

The Party Crisis and Our Tasks

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It is no secret to anyone that our Party is passing through a severe crisis. The Party's loss of members, the shrinking and weakness of the organisations, the latter's isolation from one another, and the absence of co-ordinated Party work — all show that the Party is ailing, that it is passing through a grave crisis.

The first thing that is particularly depressing the Party is the isolation of its organisations from the broad masses.

At one time our organisations numbered thousands in their ranks and they led hundreds of thousands. At that time, the Party had firm roots among the masses. This is not the case now. Instead of thousands, tens and, at best, hundreds, have remained in the organisations. As regards leading hundreds of thousands, it is not worth speaking about. True, our Party exercises wide *ideological* influence among the masses; the masses know the Party, the masses respect it. That is what primarily distinguishes the "post-revolution" Party from the "pre-revolution" Party. But that is practically all that the Party's influence amounts to. And yet ideological influence alone is far from enough. The point is that the breadth of *ideological* influence is neutralised by the narrowness of *organisational* consolidation. That is the cause of our organisations' isolation from the broad masses. It is sufficient to point to St. Petersburg, where in 1907 we had about 8,000 members and where we can now scarcely muster 300 to 400, to appreciate at once the full gravity of the crisis. We shall not speak of Moscow, the Urals, Poland, the Donets Basin, etc., which are in a similar state.

But that is not all. The Party is suffering not only from isolation from the masses, but also from the fact that its organisations are not linked up with one another, are not living the same Party life, are divorced from one another. St. Petersburg does not know what is going on in the Caucasus, the Caucasus does not know what is going on in the Urals, etc.; each little corner lives its own separate life. Strictly speaking, we no longer have a single Party living the same common life that we all spoke of with such pride in the period from 1905 to 1907. We are working according to the most scandalously amateurish methods. The organs now published abroad — *Proletary* ¹ and *Golos* ² on the one hand, and *Sotsial-Demokrat* ³ on the other, do not and cannot link up the organisations scattered over Russia, and cannot endow them with a single Party life. Indeed, it would be strange to think that organs published abroad, far removed from Russian reality, can co-ordinate the work of the Party, which has long passed the study-circle stage. True, the isolated organisations have much in common which links them together *ideologically* — they have a common programme, which has stood the test of revolution; they have common practical principles, which have been approved by the revolution, and glorious revolutionary traditions. This is the second important distinction between the "post-revolution" Party and the "pre-revolution" Party. But this is not enough. The point is that the *ideological* unity of the Party organisations does not by a long way save the Party from their want of organisational cohesion and isolation from one another. It is sufficient to point out that not even information by correspondence is kept at anything like a desirable level in the Party. How much more so is this the case as regards linking up the Party in a single organism.

Thus : 1) The Party's isolation from the broad masses, and 2) the isolation of its organisations from one another —that is the essence of the crisis the Party is passing through.

It is not difficult to understand that the cause of all this is the crisis in the revolution itself, the temporary triumph of the counter-revolution, the lull after the various actions, and lastly, the loss of all those semi-liberties which the Party enjoyed during 1905 and 1906. The Party developed, expanded and grew strong while the revolution was progressing, while liberties existed. The revolution retreated, the liberties vanished — and the Party began to ail, the intellectuals began to desert the Party, and later these were followed by the most vacillating of the workers. In particular, the desertion of the intellectuals was accelerated by the ideological growth of the Party, or rather of the advanced workers, who with their complex requirements have outgrown the meagre mental stock-in-trade of the "intellectuals of 1905."

It by no means follows from this, of course, that the Party must vegetate in this state of crisis until future liberties are ushered in, as some people mistakenly think. In the first place, the ushering in of these liberties depends largely upon whether the Party will emerge from the crisis healthy and renovated; liberties do not fall from the skies, they are won thanks, among other things, to the existence of a well-organised workers' Party. Secondly, the universally known laws of the class struggle tell us that the steadily growing organisation of the bourgeoisie must inevitably result in a corresponding organisation of the proletariat. And everybody knows that the renovation of our Party, as the only workers' party, is a necessary preliminary condition for the growth of the organisation of our proletariat as a class.

Consequently, our Party's recovery before liberties are ushered in, its release from the crisis, is not only possible but inevitable.

The whole point is to find ways of bringing about the recovery of the Party, to find means by which the Party 1) will link up with the masses, and 2) unite the organisations now isolated from one another in a single organism.

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And so, how can our Party extricate itself from the crisis; what must be done to achieve this?

