

Resistance books

peasants and other working people, through the press and in other ways. Under no circumstances should they behave like social-democratic deputies who strive to build up business connections with their electors. *They must at all times be prepared to undertake propaganda work for the communist organisation.*

8. Communist members of parliament must bear in mind that they are not “legislators” seeking agreement with other legislators, but party agitators sent into the enemy’s camp to carry out party decisions. The communist member of parliament is responsible not to the atomised mass of voters, but to the communist party, whether legal or illegal.
9. The parliamentary speeches the communist deputies make must be in a language that can be understood by every rank-and-file worker and peasant, every laundress and shepherd — the party must be able to issue their speeches as leaflets which can be distributed to the most distant rural corners of the country.
10. Rank-and-file worker-communists must not be afraid to speak in the bourgeois parliaments. Even when workers are new to parliamentary work they must not be intimidated by the so-called experienced parliamentarians. If necessary, the worker-deputies can read their speeches straight from notes. The speeches can then be published in newspapers and leaflets.
11. Communist members of parliament must use the parliamentary platform to expose, not just the bourgeoisie and its avowed followers, but also the social-patriots, the reformists, the indecisive politicians of the “centre” and the other opponents of communism. Likewise, they must use it to spread the ideas of the Third International.
12. Even where the communist party has only one or two people in parliament, the behaviour of its deputies should be a challenge to capitalism. The deputies should remember that they only deserve the name of communist if they show ceaseless hostility to the bourgeois system and its social-patriotic lackeys. ■

their loyalty to the working class by their long years of political work.

2. The organisation of the parliamentary fraction after the elections are over must be entirely in the hands of the central committee of the communist party, irrespective of whether the party as a whole is legal or illegal at the time. The central committee must confirm the election of the chairperson and the presidium of the parliamentary fraction. The central committee of the party must have a permanent representative in the parliamentary fraction with the right of veto. The parliamentary fraction must seek prior directives from the central committee on all important political questions. When the communists in parliament are about to launch an important campaign the central committee has the right and duty to appoint or reject the speaker from the fraction, demand from the speaker an outline of the proposed speech or the speech itself for the central committee to read and approve etc. Candidates standing as communists must give official written undertakings that at the first request of the central committee of the party they will resign their seats, so that, whenever necessary, the party can organise a united withdrawal from parliament.

In those countries where reformist, semi-reformist and simply careerist elements have already managed to penetrate the communist parliamentary fraction (this has already happened in certain countries), the central committees of the communist parties must undertake a thorough purge of the membership of the fraction, proceeding from the principle that the cause of the working class is better served by a small but genuinely communist fraction than by a large fraction with no consistent communist line.

4. The communist deputies must combine their legal work with illegal work if the central committee so decides. In those countries where the communist deputy enjoys a certain immunity from bourgeois law, this should be used to assist the party's illegal organisational and propaganda work.
5. Communist deputies must subordinate all their parliamentary work to the extra-parliamentary activity of their party. The party and its central committee must see that legislative proposals are regularly introduced, not with the idea that they will be accepted by the bourgeois majority, but for the purpose of propaganda, agitation and organisation.
6. In the event of street demonstrations and other revolutionary activity initiated by the working class, the communist deputy must play a leading and visible role at the head of the proletarian masses.
7. While remaining under the party's control, the communist deputies must use every means at their disposal to maintain contact with the revolutionary workers,

institutions, the communist party has to decide each case separately, evaluating the specific conditions of the given moment. A boycott of elections or of parliament, or a withdrawal from parliament, are permissible primarily when conditions are ripe for an immediate move to armed struggle for power.

19. The comparative unimportance of this question should always be kept in view. Since the focal point of the struggle for state power lies *outside parliament* the questions of proletarian dictatorship and the *mass* struggle for its realisation are, obviously, immeasurably more important than the question of how to use the parliamentary system.
20. The Communist International therefore emphasises most strongly that it considers any split or attempt to split the communist party solely on this question to be a serious mistake. The Congress also calls on all those who accept the principle of armed struggle for the proletarian dictatorship under the leadership of a centralised party of the revolutionary proletariat, and who exercise an influence on all the mass organisations of the working class, to strive for the unity of all communist elements despite possible differences on the question of how to use bourgeois parliaments.

3. Revolutionary parliamentarism

In order to guarantee that the revolutionary parliamentary tactic is used correctly, the following points should be observed:

1. The central committee and the communist party as a whole must, during the preparatory stage, i.e., before the parliamentary elections, systematically inspect the quality of the political and organisational abilities of the members of the parliamentary fractions. The central committee of the communist party must be responsible for the work of the communist parliamentary fraction. It must have the unquestionable right to object to any candidate put forward by any organisation if it doubts that the candidate, if elected, would conduct himself/herself in a truly communist manner.

The communist parties must break with the old social-democratic custom of putting forward only so-called “experienced” parliamentarians, mainly lawyers etc. As a rule, they should put forward candidates who are workers. It should not worry them that this sometimes means choosing rank-and-file members who lack any great parliamentary experience. The communist party must be ruthless in relation to those careerist elements who attach themselves to the communist party with the aim of getting into parliament. The central committees of the communist parties must sanction the candidature of people who have proved

members and not the party leadership alone; it is essential that all mass actions (strikes, demonstrations, movements among the armed forces etc.) occurring at the time are taken up in the campaign and that close contact is maintained with them. The mass proletarian organisations should also be drawn into active work around the election.

15. If conducted in line with these theses; and also with the conditions laid down in the special instruction, parliamentary work represents a direct contrast to the dirty political manoeuvring practised by the various social-democratic parties, who enter parliament to support this “democratic” institution or, at best, “to win it over”. The communist party must stand exclusively for the *revolutionary* utilisation of parliament, in the spirit of Karl Liebknecht, Höglund and the Bolsheviks.

III

16. Anti-parliamentarianism as a principle, as an absolute and categorical rejection of participation in elections or in revolutionary parliamentary work, is therefore a naive and childish position which does not stand up to criticism. Sometimes this attitude expresses a healthy disgust with the manoeuvring of the parliamentarians, but is nevertheless a failure to recognise the possibilities of revolutionary parliamentarianism. This position, is frequently connected with a completely incorrect view of the role of the party — the communist party is seen, not as a militant centralising vanguard of the workers, but as a decentralised system of loosely connected groups.
17. At the same time, a recognition of parliamentary work does not imply absolute acceptance of the need to participate, whatever the circumstances, in all elections and parliamentary sessions. Participation in a particular election or session depends on a whole series of specific conditions. A certain combination of conditions may make withdrawal from parliament essential. The Bolsheviks left the pre-parliament in order to weaken it, undermine it and sharply counterpose to it the St. Petersburg Soviet which was about to take on the leadership of the October revolution. They left the Constituent Assembly on the day of its dissolution, transferring the focal point of political events to the Third Congress of Soviets. Under other circumstances it may be essential to boycott elections and use direct action to remove the whole bourgeois state apparatus and the bourgeois ruling clique. Alternatively, participation in elections, followed by a boycott of parliament, may be necessary etc.
18. So, while accepting as a general rule the need to participate in elections to both national parliaments and the organs of local government, and in the work of these

revolutionary work and subordinating them to its plan for the overall campaign of mass struggle.

