

The Party as Vanguard: The Role of the Russian Social Democratic Party in Strikes in St. Petersburg, 1912–1914

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ABSTRACT

From 1912–1914, Russian Social Democrats agreed that the expanding strike movement had to be controlled by the Party. Radicalization of the workers' movement brought on by the stresses of modernization created a more mature movement in these years. After decades of illegal organization, followed by legal organization under a new law permitting the existence of "societies," the trade union movement in Russia began to flower. The violent repression of striking workers at Lena Gold Fields led to an increase in the frequency of strikes and contributed to further radicalization of the workers in the years before 1914. Historians have contended that the more radical Bolshevik faction of the party won support from the radicalized workers while moderate Mensheviks condemned strike activity, favoring trade unionism and revisionism. Research of activities in St. Petersburg does not support this interpretation. This paper will argue that Russian Social Democrats in both the Menshevik and Bolshevik factions who were active in St. Petersburg organizations retained the theoretical position that the Party was the vanguard of the revolution.

KEYWORDS

Russian Social Democratic Party, Strikes, St. Petersburg, 1912-14, Bolsheviks, Mensheviks

Russian revolutionaries reading Marx looked in vain for a comprehensive organizational and tactical framework for political parties. The theoretician Plekhanov, who adapted Marx to Russian socialism, relied upon the definition of the Party found in the *Communist Manifesto*:

Communists do not form a separate party opposed to other working-class parties [...] (they are) the most advanced and resolute section of the working-class parties of every country, that section which pushes forward all others [...] they have over the great mass of the proletariat the advantage of clearly understanding the line of march, the conditions, and the ultimate general results of the proletarian movement.¹

Marx offered both a broad and narrow definition of the term party. Marx and Engels also required the party to "support every revolutionary movement against the existing social and political order of things." Marx warned workers they should prepare for revolution by "taking up their position as an independent party [...] and by not allowing themselves to be misled for a single moment by the hypocritical phrases of the democratic petty bourgeoisie."² From Marx, the party member acquires a dual identity as a conscious guiding party leader and an observer who follows objective reality. In addition to problems of revolutionary identity, if the Communists are to be the most politically conscious and most organized part of the mass workers' party, parties such as those envisioned by Marx had to exist. But, what would be the nature of such parties in Russia? Furthermore, what, according to Marx, is the role of the conscious revolutionary in developing political consciousness?

Russian Social Democrats (SDs) carried out a prolonged theoretical debate on these issues in exile outside of Russia that had little to do with Russian realities. This changed after the 1905 Revolution. Legal societies became possible in 1906 and party activists embraced the new opportunities available to organize clubs, unions, libraries and educational societies with workers, especially in St. Petersburg. The Russian labor movement refused to align itself with either the Menshevik or Bolshevik wing of the Russian Social Democratic Party.³ In place of a party identity, worker activists sought a united campaign against capital and the tsarist state.

¹ Marx, Karl and Engels, Friedrich. *Collected Works*, vol. 6 Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1975, p. 497.

² *Ibid.*, vol.10, p.287.

³ Soviet and western historians have examined these years within the context of factional debate between Bolshevism and Menshevism. See Leopold Haimson's two part article: The Problem of Social Stability in Urban Russia, 1905-1917. *Slavic Review* (part 1) 23, no. 4, December 1964, pp. 619-42, and (part 2) 24, no. 1, March 1965, p.1-22. Haimson argued that Bolshevik hegemony was achieved in 1912-14 because of increased radicalization of the working class and the similarity between more radical worker

