

Chapter Two

THE ST. PETERSBURG LEAGUE OF STRUGGLE FOR THE EMANCIPATION OF THE WORKING CLASS

In the 1890s, St. Petersburg with its suburbs was a major hub of factory industry. Over the previous decade alone, 209 works and factories had been built in the St. Petersburg Gubernia. As the number of industrial enterprises grew, the army of the proletariat expanded, too. In 1890, about 10 per cent of the country's industrial workers were concentrated in the St. Petersburg industrial area; 90 per cent of them were employed in the city and its suburbs.

The St. Petersburg working class was a legitimate heir to the revolutionary traditions of the previous generations of fighters for the people's cause. By the mid-1890s, it had accumulated considerable experience in its own movement, too.

The proletariat's struggle was caused by cruel economic oppression, the arbitrariness of factory owners, the lack of political rights, and the unbearable working conditions. Strikes occurred more and more often. At the same time, the workers were striving to gain general knowledge and comprehend socialist theory.

In the winter of 1889-90, there were about two dozen workers' study circles in St. Petersburg. They were guided by Social-Democratic intellectuals and, sometimes, by advanced workers. As the number of these circles increased, it became necessary to co-ordinate their activities. Meetings of workers with representatives of the Social-Democratic intelligentsia took place beyond the Narva Gate and in the Vasilyevsky Ostrov district, and the decision was adopted to establish a central city workers' study circle consisting of representatives of the district groups.

The central circle of the intelligentsia was represented in the central city study circle by V. S. Golubev, and after he was arrested, by M. I. Brusnev. From the district workers' circles, the most respected participants of the Social-Democratic movement were elected – F. A. Afanasyev (known as Father), weaver from Voronin's mill; Ye. A. Klimanov, a blacksmith at the Expedition for making banknotes, stamps and other state papers; N. D. Bogdanov, a metal worker at the map-printing factory; G. A. Mefodyev, a turner at the Warsaw Railway shops; P. N. Yevgrafov, a fitter at the Novy harbour; V. V. Buyanov, a lathe operator at the Putilov Works; and V. V. Fomin, a turner at the Baltiisky Works. Regular lessons of the central study cir-

cle were as a rule conducted at Fomin's flat, and sometimes at Afanasyev's, Klimanov's, or Yevgrafov's, too. Later, this Social-Democratic association, set up through the joint efforts of the advanced workers and Marxist intellectuals and having a Marxist political orientation, went under the name of Brusnev's group after one of its organisers.

In 1891, the group which had carried on strictly secret activities up till that time, announced its existence by participating in a demonstration on the occasion of the funeral of N. V. Shelgunov, a democratic writer, and by organising the first May Day illegal workers' meeting in St. Petersburg. After many of its members had been arrested in 1892, Brusnev's group ceased to exist.

Despite the blow the police dealt at the Social-Democratic movement, the revolutionary workers who escaped arrest, again formed a central workers' study circle, which was joined by V. A. Shelgunov, K. M. Norinsky, I. I. Keiser, and G. M. Fisher. The efforts of its members were directed at restoring the workers' circles and providing propagandists to lead them. In the second half of 1892 and the early 1893, Marxist workers' study circles were organised in all city districts.

LENIN'S ARRIVAL IN ST. PETERSBURG AND THE SOCIAL-DEMOCRATIC MOVEMENT IN THE CITY

In the autumn of 1893, Vladimir Ilyich Ulyanov (Lenin) arrived in St. Petersburg. He was a well-educated young man of 23, a convinced Marxist. As soon as he arrived in Russia's political centre, he set about putting into effect his plan to create an independent proletarian party.

St. Petersburg Marxists were not united into a single organisation at that time; there were several Social-Democratic groups, and Marxist propaganda was not tied up with the country's political life, or with the tasks of the proletariat's struggle. The most vigorous activities were carried out by a study circle set up in 1892 by S. I. Radchenko, a student of the Technological Institute; among its members were his fellow-students G. M. Krzhizhanovsky and V. V. Starkov. Soon the circle was joined by G. B. Krasin, a former member of Brusnev's group, who had returned from an exile, and the students A. L. Malchenko, M. K. Nazvanov and P. K. Zaporozhets. In 1893, A. A. Vaneyev and M. A. Silvin, who came from Nizhny Novgorod, also joined the group.

N. K. Krupskaya, a teacher at the Kornilov school where lectures were given on Sundays, was also involved with this group. In 1890, she studied works by Marx and Engels in the study circle run by the

Technological Institute students Ya. P. Korobko and R. E. Klasson, and became a member of Brusnev's group. After the group was crushed, she got in touch with Krasin and Radchenko and worked actively in their circle.

All the members of this circle guided workers' study circles: Krzhizhanovsky led one beyond the Narva Gate, and Vaneyev at the Putilov Works and the Rubber Mill, Silvin among the New Admiralty shipbuilders, and Starkov in the village of Tentelevka and in Glazovaya Street. They also conducted individual studies with more advanced workers.

From time to time, the students discussed the practical matters involved in the circle's activities. Each member reported on his study circle – How many workers enlisted, how often they came to the studies, and what interested them. Yet everybody understood that themselves were not adequately grounded in Marxism and were studying the theory of scientific socialism in isolation from Russian reality.

The study circle of the Technological Institute students propagated Marxist ideology, maintained relations with the St. Petersburg proletariat and enjoyed great respect among the foremost workers. Among the Marxists it was known as the Central Group for Leading the Workers' Movement.

In 1893, a new Social-Democratic study circle was organised by a student, I. V. Chernyshev, at the same Technological Institute. Among its members were F. V. Lengnik, L. K. Martens, Ye. G. Bogatyryov and N. G. Malishevsky. They were known as the Young, not to be confused with the members of Radchenko's circle, who were called the Old. The majority of the members of the new circle joined the Social-Democratic movement in that same year, 1893. The Young put every effort into competing with the Old for influence over the workers' study circles, but all to no avail.

In late 1892-early 1893, a third students' study circle emerged in Russia's capital, which was joined by students from the Military Medical Academy such as K. M. Takhtarev, A. F. Nikitin, P. A. Bogoraz, N. A. Alexeyev, V. N. Katin-Yartsev, and others. They studied the works of Marx and Engels, and the working-class movement in the West, but their work consisted only in dissemination of knowledge.

An important part in the rapprochement between the intelligentsia and the workers was played by schools where lectures were read on Sundays, in which advanced young workers studied; while imparting elementary general knowledge to them, the lecturers also got them

acquainted with the ideas of scientific socialism. Quite famous among these schools was the Smolenskaya (Kornilov) school situated beyond the Neva Gate, at which about 600 workers studied. They were taught by members of the Old's circle, who worked actively to consolidate the Marxists' relations with the vanguard workers.

As the country's socio-political life showed signs of invigoration, the Narodniks became active, too. At the end of 1891, a Narodnaya Volya group was formed in St. Petersburg. Making use of old Narodnik connections, it launched propaganda of its views among the workers. In the late 1893-early 1894, a discussion took place between Narodniks and Marxists, in which advanced workers also participated. The discussion made the workers ever more convinced that the Narodniks' views were erroneous.

When evaluating the workers' participation in the discussions between Marxists and the Narodnaya Volya group members, Lenin wrote: "Those advanced workers were Social-Democrats; many of them even took a personal part in the disputes between the Narodnaya Volya adherents and the Social-Democrats that typified the transition of the Russian revolutionary movement from peasant and conspiratorial socialism to working-class socialism."*

Despite the defeat they sustained in the first dispute, the Narodniks continued their attacks on the Social-Democrats. The St. Petersburg Social-Democrats decided to draw more workers into the next discussion. About twenty people came, representing all districts of the capital, among them were V. A. Shelgunov, I. I. Reiser, A. Fisher, S. I. Funtikov, I. I. Yakovlev, A. P. Ilyin. This discussion also proved that St. Petersburg proletarians were certainly being won over to Marxist views.

The ties between the Social-Democratic workers and the circle of the Old were consolidated in the struggle against Narodism. The foundation was being laid, on which a single Social-Democratic organisation was formed subsequently in the city.

On the recommendation of the Nizhny Novgorod Marxists, Lenin established contact with Radchenko's Marxist study circle. His first meeting with its members took place at Krzhizhanovsky's-and Starkov's flat; Krasin and Radchenko were also present. The Peters-

* V. I. Lenin, "A Retrograde Trend in Russian Social-Democracy", *Collected Works*, Vol. 4, p. 260. – *Ed.*

burg Marxists told Lenin about the way propaganda was being conducted among the workers in the city. It was amateurish and involved a small section of advanced workers. The study circle members did not tie up Marxist theory with the vital political tasks facing the working class, or apply Marx's teaching to explain the country's economic and political situation, or draw practical revolutionary conclusions. This was primarily due to the weakness of the theoretical, organisational, and practical work in the Old's group.

At the very first meeting, Lenin, while criticising some aspects of the circle's activities, laid special stress on the fact that it was divorced from the workers' movement. He called on the circle's members to analyse the diverse aspects of life in Russia from the viewpoint of Marx's theory rather than study Marxism in an abstract way.

All those attending the meeting accepted Lenin's suggestion and each of them selected a subject for theoretical study. The first report, on Vorontsov's work *Our Directions*, was made by Silvin, but it proved to be superficial and contained insufficient factual data. Krasin offered to read a report on markets for discussion at the next meeting. The question of markets, of the fate of capitalism in Russia greatly interested the Russian progressively-minded public.

Krasin read his report from a copybook with Lenin's critical remarks in the margin. It was essentially a summary of a chapter from the second volume of Marx's *Capital*, a dry, dogmatic exposition, having no bearing on the economic processes under way in Russia.

After Krasin finished, Lenin took the floor. He criticised the reporter for the abstract way he had presented the development of capitalism, and for not analysing Russia's economic and political development.

In November 1893, Lenin prepared a report "On the So-Called Market Question". Relying on the Marxist theory of reproduction and an analysis of statistical data, he traced the process of the disintegration of simple commodity economy and its transformation into capitalist economy. He delivered a shattering blow at the Narodnik thesis that the internal market for capitalist industry was shrinking, and showed the absurdity of their assertion that Russia had its own path to follow, proving that capitalism in Russia was not an accident, but a natural stage in social development.

Lenin's report greatly impressed the St. Petersburg Marxists. The market question in Lenin's interpretation, Krupskaya recalled later, "was posed in an extremely concrete fashion and was tied up with the

interests of the masses; living Marxism, considering phenomena in their concrete surroundings and in their evolution, was felt in the whole approach".*

The report was a fine example of a creative approach to Marxist theory. His very first speeches brought Lenin recognition and won him a great popularity with the revolutionaries. The St. Petersburg Marxists came to rally around him. "Here he is our leader, our theoretician, we shall not be lost while led by him, that was what each of us thought," Silvin recalled, "and we were overjoyed that it was in our circle, in our organisation that this brilliant mind had appeared."

