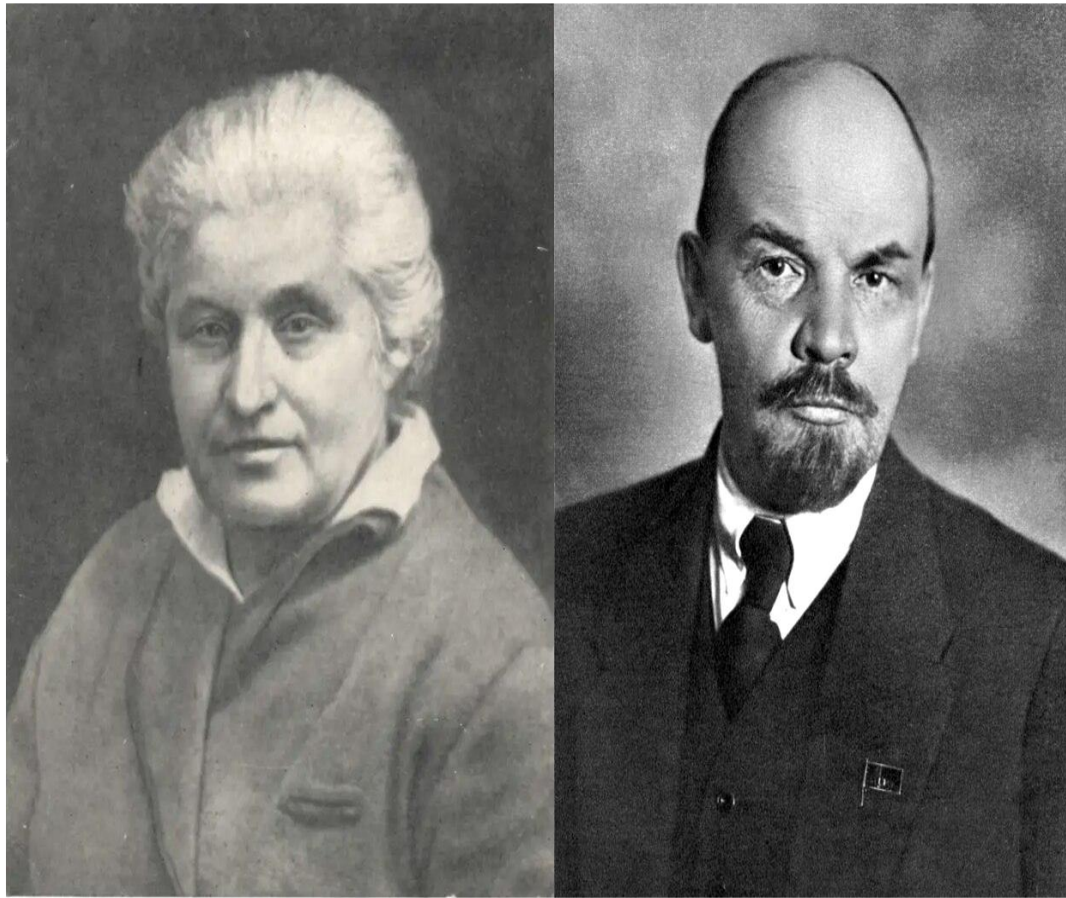


UNFORGETTABLE MEETINGS ¹



by
C. BOBROVSKAYA
1956

¹ Prepared by Maoism Library from <https://archive.org/details/recollectionsoflenin1956/page/36>

I

The first work of Lenin came into my hands at the end of 1895; it was an article "The Economic Nature of Narodism and Struve's Criticism of It" signed by "K. Tulin." This was published in a Marxist symposium "Data on Our Economic Development." The symposium, legal when it first appeared in 2,000 copies, was burned on the orders of the tsarist censorship.

In his report on the "pernicious nature" of the symposium to the Chief Censorship Committee on May 10, 1895, the censor Matveyev paid special attention to the article by "K. Tulin." In it, he said,

"The state is depicted as the assistant and ally of capitalism, which oppresses and exploits the people's labor; in so doing the innocent desires of those who expect a solution of the problem of the people's needs and the satisfaction of social demands by the state are ridiculed as obvious stupidity."

Recalling the Ministry of the Interior's ban on the re-publication of the first two volumes of Marx's Capital, this zealous tsarist censor continues:

"... but the present symposium not only disseminates the teachings set out in that work (Marx's Capital. — C. Z.-B.), but also tendentiously applies them to our society, rejecting in principle any measure for the improvement of the economic condition of the people coming from the state.

"Therefore, finding the symposium entitled 'Data on Our Economic Development' to be of a harmful nature, tending to undermine the existing order and at the same time expressed not as an individual, personal opinion but rather in the form of a programme for the Russian followers of the teachings of Marx, I on the basis of Articles 95 and 149 of the Code of Censorship bring it to the attention of the Committee."

One of the few copies of the symposium which escaped the burning reached the illegal Marxist circles in Warsaw, in which I, then a young working girl in a craft workshop, participated.

As in many other cities of Russia, there was in Warsaw at that time great discussion between the Marxists and Narodniks about the fate of the approaching Russian revolution, to which each of us was prepared to dedicate his young life. The Narodniks quite often beat us Marxists in those discussions. They had a trump card in the articles of Mikhailovsky in the legal magazine Russkoye Bogatstvo (Russian

Wealth). We Marxists were restricted to the illegal literature published by the "Emancipation of Labor" group which with great delay reached us irregularly from Switzerland.

