

More About a Conference with Guarantees

February 3, 1908

Source : *Works*, Vol. 2, 1907 - 1913

Publisher : Foreign Languages Publishing House, Moscow, 1954

Transcription/Markup : Salil Sen for MIA, 2008

Public Domain : Marxists Internet Archive (2008). You may freely copy, distribute, display and perform this work; as well as make derivative and commercial works. Please credit "Marxists Internet Archive" as your source.

The conference campaign is at its height. The election of delegates is drawing to a close. The Delegate Council will meet in the near future. Is there to be a conference or not? With what guarantees (conditions) is a conference desirable? How are these guarantees to be understood? Such, primarily, are the questions with which the Delegate Council will deal.

What should be our line of conduct on the Delegate Council?

We repeat that conferences with the oil owners are not a novelty for us. We had a conference in 1905. We had a second in 1906. What did we get out of these conferences? What did they teach us? Was it worth while holding them?

At that time, and again quite recently, we were told that conferences *by themselves*, without any conditions, unite the masses. The facts, however, have shown that neither of the two past conferences united the masses, nor could they do so — only elections were held, and with this all the "uniting" ended.

Why?

Because in organising the past conferences there was not even a hint of any kind of *freedom of speech and assembly*, it was impossible to assemble the masses at the works—in the oil fields—and in their living quarters, to draw up instructions on each point, and generally to intervene actively in all the affairs of the conference. Consequently, the masses were obliged to remain idle; only the representatives were active, far away from the masses of the workers. But we have known for a long time that the masses can be organised only during action. .

..

Further—because there was no *Delegate Council* acting freely as a permanent organ of the workers all the time the conference was in session, uniting around itself the workers in all firms and districts, drawing up the demands of these workers, and controlling the workers' representatives on the basis of these demands. The oil owners would not permit the formation of such a Delegate Council, while the initiators of the conference meekly resigned themselves to this.

This is quite apart from the fact that at that time there were no such centres of the movement as the *trade unions*, which could rally the Delegate Council around themselves and direct it along the path of the class struggle. . . .

At one time we were told that a conference, even by *itself*, could satisfy the demands of the workers. But the experience of the first two conferences has refuted this assumption too, for when our representatives at the first conference began to talk about the workers' demands, the oil owners interrupted them and said that "this is not on the agenda of the conference," that the function of the conference was to discuss the "supply of liquid fuel for

industry," and not demands of any kind. When our representatives at the second conference demanded that representatives of the unemployed also be allowed to take part, the oil owners again interrupted them and said that they had no authority to deal with demands of that kind. With that our representatives were thrown out by the scruff of the neck. And when some of the comrades raised the question of backing our representatives by means of a general struggle—it turned out that such a struggle was impossible because the capitalists had arranged both conferences in the slack season favourable for themselves, in the winter, when navigation on the Volga was closed, when the price of oil products was dropping and, consequently, when it was quite senseless even to think of a victory for the workers.

That is how "worth while" the two previous conferences were.

Clearly, a conference *by itself*, a conference without a free Delegate Council, a conference without the participation and guidance of the unions, and moreover one called in the winter—in short, *a conference without guarantees* — is merely an empty sound. Far from uniting the workers and facilitating the achievement of our demands, such a conference can only disorganise the workers and put off the satisfaction of our demands, for it feeds the workers on empty promises, while giving them nothing.

That is what the two preceding conferences have taught us.

That is why the class-conscious proletariat boycotted the third conference in November 1907.

Let this be remembered by those individual comrades in the mechanics' union who are agitating for a conference *without guarantees*, in spite of the entire experience of the previous conferences, in spite of the will of the majority of the proletariat in the oil industry, *and, lastly, in spite of the agreement reached between the unions!*

Let them remember this and not violate this agreement.

But does this mean that we must wave aside all conferences?

No, it does not!

