LENIN, ELECTIONS & SOCIALIST HEGEMONY

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"The election of someone...is a matter of such vast importance that it would be petty, cowardly and disgraceful to be afraid to speak of it straightforwardly, without beating about the bush, to be afraid of "offending" a particular individual, a particular circle, etc."

— Lenin, October 16, 1912.

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1. Introduction

"We are now 'up to the ears' in the elections," wrote a fatigued Lenin to the renowned novelist Maxim Gorky in 1912, as he busied himself with preparations for the Bolshevik campaign for the Fourth Duma. "[T]he building up of the Party", Lenin explained with characteristic bluntness, "[v]ery much depends on the outcome of the elections."[1] The image elicited in this brief exchange—of a hurried Lenin, embroiled in the finer detail of electoralism, convinced that the future of Bolshevism depended on it—may seem like a peculiar one, at odds with common perceptions of the leader of the October Revolution. At the very least, such a picture sits awkwardly alongside the well-worn Cold War caricature of the authoritarian Lenin, whose "mistrust of the masses" led him to conclude that all exercises in democracy were tiresome impediments to the fulfilment of a pathological lust for power.[2] The credibility of this smear was long ago demolished,[3] even if it lives on as a stock cliché amongst conservative historians and anti-socialist elements deeply embedded in establishment politics or the ivory towers of academia. That said, the underestimation of Lenin's involvement in electoral politics is hardly a feature exclusive to Cold War ideologues—finding expression, too, amongst a string of authors sympathetic to the Bolshevik legacy, who more often than not neglect or even completely ignore this critical aspect of his revolutionary strategy.

There has been a revival in recent years of scholarship that has greatly enriched our appreciation for what Trotsky called the "living Lenin."[4] The progenitor of this revision was the publication of Lars Lih's monumental

study of Lenin's *What is to be Done*.[5] Lih's work was followed by Tamás Krausz's Deutscher Prize-winning reconstruction of Lenin's political life,[6] an important work by Alan Shandro that rightfully reasserted the concept of hegemony to the political practice of the Bolsheviks,[7] Roland Boer's valuable reappraisal of Lenin and religion,[8] and engaging studies by Tariq Ali and John Molyneux on Leninism and its application today.[9] Whilst not explicitly concerned with Lenin, Kevin Murphy's path-breaking study of life in a Moscow metal works factory should also be included in this list. Giving lie to the widely-held presumption amongst conservative historians that the opening of the Russian archives would lead to an empirical rebuttal of the October Revolution and Lenin in particular, Murphy's skilful archive-based research tilted in precisely the opposite direction, illuminating the vibrancy of proletarian democracy during the Russian Revolution, which lingered for a period even into the 1920s.[10]

Of particular note for this article, however, is August Nimtz's perceptive study of Lenin and elections—published initially in two separate volumes, now handily combined in an accessible paperback.[11] Thoroughly immersed in Lenin's published oeuvre, Nimtz has unearthed an extensive trove of writings on elections hidden in plain sight in his *Collected Works*.[12] Indeed, the scale of Lenin's writings on the topic is staggering: Nimtz estimates that with the exception of the agrarian question no other topic takes up as much space in the relevant editions of the *Collected Works*. This extensive body of work brings new depth to our understanding of the unique way that Lenin wielded the electoral tactic, forcing us to reconsider the strategic orientation of "revolutionary parliamentarism" that underpinned this practice. Nimtz has performed a tremendous service for socialists in recovering this legacy, and the

present work seeks to build on his scholarship in some important respects.

As Nimtz has shown, there has been a widespread underestimation of Lenin's writings on elections. This disparity exists both in academic treatments of the subject and in what Lars Lih terms the "activist tradition"—a disparate body of authors from the revolutionary left sympathetic to Bolshevism, including Tony Cliff, Paul Le Banc, Marcel Liebman, Ernest Mandel, John Molyneux, Alan Woods and others. Before considering these more recent interpretations, however, it is worth noting that a distorted view of Bolshevik electoral practice was already gathering pace even before Lenin's death. Many young or newly recruited revolutionaries—some in the leadership of bourgeoning mass communist parties around the world—sought to replicate the example of Bolshevism by breaking with the reformist parliamentarism that had fatally degenerated the Second International. In the process, many drew the one-sided and ultra-left conclusion that the Russian Revolution had rendered the electoral or parliamentary tactic obsolete. Already by 1919, Lenin was complaining that this trend was being associated with the October Revolution without any careful appreciation for the nuanced strategic orientation that led to its success: "One sometimes feels like telling them to praise us less and to try to get a better knowledge of the Bolsheviks' tactics," he wrote.[13] This ultra-leftism was, of course, what occasioned Lenin's publication of *Left-Wing Communism: An Infantile Disorder,* as well as a string of other interventions into debates on the floor of the Comintern, where experienced Bolshevik leaders sought to win the nascent communist movement to a richer understanding of revolutionary practice.

The mistaken idea that Bolshevism was innately anti-electoral was

common both to these ultra-left elements of the socialist movement and to those associated with a labourist orientation. Ralph Miliband, for example, drew explicitly on this presumption when arguing that the "Leninist" model was not applicable in countries like Britain:

> [The] Bolshevik model has very little appeal in the working class movements of bourgeois democratic regimes in general, and virtually no appeal in the British working class movement. The context of a bourgeois democratic regime, in Britain at least as much as elsewhere, imposes upon revolutionary socialists a strategy of advance which has to include a real measure of electoral legitimation[.] In the British context, as in the context of any other bourgeois democratic regime, this is an inescapable requirement for a socialist party, and needs to be treated as such, as a duty and as an opportunity, and not as a distracting and meaningless chore.[14]

As we shall see, Miliband was clearly wrong to conflate Bolshevism with anti-electoralism. According to Nimtz—who catalogues a series of omissions by activists and scholars alike—studies undertaken by authors sympathetic to Lenin have leant themselves to this misreading as well. Neither volume one of Cliff's study of Lenin nor the first volume of Harding's work contain more than fifteen pages on elections and the Duma, and almost nothing on Lenin's wider electoral strategy; Woods does a little better—with 37 pages devoted to the Bolsheviks and the Duma—but again very little on Lenin and elections; Christopher Read's work appears to win the wooden spoon, however, generating "at best a page about Lenin's interest in Duma activities."[15] There are other works from within the "activist tradition" not cited by Nimtz—including Liebman and Mandel—but upon inspection neither includes enough material to contradict the tendency highlighted by Nimtz.

In fact, more recent studies have tended to double down on this legacy

of neglect. In an otherwise important study, Krausz repeats the claim that "the Bolsheviks underestimated representative democracy in a period when the operation of direct democracy itself came up against practical barriers,"[16] and Ali's reflections on the *Dilemmas of Lenin* makes little reference to his deliberations over electoralism. Molyneux's *Lenin for Today* partially bucks the trend, with his criticism of both parliamentary boycotts and reformist parliamentarism firmly in line with Lenin's thinking,[17] but even here the treatment is decidedly in the negative: Lenin's strident criticism of reformism is given considerable space, but little is said about the "revolutionary parliamentarism" that he sought to construct as its antithesis. It is worth noting that this omission is not entirely particular to Lenin—one biographer of Trotsky highlights a similar gap in scholarship: "It is remarkable that earlier works by Western scholars completely ignore Trotsky's writings on the Duma, even though these are explicitly concerned with his political works."[18]

In his attempt to correct the dearth in treatment of Lenin and elections—combined with a tendency to portray the tradition associated with Socialist Workers Party (US) as the sole inheritor of revolutionary parliamentarism—Nimtz is occasionally guilty of overstating the case. He suggests, for instance, Doug Jenness's *Lenin as Election Campaign Manager* (published in 1971 by the American SWP) as the "only introduction to the topic."[19] This ignores Maurice Sibelle's *Revolutionaries and Parliament: The Bolshevik Experience* (1993), which performs a similar introductory role.[20] Nimtz overreaches in other important respects. He charges Tony Cliff in particular with developing a distorted version of Lenin which emphasises the Bolshevik's relationship to "armed struggle" at the expense of attention to elections. This imbalance is "not accidental," Nimtz suggests, but reflects the outlook of an author who,

holding to a political framework that "was not unlike the stance of the Socialist Revolutionaries who disagreed with Lenin's electoral strategy," largely "rejected participation in electoral politics".[21] There are obvious problems with this characterisation: Cliff was not in fact an abstentionist when it came to elections; nor was he particularly impressed with the transformative potential of armed struggle. In the 1970s—roughly the same period during which he published his studies of Lenin—Cliff urged his collaborators to run for seats at Westminster, with his biographer reporting that he was "particularly enthusiastic [about] the electoral turn."[22] Again, towards the end of his life, Cliff showed a similar enthusiasm for the electoral campaign of the *London Socialist Alliance*.

It is true that both of these electoral turns were short-lived, and neither particularly successful.[23] But it does not follow that Cliff drew explicitly anti-electoral conclusions. In 1987, for example, *Bookmarks*—the publishing house of the party Cliff led—republished A. Y. Badayev's first-hand account of Bolshevik participation in elections and the Tsarist Duma. The reprint included an enthusiastic introduction by Cliff, who wrote that "Socialists in Britain…where parliamentarianism has the deepest influence in the labour movement, can benefit much from Badayev's account of how the Bolsheviks used the platform of the Duma in a revolutionary way: they stood on it, they did not kiss it."[24] This is a perspective clearly at odds with Nimtz' assertion that Cliff opposed Lenin's approach to elections, and he distorts the record further when he suggests the international tendencies associated with Cliff and the veteran Trotskyist Alan Woods "[appear] not to encourage election campaigns for its affiliates."[25] This is particularly odd in the case of Woods, formerly a leading member of the *Militant Tendency*—an organisation that could boast at one time several members of parliament, as well as a majority

on Liverpool City Council—who arguably engaged in one of the more sustained and successful interventions in electoral politics on the radical left, albeit as an entryist component of the British Labour Party.

If these points are necessary as corrections, they do not undermine the central thrust of Nimtz' contention: that the scale, seriousness and sophistication of Lenin's electoral work has been severely underestimated by scholars and activists alike. His important study should put to rest any notion that "Leninism" was intrinsically hostile to electoral work. But there is another issue at stake that is sometimes occluded in Nimtz' treatment: Lenin's practice contrasted sharply not only with the anti-electoralism of sections of the left who claim to operate in his name, but also with a sectarian approach to elections common to other sections of the revolutionary left.

This is an approach defined by an unchanging and lifeless propaganda routine, where socialist electoral work is reduced to a timeless, rote-learnt exposition of the party's programme to a disconnected and unenthusiastic working class. Norman Harding provides an example of an especially erroneous and cringe-worthy kind of left electioneering, witnessed whilst campaigning for the well-known actor Vanessa Redgrave, then standing for the Workers Revolutionary Party (WRP):

> During a canvass on a big estate consisting mainly of tower blocks, a young woman came to the door, babe in arms, with two more youngsters clinging to her skirts, obviously a woman with a lot of pressure on her. She told us that she was having problems with the council regarding repairs and rent. I asked her if there was a tenants' organisation on the estate that she could approach for advice and help. At this point Vanessa pushed past me, and started to tell her about the need to change the system. "The WRP candidate represents the fight against capitalism." The only way to solve her problems, said Vanessa,

> was to demand a general strike, and so on. Then out came the membership application form. The young mother was left with "Vote for the WRP!" ringing in her ears. On the way back from the canvass VR told me she severely disagreed with my initial approach and that she was going to raise it at the report-back meeting as an example of how important it was to fight against social democracy in the WRP.[26]

Despite having a BAFTA-winning actor as their candidate, the WRP barely scraped a few hundred votes—and a repeat exercise with the same slogan and programme at the next poll fared no better. This is not to poke fun at the ineptitude of some far-left electoral efforts, but it is worth asking: 'Is this the "revolutionary parliamentarism" that Lenin envisaged?' A close reading of Lenin's work suggests otherwise.

In order to fully appreciate this, however, it is necessary to consider Lenin's approach to elections beyond his utilisation of them as a "platform" and an opportunity to expound one's programme. Whilst it is true both of these possibilities were important to Lenin, considered in isolation they lead to an unnecessarily restrictive reading that reduces his approach to a mere propaganda exercise, overlooking the subtlety and seriousness of his electoral strategy. Nimtz study suggests other concerns—and his focus on the way that Lenin used elections to "count one's forces" is a useful starting point—but the distinction is only partially drawn out. This essay seeks to explicitly draw out these subtleties by situating Bolshevik electoral strategy within the framework of what Shandro calls Lenin's "politico-strategic logic of the struggle for hegemony."[27]

While Shandro's work does not examine Lenin's electoral strategy in detail, below I stress the regularity with which Lenin drew upon the concept of hegemony when discussing elections, and argue for considering Nimtz' empirical corrective within the strategic-hegemonic orientation

highlighted by Shandro. Doing so can shed light on the way that Lenin utilises elections not only as a platform, but as a critical bridgehead in the struggle for working class hegemony (and socialist hegemony within the proletariat). This, then, appropriately contextualises Lenin's electoral strategy—illuminating the way he used elections not for propaganda purposes only, but as means to sink roots and forge connections, to fight for the political independence of the working class and, crucially, to win socialist leadership within the ultimately determinant class struggle itself. This orientation allows us to fully appreciate the way that Lenin's approach, though informed by programme, cannot be reduced to programme—allowing an appreciation for the "art" behind his creative utilisation of electoral slogans and platforms, carefully and explicitly designed to be "capable of arousing enthusiasm among the masses."

Lastly, this essay outlines the centrality of both party building and "left-bloc" tactics to Lenin's electoral work—a series of initiatives in which the Bolsheviks sought allies for their electoral interventions from the wider left. Lenin's legacy here thoroughly contradicts the sectarian reading of revolutionary parliamentarism common amongst sections of the contemporary radical left. In excavating this vital aspect of Bolshevik practice, this work aims to further animate the "living Lenin," as a modest contribution to the process of excavation begun by others.

2. Boycott or Participation?

Bolshevik electoral practice, as with Bolshevism in general, was a product of the peculiar convergence of factors arising from Russia's uneven and combined development. Untouched by the experience of the "bourgeois revolution" that had already transformed a handful of nations to its west, Tsarist Russia rested on a precarious balance between an old order clinging to power and a new world struggling to be born. A definitively feudal political regime led by a monarchist autocracy operated without any semblance of democratic constraint, sitting alongside a bourgeoning capitalist economy built on heavy industry and the labour of a rapidly-developing working class concentrated in the urban economic centres. Consequently, neither the nascent labour movement in Russia nor the small Marxist forces seeking to lead it had encountered the question of parliamentary participation by the dawn of the twentieth century. Indeed, the Tsar had been remarkably steadfast in refusing to accede to any kind of limited suffrage, even as an increasingly deferential liberal bourgeoisie pushed a vision of tepid reform that would have left the monarchy's privilege effectively untouched. This elite gamesmanship would soon be torn asunder by developments at the base of society: a mass working class upheaval in 1905 rocked the Tsarist regime, rendering an approach based on resolute anti-democratic obstruction untenable.

