

Vladimir Lenin: Life & Legacy

Volume 1: 1870-1905

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Dedicated to the heroic people who built the first socialist state, defeated Nazi Germany, and to whom the whole world owes an immeasurable debt.

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Prologue

If there's one communist who stands equal to Karl Marx in terms of influence and theoretical impact, it is Vladimir Ilyich Ulyanov. The Russian revolutionary leader is iconic in every way and in practically all parts of the world. From murals in the global south to parodies like *The Simpsons*, he's synonymous with communism as much as Marx. Hungarian Marxist historian and philosopher, Georg Lukács, remarked in his book *Lenin: A Study on the Unity of his Thought*:

“Historical materialism is the theory of the proletarian revolution. It is so because its essence is an intellectual synthesis of the social existence which produces and fundamentally determines the proletariat; and because the proletariat straggling for liberation finds its clear self-consciousness in it. The stature of a proletarian thinker, of a representative of historical materialism, can therefore be measured by the depth and breadth of his grasp of this and the problems arising from it; by the extent to which he is able accurately to detect beneath the appearances of bourgeois society those tendencies towards proletarian revolution which work themselves in and through it to their effective being and distinct consciousness...Like Marx, Lenin never generalized from parochially Russian experiences limited in time and space. He did however, with the perception of genius, immediately recognize the fundamental problem of our time – the approaching revolution – at the time and place of its first appearance. From then on he understood and explained all events, Russian as well as international, from this perspective -from the perspective of the actuality of the revolution. The actuality of the

revolution: this is the core of Lenin's thought and his decisive link with Marx. For historical materialism as the conceptual expression of the proletariat's struggle for liberation could only be conceived and formulated theoretically when revolution was already on the historical agenda as a practical reality; when, in the misery of the proletariat, in Marx's words, was to be seen not only the misery itself but also the revolutionary element 'which will bring down the old order'...The theory of historical materialism therefore presupposes the universal actuality of the proletarian revolution. In this sense, as both the objective basis of the whole epoch and the key to an understanding of it, the proletarian revolution constitutes the living core of Marxism...Lenin re-established the purity of Marxist theory on this issue. But it was also precisely here that he conceived it more clearly and more concretely. Not that he in any way tried to improve on Marx. He merely incorporated into the theory the further development of the historical process since Marx's death. This means that the actuality of the proletarian revolution is no longer only a world historical horizon arching above the self-liberating working class, but that revolution is already on its agenda."

Before detailing the first part of his life, from the period of his birth to the end of the failed 1905 Russian Revolution, I want to quote Lenin at length from this era of his life—a particular quote that encapsulates his theoretical contribution during that time. In 1897, while in exile from Tsarist Russia, he wrote in *The Tasks of the Russian Social-Democrats*:

"The attitude of the working class, as a fighter against the autocracy, towards all the other social classes and groups in the political opposition is

very precisely determined by the basic principles of Social-Democracy expounded in the famous Communist Manifesto. The Social-Democrats support the progressive social classes against the reactionary classes, the bourgeoisie against the representatives of privileged landowning estate and the bureaucracy, the big bourgeoisie against the reactionary strivings of the petty bourgeoisie. This support does not presuppose, nor does it call for, any compromise with non-Social-Democratic programmes and principles—it is support given to an ally against a particular enemy. Moreover, the Social-Democrats render this support in order to expedite the fall of the common enemy, but expect nothing for themselves from these temporary allies, and concede nothing to them.

The Social-Democrats support every revolutionary movement against the present social system, they support all oppressed nationalities, persecuted religions, downtrodden social estates, etc., in their fight for equal rights...

“The proletariat alone can be—and because of its class position must be—a consistently democratic, determined enemy of absolutism, incapable of making any concessions or compromises. The proletariat alone can be the vanguard fighter for political liberty and for democratic institutions... That is why the merging of the democratic activities of the working class with the democratic aspirations of other classes and groups would weaken the democratic movement, would weaken the political struggle, would make it less determined, less consistent, more likely to compromise. On the other hand, if the working class stands out as the vanguard fighter for democratic institutions, this will strength the democratic movement, will strengthen the struggle for political liberty, because the working

class will spur on all the other democratic and political opposition elements, will push the liberals towards the political radicals, will push the radicals towards an irrevocable rupture with the whole of the political and social structure of present society...”

“Even in England we see that powerful social groups support the privileged position of the bureaucracy and hinder the complete democratisation of that institution. Why? Because it is in the interests of the proletariat alone to democratise it completely ; the most progressive strata of the bourgeoisie defend certain prerogatives of the bureaucracy and are opposed to the election of all officials, opposed to the complete abolition of electoral qualifications, opposed to making officials directly responsible to the people, etc., because these strata realise that the proletariat will take advantage of such complete democratisation in order to use it against the bourgeoisie. This is the case in Russia, too. Many and most diverse strata of the Russian people are opposed to the omnipotent, irresponsible, corrupt, savage, ignorant and parasitic Russian bureaucracy. But except for the proletariat, not one of these strata would agree to the complete democratisation of the bureaucracy, because all these strata (bourgeoisie, petty bourgeoisie, the “intelligentsia” in general) have some ties with the bureaucracy, because all these strata are kith and kin of the Russian bureaucracy.”

Volume 1 will cover the transformation of both Lenin and the Russian Communist movement into a viable force. His theoretical contributions on party organizing, peasant-worker alliance, and his attempts to lead the new political

movement through dogmatic and vulgar Marxist interpretations are featured heavily in this volume. Volume 2 will address the in-between years from the 1905 Revolution to the beginning of the February Revolution in 1917, with a focus on Lenin's contributions to the national question and theory of imperialism during World War 1. Volume 3 will cover the Russian Revolution to the end of his life.

Chapter 1: Tsarism & the Birth of a Revolutionary

It's been 100 years since the world lost the revolutionary titan Vladimir Ilyich Ulyanov, more commonly known as Vladimir Lenin. There have been mountains of books, articles, documentaries, and discourse surrounding his legacy, but what's the real story of his life? What did Lenin think, feel, and do in his life that cemented him as a cornerstone of socialist and communist thought? Lenin is a unifying figure among most of the communist schools—Marxist-Leninists, Trotskyists, Maoists, and more all uphold Lenin. Over a billion people around the world, especially in the global south, uphold his legacy, and millions of capitalists in the imperial core still treat his specter as a boogeyman.

Lenin was born on April 22, 1870, in Simbirsk, now named Ulyanovsk in his honor, in the Russian Empire. Tsarist Russia remained a semi-feudalist society despite the liberation of Russian serfs in 1861. The economic collapse after the defeat in the Crimean War in 1853-6 led to some liberalization of the colonial empire or "prison of nations" as Joseph Stalin called it. *"The numerous non-Russian nationalities were entirely devoid of rights and were subjected to constant insult and humiliation of every kind. The tsarist government taught the Russian population to look down upon the native peoples of the national regions as an inferior race, officially referred to them as **inorodtsi** (aliens)...The tsarist government deliberately fanned national discord, instigated one nation against another, engineered Jewish pogroms and, in Transcaucasia, incited*

Tatars and Armenians to massacre each other,” continued Stalin. The backward economy was seen as a barrier to success in modern wars. Russia’s lack of industrialization and capital was a significant issue for the ruling aristocratic class as the age of modern capitalist imperialism was approaching. The overwhelming majority of the population were peasants, and the tradition under the feudal system was that peasants—serfs—were “not very different from slaves,” writes Walter Rodney. They are tied to small plots of land while paying rent to the local lord. So while a lord couldn’t sell and buy serfs directly, they could buy or sell the land that the serfs were tied to.

Under the Corvée System as Lenin said, *“the entire land of a given unit of agrarian economy, i.e., of a given estate, was divided into the lord’s and the peasants’ land; the latter was distributed in allotments among the peasants, who (receiving other means of production in addition, as for example, timber, sometimes cattle, etc.) cultivated it with their own labor and their own implements, and obtained their livelihood from it...The feudal estate had to constitute a self-sufficing, self-contained entity, in very slight contact with the outside world. The production of grain by the landlords for sale, which developed particularly in the latter period of the existence of serfdom, was already a harbinger of the collapse of the old regime. Secondly, such an economy required that the direct producer be allotted the means of production in general, and land in particular; moreover, that he be tied to the land, since otherwise the landlord was not assured of hands. Hence, the methods of obtaining the surplus product under Corvée and under a capitalist economy are diametrically opposite: the former is based on the producer being provided with land, the latter on the*

producer being dispossessed of the land.” After the abolition of serfdom, the aristocratic and slowly growing bourgeois classes now owned half of all the land in Russia. The peasants in effect owned less land after the abolition of serfdom, and between 1861 and 1905 the average size of the peasants' holdings diminished by one-third.

