

The Terrorist Tendency in Russia

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Introduction

Oskar Anweiler, in his book on the soviets in Russia, pointed out that in *What Is to Be Done?* 'Lenin strengthened and extended Plekhanov's thesis of the primacy of political action', rejecting a purely economic trade-unionist struggle. He added that 'despite existing differences between Lenin and Plekhanov, no criticism of Lenin's theses was heard from any of his collaborators in *Iskra*. Vera Zasulich, for example, stated almost word for word the same views as Lenin in an article in *Die Neue Zeit*, the organ of the German Social Democratic Party'.¹ This critical edition of Zasulich's article is meant, among other things, to contextualise Lenin's book – more specifically, to show that the ideas contained in *What Is to Be Done?* (published in March 1902) were not some new form of party organisation concocted by Lenin but a reflection of the whole *Iskra* group's views on the current organisational needs of the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party (RSDLP). And indeed that is clearly demonstrated by the contents of the first section of the article.

However, the second part of Zasulich's document sheds new light on a different and no less important issue: the Russian Marxists' struggle, not only against the tactics of individual terrorism as the title indicates, but also against the revival of the old peasant-based Populist currents in a new guise – namely that of the Russian Socialist Revolutionary Party established in 1902. Given that it had been Zasulich's shooting of a particularly vicious tsarist official 24 years earlier that had given rise to the first terrorist organisation, *Narodnaya Volya* ('People's Will'), it is understandable that the editor of *Die neue Zeit*, Karl Kautsky, should have prefaced Zasulich's article with this note:

Source: Wera Sassulitsch, 'Die terroristische Strömung in Russland', *Die neue Zeit*, 21. 1902–3, 1. Bd. (6 and 20 December 1902), H. 11, S. 324–9, H. 12, S. 361–70.

1 [Anweiler 1974, pp. 29–30; see also Naarden 2002, pp. 126–8.]

The following remarks of our friend deserve all the more attention because she is one of the few among the living familiar, from personal experience, with systematic terrorism and its psychological effects. Hardly anyone else can therefore assess those effects as well as she, who has stood for more than a generation among the pioneers of the Russian revolutionary movement, and whose shooting of the monster Trepov on 5 February 1878 may be viewed as the beginning of the first era of systematic terrorism in Russia.

I

The editors of *Die neue Zeit* have asked me to characterise the different tendencies within the Russian revolutionary movement. In this article, however, I shall confine myself to talking about only *one* category of opponents of our tendency within the revolutionary movement – namely about the ‘*Socialist Revolutionaries*’ – and about our position towards that tendency, which has lately resonated like the echo of a pistol shot, attracting general attention.

It is all the more necessary to describe exactly our position towards that recently emerged tendency, because in the revolutionary camp there is actually a fundamental contradiction only between us – the revolutionary Social Democrats (the ‘orthodox’, the ‘dogmatists’ etc., as our opponents like to call us) – and them. Within Russian Social Democracy itself, by contrast, there is now much less disagreement than there might seem to outsiders. There are actually no principled divisions, based on different assessments of our programme, among the Social Democrats working in Russia. The remaining disagreements are constantly diminishing, and in any case they do not constitute an obstacle to the ultimate unification of the party. Abroad, however, there are several groups issuing their own newspapers independently of each other: *Zhizn*² (*Life*), *Rabocheye Dyelo*³ (*The Workers’ Cause*), *Borba* (*Struggle*),

2 [*Zhizn* (*Life*) was first published in St Petersburg (1897–1901), then in London and Geneva (1902). In early 1899, the magazine was taken over by the socialist journalist Vladimir Posse, who converted *Zhizn* into a Legal Marxist publication after the suppression of the Legal Marxists’ magazine *Nachalo* in June 1899. The magazine’s editorial policy was largely under the control of Peter Struve and Mikhail Tugan-Baranovsky, two leaders of the Legal Marxists. Like *Nachalo*, *Zhizn* supported Eduard Bernstein’s revision of Marxism.]

3 Krichevsky and comrades. [Zasulich’s note]

[*Rabocheye Dyelo* (*The Workers’ Cause*): an ‘Economist’ journal appearing irregularly in Geneva between April 1899 and February 1902 as the organ of the Union of Russian Social

*Svoboda*⁴ (*Freedom*). But all these publications had and have no groups behind them in Russia itself, with the exception of *Rabocheye Dyelo*, which by the way has not published anything during the last year.⁵

Certainly things were quite different two or three years ago, although the followers of *Rabocheye Dyelo* were of the opinion, and perhaps they still are today, that in those days everybody within the supposedly unified 'Russian Social Democratic Labour Party' were 'of one heart and of one soul' [Acts 4:32], and that harmony was only disturbed during the last two years by the polemical zeal of the orthodox [after the publication of Plekhanov's *A Vade Mecum for the Editors of Rabocheye Delo* in March 1900].

In order to clarify the present situation, we would like to devote a few words to the recent past of our movement.

The organised revolutionary activity of the Social Democrats on Russian soil began practically in 1895 with the emergence of the St Petersburg 'League of Struggle for the Emancipation of the Working Class'. The members of that organisation [which included Lenin] were people who had thoroughly prepared themselves for their work, and who stood firmly on the ground of revolutionary Marxism – then still the only Marxism, but now the preserve of the 'orthodox'. The first task of the League was to gain influence over the workers, and circumstances were then particularly favourable for that task.

The transition from intensive propaganda in small circles to agitation in the factories and workshops coincided with a new period of strikes. Strikes

Democrats Abroad. It was edited by B.N. Krichevsky, P.F. Teplov (Sibiryak), and V.P. Ivanshin, and subsequently by A.S. Martynov.]

4 The publications of this group are, by the way, no longer counted among the Social-Democratic ones. Despite all the talent of the editor, the writings of this group are characterised by their theoretical ambiguity. They are halfway between the 'Socialist Revolutionaries' and the 'Social Democrats'. They approach the first in their lack of clarity and their inclination towards terrorism, and the second in their enthusiastic participation in the movement of the working masses. We do not mention in the text *Osvobozhdenie* (*Liberation*), a magazine edited by Pyotr Struve. We speak of revolutionary currents, while this magazine is the organ of peaceful 'constitutionalists', 'moderate fathers' (as the editor puts it), spokesmen of the *zemstva* (provincial assemblies), but not of the revolution. [Zasulich's note]

[*Svoboda* (*Freedom*) was edited by 'L. Nadezhdin', a pseudonym of Yevgeny Osipovich Zelensky. Only two issues of this magazine were published in Switzerland: No. 1 in 1901 and No. 2 in 1902. The magazine *Osvobozhdenie* (*Liberation*) was financed by D.E. Zhukovsky and was at first published in Stuttgart from 1 July 1902 to 15 October 1904. In mid-1903, after the founding of the liberal *Soyuz Osvobozhdeniya* (Union of Liberation), the magazine became the Union's official organ.]