Lenin firmly guided his comrades-in-arms from an abstract-dogmatic study of works by Marx and Engels to concrete reality, and onto the path of vigorous revolutionary activity. He demanded that they did not limit their work to teaching in the circles and conducting individual studies with those workers who were advanced in politics, but that they should try to establish relations with the proletarian masses and study their living and working conditions. The small group of the Old won over to its side more and more supporters, strengthened its influence among the revolutionaries and stepped up its struggle against Narodism.

At first Lenin only delivered speeches exposing Narodism. His talks with workers, his open polemics with the Narodniks in St. Petersburg, Moscow and Nizhny Novgorod consolidated the Marxists' positions in these cities. But it was not enough to deal a final blow at the liberal Narodnik ideology.

In the spring and summer of 1894, Lenin wrote *What the "Friends of the People" Are and How They Fight the Social-Democrats*. That was in fact a manifesto of Russian revolutionary Social-Democracy, in which the theoretical and programmatic-tactical principles, and the political tasks of the Russian Marxist working-class party were formulated. Lenin not only defended Marxist theory from attacks by liberal Narodniks, but developed and applied it in the new historical conditions obtaining, elaborating on a number of new problems in philosophy, political economy and scientific socialism.

Lenin completed the first part of the work in April 1894, and the remaining two parts, by the summer same year. The book could not be published legally, but only in a strictly conspiratorial way. The first

* *Reminiscences of Vladimir Ilyich Lenin*, Vol. 1, p. 223 – Ed.

part, criticising the Narodniks' philosophical views, was hectographed in the spring of 1894, with practical matters being organised by Radchenko. The printed pages were brought to the flat of Vaneyev and Silvin, who stitched them up and took them to the Technological Institute to be disseminated from over there. The booklet was immediately spread and was a great success. A second printing of this part was promptly planned and accomplished in July by Vaneyev. Soon it was reprinted by the Moscow Social-Democrats, too.

After the first part of the work came out, Lenin found it more expedient to print the third part next, in which the political programme and practical tasks of the Russian Social-Democrats were expounded. Soon it was printed in St. Petersburg; the second part, whose publication had been thus postponed, was never printed in St. Petersburg.

Local Party organisations multiplied the book by every means at their disposal: they copied it by hand and typed it, hectographed and screened it, etc. As a result, it was extensively read in the revolutionary circles of St. Petersburg, Moscow, Nizhny Novgorod, Vladimir, Vilna, Kiev, Chernigov, Poltava, Penza, Rostov-on-Don, Tomsk, Riga, and other cities. It was also read by Social-Democratic organisations abroad, in particular, among members of the Emancipation of Labour group. "After the book was printed," S. I. Mickiewicz wrote, "Vladimir Ilyich became still more popular and a recognised authority among the Marxists. The young Russian Marxist trend realised that in his person it had acquired a gigantic political and practical force."

In order to crush Narodnik ideology completely and make use of the opportunities that were at the disposal of legal Marxists, the revolutionary Social-Democrats formed a temporary alliance with these bourgeois hangers-on. As a result, Lenin noted, there occurred unification of the "manifestly heterogeneous elements under a common flag to fight the common enemy (the obsolete social and political world outlook)".* The alliance was formed on condition that the theory and practice of legal Marxism would be freely criticised, as before.

In 1894, several discussions took place between St. Petersburg Marxists, on the one hand, and Struve and his followers, on the other. Lenin summed them up in his article "The Economic Content of Narodism and the Criticism of It in Mr. Struve's Book", in which he gave a

* V. I. Lenin, "What Is to Be Done?", *Collected Works*, Vol. 5, p. 361 – *Ed.*

devastating criticism of legal Marxism, upheld the revolutionary essence of Marx and Engels' teaching, and made a considerable contribution to the theory of scientific communism. The article played an important part in the struggle of the Russian Social-Democrats for the liberation of the workers from the ideological influence of the bourgeoisie and liberal Narodism.

Two thousand copies of the collection *Materials for a Characterisation of our Economic Development*, which contained Lenin's article criticising Struve, were printed, and it was handed in for the censor's approval (in April 1895). The censor decreed that the book was "harmful" and that the entire batch be destroyed. About one hundred copies were saved, which had been secretly taken from the stitching shop before the order was issued. The book was distributed among Social-Democratic study circles and groups. It was not only read by Marxists in St. Petersburg, but also in Moscow, Kazan, Tula, Ekaterinoslav, and other cities, and in Western Europe, too. In May 1895, a copy was brought to the British Museum. The Emancipation of Labour group had it at their disposal as well.

Lenin's intense theoretical, propagandist and organising activities in St. Petersburg marked the start of a new stage in Marxist development. Defending Marxism from attacks by the liberal Narodniks and Struvists, and elaborating on it to allow it to be applied in the new historical conditions, put forward and substantiated the principal task facing the Social-Democratic movement of the 1890s, namely, that of combining the theory of scientific socialism and the workers' movement, and creating a Marxist Party of the Russian proletariat. All the activities of the St. Petersburg revolutionary Marxists were concentrated on the accomplishment of this task.

THE SETTING UP OF THE ST. PETERSBURG LEAGUE OF STRUGGLE

By the mid-1890s St. Petersburg had not only become the centre of Marxist thought, but also of rallying all the Social-Democratic forces into a single organisation. The unification movement was led by Lenin and the closely consolidated group of the Old he guided. Initially, it included S. I. Radchenko, V. V. Starkov, G. M. Krzhizhanovsky, P. K. Zaporozhets, A. L. Malchenko, N. K. Krupskaya, Z. P. Nevzorova, A. A. Yakubova, S. P. Nevzorova, L. N. Radchenko, A. A. Vaneyev, M. A. Silvin, and Ya. P. Ponomaryov.

In the winter of 1893-94, under Lenin's guidance, the group of the

Old expanded and consolidated its ties with the workers; some of them Lenin taught individually. Among his pupils were V. A. Shelgunov, G. M. Fisher, and I. I. Yakovlev, lathe operators at the Obukhov Works, the Siemens and Galske, and the New Admiralty, respectively, and others.

This is how Shelgunov describes his first meeting with Lenin. "In the autumn of 1893 I was sitting at a conspiratorial flat waiting for a man from the Volga who wanted to see me."

A young man of medium height, wearing an old rust-coloured coat, entered the room. He had a small, reddish beard; his forehead was high and wide. Having taken a good look at me, he held out his hand to me and introduced himself:

"'I'm Ulyanov.'

"He spoke but little and listened very attentively to me, as if taking stock of me and assessing my capabilities as a revolutionary. That same day he invited me to go and visit him...

"He took a real interest in St. Petersburg workers, asking who attended the study circles, and whether I had acquaintances among them... I named several people I knew."

When he met workers, Lenin asked them about the state of affairs at their factories, about the wages and fines, working and living conditions, and the working hours. He showed interest in all aspects of the workers' life. At the same time, he also asked his pupils to collect information on the city's proletarian population.

The workers who studied in the circles he headed, admired Lenin's vast knowledge, his art as a lecturer, and his talent for explaining complicated issues of Marxist theory in simple, clear and comprehensive terms.

Babushkin, who studied *Capital* in a study circle led by Lenin, wrote: "Lenin exposed to us this science from memory, Without using any notes; he often tried to provoke objections on our part, or an argument, and-then he spurred us on, making us prove to each other his own view of the given issue. Thus, our lectures always passed in a lively and interesting way, and we developed a habit of speaking in public; this method of studying was the best way of getting listeners to understand the matter. We all liked these lessons immensely and were always impressed by our lecturer's cleverness."* Lenin's popular lec-

* *Reminiscences of Vladimir/Ilyich Lenin*, Vol. 2, pp. 36–37. – Ed.

tures on political economy, his clear answers and apt characteristics were recalled by his pupils for a long time afterwards. In the course of the studies, he constantly drew listeners into discussions on current political issues, so that the lesson often turned into a heated debate, with all those present taking an active part.

Lenin always tied up lessons in Marxist theory with revolutionary practice and taught his comrades-in-arms to do the same. He asked his pupils to collect information about workers' conditions at the enterprises and try to analyse the data obtained using the propositions contained in certain chapters of *Capital* that they were studying at the time. Babushkin recollected: "We were given a list of questions specially prepared by our lecturer, which called for a careful study and observation of the situation at the works and factories."*

To help the workers collect purposeful information Lenin drew up a questionnaire, which was used by the Marxist circles in St. Petersburg and even by provincial Social-Democratic groups. The questions concerned the number and composition of the workers, hiring terms, working and living conditions, the working hours, the wages, and the form of remuneration. Special attention was paid to information on abuses on the part of the management, the overtime and work on holidays, cheating, fines and deductions, and maltreatment by foremen and factory-owners. Considerable space was also given to the workers' family budget, expenditure on the foodstuffs, clothing and footwear, rent and taxes, and to the gap between the prices of goods at the market and in factory shops.

The questionnaire helped bring the propaganda of Marxist theory closer to vital issues. The information collected was summed up and used by the propagandists, both in lectures and speeches, and in printed matter.

Lenin's group persistently expanded the network of Marxist study circles among the St. Petersburg proletariat. An important part was played in this by advanced Marxist workers like A. Shelgunov, I. V. Babushkin, V. I. Zinoviev, I. I. Yakovlev, A. Knyazev, and A. P. Ilyin. They established close ties with those workers whom they considered as most capable of revolutionary activities underground, circulated newspapers with relevant articles and illegal books among the workers, and got to know their moods and attitude to what they read. The

* Ibid. p. 37. – *Ed.*

most dependable workers were drawn into the study circles; new circles were also organised, which were sometimes even guided by the Marxist workers themselves. "That period was the most intensive in our mental development," Babushkin recollected. "Every moment was precious, every hour free from work was registered and accounted for in advance, and every week was planned similarly. When I think of that time now, I just cannot understand from whence the tremendous energy needed for such an intense way of life was derived."

Very popular among the workers was the Smolenskaya school, where members of Lenin's group, N. K. Krupskaya, Z. P. Nevzorova-Krzhizhanovskaya, S. P. Nevzorova-Shesternina, and A. A. Yakubova lectured on Sundays.

Lenin showed a constant interest in the work of that school. He initiated a meeting between the school's teachers and members of the Social-Democratic group; subsequently, almost all the teachers who attended that meeting joined the Social-Democrats.

Through the efforts of the Marxist teachers, the school became a genuine seat of political enlightenment for the workers. Under the cover of geography, they were taught elementary political economy, and at history lessons, the history of the revolutionary movement. Even lessons in arithmetic were used for political propaganda – the sums were based on facts, exposing the system of capitalist exploitation and showing how capitalist profit was formed. The worker F. I. Bodrov recalled that at Krupskaya's lessons "the consciousness of the correctness of the great cause of emancipating the working class was implanted in his mind by the hand of a master".

