



**ROSA
LUXEMBURG
STIFTUNG**

**Rosa Luxemburg:
The Breakdown of Unity
in the RSDLP**

EDITED AND ANNOTATED
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Foreword

“We Cannot Go along with the Leninists”, or: How Lenin “Defeated” Rosa Luxemburg

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Translation: Ben Lewis

Whenever disagreements between Lenin and Rosa Luxemburg are even hinted at, a common response will be the hysterical cry: “But Lenin called Rosa Luxemburg an eagle!” This objection, which aims at cutting off any discussion of the issue at once, is by no means only raised by the Lenin guardians of all possible stripes and ranks. It can also be heard by those far more removed from his ideas. What this episode reveals (quite apart from a falsification of the original Lenin quote, as we shall see) is little more than the seemingly irreversible triumph of secondary literature over primary sources. For while it is true that Lenin referred to Luxemburg as an “eagle”, he did not consider the Polish woman to be on an equal footing with him, but rather as flying over the “hens ... in the backyard of the working-class movement, among the dung heaps”.

The full quote reads as follows:

“Paul Levi now wants to get into the good graces of the bourgeoisie — and, *consequently*, of its agents, the Second and the Two-and-a-Half Internationals — by republishing those very writings of Rosa Luxemburg in which she was wrong.¹ We shall reply to this by quoting two lines from a good old Russian fable: ‘Eagles may at times fly lower than hens, but hens can never rise to the height of eagles.’ **Rosa Luxemburg was mistaken** on the question of the independence of Poland; she was mistaken in 1903 in her appraisal of Menshevism; she **was mistaken** on the theory of the accumulation of capital; she **was mistaken** in July 1914, when, together with Plekhanov, Vandervelde, Kautsky and others, she advocated unity between the Bolsheviks and Mensheviks; she was mistaken in

what she wrote in prison in 1918 (she corrected most of these mistakes at the end of 1918 and the beginning of 1919 after she was released).² But in spite of her mistakes, for us she was — and remains — an eagle. And not only will Communists all over the world cherish her memory, but her biography and her *complete* works (the publication of which the German Communists are inordinately delaying, which can only be partly excused by the tremendous losses they are suffering in their severe struggle) will serve as useful manuals for training many generations of Communists all over the world. ‘**German Social-Democracy has been a stinking corpse since August 4 1914**’ — this statement will make Rosa Luxemburg’s name go down in the history of the international working-class movement. And, of course, **in the backyard of the working-class movement, among the dung heaps**, hens like Paul Levi, Scheidemann, Kautsky and their whole mob will cackle over the mistakes committed by this great Communist. To each their own.”³

For Lenin, then, the only one who was marching through history not in the backyard, but “in front of the house” and on the highway, was he himself. Rosa Luxemburg had no business there at all.

What caused this man even in 1922 — three years after Luxemburg’s murder — to write a recollection of her life that claimed she was wrong on *five* separate occasions? Moreover, why, despite apparently doing nothing right, did she fly above the hens in the dung heaps?

Lenin’s irritating approach was incidentally not a one-off *faux pas*, which can of course always happen in the heat of the moment. No, eight years before this, something that is difficult or even impossible to comprehend occurred. Why in February–March 1914 did Lenin, who did not speak Polish, suddenly write an extensive response to Luxemburg’s article “The National Question and Autonomy”,⁴ which had been written in her native Polish in 1908–9 and so

1 This refers to the Rosa Luxemburg’s “Fragment” on the Russian Revolution, which she wrote in prison in Breslau during September and October 1918. Levi published it at the beginning of 1922; Rosa Luxemburg, *On the Russian Revolution*, New York, 1940).

2 This is a barefaced lie [JS].

3 V.I. Lenin “Notes of a Publicist”, *Lenin Collected Works*, Vol. 33, pp. 210–211. [Translation slightly modified — BL]. My emphases [JS].

4 This text was banned in the Eastern Bloc. It was first translated into German and published by Holger Politt in 2012; Rosa Luxemburg, *Nationalitätenfrage und Autonomie*, Berlin 2012; third, corrected edition 2018.

was already over five years old? In Lenin's *Collected Works*, this rebuke of Luxemburg entitled "The Right of Nations to Self-Determination"⁵ takes up more than 60 pages. What was all that about? Nor is this the end of the matter. What was Lenin — the materialist *per se* — trying to achieve by accusing Luxemburg of "an extremely 'one-sided' materialism"?⁶

At first sight, all this seems completely incomprehensible, especially since Lenin wrote his polemic against Luxemburg between February and March 1914. This was a time when — apart from in the Balkans, which had only just been liberated from the Ottoman Empire — the national question played only a marginal role. This did not change until 28 June 1914, when Serbian terrorists assassinated the Austrian Crown Prince and his wife in Sarajevo, which was under Austrian control. The governments in Vienna and Berlin used this "9/11 moment" as a pretext to unleash World War I. Although new nation-states came into being after this conflict, the peoples living in them had by no means bled for their status as nation-states, but had merely allowed themselves to be used in the interests of the Great Powers.

