

Marxist
XXXVIII, 3
July-September 2022

Document

Declaration of the Editorial Board of *Iskra*

In undertaking the publication of a political newspaper, *Iskra*, we consider it necessary to say a few words concerning the objects for which we are striving and the understanding we have of our tasks.

We are passing through an extremely important period in the history of the Russian working-class movement and Russian Social-Democracy. The past few years have been marked by an astonishingly rapid spread of Social-Democratic ideas among our intelligentsia, and meeting this trend in social ideas is an independent movement of the industrial proletariat, which is beginning to unite and struggle against its oppressors, and to strive eagerly towards socialism. Study circles of workers and Social-Democratic intellectuals are springing up everywhere, local agitation leaflets are being widely distributed, the demand for Social-Democratic literature is increasing and is far outstripping the supply, and intensified government persecution is powerless to restrain the movement. The prisons and places of exile are filled to overflowing. Hardly a month goes by without our hearing of socialists “caught in dragnets” in all parts of Russia, of the capture of underground couriers, of the confiscation of literature and printing-presses. But the movement is growing, it is spreading to ever wider regions, it is penetrating more and more deeply into the working class and is attracting public attention to an ever-increasing degree. The entire economic development of Russia and the history of social thought and of the revolutionary movement in Russia serve as a guarantee that the Social-Democratic working-class movement will grow and will, in the end, surmount all the obstacles that confront it.

On the other hand, the principal feature of our movement, which has become particularly marked in recent times, is its state of disunity and its amateur character, if one may so express it. Local study circles spring up and function independently of one another and—what is particularly important—of circles that have functioned and still function in the same districts. Traditions are not

established and continuity is not maintained; local publications fully reflect this disunity and the lack of contact with what Russian Social-Democracy has already achieved.

Such a state of disunity is not in keeping with the demands posed by the movement in its present strength and breadth, and creates, in our opinion, a critical moment in its development. The need for consolidation and for a definite form and organisation is felt with irresistible force in the movement itself; yet among Social-Democrats active in the practical field this need for a transition to a higher form of the movement is not everywhere realised. On the contrary, among wide circles an ideological wavering is to be seen, an infatuation with the fashionable “criticism of Marxism” and with “Bernsteinism,” the spread of the views of the so-called “economist” trend, and what is inseparably connected with it—an effort to keep the movement at its lower level, to push into the background the task of forming a revolutionary party that heads the struggle of the entire people. *It is a fact* that such an ideological wavering is to be observed among Russian Social-Democrats; that narrow practicalism, detached from the theoretical clarification of the movement as a whole, threatens to divert the movement to a false path. No one who has direct knowledge of the state of affairs in the majority of our organisations has any doubt whatever on that score. Moreover, literary productions exist which confirm this. It is sufficient to mention the *Credo*, which has already called forth legitimate protest; the *Separate Supplement to “Rabochaya Mysl”* (September 1899), which brought out so markedly the trend that permeates the *whole* of *Rabochaya Mysl*; and, finally, the manifesto of the St. Petersburg Self-Emancipation of the Working Class group,^[1] also drawn up in the spirit of “economism.” And *completely untrue* are the assertions of *Rabocheye Dyelo* to the effect that the *Credo* merely represents the opinions of individuals, that the trend represented by *Rabochaya Mysl* expresses merely the confusion of mind and the tactlessness of its editors, and not a special tendency in the progress of the Russian working-class movement.

Simultaneously with this, the works of authors whom the reading public has hitherto, with more or less reason, regarded as prominent representatives of “legal” Marxism are increasingly revealing a change of views in a direction approximating that of bourgeois apologetics. As a result of all this, we have the confusion and anarchy which has enabled the ex-Marxist, or, more precisely, the ex-socialist, Bernstein, in recounting his successes, to declare,

unchallenged, in the press that the majority of Social-Democrats active in Russia are his followers.

We do not desire to exaggerate the gravity of the situation, but it would be immeasurably more harmful to close our eyes to it. For this reason we heartily welcome the decision of the Emancipation of Labour group to resume its literary activity and begin a systematic struggle against the attempts to distort and vulgarise Social-Democracy.

The following practical conclusion is to be drawn from the foregoing: we Russian Social-Democrats must unite and direct all our efforts towards the formation of a strong party which must struggle under the single banner of revolutionary Social-Democracy. This is precisely the task laid down by the congress in 1898 at which the Russian Social-Democratic Labour Party was formed, and which published its *Manifesto*.

We regard ourselves as members of this Party; we agree entirely with the fundamental ideas contained in the *Manifesto* and attach extreme importance to it as a public declaration of its aims. Consequently, we, as members of the Party, present the question of our immediate and direct tasks as follows: What plan of activity must we adopt to revive the Party on the firmest possible basis?

The reply usually made to this question is that it is necessary to elect anew a central Party body and instruct it to resume the publication of the Party organ. But, in the period of confusion through which we are now passing, such a simple method is hardly expedient.