During this period of primitive accumulation, a growing number of peasants became landless and subject to proletarianization—even in agrarian circumstances. For their respective allotments of land, peasants had to pay a “redemption” charge to the government that was, offensively, named the same as the commutation fee for them under serfdom. As Lenin wrote in *The Development of Capitalism in Russia*, “*Thus one cannot conceive of capitalism without an increase in the commercial and industrial population at the expense of the agricultural population, and everybody knows that this phenomenon is revealed in the most clear-cut fashion in all capitalist countries.*” The stain of feudalism and serfdom were thus not erased in this liberalizing period.

Because of the ruling classes' seizure of land, overpopulation in the rural areas became an issue. It was estimated by the time of the 1917 revolution that the rural areas were overpopulated by 20 million inhabitants. This atmosphere, similar to other cases of primitive rural accumulation, leads to greater urbanization. Also, starting in 1886 landlords and employers could fire workers without notice for any cause including “rudeness.” Lenin commented on this urbanization and proletarianization of the rural peasants; “*It was seen that the peasantry have been splitting up at enormous speed into a numerically small but economically strong rural bourgeoisie and a rural proletariat.*” From 1865-1890 the number of workers in large factories,

mills, and railways increased from 706,000 to 1,433,000—the working class more than doubled.

Even though there was a growing capitalist class in Tsarist Russia during the late 19th century, the increase in capital was almost entirely financed and owned by foreign capital. British, French, German, and US capitalists—whom Walter Rodney said had a “colonial relationship” with Russia—were the primary investors and owners of the emerging industrial sectors. The big power stations, railways, oil, and 90% of the mining industries were owned by the foreign bourgeoisie. The Tsarist Empire could also be called the first “genuine” police state in history. It was a volatile and changing class dynamic that the young Lenin grew up within.

He was born to two educated and enlightened parents. His father was a former teacher and Inspector of Elementary Schools, and it was common for the Ulyanov family to have “French Days” for example, where every member of the family had to speak that language. There was a certain level of status the family had for a period of time. But even in those days, the work his father did with native ethnic groups in regard to education was revolutionary and counterintuitive to a family of that status. As Maria Prilezhayeva wrote in her biography of Lenin, he would have several early encounters with class struggle, and the insightful and inquisitive minds of his father and older brother Alexandr Ulyanov, or “Sasha” as he was affectionately called, pushed the young child Lenin to be critical of the oppressive and exploitive world around him.

In early January 1886, Lenin’s father suddenly passed away in their home with Lenin present. This was devastating enough, but tragically, horrible events kept happening in his young life. The following year, in 1887, Lenin was told at

school to go home immediately to his mother for urgent news. When he arrived home, his mother was waiting for him, pale as snow. The letter in her hand was from St. Petersburg. It detailed the news that his older brother, whom he had looked up to his whole life, Sasha, had attempted to assassinate Tsar Alexander III. His sister, who was also in the capital for the university, was arrested under suspicion. A few months later, as Lenin was heading to school for his final exams, notices were posted around the city spreading news that Sasha and the other conspirators were executed. His sister was eventually released with no evidence of her involvement. He was greeted in the exam room with silence, but was the first to finish. The headmaster of his school was the father of Alexander Kerensky, whose bourgeois government was overthrown by the October Revolution decades later. Lenin's family was completely ostracized from the community, and after graduating from grammar school, they left for the city of Kazan so Lenin could attend university there.

Later in life, Lenin told his wife that he had disdain for those "liberal" family friends who abandoned his mother, who was a widow, and the entire family due to Sasha. At Kazan University, he told fellow students he wanted to become a professional revolutionary, started to read Sasha's copy of *Capital* by Karl Marx, and joined an underground Marxist discussion group in Kazan. At the age of eighteen, he would spend time around Kazan with the workers and peasants, learning about their struggles. Lenin would be one of the leaders of a student protest. News had reached the students in Kazan about a student riot in Moscow and they decided to act in solidarity. As a result of this act of resistance, Lenin was arrested and banished to the remote village of

Kokushino. From that point on he would be under constant police threat and surveillance. In his term of exile during the harsh winter, he spent his time reading the likes of revolutionaries Chernyshevsky and other Russian writers. This time of reflection steeled him to the revolutionary struggle, especially for the peasantry as he saw them as the most exploited class in the Tsarist Empire.

After his return from exile, Lenin was refused admission into Law school, and so learned the entire curriculum on his own—completing the four-year course in just a year and a half. He would pass the bar exam with honors as well. Unfortunately, the Ulyanov family continued to suffer tragedy—his sister Olga passed away from typhoid fever in 1891, four years to the day from the execution of Sasha. Lenin would spend some time in the city of Samara as a trial lawyer for local peasants and poor working-class people. In 1893, Lenin would set off to St. Petersburg by himself—with a plan to build a revolutionary mass movement.

Chapter 2: Lenin & the Russian Social Democratic Labor Party

The Marxist movement was still young and had a small influence in Tsarist Russia during Lenin's early years—even when Lenin was on his way to St. Petersburg to organize the decentralized Marxist groups. By 1893—when Lenin had arrived in St. Petersburg—Germany already had a strong Marxist party in the Social Democrat Party. Russia didn't have an analogue to that strong, organized party. But as previously mentioned, there was a strong history of revolts, terrorist actions against the regime, and an intelligentsia that was becoming more radical and materialist in their philosophical orientation. Intellectuals such as Vissarion Belinsky and Nikolay Chernyshevsky with the Narodniks—along with the growing proletarianization of the Russian peasantry—made fertile ground for Marxist theory to accelerate the growing class struggle.

Three months before Lenin was born in 1870, Karl Marx began his first serious study of Russia. *Capital* Vol. 1 was first translated from the original German to Russian in 1872 with immediate success and circulation. The first official and documented Marxist circle was in 1883—the Emancipation of Labor Group. Its most prominent figure was Georgi Plekhanov—who still is a revered theorist in Russian Marxism even though he would have serious conflicts with Lenin and the Bolsheviks. Maxim Gorky referred to the conflict between Lenin and Plekhanov: *“I have rarely met two*

people with less in common than G. V. Plekhanov and V. I. Lenin...The one was finishing his work of destroying the old world, the other was beginning the construction of a new.”

The Emancipation of Labor Group correctly challenged the inaccuracies of the Narodniks' theory and Blanquist's terrorist actions like the assassination of Tsar Alexander II. But the Emancipation of Labor Group largely were in exile and the majority of their work was on translating and writing Marxist theory. As Lenin was traveling to the capital of the Russian empire, the working class movement was boiling over waiting for a spark, but clearly there was a lack of organization.

From 1864 to 1900, St. Petersburg's population went from half a million to over 1.5 million people. It was a rapidly growing city and metropole of the Tsarist empire—with growing class contradictions. Lenin worked tirelessly to centralize and organize the Marxist groups in the city—and in others—to create a single Marxist revolutionary party. He knew that as strikes and working-class unrest were growing around him, an organized communist party was essential. The group would be called the *League of Struggle for the Emancipation of the Working Class*.

This group was born out of the ideological and material struggle that Lenin was quickly coming to lead. He would work with different Marxist leaders like Leonid Krasin, Stepan Radchenko, and Gleb Krzhizhanovsky—along with labor leaders like Ivan Babushkin—to organize this new collective and precursor to the first Russian Marxist party. Lenin would travel abroad in 1895 to visit Plekhanov, forming direct ties to the first Russian Marxist group. The previous year, Lenin published his first major work, *What the “Friends of the People” Are and How They Fight the Social*

Democrats which put utopian Narodism permanently out of the theoretical competition with Marxism. It denounced their false theory that Russia's development was unique and wouldn't face the worst of capitalism—which was materially wrong even by that time—and that the working class in Russia would not be central to the revolution to socialism. Lenin was the first to clearly state the working class—along with the peasant class—would be the key to a revolution away from capitalism and towards socialism. His next work, *The Economic Content of Narodism and the Criticism of it in Mr Struve's Book* was another refutation of the Narodniks but also, and more importantly, against the “legal Marxists” or “economists” within the Marxist intelligentsia.

During this time Lenin would also meet his future wife and fellow revolutionary Nadezhda Krupskaya, or Nadya. She had come from an aristocratic family that had fallen down the class structure of Russia—a radicalizing experience in a similar way to Lenin's family being ostracized due to Sasha. Many times they would walk together—discussing life and politics—only to have to evade the secret police that began to tail Lenin at every turn. He would often travel at night to avoid suspicion.

