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## Trotsky's Questionnaire

Statistical information on the Russian Social Democratic Labor Party is notably scarce. Like any illegal underground party, the RSDRP had neither the means nor the opportunity to record at regular intervals the size, age, profession, sex, and class of its membership. About the best it could do was to pass out a questionnaire at its infrequent congresses in an attempt to solicit the *vitae* of the party hierarchy if not of the rank and file in the underground. But even this information is lacking for the important ten-year interval between the Fifth Party Congress of 1907 and the Sixth Congress held in Petrograd during the revolution. Historians seeking statistical material on prerevolutionary Social Democracy can, of course, turn to the biographic compilations made by early Soviet historians or to the profiles drawn from agents' reports by the Okhrana.<sup>1</sup> The former, however, are highly selective and incomplete, and the latter are of questionable accuracy. Another interesting but relatively unknown source of statistical information on the underground party is a questionnaire that Leon Trotsky circulated in 1910.

Trotsky announced in April 1910 that he planned to take a "census" "to ascertain the actual condition of our party, the mood of the working masses," and especially "the strengths and resources of the party at the local level."<sup>2</sup> Questionnaires were to be obtained free of charge by members of all Social Democratic factions through the distribution network of his émigré newspaper, *Pravda*. Like many a would-be behaviorist, Trotsky complained that his subjects were slow in answering, that they gave incomplete answers, or that they found excuses for simply not replying. By the end of January 1911 he had received some ninety-two responses from twenty-seven cities in Imperial Russia, which he partially tabulated, excerpted, and published in three issues of *Pravda*.<sup>3</sup> This data pertained to the profession of party members, their age,

1. *Deiateli revoliutsionnogo dvizheniia v Rossii: Bio-bibliograficheskii slovar'*, 5 vols. (Moscow, 1927–34), and *Deiateli SSSR i Oktiabr'skoi revoliutsii: Avtobiografii i biografii*, 3 vols. (Moscow, 1926). See, for example, M. A. Tsiavlovsky, ed., *Bol'sheviki: Dokumenty po istorii bol'shevizma s 1903 po 1916 god byush. Moskovskago okhrannago otdeleniia* (Moscow, 1918).

2. *Pravda*, no. 12 (Apr. 3, 1910), p. 4; no. 14 (June 24, 1910), p. 4. The questionnaire itself was never published in *Pravda*.

3. *Pravda*, no. 16 (Sept. 24, 1910), pp. 2–3, based on fifty returns; no. 17 (Nov. 20, 1910), p. 1, based on seventy-six returns; no. 18/19 (Jan. 29, 1911), pp. 5–6, based on ninety-two returns. On some questions, Trotsky did not revise his tabulations on the basis of later returns. Judging from published correspondence, completed questionnaires con-

the year they joined the party, their factional affiliation, and their attitude toward factional issues, Duma activities, and underground deficiencies. Unfortunately, Trotsky lost interest in the project before he completed the tabulations or discussed underground opinions on such questions as Finnish independence. Nevertheless, the published results, especially in the absence of other statistical material, provide an interesting picture of the Russian Social Democratic Labor Party as the "period of reaction" was supposedly drawing to a close.

One might expect that the readers of *Pravda* and the respondents to the questionnaire would have come from among the more educated and influential members of the local party organizations, perhaps those who would usually have been delegates to party congresses or conferences. This is the kind of duty that in the past had fallen to the secretary-organizer or resident professional revolutionary who usually had come from the ranks of the intelligentsia. It is most significant, therefore, that all of Trotsky's respondents listed themselves as workers by profession and that none of them apparently were *intelligenty* (*Pravda*, no. 16, p. 2). This confirms a trend toward the proletarianization of the party that had been noticeable since the 1905 revolution. Whereas only 5 percent of the delegates to the Second Party Congress (July 1903) had been workers,<sup>4</sup> this figure increased to 25 percent at the Fourth Congress (April 1906) and to 40 percent at the Fifth Congress (April 1907).<sup>5</sup> Almost two-thirds of the delegates to the Sixth Conference in January 1912 were workers.<sup>6</sup> One suspects that this growing proletarianization of the underground was a result not so much of an influx of factory workers as of the voluntary and involuntary departure of the intelligentsia from the party's ranks. These members, who had provided the backbone of the party prior to 1905, either had been arrested for their leading role during the revolution of that year, or had emigrated, or had entered the newly legalized trade unions, or had simply given up all political work as a result of the failure of the first revolution. Repeatedly, correspondents to the émigré party press noted the absence of the intelligentsia and the adverse effect this had on local operations.<sup>7</sup>

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tinued to filter in throughout 1911, but these also were never summarized. It is unfortunate that Trotsky chose not to publish the ten autobiographical essays on "How I Became a Social Democrat" which he received in connection with the questionnaire.