But let us return to the differences between Lenin and Rosa Luxemburg. In the months leading up to World War I, the two revolutionaries were not fighting over the national question, but something different altogether. What their struggle really entailed can be seen in Lenin's third charge against her: "[...] she was mistaken in July 1914, when, together with Plekhanov, Vandervelde, Kautsky and others, she advocated unity between the Bolsheviks and Mensheviks". Aside from the claim that Luxemburg was mistaken, Lenin is correct here. However, he is wrong to say that this dispute did not break out until July 1914. It had raged since 1906 and escalated between 1910 and 1913.

Amidst this dispute, Luxemburg officially and publicly broke with Lenin. However, she announced this break in Polish and it therefore went unnoticed in Western Europe. Nevertheless, even if the news of this breach had arrived there, it would have interested no one,

because the Left in Western Europe had long been nothing but annoyed by the quarrels in Russian Social Democracy, which since 1906 had also included Luxemburg's party, the Social Democracy of the Kingdom of Poland and Lithuania (SDKPiL).⁷ The RSDLP was viewed as a group of childish Russians who were unable to achieve anything beyond accusing each other of incompetence and treason.⁸

Before 1917, Lenin was certainly no stranger in Western Europe either. Yet unlike Trotsky, for instance, he was not exactly viewed as a magnet for expressions of sympathy, but as somebody who, when it came to disagreements with others, would "make it personal". He would resort to insults and rant to cover up his lack of thought. With the possible exception of Clara Zetkin, the Secretary of the International Socialist Women's Movement, those who knew him personally did not find much, if anything at all, of interest in him.

This unsigned Polish text by Rosa Luxemburg from July 1912,⁹ now published in English for the first time, was only the second article in which the SDKPiL publicly confronted the Bolsheviks in general and Lenin in particular. For the most part, the leaders of the SDKPiL kept a low profile when it came to the Bolsheviks because they considered Lenin's group to be natural, if unpredictable, allies.¹⁰ The only other occasion was in 1904, when a rather appalled Luxemburg attempted to expose in public the absurdity of Lenin's ideas regarding the omnipotence of a party leadership over its own supporters:

But here is the "ego" of the Russian revolutionary again! Pirouetting on its head, it once more proclaims itself to be the all-powerful director of history — this time with the title of His Excellency the Central Committee of the Social Democratic Party of Russia. The nimble acrobat fails to see that the only "subject" which today merits the

5 V.I. Lenin, "The Right of Nations to Self-Determination", *Collected Works*, Vol. 20, Moscow, 1972, pp. 393–454. The text was written in February–March 1914 and published in April–June in the same year.

6 *Ibid.*, p. 432.

7 The Social Democracy of the Kingdom of Poland and Lithuania (SDKPiL) was an organization founded in Zurich in 1893 by Rosa Luxemburg, Julian Marchlewski and Adolf Warski under the name The Social Democracy of Poland. It was renamed SDKPiL in 1900.

8 For an extensive discussion of how the disputes in Russian Social Democracy were viewed in Western Europe, see Dietrich Geyer, *Kautskys Russisches Dossier. Deutsche Sozialdemokraten als Treuhänder des russischen Parteivermögens 1910 bis 1915* (Quellen und Studien zur Sozialgeschichte, Volume 2) Frankfurt am Main — New York 1981.

9 The original was written anonymously; see "Rozbicie jedności w RSDAP" ("The Breakdown of Unity in the RSDLP") in: *Czerwony Sztandar [The Red Flag]*, No. 188, July 1912, p. 2 f., <https://polona.pl/item/czerwony-sztandar-organ-socjaldemokracji-krolestwa-polskiego-ilitwy-r-10-nr-188-w,Njk3Njl1MzU/1/#info:metadata>. More than 30 years ago, Felix Tych attributed this article to Rosa Luxemburg, but with the exception of Holger Pollitt (cf. Holger Pollitt (ed. and trans.), "Unter Blitz und Donner: Zusammenstoß zweier Zeitalter", in: *Rosa-Luxemburg, Arbeiterrevolution 1905/06. Polnische Texte*, Berlin 2015, p. 27, footnote 30), this completely passed by scholarly research. See Felix Tych, "Ein unveröffentlichtes Manuskript von Rosa Luxemburg zur Lage in der russischen Sozialdemokratie", in: *Internationale wissenschaftliche Korrespondenz zur Geschichte der deutschen Arbeiterbewegung (IWK)*, 1991, Vol. 3, p. 341, footnote 10. In the footnote, Tych states that he was preparing a German translation of the text, but he never published it.

10 All the other — often intensive — disputes took place behind closed doors.

role of director is the collective “ego” of the working class. The working class demands the right to make its mistakes and learn the dialectic of history. And finally, between us, let us speak the truth. Historically, the errors committed by a truly revolutionary movement are infinitely more fruitful than the infallibility of the cleverest Central Committee.¹¹

Lenin ought to have replied to this unsigned article from July 1912. After all, it charges that “mindless Leninism” is “by its nature a policy of perpetual splits”. What is more: “Leninism, in its narrowness and with its sectarian organizational views, knows no other means of combating opportunism than to expel from the party anyone who disagrees”. It concludes: “We cannot go along with the Leninists”.¹²

Additionally, the anonymous author distinguishes between Leninism and a broad revolutionary Bolshevism that emerged from it. This must have not exactly enthused Lenin, not least because Luxemburg declared herself to be still willing to cooperate with the latter trend. She explained the difference between the two Bolshevisms as follows: “Bolshevism gradually lost its specific Leninist features and increasingly approximated the West European type of revolutionary Social Democracy.”