Studies of the revolutionary movement from 1906-14, shaped first by the memoir literature and debates among émigrés, focus on the decline of underground activity during these years. By 1908, a theoretical debate about the role of legal work in the movement, the “Liquidationist Controversy” dominated Social Democratic journals. Lenin, in an attempt to marginalize legal activity, accused Menshevik party workers of attempting to “liquidate” the underground. While debates continued in the party press, party and non-party activists inside Russia combined legal and illegal work in clubs, libraries, enlightenment societies, cooperatives and unions that strengthened the movement as a whole. Submerging party within the movement, these activists collaborated to organize excursions, libraries, print newspapers and journals and to organize strikes and demonstrations. From 1912-14, many of these collaborators won seats on governing bodies of workers’ associations. Elected on “Marxist” platforms supported by *Pravda* and the Bolsheviks, their victory often was presented in the historiography as a Bolshevik victory over the revisionist “Menshevik Liquidators.” Bolshevik activists were ascribed revolutionary characteristics that best reflected the demands of the radicalized working class movement. According to this interpretation, the expanding strike movement abandoned simple trade unionism and increasingly voiced political demands.

Recent research has indicated that the Bolshevik faction was no more revolutionary than the Menshevik in this period.⁴ Both party factions, especially those in exile, rejected spontaneous strikes and sought a guiding role in the development of working-class consciousness in this period. Fearful of police repression, the Mensheviks hoped to limit strike activity to preserve the movement. Bolsheviks remained distrustful of the masses and often refused to join strikes planned by activists inside Russia.

Labor radicalism challenged party institutions thinned by repression and political infighting. The Leninists had few ties to local groups. In St. Petersburg, Bolshevik conciliators in Kolpino, Neva, Gorodskii and Vasileostrov districts merged with the Vperedists from Petersburg Side and Vasileostrov to form the Central Group of Social Democratic Workers of St. Petersburg. They were not reliable Leninists. Some individual

demands and Bolshevik slogans. Haimson also credits a generational struggle in the union for Bolshevik hegemony, an argument refuted in Bonnell, Victoria. *Roots of Rebellion: Workers' Politics and Organizations in St. Petersburg and Moscow, 1900-1914*. Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1983, pp. 395-6; See also Swain, Geoffrey. *Social Democracy and the Legal Labour Movement, 1906-14*. London: Macmillan, 1983; Hogan, Heather. *Forging Revolution: Metalworkers, Managers, and the State in St. Petersburg, 1890-1914*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993; Arutiunov, G.A. *Rabochee dvizhenie v Rossii v period novogo revoliutsionnogo pod'ema, 1910-1914 gg.* Moscow: Nauka, 1975; Kruze, E.E. *Polozhenie rabocheho klassa Rossii v 1900-1914 gg.*, Leningrad: Nauka, 1976.

⁴ See for example, Melancon, Michael and Pate, Alice K. eds., *New Labor History: Worker Identity and Experience in Russia, 1840-1918*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2002; Pate, Alice. *St. Petersburg Workers and the Implementation of the Social Insurance Law*. In: McCaffrey, Susan and Melancon, Michael eds, *Russia in the European Context, 1789-1914: A Member of the Family*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005, pp. 189-202; Melancon, Michael. *Lena Goldfields Massacre and the Crisis of the Late Tsarist State*. College Station, TX: Texas A&M University Press, 2006; Pate, Alice. *May Day and Late Imperial Russia: Workers' Voices, 1891-1914*. In: Steinberg, John and Wade, Rex eds., *Making of Russian History: Society, Culture, and the Politics of Modern Russia, Essays in Honor of Allan K. Wildman*. Bloomington, IN: Slavica, 2009, pp.75-90.

Party Mensheviks, who upheld the authority of the illegal party, joined the Central Group. Other nonfactional SD circles included the "Group of Social Democratic Workers of St. Petersburg" in Vyborg district and the "Group of Social Democratic Workers" in Narva district which by 1912 was tied to the Menshevik Initiative Group.⁵ Finally the Mezhrainoka or the Interdistrict Group became one of the most active SD groups in the capital. Close to Trotsky, its members included Bolshevik conciliators in the Petersburg Metalworkers' Union, A.M. Novoselov, P.I. Nikolaev and A.S. Kiselev, and SD deputies A.F. Burianov and N.M. Egorov. The Mezhrainoka denied the legitimacy of decisions taken at Prague and urged unity of all "revolutionary Social Democrats."⁶ In May 1914, the Mezhrainoka collaborated to distribute Plekhanov's newspaper, *Edinstvo*.⁷