In face of the 1905 revolution, and after months of procrastination, Tsar Nicholas II made a belated effort at appeasement of the masses, first agreeing to form a parliament—known colloquially as the "Bulygin Duma" after its architect, Alexander Bulygin—that was to have a purely

superficial and advisory capacity. When this failed to quell the discontent in the streets, the Tsar issued the *October Manifesto*, committing to convene a legislative parliament—known as the First Duma, or the "Witte Duma" after its proponent Count Sergei Witte—to be elected on a very limited system of suffrage. Though won at a high price, the concession was quickly exposed as meaningless. No sooner had the manifesto been proclaimed than the Tsarist ruling class set out to undermine it through a string of by-laws that would ensure the First Duma would be toothless. These constitutional amendments to the *Fundamental Laws of the Russian Empire*—collectively known as the Russian constitution of 1906—decreed that the Tsar would remain a "supreme autocrat".[28] As Woods explains:

> In addition to a rigged franchise, the rights of the Duma were severely restricted. Parts of the budget could not be discussed. Loans and currency were exclusively the competence of the Minister of Finance. The army and navy, of course, were under the personal control of the Tsar. The Council of Ministers, hitherto nominated by the monarch, was broadened to include an equal number of elected ministers, and, under the title of senate, was turned into an upper chamber with equal rights to the Duma! This gigantic swindle was the handiwork of Count Witte, who further displayed his usefulness to the Tsar by negotiating a sizeable loan from France.[29]

It was against this background that the question of elections was first posed for Russian socialists. Uniquely, the arrangement specified that most people would vote according to social class. Workers, peasants, the urban middle class and landlords would all vote separately—electing delegates to a curia, which would then select deputies to the Duma. The new electoral system was "complex", as Alexander Kerensky recalls in his memoirs, "violat[ing] every canon of democratic procedure":

> Deputies were elected by provincial colleges consisting of delegates chosen

> separately by four groups (curias): landowners, the urban population, peasants, and, in a few districts, factory workers. One mandatory delegate to the Duma was elected by each curia, and the rest of the deputies were elected by the provincial college as a whole.[30]

In some areas elections were held on the basis of districts, which had a partial mix of social class. The ratios for electing these delegates were gerrymandered dramatically in favour of landlords to ensure support for the Tsar,[31] greatly assisted by the calculated misogyny lurking behind the denial of voting rights for women (the socialists, by contrast, "included women in its call for universal suffrage from the very beginning").[32] Overall this system had the effect of ensuring that the Duma would be powerless—but the provisions to compel workers to vote together, usually at their place of employment, would have unintended consequences that would greatly assist the socialist movement.[33]

Of concern for Russian Marxists was not only the limited nature of the First Duma, but also the motivation behind its convocation: it was a belated manoeuvre driven by the desire to dampen the insurrectionary mood in the streets, by offering the appearance of reform without fundamentally changing anything. At first, both wings of the Russian Social Democratic Party (RSDLP)—Menshevik and Bolshevik—were united in their attitude to the new Assembly. The First Duma was not a parliament at all, they agreed, but a façade intended to ensure the furtherance of Tsarist rule, and a ruse to diminish the revolutionary mood of the masses.

Though well aware of the classical Marxist position on participation in parliamentary elections—even if critical of the Bernsteinian gradualism then prevalent amongst many parties of the Second International—Lenin advocated that the Bolsheviks and the wider RSDLP should boycott

these elections. He proffered three explanations for this stance. Firstly, the Duma was "not a parliament" in any real sense, but instead "a ruse employed by the autocracy." Secondly, participation in the election would "involuntarily foster belief in the Duma among the people and thereby weaken the effectiveness of our struggle against this travesty of popular representation."[34] Lastly, he argued that the Russian revolution had not yet been extinguished, and it would be inappropriate to participate in these elections at a time when "insurgents were waging an armed fight for a constituent assembly." "It was the duty of the proletariat," he insisted, "to exert every effort to preserve the independence of its tactics in our revolution."[35] In short, Lenin thought it unwise to engage with the Tsar's contrived and decidedly limited concoction whilst a revolutionary struggle for a constituent assembly was still a live issue in the streets.

In spite of these concerns, or perhaps because of them, Lenin was anything but a disinterested observer in Russia's first election campaign. He argued that the RSDLP should make "vigorous use of all meetings connected with the elections to expound Social-Democratic views in general, and ruthlessly to criticise the State Duma in particular," and to use them to call for a constituent assembly based on universal suffrage.[36] He opposed any notion of a *passive boycott*, instead advocating an "active boycott" where the RSDLP could make use of the legal avenues afforded by the elections to make propaganda:

> What does an active boycott of the Duma mean? Boycott means refusing to take part in the elections. We have no wish to elect either Duma deputies, electors or delegates. Active boycott does not merely mean keeping out of the elections; it also means making extensive use of election meetings for Social-Democratic agitation and organisation. Making use of these meetings means gaining entry to them both legally (by registering in the voters' lists) and illegally, expounding at them the whole programme and all the views of

> the socialists, exposing the Duma as a fraud and humbug, and calling for a struggle for a constituent assembly.[37]

Despite the promotion of this boycott tactic, large numbers of workers took part in the first stages of the elections. As a result, some members of the RSDLP defied the boycott to stand as candidates, resulting in the election of a number of deputies broadly sympathetic to the Marxist left. Eva Broido, a Menshevik, describes the atmosphere of confusion:

> The Bolsheviks were against, the Mensheviks for participation. In the end they agreed that the party should participate only in the first stage of the elections – that of the electoral colleges (there was no direct vote). In this way the party hoped to exploit the elections for the purposes of propaganda and agitation, particularly among the workers. In the event things turned out differently. Where the Mensheviks had a big majority, as in the Caucasus, the party went right through with the elections and returned several members to the Duma. In addition, several members who had been elected as independents now joined the Social Democrats. The party was thus represented in the Duma and had to define its attitude to current political events.[38]

The active involvement of sections of the working class was enough to compel an about-turn from Menshevism: the boycott was mistaken, they argued, and should be repudiated. For their part, the Bolsheviks remained unconvinced. When the Tsar dissolved the First Duma after just 73 days, they appeared to have been proven correct. "History has proved that the tactics of boycotting the Bulygin Duma were the only correct tactics at that time," Lenin concluded, "and were entirely justified by events."[39] "The call to boycott the Witte Duma" following this "was a call to concentrate these uprisings and make them general."[40] "Life itself", as Lenin often put it, would soon raise the question again, with different results.

The First Duma was to be short-lived. Nevertheless, pressure would soon mount to convene elections for a Second Duma—a concession the Tsar begrudgingly granted, scheduling elections for January 1907.[41] "The Left-wing Social-Democrats", wrote Lenin soon after the Tsar's climb down, "must [now] reconsider the question of boycotting the State Duma".[42] What motivated this change of position? Lenin argued that the boycott was a position that arose "concretely, and in connection with a definite political situation"—namely a revolutionary situation—"at a time when the insurgents were waging an armed fight for a constituent assembly."[43] "[A] choice of paths" was presented at the time between the "direct revolutionary struggle and against the constitutional-monarchist path." The strength of these two paths "could only be gauged and tested" within a struggle that would determine "the relative strength of the revolutionary and counter-revolutionary classes":[44]

> During the period of the Bulygin Duma this slogan was the correct and the only revolutionary slogan of the workers' party not because it was the simplest, most forth right, and clearest, but because the historical conditions at the time set the workers' party the task of taking part in the struggle for a simple and direct revolutionary path against the zigzag path of the monarchist constitution.[45]

Conversely, Lenin now argued that revolutionaries should participate in the elections—albeit with the important proviso that this work would be an auxiliary to the more crucial realm of extra-parliamentary activity:

> We shall not refuse to go into the Second Duma when (or "if") it is convened. We shall not refuse to utilise this arena, but we shall not exaggerate its modest importance; on the contrary, guided by the experience already provided by history, we shall entirely subordinate the struggle we wage in the Duma to another form of struggle, namely, strikes, uprisings, etc.[46]

This position was met with ferocious resistance inside the Bolsheviks—with much of its membership encumbered by an "anti-parliamentary cretinism", as Woods aptly put it.[47] Many Bolsheviks—fresh from the insurrectionary climate of the 1905 revolution—could not fathom Lenin's newfound enthusiasm for electoral and parliamentary work. Mikhail Pokrovsky, a historian and Bolshevik activist, recalls the ultra-left indignation then gripping the party:

> Thus, the man who had sounded the call for armed revolt began to urge us to read the newspaper *Russia (Rossia)*, which printed stenographic reports on the sessions of the State Duma. What a hail of ridicule this called forth on Lenin—this time not from the bourgeoisie but from our midst! Who did not jeer at him? Who did not bait him? The man had lost his fire, nothing of the revolutionary was left in him. The faction had to be recalled, the Duma faction liquidated; an armed revolt had to be called immediately.[48]

This ultra-leftism only served to reinforce Lenin's conviction that a break was needed from the "close-knit, exclusive" circles that had come to define Bolshevik organisation: "Undoubtedly, the present leaders of the present workers movement in Russia will have to break with many of the circle traditions[.] Only the broadening of the Party by enlisting proletarian elements can, in conjunction with open mass activity, eradicate all residue of the circle spirit."[49] In his mendacious biography of Lenin, Robert Service suggests that this enthusiasm for a rapprochement with the Mensheviks—culminating in the 1906 unity congress of the RSDLP in Stockholm, Sweden—was largely motivated by Lenin's desire to use his opponents' support for electoral participation as a means to bypass the entrenched boycottism within his Bolshevik faction.[50] Service's proclivity for casting his subject within the shadowy penumbra of factional plotting leads to a sensationalist, Machiavellian presentation of the matter. Regardless, it is notable that it was only on the question

of electoral participation that Lenin broke ranks with other Bolsheviks (despite having unenthusiastically moved the official Bolshevik position earlier in the congress, as he was mandated to do).

Notwithstanding the strength of ultra-left opposition, the proposal to participate in the elections was passed. This would not be the end of the matter among the Bolsheviks. On a number of occasions Lenin had to return to a defence of participation. In his 1907 pamphlet *Against Boycott*, for example, he objected to the tactical inflexibility espoused by some ultra-left Bolsheviks, usually under the guise of opposition to "compromise" with the system. Such static posturing was anathema to the Marxist method, Lenin argued:

> Marxism's attitude towards the zigzag path of history is essentially the same as its attitude towards compromise. Every zigzag turn in history is a compromise, a compromise between the old, which is no longer strong enough to completely negate the new, and the new, which is not yet strong enough to completely overthrow the old. Marxism does not altogether reject compromises. Marxism considers it necessary to make use of them, but that does not in the least prevent Marxism, as a living and operating historical force, from fighting energetically against compromises. Not to understand this seeming contradiction is not to know the rudiments of Marxism.[51]

The boycott position, therefore, was always conditional: it was correct when the revolution was posing a threat to the Tsarist regime, but wrong once that state of affairs receded. That said, it is also the case that some of the other charges Lenin levelled against the First Duma—not least its severely limited electoral system, gerrymandered to ensure the over-representation of Tsarist supporters—were still operative. Lenin conceded that the Duma was "far removed from proper democratic representation." "Nevertheless", he continued, "the masses of the workers

are making themselves heard in the elections."[52] This suggests another reason for the abandonment of the boycott tactic: Lenin was learning from the participation of left-wing workers (loosely associated with the Social-Democrats) who ran in the elections to the First Duma, some of whom were elected and raised their voices within it.

Lenin took great interest in the discussions in the First Duma and in the role played by the deputies associated with the Social-Democrats. In 1906, before he had publicly reversed his position on the boycott, Lenin wrote that "[n]o Social-Democrat can have any doubt now that in the present situation the pronouncements of our Party members in the Duma could be of great value to the cause of the proletariat and of the whole people."[53] Lenin was concerned with the way that these deputies could be used to advance the struggle. Consider this detailed advice he gave during the famine:

> Our Social-Democratic deputies in the Duma are now faced with a very serious task. Firstly, they must launch a major attack against the Cadets when the Budget and Food Committee's report comes up for discussion. They must demand recourse to "free institutions" of the people. They must open the eyes of the peasants to the reason why the Cadets, among whom there are so many landlords, are afraid of the people who need all the land—without any redemption payment—and complete freedom. They must insist on a vote being taken on their resolution on this question, so that the party of the proletariat may be ensured of the sympathy of all the toiling masses, and so that the wavering and cowardice of the liberal landlords may be clearly and publicly exposed….They must be well prepared for a far more thorough and resolute criticism of the whole Budget than that made by the Cadets in the Committee. Voices will then be heard from the rostrum of the Duma relentlessly exposing the double game the Cadets are playing, exposing all the "secrets" of the Russian Budget of the police pogrom-mongers.[54]

Lenin was rebuked by elements of the RSDLP for his enthusiastic collaboration with the social-democrat Duma deputies, given his support for the boycott. He was emphatic, nonetheless, that such an approach was necessary: "Does the fact that we boycotted the Duma necessarily mean that we must not form our Party Group in the Duma? Not at all….We were obliged to do—and did—everything in our power to prevent the convocation of a sham representative body. That is so. But since it has been convened in spite of all our efforts, we cannot shirk the task of utilising it."[55]

Lenin agreed that the deputies had occasionally made "minor mistakes" that had to be corrected "but on the whole they have adopted a correct position."[56] It is plausible to suggest, therefore, that Lenin was learning from experience. He was particularly impressed with the way the deputies used their positions to expose the Duma's subservience to the Tsar, and to turn their parliamentary resolutions into "revolutionary appeals":

> In their resolution, which we published yesterday, the Social-Democrats quite rightly said that no money should be given to the autocratic government, that the State Duma ought to set up its own relief committee, send its members to the affected areas and invite the co-operation of "free public organisations". The Social-Democrats turned their resolution into a revolutionary appeal to the people which branded the government as "the real culprit responsible for the famine", squandering the people's money on waging war against the people. The Social-Democrats demanded the cessation of expenditure on the gendarmerie, the political police, the rural mounted police, and so forth; they demanded a reduction in the salaries and pensions of high-placed drones and an audit of the cash balance and accounts of the Treasury. They also quite rightly demanded that the revenues from crown, church and monastery lands be used for famine relief. The Social-Democrats openly indicted the old

> regime as a whole, and all its organs, and also criticised the whole Budget.[57]

The Duma was very much a sham parliament, but Lenin recognised that the debates and discussions within it were having an impact on the outside. He noted, in particular, the manner in which discussions in the Duma were developing along left-right lines:

> An alignment has arisen in the Duma actually corresponding to the revolutionary situation; the Octobrists and the Cadets on the right, the Social-Democrats and the Trudoviks (or more correctly, the best of the Trudoviks), on the left. We can and must utilise this alignment to warn the people against the dangerous side of the Cadet Duma, so as to develop a revolutionary movement not restricted to the Duma, to Duma tactics, to Duma aims, etc.[58]

Nimtz suggests that Lenin had been privately opposed to the boycott of the First Duma, but was forced to promote the position out of a sense of duty to Bolshevik democratic centralism.[59] Woods argues a similar point of view, postulating that Lenin "maintained his earlier reservations, but felt constrained by factional ties from expressing his views openly."[60] Other writers see it as an example of Lenin's tendency to "bend the stick," or his tactical flexibility.[61] Regardless of the precise timing, there is good reason to suggest that it was practical experience that accounts for this turnaround—at least to settle in Lenin's mind that he had to openly fight for the position and confront the ultra-left tendencies in his own party.