That was why the legally published Marxist symposium, with "K. Tulin's" article as the main centre of attention, was such a great event for us. His exhaustive criticism of Narodism was our daily bread. It gave us a splendid weapon in our day-to-day struggle with our ideological opponents, who contemptuously labeled us "little Marxists," accusing us of evil schemes allegedly aimed at "the speediest possible boiling up of our own Russia in a factory cauldron," and so on.

A detail, to which it is now, after the passage of half a century, not shameful to confess, is revealing only that part of Lenin's work which dealt with the Narodniks became imprinted on our minds. That part in which he, dealing with Struve's book, administered is sharp rebuff to the first attempts to distort Marxism in Russia, passed us by almost completely. So regrettable an occurrence indicates our theoretical naiveté at the time, The living Narodniks were there on the spot, we met them every day and fought with them, but a living legal Marxist had not yet entered our field of vision.

Of the author "Tulin" we were only able to find out that that was not his real name and that he lived and worked not abroad but in Russia. How much more fortunate than we in remote Warsaw, far from central Russia, were the comrades then in direct contact with Lenin.

I heard of Lenin, then personally unknown to me, for the second time in 1896, when in summer I left Warsaw for a short stay in my native town of Velizh, in the Vitebsk Province, this time, instead of the puzzling "Tulin," it was the still more puzzling "'Starik," who, moreover, was certainly no "Starik" in years, but who was so called for reasons of security.

The famous strike of St. Petersburg weavers and spinners had just finished. Its scale and organization produced 'a tremendous impression upon workers throughout Russia. The start of an open mass workers' movement in the capital also roused us, the workers in illegal Marxist circles in other cities, with especial force. Till then, our activity had not gone beyond propaganda among small groups of workers, conspiratorial meetings with individual workers, and so on.

Our impressions of the events in St. Petersburg were later well expressed by Lenin's sister, the late A. I. Elizarova, in her recollections of her brother. "It was as though a window was opened into the stifling and stuffy cell of the Russian autocracy;

we all thirstily drank in the fresh air, experiencing an unprecedented boldness and vigor.”

How could one not feel a new surge of courage, when events were opening up such glittering prospects, when the opportunity for the realization of our long-cherished dream, the long-awaited meeting with the working masses, was coming so nearby?

To Velizh came my friend Yelena, a pupil of the St. Petersburg féldshers’ school. We sat in her family’s squalid hut and had a heart-to-heart talk — or, rather, Yelena, with increasing excitement, would talk and I would listen, striving not to miss a single word of her enthralling tale. Her pockets were stuffed with illegal literature which she had brought from St. Petersburg, duplicated appeals to the striking weavers and spinners. Among these short leaflets was one more lengthy pamphlet headed: To the Working Men and Women of the Thornton Mill.

Yelena described how this leaflet had been put out in autumn 1895, when the general strike of weavers and spinners was only in its preparatory stages, and how it was written by a man who quickly found himself in prison, where he still remained. He was called “Starik.” While in prison he was guiding the day-to-day revolutionary activity of the St. Petersburg Social-Democrats; his links with them had not been broken even after his arrest. She did not know his real name, but even if she did, she would not have told, strictly observing the requirements of security.

The “note-books,” in which “Starik” gave the Narodniks such a drubbing that they lay very low, enjoyed great popularity among the Social-Democrats of St. Petersburg. She had wanted very much to bring these “note-books” but hadn’t been able to. They were few and were seized upon to be read, their conviction producing a deep impression.

That was how in 1896 I became acquainted with a second work of Lenin — To the Working Men and Women of the Thornton Mill — and also learnt of the existence of his “note-books” (What the “Friends of the People” Are and How They Fight the Social-Democrats?). But I was still unable to read this remarkable book.

Two years later, in 1898, I went for a brief period to Switzerland and came into close contact with the “Emancipation of Labor” group. Living in the house of Axelrod, one of its founders, I more than once heard his delighted comments about the author of the newly-published pamphlet, The Tasks of the Russian Social-Democrats, to which he had written a preface, and which I immediately read.

I was overcome with curiosity and very much wanted to find out who had written such a splendid book. But the strictest security rules were observed there too, although it was Switzerland, not Russia. The only thing that I was able to get from Axelrod was that the book was written in exile and that its author was a fervent supporter of the “Emancipation of Labor” group.

The atmosphere among the Russian Social-Democrats abroad organized in the “Union” was extremely tense and a split was maturing. Under the influence of the revisionist articles of Eduard Bernstein, appearing in the theoretical journal of the German Social-Democrats, *Neue Zeit*, the activity of the Russian Economists was increasing greatly. The most inveterate of these were Prokopovich and Kuskova, later to be the authors of the notorious Credo, against whose whole conception Lenin declared war. Lenin in 1899 described Prokopovich as a zealous partisan of Bernstein. “In his well-known *Die Voraussetzungen*, etc.,” he wrote, “Bernstein recommended ... Prokopovich as his Russian supporter, in so doing however making a proviso to the effect that Prokopovich was more Bernsteinian than Bernstein himself.”

II

In 1899, fulfilling an assignment of the Kharkov Party Committee, I with many precautions delivered several score copies of *The Tasks of the Russian Social-Democrats* from Vilno to Kharkov in a basket with other illegal literature.