The strongest Menshevik organization was the Central Initiative Group formed after a secret conference in January 1911. The Initiative Group hoped to unite both legal and illegal groups throughout Russia and included workers as well as Menshevik *praktiki* such as I.A. Isuv, V. Ezhov, I.S. Astrov, P.A. Garvi, K.A. Gvozdev, K.M. Ermolaev, Eva Broido, secretary of the Organizational Committee and the trade union leaders, A.N. Smirnov and V.M. Abrosimov.⁸ In all, seven district initiative groups were established at Moscow, Narva, Neva, Gorodskii, Vyborg, Petersburg Side and Vasileostrov encompassing a membership of around 100.⁹ By 1913, the predominance of intellectuals over workers in the Initiative Group was drastically altered. Although the Group's existence was sporadic, a total of sixteen workers, four of these members of the Metallists' Union, participated throughout the year. The active intellectuals were the veteran Mensheviks, Feodor Dan, Isuv and S.M. Shvarts, a former Bolshevik. By the end of the year and into 1914, Dan and Iulii Martov began to encourage an expansion of illegal activity through the district initiative groups. The Central Initiative Group failed to recover from arrests in 1914.¹⁰

The Menshevik central apparatus elected at the Vienna conference in August 1912 had a varied existence. The Menshevik Organization Committee (OK) included the trade

⁵ I. Iurenev, "Mezhrainoka, 1911–1917," *Proletarskaia revoliutsiia*, 24, 1924, p.114; Iakovlev, I, *April'sko-maiskie dni 1912 goda v Peterburge. Krasnaia letopis.* 3, 1925, p.228; *Rabochaia gazeta* 4/5, 28/15 April 1911, p.4.

⁶ Iurenev, I. "Mezhrainoka," 24, 1924, pp:115–16; Bulkin "Departament politicii i soiuz metallistov," *Krasnaia letopis'*, 9, 1923, p.137.

⁷ Iurenev, I, "Mezhrainoka," pp.116–125; Liubimov, A.I."Neobkhodimaia raziasneniia" *Edinstvo*, 1, 18 May 1914.

⁸ *Listok golosa sotsialdemokrata* ,1, 25 June 1911, p.3 ; See Larin, Iu. Puti sozdaniia. *Delo zhizni*, 7, 1911, pp.:13–20. Many of these had signed the Open Letter in *Golos Sotsial-demokrata* in 1910. See Chapter V above.

⁹ *Izveshchenie o konferentsii organizatsii RSDRP* New York: Krauss International Publications, 1982, p. 10; Dan to Akselrod, 11 May 1912. In: Saper, Boris, ed. *Theodore Dan Letters,(1899–1946)*. Amsterdam: IISG, 1985, p.261.

¹⁰ Dan to Akselrod, 24 January 1912, 14 September 1912, *Ibid.*, pp.245–6, 254; Dan to Garvi, April 1912, 13 August 1912, *Pis'ma P.B. Akselroda i Iu. O. Martova*, pp. 223, 252–3; McKean, Robert B. *St Petersburg Between The Revolutions: Workers and Revolutionaries, June 1907-February 1917. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1990*, p.108 citing GARF, f.102, DPOO 1913g. d.5 ch.57, 11.190, 201,311–12; pp. 107–8, citing GARF f.102, DPOO 1913g. d.5 ch.57, 11.2, 166,190,274–5,310–31.

unionist A.N. Smirnov, Petr Garvi, an active party worker, Eva Broido, secretary until her arrest in January 1913 and the lawyer, Baturskii.¹¹ In late 1912, the OK set up district committees which were decimated by arrests in February 1913. Throughout 1913, the only successful meetings of the OK occurred in April.¹² By early 1914, the OK renewed legislative work, calling for freedom of coalition, democratization of city governments and abolition of the Pale, but simultaneously promoted the formation of illegal cells. Menshevik cells existed in educational societies and trade unions throughout the capital before the war and Duma deputies met with Garvi, Dan, Martov and Baturskii to discuss political activity in clubs and the organization of insurance centers. The OK, *Vperedists* and Party Mensheviks formed the 3 July Bloc at the Unity Congress sponsored by the International and held in Brussels from 3–5 July 1914.¹³ The Menshevik network, though broad, was disconnected due to continual arrests.