Lenin considered strengthening and expanding ties with the workers of great importance. In the winter of 1894-95, the activities of the group of the Old were modified to serve this purpose better. The propagandists were distributed by districts; they were not only obliged to conduct lessons in the circles, but also to study their district, the moods prevailing among the workers, and the state of affairs at the works and factories. Once a week, the members of Lenin's group met to exchange opinions. Krupskaya recalls: "Vladimir Ilyich asked everybody a lot of questions, about the way he lectured, what the workers said, etc." Lenin taught his comrades how to conduct secret activity, an art in which he himself was a past master: how to code a message, set up a secret flat, organise protection of an illegal meeting. He recommended them to reduce meetings, empty talk, etc. to an absolute minimum.

Revolutionary practice gave birth to new, Lenin-style methods of Social-Democratic work. The creative approach by St. Petersburg Marxists to studying Marxist theory, their ability to apply it to concrete phenomena in Russian reality, their extensive connections with works and factories, and utter commitment to the cause – all prepared the ground for a change in tactics. The upgrading of the workers' movement in the 1890s called for the transfer from Marxist propaganda in small circles of advanced workers to political agitation among the proletarian masses using vital issues of their everyday needs.

Lenin stressed that economic agitation must be tied in with the great historic tasks facing the Russian Social-Democrats. The prerequisites had already taken shape in St. Petersburg, and the cadres capable of accomplishing this task had already been created.

Thus, in the autumn of 1894 Lenin proved the need for the change from propaganda to agitation and defined its general thrust. Not all Marxists, however, were agreed on that point. Passionate debates ensued. The opponents of going over to agitation maintained that the new tactics would impair the system of underground activities, cause mass arrests and bring about chaos in the Social-Democratic movement.

An erroneous view of the content of agitation had also become manifest. Some Social-Democrats, who opted for mass agitation, reduced it to economic issues alone. They put forward the theory that the working-class movement had developed "by stages"; at the first stage, the proletariat waged the struggle solely for the satisfaction of its economic needs, at the second stage it began to realise that it cannot achieve this goal without political struggle and only at the third stage did it launch political actions. They suggested that agitation be adjusted to the same pattern, i. e., at the first stage it should be of an economic nature, while the struggle for political demands should be put off to the distant future. This theory was a manifestation of the nascent Economism, an opportunist trend among Russian Social-Democracy.

In the course of discussions, criticism was lavished on the opportunist concept exposed in the booklet "On Agitation", and it was decided that, while going on with propaganda in the study circles, agitation should be started among the masses, based on their vital needs.

It was decided to begin massive agitation by demanding that the authorities should "abide by the law". The information collected with the help of a questionnaire showed that even tsarist laws, which did, to a certain extent, call for the protection of the workers' rights, were

grossly violated by the industrialists. The St. Petersburg Marxists made use of these facts to incite the workers to stand up for their legitimate rights. Lenin wrote about that time as follows: "The *early* Social-Democrats of that period *zealously carried on economic agitation...* They did not regard this as their sole task. On the contrary, *from the very beginning* they set for Russian Social-Democracy the most far-reaching historical tasks, in general, and the task of overthrowing the autocracy, in particular."*

The first practical steps towards new tactics were made by Lenin's group in December 1894, in connection with the workers' outbreaks at Semyannikov's works caused by a delay in paying wages.

These events served as a pretext for issuing a leaflet "To the Workers of Semyannikov's Works", written by Lenin and I. V. Babushkin, who also took it upon himself to distribute it. The leaflet was copied out by hand, all in block letters, and made a great impression on the workers. It marked the changeover of the St. Petersburg Marxists from propaganda in the study circles to agitation among the proletarian masses.

Early in 1895, another leaflet appeared, hectographed this time. It was written by G. M. Krzhizhanovsky and addressed to the workers of the Nevsky Works. The leaflet explained in popular form that it was necessary to work for rallying the workers and staging an onslaught against the capitalists. It also said that not only the capitalists, but the tsarist government, too, were the workers' enemies. "Factory-owners and the police," it said, "and the entire state administration – they are all one, and they are all against us." The leaflet called for organised action, explaining that that was the only way of securing the satisfaction of the workers' demands.

Lenin's group now reacted to all major manifestations of discontent among the workers, trying to guide the movement and impart to it a conscious, organised character; such an attitude on the part of the Social-Democrats to the working-class movement was new in principle.

Agitation was expanded in every possible way – by issuing leaflets and arranging talks with the workers, etc. Police reports noted that the Social-Democrats in St. Petersburg had stepped up their activities

* V.I. Lenin, "What Is to Be Done?", *Collected Works*, Vol. 5, p. 376. – *Ed.*

since February 1895. The Marxists made speeches to groups of workers more and more often at industrial enterprises. Meetings became a usual thing, at which advanced workers discussed matters involved in the preparation and carrying out of strikes, issuing and distributing leaflets, setting up new study circles and supplying them with illegal literature, and organising workers' funds to render assistance to those on strike.

The work in the study circles changed in accordance with the modified tactics of revolutionary activities. They were now made to serve the purposes of agitation, too. Among the foremost workers, the idea took firm root that they should not keep aloof from the life of the proletarian masses of the capital, but should actively interfere in it, taking into account the workers' needs and demands, and fighting against all violations of their rights.

The organisational structure of the Old's group was also improved; in fact, it was already functioning as the League of Struggle. Lenin paid particular attention to discipline, observing secrecy and good co-ordination of the group's activities. The duties of each of its members were carefully delineated; each of them was made responsible for a definite district.

Thus, the Social-Democrats, under Lenin's guidance, started out on the path of mass political agitation. This historic turn from Marxist propaganda in small study circles of advanced workers to mass political agitation was a genuinely important beginning undertaken by the St. Petersburg Marxists and of decisive significance for an upsurge in the working-class movement and the development of Revolutionary Social-Democracy in Russia.

At that time, the transition from propaganda to agitation and the merger of the theory of scientific socialism and the mass workers' movement was a vital issue for Social-Democracy all over the country. This was the main issue at a conference of the representatives of Social-Democratic study circles and groups from St. Petersburg, Moscow, Kiev, and Vilna, which was convened in St. Petersburg in February 1895. The St. Petersburg Social-Democrats delegated Lenin and Krzhizhanovsky. As soon as the discussion started, controversies were revealed: T. M. Kopelzon, the representative of the Vilna Social-Democrats, and Ye. I. Sponti, from Moscow, insisted that in conducting agitation among the masses, to "keep to the economic ground mostly, until the masses mature sufficiently to understand political slogans". This idea was essentially consonant with the view A. Kremer

expressed in his booklet "On Agitation".

Lenin determinedly rebuffed all these opportunist sorties aimed at reducing the working-class movement to a struggle for economic interests alone. He substantiated and upheld the Marxist proposition to the effect that it was necessary to combine the economic and political struggle.

Lenin's criticism of the views of Kopelzon and Sponti, who advocated the spontaneous workers' movement, was a matter of principle. The same opportunist positions were maintained by the Young in St. Petersburg – I. V. Chernyshev's and K. M. Takhtarev's groups, who considered that the Social-Democrats were not called to lead the workers' movement, but to be of "service" to it. The Young wanted to set up a workers' organisation that would only engage in economic struggle. Lenin's group opposed these opportunist views and plans in a most determined manner. Debates on the nature of mass agitation and the direction of the activities of the workers' organisation started a prolonged, consistent and principled struggle against opportunism among Russian Social-Democracy.

As the February conference also failed to reach agreement on sending abroad a delegate from the Social-Democratic circles for establishing contact with the Emancipation of Labour group, the St. Petersburg Marxists decided to send Lenin as their representative for talks with Plekhanov.

The need for firmer ties with the Emancipation of Labour group was dictated by the tasks facing the Russian Social-Democrats at the movement's new stage. It was essential to convince Plekhanov's group to intensify its publishing activities and organise a more regular supply of Social-Democratic literature to local study circles and groups, to help them consolidate their forces and fight for establishing a Marxist workers' party in Russia.

Lenin's trip abroad had to be postponed, however, because in March he fell ill with pneumonia. When he was well again, Lenin began to make preparations to go abroad. He took the necessary measures for the organisation to function smoothly during his absence. In April 1895, at a conference in Tsarskoye Selo, he compiled a plan for its activities; coding the correspondence and maintaining contacts was entrusted to Krupskaya. On 25 April, 1895, Lenin left St. Petersburg. After spending a few days in Moscow he went abroad. In a letter to his mother dated May 2nd, he wrote: "This is my second day of

travel broad..."* As soon as he departed, the Police Department ordered its agency abroad to follow closely Vladimir Ulyanov's activities and communications.

In Switzerland Lenin met Plekhanov, Axelrod and, other members of the Emancipation of Labour group. He informed them of the Social-Democratic movement in St. Petersburg and gave them new Marxist publications printed in Russia – *Materials for a Characterisation of Our Economic Development* and *What the "Friends of the People" Are and How They Fight the Social-Democrats* – and several leaflets, which testified to the increased ideological and political maturity of Russian Social-Democracy.

Lenin had a profound respect for Plekhanov, the first Russian Marxist and organiser of the Emancipation of Labour group. Serious controversies were, however, revealed during the exchange of opinion between Lenin, on the one hand, and Plekhanov and Axelrod, on the other, on the prospects and motive forces of the bourgeois-democratic revolution in Russia, and the role to be played in it by the peasantry and the liberal bourgeoisie. Plekhanov and Axelrod maintained that in the given historical period, the liberal bourgeoisie rather than the peasantry would be the proletariat's ally in the forthcoming bourgeois-democratic revolution, since the interests of the proletariat coincided with the principal interests of the liberal bourgeoisie. They overestimated the part played by the latter, while underestimating the role of the peasantry. Axelrod recalled later that Plekhanov said to Lenin: "You are showing your back to the liberal, and we – our face."[†]

In spite of certain controversies with Plekhanov and Axelrod on tactical and organisational matters, Lenin reached an understanding with the Emancipation of Labour group on the joint publication of *Rabotnik* (The Worker), a popular collection of articles. On behalf of the Russian Social-Democrats, he promised to supply articles and information on the workers' movement in Russia. The agreement on the publication of the collection addressed to the mass of the Social-Democrats went beyond the framework of Social-Democratic activities conducted in St. Petersburg and was of great importance for the

* V. I. Lenin, "To His Mother. May 14 (2), 1895", *Collected Works*, Vol. 37, p. 72. – Ed.

† *Correspondence of G. V. Plekhanov and P. B. Axelrod*, Vol. 1, Moscow, 1925, pp. 270-71 (in Russian). – Ed.

development of the Social-Democratic movement all over Russia.

Lenin made a great impression on the members of the Emancipation of Labour group with his serious manner, his business-like approach to the matters at hand, unpretentiousness and a talent as a political leader. Krzhizhanovsky in his *Reminiscences* described the content of one of Plekhanov's lost letters: "Many people from Russia came to see Plekhanov during the many years of his stay abroad, but, perhaps, he did not place as much hope in anyone as he did in the young Ulyanov."* This letter is also mentioned by Z. P. Nevzorova-Krzhizhanovskaya, as she describes Plekhanov's attitude to Lenin: "For the first time a man has arrived from Russia, who surprisingly combined a profound theoretical grounding with active practicisim... This man is bound to play an important part in the revolutionary movement." And this is what Plekhanov wrote in a letter to Axelrod: "It is a stroke of good luck that there are such young men [like V. I. Lenin] in our revolutionary movement."