One further piece of evidence bolsters this proposition. At the same time that Lenin was engaged in a fierce fight with his own faction over participation in elections, he was struggling with the Mensheviks on the question of armed actions and guerrilla warfare. The relationship between these two questions sheds light on Lenin's contingent approach to armed actions, but it also deepens our understanding of his approach to elections. What mattered to Lenin was not the particularity of the

tactic, but whether the tactic "conform[ed] to the temper of the broad masses and the conditions of the working-class movement."[62]

When it appeared—wrongly as it transpired—that the bourgeoning armed actions developing after the 1905 revolution might blossom into a more thorough and widespread insurrectionary climate, Lenin attempted to generalise this "guerrilla warfare."[63] This took two forms. Firstly, as Trotsky recalled, after the defeat of the 1905 revolution "routed insurrectionists continued convulsively for a long time in the form of scattered local explosions, guerrilla raids, group and individual terrorist acts."[64] Lenin sought to give this rebellious mood some direction, by instructing the fighting detachments of the Bolsheviks "to assume leadership of the rebellious masses, teaching them how to use arms and how to deliver the most telling blows at the enemy."[65] Secondly, Lenin sought to exploit this situation by arranging for a string of daring expropriations—called "exces" for shorthand—to fund the revolutionary movement. The balance sheet of this activity would turn out to be bleak. Instead of leading to a more generalised insurrectionary climate, a substitutionist orientation developed that "contained in it a goodly element of adventurism, which, as a rule, was foreign to Lenin's politics." Mikhail Olminsky, a Bolshevik organiser and one of Lenin's closest confidantes at the time, recalled the disastrous results: "Later, when the revival of the revolutionary labour movement began, that revival was slowest in those cities where 'exes' had been most numerous."[66]

Despite these setbacks, Lenin was committed to a tactical flexibility. What motivated his orientation towards armed actions was the same framework that informed his intention to stand for elections—the mass participation of workers. But there is a subtle contradiction here: if armed tactics were only acceptable because they conformed to an

insurrectionary mood of the masses, how do we square this with a simultaneous participation in the Duma elections that were apparently permissible because the insurrectionary mood had subsided? As Duncan Hallas keenly observed, "Lenin himself was much slower to abandon armed action than boycottism. Yet the two policies were inextricably connected. If it is necessary to abandon the boycott then, by the same token, the armed struggle is inappropriate. Lenin did not immediately draw this conclusion."[67] This experience, along with the subsequent participation of the Bolsheviks in the district council and Constituent Assembly elections in 1917, would suggest that Lenin's appreciation of the electoral tactic within a wider revolutionary strategy had deepened from practical experience.

Lenin saw participation in elections as a tactical question. It would be wrong, however, to reduce his view to a needlessly binary either/or: 'sometimes you participate, sometimes you don't.' Certainly, Lenin did not rule out raising the slogan of boycott in future.[68] In practice, it should be noted, the boycott of the First Duma was the first and last time the Bolsheviks pursued this tactic.[69] When the Second Duma was dissolved after 103 days, to be reconvened via elections in October 1907, the Bolsheviks participated. This despite the fact the elections to the Third Duma were held under an even more restrictive system than those previous, designed to further rig its composition in favour of the Tsar—greatly reducing the number of workers and peasant deputies elected.[70] So undemocratic was the new system that even Sergei Witte, the architect of the Duma, was driven to concede in his memoirs that the new electoral law "excluded from the Duma the voice of the people, i.e., the voice of the masses and their representatives, and gave a voice only to the powerful and the obedient."[71] In the face of this brazen

manipulation, the Bolsheviks still participated in the election. Indeed, they again participated in the elections of 1912, the last of the Tsarist era.

Despite Lenin's earlier argument that the boycott position owed its origins to the revolutionary situation in 1905, he did not again advocate the slogan during the revolutionary days of 1917. Retrospectively, in 1920, Lenin recalled: "It was an error … for the Bolsheviks to have boycotted the Duma in 1906."[72] Indeed, the Bolsheviks energetically participated in the district council elections in 1917 and those to the Constituent Assembly, which took place at the height of the Russian Revolution—a move Lenin would later describe as "highly useful" and "exceedingly valuable."[73] Summing up this experience, he wrote of the "great usefulness, during a revolution, of a combination of mass action outside a reactionary parliament with an opposition sympathetic to (or, better still, directly supporting) the revolution within it."[74] Lenin arrived at this conclusion through a synthesis of Marxist theory and the practical experience of the Russian workers movement itself. "[T]he fundamental Bolshevik prejudice is precisely this," Trotsky wryly observed, "that one learns to ride on horseback only when sitting on the horse."[75]

3. Elections and Hegemony

> The elections to the State Duma naturally impose upon all Marxists, upon all members of the working-class movement, the duty to bend all their efforts to develop the most energetic, persistent activity and initiative in every field of that movement.[76]

The pugnacious vitality witnessed in this passage, written by Lenin in 1911, would be a central and recurring feature of his electoral work. Why, then, was this revolutionary socialist—committed to smashing the very edifice of the bourgeois state—so earnest in his application of the electoral tactic? Part of the answer, at least, is to be found in what Michael Löwy identifies as Lenin's tendency to "put politics in command"—"his obstinate, inflexible, constant and unflinching tendency to grasp and highlight the political aspect of every problem and every contradiction."[77] It was this shrewd comprehension of the political that drew Lenin to the electoral tactic. For him, the ballot was not the agency for transformative change. But the process that surrounded it, and the parliamentary platform that arose from it, was a cauldron for the making and remaking of bourgeois hegemony: the political and ideological justification for ruling class power among the masses of people.

Any project committed to the construction of a socialist counter-hegemony, by virtue of this reality, could not ignore or abstain from participation in elections. In the process of reaffirming the necessity of revolution in the triumph of socialism, Lenin underscores his belief that proficient use must be made of the electoral tactic to prepare for this potentiality:

> Today there is no revolutionary situation, the conditions that cause unrest among the masses or heighten their activities do not exist; today you are given a ballot paper—take it, learn to organise so as to use it as a weapon against your enemies, not as a means of getting cushy legislative jobs for men who cling to their parliamentary seats for fear of having to go to prison.[78]

Thus Lenin cautioned that elections were a "modest opportunity for activity" whose potential shouldn't be exaggerated—in light of the "not very broad and not very open" Duma stacked against the workers' movement—but he was adamant that revolutionaries must exploit the occasion for all it was worth, regardless of the undemocratic scheming of the Tsarist ruling class.

Just how important, then, was the electoral tactic to Bolshevism? And what place did it have within wider Leninist strategy? Nimtz makes the provocative claim that the victory of Bolsheviks in October 1917 rested to a considerable extent on their electoral work over the preceding years. If such a statement is true, then it must surely be appraised alongside other, arguably more decisive, factors: not least the way that the Bolsheviks fought for the leadership of the enormous wave of working class action following the *Lena Goldfields Massacre* in April 1912, which enveloped the Tsarist regime in one of the most sustained political strike movements in world history.[79]

In the absence of this renewed surge of class struggle, it should be said, there would likely not have been a revolution—never mind one with Bolshevik leadership. Acknowledging this qualification, however, need not detract from an assessment of Lenin's work in the electoral field. As a matter of fact, the wave of strike action following the Lena massacre did not dampen Lenin's enthusiasm for electoral intervention—on the contrary, it reinforced a palpable sense of urgency that the Bolsheviks

must secure a parliamentary platform. As Lenin wrote in 1912:

> The political strikes and the first demonstrations over the Lena shootings show that the revolutionary movement among the masses of workers in Russia is growing. This thickening of the revolutionary atmosphere casts a vivid light on the tasks of the Party and its role in the election campaign…a small platform, is a necessary factor in this situation. We need this platform, we need the election campaign, for our revolutionary work among the masses.[80]

How, then, do we square Lenin's focus on mass struggle with his insistence on a serious intervention into elections? Nimtz appears to solve this dilemma by refuting what he rightfully sees as a false dichotomy: the experience of Bolshevism, he argues, demonstrates that revolutionaries need not choose between the "street or the ballot"—they could use both. The idea that Bolshevism made good use of tactics in the street and in parliament is very true, and an urgently necessary correction against studies that have ignored Lenin's electoral activity. In drawing this out, there is perhaps a danger of replacing a false dichotomy with a similarly unhelpful equivalence. Lenin most certainly made use of the ballot and the street and factory-based agitation, but he always insisted that work in the former was subordinate to the centrality of the latter: "the Bolsheviks regard direct struggle of the masses…as the highest form of the movement, and parliamentary activity without the direct action of the masses as the lowest form of the movement." However, in the same article, Lenin scolds those Bolsheviks who had "committed to memory" this statement and "learned it by heart," but "did not understand it, and so disgraced themselves."[81] He goes on:

> Get this into your heads, o unjustly removed ones: when the conditions of acute and increasing reaction are really present, when the mechanical force of this reaction really severs the connection with the masses, makes sufficiently broad work difficult and weakens the Party, it is then that the specific task of

> the Party becomes to master the parliamentary weapon of struggle; and that, o unjustly removed ones, is not because parliamentary struggle is higher than any other forms of struggle; no, it is just because it is lower than them, lower, for example, than a struggle which draws into the mass movement even the armed forces, which gives rise to mass strikes, uprisings, etc. Then why does mastery of the lowest form of struggle become the specific (i.e., distinguishing the present moment from other moments) task of the Party? Because the stronger the mechanical force of reaction and, the weaker the connection with the masses, the more immediate becomes the task of preparing the minds of the masses (and not the task of direct action).[82]

There is an exquisite application of the dialectical method in this passage. Strikes and mass struggle, to be sure, were always and everywhere a higher form of action—but at times the objective circumstances enforced a concentration on lower forms of struggle, as in electoral work. Grasping this distinction requires a framework more sophisticated than either the "ballot *or the* street" or the "ballot *and the* street." It is necessary to reframe the argument by placing it within the "politico-strategic logic" of Lenin's struggle for hegemony: to assess the way that Lenin used elections as a means to win working class hegemony within the wider democratic movement, but also the way that elections assisted in the creation of Bolshevik hegemony within the working class struggle itself, which Leninist theory always insisted was decisive.

The Marxist theory of hegemony is, of course, most widely associated with Gramsci.[83] Less known is that the "great 'metaphysical' event" that precipitated this conceptualisation was "the theorisation and realisation of hegemony carried out by Ilyich [Lenin]".[84] If the imprecision of some of Gramsci's formulations have led to an abundance of widely contradictory interpretation, it is the precision of Lenin's work—his habit of "repeating what was necessary *ad infinitum* in the plainest, heaviest, most single-

minded hammer-blow pronouncements"[85]—that has sometimes leant itself to a sterile and didactic reading of Bolshevism, wherein the subtle, brilliant flexibility of Lenin's strategic and tactical orientation is reduced to a static and unchanging "programmatic" legacy, to be repeated ad-nauseam regardless of circumstance.

Concerning elections, this often finds expression in the notion that Lenin regarded them merely as a "platform" or an opportunity for the dissemination of propaganda. Certainly he did indeed see the importance of both propositions. But neither is sufficient as a summation of Lenin's electoral strategy, and considered in isolation they lead to the narrow conclusion that elections served merely as opportunities for handing out leaflets or giving a speech. Lenin's approach to elections, as we shall see, is considerably more nuanced.

As Shandro argues, Lenin's concept of "proletarian self-emancipation could only be grasped concretely in terms of the logic of struggle for hegemony, hence as an essentially collective process articulated in relation to determinate organisational forms."[86] A crucial aspect of this "collective process" was the electoral tactic. Lenin insisted that revolutionary electoral work was vital not only as "a means for the political enlightenment of the people"—the aforementioned 'platform' and 'propaganda'—but also "from the tasks *of the hegemony of the proletariat in the struggle for liberation*."[87]

What precisely did Lenin mean by this? Prior to 1917, the Russian revolutionary movement had overwhelmingly embraced the argument that a "bourgeois revolution" was necessary to open up the possibility of socialist transformation—a revolution that would overthrow the Tsar and establish a bourgeois democracy similar to those in parts of Western

Europe and the US. Stalinist falsifiers would later attempt to equate the Bolshevik approach with the tactic of the 1930s "Popular Front", in which the working class would cede leadership of the democratic struggle to bourgeois forces. Leninism under Lenin, however, was predicated on his insistence that the working class must fight for hegemony of the anti-tsarist movement. Writing in 1907, Lenin clearly identifies this as the critical point of separation between Bolshevism and Menshevism: "The essence of the dispute between the two wings of the Russian Social-Democratic Party is in deciding whether to recognise the hegemony of the liberals or whether to strive for the hegemony of the working class in the bourgeois revolution."[88] It was this orientation that informed Lenin's approach to elections, crystallised in a 1906 resolution that stipulated that Bolsheviks must "base the election campaign on opposition between revolutionary and 'peaceful' struggle, showing the great danger of Cadet hegemony in the emancipation movement."[89]

"The hegemony of the working class," Lenin explained, "is the political influence which that class (and its representatives) exercises upon other sections of the population."[90] Of importance here is the explicit identification of the role of "representatives"—i.e. deputies in the Duma—in Lenin's conceptualisation of political hegemony. This did not arise from a reformist illusion in parliamentary power, but rather from a recognition that elections—and the Duma platform that arose from them—were actualising the dividing lines of politics in the minds of millions: "The broad masses of the workers are witnessing a struggle between parties, that is, between definite political parties, for the first time in Russia."[91]

As such, this "struggle between parties" in the Duma would also have consequences for which social forces would lead in the democratic

struggle more generally. When the First Duma was dissolved, for example, many of the deputies decamped to Vyborg in the autonomous Grand Duchy of Finland in July 1906, where they issued a 'manifesto' calling for public resistance to the Tsar's move. The 'Vyborg appeal' was enough to budge the monarchy into convening the Second Duma, which in turn was enough for the liberal sponsors of the initiative to retreat. The socialist movement was largely peripheral in this context, despite its overwhelming influence in the revolutionary upsurge in 1905—just one year previously. One Bolshevik organiser, Cecilia Bobrovskaya, remembers that the liberals "boasted a great deal about the Vyborg Manifesto," leading them to "be cocksure of victory in the elections to the Second State Duma."[92] The consequences of this liberal surge were explicitly drawn out by Trotsky—electoral abstentionism on the part of socialists, he appraised, had in practice helped to reinforce bourgeois hegemony: "the boycott tactic…propelled large democratic strata towards the Kadets, forced many radicals to consider themselves represented by the Kadet party, and thus transformed the Kadets into the organ of "national" opposition; it was this exceptional situation that drove the Kadets to issue the Vyborg declaration[.]"[93]

Lenin was acutely aware, following the events at Vyborg, of the way the liberals exploited their presence in the Duma to place the political situation under their control, and was thus determined to displace this hegemony. "The hegemony of the liberals in the Russian emancipation movement," Lenin warned, "will always mean defeat for this movement."[94] Elections were a crucial means to this end—a point Lenin would again return to in the run up to the 1912 election, stating plainly that the "election struggle in St. Petersburg is a struggle for hegemony between the liberals and the worker democrats within the whole of