Lenin, who of course knew that this was written by Rosa Luxemburg and that his long-time opponent Leo Jogiches was standing in the background, replied in his own particular way — namely not at all. Or at least not publicly. Instead, he resorted to intrigue, a political method with which he was more than familiar. **In the field of politics, he was a thoroughbred who this female thinker — both to her detriment and to her honour — did not view as particularly brilliant.**

Since the publication of Rosa Luxemburg’s article, Lenin concentrated on the disputes within the

SDKPiL, and Jogiches and Luxemburg had a hard time fending off Lenin’s intrigues. In 1913, Luxemburg wrote the following to the editors of the *Social-Demokrat* in Copenhagen:

The “safe source” from whom the editors of the *Social-Demokrat* received their information about relations in the Polish party is Lenin, the representative of the Russian Social Democratic faction. This faction, which for years has been systematically splitting the workers’ party in Russia itself and been leading a ruthless factional struggle, which has formed a fictitious “Central Committee” that is recognised by nobody, which stubbornly thwarts all efforts at unity and in so doing has brought the Russian party movement to the brink of ruin — this faction is a most unreliable and unqualified source of information on relations in the Polish party. Lenin’s faction and its representatives do not understand a word of Polish and therefore cannot say anything about internal relations in the party on the basis of their own knowledge. But they are systematically seeking to bring about the same split in the Polish Social Democracy that is their specialty in the Russian party. They therefore blindly support the troublemakers and the disorganizations that have broken off from the Polish Social Democracy in order to cause as many difficulties for this party as possible. They do so out of revenge for the fact that the Polish Social Democracy is doing its best to combat its splitting policy in Russia. In light of this, we will not tolerate Russian or any other foreign organisations being drawn on as authoritative sources of information about relations in the Polish party.¹³

Unlike Lenin, Rosa Luxemburg enjoyed great authority in the European workers’ movement. Although she was not to everyone’s liking, she was invulnerable, at least while she was still alive. So in order to discredit her at least in the Russian movement, if not elsewhere, Lenin looked for a replacement battlefield. He was assisted in this by Jakub Hanecki,¹⁴ who had been a member of the main executive committee of the SDKPiL until its break with Rosa Luxemburg’s alter ego Leo Jogiches in 1909, and who had

11 <https://www.marxists.org/archive/luxemburg/1904/questions-rsd/ch02.htm>. Only in 1918 did she resume criticizing the Bolsheviks in public. See Rosa Luxemburg: “Nicht nach Schema F”, in Paul Levi, *Ohne einen Tropfen Lakaienblut Schriften, Reden, Briefe, Vol. I/1: Spartakus*, Berlin 2018, pp. 445–449; “Die Revolution in Rußland” (GW, Vol. 4, pp. 242–245); “Russische Probleme” (*ibid.*, pp. 255 ff.); “Der alte Maulwurf” (*ibid.*, pp. 258–264); “Zwei Osterbotschaften” (*ibid.*, pp. 265–269); “Brennende Zeitfragen” (*ibid.*, pp. 275–290); “Die geschichtliche Verantwortung” (*ibid.*, S. 374–379); “Der Katastrophe entgegen” (*ibid.*, pp. 380–384); “Die russische Tragödie” (*ibid.*, pp. 385–392). Many texts can also be found in Annelies Laschitzka (ed.), *Rosa Luxemburg und die Freiheit der Andersdenkenden*, Berlin 1990, pp. 33–109.

12 All citations are from the article below.

13 Rosa Luxemburg an die Redaktion des *Social-Demokraten*, October 20 1913”, in Luxemburg, *Gesammelte Briefe*, Vol. 6, Berlin 1993, p. 193.

14 Jakub Hanecki (actually Jakub Fürstenberg, 1879–1937) was a member of the executive board of the SDKPiL between 1903 and 1909 and then became a leading Bolshevik. While living in Scandinavia during World War I, he engaged in — to put it mildly — risky trade deals that subsidized both Lenin and the Polish Social Democrats that had joined the Bolsheviks. He was murdered as an alleged fascist along with 2,000 other Polish communists as part of the Stalinist Bolshevik leadership’s persecution of Communists.

risen through the ranks of Polish Social Democracy to become, alongside Karl Radek,¹⁵ Lenin's closest ally in 1913. It was Hanecki who acquainted Lenin with Luxemburg's writings in Polish.¹⁶ Lenin's text "On the Right of Self-Determination of Nations" was ultimately nothing more than a "cover-up" job for his splitting policy.

Lenin, by the way, was not innovative at all in this work. He merely repeated positions advocated by Marx and Engels 60 years earlier. By contrast, in 1922, three years after Rosa Luxemburg's death, Lenin became quite enterprising and joined the list of male authors (other genders have probably signed up since) who hide behind Rosa Luxemburg quotes

that they themselves made up:¹⁷ "'German Social-Democracy has been a stinking corpse since 4 August 1914' — this statement will make Rosa Luxemburg's name go down in the history of the international working-class movement."

Although it is obvious that a Polish intellectual would never allow herself to come across in such a "Russian" way, unfortunately we must acknowledge that Lenin's forgery was a successful one. Rosa Luxemburg has in fact gone down in history with this mindless nonsense, and on a global scale at that. Poor Rosa.

