

V. I. Lenin

APROPOS OF THE *PROFESSION DE FOI*

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APROPOS OF THE *PROFESSION DE FOI*

Although the *Profession de foi*, composed by the Kiev Committee, is only a rough draft, for the elaboration and polishing of which, according to the Committee, there was an insufficiency of time, it nevertheless allows one to obtain quite a clear idea of the views of the Kiev Committee. These views must certainly call forth an emphatic protest from those Russian Social-Democrats who abide by the viewpoint of the old principles of Social-Democracy proclaimed in Russia by the Emancipation of Labour group, enunciated repeatedly in the publications of the R.S.D.L.P. and reaffirmed in its manifesto. There is no doubt that the views of the Kiev Committee reflect the very considerable influence of the new trend of the "young Russian Social-Democrats," which, when developed to the extreme, has merged with Bernsteinism and yielded such products as the famous *Separate Supplement to "Rabochaya Mysl"* (September 1899) and the no less famous *Credo*.

 It cannot be said that the *Profession de foi* has gone all the way towards this opportunist and reactionary trend, but it has taken such serious steps in that direction and denotes such confusion in the basic ideas of Social-Democracy, such a vacillation in revolutionary thinking, that we consider it our duty to give warning to the comrades in Kiev and to analyse in detail their deviation from principles long established both in international and in Russian Social-Democracy.

* Profession of faith, a programme, the exposition of a world outlook. --Ed.

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The very first sentence of the *Profession de foi* gives rise to the most serious bewilderment: "While admitting that the struggle for the political rights of the proletariat is the immediate general task of the working-class movement in Russia, the Kiev Committee nevertheless does not believe it possible at the present time to turn to the mass of the workers and call on them to take political action, in other words, it does not believe it possible to carry on *political* agitation, because the Russian workers have not, in the mass, attained the maturity for political struggle." We shall not discuss the formulation of this passage; of importance to us only are the ideas contained in it and reiterated (note this) in many other places in the *Profession de foi*, ideas of such a nature that they simply leave us wondering: Can those who wrote this really be Social-Democrats?

"The Russian workers have not, in the mass, attained the maturity for political struggle"! If this is true, it is tantamount to a death sentence for Social-Democracy as a whole; for it means that the Russian workers have not, in the mass, reached the maturity necessary for Social-Democracy. In actual fact, there is not and never has been a Social-Democracy anywhere in the world that is not inseparably and indivisibly bound up with the political struggle. Social-Democracy without the political struggle is a river without water, it is a howling contradiction, it is either something in the nature of a return to the utopian socialism of our forefathers who despised "politics," or to anarchism, or to trade-unionism.

The first *profession de foi* of world socialism, the *Communist Manifesto*, established a truth that has since become an elementary verity -- that every class struggle is a political struggle, that the working-class movement only then grows out of its embryonic state, its infancy, and becomes a class movement when it makes the transition to the political struggle. The first *profession de foi* of Russian socialism, Plekhanov's booklet, *Socialism and the Political Struggle*, which appeared in 1883, reaffirmed this elementary truth in its application to Russia and showed precisely how and why the Russian revolutionary movement must bring about a fusion of socialism and the political struggle, a fusion of the spontaneous movement of the masses of

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workers and the revolutionary movement, a fusion of the class struggle and the political struggle. By adopting the standpoint of socialism and the class struggle and simultaneously rejecting the possibility of "calling at the present moment on the masses to take political action," the Kiev Committee is, in essence, departing completely from the principles of Social-Democracy, and the desire to remain true to these principles has led the Committee into a number of glaring contradictions.

Indeed, how can one speak of the "political education" of the workers, if one does not recognise the possibility of conducting political agitation and political struggle? Surely there is no need to prove to Social-Democrats that there can be no political education except through political struggle and political action. Surely it cannot be imagined that any sort of study circles or books, etc., can politically educate the masses of workers if they are kept away from political activity and political struggle. Surely Russian Social-Democracy does not have to go back to the viewpoint of the serf-owners who declared that it was first necessary to educate the peasants and then to emancipate them, or to the viewpoint of those ink-slingers who grovel before the government and say that the people must first be educated and then granted political rights. How can one undertake to bring the workers to recognition of the need to struggle for political rights and at the same time not believe in the possibility of calling on them to take political action, in the possibility of conducting political agitation? Arouse the consciousness of the need for political struggle and at the same time not call for political struggle?! What falderal is this? What does it mean? This kind of tangle is not the result of something left unsaid or of the unfinished nature of a rough draft; it is the natural, inevitable result of the dualism and equivocation that permeate all the views of the Kiev Committee. The Committee wants, on the one hand, to remain true to the basic principles long established in international and Russian Social-Democracy and, on the other, is infatuated with the fashionable Bernsteinian catchwords, "necessity," "gradualness" (end of Section I of the Kiev Committee's *Profession de foi*), "the directly economic character of the