5 [*Rabocheye Dyelo* ceased publication in February 1902.]

had previously erupted periodically in the Russian factory districts, but the Socialists had, with few exceptions, played no role in them. This time, however, the strikes were prepared by the 'Marxists', and they participated vigorously in the struggle. The massive strike of 1896 in St Petersburg, which drew the attention of the whole European press, was preceded by a month-long agitation. Masses of leaflets were distributed, in which the workers were encouraged to fight abuses and demand a reduction in working hours. The success achieved by the St Petersburg workers went to the recently-created Social Democracy's head. 'Leagues of Struggle' were formed in the provinces which, in imitation of that model, called on the workers to struggle for economic betterment, pointing to the example of St Petersburg comrades. Numerous strikes did in fact break out, and that certainly had the effect of bringing the workers and the Social Democrats closer together, and of raising their confidence in their own power. Although the leaflets were quite awkward in many cases, they made the workers aware of the fact that their strikes are not just riots of desperate masses, but means of struggle used all over the world – reference was often made in a few words to the 'brothers abroad'. The term 'working class' itself was foreign to workers uninfluenced by political propaganda. The eager participation of the Social Democrats in this strike wave, which continued also in 1897 and 1898, was certainly very successful: it created the basis for the later movement.

But by the time the strike movement became particularly lively, the founders of the St Petersburg League of Struggle for the Emancipation of the Working Class were already in jail. They were replaced by others, and then again by others, who were less well-prepared; and the fighters in the provinces changed just as quickly. Soon these 'Leagues of Struggle' (renamed in 1898 [after the first RSDLP congress held at Minsk] committees of the 'Russian Social Democratic Labour Party') came to be dominated by people whose views were influenced by enthusiasm for the mere strike movement. A curious fanaticism developed in favour of 'economic struggle' (strikes and strike-funds), to the exclusion of everything else. The young Marxists became, without knowing it, 'pure-and-simple trade unionists'⁶ and defended their views by appealing to Marxist literature. Economic struggle, they claimed, is proletarian struggle, class

6 [The original reads 'Nur-Gewerkschaftlern'. Cf. *What Is to Be Done?*, Chapter II: 'There is much talk of spontaneity. But the *spontaneous* development of the working-class movement leads to its subordination to bourgeois ideology, to its development along the lines of the *Credo programme*; for the spontaneous working-class movement is trade-unionism, is *Nur-Gewerkschaftlerei*, and trade-unionism means the ideological enslavement of the workers by the bourgeoisie. Hence, our task, the task of Social-Democracy, is to combat spontaneity, to divert the working-class movement from this spontaneous, trade-unionist striving to come

struggle, and ‘every class struggle is a political struggle’ [*Communist Manifesto*, Chapter II]. Or: any ideology, any political institution, is a superstructure on the economic foundation, therefore (!) intellectuals must not ‘impose’ their beliefs on the workers.⁷ Neither propaganda in workers’ circles nor political agitation were required – the workers on their own would arrive at the knowledge of all they need to know through economic struggles.⁸

In his well-known book [*The Preconditions of Socialism and the Tasks of Social Democracy*] Eduard Bernstein proudly claims against Plekhanov that most Russian Social Democrats profess his, Bernstein’s, views.⁹ It should be noted that our ‘pure Economism’ appeared without Bernstein’s help, and that his book, which was published [in Russian] in 1900, in three editions approved by the censors, has not had the slightest influence.¹⁰ However, the ‘Economists’ relied for a while on his authority (though they often knew his thoughts only from hearsay) and set his views against our ‘outdated’ ideas. A Bernstein-like

under the wing of the bourgeoisie, and to bring it under the wing of revolutionary Social Democracy’ (Lenin 1961, p. 384).]

7 [The ‘Economists’ argued ‘that politics is the superstructure, and therefore, “political agitation must be the superstructure to the agitation carried on in favour of the economic struggle; it must arise on the basis of this struggle and follow in its wake”’ (Lenin 1961, p. 388).]

8 [‘The majority of the Economists look with sincere resentment [...] upon all theoretical controversies, factional disagreements, broad political questions, plans for organising revolutionaries, etc. “Leave all that to the people abroad!” said a fairly consistent Economist to me one day, thereby expressing a very widespread (and again purely trade-unionist) view; our concern is the working-class movement, the workers, organisations here, in our localities; all the rest is merely the invention of doctrinaires, “the overrating of ideology”’ (Lenin 1961, p. 365).]

9 [‘In order to put Mr Plekhanov’s style of disputation in its proper light, I must mention that a large, if not the largest, part of Russian Social Democrats active in Russia, including the editors of the Russian workers’ paper, have declared themselves firmly in favour of a standpoint very similar to mine, and that various of my “contentless” articles have been translated by them and distributed in special editions’ (Bernstein 1993, p. 191). A reference to the Legal Marxists and the ‘Economists’ in the Russian Social-Democratic movement. See Baron 1963, pp. 195ff.]

10 [‘The “ex-Marxists”, who took up the flag of “criticism” and who obtained almost a monopoly to “demolish” Marxism, entrenched themselves in this literature. Catchwords like “Against orthodoxy” and “Long live freedom of criticism” (now repeated by *Rabocheye Dyelo*) forthwith became the vogue, and the fact that neither the censor nor the gendarmes could resist this vogue is apparent from the publication of *three* Russian editions of the work of the celebrated Bernstein (celebrated in the Herostratean sense) and from the fact that the works of Bernstein, Mr Prokopovich, and others were recommended by Zubatov (*Iskra*, No. 10)’ (Lenin 1961, p. 363).]

tone was also struck in the promotion of the struggle 'for our own interests and not for some future generation's sake'.¹¹ One could recognise Bernstein's influence in the assertion that every kopek added to the workers' wages is a more important gain than all socialism and all politics, or in the reference to England, where workers are not imposed upon by any doctrine, and where they allegedly achieved more real and lasting successes than anywhere else.¹²

At the beginning of our movement, all Russian Social Democrats took German Social Democracy as their model; at the time of 'Economism', however, the British trade unions and the Belgian [Socialist] Party with its cooperatives were held up as a model.