11. The platform of bourgeois parliament is one such auxiliary centre. The fact that parliament is a bourgeois state institution is no argument at all against participation in the parliamentary struggle. The communist party enters this institution not to function within it as an integral part of the parliamentary system, but to take action inside parliament that helps to smash the bourgeois state machine and parliament itself (examples are the activity of Liebknecht in Germany and of the Bolsheviks in the tsarist Duma, the “Democratic Conference”, Kerensky’s pre-parliament, the “Constituent Assembly” and the town dumas and, finally, the action of the Bulgarian communists).
12. Parliamentary activity, which consists mainly of disseminating revolutionary ideas, unmasking class enemies from the parliamentary platform, and furthering the ideological cohesion of the masses, who, especially in the backward areas, still respect parliament and harbour democratic illusions — this activity must be absolutely subordinate to the aims and tasks of the mass struggle outside parliament.

Participation in election campaigns and the utilisation of parliament as a platform for revolutionary ideas is of particular significance for the political conquest of those layers of the working class such as the rural working masses who until now have stood aside from political life and the revolutionary movement.

13. Should the communists receive a majority in the local government institutions, it is their duty to take the following measures:
 - a. form a revolutionary opposition to fight the bourgeois central authority;
 - b. aid the poorer sections of the population in every possible way (economic measures, the organisation or attempted organisation of armed workers’ militias etc.);
 - c. expose, at every opportunity, the obstacles which the bourgeois state power places in the way of fundamental social change;
 - d. launch a determined campaign to spread revolutionary propaganda, even if it leads to conflict with the state power;
 - e. under certain circumstances, replace the local government bodies with soviets of workers’ deputies.

All communist activity in the local government institutions must be seen as a part of the struggle to break up the capitalist system.

14. The election campaign itself must be conducted not as a drive for the maximum number of parliamentary seats, but as a mobilisation of the masses around slogans of proletarian revolution. The election struggle must involve rank-and-file party

machine, destroying it and its parliamentary institutions, whether republican or constitutional-monarchical.

5. The same attitude should be taken to the local government institutions of the bourgeoisie which it is theoretically incorrect to differentiate from state organs. Local government institutions are also apparatuses of the bourgeois state mechanism and must be destroyed by the revolutionary proletariat and superseded by local soviets of workers' deputies.
6. Consequently, communism rejects parliamentarianism as the state form of the future society, or as the form of the class dictatorship of the proletariat. It denies the possibility of parliament being won to the proletarian cause on a long-term basis. It sets itself the task of *destroying* parliamentarianism. *It follows from this that bourgeois state institutions can be used only with the object of destroying them.* This is the *one and only* way the question of their utilisation can be posed.

II

7. Every class struggle is a political struggle for, in the final analysis, it is a struggle for power. Any strike that extends over the whole country begins to threaten the bourgeois state and thus acquires a political character. To attempt to overthrow the bourgeoisie and smash its state is to engage in political struggle. The creation of a *proletarian class* apparatus for administration, and suppression of bourgeois resistance — whatever form this apparatus takes — involves the conquest of political power.
8. This means that the question of the political struggle can in no way be reduced to the question of the attitude to be taken towards parliamentarianism. Inasmuch as the proletarian class struggles develop from small and partial encounters into a bid to overthrow the whole capitalist system, this is a general question.
9. The most important form of proletarian struggle against the bourgeoisie and its state power is, first and foremost, mass action, which is organised and directed by the revolutionary mass organisations of the proletariat (unions, parties, soviets) under the general leadership of a united, disciplined, centralised communist party. Civil war means war and to wage it the proletariat needs its own experienced political officers' corps and its own strong political general staff, capable of leading all the operations in these areas of struggle.
10. The mass struggle is a whole network of activities which increasingly intensify and logically culminate in an insurrection against the capitalist state. As the mass struggle develops into civil war the leading party of the proletariat must, as a general rule, secure each and every legal position, using them as auxiliary centres of its

communist who enters parliament and a social-democratic parliamentarian here emerges clearly. The social-democratic deputies act on the assumption of the relative stability and the indefinite duration of the existing regime. They set themselves the task of achieving reforms at all costs, and are concerned that the masses should value properly each gain as the fruit of socialist parliamentarism (Turati, Longuet and Co.).

A new tactic is emerging to replace the old and compromising parliamentarism. It is one of the weapons with which parliamentarism in general will be destroyed. However, the disgusting traditions of the old parliamentary tactics have driven some revolutionary elements to oppose parliamentarism on principle (IWW revolutionary syndicalism, KAPD). Taking all these circumstances into consideration the Second Congress of the Third Communist International advances the following theses:

2. Communism, the struggle for the dictatorship of the proletariat & the utilisation of bourgeois parliaments

I

1. Parliamentarism as a state system became a “democratic” form of the rule of the bourgeoisie, which at a certain stage of its development needed a form of popular representation. Although the latter was in reality a weapon of suppression and oppression in the hands of the ruling class, it outwardly appeared to be the organization of the popular will, standing above classes.
2. Parliamentarism is a definite form of the state. Therefore, it cannot possibly be a form of communist society, which knows neither classes, nor the class struggle, nor any kind of state power.
3. Parliament cannot act as a form of *proletarian* state administration in the transitional period from the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie to the dictatorship of the proletariat. At times of acute class struggle, eventually developing into civil war, the proletariat must inevitably build its own state organisation as a *militant* organisation which excludes representatives of the former ruling classes. At this stage any pretence about the existence of a “popular will” reflecting the wishes of the entire population is harmful to the proletariat. The parliamentary separation of power is not necessary, is in fact contrary to the interests of the proletariat. The state form of the proletarian dictatorship is the soviet republic.
4. Bourgeois parliaments are one of the most important apparatuses of the bourgeois state machine and, like the bourgeois state in general, cannot be won over to the side of the proletariat. The task of the proletariat is to shatter the bourgeois state

robbery and destruction committed by imperialism, parliamentary reforms which are wholly lacking in consistency, durability and order lose all practical significance for the working masses.