For example, there was a talk in the city about issues at the Semyannikovsky factory; workers had their pay delayed right before Christmas and a riot broke out. Police had arrested some of the supposed leaders of the riot during the night. Labor leader and worker of that factory Babushkin heard a knock on his door—he answered assuming it was his turn to be arrested—it was Lenin covered in snow. He wanted to know everything that had happened and the workers' demands. They worked through the night devising and writing pamphlets to distribute to the workers—only four

were made. But Lenin enthusiastically told Babushkin in the morning, “This is our first fighting leaflet.” This type of non-stop work and dedication to the workers’ cause is what allowed Lenin to lead to the centralization of the communist movement for the first time in Russian history. December of 1895—only months away from the official formation of the *League of Struggle for the Emancipation of the Working Class*—the collective’s newspaper was in preparation for publication. Lenin had written most of the initial articles that were set to be published. And it was named *The Workers Cause*. However, over 160 leading members were arrested seemingly overnight, Lenin included. At 2 am, he was woken up by the police with a warrant for his arrest. Maria Prilezhayeva—a Soviet writer who was awarded the Nadezda Krupskaya RSFSR State Prize and Order of Lenin for her biography of Lenin—said he thought instantly about his comrades, about Nadya Krupskaya; would this be it? Lenin said to himself, “No, you can’t silence us any longer. Hundreds of thousands of workers have joined our ranks. The entire working class of Russia will soon rise up.”

Vladimir Lenin was now in the Tsarist Gulag system and would spend 14 months in solitary confinement. Always the hard-working revolutionary, he would smuggle letters and pamphlets to the outside. Books were not prohibited so Nadya and Lenin’s sisters would bring him books. This was the clandestine vehicle for Lenin to get his work out—through invisible ink from milk and bread written into the pages. The League carried on the work even with a large section of the leadership behind bars or in exile—and the strikes and working-class struggles against the Tsarist empire and capitalism continued.

In early 1897, Lenin would be sent into exile in Shushenskoye, Siberia. The next year Krupskaye would also be sent into exile with him. They still tirelessly worked toward the revolution. He liked to write standing up at his lectern—he would simultaneously be working on one of his masterpieces: *The Development of Capitalism in Russia* as well as articles and translations of works from Russian to English and vice versa. They liked to collaborate on works together since she was also a proficient writer and theorist—their free time was spent walking in the forests and on the banks of the Shusha River. Even in exile under a brutal police state—they were young and in love.

During this time in prison and exile, the formation of the Russian Social Democratic Party was taking place; a party along the lines of the Marxist parties that Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels helped to organize. Already, there were fierce disagreements and an ideological and organizational struggle. In 1895-1896 Lenin drafted a proposed party program detailing the exploitative class structure of Tsarist Russia, the *“party’s aims”* and *“relation to other political trends,”* and the party’s *“practical demands.”* It was called to build class consciousness, and work towards *“political liberty”* as this was a political, and not purely economic, struggle. It had an embryo of the United Front strategy later popularized by the Communist International in the 1930s as Lenin wrote, *“That is why the Russian Social-Democratic Party will, without separating itself from the working-class movement, support every social movement against the absolute power of the autocratic government, against the class of privileged landed nobility and against all the vestiges of serfdom and the social-estate system which hinder free competition.”* It called for an end to all exploitation that could

only happen with the *“passage of political power into the hands of the working class, the transfer of all the land, instruments, factories, machines, and mines to the whole of society for the organization of socialist production, under which all that is produced by the workers and all improvements in production must benefit the working people themselves.”* The program called for universal and direct suffrage, equality of all nationalities, freedom of assembly and religion, massive labor reform, and more. In 1898, however—while Lenin was still in exile—the First Congress of the Russian Social Democratic Labor Party was held in Minsk. Most of the organizers and attendees were arrested by the police. The party would have to be reformed—again—and Lenin thought a party newspaper was essential to unite the party. It was another setback, but in time it would prove to be a minor one as that spark that would kindle the flame of revolution was already struck.

Chapter 3: Iskra & What is to Be Done?

In February 1900, Lenin was finally released from exile in Siberia. He immediately set about creating a clandestine system of distribution for what would become the ideological sword of the Russian Social Democratic Labor Party (RSDLP) for the next five months. The police state apparatus of Tsarist Russia meant the party newspaper would have to be produced abroad and then smuggled into Russia, so Lenin obtained permission to travel abroad, supposedly for his health. Nadya still had several months left in exile but would eventually reunite with him abroad.

The name of the newspaper would be *Iskra*—*the Spark*—from a line in the poem by a Decembrist, “The spark will kindle the flame.” Lenin thought it was befitting of this new revolutionary party. He eventually found his way to Leipzig, Germany. Where a small print shop owner by the name of Hermann Rau—a member of the German Social Democratic Party—was told by friends that Russian Marxists were in the city and looking for a print shop to make a revolutionary paper. In this small one-press printing shop, the first issue of *Iskra* was printed. The system of distribution to get *Iskra* from Germany to “every major city” of Tsarist Russia was vast, secretive, and ultimately truly impressive. Secret meetings and suitcase drop-offs at bars, seaports, etc. were common. Cadres from Germany, Sweden, and Finland—all the way to the Caucasus region where Stalin was the first to smuggle *Iskra* into the region—were highly

effective. This was an illegal paper in the Tsarist Empire— anyone caught with it would be sent to the gulags, in exile, or worse. The operation had to be at a high organizational level in order to fulfill its mission of spreading revolutionary consciousness to the working class.

By 1901, Vladimir Ulyanov began writing under the name “Lenin” for Iskra’s articles and it would be the name the entire world would come to know. In 1902, due to mounting police pressure in Germany, the Iskra editorial board and production moved to England and then Geneva, Switzerland. Lenin became the “guiding spirit” and a significant contributor to Iskra, but it was one of many “circles” as Lenin called them during this time of disunity of the RSDLP. The party’s forming congress was prematurely stopped by the police, so while a Social Democratic Party did exist, there was no unified program, central committee, party organ/newspaper, or party rules. There were many different factions or “circles” in the RSDLP:

- The Iskra (which would eventually be split as well) at the beginning featured the staff of Lenin, Plekhanov, Dimitri Ulyanov (Lenin’s younger brother), Vera Zasulich, Aleksandr Petresov, Pavel Axelrod, Julius Martov, and eventually Leon Trotsky. The latter three would especially lead to the split of the Iskra faction.

- Rabocheye Dyelo was the newspaper of the Union of Russian Social Democrats Abroad and was the far-right of the RSDLP.

- Yuzhny Rabochy was the name of an illegal newspaper and a group of Russian social democrats. Represented the center of the party along with the Bund.

- The General Jewish Labour Bund was a Jewish socialist party primarily in western Russia, Poland, and Lithuania.

These were most of the main groups that would be struggling for control of the RSDLP. From 1900-1903 Lenin actively struggled for the ideological spirit of the Russian revolutionary party, which he knew was going to hit a climactic moment at the next party congress. He published several key works that led up to that fateful congress of 1903. Several articles, pamphlets, and books on the Agrarian Question such as *The Agrarian Question and the "Critics of Marx"*, *The Workers' Party and the Peasantry*, and *To the Rural Poor* deal with the material and theoretical breakthrough of the alliance of the working class with the peasantry. *"And the peasants, too, will then rise all over Russia and go to the aid of the urban workers, will fight to the end for the freedom of the workers and peasants. The tsar's hordes will be unable to withstand that onslaught. Victory will go to the working people, and the working class will march along the wide, spacious road to the liberation of all working people from any kind of oppression. The working class will use its freedom to fight for socialism!"* Groups like the Rabocheye Dyelo-ists were against unity between these two oppressed classes. These works were also vehicles for Lenin to promote and explain his proposed party program, which would be one of the key dividing conflicts.

Lenin's other two, and most important works before the Party Congress, were *Where to Begin?* and *What is to Be Done?* The former is a "skeleton plan" for the latter as Lenin said. *Where to Begin?* was published in *Iskra* in 1901; it was a "question of a system and plan of practical work" for the RSDLP which Lenin admits they had "not yet solved." There was internal party debate about the organizational structure and foundation of the party, and it was an issue Lenin thought clearly was one of the priorities of the party

due to it risking “ideological instability” within the RSDLP. Lenin also attacked the adventurists within the Party who wanted to lead the Party on a military path they were not ready for:

“In principle we have never rejected...terror. Terror is one of the forms of military action that may be perfectly suitable and even essential at a definite juncture in the battle, given a definite state of the troops and the existence of definite conditions...Without a central body and with the weakness of local revolutionary organisations, this, in fact, is all that terror can be. We, therefore, declare emphatically that under the present conditions such a means of struggle is inopportune and unsuitable; that it diverts the most active fighters from their real task, the task which is most important from the standpoint of the interests of the movement as a whole; and that it disorganises the forces, not of the government, but of the revolution...But can we issue the call for such a decisive assault at the present moment? Rabocheye Dyelo apparently thinks we can. At any rate, it exclaims: “Form assault columns!” But this, again, is more zeal than reason...”