Lenin's meeting with the Emancipation of Labour group served it to establish more regular relations with Russia and invigorate its literary and publishing activities.

After a three-week stay in Switzerland, Lenin went to Paris where he met Paul Lafargue, an outstanding figure in the French and international workers' movement and the son-in-law of Karl Marx. Then he visited Berlin and made acquaintance there with Wilhelm Liebknecht, a founder of the German Social-Democratic Party, and other prominent leaders of that Party.

When abroad, Lenin studied the West-European revolutionary movement, the works of Marx and Engels on the Paris Commune, and other Marxist literature. When he stayed in Germany, he went to workers' meetings, and studied the work of Social-Democratic organisations. He put much effort into organising the dispatch of Marxist literature to Russia. It was his suggestion that the pages of illegal books be glued together as if they were the hard covers of legal books; in such a cover, for example, a report on the Breslau Congress of the German Social-Democratic Party was sent to Russia in 1895. Lenin wished very much to see Engels, but it proved impossible because of the latter's grave illness. On 7 September, 1895, Lenin returned to Russia. As he was crossing the border, he managed to deceive the gendarmes who had been given orders to "examine his luggage care-

* *Reminiscences of Vladimir Ilyich Lenin*, Vol. 2, p. 17. – *Ed.*

fully": he smuggled in illegal printed matter in a suitcase with a double bottom; it was subsequently distributed among the Social- Democratic groups and study circles. Lenin went straight from the border station to Vilna; then he visited Moscow and Orekhovo-Zuyevo, and established contacts with local Social- Democrats, making an agreement with them about assistance in publishing *Rabotnik* collection abroad. On 29 September, he arrived in St. Petersburg.

The chief of the Police Department stated that following Lenin's return, many "foreign revolutionary publications" appeared, and that "as he returned, the activities of the circle became more lively". The Police Department closely followed Lenin's every step.

In spite of that, Lenin's group continued its work successfully to establish a proletarian organisation in Russia – an embryo of a powerful revolutionary party, capable of leading the struggle against the autocracy and the bourgeoisie. It extended its ties with the workers, consolidated itself ideologically and gained in strength organisationally. Gradually, its nucleus was formed, consisting of the most experienced and respected members – Lenin, Starkov and Krzhizhanovsky. Lenin and his group maintained relations with Social-Democratic study circles through the district leaders: V. A. Shelgunov (Nevsky District), I. I. Yakovlev (Vasilyevsky Ostrov District) and B. I. Zinovyev (Moskovsko-Narvsky District). Characterising the organisation's structure in 1895, Lenin wrote: "...10-16 persons (committee). 20-30 workers' circles. Maximum, 100-150 ties."*

Meanwhile, besides Lenin's organisation, several independent Social-Democratic groups were active in St. Petersburg, although they did not enjoy as much influence among the workers – these were the Young group, a group of medical students, and a group led by Yu. O. Martov. The influence of Lenin's group had grown so much, however, that some leaders of the other Social-Democratic groups saw the futility of their independent existence. Martov, for example, established contact with Lenin's group through Radchenko and suggested that work be carried on in common. Talks followed, during which controversies on the organisational principles and the line of activities were revealed. Martov and his adherents came up against centralism and the observance of strict conspiracy, maintaining that agitation should

* V.I. Lenin, "Plan for an Article '1895 and 1905 (Short Parallel)'", *Collected Works*, Vol. 41, p. 137 – *Ed.*

mainly consist in inciting the struggle for the economic interests of the working class. That testified, as Martov himself noted some time later, to the narrowness of the interests and prospects, and the lack of understanding of the importance of establishing a revolutionary Marxist workers' party, an issue which preoccupied Lenin at that time. Lenin sharply criticised Martov's erroneous propositions and produced such convincing arguments that Martov and his followers had to accept his viewpoint. After unity of views on organisational, programmatic and tactical matters had been achieved, it was decided to admit Martov's group into Lenin's organisation.

The group of the Young continued to act independently. There was no question of its merger with Lenin's organisation, for they diverged on matters of principle. Many of the Young held opportunist views, trying to reduce the proletariat's class struggle to that for economic demands alone. Their views were an exact replica of those of the Vilna Social-Democrats contained in the booklet "On Agitation". One more circumstance caused the Young to be regarded with caution – Chernyshev's first aid was N. N. Mikhailov, a dentist, whom the St. Petersburg Social-Democrats suspected of being an agent provocateur; some time later this was proved to be true: in December 1895, he helped the police to arrest the leaders of the League of Struggle for the Emancipation of the Working Class, and Lenin among them, too.

The Social-Democratic group of medical students, led by K. M. Takhtarev, also maintained that agitation should be of an economic nature. They saw catering to the needs of the mass workers' movement as the main task of Social-Democracy, denying their leading role in the class struggle.

Chernyshev's and Takhtarev's groups joined the League of Struggle for the Emancipation of the Working Class only in the summer of 1896, when the ranks of the Old thinned due to numerous arrests, while members of these groups themselves became substantially more "left" under the influence of the proletariat's mass actions, in particular, the general strike of the St. Petersburg textile workers.

By the autumn of 1895, Lenin's group had completed the unification of all the Social-Democratic circles in St. Petersburg that held revolutionary Marxist positions.

In late October-early November 1895, a meeting of St. Petersburg revolutionary Marxists was held on Lenin's initiative at which a joint city Social-Democratic organisation was finally formed. Lenin, Krzhizhanovsky, Starkov, Vaneyev, and Martov formed its nucleus –

leading centre. Subsequently, this organisation was called the St. Petersburg League of Struggle for the Emancipation of the Working Class.

The circumstances called for improved forms of organisation and more precisely defined functions of the leading centre members. The organisational structure relied on the most important principle of the revolutionary proletarian party – that of democratic centralism.

However, the organisational principles suggested by Lenin were not agreed upon by all the Social-Democrats. Martov opposed centralism and strict conspiracy; Radchenko also declared that centralism would mean curbing the rights of the rank-and-file by its leadership. Twenty-five years later, recalling these controversies and debates on organisational matters, Lenin wrote in *"Left-Wing" Communism – an Infantile Disorder*: "There *have always been* attacks on the 'dictatorship of leaders' in our Party. The first time I heard such attacks I recall, was in 1895, when, officially, no party yet existed, but a central group was taking shape in St. Petersburg, which was to assume the leadership of the district groups."* Objecting to Martov and Radchenko, Lenin proved that "primitive democratism" was impossible in Russia. Most of those present supported the organisational principles suggested by Lenin. The structure of the organisation was modified: a third element – Moskovsko-Narvskaya, Nevskaya and Zarechnaya district groups – was introduced in addition to the central group and the workers' study circles.

The district groups were to draw into the organisation new members with the consent of the leading centre, set up workers' and students' study circles, supply them with illegal publications, collect information on the state of affairs in the corresponding district, etc. The district group led the activities of workers' circles, the primary cells which were no longer just circles for conducting propaganda: they have now become embryos of primary party organisations which were carrying on revolutionary work directly at enterprises. The circles' members, in addition to conducting propaganda, were also engaged in agitation and in organising the working-class movement.

The practical leadership of all the organisation's work was effected by its leading centre.

* V. I. Lenin "' Left-Wing' Communism – an Infantile Disorder", *Collected Works*, Vol. 31, p. 45. – *Ed.*

The illegal conditions in which operations were carried out called for centralisation combined with certain democratic principles. Lenin implanted strict discipline among the members of the League, respect for the higher bodies and the unconditional fulfilment of its directives. On his suggestion, accountability was introduced at all levels. The district groups had to report weekly to the centre on their activities. At the same time, the League of Struggle developed democratism, too, insofar as it was possible in the underground. Once a month at least, all the members of the district groups came to a meeting. From the autumn of 1895, meetings of representatives of the workers' circles were held by districts, as well as general meetings of elected workers' representatives from the districts and members of the League, at which the questions involved in the preparation and carrying out of strikes were discussed, the establishment of workers' mutual assistance funds to help the strikers, the distribution of leaflets, etc.

On Lenin's recommendation, strict conspiracy was observed in the League of Struggle, and each member was engaged in a special type of activity which consisted in conducting agitation, setting up study circles, disseminating illegal literature, studying the workers' conditions, taking care of secret flats, protecting meetings and lessons in the study circles, exposing agents provocateurs, supervising the work of libraries, maintaining hiding places for illegal publications, etc. Such division of responsibilities, on the one hand, did, to a certain extent, save the League from failures, and, on the other hand, guaranteed the active participation of all the organisation's members in revolutionary work.

On Lenin's initiative, any new member before being admitted had to undergo a test and so-called trial period. Lenin wrote on this score the following: "We are also aware that the preliminary period envisaged by our system during which the League of Struggle will collect the necessary information about individuals or groups offering their services and give them something to do by way of trial will be a very difficult one for many people eager to devote their energies to revolutionary work. But without his preliminary testing, revolutionary activity in present-day Russia is impossible."*

The League of Struggle for the Emancipation of the Working Class was Russia's first Social-Democratic organisation which entered

* V. I. Lenin, "The Tasks of the Russian Social-Democrats", *Collected Works*, Vol. 2, pp. 350-51. – *Ed.*

the path of combining scientific socialism with mass workers' movement, and the struggle for the proletariat's economic interests with the political struggle against the autocracy and the capitalists: Lenin was its ideologist, organiser and leader.

The organisation started vigorous activities among the St. Petersburg proletariat, trying to draw into the orbit of its influence as many workers as it could. It maintained contacts with more than 70 enterprises in the city, including almost all of its big industrial works employing over a thousand workers each. In 1891-1895, these accounted for more than 90 per cent of the strikes staged by the proletariat.

The League relied on the advanced workers. Organisers from among the workers were acting at St. Petersburg works and factories; they collected information, distributed leaflets and other illegal printed matter, and established ties between the district groups of the League and the enterprises. Babushkin recollected: "The matters were supervised locally by the workers, who passed on literature to all the works and factories to be distributed there. There was only one such worker at each works and factory. He knew where, and how much printed matter was needed, the day on which leaflets were distributed, etc. Resourcefulness was the most indispensable quality, for a host of questions had to be dealt with on the spot as they cropped up in the study circles, at the works and factories, and at schools."

The influence of the League of Struggle among the revolutionary-minded intellectuals was also growing. An agreement was reached with the St. Petersburg Narodnaya Volya group organisation, many of whose members had by that time notably approached the Marxists. In 1895, the Narodnaya Volya was dissolved, some of its members joining the Social-Democrats and others the newly formed party of Socialist-Revolutionaries. That evolution towards Marxism, according to the former Narodnaya Volya member N. Meshcheryakov, was "partly due to Social-Democratic books and other printed matter which had to be carefully studied in order to speak at discussions, but mostly due to Marx, whose works I read over and over again; yet the main reason was life itself, which mercilessly smashed the Narodnik illusions".