Parliamentarianism, like bourgeois society as a whole, is losing its stability. The transition from an epoch of stability to an epoch of crisis has necessitated the adoption of new tactics by the proletariat in the sphere of parliamentarianism. Even in the past period the Russian workers' party (Bolsheviks), for example, developed an essentially revolutionary parliamentarianism, the reason being that the political and social equilibrium of Russia was destroyed by the 1905 revolution and the country entered a period of storm and stress.

Those socialists who, while sympathising with communism, point out that their countries are not yet ripe for revolution and refuse to break with the parliamentary opportunists have as their starting-point the conscious or semiconscious assessment of the approaching epoch as one of the relative stability of imperialist society and believe, therefore, that in the struggle for reforms a coalition with Turati and Longuet can have practical results.

The struggle for communism, however, must be based on a theoretical analysis of the character of the present epoch (the culminating point of capitalism, its imperialist self-negation and self-destruction, the uninterrupted spread of civil war etc.). The forms of political relations and groupings can vary from country to country, but their essential nature remains everywhere the same. For us the goal is the direct political and technical preparation of a proletarian uprising to destroy bourgeois power and establish the new power of the proletariat.

At the present time parliament cannot be used by the communists as the arena in which to struggle for reforms and improvements in working-class living standards as was the case at certain times during the past epoch. The focal point of political life has shifted fully and finally beyond the boundaries of parliament. Even so, the bourgeoisie is still forced, by its relations with the working class, and also by the complex relations within the bourgeois class, to push measures sometimes and somehow through parliament. In parliament the various cliques haggle for power, exhibiting their strengths, betraying their weaknesses and compromising themselves etc., etc.

The historical task of the working class is therefore to wrest the parliamentary apparatus from the hands of the ruling classes, breaking and destroying it and replacing it with new organs of proletarian power. At the same time it is very much in the interests of the revolutionary general staff of the working class to have its reconnaissance units in the parliamentary institutions of the bourgeoisie in order to hasten their destruction. The fundamental difference between the tactics of a revolutionary

Appendix

The Communist Parties & Parliamentarism

1. The new epoch & the new parliamentarianism

From the start, from the epoch of the First International, the attitude of the socialist parties to parliamentarism was that bourgeois parliaments should be used for agitational purposes. Participation in parliament was considered as a means of developing class consciousness, i.e., of awakening the hatred of the proletariat for the ruling classes. This attitude has changed, under the influence not of theory, but of the course of political events. As a result of the development of the productive forces and the extension of the arena of capitalist exploitation, capitalism and the parliamentary states acquired a lasting stability.

As a consequence, the parliamentary tactics of the socialist parties adapted themselves to the “organic” legislative work of the bourgeois parliament, and the struggle for reforms within the framework of capitalism became increasingly significant for these parties. The so-called maximum program became a platform for debating the altogether remote “final goal”. In these circumstances parliamentary careerism and corruption flourished and the vital interests of the working class were secretly, and sometimes openly, betrayed.

The attitude of the Third International to parliament is determined not by new theoretical ideas, but by the change in the role of parliament itself. In the preceding historical epoch parliament was an instrument of the developing capitalist system, and as such played a role that was in a certain sense progressive. In the modern conditions of unbridled imperialism parliament has become a weapon of falsehood, deception and violence, a place of enervating chatter. In the face of the devastation, embezzlement,

These theses were adopted by the Second Congress of the Communist International, held in Moscow, July-August 1920.

prejudices than they were in Russia; because of that, it is *only* from within such institutions as bourgeois parliaments that communists can (and must) wage a long and persistent struggle, undaunted by any difficulties, to expose, dispel and overcome these prejudices”.

This remains a central task confronting revolutionary socialists in Australia today. Study of the experience of the Bolsheviks’ parliamentary activity can provide us with valuable lessons to guide us in carrying out that task. ■

parliamentary careers.

Of course, this was the result of the relatively peaceful development of West European capitalism and the long “boom” from 1893 to 1913. Parliamentary campaigns were no longer seen as part of the mass struggle against capitalism. Election campaigns were seen as a means winning gradual reforms within the framework of the capitalist system.

The Bolsheviks, on the other hand, operated from the premise that bourgeois parliaments cannot in any way serve as the arena of struggle for reforms, or for improving the lot of the working people. The central means of winning reforms was the mass mobilisation of the working class — in strikes, street marches, factory occupations, etc. Parliamentary work was only an auxiliary to this mass action strategy.

The Bolsheviks, remaining faithful to the lessons drawn by Marx and Engels from the experiences of the 19th century revolutions, repudiated parliamentarism as a state form; they understood that only a state based on democratically centralised organs of workers’ power like the Paris Commune of 1871 or the soviets of 1905, could satisfy the needs of the working class. They repudiated the possibility of winning over parliament to their side; and understood it was only possible to speak of utilising the institutions of the capitalist state with the object of destroying them.

In their resolutions they clearly stated that the fundamental method of struggle of the working class against capitalist rule is the method of mass action; parliamentary tactics, although important, are supplementary and subordinate. They carried out election campaigns which were not geared primarily toward getting votes but to building — through propaganda, agitation and organisation — anti-capitalist actions that involved not only their candidates and party leaders but also the masses of working people. That is, they utilised their election campaigns to do the opposite of what the parliamentary system is all about — to draw the masses into political activity, rather than excluding them from it.

These lessons of the Bolsheviks’ positive experience of utilising parliament for revolutionary objectives, and the lessons they drew from the opportunist parliamentary cretinism of the reformist Social-Democrats in Western Europe, were codified in the theses adopted by the Second Congress of the Communist International in 1920 on “The Communist Parties and Parliamentarism”.

In his pamphlet on Marxist tactics, *‘Left-Wing’ Communism — An Infantile Disorder* (which was written and circulated to the delegates on the eve of the second Comintern congress), Lenin observed that in advanced capitalist countries, like Australia, “the backward masses of the workers and — to an even greater degree — of the small farmers are much more imbued with bourgeois-democratic and parliamentary

professional revolutionaries, with 20,000 members, into a mass party of revolutionary action, with 240,000 members at the time of the October Revolution.

Lessons of the Bolshevik experience

The Bolshevik experience in the tsarist Duma in 1912-14 provides some valuable lessons for the socialist movement today. It demonstrated that parliamentary elections and parliament can provide revolutionary socialists with important opportunities for legal political work; that parliament can be used by revolutionaries as a means of reaching and cementing ties with working people; that it can be used to combat the influence of liberalism within the working class (including parliamentary cretinism); that it can be used to organise and mobilise the working class and its allies for a revolutionary struggle for political power.