During the period of dispersion and instability among Russian Social-Democrats, Lenin’s *Tasks*, so precisely and clearly pointing the way for practical activity, played a tremendous role in the localities.

Kharkov at that time was no happy exception. Despite the comparatively extensive scale of the work, there was a great deal of confusion. Lenin mentioned this in his well-known foreword to the pamphlet *May Days in Kharkov*. Criticizing the shortcomings of the Kharkov Party organization which revealed themselves on May Day, 1900, the first public demonstration by the Kharkov workers, Lenin wrote:

“The mass of the workers were already aroused and ready to fall in behind the socialist leaders, but the ‘General Staff’ (the Party organization – C. Z.-B.) had still not succeeded in organizing a hard core which would correctly allocate the existing forces of the class-conscious workers and ensure a so conspiratorial - (secret) handling of affairs that the plans of action prepared beforehand should remain unknown not only to the authorities, but also to everybody outside the organization.”

All we active Party workers, even if we were not fully conscious of it, at least sensed this absence of a “hard core” correctly allocating the existing forces. This was felt not only in our organization – the “core” was then lacking throughout the Party.

That was why our hearts beat so joyfully when in the summer of 1900 we heard a rapporteur from Poltava setting out the plan for the creation abroad of a central guiding journal for the Party.

Telling us in detail of the plan for the future Leninist *Iskra*, the rapporteur, without giving names, informed us that this plan had been worked out in exile and that its initiator had completed his term of exile and already gone abroad, where he would work to carry it to fruition, doing everything in complete agreement with the “Emancipation of Labor” group, with which there were longstanding ties.

Not all who were present at the conference welcomed the rapporteur’s tidings. Several Economists, recently arrived from St. Petersburg, adherents of Rabochaya Mys! (Workers’ Thought), voiced the fear that the new paper, being under the wing of the “Emancipation of Labor” group, would make a call only for political struggle, ignoring the economic fight.

Nor did the Yuzhny Rabochy supporters, infected with local “patriotism,” view the project with any great enthusiasm, fearing that the future Party paper would dim the glories of their own.

However, in general, objections were few, and together with the rapporteur we agreed on co-operation with the new paper both with articles and correspondence and whatever material aid was possible,

After his departure we impatiently awaited the first issue of the promising new paper. But many of us had to wait a long time: we were soon all arrested. I personally, for example, was able to see the first issues of *Iskra* only almost 18 months after their appearance, at the conclusion of preliminary detention. *Iskra* could not at that time penetrate to a solitary confinement cell in the secret wing of the Kharkov Provincial Prison.

I did not have Lenin’s *Iskra* with me in my cell, but I did have Vladimir Ilyich’s major work *The Development of Capitalism in Russia*, recently legally published by him under the name of Ilyin.

“The socialist intelligentsia,” wrote Lenin as early as 1894, “can expect to perform fruitful work only when it abandons its illusions and begins to seek support in

the actual, and not the desired development of Russia, in the actual, and not the possible social-economic relations.”

I shall never forget the immense inner satisfaction that I derived from careful study of Lenin’s fundamental work. Somewhat later, when I met Lenin personally, I recalled that satisfaction. At first, he tried to pass it off with a joke: “Poor, poor you, wading through all my innumerable dull figures in solitude, how I pity you,” and so on. But then he started to enquire seriously about just how I had found my way through his tables, whether they were understandable and how other comrades read the book. It was clear that he himself attached considerable importance to a reading of this book by Party workers, and he joked only because of his ever-present modesty.

Although we prisoners in the solitary confinement cells of the tsarist prison could not read the first numbers of Lenin’s *Iskra*, news of an event so important for the Party as the appearance of this newspaper in Russia reached us even behind the prison bars. In autumn 1901, on my release from prison and exile to my home town “prior to appearance in court,” my first thought was to obtain and read at least one copy of this remarkable paper. An opportunity presented itself on the way home, which lay through Vitebsk.

The Vitebsk Social-Democrats had No. 4 of *Iskra*, of which the editorial “Where to Begin?” was widely discussed in all the illegal city circles.

“The question ‘*What Is to Be Done?*’ ” Lenin wrote, “has recently become especially acute for the Russian Social-Democrats. It is not, as it was at the end of the 80’s and beginning of the 90’s, a question of the choice of a road, but of what practical steps we must take and how exactly they should be taken along the road we have already chosen. The question is one of a system and plan for practical activity. It must be confessed that this question of the nature and methods of struggle, fundamental for a practical party, remains as yet unsolved for us, and still arouses serious disagreements revealing a deplorable instability and looseness of thought.”

Who was this who so sharply characterized that state of affairs in our local Party organizations, with their “deplorable instability and looseness of thought”? Who was the author of this article which opened up such wide horizons, proposing an elaborate plan “for the creation of a rostrum for the nation-wide exposure of the tsarist government”? This newspaper-rostrum was not to limit itself to the dissemination of ideas, to political education and the winning of political allies; it was also to be an

organizational centre for the whole Party. The way was opened for the participation of rank-and-file Party workers in this great work.

Lenin's article "*Where to Begin?*" was an unforgettable signpost pointing out my future road. It was this which prompted me to immediately go underground in order later to go to Switzerland to get in touch with *Iskra* and, if the comrades there found me suitable, to become one of those "regularly fulfilling the detailed functions of all-Russian work," to become one of the agents for *Iskra*.