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movement," the impossibility of political agitation and struggle, the necessity of adhering to the solid ground of real demands and needs (as though the struggle for political liberty is not called forth by the most real demand and need!); in a word, it is infatuated with the fashionable catchwords out of which such writings *à la mode* as the *Credo* and the *Separate Supplement to "Rabochaya Mysl"* are spun. Let us examine in its essence the thesis in which all the weak aspects of the *Profession de foi* now under discussion are focused, the thesis that it is "impossible at the present time to turn to the mass of the workers with the call to take political action"; that it is impossible, in other words, to conduct political agitation, because the Russian workers have not yet attained the maturity for political struggle. This last assertion is, fortunately, untrue (we say "fortunately," for were it true, it would inevitably lead Russian Marxists and Russian Social-Democrats into the quagmire of trade-unionist and bourgeois-liberal vulgarisation into which the authors of *Credo*, *Rabochaya Mysl*, and their numerous hangers-on in our legal literature are trying to push them). The Russian workers have, in the mass, not only attained maturity for political struggle, but they have on many occasions demonstrated it by engaging in acts of political struggle, often even spontaneously.

Is not the mass distribution of manifestos in which the government is condemned and castigated really an act of political struggle? Have not the Russian workers in the mass "used their own means" to deal with the police and the soldiery when these became excessively arrogant; have they not liberated arrested comrades by force? Have they not in many places fought in real street battles against troops and police? Have not the Russian workers in the mass, for more than twenty years, sent the best, most developed, most honest, and most courageous of their comrades into the revolutionary circles and organisations? But for the sake of a fashionable doctrine of bourgeois vulgarisation we, representatives of the revolutionary Social-Democratic Party, are supposed to forget all that and admit the impossibility of calling on the working masses to take political action! The objection will probably be raised that the

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cited instances are more often spontaneous outbursts rather than political struggles. To which we answer: Were not our strikes mere spontaneous outbursts until the revolutionary circles of socialists undertook extensive agitation and summoned the working masses to the class struggle, to the conscious struggle against their oppressors? Can one find in history a single case of a popular movement, of a class movement, that did not begin with spontaneous, unorganised outbursts, that would have assumed an organised form and created political parties without the conscious intervention of enlightened representatives of the given class? If the working-class urge, spontaneous and indomitable, to engage in political struggle has so far taken mainly the form of unorganised outbursts, only *Moskovskiy Vedomosti* [\[112\]](#) and *Grazhdanin* [\[113\]](#) can draw from this the conclusion that the Russian workers have not yet, in the mass, attained the maturity for political agitation. A socialist, on the contrary, will draw from it the conclusion that the time has long been ripe for political agitation, for the broadest possible appeal to the working masses to engage in political action and political struggle. If we do not make this appeal, we fail in our duty and, in actual fact, cease to be Social-Democrats, since economic and trade-union organisations without political struggle have always and everywhere been advocated by zealous champions of the bourgeoisie. For this reason the persistent ignoring of the political struggle and the political tasks of the Russian working class, such as we see, for instance, in *Rabochaya Mysl*, cannot be called anything but criminal and disgraceful. This hushing-up is tantamount to demoralising the political consciousness of the workers, who see and feel political oppression, who revolt spontaneously against it, but who meet with indifference on the part of their socialist leaders or even with polemics against the ideas of political struggle. When we are told that the ideas of political liberty must be brought "gradually" to

the masses, what can we call this but indifference and extreme narrowness? One might think that hitherto we have been too hasty in bringing these ideas to the masses, so that we need to curb and moderate ourselves!!! Or, when we are told that "a political clarification of the condition of the working class" is necessary only "to the

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extent that there is reason for it in each individual case," as though "reasons" for political agitation are not furnished by a multitude of the most widespread, day-to-day facts of working-class life!

The effort to limit political agitation to the existence of reasons in each individual case is either senseless or it reflects a desire to take a step backwards in the direction of *Credo* and *Rabochaya Mysl*, a desire to narrow the scope of our already far-too-narrow propaganda and agitation. The objection will also probably be raised that the working-class masses are not yet able to understand the idea of the political struggle, an idea that is comprehensible only to certain, more developed workers. To this objection, which we hear so frequently from "young" Russian Social-Democrats, our answer is that, firstly, Social-Democracy has everywhere and always been, and cannot but be the representative of the class-conscious, and not of the non-class-conscious, workers and that there cannot be anything more dangerous and more criminal than the demagogic speculation on the underdevelopment of the workers. If the criterion of activity were that which is immediately, directly, and to the greatest degree accessible to the broadest masses, we should have to preach anti-Semitism or to agitate, let us say, on the basis of an appeal to Father Johann of Kronstadt.^[14]

It is the task of Social-Democracy to develop the political consciousness of the masses and not to drag along at the tail-end of the masses that have no political rights; secondly, and this is most important, it is untrue that the masses will not understand the idea of political struggle. Even the most backward worker will understand the idea, provided, of course, the agitator or propagandist is able to approach him in such a way as to communicate the idea to him, to explain it in understandable language on the basis of facts the worker knows from everyday experience. But this condition is just as indispensable for clarifying the economic struggle: in this field, too, the backward worker from the lower or middle strata of the masses will not be able to assimilate the general idea of economic struggle; it is an idea that can be absorbed by a few educated workers whom the masses will follow,

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guided by their instincts and their direct, immediate interests.

