

COMMUNIST DISSIDENTS IN EARLY SOVIET RUSSIA

Five Documents Translated and Introduced by Simon Pirani



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Introduction¹

The five documents in this collection were written in a short, tumultuous period of less than two years – between the autumn of 1920 and the summer of 1922 – that followed the Reds’ victory in the Russian civil war.² After the main White armies were defeated in October-November 1919, early Soviet Russia lived through an extraordinary 15-month interregnum. On one hand, the Red Army consolidated its control over Ukraine (by February 1920) and, when attacked by Polish forces, pursued its enemies almost as far as Warsaw, briefly inspiring communists’ hopes of sparking a European revolution before an ignominious defeat (August 1920). On the other hand, grain requisitioning policies, on which supply to the revolution’s urban base relied, exacerbated tensions in

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- 1 With thanks to Maria Chekhonadskikh, for help in preparing the “We are collectivists” platform for publication; to Barbara Allen, Clayton Black and Steve Smith for their comments on this Introduction, and to Dr Allen for help with translation and other issues; to Brian Eley, who designed the cover; to Bridget Leach and Alla Morozova; and to Denys Gorbach and Evgeniya Polshchikova, who translated this Introduction and the notes into Russian
 - 2 The first section of this Introduction summarises points from S. Pirani, *The Russian Revolution in Retreat 1920-1924: Soviet workers and the new communist elite* (London: Routledge, 2008). The publication of these documents continues the research for that book, in which communist and working-class dissent in the early 1920s is discussed in more detail

the countryside, and in the autumn of 1920 a string of peasant revolts erupted.

In February-March 1921, the interregnum was brought to an end by a political and economic crisis. Food supply and transport came close to collapse. Peasant anger merged with working-class discontent, over both material hardships and the Bolsheviks' encroachments on soviet democracy. A wave of strikes erupted in Moscow and Petrograd (now St Petersburg), followed by the revolt at the Kronshtadt naval base, which was suppressed by the Red Army. This stand-off with the workers and peasants, in whose name the 1917 revolution had been made, posed a potentially existential threat to the Soviet government. A tactical retreat followed, at the Russian Communist Party (RCP) tenth congress in March 1921. Grain requisitioning, trade monopolies, labour compulsion and other "war communist" economic policies were abandoned, and replaced by the New Economic Policy (NEP). Initially this meant replacing grain requisitioning with a tax in kind on peasant farmers, but it soon expanded into a revival of private entrepreneurship and trading that left only the financial system and key industries in state hands.

The RCP changed rapidly during this time. It had about one-third of a million members in March 1919, and opened its doors to recruits in October 1919, when the civil war's outcome was in the balance. As a result, membership rose to nearly half a million by January 1920, and to around three-quarters of a million in the spring of 1921. From there it fell again: some members left, disillusioned; many more were excluded in a series of purges. The cohort that joined the party during the civil war outnumbered those who joined in 1917; both groups

dwarfed the core of a few tens of thousands of veterans of the clandestine, pre-1917 organisation. As Soviet Russia emerged from the civil war, a material rift opened up between the party ranks (mostly workers and Red Army soldiers) and an as-yet-embryonic elite of party leaders, “responsible officials” in soviet bodies, and non-party specialists and managers. The party’s internal discussions were for months dominated by talk of “the tops and the ranks”: in September 1920, it was the main subject of the party’s national conference; two months later, a coalition of opposition groups that focused attention on the issue narrowly failed to take control of the Moscow party. The first document in this collection was written during this discussion; the other four appeared after the tenth congress, and considered in various ways the new order taking shape under the NEP, the elite’s burgeoning role in it, and the escalating assaults on soviet democracy.

The communist dissidents of 1920-22 were anything but a homogenous group. There were some points on which they concurred with each other and with the RCP leadership: that the forward march of the revolution was inevitable, although the pace could be in question; that the motor of progress was the class struggle, understood narrowly as one waged by the working class not only against the bourgeoisie and the moneyed middle class, but also, to differing extents, against elements of the intelligensia and of the peasantry. Crucial issues on which the oppositionists were divided included their assessment of the Soviet state and of the RCP: the state had in some respects crossed to the enemy camp, in the more radical groups’ view. Such radicals included short-lived breakaways from the RCP such as the Workers and Peasants Socialist Party (WPSP) and

the Workers Truth group, whose documents are included here. Within the RCP, the two most significant groups on a national level were the Workers Opposition, whose supporters were concentrated in the RCP leadership of the trade unions, and the Democratic Centralists. Both were formal participants in the discussion preceding the tenth congress, and both were dissolved after it, in accordance with the decision to ban factions. (Collections of these groups' documents have been published recently, or are in preparation, by other historians.³)

THE DOCUMENTS

Document no.1 is a letter written in September 1920 by Anton Vlasov, a Red Army commander, to the RCP Central Committee and specifically to Lenin. Vlasov called on the party leadership to take action against the material privilege and corruption of the “tops”, and warned that the party was losing the confidence of the ranks and of the working class. He directed workerist anger at officials’ “servility, debauchery and luxury”, and an especially sexist ire at party leaders’ wives.⁴

3 See Barbara Allen (ed. and trans.), *The Workers' Opposition in the Russian Communist Party: Documents, 1919-30* (Leiden: Brill, 2021). Collections of documents by the Democratic Centralists and the Workers Group (see below) are also under preparation for the *Historical Materialism* book series

4 Demonising officials’ wives was a commonly-used trope among male rank-and-file communists. See Pirani, *The Russian Revolution in Retreat*, pp. 120-121. The historian Jean-Jacques Marie suggests that Vlasov’s motivation may have been antisemitic, but the text of the letter does not bear this out. The reference to Rozengol’ts as “that tradesman who has learned to shout and command” could possibly be read as antisemitic in tone. But Vlasov denounces party leaders of all ethnic backgrounds, and the greatest vitriol is reserved for Burdukov, a Russian, and Novikov,

If nothing is done, Vlasov warned, soldiers like himself will intervene “arms in hand”. Some of Vlasov’s claims about elite privilege seem exaggerated, and the Moscow committee of the party found them to be “three quarters untrue”. Historians have found no more details of Vlasov’s biography. But there is no doubt that his anger at party structures that had been “completely torn away from the masses” was widely shared.⁵

Document no. 2 is a declaration by a small group who felt that anger, and quit the RCP in early 1921 to form the short-lived Workers and Peasants Socialist Party (WPSP). It is the only extant document from the group, published in May 1921 and addressed to the Moscow soviet. It denounced the “nanny-communists”⁶ who now dominated the party and the soviets, and who “ruthlessly and cynically trample under foot everything that the proletariat once fought for, and spilled its blood for”. Dissatisfaction – with hardship and supply shortages, with the perceived exacerbation of that hardship by economic policy decisions, and with the RCP’s political intolerance – was running high in the Moscow factories. In elections to the soviet, held in April 1921, many factories elected non-party delegates, who had stood against, and defeated, RCP candidates. When the soviet assembled in May, these non-partyists represented most of the largest factories, which in 1917 had been the bedrock

most likely a Russian. J.J. Marie, *Cronstadt* (Paris: Fayard, 2005), p. 154

5 See Pirani, *The Russian Revolution in Retreat*, pp. 52, 59 and 121. The Moscow committee minutes are at TsAOPIM, op. 3, f. 1a, d.6, l. 42ob

6 The phrase “opekuny-kommunisty” is used. An opekun is a guardian appointed to safeguard the interests of minors or incompetents; the sense here was that the communist “tops” treated workers as incapable children. This was a common theme for oppositionists. See S. Pirani, *The Russian Revolution in Retreat*, p. 105

of the Bolsheviks' support. However, the RCP comfortably maintained its majority, thanks to large numbers of delegates from government offices. A tiny number of delegates (28 out of 2115) represented other parties, including the WPSP. The economic policy proposals in the declaration, and even the denunciation of "executive-committee-ism" and measures proposed to tackle it, would not have been out of place inside the RCP. But the demand for political rights for those outside the RCP, and the very fact that the declaration's authors had themselves quit the party, was unacceptable.

The WPSP was founded and led by Vasilii Paniushkin, whose revolutionary experience, like Anton Vlasov's, had been shaped in the military. Before 1917 he was a seafarer, and was alleged to have been among a group of Bolsheviks who during the revolution killed seven students found to have tsarist officers' epaulettes. By 1918 he had risen up the party's ranks to serve as a special military commissar and member of the collegium of the Cheka (security police). In 1920 he joined the rank-and-file opposition in Moscow. In June 1921, after the declaration appeared, Paniushkin was arrested. Six months later he was freed, after a meeting with Lenin; the WPSP was wound up and he was restored to RCP membership.⁷

Document no. 3, a platform entitled "We are collectivists", strikes a contrast with the others in content and style. Here there is little of the anger that consumed Vlasov, or the political and practical urgency that motivated the WPSP. Rather, the authors, whose names are unknown, presented a view of communist

7 On Paniushkin, see Pirani, *The Russian Revolution in Retreat*, pp. 104-105, 118-119 and 249

philosophy and culture, as well as politics and organisation, in preparation for a struggle – for “technological revolution”, to organise the social relations of production and for proletarian culture (part VIII) – that they expected would split the RCP, but only over a number of years. Rather than leaving the RCP, they were resolved to stay within it, as an ideologically tight-knit, and essentially clandestine, group of fellow thinkers in proletkult organisations and trade unions (part IX).⁸

The Collectivists declared themselves to be adherents of Vperedism, the Marxist tendency headed, prior to 1917, by Aleksandr Bogdanov.⁹ This signified, above all, a belief in the “idea of independent proletarian culture” (part II). Developing this culture, through “proletarianisation” of the arts and sciences, and building on the work of the proletkult

8 The proletarian culture movement was founded in October 1917, shortly before the Bolshevik seizure of power, at a conference initiated by the Petrograd factory committees and supported by Anatolii Lunacharskii, who would soon become commissar of enlightenment. During the civil war, under the acronym Proletkult, it expanded as a national network of workers’ associations, and briefly became a focal point for worker writers and artists, and an active participant in discussions about the future of revolutionary culture. In October 1920, the Proletkult was integrated into the commissariat of the enlightenment, but its local organisations continued in practice to enjoy some autonomy for some years afterwards

9 Aleksandr Bogdanov (1873-1928) was a physician, philosopher and science fiction writer, and from 1903 a member of the Bolshevik fraction of Russian Social-Democracy. In the aftermath of the 1905 revolution, Bogdanov was at odds with Lenin first on philosophical issues and then political ones. He formed Vpered as a grouping within Bolshevism in 1909; it was dissolved in 1912. After that, Bogdanov ceased political activity and focused on research and writing; he was nevertheless popular, after 1917, among some rank-and-file Bolsheviks. His philosophy of Tektology is seen as a precursor of systems theory

organisations set up after 1917, was a central practical task. So was the preparation of technological revolution (part X).

Having started out with this distinctive and thought-provoking critique of Bolshevik ideology, the Collectivists moved on to less original political proposals that overlap with those of the Workers Opposition, the WPSP and the Workers Group. The platform's authors had, before the tenth party congress in March 1921, supported the Workers Opposition as a proletarian voice in the RCP – but thought that its “belief in the necessity of building communism and its militant utopianism” had been overtaken by events (part III). The proletariat may have retained “hegemony” after the tenth congress – and the platform categorised the Soviet state as “the dictatorship of a proletarian-peasant bloc” – but the party leadership had now sanctioned a “transition from war communism to state capitalism” and a corresponding shift of political power away from the working class to “the technical intelligentsia” (part IV). Progress from this state capitalism to socialist revolution is inevitable, the authors believed, and they expected it to unfold internationally over the course of the next two decades (part VII).

Alla Morozova has recently argued that, while the Collectivists were surely influenced by Bogdanov, they can not accurately be described as “Bogdanovists”; politically, they formed an intermediate link between the Workers Opposition and Workers Truth.¹⁰ Whether they implemented their plan to build a clandestine network in the Communist

10 Alla Morozova, “Byla li platforma ‘kollektivistov’ platformoi ‘bogdanovtsev’? K voprosu o stepenii retseptsii i transformatsii idei A.A. Bogdanova v dokumentakh vnutripartiinoi oppozitsii v RKP(b) v nachale 1920-kh godov”, *Via in tempore* 49 (2022), no. 1, pp. 163-174

party is unknown: certainly it left no trace that historians have found. Nevertheless, the Collectivists' platform was distributed at a proletkult conference in November 1921, and attracted sufficient attention that Lenin proposed publishing it, together with a response. That was never done, but Bukharin polemicised against it in *Pravda*, the party's main newspaper. Bogdanov, who had abandoned Bolshevik politics to focus on research, was denounced in Bukharin's article, and responded robustly. In September 1923 he was arrested and briefly detained as the supposed ideologue of the Workers Truth group. He denied any direct connection with it, and with the Collectivists, and historians have found no evidence of any.¹¹

Document no. 4, an appeal by the Workers Truth group issued in early 1922, deals with some of the same themes as the Collectivists – the class character of Russian society, and of the soviet government, and the need for cultural as well as political renewal. The group was formed by communist militants who had fought in the Red Army during the civil war, including several who were studying on higher education courses on to which communist cadres had been invited. Workers Truth defined the Russian economy as state capitalist, but considered the “proletarian dictatorship” that the RCP proclaimed to be a fiction. In the group's view, the “technical organising intelligentsia” was drawing together with

11 Morozova, “Byla li platforma”, op. cit. On the polemic between Bukharin and Bogdanov, see: Bukharin, “Kollektivistskoe likvidatorstvo”, *Pravda*, 13 December 1921; N.S. Antonova and N.V. Drozdova (eds.), *Neizvestnyi Bogdanov v 3-kh knigakh* (Moscow: AIRO, 1995), kn. 1, pp. 204-222

elements of the old bourgeoisie, and “a new bourgeoisie [was] taking shape”; capital was “on the march against the gains made by the working class” in 1917. The RCP was facilitating this offensive, having “increasingly, irretrievably, lost its relationship and commonality with the proletariat”. All this meant that a new workers’ party was needed.

The group’s analysis of the soviet state’s class character challenged the RCP’s claim that the enemy was essentially external and the state essentially a “workers’ state”. Actually, the appeal asserted, workers are “disorganised” and their consciousness is muddled: “are they living under the ‘proletarian dictatorship’, as the Communist party repeats endlessly in speeches and articles, or in a country of arbitrary rule and exploitation, as life itself convinces them at every step?” Workers, who were “eking out a miserable existence” while the new bourgeoisie “wallows in luxury”, needed clarity and organisation in a new party. When arrested in November 1923, Polina Lass-Kozlova, one of the leaders of the Workers Truth group, told her interrogators that she and her comrades believed that, under the given historical conditions, the proletariat’s lack of experience of practical statecraft, and its lack of cultural preparation, meant that proletarian dictatorship was impossible. They acknowledged that soviet power was “the only possible” one in Russia, but that describing it as a worker-peasant government “did not correspond to the real content and nature of that power”.¹²

The Workers Truth group circulated typewritten copies of

12 “Iz protokola doprosa v OGPU P.I. Lass-Kozlovoi”, V. Vilkova, RKP(b) *Vnutripartiinaia bor’ba v dvadtsatye gody: dokumenty i materialy 1923 g* (Moscow: Rosspen, 2004), pp. 104-105

the appeal published here, and two editions of a newspaper, before being suppressed. Prominent members were rounded up by the security forces in September 1923, when workers' aspirations to improved pay and conditions fuelled a wave of strikes. The security police feared that this would provide fertile ground on which dissident communist groups could grow. They also targeted another such network, the Workers Group led by Gavriil Miasnikov, a worker Bolshevik based in Perm', and supported by many who had participated in the 1920 Moscow opposition.¹³ The Workers Truth members protested vigorously at being categorised in the party press as "Menshevik-counter-revolutionaries". Prosecution documents had described them as "old Mensheviks"; actually, apart from Lass-Kozlova, who was 28, they were all under 25; all had joined the Bolsheviks as teenagers. Fania Shutskever, a Red Army veteran, spent more than a year in prison; at least three others were detained. One of them, E. Shul'man, told Trotsky in December 1923 that they were being exiled to distant parts of Russia.¹⁴

13 For Miasnikov's biography, see Paul Avrich, "Bolshevik Opposition to Lenin: G.T. Miasnikov and the Workers Group", *The Russian Review* 43 (1984), pp. 1-29. Translations of the Workers Group's 1923 manifesto, and Miasnikov's 1930 pamphlet *The Current Deception*, published in France in 1930, were published in: International Communist Current, *The Russian Communist Left 1918-30* (ICC, 2005). A protocol of Miasnikov's interrogation by the Soviet security police in 1945, before he was executed, is available in an electronic library: The Last Testament of the Left Communist Gavriil Miasnikov, translated and annotated by Malcolm Archibald (<https://www.katesharpleylibrary.net/bzkjbjz>, accessed on 20 January 2023)

14 On the dissidents' activity in 1922-23, see Pirani, *The Russian Revolution in Retreat*, pp. 195-199 and 203-205. On arrests, see also Vilkova,

Document no. 5, excerpts from Iosif Litvinov's diary, shines an exceptional light on the moods, political and psychological, of the civil war veterans among whom Workers Truth first took root. Litvinov, a Latvian Jewish communist, had served in the tsarist army, participated in the revolutionary soldiers' movement, and then in the short-lived soviet seizure of power in Riga in 1919. He wrote the diary while studying at the Institute of Red Professors in Moscow, alongside Shutskever among others. On top of the emotional turmoil into which soldiers returning from so many wars have been plunged, the Red Army veterans, in addition, felt that NEP was, at least, the bonfire of their hopes for changing society; at most, a betrayal. Litvinov's first diary entry notes that communists were committing suicide "on a daily basis". His diary is very unusual for having survived the Stalinist era, and found its way to post-Soviet historians, through a complex and tragic series of circumstances (see the Introduction to the text). Many more such documents were destroyed by their authors or otherwise disappeared.