Due to the fractured ideological trends having their respective newspapers and press outlets, Lenin also called for a single recognized party newspaper because he saw it as a “collective propagandist...collective agitator...[and] collective organizer.” In his next work, and considered one of his best, *What is to Be Done?* Vladimir saw the growing crises of the Party with the “two trends” that ran opposed to each other in the Social Democratic movement—revolutionary or reformism. It wasn’t just a Russian issue, as Lenin correctly observed the trend largely originated from

German Social Democrat Eduard Bernstein. *“The essence of the “new” trend, which adopts a “critical” attitude towards “obsolete dogmatic” Marxism, has been clearly enough presented by Bernstein and demonstrated by Millerand. Social-Democracy must change from a party of social revolution into a democratic party of social reforms.”* Lenin said Bernstein, and the reformist and opportunist line he started “denied” scientific socialism, dialectical and historical materialism, and the dictatorship of the proletariat. This growing denial of basic tenets of Marxism was infecting the more ideologically unstable “circles” within the RSDLP. But this was an inevitable material outcome of the alliance between the “legal Marxists” and the revolutionary Social Democratic group during the previous decades which Lenin attributed this alliance with the win of the Social Democrats over Narodism. This “temporary alliance” was vital to that early era, but was rapidly becoming obsolete as the class struggle was progressing to a new phase of development.

Vladimir Lenin mapped out the history and fallout of this alliance, the importance of organization over *“worship of spontaneity,”* and added; *“Without revolutionary theory there can be no revolutionary movement. This idea cannot be insisted upon too strongly at a time when the fashionable preaching of opportunism goes hand in hand with an infatuation for the narrowest forms of practical activity.”* At this point, we wish to state only that the role of vanguard fighter can be fulfilled only by a party that is guided by the most advanced theory.” He showed the reality of the peasant revolts and terroristic acts were “spontaneous” and simply the “resistance of the oppressed.” However, he also believed the systemic strikes within Russia only represented the “class struggle in embryo.” The working class of Tsarist

Russia needed “Social-Democratic consciousness,” that had to come “from without” via a revolutionary Social-Democratic party built on the alliance of the proletarian and peasant classes—and that party had to be built on democratic centralism around professional revolutionaries. He called for not just political “education” but also “agitation” against every “concrete example” of “oppression.” Ultimately not to limit the political, economic, and ideological struggle of the oppressed classes, which was different from the view of other “circles” of the RSDLP.

Lenin prophetically said, *“The national tasks of Russian Social-Democracy are such as have never confronted any other socialist party in the world. We shall have occasion further on to deal with the political and organisational duties which the task of emancipating the whole people from the yoke of autocracy imposes upon us. The Russian proletariat will have to undergo trials immeasurably graver; it will have to fight a monster compared with which an antisocialist law in a constitutional country seems but a dwarf. History has now confronted us with an immediate task which is the most revolutionary of all the immediate tasks confronting the proletariat of any country. The fulfilment of this task...would make the Russian proletariat the vanguard of the international revolutionary proletariat.”*

Chapter 4: Bolshevik vs. Menshevik Split & One Step Forward, Two Steps Back for Revolution

The Second Congress of the Russian Social-Democratic Labour Party was a pivotal moment in the Russian Marxist movement and cemented Lenin as one of the key leaders. Lenin and Nadya by 1903 were living in the town of Secheron, near Geneva Switzerland. There he, along with a never-ending stream of fellow Marxists visiting him, drafting the Rules of the Party and the Party Programme to be voted on at the Congress. The year prior the party organized a conference by the “Bund, the Petersburg Committee, the Yekaterinoslav Committee, Iskra, the Union of Russian Social-Democrats Abroad, the Nizhny-Novgorod Committee, and the Association of Southern Committees and Organisations.” That conference was almost a Party Congress but ultimately formed the Organizing Committee for the Party Congress. However, most of the Organizing Committee were subsequently arrested by the Russian police state. A second Organizing Committee was formed after contact with the original was lost—this new one did not have any members of the Bund featured on it. In effect, the first split of the party was foreshadowing itself.

As Plekhanov said in the opening of the Party Congress, “The reasons for this absence were not known to

the [Organizing Committee], but it hoped that the Bund would not refuse subsequently to take part in its activity...” The new Committee organized the party Congress for Brussels where eventual police pressure would have it moved mid-session to London. Lenin wrote in-depth on the Party Congress that would create the Bolshevik-Menshevik split.

One Step Forward, Two Steps Back draws heavily from the minutes of the Congress to make sure it wasn't inaccurate. As he stated, “*The first question is that of the political significance of the division of our Party into “majority” and “minority” which took shape at the Second Party Congress and pushed all previous divisions among Russian Social-Democrats far into the background. The second question is that of the significance in principle of the new Iskra’s position on organisational questions, insofar as this position is really based on principle.*” Lenin added that the “*“majority’ is the revolutionary, and the ‘minority’ the opportunist wing of our Party...*” For Lenin, this Congress was a clear demarcation between two wings of the party that was at significant odds with each other—a “crisis” in the party.

It's tragic, as by all accounts he was “deeply content” as the Congress started and Plekhanov gave the opening speech. This was the real first Congress of the RSDLP—an organization he had spent over a decade trying to form, went to prison, and exile to achieve. This was supposed to be a moment of triumph for Lenin and the entire Russian working and peasant classes. This was the dream of countless people who sacrificed everything. But unfortunately, and clearly, several eclectic groups with “ideological instability” came to opportunist, party-wrecking, and individualist lines.

Per historian Christopher Read, 43 delegates with 51 votes and 14 “consultive delegates” were allowed to speak but not vote at the Congress. Iskrists, as they were called at the time, had 27 delegates with 33 votes. The rest were seven Economists, five Bundists, and four undecided. Lenin separated it into “24 Iskra-ists of the majority, nine Iskra-ists of the minority, ten in the centre, and eight anti-Iskra-ists.” That delicate alliance between the majority and minority within Iskra would eventually fall apart. Julius Martov, Leon Trotsky, and others in that minority stayed with the Iskra voting bloc on the vote on the Party Programme, condemning the federation of the party, and endorsing Iskra as the “Party’s Central Organ.” They were also united against the rest of the “anti-Iskra-ists and the entire ‘Centre’” for other resolutions regarding Iskra, and the position of the Bund—who wanted to be an independent group within the Party and not adhere to the Party program in total, but only in part and when it suited them. This was the same with the Yuzhny Rabochy group and the Rabocheye Dyelo/Union of Russian Social Democrats Abroad which the former was voted to be dissolved.

The Iskra-ist minority, however, did break and form a coalition with the anti-Iskra-ists and “centre” when it came to other votes—equality of languages and paragraph 1 of the Party Rules. The Iskra majority was defeated in these votes, but slowly and then quickly, groups began to leave in protest. The Bund left the Congress after not getting the independence to break Party rules. Lenin said only “Comrade Brouckère remained at the Congress” out of the eight anti-Iskra-ists. So the opportunist coalition that had formed had a small majority and then gave it away—purely out of pettiness and a sense of “anarchist individualism.”

Elections at the Congress for the Central Organ, Committee, and Party Council were the “final division” between the Bolshevik and Menshevik camps. It was the “complete fusion” of the minority of Iskra with the opportunist and reactionary circles of the Party. Martov would later call this division of the party, with Lenin’s programs and policy proposals receiving the majority of the support at the Congress, “accidental.” Lenin refuted that by asking if it was an “accident” that the “most extreme” and “opportunist” wings of the Party withdrew from a struggle with the most “consistent revolutionary Social-Democrats.”

Lenin summarized exactly what this divide at the Congress was about, “...struggle between the opportunist and the revolutionary wing of the Party on the question of organisation, the same conflict between autonomism and centralism, between democracy and “bureaucracy”, between the tendency to relax and the tendency to tighten organisation and discipline, between the mentality of the unstable intellectual and that of the staunch proletarian, between intellectualist individualism and proletarian solidarity.” The reactionary wings of the party wanted a loose organization, not a revolutionary party that had strict membership to avoid infiltration. Democratic Centralism was vital to avoid anarchistic and individualist actions that would hurt the collective party—in order for the Party to have authority it can’t be divided into many different groups that don’t coherently and collectively work together. The dictatorship of the proletariat—the basic Marxist concept of the working class needs to have political and state power in order to start a socialist transition—was key to any communist revolutionary party. These were the key struggles that Lenin and the majority—the Bolsheviks—struggled for

during the Party Congress. There were 37 sessions of the Congress, and Lenin took the floor to speak 120 times. After the Party Congress was concluded, on August 24, many of the delegates and Lenin visited Karl Marx's grave at Highgate Cemetery. It was a solemn pilgrimage that Lenin would often take when he and Nadya lived in London as well. Lenin softly said in front of Marx's grave, "[he] is our teacher. Let us pledge to be faithful to his teaching. We shall never give up the struggle. Onwards, comrades, only onwards."

Unfortunately, even with Plekhanov and Lenin himself offering concession after concession to the Mensheviks and Martov especially, the infighting would become too much following the Congress. Lenin would resign from the Iskra board. Many Social Democrats would come to favor Martov's interpretation of the Party Congress—Karl Kautsky and Rosa Luxemburg—two giants of the German Social Democratic Party. Plekhanov the old ally and mentor of the entire Russian Marxist movement also abandoned Lenin and the Bolsheviks. However, it wasn't purely due to a perceived "Robespierrean" view of Lenin that was prevalent at the time. Lenin foreshadowed this development of a divide of the Social Democratic Movement—the Second International—with critiques of Bernstein. But in just about a decade the fractures of the reformist and vulgar distortions of Marxism would rupture the international socialist movement. It just happened to rupture and divide in Russia first in 1903.