III

Several months were necessary for the correspondence and financial arrangements for the journey, to arrange the illegal crossing of the frontier, and so on. Not till summer 1902 did I reach Zurich.

When for old acquaintance's sake I called upon Axelrod, I immediately saw that in this always hospitable home some somber mood incomprehensible to me now ruled. To my delight at the article in *Iskra* No. 4 which had decided my fate, and to my still greater delight at Lenin's *What Is to Be Done?* which appeared at that time Axelrod responded either with some unimportant remark or a morose silence, When Plekhanov came from Geneva, the three of them – Axelrod, Plekhanov and Zasulich – talked for a long time behind closed doors.

We could not understand why the editors of *Iskra*, its chief workers, moved from Munich to London, whence came some "unpleasant" letters to Axelrod. London seemed remote and strange.

In Zurich a small *Iskra* distribution centre remained in the cellar of Axelrod's house. We sent bundles of the latest issues of *Iskra* to all European cities where among the then numerous Russian students "*Iskra* Aid Groups" were formed.

Working day in and day out in this centre with Axelrod's daughter, I was able eventually to find out from her that a struggle was under way within *Iskra* concerning the drafting of a programme for the forthcoming Party Congress, that "Petrov," who made no concession "even" to Plekhanov, was responsible for the exacerbation of this struggle, that Petrov had a "difficult nature" and that however hard Axelrod and Zasulich tried to reconcile Plekhanov and Petrov, they had so far had no success.

But, of course, the exacerbation of relations between Lenin and Plekhanov was in no way caused by Petrov's (Lenin's) "difficult nature," but by a profoundly principled struggle between them on basic questions of the programme of a proletarian party.

At first, we knew nothing of the essence of this bitter struggle. Only a small circle of the senior comrades was in touch with events. It began to be alarming. We feared that the slightest rift in *Iskra* would play into the hands of the enemies of the Party and of every sort of revisionist faction. As time went by some sort of information about the ideological differences between Plekhanov and Lenin, whose prestige had grown extraordinary since the appearance of his *What Is to Be Done?*, filtered down even to us, the novice Party workers. London no longer seemed strange and remote. I wanted to go there, to the author of *What Is to Be Done?*, to hear from his own lips what there would be for us to do on our return to Russia and, above all, the conviction emerged that only with his aid would it be possible to return quickly.

On more than one occasion I spoke to Axelrod of our desire to get to London, but he obstinately rejected any such suggestion, declaring that very shortly the most important of the *Iskra* workers, including the author of *What Is to Be Done?*, would have to come to Zurich and we would all see them.

Only a few of the more important workers who had still for various reasons to remain outside Russia were sent to London. It was proposed that we, a small group of workers who had so far shown ourselves to be not bad local organizers, should immediately start out for Russia, and each of us received a special assignment from *Iskra*. It was proposed that I should go to the northern textile region – Ivanovo-Voznesensk, Yaroslavl, Kostroma and Shuya – where the first task was to restore *Iskra*'s severed links with the Northern Union of the R.S.D.L.P.² (having the code name “Semyon Semyonovich”), broken up by the gendarmerie a little while before.

On the way I had to stop in St. Petersburg to print an all-Russian leaflet in the secret print-shop from copy sent to Zurich by the *Iskra* editors. Whether the author of this leaflet was Lenin or not I was not able to establish then or since. I also received the task of calling at Tver (Kalinin) to receive a basket containing issues of *Iskra* and several copies of *What Is to Be Done?* which was held there, in order to distribute them together with the leaflets printed in St. Petersburg in the mills and factories in the district “entrusted” to me. In addition, I was to supply *Iskra* regularly with correspondence, articles and every kind of information. That was how I became an agent for Lenin's *Iskra*.

² Northern Union of the R.S.D.L.P. united the Social-Democratic organizations of the Vladimir, Kostroma, Yaroslavl and Tver Provinces of Russia. – Ed.

IV

After several months of intense work followed the then inevitable result for us underground workers – fresh arrest, but on this occasion, it didn't take much time. By summer 1903, choosing Tver as my place of temporary residence "prior to appearance before the court," I was again able to take part in active Party work.

The Tver organization was an *Iskra* group, maintaining permanent contact with the centre abroad. It was guided in all its activity by the organizational principles set out by Lenin in his *What Is to Be Done?* A special feature of its work at that time was its well-established activity in the countryside.

"To bring political knowledge to the workers the Social-Democrats must go among all classes of the population, must dispatch units of their army in all directions,"

taught Lenin. In accordance with this, the Tver comrades made skillful use of the fact that the personnel of even such a large local undertaking as the Morozov Mill was in the main made up of peasants who still retained their links with the countryside. Lenin's pamphlet *To the Village Poor* which we received played a truly exceptional role in winning over the peasantry in our area to the Social-Democrats and in extending and strengthening our influence in the countryside.

The Second Congress of our Party took place abroad at this time. The Tver organization elected a firm *Iskra* supporter, Alexander Gusev, as its delegate. It later transpired that he did not reach his destination. While crossing the frontier illegally he fell seriously ill and died in Geneva a few days after his arrival. *Iskra* No. 50 published a moving obituary of our comrade who died at his post.