4. J. L. H. Keep, *The Rise of Social Democracy in Russia* (Oxford, 1963), p. 117.

5. Institut Marksizma-Leninizma pri TsK KPSS, *Chetvertyi (ob'edinitel'nyi) s'ezd RSDRP, aprel (aprel-mai) 1906 goda: Protokoly* (hereafter abbreviated *Prot. IV*) (Moscow, 1959), p. 459. Idem, *Piatyi (Londonskii) s'ezd RSDRP, aprel-mai 1907 goda: Protokoly* (Moscow, 1963), p. 656.

6. Tsiavlovsky, *Bol'sheviki*, pp. 86–89.

7. See the correspondence from various Ukrainian organizations to *Pravda*, no. 11 (Mar. 18, 1910), p. 4; no. 14, p. 4; no. 16, pp. 3–4. *Proletarii*, no. 18 (Oct. 29, 1907),

If the party was becoming increasingly proletarianized, Trotsky's questionnaire indicated that it was also becoming increasingly younger. At the time of the Second Congress the average age of the delegates had been 31.7 years; two years later at the Third Congress this had dropped to 30.5; and in 1907 the average age of the Fifth Congress delegates had been 27.7.<sup>8</sup> Trotsky found that 92 percent of his respondents were under thirty. From his figures it would appear that their average age in 1910 was twenty-four (*Pravda*, no. 16, p. 2). When one looks at some of the underground leaders who came to hold positions of importance as a result of the departure of the intelligentsia, this youthfulness is even more pronounced. In the Ukraine, for instance, the Kharkov, Kiev, and Ekaterinoslav party organizations were at various times after 1907 led by secretaries who ranged in age from eighteen to twenty-two.

As a corollary to this, Trotsky found that his respondents were less experienced, in terms of the number of years they had been in the party. The fifty-two delegates at the Second Congress had been Social Democrats for an average of 8.5 years each. This average declined at the Third Congress to 7.5 years, at the Fourth Congress to 6.5 years, and at the Fifth Congress to 6.1 years.<sup>9</sup> This downward trend was confirmed by the respondents to the questionnaire, two-thirds of whom had been party members for five years or less (*Pravda*, no. 16, p. 2).<sup>10</sup> Trotsky concluded from this data that the majority of the present underground workers had joined the RSDRP in 1905 or after and that they thus represented a new generation of party members who, in comparison to the pre-1905 leadership, came from a different class, were younger, and had less experience in party affairs.

This change in the composition of the underground had a negative effect on the viability of the local party organizations during the years of reaction. The departure of the intelligentsia meant that the underground lost most of its trained agitators, propagandists, and organizers. This loss is reflected in the declining production of illegal leaflets after 1908, in the almost total absence of underground Social Democratic newspapers after 1909, and in the fact that by 1911 "formal organizations on the local level [were] the rare exception rather than the rule."<sup>11</sup> When Trotsky asked "what is being done by the local

p. 7; no. 40 (Dec. 1, 1908), p. 7. *Golos Sotsial-demokrata*, no. 19/20 (January/February 1910), p. 30.

8. Institut Marksizma-Leninizma pri TsK KPSS, *Vtoroi s'ezd RSDRP, iul-avgust 1903 goda: Protokoly* (Moscow, 1959), pp. 801-25; *Tretii s'ezd RSDRP, aprel-mai 1905 goda: Protokoly* (Moscow, 1959), pp. 730-50; *Prot. V*, p. 658.

9. *Prot. II*, pp. 801-25; *Prot. III*, pp. 730-50; *Prot. IV*, p. 459; *Prot. V*, p. 658.

10. One might also note (by subtracting the average length of party membership from the average age) that workers were joining the RSDRP at an increasingly earlier age. At the Second Congress the average age at which the delegates joined the party was 23.2; at the Fifth Congress, 21.6; for the respondents of the questionnaire, 19 years of age.