COMMENTS

The communist dissidents of the early 1920s made little impact on the convulsive course of Soviet history. The Cheka and its successors effectively made it impossible to operate outside the Communist party. Some dissidents abandoned

RKP(b) Vnutripartiinaia bor'ba v dvadtsatye gody, pp. 116-118. It is possible that Shul'man's letter did not reach Trotsky; historians found it in Viacheslav Molotov's archive. But the arrests were publicly known and mentioned during the 1923 party discussion; neither Trotsky nor any of his closest comrades registered any protest

public activity (at least, any that was visible to historians); some, such as Paniushkin, returned to the Communist party and served the Soviet state in political or administrative roles. This latter path was also trod by prominent members of the Democratic Centralist group and the Workers Opposition.

The New Economic Policy gave way during the first five-year plan (1928-32) to a policy of forced industrialisation and collectivisation. This resulted in a new influx of migrants from the countryside to urban areas, and a fearful attack on working-class living standards and demands for speed-up in industry. Workplace revolts ensued, and former Communist party members and non-party communists were prominent among their organisers. In 1928, members of both the Bolshevik-Leninist faction led by Trotsky, and the Democratic Centralist group, were expelled en masse from the party. Although they effectively operated underground, they saw no alternative to one-party rule, and saw the workers' movement as an auxiliary to pressure for internal change, rather than a force to be mobilised against the "workers' state".¹⁵ In the 1930s and 1940s, almost the only traces of dissident communist activity were left in the prison camps.

In the Soviet Union after Stalin, socialist and communist dissidents were deprived of direct connections with their predecessors: they knew little more about them than could be

15 On the workers' movement, see e.g. Jeffrey Rossman, *Worker Resistance Under Stalin: class and revolution on the shop floor* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2005). On the communist opposition, see e.g. Aleksei Gusev, "The 'Bolshevik Leninist' opposition and the working class, 1928-1929" in D. Filtzer et al (eds), *A Dream Deferred: new studies in Russian and Soviet Labour History* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2009), pp. 153-170

gleaned from official publications.¹⁶ This was a painful break in the historical memory of the workers' movement. Not only had the dissident communists of the 1920s been physically annihilated or terrorised into silence, but also the documents in which they articulated their understanding of how the revolution had degenerated disappeared into the archives.

Now, a little more than a century after they were written, the documents can be a source of inspiration – but not a model for our times. Too much has changed. To their authors, the international working class would be unrecognisable. In India and China, let alone the wealthy capitalist countries, urban working people comprise a far greater share of the population than in 1920s Russia; rates of nutrition, literacy and health care access are incomparably higher. Most have electricity and the internet. Or, to look at technological progress another way, the “gigantic technologies of destruction” that so horrified the Workers Truth group – poison gas, artillery and early armoured vehicles – have been superseded by machine guns, flying bombers, nuclear weapons and electronic surveillance. Ecological crises loom. Social transformations in this century may have as little in common with the Russian revolution as it had with the French revolution of 1789.

Revolutions often raise hopes they can not fulfil, and the documents in the collection are striking, first, for the way that they reflect the collision between the hopes of 1917 and the civil war, and the harsh economic and political facts of the NEP. “People, who have lived for four years as if on a drug-

16 A recent overview is: Ilya Budraitskis, *Dissidents Among Dissidents* (London: Verso, 2022), pp. 103-166

induced high, are counting their wounds”, Litvinov wrote (doc. 5, 15 January entry). To the Collectivists, “the military consumer communism of the besieged fortress” had during the civil war seemed to be “genuine production communism”; looking back self-critically, they realised that “it never once entered our heads to check our perspectives and our view of the future against the facts” (doc. 3, part III). In 1921-22, back in civilian life and confronted with the NEP, this reckoning with reality could no longer be postponed.

The character of the soviet state was a conundrum with which all the documents’ authors tussled. The material inequality that enraged Vlasov, and so many others, had to be explained. For the WPSP, the problem was that the proletariat had been “pushed out of the governance of the Republic”; proletarian power was being subverted by “a bureaucratised element whose connections with the proletariat have been severed or lost” (doc. 2). This view of a hostile class element within the state could also be heard within the RCP, and was not especially controversial; it was the WPSP members’ readiness to quit the party that provoked a reaction. The authors of other documents went further, though.

The Collectivists defined this alien grouping as a “technical-bureaucratic intelligentsia” that was on the way to becoming a “new bourgeoisie”; they believed they were witnessing a transition from “dictatorship of the worker-peasant bloc under proletarian hegemony” to the political rule by this intelligentsia (doc. 3, part IV). The Workers Truth group argued that this “technical organising intelligentsia” had come to the fore not only in Soviet Russia, but in all the countries emerging from the first world war. In Russia,

the RCP had become the party of this intelligentsia, and, thereby, “the representative of the general, national interest of capital”. The idea that Soviet Russia was a “proletarian state” was a deception; “the class interests of the ruling bourgeois groups in Russia naturally require the papering-over of class contradictions in our republic”.

However, the formation of the new elite had aspects to which the communist dissidents paid little attention. Some tens of thousands of “responsible officials”, all party members, were at its centre, and indeed were given special dispensation by the 11th party congress in 1922 for excessive legal earnings; they, along with managers in industry and the notorious NEPmen, were accumulating political, social and economic power.¹⁷ The dissidents’ narrow focus on the “intelligentsia”, surely reflecting long-standing prejudices in the industrial workers’ movement against specialists, belied this complexity. Vlasov railed against “the intelligentsia’s thirst for power” and the way that the directorate of food supply had become a “haven for Mensheviks” (doc. 1); the Collectivists’ and Workers Truth group’s analyses also reflected this bias. For the Collectivists, the proletkult organisations, on which they relied to carry forward the struggle for cultural and technological revolution, had as a priority to be purged of “middle-class elements” and “elements hostile to the proletariat” (doc. 3, part X).

Some dissidents, in keeping with long-standing Bolshevik tradition, also assumed that the peasantry, which comprised the vast majority of the Russian population, was essentially

¹⁷ See S. Pirani, *The Russian Revolution in Retreat*, especially pp. 166-191. The NEPmen were private entrepreneurs of the period

hostile. For the Collectivists, the peasantry, “in consequence of its intermediate social position”, could not play an independent political role; as capital’s offensive against the proletariat intensified, the peasantry would side with it. Proof of its “limiting role” in its alliance with the proletariat was the party’s failure to nationalise the land in 1917, and its decision to replace the food supply monopoly with the tax in kind, in 1921 (doc. 3, part IV). The Workers Truth group also saw the countryside as the source of threats: the NEP was stimulating “rapid growth of a significant layer of kulaks”, they claimed (doc. 4) – certainly a premature judgment in 1922. The WPSP’s declaration, by contrast, refers throughout to the need to “consolidate close links” between the urban and rural proletariats, and to the need to supply traded goods to the countryside (doc. 2).

As well as the narrow definition of the working class, as employed industrial workers, the dissidents also shared the Bolsheviks’ assumptions that political positions were innately determined by class characteristics – and that democracy could be afforded only to those understood to be proletarian. The WPSP urged that political rights be extended to “all genuinely revolutionary parties” who were “not stained by betrayal of the proletarian cause”, and the release of those parties’ representatives – but not, presumably, any Mensheviks or Socialist Revolutionaries – from prison. The death penalty, the WPSP said, should be abolished “except in cases of clearly defined enemies of the proletariat” (doc. 2). The Workers Truth group was much less categorical, but claimed (incorrectly) that bourgeois opposition groups enjoyed freedom of speech and combination, and that “revolutionary elements of the proletariat” had to fight for it (doc. 4).

The dissidents' narrow identification of revolution with the industrial working class left them with other blind spots. The huge changes that the revolution had brought about, and was bringing about, for women, and in the domestic sphere, are not mentioned in the documents, apart from the WPSP's brief assertion that "serious attention" needed to be paid to schools and nurseries, as well as other municipal services (doc. 2).

Reading these documents in 2023 – when the war in Ukraine provides a shocking reminder of the durability of Russian imperialist nationalism – the dissidents' lack of interest in Russia's future relationship with its former colonies is also striking. When the Workers Truth group urged "support by all means to the national bourgeoisie of the emerging capitalist countries of the east in their struggle against colonial empires", they meant "India, China, Egypt and so on", and not, apparently, Russia's periphery. The Russian republic's task was "the establishment of close links" with "advanced capitalist countries such as Germany and America", and a boycott of "reactionary France" (doc. 4). This fitted with their view that Russia could aim only for state capitalism, and not socialism, and that the class struggle would be conducted most effectively if that bitter truth was recognised. The Collectivists envisaged an ongoing struggle against "the colonising aspirations of foreign concessionaire capital, and the speculative tendencies of Russian capital" (doc. 3, part X).

We must not read back to 1921-22 changes that took place subsequently. The dissidents knew no more about the future crushing effects of Stalinist centralisation than they did about the first five-year plan or the purges. By 1921 the Ukrainian

Rada's fate had been sealed, and the Georgian republic had been subverted, and then removed by the Red Army – but the Soviet Union did not yet exist, and in 1922 the row among Bolshevik leaders about its constitution and nationalities policy was conducted behind closed doors. The dissidents shared most communists' conviction that national and democratic issues were subordinate to the class struggle. In the circumstances – when the revolution had destroyed the empire, and Russia's future relationship with its former colonies was in flux – what mattered most was defence of the revolution from the capitalist powers. Whether or not the soviet state could be defined as a “workers' state”, the dissidents were for defending it, as they had done during the civil war, arms in hand.

The documents' authors feared that the Russian republic was being bureaucratised, and even that it was being turned into an agency of capital – but that did not mean an agency of imperialism. This really was a blind spot, one shared with socialists in imperialist countries at other times and places. It was combined with an allegiance to the republic founded in their self-identity as communists, as opposed to people of any particular nation. Litvinov, a Latvian Jew who renounced his religion and changed his surname to a Russian-sounding one, lamented the fate of “poor, unhappy Russia: everyone wants to take you on the road that they have chosen”: the Christians, to Orthodox piety, the communists, to world revolution; he wanted Russia to “live just for yourself” (doc. 5, 3 February entry). Five months later, in a better mood, he hailed the Russian republic as “the most stable government in the world”, in contrast to the European powers (doc. 5, 10 July entry).

The dissidents also had to confront the painful fact that it was the Communist party, of which they had all been members, that was presiding over the growing bureaucratisation and authoritarianism of the soviet state. Their starting point was the gulf between the party and the industrial working class for which it claimed to speak. The WPSP asserted that the bourgeoisie has “found reliable helpers in the communist party” for their “drive to smash the proletarian power from within” (doc. 2). According to Workers Truth, the Communist party had “increasingly, irretrievably, lost its relationship [...] with the proletariat”; the “chasm” dividing it from the working class was “getting ever deeper” (doc. 4). The Collectivists explained the party’s desertion of the proletarian cause in mechanical class terms: while the proletariat could develop collectivist culture, “authoritarianism and individualism” were “characteristic of [non-proletarian] layers of our party: the peasantry and the intelligentsia” (doc. 3, part IV).

Litvinov, writing only for himself, opened up broader issues about the reproduction of alienated personal and social relations in the “communist” organisation. “There is no genuine friendship or solidarity between communists”, he wrote (doc. 5, 21 February entry) – a damning indictment. He pondered the relationship of communism and humanism. In the party’s lame attempts to explain reactions to the 1922 famine on the Volga in class terms, the theory of class struggle had been vulgarised “to the point of idiocy”; “all that is common to all humanity was declared to be non-existent”; the party had become “a herd of sheep, bereft of its own judgement” (doc. 5, 26 January entry).

Stalinist murder and censorship severed the experience

of Litvinov's generation not only from socialists and others in the Soviet Union, but also from socialists and communists internationally, as they tried to understand the outcome of the 1917 revolution and the first state that claimed to rule in the name of working people. As the revolution degenerated, the only voice that had lived through it, that could be clearly heard in the workers' movement elsewhere, was Lev Trotsky's, and then only to the extent that the Trotskyists were able to counter the Stalinist lie machine. Some of the Mensheviks, anarchists such as Grigorii Maksimov, and the hard-to-categorise Victor Serge, had smaller audiences. The Workers Opposition was known, if at all, through Alexandra Kollontai's pamphlet about it. The fraying threads of discussion and understanding were further broken by the second world war and the larger political, social and cultural divisions of the "cold war"; the bureaucratism and incorporation of workers' organisations in Western countries had its effect too. But that the heterogenous multitude of voices in the post-revolutionary Soviet state was almost unheard by later generations is undeniable.¹⁸

The opening of the Soviet archives in the late 1980s, and the collapse first of the Soviet Union's repressive apparatus and then of the Union itself, was a shift in the opposite direction.

18 For example, in his three-volume *Main Currents of Marxism*, published in the 1970s, Leszek Kolakowski mentions the Workers Opposition in passing, but otherwise focuses on differences among the Bolshevik leaders (Lenin, Trotsky, Stalin and Bukharin). Marcel van der Linden, in *Western Marxism and the Soviet Union: a survey of critical theories and debates since 1917* (Leiden: Brill, 2007) mentions in passing an article written by Miasnikov in 1931, but none of the other dissident communists

Historians played their part, and so all the documents published here, except the WPSP manifesto, have been published in Russian, albeit in small-circulation academic books and journals (see introduction to each document for details).

All the documents are published here in English for the first time. In the use of sub-headings, capital letters, paragraphs and so on, I have tried to follow their original style.

1. Anton Vlasov's letter to the Central Committee

This letter was sent by Anton Vlasov, a Red Army officer, to the Central Committee of the Russian Communist Party (RCP) in September 1920. A copy was retained in the archive of Nikolai Bukharin, in 1920 editor of the party newspaper, Pravda, and published in 1998 by historians who found it there.¹ While some stories of leading party members' luxurious circumstances may be exaggerated, the letter expresses sentiments that were widespread among rank-and-file communists at the time. I have found no additional information about Vlasov.

TO THE CENTRAL COMMITTEE OF THE RCP

Copies to: comrade Lenin; the Moscow Committee; *Pravda* editorial board; all district committees; the Petrograd regional committee.

Esteemed comrades,

I, a wounded Red Army officer, have had some medical treatment, and in the next few days I will travel back to the

1 Russian State Archive of Social and Political History (RGASPI), f. 329, op. 2, d. 1, ll. 28-29; "My vse vidim i vse znaem: krik dushi krasnogo komandira. Publikatsiia k.a.n. Aleksandra Vatlina", *Istochnik* 1998: 1(32), pp. 85-87

southern front. Having lived in Moscow for three months, I have seen things that I would never even have guessed at.

I have seen depravity among our responsible communist officials, and I have seen the free-for-all they have created being encouraged by the Central Committee (CC).

I have seen how a petty-bourgeois lifestyle² is completely predominant among domesticated communists.

Here is a characteristic example of the CC's powerlessness in the face of the ever-greater appetites of some of its members.

Located in Moscow, I was assigned to the Moscow Regional Headquarters reserve, and lived in the apartment of a worker at the Motor factory, an old comrade of mine.³ An official from the headquarters, who works closely with [Aleksandr] Burdukov, the Regional Headquarters commissar,⁴ lived there

2 Vlasov said the elite was dominated by "meshchanstvo", i.e. the estate (as defined in the tsarist empire's legal code) of better-off urban residents. Both before and after the 1917 revolution, the term was used pejoratively. For some communists it had the added implication of conservative, patriarchal views of sex and the family. See Sheila Fitzpatrick, "The Problem of Class Identity", in S. Fitzpatrick, A. Rabinowitch and R. Stites (eds.), *Russia in the Era of NEP: explorations in Soviet society and culture* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), pp. 12-33

3 Motor was a relatively small engineering works in the Zamoskvorech'e district

4 Aleksandr Burdukov joined the Russian Social Democrats (Bolshevik faction) in 1905. After the 1917 revolution he was commissar at the Headquarters of the Moscow Military Region, and later the Region's commanding officer; he worked closely with N.I. Muralov, one of the Red Army's senior commanders. From 1925 he worked as director of the state academy attached to the Bolshoi theatre, and then rector of the Timiriazev agricultural sciences academy. He died in 1940, likely a victim of the Stalinist purges. See P.V. Batulin, "Sozдание sovetskoi voennoi tsenzury v 1918 godu", *Voенно-istoricheskii arkhiv* 2 (122),

too. And from conversations with him, and checks made with another responsible comrade, I have learned the following.

The workers of the Motor factory appropriated for collective development an estate with a very good manor house, where they were thinking of setting up a children's camp. But to their misfortune, the estate took the fancy of the "communist" Ganshin, commandant of the city of Moscow, the "communist" Burdukov and the "communist" Liublin. They wanted to take the estate from the workers, but the latter would not give it up. The matter went to the Sovnarkom,⁵ and... the worker-peasant power took the estate from the workers (who, due to their public-spiritedness, did not protest arms in hand, which, in my opinion, they certainly should have done) and handed it over to a few of these "top guns of the revolution", who – Burdukov, for example – already have spacious town houses in Moscow.

And so these Motor factory workers can observe, every morning and evening, how the aforementioned "comrades", with their family members and kids, go back and forth by automobile. It's a wonderful picture for agitation, a great advertisement, don't you think?! Isn't this the powerlessness of the party? Isn't this an example of scratch-my-back-I'll-scratch yours?

Here is another example of how some communists work, and how that suits some of the specialists, and what sort of influence they have on the work of the whole Republic.

