM"

A. WHAT IS "FREEDOM OF CRITICISM"?

"Freedom of criticism" is undoubtedly the most fashionable slogan at the present time, and the one most frequently employed in the controversies between the Socialists and democrats of all countries. At first sight, nothing would appear to be more strange than the solemn appeals by one of the parties to the dispute to freedom of criticism. Have voices been raised in the advanced parties against the constitutional law of the majority of European countries which guarantees freedom to science and scientific investigation? "Something must be wrong here," will be the comment of the onlooker, who has not yet fully grasped the essence of the disagreements among the disputants, but has heard this fashionable slogan repeated at every crossroad. "Evidently this slogan is one of the conventional phrases which, like a nickname, becomes legitimized by use, and becomes almost an appellative," he will conclude.

In fact, it is no secret that two trends have taken shape in the present-day international* Social-Democracy. The fight between these trends now flares up in a bright flame, and now dies down and smoulders under the ashes of imposing "truce resolutions." What this "new" trend, which adopts a "critical" attitude towards "obsolete dogmatic" Marxism, represents has with sufficient precision been *stated* by Bernstein, and *demonstrated* by Millerand.

Social-Democracy must change from a party of the social revolution into a democratic party of

* Incidentally, this perhaps is the only occasion in the history of modern Socialism in which controversies between various trends within the socialist movement have grown from national into international controversies; and this, in its own way, is extremely encouraging. Formerly, the disputes between the Lassalleans and the Eisenachers,⁵ between the Guesdites and the Possibilists,⁶ between the Fabians⁷ and the Social-Democrats, and between the Narodnaya Volya-ites⁸ and Social-Democrats, remained purely national disputes, reflected purely national features and proceeded, as it were, on different planes. At the present time (this is quite evident now), the English Fabians, the French Ministerialists, the German Bernsteinians and the Russian critics—all belong to the same family, all extol each other, learn from each other, and together come out against "dogmatic" Marxism. Perhaps in this first really international battle with socialist opportunism, international revolutionary Social-Democracy will become sufficiently strengthened to put an end to the political reaction that has long reigned in Europe?

social reforms. Bernstein has surrounded this political demand with a whole battery of symmetrically arranged "new" arguments and reasonings. The possibility of putting Socialism on a scientific basis and of proving from the point of view of the materialist conception of history that it is necessary and inevitable was denied, as was also the growing impoverishment, proletarianization and the intensification of capitalist contradictions. The very conception, "*ultimate aim*," was declared to be unsound, and the idea of the dictatorship of the proletariat was absolutely rejected. It was denied that there is any counterdistinction in principle between liberalism and Socialism. *The theory of the class struggle* was rejected on the grounds that it could not be applied to a strictly democratic society, governed according to the will of the majority, etc.

Thus, the demand for a resolute turn from revolutionary Social-Democracy to bourgeois social-reformism was accompanied by a no less resolute turn towards bourgeois criticism of all the fundamental ideas of Marxism. As this criticism of Marxism has been going on for a long time now, from the political platform, from university chairs, in numerous pamphlets and in a number of learned treatises, as the entire younger generation of the educated classes has been systematically trained for decades on this

criticism, it is not surprising that the "new, critical" trend in Social-Democracy should spring up, all complete, like Minerva from the head of Jupiter. The content of this new trend did not have to grow and take shape, it was transferred bodily from bourgeois literature to socialist literature.

To proceed. If Bernstein's theoretical criticism and political yearnings are still unclear to anyone, the French have taken the trouble graphically to demonstrate the "new method." In this instance, too, France has justified its old reputation of being the country in which "more than anywhere else, the historical class struggles were each time fought out to a decision...." (Engels, in his introduction to Marx's *The Eighteenth Brumaire*.⁹) The French Socialists have begun, not to theorize, but to act. The democratically more highly developed political conditions in France have permitted them to put "Bernsteinism into practice" immediately, with all its consequences. Millerand has provided an excellent example of practical Bernsteinism; not without reason did Bernstein and Vollmar rush so zealously to defend and praise him! Indeed, if Social-Democracy, in essence, is merely a party of reform, and must be bold enough to admit this openly, then not only has a Socialist the right to join a bourgeois cabinet, but must always strive to do so. If democracy, in essence,

means the abolition of class domination, then why should not a Socialist minister charm the whole bourgeois world by orations on class collaboration? Why should he not remain in the cabinet even after the shooting down of workers by gendarmes has exposed, for the hundredth and thousandth time, the real nature of the democratic collaboration of classes? Why should he not personally take part in greeting the tsar, for whom the French Socialists now have no other name than hero of the gallows, knout and exile (knouteur, pendeur et déportateur)? And the reward for this utter humiliation and self-degradation of Socialism in the face of the whole world, for the corruption of the socialist consciousness of the worker masses—the only basis that can guarantee our victory—the reward for this is pompous *plans* for niggardly reforms, so niggardly in fact that much more has been obtained from bourgeois governments!

He who does not deliberately close his eyes cannot fail to see that the new “critical” trend in Socialism is nothing more nor less than a new variety of *opportunism*. And if we judge people not by the brilliant uniforms they don, not by the high-sounding appellations they give themselves, but by their actions, and by what they actually advocate, it will be clear that “freedom of criticism” means freedom for an opportunistic trend in Social-Democracy, the

freedom to convert Social-Democracy into a democratic party of reform, the freedom to introduce bourgeois ideas and bourgeois elements into Socialism.

“Freedom” is a grand word, but under the banner of free trade the most predatory wars were conducted; under the banner of free labour, the toilers were robbed. The modern use of the term “freedom of criticism” contains the same inherent falsehood. Those who are really convinced that they have advanced science would demand, not freedom for the new views to continue side by side with the old, but the substitution of the new views for the old. The cry “Long live freedom of criticism,” that is heard today, too strongly calls to mind the fable of the empty barrel.

We are marching in a compact group along a precipitous and difficult path, firmly holding each other by the hand. We are surrounded on all sides by enemies, and we have to advance under their almost constant fire. We have combined voluntarily, precisely for the purpose of fighting the enemy, and not to retreat into the adjacent marsh, the inhabitants of which, from the very outset, have reproached us with having separated ourselves into an exclusive group and with having chosen the path of struggle instead of the path of conciliation. And now several among us begin to cry out: let us go into this

marsh! And when we begin to shame them, they retort: how conservative you are! Are you not ashamed to deny us the liberty to invite you to take a better road! Oh, yes, gentlemen! You are free not only to invite us, but to go yourselves wherever you will, even into the marsh. In fact, we think that the marsh is your proper place, and we are prepared to render *you* every assistance to get there. Only let go of our hands, don't clutch at us and don't besmirch the grand word "freedom," for we too are "free" to go where we please, free to fight not only against the marsh, but also against those who are turning towards the marsh!

B. THE NEW ADVOCATES OF "FREEDOM OF CRITICISM"

Now, this slogan ("freedom of criticism") has been solemnly advanced, very recently, in No. 10 of the *Rabocheye Dyelo*, the organ of the Union of Russian Social-Democrats Abroad,¹⁰ not as a theoretical postulate, but as a political demand, as a reply to the question: "is it possible to unite the Social-Democratic organizations operating abroad?"—"in order that unity may be durable, there must be freedom of criticism." (P. 36.)

From this statement two quite definite conclusions follow: 1) that the *Rabocheye Dyelo*