Make the Party as legal as possible and unite it around the legal group in the Duma, some say to us. But how can it be made as legal as possible when the most innocuous legal institutions, such as cultural societies, etc., are suffering severe persecution? Can it be done by abandoning its revolutionary demands? But that would mean burying the Party, not renovating it! Moreover, how can the group in the Duma link the Party with the masses when it is itself isolated not only from the masses, but also from the Party organisations?

Clearly, such a solution of the problem serves only to confuse it further and to make it difficult for the Party to extricate itself from the crisis.

Transfer as large a part of the Party functions as possible to the workers themselves and thereby rid the Party of the inconstant intellectual elements, others tell us. There can be no doubt that ridding the Party of useless guests and concentrating functions in the hands of the workers themselves would contribute a great deal to the renovation of the Party. But it is no less clear that the mere "transfer of functions" under the old system of organisation, with the old methods of Party work, and with "leadership" from abroad, cannot link the Party up with the masses and weld it into a single whole.

Obviously, half-measures cannot achieve much— we must seek radical means for a radical cure of the ailing Party.

The Party is suffering primarily from its isolation from the masses; it must be linked up with the masses at all costs. But this can be done under our present conditions primarily and mainly on the basis of those questions which are particularly exciting the broad masses. Take, for example, the impoverishment of the masses and the offensive launched by capital. Huge lockouts swept over the workers like a hurricane, and the cutting down of production, arbitrary dismissals, reduction of wages, lengthening of the working day and the capitalist offensive

in general are continuing to this day. It can hardly be realised what suffering all this is causing among the workers, how intently it is making them think, what a host of "misunderstandings" and conflicts arise between the workers and the employers, what a mass of interesting questions are arising in the minds of the workers on this basis. Let our organisations, in addition to conducting general political work, constantly intervene in all these minor conflicts, let them link these up with the great class struggle and, backing the masses in their daily protests and demands, demonstrate the great principles of our Party by means of living facts. It should be clear to everybody that only in this way will it be possible to stir the masses who have been "forced to the wall," only in this way will it be possible to "shift" them past the accursed dead point. And "shifting" them past this dead point means precisely — rallying them around our organisations.

The Party committees in the factories and works are the Party organs which could most successfully develop such activities among the masses. The advanced workers in the factory and works committees are the living people who could rally to the Party the masses who are around them. All that is needed is that the factory and works committees should constantly intervene in all the affairs of the workers' struggle, champion their daily interests and link up the latter with the fundamental interests of the proletarian class. To make the factory and works committees the principal bastions of the Party — such is the task.

Further, in pursuit of the same object of drawing closer to the masses, the structure of the other, higher, Party organisations must be adapted to the task of defending not only the political but also the economic interests of the masses. Not a single branch of industry of any importance must escape the attention of the organisation. To achieve this, in building up the organisation the territorial principle must be supplemented by the industrial principle, i.e., the factory and works committees in the various branches of industry must be grouped in sub-districts according to industry, and these sub-districts must be linked up territorially in districts, etc. It will not matter if this increases the number of sub-districts—the organisation will gain a firmer and more stable foundation, and it will become more closely linked with the masses.

Of still greater importance for overcoming the crisis is the composition of the Party organisations. The most experienced and influential of the advanced workers must find a place in all the local organisations, the affairs of the organisations must be concentrated in their strong hands, and it is they who must occupy the most important posts in the organisations, from practical and organisational posts to literary posts. It will not matter if the workers who occupy important posts are found to lack sufficient experience and training and even stumble at first—practice and the advice of more experienced comrades will widen their outlook and in the end train them to become real writers and leaders of the movement. It must not be forgotten that Bebels do not drop from the skies, they are trained only in the course of work, by practice, and our movement now needs Russian Bebels, experienced and mature leaders from the ranks of the workers, more than ever before.

That is why our organisational slogan must be: "Widen the road for the advanced workers in all spheres of Party activity," "give them more scope!"

It goes without saying that in addition to the will to lead and initiative in leadership, the advanced workers must possess considerable knowledge. We have few workers who possess knowledge. But it is just here that the assistance of experienced and active intellectuals will be of use. Arrangements must be made for higher circles, "discussion groups" for advanced workers, at least one in every district, at which they will systematically "go through" the theory and practice of Marxism. All this would to a very large extent fill the gaps in the knowledge of the advanced workers and help them to become lecturers and ideological leaders in the future. At the same time, the advanced workers must more often deliver lectures at their works and factories to "get the utmost practice," even at the risk of "making a mess of it" in the opinion of their audience. They must once and for all cast aside excessive modesty and stage fright, and arm themselves with audacity, confidence in their own strength. It will not matter if they make mistakes at first; they will stumble once or twice, and then learn to walk independently like "Christ walking on the water."