The above-mentioned Burdukov, to whom I paid close

2010, pp. 120-137; V.I. Lenin, *Polnoe Sobranie Sochinenii* (Moscow: izd. Politicheskoi Literatury, 1975), vol. 54, p. 767

5 The Soviet of People's Commissars, effectively the Soviet government

attention – and who I myself saw several times, and, in particular, I talked with his secretary and with the official who lives in the same place as me – gives the impression of a typical dimwitted petty bourgeois with a fat belly, a family, and a team of flunkies to take order and run errands. He himself doesn't do a thing, except fixing things up with letters and recommendations for friends of his friends, relatives of his relatives, acquaintances of his acquaintances, and acquaintances of the most powerful movers and shakers. At the command department of the Headquarters, when receiving my pay, I myself heard former officers [of the tsarist army] telling each other that if you know a friend of Burdukov's, then you can get appointed wherever you want, and all cases are referred to Novikov, the former general and head of the Military Division of the Headquarters.⁶ He sorts out all problems, even those of a political character: communists are appointed, and removed, on his orders – and Burdukov, enraptured by his sweet words, doesn't notice. In general, at Headquarters, Novikov is the be-all and end-all.

And how this specialist lives. Burdukov has given him a

6 This may refer to Aleksandr Novikov (1864-1937), who served as a major-general and then lieutenant-general before and during the first world war; volunteered for the Red Army in 1918 and served in it until 1922; and was arrested and imprisoned in 1930 in connection with the "Operation Vesna" investigation of former tsarist officers, and then exiled. K.A. Zalesskii, *Kto byl kto v Pervoi mirovoi voine* (Moscow: Astrel, 2002), p. 453; Ia. Titchenko, *Golgofa russkogo ofitserstva v SSSR 1930-1931 gody* (Moscow: izd. MONE, 2000); A.G. Kavtaradze, *Voenspetsy na sluzhbe Respubliki Sovetov* (Moscow: Nauka, 1988); <https://www.ria1914.info/> (accessed 27 January 2023)

motor car, exclusively for trips to his dacha. What a charming picture is on show every day: former general Novikov, with his friends and his wife, get into the motor car at the front entrance of the Headquarters, right before the eyes of Red Army soldiers and communists, and off they go to the dacha. And what a dacha it is! Novikov has a secretary – a former landowner, who owns a country house, whose estate and house were nationalised. So Burdukov made sure that this secretary's estate, and house, went to Novikov, who is now the master of it. What a touching union of general, landlord and communist! Into what empire of communism have they entered? The Regional Military Headquarters takes on as staff only Novikov's protégés – that is, undercover White guards, like him himself.

All I have written here has been confirmed by members of RCP fraction at the Regional Commissariat, who are so terrorised by the repression meted out to all who raise their voice in protest that they keep quiet.

As for the party and its influence on the masses, it's necessary to say the following.

Our communist workers' party is on the verge of bankruptcy. The party has absolutely no authority: if it has, that is just fear of the Cheka. And why? Because, comrades, our party committees have become bureaucratic bodies. They have been completely torn away from the masses, and a party member who goes to sort out any kind of issue at district, Moscow or even Central Committee level, is often addressed in a sharp, even vulgar, manner by the committee secretary. And if the member is not especially high-ranking, he may not be granted an audience at all. Look at the Bauman district,

where, thanks to the bureaucratic, out-of-touch district committee, the Moscow committee has found it necessary to judge comrades – the very best comrades – for daring to express their dissatisfaction with the district committee.⁷ Now there is surveillance; they send informers to keep an eye on their own communist comrades (doesn't that remind you of something in the Great French Revolution?). And all this for what? For the intelligentsia's thirst for power, glory and so on. And at the same time just look what goes on in the soviet administrative bodies, in Glavsnaprodarm [the Central Directorate for Food Supply to the Red Army and fleet], that haven for Mensheviks – where a whole mob of them are working, the whole Menshevik Central Committee, and where they create jobs especially for their members. And what's the Cheka doing there?

I have been told that, in answer to a comrade, who talked to him about the situation, Il'ich⁸ said that “the voice of the organised proletariat has not yet been heard”.

Dear Vladimir Il'ich, I know you are very tactful, but look, don't get it wrong: wouldn't it be a bit late, when we hear the voice of the organised proletariat? Because if that voice is heard, it will be the voice of steel and lead. For the whole war, and the whole civil war, I was at the front. I was

7 In the party organisation in the Bauman district of Moscow, an opposition group came together in August 1920, held together by anger at the “tops” rather than by a written programme. It took control of the district committee in October 1920 and held it for a year. See Pirani, *The Russian Revolution in Retreat*, pp. 61-63

8 Vlasov uses Lenin's patronymic here in an affectionate sense, and in the next passage addresses Lenin with the informal “ty” (similar to “tu” in French)

in command of a battalion and of a regiment, and I have many comrades both at the front and in Moscow; as a worker, the masses trust me. And with my full-blooded interest in defending the gains of the revolution (not as a member of the intelligentsia), I say to you: yes, it would be late, for in the heart of every conscious comrade from the front, who at the front has become used to almost complete equality, who has broken from every kind of servility, debauchery and luxury – with which our very best party comrades now surround themselves – there boils hatred and disbelief, when he, wounded, trudges from one end of the city to the other, while the wives of the Sklianskiis, Burdukovs, Kamenevs, Steklovs, Avanesovs, Taratutas and other high-ranking and low-ranking “communists” ride to their dachas, sporting huge hats with bird-of-paradise feathers.⁹ Off they go to Arkhangelskoe, Tarasovka or wherever,¹⁰ to the mansions and manor houses that were taken from the bourgeoisie by the working class, and which those workers are now not allowed to go anywhere near, let alone use, as the comrades from the Motor factory wanted to do. The workers make these palaces dirty: better to give them to Ganshin, Burdukov or the People's Commissars, like Tarasovka, which people now call “Tsarskoe Selo”, and quite right too. Look how the commissars live there. Taratuta alone takes up 12 rooms and has four militia men on guard.

9 As well as Burdukov, those mentioned were senior Soviet government figures: Efraim Sklanskii, People's Commissar for War; Lev Kamenev, head of the Moscow party organisation; Iurii Steklov, editor of *Izvestiia*; Avram Avanesov, deputy People's Commissar of workers' and peasants' inspection; and Viktor Taratuta, a senior official of the Comintern

10 These were settlements near Moscow with large country houses and estates

Worse than ministers of the old regime! And these are representatives of the Communist party, representatives of the International. Shame! And what is even more shameful: the Central and Moscow committees of the party know about this and are powerless to do anything.

And you, sitting in the Kremlin! You think the masses don't know what you're up to. They know everything. Every day, the word is spread from a thousand lips, about how the Steklovs and Krylenkos¹¹ behave, taking their automobile trips to go hunting, and how the wives of Sklianskiis and Trotskiis are faring, dressed up in silk and diamonds.

And you think that the masses are not enraged by this, that it's all the same to us, who plays the Bonaparte – Kerenskii, or Rykov and Trotskii? You think that we don't know, that when a comrade somewhere raises his voice, he is exiled to an outlying district? You think that we don't know that most of the responsible posts are filled with talentless people, because of who they know? Look at Glavpolitput' [the chief political directorate for rail transport]: there is Rozengol'ts, that tradesman who has learned to shout and command, and who had dismissed all the best comrades.¹² And Sklianskii – he really is a nothing, squared! And the wives of Kamenev, Trotskii and Lunacharskii: really caricatures of public servants. They only get in the way, but they are kept on because their husbands have power and muscle.

There's a caveat. They could think about shooting me for

11 Nikolai Krylenko (1885-1938), a leading Bolshevik, at this point chairman of the All-Russian Executive Committee of the Soviets

12 Arkadii Rozengol'ts (1889-1938), a leading Bolshevik who worked in the railways commissariat and the Red Army command

writing this letter. And so I warn you in advance, that I have a copy of this letter with me, and will give it to several comrades, so that if I am arrested, they will copy and circulate it. (Oh shame, shame on us all! A worker communist, wounded five times in the struggle for the revolution, has to expect the firing squad, because he wants to speak the truth!) Comrades! Where are the people who respect themselves, where are the fighters for freedom? Do we really only have pen-pushers left?... (Anyway, I will continue.)

We see everything and know everything. If the party conference, or the CC, does not change the policy of bureaucratisation, if they do not subdue the Bonapartes, then we, with arms in hand, will this winter fulfil the revolution's true mission.

The party is bankrupt. Its influence has fallen to a minimum. Conscious workers are pushed aside for the sake of petty quibbles (while the crimes committed by the party's "top guns" go unpunished), and in the party's ranks there remain only the most desperate adventurers, and demagogues who know the right moment to smile at someone's wife. And where are the workers? You have pushed them all out of the party.

In the name of all those at the front – to which I am now going, to speak honestly about your work – I appeal to the Central Committee of the RCP, as the leading body, and to you, dear comrade Lenin, to you, the only real revolutionary who lives in a spartan manner: think, help, sort out whoever needs sorting out. If you can't do it yourself, tell us, we will help. Act quickly, before it's too late. Winter will be here soon: the Army will run out of boots, of clothing, it will clear off. It will rise in revolt. Hurry, Il'ich!

I appeal to the Moscow committee, as the local organisation: comrades! Raise your voices! Give your authoritative opinion; you can see better than they can from the Kremlin. I appeal to all district party committees in the city of Moscow, and to all regional committees: comrades, before it's too late, act! Let us restore all the achievements of the revolution that have been usurped.

With communist greetings from a Red commander and metalworker,

Anton Vlasov,

September 1920.

2. Declaration of the Workers and Peasants Socialist Party

The declaration is addressed to delegates to the Moscow Soviet, who gathered, following elections in April 1921, at the first plenary meeting on 13 May. The authors identify themselves as representatives of workers in the soviet; the leader of the Workers and Peasants Socialist Party, Vasilii Paniushkin, was a delegate – and was detained, along with Bretan, a non-party ally, immediately after the second plenary session on 31 May. The declaration is published here for the first time.¹

[] signifies a word that I have left out, or guessed at, due to the original text being unreadable.*

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1 The Declaration is preserved in the Central Archive of the Social-Political History of Moscow, f. 3, op. 2, d. 18, ll. 2-3. An archivist's note reads: "from 29 May, plenum of the Moscow committee of the Russian Communist Party 23.05.21". On the circumstances, see Pirani, *The Russian Revolution in Retreat*, pp. 96-107.

Workers and Peasants Socialist Party

Workers of the World Unite

DECLARATION

to the first plenum of the Moscow Soviet of Workers' and Peasants' Deputies

With the proletarian revolution well into its fourth year, we must acknowledge the following: the proletariat of town and country, having seized power from the bourgeoisie – and paid a heavy price in casualties – has been pushed out of the governance of the Republic, and, thanks to all kinds of machinations and subterfuge by the ruling communist party, reduced to the status of a citizen without rights, often enough an “unreliable” citizen.

The soviets, the supreme achievement of the October revolution, instead of becoming the bearers and expressions of the proletariat's will, have turned into a smokescreen, a blunt weapon in the hands of the nanny-communists. These nannies now ruthlessly and cynically trample under foot everything that the proletariat once fought for, and spilled its blood for. The election of the Moscow Soviet serves as a great example. And no wonder that at the plenum of the Moscow Soviet we see so few genuine representatives of the revolutionary proletariat. As a consequence of the proletarian Social revolution, the class struggle has not ended; it has just moved on to another stage of development. The bourgeoisie and its servile lackeys who bear the mark of Cain, such as the Mensheviks and SRs, having lost the chance to break the Soviet Republic from the outside, use new methods of battle against the proletariat. Their drive to smash the proletarian power from within has become all too obvious and audacious. Unfortunately we have

to accept the fact that in this regard the bourgeoisie has found reliable helpers in the communist party. The party is poisoned by a petty-bourgeois hostility to the proletariat; 75 per cent of it comprises a bureaucratised element whose connections with the proletariat have been severed or lost. The communist party has taken a wrong turn, one that is damaging for the social revolution – the road of concessions to the kulaks, speculators and the international robber-capitalists, to the detriment of the interests and aspirations of the proletarian masses of town and country. Under these conditions, we face a threat that all the gains of the October revolution will inevitably be eliminated.

Saving the revolution is the task of the urban and rural proletarians themselves, allied by the close commonality of their interests, and unconstrained by any of the nanny-soviets' casuistry. The only way out of the dead end, and towards the realisation of socialism, is through the deepening and widening of the gains of October, with the direct involvement of the urban and rural proletariat in every aspect of the life of the republic.

As representatives in the Moscow Soviet of workers, invested with their trust in us to defend the interests of the proletariat, we, members of the Workers and Peasants Socialist Party and non-party defenders of the Social revolution, declare:

We entered the Soviet not for idle talk, but to undertake persistent work, day by day, so that by correcting the mistakes already made, and those that may be made from here on, we can pave the way to a socialist future. In our work we intend to be guided by the spirit[*] of the October revolution and the paths forward to which it pointed, which means:

1. In view of the principle that Soviets must express the will of the proletariat and, consequently, be proletarian in nature – which is possible only when the proletariat is present in the soviets – the non-proletarian and at times anti-proletarian element, even if wearing a communist mask, must be removed. The idea of Soviet power – which has degenerated into a new and damaging phenomenon, executive-committeeism – needs to be resurrected in the form in which it inspired the proletariat in October [1917]. The chairman of the Soviet and of the Executive Committee can not be one and the same person: no one can take charge of oversight, and be the subject of that oversight, at the same time. This measure must be made compulsory, given the possibility of behind-the-scenes arrangements, made due to nepotism and to personal sympathies. We will insist on this point, especially, when the question of organising Soviet construction is discussed.

2. In the sphere of economic construction, it is vital to note that the difficult economic situation in our country – the desperate shortage of metals and fuels, the scarcity of every[*] kind of equipment and raw material – demands, immediately, the most heroic effort to[*] repulse the approaching catastrophe. The fundamental measures that can increase productivity are: the implementation of an economic policy[*] coordinated with workers' organisations, trade union organisations[*] and production unions;² and

2 Before and during the 1917 revolution, industrial unionism – as opposed to craft unionism – was strong in Russia, where the role of large factories in industry was even more dominant than in other European countries. In 1920, in the internal dispute within Bolshevism about unions' role in industry, the Workers Opposition argued that production unions

the assignment of the decisive voice to those organisations in the economic bodies that take control of, and distribute, all the country's material resources. Direction of the economy is at the same time direction by the working masses. The introduction of a system of organising and directing the economy through production unions will produce a united[*] leadership, and eliminate the counterposition of the working masses to specialists. In this way we can create a wide space for organising and administrative activity by people doing academic work, theory and practice, and also put an end to the unresponsiveness and unaccountability of certain leaders[*] of large[*] industrial enterprises.

In order to put these measures into practice, it is necessary to strengthen the grassroots organisations of the trade unions and production unions, at factories and other workplaces – the factory committees and higher[*] organisations – and to prepare them to manage the economy directly; to move them towards conscious, creative participation in management, towards taking the initiative. For this, it is necessary:

a. To clearly demarcate the areas of production covered by different unions.

b. Not to appoint people to administrative posts in economic bodies without the union's involvement.

c. Not to reject candidates from the unions, and to oblige the Supreme Council of the National Economy and its affiliate bodies to accept them.

d. To ensure that all employees appointed by, or proposed

(*proizvodstvennye soiuzy*), i.e. industrial unions, as opposed to trade unions (*professional'nye soiuzy*), should play a part in management

for positions by, a union, are responsible to that union and may be recalled by it at any time.

Only when the unified management of the republic's economy is concentrated in the production unions' hands will we attain the unity of will necessary to organise the economy, and create genuine possibilities for the broad working masses to take the initiative, and to influence the organisation and development of the economy.

3. Economic construction is closely bound up with the question of organising workers' living conditions.

In this respect, it is necessary to implement the following measures, without delay:

a. A decisive struggle against all unlawful distribution of rations, and the immediate, total abolition of all special rations, whatever the recipients' duties or position.

b. An immediate end to the practice of paying for specialists' labour in kind, and the replacement of in-kind payments by money payments.

c. Take measures for the preferential supply to workers of widely used products.

d. Simplify and speed up the procedure for receiving work clothing, and also for receiving basic, and bonus, in-kind payments.

e. In locations where housing problems are acute, undertake the compression of [space used by] Soviet and military bodies, with a view to making housing available to workers.

f. Organise the repair of workers' accommodation, with material support from enterprises, on condition of the guaranteed completion by the enterprise of its basic production

tasks, and the transfer of living space exclusively to workers at the given enterprise.

g. Organise special trains and buses for workers, coinciding with the starting and finishing times of work at the enterprises.

h. In order to meet the needs of factory workers, direct factories to organise, or organise specially, workshops to produce clothing and footwear. Enterprises must give all the support and help that such workshops need, in terms of organising equipment and, insofar as is possible, with the supply of raw materials.

i. At enterprises that have land attached to them for communal cultivation, vegetable gardens, etc, ensure that the equipment necessary to work these resources is provided at the enterprise's expense.

j. At enterprises situated adjacent to the countryside, organise the repair of agricultural machinery.

k. Raise the standard of the city's municipal services and facilities to the required level.

l. It is necessary to pay serious attention to schools, nurseries and so on.

4. The Moscow Soviet must adopt a firm policy with regard to the peasantry; this means consolidating close links between the urban proletariat and the poor and middle peasants, and meeting the countryside's needs, in the first place with supplies of equipment.

5. Recognising the right of all genuinely revolutionary parties, that have participated in the emancipation of the proletariat from the yoke of capital, to exist freely in our free republic, we demand: the granting of political rights to all those parties not stained by betrayal of the proletarian cause;

the release of all representatives of those parties from prison, if they have not been found guilty of a criminal offence; and the total abolition of the death penalty, except in cases of clearly defined enemies of the proletariat, the struggle against which must be conducted in the most decisive manner.