Not at first knowing of the death of our delegate or of the events at the Congress we daily awaited tidings from abroad with growing impatience; the mood of all was extremely optimistic, based upon the profoundest certainty that *Iskra* would emerge from the Congress completely victorious.

But then, like a bolt from the blue, came rumors that *Iskra* itself had been split at the Congress. We did not want to believe this. I felt I had to go abroad to study the documentary material which would give a clear picture.

It was no easy matter to get away from local work and cross the frontier. But events soon helped me to carry out such a trip. With the approach of autumn, secluded places in the woods had already become inadequate "quarters" for our Party meetings.

We had to meet in the city in the homes of sympathetic intellectuals or workers. To evade shadowing by the tsarist secret police became more and more difficult. The shadowing increased and one autumn night our organization was smashed. The arrests were on a mass scale, and many sympathizers, not to speak of active workers, were seized.

But the police only carried out searches at the homes of a few of us who had comparatively recently come out of preliminary detention and who were in Tver pending trial under open police surveillance. The gendarmerie clearly counted upon the destroyed Party organization being restored by those under supervision. We immediately saw through this maneuver, of course; we well understood that here new people were needed, people not known to the local defenders of the tsarist regime. It would be better for us to take advantage of the auspicious moment to go somewhere else where we were not known.

However, before setting out for a new city, I wanted to know exactly what was going on throughout the Party, I wanted to go abroad, even if only for a very short time, and this I was able to do. In the depths of autumn 1903 I arrived in Geneva.

There I found the struggle between the Mensheviks and the Bolsheviks at its height. The sessions of the Congress of the League of Russian Revolutionary Social-Democrats Abroad were in progress.

During those feverish days the Mensheviks headed by Martov also carried on vigorous activity for "the snaring of souls" outside the Congress, seeking to draw into the Menshevik camp those of us who, having only just arrived, had not been at the Congress of the League. I was the object of special attention both from Axelrod, who had known me for a number of years, and from Martov, who remembered me from a meeting in Kharkov in 1900.

With such great bitterness did the Menshevik leaders assure me that Lenin was a "usurper," a "mailed fist" who had introduced a "state of siege" into the Party, and so on and so forth, that after a few such conversations I was summoned to the office of the pension in which I was staying. There I was with great courtesy warned that "If such loud, heated voices are heard coming from your room until late at night in the future, we shall have to ask you to leave."

In the days following I studied the material dealing with the split. One document, entitled "An Account of the Second Congress of the R.S.D.L.P.", written by Lenin, was the object of my special attention, "We proved," it said in part, "that it is

necessary to narrow down the understanding of the term 'Party member' in order to separate the workers from the chatterers and to put an end to organizational chaos."

For the majority of rank-and-file Party workers, like myself, who had not been able to go into all the disputed issues, the difference between Lenin and Martov on the question of the formulation of the first point of the Party Rules – who should be considered a member of the Party – was fundamental. We were then suffering too much from difficulties with various sympathizers from among the bourgeois intellectuals, who were not amenable to Party discipline, timid, valuing their legality and peace of mind, for it to be considered useful for the Party to legitimize them as members through its Rules.

From a personal experience during the last days before my departure from Tver I could see how unreliable were our bourgeois democrat hangers-on, adhering in words to our programme, aiding our organizations, but not taking an active part in their work. When our Party had to work underground, when we were daily and hourly in danger of disaster, it was necessary for the preservation of continuity to have at least one member of the Committee in reserve who for security reasons would for the time being stand a little outside the day-to-day active work. In case of arrest this reserve would help the new workers to re-establish what had been destroyed by the gendarmerie and was himself required to take part in the work if there were not enough people.

We in Tver had one such reserve Committee member, a Zemstvo doctor by profession. After the collapse of our organization, when I, together with the other people under police surveillance, had only undergone a search, and after a series of precautions made my way in the morning to the Zemstvo hospital to our reserve doctor, I heard to my surprise that he by no means intended to come out of reserve and had no intention of compromising himself by active Party work, That was not for him. Let new people come and do the work. Yes, indeed, how great was the need in the localities to separate the workers from the chatterers!

Thus, a simple acquaintance with Lenin's formulation of the first point of the Party Rules was sufficient reason for me to tell Axelrod that I intended to go to the meeting of Bolsheviks where I could see the author of this formulation.

VI

For seven years – from 1895 to 1902 – in Warsaw, Velizh, Zurich and Kharkov, and under various names – Tulin, "Starik," Ilyin and the unknown *Iskra* organizer Petrov – the features of the teacher had flashed before me. Only in summer 1902, when I

had read *What Is to Be Done?*, a book serving us as such a remarkable guide to action, did these names become concentrated in one – Lenin.

That was why, before I saw Lenin, I imagined him to be just as he in fact was when I met him – standing immeasurably higher than us all but at the same time an equal, simple comrade, who brought out all that was best in you yourself as a revolutionary.

In one of the squares in the centre of Geneva there was – and perhaps still is – the Landolt Café. There, in two opposite and fairly spacious back rooms, the Bolsheviks and the Mensheviks would meet almost every night.

To the Bolsheviks' room came Lenin accompanied by his wife Nadezhda Konstantinova and a group of active Bolshevik Party workers, who had broken out of jail and escaped from exile and who were abroad only for a short time to link up with the Party centre.