Jörn Schütrumpf

15 Karl Radek (actually Sobelsohn, 1885–1939) was expelled from the SDKPiL in 1911 and then became a leading Bolshevik. He became the Bolsheviks' Germany specialist until he was ousted in 1924. From 1920, he oversaw the Communist Party of Germany's subordination to the Bolsheviks, as well as the imposition of Lenin's central method of defaming opponents as a part of left-wing politics on an international scale. During the Second Moscow Show Trial of 1937, he was sentenced to ten years' imprisonment and murdered on 19 May 1939 on Stalin's orders.

16 Cf. Holger Politt, "Zur vorliegenden Ausgabe" in Rosa Luxemburg, *Nationalitätenfrage und Autonomie*, p. 34.

17 "Classics" among the fake Rosa Luxemburg quotes are: "Those who do not move do not feel their chains" and "Talking is our privilege. If there is a problem we can't solve by talking, then there's no point to anything." Recently, we have witnessed a boom in this particular banality: "It is not only those without anything to eat who are alienated and degraded, but also those who do not share in the great goods of humanity."

The Breakdown of Unity in the RSDLP

Rosa Luxemburg

Translation: Maciej Zurowski

I.

As our comrades will be aware, the organizational unity of the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party has been shattered by the Leninists from one side and by the liquidators from the other.¹⁸ Lenin, the former leader of Bolshevism,¹⁹ has so far been unable to break free from the “idea” that a small circle must rule over the party.

Even before the revolution began,²⁰ he had destroyed the unity of the party in order to advance his organizational ideas. In his mind, the Central Committee is everything and the actual party only its appendage. His vision of the party is that of a soulless mass, which moves mechanically at the command of a leader, like an army on parade or a choir singing to the baton of the conductor. As early as 1904, comrade Rosa Luxemburg found herself compelled to castigate²¹ this Leninist anti-Marxist, purely bourgeois conception of a political party, according to which the leader is everything and the masses nothing, in the preeminent organ of the Marxist International, *Die Neue Zeit*. That conception was vividly reminiscent of the organizational nonsense of the PPS²² at the time, and it resembles that of the “Faction” today.²³ It is deeply contrary to the organizational ideas of the SDKPiL and of the entire Workers’ International.

The revolution, which compelled the RSDLP²⁴ to unite at its Stockholm party congress of 1906, ignored these platitudinous “ideas” of Lenin’s, which he had borrowed from conspiratorial parties and which are to a Social Democratic party like water is to fire, and got on with the agenda. On tactical questions, our

SDKPiL delegates always fought as energetically as possible at every All-Russia Party Conference, as well as at the Stockholm [1906] and London [1907] party congresses, against the Leninist notions of a “technical preparation” of the revolution, of “expropriations”²⁵ and other such lovely “ideas” which we also find in the “Faction” and which we have mercilessly eradicated from our own ranks. No less vigorously and resolutely did our representatives on the Central Committee and in the central organ combat Lenin’s efforts to drag the party down to the level of his faction and thus eliminate it organizationally.

But Bolshevism, led for a long time by Lenin, was also an expression of revolutionary aspirations in the RSDLP. In terms of their attitudes towards the bourgeois classes, the Tsarist government and the tasks of the revolution, the Lenin-led Bolsheviks upheld the political slogans of revolutionary Social Democracy, even if they justified them in a wooden and superficial manner.²⁶ In the struggle against the opportunism of the Mensheviks, who placed their hopes in the liberals and muted their own revolutionary slogans, representatives of the SDKPiL and the Bolsheviks found themselves on a common political line and defended it with similar slogans. In the organizational realm, the representatives of the SDKPiL combatted the Bolsheviks’ factionalist and sectarian aspirations, but stood shoulder to shoulder with them in the struggle against opportunism and for the revolutionary character of all-Russian Social Democracy.

After all the experiences with revolution and counter-revolution, under the impression of the growth of a movement in the working masses, and finally under

18 Liquidators: Before the Russian revolution of 1905–6, socialist and Social Democratic forces in Russia could only fight against Tsarism illegally. After the Tsar had made concessions towards parliamentarism in October 1905, representatives of Menshevik groups in the RSDLP demanded from 1908 onwards that the party switch to legal work and liquidate its illegal structures. The Bolsheviks, the SDKPiL and the foreign organization of the Mensheviks rejected this liquidationism. — I am grateful to Vladislav Hedeler for the relevant information.

19 The so-called majority, the Bolsheviks, had by this time disintegrated into several groups, the majority of which were not loyal to Lenin. In 1912, Lenin was in the minority in his “majority” and was no longer considered the leader by the majority of his “majority”.

20 This refers to the Russian Revolution of 1905–6, which had one of its main settings in the Russian-occupied part of Poland, especially in the industrial centres of Lodz, Warsaw and Białystok.

21 Rosa Luxemburg is referring to herself here — see Rosa Luxemburg, *Organizational Questions of the Russian Social Democracy [Leninism or Marxism?]* (1904), available from the Marxist Internet Archive at <https://www.marxists.org/archive/luxemburg/1904/questions-rsd/ch01.htm>

22 PPS: Polish Socialist Party, founded in Paris in November 1892. In opposition to the nationalist PPS, Leo Jogiches, Rosa Luxemburg, Julian Marchlewski and Adolf Warski founded the Social Democracy of the Kingdom of Poland in 1893.