Incidentally, as an intellectual tendency 'pure Economism' did not make its appearance at once, and in an aggressive form it appeared almost exclusively in *Rabochaya Mysl'* (*Workers' Thought*), the organ of the St Petersburg League of Struggle.¹³ Apart from that sheet, one could only get to know this tendency from oral debates and unpublished manuscripts.¹⁴ In the Union of Russian Social Democrats Abroad, which published the 'Library of Contemporary Socialism' edited by the Emancipation of Labour Group, 'Economism' asserted itself in 1898 and spread rapidly through the incoming members from Russia (according to the Statute the members of the Russian committees were incorporated into the Union without a vote), a situation which soon led to a split in the Union between two factions, and finally resulted in formal separation between them. The 'youngsters' made sure that the old comrades

11 ['Let the workers conduct their struggle, knowing that they are not fighting for just some kind of future generation but for themselves and their children' (Editorial from *Rabochaya Mysl'*, No. 1, October 1897, quoted in Lih 2006, p. 278).]

12 ['Catchwords like "We must concentrate, not on the 'cream' of the workers, but on the 'average', mass worker"; "Politics always obediently follows economics", etc., etc., became the fashion [...] Political consciousness was completely overwhelmed by spontaneity [...] the spontaneity of those workers who were carried away by the arguments that a kopek added to a ruble was worth more than any socialism or politics, and that they must "fight, knowing that they are fighting, not for the sake of some future generation, but for themselves and their children" (leader in *Rabochaya Mysl'*, No. 1)' (Lenin 1961, p. 381).]

13 [*Rabochaya Mysl' (Workers' Thought)* was a newspaper published from October 1897 to December 1902. Sixteen issues appeared in St Petersburg, Berlin, Warsaw and Geneva. It was edited by K.M. Takhtarev.]

14 [Kruskova's *Credo* circulated in manuscript, and was first published by the opponents of 'Economism', accompanied by a 'Protest of Russian Social Democrats' drafted by Lenin and signed by 17 Marxist exiles in Siberia (Lenin 1964a). Not until 1906 did Kruskova announce that she had written the *Credo*. Other documents by the 'Economist' tendency were published by Plekhanov in his *Vade Mecum*, consisting primarily of unpublished material by Kruskova and Prokopovich.]

were precluded from associating with comrades engaged in practical work, and that they had no opportunity of propagating their views to the required extent. The brochures of Plekhanov and Axelrod were sent to Russia in inadequate numbers and they were not widely distributed, because they came into the hands of those same 'Economists' against whom they were directed.

The organ of the 'youngsters', *Rabocheye Dyelo* (*The Workers' Cause*), did not aggressively confront 'Economism'; it rather considered its task to be the echo of the [Russian] committees headed by the 'Economists'.

Then, at the beginning of 1900 the 'harmony' of the party was outwardly disturbed by the Emancipation of Labour Group.¹⁵ In reality, however, the party was sharply divided. Since the economic struggle had also come to a standstill (the strikes stopped suddenly due to the economic crisis) and the workers were on the defensive, the party lost its active, revolutionary character. The turnabout made at that time by the most well-known supporters of Marxism in the legal press, Struve and Co.,¹⁶ [who turned into liberals,] had a disastrous effect on those elements whose views were only now taking shape. They became 'critics' who let no sentence of Marx pass without proclaiming it 'obsolete', 'naïve', 'meaningless', although in place of that 'naïveté' nothing appeared but the belief in divine providence.

At the beginning of 1900, that Social-Democratic group which had been involved from the beginning in the organic movement, and which had been temporarily removed from the battlefield even before the advent of 'Economism', was able to resume work. It decided to confront immediately those phenomena having a destructive and confusing influence on the movement. We [Zasulich, Plekhanov and Axelrod] already knew these comrades [Lenin, Potresov and Martov] since the 1890s. We eagerly waited for their return to the battlefield and then joined their [editorial] projects.

At that time, the magazine *Zarya* (*The Dawn*) began to appear in Stuttgart. 'Before we can unite, and in order that we may unite, we must first of all draw firm and definite lines of demarcation' – its Declaration reads.¹⁷ It undertook

15 [In March 1900 the Group for the Emancipation of Labour published Plekhanov's *A Vademecum for the Editors of Rabocheye Delo*. In April 1900, when the Union of Russian Social Democrats Abroad held its second congress, the rival factions split, and Plekhanov and his supporters set up a new body called "The Revolutionary Organisation "*Social-Democrat*"; which was in fact a revival of the Emancipation of Labour Group. They declared that the immediate task facing Social Democracy was to oppose 'Economism'.]

16 Other supporters of Marxism, who wrote for the [legal] press, from exile or banishment, could have but little influence because they remained unknown to the readers, since they had to sign almost every other article with a different pseudonym. [Zasulich's note]

17 [A reference to the 'Declaration of the Editorial Board of *Iskra*' (Lenin 1964b, p. 354).]

a 'critique of our critics'¹⁸ and was above all dedicated to clarifying and defending the ideas of revolutionary, Marxist socialism. At the same time, a journal was founded called *Iskra* (*The Spark*), dedicated to political agitation in the broadest sense, to the discussion of the tactical and organisational issues of the party, together with a critique not only of the views, but also of the activities of the [Russian] committees. And, in some respects, the results surpassed our expectations.

It can already be said with certainty that the 'Economist' phase of our movement has only an archival interest, and that the unity of the party has been restored. It is again a revolutionary, Marxist party, as we longed for in the bleakest days of the revolutionary movement, when we propagated our ideas from exile, and as it started to develop its practical activity in Russia in the form of the St Petersburg League of Struggle seven years ago.