THE LEAGUE OF STRUGGLE AT THE HEAD OF THE MASS STRIKE OF ST. PETERSBURG WORKERS. AN EMBRYO OF THE PARTY OF A NEW TYPE

After the League of Struggle had been finally established, the scope of the agitation it conducted among the proletarian masses con-

siderably increased. During November and December of 1895, it issued no less than 11 leaflets (the overall number of leaflets issued in 1895 and 1896 was no less than 70). When writing leaflets, the League members proceeded from the workers' daily needs and the actual situation at one factory or another, and tried, as soon as possible, to go over to political slogans. The leaflets, reflecting the workers' vital interests, were a great success. As soon as the workers saw, Lenin recollected later, that the Social-Democratic circles "desired to, and could, supply them with a new kind of leaflet that told the whole truth about their miserable existence, about their unbearably hard toil, and their lack of rights, they began to send in, actually flood us with, correspondence from factories and workshops".* Those "denunciatory writings" had a great impact on the workers at industrial enterprises.

The leaflets issued by the League of Struggle told the workers about the situation at the works and factories, the strikes and their outcome. They formulated the workers' demands and called for organised struggle and proletarian solidarity. The official press ignored the workers' question, pretending it did not exist in Russia at all. So leaflets issued by the League were in fact a primary type of working-class periodicals, serving as a kind of a newspaper for the workers.

Due to its close ties with the capital's industrial enterprises and complete awareness of the situation there, the League of Struggle was able to render assistance to the workers and lead the movement against economic oppression and for political rights. At the end of October and the beginning of November 1895, the economic situation of the workers at the Thornton factory took a sharp turn for the worse. They lived in crowded, dirty, stuffy barracks, paying an enormous rent for these poor living quarters. The working day lasted 14 and a half hours. The wages had been lowered several times, and were now seven roubles per month on the average for weavers, and down to 3 roubles 20 kopecks for many other categories of workers. The system of fines was outrageous, and arbitrariness on the part of the management knew no bounds. The workers were only allowed to leave the factory barracks on holidays, and even then they had to be back by 11 p. m. sharp; and they were obliged-to-buy their food and all the things they needed in the factory shop. As a result of all this, resentment was

* V. I. Lenin. "What Is to Be Done?", *Collected Works*, Vol. 5, p. 398.—
Ed.

mounting among the workers, and a strike was imminent.

The League of Struggle convened a conference of district groups representatives to discuss the preparations for the strike and carrying it out, and to obtain information on the situation at other industrial enterprises in the city. The conference opened with reports on the situation in the districts in general and at individual works and factories in particular. Two weavers from the Thornton factory were specially invited to the conference, and Lenin put apt questions to them, so that he got all the information he needed. The League helped the workers formulate their demands, having hectographed a special leaflet, which was distributed at the factory early in November.

The Thornton factory weavers went on strike. In the early hours of November 7th the police arrested 13 strikers, but the workers were not to be intimidated and refused to go back to work. Only after the factory inspector assured them that their demands would be met and the workers arrested set free did the workers call off the strike.

The inspector's promises, however, were not kept. Then Lenin, with the help of the factory workers, who participated in the Social-Democratic movement, and Krupskaya, who had paid a visit to the factory barracks, wrote a leaflet "To the Working Men and Women of the Thornton Factory", in which concrete economic demands were organically combined with the proletariat's general class tasks. The leaflet reminded the workers about the 6th and 7th November, which were fresh in everybody's memory, when the weavers "by their solid resistance to the employer's pressure have proved that at a difficult moment there are still people in our midst who can uphold our common interests as workers, that our worthy employers have not yet succeeded in turning us for all time into the miserable slaves of their bottomless purses".*

The leaflet showed the ways and means of struggle which would lead the workers to victory: "Let us, then, comrades, stand firm and steadfast and carry on to the very end, let us remember that we can improve our conditions only by our common and concerted efforts."† It explained that the factory owners would resort to all kind of ruses to split the workers' ranks and prevent their joint action, and that there-

* V. I. Lenin, "To the Working Men and Women of the Thornton Factory", *Collected Works*, Vol. 2, p. 81. – *Ed.*

† *Ibid.* – *Ed.*

fore every worker should take part in the struggle led by the weavers.

The strike at the Thornton factory, led by the League of Struggle, paved the way for a new upsurge of the strike movement in St. Petersburg. On November 9 and 10 strikes began at the Laferme tobacco factory, caused by the reduction of the wages and the arbitrary rejection of defective products. Outraged by enormous fines, low wages and the rough treatment by the management, the women workers downed tools. Lenin and Silvin, the leader of the Zarechye District group, went to the factory to get first-hand information and then wrote a leaflet, "What Should Women Workers at the Laferme Factory Demand", in which the demands put forward by the women cigarett-makers were formulated. To suppress the strike, gendarmes, policemen and fire brigades were summoned, and arrests of the initiators of the strike began. Still, the Ministry of Finance was compelled to issue an order prohibiting the factory owners to reject products arbitrarily and obliging them to use the sums received from the fines for the workers' needs.

On November 13th-15th, following the example of the Laferme factory, workers at a factory of the Association of Mechanical Footwear Production went on strike, as a protest against exorbitant deductions from wages. The League addressed a leaflet to the strikers, calling them to political struggle. The three-day strike ended in success: the workers' demands were satisfied.

The agitation carried on by the St. Petersburg League of Struggle brought tangible results. It was thought highly of not only by the Social-Democrats in Russia, but in the West, too. At the Socialist Congress, which took place in London in 1896, Plekhanov said: "The winter of 1895-1896 in St. Petersburg abounded, as never before, in workers' strikes and unrest, and was seething with the type of life that is characteristic of awakened consciousness among the working-class masses."*

The main content of the agitation consisted in exposing the factory orders, which was "a starting-point for the awakening of class-consciousness, for the beginning of a trade-union struggle, and for the

* *The First Congress of the RSDLP, March 1898. Documents and Materials*, Moscow, 1958, p. 114 (in Russian). – *Ed.*

spread of socialism"* The leaflets and pamphlets, exposing all kind of injustice, served to unite the proletariat. They "created a tremendous sensation, not only in the particular factory exposed in the given leaflet, but in all the factories to which news of the revealed facts spread."† Even the most backward workers developed a regular passion for seeing their pronouncements printed – it became a kind of warfare waged against the exploiters. The appearance of a leaflet, Lenin wrote, was "in truth a declaration of war, because the exposures served greatly to agitate the workers; they evoked among them common demands for the removal of the most glaring outrages and roused in them a readiness to support the demands with strikes... On more than one occasion, the mere appearance of a leaflet proved sufficient to secure the satisfaction of all or part of the demands put forward."‡ As a rule, however, it was by going on strike that the workers achieved a victory. Out of 15 strikes, staged by the workers in 1895, nine ended in victory and one in a compromise.

The mass agitation launched by the League of Struggle in its leaflets proved to be an excellent means of inculcating class consciousness in the workers. Yet the level of the class struggle achieved and the further development of the proletarian movement called for organising political agitation on a nationwide scale and the systematic explanation to the workers of the immediate tasks and ultimate goals. That task could be fulfilled only by a Social-Democratic newspaper, of which Lenin conceived even before his trip abroad. He thought that it should not be of a local nature, and by no means an "'Economic' newspaper, but one that aimed to unite the strike movement with the revolutionary movement against the autocracy".§

On Lenin's initiative, the League of Struggle decided to start a newspaper under the name of *Rabocheye Dyelo* (Workers' Cause). Early in December 1895 the first issue was prepared for print, its ideological tenor determined by Lenin's articles. In his editorial "To the Russian Workers" Lenin delineated the historic tasks which faced the Russian working class, stressing that the main one was that of winning

* V. I. Lenin, "What Is to Be Done?", *Collected Works*, Vol. 5, p. 399. – *Ed.*'

† *Ibid.*, p. 298. – *Ed.*

‡ V. I. Lenin, "What Is to Be Done?", *Collected Works*, Vol. 5, pp. 398-99. – *Ed.*

§ *Ibid.*, p. 377. – *Ed.*

political freedom. The editorial urged that it was high time to establish an independent workers' party, capable of becoming the proletariat's political leader. Krzhizhanovsky later said that this issue determined the political line of the Social-Democratic work conducted in Russia for a whole decade to come.

Lenin's article "Frederick Engels", emphasising the great contribution Engels had made to the world working-class movement, was intended for that issue, too. In his article "What Are Our Ministers Thinking About?" Lenin exposed the tsarist government's reactionary policies in the sphere of public education and showed that tsarism was mortally terrified at the thought of the working people acquiring knowledge. Several letters from the provinces about the strike movement were also edited by Lenin. Vaneyev and Silvin wrote an article on the strike at the Laferme factory, and Krzhizhanovsky, on the strike at the Thornton factory; the issue also carried letters about the strike movement in other Russian towns.

On December 6, 1895, a meeting of the League of Struggle leading group, chaired by Lenin, took place, at which materials to be included in the first issue of *Rabocheye Dyelo* were discussed. The final text, two copies of which had been written by hand, was read and approved on December 8th at Krupskaya's flat.

It did, however, prove impossible to get the newspaper printed. The police, assisted by an agent provocateur, traced the League. In the early hours of December 9, Lenin, Krzhizhanovsky, Starkov and Vaneyev, four out of the five members of its leading group, were arrested. The district groups also sustained heavy losses. Altogether, 68 people were arrested. The police also seized the manuscripts of the articles intended for the first issue of *Rabocheye Dyelo* at Vaneyev's flat.

A severe blow was dealt the League of Struggle. Yet Lenin's organisation, closely connected with the workers' study circles in St. Petersburg, was not extinguished, but continued its activities. A few days after the arrests, a meeting took place of those members of the central and district groups who remained free. They assessed the strength of the organisation and elected a new leading centre, comprising S. I. Radchenko, M. A. Silvin, Yu. O. Martov and Ya. M. Lyakhovsky.

It was decided at the meeting to call the organisation established by Lenin the League of Struggle for the Emancipation of the Working Class, and to tackle the following tasks: first, to demonstrate that the

Organisation, far from being destroyed, had even gained in strength; second, to go on with agitation, mostly by issuing leaflets. The appeal "To All St. Petersburg Workers", which had been written before the arrests, was read and approved; it called for unification and organised struggle. The participants in the meeting confirmed the text of the leaflet on behalf of the St. Petersburg League, urging the workers to continue the struggle. It said that in the early hours of December 9 the gendarmes raided the city and that dozens of suspects were thrown behind the bars, while the factories were swarming with police spies. So order has been restored, and there will be no more strikes, no leaflets,' – this is what the capitalists think, while their police accomplices are watering at the mouth, contemplating the decorations due to them for their savage services," ran the leaflet. But the League of Struggle for the Emancipation of the Working Class "stays intact and will go on working for its cause. The police are mistaken. Nothing at all can stop the strikes and the struggle, until the working class frees itself of oppression by the capitalists." The leaflets were mimeographed and circulated at the works and factories.