Recognising that the great tasks and responsibilities before the Moscow Soviet will be carried out only with the close, unflinching unity between the delegates and their electors, who must be kept informed of the Soviet's creative work by means of weekly reports by delegates, the Workers and Peasants Socialist Party calls on the proletarian masses of Moscow and the Moscow region to close ranks around the Soviet, and to undertake a decisive struggle against economic ruin, as a step towards the final goal of world socialism.

LONG LIVE SOVIET POWER – the great gain of the October revolution

Long live the world socialist revolution

Long live the revolutionary proletariat of town and country

The Workers and Peasants Socialist party.

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3. ‘We are collectivists’

*This platform document was circulated in November 1921 at a Proletkult conference, and first published a century later, in 2021, in the Russian historical journal Istoricheskii arkhiv. Its authors are unknown. The document was stored in the Soviet, later Russian, archives. This text has been copied from that original, and checked against the Istoricheskii arkhiv publication. Some archaic spellings have been updated, and minor grammatical mistakes corrected.*¹

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We are COLLECTIVISTS. For us, the collective is not a passive way of looking at the world, but rather an active relationship with the world. It is a practical ideal, and a theoretical idea. Our ideal is a unified, harmoniously-formed comradesly organisation of labour and of cognition. Our idea is acknowledgement of the collective as the true constructor of our lives, the force that combats the secret, elemental power of nature – and the individual is just one cell of the living

1 Russian State Archive of Social and Political History, f. 17, op. 60, d. 43, ll. 20-28; A. Morozova, “My marksisty toi shkoly, ideinym vozhdem kotoroi iavliaetsia Bogdanov”, *Istoricheskii Arkhiv* 2021 (2), pp. 115-137

body of the collective, a partial embodiment of the collective's power. We recognise not only the collectivism of labour and of social struggle, as all Marxists do, but also the collectivism of understanding, of thought, which is rejected by the majority of Russian Marxists, led by Lenin. For us, ideology in general, and science and arts in particular, is the experience of collective labour, gathered together, ordered and organised – and constituting simultaneously a tool for strengthening and drawing together the collective, and a tool for the organisation of collective labour. For them [the majority of Marxists] art is simply the decoration of life; and science, with the exception of small segments that relate to social phenomena, is objective truth. For them, ideology is always superstructural. That, in broad outline, is our point of view and our difference with the ruling majority of the Communist party.

2. Our collectivist-labour viewpoint is at the same time an organisational viewpoint. This means that, in our opinion, our comprehension breaks the universe, or the world process, into different particle-elements, which express themselves in no other way than in combinations, organised to the same degree but by different means. From this point of view, the whole content of the life of humanity turns out before us, as the organisation of external forces of nature, the organisation of the forces of the human collective and the organisation of experience. We think that for humanity there is not, and can not be, any activity apart from organisation, or any aims or interests apart from organisational ones. Moreover, we conceptualise the life of humanity as a struggle of organisational forms, which clash and disorganise each other, and which as a result produces new forms, organised on a higher level.

We see the content of the entire world process in exactly the same way. In the course of this struggle of organisational forms, the difference in the degree of organisation of different combinations of elements reveals itself. We consider the element-particles, of which the organisational processes of the universe are composed, to be activities-resistances. They act as activities in relation to organisation, and on the other hand as resistances in relation to disorganisation. We view each element in its relationship to the whole, and each whole in relation to the surrounding environment. Here is the methodological essence of the organisational point of view, the compass that guides our labour and our understanding.

3. We consider ourselves, without qualification, to be steadfast and consistent Marxists. Our steadfastness does not mean that we unquestioningly agree with every thought – wherever, whenever and on whatever subject – expressed in speech or writing by Marx or Engels. We consider that sort of steadfastness to be simply doctrinaire and dogmatic. No, our steadfastness boils down to an unconditional acceptance of the general methods and viewpoints that the founders of Marxism used in their work: the dialectical method and the proletarian-class viewpoint. In no respect do we understand our Marxist consistency as repetition of what is now said even by schoolteachers. Such consistency would better be named conservatism. We think that consistency must be expressed in the Marxist re-working of those areas of knowledge that Marx and Engels were not able to work on. For us, consistency is the continuation of the struggle by the founders of Marxism to re-make society and to re-make knowledge. We reject the dogmatic-conservative, abstract-religious, corrupted

understanding of Marxism. Our Marxism is not the Marxism of Plekhanov and Lenin. We are Marxists of the school whose ideas are inspired by Bogdanov.

4. In the Communist party we are representatives of the proletarian wing. Our position is the point of view of the proletariat, already completely matured for the class struggle, and in the process of maturing for the organisation of the new society – the proletariat, whose militant consciousness is already formed and whose organisational consciousness is in formation. In the process of labour and struggle, the proletariat is required by its activity to overcome the resistance of nature and of society. The proletariat unites and breaks up, organises and disorganises, these activities and resistances; its life is full of labour struggle. And it must live and struggle in great collectives. The machine-automatic technics of labour, and the democratic-class technics of struggle, make from the proletariat a new type of labour force. Proletarian cooperation under these conditions has a comradely character; organisational work is mixed up with administrative work, work in one industrial sector is constantly replaced by work in another. The conditions of struggle and labour do not remain unchanged. They constantly develop, new conditions take shape, they are transformed. And together with the conditions, the tools change: the tools of struggle, of labour and of understanding. This is the experience of proletarian labour. It is absolutely clear that our point of view is the point of view of this class.

5. This point of view brings us to accept a whole series of propositions that play the role of directives for practical work. These propositions include: We consider politics to be a part

of culture, and approach it always in relation to the latter. We accept the need for the class integrity of the proletariat's culture and ideology. We strive to free that culture from authoritarian-religious and individualistic-abstract elements that are alien to the working class but inherent in other classes of society. In our view, culture must be cleansed of such impurities, independent, proletarian, collectivist-labouring. In relation to the creativity of this independent proletarian culture, we are maximalists. With regard to consciousness, we now endeavour to attain the greatest possible, maximum results. The creativity of proletarian culture is the sum of all the organisational methods of the proletariat. The establishment of proletarian art and science is for us an aim for the present day. All these propositions flow from our organisational point of view generally, and our view of ideology in particular. We see ideology as an instrument of organisation. Like any instrument, its development is shaped by the material on which it works; it adapts to that material in order to adapt it, in turn – that is, to transform it. And so ideology is not just superstructural, as the majority of Russian Marxists think. In reality it is absolutely clear that the separate parts of this instrument must be seen always in relation to the whole; the instrument must correspond to the hands that hold it for work, and must be ready for use. Here lie the roots of our general cultural approach, of our demand for the class purity of culture and our cultural maximalism.

II.

We are successors of the ideological tendency within Bolshevism who at one time were named "Vperedists". The "Vpered" literary group emerged at the end of 1909, as a group

of left Bolsheviks. As well as a whole array of political-tactical disagreements with the majority of the [Bolshevik] fraction, this group was distinct from the majority in its view of culture. It advanced the idea of independent proletarian culture. In 1911, at a time of fierce political reaction, the group broke up as a political force. But Vperedism as a current of thinking, and as a platform of struggle for proletarian culture, did not die. In 1917 it revived in the form of proletkultism, in the form of a purely cultural movement. The adaptation to post-revolutionary conditions by the old bourgeois intelligentsia took its toll, and the organisational cells of the movement did not avoid the fate of all the new organisations: they were contaminated with elements alien to the proletariat. The Proletkult was polluted, but in spite of this, proletkultism as a tendency of thought remained clean. Proletkultism is the ideological successor of Vperedism. We are proletkultists. Our banner is the old banner of the ideological tendency of "Vpered".

III

In the period of war communism, we fought in the ranks of the workers opposition against the majority of our party headed by the central executive committee.²

1. The following considerations were the preconditions for all our political work. The development of finance capital, as a system of production relations, has reached a dead end from which there can only be two ways out: either heroic-

2 The Central Executive Committee of Soviets, elected by Soviet congresses, was effectively the second layer of government after the Soviet of People's Commissars

decisive, but perhaps unbelievably-difficult, steps towards communism, or the collapse of any culture, even bourgeois, and a return to primitive-simple forms of social life. We see the desperately-decisive, heroically decisive construction of the production relations of communism as a historical necessity in our times. Of course, we could not fail to see, also, that not all the potential for that construction is at hand now. In particular, it was clear to us that a communist economy could not be based on our half-artisanal technics, which in the final analysis have suffered destruction wrought by war and revolution. We also saw that the culture-ideology of the proletariat is not an instrument by means of which new production relations of communism could be built. The undeveloped nature of the proletariat's organisational consciousness, its lack of independence, was evident to us. We understood the necessity of technological and cultural revolutions, but we thought they were possible only in the form of communist production relations. That is on one hand. On the other, we saw how our Party was being transformed, from a proletarian one to a working-class-intellectual one; and with the entry of authoritarian³ and individualistic elements into membership, the culture inherent in these groups took an ever firmer hold of the party's tactics. We witnessed the formation of a fossilised layer of privileged bureaucrats, to which the leading role in the party and soviet organs, and the trade unions, was increasingly handed over. The reality was at odds with the historical necessity. A threat emerged to

3 The word "authoritative" ("avtoritetnye") is used, but this appears to be a mistyping of "authoritarian" ("avtoritarnye"), a word used elsewhere in the platform in similar contexts

the construction of communism, which in our opinion was a historical necessity. It turned out that the revolution had come to a standstill. It seemed that it could even turn back to the pre-1917 position. A way out had to be found. These considerations were our starting-point.

2. And from this we reached – and could only reach – one conclusion: we wanted to move the revolution from this standstill, to continue and strengthen the construction of communism, by means of the heroic efforts of the proletariat and the proletarian section of our party. And building production relations of that kind means making technological and cultural revolution. The purging from the party of elements that do not stand fully on the proletarian viewpoint. The destruction of the incorrigible and privileged bureaucracy, renovation by means of workerisation.⁴ The transfer of the management of production to production unions. Strengthening work towards the formation of independent proletarian culture. That is what we proposed in practice.

3. The historical significance of the Workers Opposition became obvious only after the tenth party congress. Until that moment, Lenin was saying that, in essence, we were moving towards state capitalism, and at the end of the congress we ourselves understood this. At that moment it became clear that the Workers Opposition was expressing the mood of the

4 In 1920, dissident communists, including but not only those who participated in the Workers Opposition, raised the demand for “workerisation” – bringing workers straight into the soviet apparatus, and higher party committees, on a quota basis – as a means to tackle “bureaucratisation”, a problem acknowledged on all sides including by the party leadership

proletarian section of our party, for which the shift towards state capitalism, still hardly noticed by many, was a painful experience. And as the section of the party with the most revolutionary aspirations, this proletarian section could not accept or approve of this shift. We see the historical significance of the workers opposition in the fact that, well before others, it felt that the revolution had turned on to another road, and understood that even as the proletariat drove down that road, it could not accept it as its own.

4. We have now understood and taken account of the basic mistake of the Workers Opposition: it boils down to its belief in the necessity of building communism and its militant utopianism. We believed that communism was the historical necessity of our times. The military consumer communism of the besieged fortress seemed to us to be the genuine production communism of the proletariat. It never once entered our heads to check our perspectives and our view of the future against the facts, against reality. We thought that the Russian proletariat, which had not yet developed organisational consciousness, could participate in economic and state construction, just as it had participated in the work of revolutionary and military destruction. We imagined that the organisational consciousness of the proletarian masses would take shape in the process of organisational work. It would have been impossible to understand and take account of this mistake in advance: it only became clear as a result of failure at the [tenth] congress, after the defeat in battle.

5. We recognise the mistake that we have made, but in no way repudiate our past. On the contrary, we think that we could not have acted differently then. We have respect for

our mistaken but historically necessary past. However, we have learned from our mistakes. We see in that past useful lessons for the future. Here are these lessons. We accept, and remember, the necessity of checking in living facts, in reality, all our theoretical assumptions. We have always understood it to be necessary to check, in this way, all the official theoretical and practical proposals shared by the leading majority of the communist party. And to do this with a clear head and a cold heart, without the least prejudice, fearlessly looking reality in the eye. Now we understand, and remember, that in defining our view of the future, we need always not only to specify the necessity of this or that goal or action, but also to assess the possibility of achieving them in the given conditions. Without doing this we are threatened by the danger of utopianism. And now, as we undertake the checking of our assumptions, we think it is necessary to spell out both these points.

IV

Checking over the official theoretical and practical propositions of our party, we have found a whole number of extraordinarily essential differences between them and us. They concern organisational, tactical and even programmatic issues. In organisational work, we can not accept the fact that the primary focus of attention is not on the party's proletarian elements, but on layers of the so-called responsible officials, who essentially comprise a new bureaucratic intelligentsia. For us the most valuable layer of the party is not this bureaucratic intelligentsia, but rather the industrial proletariat – to which not that much attention is paid, despite the fact that it is the bearer of the new culture and, in our view, must form the core

of a party that considers itself proletarian. In terms of tactics, we can not accept authoritarianism and individualism, which are practised alongside comradely cooperation. More and more this authoritarianism and individualism replaces and constrains comradely cooperation. We consider these methods to be alien to, and even dangerous to, the proletariat and its collectivist culture. Authoritarianism and individualism are characteristic of other layers of our party: the peasantry and the intelligentsia. These methods express their experience of labour and are elements of their culture. This situation can not be reconciled with our point of view, and we do not agree with it. And finally: differences on programme. Here we can not agree with the general theory of revolution in Russia and the west. The official formulation of this theory is that the social composition of the Soviet power that exists in Russia is the dictatorship of the proletariat. The proletariat needs to cooperate politically with the peasantry, but that does not change things. In reality the peasantry, in consequence of its intermediate social position – as an intermediate class of labouring property owners – can not play an independent political role. The peasantry will always follow its allies. For this reason the proletariat, notwithstanding its alliance with the peasantry, remains a dictator. These dynamics will not change in the transition from war communism to state capitalism. Cooperating with the technical, and even bourgeois, intelligentsia in respect of the productive forces and production relations, the proletariat politically remains a dictator. And Soviet power remains the form of its dictatorship. Technological revolution, notwithstanding the production relations of state capitalism, will be carried

through in the political framework of proletarian culture. The only question is whether, when that revolution is completed, the soviet state will destroy elements of capitalism by violence, or by competition. But so far we do not have the material to answer this question directly. The revolution in the west will be similar to ours with regard to the social composition of power. Its victory will be expressed in the establishment of a soviet government, which is a form of proletarian dictatorship. It will be reminiscent of our revolution in as much as it will go through a period, more or less difficult and prolonged, in which the productive forces collapse and the state apparatus is disrupted. But there will also be an essential difference with our revolution. The advanced state of their technology will give western countries the opportunity immediately to take the road of construction of communist relations of production. The revolution in the west will be a colossal source of political support for soviet power. But we should not hope for immediate economic or technical help from Soviet governments that are born out of revolution: the inevitable period of collapse and disruption will obstruct that. We disagree with almost all aspects of this theory. We consider Soviet power not to be the dictatorship of the proletariat, but rather the dictatorship of a proletarian-peasant bloc. While it is true that the proletariat plays the leading role in this bloc, it does so within the limits of the general interests of classes in general. The peasantry plays a limiting role in this bloc: it is the proletariat that has to abide by the peasantry's limits, rather than the opposite.

We see proof of this in the facts of our revolutionary history, such as the party's refusal in 1917 to nationalise the

land with a view to its socialisation, and the transition in 1921 from the food supply monopoly to the tax in kind. From our point of view, this is a manifestation of the organised law of the least.⁵ We think that in these conditions we can speak of the hegemony of the proletariat, rather than its dictatorship. In the transition from war communism to state capitalism, in our view the situation with respect to political relationships must change significantly. We think that the relations of production of state capitalism influence the social composition of the state power. In reality, state capitalism is not limited to state regulation of capitalist trading relations in the non-state economy. These trading relations, into which enter the old technical intelligentsia and the new bureaucratic intelligentsia, inevitably force their way through to the state sector of the economy. In this way – given that the proletariat is incorporeal, and lacks any independent culture – a new class appears: the technical-bureaucratic intelligentsia, that is, the new bourgeoisie. One of the basic propositions of

5 Bogdanov developed the “law of the least” within his theory of Tectology, which he defined as a universal science of organisation. Tectology was expressed in Bogdanov’s writings as a set of overarching principles of organisation that applied in physical, psychical or social contexts; the theory endeavoured to overcome the division of labour and specialism inherent in bourgeois society and research. The law of the least, stated simply, says that any organisational system breaks at its weakest link; Bogdanov gave the example of a weight suspended from a chain. He analysed social phenomena, including the first world war and revolution, in the light of the law; the working of the law, he argued, could endanger humanity if not brought under control. Bogdanov’s Tectology is seen as a precursor to General Systems Theory developed by Ludwig van Bertalanffy in the 1940s. James White, *Red Hamlet*, pp. 287-317

Marxism states that political power is concentrated in the hands of the class that acts as the real organiser of production. Politics really is the concentrated expression of economics. For this reason, the further and deeper degeneration of Soviet power is inevitable – from a dictatorship of the worker-peasant bloc under proletarian hegemony, to the political rule of the technical intellectuality.⁶ In order to go forward from state capitalism to genuine communism, or more accurately collectivism, in our opinion a new revolution will be necessary. Its content will be the appearance of a genuine, unconstrained, dictatorship of the proletariat, which by that time will be able to form its organisational consciousness. This political revolution will evidently coincide with the point of completion of the technical revolution in society and the cultural revolution in the proletariat. We think that the revolution in the west will in all respects resemble our Russian revolution. It will, in the final analysis, also lead to state capitalism and the rule of the technical-bureaucratic intelligentsia. As a rule, the revolution in the west will also take the path of civil war and the dictatorship of the proletariat in a political bloc with its petty-bourgeois fellow travellers. We would explain the need for this bloc to be substituted by the rule of the technical intelligentsia, in the west as well as here, by the unformed organisational consciousness of the proletariat. These are the issues on which we diverge from the official majority of the communist party.