As Lenin stated, "One step forward, two steps back.... It happens in the lives of individuals, and it happens in the history of nations and in the development of parties. It would be the most criminal cowardice to doubt even for a moment the inevitable and complete triumph of the principles of

revolutionary Social-Democracy, of proletarian organisation and Party discipline.”

Chapter 5: The 1905 Revolution, Bloody Sunday, & the Birth of the Soviets

In the early years of the turn of the century, it wasn't just internal party struggle that was stirring the revolutionary movement in Tsarist Russia, massive class unrest was exponentially growing. St. Petersburg was the epicenter of working class unrest from the mid-1890s, and it rapidly expanded across the empire. Data from the period for how many times the army was deployed to put down strikes and unrest is clear: 19 in 1893, 33 in 1900, 271 in 1901, and 522 in 1902. Between 1800-1854 there were 35 years of famine, and in 1891-1910, there were 13 years of famine. As aforementioned, the growing working class was met with ever-growing class antagonisms and worsening material conditions. Lenin and the split Russian Social Democrats were also not the only group to form in these pivotal years. The Socialist Revolutionary Party (SR) would form and launch a terroristic and Blanquist campaign by assassinating government officials and bombing municipal buildings. Then the imperial regime decided a war with the rising imperial threat of Japan was vital to secure eastern Russia and Manchuria despite the internal issues bubbling to the surface.

Disputes over Korea and a buffer zone of influence between the two empires led to full hostilities with the Japanese attack on Port Arthur, modern-day Lüshunkou, China. The infamous battle started on August 1, 1904, and

lasted until January 2, 1905—with many other major Russian defeats in that time as well. The war was going disastrously for the Tsarist regime, and Tsar Nicholas II stubbornly decided to keep it going even after Japan offered numerous times for a mediated armistice. This had a compounding effect on the class struggle in the empire that was present for decades.

The autocratic corruption of the Tsarist regime was being demonized by practically every class besides the aristocracy. Its inefficiency and lack of reforms were creating a tornado of unrest and radicalization. In December 1904, a mass strike in Baku, the oil production hub of the empire, was successful with a particular Bolshevik being a key organizer, Ioseb Besarionis dze Jughashvili, more commonly known as Joseph Stalin. This quickly spread to St. Petersburg in January 1905 as a general strike. After three workers were fired at the Putilov Plant, protests spread throughout the city. Within a day 360 factories had shut down due to strikes. On that fateful January 22, a mass protest was organized by a “half welfare worker and half police spy,” Father Gapon. Its goal was to march on the Winter Palace and demand a constitution and redress for grievances. The masses were then fired on by the military and police. Cossack cavalry charged into the crowd. Over 1,000 people are believed to have been killed in the onslaught for what would be called, “Bloody Sunday.” It was the same day that news would reach St. Petersburg of Port Arthur falling to the Japanese. Lenin prophetically wrote in the week prior that it was a *“blow struck at the whole of reactionary Europe...It was the Russian autocracy and not the Russian people that started this colonial war, which has turned into a war between the old and the new bourgeois worlds. It is the*

autocratic regime and not the Russian people that has suffered ignoble defeat. The Russian people has gained from the defeat of the autocracy. The capitulation of Port Arthur is the prologue to the capitulation of tsarism.”

The masses in rallies, and even economic strikes, before Bloody Sunday were commonly led by religious figures, liberals, etc. It was always the people believing if they just showed the Tsar they were suffering, the Tsar would, in all his grandeur, help them. The Bolsheviks ahead of Bloody Sunday in St. Petersburg had warned the workers not to go—that it was dangerous and the Tsar would not listen to peaceful demonstrations. After Bloody Sunday, the masses were radicalized and revolutionary. They had lost hope in the Tsar being their savior. The blood-soaked snow in St. Petersburg could not be forgotten, and the many men, women, and children who were murdered by the regime were now martyrs. Barricades were set up all over the city by the people in response to ready for war. A revolution had begun.

Lenin and the exiled Bolsheviks in Geneva all gathered at the community dining hall run by the Lepeshinsky family. It was a common meeting place for the radical Russian diaspora. The Geneva papers were rushed into the hall. The weight of the movement hung in the air. There wasn't much discussion at first. Most sat in silence as they started to understand how everything now changed. Someone started to sing the workers' funeral march, "A Victim of Dire Bondage" with everyone quickly joining in. Lenin proclaimed, "A Revolution has begun in Russia," and thought to himself, "We must get back home as soon as possible."

Internal party issues had still gripped the Social Democrats to the point of them being largely caught off guard by the news. The Mensheviks had taken control of Iskra so the Bolsheviks started Vperyod (Forward). Lenin's words in that first article after the news:

*“The working class, which would seem to have stood aside for a long time from the bourgeois opposition movement, has raised its voice. With incredible speed the broad masses of the workers have caught up with their advanced comrades, the class-conscious Social-Democrats. The workers’ movement in St. Petersburg these days has made gigantic strides. Economic demands are giving way to political demands. The strike is turning into a general strike and it has led to an unheard-of colossal demonstration; the prestige of the tsarist name has been ruined for good. The uprising has begun. Force against force. Street fighting is raging, barricades are being thrown up, rifles are crackling, guns are roaring. Rivers of blood are flowing, the civil war for freedom is blazing up. Moscow and the South, the Caucasus and Poland are ready to join the proletariat of St. Petersburg. The slogan of the workers has become: Death or freedom! Today and tomorrow a great deal will be decided. The situation changes with every hour. The telegraph brings breath-taking news, and all words now seem feeble in comparison with the events we are living through. Everyone must be ready to do his duty as a revolutionary and as a Social-Democrat.
Long live the revolution!”*

Long live the insurgent proletariat!”

The Bloody Sunday protest and many of the early actions taken by the growing uprising grew out of the “Zubatov movement.” These were unions started by Sergei Zubatov, a police administrator, and were entirely controlled by the police. Father Gapon himself was a part of the Zubatov movement and was later assassinated by the Social Revolutionaries. Lenin even went as far as to claim the Zubatov movement was orchestrated by the Tsarist regime to give an excuse to bring in the military to crack down on the rising St. Petersburg working class. *“The proletariat has risen against tsarism. The proletariat was driven to revolt by the government. There can hardly be any doubt now that the government deliberately allowed the strike movement to develop and a wide demonstration to be started more or less without hindrance in order to bring matters to a point where military force could be used. Its manoeuvre was successful. Thousands of killed and wounded—such is the toll of Bloody Sunday...”* Regardless of the Tsarist’s alleged ulterior motives or designs, the situation rapidly grew out of hand. Uprisings spread within days all throughout the empire. Military arsenals were taken, and the workers and peasants were spontaneously organized and rising up. Within just 4 days strikes and unrest were as far as Baku, Kiev, Sevastopol, and every major city in the western parts of the empire.

“The revolution is spreading. The government is beginning to lose its head... Only an armed people can be the real bulwark of popular liberty. The sooner the proletariat succeeds in arming, and the longer it holds

its fighting positions as striker and revolutionary, the sooner will the army begin to waver; more and more soldiers will at last begin to realise what they are doing and they will join sides with the people against the fiends, against the tyrant, against the murderers of defenceless workers and of their wives and children. No matter what the outcome of the present uprising in St. Petersburg may be, it will, in any case, be the first step to a wider, more conscious, better organised uprising... The immediate arming of the workers and of all citizens in general, the preparation and organisation of the revolutionary forces for overthrowing the government authorities and institutions—this is the practical basis on which revolutionaries of every variety can and must unite to strike the common blow.”

Along with the strikes in the big cities, throughout the year there were peasant revolts sporadically everywhere, and in June the prize battleship Potemkin mutinied for the revolution. The autocracy was petrified, so they signed a humiliating peace deal with Japan hoping to move the military forces tied up with the war inward on their own people. The younger generation of revolutionary exiles was desperate to return to the revolution. Lenin was a part of this group being only around 35 years old. After February, the Menshevik at the time Leon Trotsky would return to St. Petersburg and be an influential figure in building the St. Petersburg Soviet in October. Rising Bolshevik leader Joseph Stalin would be a central organizer in the Caucuses. However, until October, Lenin would stay in Geneva mainly and work on building the Social Democratic movement and his journalistic work.