But the party still has to solve a different task, one to which the 'organisation of *Iskra*' devoted itself since its appearance, namely: the strengthening – more correctly, the creation – of a unified party organisation. The party arose as a result of purely practical work for the purposes of agitation and propaganda in labour circles; hence, at the beginning, the lack of systematic, unified action in the various cities was less evident. The consequence is that the party now consists of a whole range of more or less well-established organisations, committees, which are completely independent from each other.¹⁹ Only occasionally are there [higher-level] organisations such as district committees. Nothing separates those committees [politically], but also nothing connects them into a whole, except for the community of ideals. In fact, they are completely independent of each other, and each committee cares only about the affairs of its own city. The only exception in the last two years has been the 'organisation of *Iskra*', which is bound to no place: it distributes its journal and establishes links everywhere.

18 The title of an article series by Plekhanov [Zasulich's note] [a reference to Plekhanov 1976].

19 In 1898, when the party was founded, it consisted of the Committee in St Petersburg, Moscow, Kiev and Yekaterinoslav and of the 'General Jewish Workers' Union [*Allgemeinen jüdischen Arbeiterbund*]', where the last was in turn made up of individual committees (in Warsaw, Łódź, Minsk, Kovno, Vilnius, Belostok, etc.). There currently exist, besides the above-mentioned places, committees in Ivanovo-Voznesensk, Jaroslav, Kostroma (these three form the 'Northern Union'), Tver, Nizhny Novgorod, Saratov, Kharkov, in the Don district, in Kremenchuk, Poltava, Odessa, Nikolayev, Tbilisi, Tomsk, Krasnoyarsk, Irkutsk, Chita (the last four form the 'Siberian Association'). Organisations analogous to the Committees, but differently named, exist in Tula, Riga, Kishinev, Kazan, Penza, Simferopol, Sevastopol, Theodosia and Bryansk. [Zasulich's note]

The work that these independent committees perform is absolutely necessary, but there can also be no doubt that they are completely inadequate in the face of the movement's livelier tempo and of the political tasks faced by the party, which are no longer contested by anyone. Under existing conditions, it is quite impossible for the spatially separated committees to reach joint decisions on the issues of the day and to act quickly together. For the party to be able to activate its latent forces, to employ fully all the people standing at its disposal, it is necessary that next to each [local] committee a general party organisation shall exist, handling the affairs of the party as a whole, connected with all the local organisations and turning those organisations into an active whole.

The urgent need for a 'Central Committee', a central organisation superior to the local organisations, is well recognised, although not everybody sees clearly what the nature of that central organisation should be. But we believe that, in one respect, the central organisation will develop according to the only model possible under the unrestrained despotic regime (and it has already gradually developed in that way): it will be an organisation of chosen 'illegal' revolutionaries, an organisation consisting of people who have, so to speak, made revolution their chosen profession, who are dedicated solely to revolutionary activity, who therefore can, at any and all times, alter their names as well as their conditions of existence in order to escape persecution, and who can always dedicate their undivided attention to serving the cause.²⁰ Only under such conditions is an intensive activity conceivable in Russia for a long period of time; only such people can operate for several years, whereas now a person can do it for barely a few months.²¹ Only under such conditions can revolutionaries acquire that conspirational ingenuity, those skills in revolutionary matters, which under different conditions cannot be developed, even by people with the most outstanding talent. It has been said of the secret

20 [‘Our primary and imperative practical task [is] to establish *an organisation of revolutionaries* capable of lending energy, stability, and continuity to the political struggle. [...] In an autocratic state, the more we *confine* the membership of such an organisation to people who are professionally engaged in revolutionary activity and who have been professionally trained in the art of combating the political police, the more difficult will it be to unearth the organisation, and the *greater* will be the number of people from the working class and from the other social classes who will be able to join the movement and perform active work in it’ (Lenin 1961, pp. 446, 464).]

21 [‘Things have reached such a pass that in several places the workers, because of our lack of self-restraint and the inability to maintain secrecy, begin to lose faith in the intellectuals and to avoid them; the intellectuals, they say, are much too careless and cause police raids!’ (Lenin 1961, p. 443).]

organisations at the end of the 1870s that they were a general staff without an army, that they consisted of nothing but leaders, who had no-one to lead. Now that the awakening of the working class is undeniable, that the determination to fight flares up at every opportunity, it is clear that there is such an army. On the other hand, there are increasing cases of revolutionaries that successfully escape from prisons and exile, and this circumstance offers the guarantee that soon the illegal cadres, which under Russian circumstances are necessary to mobilise that army, will be at hand.

However, the fact that the Social-Democratic organisation could not immediately adapt to the conditions of the new phase of the movement, the delay that occurred because the movement encompassed many elements that had to be brought together into a tight organisation (which had first to be created), has given rise to a phenomenon that will set many barriers to the further development of our organisation – namely, the emergence of a terrorist tendency.

II

The 'Socialist Revolutionaries' want to find a contradiction in the fact that *Iskra* recognised and paid tribute to Karpovich, Balmashev and Lekert,²² while on the other hand it opposes the propagation of systematic terrorism, to which that party pays homage and for the pursuit of which it has formed a 'Combat Organisation'.²³ However, as an excellent article [by Rosa Luxemburg] in the

22 [A reference to the shooting of Minister of Education N.P. Bogolepov by P.V. Karpovich on 15 March 1901, to the killing of the Minister of Interior D.S. Sipyagin by S.V. Balmashev on 2 April 1902, and to the assassination attempt against the governor of Vilna, General Victor von Wahl, carried out on 18 May 1902 by Hirsh Lekert, a member of the Bund executed on 10 June 1902.]

23 The 'Combat Organisation' [led by Grigory Gershuni and later by the notorious *agent provocateur* Yevno Azef,] announced its existence only after the assassination carried out by Balmashev. It was highly indignant at the fact that *Iskra*, citing Balmashev's statement in court, portrayed this as an individual attack, just like the assassination carried out by Karpovich. This organisation claims to have 'rendered judgement' against Sipyagin and to have commissioned Balmashev with enforcing it. Be that as it may, for the general public, which formed its opinion on Balmashev's act before it learned anything about the existence of a 'Combat Organisation', that delayed 'judgement' of a completely unknown organisation could have no weight. [Zasulich's note]

Leipziger Volkszeitung has already pointed out (on 27 August this year), our position could not have been otherwise.²⁴

In fact, whatever results the heroes themselves expect from their assassination attempts, for the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party, which sees as its next task the organisation of the revolutionary mass-struggle against Russian absolutism, the martyrdom of those heroes can only have symptomatic significance. We admit it: we Russian Social Democrats must express our deepest sympathy to these people, if only because in a sense we feel responsible for their fate. We have not yet developed our activities to the extent that everybody can find satisfaction in party activity, we have not yet reached the point where everybody can see clearly that such party activity must lead to victory over absolutism, that everybody can find in party activity that sense of gratification which now causes self-sacrificing people to go joyfully to their death, just to take revenge on this or that tool of absolutism. Our party can only prevent such acts of self-sacrifice by perfecting its organisation, and by expanding and deepening the struggle. Only by doing everything possible in that respect can Social Democracy turn that overabundance of legitimate anger and hatred into the development of daily detail work, into a tenfold increase of resolute courage in the class struggle, rather than letting that feeling of anger and hatred lead individuals to risk their lives in order to eliminate some vile bureaucrat.