The only formal Bolshevik organization, the Petersburg Committee (PK), was not consistently loyal to Prague. Reincarnated repeatedly from 1912–14, the PK leadership fluctuated between conciliators, *Vperedists* and Leninists. In February 1912, all its members were workers, six from Putilov. Party activist I. Iurenev complained that the PK was not united and had no central leadership and E.P. Onufriev reported to Krupskaiia the PK was affiliated with the Central Group, which had denounced the Prague resolutions. While the PK actually sanctioned the Prague resolutions, they contended "true unity is only possible by means of joint work in the localities."¹⁴ Arrests suppressed the PK in 1913 and 1914, which obliged the board of the Metallists' Union to take over its activities. In 1913, ten skilled metalworkers sat on the PK including the conciliator Kiselev, Mitrevich, assistant secretary of the union, and board members P.A. Mel'nikov and Ignatev. In February 1914, five of the eight members were metallists and either officers or activists from the two *Vperedists* strongholds, Vasileostrov or Vyborg districts.¹⁵ Party workers in the metallists' union noted in 1913, the "lack in St. Petersburg of strong party organizations capable of leading a general strike."¹⁶

Local activists cooperated in a number of demonstrations during the prewar years. For May Day 1912, the nonfactionalist group "Unity," the Central Group and local Socialist Revolutionaries formed the "Group of Worker Social Democrats." This organization summoned a "meeting of all Petersburg workers' organizations" to compose a May Day proclamation calling for the establishment of a democratic republic. When the

¹¹ Listok organizatsionnogo komiteta po sozyvu obshchepartiinnoi konferentsii. 3, 1912, p.1

¹² McKean.Op.Cit., p. 108–9 citing f.102, DPOO 1913g, d.307, prod.III, 1.116.

¹³ *Nasha zaria*. 4, 1914, pp: 60–63; Elwood, R. Carter. Lenin and the Brussels 'Unity' Conference of July 1914. *Russian Review*, 39, January 1980, pp.32–49.

¹⁴ *Iz epokhi 'Zvezdy' i 'Pravdy,' 1911–14*, vol.3, Moscow 1921, pp.184, 230, 234–5; Iurenev, "Mezhrainoka," p.111; "V.I. Lenin v 1912–14 gg." *Krasnyi arkhiv*, vol.2, no.62, 1934, p.229.

¹⁵ *Sotsial demokrat*, 31, 28 June 1913; *Listovki Peterburgskikh bol'shevikov. 1902–1917. Tom vtoroi, 1904–1917*. Leningrad: Ogiz, 1939. p. 77–78; McKean. Op.Cit., p.112, citing GARF f.102 DPOO 1914g. d.5, ch.57, 84–5; d.5 ch.57, t.2, 1.24.

¹⁶ McKean. Op.Citi. pp. 104–5 citing GARF f.102, DPOO, 1913g.d.5 ch.57, 11.308–9; d.341 prod.II, 11.218–20; prod.III, 1.266.