In short, 1) intensified agitation around daily needs linked with the general class needs of the proletariat, 2) organisation and consolidation of the committees in the factories and works as the Party's most important district centres, 3) the "transfer" of the most important Party functions to the advanced workers and 4) the organisation

of "discussion groups" for the advanced workers—such are the means by which our organisations will be able to rally the broad masses around themselves.

One cannot help observing that life itself is pointing out this path to the overcoming of the Party crisis. The Central region and the Urals have been doing without intellectuals for a long time; there the workers themselves are conducting the affairs of the organisations. In Sormovo, Lugansk (Donets Basin) and Nikolayev, the workers in 1908 published leaflets and in Nikolayev, in addition to leaflets, they published an illegal organ. In Baku the organisation has systematically intervened in all the affairs of the workers' struggle and has missed scarcely a single conflict between the workers and the oil owners, while, of course, at the same time conducting general political agitation. Incidentally, this explains why the Baku organisation has maintained contact with the masses to this day.

Such is the situation as regards the methods of linking the Party with the broad masses of the workers.

But the Party suffers not only from isolation from the masses. It also suffers from the isolation of its organisations from one another.

Let us pass to this last question.

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And so, how can the isolated local organisations be linked up with one another, how can they be linked up in a single well-knit Party, living a common life?

One might think that the general Party conferences that are sometimes arranged would solve the problem, would unite the organisations; or that *Proletary*, *Golos* and *Sotsial-Demokrat*, which are published abroad, would, in the long run, rally and unite the Party. There can be no doubt that both the first and the second are of no little importance in linking up the organisations. At any rate, the conferences and the organs that are published abroad have been until now the only means of linking up the isolated organisations. But in the first place, conferences, arranged very rarely at that, can link up the organisations only for a time and, therefore, not as durably as is required in general: in the intervals between conferences the connections are broken and the old amateurish methods continue as before. Secondly, as regards the organs that are published abroad, apart from the fact that they reach Russia in extremely limited quantities, they naturally lag behind the course of Party life in Russia, are unable to note in time and comment on the questions that excite the workers and, therefore, cannot link our local organisations together by permanent ties. The facts show that since the London Congress, the Party has succeeded in organising two conferences ⁴ and in printing scores of issues of the organs published abroad; and yet the work of uniting our organisations in a genuine Party, the work of overcoming the crisis, has made scarcely any headway.

Hence, conferences and organs published abroad, while extremely important for uniting the Party, are, nevertheless, inadequate for overcoming the crisis, for permanently uniting the local organisations.

Evidently, a radical measure is needed.

The only radical measure can be the publication of an all-Russian newspaper, a newspaper that will serve as the centre of Party activity and be published in Russia.

It will be possible to unite the organisations scattered over Russia only on the basis of common Party activity. But common Party activity will be impossible unless the experience of the local organisations is collected at a common centre from which the generalised Party experience can later be distributed to all the local organisations. An all-Russian newspaper could serve as this centre, a centre that would guide, co-ordinate and direct Party activity. But in order that it might really guide the Party's activity it must receive from the localities a constant stream of inquiries, statements, letters, information, complaints, protests, plans of work, questions which excite the masses, etc.; the closest and most durable ties must link the newspaper with the localities; acquiring in this way adequate material, the newspaper must note in time, comment on and elucidate the

necessary questions, distil from this material the necessary directions and slogans and bring them to the knowledge of the entire Party, of all its organisations. . . .

If these conditions do not exist there can be no leadership in Party work, and if there is no leadership in Party work the organisations cannot be permanently linked up in a single whole!

That is why we emphasise the necessity of precisely an all-Russian newspaper (and not one published abroad), and precisely a leading newspaper (and not simply a popular one).

Needless to say, the only institution that can undertake to launch and run such a newspaper is the Central Committee of the Party. Even apart from this it is the duty of the Central Committee to guide Party work; but at the present time it is performing this duty unsatisfactorily and, as a result, the local organisations are almost completely divorced from one another. And yet, a well-run all-Russian newspaper could serve as a most effective instrument in the hands of the Central Committee for effectively uniting the Party and guiding Party activity. More than that, we assert that only in this way can the Central Committee be transformed from a fictitious centre into a real, all-Party centre, which will really link up the Party, and really set the tone of its activity. In view of this, the organisation and running of an all-Russian newspaper is the direct task of the Central Committee.