The arrests made in December worried the workers. In government circles rumours slandering the Marxists were released. To curb the campaign aimed at discrediting Social-Democracy in the eyes of the public at large, the League issued a leaflet written by Babushkin in late December 1895. It was entitled "What Is a Socialist and a Political Criminal?" and explained in popular form that the socialists, who were described as "enemies of the workers" and "political criminals" in official government papers and whom the government was out to destroy, were in actual fact "those who are striving to emancipate the oppressed working people from the yoke of the capitalist employers". "The proletariat's enemies call the Socialists 'political criminals', the leaflet went on, "because they oppose our barbaric government's efforts to defend the interests of the factory and works owners and to keep the deprived worker under its heel so that they could quietly strip him of his miserable pennies to enable officials to indulge in all sorts of luxuries and satisfy their carnal whims." The leaflet called on the workers to close their ranks and come out shoulder to shoulder, so that "no obstacle will be left standing in their way". This passionate political leaflet was widely circulated among the St. Petersburg workers.

The appearance of leaflets signed by the League of Struggle for the Emancipation of the Working Class not only bewildered the industrialists, but the government circles as well. The assistant public prose-

cutor Kichin reported to his chief that "criminal proclamations" had appeared after the arrests. He complained that they called on the workers to come out boldly with their demands and act in unison. The assistant public prosecutor asked for more warrants for arrests.

In the early hours of 5 January, 1896, 19 more people were arrested, among them members of the League new leading centre, Martov and Lyakhovsky, and Ya. P. Ponomaryov, who supervised the technical matters. The district groups also suffered greatly: many active participants in the Social- Democratic movement were thrown into prison, among them Babushkin.

In December 1895 and January 1896, 88 persons were put v on trial in connection with the League of Struggle case. Among them were representatives of different social strata, yet most of them were workers: they comprised 60 per cent of the arrested (53), while students accounted for 17, engineers for 6.8, teachers for 5.7, and doctors, for 3.4 per cent. These figures reflect the composition of the organisation created by Lenin and testify to the fact that the League of Struggle was a working-class organisation which brought together the best part of the St. Petersburg proletariat.

Over half of the 53 arrested workers were metalworkers – fitters, lathe operators, planers and foundry men, and a large part were textile workers – weavers and spinners. They were, as a rule, literate people, who had been trained at vocational training schools, during Sunday and evening courses, and at parish and other primary schools. All of them continued studying on their own and read extensively, and some of them even had their own libraries. They were regular workers, the vanguard of the proletariat. Over 73 per cent of those arrested were young people of 18 to 25 years of age. They were steeled in the struggle against capitalist exploitation and police terror, having started work-at an early age.

Even police reports recognised that the working-class organisation established by Lenin was so vital that the arrests effected in December and January only succeeded in suspending the activities for a while, and that "in mid-April 1896, the appeals of the League of Struggle with regard to the workers socialist May Day holiday, were again widely circulated among the workers".

Early in January 1896, the leading centre of the League co-opted new members. Now, in addition to S. I. Radchenko M. A. Silvin, who had escaped arrest, it included N. K. Krupskaya, S. A. Gofman, and F. I. Gurvich (Dan). Lenin, who was in prison at that time, was kept in-

formed about the League's work and continued to supervise its activities in practice. The liaison was maintained through his sister A. I. Ulyanova-Yelizarova and N. K. Krupskaya. Each time before she went to see her brother in prison, his sister visited the League members, received information on the organisation's work, and then passed it on to Lenin. Krupskaya also told him in detail about the state of affairs in the League, so that Vladimir Ilyich was fully informed of its activities and was able to give advice on its further work, either orally or by coded messages.

The long months of imprisonment were filled with strenuous creative work. Lenin continued to collect material for his fundamental work *The Development of Capitalism in Russia*, compiled leaflets, and wrote a popular pamphlet addressed to the workers "On Strikes", which he sent to an underground printing-shop. However, the printing-shop was discovered by the police, and the manuscript fell into their hands. While in prison, Lenin was very anxious to set up a party. At the end of 1895, he wrote "The Draft Programme", and in the summer of 1896, "Explanation of the Programme of the Social-Democratic Party".

In the first part of "The Draft Programme" Lenin formulated the immediate and ultimate goals of the Marxist Party – the overthrow of the autocracy, gaining political freedom, then the overthrow of the bourgeoisie and winning of political power by the working class, as well as the construction of socialist society. In the second part he explained "what should be the activity of the Party and of all class-conscious workers, and what should be their attitude to the interests and strivings of the other classes in Russian society".* In the third, final part he formulated the Party's practical demands, the demands for the working class and the peasantry.

It was no easy matter to write such a large work in code. With his characteristic resourcefulness, Lenin began writing it in milk between the lines of legal books. "He made minute ink-pots out of bread, so that he could swallow them if he heard somebody at the door or noticed someone looking through the peep-hole. Later he recalled laughingly that one day he had such bad luck that he had to swallow six ink-

* V. I. Lenin, "Draft and Explanation of a Programme for the Social-Democratic Party", *Collected Works*, Vol. 2, pp. 98-99. – *Ed.*

pots."*

Keeping constantly in contact with Lenin and following his advice, the League of Struggle continued working actively. There were new worker members in the districts, and its ranks were also swelled by students and intellectuals, many of whom were past masters at some sort of underground activity. Academician I. M. Gubkin, for example, who had been a member of the League, recalled many years later: "I became so experienced in this kind of work that I have even acquired a sort of trade – adjuster of mimeographs. I was often awakened in the middle of the night and dragged off to some obscure hole in the St. Petersburg Side to put in order and run the apparatus."

Closely linked with the capital's works and factories, the League immediately reacted to all conflicts. When the pay rates were reduced and miscalculations of the workers' output increased at the König factory, the League issued a leaflet calling on the spinners to go on strike if their demands were not met. A few days later, when new rules for paying wages were introduced for the shipbuilders which infringed on their interests, it issued another leaflet, "To the Workers at the New Admiralty". The management had to cancel the new rules and annul the fines meted out to 891 shipbuilders. The League issued leaflets "To the Armourers of the Sestroretsk Works from the Workers' League in St. Petersburg", "Comrade Workers of Alexandrovsky Cast-iron Mill" and "To the Workers of the Voronin Mill", in which it called on the workers to go on strike if their demands were not satisfied.

In the first four months of 1896 the League issued 17 leaflets; the number of copies grew with each month – now they were distributed in hundreds and thousands. The effect of them on the workers increased, and the strike movement expanded.

The class consciousness of the workers and their awareness of the solidarity of their interests with those of the international proletariat were growing. On the 25th anniversary of the Paris Commune the League sent an address to French workers on behalf of the St. Petersburg proletariat. It said that, while bourgeois France was embracing the tsarist government, "the freedom-loving thought of the Russian proletariat was throbbing in pain locked in the tsarist prison", but was also rising to the struggle. The League called for the strengthening of international ties: "Let us lay the foundations for more vigorous rela-

* *Reminiscences of Vladimir Ilyich Lenin*, Vol. 1, pp. 54-55. – Ed.

tions between the proletarians of both our countries on the anniversary of the day when the first breach was made by the French proletarians in the stronghold of the bourgeois world. Let them remember the behest of their great teacher: 'Workingmen of All Countries, Unite!'" As a token of international solidarity, the St. Petersburg workers also sent to the Paris workers one hundred roubles to buy a wreath and lay it on the Communards' grave.

For May Day of 1896, the League issued a leaflet printed in a record number of copies – over 2,000, which was distributed at 40 St. Petersburg works and factories. It summed up the results of the League's activities for the first period as follows: "Over the year past Russian workers showed to their employers that the submissiveness of the slaves is being replaced in them by the steadfast staunchness of people who do not bow to the impudence of capitalists coveting unpaid labour." The workers, it was said in the leaflet, went on strike almost in all the industrial centres of Russia, and most of the strikes ended in victory. The leaflet called on the workers to join the League and promote the great cause of the workers' unification. In conclusion, confidence was expressed that the working class will ultimately win out: "Our muscular arm will be raised, and the shameful chains will fall away; the working people of Rus will arise, and the hearts of the capitalists and the government, which is always at the former's beck and call, will contract in fright."

The St. Petersburg League of Struggle for the Emancipation of the Working Class, created by Lenin on the principles of Marxism, was an embryo of a proletarian party of a new type, the first Russian organisation to try to combine scientific socialism with the mass workers' movement. The League's consistent activities immediately told on the workers' movement: by the mid-1890s the St. Petersburg proletariat's action had grown considerably.

In the summer of 1896, the strike movement of the St. Petersburg proletariat became a regular "industrial war". The refusal of factory owners to pay for forced absence from work on the occasion of the coronation of Nicholas II served as an immediate cause for a general strike of the textile workers. On 14 May, workers at the Rossiiskaya Mill downed tools and went to other factories to call on their comrades to follow suit. The strike expanded. On May 30th, it spread to the largest textile factories – the Novaya and the Nevskaya Cotton Spinning mills; the number of strikers had almost doubled.

On May 30th, the senior factory inspector said at the conference at

the St. Petersburg Governor: "The calm way in which the strike is proceeding makes one convinced that there is a strong organisation behind these disturbances." It was decided to bring the strikers to trial.

By that time, about a dozen factories had gone on strike. The workers' actions had to be co-ordinated. At a meeting held at in May, at which about a hundred representatives of the factories involved in the strike were present, the workers' general demands were worked out under the guidance of the League of Struggle and a leaflet reflecting them issued under the heading: "What Are the Workers of the St. Petersburg Cotton Spinning Mills Demanding?" Their demands were as follows: 1) the working day should last from 7 a. m. to 7 p. m.; 2) a dinner-break should last one and a half hours, so that the working hours should be ten and a half instead of 13; 3) the pay rates should be raised everywhere by one kopeck, and by two kopecks wherever possible; 4) on Saturdays work should stop simultaneously everywhere, at 2 p. m.; 5) the factory owners should not stop or set off again machine-tools at their whim before the set time; 6) the wages for the first fortnight of each month should be remunerated accurately and paid on time, not delayed indefinitely; 7) the wages for the time wasted during the coronation days should be paid in full.

The leaflet united the strikers into the general front of struggle against the employers and imparted an organised character to the movement. On June 1st, the League issued yet another leaflet, "To the Workers at All St. Petersburg Mills", urging them to fight in an organised manner to get their demands, formulated in the leaflet of May 30th, satisfied.

By June 3rd the strike had spread to almost all the textile mills in the city; from 30 to 40 thousand workers were involved. That was a great success for the League, which in fact prepared and supervised the general strike of the St. Petersburg textile workers.

The League members were in the midst of events and led the struggle of the strikers, despite the aggravation of police reprisals. The leaflets written by them were, as formerly, approved by the leading centre. "Each illegal book or pamphlet, which passed through our store fund," Silvin wrote, "bore our mark, showing, on the one hand, that its content had been approved by the League for distributing among workers; and, on the other, it also added to the organisation's prestige."