23 “Faction”: this refers to the right wing of the PPS, which under the leadership of Józef Piłsudski called itself Polish Socialist Party — Revolutionary Faction.

24 RSDLP: Russian Social Democratic Labour Party, founded in Minsk in 1898, split into Bolsheviks and Mensheviks and into several groups that were neither one nor the other at the Second Party Congress in London in 1903. The reunification of Bolsheviks and Mensheviks and all the others took place at the Fourth Party Congress in Stockholm. The Latvian Social Democracy, the General Jewish Labour League (Bund) and the SDKPiL joined the RSDLP as independent organizations at this congress.

25 Expropriations: ambushes on cash transports etc.

26 Internally, Rosa Luxemburg spoke of a “Tatar Marxism” — see Rosa Luxemburg to Leo Jogiches, 10 August 1919 in Stephen Eric Bronner (ed) 1978, *The Letters of Rosa Luxemburg, Boulder, Colorado*: Westwood Press, p. 127.

the sheer impact of the restoration of party unity — in which the Bolsheviks, under pressure from our representatives in the central institutions of the party were increasingly forced to co-operate with the Mensheviks and factionless comrades — Bolshevism gradually lost its specific Leninist features and increasingly approximated the West European type of revolutionary Social Democracy. All that remained of Leninism proper was its petite-bourgeois conception of the role of the peasantry in the revolution. From an organizational point of view, all that was left was a small circle around Lenin himself, as well as *Vperyod*,²⁷ a group that had grown out of the “Otsovists”²⁸ and “Ultimatists”²⁹ and that was squabbling with Lenin — all representatives of the same mechanical understanding of revolution that is a characteristic feature of Leninism itself. In the final analysis, “Vperyodism” is merely a variety of Leninism: it emerged in 1909 from the Otsovist opposition, which demanded that the Social Democratic parliamentary group give up its seats and withdraw from the Duma since this reactionary Duma could supposedly not serve the cause of the revolution — it is difficult not to notice this tendency’s affinity with anarchism.

The Bolsheviks’ turn towards an internationally oriented revolutionary Social Democracy was demonstrated in a particularly vivid fashion at the last plenary session of the Central Committee³⁰ in January 1910, when the majority of Bolsheviks objected to Lenin’s sectarian and factionalist policy, deciding against him to liquidate their faction, break radically with their leader’s old sectarian and factionalist policy, and embark on the road to organizational unity with the rest of the party.³¹

Experience had convinced the overwhelming majority of Bolsheviks that the Leninist policy of organizational withdrawal into a narrow circle was extremely conducive to opportunism and detrimental to the revolutionary wing of Social Democracy: instead of attaining commanding influence over the whole party and rally it behind them, the Bolsheviks erect a factional wall that cuts them off from the party, thus condemning themselves to impotence.

Lenin’s organizational views, which had been swept from the face of Russian Social Democracy by the revolution and by the restoration of party unity, could only thrive again in an atmosphere of party disintegration, generated by the counterrevolution in general and by the liquidators in the ranks of the party in particular. Leninism, in its narrowness and with its sectarian organizational views, knows no other means of combating opportunism than to expel from the party anyone who disagrees. This is why Leninism is by its nature a policy of perpetual splits.

Lenin also resorted to this policy when the machinations of the liquidators prevented the Central Committee from meeting for a year and a half, thus also depriving the party of the ability to fend off moves aimed at a split. When radical elements of the party, i.e. the representatives of the SDKPiL and anti-factionalist Bolsheviks, founded an Organizing Committee in June [1911] together with the Leninists in order to convene a general party conference in line with the decisions of the Central Committee’s plenary session, the Leninists decided to take advantage of this situation by means of minor rapprochement and deception manoeuvres vis-à-vis the Organizing Committee. Their idea was to regroup themselves once again into a faction and impose the will of this faction on the party, even at the cost of a split.

Behind the back of the party as a whole, they sent some of their Russian supporters abroad as delegates of partly fictitious organizations at the beginning of this year [1912]. Together with them, they organized a meeting that they grandiloquently proclaimed as the “General Conference” of the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party.³² They had excluded SDKPiL representatives from participating in the organization of the conference by means of common fraud beforehand. This way, they could organize it unhindered and unscrupulously in line with their factional interests, secure the majority for themselves, etc. Having successfully precluded the participation of other party groups, the Leninists, in order to save face, still mustered enough humour to invite — virtually on the eve of their conference — a number of representatives from other groups and tendencies, chosen at whim. They asked, for example, our Central Executive

27 Вперед, *Vperyod*: a group within the Bolsheviks formed by Alexander Bogdanov to contest Lenin’s claim to leadership.

28 Otsovists: the Russian word *otzyvat* means “to recall”. The supporters of this tendency demanded the recall of the Social Democratic deputies from the Duma.