To the room opposite came Martov, invariably accompanied by Dan and his fairly large Menshevik following, made up to a great extent of émigrés who had firmly settled abroad and of bourgeois intellectuals calling themselves revolutionaries. Later on, to the great disappointment of Lenin and ourselves, his supporters, Plekhanov also began to go to the Mensheviks after his break with Lenin.

Arriving at the Landolt and going with a group of comrades to the "Bolshevik room" I found there – from the numerical point of view – a more than modest audience, Vladimir Ilyich appeared, followed by Nadezhda Konstantinova, greeting everyone and exchanging jocular remarks with the comrades in passing.

He briskly mounted the improvised platform and launched into a survey of the thorny questions of the unhappy situation inside the Party after the League's Congress and the betrayal of Plekhanov. Martov and his supporters slandered the Party, disseminated every kind of fable about the Party Congress majority, discrediting the Bolshevik members of the Central Committee elected by the Congress, cut the ties which Lenin, as the Central Committee's representative abroad, maintained with Russia, intercepted money dispatched from Russia for the sending of workers there, and held up literature. Plekhanov, who on the evening the League's Congress concluded (October 31, 1903) told Lenin that he "could not shoot at his own side," now worked hand in glove with the Mensheviks. The intellectual individualism, the vacillation, which had appeared at the Second Congress during the discussion on the

first point of the Party Rules, had resulted in the chaos and collapse of which we were now the witnesses.

The urgent task was to send the largest possible number of comrades, staunch Bolsheviks, to Russia, who, occupying places in the Committees, would correctly inform the local Party organizations of the situation within the Party. But the absence of sufficient means for the sending of an adequate number of comrades was an obstacle. It was necessary to husband our resources strictly.

Of course, after the lapse of more than 50 years, I can describe the first speech I heard by Lenin only in the most general terms.

There was nothing involved about what Lenin said, everything was simple and comprehensible to any active Party worker. But everything was said in such a way that it went right to the heart, prompting the desire to set out for Russia immediately, that very day, even on foot, to make every effort to prove Lenin's correctness to the local Party organizations and to warn the Committees of the dangers threatening the Party if they turned aside from the road he indicated,

After his report Lenin came up to the group of comrades who presented me, the novice, to him. Clasp my hand warmly, Vladimir Ilyich, screwing up his eyes, asked whether I wasn't afraid to come here to the "dreadful" Bolsheviks, where there were "usurpers," "mailed fists" and the "terrible" Lenin, who was introducing a "state of siege" into the Party.

When the gathering started to break up, Vladimir Ilyich and Nadezhda Konstantinova very warmly and cordially invited me to visit them informally, an invitation which I did not of course hesitate to take advantage of.

VII

Vladimir Ilyich at that time lived on the outskirts of Geneva with Nadezhda Konstantinova and her mother Elizaveta Vasilyevna Krupskaya, who was never separated from her daughter, invariably following her both into exile and abroad. In the suburb of Chasseron "the Ilyichs," as we called Vladimir Ilyich and Nadezhda Konstantinova, occupied a small cottage. They lived in the upstairs, which was reached by a wooden staircase. Downstairs was a large kitchen with a stove on which a large enameled kettle was permanently boiling in case a visitor should come. In a small room next to it was Elizaveta Vasilyevna, perpetually worried about her modest household. Her very first words were good natured grumbles:

“They pore over books and _ notebooks up there; Vladimir Ilyich torments himself with work and Nadya gets tired out – you can’t get them down to eat.”

It was here in the kitchen that on other occasions when several comrades came at once Vladimir Ilyich would receive guests, because the “apartments” upstairs were too cramped.

The furniture in two rooms upstairs consisted of simple tables, buried under magazines, manuscripts and newspaper cuttings. Along the walls were crudely knocked together shelves with books. In each room was a small bed, covered with a plaid rug, and a couple of chairs.

In the centre of Vladimir Ilyich’s table there was a Russian abacus, with the aid of which he probably reckoned up his ““one-horse” and “one-quarter of a horse” peasant households.

On Nadezhda Konstantinova’s table were her “instruments of production”: a bottle of invisible ink and the “keys” with the aid of which she would write her code messages between the lines of some “congratulations on the Saint’s Day.” Day and night Nadezhda Konstantinova sat there decoding information received from Russia about the state of affairs in the localities and coding Lenin’s messages to the Committees and individual Party workers telling of the situation in the Party centers abroad.

When I arrived both Vladimir Ilyich and Nadezhda Konstantinova were sitting at their tables working; I was a hindrance, but I was nevertheless received very hospitably.

It was the first time I had seen Lenin at home, dressed student style in a dark-blue Russian shirt, an attire which was somehow especially in keeping with his well-set, harmonious “Russian” face.

Vladimir Ilyich first started to ask about my experience in prison and about the difficulties of underground work. I told him my impressions of the Kharkov Prison, telling in so doing how I had read *The Development of Capitalism in Russia* in my cell; then it was that Vladimir Ilyich jokingly called me ““poor, poor you” for having had to work through his “boring” tables.

Vladimir Ilyich questioned me in great detail about the state of affairs in the Tver organization from which I had come, showing special interest in our work in the countryside, in the organizational details and the formation of peasant committees in

the villages. He did not hide his satisfaction when I told of the importance of his pamphlet *To the Village Poor* for us.