But terrorism as the specific task of an entire organisation, as a loudly announced 'means of struggle against the absolutist bureaucracy, destined to restrain the arbitrariness of the government, to disorganise the government machinery', etc. is something quite different from that spontaneous terrorism by which people give vent to their anger in isolated acts. We must counter the systematic propaganda of that terrorism with a systematic counter-propaganda, as unpleasant as that duty might be.

The editors of *Die neue Zeit* have asked me to describe the characteristics of the Russian revolutionary tendencies in their historical and theoretical foundations. As far as the Socialist Revolutionaries are concerned, it is impossible to fulfil that task in an article, given the eclectic character and the ambiguity of their ideas, which in general are not based on a single, clear-cut theoretical view. This tendency even denies the need for such a theoretical basis, rejecting any theoretical justification of a party programme, any pursuit of theoretical clarity and consistency, as harmful dogmatism and doctrinarism. The 'Socialist Revolutionaries' most often refer to Pyotr Lavrov as their teacher, but they are also occasionally willing to award that honorary

24 [A reference to Luxemburg 1972.]

title to Karl Marx – which does not, however, prevent them from announcing with joy that Marx's 'dogma' has been turned to nothing by the blows of the critics and revisionists of all countries. Remarkable in its arrogance is a long editorial article entitled 'The World-Wide Growth and the Crisis of Socialism' in *Vestnik russkoi revoliutsii* (*Messenger of the Russian Revolution*).²⁵ In the author's opinion, the crisis of Marxism is so complete and general, there are so few real followers of Karl Marx left ('you can count them on your fingers') that the author is concerned that Marxism could be 'completely discarded'. Since, in their motley eclecticism, the 'Socialist Revolutionaries' in fact advise to add a pinch of Marxism, the author writes: 'Now that a whole field of socialist thought [the article does not refer to Russia, but to socialism all over the world – V.Z.] in the form of rigid and exclusive Marxism has been consigned to history, it is necessary to detect the sound core of Marxism and *to ensure that it is not completely discarded* [our emphasis], but that it gets appropriate conditions for growth.'²⁶

They do not yet have a party programme, and refer provisionally to some articles in their newspaper, which asks that only the views laid down there be considered as the official views of the party.

We will now expound the official and non-official views of the Socialist Revolutionaries on terrorism, because here is to be found, in our opinion, the explanation for both the sudden 'growth' of this party (loudly announced, but in reality not so significant), and for the 'crisis' that awaits it. For the time being, we will only highlight a claim in relation to terrorism which recurs repeatedly in the aforementioned articles. The Socialist Revolutionaries consider it wrong to portray the proletariat, those who are forced to sell their labour-power, as a special class. They consider themselves 'representatives of labour', not however of wage labour but of 'labour *per se* ... regardless of whether it is separated from the means of production or closely connected with them', and they contrast 'labour *per se*' to exploitation, also *per se*. 'Some are exploited directly in the production process by capitalist entrepreneurs, others indirectly, in the sphere of commodity exchange, in the sphere of lease and debt contracts – but these are only *outward forms* of extracting unpaid labour.'

25 *Socio-Political Review*, edited by K. Tarasov, Nr. 2. [Zasulich's note]
[*Vestnik Russkoi Revoliutsii. Sotsialno-politicheskoye obozreniye* (*Herald of the Russian Revolution: A Socio-Political Review*) was an illegal journal published in Paris and Geneva in 1901–5. Four issues came out. The first was published by the Old *Narodovol'tsy* Group and edited by N.S. Rusanov (K. Tarasov). Beginning with issue No. 2 it became the theoretical organ of the Socialist Revolutionary Party.]

26 *Ibid.*, p. 75.

As far as the historical foundations of the Socialist Revolutionary Party²⁷ are concerned, it claims to continue the work of *Narodnaya Volya* (*The People's Will*), but under more favourable circumstances. To us, on the other hand, the Socialist Revolutionaries appear rather as clumsy imitators of the representatives of that party. Some connecting links between the old *Narodnaya Volya* and the circles which have come together to form the Socialist Revolutionary Party can, of course, be identified in the circles of the 1880s and 1890s.

However great the general despondency in that 'damned decade' of the 1880s, the echo of the defeated movement did not completely disappear, and new but non-viable circles of devotees of *Narodnaya Volya* always emerged. At the beginning of the 1890s, the moral exhaustion and despair which had taken possession of Russian society after the terrorist struggle were gradually overcome. The bearers of the new hopes were then the Marxists in the circles of the St Petersburg students, but there were also circles of followers of *Narodnaya Volya*. However, while the Marxists in their struggle against the *Narodniks* (Populists), who dominated the entire *intelligentsia*, closed ranks and asserted their theoretical position ever more sharply, the youth who committed to the programme of the *Narodnaya Volya* began to doubt its accuracy, and to approach the Social Democrats. The last circle of that kind, which had its own secret printing press (it fell into the hands of the police in 1896), had moved in terms of its views so close to the Marxists that a union was in prospect, while the exiled 'elders' of *Narodnaya Volya*, on the other hand, declared that they could no longer regard these followers of their tendency as their comrades. Ever since that organisation was wiped out, no new circles were created under the old party name, whereas towards the end of the 1890s appeared – especially in the South – circles whose beliefs had much in common with those of the recent followers of *Narodnaya Volya*. They gave themselves the name 'Socialist Revolutionary Party'. These, however, were not circles of revolutionary youth, but mostly people who had returned from exile, i.e. people whose views were formed before Social Democracy had spread in Russia; they won no great influence among the student youth, and they had but few connections with the workers.