The Third Party Congress was held in April during the first year of the revolution. Lenin was sincere in trying to bridge these divides between party circles, between the Bolsheviks and Mensheviks. The “rank and file” party members were overwhelmingly on the Bolshevik’s side due to the perceived good-will attempts to eliminate inter-party discourse, and the Menshevik’s refusal to participate in the Third Party Congress. Lenin was clear about the recent party split, it’s causes and effects:

“To achieve this great aim we must unite all class-conscious proletarians in a single Russian Social-Democratic Labour Party. Our Party began to constitute itself quite some time ago, immediately following the broad working-class movement of 1895 and 1896. The year 1898 saw the convocation of its First Congress, which founded the Russian Social-Democratic Labour Party and outlined its aims. The Second Congress was held in 1903. It gave the Party a programme, adopted a series of resolutions on tactics, and endeavoured, for the first time, to build an integral Party organisation. True, the Party did not at once succeed in this effort. The minority at the Second Congress refused to submit to the majority and started a split that has caused great harm to the Social-Democratic working-class movement. The first step towards this split was the refusal to carry out the decisions of the Second Congress and to accept the leadership of the central bodies it had set up. The last step was the refusal to participate in the Third Congress. The Third Congress was convened by a Bureau elected by the majority of the committees working in Russia, and by the Central

Committee of the Party. All the committees, breakaway groups, and the periphery organisations dissatisfied with the committees were invited to the Congress. The vast majority of these organisations, including nearly all the committees and organisations of the Minority, elected delegates and sent them abroad to attend the Congress. Thus everything possible under our police regime was done to convene an all-Party congress; it was only the refusal of three members of the former Party Council resident abroad that resulted in the boycott of the Congress by the entire Party Minority. Nevertheless, despite the absence of the Minority, the Third Congress took every measure to enable the Minority to work with the Majority in one party. The Congress held the reversion to the antiquated and superseded views of Economism discernible in our Party to be incorrect; at the same time, it provided precise and definite guarantees of the rights of every minority, guarantees embodied in the Rules of the Party and binding on all its members. The Minority now has the unconditional right, guaranteed by the Party Rules, to advocate its views and to carry on an ideological struggle. so long as the disputes and differences do not lead to disorganisation, so long as they do not impede constructive work, split our forces, or hinder the concerted struggle against the autocracy and the capitalists. The right to publish Party literature is now granted by the Rules to every qualified Party organisation. It has now been made incumbent on the C.C. of the Party to transport all kinds of Party literature upon the demand of five qualified committees, or one-sixth of all such committees in the Party. The autonomy

of the committees has been defined more precisely and their membership declared inviolable, which means that the C.C. no longer has the right to remove members from local committees or to appoint new members without the consent of the committees themselves. This rule admits of only one exception, namely, in cases where two-thirds of the organised workers demand the removal of a committee; under the Rules adopted by the Third Congress such removal is incumbent on the C.C. if two-thirds of its members agree with the decision of the workers. Every local committee has been accorded the right to confirm periphery organisations as Party organisations. The periphery organisations have been accorded the right to nominate candidates for committee membership. The boundaries of the Party have been defined more precisely, in accordance with the wishes of the Party majority. A single centre has been set up instead of two or three. The comrades working in Russia have been guaranteed a decided preponderance over the Party's section abroad. In a word, the Third Congress has done everything to remove all possibility of charging the Majority with abuse of numerical superiority, with mechanical suppression, with despotism of the central bodies of the Party, and so on and so forth."

Lenin wrote before the Congress in an article *Time to Call a Halt* and an *Open Letter to Comrade Plekhanov*, that Plekhanov had capitulated to "revisionist" and "anarchists-individualists" within the party, and that the Mensheviks had disrupted local party work within Russia ahead of the revolution and the party congress. The "party crisis" had

“grown to such dimensions” that the RSDLP was brought to a “standstill.” And even though there was dissension based on tactics and organization—“more often than [not],” the disputes were because one side was Menshevik versus the other side being Bolshevik. Out of the 75 votes that would be representative at the Party Congress, 52 voted in favor, yet Plekhanov and the Mensheviks controlling the Party Council refused to participate. Thus, the Third Party Congress elected a new central committee, all Bolsheviks—Lenin, Bogdanov, Krasin, Postalovsky, and Rykov. They officially closed *Iskra* and *Vperyod* (Forward) as the dual disputing party papers for the Proletary (Proletariat). Lenin would again call for “unity” with the Mensheviks, “We are in agreement with you over nine-tenths of the questions of theory and tactics, and to quarrel over one-tenth is not worthwhile.”

The reality is though, regardless of Lenin’s seemingly good-will intentions to unite the RSDLP, that “one-tenth” of disagreement between the Bolsheviks and Mensheviks was a wide and deep chasm between the two. Lenin’s clarity on the actuality of revolution and the concrete analysis based on the concrete material conditions of his time set him apart, and that would be for the first time materially clear in this historical record of the 1905-1907 revolution. It would develop into a world-altering movement in 1917. Lenin and the Bolsheviks faced the questions of the revolution of 1905 with a crystal clear analysis—the need for a militant party of the proletariat to mobilize and organize the mass class struggle beyond purely economic struggles and strikes. The actuality of the revolution was here, and the Mensheviks fell behind due to their criticism of the armed struggle, especially after the enactment of the State Duma. During a revolution,

to not side with the masses of people uprising is to be counter-revolutionary, and that is the issue with the Mensheviks during this time.

Fundamentally, the Mensheviks, along with the rest of the international socialist movement, could not perceive a revolution where the proletariat wasn't the only revolutionary class. Lenin and the Bolsheviks saw clearly that the majority of the population were semi-serfs, and they had amassed revolutionary potential due to the generational oppression they had been facing. Even Karl Kautsky, the pseudo-heir to Marx and Engels and the 'recognized' principled Marxist compared to Eduard Bernstein thought the urban proletariat should be neutral in the revolution. This dogmatic interpretation of Marxism would plague the Western communist movement. It was taking historical documents written by Marx and Engels and attempting to overlay them to a different time and material conditions, and for such seasoned theorists, a grave error against dialectical materialism. Nadya in her biography of her husband, *"Reminiscences of Lenin"* wrote how Lenin took this critique from Kautsky and others seriously. He dived back into Marx and Engel's work on the agrarian issue and in Lenin's article *"Marx on the American Redistribution"* stated, *"There is hardly another country in the world where the peasantry is experiencing such suffering, such oppression and degradation as in Russia. The more dismal this oppression of the peasantry has been, the more powerful will now be its awakening, the more invincible its revolutionary onslaught. It is the business of the class-conscious revolutionary proletariat to support this onslaught with all its might..."* The Mensheviks themselves became split when Leon Trotsky and Alexander Parvus formed a separate faction, who were

for an armed revolution, but purely of the workers—the urban proletariat. There was still a complete disregard for the vast majority of the people—the peasantry.

During the spring, summer, and early fall of 1905 the revolution was sporadic, unorganized, but continuous. The first form of dual power in Russia was created during this time with the worker's councils, or Soviets. First in May in the city of Ivanovo, then Kostroma, and Moscow in September. It would set the stage for the autumn and winter revolutionary explosion. Lenin was still in Geneva, Switzerland until the autumn but diligently stayed up to date. He would even make efforts to meet with Father Gapon—who led the initial St. Petersburg strike during Bloody Sunday—and revolutionaries from the battleship Potemkin and throughout the Tsarist empire. The battleship Potemkin famously led a mutiny and sided with the revolution before surrendering, but it inspired the masses and foreshadowed to events of 1917. In September, the Tsarist Empire was forced to sign an embarrassing peace treaty with rising imperial power Japan—hoping this would de-escalate the unrest throughout the empire.

October, everything escalated. A strike wave broke out in Moscow, and by October 7th had spread to St. Petersburg for a full-on General Strike. Workers called for civil liberties, eight eight-hour work days, amnesty for revolutionary activities, and a Constituent Assembly. Initially, the telegraph workers didn't want to participate so other workers cut the wires, uprooted poles, tore up railroad tracks, and blockaded key nodes of transportation. By October 12, the entire city was at a standstill and then unrest spread throughout the country when 750,000 railroad workers went on strike too. Some forty cities were affected or

had their own general strikes such as Moscow, Kharkov, and Reval—and barricades were set up in Kharkov, Odessa, and other cities with open street fighting between workers and Tsarist forces. The entire economic and social life of the empire was halted by the rising tide of the masses. Lenin wrote in October, *“One thing is certain: before our very eyes, the insurrection is spreading, the struggle is becoming ever more widespread, and its forms ever more acute. All over Russia the proletariat is pressing onward with heroic efforts, indicating now here, now there, in what direction the armed uprising can and, undoubtedly, will develop...The civil war has assumed the form of desperately stubborn and universal guerilla warfare.”* The forces of reaction and autocracy had to yield from the pressure—in a way.