Vladimir Ilyich chuckled merrily about one incident that befell one of our propagandists sent into a village. He was a qualified propagandist, but nonetheless he returned with a “secret” sealed letter containing a request from the Peasant Committee that he should not be sent again. The reason was: “...he is a gentleman, spending the night in a peasant’s hut, but when washing in the morning, taking a brush out of his pocket and beginning to clean his teeth.”

This vexatious affair with the toothbrush prompted Vladimir Ilyich to speak of the importance, in the conditions of illegality under which our Party then labored, to foresee every little thing, to be always on the watch, and to know thoroughly the situation in which one had to operate.

To be vigilant and cunning in the battle with the tsarist police was considered by Lenin to be an all-important feature of a revolutionary. I never forgot these instructions from Vladimir Ilyich during the future years of illegal Party work. It helped prolong the periods of work between one arrest and the next.

Lenin’s attention to our local Party work, his interest in the difficulties, joys and griefs of each worker was very moving, and the respect with which he listened to your every remark, even the timidest, gave new courage.

During this, my very first visit to the home of Lenin, I very much wanted to hear from him of the further course of the inner-Party struggle. But Vladimir Ilyich, being in a happy mood, wishing clearly to rest a while from the questions which so agitated him, on this occasion dismissed it with jokes. He was particularly witty at dinner when we were all invited downstairs by Elizaveta Vasilyevna.

“Now,” said Vladimir Ilyich humorously, “our Elizaveta Vasilyevna considers that the division which has arisen within our Party can be easily removed, that Julius Osipovich (Martov) must be reconciled with Vladimir Ilyich and that Vera Ivanovna (Zasulich), whom she intends to visit for a chat on this score, can do it.”

At first it seemed to me that Ilyich had thought up this “plan for a way out of the situation” as a joke, but from what followed it was clear that the naive old mother had indeed planned to go on such an errand to Zasulich in the absolute belief that she could in that way succeed in restoring peace in the Party, disturbed as a result of the “fancies

of Vladimir Ilyich and Julius Osipovich,” as she put it. But the main thing was that then
““Nadya would stop worrying herself about this business.”

Making fun of Elizaveta Vasilyevna, Vladimir Ilyich for himself added:

“Julius (Martov) and I now walk on different sides of the Geneva streets. We see each other from afar and each of us crosses to the other side of the street; as for Plekhanov, I write to him. I sign myself not ‘predanny Vam’ – yours truly – but ‘predanny Vamy’ – betrayed by you.”

Despite this jocular tone, these words echoed a great bitterness.

VIII

We took up much of Lenin’s time, not only when he spoke to us in the evenings in the Landolt, but when, singly or in groups, we descended upon him at home. Even now I blush to recall how unceremoniously we behaved.

I well remember one evening when, listening to Lenin until late at night, I was stranded at his cottage, far from where I lived. I had missed the last tram and it was late and rather frightening to go on foot through the deserted streets. Vladimir Ilyich offered to accompany me, in order also to get a bit of fresh air.

Taking advantage of this happy opportunity for a heart-to-heart talk with Ilyich, I began to ask him some ethical questions linked with my life as a professional revolutionary, which were then particularly troubling me. The point was that, in fulfilling the duties of *Iskra* agent, I frequently felt myself not sufficiently qualified for the post. The local Party organizations always respected those who came from the centre, and this worried me very much. It seemed to me that only specially gifted comrades, with a broad political horizon, oratorical talent and profound theoretical knowledge, had the right to be professionals. Professional revolutionaries from among the workers, it seemed to me, must have some special proletarian super instinct to make up for their insufficient theoretical knowledge.

Having none of the qualities listed, I was tormented by the awareness that I was taking the high title of professional revolutionary in vain. I decided there and then to tell Vladimir Ilyich of the thoughts that were worrying me and to ask his advice. Vladimir Ilyich listened very attentively, as he always did, and was then himself carried away, beginning to talk of how he viewed the structure of our Party and its role in the unfolding revolutionary events.

Of the question of the right to call oneself a professional revolutionary which I had touched upon, Vladimir Ilyich said that this right belonged to those who were above all unreservedly devoted to the Party and the working class. This right should be enjoyed by people whose personal life merged with that of the Party. The revolutionary organization should not be restricted to a narrow circle of leaders; permanent, untiring workers who were directly linked with the masses, who would help build the edifice of the Party brick by brick, were necessary.

Of course, I was listening breathlessly and did not notice that we had reached the house where I lived. It was absolutely impossible to break off the conversation at that point. I stopped helplessly and wanted to suggest to Ilyich that he come into my apartment, but everyone was already asleep there. Ilyich thought for a moment, then resolutely turned about, and we went back, continuing our interrupted conversation.

When in this way we again reached his cottage, Vladimir Ilyich laughed and began to make jokes, saying that all the same we should put an end to this endless seeing-off. But as he himself "was to blame" for being carried away by his own reasoning, he would once again accompany me home, but this time for the last time.

On parting, Vladimir Ilyich said to me:

"A little more confidence in your own strength! A little more confidence is what is wanted!"

How often in the most difficult, complex moments of Party work did I draw support from those words of Ilyich: "A little more confidence in your own strength."