The turnabout of Struve and Co.,²⁸ and then the dispute between *Iskra* and the 'Economists', gave the enemies of Social Democracy new hope. The magazine *Russkoye Bogatstvo* (*Russian Wealth*), organ of the peaceful, legal

27 [Partiia Sotsialistov-Revoliutsionerov or PSR.]

28 [A reference to the passage of the 'Legal Marxists' to liberalism.]

followers of Lavrov,²⁹ claimed at that time that the Marxists had been crushed and destroyed; that they, like the cats in the fable, were about to eat each other up to their tails. According to our opponents in exile, moreover, the cats had already actually eaten each other, and only their tails were still fighting on. But their jubilation was gratuitous: although the Marxists were badly at loggerheads, their opponents still won no influence over the youth and the workers. In the spring of 1901, during the first demonstrations, there were, according to the testimony of one of the authoritative writers of the Socialist Revolutionaries, no serious revolutionary organisations in Russia except for the Social-Democratic ones; he testifies expressly that his party was still being formed.

Only in the year 1901, when the intense growth of class consciousness and the joining together of the workers expressed itself spontaneously in a stormy manner (only for the Social Democrats and the police, the years-long preparation for that was no secret) and when the student movement flared up to a previously unheard-of extent and intensity, so that the scope of the revolutionary movement, which had already started earlier, became clear to everyone, and when finally the first pistol shots were fired – only then were the ‘Socialist Revolutionaries’ born. Abroad appeared the aforementioned publications, while the Russian circles showed greater activity. Towards the end of 1901 we finally learned that those circles had joined in a ‘Party of Socialist Revolutionaries’. Only in April of this year [1902], after the assassination attempt against Sipyagin, did that party become a factor in the revolutionary movement with which the Social Democrats have to reckon, and towards which we have to take a definite stand. After that attack, the Party of Socialist Revolutionaries announced that a ‘Combat Organisation’ had been formed, which set itself the task of systematically pursuing terrorism. The party now vigorously preached terrorism in its journal, in calls and proclamations, which were issued now by the party, now by the Combat Organisation, now by a group of the most radical and consistent terrorists.

I have already mentioned that, in our opinion, currently the whole meaning of the Socialist Revolutionaries, all the interest that the wider circles take in them, is related to the declaration that the party wants to systematically pursue terrorism. For that reason, it is necessary to consider their argumentation and the position of Social Democracy on this issue more closely.

First, it should be pointed out that, although a part of the Party of Socialist Revolutionaries proclaims that liberation can only be fought out in a ‘duel’

29 [*Russkoye Bogatstvo* (*Russian Wealth*) was a monthly magazine published in St Petersburg, Russia, from 1876 to mid-1918. In the early 1890s, it was an organ of the liberal *Narodniks*.]

between the terrorists and absolutism, the articles of their party organ, which should be regarded as the official position of the party on this question, tell a different story. The party – we read there – pursues organised, systematic terrorism, not with the aim of *replacing* the mass struggle, but in order to *supplement* and *strengthen* that mass struggle. Accordingly, terrorism is allegedly necessary ‘as self-defence, as a means of defence without which the impudence and the unrestrained arbitrariness of absolutism would exceed all limits’. The task of the Combat Organisation of the Party of Socialist Revolutionaries is to curb that arbitrariness. It ‘fully assumes the role of a protection force and thus frees the local committees of the party from the unpleasant duty of having to neglect their main task, of wasting their forces in self-defence and in curbing tyrants.’ Under the protection of the Combat Organisation, the propagandists, agitators and organisers will allegedly ‘have the full possibility’ of pursuing their tasks, etc.

We, the few old revolutionaries who remember the clash of opinion within the *Zemlya i Volya* (*Land and Freedom*) Party between the terrorists (who later became the *Narodnaya Volya* Party) and the other revolutionaries, find in these words of the Socialist Revolutionaries almost verbatim the arguments of the former terrorists. The latter also did not set out to destroy and replace the activity of *Zemlya i Volya*. On the contrary, they wanted to defend their comrades and restrain those in power, and for that purpose they formed a ‘protection force [*Schutztruppe*]’ – they used those exact words. The Socialist Revolutionaries can read in one of the numbers of their [theoretical] organ (*Viestnik russkoi revoliutsii*, No. 2) how that ‘protection force’, without having protected anyone, and after unleashing the gendarmerie and the police against us even more than before, absorbed at first a large part and later the entire forces of the [*Zemlya i Volya*] Party, until it eventually collapsed, whereby at the same time every revolutionary movement also collapsed. In the above-mentioned organ, of course, this story is not told in order to warn its readers against the fantastic goals of the ‘protection force’, but if one does not want to falsify history, one cannot describe those operations without reaching this warning as an unavoidable conclusion.

We are told, of course, that terrorism now appears under more favourable conditions, that the working class has awakened, that the peasants have begun to revolt, etc. But it should be understood that both ‘protection’ and ‘curbing’ are out of the question. We must stress the fact that assassination attempts against the authorities do not ‘curb’ absolutism, and that they cannot ‘protect’ the revolutionary activists; in a word, that such assassination attempts do not hinder absolutism in its struggle against the internal enemy. On the contrary, assassination attempts are only suitable to further natural selection

among the tools of absolutism. The mad, but otherwise average Mr Sipyagin was replaced by the rabid butcher Plehve, a man whose experience in the annihilation of internal enemies goes back to the time of *Narodnaya Volya*.³⁰ It would not surprise us in the least if, in the future, a secret document were discovered in which this man arranges for the whipping of workers as a means of strengthening the terrorist tendency, while at the same time pushing it away from Petersburg and into the provinces. It is also clear that the government always has at its disposal a number of people (especially in the Gendarmerie Corps and the State Police) who have sold their soul to the state, and who accept from the outset universal hatred and a certain personal risk in order to further their careers. Among those people the government will always find a substitute for each Sipyagin.