To establish and consolidate the Party means to establish and consolidate unity among all Russian Social-Democrats, and, for the reasons indicated above, such unity can not be decreed, it cannot be brought about by a decision, say, of a meeting of representatives; it must be worked for. In the first place, it is necessary to work for solid ideological unity which should eliminate discordance and confusion that—let us be frank!—reign among Russian Social-Democrats at the present time. This ideological unity must be consolidated by a Party programme. Secondly, we must work to achieve an organisation especially for the purpose of establishing and maintaining contact among all the centres of the movement, of supplying complete and timely information about the movement, and of delivering our newspapers and periodicals regularly to all parts of Russia. Only when such an organisation has been founded, only when a Russian socialist post has been established, will the Party possess a sound foundation and become a real fact, and, therefore, a mighty political force. We intend to

devote our efforts to the first half of this task, i.e., to creating a common literature, consistent in principle and capable of ideologically uniting revolutionary Social-Democracy, since we regard this as the pressing demand of the movement today and a necessary preliminary measure towards the resumption of Party activity.

As we have said, the ideological unity of Russian Social-Democrats has still to be created, and to this end it is, in our opinion, necessary to have an open and all-embracing discussion of the fundamental questions of principle and tactics raised by the present-day “economists,” Bernsteinians, and “critics.” Before we can unite, and in order that we may unite, we must first of all draw firm and definite lines of demarcation. Otherwise, our unity will be purely fictitious, it will conceal the prevailing confusion and hinder its radical elimination. It is understandable, therefore, that we do not intend to make our publication a mere storehouse of various views. On the contrary, we shall conduct it in the spirit of a strictly defined tendency. This tendency can be expressed by the word Marxism, and there is hardly need to add that we stand for the consistent development of the ideas of Marx and Engels and emphatically reject the equivocating, vague, and opportunist “corrections” for which Eduard Bernstein, P. Struve, and many others have set the fashion. But although we shall discuss all questions from our own definite point of view, we shall give space in our columns to polemics between comrades. Open polemics, conducted in full view of all Russian Social-Democrats and class-conscious workers, are necessary and desirable in order to clarify the depth of existing differences, in order to afford discussion of disputed questions from all angles, in order to combat the extremes into which representatives, not only of various views, but even of various localities, or various “specialities” of the revolutionary movement, inevitably fall. Indeed, as noted above, we regard one of the drawbacks of the present-day movement to be the absence of open polemics between avowedly differing views, the effort to conceal differences on fundamental questions.

We shall not enumerate in detail all questions and points of subject-matter included in the programme of our publication, for this programme derives automatically from the general conception of what a political newspaper, published under present conditions, should be.

We will exert our efforts to bring every Russian comrade to regard our publication as his own, to which all groups would communicate every kind of information concerning the movement, in which they

would relate their experiences, express their views, indicate their needs for political literature, and voice their opinions concerning Social-Democratic editions: in a word, they would thereby share whatever contribution they make to the movement and whatever they draw from it. Only in this way will it be possible to establish a genuinely all-Russian Social-Democratic organ. Only such a publication will be capable of leading the movement on to the high road of political struggle. “Extend the bounds and broaden the content of our propagandist, agitational, and organisational activity”—these words of P. B. Axelrod must serve as a slogan defining the activities of Russian Social Democrats in the immediate future, and we adopt this slogan in the programme of our publication.

We appeal not only to socialists and class-conscious workers, we also call upon all who are oppressed by the present political system; we place the columns of our publications at their disposal in order that they may expose all the abominations of the Russian autocracy.

Those who regard Social-Democracy as an organisation serving exclusively the spontaneous struggle of the proletariat may be content with merely local agitation and working-class literature “pure and simple.” We do not understand Social-Democracy in this way; we regard it as a revolutionary party, inseparably connected with the working-class movement and directed against absolutism. Only when organised in such a party will the proletariat—the most revolutionary class in Russia today—be in a position to fulfil the historical task that confronts it—to unite under its banner all the democratic elements in the country and to crown the tenacious struggle in which so many generations have fallen with the final triumph over the hated regime.

* *
*

The size of the newspaper will range from one to two printed signatures.

In view of the conditions under which the Russian under ground press has to work, there will be no regular date of publication.

We have been promised contributions by a number of prominent representatives of international Social-Democracy, the close co-operation of the Emancipation of Labour group (G. V. Plekhanov, P. B. Axelrod, and V. I. Zasluch), and the support of several organisations of the Russian Social-Democratic Labour Party, as well as of separate groups of Russian Social-Democrats.

In the Name of the Editorial Board

Notes

[1] *The Self-Emancipation of the Working Class group* was a small circle of “economists” that came into being in St. Petersburg in the autumn of 1898 and existed for a few months only. The group issued a manifesto announcing its aims (printed in the magazine *Nakanune* [*On the Eve*], published in London), its rules, and several proclamations addressed to workers. Lenin criticised the views of this group in Chapter 2 of his book, *What Is to Be Done?*

Written: Written in September 1900

Published: First published in 1900 by *Iskra* as a separate leaflet.

Published according to the text of the leaflet, 1900.

Source: “Marxists Internet Archive”