Eventually Tsar Nicholas II, with the help of soon-to-be prime minister Sergei Witte, made certain concessions. Under the October Manifesto from the Tsar, a semi-constitution and pseudo-representational body called the State Duma were promises made by the autocracy. The Duma would have two houses—the upper house appointed directly by the Tsar—lower house elected by the bourgeois and aristocratic classes. It had no real material power and was controlled by the ruling classes. It was only to meet for 1-2 months out of the year as well. These concessions had a blowback effect—instead of the people seeing this as the ultimate win—they say it was a sign of the ruling classes on the retreat. Around this time, on October 26, the first Soviet Workers’ Deputies of St. Petersburg meet at the Institute of Technology. At first, it was only 30-40 delegates representing unions and workers were present. It only existed for fifty days but it eventually grew to nearly 600 delegates representing 147 factories, 34 workshops, and 16 unions. It

was a direct example of a dual power structure being created in a revolutionary period. It organized the masses for strikes, demonstrations, armed struggle, and for community defense against Black Hundred programs and Tsarist aggression. It was the embryo, born organically by the direct mass struggle of the people, of a revolutionary government—echoing the history of the Paris Commune of 1871. The Soviets allowed three delegates from the Bolsheviks, Mensheviks, and the Social Revolutionaries with a voice in the discussions and votes in decision-making for the Soviets. It had no paid bureaucracy and because it wasn't concerned with contending classes, was not a dual chamber parliamentary institution to try to appease a ruling capitalist class. Lenin and the Bolsheviks viewed the Soviet not just as a parliamentary body for workers, but as a true revolutionary dual-power structure created to replace bourgeois parliamentism by the direct seizure of power. After two months of agitation and ultimately leadership by Trotsky, most of the Soviet leadership in St. Petersburg was arrested. However, other Soviet Worker's Deputies would spring up across the empire in a winter revolutionary bloom.

October, November, and December of 1905 saw the greatest increase in revolutionary activity and state violence of the uprising. Over 4,000 people were murdered by the state in 100 cities, with more than 10,000 more injured. Black Hundreds, a proto-fascist and pro-monarchist group organized pogroms against Jewish people, workers, and students. The Soviets and workers parties organized militias to combat them and the state. The uprising spread to Poland, which was under the control of the Tsar at the time, and it intensified in the countryside with the peasantry and colonized nations. Massive spontaneous strikes, boycotts,

refusal to pay taxes, seizing and redistribution of property and basic necessities, and even destruction of landlord property—about 2,000 lordly manors and estates were destroyed (which would be \$3.3 trillion dollars in damages in today's US dollar worth). While Marxist propaganda and agitation certainly influenced the urban proletariat's radicalization and organization—Trotsky himself along with several other Mensheviks and Bolsheviks were active members of the St. Petersburg Soviet—the peasantry and colonized people of the imperial periphery were acting out of generational trauma—unguided and unorganized. There was an attempt to organize the peasants more with the creation of the Peasants Union, but the leadership in Moscow was arrested. The Ministry of the Interior declared the peasant revolts had to be put down. It was in this rapid shift in the struggle from general strikes to armed struggles in urban, as well as rural areas, Lenin would finally return to Russia.

Lenin and Nadya returned to St. Petersburg as many of the young revolutionaries did around the time of the October Manifesto which in theory opened up some forms of legal class struggle. He waited in Stockholm, Sweden, for a contact to give him fake documentation and alias to enter Russia—the contact never came and eventually Lenin smuggled his way into St. Petersburg—Nadya joining a couple weeks later. At first, they lived separately and were undocumented. Nadya writes that the "*moment*" they did get proper documentation their residence was perpetually spied on by the Tsarist police. Eventually, they would move to Finland in hiding as the Tsarist regime's reach in that area was limited due to the revolution in other areas. Lenin would travel to Moscow and other areas to clandestinely organize the Bolsheviks as well. His participation in revolutionary

activities in the 1905 revolution, and eventually the October Revolution of 1917, has been scrutinized. This narrative is even carried by fellow Marxists. British Marxist historian Christopher Hill describes Lenin as, *“taking little public part in revolutionary activities, but extremely active as a publicist and behind the scenes. With the defeat of the revolution Lenin withdrew to Finland, and finally left Russia...”* But this tells really half the story. As previously mentioned and confirmed by Nadya, Lenin was traveling under secrecy quite some distance in the middle of a heightened period to direct revolutionary activity. He was in Moscow in December before a massive general strike rocked the city and the Moscow Soviet Workers’ Deputy was established—this time with a Bolshevik majority. Bourgeois historian Christopher Read said Lenin was, *“actively involved in the struggle in Russia...minor but active role in organizing street action and supporting armed uprising.”* Lenin would speak at the Soviet in St. Petersburg before it was dissolved as well. Even before coming back to Russia, Lenin organized shipments of weapons to revolutionary forces. So, the perception that Lenin was just writing about revolutionary activities, and not actively participating in them is just unfounded.

The party was growing rapidly enough that the Bolsheviks started a daily paper to accompany the Proletary, the Novaya Zhizn (New Life). Lenin would use these platforms to analyze the revolution and balance of forces in the class struggle. The Bolsheviks and Mensheviks vehemently disagreed on the role of a socialist party regarding electoral participation and armed struggle—before and after the enactment of the State Duma and the formation of the Soviets. There aren’t many surviving works from Menshevik leaders like those from Lenin and other notable

Bolsheviks—a victim of losing the factional war. However, Julius Martov, one of the leading Menshevik figures of the era wrote in 1907 in *The Lessons of the Events in Russia* with a hyper-focus on the “legal” side of the struggle. In a time when the revolution was all but over, perfect for reflection on why the *armed* revolution failed, Martov spends little or no time writing on the need to increase the military capacity of the working class and social democrats. No effort from Martov to explain how to train and equip working-class militias to not only hold cities for weeks but to gain political and economic power.

It must also be noted that before the October Manifesto and the creation of the State Duma, certain liberal and bourgeois factions were on the side of the revolution—such as the Cadets. Once October happens, the bourgeoisie returns to the side of the Tsar and against the working and peasant classes. In a dogmatic view of Marxism and class struggle—where society goes through distinct stages of ancient slave-owning, feudal, bourgeois, and then socialist societies—the revolution is over after October. The effort, in a dogmatic Marxist view which the Mensheviks were a victim of, to get the semi-feudal Tsarist society to socialist and a dictatorship of the proletariat was impossible. It had to go through those distinct and universal stages. Lenin and the Bolsheviks rejected that and adapted to their material conditions. Marx and Engels rejected any attempts to dogmatically take their works and transpose them incorrectly to a different time with a different set of material conditions. A more modern and renowned Marxist theorist, Walter Rodney, summed up this phenomena, “Marxism can only be of value if whatever it takes to be the universal is applied to the particular; and it is in the very particularity of the exercise

that one will demonstrate that the universal is actually universal and that it is applicable.” Lenin clearly saw—due to the semi-feudal stage of development of Russia—that the “revolutionary people” were the working class and peasantry. The dictatorship of the proletariat that Marx and Engels wrote about when concerning capitalist-developed western Europe, was expanded upon when looking outside those material conditions with the “revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry.”

Lenin in *Two Tactics of Social-Democracy in the Democratic Revolution* explained the differences in strategy and tactics between the Bolsheviks and Mensheviks. He dismissed their “tactics-as-a-process” that was rigid and non-dialectical. While the Mensheviks sought only parliamentary and bourgeois tailist policies because of the stagism they prescribed, Lenin stated, “The difference between us in this respect is that we march side by side with the revolutionary and republican bourgeoisie, without merging with it, whereas you march side by side with the *liberal and the monarchist bourgeoisie...*” He continued, “*They failed to take into consideration that in a period in which a revolution has begun, when there is no parliament, when there is civil war, when insurrectionary outbreaks occur, the concepts and terms of parliamentary struggle are changed and transformed into their opposites...our admirers of Martynov repeat the lessons of peaceful parliamentarism just at a time when, as they themselves state, actual hostilities have commenced...A Social-Democrat must never for a moment forget that the proletariat will inevitably have to wage the class struggle for Socialism even against the most democratic and republican bourgeoisie and petty bourgeoisie.*”

At the end of December, the Bolsheviks decided to hold their own party congress in Finland and Sweden called the Tammerfors Conference—though there was a Menshevik representative named E.L. Gurevich. Its congress minutes have unfortunately been lost to time but certain details are well known. Nadya describes the atmosphere of the Conference as “enthusiasm...reigned there,” because the “revolution was in full swing.” It was the first time Lenin and Stalin met in person as well. They had been writing to each other privately since 1903 and Stalin had idolized him since the 1890s. It’s quite comical when Stalin gives a speech decades later on this meeting stating:

“I had pictured Lenin as a giant, stately and imposing. What, then, was my disappointment to see a most ordinary-looking man, below average height, in no way, literally in no way, distinguishable from ordinary mortals...It is accepted as the usual thing for a “great man” to come late to meetings so that the assembly may await, his appearance with bated breath; and then, just before the “great man” enters, the warning whisper goes up: “Hush! . . . Silence! . . . he’s coming.” This ritual did not seem to me superfluous, because it creates an impression, inspires respect. What, then, was my disappointment to learn that Lenin had arrived at the conference before the delegates, had settled himself somewhere in a corner, and was unassumingly carrying on a conversation, a most ordinary conversation with the most ordinary delegates at the conference. I will not conceal from you that at that time this seemed to me to be something of a violation of certain essential rules. Only later did I realise that this simplicity and modesty, this striving to remain unobserved, or, at least, not to make himself conspicuous and not to emphasise his high position, this feature was one of Lenin’s strongest points as the new leader of the new masses, of the simple and ordinary masses of the “rank and file” of humanity.”