Third Duma used its powers of interpellation to investigate the framing of the SD Second Duma fraction, all activists cooperated in demonstrations at Narva and Vasileostrov.¹⁷

In 1913, the PK, Central Initiative Group, local SRs and unions attempted to reestablish the Central Bureau of Trade Unions. *Metallist* was published until 1914, and accepted contributions from activists regardless of factional identity. The Okhrana credited the press with raising the consciousness of workers and, in effect, acting as the illegal underground party organization by spreading party ideas.¹⁸ Even the police noted, “ There is marked increase in the new conciliatory movement among workers in the rank and file of Social Democracy who are extremely dissatisfied with the political fervor and factional infighting between the pravdisit and the liquidators.”¹⁹

The reaction of Party activists to the upsurge in strikes after the massacre of protesters in Lena was similar. While the Menshevik press criticized "strike fever" as a "dangerous illness," Bolshevik activists in the capital also feared the spontaneity of the masses would cause repression of the St. Petersburg Metalworkers' Union and suppression of legal activities.²⁰ After winning a majority of seats on the metallists' board, Bolsheviks actively began to implement the directives of Prague, moving into the legal arena and overtaking former Menshevik territory. However, their policies differed little from the former Menshevik administration of the union. Since 63% of the strikes in St. Petersburg from 1912 to 1914 involved metallists, both SD factions had to respond to the escalating strike movement.²¹ An examination of this response, the nature of Bolshevik victory, the individuals who governed the union and the governing board's actions after the Bolsheviks won a majority reveals little significance in Bolshevik hegemony.²²

From 1912 to 1914, protests initiated by the metallists and Social Democratic activists were either political in their initial conceptualization, or locally initiated in response to a particular economic or political policy of the factory administration or government.²³ These protests and work stoppages were not coordinated or controlled.²⁴ The police repeatedly hindered attempts at citywide collaboration and workers' actions

¹⁷ Iakovlev, "Aprel'sko-maiskie dni," pp.230-4.

¹⁸ Bonnell.Op.Cit. p.412 citing GARF DPOO f.102, d.341, 1913, pp.8-10.

¹⁹ Bonnell. Op.Cit. p. 425.

²⁰ *Luch* no. 53, 17 November 1912, p.:1.

²¹ Arutiunov, G.A. *Rabochee dvizhenie*, p. 258.

²² The scholarly discussions of strikes and the Bolshevik victory exaggerate and distort the reality in the movement. See for example Haimson, L.H. and Tilly, Charles Tilly, eds. *Strikes, Wars, and Revolutions in an International Perspective: Strike Waves in the Late Nineteenth and early Twentieth Centuries*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989). Haimson interprets the election of Bolsheviks as an indication of a younger cohort of Bolshevik workers who rejected Menshevism and pushed Russia to the brink of revolution before the war. Bonnell cites the election of Bolsheviks as a rejection of the reformist trade union. See Bonnell, *Roots*, pp.434-8 .

²³ On the characterization of strikes see Haimson and Tilly. Op.Cit.

²⁴ Elwood blames the lack of coordination and spontaneous nature of the strikes on the lack of a viable underground organization. See Elwood, R.C. *Russian Social Democracy in the Underground: A Study of the RSDRP in the Ukraine, 1907-1914*. Amsterdam: International Institute for Social History, 1974, pp. 236-38.

were equivocal. The workers' demands and motivations suggest they collectively opposed authority in all its forms and sought a united movement against those who attempted to wield political, economic or ideological power. Among the Social Democrats, both Mensheviks and Bolsheviks attempted to assert Party control of the movement.

The first types of protests, political demonstrations, were regularly summoned on May Day and the anniversaries of 9 January and 4 April. After the news of the massacre of miners at the Lena Goldfields on 4 April 1912 reached the capital, the Menshevik deputy, G. S. Kuznetsov, local SDs and students called for a demonstration on Nevskii Prospect on Sunday, 15 April. However, activists in Narva and Moscow districts, more inclined toward political strikes than demonstrations, did little to inform workers of the planned protest. Meetings at Baltic Shipyards and the engineering plant at United Cables approved a five day stoppage beginning two weeks later, on May Day. Therefore students, rather than workers, dominated the protests on 15 April, while workers participated in a wave of spontaneous strikes from 14–22 April involving around 140,000 workers.²⁵