The Bolshevik experience showed that revolutionaries can use parliament as a platform for revolutionary activity, without being corrupted and taking responsibility for the reactionary government and its policies; that parliamentary work can play a central role in the entire scope of party activities. Lenin did not view electoral work in a period of ascending radicalisation as a peripheral or sideline activity. It was not a routine task but a central task of the party, requiring tremendous mobilisation of forces, political inspiration, and great care for detail.

Socialist electoral campaigns can be used to draw the masses into extraparliamentary action. Calls for boycotting parliamentary elections, while a legitimate tactic, should be used carefully. As the resolution on “The Communist Parties and Parliamentarism” adopted by the Second Congress of the Communist International, held in 1920, observed: “Boycotting of elections or parliament, or leaving parliament is permissible, chiefly when conditions are ripe for an immediate transition to an armed fight for power”, i.e., when the masses are ready to support an armed insurrection to overthrow the parliamentary system.

Participation by revolutionaries in parliamentary elections is necessary because it provides a platform for more effectively combating parliamentary illusions than simply denouncing parliament from the sidelines.

The Bolsheviks showed that parliamentary representatives, in order to maintain their principled line and to be effective, must be subordinated to the party as a whole. The West European Social-Democratic parliamentary representatives had begun to decide for themselves what their line in parliament was going to be. They voted for the imperialist war, contrary to the resolutions previously adopted by their party conferences. They adapted to capitalism. They began to see parliament as a means of winning legislative reforms in “the interests of the workers” and advancing their own

parliamentary fraction. Many years later it was discovered that the leader of the Bolshevik deputies was actually a police agent. The discipline in the fraction was so good that Roman Malinovsky, the agent, became one of the best spokespersons for the Bolsheviks in the Duma.

When the inter-imperialist world war broke out in 1914 the Bolsheviks were one of the few Social-Democratic parties that opposed to it. The Bolshevik Duma deputies voted against giving the government war credits, denounced the imperialist war and walked out of parliament. They were arrested soon after at a conference called to assess their work. They were sentenced to hard labour in Siberia. The arrests provoked demonstrations, and gave the Bolsheviks an opportunity to explain to the masses their opposition to the war.

Their public opposition to the war provided the regime with a pretext to clamp down on the Bolsheviks. With the parliamentary fraction in jail and the party press confiscated, the Bolsheviks were unable to launch any large antiwar movement. Under an unrelenting barrage of patriotic propaganda from the tsarist regime and the bourgeois liberals, the mood of the masses shifted in a prowar direction.

However, the deprivations caused by the war brought about increasing social discontent in 1916, finally exploding in the February 1917 uprising which swept away the monarchy and its parliament — to be replaced by the dual power of the self-appointed Provisional Government dominated by the bourgeois-liberal Kadet party on the one hand, and on the other by the rival Soviets of Workers and Soldiers Deputies, initially dominated by the petty-bourgeois democrats — the Menshevik and SR parties.

In the course of the turbulent events of 1917 the Bolsheviks gradually defeated the influence of the petty-bourgeois democrats within the ranks of the workers, then among the peasant soldiers. They won majorities in the St. Petersburg and Moscow Soviets after they led the mass resistance to General Kornilov's counterrevolutionary coup attempt in September 1917, and on the basis of that majority support they led the insurrection of November 7, 1917 (October 25 in the tsarist calendar) transferring all power to the Second All-Russia Congress of Soviets.

The Bolsheviks' electoral work in the period from 1912-1914 was a crucial aspect in the success of the October Revolution in 1917. Their work in election campaigns, their work in the Duma and their speeches, combined with their work in the factories and neighbourhoods enabled them to establish a base within the working class. When the Bolshevik leaders returned after February 1917, many of the roots in the working class they had established before the war still existed. This facilitated the transformation through 1917 of the Bolshevik organisation from a relatively small nucleus of

Bolshevik Duma fraction was the collection and distribution point for all the funds raised. This close relationship with the workers allowed the Bolsheviks to use the Duma in a revolutionary manner. Whenever they spoke they used the floor to expose the conditions faced by the working class. In question time they were able to demand answers from ministers on the current struggles. They participated in committees in order to gain information which they could use in their propaganda work.

However, they did not participate in working on legislation or passing laws, except where the law would benefit working people. The aim of all their parliamentary activity was to help build the mass movement and the revolutionary party.

The Duma fraction & the party

Through their active participation in workers' struggles the Bolshevik Duma deputies won the respect of the workers. They were in the best position to do semi-legal party work. Their main responsibility was not passing legislation but carrying on the large number of activities that would be the normal activities of a revolutionary party operating in conditions of illegality. They helped arrange false passports, set up conferences, raised funds and worked for the newspaper.

Badayev was assigned to work on the paper. All the struggles they were involved in were reflected in *Pravda*. The editorial offices became a centre of activity for the struggles.

The deputies would tour their electorates not only to consult with workers but to facilitate the growth of the party and its branches. The fraction itself became the organising centre for the Bolshevik party.

In all situations they acted under direct instructions from the leading bodies of the party. There were several meetings between the Bolshevik deputies and the Central Committee of the party. Badayev recounts the results of one of these meetings:

We returned from Krakow, armed with concrete practical instructions. The general policy to be followed by the six Bolshevik deputies was clearly outlined and also the details as to who was to speak on various questions, the material that should be prepared, the immediate work that should be done outside the Duma, etc. Coming as we did from an entirely complicated and hostile environment, this direct exchange of ideas with the leading members of the party and above all with Lenin was of utmost importance to us.

Lenin sent detailed questionnaires to all the deputies. He wrote some of the speeches they gave in the Duma. As with any parliamentary fraction there was constant pressure to adapt to the parliamentary environment. Lenin urged them to take harder positions on some questions particularly when the war broke out in 1914.

The Bolshevik fraction was one of the best examples of a revolutionary

the Bolsheviks to split from the fraction.

The Menshevik numbers in the Social-Democratic fraction did not reflect their support in the country. The electoral gerrymander meant that the Menshevik deputies only represented 246,000 people, whereas the Bolsheviks represented one million.

After the split a wide-ranging debate occurred among the workers. The Bolsheviks campaigned against the Mensheviks. They collected petitions, debated Mensheviks in the workplace, and wrote articles in *Pravda*. Badayev estimated that they won between 75 and 90% support among the workers. The Bolsheviks had won a majority of seats on 14 of the 18 union boards.