If, in the official article, the utilitarian side of terrorism, so to speak, is above all stressed, the article does not, however, fail to credit it with something else. Terrorism – it is said – is a *matter of honour* for the party; honour requires that the tools of the government should be ‘punished’, that ‘blows should be answered by blows’ rather than suffered passively. Accordingly, only terrorism is recognised as revolutionary struggle in the past and at present. The enormous work carried out by Social Democracy in the field of propaganda, agitation and organisation of the working masses is recognised as useful, but described as peaceful cultural work, not as a revolutionary activity. The demonstrations, which were enthusiastically praised before the advent of active terrorist propaganda, and which are also now recommended in another context, are described in the darkest colours as soon as proof of the necessity of terrorist action is required: they allegedly lead only ‘to expose oneself to the Cossacks’ whips’, and to corporal punishment in the event of arrest. Our whole vast movement has in their eyes, for the greater glory of terrorism, a shameful, cowardly, ‘servile’ character, but that situation will only last until the arrival of the protection force, which will ‘wipe out the disgrace’. Only the protection force carries out actual struggle. The struggle is conceived of in a narrow-minded, material, purely physical sense, and reduced to bloody deeds. Where no shots are heard, there is no struggle.

However, looking at the facts more closely, it turns out that those terrorist acts are not at all a material struggle, but only demonstrative actions. Demonstrations in the new, revolutionary Russia have reached a level unheard of in the old Russia. The growth of audacity and insubordination,

30 [The tsarist Minister of the Interior Vyacheslav von Plehve was eventually killed by a member of the Socialist-Revolutionary Combat Organisation, Yegor Sazonov, on 28 July 1904.]

which makes itself felt across the whole country; the huge, never previously seen dissemination of illegal literature and the constant demand for it; the quickness and readiness with which, despite countless arrests, the ranks of the organised Social Democrats close and multiply; and finally the street demonstrations themselves: thousand-strong multitudes supporting the student protests, massive crowds marching this year across the whole country under the slogan 'Down with absolutism' without meeting any resistance from the general population³¹ – all that demonstrated to the subjects of the Russian government, and to the government itself, how unstoppably and powerfully do the enemies of the government grow, how strong is the antagonism between the professional defenders of the government and the masses. The pistol shots only supplement all this by demonstrating the intensity of revolutionary tension among individuals, or (if terrorism is the exclusive speciality of a 'Combat Organisation') of the revolutionary tension existing in a small group of professional revolutionaries.

That terrorism does not in actual in fact cause material harm to the government is probably best proved by the announcement of the 'Combat Organisation' that it knew about the impending resignation of Sipyagin, and that precisely for that reason – because they could not kill him after his resignation, but also did not want to leave him unpunished – the enforcement of the judgement had to be accelerated. 'For the revolutionaries the question was not whether a Sipyagin would be replaced by some other minister' – the Socialist Revolutionaries explain in their official organ. 'We are not fighting against individuals, but against the system.' 'Our blows are directed against individuals only insofar as these individuals embody the system and give expression to it more or less completely.' This statement is indeed vague and contradictory, but it leaves no doubt about the fact that the 'Combat Organisation' did not set itself the task of harming the government by depriving it of some useful tool (Sipyagin was about to leave anyway), and that it was also not a question of the person assassinated (although here a contradiction arises, because it was feared that he would escape the bullet by his resignation). The 'Combat Organisation' chose Sipyagin only as the embodiment of the system, as its symbol. Is this anything other than a demonstrative act, or, if you will, a symbolisation of the struggle? This was even clearer from their

31 [In the late nineteenth century, the tsarist state used to unleash the plebeian strata of the urban population against student demonstrators. For instance, a demonstration on 3 April 1878 was repressed with the help of the Moscow butchers. The *Official Messenger* wrote that the assault had been 'the reply of the simple people of Russia to the scandalous demonstration that had greeted the acquittal of Vera Zasulich' (Venturi 1960, p. 616).]

behaviour in the attacks against [the Governor of Vilna, General Victor] von Wahl and Prince [Ivan Mikhailovich] Obolensky.³² The slightly-wounded von Wahl was congratulated one hour after the assassination attempt and soon promoted to a higher post. He had every reason to regard Lekert's pistol shot as a happy accident. Obolensky was promoted without having to shed one drop of blood. By contrast, Lekert was executed and Thomas Kachura is certainly lost. Nonetheless, those assassination attempts were the occasion for endless talk about the 'impending blows of the avengers', of phrases about the flogged peasants having been 'avenged', about misdeeds having found 'atonement', etc. It should be clear that all this talk has nothing to do with the 'blows inflicted', with 'atonement', etc., but that its only purpose was to demonstrate that tension of revolutionary feeling that was expressed in the assassination attempts.

If the only effect of a street demonstration is 'to expose the demonstrators to the Cossacks' whips', as the Socialist Revolutionaries claim, then the only effect of the assassination attempts is to bring their perpetrators to the gallows. In the first case, the masses unfold the red banner, despite the Cossacks' whips, and demonstrate their hatred against the government with the cry 'Down with absolutism'. This is the new Russia going into battle. In the second case, individuals express the same hatred through bombings, despite the gallows. Revolutionary tension in individuals or in tiny groups was expressed in Russia already three quarters of a century ago. Now that the new Russia enters the arena, that the spirit of the struggle penetrates the masses, the natural place of courageous people ready to sacrifice themselves is in the ranks of those masses. The task of the hero today is not to 'avenge' or 'defend' the masses, but to inspire and agitate them; now we have to act, not for the masses, but among the masses. Unfortunately, the old, formerly justified, today fortunately false idea about the handful of heroes versus the passive mass still haunts the minds of some of the revolutionaries, and causes them to want to push the movement back onto the old hopeless path.

But the supporters of terrorism boast particularly of its 'agitational' effect. Terrorism provokes much excitement, the prestige of the terrorists increases, it evokes a joyful feeling, it 'satisfies the psychological need for resistance, which thrills the hearts of the maltreated and insulted', etc. 'Did not nine out of ten Russians welcome with joy the death of a Sipyagin?'; the most radical terrorists

32 [On 29 July 1902, the worker Tomas Kachura, at the behest of the PSR's 'Combat Organisation', fired his revolver thrice at the Kharkov Governor Obolensky, who had become a candidate for assassination because he had ordered the mass flogging of peasants who had revolted in Kharkov province in the spring of 1902. Obolensky was only slightly wounded by one of the three shots.]

from the 'Socialist Revolutionary' Party ask triumphantly. To be sure, terrorism gives rise to joyful feelings, creating a *false* satisfaction about a supposed 'blow' struck at the regime, about a victory that does not exist in reality. It creates a fictitious 'satisfaction of the psychological need for resistance'. That is precisely the damage caused by the psychological effects of terrorism, which lead to the gradual abatement and weakening of the movement. That satisfaction comes far too cheaply!

