

## 6. THE STRUGGLES AGAINST THE LIQUIDATORS, THE OTZOVISTS AND TROTSKY

During the years of Stolypin reaction, the Russian reactionaries greatly extended their suppression of the revolutionary movement. At the same time they introduced changes in the countryside which facilitated the development of a kulak economy. The revolutionary movement was on the decline. Lenin pointed out that as the objective tasks of the Russian revolution had not been fulfilled and the deep-rooted causes which had given rise to the Revolution of 1905 remained, the masses would be impelled to renew their revolutionary struggles and therefore a new rise of the revolutionary tide was inevitable. He laid it down that the fundamental aims of the Bolsheviks were still the overthrow of tsardom, the completion of the bourgeois-democratic revolution and the transition to socialist revolution.

Lenin also pointed out that under intensified reactionary rule, it was impossible for a general political strike or an armed uprising to be staged immediately, and instead, roundabout methods had to be employed against tsardom. Defensive tactics — an improved combination of underground work and legal work — should be adopted to build up strength and prepare the way for replacing defensive by offensive tactics once the revolutionary tide rose. He said that the Party must “concentrate all our efforts on a systematic, undeviating, comprehensive and

persistent utilisation of each and every legal possibility in order to gather the forces of the proletariat, to help it to group and consolidate itself, to help it to train itself for the struggle and stretch its limbs; and also steadily to restore the illegal Party units, to learn how to adapt them to new conditions, to restore the illegal purely Party organisations, and, first and foremost, the purely proletarian organisations, which alone are capable of directing all the work in the legal organisations, to imbue this work with the revolutionary Social-Democratic spirit”.<sup>1</sup> In order to make an orderly retreat and once more accumulate revolutionary strength so as to be prepared for the new rise in the tide of revolution, the Party had to fight on the one hand the liquidators who made a fetish of bourgeois legality and wanted to abolish the Party, and on the other the Otzovists who refused to make use of legal opportunities.

### LIQUIDATORS MAKE A FETISH OF BOURGEOIS LEGALITY

Frightened by counter-revolutionary violence, the Mensheviks refused to believe that a new rise in the tide of the revolution was possible. Many of them became liquidators, advancing the slogan of organizing an “open working-class party” or of “a struggle for an open party”. They attempted to liquidate the organization of the Russian Social-Democratic Labour Party and in its place to substitute an amorphous association which, they contended, must at all costs work within the limits of

<sup>1</sup>“Notes of a Publicist”, *Collected Works*, Moscow, Vol. 16, p. 259.

legality, even if that legality had to be attained at the cost of open renunciation of the programme, tactics and traditions of the Party. Pointing out that liquidationism was ideologically connected with opportunism, but was something more than opportunism, Lenin said:

The opportunists are leading the Party on to a wrong, bourgeois path, the path of a liberal-labour policy, but they *do not renounce* the Party itself, they do not liquidate it. Liquidationism is *that brand* of opportunism which goes to the length of *renouncing* the Party.<sup>1</sup>

To carry out their capitulationist line, the liquidators conducted splitting actions against the Party. They renounced the Party, left its ranks and fought it in the columns of the legal press, in the legal workers' organizations, in the trade unions, co-operative societies and at mass gatherings. In his article "Controversial Issues", Lenin said that the liquidators' "slogan of an open working-class party is, in its class origin, a slogan of the counter-revolutionary liberals. It contains nothing save reformism".<sup>2</sup> He said:

Liquidationism means not only the liquidation (i.e., the dissolution, the destruction) of the old party of the working class, it also means the destruction of the *class independence* of the proletariat, the corruption of its class-consciousness by *bourgeois* ideas.<sup>3</sup>

Lenin pointed out that under the conditions prevalent in Russia at the time, it was inevitable for the opportunists to become liquidators. He wrote:

<sup>1</sup>"Controversial Issues", *Collected Works*, Moscow, Vol. 19, p. 151.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 161.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 155-56.