This is likewise true of the political sphere; of course, only the developed worker will comprehend the general idea of the political struggle, and the masses will follow him because they have a very good sense of their lack of political rights (as the Kiev Committee's *Profession de foi* admits in one place), and because their most immediate, everyday interests regularly bring them into contact with every kind of manifestation of political oppression. In no political or social movement, in no country has there ever been, or could there ever have been, any other relation between the mass of the given class or people and its numerically few educated representatives than the following: everywhere and at all times the leaders of a certain class have always been its advanced, most cultivated representatives. Nor can there be any other situation in the Russian working-class movement. The ignoring of the interests and requirements of this advanced section of the workers, and the desire to descend to the level of understanding of the lower strata (instead of constantly raising the level of the workers' class-consciousness) must, therefore, necessarily have a profoundly harmful effect and prepare the ground for the infiltration of all sorts of non-socialist and non-revolutionary ideas into the workers' midst.

To conclude the analysis of the Kiev Committee's views on the political struggle [I add the following]. The Committee, in a manner that is highly strange and, at the same time, highly typical of the entire *Profession de foi*, not considering it possible at the present time to call on the masses of the workers to take political action, recognises the desirability of organising partial demonstrations for purely agitational purposes (and not for the purpose of bringing pressure upon the government) on issues that are comprehensible to the broad masses Socialists calling on the workers not to bring pressure to bear on the government!!! That is about the limit. . . . Only it is beyond our ken how demonstrations that do not bring pressure to bear on the government are possible. Should we perhaps recommend to the workers that they demonstrate within the four walls of their hovels and lock the doors before they begin? Or per-

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haps they should demonstrate by making the gesture of the fig with their hands in their pockets? That would probably not bring such harmful and ruinous "pressure upon the government"! And we also despair of understanding what is meant by a "partial demonstration." Does it, perhaps, mean of one trade, on issues of that trade alone (again: what has this to do with socialism?), or, perhaps, on partial political issues and not against the entire political system, the autocracy in its entirety? But if this is so, are these not purely and simply the ideas of *Credo* and of the sheerest opportunism, ideas that extremely lower and obscure the political consciousness and the political tasks of the working class? If this is so, hadn't we better repeat the "winged phrase" of a "young" metropolitan Social-Democrat: "It is premature to discredit the autocracy among the workers"? . . .

The *Profession de foi* displays an extreme narrowness of views not only in regard to the question of "politics." "At the present time," we read, "agitational influence brought to bear on the masses can only take the form of, firstly, assistance in the economic struggle of the proletariat. The Committee, therefore, takes advantage of every clash between the workers and the employers, or every important act of abuse on the part of the employers, to address a manifesto to the workers explaining to them their situation and calling on them to protest; it takes a leading part in strikes, formulates the workers' demands, shows the best way to win the demands, and by all these means develops class-consciousness in the workers." That is all; nothing more is told us on the economic struggle. And this is a *profession de foi*! Read these passages over again carefully: Again we have here the language of

the *Credo* and the ideas of the *Credo* (which illustrates once more the abysmal blundering of the *Rabocheye Dyelo* editors who stubbornly desire to conceal the views of the "young economists" and to see in them nothing but the deviations of individuals).

For the socialist, the economic struggle serves as a basis for the organisation of the workers into a revolutionary party, for the strengthening and development of their class struggle against the whole capitalist system. If the economic struggle is taken as something complete in itself there will be nothing socialist in it; the experience of all European

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countries shows us many examples, not only of socialist, but also of anti-socialist trade unions.

It is the task of the bourgeois politician "to assist the economic struggle of the proletariat"; the task of the socialist is to bring the economic struggle to further the socialist movement and the successes of the revolutionary working-class party. The task of the socialist is to further the indissoluble fusion of the economic and the political struggle into the single class struggle of the socialist working-class masses. The diffuse expressions of the Kiev Committee's *Profession de foi*, therefore, open wide the doors to Bernsteinian ideas and legalise an impermissibly narrow attitude to the economic struggle.