Resolutions of support for the Bolsheviks poured in from around the country. The Bolsheviks were the obvious choice of the workers.

Mass action & parliamentary work

The victory for the Bolsheviks was the result of their consistent efforts to link their work in the Duma to mass action and support for workers' struggles. Badayev wrote: "There was not a single factory or workshop, down to the smallest, with which I was not connected with in some way or other."

The relative immunity of the deputies from prosecution by the police allowed the workers' deputies to operate fairly openly. They visited the factories and accepted delegations from workers. They toured the working-class areas, talked to workers, gathered information, and carried out internal party assignments.

From the first day the Duma opened, the Bolsheviks used every opportunity to mobilise the masses. Within a week 60,000 workers, one quarter of the working population of St. Petersburg were out on strike against harsh sentences of sailors accused of conspiring to prepare a revolt. A quarter of a million workers joined the protests across Russia.

Badayev describes incident after incident where workers employed the strike and street protest to win their demands. The issues were many and varied. An explosion in a munitions factory, struggles over wage cuts, lockouts from unproductive factories, even unfair treatment from supervisors were grounds enough for the workers to take action. The Bolshevik Duma deputies actively campaigned in support of these strikes and protest actions. They used their parliamentary immunity to investigate industrial accidents. They negotiated with the government on behalf of the workers, always reporting back to workers the results of their discussions. They organised strike funds and collections across the country.

Pravda was the central tool for this work. The paper carried articles about every struggle. Appeals for funds were made in the paper and donations were listed. The

the working class and particularly for the St. Petersburg proletariat, which had shown such revolutionary class consciousness.

At meetings of the curia the Bolsheviks tabled instructions to the elected delegates which were discussed and voted on. The instructions debated served to involve the voters in discussing the role of elected representatives and to give them a mandate for their action. The Bolshevik instructions called on deputies to use the Duma for making the demands of the working class known and not to play at legislation. They bound the deputies to the platform of the Bolsheviks.

As it turned out the Mensheviks and the Bolsheviks were the only ones to contest the workers gubernia (electoral districts). The process of clarification pursued by the Bolsheviks was vital in winning the majority of the workers over to the side of the Bolsheviks a year later when the Bolsheviks and Mensheviks formally split into two separate parties.

The initiation of the Bolshevik election campaign coincided with the publication of the first legal Bolshevik newspaper, *Pravda*, a four-page newspaper which came out daily. It became the principle instrument for publicising the campaign and popularising the electoral platform of the party.

The circulation of the paper rapidly rose— to 40,000 a day in St. Petersburg alone. It became the central means by which workers were informed of the action of their deputies. It became the central way for workers to read the speeches of the deputies.

Very little media coverage was granted to the Bolsheviks in the bourgeois press. The Bolsheviks realised this and Lenin monitored the development of *Pravda* as closely as he did the election campaign.

Six out of the 442 deputies elected to the fourth Duma were Bolsheviks. The breakdown of parties elected to the Duma was: 65 rights, 120 nationalists and moderate rights, 98 Octoberists, 48 progressives, 59 Kadets (Constitutional Democrats), 21 national groups, 10 Trudoviks (Labourites, i.e., Socialist-Revolutionaries), 14 social-democrats and 7 independents. The social-democratic fraction was further divided into 6 Bolsheviks, 7 Mensheviks and 1 non-aligned deputy.

Split in the RSDLP fraction

Mensheviks and Bolsheviks were in conflict from day one of the parliamentary session. Debates occurred over questions of admission of the Polish deputy to the fraction. His politics were at odds with the RSDLP but he aligned himself with the Mensheviks. Tensions grew within the fraction and escalated when the Bolsheviks withdrew from the board of the Menshevik paper *Luch*. The Mensheviks used their numbers in the fraction to block Bolshevik speakers in the Duma and in committees, thereby forcing

Anyone involved in debates with the Greens and Democrats about elections would be familiar with the Menshevik view. The search for high profile candidates is of greater significance for them than the program of those candidates.

The election campaign & mass action

The Bolsheviks used every opportunity in the election campaign to mobilise people and involve them in the campaign. Electoral meetings passed motions on the most burning questions of the day. The authorities did everything they could to hamper the election. Badayev described it this way:

The atmosphere in which the elections were held and the hasty “disqualification” of the delegates from half of the factories and mills aroused the indignation of the St. Petersburg workers. The government had gone too far. The workers answered with a powerful movement of protest.

The Putilov factory was the first to act. On the day of the elections, October 5, instead of returning to their benches after dinner, the workers assembled in the workshops and declared a strike. The whole factory came out — nearly 14,000 workers. At 3pm several thousand workers left the factory and marched towards the Narvsky gate singing revolutionary songs, but they were dispersed by the police. The movement spread to the Nevsky shipyards, where 6500 workers organised a meeting and a political demonstration. They were joined by the workers of the Pale and Maxwell mills, the Alexeyev joinery works, etc. The following day the workers of the Erickson, Lessner, Heisler, Vulcan, Duflon, Phoenix, Cheshire, Lebedev, and other factories struck.

The strike quickly spread all over St. Petersburg. The strike was not restricted to those factories at which the election of delegates had been annulled, but many others were also involved. Meetings and demonstrations were organised. Several factories linked their protests against the persecution of trade unions with those against the nullification of the elections. The strike was completely political; no economic demands whatever were formulated. Within ten days more than 70,000 were involved in the movement. The workers demonstrated very clearly that they would not give up their right to vote and that they realised both what the elections meant and what the work of the future workers’ deputies in the Duma would be.

The strike movement continued to grow until the government was convinced that it could not deprive the workers of their right to vote and was forced to announce that new primary elections would be held in the works affected. Many factories and mills which had not participated before in the election of the delegates were included in the new list. In consequence, the elections of electors had to be annulled and new elections held after additional delegates had been elected. This was a great victory for

By contrast, the Menshevik position was to wrest the Duma from the hands of the reactionaries by seeking to win more seats in it for the bourgeois liberals. They believed that the struggle in the election campaign was between the reactionaries and the liberal bloc, of which they sought to be the left wing. The equivalent today of this Menshevik position is held by those who believe that we should subordinate our electoral work to supporting the bourgeois-liberal Labor Party against the conservative Coalition parties.

The electoral system

The Duma electoral system was a particularly complicated undemocratic process. Representation was weighted to ensure that a Duma sympathetic to the tsarist government was elected. There were only six out of 442 deputies elected from the working-class centres. Even in areas where there was a mixture of voters from different social classes, only those who paid a poll tax were able to vote thereby excluding the majority of workers. Voter registration was handled by the police who victimised known radicals. Even in the working-class constituencies only workers who had worked six months in a particular factory could participate. Managements would sack potential candidates they did not like.