11. A recent Soviet compilation of leaflets printed in the Ukraine, for example,

organizations?," he replied rhetorically and on the basis of his returns: "little is being done and what is being done is carried out poorly, even wretchedly" (*Pravda*, no. 16, p. 2). Many of the younger and less experienced workers who tried to fill the positions formerly held by the intelligentsia either "performed better with a hammer than with a pen"<sup>12</sup> or they lacked the confidence of the remaining rank-and-file members. As one Social Democrat reported contemptuously, they were "urchins playing at revolution."<sup>13</sup> It is not surprising, therefore, that the size of the Social Democratic Party declined drastically as a result of these factors and of concurrent police pressures. Whereas the RSDRP had claimed 150,000 members at the time of the Fifth Congress, Trotsky estimated that the party numbered only 10,000 three years later (*Pravda*, no. 12, p. 3). Even this figure was perhaps optimistic judging from his own more detailed analysis of Social Democratic organizational strength in 1912.<sup>14</sup>

Trotsky's questionnaire also produced some interesting information concerning the factional affiliation of the remaining Social Democrats. Soviet historians consider these years to be the period of "the war on two fronts," when Lenin battled the Liquidator Mensheviks on the right, who sought to "liquidate" operations in the illegal underground, and the Vperedists (Otzovists, Ultimatists, etc.) on the left, who wanted to curtail activities in all legal organizations. By implication, these factional feuds which absorbed the various splinter groups in emigration were mirrored in the underground, with the Bolsheviks gradually gaining the upper hand by the time of the Prague Conference. Trotsky's questionnaire casts doubt both on the prevalence of factionalism in the underground and on Bolshevik popularity. Of his ninety-two respondents, forty-three claimed to be "nonfactionalists" or "antifactionalists," while another twelve either answered that the question of factional affiliation was irrelevant or ignored the issue altogether. In other words, 60 percent of those questioned refused to identify themselves with any faction. Of the remaining thirty-seven, seventeen said they were Bolsheviks, twelve claimed to be Mensheviks, seven were Vperedists, and one belonged to

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contains thirty-nine proclamations for 1908 but only five for 1911: Institut istorii partii TsK KP Ukrainy, *Bol'sheviki Ukrainy v period mezhdu pervoi i vtoroi burzhuazno-demokraticeskimi revoliutsiiami v Rossii, iun' 1907 g.-fevral' 1917 g.: Sbornik dokumentov i materialov* (Kiev, 1960). I. G. Levitas, M. A. Moskalev, and E. M. Fingerit, *Revoliutsionnye podpol'nye tipografii v Rossii, 1860-1917 gg.* (Moscow, 1962), pp. 270-320. The quotation is Trotsky's conclusion as expressed in *Pravda*, no. 18/19, p. 2. Lenin concurred with this observation: "almost everywhere on the local level [in 1911] party groups are completely informal, extremely small, and irregularly convened," *Leninskiĭ sbornik*, 25 (Moscow, 1933): 86.

12. See the report of an Ekaterinoslav worker to *Pravda*, no. 14, p. 4.

13. *Proletarii*, no. 46 (July 11, 1909), p. 7.

14. *Pravda*, no. 24 (Mar. 14, 1912), pp. 5-6; *Izveshchenie o konferentsii organizatsii RSDRP* (Vienna, 1912), pp. 10-13.

Plekhanov's Party Mensheviks.<sup>15</sup> There was no indication in the published responses of parallel factional groups existing on the local level. On the contrary, many organizations, like the one in Ekaterinoslav, had Mensheviks, Bolsheviks, Vperedists, "nonfactionalists," and even Liquidators operating within a single underground unit (*Pravda*, no. 16, p. 2).

Even among those who identified themselves by faction, there was a marked distaste for factional issues. As one Vperedist from Vologda replied, "the workers are opposed to the factional fight. Many understand [the issues] but nevertheless cannot bear the polemics which they view as mainly personal affairs which disrupt comradely solidarity"; a Bolshevik from Moscow reiterated that "sharp disagreements among the factional groups are few; to the contrary, there exists a sincere desire for joint work. The workers' attitude toward factional feuds is strongly negative" (*Pravda*, no. 16, pp. 2-3).<sup>16</sup> Perhaps this attitude is best summed up by a correspondent from Odessa: "Every common worker was astonished at this fight between the two factions; astonished and alienated, since as workers we thirsted for active work but were forced to waste our energies on endless and useless polemics . . . about whether Lenin said this or Martov said that. . . . In between this and that argument it is forgotten that the first and essential condition of the struggle—of the victorious struggle—is the absence of any discord and unity. Thus I, like many others . . . am not a Bolshevik, I am not a Menshevik, I am not an Otzovist, I am not a Liquidator—I am only a Social Democrat."<sup>17</sup>