29 Ultimatists: ultra-left Otsovists who were expelled from the Bolsheviks in 1909.

30 The Central Committee of the RSDLP was the highest organ of the party between congresses, consisting of 15 members.

31 The January–February plenary session of the RSDLP Central Committee took place in Paris from 15 January to 7 February 1910. The SDKPiL was represented by Leo Jogiches and Adolf Warski. Under their influence and that of the Bolsheviks, who had turned away from Lenin’s factionalist policy — Feliks Tych spoke of the “‘conciliatory’ line of the Bolsheviks” (see Feliks Tychs, *Ein unveröffentlichtes Manuskript*, p. 344, footnote 3) — it had been decided against Lenin and his group to dissolve the factions and discontinue the factional press organs. See *ibid.* Since the Mensheviks did not abide by this decision, Lenin also continued and intensified his factional activity.

32 At the Prague Conference (18–30 January 1912), Lenin’s tendency within the Bolsheviks split from the RSDLP and formed an independent party, the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party (Bolshevik).

to send SDKPiL representatives. In line with the *ius caducum*,³³ two delegates were “generously” permitted, despite the fact that our organization had always sent five delegates to all other All-Russia Party Conferences, and rightfully so. It is unclear why the Leninists assumed that we were supporters of Stolypin’s³⁴ policy, who had recently referred to Poles as “infants” and reduced the number of delegates from the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth from 36 to 12.

Needless to say, none of the Russian comrades’ various tendencies sent delegates to this ridiculous Leninist charade, and the same was true of the SDKPiL, the Latvian Social Democrats, and the Bund.³⁵ But the Leninists, always more bellicose than wise, were not deterred by their splendid isolation. Pleased to be in their own little circle at last, they elected their own Central Committee as well as the editorial board of their journal and, to add to the comedy of the situation, announced that their decisions and their institutions were binding on the party as a whole, even on those who had had nothing to do with this theatre.

These solemn proclamations might be met with hearty laughter, were this not at the same time so sad for the Leninists themselves, who after all belong politically to the revolutionary part of the party, yet so thoughtlessly destroy the left wing of Russian Social Democracy.

II.

The open liquidators at the opposite end of the party, alongside the remnants of the “Menshevik” faction grouped around the journal *Golos Sotsial-Demokrata*³⁶ and supported by the small Pravda group from abroad,³⁷ and the thoroughly opportunist Bund decided together with the Central Committee of the Latvian Social Democracy to convene a conference as well. In doing so, they were riding roughshod over the fundamental decisions of the party and, for their part, advancing the split no less blatantly than the Leninists.

This year in January, on the initiative of the Latvian Social Democrats, a meeting was held between

Central Committee representatives of the Latvian Social Democracy and the Bund respectively and a representative of the Caucasian District Committee. The objective was to form an Organizing Committee that would convene an All-Russia Party Conference. At the outset, when there was still a legitimate hope that it might be possible to steer this conference in an anti-liquidationist direction as well as attract the Latvian Central Committee, perhaps even organizations of the Leninist tendency from Russia itself, our Central Executive considered itself duty-bound to try to restore the unity of the RSDLP in this way and decided to take part in the conference. However, the liquidationist-opportunist current proved too strong at this conference.

The question of convening a party conference had been addressed by the Central Committee in its last plenary session in January 1910 and a number of decisions had been taken unanimously in this regard. It was precisely these decisions that were now trampled on by the conference majority without a second thought.

After all, the last plenary session of the Central Committee had unanimously — i.e. including the votes of the Bundists — rejected the policy of the liquidators (and equally Otsovisim) as a “symptom of bourgeois influences in the proletariat”. For the next general party conference, the plenary session had decided — also unanimously — to admit, in addition to delegates from illegal parties, only those Social Democratic activists from the legal movement prepared to join with the illegal party and work under its leadership. Thus, the plenary session of the Central Committee unanimously excluded from participation in the party conference all open liquidators, who consider the mere existence of the illegal RSDLP to be unnecessary or even harmful. It was decided to give Social Democratic representatives working exclusively in the legal movement only an advisory vote at the conference. It would then be up to the conference itself to decide whether they would be conceded a decisional vote.

Meanwhile, at the meeting of the four organizations, members of the Bund presented a motion that would not only allow open liquidators to participate in the

33 *Ius caducum* (Latin *caducus*: rail, fleeting, perishable, transitory) — an inheritance without heirs. A legal institution derived from Roman law, the term refers to the restriction of inheritance to a certain group of persons and to testamentary restrictions. In the absence of entitled persons or a will, the inheritance falls to the sovereign. In medieval Poland, the *caducum*, at first referred to as inheritance, fell to the ruler.

34 Pyotr Arkadyevich Stolypin (1862–1911) — Russian prime minister from 1906 until his assassination.

35 Bund: The General Jewish Labour League in Lithuania and Poland, usually referred to as “Bund”, was a Jewish workers’ party active in several East European countries from 1897 to 1935. Its aim was the legal recognition of Jews in Russia as a distinct nation with minority status. The Bund was committed to Marxism, anti-clericalism, and non-Zionism, while rejecting Lenin’s policies. The Bund was declared illegal in the Soviet Union in late 1922; leading members were murdered; others later fell victim to the persecution of socialists and Communists organized by Stalin’s Bolshevik leadership.

36 Голос социал-демократа, *Golos Sotsial-Demokrata* (“Voice of the Social Democrat”): Menshevik paper published in Paris from 1908 to 1911.