The Bolsheviks approved of the merging and unity of the two factions of the RSDLP, a call for a unity congress, furthered the

agrarian question and called for the confiscation of all landed estates and church property, a boycott of the first Duma (which Lenin objected to but was outvoted), further democratic centralism, and “preparation and organization of an armed uprising.” As the conference was going on, a new wave of the revolution started in Moscow and the conference had to be ended early.

The Moscow uprising, the Bolshevik-majority Soviet, and the de facto control of the entire city for almost two weeks shook not only the empire, but the revolution as well. The events of the Moscow uprising were quite similar to the events of October—a strike wave hit the city, and the Tsar sent in detachments of troops to put down the strikes to not have a repeat of October. Armed worker militias were quickly organized, set up barricades throughout the city, and held the city for ten days. The Tsar sent in infantry, heavy artillery, and Cossack cavalry and laid siege to Moscow, particularly the Presyna district where many of the factories were and where the Bolshevik-led Soviet was located. However, there was a limited amount of organization for the fighting and a severe manpower issue for the revolutionary fighting force. Out of the nearly 150,000 workers who started the strike wave in Moscow, only 1,500 were actively fighting on the barricades when the Tsarist reaction arrived. The leadership was ill-prepared for the immediacy of the strike-to-revolution transition which exploded with a bombing of a police station. After the Tsarist regime stamped out this revolutionary fire, at least 1059 people were killed—137 women and 86 children—and 510 people were arrested and sent to the gulags.

In *Lessons of the Moscow Uprising*, Lenin saw that the “mass proletarian struggle developed from a strike to an uprising.” The struggle had reached again a new “higher stage” through the “enormous sacrifices” of the working class of Moscow. He saw that even though the Moscow uprising was put down, it wasn’t a mistake of the people to take arms. The mistakes and lessons were in “tactics and organization... military tactics... tactics of guerrilla warfare...” The idea of

“small” and “mobile” units striking the enemy and regrouping for continual harassment. The “new barricade tactics” to turn a city into a guerrilla fortress. All of these were advancements in Lenin’s view of the working class struggle in Russia from the age of labor strikes for purely economic gains. The failures were not to “develop” these tactics *“far enough...to a really mass extent. There were too few volunteer fighting squads, the slogan of bold attack was not issued to the masses of the workers and they did not apply it; the guerrilla detachments were too uniform in character, their arms and methods were inadequate, their ability to lead the crowd was almost undeveloped.”* Lenin also tied in the spontaneous “mass terror” from the peasantry and working class throughout the month and how that with more organized guerrilla warfare will teach the masses, through the struggle, the correct tactics and strategy. That Marxists can’t ignore “mass terror” and *“incorporate it into its tactics, organizing and controlling it of course, subordinating it to the interests and conditions of the working class movement.”*

Conversely, Plekhanov denounced the Moscow Uprising, “They should not have taken to arms.” Lenin, according to Nadya, “felt the Moscow defeat very keenly.” Plekhanov due to his health and age was not in Russia. He was alienated not only from the revolution but from the very masses of people who were sacrificing their lives for the struggle. That distance and alienation from the struggle lead to deviations and revisionism. Lenin, the Bolsheviks, and even Mensheviks like Trotsky were actively engaging in the struggle with the masses. It would set the road for some conciliatory efforts from certain Mensheviks with the Bolsheviks by 1917.

From 1906-1907, the revolution ebbed and flowed. The Bolsheviks organized underground partisan groups for guerrilla warfare throughout the countryside where the revolutionary fervor was not as exhausted as the urban hubs of the empire. Unlike other revolutions—France and England in particular—the peasantry in Tsarist Russia didn’t side with the reactionary forces. Also, unlike the Paris Commune, the Revolution had

spread like wildfire throughout many urban centers and the countryside. In this timeframe, there would be three different Duma's created. The Tsar would open up semi-compromises for the masses, the masses would continue the revolution, and the Tsar would restrict or shut down the Duma completely, and this was the pattern for the next two years. It was a tumultuous, protracted, and ever-fluid struggle. The Mensheviks kept a static, dogmatic, approach to work purely through the parliamentary struggle and within a bloc with the liberal bourgeois Cadets. The Bolsheviks through this period did have a program that ebbed and flowed with the material conditions and the stage of the struggle at present.

In late April and early May, there was an attempt at a Unity Congress of the RSDLP with both Bolshevik and Menshevik factions present along with every major national organization such as the Jewish Bund again. They fought on issues of democratic centralism, armed struggle, underground partisans, attitude towards the State Duma, the agrarian question, and more. However, it was the formal unification of the party again, with the Bolsheviks ignoring the resolution in the congress about the liquidation of the underground guerrilla units. Those were kept active by the Bolsheviks. This party unity wouldn't stop Lenin's sharp criticism of Menshevik's proposals and theory, and there wasn't consistent unity between the two factions. During the Second Duma, Bolsheviks were able to form Left Blocs in Moscow and St. Petersburg to win elections, but the Mensheviks only worked in the Left Bloc in Moscow and not St. Petersburg—which went against their programs and showed a pettiness and factional thinking instead of keeping the class struggle as the priority. Nadya calls the atmosphere of the Unity Congress as “factional” but that Lenin “still hoped” the wave of revolutionary activity would unify the factions. He would write to St. Petersburg workers about the congress afterward stating, “Freedom of discussion, unity of action is what we must strive for...All Social-Democrats agree among themselves in Supporting the revolutionary action of the peasantry and criticizing petty-bourgeois utopias...In the

elections complete *unity* of action is imperative. The congress has decided that we should *all* vote wherever there are any elections. No criticism for taking part in the elections is to be made during the elections. The *action* of the proletariat must be united.”

In June of 1906 the historic revolutionary contemporary, Rosa Luxemburg, would travel to Russia and worked with Lenin and the Bolsheviks. She was recently released from prison in Tsarist-controlled Warsaw. She would meet and work with Lenin—building a respectful relationship. It will come again when in 1917, Luxemburg would critique the Bolsheviks. It’s often used by left communists and social democrats today as ammunition against the ‘purity’ of the Russian Revolution—even though Rosa Luxemburg would have her own break with Social Democracy in Germany like Lenin in Russia, led a communist revolution that started soviets, but tragically be murdered by an alliance of social democrats and reactionary elements. The irony of today is when the ideological descendants of dogmatic Marxism and social democracy of the Second International denounce Lenin but uplift Rosa Luxemburg.

The First Duma was “legally” dissolved in the summer of 1906 and the Second Duma would be created in early 1907 before also being dissolved and a massive wave of state repression against all political parties that did not align with the autocracy like the Black Hundreds. Which were able to gain—with a right-wing bloc with the Octobrists—a majority within the Third State Duma by the time it was created in early November. At this point, Lenin was clear on the “utter uselessness” of using the Duma to achieve the demands of the workers and peasants. There was an “impossibility of achieving political freedom by parliamentary means as long as the real power remains in the hands of the tsarist government.” The struggle had to be waged in “open struggle” against the forces of “absolutism.” In August 1907, the Second International, the collective body of all the socialist parties in the world—had another congress in Stuttgart. Lenin, Stalin, and other

Bolsheviks were delegates from the RSDLP. Issues on war, colonialism, trade unionism, etc. were discussed. It was also another time of meeting Rosa Luxemburg, Karl Kautsky, etc., and pushing for a more dialectical approach compared to the revisionist trend by Eduard Bernstein and others.

Due to the continued and increased state repression and the revolutionary movement being exhausted by the end of 1907, a mass exodus of revolutionaries happened again. The parties became illegal again and the forces of reaction had temporarily triumphed. Eventually, even Lenin would have to leave Russia again, thinking he may never see it again, and he almost didn't. He was supposed to get smuggled from Finland to Sweden and had to cross a massive lake. His contact never showed so he sent out on the frozen lake at night. Lenin according to all sources almost died in that journey to Sweden across a frozen lake. He would later tell Nadya that when he felt the ice give way underneath him he thought to himself, "Ah, what a stupid way to die." Lenin and Nadya would travel from Stockholm, Sweden to Berlin, Germany. They had to escape police in Berlin who were arresting Russian revolutionaries fleeing Tsarist repression just to face Kaiser oppression. Their saving grace was again, Rosa Luxemburg who hid them before getting them safely back to Geneva Switzerland. The Ulyanovs had returned to a life of diaspora and secret police evasion, but the revolutionary drive was not extinguished.

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