Trotsky, like most of the émigré leaders, was particularly interested in the attitude of this new generation of underground workers toward the Third Duma, which he considered to be both a forum for legal agitation and a means of protecting the workers' interests in legislative matters. He found that his respondents obviously did not share his sentiments. Of the seventy-six replies that he analyzed, twenty simply did not answer the question "Do you follow the work of the Social Democratic fraction in the Duma?" Another nineteen replied that they either "did not follow," "rarely followed," or "were not interested" in the Duma's activities. Still others answered that they were "indifferent," that the Duma was "just words," or that they were only "interested in the scandals" that came out of it.<sup>18</sup> Few organizations appre-

15. *Pravda*, no. 16, p. 2; no. 18/19, p. 5. The number of "nonfactionalists" and Bolsheviks might be somewhat misleading. The former was a term used by many of Trotsky's own followers to indicate their agreement with his strong stand against factionalism and in favor of party unity. To the die-hard Leninists, the "nonfactionalists" in fact represented a competing faction, and therefore some Bolsheviks may have refused on principle to answer the questionnaire.

16. See also *Golos Sotsial-demokrata*, no. 8/9 (July/September 1908), pp. 36-37.

17. *Pravda*, no. 13 (May 15, 1910), pp. 2-3.

18. *Pravda*, no. 17, p. 1; no. 18/19, p. 5. This disinterested attitude toward the Duma is also evident in local correspondence to the other émigré newspapers. See, for

ciated the positive aspects of Social Democratic participation in the Duma, and fewer still supported the fraction's endeavors by holding meetings, passing resolutions, or issuing leaflets.

Trotsky did not feel that this negative response reflected widespread Vperedist sentiment. Indeed, he noted the paradox of professed Vperedists viewing the Duma favorably while several Mensheviks claimed that the workers justifiably had little faith in the body. The problem thus was not one of factional approach but rather of faulty communication. The lack of party newspapers, the one-sided coverage of Social Democratic Duma activity in the bourgeois press, and the absence of ties between the fraction and the local organizations meant that the Duma group was isolated, the workers were poorly informed, and the opportunity for effective legal agitation was minimalized.

"All of these answers," concluded Trotsky, "confirm the formula given us in the correspondence from one of our comrades near the Volga: 'it is not the party that needs the masses, but the masses that need the party.' The truth of this statement will become more and more obvious as the industrial resurgence stirs the working masses and increases their courage and their militancy" (*Pravda*, no. 16, p. 3). By the summer of 1910, the Russian economy was in fact reviving and the number of strikes was once again increasing. But there is no indication in the responses to Trotsky's questionnaire that the RSDRP was itself reviving or that it was capable of capitalizing on this unrest. Rather than undergoing a "revolutionary resurgence," as many Soviet historians claim, these replies would indicate that the party in 1910 and 1911 was desperately short of experienced underground leaders; that émigré factionalism was alienating many of the rank and file in Russia; and that the principal opportunity for legal Social Democratic activity through the Imperial Duma was being wasted.

Trotsky suggested on the basis of his questionnaire that an all-party conference should be called to rejuvenate the underground, to reunify the splinter groups abroad, and to strengthen Duma operations (*Pravda*, no. 18/19, pp. 2, 6). The Sixth Party Conference that finally convened in Prague, however, was called by Lenin rather than by Trotsky. Instead of unifying the party, it finalized the 1903 split and initiated events that were to lead to the 1913 schism in the Duma fraction. Even though the RSDRP may have undergone a "resurgence" in St. Petersburg after the Lena massacre and especially during July 1914,<sup>19</sup> in many areas of Imperial Russia the masses were still in "need of the party" on the eve of war and revolution.

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instance, *Proletarii*, no. 40, p. 7; *Rabochaia gazeta*, no. 6 (Sept. 22, 1911), p. 6; *Sotsial-demokrat*, no. 4 (Mar. 21, 1909), p. 8, and no. 12 (Mar. 23, 1910), p. 10.

19. See Leopold Haimson, "The Problem of Social Stability in Urban Russia, 1905-1917," *Slavic Review*, 23, no. 4 (December 1964): 619-42; 24, no. 1 (March 1965): 1-22; and subsequent Forum discussion.