As May Day approached, students active in a study circle at Putilov piloted the establishment of 1 May Committees at Moscow, Narva, Petersburg and Vasileostrov districts. These committees with joint participation of all SD and SR groups except the Initiative Group formed the Central Bureau of 1 May Committees, which distributed leaflets calling for a strike, a democratic republic, Constituent Assembly, eight-hour day and land confiscation.²⁶ In response to such widespread agitation, 150,000 laborers joined May Day strikes. The police, prepared for the protest, prevented convergence of strikers in the center and dispersed the demonstration.²⁷ Although activists made efforts to coordinate strike action after May Day, inviting formation of strike committees at district meetings, arrests curbed their success until August.²⁸

Local activists also resisted Party leadership in political protests occurring in 1913. The PK, a long celebrated bastion of Bolshevism, did not agitate for strikes on 9 January 1913: they advocated only factory meetings. Despite the lack of Bolshevik agitation, 71,000 walked off the job on the anniversary of Bloody Sunday.²⁹ For May Day 1913, the OK, PK and TsK printed leaflets and the PK formed a strike committee with local SRs.³⁰ Collaboration between party activists continued throughout 1914, when the Central Initiative Group, Bolsheviks, *Mezhrainoka* and SRs coordinated strike plans for 9 January. Petersburg socialist groups also supported work stoppages when the

²⁵ RTsNDI, f.6860, o.1,d.173,l.4; *Zvezda* 31/67, 17 April 1912; *Pravda*(Vienna), 25, 6 May/23 April 1912, p.3.

²⁶ Iakovlev. Op.Cit. pp. 230–7, McKean.Op.Cit. p.90 citing GARF f.1405,op.530, d.824,11.82,88; f.102, DPOO 1912d.341,1.108.

²⁷ *Pravda* 8, 1 May 1912; 9, 3 May 1912; *Listovki Peterburgskikh bol'shevikov*, 2:64–5; Iakovlev. Op.Cit. pp.232, 234–5.

²⁸ McKean.Op.cit. p.91, citing f. 102, DPOO 1912g, d.341, 11.136–7,161,181;d.101, 11.81, 225–6.

²⁹ *Listovki Peterburgskikh bol'shevikov*, 2:74–5, "Lenin i Pravda," *Krasnaia letopis'*, 1, 1924, p.71; Kruze, E.E. *Istoriia rabochikh Leningrada. Tom pervyi. 1703–fevral'1917*. Leningrad: Nauka, 1972, p.431.

³⁰ *Listovki*, pp. 82–84; *Pravda*. 10/304, 3 May 1913, p.3; *Luch*. 100/86, 3 May 1913, p.2.

Menshevik deputy, N.S. Chkheidze was arraigned for a speech given in the Duma and the left was expelled for fifteen sessions. On 23 March, metalworkers and party activists reorganized the PK and called for demonstrations on Good Friday. Both Mensheviks and SRs agreed with the plans and the educational societies "Sampsonievskii" and "Science and Life" promoted the strike.³¹ Coordination continued on 4 April, May Day and in other protests even though party institutions were weak and decentralized.

In contrast to political demonstrations, party activists and the union administration of both factions often denounced strikes emerging from the shop floor or joined them only after they had begun. An economic upswing produced a labor shortage in 1912, which prevented concerted action by employers. The Petersburg Society of Manufacturers and Factory Owners (PSMFO) could not agree on a response to the massive strikes that began after Lena. Even though their 1912 Convention voted against union mediation in disputes, standardized black listing, rejected a minimum wage and pay for strikers, most PSMFO members did not confirm to this agreement until March 1913.³² This time lag allowed for the expansion of worker unrest.