Russia's emancipation movement."[95] Time and time again Lenin alerted the working class movement to the way that liberals were skilfully and energetically using elections to construct a hegemony in their own image. Analysing the liberal election campaign in 1912, Lenin appraised that their "strategy" was "daily directed towards taking the leadership of the 'whole' opposition movement into their hands."[96] One way that the liberals did this was by attempting to polarise the election between those who were for or against the Tsar—eliminating any class dimension, removing socialists from the equation in the process. Lenin insisted that revolutionary socialists must carve out a space separate from the liberals that would bolster efforts to wrench hegemony away from them:

> What are the conclusions to be drawn from this pre-election "political mobilisation" of the parties? The first and principal conclusion, which the working-class democrats drew long ago, is that there are three, not two, camps engaged in the contest. The liberals are eager to make it appear that the contest is really between two camps… "For or against a constitution?" is how the Cadets formulate the difference between the two camps. Actually, however, this formulation defines nothing at all[.][97]

Lenin saw a "secret" strategy behind the flimsy platform of the liberals. In a remarkable passage—that prefigures aspects of the 'triangulation' of the modern era—Lenin argued that the vagueness of the liberal platform was purposeful, designed to attract support from both counter-revolutionary sections of the population, whilst saying just enough to attract support from genuinely democratic elements of the electorate from other parties.[98] The liberals had another tool that they regularly deployed in the struggle for hegemony—exploiting genuine fear about the Black-Hundreds amongst progressive elements of society. The threat of the reactionary and anti-Semitic Black-Hundreds was of course real, but the liberals were keen to exploit this by suggesting that a vote for

smaller forces would open the door to these reactionary forces winning seats. This early incarnation of what we today call "lesser-evilism" was roundly condemned by Lenin:

> [T]he whole of the Cadets' election campaign is directed to frightening the masses with the Black-Hundred danger and the danger from the extreme Left parties, to adapting themselves to the philistinism, cowardice and flabbiness of the petty bourgeois and to persuading him that the Cadets are the safest, the most modest, the most moderate and the most well-behaved of people. Every day the Cadet papers ask their readers: Are you afraid, philistine? Rely on us! We are not going to frighten you, we are opposed to violence, we are obedient to the government; rely on us, and we shall do everything for you "as far as possible".[99]

Lenin insisted that to combat the Black-Hundred threat, what was needed was "not blocs with the Cadets, but the preparedness of the masses to engage in a struggle that will go beyond the bounds of so-called parliamentarism."[100] He repeatedly stressed that Bolsheviks must fight to preserve the independence of the socialist movement from the liberals within the elections: "It is not two, but three camps that are contending in the elections. Do not lump the second camp (the liberals) with the third camp (the democrats)."[101]

In a leaflet circulated in the run up to elections to the Third Duma—with the headline "How to Vote in the St. Petersburg Elections"—Lenin stressed this point to the electorate:

> At all events, there is no doubt that there will be three election lists in St. Petersburg—the Black-Hundred, the Cadet, and the Social-Democratic.
>
> All voters must, therefore, clearly realise whom they are sending to the Duma:
>
> the Black Hundreds, i.e., the Right parties, who are for a government based on military courts, for pogroms and violence?

> the Cadets, i.e., the liberal bourgeoisie, who go to the Duma to legislate, i.e., to compromise with the Gurkos, who actually enjoy both the right to legislate and the right to dissolve the Duma if it incurs their displeasure?
>
> or the Social-Democrats, i.e., the party of the working class, which, at the head of the whole people, is fighting for full freedom and socialism, for the emancipation of all working people from exploitation and oppression?
>
> Let every voter know that he must choose between these three parties.

And again:

> Citizens and voters! You are told that the Cadets and the Social-Democrats may enter into an election agreement, that they may put up a joint election list.
>
> This is not true. Let everybody know that whatever happens there will be three lists in St. Petersburg: the Black-Hundred, the Cadet and the Social-Democratic.[102]

Lenin was exercised, therefore, with preserving the independence of the working class within the struggle. He understood that elections did not offer the most favourable arena for the creation of this independent agency—that was more likely to happen through mass collective action—but it was nevertheless necessary to intervene in them in a rearguard action against the efforts of bourgeois forces to dissolve it. When studying *On War*—Carl von Clausewitz's classic treatise on military strategy—Lenin highlighted the passage that read: "In political terms a defensive war is a war fought for one's own independence." At the end of this section Lenin wrote in the margins "right!"[103]

If electoral participation was necessary to preserve the independence of the working class, then it was also a crucial battleground within the labour movement itself. In the 1912 elections, for example, the Mensheviks initiated an orientation toward "Wrest[ing] the Duma from

the hands of the reactionaries." The Menshevik approach, Lenin argued, was a "system of policy that objectively means transferring hegemony to the liberals." In stark contrast, Lenin proposed the slogan "Wrest the democratic movement from the hands of the liberals"—explaining that "only a democratic movement which has ceased to be dependent on the liberals is capable of actually undermining reaction."[104] "Wherein lies the difference between the two formulations?" asked Lenin: "In the very fact, among other things, that the first excludes the idea of the "hegemony" of the working class, whereas the second deliberately defines this very idea."[105]

> The Marxist tells the workers: in order really and successfully to fight for the freedom of your "own" political self-determination, you must fight for the free political self-determination of the entire people, you must show the people what the successive democratic forms of its political existence should be, and win the masses and the undeveloped sections of the working people away from the influence of the liberals. If your party is really to attain a full understanding of the tasks of the class, and if its activity is actually to be of a class nature and not of a guild nature, it is necessary for it not only to take part in political life, but, in spite of all the vacillations of the liberals, to direct the political life and initiative of the broad strata on to a greater arena than that indicated by the liberals, toward more substantial and more radical aims.[106]

"Renunciation of the idea of hegemony," Lenin concluded, "is the crudest form of reformism."[107] What motivated Bolshevik electoral strategy, therefore, was not the objective of standing in elections in order to seize parliament, but using elections and parliament as a means to shape the wider movement. His electoral strategy was predicated on the idea that the "Cadet monopoly" in the democratic movement "should be broken, broken at all costs, in full view of the masses who see the election, hear about the election, and who are following the chances of the candidates

and the results of the election."[108]

Lenin's approach to elections contained another subtle, but crucial strategic orientation. In 1912, he wrote, "we always take care, in our official statements, to speak of the fight against the Right in terms different from those we use in speaking of our fight against the liberals." That is to say the Bolsheviks directed the majority of their fire at the right, not at the liberals. Lenin would go on to insist that the fight "against the liberals" waged by socialists was "more profound, more consistent and richer in content, and it does more to enlighten and rally the masses, than the fight against the [Right]."[109] This critical distinction allowed Lenin to avoid a lesser-evilism that would have resulted in the workers movement trailing behind the liberals, without reverting to a sectarian posture that put socialists out of sync with the democratic sentiments of the masses—who distinguished between liberals and the resolutely monarchist forces. Bolshevik electoral strategy therefore had two complimentary aspects: it emphasised implacable hostility to those within the Tsarist ruling class at the top of society whilst openly fighting for socialist hegemony against the liberals who would inevitably betray that sentiment.

4. Left Bloc or Progressive Bloc?

The October Revolution, it has been regularly asserted, was singularly successful because of the presence of a revolutionary party meticulously constructed over the preceding years. A cursory glance at the historical record would confirm this as an elementary truism: there would indeed have been no revolution in the absence of a revolutionary party.

That said, this is only one element (albeit a critical one) of a more comprehensive explanation for Bolshevik success in 1917. "The truth is always concrete," as Lenin consistently repeated, but the "concrete is concrete because it is the concentration of many determinations."[110] What might these other determinations be? Keen to acknowledge the centrality of party-building to Lenin's strategy, much of the scholarship on Lenin from within the "activist tradition" has at times lost sight of the way the Bolshevik party was built out of a wider imbrication of left-cooperation within Russia, a political project that encompassed an "empire-wide network of labour unions, cooperatives, cultural-educational societies, and, a little later, sickness funds [that] constituted a vast forum for joint socialist effort."[111] Recent treatments have tended to bend the stick in the other direction, emphasising the "broad party" nature of the RSDLP—in step with the "Erfurtian"[112] politics of parties across the Second International—and invariably underestimating both the acute differences between Bolshevism and Menshevism and the independent agency that led them to embark upon vastly divergent trajectories.[113]

A rounded understanding of the creation of the Bolshevik party must

therefore be informed by the way that Lenin and others consciously and deliberately sought to construct this "joint socialist effort"—not in lieu of party building, nor in isolation from it, but as a necessary ingredient in the development of a fighting labour movement from which the Bolsheviks would draw their sustenance. Central to this orientation—and the wider hegemonic perspective that informed it—was Lenin's electoral strategy, and particularly his persistent utilisation of the "left-bloc" tactic: a series of creative initiatives designed to draw other "left" parties with mass support into cooperation with the Bolsheviks at the polls.

Both the Bolsheviks and Mensheviks stood on the same "social democratic" lists—in accordance with Russian law. The practice of each faction would differ considerably, however—putting obvious question marks over the easy absorption of the Bolsheviks into the "broad party" model common to social democratic parties in the west. As discussed earlier, Lenin insisted on the resolute independence of the workers' movement from the liberal bourgeoisie. This prohibition did not stretch to parties whose base lay within other sections of the "masses": workers, peasants or parts of the lower middle class. The Mensheviks, by contrast, were unwavering in their insistence on the necessity of aligning with the liberal bourgeoisie. The clash between these perspectives would play out in some form in every election under Tsarist rule.

In the first round of voting—where workers would select delegates to a curia that would then select deputies to the Duma—Lenin insisted on the "complete independence" of the socialist forces. The second stage of voting was a different matter. Here Lenin energetically sought to create a "left-bloc" between socialists and other forces—often with predominately peasant parties such as the Socialist Revolutionaries (SRs)

and the Trudoviks (or the most left sections of these parties), and also with other sections of the socialist movement close to the Bolsheviks' position—in order to maximise the votes for each in electing deputies to the Duma. The majority of the Mensheviks rejected this outright, insisting on an alliance with the liberals. In contrast to the Menshevik policy of creating a bloc along "progressive" lines, Lenin advocated for a specifically left-bloc orientation that would accentuate the class divide in politics. He explains this divergence between the Menshevik and Bolshevik approaches to voting:

> One line is to vote, as a general rule, for the more progressive candidates, without going into any further definitions. The other line is to take advantage of the antagonism between the Rights and the liberals to organise the democrats. The ideological implication of the first line is passive subordination to the hegemony of the Cadets[.] The ideological implication of the second line is the waging of a struggle against the leadership of the Cadets over the peasants and over bourgeois democracy in general[.][114]

Lenin would consistently advocate this line right up until the revolution—indeed it reached its zenith in the collaboration between the Bolsheviks and Left SRs, which ensured a pro-Soviet majority in the 1917 Constituent Assembly elections. Lenin continued to object to joint Menshevik-liberal efforts to use the threat of the Black-Hundreds as a means to frighten voters behind their bloc. On the other hand, he conceded that in the later stages of voting—once the role of the masses had been eliminated and it was merely a matter of arithmetic—it would of course be permissible to choose a liberal over a Black-Hundred if such a choice was forced.

Eric Blanc suggests this as evidence that Lenin "sometimes even openly advocated a lesser-evil voting tactic" in elections.[115] This is a fairly crude

mischaracterisation.[116] Lenin's electoral strategy was always founded on the necessity of working class independence and the wrenching of hegemony from the liberals. He argued that the second stage of the elections occurred "when the principal, the chief, the decisive part of the election campaign is over,"[117] and even then agreements were only permissible "where it is impossible together with the democrats to defeat the liberals."[118] Lenin's advice regarding the later stages of voting, therefore, should be understood not as a proposal for a political accommodation between liberals and the left, but as an acknowledgement that Russia's peculiar electoral arrangements might necessitate technical agreements with other forces in very specific circumstances. It is akin, therefore, to the kind of technical arrangements found in modern parliaments—in the Irish Dáil, for example, where parliamentarians from left and right will occasionally form "technical groups" to avail of greater speaking rights or access to various committees—rather than instances in which the left lends its votes to a capitalist party such as the Democrats in the US, which of course forms the backdrop for Blanc's discussion of Bolshevism. Indeed, Lenin explicitly warned against lesser-evil voting in a passage worth quoting at length:

> "We must choose"—this is the argument the opportunists have always used to justify themselves, and they are using it now… We must choose—between the existing evil and a very small rectification of it, because the largest number of those who are in general dissatisfied with the existing evil are in favour of this "very small" rectification. And by achieving the small thing, we shall facilitate our struggle for the big one.
>
> That is exactly how the German opportunist Social-Democrats argued. They said, in effect: There is a social-liberal trend which demands the repeal of the anti-socialist laws, a reduction of the working day, insurance against illness, and so on. A fairly large section of the bourgeoisie supports these demands.

> Do not repel it by tactless conduct, offer it a friendly hand, support it, and then you will be practical politicians, you will achieve small, but real benefits for the working class, and the only thing that will suffer from your tactics will be the empty words about "revolution"…The French ministerial socialists argued exactly like the Bernsteinians. They said in effect: We must choose between reaction and the bourgeois radicals, who promise a number of practical reforms. We must support these radicals, support their Cabinets; phrases about social revolution are merely the chatter of "Blanquists", "anarchists", "utopians", and so forth.
>
> What is the main flaw in all these opportunist arguments? It is that in fact they substitute the bourgeois theory of "united", "social" progress for the socialist theory of the class struggle as the only real driving force of history. According to the theory of socialism…the real driving force of history is the revolutionary class struggle; reforms are a subsidiary product of this struggle…According to the theory of bourgeois philosophers, the driving force of progress is the unity of all elements in society who realise the "imperfections" of certain of its institutions. The first theory is materialist; the second is idealist. The first is revolutionary; the second is reformist.
>
> A logical deduction from the second theory is the tactics of ordinary bourgeois progressives: always and everywhere support "what is better"; choose between reaction and the extreme Right of the forces that are opposed to reaction. A logical deduction from the first theory is that the advanced class must pursue independent revolutionary tactics…that undoubtedly enhance the independence, class-consciousness and fighting efficiency of the proletariat.[119]

Barring very specific cases, then, Lenin's left-bloc strategy was explicitly forged as a means of opposing the politics of lesser-evilism, which he ridiculed as little more than a "passive subordination to the hegemony of the Cadets."[120] Drawing the balance sheet on this experience, Lenin concluded that events had proven the left-bloc tactic to be the correct one:

> Experience has shown that we Bolsheviks, far from underestimating the possibility of blocs with the Cadets (at the second stage and so on), rather continued to overestimate it, for what actually occurred in a number of cases was the formation of blocks between the Cadets and the Octobrists against us! This, of course, does not mean that we refused…in a number of cases, such as at gubernia election meetings, to resort to blocs between ourselves and the Cadets against the Rights. What it does mean is that our general line (three camps; democrats against Cadets) was borne out and strengthened still further by experience.[121]

Controversy over alliances with liberals was not the only strategic problem demanding Lenin's attention. There were also those, including within the Bolshevik organisation, who held to a sectarian resistance against any kind of electoral agreements with other forces on the left—"so-called pure Bolsheviks [who] would have no agreements with any other party whatsoever."[122] Lenin countered that no previous revolution had "failed to provide examples and instances of 'Left bloc' tactics, and wherever these movements triumphed, in all such cases, it was always as a result of these tactics, a result of the struggle being directed along these lines in spite of the vacillations and treachery of the liberals."[123] Left-bloc tactics, therefore, were an "important question of principle, not only [from] the standpoint of election agreements [but] from the point of view of the general character and content of election propaganda and agitation"—a "policy obligatory for every workers' party" in the context of the Russian revolution, according to Lenin.