Thus, an all-Russian newspaper as an organ that will unite and rally the Party around the Central Committee—such is the task, such is the way of overcoming the crisis through which the Party is passing.

Let us sum up all that has been said above. Owing to the crisis in the revolution, a crisis has developed in the Party—the organisations have lost permanent contact with the masses, the Party has been broken up into separate organisations.

Our organisations must be linked up with the broad masses—this is a local task.

The above-mentioned organisations must be linked up with one another, around the Central Committee of the Party—this is a central task.

To carry out the local task, in addition to general political agitation, economic agitation must be conducted around the acute daily needs of the workers; there must be systematic intervention in the workers' struggle;

factory and works Party committees must be formed and consolidated; as many of Party functions as possible must be concentrated in the hands of the advanced workers; "discussion groups" must be organised for the advanced workers for the purpose of training mature workers' leaders equipped with knowledge.

To carry out the central task we must have an all-Russian newspaper that will link the local organisations with the Central Committee of the Party and unite them in a single whole.

Only if these tasks are carried out will the Party be able to emerge from the crisis healthy and renovated; only by fulfilling these conditions can the Party undertake the responsible role of worthy vanguard of the heroic Russian proletariat.

Such are the ways of overcoming the Party crisis.

Needless to say, the more fully the Party utilises the legal possibilities around it—from the floor of the Duma and the trade unions to co-operative societies and burial funds—the sooner will the task of overcoming the crisis, the task of the renovation and recovery of the Russian Social-Democratic Labour Party, be carried out.

Notes

1. *Proletary (The Proletarian)* — an illegal newspaper founded by the Bolsheviks after the Fourth ("Unity") Congress of the Party. It appeared from August 21 (September 3), 1906 to November 28 (December 11), 1909. Altogether 50 numbers were issued— the first 20 in Finland, and the rest in Geneva and Paris. Actually Proletary was the central organ of the Bolsheviks and was edited by V. I. Lenin. During the Stolypin reaction the paper played a leading role in preserving and strengthening the Bolshevik organisations.

2. *Golos Sotsial-Demokrata (The Voice of the Social-Democrat)* — the organ of the Menshevik Liquidators, published abroad from February 1908 to December 1911. The editorial board consisted of G. V. Plekhanov, P. B. Axelrod, Y. O. Martov, F. I. Dan and A. S. Martynov. In view of the paper's pronouncedly liquidationist trend, Plekhanov ceased contributing to it in December 1908 and subsequently formally resigned from the editorial board. In spite of the decision adopted by the Plenum of the Central Committee of the R.S.D.L.P. in January 1910 that the paper should cease publication, the Mensheviks continued to issue it, openly advocating Liquidationism in its columns.

3. *Sotsial-Demokrat (The Social-Democrat)* — the Central Organ of the R.S.D.L.P., published from February 1908 to January 1917. The first issue was published in Russia, but after that the paper was published abroad, first in Paris and then in Geneva. In conformity with the decision of the Central Committee of the R.S.D.L.P., the editorial board of the Central Organ was constituted of representatives of the Bolsheviks, Mensheviks and Polish Social-Democrats. The paper published leading articles by V. I. Lenin. On the editorial board of the paper Lenin fought for a consistent Bolshevik line. A section of the editorial board (Kamenev and Zinoviev) took up a conciliatory attitude towards the Liquidators and tried to thwart Lenin's policy. The Mensheviks Martov and Dan sabotaged the work of the editorial board of the Central Organ and at the same time openly defended Liquidationism in the columns of *Golos Sotsial-Demokrata*. Lenin's uncompromising struggle against the Liquidators led to the resignation of Martov and Dan from the editorial board of *Sotsial-Demokrat* in June 1911. Beginning with December 1911 the paper was edited by V. I. Lenin. It published a number of articles by J. V. Stalin which are reproduced in the present volume. The *Sotsial-Demokrat* systematically published information on the work of the local Party organisations in Russia, including those in Transcaucasia.

4. The Third Conference of the R.S.D.L.P. (the "Second All-Russian Conference") was held on July 21-23, 1907, and the Fourth Conference of the R.S.D.L.P. (the "Third All-Russian Conference") was held on November 5-12, 1907.