The Mensheviks held a majority on the Union's governing board when a strike at Siemens–Halske against a May Day fine became a 91-day protest against factory reforms. Workers opposed recently decreased rates, time clocks and demanded a polite form of address, a council of elders, hot water, and extra pay for Saturday and preholiday work. In 1913, metallists walked off the job for 102 days at Lessner in Vyborg district after the suicide of Iakov Strongin who had been accused by the foreman of stealing brass screws. The strike committee consulted the union only after 82 days. The owners refused to bargain with the union, brought in strike breakers, blacklisted strikers and eventually defeated the strike.³³

A change in the Metalworkers' Union Board did not produce a corresponding change in strike policy. In the summer 1913, a specialist in time work, Balik, was carted out of the factory in a wheelbarrow at New Aivaz industrial plant.³⁴ Even though the majority of the newly elected interim board was Bolshevik, the union's response was cautious. On 28 July, the union passed a resolution condemning the use of wheelbarrows and refused to grant strike assistance until 17 August. The factory administration responded more promptly, closing the factory for six weeks while reforms were completed and then hiring many replacements especially from the new pool of women and unskilled workers.³⁵ The strike failed.

³¹ *Listovki*, pp. 88–90, 102–3; *Novaia rabochaia gazeta*. 8/26, 11 January 1914.

³² For a study of the PSMFO see Hogan. Op.Cit. pp.212–13.

³³ *Zhivaia zhizn'*. 3, 13 July 1913, p.3; Balabanov, M. *Rabochee dvizhenie v Rossii v gody pod'ema 1912–14 gg.* Leningrad, 1927, p.54.

³⁴ Kruze, E.E. *Peterburgskie rabochie v 1912–14 godakh*. Leningrad: Nauka, 1961, pp. 156–7; *Pravda*. 116/320, 22 May 1913, p.5.

³⁵ By 1 September, six weeks into the strike 726 rubles was collected, and on 14 September a total of 1378. *Metallist* 5/29, 19 July 1913, p.6 ; 6\30, 10 August 1913, p.16; 7\31, 24 August 1913, pp.11–12;

Local activists participated in strikes and protests despite pronouncements of condemnation by emigres, party institutions, and theoretical leaders of both factions. The Menshevik August Conference at Vienna had delegated full responsibility for strike action to the union administration and urged members to appraise possibilities for victory before walking out.³⁶ The Central Initiative Group opposed walkouts in June 1913 to protest charges against 52 sailors of conspiracy to commit armed uprising. The PK had been arrested and did not initiate the strike. When 36,000 participated, *Luch* denounced the protest as "chaotic, prematurely weakening the forces of the working class."³⁷

Menshevik *literatory* responded to the strikes with some degree of alarm, as they were convinced government repression of unions was sure to follow continued work stoppages. Garvi condemned the "elemental nature" of strikes "preceding for the most part apart from the existing trade unions" a sentiment echoed confidentially by Dan and Martov.³⁸ Dan and Martov also published articles predicting poor results from the strike movement. In the thick journal, *Nasha zaria*, Dan warned "in the political struggle the strike is not always the sole expedient means."³⁹ On the March walkouts that led to the closing of the union in 1914, Martov theorized "the elemental development of the recent wave of political stoppages has led the workers into a dead end."⁴⁰ Émigré Mensheviks were alarmed by the "spontaneity" of striking workers, "hotheads intoxicated by their own mood and the excitement reigning in St. Petersburg." The *praktiki* defended union organization against their critics who labeled unions a "harmful undertaking" which corrupted working-class struggles.

Leninists at Prague approved the formation of cells in legal organizations, but the Bolshevik hierarchy moved slowly in this regard. Only after an increase in strike activity was noted did Lenin observe:

the proletariat is drawing the masses into a revolutionary strike, which indissolubly links politics with economics, a strike which wins the support of the most backward sections by the success for an immediate improvement in the life of the workers, and at the same time rouses the people *against the tsarist monarchy*.

While requiring a revolutionary stance of the strike movement, the Bolsheviks moved more fully into the legal organizations. The TsK resolved in 1913:

Social Democrats must attract into all workers' societies the broadest possible circles of workers, inviting into membership all workers without distinction

Hogan. Op.Cit. claims the strike failed because of factional struggle in union, but the Bolsheviks already had taken control of the union board.