Engaging in electoral blocs did not justify engaging in unprincipled arrangements for the purposes of gaining seats, however. In 1907, the Bolsheviks translated and published Wilhelm Liebknecht's pamphlet *No Compromises, No Electoral Agreement*. In the preface, Lenin wrote:

> Liebknecht does not in the least deny that agreements with the bourgeois

> opposition parties are "useful" both from the standpoint of obtaining "seats in parliament" and from the standpoint of enlisting an "ally" (a supposed ally) against the common enemy—reaction. But the true political acumen and the staunch Social-Democratism of this veteran German socialist are revealed by the fact that he does not limit himself to these considerations. He examines the question whether the "ally" is not an enemy in disguise whom it would be particularly dangerous to admit to our ranks; whether and in what way he actually fights against the common enemy; whether agreements, while being useful as a means of obtaining a larger number of seats in parliament, are not detrimental to the more permanent and more profound aims of the proletarian party.[124]

The Bolsheviks were engaged in some form of left-cooperation for every election in which they stood. Menshevism, by contrast, "recommended the liberal bourgeoisie as the workers' only suitable ally."[125]

> Between 1900 and 1917, two general categories of bloc activities existed. When revolution seemed imminent, all socialists banded together and even built bridges to the liberal opposition in order to strike together. In less propitious times, outlooks on post-revolutionary Russia (whether Russia would move quickly toward socialism or experience lengthy capitalist development) determined with whom this or that socialist group would march. The Right Mensheviks, Right SRs, Bundists, and Popular Socialists, all of whom expected a prolonged capitalist phase, banded together; the Bolsheviks, Left SRs, Mezhraiontsy, and (with some reluctance) the Left Mensheviks, all of whom expected a rapid transition to socialism, made common cause. Thus two competing socialist blocs left and right gradually emerged and during the war achieved their highest definition over the issue of whether to support or oppose the war.[126]

Nimtz locates Lenin's "left-bloc" orientation within the framework of the proletarian-peasant alliance common to Bolshevism at the time. Undoubtedly, this is the thrust of the justification given in much of

Lenin's writings. This may offer an alternative explanation for the dearth of treatment of Lenin and elections in studies rooted in the "activist tradition" which, following Trotsky, view Lenin's earlier advocacy of the *Revolutionary-Democratic Dictatorship of the Proletariat and the Peasantry* as a mistaken orientation superseded by "permanent revolution" in 1917.[127] This is not the space to explore this question in full: it's sufficient here to note that the electoral orientation advocated by Lenin does not necessarily contradict the theory of permanent revolution. For one, Lenin's schema always had the proletariat firmly in the driving seat within any alliance—it was the duty of the Social-Democrats to "lead" the peasant parties in the Duma. In any case, Trotsky's theory was not at odds with this tactical aspect—concerned, instead, with opposing any notion that the future revolution would be primarily peasant in nature, resulting in a peasant rather than worker-led government.[128] However, it was not only relations with the peasants that motivated the left-bloc tactic. Sources also suggest that the left-bloc arose from the demands of winning socialist hegemony *within the working class* itself.

The demarcations between workers and peasants—and the parties that sought to represent them—were sometimes blurred. Both the SRs and the Trudoviks had a base inside workplaces. Left-bloc tactics were therefore not only the outcome of Lenin's theoretical orientation towards the peasants. An abundance of evidence suggests "that pressure from below—from workers, students, soldiers, peasants, and from the rank and file cadres, all of whom disliked factional strife—was a significant factor in the left bloc phenomenon."[129] In the Second Duma elections, for example, the SRs polled considerably better than expected in predominately proletarian, urban districts. Despite this, Lenin remained undeterred: "As far as we are concerned, such results *can only fortify* our

conviction that today, more than ever, our duty and the guarantee of our success *lie in joint work*, not with the liberal bourgeoisie, who want to put an end to the revolution, but with the democratic peasantry."[130] Lenin was particularly enthused by the results in the capital:

> To sum up: the Left bloc in St. Petersburg *undoubtedly* won over to its side the shop-assistants and the urban petty bourgeoisie, *roused* a section of them to political life for the first time, and *captured* a very considerable section of them from the Cadets. If we want to and set about it properly, we can rouse for the political struggle hundreds and thousands of the urban poor in every district in the capital. We can win, in every district, hundreds of shop-assistants, clerks, etc., from the party of the bourgeois liberals who are bargaining with Stolypin. If we work tirelessly in that direction, the influence of the treacherous Cadets over the urban poor will be broken. The Cadets will not survive another election struggle against the Left bloc in St. Petersburg! They will be completely routed under the present electoral law[.][131]

Lenin appeared to be acutely aware of the unpopularity of left division amongst workers. Remarking on the second Duma elections, he suggested that the left-bloc "not only could, but certainly would, have won" had the Mensheviks "not split the workers' election campaign."[132] The 1907 election in St. Petersburg is particularly instructive in this regard. In the run up to the poll, a conference of the RSDLP was held in the city, at which Bolshevik and Menshevik factions debated the merits of both the left-bloc tactic associated with the former, and the "progressive" alliance with the liberals urged by the latter. The Bolsheviks carried the vote after an embittered debate, and alliances with the Cadets were forbidden as a result. This would occasion a "walk out" by the Menshevik delegates, who determined to follow their strategy regardless. Several newspapers carried news of this schism, resulting in a detrimental impact on Menshevik fortunes in the elections—with the

Bolsheviks out-polling them, amounting to "a clear victory for Lenin's strategy of independent working class action." Nimtz contends that "this is no doubt the moment when the Bolsheviks assumed leadership of the St. Petersburg proletariat."[133] This is a substantial claim, and one difficult to verify from the available sources. That said, it is notable that Lenin identified the 1907 election as the first time the "hegemony" of the working class "became a fact":

> The St. Petersburg election campaign has been a definite gain for the revolution, first, because it has brought out the relations between the political parties and revealed the frame of mind (and, consequently, the interests and the entire political situation) of the different classes, and then it has served in a big, public, mass event, as a practical test of the various answers given to the fundamental questions of Social-Democratic tactics in the Russian bourgeois revolution.
>
> The Bolsheviks determined their policy themselves, and in advance, unfurled their own banner, the banner of the revolutionary proletariat, before the people…. And all who were capable of fighting followed us. The Left bloc became a fact. The hegemony of the revolutionary proletariat became a fact. The proletariat led all the Trudoviks and a large part of the Mensheviks, even intellectuals.[134]

Lenin's approach to left-unity was always conditional and applied according to circumstance. In 1912, he encouraged Inessa Armand to travel to Russia to help organise the Bolshevik election campaign, with express instructions to convince wavering Bolsheviks of the need to stand separately from the Mensheviks.[135] This approach was not unique to Lenin (whose stance was in part motivated by the sectarian convictions of his rivals that Bolshevism was set to be routed in the election) and it was forged in the face of a unity offensive by the German SPD, which offered a contribution of 80,000 marks towards their campaign under

the proviso that the two competing factions agreed joint candidates and an "equitable means of distributing this money".[136] Privately, the Mensheviks would later admit that they had underestimated Bolshevik prospects, with Martov complaining to fellow Menshevik Alexander Potresov that their "failure in the labor curiae… shows once more that Menshevism caught on too late to the reviving danger of Leninism."[137]

Whilst the precise nature of Bolshevik left-bloc tactics changed according to circumstances, there was both a consistency in the regularity with which it was applied and a remarkable flexibility in what forces they sought for alliances:

> Since 1905 [the Bolsheviks] 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…During the Duma elections of 1907, the Bolsheviks entered briefly into a formal political bloc with the Socialist-Revolutionaries. Between 1903 and 1912, there were periods of several years in which we were formally united with the Mensheviks in a single Social-Democratic Party[.][138]

This tactical malleability is perhaps best illustrated by the events of 1917. Consider, for example, the attitude of the Bolsheviks to blocs with other forces on the left in the run up to the district council elections of that year.[139] At the conference of the Bolsheviks in April 1917, they voted against any bloc with the Mensheviks or SRs due to their positions on the war, adopting a resolution affirming that "unity with parties and groups which are pursuing such a policy is absolutely impossible." But the resolution also added that "closer relations and unity with groups and trends that have adopted a real internationalist stand are

necessary."[140] Lenin explains the shape that this left-bloc would take in these circumstances:

> Our Party is going to the polls with its own lists of candidates. According to preliminary reports received by the Secretariat of the Central Committee these lists have been made up without any blocs in 4 out of 12 districts…. In all the other districts we are forming blocs only with the internationalists, specifically, in 6 districts….with the "Inter-District" Organisation[141] (who, as we know, have most emphatically condemned the Narodniks and Mensheviks for joining the capitalist cabinet); in 4 districts…with the internationalist Mensheviks opposed to "socialist" ministerialism; and in 1 district (Nevsky) with internationalists from the Socialist-Revolutionary Party, who condemn their party's "ministerialism".[142]

5. Bolshevik Elections in Practice

"We cannot conduct consistent Social-Democratic work," exclaimed Lenin, "unless we pay close attention to the way in which the masses of the workers have voted for the candidates of the various parties."[143] Lenin himself took this edict with the utmost seriousness. He was the chief expert on the question within the Bolsheviks, and studied electoral legislation in great detail—compiling and editing the *Voter's Handbook (Our Election Law)* "which dealt with the electoral law and the regulations concerning the elections to the Duma".[144] He repeatedly urged the Bolsheviks to follow this example by professionally preparing and engaging with the electoral tactic. In the run up to the 1912 campaign, for example, he wrote: "[T]he elections are quite near at hand—a mere seven to nine weeks. We must take steps to *redouble our efforts* with regard to all aspects of our pre-election work."[145] The closer the poll approached, the greater Lenin's urgency grew: "The elections are only a few weeks off," he wrote with exasperation: "*we can and must bend our energies* to increase our influence on the voters, on the masses."[146] Lenin's enthusiasm for a robust election campaign did not wane during the revolution either, as evidenced by this enthusiastic appeal in the run up to the district council elections in 1917:

> Comrade workers! Let us all get down to work, canvassing all the poorest homes, awakening and enlightening the domestic servants, the most backward workers, etc., etc. Let us campaign against the capitalists and the Cadets, disguised as "Radical Democrats", who hide behind the Cadets' backs. Let us campaign against the petty-bourgeois defencist mire of the Narodniks and Mensheviks, against their bloc, which stands for no parties and no

> principles, against their attempts to sneak into their joint lists the Trudoviks, the advocates of compensation, and the heroes of Plekhanov's Yedinstvo with whom even such ministerial papers as Dyelo Naroda and Rabochaya Gazeta are ashamed to be seen in the same company![147]

Lenin was closely involved in the organisation of Bolshevik election campaigns. He was a stickler for detail, insisting that "preparation for elections" consisted of "minute technical arrangements."[148] Indeed, he argued that "if a party (the party of any class) has *not got ready in six months*, nothing can help it any longer, for it is already a *zero in the elections*."[149] The six-month long 1912 election campaign, Lenin noted, involved "dozens of reports", "hundreds of speeches at factory groups and at the meetings" and other activity.[150] On more than one occasion, Lenin spoke of the importance of "the pre-election mobilisation" of political forces, which he insisted should be organised with military precision:

> [W]hat is known as the pre-election mobilisation of the party forces. Mobilisation is a military term. It means putting the army in a state of readiness for action. Just as an army is put in a state of readiness before a war, the reserves being called up and arms and ammunition distributed, so, before an election, all parties sum up their work, reaffirm their decisions on party views and slogans, rally their forces and prepare to fight all the other parties.[151]

Participation in elections were necessary for "consistent and steady work among the masses in the spirit of Marxism",[152] and an opportunity "to gain some 'foothold', establish connections of one kind or another, and start work that is systematic even if very modest."[153] In developing this "foothold", Lenin was insistent on developing a style that was organic to the experience of workers themselves. Elections were not only important as a means to highlight the general crimes of the system and the socialist alternative, but also as an opportunity to speak to workers about their direct concerns: "That is the only way to raise election agitation somewhat

above the question of how many lawless acts such-and-such a police officer, governor, or administrative body is guilty of."[154] To succeed, a socialist election campaign requires a symbiotic relationship between party activists and ordinary workers. One method for creating this, Lenin determined, was by systematically canvassing the places where the mass of people lived or congregated:

> [T]rue proletarians, with the help of the unorganised and downtrodden poor, should distribute leaflets, canvass workers' houses and cottages of the rural proletarians and peasants in the remote villages…they should go into the public houses, penetrate into unions, societies and chance gatherings of the common people, and speak to the people, not in learned (or very parliamentary) language, they should not at all strive to "get seats" in parliament, but should everywhere try to get people to think, and draw the masses into the struggle, to take the bourgeoisie at its word and utilise the machinery it has set up, the elections it has appointed, and the appeals it has made to the people; they should try to explain to the people what Bolshevism is[.][155]

In order to "give a clear and complete answer" to the questions facing workers, it was necessary to grasp the "full profundity and significance" of the various "trends of thought" dominant in an electoral campaign. Following this, Lenin urged his fellow Bolsheviks to become thoroughly "[appraised] of the dominant-ideological and political trends of the given period, or the most widespread of them" when preparing for an election:

> Without an appraisal of the "active", current or "fashionable" ideological and political trends, the programme and tactics may degenerate into dead "clauses" which can by no stretch of the imagination be put into effect or applied to the thousands of detailed, particular, and highly specific questions of practical activity with the necessary understanding of essentials, with an understanding of "what is what".[156]

In the course of the election campaign, it would be revealed how "different classes" would be represented by "entirely different programmes and tactics".[157] In order to fully exploit this, it was necessary for socialists to acquaint themselves with the policies and slogans of their opponents: "Correct practical conclusions regarding the election campaign can only be drawn," Lenin explained, "if the principles on which each of the three camps bases its policy are clearly understood."[158] In one article, Lenin rhetorically asks *"What Was the Issue in the Elections"*—a question of fundamental importance if a Marxist was to fully understand the results:

> In most of the statements and articles on the elections, this question is pushed into the background more than any other, or is even obscured altogether. Yet it is the question of the ideological and political content of the election campaign, the most important question, one which has to be elucidated, or all other questions, and all the usual data on "opposition percentages" and so on, will completely lose their value.[159]

The "substance and mainspring" of the Bolshevik election campaign, Lenin argued, could be summed up in three words: "for the revolution". Notwithstanding this general edict, Lenin repeatedly objected to ultra-left "phrase-mongering" as a substitute for serious electoral work. "An election campaign," requires "the application of a definite solution of political problems to complicated propaganda, agitational, organisational, etc., activity. You cannot embark upon such a campaign without a definite answer to the problems."[160] It was not just a question of presenting the Bolshevik programme in its entirety, following this, but learning to "particularise on our election platform in speaking before any audience, on any occasion, and on any subject."[161]

Lenin saw the need to intervene in elections generally—urging the Bolsheviks to stand for both the specific curia created for workers, as

well as the more general geographical lists—but he also saw the need for concentration, describing the elections in St. Petersburg as "the focal point of the entire Fourth Duma election campaign." This is where the Bolsheviks were best organised, a state of readiness that would afford an opportunity to create "a model of the election campaign which worker democrats have to undertake in the incredibly difficult conditions of Russian reality."[162] Following this, Lenin warned against parochialism. If the Bolsheviks were to make a breakthrough in one place, it would be a victory for the movement in the whole country: "The attention of all Russia is riveted on the election struggle in St. Petersburg. All Russia should also help St. Petersburg. Unless the St. Petersburg workers receive the most varied aid from all parts of Russia, they will be unable to overcome the "enemy" by themselves."[163]

Lenin was keenly aware that establishment parties had a head start on the left electorally—not only on account of the Duma's electoral system, but also because of the disparity in relative financial strength. Russia's ruling class parties, not unlike those in our own time, were extensively bankrolled by wealthy donors. With extraordinary foresight, Lenin recognised how capitalist parties were exploiting these resources—prefiguring much of what defines bourgeois electoral politics today:

> In Russia, as in all other countries, the election campaign is attended by the most brazen self-advertisement. All the bourgeois parties, that is, those which uphold the economic privileges of the capitalists, are advertising themselves in the same way as individual capitalists advertise their goods. Look at the commercial advertisements in any newspaper—you will see that the capitalists think up the most "striking", bombastic and fashionable names for their merchandise, which they praise in the most unrestrained manner, stopping at no lie or invention whatever.