As the class struggle became more acute, the demand for illegal literature increased. The technical appliances used to multiply the copies were working full-time. There were days, on which three different

leaflets had to be printed and distributed. The mimeograph and the hectograph worked without stop. Leaflets were both of a general nature, expressing the workers' demands as a whole, and also those containing demands of groups of workers at a particular factory.

In the latter half of May the League stepped up agitation, and meetings of the workers, representing various factories, became more frequent. At the meetings, they were given the League's appeals, to be distributed among their fellow-workers. Such meetings went on practically all the time. The most heated meeting was held in the first few days of June at the Putilovsky Val. They were attended not only by representatives of the workers who were on strike but by other workers as well; F. Lengnik, the League's representative, took the floor: he told the workers about the impression produced by the St. Petersburg strike abroad, about the sympathy of German workers and collection of funds for the strikers, and gave out some thousand copies of the leaflet "What Are the Workers of the St. Petersburg Cotton Spinning Mills Demanding?"

On 3 June 1896, the League issued the leaflet "To All St. Petersburg Workers", calling on them to support the textile workers on strike. "All the workers are brothers, indeed, made very close by their hard lot. We all share common interests, and common strivings and goals." The leaflet called on the workers to be guided in their struggle against the exploiting classes, not by narrow professional, but by class interests. "When we shall really become one single whole, no force in the world will be able to overpower the workers' movement."

The government and factory owners intensified their offensive against the striking workers. The workers' living quarters were flooded with gendarme detachments, Cossacks and army units. Arrests were made and the prisons became overcrowded. A secret circular advised the judges not to abide by the law when trying the strikers but apply the rules adopted at the factory concerned. The government did everything it could to suppress the working-class movement.

In those turbulent days the League issued one leaflet after another, actively and promptly influencing the course of the strike. To attract the attention of the progressively-minded public to the working-class question and to the general strike of the textile workers, a leaflet "To Russian Public" was issued, calling on all the Russian people to support the "conscious movement of the St. Petersburg workers, unprecedented in its scope and nature". It was emphasised in the leaflet that the conscious proletariat was the main revolutionary force, destined

"to do away with our common enemy – the autocracy". It was widely circulated in the city, and was sent by post to certain individuals and institutions, and to newspaper offices.

Meanwhile, the government and the industrialists were preparing to deal a decisive blow at the strikers. The police began mass searches and arrests.

To effect a split among the strikers, the management of several factories paid 50 per cent of the wages to those workers who refused to take part in the strike, although they could not work either. The management promised to modify the pay rates, pay the wages regularly, compensate for overtime work and remove from the factories foremen who took bribes.

On 15 June, 1896, S. Yu. Witte, Minister of Finance, addressed the workers of the cotton spinning mills and weaving factories. He demagogically assured them that "the government holds dear both the welfare of the factory-owners and the workers" and promised protection by the tsarist government to those who "will do their duty by the law and live as God willed".

Brutal reprisals and the policy of flirting with the workers attained their aim: The textile workers, who were in dire need by now, had to call off the strike.

The League answered to Witte's assurances by a leaflet, "To the St. Petersburg Workers", in which the minister's lies and hypocrisy were exposed and the class essence of the tsarist government's policy was revealed, thus showing how false the minister's attempt to disguise the autocracy as a supra-class form of government was.

The League activists, who remained at large, considered this leaflet insufficiently pointed in political respect. They asked Lenin in prison to compose a reply to the minister, and Lenin wrote a leaflet headed: "To the Tsarist Government". But as the liaison failed at that time, and soon fresh arrests ensued, Lenin's leaflet was not printed until November.

Lenin exposed the falseness of the government's assertion that the strikes were caused by the "specific nature of cotton-spinning and weaving production". The cause of the strikes, Lenin pointed out, lay in the specific nature of all of Russian production and the administrative order, in the lack of rights for Russia's citizens and the unbridled arbitrariness of the government, which fawned upon the capitalists. The minister's blabber to the effect that the strike was entirely the fault of the "instigators" was reminiscent of the reasoning of a police offi-

cial bribed by the capitalists: "Agitators came ... and a strike broke out. Now, when all the ministers saw a strike of 30,000 workers, they began to think, and finally came to the conclusion that strikes do not break out because socialist agitators come on the scene, but that socialist agitators come on the scene because strikes break out, because the workers' struggle breaks out against the capitalists.... That is a good lesson for Finance Minister Witte."*

Lenin ridiculed the Minister of Finance and exposed the hypocrisy of the government's declaration that the strikes assumed a political character only due to the Social-Democrats. "...Before any socialists did, the government itself took all possible measures to give the strikes a political character," he wrote.† Arrests and banishments from the capital, activities by police spies and agents provocateurs, fawning upon the factory owners and the defence of their interests by the government, all amounted to the fact that "the government itself was ahead of everybody else in explaining to the workers that the war they were waging against the factory owners must inevitably be a war against the government".‡

The government and the capitalists launched an offensive against the proletariat unanimously. "Peaceful workers who stood up for their rights and defended themselves against the factory owners' tyranny had the entire strength of the state power, with police and troops, gendarmes and public prosecutors, hurled against them."§ The entire strength of the state treasury came down on the workers, who had only a few coppers, their own and their comrades', to support them.

The leaflet ended in a political assessment of the strike movement. "The strikes of 1895-96 have not been in vain. They have been of tremendous service to the Russian workers, they have shown them how to wage the struggle for their interests. They have taught them to understand *the political situation and the political needs of the working*

* V. I. Lenin, "To the Tsarist Government", *Collected Works*, Vol. 2, pp. 124-25 – *Ed.*

† V. I. Lenin, "To the Tsarist Government", *Collected Works*, Vol. 2, p. 125. – *Ed.*

‡ *Ibid.* – *Ed.*

§ V. I. Lenin, "To the Tsarist Government", *Collected Works*, Vol. 2, p. 126. – *Ed.*

*class.**

The workers who assumed their work after the acute class struggles were different people. The collision with the government served to open the eyes of many of them to political matters. They understood that the capitalists were backed by another enemy, the tsarist government, without the overthrowing of which it was impossible to secure the satisfaction of their vital demands. Fully aware of the significance of the strike struggle of the St. Petersburg proletariat for the whole Russia, the League sent its leaflets to Moscow, Nizhny Novgorod, Kiev, Tver, and other cities. In all the fairly large industrial centres the summer strike of the St. Petersburg spinners and weavers was discussed. It was defended or upbraided but everybody tried to assess it. This famous "industrial war" enriched the Russian proletariat with revolutionary experience and raised high the banner of the Russian Social-Democracy.

The strike of the St. Petersburg textile workers produced a tremendous response, too. The workers in Britain, France, Germany, Austria and Switzerland followed the events in St. Petersburg closely and raised funds to help the strikers.

The movement of fraternal solidarity assumed special scope in Britain, where tremendous effort was put in it by Eleanor Aveling, the daughter of Karl Marx, and Vera Zasulich, a famous Russian revolutionary. On June 26, 1896, a Uniting Committee on the Strike was set up in London and in August it sent a letter to the League, accompanied with a sum of money for the strikers. "The Committee," the letter ran, "which has been organised here to collect money to assist the great St. Petersburg strike, is sending you its fraternal greetings and expressing its heartfelt pleasure at the results achieved through your efforts." In its answer to the British workers, the League declared that "the Russian workers will never forget the friendly hand offered to them in the heat of battle, at a decisive moment in its entering the scene of world history".

The Western Social-Democratic press widely commented on the course of the strike. The central organ of the German Social-Democratic Party noted that it was the first mass strike in Russia. On June 27th, 1896 *Vorwärts* wrote that "the St. Petersburg events testify to the fact that socialism has successfully penetrated into the masses... The main contribution has been made by the St. Petersburg League of

* Ibid, p. 127. – *Ed.*

Struggle for the Emancipation of the Working Class, which is working indefatigably to disseminate the fundamentals of socialism in Russia".

The Vienna *Arbeiter-Zeitung* wrote on June 26, that "the mass strike in St. Petersburg was an event of historic significance, for it opened up a new stage in the development of Russia. The Russian industrial proletariat has for the first time ever come out on the scene with its own special demands and goals, and for the first time ever the broad sections of the workers are leading a purposeful, conscious struggle... Thus the socialist movement in Russia is going beyond the dominion of political theory and onto the soil of the practical class struggle". The Russian working-class movement was becoming an important component of the international proletariat's struggle.

Lenin pointed to the great importance of the 1895-1896 strikes in St. Petersburg; he wrote that the agitation of 1894-95 and "the strikes of 1895-96 had already given rise to a *mass* working-class movement, which both in ideas and organisation was linked with the Social-Democratic movement."* It was precisely due to the Social-Democratic leadership of the St. Petersburg League of Struggle that the strike had assumed such great scope and political significance. "Does not this organisation represent the embryo of a revolutionary party based on the working-class movement, which leads the class struggle of the proletariat against capital and against the autocratic government without hatching any conspiracies, while deriving its strength from the *combination* of socialist and democratic struggle into the single, indivisible class struggle of the St. Petersburg proletariat? Brief as they may have been, have not the activities of the League already shown that the proletariat, led by Social-Democracy, is a big political force with which the government is already compelled to reckon, and to which it hastens to make concessions?"†

Even the government circles understood that the "peace" established at factories was of a temporary nature. The government commission sent to investigate the causes of the strikes arrived at the conclusion that if everything was left as it had been at the factories, then, because of the laborious conditions, the workers would continue to

* V. I. Lenin, "Disruption of Unity Under Cover of Outcries for Unity", *Collected Works*, Vol. 20, p. 343. – *Ed.*

† V. I. Lenin, "The Tasks of the Russian Social-Democrats", *Collected Works*, Vol. 2, p. 341. – *Ed.*

present a fertile soil for the "sowing of harmful doctrines". The strikes would occur again and again, and each time it would be more difficult "to resolve them, since the accumulated experience would inevitably rally the workers into an ever more organised mass".

After the strike, the League went on with agitation among the masses. From July 15 to August 6, ten leaflets were issued, in which particular attention was paid to analysing the experience of the struggle in the form of strikes. The same issue was discussed at the workers' meetings, one of which took place on July 14 in a wood near Pargolovo (a suburb of St. Petersburg. – *Tr.*), attended by about 30 representatives from workers' study circles. The League's leading centre was represented by M. A. Silvin and F. V. Lengnik. The meeting was opened by a speech by V. G. Vattsel, a worker from the Baltiisky Works, who managed, in the words of Lengnik, to raise "the textile workers' strike to a level of great principle".

The meeting recommended that more leaflets be printed, both written specially for workers at individual industrial enterprises and of a general political nature, addressed to the whole of the city's proletariat. The question of establishing a popular workers' newspaper was also discussed.