It was characteristic that Vladimir Ilyich himself did not object to our "plundering" of his time and that we, the "plunderers," felt no twinges of conscience. My friend Makar, for example, a pattern-maker who had worked many years in the Putilov Plant in St. Petersburg and who was temporarily in Geneva with us, came to me almost every day and insisted that we go and have a chat with Ilyich. To my objections that it was inconvenient to bother Ilyich so often, Makar invariably replied:

"It's nothing. We need Ilyich, but he also needs us; we bring a breath of Russia."

Makar's constant gravitation towards Lenin was an expression of his profound respect for Ilyich. I recollect how once this great sturdy fellow burst in upon me with shining face and with completely childlike delight exclaimed:

"Ilyich's eyes, his eyes! How they shone yesterday!"

It appeared that I had missed a lot by not going to see Ilyich yesterday, when he had assailed the supporters of Martov with special vigor. Lenin at that time already prepared his remarkable *One Step Forward, Two Steps Back*. It may be that on that evening Makar had been fortunate to hear from Ilyich's own lips those words, so full of sarcasm, assailing the Mensheviks.

Vladimir Ilyich himself listened particularly attentively to Makar and talked to him at great length. Never did Lenin cease to show that in teaching the workers, it was necessary to learn from them.

Vladimir Ilyich spent New Year's Eve, 1904, with us. We saw the opera *Carmen* in a rather poor production, drank beer in the Landolt and strolled through the streets of Geneva, which were crowded that night. During the encounters with the Mensheviks which were inevitable during such walks we demonstratively turned away. We jestingly remarked that the Martov supporters turned away from us too. Our joyful, enthusiastic mood did not forsake us that New Year's Eve. In addition to everything else, we were still young; Vladimir Ilyich too was young, fond of a joke and a laugh.

IX

The new year was one of rapid growth for the revolutionary wave in Russia. It was, therefore, all the more urgent that the Party be rescued from the blind alley into which it had been led by the wrecking policy of the Mensheviks.

In his meetings with us Vladimir Ilyich began to allocate more and more attention to the practical preparation for a Congress in the localities, in Russia, whither, despite the scarcity of resources (the Mensheviks had seized the Party funds), we had been able to send a few people.

With the aim of establishing in Moscow a Northern Bureau of the Central Committee consisting of staunch Bolsheviks, Vladimir Ilyich had first of all sent there our general favorite Nikolai Bauman³—an escapee from the Kiev Prison and the chief organizer of that audacious break-out by 10 *Iskra* people famous in our Party's history.

A whole district of Moscow, in the streets of which this prominent Bolshevik fell fighting for the cause of the proletarian revolution in October 1905, is named after Nikolai Bauman. His blood cemented the ties of the working class and the working

³ N. E. Bauman (1873-1905)—an outstanding leader of the R.S.D.L.P., leader of the Moscow Bolshevik organization.—Ed.

people of Moscow with the Moscow Bolshevik organization, which led them through many trials to another October – the victorious October 1917.

As a second member of the Northern Bureau went another faithful supporter of Lenin – the Central Committee member, now dead, Comrade Lengnik (Party pseudonyms Kurtz, Kol, and others).

By the spring 1904 a number of Bolsheviks had been sent to work in Russia by Lenin, among them Vladimir Bobrovsky, who had escaped with Bauman from the Kiev Prison and who was sent to the Caucasus at the disposal of the Union Committee.

The Caucasus Union Committee under the leadership of J. V. Stalin, who escaped from Siberian exile in January 1904, was then waging a bitter struggle for the Bolshevikization of the local Party organizations, and preparing intensively for the Third-Party Congress. It was proposed that I also should accompany the next group of comrades to be sent to Russia. But our departure was delayed by lack of resources, and also by the fact that owing to a sudden wave of arrests in Russia, Lenin did not have sufficiently verified addresses where we could present ourselves on arrival.

I was temporarily sent to Berlin, where for several months before my departure for Russia my flat served as a forwarding centre in our organization for the illegal shipment of people and literature across the frontier. In the beginning of March 1904, I left Vladimir Ilyich during the most difficult days of his struggle for the Party.

Lenin saw better than anyone else that in the impending revolutionary events of militant 1905 the proletariat must advance as an independent serried column, with its own special slogans, not as the blind tool of the bourgeois revolution, but as its most conscious and most resolute participant and driving force.

Of Lenin, Stalin said:

“...Never was the genius of Lenin’s insight displayed so fully and distinctly as in a time of revolutionary outbreaks. In times of revolution, he literally blossomed forth, became a seer, divined the movement of classes and the probable zigzags of the revolution, seeing them as if they lay in the palm of his hand.”

Then too, as if in the palm of his hand, Vladimir Ilyich saw the urgent need for the speediest concentration of the Bolshevik forces – the need for the formation of a party of a new type, under whose guidance the proletariat could really appear as the driving force of the revolution. That was why Lenin brushed aside every obstacle which

both the Mensheviks and conciliators from among the Central Committee majority constantly put in his way, and acted over the heads of these opportunists.

Relying upon a number of Bolshevik Committees in Russia, upon conferences convened by these Committees, and also upon a group of Bolshevik writers who came abroad to give him assistance, Lenin in 1904 established a firm Bolshevik centre – the newspaper *Vperyod* (No. 1 came out on January 4, 1905) and the Organization Committee for the convening of the Third Congress, which worked out the Bolsheviks' tactics for the developing bourgeois-democratic revolution and united the most conscious strata of the proletariat around their slogans.