37 Правда, *Pravda* (“The Truth”): the paper of Trotsky, who never joined a group until 1917. He published *Pravda* in Vienna from 1908 to 1912.

party conference, but even grant them a decisional vote from the outset. When a representative of our Central Executive³⁸ pointed out that the unanimous decisions of the plenary session of the Central Committee were being ignored and tabled a motion to oblige the conference to stick to these decisions, the majority of the conference — at the request of Bundists — refused to vote and proceeded to the agenda. It became clear that the four parties present at the meeting wanted to call a joint party conference together with the opportunists and liquidators, i.e., they wanted to deliver the party to its most dangerous enemies. Thereupon, the representative of the Central Executive of our party left the conference.

The Bundists, who were taking the lead in this divisive effort by the liquidators, were not content with the fact that the meeting had arbitrarily broken the unanimous and fundamental party decisions regarding the future conference. They went even further. In the liquidationist Organizing Committee, they put forward a plan to win the PPS left to the All-Russia Party Conference by offering it a role in the consultations on the fourth State Duma election. In other words: having disregarded the binding decisions of the Central Committee of the party, they decided that the RSDLP would trample on the organizational agreement with the SDKPiL. This agreement, reached at the Unity Congress of Stockholm in 1906 and still in force today, stipulates that the party as a whole, and all the more so its constituent parts, have no right to enter into any relations with any Polish party without the consent of the SDKPiL.

III.

We are thus facing a formal and complete split in the RSDLP. The Leninists exclude from the party whoever they want to exclude, for the sake of their own power and at their whim. The others, in their own factional interest of extreme opportunism and liquidationism, turn the unanimous decisions of the party on its head, do not give a damn about organizational agreements and destroy party unity unscrupulously and without a second thought.

In light of this situation, what should be the position of the SDKPiL?

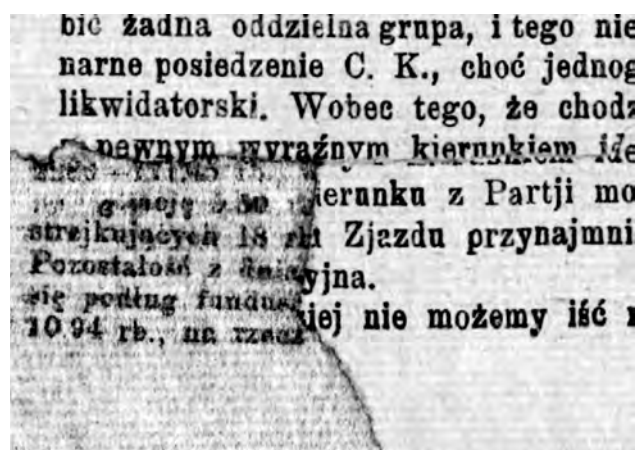
This question is answered in a resolution of our Sixth Party Congress, which defines our position in the RSDLP. The resolution reads:

The party congress believes that the next tasks of our organization within the party are, and will continue to be:

- 1) efforts to ensure that the party as a whole stands on the ground of revolutionary Social Democracy.
- 2) the fight against all factional endeavours in so far as they aim to undermine the unity of the party and joint efforts to maintain this unity.

Our recent national conference took the same position, highlighting the necessity for our representatives to participate in the central institutions of the RSDLP “in order to safeguard the unity of the party, which faces a serious danger posed by the intensified struggle between the Russian factions, and to help steer the general party policy in the direction of revolutionary Marxism, which without the participation of revolutionary Social Democratic groups would be under threat from a wave of opportunism sweeping the ranks of certain sections of Russian comrades”.

Our position, defined by the Sixth Congress and the only one worthy of revolutionary Social Democracy, is therefore clear: obliged to stand up against factional aspirations and to uphold party unity, we cannot go along with the Leninists, who are wrecking this unity: by the principle of the *ius caducum* and without the involvement of the party as a whole, they exclude from the party all elements they consider undesirable. We, too, believe that at least the open liquidators should be expelled from the party. But no individual group has the right to do this on its own — not even the last plenary session of the Central Committee did that, despite the fact it unanimously condemned the liquidationist tendency. Because this is a political struggle with a specific ideological direction, only the party congress can exclude the supporters of this tendency within the party ...³⁹



38 I.e. Leo Jogiches.

39 Here and in the following, four lines could not be deciphered in the present copy.

... we cannot go along with an Organizing Committee consisting of the supporters of the *Golos Sotsial-Demokrata*, the Bundists and the *Pravda* circle, because it not only destroys the unity of the party and deliberately violates its basic resolutions and agreements, but also acts in the interests of the factional nonsense of extreme opportunists and avowed enemies of the party, such as the open liquidators.

IV.

As we have already said, Leninism cannot live without splitting. It is not content with wrecking the Russian section of the party, it also wants to destroy the unity of the so-called "national" organizations. It has already tried to split the Social Democracy of Latvia, and in its journal *Sotsial-Demokrata* it has announced in no uncertain terms that it will try to do the same to the SDKPiL. To this end, the Leninists have resorted to a device that could only fool half-wits, suggesting in secret to our so-called opposition abroad that since the SDKPiL had not participated in the "conference" of the Bolsheviks, it had left the RSDLP.