The process in the working-class constituencies involved election of delegates from factory-based meetings (*curias*) who then voted for electors, who then formed an electoral college which elected the Duma deputies. This process was fraught with possibilities for manipulation. Elections were called on one or two days notice. Candidates could be disqualified without recourse. Factory managements hampered the elections at the workplace.

Within this framework, the Bolsheviks were forced to work secretly. Secret meetings were held in the forests to discuss candidates.

The Bolsheviks conducted a systematic campaign at these meetings and at all levels of the election process. They argued against non-party candidates. "Non-party candidates were men without conviction and therefore would easily wander in the wrong direction," they explained. The interests of the working-class could best be defended by people from a party whose positions were known and which would have control over its representatives.

The Mensheviks argued for united tickets to be put forward by the Social-Democrats. They argued that the candidates put up by the Social-Democrats should be selected on the basis of their personal abilities. By contrast, the Bolsheviks argued that candidates should be elected on the basis of their political platform; that the debate would strengthen unity because the workers could then elect deputies who represented the views of the majority.

maintaining the independence of the party of the proletariat from all the non-proletarian parties, to revealing the petty-bourgeois nature of the pseudo-socialism of the democratic groups (mainly the Trudoviks, the Narodniks and the Socialist-Revolutionaries), and to exposing the harm done to the cause of democracy by their vacillations on questions of mass revolutionary struggle.

At the same time, the Bolsheviks were prepared to make electoral alliances with the petty-bourgeois democratic parties such as the Socialist-Revolutionaries and even with bourgeois liberals against the monarchist parties, while preserving their freedom to criticise their allies.

In his 1920 pamphlet *'Left-Wing' Communism — An Infantile Disorder*, Lenin recalled that:

Prior to the downfall of tsarism, the Russian revolutionary Social-Democrats made repeated use of the services of the bourgeois liberals, i.e., they concluded numerous practical compromises with the latter ... while at the same time being able to wage an unremitting and most merciless ideological and political struggle against bourgeois liberalism and against the slightest manifestation of its influence in the working-class movement. The Bolsheviks have always adhered to this policy. Since 1905 they have systematically advocated an alliance between the working class and the peasantry, against the liberal bourgeoisie and tsarism, never, however, refusing to support the bourgeoisie against tsarism (for instance, during second rounds of elections, or during second ballots) and never ceasing their relentless ideological and political struggle against the Socialist-Revolutionaries, the bourgeois-revolutionary peasant party, exposing them as petty-bourgeois democrats who have falsely described themselves as socialists. During the Duma elections of 1907, the Bolsheviks entered briefly into a formal political bloc with the Socialist-Revolutionaries ...

The aim of these electoral alliances, as with all the Bolsheviks' tactics, was, as Lenin explained, "to *raise* — not lower — the *general* level of proletarian class-consciousness, revolutionary spirit, and ability to fight and win". Lenin went on to note that:

The petty-bourgeois democrats (including the Mensheviks) inevitably vacillate between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, between bourgeois democracy and the soviet system, between reformism and revolutionism ... The communists' proper tactics should consist in *utilising* these vacillations, not ignoring them; utilising them to call for concessions to elements that are turning towards the proletariat — whenever and in the measure that they turn towards the proletariat — in addition to fighting those who turn towards the bourgeoisie.

Educating, training and organising the working class and its allies to win the revolutionary mass struggle for power was the objective of the Bolsheviks' electoral approach.

make up this watchword, this general slogan: (1) a republic, (2) confiscation of all landed estates, and (3) the eight hour day.

This was in line with the decision of the January 1912 Prague conference of the RSDLP. The rest of the party's program was to be brought up in propaganda and linked with the above three slogans.

These three slogans formulated the fundamental demands of the Russian workers and peasants. The eight-hour day was the chief demand of the economic struggle in the working class. The demand for the confiscation of the landlords' estates offered a revolutionary solution of the agrarian question.

The slogan of a republic directly raised the question of political power. This slogan expressed the view that there was no possible way of the working class improving its lot under the existing form of government. A republic could only come into being in Russia through the revolutionary overthrow of the tsarist regime.

The Bolsheviks thus linked all the other demands and policies they raised in the election campaign with the idea that a fundamental change in the political order was necessary; that the interests of the masses could only be advanced through a radical change of governmental power.

The Menshevik election platform, on the other hand, was centred around two demands: (1) sovereignty of the people's representatives and (2) review of the agrarian legislation. These were complete adaptations to the legal framework that they were operating within. The electoral system was rigged in such a way to produce a Duma with a majority for the capitalists and landlords. There was no way that the interests of the workers and peasants could be satisfied by the Duma. The Mensheviks' platform was tantamount to saying that the system could produce these results, rather than, the system needs to be replaced in order to produce these results.

The Bolsheviks were not interested in sowing illusions among the masses that their demands would be met through the parliament. They regarded parliamentary election campaigns as opportunities for far-reaching propaganda and agitation, as one of the means of organising the masses for direct action against the existing regime.

The Bolsheviks' attitude to electoral alliances

The Bolsheviks were also clear in their attitude to other parties. The conference resolution of January 1912 stated:

... the party must wage a merciless war against the tsarist autocracy and the parties of the landlords and capitalists that support it, persistently exposing at the same time the counterrevolutionary views and false democracy of the bourgeois liberals (with the Cadet party at their head). Special attention should be paid in the election campaign to

In 1911 Lenin argued that the election campaign for the fourth Duma be the centre of the party's propaganda offensive. He wrote:

The elections for the fourth Duma are due to be held next year. The Social Democratic Party must launch its election campaign at once ... Intensified propaganda, agitation, and organisation are the order of the day, and the forthcoming elections provide a natural, inevitable, topical "pretext" for such work.

The seriousness with which the Bolsheviks approach the election campaign can be gained from this passage in Badayev's book:

The Central Committee attached exceptional importance to the elections in St. Petersburg and therefore instructed the St. Petersburg organisation to extend its work as widely as possible and to mobilise *all* party forces for the election campaign. The St. Petersburg committee set up a commission to superintend the elections, and the city wards were allocated among its members.

He then went on to explain the attention to detail, the involvement of every member, from the leading bodies of the party, to the worker members in the factories.

The election campaign was the centre of party life for the Bolsheviks. This was particularly so because this was the only legal work open to them. The Bolshevik candidates, of course, could not openly run as socialists. Publicly, they presented themselves as "consistent democrats".