6 The text clearly states “intellectuality” (“intelligentnost’”), although this may be a mistyping of “intelligentsia” (“intelligentsiia”)

V

However we can not agree with the current views of the former Workers Opposition. Those views, in the manner formulated at the group's last meeting, make clear that it stands by its old positions completely and unreservedly. The Workers Opposition has learned nothing since the party's Tenth Congress. The Workers Opposition has adopted as demands for the struggle with the ruling majority the same measures that it proposed for communism – although it is now clear that we are building state capitalism. We therefore consider its position utopian. Furthermore, we can not reconcile ourselves with the pure profession-ism⁷ characteristic of the [Workers Opposition] group's current position. This profession-ism has led it to completely ignore all work, except work in the trades unions, and in the economic [management] organs that, one way or another, work alongside them. They are the be-all and end-all of the tactical resolution [of the Workers Opposition]. The group's position in this regard expresses nothing more than the union bureaucracy's profession-ist restraints.

VI

We remain convinced that the position of the RSDWP [Russian Social Democratic Workers Party] mensheviks is deeply mistaken and harmful to the proletariat. Their basic

7 The word professionalizm is used. Although it can be translated as "professionalism", in this context it means "centred on professions or trades". This is clear from the rest of this paragraph, which criticises the Workers Opposition for its exclusive focus on trades unions (professionalnye soiuzy). In addition to the Collectivists' criticism, there were polemics within the Workers Opposition itself in 1921 about the respective merits of trades unions and production unions

error is an opportunistic understanding of the organisational development of the proletariat's struggle for socialism. For them, this amounts to uninterrupted compromise, collaboration, smoothing-out contradictions, and divisive concessions and adaptations. This conception is the ideology of the top ranks of the proletariat, that are more closely linked to old bourgeois culture, and educated in the low-level practical struggle for their interests. It finds its clearest expression in the menshevik theory of political democracy and the rule of labour. In our view, the mensheviks' position is damaging to the proletariat, above all because it keeps it imprisoned by bourgeois culture. But that is not all. Implementation of the mensheviks' political ideal – the rule of labour in our Russian conditions – would signify a step backwards compared to what we have now. The rule of labour really implies equalising the proletariat and peasantry, in terms of political rights. In circumstances where the peasantry has the numerical advantage, this would amount to taking from the proletariat its hegemony. The political power of the intermediate class will inevitably be drawn towards coalition with the big bourgeoisie, that is, essentially, to the latter's rule. In other words, menshevik policy will inevitably take the country back to capitalism. That is how things always were in our revolution, when the peasantry was freed from the proletariat's hegemony. The Czechoslovak adventure⁸ is one of

8 This presumably refers to the anti-Bolshevik uprising in 1918 by a Czechoslovak regiment based in southern Russia, which travelled through Siberia giving support to short-lived White regional governments. The Mensheviks had no involvement in this uprising, although they were represented in the Vladivostok city дума (council), that took over the city for some weeks when the Czech forces arrested the local Bolsheviks

the most striking examples of this. We continue to regard the mensheviks' position as counter-revolutionary.

VII

These are our differences with all the politically- and organisationally-formed groups, that use marxist methods in one way or another. However, besides them, there is one more marxist position, which has so far not been formulated organisationally or politically: the position of the former leader of the "Vpered" group, BOGDANOV. We have no disagreements with him. We share this position in full and consider it our own. We accept that financial capitalism has not consolidated the economic organisation of society to such a degree that it can be considered the last step on the road to socialism. The world war, which was essentially a struggle between monopolists to redivide the already divided world, was in our view an expression of the general crisis of financial capitalism. We see the dramatic collapse of the world economy, caused by the war, as an indication of the demise of finance capital generally. In the process of that collapse, the bourgeois classes began to organise military-state capitalism, the essence of which boils down to an amalgam of capitalism with siege communism, in the form in which the bourgeois classes could organise it. We think that as a result of this trend, and the incomplete but quite profound breakdown of finance capital, there is no road back. On the other hand, this does not either signify the start of the socialist revolution. For that just one condition is required, the insolubility and sharpening of finance capital's contradictions. This is a negative condition; there is no other positive condition. The proletariat does

not have sufficient organisational experience or capacity to undertake these tasks. Its organisational consciousness is insufficiently developed; it still remains under the influence of bourgeois culture. The collapse of the Second International, and slow pace of the development of revolution in the west, are indicators of the proletariat's lack of cultural independence. We accept that before the war the proletariat in its majority was not socialist, but began to change under the impact of the war. The socialist revolution began in the working class; the revolution arose in the formation of its consciousness of struggle; the proletariat found the will to overthrow the bourgeois order and to try to seize power. But that socialist revolution in the proletariat is far from complete. Not all of it has a consciousness of struggle. And the organisational consciousness of the whole proletariat has not been formed. New organisational methods, the entirety of which is a product of proletarian culture, still have to be worked out and integrated into working-class consciousness. Without this and before this, a socialist revolution in society is in our opinion impossible. Under these circumstances, any attempt to resolve the organisational issues that are constantly posed by the collapse of capital will inevitably lead to the organisation of state capitalism on a world scale. There are organisational forces to tackle these issues: the hired-organising intelligentsia, technical, scientific and bureaucratic, that is growing in the bowels of financial capital, must play this role. It has widened and deepened its experience in the course of the construction of military-state capitalism. During the war, the intelligentsia grew from being a social group to being a social class. And the world crisis produced by the war caused a change in its outlook:

from an imperialist basis it moved to a peaceful approach. We see this peaceful-state capitalism as the last phase on the road to socialism, the last phase of capitalist construction. In our view, the role of the ruling class in this phase must be played by the technical intelligentsia, which will also be the new bourgeoisie. We think that the new bourgeoisie will exploit the proletariat by way of receiving, above and beyond wages paid for their own labour, an additional proportion of the state's revenue – a bonus or *tantieme*.⁹ On this proportion will go that same share of surplus value that remains after the expense of expanding production. Class struggle will of course be inevitable. But it will take on new forms, corresponding to the peculiarities of this new ruling class. The individualism, careerism and professional narrowness, characteristic of the technical intelligentsia by its very nature, will push particular sections of it, in pursuit of their own profit, to damage the organisation of the economy as a unified whole. This situation will put before the proletariat a new aim for its struggle, for the highest level of organisation: in its interests, in the interests of the whole. That will be the new content of the proletariat's class struggle. It is evident that this struggle will be waged more gently than it is now. The new bourgeoisie really is itself closely linked to production, and so will start to better understand and take into account employees, as living productive forces. For the sake of its own stability, the new bourgeoisie will, without any great resistance, provide the proletariat with relatively bearable living conditions. But in the end a new revolution will be inevitable – a socialist revolution in society. But this

9 A *tantieme* is a bonus paid as a share of profits

will not happen before that revolution is finished in the proletariat itself, that is, when it forms its class consciousness and is prepared for its role as an organiser. At the same time we consider that the road to state capitalism also lies through revolution, and this revolution must to a significant extent be the proletariat's task. By its nature the proletariat stands closer than the technical intelligentsia to the task of organising peaceful-state capitalism. The latter has insufficient will or skill, the former only lacks skill. The proletariat can come to power in a political bloc with petty-bourgeois elements of society, above all the peasantry and the lower ranks of the working intelligentsia. In doing so, it will force out of power, and more or less defeat in struggle, the bourgeoisie and the big-bourgeois part of the technical intelligentsia. The political form of the bloc's rule will be the soviet state and the communist party. They are not, essentially, the government and party that will save society. The economic content of their activity will be the organisation of the communism of poverty and general want, in the interests of the working masses. The communist bloc will persist up to the point at which economic life is restored and poverty is overcome. And from then on the social divisions within the bloc will get sharper and sharper. The transition to peaceful state capitalism will begin. The bloc will divide into its constituent elements, and the technical intelligentsia will retain the ruling role. It is evident that this upheaval, or rather, this change of direction, will take place continuously and without any particular violence. We think that for the final destruction of financial capitalism, a final world war will be needed, out of which world revolution may be born. This will mark the end of finance capital's dominance. We

think that the phase of world state capitalism will continue for roughly one-and-a-half or two decades. This will in effect be a breathing-space for the proletariat, during which it will complete the formation of its organisational consciousness, and put together and assimilate proletarian culture. For this it is necessary that a new generation comes on the scene. That, in its essentials, is our current principled¹⁰ position, founded on the basis of the experience of the Russian and German revolutions: it is the lessons we have concluded from them.

VIII

Arising from our position, we believe that now, and for the whole period of state capitalism, the Russian proletariat is faced with three tactical tasks. They consist of the following: [First,] the struggle for technological revolution. That is the task in the sphere of the organisation of productive forces. [Second,] the struggle for the highest level of organisation. That concerns the sphere of the organisation of the [social] relations of production. [Third,] the struggle for proletarian culture. This task will be defined in the sphere of the formation of social consciousness. These, too, are the tactical tasks of the proletarian section of the communist party.

IX

Notwithstanding the substantial disagreements that we have with the leading majority of the communist party; notwithstanding the fact that we consider a split in that party

¹⁰ The text says “provintsial’naia” (provincial), which makes no sense in the context. I assume this is a mis-typing of “printsipial’naia” (principled)

inevitable, over the course of a fairly long but measurable and recognisable period of years; we consider ourselves duty-bound to remain in its ranks. In this period of technological revolution, while the proletariat is part of the ruling bloc and playing a more or less leading role in it, we will undertake active and responsible work in the party, to strengthen and defend it in every possible way, up to and including fighting, arms in hand. We consider it necessary to act in this way because, in our view, no other party except the communist party – even the communist party that we actually have now – can take society on the road towards world state capitalism, i.e. move it forward to a communist structure. Moreover, it is only within the communist party that we will have the greatest opportunities to propagandise our ideas and struggle for their implementation. Therefore, while carrying out day-to-day party work, we will propagandise our views among the proletarian layers of our party. We will disseminate our collectivist ideas, and our understanding of the period we are going through and the development of the relations of production. This is necessary so that, when the point of a split inevitably arrives, the proletarian layers of the party will leave it along with us. In our view, on one hand it is necessary to undertake the propaganda of our views, and the struggle for our tactical aims, without mounting any political opposition to the ruling majority of the party. On the other hand, since the social and political prerequisites are not fully realised, we consider it harmful both to the party and to ourselves to set up organised associations that, however remotely, resemble factions. This would weaken the party and could take it to a premature, unprepared split. And that would weaken our

group, too, and deprive it of the means for political-factional struggle. An open declaration of our whole position would inevitably lead to the formation of a faction, with all the consequences for us and for the party. [Consequently,] for the whole period prior to the ripening of the elements of a split, we will take on the role of a narrow, closed cultural group within the party. We consider it possible to accept in to our circle only those who fully and steadfastly stand on the basis of our collectivist world view, and we will accept people only with very careful consideration. We acknowledge that within our group comradely ideological discipline and firm organisational cohesion, based on comradely cooperation, is necessary. We consider it necessary to group ourselves organisationally around proletkult associations and trade unions, which for our work offer the best surroundings, and through which we may keep in contact with other groups of our co-thinkers, or those who are just sympathetic to us, throughout the republic. In this period, we will undertake work in the most varied sectors and in all possible posts, from rank-and-file worker to people's commissar. That is our approach to the communist party.

X

Concretely, we see practical work to achieve our three basic aims as a struggle for the following principal actions. In the struggle for technological revolutions, these actions amount to the improvement of our industry, above all. Improvement here means the reduction of industrial capacity to the level that corresponds to the available quantity of material resources. We consider it necessary to reduce the quantity of workers so that the state is able more or less to supply them

with basic necessities. This reduction must be carried out at the expense of marginal, non-proletarian, petty bourgeois and speculator elements, who were pushed into all the enterprises during the war and revolution. Moreover, the reduction of capacity should mean the closure of small, poorly-equipped enterprises. Production should be concentrated in large, well-equipped enterprises. And these should be started up only when there are sufficient supplies of raw material and fuel. The final point is the restoration, as far as possible, of the production equipment available. A programme is needed for the repair and collection of the remaining equipment that can be put to use in the large enterprises that are operating. That is how we see the improvement of our industry: that is the first group of actions on the road to technological revolution. The second group is the scientific organisation of labour in general, and production and management in particular. These actions comprise two elements: the scientific working-out of a plan, and its accurate implementation. The scientific work must rely on a study of labour processes, on the gathering and systematisation of the experience of labour, as a result of which formulas of production, so to speak, can be established. These formulas will express the mutual dependence of parts of the labour process and will comprise its ideological model. The second basis is the adoption of the most effective methods of work, as tested in practice, and will be expressed in the training undergone by those who work on the plan. It will take the form of special written instructions, setting out the most effective methods of work. And finally, the latter group of actions includes all that directly and fundamentally remakes and revolutionises industry. Here the

transition of our industry and economy to electrical energy will play the main role. We consider it necessary to struggle in the most decisive manner for the electrification of our country, against the bureaucratic red tape that is strangling the majority of our soviet and party organisations. Existing Russian industry, which is not very soundly developed, must urgently be supplied with electrical energy. Furthermore, in our view, automation is necessary. Automatic, self-regulating mechanisms will raise productivity and turn workers from narrow specialists into harmonised, complete and all-roundedly developed workers. We consider that one of the main aims of our revolutionising actions in industry must be the fundamental technological transformation of our agriculture. We need to make every effort to ensure that new technology reduces to zero the economic significance of small peasant agriculture, and on its ruins, so to speak, builds large-scale production. In the struggle for the highest level of organisation, these most urgent tasks can be outlined as follows: struggles to ensure that new economic enterprises correspond with the aims of technological revolution. This means that we really must make the production relations of state capitalism into the economic form of the revolution in the forces of production. The offer of enterprises for lease, production concessions, or work on a contract basis must be conducted in such a way as the reconstruction and rebirth of our technology moves forward. From this point of view, we consider it necessary to direct all actions towards the new course. From this arises the necessity of struggle with the colonising aspirations of foreign concessionaire capital, and the speculative tendencies of Russian capital. At the same

time, this struggle must also confront the protectionism, and the relations with various groups of private entrepreneurs, of the Soviet state's bureaucracy. That is the first point. The second is the need for a respectful attitude to the labour force; for a struggle against all that one way or another exhausts it, and thereby destroys the basis of production, the main productive force in society. In other words we consider it necessary to struggle against the exploitation of labour power, against the predatory squandering of that power, for its thoughtful application. Such application assumes that the worker receives a quantity of what he produces, more or less sufficient to restore the energy that he has expended. And from the surplus product, surplus value comprises only what is left after the proletariat's needs, in terms of consumption, have been covered. That also includes the maintenance and development of comradely cooperation in genuinely proletarian organisations such as the trade unions. This type of cooperation must work against bureaucratism and professional narrow-mindedness with which our trade union organisations are infected, along with organs of the soviet state. We consider it necessary to preserve working-class democratism and collegiality. But all this is just at the first stage. Further on, the trade unions must move to collectivism in their work. In trade unions, rather than expressing the opinion of a majority arrived at by arithmetic counting of votes and individual opinions, we need the working out of unified views of the whole proletariat. Professional union officials need to give way to properly elected workers, and narrow professional interests to the interests of the whole proletariat. The final tactical task is the struggle for proletarian

culture. Here we need to note such actions as: improvement of the proletkult associations, which during their lifetime have been too heavily dominated, both in their leadership and among art and drama students, by elements hostile to the proletariat, who are unable to understand the ideas of proletarian culture. These elements simply discredit the proletarian movement. The proletkults must be rehabilitated, by bringing in to the studios only industrial proletarians, as a rule, and by the purging of middle-class elements. And the leadership must be selected exclusively from among collectivists, ideological proletkultists. To achieve all this we consider it necessary to link the proletkults and the unions more closely. The shift of the proletkults' work to a new direction. Up to now, they have worked exclusively on the proletarianisation of the arts. But now, work on the proletarianisation of the sciences must be put centre stage. The establishment of elements of a workers' encyclopaedia, the organisation of studios for the sciences, and workers' universities, are steps in this direction. The strengthening of the propaganda of proletkultist ideas among proletarians and the proletarian youth. Such propaganda must be carried out by party organisations, trade unions, youth unions and various educational institutions at which proletarian youth are studying. We need to acquaint the proletariat with the achievements of proletarianisation of the arts and scientists. One of the most important actions is the training of active workers who can lead the proletkultist movement; we think this can be done in studios for long-term study. Those are the most important actions on the road to achieving our tactical tasks.

XI

That is our platform – the platform of the collectivists. We acknowledge the need to develop it in more detail, both with respect to the principled and tactical parts, which are expressed only in general outlines. However, we plan to do this in the process of work on the basis of the platform in its current form. The tactical part defines our activity in the conditions of the current moment – more, for the whole current period. Each and every change in the situation will require us to review the tactical part and redefine our tactical tasks. But, for now, we adopt the platform in its current form as the basis for our everyday activity.

4. Appeal of the Workers Truth group

*Typewritten copies of this appeal were distributed in Russia's largest industrial areas in mid-1922. The appeal was published in Sotsialisticheskii vestnik, the Menshevik newspaper based in Paris, in early 1923, and was republished in a document collection in 2000.*¹

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The emancipation of the workers must be the task of the working class itself²

1 This translation is from the text published in *Sotsialisticheskii vestnik* (1923), no. 3, pp. 12-13. Copies of the appeal are archived at the Russian State Archive of Social and Political History (RGASPI) (f. 17, op. 71, d. 81); and at the Central State Archive of Political History of St Petersburg, f. 4, op. 1, d. 1245, ll. 142-145. The latter version was published in V.Iu. Cherniaev and E.I. Makarov (eds.), *Piterskie rabochie i 'Diktatura proletariata'. Oktiabr' 1917-1929: ekonomicheskie konflikti i politicheskii protest* (St Petersburg, BLITs, 2000), pp. 305-312. Another document collection, on the internal party struggle in the early 1920s, includes a brief excerpt from this appeal, and some letters and statements by members of Workers Truth group after they were arrested in 1923 (see Introduction). (V. Vil'kova, *RKP(b) Vnutripartiinaia bor'ba v dvadtsatye gody: dokumenty i materialy 1923 g* (Moscow: Rosspen, 2004), pp. 89-91.)