> The general public—at any rate in the big cities and trade centres—has long since become used to commercial advertisement and knows its worth. Unfortunately, political advertisement misleads an incomparably greater number of people; it is much harder to expose and its deception much more lasting. The names of some parties, both in Europe and in Russia, are chosen with a direct eye to advertisement, and their "programmes" are quite often written for the sole purpose of hoodwinking the public. The greater the degree of political liberty in a capitalist country and the more democracy there is, i.e., the greater the power of the people and of their representatives, the more shameless, in many cases, is the self-advertisement of parties.[164]

The Bolsheviks could not compete with the financial resources behind this machine. Instead, Lenin endeavoured to develop his own system of electoral propaganda—no less calculated and sophisticated than that of the bourgeois parties, but with the capacity to outflank them by speaking to the real interests of working class people. In this regard the correlation between Lenin's efforts to launch a revolutionary newspaper and his electoral strategy was striking. *Zvezda*, for example—the (largely) Bolshevik weekly that ran from 1910-1912—was published as an organ of the Social-Democratic Duma fraction, under the stewardship of Bolshevik deputy N. G. Poletaev.[165] Its better-known successor, *Pravda*, was launched with the expressed intention of bolstering the Bolshevik campaign for the Fourth Duma: "The raison d'être for Pravda, at least in Lenin's mind, had been the Duma election campaign. He was therefore very upset when the editors failed to exploit the agitational potential of this campaign sufficiently or espoused election alliances contrary to those approved by the Prague Conference."[166]

In light of his considered approach, Lenin took great care in crafting propaganda for an election campaign—developing a particular indignation at those guilty of ultra-left sloganeering: "There is nothing

more repugnant to the spirit of Marxism", Lenin argued, "than phrase-mongering." Following this, electoral propaganda should be written or delivered in "plain, direct, and clear" language in order to give an "answer to the plain, clear, and immediate questions" that were of concern to workers.[167] If a socialist is not able to explain their case in simple language, therefore, the socialist does not understand the case themselves—"vague thoughts," transform "into vague, bombastic, and pompous phrases."[168]

In order to achieve this straightforward messaging, "[it] was essential to give the election platform of Social-Democracy a finishing touch by adding a brief general slogan." A slogan, Lenin explained, is "a watch word for the elections, stating the most cardinal issues of current political practice." This slogan must be "capable of arousing enthusiasm among the masses who can no longer endure life as it is":[169]

> The Marxists, in starting on the election campaign of 1912, put in the very forefront the slogans of consistent democracy as a counterpoise to liberal labour policy. These slogans can be tested in two ways: firstly, by the view and experience of other countries and, secondly, by the experience of the campaign of 1912. Whether the Marxists' slogans are correct or not should now be evident from the relationship which has actually come into being between liberals and democrats. What makes this test of slogans objective is that it is not we who tested them but the masses, and not merely the masses in general, but our opponents in particular.[170]

Electoral slogans should not be plucked from the air, Lenin insisted, but must be consistent with the party's wider platform. Contrarily, it was not sufficient to simply refer to the party's programme as if it were some readymade script, applicable to every occasion. Lenin stressed the art behind the creation of electoral slogans, concretely applied depending

on the objective circumstances:

> Under no circumstances should a Marxist forget that the slogan of the immediately impending struggle cannot be deduced simply and directly from the general slogan of a certain programme. It is not sufficient to refer to our programme [in] order to determine the slogan of the struggle that is immediately impending now[.] For this we must take into account the concrete historical situation, we must trace the whole development and the whole consecutive progress of the revolution; our tasks must be deduced not only from the principles of the programme, but also from the preceding steps and stages of the movement. Only such an analysis will be a truly historical analysis, obligatory for a dialectical materialist.[171]

Slogans should assist in creating clear water between socialists and their opponents:

> We shall never reduce our tasks to that of supporting the slogans of the reformist bourgeoisie that are most in vogue. We pursue an independent policy and put forward only such reforms as are undoubtedly favourable to the interests of the revolutionary struggle, that undoubtedly enhance the independence, class-consciousness and fighting efficiency of the proletariat. Only by such tactics can reforms from above, which are always half-hearted, always hypocritical, and always conceal some bourgeois or police snare, be made innocuous.

The slogans of the Bolsheviks—known colloquially as the *three-whales of Bolshevism*, "by analogy with those whales upon which according to an old popular fable the earth reposes"[172]—were:

> Long live the Russian Democratic Republic!
>
> Long live the 8-hour day!
>
> Long live the confiscation of all landed estates![173]

"A slogan is not a guarantee of simple and easy victory," wrote Lenin—

"A slogan is an indication of the *aim* that must be achieved in order to fulfil *certain* tasks."[174] In addition to this, Lenin created a 2000-word election platform which provided a "final statement" outlining the wider Bolshevik outlook on the election and the stakes at play for workers. A platform, Lenin explained, "is something that has existed long before the elections; it is not something specially devised 'for the elections', but an inevitable result of the whole work of the party, of the way the work is organised, and of its whole trend in the given historical period."[175] The Bolsheviks also produced various leaflets addressed to the electorate. Below is an extract from their election address in 1906:

> Comrade workers, and all citizens of Russia! Vote for the candidates of the Russian Social-Democratic Labour Party! It is a party that is fighting for complete freedom, for a republic, for the election of government officials by the people. It is fighting against all national oppression. It is fighting for all the land to be given to the peasantry without compensation. It is supporting all the demands of the politically conscious sailors and soldiers by fighting to secure the abolition of the standing army and the substitution for it of the armed nation.[176]

Because of the nefarious manner in which elections were organised by the Tsarist regime, all manner of obstacles were placed in the way of radical forces, including the potential arrest of candidates. The selection of these candidates, therefore, was a perilous endeavour. The date of the election was often withheld until the last moment, causing the Bolsheviks to act with utmost secrecy about who would be put on the ballot—lest they be gifted a one-way ticket to Siberia. Candidates were usually selected in meetings deep in the forest, away from the glare of the Okhrana [the secret police], with the workers "only informed of them at the last moment before the elections."[177] In one sense, this meant that election campaigns in Russia were not as personality-driven as

those in bourgeois democracies. This did not mean the character of the candidates was unimportant, however—they had to be both disciplined enough to resist the repression of the state during the campaign and trustworthy enough to follow revolutionary policy should they be elected.[178] It also mattered on the factory floor: Badayev recalls that the candidates "were vehemently debated" and the "the merits of each candidate [considered] individually. Apart from the political platform, the personal characteristics of each candidate were discussed, his activity, his influence at the works, his political steadfastness, etc."[179]

The selection of candidates—and the course of their campaigns—was not only the prerogative of the local party districts. The national leadership played a significant role too: both in directing the campaign as a whole, and in deciding who was best to run for office. Bolshevik electoral campaigns, therefore, were defined by a convergence of *local initiative* and *party discipline*—districts leading on the ground, in a manner befitting the conditions they were operating in, without ever succumbing to a localised particularism that might see national priorities jettisoned in favour of local gain. This synthesis of initiative and discipline demanded a degree of flexibility for local leaderships—so long as their actions were in accordance with the strategy, policies and slogans agreed by the party as a whole—as well as the right of the leadership to intervene to ensure that national priorities were being followed. Indeed, Badayev suggests this feature proved to be the critical delineation between Bolshevik and Menshevik election campaigns—with the latter defined by a lack of political discipline, and local districts conducted themselves as they pleased without any sense of accountability to the party's elected bodies:

> In the Menshevik camp this strict subordination to the directions of the centre was not recognised. In the preceding Dumas, the Menshevik members ignored

> and violated Party discipline, acting independently of the leading centres of the Party…The Bolshevik deputies, on the contrary, were bound by close and indissoluble ties to the leading Party organisations. The entire election campaign to the Fourth Duma had been conducted under the guidance of and in accordance with the instructions of our Central Committee. From Cracow, where our Party headquarters abroad were located, thousands of threads stretched forth, uniting into a single web all our organisations engaged in the election campaign. In addition to issuing general instructions, the Central Committee played an active part in the selection of candidates at the workers' electoral colleges.

Lenin played an active role in this process, including in the selection of candidates. He was against any notion that only parliamentary "specialists" should stand for election and was particularly keen to put forward ordinary workers with some roots and standing in the relevant workplace or locale. In the 1912 elections, for example, all six of the Bolsheviks elected to the Duma were from the shop floor.[180] This was not an absolute rule, by any stretch: it was as much a result of Tsarist electoral law—which stipulated that candidates in a workers' curia had to be employed there—as it was a reflection of the centrality of the working class to Bolshevism. Candidates not drawn directly from the working class were more common in the municipal council elections and those to the Constituent Assembly in 1917 that were held under a different electoral system. Krupskaya ran for office to the former, for example, and Trotsky was on the Bolshevik list for the latter.[181]

Of greater concern for Lenin was the political reliability of prospective candidates. He urged the Bolsheviks to "[train] their own working-class members of parliament[,] who are not out for mandates, not out to profit by parliamentary manipulations, but are the trusted envoys of the working class."[182] Consequently, Lenin warned against allowing new

recruits to stand for election (with the exception of Trotsky, who Lenin supported running for the Constituent Assembly despite having only joined the Bolsheviks in the same year) both because they were untested, but also in order to avoid careerists joining with the sole intention of obtaining a seat:

> It is absolutely inadmissible also to have an excessive number of candidates from among people who have but recently joined our Party and have not yet been tested (like Larin). In filling the list with such candidates who should first have worked in the Party for months and months, the C.C. has thrown wide open the door for careerists who scramble for seats.[183]

There were some similarities between these elections and those of the modern era. The ferocity of the debates between the Bolsheviks and the Mensheviks occasioned the emergence of "independent" candidates, who pledged to represent workers free from party control and apparent factional squabbling. The Bolsheviks systematically resisted this a-political tendency, as Badayev recalls:

> The struggle was conducted almost exclusively between the Bolsheviks and the Mensheviks. But at the same time it was possible that some unexpected candidates might be elected as independents, and might subsequently play a part in the selection of electors. Such non-party people usually argued against party candidates, that 'one should not be led by the reins of any party,' that 'it is necessary to elect honest people known to the workers.'
>
> The Bolsheviks persistently attacked this position, explained its harmfulness to the working class and pointed out that non-party people were men without any firm convictions or principles, who might easily wander in the wrong direction. The working class can be genuinely represented only by members of a party which possesses a platform and a programme of its own, and which is controlling its representatives.[184]

Lenin stressed that an election campaign should not be simply reduced to the "chances" of success, "for the issue goes much deeper—it concerns the whole character of political propaganda during the elections, the whole ideological and political content of the election campaign."[185] Consequently, a revolutionary approach to elections was in contrast to the win-at-all-costs tactics of reformism: "The important thing for us is not to get seats in the Duma by means of compromises; on the contrary, those seats are important only because and insofar as they can serve to develop the political consciousness of the masses, to raise them to a higher political level, to organise them, not for the sake of philistine happiness, not for the sake of "tranquillity", "order" and "peaceful [bourgeois] bliss."[186] Lenin's unwillingness to trade principle for electoral office should not be misread as an indifference towards electoral success or failure. On the contrary, Lenin sought with all his energy to ensure that socialists would be elected to the Duma. He stressed not only the political value of running for office, but also the prize that came from succeeding:

> [W]e must take part in the elections, firstly, to rally and politically enlighten the mass of the workers during the elections, when party struggles and the entire political life will be stimulated and when the masses will learn politics in one way or other; and, secondly, to get our worker deputies into the Duma. Even in the most reactionary Duma, in a purely landlord one, worker deputies have done, and can do, a great deal for the working-class cause, provided they are true worker democrats, provided they are connected with the masses and the masses learn to direct them and check on their activity.[187]

Lenin's engagement with elections did not cease with the closing of the polls. In fact, he was notorious for the systematic manner that he dissected their outcome: poring over the detail of results once they were published, from which he would draw political conclusions. Election

results, he suggested, provided "a wealth of instructive material for a true study of the character of the various parties, and the class tendencies, or class significance, of their policies."[188] In particular, Lenin was keen to study the election results for clues to what he called the "physiognomy and strength of the various classes."[189]

> An election campaign is of outstanding interest to any intelligent political leader because it furnishes objective data on the views and sentiments, and consequently interests, of the different classes of society. Elections to a representative body are comparable in this respect to a census of the population, for they provide political statistics. To be sure, these statistics may be good (in the case of universal, etc., suffrage) or bad (in the case of elections to our parliament, if one may call it that). To be sure, one must learn to criticise these statistics—just as any statistics—and to use them critically. To be sure, these statistics should be taken in connection with all social statistics in general; and strike statistics, for example, will often turn out—for those who are not affected with the disease of parliamentary cretinism—to be a hundred times more serious and profound than election statistics.
>
> Despite all these reservations, it is beyond question that elections supply objective data. Testing subjective wishes, sentiments and views by taking into account the vote of the mass of the population representing different classes should always be of value to a politician who is at all worthy of the name.[190]

6. Elections and the Comintern

After the Russian Revolution, Lenin faced the question of a revolutionary attitude toward participation in parliamentary elections once more. The large influx of newly radicalised layers of young workers into communist parties around the world, who brought with them a deeply engrained disdain for parliamentarism—"a sort of punishment for the right-wing degeneration of social democracy"[191] as Krausz puts it—combined to create the conditions for a renewal in the kind of ultra-left boycottism that Lenin had encountered in the earlier days of Bolshevism.