... in a period of bourgeois revolution, the opportunist wing of the workers' party, at times of crisis, disintegration and collapse, is bound to be either out-and-out liquidationist or liquidator-ridden. In a period of bourgeois revolution the proletarian party *is bound* to have a following of petty-bourgeois *fellow-travellers* ... who are least capable of digesting proletarian theory and tactics, least capable of holding their own in time of collapse, most likely to carry opportunism to its extreme.<sup>1</sup>

Lenin drew a clear line of demarcation between the Bolsheviks and the liquidators on the question of the limits of legal activity. He said:

... we want to strengthen the Social-Democratic Party, utilising all legal possibilities and all opportunities of open action; the liquidators want to squeeze the Party into the framework of a legal and open (under Stolypin) existence. We are fighting for the revolutionary overthrow of the Stolypin autocracy, utilising *for this struggle* every case of open action, widening the proletarian basis of the movement for this purpose. The liquidators are fighting for the open existence of the labour movement ... under Stolypin.<sup>2</sup>

To preserve the purity and unity of the political party of the proletariat, the Russian Social-Democratic Labour Party adopted a resolution at its Prague Conference in January 1912, expelling the Mensheviks and liquidators.

<sup>1</sup>"The Liquidation of Liquidationism", *Collected Works*, Moscow, Vol. 15, p. 455.

<sup>2</sup>"Some Sources of the Present Ideological Discord", *Collected Works*, Moscow, Vol. 16, pp. 91-92.

"LIQUIDATIONISM ON THE LEFT" AND TROTSKY,  
WHO VEERED WITH THE WIND

While fighting the liquidators, Lenin also opposed the "Left" windbags, the Otzovists represented by Bogdanov and others, who were petty-bourgeois fellow-travellers in the Bolshevik Party.

The Third Duma, held in November 1907, was an out-and-out reactionary Duma of the Black Hundreds and the Constitutional-Democrats. The Otzovists demanded the recall of the Social-Democratic deputies from the Duma. They refused to work in the trade unions and other legally existing organizations and insisted on illegality at any price, maintaining that there were no legal avenues for Party work.

Lenin indicated that the objective conditions for boycotting the Duma did not exist as the revolutionary tide was at a low ebb. He contended that the Social-Democratic Party should participate in the Third Duma and use the rostrum it afforded to struggle against the tsarist government and the Constitutional-Democrats and conduct propaganda for socialism. To use the rostrum of parliament for preparing revolution was a necessary tactic in the specific historical circumstances. While attending the Duma, the Social-Democratic Party was "not to do deals or haggle with the powers that be, not to engage in the hopeless patching-up of the regime of the feudal-bourgeois dictatorship of counter-revolution, but to develop in every way the class consciousness, the socialist clarity of thought, the revolutionary determination and all-round organisation of the mass of the

workers".<sup>1</sup> Every activity of the Social-Democratic fraction in the Duma "must serve this fundamental aim".<sup>2</sup> By refusing to utilize legal opportunities for revolutionary activities, the Otzovists were separating the Party from the working class, were secluding themselves in underground organization and denying the Party the opportunity to use legal cover. In fact, the Otzovists renounced Party leadership of the broad non-Party masses and hampered the gathering of strength for a new advance of the revolution. Lenin called the Otzovist trend "liquidationism on the left" and maintained that it was just as necessary to struggle against this as against the liquidationism on the right. Finally, in June 1909, the Otzovists were expelled from the Bolshevik Party.

Later, when discussing the struggle against the Otzovists, Lenin wrote:

Of all the defeated opposition and revolutionary parties, the Bolsheviks effected the most orderly retreat, with the least loss to their "army," with its core best preserved, with the least (in respect to profundity and irremediability) splits, with the least demoralization, and in the best condition to resume the work on the broadest scale and in the most correct and energetic manner. The Bolsheviks achieved this only because they ruthlessly exposed and expelled the revolutionary phrasemongers, who refused to understand that one had to retreat, that one had to know how to retreat, and that one had absolutely to learn how to

<sup>1</sup> "Conference of the Extended Editorial Board of *Proletary*", *Collected Works*, Moscow, Vol. 15, pp. 439-40.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 440.

work legally in the most reactionary parliaments, in the most reactionary trade unions, co-operative societies, insurance societies and similar organizations.<sup>1</sup>

At that time Trotsky adopted a completely liquidationist stand. He declared:

The pre-revolutionary Social-Democratic Party in our country was a *workers'* party only in ideas and aims. Actually, it was an organisation of the Marxist intelligentsia, which led the awakening working class.<sup>2</sup>

Lenin commented, in "Disruption of Unity Under Cover of Outcries for Unity", "This is the old liberal and Liquidationist tune, which is really the prelude to the *repudiation* of the Party."<sup>3</sup> In 1912 Trotsky organized the August Bloc, assembling the liquidators, the Otzovists and other anti-Bolshevik groups and trends to oppose Lenin. However, he pretended to be "non-factional", saying that "all trends employ the same methods of struggle and organisation".<sup>4</sup> He maligned Lenin saying, "The outcries about the liberal danger in our working-class movement are simply a crude and sectarian travesty of reality."<sup>5</sup> Trotsky's hypocritical and high-sounding outbursts simply served as a blatant apology for liquidationism. Lenin exposed Trotsky's inglorious past, which was characterized by inconsistency and vacillation. At one time Trotsky had been an ardent Menshevik, at another

<sup>1</sup> "Left-Wing' Communism, an Infantile Disorder", *Selected Works*, Moscow, Vol. II, Part 2, p. 349.

<sup>2</sup> Quoted by Lenin in "Disruption of Unity Under Cover of Outcries for Unity", *Collected Works*, Moscow, Vol. 20, p. 343.

<sup>3</sup> "Disruption of Unity Under Cover of Outcries for Unity", *ibid.*

<sup>4,5</sup> Quoted by Lenin in "Disruption of Unity Under Cover of Outcries for Unity", *ibid.*, p. 344.

he proclaimed the absurdly "Left" theory of "permanent revolution". A short while earlier he had collaborated with the "Economists", and now he had joined with the liquidators. He declared himself to be above factions for the simple reason that he used to "borrow" his ideas from one group one day and from another the next day.<sup>1</sup> In fact, he was "a representative of the 'worst remnants of factionalism'".<sup>2</sup>

#### UNITY WITH THE LIQUIDATORS IS IMPOSSIBLE

The Second International had always supported the opportunists in the Russian Social-Democratic Party. Therefore in order to fight the liquidators in the Party, Lenin had to struggle against the Second International which supported liquidationism.

In December 1913 the Executive Committee of the International Socialist Bureau again discussed the question of unity in the Russian Party. Two plans were put forward at the meeting. One was submitted by Rosa Luxemburg; she took a conciliatory stand and made an unprincipled demand for the restoration of so-called Party unity. Lenin criticized her mistake. The other plan was put forward by Kautsky; his proposal was "to arrange a general exchange of opinion". The International Bureau adopted a resolution along the lines proposed by Kautsky. Lenin said that the resolution was acceptable, but pointed out that Kautsky erred in stating at the meeting that the Russian Party "had disappeared". He

<sup>1</sup> "Disruption of Unity Under Cover of Outcries for Unity", *ibid.*, p. 346.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 331.

said that "a distinction must be drawn between Kautsky's resolution, which was adopted by the Bureau, and the *speech* he made";<sup>1</sup> he called it "a good resolution and a bad speech".

A conference to restore the "unity" of the Russian Party was convened in Brussels in July 1914, under the auspices of the International Bureau. Besides the Bolsheviks, the Mensheviks and the liquidators, there were other groups and trends. The conference was originally arranged for the exchange of opinion, but under Kautsky's manipulation, it passed a resolution for restoring "unity". The Bolsheviks refused to vote on the resolution. Lenin held that there was not the least possibility of compromising with the liquidators. Long before the conference he had written:

The Party cannot exist unless it defends its existence, unless it unreservedly fights those who want to liquidate it, destroy it, who do not recognise it, who renounce it.<sup>2</sup>

He had demanded as a condition for real Party unity "a complete rupture with liquidationism and the utter rout of this bourgeois deviation from socialism".<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>"A Good Resolution and a Bad Speech", *Collected Works*, Moscow, Vol. 19, p. 529.

<sup>2</sup>"Controversial Issues", *op. cit.*, p. 151.

<sup>3</sup>"The Sixth (Prague) All-Russian Conference of the R.S.D.L.P.", *Collected Works*, Moscow, Vol. 17, p. 460.