2 The epigraph to the Appeal cites the rules of the International Working

DECLARATION

to the revolutionary proletariat and all revolutionary elements who remain faithful to the struggling working class.

“In the difficult months of ideological confusion and disarray in the party, and apathy in the working class, we, a group of communists, set ourselves the task of determining a proletarian class position.” With this battle-cry, in the autumn of 1921, we defined ourselves and formed our group... in the Workers Truth journal.

The Workers Truth group was organised in the autumn of last year. A year of the New Economic Policy (NEP) (the restoration of usual capitalist relations) sharpened the class contradictions in our republic to the greatest extent, and produced the necessary preconditions for work on a wider front.

Our declaration is one step on this road.

It is time to gather our forces, and organise resistance to capital, which is moving from one offensive to another.

In October 1917 the Russian working class – few in number, unprepared, in a peasant country – carried through the historically necessary October Revolution. Led by the Russian Communist Party (RCP), the working class overthrew and destroyed the power of the ruling classes. Through the long years of the Revolution and civil war, the working class resisted the onslaught of international and Russian reaction.

Mens' Association, drafted by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels when it was founded in 1864. My translation from the Russian varies from the original English text of the rules, which stated: “the emancipation of the working classes must be conquered by the working classes themselves” (from the *Beehive* newspaper, November 1864, see <https://www.marxists.org/history/international/iwma/documents/1864/rules.htm>)

Despite the unimaginably heavy losses suffered by the working class, the October Revolution remains an outstanding, heroic event in the history of proletarian struggle in Russia. The Russian October revolution gave the struggling international proletariat invaluable experience in the struggle with capital.

As a result of the October Revolution, all the obstacles that stood in the way of Russia's economic development were destroyed. The yoke imposed by the landlords, the parasitic tsarist bureaucracy and the bourgeoisie, backed up by reactionary sections of European capital, has been smashed. After the successful revolution and civil war, the perspective of rapid transformation into a country of the capitalist vanguard opened before Russia. All this is the enormous, indubitable achievement of the October revolution.

But what changed in the conditions of the working class? The working class in Russia is disorganised, and in workers' consciousness there is a muddle: are they living under the "proletarian dictatorship", as the Communist party repeats endlessly in speeches and articles, or in a country of arbitrary rule and exploitation, as life itself convinces them at every step? The working class ekes out a miserable existence, while the new bourgeoisie (the responsible officials, factory directors, managers of trusts, presidents of executive committees, and so on) and NEPmen³ wallow in luxury, and restore to our memory pictures of bourgeois life from time immemorial.

3 A NEPman was one of the private entrepreneurs who became highly visible after the introduction of the New Economic Policy. In communist discourse they were held in contempt, and subject to a good deal of caricature

And in the future – more long, hard years of struggle to exist. However, the more difficult the situation, the more the struggling proletariat needs clarity and organisation. To bring such class clarity into the ranks of the Russian working class, and support by all possible means the organisation of the struggling proletariat's revolutionary forces – these are our aims.

THE WORLD ECONOMY AND THE RELATIONSHIP OF CLASS FORCES.

During the war, economic relationships between different countries were broken. This made it necessary for separate national economies to create conditions, within their state borders, to function independently. On the other hand, the war with its gigantic technologies of destruction placed a powerful burden on national economies.

The result was the state regulation and state organisation of production under the banner of war: military-state capitalism. Clearly, there is no socialism there – no trace of it. Moreover, the relations between the proletariat and other classes, and the distribution of the national wealth, in every respect stayed as it had been even before state capitalism.

With the restoration of severed peacetime economic relationships, at the end of the war, the intervention and regulation of the economy by the state was naturally weakened. But the trend towards the centralisation of production, and towards the formation of trusts and syndicates, not only did not weaken, but became stronger; international competition strengthened it further.

What changed during these years in the relationship of

class forces in modern society? Bourgeois groups turned out to be unable to rise above the interests of particular enterprises and anarchistic methods of economic management. They also appeared incapable of leading the state capitalism of the war period. Still less could they restore the standard system of peaceful production in the complex post-war environment.

The proletariat was not prepared for organising society on new foundations.

Increasingly the technical organising intelligentsia came to the fore, leading and implementing the organisation of production.

In its methods of work and ideology, this intelligentsia is bourgeois through and through, and can only develop a capitalist economy. A new bourgeoisie is taking shape, by means of the merging of business-oriented elements of the old bourgeoisie and this up-and-coming organisational intelligentsia.

Capital organised its forces, and is on the march against the gains made by the working class. The task of uniting its own forces stands starkly before the international proletariat.

THE RCP AND THE WORKING CLASS.

The communist party, the party of the working class during the years of revolution, having become the ruling party – the party of organisers and leaders of the state apparatus and of economic life on capitalist foundations, with the working class exhausted and disorganised – has increasingly, irretrievably, lost its relationship and commonality with the proletariat. The soviet, party and trade union bureaucrats, the organisers of state capitalism, are living in material conditions that contrast

sharply with those in which the working class exists. Their material comforts and the stability of their general position depend on the extent of the exploitation of the labouring masses, on their subordination. All this has inevitably resulted in a contradiction of interests, and brought about the communist party's break with the working class.

The social reality of the communist party inevitably determines its social consciousness, its interests and its ideology, and these sharply contradict the interests of the struggling proletariat.

The RCP has become the party of the organising intelligentsia. The chasm between the RCP and the working class is getting ever deeper, and this fact can not be papered over by any number of resolutions and declarations of communist congresses, conferences and so on.

THE ECONOMY AND RELATIONSHIP OF CLASS FORCES IN RUSSIA.

The breakup of peacetime relationships had an especially damaging effect on large-scale industry in Russia, which was so closely bound up with industry in the western countries. The tremendous stress on the productive forces, experienced by the country's economic organism during the imperialist and revolutionary wars, tore that organism apart. Tight limits were imposed on the future development of large-scale industry: (a) its sharply constrained material base; (b) technical backwardness compared to the west (higher costs of production); and (c) the limited purchasing power of the population, most of whom are peasants, whose economy has also suffered from the destructive effect of war.

The NEP, i.e. the restoration of typical capitalist relations, and the intensive economic differentiation of the peasantry, aggravated by the famine of 1920-21, created the conditions for the rapid growth of a significant layer of kulaks in the Russian countryside.⁴ The small-scale, unorganised character of peasant agriculture, under conditions where communication technologies have been damaged, will define in the near future the dominant role of trading capital. Together with the latter, the power of the state will grow, as the representative of the general, national interest of capital; so too will the power of the organising intelligentsia that controls the apparatus of state management and regulation of the economy. The proletariat, atomised by the destruction of industry, weakened by losses, by ideological muddle, and by the alienation (by bourgeois confinement) of some of its most active elements – and in the absence of its proletarian party and revolutionary workers' organisations – is unable to play any significant or influential role

THE TRADE UNION MOVEMENT IN RUSSIA.

The class interests of the ruling bourgeois groups in Russia naturally require the papering-over of class contradictions in our republic. Consequently, the representatives of the ruling party that lead the trade union movement do all in their power, by means of activities and corresponding propaganda, to support the spontaneous economism that is clearly noticeable in the working masses.

The NEP sharply increased workers' aspirations to improve

⁴ "Kulak" (fist) was a term, usually pejorative, for rich peasants

their material conditions, and, notwithstanding a substantial increase in wage rates, the struggle for “five kopecks”⁵ became still more stubborn and bitter. The trade union bureaucracy is in no condition to get this movement under control. Insofar as even simple economic demands collide with capital’s interests, the wave of economism is rolling around in the mind of the opportunist trade union bureaucracy. The revived activity of the working class is seeking an outlet.

THE NEED TO SET UP A WORKERS PARTY

In spite of the catastrophic breakdown of industry, the workers’ material position – while still significantly lagging behind the minimum living standard – nevertheless is gradually improving. Freed in part from the daily quest for a crust of bread, workers are again demonstrating their energy as a class; among the advanced workers, protest – albeit muffled and incoherent, so far – is again growing against the new capitalist power structure. The revolutionary element is small in number, its ideological formation is weak, and communist fetishes are strong – but the growth of class activism, among the advanced non-party workers and class-conscious elements within the RCP, provides the necessary preconditions for the foundation of a party of the Russian proletariat.

AIMS OF THE RUSSIAN WORKERS’ PARTY

The current government, which most successfully represents the real vital interests of modern-day Russia, and is progressive

5 The colloquial word “piatachok”, similar in usage to “sixpence” or “a brass farthing”, is used.

in that respect, should have the support of the working class – to the extent that that does not obstruct the class struggle. The same applies to the ruling party, which is alien to the working class, but is the only force capable of leading our republic.

To the extent that the working class, under capitalist conditions, can influence the *foreign policy* of its bourgeoisie, it aims for support for progressive capitalist groupings and boycott of reactionary ones. In keeping with this approach, the working class of Russia should aim for:

1. The establishment of close links between the Russian republic and advanced capitalist countries such as Germany and America, and the boycott of reactionary France;

2. Support by all means to the national bourgeoisie of the emerging capitalist countries of the east (India, China, Egypt and so on) in their struggle against colonial empires and their predatory policies in the colonies.

Under capitalist conditions, the working class naturally fights for *democracy*, i.e. for conditions that ensure a minimum of opportunities for the political, economic and cultural struggle of the working class. In the Russian republic, where even opposition bourgeois groups enjoy freedom of the press, of combination, and so on, *de facto* and partly *de jure*, the working class must fight:

1. For the freedom of the press and of combination for the revolutionary elements of the proletariat;

2. Against arbitrary administrative rule, insofar as it emerges in the absence of elected legislative institutions; and

3. Against the fetish of “monopoly” electoral rights for working people and the fetish of the freedom to use those rights.

In the sphere of trade union work, in the absence of any proletarian mass organisations, the unpostponable task of the revolutionary elements of the Russian working class is the transformation of the existing opportunist trade unions, most of which do not enjoy the working masses' confidence, into fighting proletarian organisations.

This struggle must be waged under these slogans:

1. The genuine defence – in line with industry's available resources – of the economic interests of the proletariat, who are suffering unbearable exploitation.

2. Implementation in practice of the legal code on labour, and

3. Clear articulation of the political interests of the proletariat, that are hidden by the struggle for “five kopecks”.

An especially clear approach, and intense work, is necessary in the sphere of *cultural work* in the proletariat. Under a communist, soviet and allegedly proletarian mask, bourgeois ideology – including the ideology of the organising intelligentsia – has imprisoned dozens and hundreds of thousands of activist workers. This includes not only employees in soviet and economic institutions, worker party members, worker-students (in the Workers' Faculties⁶ etc), but also many workers at the point of production. In struggle against bourgeois ideology (culture), for its proletarian opposite, the tasks of the revolutionary elements of the working class boil down to:

6 Workers' faculties (rabochie fakul'tety, known as rabfaky) were set up in 1919, to provide courses to prepare students of working-class backgrounds to enter higher education

1. Ruthless struggle against middle-class⁷ and authoritarian tendencies within the working class.

2. Support by all means for proletarian cultural organisations, and the realisation, through them, of the ideas of proletarian ideology.

3. Development of cultural work (political, educational and professional-technical), in the first place among workers at the point of production; and struggle against the transfer of resources and attention to institutions of higher education full of former workers and those who have left the proletariat.

4. The sharpest differentiation from official soviet literature and art, and support by all means for proletarian literature, and similar, organisations.

In the sphere of *organisation of young working-class people* and revolutionary elements, considering the revolutionary sensibility and activism of young working-class people, it is necessary to pay serious attention to *propaganda* work among them, and the *preparation of cadres, future fighters for the emancipation of the working class*. Despite the petty-bourgeois, opportunistic character of the Communist Youth League, to the extent that there are valuable revolutionary elements in it, it is necessary to pay attention to work among the proletarian section of the league, while not abandoning independent work among young people outside it.

ATTITUDE TO THE SOCIALIST PARTIES.

Our attitude to the Mensheviks is defined by our appraisal

7 The word “meshchanskie” is used, derived from “meshchanstvo”, one of the legally-defined estates under tsarism. See note 2 to document 1, above

of their most recent platform. While it provides an analysis of the social and ideological evolution of the RCP that is valuable in many respects, the Mensheviks draw deeply mistaken and damaging conclusions about the need to return nationalised property to its former owners. These conclusions take no account of the deep-going and progressive changes in the Russian economy. The Mensheviks' platform is the fruit of their hopeless isolation from Russian reality and transformation into a purely intellectual grouping.

The remains of the Socialist Revolutionaries – the party of the Russian peasantry – have been torn away from their base and have lost their influence. Now the SRs' role, particularly in respect of defending the well-to-do peasantry, has been taken over by the RCP.

ATTITUDE TO THE WORKERS OPPOSITION.

The Workers Opposition group was valuable for the presence of revolutionary elements, but reactionary objectively, in its aspiration to revive the completely outworn slogans and methods of war communism. Our aim is to attract the revolutionary elements of the "Workers Opposition", having separated them from these reactionary ideals.

The central group of Workers Truth appeals to all revolutionary workers, class-conscious proletarian elements who have taken sides with the struggle: we make this warm proletarian appeal to you to leave behind the lethargy and muddle evoked by communist illusions. Let us start to work intensively on organising revolutionary elements and explaining to the working masses the really terrible situation we are in.

The Russian working class – at one time the proletariat’s vanguard battalion – has now been pushed back, almost to the position of ten years ago.

The work in front of us will be slow and tough, and in the first place ideological. At the factories, in the trade union organisations, Workers Faculties and soviet-party schools, in the Communist Youth League and the party organisations, we must form propaganda circles in solidarity with *Workers Truth*.

Organise propaganda circles, and do not forget the basic conditions for the development of revolutionary organisation in countries where capital is on the offensive – careful selection of comrades and strict conspiracy.

To work, comrades!

The central group of Workers Truth

5. From Iosif Litvinov's diary

The mood in 1922 in the communist milieu within which the opposition groups worked is strikingly portrayed in these excerpts from the diary of Iosif Israilovich Litvinov (Litvin). Born in 1896 into a Jewish rabbi's family in Latvia (then, the Courland province of the Russian empire), he became active in the workers' movement in 1911 and joined an underground social-democratic internationalist group in 1915. Litvinov served in the tsarist Army and participated in the revolutionary soldiers' movement, spent four months as a prisoner of war in Germany and participated in the soviet seizure of power in Riga in 1919. After the Reds were pushed out of Latvia, he was active in soviet structures in Ukraine, and served briefly in the Russo-Polish war before moving to Moscow. By one account Litvinov participated in the joint opposition in the Moscow party alongside Paniushkin, Efim Ignatov and others, in 1920.¹ He studied at the Institute of

1 Vladimir Genis, citing the RCP central committee's archives, writes that Nikolai Ezhov (who in 1933, when Litvinov was witch-hunted, was working in the party administration, and moved to the security police in 1934) claimed that Litvinov participated in the 1920 oppositions. While Ezhov is hardly a trustworthy source of information, it would not have been surprising for someone of Litvinov's background and cast of mind to have been involved in the 1920 opposition. V.L. Genis, *Nevernye sluga rezhima: pervye sovetskie nevozvrashchentsy (1920-1933)*, kniga 2. "Tret'ia emigratsiia" (1929-33) (Moscow: Ulianovskii dom

Red Professors and the Sverdlov university, while teaching at the Moscow higher technical institute and some workers' faculties.² Litvinov worked in higher education institutions until 1926, and then as an economist. In 1929 he was sent to work in the economics department of the Soviet Union's embassy in London. In 1933, after a fierce dispute with the head of the embassy's Communist party cell, he was recalled to Moscow. Litvinov knew that his diary, which he continued writing until 1924, would prove dangerous to him. He had left it with a close friend in Moscow, and, fearing repression, wrote to another close friend, Isaak Magarik (who is also mentioned in this text), asking him to retrieve it and if necessary destroy it. Litvinov's friends vacillated, and handed the diary to the security services. Meanwhile, Litvinov insisted vehemently to embassy officials that he remained faithful to communism, but feared going back to Moscow. He, his wife Raisa Rabinovitch and their two children became "non-returners". (This heartbreaking story of Stalinist repression has been researched and recounted by the historian Vladimir Genis.³) In London, Litvinov found work as a teacher and as editor of a local Jewish newspaper. In the 1940s, shaken by news of the holocaust – during which his parents and younger brother perished in the Riga ghetto – Litvinov, now using his original name, Litvin, embraced the Jewish faith. For many years he edited a quarterly review of religious issues, published by the Zionist Federation. He died in London in 1966.⁴

pechaty, 2009), p. 636

- 2 The workers' faculties prepared students from working-class backgrounds for higher education. See note 6 to document 4, above
- 3 Genis, *Nevernye sluga rezhima*, pp. 634-659; V.L. Genis, "Iosif Litvinov: dnevnik 'krasnogo professora'. Fevral'-sentiabr' 1924 g.", *Voprosy istorii* no. 5, 2013, pp. 99-121
- 4 These biographical details are from "Ptitsegonstvo nadoelo do smerti...".