Agitational activity among the masses must be of the broadest nature, both economic and political, on all possible issues and in regard to all manifestations of oppression whatever their form. We must utilise this agitation to attract growing numbers of workers into the ranks of the revolutionary Social-Democratic party, to encourage the political struggle in all conceivable manifestations, to organise this struggle and transform it from its spontaneous forms into the struggle of a single political party. Agitation, therefore, must serve as a means of widely expanding the political protest and the more organised forms of political struggle. Today our agitation is too hemmed in; the range of questions it touches upon is too limited. It is our duty therefore not to legitimise this narrowness but to try to liberate ourselves from it, to deepen and expand our agitational work.

In the *Profession de foi* now under discussion this narrowness leads, not only to the theoretical errors above analysed, but to the narrowing of the practical tasks. This narrowing can be seen in the desire "to make the investigation of the workers' conditions at local factories and works, through questionnaires and other means, the immediate pressing task." We, of course, can have nothing against questionnaires in general, since they constitute an essential accessory to agitation, but to occupy ourselves with investigations means to expend unproductively revolutionary forces that are sparse enough as it is.

In fact, much can be gathered from our legal inquiries. We must make it our immediate and urgent task to

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extend agitation and propaganda (especially on the political level), all the more so, since the very good habit, now becoming widespread among our workers, of sending reports of their own to the socialist newspapers guarantees an abundance of material.

A still greater narrowing is to be seen in the fact that on the question of funds only "trade-union strike" funds are recognised as desirable, while not a word is said to the effect that these funds must become integrated in the Social-Democratic Party to be used for the political struggle.

To limit our secret funds to purely economic activity is a desire natural to the authors of the *Credo*; but it is incomprehensible in the *Profession de foi* of a committee of the Russian Social-Democratic Labour Party.

On the question of legal societies the *Profession de foi* is no less narrow, displaying the same effort to make concessions to the notorious Bernsteinism. For a committee of the Social-Democratic Party to assist in the founding of funds means again to scatter forces and to wipe out the distinction between purely cultural activity and revolutionary work; a revolutionary party can and must make use of legal societies for the strengthening and consolidation of its own work, as centres of agitation, as a convenient cover for establishing connections, etc., etc. -- but only for this. To expend socialist forces on rendering assistance to the founding of societies is in the highest degree irrational; it is incorrect to accord these societies an independent significance and it is simply ridiculous to believe that legal societies can be "fully independent of the participation and pressure of the employers."

Lastly, the narrowness and specific character of the Kiev Committee's views are reflected in its organisational plans. It is true we agree fully with the Kiev Committee that this is not the time to announce the re-establishment of the Party and to elect a new Central Committee; but we view as utterly erroneous the opinion concerning the "directly economic character of the movement," the opinion that the Russian proletariat "is not prepared for political agitation." It would also be an error to wait until "local groups grow stronger, increase their membership, and strengthen

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their connections with the working-class milieu" -- such reinforcement often leads to immediate collapse.

On the contrary, we must immediately set about the work of unification and begin it with literary unity, with the establishment of a common Russian newspaper that must make an effort to prepare for the re-establishment of the Party by serving as an organ for the whole of Russia; by gathering correspondence and news items from the circles in all localities; by providing space for the discussion of disputed questions; by extending the scope of our agitation and propaganda; by devoting special attention to organisational questions, to tactical and technical methods of conducting the work; by satisfying all the demands of the most developed workers, and by constantly raising the level of the lower strata of the proletariat (attracted by workers' correspondence, etc.) to an ever greater conscious participation in the socialist movement and in the political struggle.

Only in this way, we are convinced, can real conditions be provided for the unification and re-establishment of the Party, and

only a direct and frank polemic against narrow "economism" and the growing spread of Bernsteinian ideas can ensure the correct development of the Russian working-class movement and Russian Social-Democracy.

From Marx to Mao	Lenin Collection	Reading Guide	Notes on the Text Below
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NOTES

[112] *Moskovskiy Vedomosti (Moscow Recorder)* -- one of the oldest Russian newspapers, originally issued (in 1756) as a small sheet by Moscow University. In 1863 it was taken over by M. N. Katkov and became a monarchist-nationalist organ, reflecting the views of the most reactionary sections of the landlords and the clergy. In 1905 it became one of the leading organs of the Black Hundreds and continued to appear until the October Revolution in 1917. [p.290]

[113] *Grazhdanin (The Citizen)* -- a reactionary magazine published in St. Petersburg from 1872 to 1914. From the eighties of the last

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century it was the organ of the extreme monarchists and was edited by Prince Meshchersky and financed by the government. It had a small circulation, but it was influential in bureaucratic circles. [p.290]

[114] *Johann of Kronstadt* (I. I. Sergeev) -- the priest of Kronstadt Cathedral, an obscurantist notorious for his pogrom incitements directed against non-Russian nationalities. [p.291]

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