At this time the split between the Mensheviks and the Bolsheviks had not been formalised. While both factions operated separately, they were seen by the masses as one party, the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party. The differences were blurred even further due to the fact that the party was banned and could not operate openly.

However, through the election campaign the Bolsheviks were able to draw out the difference between their revolutionary line and the reformist approach of the Mensheviks.

The Bolshevik & Menshevik election platforms

Lenin explained the importance of the election platform — that it was not created especially for election times, but flows from the general program of the party and the positions that the party has established through the experience of previous years. He wrote:

Very often it may be useful, and sometimes even essential, to give the election platform of social-democracy a finishing touch by adding a brief general slogan, a watchword for the elections, stating the most cardinal issues of current political practice, and providing a most convenient and most immediate pretext, as well as subject matter, for comprehensive socialist, propaganda. In our epoch only the following three points can

peasant masses in the countryside — into its sweep. The Bolsheviks failed to recognise this and, expecting a revival of the revolutionary mass movement, again called for a boycott of the Duma. The boycott failed and the Duma was established.

Soon after, the tsarist government felt it was necessary to disband the Duma and set up one that would be more loyal. The government called for new elections in early 1907. This time the Bolsheviks and the Mensheviks joined other radical parties in running candidates in the election. A number of Bolsheviks were elected as deputies.

In June 1907 the second Duma was dissolved and the workers' deputies were arrested and imprisoned. A large number of Bolsheviks called for a boycott of the third Duma elections. Lenin and the majority of Bolsheviks opposed the boycott. The Bolsheviks again ran candidates and a few were elected. The third Duma lasted until 1912, when elections were called for the fourth Duma — the last Duma before the February 1917 revolution.

The election campaign for the fourth Duma

The Bolsheviks activities in this last Duma provide a rich repository of lessons. These are preserved in book by one of members of the Bolshevik fraction in the Duma — A. Badayev — published in 1929 under the title *The Bolsheviks in the Tsarist Duma*. This book constitutes the primary source for this talk on Bolshevik electoral tactics.

The Bolsheviks decided to run candidates for the fourth Duma despite the fact that the third Duma dutifully carried out the wishes of the tsarist regime. The Bolsheviks were more than aware of this when they made their decision to run. They had no illusions in parliament. Their paper, *Pravda*, wrote as follows:

The entire activity of the state Duma was directed towards the class interests of its majority. Therefore these five years of an “efficient” Duma did not in any way assist in the solution of a series of urgent questions which are of enormous importance to the country. All attempts made by the left parties, by means of interpellations [question time], to shed light on the dark aspects of Russian life and to draw to them the attention of the country were frustrated by the votes of the dominant majority ...

The electoral laws were rigged in favour of the Black Hundreds, the pro-monarchist, pro-landlord forces in the Duma. There was no doubt that the activities of the fourth Duma would be directed against the workers.

In spite of these considerations the Bolsheviks decided to take an active part in the elections. Experience had taught them that the Duma elections could be used for agitational purposes. The Duma fraction had become an organising centre for the Russian party and the work done by the fraction outside the Duma was indispensable to the growth of the party in that period.

authority and freedom than in the press or at meetings.

Engels went on to say that electoral propaganda was a more effective means of struggle than “revolutionary” adventures “carried through by small conscious minorities at the head of unconscious masses” — referring to various ultraleft attempts by small groups to seize power through street fighting. He viewed the participation of socialists in elections as “one of the sharpest weapons” to fight the state institutions and expose the other parties to the masses; as an effective method of reaching the masses of people with the ideas of the party; as a useful platform to express the ideas of the party and attack its opponents if the party succeeded in winning seats; as a gauge of strength and support of the party among the masses; as a means of legitimising the party before the masses and putting the party in a position where attempts to outlaw the party could be fought more easily. This was particularly important in Germany in light of the Anti-Socialist Law. The party’s legal activities — its election campaigns — were powerful weapons enabling it to fight for the right of the party to exist.

The Bolsheviks & the tsarist Duma

The most successful application of the revolutionary Marxist approach to parliamentarism was carried out by the Russian Bolsheviks.

The first experience of the Bolsheviks with parliamentarism was in 1905 when the tsarist regime attempted to call elections for a Duma — the Russian name for parliament.

The tsarist regime was an absolute monarchy, with all legislative and executive power concentrated in the hands of the tsar. The Duma was merely a concession to the revolutionary upsurge of 1905. Moreover, it was to be simply an advisory body, elected on an extremely limited franchise that assured the landed nobility a majority of members.

The Bolsheviks successfully advocated a boycott of the first Duma. It was swept away by the October 1905 general strike and the formation of the St. Petersburg Soviet [Council] of Workers’ Deputies. The Soviet was made up of delegates elected by factory assemblies to organise and coordinate the general strike. Lenin described it as the “embryo of a provisional revolutionary government.”

The boycott of the first Duma was a successful tactic given the revolutionary possibilities at that time. The masses were mobilising for an armed uprising against the institutions of the old regime and it was wrong to rely on the parliamentary tactics of a more stable period.

By 1906 the revolutionary upsurge had ebbed, largely due to the fact that it was confined to the urban centres and had not drawn the majority of the population — the

would be the election of a “national representative assembly.” In such an election, they argued, the Communist League must strive to see that “everywhere workers’ candidates are put up alongside the bourgeois-democratic candidates, that they are as far as possible members of the League, and that their election is promoted by all possible means.” They went on to argue that:

Even where there is no prospect whatever of their being elected, the workers must put up their own candidates in order to preserve their independence, to count their forces and to lay before the public their revolutionary attitude and party standpoint. In this connection they must not allow themselves to be bribed by such arguments of the [bourgeois] democrats as, for example, that by so doing they are splitting the democratic party and giving the reactionaries the possibility of victory. The ultimate purpose of all such phrases is to dupe the proletariat. The advance which the proletarian party is bound to make by such independent action is infinitely more important than the disadvantage that might be incurred by the presence of a few reactionaries in the representative body.

In his 1895 introduction to Marx’s *Class Struggles in France*, Engels noted that “The *Communist Manifesto* had already proclaimed the winning of universal suffrage, of democracy, as one of the first and most important tasks of the militant proletariat.”