While it was common for communists, like others, to keep diaries in the 1920s, Litvinov's is considered by historians to be almost unique. Material containing such frank expressions of opposition was usually destroyed by its authors or otherwise disappeared. Litvinov's diary found its way from the security services to the Russian State Archive of Political and Social History. Excerpts were published in Neizvestnaia Rossiia (Unknown Russia) in 1993, and in Voprosy Istorii (Questions of History) in 2013.⁵ The excerpts here constitute about one-third of the material published in 1993; I have selected parts that focus on political and social issues. Gaps are indicated with [...].

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[15 January 1922.] There has been talk of suicides. Lately that's the most popular theme among communists. The communists are shooting themselves and poisoning themselves on a daily basis. And it's talked about on a daily basis. And the unflinching Rozit⁶ quite rightly pointed out that they don't shoot

Iz dnenika I. I. Litvinova 1922 g. (Publikatsiia V. Genisa i A. Ershova)." *Neizvestnaia Rossiia* IV (Moscow: Mosgorarkhiv, 1993); Genis, "Iosif Litvinov", *Voprosy istorii*, op. cit.; and Stephan E. C. Wendehorst, *British Jewry, Zionism, and the Jewish State, 1936-1956* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), pp. 39-40, 304-305. Biographical details for Litvinov's fellow students and comrades, in these notes, are also from "Pritsegonstvo nadoelo do smerti..."

5 The excerpts here are from the Russian State Archive of Political History (RGASPI), f. 589, d. 1509, ll. 16-52, published in "Pritsegonstvo nadoelo do smerti...", *Neizvestnaia Rossiia* IV, op. cit

6 Dav Rozit (1895-1937) was, like Litvinov, of Latvian origin. 1917, joined the Latvian Social Democratic party. During the civil war he fought as a partisan and worked as a political commissar in the Red Army.

themselves because of social issues, but because of personal issues – their material circumstances and family problems. Yes, social activity, like academic activity, can't bring a person real happiness. The exceptions are much rarer than many people think. Social activity is just a way of forgetting, of drowning out one's inner voice. And now, when the revolution is over and the storm has passed, when the waves have settled, many people, who have lived for four years as if on a drug-induced high, are counting their wounds. And counting their comrades. And they come to the saddest conclusions. Personal life is wrecked. Loneliness. No family. Hardly any support. Nerves shattered. Health ruined. People are at the end of their tether. They don't have any material security. And many of their comrades are living comfortably. So, one is comfy: a family, wife and children. Another is soon to finish higher education. A third is keeping life and soul together, god only knows how. A fourth is buying and selling, left, right and centre, and getting rich. A fifth is a senior official who commands honour and respect. And then there are many, many communists, who, seeing how they have been made fools of, disillusioned and embittered, take their own lives, for any reason or without any reason. And then they are damned for it by those happy people who have sorted themselves out. So it was, so it will be ... Apart from anything else, Rozit also wants to enrol at the VTU [higher technical institute].⁷ That fieriest of communists, who last

1921-24 studied at the Institute of Red Professors; after that, worked in Soviet administration. 1929, sided with the "right opposition" led by Nikolai Bukharin. 1937, falsely accused of "counter-revolutionary terrorist organisation" and shot

7 The Moscow higher technical institute (Moskovskoe vysshee

year demanded from me a promise that I wouldn't go to the VTU. And now him! The host of communist true believers is melting away. Yes, they all cover their real intentions with the fig leaf of phrases such as: "We need to work to restore industry, we need red specialists, without learning there will be no socialism." But hardly anyone believes that what you learn at the Sverdlov, or at the Institute [of Red Professors],⁸ is genuine. They don't trust it. Learning old-style has always been needed: that's a reliable route to security. And people aspire to enter the temples of learning. This will produce many benefits – very many. Russia will end up with an army of educated people, sober, energetic, worldly-wise, people who have really been put through the wringer.⁹ But who will they serve, that's the question: capitalism or socialism? Themselves, and the capitalists, or the proletariat? Only you, the Almighty, know the answer to that. Maybe from them, like from the Quakers, new Yankees will be produced. By the way, yesterday I was called up to participate in the election campaign for the

tekhnicheskoe uchilishche (VTU)) was the first institution of higher technical education in Russia, founded in 1868

- 8 The Ya.M. Sverdlov Communist University was founded in 1919, the first higher education institution running courses specifically for party cadres; 1935 renamed the Higher School of Propagandists; 1939, the Higher Party School. The Institute of Red Professors provided training for teachers in higher education of economics, philosophy and history; 1931 reorganised into several institutes
- 9 The Russian phrase used translates literally as "through fire, water and copper pipes". Going through fire and water is a common phrase, originating in the Bible, in western cultures; linguists think the copper pipes were added in the 20th century. The idiomatic meaning is: someone who has been through many trials and tribulations and conquered their fears

Moscow soviet. I refused, straight away, and actually cursed and said that I would not go, because I could not. I have to study. If they want to exclude me from the party, fine. That will help. It would take more than that to worry me. The real reason I refused – for me, doing agitation now would be impossible (plus, forthcoming exams).

[...]

26 January. Today I passed the analytics exam. As far as grading is concerned, my continuing education at VTU is assured. I surprised myself, doing so well. It's not so long ago that I was convinced that I just don't have the strength now. In the last few days I worked hard at maths and really started to get the hang of it. I worked with Shutskever¹⁰ and Kogan. I couldn't have done it on my own. Our collective labours were very productive. We went through the Polyakov textbook with a fine-toothed comb. We ended up with hardly a single question mark. [...] On the way home, I popped in to see Shutskever. She also did the analytics exam today. She is far less worried than I am. For a start, her nerves are stronger than mine. And besides, she really hasn't been through what I have. She is not living in fear of failing the exam. I invited her to a "feast". We dined on

10 Fania Shutskever (1898-?) was born into a family of Jewish leather-worker in Vilnius, Lithuania. 1916, joined the Bolsheviks in Kharkiv, Ukraine; 1918-20, served in the Red Army as a nurse and then as a partisan; 1921-23, taught history at the Sverdlov university and studied at the Moscow Higher Technical School; was a founder of the Workers Truth group; 1923-24, expelled from the party and imprisoned; 1925, worked for the party history commission; 1926, rejoined the party and worked in the aviation industry; 1938, arrested

herring and potatoes, onions, vegetable oil and vinegar. The cooking was pretty decent. We had dinner and chatted about Lucullan banquets and the ancient Romans' gourmandism.¹¹ We agreed to meet tomorrow, go to the market and sell the remains of our rations. That's how honest communists live. Having given the party their best years (in her case, working in clandestinity), having been at all the battlefronts, they are obliged to drag themselves around markets with foodstuffs, to scrape together what's needed for essentials. And this is while the party is in power. How many bastards are feathering their nests?... Thousands of ruffians and johnny-come-latelies are living like kings at the soviets' expense.

I talked with Shutskever about the cruel jokes played by fate on us and our politics. I made this case to her: it is as if life had set itself the task of taking us to absurdity, of showing and proving to all that we were wrong. Look at the speculators, for example. Where do they feel themselves more secure than with us? In Berlin, hungry crowds smash their way into shops. In Moscow that is not yet possible. Hungry people know that if and when speculation is halted, hunger will be more intense. They know this very well. Personal experience has convinced them. And so the hungry crowds thank the speculators. "If it wasn't for them, we would perish all together" – you hear that all over the place. And so we, communists – having shouted for four years about parasites, spongers, merchants, speculators and capitalists – have by our actions proved... that capitalists, even the very worst of them, the speculators, are not spongers

11 Lucius Licinius Lucullus (roughly 118-57 BC) was a Roman general and statesman, reputed to have staged lavish banquets

at all; that it's almost impossible to manage without them. "Don't judge us by our words, judge us by the results of our actions", the communist defenders of capitalism could say, and demand recompense for our propaganda of the deed... in the service of capitalism. Same with the ARA ([American Relief Administration], the American aid organisation for the Volga region).¹² For four years we have been vulgarising to the point of idiocy the theory of class struggle. We weren't far from denouncing as heretics those who denied the class character of mathematics. All that is common to all humanity was declared to be non-existent. "In class society there can not be anything that is outside or above class relations." And suddenly, famine on the Volga destroyed the entire rationale of our pamphlets, agitators, newspaper articles etc. Destroyed it just so, without any philosophising, without the use of any dialectical-plekhanovite transformations. And destroyed it fundamentally. According to the latest pedagogical methods, demonstratively. In Soviet Russia millions of peasants are starving; the wealthy and the landowners have been crushed not long since; the very existence of Soviet power is in peril. And who helps those who are starving? The world proletariat? The Comintern, in which Zinoviev invested so much hope? The Profintern?¹³ Nothing of the sort. The workers of all countries collected maybe 200,000 gold rubles. While the

12 The American Relief Administration was set up in 1919 by the US Congress to provide famine relief in Russia. It was supported roughly equally by state and private funds

13 Grigory Zinoviev, a senior Bolshevik leader, was in 1922 president of the Executive Committee of the Communist International (Comintern). The Profintern was an international trade union organisation affiliated to the Comintern

American billionaires donated tens of millions. They are feeding millions of children. They send grain (this is America, which competes with us on the grain market). Fridtjof Nansen – a “bourgeois” scientist who has nothing in common with the proletariat or socialism – makes sacrifices, just to help the starving.¹⁴ Dozens of doctors – of the finest bourgeois pedigree – arrive from all over the world, and die in the struggle with the epidemic in the regions affected by famine. And there are queues of children at the American canteens and hospitals; and for the doctors, hero-victims of the epidemic; and for the trains with American bread. How starkly all this confirms our theory of the class character of culture and ethics in “bourgeois” society! It all speaks – no, screams – so loudly, so convincingly, that you would need to be deaf as a post not to hear this voice of life.

And let's take the communists. How they have degenerated! People who set themselves the aim of changing the world, of fighting with all forms of prejudice, must themselves be brave, revolutionary, and fearless in deed, word and thought. And so the Bolsheviks were, at one time. And now? How does the party look? A herd of sheep, bereft of its own judgement, out to please those with influence, terrified of taking a single independent step. The communists have worked out their own caste prejudices, their rules, their catechism. You mustn't have two miserable rations – but a communist can be on 500 gold rubles a month. A party member mustn't lease out some

14 Fridtjof Nansen was a Norwegian researcher of the Arctic, oceanographer and zoologist; 1906 winner of the Nobel prize for medicine; he became a diplomat and, from 1921, the League of Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

penniless enterprise – but it's fine for an intermediary agent to work at the Tsentrosoiuz and earn 130 million a month.¹⁵ And these people will change the structure of the economy and carry through the greatest revolution in history?! History is made by people, as Marx rightly said, but will majestic historical events be made by these kind of people? The journal *Sverdlovets* [for students and staff at the Sverdlov Communist University] has just appeared. Reading it, you wouldn't believe your eyes. Unparalleled meanness of spirit, poverty of thought, no sense of youthful enthusiasm, no honourable ambitions. It stinks of bureaucracy, of spiritual stagnation, of the catechism and of small-mindedness. The journals of third-year secondary school [realschule] students in years gone by had substantially richer content than *Sverdlovets*. What's more, Sverdlov university is the pride and joy of Soviet Russia. Praised to the skies by Chlenov in his letter to *Smena Vekh*.¹⁶ And this is in the centre of Russia, in Moscow. What is going on in the party's provincial organisations? Yes, our communist party has degenerated. Party discipline, that should strengthen the party's revolutionary battle-readiness, has killed off anything revolutionary in its ranks. Party tasks, that should be directed at supporting the communist spirit among communists, have killed off all spirit, all living life. The party gives off a foul smell

15 Tsentrosoiuz is an acronym for the All-Russian Central Union of Consumer Societies, an umbrella organisation for trading and retail cooperatives

16 Semen Chlenov (1890-1937) was a veteran (pre-1905) Bolshevik; he had a legal education and was a senior academic, in 1922 the deputy rector of the Institute of Red Professors. *Smena Vekh* (*Changing Times*) was a journal published in Paris in 1921-22 by a group of White emigres who advocated cooperation with the Soviet government

(notwithstanding the intensive purge). That's the capricious dialectic of life for you.

Shutskever agreed with all my arguments. In fact, I haven't recently met a single communist with brains who wouldn't agree. Strange. Even Repshe,¹⁷ formerly the most unflinching communist (he's also Latvian), is in despair. He came round to my place yesterday evening for an hour, and spent the whole time complaining at our stupidity. What use is it to anybody to have thousands of young people from all parts of Russia swotting up on the difference between value and price? Our party schools teach nothing except two or three hundred badly-understood definitions. And he is right, to a significant extent.

[...]

1 February. [...] Now I don't know what the point of scientific knowledge is for me. At the end of the day, science is not the point of living; it is for adorning and improving life. There are only two reasons that compel me to study. The first is the wish finally to become independent from those bird-chasers and their futile bird-chasing,¹⁸ to stand on my own two feet, to

17 Ivan Repshe (1892-1960) was of Latvian peasant background; 1913-18 served in the tsarist army; 1918, joined the Bolshevik party; studied at the Sverdlov university (from 1919) and the Institute of Red Professors (from 1922). Later worked at Gosplan, the state planning authority and as a manager in the electrical industry

18 I have translated the word "bird-chasers" (ptitsegonov) literally. In addition to its primary meaning, "scarecrows", it has a secondary, idiomatic meaning, referring to people who are chasing or scattering birds, i.e. spending time on small, pointless things and wasting time

live “as god commands”, and earn my crust of bread separately from my beliefs, which can and must change. No one should stand still, and so a person's whole existence should not have to be devoted to the confession of any programme, no matter which. I am a communist and a revolutionary: organically, bourgeois society is repugnant to me. But I am weighed down by the thought that, materially, I am chained too tightly to the party. Being determines consciousness. The devil only knows what I would be now, without this dependence. I want my fight for ideas to be the free impulse of a free person. Moreover, I have a terribly independent character. I don't like taking orders. I can not, and do not want to, give orders, and still less can I stand others having power over me. I want to be free as a bird. I am revolted by everything that is served up to me as orders, as dogma. I was still a child when I stopped praying – because my father ordered me to pray; I stopped believing in god, because I was forbidden not to believe. And more than anything I love to think freely. A directive to think in a certain way will only compel me to think differently. The second reason is to forget what is past. These are the two forces driving me to subdue myself and work at my studies. But science has lost its wonder, in my eyes. If you had said to me five or six years ago, that I would be at an institute, would have the opportunity to learn about science and that I would have no appetite for it, I would have spat in your face. And now... “when there were teeth, there were no nuts – now there are nuts, but no teeth.”

and energy. The word is rarely used, but Litvinov, writing for himself, used it in his diary repeatedly, referring to an aspect of small-minded bureaucratism, along with the noun “bird-chasing” (ptitsegonstvo)

3 February. [...] The [Moscow] university professors are on strike, and they say that the VTU is going to join in. That's how the old regime's fate weighs down on us. Yesterday I heard that the workers' faculty students call our written canon, "the communists' Divine law". And there really is some similarity! I am starting to think that the new order is just the old one, turned inside out. Speculation, prostitution and every kind of scumbag are flourishing openly, while political activists, old fighters against tsarism, are languishing in jail. (To do justice to the party youth, it needs to be said that the most conscious section are deeply shocked about all this – but who cares about them.) There is a privileged caste, a sort of left "union". I observe and am surprised. There is hardly a single communist that is not materially tied to the party. Most of those who were really independent have already got out! The other day, an old militant who worked in the underground admitted to me: "I would leave... but I am tired. Prison, exile and revolution have worn me down. I have forgotten my own trade: for four years I didn't go near it. I don't know how I will live... Against your own will, you end up getting back in the old harness."

We have local schools, the *gubsovpartshkoly*,¹⁹ better supplied than all the rest; the students from there are desperate to get into the workers' faculties, but they don't let them go so easily (just like the old religious seminaries, down to a T). The professors are striking to demand an improvement in conditions in the laboratories, better salaries, and that they be taken on by *Glavprofobr*.²⁰ And they are right. Either we need specialists –

19 This acronym stands for provincial soviet party schools

20 This acronym stands for the Central Directorate of Professional Education, the main agency directing professional education in

then budget the higher education institutions, with at least half the sum spent on the University of the Working People of the East²¹ – or let's say that the institutions of higher education are not needed: then there will be no reason to keep taking the mickey out of students and professors alike. Poor, unhappy Russia: everyone wants to take you on the road that they have chosen; they never let you take the shortest and most direct road without diverting to the left or right. You have to be the citadel either of old Christian Orthodox piety, or of world revolution, but you mustn't live just for yourself. And you might be dying of dark ignorance, of hunger or of epidemics. The Volga is dying, and in Moscow dozens of children are committing suicide due to hunger. They are even writing about this in the newspapers now. On the other hand, the network of provincial party schools is growing. The newspapers report that too. And the speculators proudly declare: "We are not political, the Cheka doesn't have any business with us." Under the tsarist regime, they used to say that, during the search of a brothel, the madame said: "Look, I am not a student; I don't go against the tsar; there's nothing for you to find here... I am just a poor cow..." Same song, new key. [...]