This occasioned a series of intense exchanges between Lenin and the bourgeoning communist parties on the question of electoral participation (and other matters of 'legal work' such as Trade Unions), culminating in the publication of *Left-Wing Communism: An Infantile Disorder*, written in 1920 and first published for delegates to the Second World Congress of the Comintern in that year. "This little book," Marcel Liebman wrote of *Left-Wing Communism*, "deserves its fame,"[192] attaining a stature only comparable "to that of the *Communist Manifesto*" according to Tony Cliff.[193]

Nimtz sees *Left-Wing Communism* as evidence that "Lenin intended his electoral/parliamentary strategy for any country where the working class had political weight."[194] This is too definitive an interpretation. Firstly, it ignores the "fraternal, restrained and soothing"[195] engagement on the question of elections between Lenin and western communists in the years between the October Revolution and the publication of *Left-Wing Communism*, when he argued that the "question of parliamentarism

is now a partial, secondary question."[196] Nimtz mentions Lenin's correspondence with Sylvia Pankhurst in passing, for example, but does not pursue its content. Here we find Lenin making clear to Pankhurst—at the time opposed to participating in parliament—that he was "personally convinced that to renounce participation in the parliamentary elections is a mistake on the part of the revolutionary workers of Britain." Lenin suggested that it may be necessary to temporarily form two communist parties—where "one of these parties recognise participation in the bourgeois parliament, and the other reject it"—but insisted that the "most reasonable thing" would be to not "split over it":[197]

> I have no doubt at all that many workers who are among the best, most honest and sincerely revolutionary members of the proletariat are enemies of parliamentarism and of any participation in Parliament. The older capitalist culture and bourgeois democracy in any country, the more understandable this is, since the bourgeoisie in old parliamentary countries has excellently mastered the art of hypocrisy and of fooling the people in a thousand ways, passing off bourgeois parliamentarism as "democracy in general" or as "pure democracy" and so on, cunningly concealing the million threads which bind Parliament to the stock exchange and the capitalists, utilising a venal mercenary press and exercising the power of money, the power of capital in every way.[198]

In one sense this could be read as an example of Lenin's tendency to "patiently explain". An important complementary factor, I would suggest, was Lenin's intention to relate to advanced workers without setting up unnecessary barriers between the Comintern and those breaking with reformism: "There is no doubt that the Communist International and the Communist Parties of the various countries would be making an irreparable mistake if they repulsed those workers who stand for Soviet power, but who are against participation in the parliamentary struggle."[199]

As he wrote to Pankhurst:

> It is better to be with the revolutionary workers when they are mistaken over some partial or secondary question than with the "official" socialists or Social-Democrats, if the latter are not sincere, firm revolutionaries, and are unwilling or unable to conduct revolutionary work among the working masses, but pursue correct tactics in regard to that partial question. And the question of parliamentarism is now a partial, secondary question.[200]

In his *Greetings To Italian, French and German Communists*, published a few months after his letter to Pankhurst, Lenin again noted the aversion among many newly recruited communists to the question of parliament.[201] Lenin was careful to couch his criticism of the young communists, suggesting that those who supported boycottism were "quite sincere, convinced and valiant working class revolutionaries" whose opposition to electoral participation arose from the "lack of revolutionary experience" among them. "There is nothing terrible in that," Lenin added, "it is a matter of growing pains."

In the post-October period, the Bolsheviks were having to contend not only with the reluctance of communists to participate in elections, but also with the ferocious assault by reformist forces against the Bolshevik dissolution of the Constituent Assembly in favour of soviet power. Thus in his *Greetings To Italian, French and German Communists* and in other works in this period, Lenin combined gentle encouragement of western communists with a vigorous and full-frontal assault on the parliamentary reformism of Kautsky. Consequently, Lenin's argument that it was vital that revolutionaries participate in elections could often be found alongside statements like the "proletarian revolution is impossible without the sympathy and support of the overwhelming majority of the working people," but is "not decided by elections." These statements are

not innately contradictory, and indeed flow from the core Leninist thesis that participation in bourgeois parliament is a necessary tactic in the struggle for the elimination of bourgeois rule more generally. However, it is not difficult to grasp how many young communists—and indeed many socialists and communists since—drew the conclusion that electoral participation was nothing more than an occasional tactic that could be abandoned in favour of the higher planes of the "struggle".

A further corrective to the assertion that Lenin regarded his electoral/parliamentary strategy as applicable in any country where workers "had political weight" is required. One glaring omission in Nimtz's treatment of this period is the absence of extended comment on Lenin's electoral advice to British Communists in light of the existence of a mass Labour Party. Lenin argued that "most British workers still follow the lead of the British Kerenskys" of the Labour Party and had "not yet had experience of a government composed of these people—an experience which was necessary in Russia and Germany so as to secure the mass transition of the workers to communism." This particularity demanded that revolutionaries "help the masses of the workers see the results of a [Labour] government in practice"—with Lenin suggesting that a failure to grasp this aspect of British circumstances "would mean hampering the cause of the revolution, since revolution is impossible without a change in the views of the majority of the working class, a change brought about by the political experience of the masses, never by propaganda alone":

> At present, British Communists very often find it hard even to approach the masses, and even to get a hearing from them. If I come out as a Communist and call upon them to vote for Henderson and against Lloyd George, they will certainly give me a hearing.
>
> We would take part in the election campaign, distribute leaflets agitating

> for communism, and, in all constituencies where we have no candidates, we would urge the electors to vote for the Labour candidate and against the bourgeois candidate.[202]

Lenin's advice to British Communists should not be read as timeless, or as trumping any of his other tactical advice. Indeed, as can be seen, Lenin's call for support for the formation of a Labour government was envisaged as part of plan to stand Communist candidates in the Westminster elections, in order to attain Communist MPs who could work "within parliament [to] help the masses of the workers see the results of a Henderson and Snowden government in practice." Lenin did not advocate that revolutionaries should support Labour carte-blanche. Indeed, he suggested the Communist Party should

> propose the following "compromise" election agreement to the Hendersons and Snowdens: let us jointly fight against the alliance between Lloyd George and the Conservatives; let us share parliamentary seats in proportion to the number of workers' votes polled for the Labour Party and for the Communist Party (not in elections, but in a special ballot).[203]

In the event of Labour rejecting this fraternal pact, Lenin urged continuing tactical caution: "We would put up our candidates in a very few but absolutely safe constituencies, namely, constituencies where our candidatures would not give any seats to the Liberals at the expense of the Labour candidates." Arguably, the first-past-the-post system for Westminster elections—in which the 'winner takes all'—and the relative size of the Communist Party of Great Britain compared to the Labour Party meant that this tactical advice was difficult to put into practice,[204] but it does not invalidate the thrust of Lenin's argument: that the Bolshevik "electoral/parliamentary strategy" was indeed relevant, but had to be creatively applied. Lenin's admonishment of the contributions

of some Bolsheviks to debates within the Communist International as being "too Russian" was predicated on more than a fear that the essence of Bolshevism would be lost in translation. He was concerned that this experience had to be adapted to the particular conditions of each nation state. "The peculiar nature of the actual situation," Lenin wrote, "must determine the peculiar nature of the tactics for the present moment."[205]

Without ever abandoning his case, Lenin was willing to relegate electoral participation to a "secondary consideration" in favour of the more urgent goal of congealing the disparate revolutionary forces around the world into bona fide communist parties. The publication of *Left-Wing Communism*, however, would signal a decisive end to the "restrained and soothing" approach he had taken inside the Communist International on the matter. Marcel Liebman describes the book as an "exhaustive catalogue of the mistakes of Leftists", taking direct aim against the "rigidity into which they were led by their purism." In this work we find the "best Lenin", Liebman argued, in which an "acute realism is joined with firmness of revolutionary principle."[206] Lenin was indignant against those who supported the October Revolution but failed to "ask why the Bolsheviks have been able to build up" the support necessary to carry it out. "Would it not be better if the salutations addressed to the Soviets and the Bolsheviks were more frequently accompanied by a profound analysis of the reasons why the Bolsheviks have been able to build up the discipline needed by the revolutionary proletariat?" Lenin invited the new communist movements to consider the "great usefulness" for revolutionaries "of a combination of mass action outside a reactionary parliament with an opposition sympathetic to (or, better still, directly supporting) the revolution within it."[207]

> The art of politics…consists in correctly gauging the conditions and the

> moment when the vanguard of the proletariat can successfully assume power, when it is able—during and after the seizure of power—to win adequate support from sufficiently broad strata of the working class and of the non-proletarian working masses, and when it is able thereafter to maintain, consolidate and extend its rule by educating, training and attracting ever broader masses of the working people…In Russia the elections to the Constituent Assembly in November 1917, a few days after the proletarian revolution of October 25, 1917, were one of the criteria of the success of this struggle.[208]

Lenin identified much of the spirit of boycottism as arising from a crude reading of the October Revolution. Many newly recruited communists saw the events of 1917 as evidence that electoral participation was no longer necessary, as the development of the Soviet had exposed the entire edifice of parliamentary democracy as historically outmoded and obsolete. Lenin countered that bourgeois democracy had long been obsolete in the "abstract" sense, as was the entire capitalist system. This abstract truism, however, did not mean that parliament or capitalism were obsolete in practice:

> In September–November 1917, did we, the Russian Bolsheviks, not have more right than any Western Communists to consider that parliamentarianism was politically obsolete in Russia? Of course we did, for the point is not whether bourgeois parliaments have existed for a long time or a short time, but how far the masses of the working people are prepared (ideologically, politically and practically) to accept the Soviet system and to dissolve the bourgeois-democratic parliament (or allow it to be dissolved). It is an absolutely incontestable and fully established historical fact that, in September–November 1917, the urban working class and the soldiers and peasants of Russia were, because of a number of special conditions, exceptionally well prepared to accept the Soviet system and to disband the most democratic of bourgeois parliaments. Nevertheless, the Bolsheviks did not boycott the Constituent Assembly, but took part in the elections both before and after the proletariat conquered political power.[209]

What mattered, Lenin argued, was not whether parliament was obsolete in the abstract, but whether it is "obsolete to a class, to the masses." Ultra-left posturing was easy, he conceded, but it was not a solution to "a very difficult problem"—"It is very easy to show one's 'revolutionary' temper merely by hurling abuse at parliamentary opportunism, or merely by repudiating participation in parliaments."

> You think, my dear boycottists and anti-parliamentarians, that you are "terribly revolutionary", but in reality you are frightened by the comparatively minor difficulties of the struggle against bourgeois influences within the working-class movement, whereas your victory—i.e., the overthrow of the bourgeoisie and the conquest of political power by the proletariat—will create these very same difficulties on a still larger, an infinitely larger scale. Like children, you are frightened by a minor difficulty which confronts you today, but you do not understand that tomorrow, and the day after, you will still have to learn, and learn thoroughly, to overcome the same difficulties, only on an immeasurably greater scale.[210]

Much of the ultra-left of the Comintern, according to Trotsky, were afflicted with a "mystical fear of parliamentarianism" that led to a sectarian orientation. These groups, he argued, preferred to "select a group of agitators, propagandists and writers, who remain undefiled by such vulgar activities as parliamentary elections"[211] in order "to preserve the 'purity' of [their] own group, i.e., sect."[212] This sectarianism was compounded by a genuine fear of the treachery of reformist politicians. Whilst acknowledging that it was necessary to wage "a merciless struggle… against parliamentary cretinism and careerism," Trotsky also condemned "all sectarian summonses [to] turn one's back upon parliamentary and municipal institutions."[213] Lenin insisted that the problem was not the election of "leaders", or even the participation in parliament per se, but that those elected to it were not informed by a revolutionary orientation:

> Criticism—the most keen, ruthless and uncompromising criticism—should be directed, not against parliamentarianism or parliamentary activities, but against those leaders who are unable—and still more against those who are unwilling—to utilise parliamentary elections and the parliamentary rostrum in a revolutionary and communist manner. Only such criticism—combined, of course, with the dismissal of incapable leaders and their replacement by capable ones—will constitute useful and fruitful revolutionary work that will simultaneously train the "leaders" to be worthy of the working class and of all working people, and train the masses to be able properly to understand the political situation and the often very complicated and intricate tasks that spring from that situation.[214]

In response to a letter written by Willie Gallacher—the renowned Scottish communist and revolutionary trade unionist—who at the time advocated the boycott of a Westminster parliament brimming with reactionaries "anxious to prove that they can rule as effectively as the 'boss' class", Lenin challenged his supporters to seriously study the "art" behind revolutionary parliamentarism—if the bourgeoisie had its share of "class politicians", Lenin evinced, then surely the socialist movement must train their own:

> The writer of the letter is full of a noble and working-class hatred for the bourgeois "class politicians"…a hatred understood and shared, however, not only by proletarians but by all working people…The writer, however, has apparently lost sight of the fact that politics is a science and an art that does not fall from the skies or come gratis, and that, if it wants to overcome the bourgeoisie, the proletariat must train its own proletarian "class politicians", of a kind in no way inferior to bourgeois politicians.
>
> The writer of the letter fully realises that only workers' Soviets, not parliament, can be the instrument enabling the proletariat to achieve its aims; those who have failed to understand this are, of course, out-and-out reactionaries… But the writer of the letter does not even ask—it does not occur to him to

> ask—whether it is possible to bring about the Soviets' victory over parliament without getting pro-Soviet politicians into parliament, without disintegrating parliamentarianism from within, without working within parliament for the success of the Soviets[.][215]

Crucially, Lenin insisted that parliamentary tactics were even more important in the west than they had been in Russia, as western workers were "more imbued with bourgeois-democratic and parliamentary prejudices than they were in Russia." "[B]ecause of that," Lenin continued, "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." He conceded that it would be "more difficult to create a really revolutionary parliamentary group" in the west than it had been in Russia. But that was not an excuse for refusing to begin the "the arduous job of utilising reactionary parliaments for revolutionary purposes":

> To attempt to "circumvent" this difficulty by "skipping" is absolutely childish. You want to create a new society, yet you fear the difficulties involved in forming a good parliamentary group made up of convinced, devoted and heroic Communists, in a reactionary parliament! Is that not childish? If Karl Liebknecht in Germany and Z. Höglund in Sweden were able, even without mass support from below, to set examples of the truly revolutionary utilisation of reactionary parliaments, why should a rapidly growing revolutionary mass party, in the midst of the post-war disillusionment and embitterment of the masses, be unable to forge a communist group in the worst of parliaments?[216]

Many of the objections to participation in parliamentary elections carried echoes of earlier debates within the Bolshevik organisation itself. A common refrain was that revolutionaries should absent themselves from elections because of the thoroughly reactionary nature of these institutions. That bourgeois parliaments were indeed rotten was not in

any doubt. Then again, were they any less reactionary than the autocratic stitch-up of the Tsarist Duma? Lenin not only insisted that they were not, but that Bolshevik participation had been an essential element in exposing the bankruptcy of bourgeois rule for Russian workers:

> We Bolsheviks participated in the most counterrevolutionary parliaments, and experience has shown that this participation was not only useful but indispensable to the party of the revolutionary proletariat, after the first bourgeois revolution in Russia (1905), so as to pave the way for the second bourgeois revolution (February 1917), and then for the socialist revolution (October 1917)….far from causing harm to the revolutionary proletariat, participation in a bourgeois-democratic parliament, even a few weeks before the victory of a Soviet republic and even after such a victory, actually helps that proletariat to prove to the backward masses why such parliaments deserve to be done away with.[217]

In August 1920, the Comintern would debate the question of elections and parliament at the Second World Congress, before agreeing a resolution that condemned the "childish doctrine" of ultra-left boycottism, "which occasionally has a basis in healthy nausea at politicking parliamentarians, but which does not see at the same time the possibility of a revolutionary parliamentarism."