F. V. Lengnik informed those at the meeting about the international workers' movement and the response of the European proletariat to the general strike of St. Petersburg spinners and weavers. He emphasised that the workers' movement in Russia was a component part of the international proletarian movement. Then he told the workers about the international Socialist Congress, which was to be convened and the need to send representatives from the Russian proletariat there. It was decided to delegate G. V. Plekhanov, the leader of the Emancipation of Labour Group, as representative of the St. Petersburg League of Struggle.

Under the influence of the League's activities and the mass workers' movement, the Young shifted to the left. It was decided to admit a small group led by K. M. Takhtarev into the League. Already, when taking part in the meeting at Pargolovo, Takhtarev and his followers, M. Ya. Sitnikov and V. N. Katin-Yartsev, arrived at the conclusion that there were no "substantial differences between them (the group led by Takhtarev and the League. – *The Authors.*), which would constitute an obstacle to joint actions under a common banner", and so they "decided to unite", and by the beginning of August they were considered "as members of the League". The Takhtarev's group was

admitted on condition that they recognised the League's organisational principles, programme and tactics. The League started preparations for powerful new action by the capital's proletariat, but a fresh round of arrests prevented it. Almost all the members of the leading centre found themselves behind bars, either in a detention prison or in the Peter and Paul Fortress. From February to October 1896, 128 people were put on trial in connection with the activities of the St. Petersburg League of Struggle, among them 101 workers, eight students, eight teachers, three engineers, four office employees, two doctors and two representatives of other professions. These data testify to the fact that in the mid-1890s, the workers "became the main force in the liberation movement in Russia, assuming the part of leader in the revolutionary process. The revolutionary-minded workers had quite a high educational level: among those put on trial, there were eight people with a higher and five with a secondary education, and the rest had had primary schooling or learned their ABC on their own.

Due to the frequent arrests of the League members and the constant inflow of new strength, it is impossible to assess its membership precisely. The police documents and all kind of reminiscences, however, allow an approximate estimation of its activists. It has already been mentioned that in December 1895 and January 1896, 88 people were put on trial. But many people escaped arrest at that time, so that this figure is far from covering the whole membership, which was much greater; there were about 150 members in the League of Struggle for the Emancipation of the Working Class at the moment it was being formalised.

The organisation's social composition at that period can be judged by the affiliations of those put on trial from December 1895 to September 1896: out of 216 people, 154, or 71 per cent, were workers. These data convincingly refute the lie invented by bourgeois falsifiers, who assert, on the basis of the dust-covered archives of Russian liberals, that the League was made up of intellectuals. In actual fact, the latter accounted for less than a third. The bulk of the League consisted of the most advanced and active workers. Among them there were I. V. Babushkin, V. A. Shelgunov, F. I. Bodrov, N. Ye. Merkulov, V. G. Vattsel, P. Ya. Ivanov, B. I. Zinovyev, N. G. Poletayev, I. I. Yakovlev, K. M. Norinsky. They extended the scope of agitation at the city's industrial enterprises, convened workers' meetings and spoke at them as chief reporters, initiated and led the strikes, and imparted to them an organised character. They offered their own flats for meetings and the

studies of the workers' circles, and sometimes set up such circles themselves and conducted studies there. The foremost workers, holding Social-Democratic views, collected information on the condition of the St. Petersburg proletariat, wrote leaflets and articles, printed and distributed them. "Without such men the Russian people would remain for ever a people of slaves and serfs. With such men the Russian people will win complete emancipation from all exploitation."* History has convincingly proved these Lenin's words.

The tsarist authorities cruelly persecuted the vanguard workers and representatives of the revolutionary intelligentsia. One wave of the arrests followed another; not only the League members, but the rank-and-file participants in strikes were thrown into prison. After the summer 1896 strike, 1,600 people were brought to trial, and 700 were expelled from St. Petersburg. By mid-October, almost the whole of the League's leading centre had been imprisoned, and the leadership was taken over by new people.

A new leading centre was formed at a meeting of the League members who remained free, with S. I. Radchenko, A. A. Yakubova, K. M. Takhtarev, A. N. Potresov and L. N. Radchenko included.

The appearance in the leading centre and in the district groups of the Young, insufficiently experienced politically and not steered enough in the class struggles, inevitably had its effect on the League's activities.

The Young sought support not among the vanguard workers, but among the backward ones. They saw servicing the spontaneous workers' movement, rather than leading it, the chief task of a Social-Democratic organisation. The emergent opportunist trend bowed to spontaneity and underestimated the importance of making the working class conscious of socialist aims. Even the old leaders of the League began to vacillate, so that the opportunist trend in the League's leadership gained in strength. A certain recess set in in the organisation's activities: for the first seven months of 1896, 41 leaflets were issued, and in the remaining five months of the same year, only 13; in some of them, moreover, notes of Economism were evident.

Takhtarev and his associates tried to justify their opportunist policies by the lull that set in in the capital after the summer strike. They

* V. I. Lenin, "Ivan Vasilyevich Babushkin", *Collected Works*, Vol. 16, p. 364. – *Ed.*

said that the old organisational forms of the League were no longer consonant with the situation. If the organisation sticks to its old positions, they said, it "will lose its importance and authority among the workers". Now "we have to take into account the fact that there are workers who consider themselves experienced enough to take more independent action and choose their direction themselves. These workers ... do not wish to be bossed about by intellectuals any longer". Having opposed the Social-Democratic workers to the Marxist intelligentsia and invented a fable about the struggle allegedly going on between them for leading positions in the organisation, the Young decided to reorganise the League. If it is not reorganised, Takhtarev threatened, the proletariat will set up its own independent organisation to exist parallel to the League. Referring to the need for strengthening the League's ties with the workers, Takhtarev and his associates insisted on reorganising the leading centre and establishing a workers' fund that would be independent of the League.

A controversy ensued in the leading centre of the League between Leninist and the opportunist trends. The Leninists led by S. I. Radchenko determinedly rebuffed all the attempts by the opportunists to curtail Social-Democratic work and direct the working-class movement along the road of trade-unionism. Thus, "the *two* future conflicting trends in Russian Social-Democracy arose and grew, as Lenin wrote.*

The League's leading centre, weakened as it was by this controversy, could no longer respond immediately to the workers' unrest and influence the strike movement in the same effective way as before.

Meanwhile, the fear of organised action on the part of the St. Petersburg proletariat made the autocracy pass the law of June 2, 1897, which reduced working hours to 11 and a half, a fact that in itself, as Lenin wrote, "shows the *success* of the working-class movement in Russia; it shows what tremendous power lies in the class-conscious and staunch demand of the working masses. No amount of persecution, no wholesale arrests and deportations, no grandiose political trials, hounding of the workers have been of any avail... This autocratic government, considered to be all-powerful and independent of the people, had to yield to the demands of several tens of thousands of St.

* V. I. Lenin, "What Is to Be Done", *Collected Works*, Vol. 5, p. 378. – *Ed.*

Petersburg workers...

"On the other hand, the significance of the new law lies in the fact that it necessarily and inevitably *gives a fresh impetus* to the Russian working-class movement."^{*}

Another wave of arrests made the League still weaker. The opportunists – Takhtarev, Katin-Yartsev, Akimov, Goldman (Gorev) et al. snatched at this opportunity and set up a Central Agitation Group, or the Workers' Committee, made up of workers alone; this action was aimed at splitting the organisation into two sections: a workers' and an intellectuals'.

The opportunists demanded that the League should not take any independent action without first obtaining consent from the Central Agitation Group. In their opinion, the chief goal of the League consisted in catering to the needs of the workers' movement. They also planned to establish independent workers' funds, which would not depend on the League. Thus, the League was essentially being replaced by a broad non-Party organisation.

The struggle going on between the revolutionary and the opportunist trends became more acute with every passing month. The Old criticised the opportunist tendencies of the Young but, due to their own inadequate theoretical grounding, failed to expose convincingly these supporters of the reverse movement; that task was accomplished by Lenin,

On February 13, 1897, Lenin was sentenced to three years of exile in Eastern Siberia, under police surveillance. On the following day he was set free from prison: the authorities allowed Lenin, Krzhizhanovsky, Vaneyev and several other people tried and convicted in connection with the League of Struggle activities to stay in St. Petersburg for three days to see to their personal affairs. All of them used that time to meet the leaders of the League. Several meetings took place between February 14 and 17, at which a bitter dispute arose over tactical and organisational issues.

In the ensuing polemics with the old leadership of the organisation, the Young demanded that the Social-Democrats concentrate their efforts on establishing workers' funds, which they considered the main form of the proletariat's rallying together. They substituted a non-Party organisation, whose main aim was the struggle to improve the work-

^{*} V. I. Lenin, "The New Factory Law", *Collected Works*, Vol. 2, p. 302-03. – *Ed.*

ers' material position, for the militant Party organisation, called upon to lead the working-class political and economic struggle. In fact they rejected the working-class struggle for political freedoms, and ultimately, for socialism.

The Old led by Lenin sharply criticised the opportunist position of the Young. They proved that the chief task was that of consolidating the League, of creating an organisation of revolutionaries that could have led the workers' study circles, workers' funds, and all other proletarian organisations. Lenin and his associates (Vaneyev, Krzhizhanovsky, Starkov, Radchenko and others) rejected the opportunist proposals of the Young, seeing the League as an embryo of the revolutionary party of the proletariat.

In outlining the contours of a working-class party and explaining how it can be created, Lenin proceeded from the experience accumulated by the St. Petersburg League of Struggle for the Emancipation of the Working Class, which had directed the class struggle of the proletariat against the capitalists and the autocracy, basing its activities on the workers' movement and drawing its strength from the fight for socialism and democracy, combined in the indivisible class struggle. Lenin warned the Social-Democrats against biding their time and called on them to concentrate their efforts to carry out the main task faced by the revolutionary Marxists – formation of a united proletarian party by rallying together the Social-Democratic study circles and groups scattered all over Russia. Recollecting how he started his revolutionary activities in the group of the Old, Lenin wrote: "I used to work in a study circle that set itself very broad, all-embracing tasks; and all of us, members of that circle, suffered painfully and acutely from the realisation that we were acting as amateurs at a moment in history when we might have been able to say, varying a well-known statement: 'Give us an organisation of revolutionaries, and we will overturn Russia!'"*

Lenin's idea that it was necessary to unite Social-Democratic study circles and groups into a single proletarian party on an organisational principle and on the basis of ideological unity, was approved and supported not only by the revolutionary Marxists of St. Petersburg, but of the whole Russia, too.

* V. I. Lenin. "What Is to Be Done?", *Collected Works*, Vol. 5, pp. 466-67. – *Ed.*

The League of Struggle for the Emancipation of the Working Class led by Lenin was a genuine embryo of Bolshevism, as well as a splendid political school for advanced workers and the best representatives of the revolutionary intelligentsia, which gave Russia dozens of professional revolutionary fighters and active builders of the new-type Marxist Party; among them were Babushkin, Shelgunov, Poletayev, Kalinin, Bodrov, Krupskaya, Krzhizhanovsky, Radchenko, Silvin, and many others. In this way Lenin helped to create the core of professional revolutionaries, who made it possible to establish the Bolshevik Party of the Russian proletariat.