

The Proletarian Class and the Proletarian Party

(Concerning Paragraph One of the Party Rules)

The time when people boldly proclaimed “Russia, one and indivisible,” has gone. Today even a child knows that there is no such thing as Russia “one and indivisible,” that Russia long ago split up into two opposite classes, the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. Today it is no secret to anyone that the struggle between these two classes has become the axis around which our contemporary life revolves.

Nevertheless, until recently it was difficult to notice all this, the reason being that hitherto we saw only individual groups in the arena of the struggle, for it was only individual groups in individual towns and parts of the country that waged the struggle, while the proletariat and the bourgeoisie, as classes, were not easily discernible. But now towns and districts have united, various groups of the proletariat have joined hands, joint strikes and demonstrations have broken out—and before us has unfolded the magnificent picture of the struggle between the two Russias—bourgeois Russia and proletarian Russia. Two big armies have entered the arena—the army of proletarians and the army of the bourgeoisie—and the struggle between these two armies embraces the whole of our social life.



Since an army cannot operate without leaders, and since every army has a vanguard which marches at its head and lights up its path, it is obvious that with these armies there had to appear corresponding groups of leaders, corresponding parties, as they are usually called.

Thus, the picture presents the following scene: on one side there is the bourgeois army, headed by the liberal party; on the other, there is the proletarian army, headed by the Social-Democratic Party; each army, in its class struggle, is led by its own party.^[1]

We have mentioned all this in order to compare the proletarian party with the proletarian class and thus briefly to bring out the general features of the Party.

The foregoing makes it sufficiently clear that the proletarian party, being a fighting group of leaders, must, firstly, be considerably smaller than the proletarian class with respect to membership; secondly, it must be superior to the proletarian class with respect to its understanding and its experience; and, thirdly, it must be a united organisation.

In our opinion, what has been said needs no proof, for it is self-evident that, so long as the capitalist system exists, with its inevitably attendant poverty and backwardness of the masses, the proletariat as a whole cannot rise to the desired level of class consciousness, and, consequently, there must be a group of class-conscious leaders to enlighten the proletarian army in the spirit of socialism, to unite and lead it in its struggle. It is also clear that a party which has set out to lead the *fighting* proletariat must not be a chance

conglomeration of individuals, but a united centralized *organisation*, so that its activities can be directed according to a single plan.

Such, in brief, are the general features of our Party,

Bearing all this in mind, let us pass to the main question: Whom can we call a Party member? Paragraph One of the Party Rules, which is the subject of the present article, deals with precisely this question.

And so, let us examine this question.

Whom, then, can we call a member of the Russian Social-Democratic Labour Party — i.e., what are the duties of a Party member?

Our Party is a Social-Democratic Party. This means that it has its own programme (the immediate and the ultimate aims of the movement), its own tactics (methods of struggle), and its own organisational principle (form of association). *Unity* of programmatic, tactical and organisational views is the basis on which our Party is built. Only the unity of these views can unite the Party members in *one* centralised party. If unity of views collapses, the Party collapses. Consequently, only one who fully accepts the Party's programme, tactics and organisational principle can be called a Party member. Only one who has adequately studied and has fully accepted our Party's programmatic, tactical and organisational views can be in the ranks of our Party and, thereby, in the ranks of the leaders of the proletarian army.

But is it enough for a Party member merely to *accept* the Party's programme, tactics and organisational views? Can a person like that be regarded as a true leader of the proletarian army? Of course not! In the first place, everybody knows that there are plenty of windbags in the world who would readily "accept" the Party's programme, tactics and organisational views, but who are incapable of being anything else than windbags. It would be a desecration of the Party's Holy of Holies to call a windbag like that a Party member (i.e., a leader of the proletarian army)! Moreover, our Party is not a school of philosophy or a religious sect. Is not our Party a *fighting* party? Since it is, is it not self-evident that our Party will not be satisfied with a platonic *acceptance* of its programme, tactics and organisational views, that it will undoubtedly demand that its members should *apply* the views they have accepted? Hence, whoever wants to be a member of our Party cannot rest content with merely accepting our Party's programmatic, tactical and organisational views, but must set about applying these views, putting them into effect.

But what does applying the Party's views mean for a Party member? When can he apply these views? Only when he is fighting, when he is marching with the whole Party at the head of the proletarian army. Can the struggle be waged by solitary, scattered individuals? Certainly not! On the contrary, people first unite, first they organise, and only then do they go into battle. If that is not done, all struggle is fruitless. Clearly, then, the Party members, too, will be able to fight and, consequently, apply the Party's views, only if they unite in a compact *organisation*. It is also clear that the more compact the organisation in which the Party members unite, the better will they be able to fight, and, consequently, the more fully will they apply the Party's programme, tactics and organisational views. It is not for nothing that our Party is called an *organisation of leaders* and not a conglomeration of individuals. And, if our Party is an *organisation of leaders*, it is obvious that only those can be regarded as members of this Party, of this organisation, who work in this organisation and, therefore, deem it their duty to merge their wishes with the wishes of the Party and to act in unison with the Party.