To the remarks of the boycottist Socialist-Revolutionaries that we must not go to the conference because our enemy, the bourgeoisie, is inviting us to it, we can answer only with a laugh. After all it is the same enemy, the bourgeoisie, who invites us to go to work in the factories, at the works, or in the oil fields. Should we therefore boycott the factories, works or oil fields only because our enemy, the bourgeoisie, invites us to them? If we did, we might all die of starvation! If that argument were sound, it would mean that all the workers have taken leave of their senses by going to work on the invitation of the bourgeoisie!

As for the statement made by the Dashnaksakans that we must not go to the conference because it is a bourgeois institution—we need not pay any attention whatever to this absurd statement. After all, present-day social life is also a bourgeois "institution," the factories, works and oil fields are all bourgeois "institutions," organised "in the image and likeness of" the bourgeoisie, and for the benefit of the bourgeoisie. Shall we boycott all these merely because they are bourgeois? If so, where shall we migrate to, to Mars, Jupiter, or perhaps to the castles in the air built by the Dash-naktsakans and Socialist-Revolutionaries? . . . ¹

No, comrades! We must not turn our backs on the positions of the bourgeoisie, we must face and storm them! We must not leave the bourgeoisie in possession of their positions, we must capture them, step by step, and eject the bourgeoisie from them! Only those who live in castles in the air can fail to understand this simple truth!

We shall not go to the conference if we do not receive in advance the guarantees we demand. But if we obtain the guarantees we demand, we shall go to the conference in order, by relying on these guarantees, to transform the conference from a begging instrument into a weapon in the further struggle, in the same way as we go to work, after certain necessary conditions are satisfied, in order to transform the factories, works and oil fields from an arena of oppression into an arena of emancipation.

By organising a conference with guarantees won by the workers, and by calling upon the mass of fifty thousand workers to elect a Delegate Council and to draw up our demands, we shall lead the working-class movement in Baku on to a new road of struggle advantageous to it, on to the road of an organised and class-conscious and not of a spontaneous (disunited) and beshkesh movement.

That, properly speaking, is what we expect from a conference with guarantees; that is why we say : *a conference with guarantees, or no conference at all!* ²

Let the gentlemen who supported the old type of conference agitate against guarantees; let them extol conferences without guarantees; let them flounder in the Zubatov marsh—the proletariat will drag them out of the marsh and teach them to walk through the wide fields of the class struggle!

Let Messrs. the Dashnaktsakans and Socialist-Revolutionaries "soar"; let them boycott the organised action of the workers from their lofty heights. The class-conscious proletariat will pull them down to this sinful earth and compel them to bow their heads before a conference with guarantees!

Our object is clear: to gather the proletariat around the Delegate Council and to rally the latter around the unions for the achievement of our common demands, for the improvement of our conditions of life.

Our road is clear: from a conference with guarantees to the satisfaction of the vital needs of the proletariat in the oil industry.

In due time we shall call upon the Delegate Council to fight both the marsh-dweller supporters of a conference and the fairy-tale fantasies of the Socialist-Revolutionary and Dashnak boycottists.

A conference with certain guarantees, or a conference is unnecessary!

Gudok, No. 17, February 3, 1908

Notes

¹. That the boycottist stand taken by Messrs. the Dashnaktsakans and Socialist-Revolutionaries is utterly inconsistent and unrealistic is proved by the very fact that they themselves are favourably inclined towards a conference between the typographical workers and their employers, and towards a collective agreement between them. Furthermore, individual members of these parties are even permitted to take a hand in this matter.

². In November 1907 the Baku Bolsheviks headed by J. V. Stalin issued the slogan: "A conference with guarantees, or no conference at all." The terms on which the workers agreed to participate in the conference were the following: active participation in the conference campaign by the trade unions, the wide discussion of demands by the workers, freedom to convene the future Delegate Council, the date of the conference to be chosen by the workers. An extensive campaign was instituted in the Baku oil fields and works for the election of the Delegate Council which was finally to adopt the terms on which the workers were to participate in the conference and elect representatives to the organisation commission which was to convene the conference. These delegates were elected at open meetings. The majority of the workers voted for the line proposed by the Bolsheviks. The Dashnaks and Socialist-Revolutionaries, who advocated a boycott of the conference, and the Mensheviks, who were in favour of a conference without any guarantees, found no support among the masses.