³⁶ *Izveshenie*, pp.33–4.

³⁷ *Luch*. 149/235, 2 July 1913, p.4.

³⁸ Dan to Martov, 22 January 1913, *Dan Letters*. Op.Cit., p.290; Garvi, "Nachalo lokautnoi epidemii," *Nasha zaria*. 2, 1913, pp.19–23.

³⁹ "Burnyi di," *Nasha zaria*., 4, 1914, pp.93–10.

⁴⁰ *Severnaia rabochaia gazeta*. 41, 28 March 1914, p.1.

according to party views. But the Social Democrats within these societies must organize party groups [cells] and through long, systematic work within all these societies establish the very closest relations between them and the Social Democratic Party.⁴¹

Even the Leninist TsK tactics moved toward a combination of legal and illegal work.

After the Bolsheviks gained control of the Metallists' Union, the board continued to register complaints about the spontaneous nature of strikes. From 25 August 1913 to 18 January 1914, 29 of 41 strikes began before the union was consulted. On 3 November 1913, Kiselev admitted "a majority of stoppages and conflicts proceed without any organizational influence on the part of the union." At the general meeting on 19 January 1914, strike assistance was restricted to those who had been members for at least one year.⁴² Both the PK and the union denounced the spontaneous strike activity which followed the closing of the labor press from 6–12 March 1914.⁴³ In response to the walkouts, 16 engineering and electrical firms joined a lockout from 20 – 24 March. The Bolsheviks and the union met on 21 March to determine an appropriate response to the employers' attack. Before any compromise could be reached the union was closed 1 April 1914 under articles 33–35, for the disturbance of public order.⁴⁴

Party activists and workers inside Russia rejected party factionalism and infighting. They collaborated in trade union activities, strikes and worker associations voting for "Marxist" slates. In elections to insurance institutions following passage of the "Law on Social Insurance," the labor movement reaffirmed the desire for unity. Activists from both party factions utilized the slogan, but defined it differently. Leninists called for unity of all anti-liquidationist elements in hopes of claiming center stage as the true Social Democrats. Mensheviks and pro-Menshevik trade unionists still retained the hope that party workers in legal and illegal arenas could work together. Menshevik insurance activists asserted, "divisiveness and fratricidal struggle among leading workers in the campaign is far worse, more senseless, than in political organizations embracing only the vanguard."⁴⁵

From 1912–1914, Petersburg workers acted independently of both the union and party leaders. They staged strikes and walkouts without approval. Both Social Democratic factions, acting through union and other governing boards, condemned spontaneous strikes asserting the authority of the Party over the movement. Fearing repression by tsarist authorities, they sought to limit workers' demands for economic and social justice.

⁴¹ Taylor Hammond, Thomas. *Lenin on Trade Unions and Revolution 1893–1917*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1957, p. 72.

⁴² *Metallist*. 7/31, 24 August 1913, p.11; 8/32, 18 September 1913, p.11; 11/35, 16 November 1913, pp.13,14 ; 12/36, 5 December 1913, p.8 ; 2/39, 4 February 1914, p.11.

⁴³ Shidlovskii, G. Petersburgskii komitet bol'shevikov v kontse 1913g i v nachale 1914g., *Krasnaia letopis'*. 17, 1926, p.129.

⁴⁴ *Put' pravdy*. 42, 21 March 1914, p.1; 52, 2 April 1914, p.3; 53, 3 April 1914, p.3.

⁴⁵ *Strakhovanie rabochikh*. 7, 1914, p.3.

This attempt to establish the Party as the vanguard of the movement led to the complete rejection of party identity by Russian worker activists. Radicalized workers made politically conscious by prolonged socialist agitation and their daily experiences demanded a united workers' movement rather than Party leadership. By 1914, the discourse of unity placed the workers, not the Social Democratic Party, at the political center.