8 February. The papers are reporting the railway strike in Germany, and the general strike in Berlin. Berlin has no gas, water, light or trams. I read about this and a shiver went through my whole body. I wanted to be there, to say the words to set people's hearts alight, to call the masses to battle, to

post-revolutionary Russia

21 The University of the Working People of the East specialised in training Communist party cadres, rather than on technical or scientific subjects

storm the heavens. But alas, that was only for a minute, and then it passed. My belief in revolution has petered out. That's what my internal voice will say tomorrow: they will go to work, they will be beaten, crushed, disillusioned. Without belief in themselves and their power. And Stinnes²² and his like will celebrate victory. Apart from that, what might revolution do to me? Once your life is broken, you willy-nilly lose interest in revolution, which is only the means to make life better – but it isn't life itself, at least not for me, now. Some other news today: they have done away with the Cheka.²³ Good riddance. It would be better if it had never existed. It didn't so much combat counter-revolution as dirty the revolution's name and breed enemies of Soviet power. Future historians will pronounce a more objective verdict than me, but now, in any case, the opinion of the overwhelming majority of thinking communists is that the Cheka did us more harm than good. There was no need to breed counter-revolutionaries with the old economic policy, and no need for the Cheka either. All the same, I have given lectures at the Cheka academy but, thank goodness, have never been directly involved in its work. My hands are clean. I never at any time teamed up with the Cheka, always fought against its uncontrolled, barbaric practices – for which I have been got at, more than once. And once nearly paid with my life (in 1919 in Dvinsk with those

22 Hugo Stinnes (1870-1924) was a prominent German industrialist and right-wing nationalist politician

23 On 6 February 1922 the Soviet government issued a decree renaming the Cheka the State Political Directorate (Gosudarstvennoe politicheskoe upravlenie, or GPU) of the internal affairs ministry

roughneck Latvians, who, to a man – except for Danishevsky²⁴ – all subsequently went over to the whites). My hands haven't been stained with any human blood. Not because I compelled someone else to do the dirty work, but because I was always against such work. That's something, at least. I wouldn't want to end up with a contaminated conscience.

[...]

21 February. I slept well. I want to note the following. There is no genuine friendship or solidarity between communists. Everyone can see this. Schemes and intrigues fill every pore and poison the atmosphere. Why? Because there can not be any living life, or any real spirit of creativity and friendship, where formalism and deadening rules reign supreme. Every communist knows that his party friend could shoot him at any moment. And this ruins everything. Distrust between communists is universal; everyone leaves things unsaid. Just communist dogs, as Magarik wrote.²⁵ I am judging myself

24 Karl Danishevskii (1884-1938) joined the Latvian social-democratic party in 1900; from 1906, represented it on the Russian Social-Democratic Labour Party central committee. During the civil war, a member of the revolutionary military council of the republic. 1923, signed the Platform of the 46 circulated by the Trotskyist opposition. In the 1930s, worked on the central soviet executive committee. Killed in the Stalinist purges

25 Isaak Magarik (1897-?) was of Latvian origin. 1917, joined the Menshevik Internationalists, and then the Bolsheviks; 1918-20 worked in the party's Jewish sections and as a political commissar in the Red Army; 1919, participated in the Bolshevik uprising in Riga; while studying in Moscow was expelled from the party in 1921 and 1923, but readmitted; worked as an engineer and a teacher of engineering. In

here. Stremoukhov has known me for two years, but after seeing Dvolaitzky's declaration, he started looking at me like an escaped convict.²⁶ How can I be friends with him? Will the day really come when I can forget this? It turns out that he didn't make friends with me at all, but with my party membership card. So far everything with the card is fine. If something should happen to it, OK, it's all over. Anyway, we are friends no longer. You can't have comradesly solidarity between membership cards. Feelings must prevail; they can not be scripted. Otherwise – mustiness, formalism, stagnation. And on the basis of my own experience, I can confirm that in no milieu is the absence of comradesly solidarity more strongly felt than among communists. Suspicion dominates; people look at each other like not-yet-unmasked thieves or blackmailers; you are terrified to say one word too many in conversation. And the sheep don't understand that this is the worst possible state that the party could be in, that this signifies its slow but certain death. [The prominent Communist intellectual

1933, after being contacted by Litvinov and asked to hide or destroy Litvinov's diary, he together with another friend handed it to the security police. Nevertheless he was expelled from the party in 1934 for "hiding from the party, and himself sharing, the antiparty views, and ideology hostile to the party, of the non-returner Litvinov", etc. Killed in the Stalinist purges

- 26 Sholom Dvolaitzkii (1893-1937), like Litvinov of Latvian Jewish origin, joined the Bolsheviks in 1917; rose in their ranks during the civil war; 1921-23, lectured at the Institute of Red Professors. He claimed, falsely, that Litvinov had been in the Menshevik organisation in 1917, and failed to mention this in the required paperwork. This matter hung over Litvinov's head for the first half of 1922 until the party cell found the claim to be false (see entry for 10 July). Nikolai Stremoukhov (1896-1945), another civil war veteran, was the cell secretary

David] Riazanov is right. When the sabbath no longer exists for people, but people exist for the sabbath – there ends all that is human, and there starts the supremacy of the monasteries, the priests and the generals.

[...]

9 March. After a long break – an enforced one – I am returning again to my diary. I have to record here the sad events of recent days, which will stay in my memory for a long time. 3 and 4 March were grey days, nothing much to report. [Isaak] Mesezhnikov²⁷ was at the doctor's on the 4th, about his nervous illness, and he was prescribed sodium bromide for insomnia. In the evening he came round to my place. We joked around, I set him a riddle, which he failed to solve. I teased him about it – completely overlooking his hypochondria and lack of confidence in his own abilities, which in the last few days had grown to an unbelievable extent. In the morning of the 5th, at 9.30 am when I still had not got up, Mesezhnikov turned up again. He started talking about the riddle from the day before, trying to prove that the answer was wrong. I again told him, it's no good blaming the mirror if you have an ugly mug. You didn't guess – just admit it, and basta. This really annoyed him, and he delivered a great lamentation (in recent days, as his hypochondria became more acute, these lamentations came very often). He declared that evidently we would quarrel, that he could see he was disturbing me, but

²⁷ Isaak Mendeleevich Mesezhnikov was a student at the Institute of Red Professors

that he could not stand loneliness, that he would only make a nuisance of himself for a few days. I replied, as usual, by swearing at him. His lamentations really were getting to me, and I wanted to study – and certainly his arrival always meant that studying was kaput. Then we talked, discussed history, he drank some tea, and then very exuberantly finished off a bag of sweets that he had bought a few days previously. Then Magarik turned up. They played chess. Out of six games, Magarik won four-and-a-half, Mesezhnikov one-and-a-half. Then Magarik and I read some Pushkin, and Magarik recited some of his own poems. Mesezhnikov went out and returned, several times. At quarter to five he arrived, and we didn't let him in immediately. I had been reading Magarik my diary and didn't want anyone else to know about it. Then Mesezhnikov came in, asked my permission to lie down, and then turned to me and said: "comrade Litvinov, it's 4.45, you need to hurry up and eat lunch, it's late". He looked sad, dark, and he spoke quietly. The combativeness he had shown when we were arguing was gone. Magarik and I went out.

I walked with Magarik to the Nikitskie Vorota. We talked alot, about Mesezhnikov, among other things. I returned and hurried to the canteen. I went in, took my student card, and then Rozenberg²⁸ approached me and asked: "Did you have a revolver?" Yes, I replied. "And did Mesezhnikov know where it

28 Simkho Rozenberg (1895-?). Born into a Latvian Jewish family. 1915, joined Poale Zion, the Jewish socialist party; 1920, joined the Communist party; 1921, graduated from university and enrolled at the Institute of Red Professors. Expelled from, and restored to the party in 1921 and 1924; worked as an economist, in senior administrative positions in higher education, and from 1931 in the commissariat of finance. Killed in the Stalinist purges

was kept?" "What happened?", I asked, terrified. "Mesezhnikov shot himself, in your room." I was stunned. I ran upstairs. The door was locked. Stremeukhov had the key and I was not allowed into the room. For an hour and a half I walked around in a daze. To lose my only friend, in this way, was infinite sorrow. Moreover, I expected that my room would be searched. They would find the diary, find out everything. Unpleasant and hurtful. Finally the militia showed up, the room was opened. I wanted to go in but thought I didn't have the strength. I waited in the corridor. Then I went in. They didn't search the room, and showed no interest in doing so. Mesezhnikov had sat on the chair and shot himself with my Nagan [revolver]. He shot himself in the right temple. The bullet came out of his left ear. He was lying on the floor in a pool of blood and brains. Death surely took him almost immediately. Before his death he took off his hat and glasses, and left on the table a letter to his parents, dated 17 February, in which he explained his decision to take his own life, since he didn't have the strength any longer to bear the burden, and life was bringing him nothing but grief. Everyone gathered in my room and read the letter. It was read aloud, the reading punctuated by sighs. Then everyone left my room, it was locked, and we all moved to Stremoukhov's room. There, in the presence of the bureau of the cell [of Communist party members at the institute] the question of Mesezhnikov's funeral was discussed. One of the militiamen announced that a suicide needed to be sent to the morgue. I protested. Several students supported the militiaman. But the other militiaman also protested. In the end the bureau decided not to participate officially in the funeral. Unofficially, the institute could contribute towards making the arrangements. Then the interrogation: long, boring

and incompetent. I too was questioned. I gave official, formal answers. After the interrogation the militia went off, taking my gun – which at that moment infuriated me. Then my bed was moved into Stremoukhov's room. The whole time I avoided looking at Mesezhnikov.

In the evening I went to see Shutskever and told her the whole story. She was stupefied. I almost burst out laughing at the sight of the surprise on her face – but then I began to feel that a wail of sorrow was rising in my throat. At Shutskever's place I met a woman, an old communist, a former student at Sverdlov university. I wanted to get her a place in the workers' faculty. It turned out that now, she has left the party. I stayed for a while at Shutskever's, and then we went together to speak with the other executors of Mesezhnikov's will. He named as executors Romchenko, Volkovysskii and me.²⁹ We called at Romchenko's place and together with him I went to Volkovysskii's, while Shutskever went home. At Volkovysskii's we decided not to send a telegram to Mesezhnikov's parents, to bury him at Vagankovo cemetery, and to start arranging it the next day. [...]

[On the next day] in the evening there was a meeting of the communist students at the institute. Suicide was discussed. It was decided to relate to each other more attentively, and not to participate in the funeral officially. I spoke up about moving to another room, but, for the moment that was refused, which worried me a great deal. On the morning of the next day, 5 March, I received permission to move to Stremoukhov's room,

29 Samuil Volkovysskii (1899-?). 1917, joined the Bolshevik party. After studying, worked as an engineer. 1927, expelled and readmitted, and 1935, expelled, for alleged Trotskyist affiliations. Killed in the Stalinist purges

and did so straight away. Kovalevskii moved into my old room with his family.³⁰ Before that the room was washed down. Some nuns were crossing themselves and crying... I saw how they took out a bucket with Mesezhnikov's blood and brains. They threw it down the toilet. Pointless, awful. [...]

On the morning of the 9th I went for a horse – which I took, after some bargaining. The funeral was at 1 pm. From the student body, no one was there except Gravé.³¹ On the other hand most of staff were there. Their hearts haven't yet turned to stone. It was sad, and funny. Especially when the waggoner, before starting out, put on his hat and white cassock, over a simple shirt. Then, when he got near to the cemetery, he took off the cassock and top hat and again became an ordinary driver. We dug a grave for Mesezhnikov among the old spinsters and gendarme's wives, the genuine Orthodox Christians. Before going, I inwardly said goodbye to him, and we walked home, discussing death, the transitory nature of our life on earth, and so on. The ceremony had ended; Mesezhnikov is no more. Where he was is now empty, and the Vagankovo cemetery has acquired another fresh, hardly-noticed grave. When I got home I had to prepare a lecture for

30 From the context, it appears that the date referred to was 7 March, not the 5th. Nikolai Kovalevskii (1892-1937) participated in the 1917 revolution in Moscow as an independent social-democratic internationalist, joined the Bolsheviks in 1918, and after studying at the Institute of Red Professors worked in state administration. Killed in the purges

31 Berta Gravé (1900-1979). Born in Chernihiv, Ukraine. Joined the Bolsheviks during the civil war; after studying at the Institute of Red Professors; worked in a series of teaching jobs; 1937, expelled from the Communist party after her husband's arrest; 1940, arrested and exiled; 1954, returned to Moscow

the Krasnopresnenskii district party school. After giving the lecture – quite successfully – I went to see Volkovysskii. We talked, for a long time. It was a moonlit night, well suited to romanticism, fairy tales, dreams, pessimism and melancholy.

[...]

14 March. After Mesezhnikov's suicide, my whole mood changed. In my eyes, life took on a special beauty. I understood intuitively, understood with my whole being, the horror and, most important, the senselessness of death. A person lives, thinks, creates, and suddenly, snap, it's over. The brain, with which people think, is spilt on the floor; it turns into a mess, stinking and repulsive, and is thrown down the toilet. The human body, a source of pleasure and happiness for others, turns into a decomposing hunk of meat, into carrion. A comrade, such a welcome guest five minutes ago, after death becomes a phantom. All this has had such a strong effect on me, has shaken me so thoroughly, that now I align with the teaching: "a living dog is better than a dead lion". It is sadness enough that natural death is inevitable. To worsen one's situation by self-destruction, in my opinion, is the greatest insanity. [...]

Real winter has come in, with snow and ice. The fifth anniversary of the February revolution was a pale non-event. No one is in the mood to celebrate anything in Russia now. Doubt has gripped all sections of society. Thoughts that a few months ago were considered the greatest heresy are now voiced by the most faithful communists. Free thought and criticism has become a widespread trend. Communist pig-headedness and dullness is disappearing, bit by bit. The declaration of 22

former members of the Workers Opposition to the plenum of the Comintern was widely discussed, although only for a few days.³² Then it died down. There was great sympathy for the 22: much more than I thought there would be. Even their opponents acknowledge that a little window [for discussion] needs to be opened. But in my opinion nothing serious will come out of this story. The exodus from the party has recently turned into an epidemic. The most honest proletarian elements are leaving. If this goes on for long, it will be very difficult in our country to find a single rank-and-file communist proletarian, an old party hand. Today Motylev – that capable, but stupid, over-confident bureaucrat – thanked me for the lecture at the Krasnopresnenskii district party school.³³ He proposed that I come to do another one. I politely declined.

[...]

32 The tenth congress of the Communist party in 1921 had imposed a ban on factions. In its aftermath, attempts by former members of the Workers Opposition to advance their political principles within the party met with a range of repressive measures. Aleksander Shliapnikov and 21 other oppositionists signed a letter to the executive of the Communist International, which met in Moscow in February 1922, accusing the “unified forces of the party and trade union bureaucracy” of persecuting and discrediting those with dissident opinions, and stifling proletarian democracy. The Comintern set up a commission to deal with the matter but no action was taken. Allen, *The Workers Opposition in the Russian Communist Party*, pp. 314-320 and 460-464

33 Vol'f Motylev (1899-1967). Born in Vitebsk, Belarus. 1920, joined the Bolshevik party. After studying at the Institute of Red Professors worked as a teacher and in senior jobs in higher education and publishing. 1940, expelled from the Communist party; 1956, readmitted

28 March. On Sunday I was at the Volkovysskiis'. I slept at their place. We chatted and argued about sanctimoniousness, hypocrisy etc. Volkovysskii is a devout communist, "a believer", whether for long I don't know. Pavlova was supposed to come round to see me yesterday, but I went to the RCP congress.³⁴ I was captivated. My old yearnings cast a spell over me. Then I thought better of going... but went, all the same. It was awkward to miss out on company. But I wanted to see the congress and to hear Lenin. Lenin spoke for three hours. The general conclusion from his speech was: the revolution has gone by; the time has come to be business-like; today, organic construction is our aim. It's over. We need to use the bourgeoisie, not deal it a death blow. There are a lot of riff-raff in the factories, he declared. In relation to the seizure of church valuables, there has been a major disturbance at Shuia (a working-class centre).³⁵

[...]

5 May. I was at the party meeting at the Moscow VTU today after a gap of three months. Tedious, shitty, disgusting. Demagoguery from Bakshitskii-Zelenskii. [...] What influence the NEP will have [on the party] is not yet known. On one hand, it's possible that the RCP will turn into a caste, that experiments that could not be conducted on a mass scale

34 This refers to the eleventh congress of the Communist party, held in March 1922

35 In 1922 the RCP launched a campaign to seize icons and other valuables from churches, to be sold for famine relief. It was resisted by believers, especially in the countryside

will be carried out on party members. On the other hand, maybe the general spirit of personal freedom will affect the party too. The atmosphere in the party could be refreshed, it could become more cultured, more European. It can not now be forecast which tendency will win out. The party is at a crossroads. Clearly, Lenin is on the side of the latter tendency. But victory of the former can not be ruled out. In that case, all life and culture will drain out of the party and it will become dead wood; only fossilised conservatives, careerists, fraudsters and thieves will remain. [...] I desperately want to get out of chasing the birds. Today it is two months since Mesezhnikov's death. He has been forgotten by everyone. Apart from a very small circle of people, no one remembers him.

[...]

10 July, Monday. [This entry starts with a long account of a meeting of the VTU party cell, at which the accusations against Litvinov by Dvolaitkii (of "Menshevism" etc) were rejected.] [...] On Monday Gerson and his wife came to visit. They went off to plead her case, to find a place for her in the medical faculty. So far not a peep in response. The weather is brilliant. The harvest will be terrific. I could travel to Crimea, to Yalta, for two months. The ruble has stabilised. Prices of foodstuffs are falling every day. Soviet power is solid as never before. The government of the RSFSR [Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic] is without doubt the most stable in the world. In China, civil war and a succession of half a dozen presidents; in Japan, a ministerial crisis every month; in Germany everything is boiling and bubbling, the government

balances between left and right, any day the sparks could light a fire. In France, a conflict is developing between the masses, immiserated by war, and the hooray-patriots led by Poincaré. In England, even in England, Marshal [Sir Henry] Wilson has been killed and in Ireland there is civil war. How long Lloyd George will last, we don't know. In the USA, strikes on the grandest scale. In Poland, shambles and disorder, endless ministerial crises and punch-ups, peasant revolts and strikes. The most stable government in the world – the Soviets. To hell with all the predators, snitches, White guards and scoundrels.

[...]

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Front cover photo: members of the communist party cell at the Moscow Institute of Prosthetics, in front of a banner hailing "the international Red army", 1922. From the Russian State Archive of Cinematic and Photographic Documents