The feeling of hatred and insulted human dignity produced by the abuse of imprisoned comrades finds a natural outlet if a striving arises to bring into being a power that makes those abuses impossible, if all the forces are directed to mobilise the masses so that, in such cases, they hasten to march as a crowd and free the abused prisoners from jail. But what kind of satisfaction can we obtain if people persuade themselves that a pistol shot against the abuser represents 'a blow' that 'wipes out the shame' and 'avenges the abuse'? Still cheaper will the satisfaction be if someone believes the Socialist Revolutionaries' promises that, with the existence of a Combat Organisation, 'no vile crime will go unpunished'. This belief will eventually lead to the idea of considering all perpetrators of such crimes as susceptible of being 'punished' and all crimes as worthy of being 'redeemed'.

The worker Kachura argues, in a letter published by the Socialist Revolutionaries, that he was disappointed by the strikes, that one and a half years ago (the letter is dated July of this year [1902]), he, together with the Socialist Revolutionaries, became convinced of the uselessness of demonstrations, and that for this reason he turned his back on Social Democracy and joined his new comrades. Also the 'forbidden books' disappointed him, and he could attach no significance to them. In April this year he was admitted to the Combat Organisation and it was him who 'suggested... to take action against the Governor of Kharkov'. 'Of course I do not think', he says, 'that if I shoot down the governor, the mistreatment of the peasants will stop', but after a whole series of such attacks, the government will, 'I believe, soon retract its claws.' 'I am convinced', he says, 'that the Combat Organisation will succeed in forcing the government to no longer employ whips and blows against us, and that our organisation will make possible a free development of the workers' and peasants' movement.'

What would become of the movement if Kachura's faith in the Combat Organisation were to spread among the workers, and if his disappointment with regard to all the other forms of struggle were to be imitated?

We know that, according to the official declaration of the Socialist Revolutionary Party, terrorism should *not replace but complement* the mass struggle. However, terrorism has its own logic. Also Kachura, who is convinced

that without that 'Combat Organisation' the mass movement is impossible, will hardly ask the mass movement to stop until the Combat Organisation renders freedom 'possible'. Kachura claims that, if the workers know that 'someone stands up for them', they will know that they can fight. But Kachura is wrong; he judges according to his own feelings, but when he wrote his letter, he already counted himself among those individuals who would 'stand up' for the masses, who in his view cannot fight without the protection of those individuals. As soon as the masses start to believe in their own impotence, as soon as they count on the fact that not them, but individuals, will 'force the government', by means of assassination attempts, to give up and grant them freedom, the mass movement will invariably withdraw behind terrorism, taking second place to it; the battle lust will turn into a desire to hear about a new assassination attempt, the revolutionary feeling will dissolve into jubilation over such acts – until those acts stop because they have reached their culmination, as was the case in 1881 [with the assassination of Tsar Alexander II],³³ or until the nerves grow weary, slackness creeps in, and the assassination attempts lose their novelty, which will happen when terrorism no longer develops in a crescendo, but contents itself with 'punishing' individual bureaucrats. But the eventual cessation of terrorism will infallibly bring about a profound moral lassitude, it will disappoint all those who have relied upon it, and the energetic mass-struggle will be over until a new generation steps onto the battlefield.

However, although a certain tendency to terrorism (generated by the desire to avenge the executions) made itself felt even among Social Democrats, we are firmly convinced that the mainstream of the movement will not pursue that path. Among Social Democrats, the prevailing thought and feeling is to strengthen the party organisation, to organise more intensively, expand and consolidate the mass struggle; here there is no room for frustration – and the inclination of additional circles for terrorism arises only on the ground of frustration.

In conclusion, we would like to quote a few sentences from the excellent leaflet *On Terrorism*, published by the editors of the *South Russian Worker*, the best sheet of our party appearing in Russia. The pamphlet points out that 'the situation of the revolutionaries today is different from what it was twenty

33 ['On 1 March 1881, against all the odds, they – the People's Will group (*Narodnaya Volya*) – achieved this goal. But it was a hollow victory, which exposed the false premises on which the Populist movement rested. Tsar Alexander II was succeeded by Tsar Alexander III, and neither of the developments anticipated by the terrorists came to pass: Russia did not obtain a constitution, and the peasants failed to revolt' (Keep 1963, p. 14).]

years ago; back then they were lonely and terrorism was for them the last hope of the drowning man who clutches at straws.' Today, by contrast, a great change has occurred, both in the society at large and in the behaviour of the peasant masses, but most of all, 'the working class has appeared as an active and purposeful social force on the scene of history.' Of course, our comrades continue, the revolutionaries are faced with the huge task of deepening the mass movement and giving it a revolutionary organisation. The path to that goal is thorny, the persecutions are cruel. There are individual revolutionaries 'who, exhausted and embittered by the persecutions of the government, abandon themselves to the sweet feeling of revenge. *But the revolutionaries must not forget the cause of the revolution on account of the cause of the revolutionaries . . .* they must not abandon themselves to that feeling. . . . There are countless acts of barbaric violence [perpetrated by the government], and countless ways of insulting our honour, but the revolutionary party would perish if it wasted its strength in single combats, if it wished to settle accounts with every tyrant responsible for those abominations. . . . Where honour has been insulted, only the insulted person himself can restore that honour, no-one else. Other persons may create conditions in which such insults are impossible, but that goal cannot be achieved through assassination attempts against the offenders. The individual who can no longer master his immediate feeling of injury can carry out those attempts. We will not condemn him: those who seal their devotion to the great cause of freedom with their heart's blood are sacred to us. But we protest with all our strength against the attempt to bureaucratically organise those immediate emotional outbursts. We protest against the literary propaganda of organised terrorism, as a product of that feeling.' The rejection of immediate revenge for individual acts of violence, it says in conclusion, 'presents us with the duty of dedicating our whole lives to creating conditions in which those acts of violence are impossible.'

Thus think and speak comrades working in the south of Russia, where the Socialist Revolutionaries are most strongly represented. In the central area and in the main cities, there are no indications of terrorist inclinations among Social Democrats.

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