When universal male suffrage was granted in Prussia by Bismarck’s government in 1866, “our workers immediately took it in earnest and sent August Bebel to the first, constituent Reichstag.” Through such socialist election campaigns, the German Marxists had been able to transform the parliamentary franchise “from a means of deception, which it was before, into an instrument of emancipation.” Engels continued:

And if universal suffrage had offered no other advantage than that it allowed us to count our numbers every three years; that by the regularly established, unexpected rapid rise in the number of our votes it increased in equal measure the workers’ certainty of victory and the dismay of their opponents, and so became our best means of propaganda; that it accurately informed us concerning our own strength and that of all hostile parties, and thereby provided us with a measure of proportion for our actions second to none, safeguarding us from untimely timidity as much as untimely foolhardiness — if this had been the only advantage we gained from the suffrage, it would have still been much more than enough. But it did more than this by far. In election agitation it provided us with a means, second to none, of getting in touch with the masses of the people where they still stand aloof from us; of forcing all parties to defend their views and actions against our attacks before all the people; and, further, it provided our representatives in the parliament with a platform from which they could speak to their opponents in parliament and to the masses without, with quite other

to the self-government of the producers. In a rough sketch of national organisation that the Commune had no time to develop, it states clearly that the Commune was to be the political form of even the smallest country hamlet, and that in the rural districts the standing army was to be replaced by a national militia, with an extremely short time of service. The rural communes of every district were to administer their common affairs by an assembly of delegates in the central town, and these district assemblies were again to send delegates to the National Delegation in Paris, each delegate to be at any time revocable and bound by the *mandat impératif* [formal instructions] of his constituents ...

Commenting on these remarks of Marx, Lenin wrote in *The State and Revolution*:

The way out of parliamentarism is not, of course, the abolition of representative institutions and the elective principle, but the conversion of the representative institutions from talking shops into “working” bodies. “The Commune was to be a working, not a parliamentary, body, executive and legislative at the same time.”

“A working, not a parliamentary, body’ — this is a blow straight from the shoulder at the present-day parliamentarians and parliamentary “lap dogs” of social-democracy! Take any parliamentary country, from America and Switzerland, from France to Britain, Norway and so forth — in these countries the real business of “state” is performed behind the scenes and is carried on by the departments, chancelleries and general staffs. Parliament is given up to talk for the special purpose of fooling the “common people” ...

The Commune substitutes for the venal and rotten parliamentarism of bourgeois society institutions in which freedom of opinion and discussion does not degenerate into deception, for the parliamentarians themselves have to work, have to execute their own laws, have themselves to test the results achieved in reality, and to account directly to their constituents. Representative institutions remain, but there is *no* parliamentarism here as a special system as the division of labour between the legislative and the executive, as privileged position for the deputies. We cannot imagine democracy, even proletarian democracy, without representative institutions, but we can and *must* imagine democracy without parliamentarism, if criticism of bourgeois society is not mere words for us, if the desire to overthrow the rule of the bourgeoisie in our earnest and sincere desire, and not a mere “election” cry for catching workers’ votes, as it is with the Mensheviks ...

While being revolutionary opponents of parliamentarism, Marx and Engels supported the extension of universal suffrage to the working class and the utilisation of parliamentary elections for purposes of socialist propaganda. In a March 1850 circular to members of the Communist League in Germany, for example, Marx and Engels expected that the immediate consequence of an anti-feudal revolution in that country

in particular in the French and German revolutions of 1848 and the Paris Commune of 1871.

Marx and Engels had no illusions that the working class could win political power through the parliamentary system. Following the failed bourgeois-democratic revolutions of 1848 they pointed out that the working class cannot lay hold of the ready-made apparatus of the capitalist state and utilise it in the interests of the working class. The working class would have to smash that state and replace it with one of its own. Out of the experience of the revolutionary uprising in Paris in 1871, they were able to see what forms and structures such a working-class state would take.

In his Address to the General Council of the International Working Men's Association (the First International) in May 1871, later published in *The Civil War in France*, Marx observed:

Paris, the central seat of the old governmental power, and, at the same time, the social stronghold of the French working class, had risen in arms against the attempt of Thiers [the president of the bourgeois republican government] and the Rurals [nickname for the monarchist-dominated French parliament] to restore and perpetuate that old governmental power bequeathed to them by the empire [by Napoleon III, Louis Napoleon Bonaparte, nephew of Napoleon Bonaparte and emperor of France from 1852-71]. Paris could resist only because, in consequence of the siege [of Paris by the Prussian army in the Franco-Prussian War of 1870.71], it had got rid of the army, and replaced it by a National Guard, the bulk of which consisted of working men. This fact was now to be transformed into an institution. The first decree of the Commune, therefore, was the suppression of the standing army, and the substitution for it of the armed people.

The Commune was formed of the municipal councillors chosen by universal suffrage in the various wards of the town, responsible and revocable at short terms. The majority of its members were naturally working men, or acknowledged representatives of the working class. The Commune was to be a working, not a parliamentary, body, executive and legislative at the same time. Instead of continuing to be the agent of the central government, the police was at once stripped of its political attributes, and turned into the responsible and at all times revocable agent of the Commune. So were the officials of all other branches of the administration. From the members of the Commune [i.e., the municipal government] downwards, the public service had to be done at *workmen's wages* ...

The Paris Commune was, of course, to serve as a model to all the great industrial centres of France. The communal *regime* once established in Paris and the secondary centres, the old centralised government would in the provinces, too, have to give way

Revolutionaries & Parliament

The Bolshevik Experience

By Maurice Sibelle

One of the greatest obstacles to winning working people to the perspective of a socialist revolution is the widespread and deeply ingrained illusion — inculcated in their minds day-in and day-out by the capitalist rulers — that through the institutions of bourgeois democracy, particularly parliament, working people can defend and advance their interests. Historical experience has shown that socialists cannot destroy this widely-held illusion simply by presenting arguments against it. On the contrary, the working masses can only be convinced that parliament is an instrument of capitalist rule when this argument is backed up by their own experience. That is, the masses of working people will have to go through the practical experience of struggles in which they can test the limits that the parliamentary system places on their activity before they can be convinced of the necessity of overthrowing this system and replacing it with genuinely democratic political institutions — a centralised system of elected committees or councils of working people's delegates like the Russian soviets of workers' deputies that emerged in the 1905 revolution and again in 1917.

Between 1912-14 the Russian Bolsheviks led by Vladimir Lenin were able to use the tsarist parliament — the Duma — to build a revolutionary workers' movement. This experience provides possibly the richest period for lessons in *revolutionary* parliamentarism. It was a vital period in the history of the Bolshevik party. The work done in this period laid the ground work for the rapid changes that occurred in 1917 and the eventual victory of the October Revolution.

Marx & Engels on parliamentarism

The Bolsheviks based their electoral work on the writings of Marx and Engels which summed up the experience of the revolutionary workers' movement in the 19th century,

This an edited version of a talk presented to the January 1993 Socialist Activists Educational Conference sponsored by the Democratic Socialist Party.

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