Hence, to be a Party member one must apply the Party's programme, tactics and organisational views; to apply the Party's views one must fight for them; and to fight for these views one must work in a Party organisation, work in unison with the Party. Clearly, to be a Party member one must belong to one of the Party organisations.^[2] Only when we join one of the Party organisations and thus merge our personal interests with the Party's interests can we become Party members, and, consequently, real leaders of the proletarian army.

If our Party is not a conglomeration of individual windbags, but an organisation of leaders which, through its Central Committee, is worthily leading the proletarian army forward, then all that has been said above is self-evident.

The following must also be noted.

Up till now our Party has resembled a hospitable patriarchal family, ready to take in all who sympathise. But now that our Party has become a centralised *organisation*, it has thrown off its patriarchal aspect and has become in all respects like a *fortress*, the gates of which are opened only to those who are worthy. And that is of great importance to us. At a time when the autocracy is trying to corrupt the class consciousness of the proletariat with "trade unionism," nationalism, clericalism and the like, and when, on the other hand, the liberal intelligentsia is persistently striving to kill the political independence of the proletariat and to impose its tutelage upon it—at such a time we must be extremely vigilant and never forget that our Party is a *fortress*, the gates of which are opened only to those who have been tested.

We have ascertained two essential conditions of Party membership (acceptance of the programme and work in a Party organisation). If to these we add a third condition, namely, that a Party member must render the Party financial support, then we shall have all the conditions that give one right to the title of Party member.

Hence, a member of the Russian Social-Democratic Labour Party is one who accepts the programme of this Party, renders the Party financial support, and *works in one of the Party organisations*.

That is how Paragraph One of the Party Rules, drafted by Comrade Lenin, ^[2] was formulated.

The formula, as you see, springs entirely from the view that our Party is a centralised *organisation* and not a *conglomeration* of individuals.

Herein lies the supreme merit of this formula.

But it appears that some comrades reject Lenin's formula on the grounds that it is "narrow" and "inconvenient", and propose their own formula, which, it must be supposed, is neither "narrow" nor "inconvenient". We are referring to Martov's ^[3] formula, which we shall now analyse.

Martov's formula is: "A member of the R.S.D.L.P. is one who accepts its programme, supports the Party financially and renders it regular personal assistance under the direction of one of its organisations." As you see, this formula omits the third essential condition of Party membership, namely, the duty of Party members *to work* in one of the Party *organisations*. It appears that Martov regards this definite and essential condition as superfluous, and in his formula he has substituted for it the nebulous and dubious "personal assistance under the direction of one of the Party organisations." It appears, then, that one can be a member of the Party without belonging to any Party organisation (a fine "party", to be sure!) and without feeling obliged to submit to the Party's will (fine "Party discipline", to be sure!). Well, and how can the Party "regularly" direct persons who do not belong to any Party organisation and, consequently, do not feel absolutely obliged to submit to Party discipline?

That is the question that shatters Martov's formula of Paragraph One of the Party Rules, and it is answered in masterly fashion in Lenin's formula, inasmuch as the latter definitely stipulates that a third and indispensable condition of Party membership is *that one must work in a Party organisation*.

All we have to do is to throw out of Martov's formula the nebulous and meaningless "personal assistance under the direction of one of the Party organisations". With this condition eliminated, there remain only two conditions in Martov's formula (acceptance of the programme and financial support), which, by themselves, are utterly worthless, since every windbag can "accept" the Party programme and support the Party financially—but that does not in the least entitle him to Party membership.

A "convenient" formula, we must say!

We say that real Party members cannot possibly rest content with merely accepting the Party programme, but must without fail strive to apply the programme they have accepted. Martov answers: You are too strict, for it is not so very necessary for a Party member to apply the programme he has accepted, once he is willing to render the Party financial support, and so forth. It looks as though Martov is sorry for certain windbag "Social-Democrats" and does not want to close the Party's doors to them.

We say, further, that inasmuch as the application of the programme entails fighting, and that it is impossible to fight without unity, it is the duty of every prospective Party member to join one of the Party organisations, merge his wishes with those of the Party and, in unison with the Party, lead the fighting proletarian army, i.e., he must organise in the well-formed detachments of a centralised party. To this Martov answers: It is not so very necessary for Party members to organise in well-formed detachments, to unite in organisations; fighting single-handed is good enough.