Well, of course! Except that the "departed" SDKPiL is finding itself in strangely numerous company: The party-loyal Bolsheviks did not join Lenin's circle either, so they too have surely left the party. The Mensheviks, too, led by Plekhanov, did not recognize the Leninist "conference", so they too have "left the party". The "Vperyodists", likewise, do not recognize the little faction of their brothers in spirit, the Leninists, so it is obvious that they are no longer part of the "party" either. The Social Democrats of Latvia greeted the call of the Leninists with contempt, so it is evident that Latvia, too, is "no longer in the party". The SDKPiL turned its back on the Leninist tricksters and factionalist wreckers, therefore it has also left the RSDLP.

Of course, the Bund and other opportunist and liquidationist organizations are not even mentioned any more. Apparently, it goes without saying that they have all found themselves "outside the party" — after all, they did not join the Leninist circle that declared itself the "party" alone. In short, on closer examination, it turns out that the entire RSDLP has "left" the RSDLP, and only one small group has remained, namely Lenin's. In other words, the whole party has

"left" the Lenin faction, and this faction has thus become the whole of the party! Such sleight of hand is normally only performed in small-town circuses.

And that is not all. At present there is a danger that half of the Leninists will soon also be "kicked out of the party" by the other half of the Leninists. For, as can be gleaned from no. 16 of the Bolshevik *Zvezda* newspaper,⁴⁰ the Leninists are consulting with the liquidators in St. Petersburg on questions concerning the election of the fourth State Duma, for which they certainly risk being threatened with the tried-and-tested method of Leninist tactics: splitting and expulsion. Such is the fate of Leninism: left to itself, it must constantly split and cultivate splits, *ad infinitum*.

In reality the RSDLP, as a whole, does not exist. There has not been an all-party congress for more than three-and-a-half years, the Central Committee has not met for over two-and-a-half-years, and there has been virtually no central party organ for a year. Only separate components of the party exist. Each constituent part, each group prints the name RSDLP on the mastheads of its publications and considers itself part of the party, but none claims to constitute the party all by itself. After all, the RSDLP is not solely the party of the Russian workers, but the party of the workers of the Russian state — without distinction of nationality and race. We would therefore be just as justified in saying that the Leninists do not belong to the RSDLP since they are not affiliated with the SDKPiL.

Secondly, the unity of the party has been wrecked by Russian comrades. However, there is no "Russian section" of the party. Within the party there are only various separate Russian groups and tendencies. Even if we were to unite with one of these groups, this would not mean that we would thereby unite with the Russian section of the party.

Thirdly, our commonality with the Russian comrades does not consist in uniting with one Russian group or another, but in the commonality of the basic principles of our programme and tactics, in the common recognition of the resolutions of the party congresses, in the common worldview of Marxism. Those who fall outside the framework of this worldview and the basic principles of the party, such as the Russian terrorist "Eserists",⁴¹ the PPS and so on, do not belong to the party. It is true: an organization such

40 Экскурсии: "Excursions"

41 Eserists: pejorative for "SR", the abbreviation of the Socialist Revolutionary Party, which came into being in late 1901 and early 1902 through the unification of various groups of Narodniks, who operated among the rural population and focused on individual terrorism.

as the Bund, whose nationalism, or non-territorial Zionism,⁴² drives a wedge between Russian and Polish organizations and undermines the class cohesion of the proletariat, can wreck the unity of the party and override its organizational principles as it pleases. It can even invite the PPS in, which it resembles in spirit and in lack of principle. But it can only do so to the extent that it defies the party as a whole and works around the organizational principles that the party has adopted at its congress — that is to say, by exploiting the chaos and weakness of the party.

In order for the RSDLP to be able to act as a whole again, whether in the near or distant future, it must first of all put to rest all the resolutions and arrangements that presently only serve to tear the party apart, all the resolutions and arrangements that merely make for a factional rat dance around the table when the cat — the party as a whole — is not at home.

No Social Democrat can have any doubt, however, that the RSDLP will be brought back to life in the near future.

The reunification of Social Democracy into one single party at the Stockholm Party Congress was the product and achievement of the 1905–6 revolution. Like many other accomplishments of the proletariat, this fruit of the revolution was wrested from us by the triumph of counterrevolution. The liquidationist tendency emerged and grew stronger under the impact of counterrevolution; mindless Leninism also thrived again, and the two tendencies have together brought about the collapse of party unity.

But now, a revolutionary movement has arisen among the working masses. And this movement is the surest guarantor of the imminent resurrection of the RSDLP under the banner of revolutionary Marxism.

42 Here Rosa Luxemburg clearly exaggerates. The Bund fought political Zionism from the beginning — both entered the political arena at the same time in 1897. There was a real non-territorial Zionism, so to speak, which was represented e.g. by the Zionist Socialists (ZS), who did not see Palestine as the only possible home for Jews. Another Jewish party, the *Socialističeskaja Evrejskaja Rabočaja Partija* (Socialist Jewish Workers' Party, SERP), was divided on this question: at least some of its members opted for a "territorial" solution, i.e. for the formation of Jewish self-governing bodies in the diaspora. During the first Russian revolution in 1905–6, the individual left-wing parties on the territory of Russia boasted the following membership figures: Social Democratic Party (total); 84,000 (of which Bolsheviks: 46,000, Mensheviks: 38,000); Bund: 33,000, ZS: 26,000, Poale Zion: 16,000, SERP: 13,000. However, Poale Zion soon outnumbered all other Jewish parties in terms of membership. I would like to thank Mario Kessler for this information as well as for further references.

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