What, then, is our Party? we ask. A chance conglomeration of individuals, or a united organisation of leaders? And if it is an organisation of leaders, can we regard as a member one who does not belong to it and, consequently, does not consider it his bounden duty to submit to its discipline? Martov answers that the Party is not an organisation, or, rather, that the Party is an unorganised organisation (fine "centralism," to be sure!)

Evidently, in Martov's opinion, our Party is not a centralised organisation, but a conglomeration of local organisations and individual "Social-Democrats" who have accepted our Party programme, etc. But if our Party is not a centralised organisation it will not be a fortress, the gates of which can be opened only for those who have been tested. And, indeed, to Martov, as is evident from his formula, the Party is not a fortress but a banquet, which every sympathiser can freely attend. A little knowledge, an equal amount of sympathy, a little financial support and there you are — you have full right to count as a Party member. Don't listen — cries Martov to cheer up the frightened "Party members" — don't listen to those people who maintain that a Party member must belong to one of the Party organisations and thus subordinate his wishes to the wishes of the Party. In the first place, it is hard for a man to accept these conditions; it is no joke to subordinate one's wishes to those of the Party! And, secondly, as I have already pointed out in my explanation, the opinion of those people is mistaken. And so, gentlemen, you are welcome to ...the banquet!

It looks as though Martov is sorry for certain professors and high-school students who are loth to subordinate their wishes to the wishes of the Party, and so he is forcing a breach in our Party fortress through which these estimable gentlemen may smuggle into our Party. He is opening the door to opportunism, and this at a time when thousands of enemies are assailing the class consciousness of the proletariat!

But that is not all. The point is that Martov's dubious formula makes it possible for opportunism to arise in our Party from another side.

Martov's formula, as we know, refers only to the acceptance of the programme; about tactics and organisation it contains not a word; and yet, unity of organisational and tactical views is no less essential for Party unity than unity of programmatic views. We may be told that nothing is said about this even in Comrade Lenin's formula. True, but there is no need to say anything about it in Comrade Lenin's formula. Is it not self-evident that one who works in a Party organisation and, consequently, fights in unison with the Party and submits to Party discipline, cannot pursue tactics and organisational principles other than the Party's tactics and the Party's organisational principles? But what would you say of a "Party member" who has accepted the Party programme, but does not belong to any Party organisation? What guarantee is there that such a "member's" tactics and organisational views will be those of the Party and not some other? That is what Martov's formula fails to explain! As a result of Martov's formula we would have a queer "party," whose "members" subscribe to the same programme (and that is questionable!), but differ in their tactical and organisational views! What ideal variety! In what way will our Party differ from a banquet?

There is just one question we should like to ask: What are we to do with the ideological and practical centralism that was handed down to us by the Second Party Congress and which is radically contradicted by Martov's formula? Throw it overboard? If it comes to making a choice, it will undoubtedly be more correct to throw Martov's formula overboard.

Such is the absurd formula Martov presents to us in opposition to Comrade Lenin's formula!

We are of the opinion that the decision of the Second Party Congress, which adopted Martov's formula, was the result of thoughtlessness, and we hope that the Third Party Congress will not fail to rectify the blunder of the Second Congress and adopt Comrade Lenin's formula.

We shall briefly recapitulate: The proletarian army entered the arena of the struggle. Since every army must have a vanguard, this army also had to have such a vanguard. Hence the appearance of a group of proletarian leaders — the Russian Social-Democratic Labour Party. As the vanguard of a definite army, this Party must, firstly, be armed with its own programme, tactics and organisational principle; and, secondly, it must be a united organisation. To the question—who can be called a member of the Russian Social-Democratic Labour Party? — this Party can have only one answer: one who accepts the Party programme, supports the Party financially and works in one of the Party organisations.

It is this obvious truth that Comrade Lenin has expressed in his splendid formula.

Proletariatis Brdzola
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Notes :

- [1] We do not mention the other parties in Russia, because there is no need to deal with them in examining the questions under discussion.
- [2] Just as every complex organism is made up of an incalculable number of extremely simple organisms, so our Party, being a complex and general organisation, is made up of numerous district and local bodies called Party organisations, provided they have been endorsed by the Party congress or the Central Committee. As you see, not only committees are called Party organisations. To direct the activities of these organisations according to a single plan there is a Central Committee, through which these local Party organisations constitute one large centralised organisation.
- [3] Lenin is the outstanding theoretician and practical leader of revolutionary Social-Democracy.
- [4] Martov is one of the editors of *Iskra*.