> The most important method of struggle of the proletariat against the bourgeoisie, i.e. against its state power, is above all mass action….In this mass struggle, which develops into civil war, the leading party of the proletariat must as a rule consolidate all its legal positions by making them into auxiliary bases of its revolutionary activity and subordinating these positions to the plan of the main campaign, the campaign of the mass struggle.
>
> Participation in election campaigns and revolutionary propaganda from the parliamentary rostrum is of particular importance for winning over those layers of the workers who previously, like, say, the rural toiling masses, stood

far away from political life.

Election campaigns should not be carried out in the spirit of the hunt for the maximum number of parliamentary seats, but in the spirit of the revolutionary mobilisation of the masses for the slogans of the proletarian revolution. Election campaigns should be carried out by the whole mass of the Party members and not only by an elite of the Party.[218]

7. Conclusion

Lenin was an activist and a thinker deeply committed to the revolutionary overthrow of the capitalist system—a seething conviction that remained with him until his death. So keen was he to bring on this revolutionary situation that some suggest this passion led him to a strategic impatience, perhaps even emanating from the ethereal remnants of a distant Narodnik youth—a view epitomised in Christopher Read's quip that "Leninism was Marxism in a hurry."[219] Certainly, there are many examples of Lenin manifesting an anxious demeanour—demanding more, sooner, faster and with more professionalism. Undoubtedly, too, there are more than a few occasions when he displayed a political impatience, as evidenced by his fleeting flirtation with guerrilla warfare. But when we consider Lenin the election strategist—engaged in the most mundane planning, over many campaigns in a period spanning almost two decades, and in a context rigged against his party from the very start, and at every juncture—is there not cause to rethink this portrait of the rash Bolshevik leader? To appreciate instead his remarkable patience, foresight, and strategic nuance—in short, to fully acknowledge the hegemonic logic at the core of the Leninist hypothesis?

Marx was the theorist, Lenin was the man of action—or so goes a regularly repeated cliché that reduces the Bolshevik experience to a purely practical phenomenon. It should be conceded, of course, that Lenin was deeply embedded in action: the aloofness of the intellectual "watchtower" was anathema to him. Bolshevism, however, was not only concerned with the practical application of Marxism. "The real problem,"

as Daniel Bensaïd succinctly and perceptively noted, "is how the general will is formed."[220] This was the central conundrum of Lenin's life and the historical and theoretical challenge that led him to develop his electoral orientation. Lenin never argued that socialism could come through parliament. He rarely, and only temporarily, argued that elections had primacy over other activity. What Lenin firmly grasped, perhaps better than any Marxist of his generation, was that elections were a crucial arena for the forging of the "general will": for the development of an independent class politics and the construction of an irreconcilably revolutionary socialist counter-hegemony.

In 1919, when expounding on the "priceless legacy" bequeathed by the October Revolution to the international socialist movement, Trotsky listed three crucial periods that "prepared a large personnel of revolutionary leaders, tempered in struggle and bound together by the unity of the social-revolutionary program." These he identified as "[t]he underground agitation of the pioneer Marxists; the revolutionary manifestation during the early years of this century, the October general strike and the barricades of 1905; [and] the revolutionary 'parliamentarianism' of the Stolypin epoch."[221] Much ink has been spilt ruminating about the first two—but the last has been criminally underappreciated. It's high time we recovered it.

Endnotes

1 Lenin, *Collected Works*, Volume 35 (1976), Pg 58.

2 See for example Orlando Figes, *A People's Tragedy: The Russian Revolution 1891-1924* (1996), Richard Pipes (ed), *The Unknown Lenin: From the Secret Archive* (1996), Robert Service, *Lenin: A Biography* (2010).

3 See for example: Tony Cliff, *Lenin: Building the Party 1893-1914* (1986), Paul Le Blanc, *Lenin and the Revolutionary Party* (2015), Moshe Lewin, *Lenin's Last Struggle* (1969), Marcel Liebman, *Leninism Under Lenin* (1980), Ernest Mandel, *Trotsky: A Study in the Dynamic of his Thought* (1979), John Molyneux, *Marxism and the Party* (1978), Alan Woods, *Bolshevism: The Road to Revolution: A History of the Bolshevik Party from the Early Beginnings to the October Revolution* (1999), accessed at https://www.marxist.com/bolshevism-the-road-to-revolution.htm.

4 Leon Trotsky, *My Life: An Attempt at an Autobiography* (2012), Pg 514.

5 Lars Lih, *Lenin Rediscovered: What is to Be Done? in Context* (2006). For a critical take on some of the limitations of this work see Chris Harman, "Lenin Rediscovered?" in *Historical Materialism*, Volume 18 (2010), Pg 64-70. And John Molyneux, *Lih's Lenin*, accessed at http://johnmolyneux.blogspot.com/2006/11/lihs-lenin-review-of-lars-t-lih-lenin.html.

6 Tamás Krausz, *Reconstructing Lenin: An Intellectual Biography* (2015).

7 Alan Shandro, *Lenin and the Logic of Hegemony: Political Practice and Theory in the Class Struggle* (2014).

8 Roland Boer, *Lenin, Religion, and Theology (*2013).

9 Tariq Ali, *The Dilemmas of Lenin: Terrorism, War, Empire, Love, Revolutio*n (2017). John Molyneux, *Lenin for Today* (2017).

10 Kevin Murphy, *Revolution and Counterrevolution: Class Struggle in a Moscow Metal Factory* (2005).

11 August H. Nimtz, *The Ballot, the Streets—or Both: From Marx and Engels to Lenin and the October Revolution* (2019).

12 All Lenin articles cited in this work come from the Marxist Internet Archive transcription of *Lenin's Collected Works* (LCW), unless otherwise stated. I have only cited the article or pamphlet titles to avoid cluttering the notes with links. LCW can be accessed here https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/cw/index.htm.

13 Lenin, *Left-Wing Communism: An Infantile Disorder* (April-May 1920).

14 Ralph Miliband, Moving on, in *The Socialist Register* (1976), Pg 128-140.

15 See Nimtz (2019), Pg 185-194, 365-412.

16 Krausz (2015), Pg 224.

17 See Molyneux (2017), Pg 18-19, 113, 168-169.

18 I.D. Thatcher, Trotsky and the Duma, in I.D. Thatcher (ed) *Regime and Society in Twentieth-Century Russia* (1999).

19 Doug Jenness, *Lenin as Election Campaign Manager* (1971).

20 Maurice Sibelle, *Revolutionaries and Parliament: The Bolshevik Experience* (1993). Accessed at https://www.scribd.com/document/11433457/Revolutionaries-and-Parliament.

21 See Nimtz, Pg 383-384.

22 Ian Birchall, *Tony Cliff: A Marxist for His Time* (2011), Pg 411.

23 The SWP (GB) would have a more successful outing as part of the Respect coalition, which was initiated in the years after Cliff's death, before it dissolved in acrimony in the late 2000s.

24 Tony Cliff, "Introduction" in A. Y. Badayev, *Bolsheviks in the Tsarist* Duma (1987), Pg 12.

25 Several other IST affiliated groups have taken part in elections, and some have members of parliament. The IMT has also had several elected representative amongst its followers.

26 Norman Harding, *Staying Red* (2005), Pg 213-214.

27 Shandro (2014), Pg 272.

28 For more on the development of the First Duma and Russia's complex electoral system, see J.L.H Keep, Russia Social-Democracy and the First State Duma, in *Slavonic & East European Review* 34, No 82 (Dec 1955), Pg 180-199, and Natal'ia Borisovna Selunskaia and Rolf Torstendahl, *The Birth of Democratic Cultures in Late Imperial Russia: Reforms and Elections to the First Two National Legislatures* (2012).

29 Woods (1999).

30 Alexander Kerensky, *Memoirs: Russia and History's Turning Point*, Pg 84. Cited in Woods (1999).

31 The ratios for the Second Duma, for example, were as follows: "It allowed for one elector to every 2,000 voters in the landowner curia, one to each 7,000 in the urban curia, i.e., the vote of a landlord was equal to three votes by the urban bourgeoisie, 15 peasant votes, and 45 workers' votes. The electors from the worker curias constituted only 4 per cent of the electors who elected deputies to the state Duma." Cited Cliff (1986), Pg 249.

32 Nimtz (2019), Pg 226.

33 "[T]he establishment of worker curias, i.e., the separate election of workers' deputies," Lenin would later admit, "enables us all the more easily to ascertain the will of the workers." Quote from Lenin, *Material on the*

Conflict Within the Social-Democratic Duma Group (1913).

34 Lenin, *Should We Boycott the State Duma?* (1906).

35 Lenin, *The Boycott* (1906).

36 Lenin, *A Tactical Platform for the Unity Congress of the R.S.D.L.P* (1906).

37 Lenin, *Should We Boycott the State Duma?* (1906).

38 Eva Broido, *Memoirs of a Revolutionary*. Cited in Woods (1999).

39 Lenin, *The Boycott* (1906).

40 Lenin, *Against Boycott* (1907).

41 For more on the relationship of the RSDLP to the Second Duma see Alfred Levin, *The Second Duma: A Study of the Social-Democratic Party and the Russian Constitutional Experiment* (1966). And David Lane, *The Roots of Russian Communism* (1968), Pg 52-58.

42 Lenin, *The Boycott* (1906).

43 Ibid.

44 Lenin, *Against Boycott* (1907).

45 Ibid.

46 Lenin, *The Boycott* (1906).

47 Woods (1999).

48 Cited in Le Blanc (2015), Pg 136.

49 Ibid.

50 Service (2010), Pg 179.

51 Lenin, *Against Boycott* (1907).

52 Lenin, *The Elections in the Worker Curia in St. Petersburg* (1907).

53 Lenin, *The Declaration of Our Group in the Duma* (1906).

54 Lenin, *Famine Relief and the Tactics of the Duma* (1906).

55 Lenin, *The Unsound Arguments of the "Non-Party" Boycotters* (1906).

56 Ibid.

57 Lenin, *The Cadet Duma Grants Money to the Pogrom-Mongers' Government* (1906).

58 Ibid.

59 Nimtz (2019), Pg 130.

60 Woods (1999).

61 Tony Cliff's metaphorical appraisal of Lenin's tactical flexibility. See Cliff (1986).

62 Lenin, *The Question of Guerrilla Warfare* (1906).

63 For an example of Lenin's writings on this question at the time see Lenin, *Guerrilla Warfare* (1907).

64 Leon Trotsky, *Stalin – An Appraisal of the Man and his Influence* (1941), accessed at https://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1940/xx/stalin/ch04.htm.

65 Ibid.

66 Ibid.

67 Duncan Hallas, Building the Revolutionary Party, From *International Socialism*, 1st series, No.79 (June 1975), Pg 17-22.

68 "While not renouncing the use of the boycott slogan at times of rising revolution, when the need for such a slogan may seriously arise, we must at the present moment exert every effort in an endeavour by our direct and immediate influence to convert one or another upswing of the working-class movement into a sweeping, universal, revolutionary, and aggressive movement against reaction as a whole, against its foundations." Lenin, *Against Boycott* (1907).

69 The Bolsheviks even stood for election to the "war industries committees" in 1915 on an anti-war and revolutionary platform. Though they boycotted the actual committee themselves.

70 The standard analysis of the elections to the Third Duma is Alfred Levin, *The Third Duma, Election and Profile* (1973).

71 Woods (1999).

72 Quoted in Trotsky (1941).

73 Lenin (April-May 1920).

74 Ibid.

75 Trotsky, *Terrorism and Communism: A Reply to Karl Kautsky* (2007), Pg 97.

76 Lenin, *Fundamental problems of the election campaign* (1911).

77 Michael Löwy, *Fatherland Or Mother Earth?: Essays on the National Question (*1998), Pg 41. Lenin's argument for the primacy of politics was an early feature of his polemics with the "economists". See for example Lenin, *A Protest by Russian Social-Democrats* (1899).

78 Lenin, *The Collapse of the Second International* (1915).

79 See Kevin Murphy, The Prerevolutionary Strike Movement in Russia, 1912-1916, in *Workers of the World: International Journal on Strikes and Social Conflicts*, Vol. 1 No. 1 (2012), Pg 19-38.

80 Lenin, *The Fourth Duma Election Campaign and the Tasks of the Revolutionary Social-Democrats* (1912).

81 Lenin is polemicizing here against ultra-left Bolsheviks associated with Alexander Bogdanov and others, whom he later forced out of the Bolshevik organisation. For more background see Cliff (1986), Pg 281- 293. Krausz (2015), Pg 125-139. Le Blanc (2015), Pg 130-142.

82 Lenin, *The Faction of Supporters of Otzovism and God-Building* (1909).

83 As Perry Anderson notes "Gramsci's concept in the Prison Notebooks is frequently believed to be an entirely novel coinage—in effect, his own invention…Nothing reveals the lack of ordinary scholarship from which Gramsci's legacy has suffered more than this widespread illusion. For in fact the notion of hegemony had a long prior history, before Gramsci's adoption of it, that is of great significance for understanding its later function in his work. The term gegemoniya (hegemony) was one of the most central political slogans in the Russian Social-Democratic movement, from the late 1890s to 1917." Perry Anderson, The Antinomies of Antonio Gramsci, in *New Left Review* 100 (November-December 1976), Pg 13-14.

84 Cited in Peter D. Thomas, *The Gramscian Moment: Philosophy, Hegemony and Marxism* (2009), Pg 38.

85 Cliff (1986), Pg 67.

86 Shandro (2015), Pg 197.

87 Lenin, *The Election Campaign and the Election Platform* (1911). Emphasis added.

88 Lenin, *The Elections to the Duma and the Tactics of the Russian Social-Democrats* (1907).

89 Lenin, *Report on the election campaign for the Second Duma* (1906).

90 Lenin, *Those Who Would Liquidate Us* (1911).

91 Lenin, *The Elections in the Worker Curia in St. Petersburg* (1907).

92 Cecilia Bobrovskaya, *Twenty Years in Underground Russia: Memoirs of a Rank-and-File Bolshevik*, Chapter 10. Accessed at https://www.marxists.org/archive/bobrovskaya/twenty-years/ch10.htm

93 Leon Trotsky, *1905* (1973), Pg 296.

94 Lenin, *The Fourth Duma Election Campaign and the Tasks of the Revolutionary Social-Democrats* (1912).

95 Lenin, *The Significance of the St. Petersburg Elections* (1912).

96 Lenin, *Some Conclusions to be Drawn from the Pre-Election Mobilisation* (1912).

97 Ibid.

98 "The liberal Zaprosy Zhizni blurted out the "secret" of this strategy, so carefully kept by Rech. "The Progressists," writes Mr. R. B.[1] in Zaprosy Zhizni No. 13, "have opened their campaign by a promising move [!]—they formed the so-called 'non-partisan Progressist bloc', which proved from the first to have a strong appeal for the political opposition circles to the right of the Cadets." On the other hand, "the election platform of the Trudovik group, despite its vagueness—in part due to it, perhaps—meets the requirements of large sections of the democratic intelligentsia". "Under certain conditions, the Trudovik group to the left of the Cadets could perform a role similar to that undertaken by the Progressist group to the right of the Cadets. The opposition front would then be made up of mobile and wavering, but flexible extreme flanks, and an immobile but persistent centre, which strategically has its advantage in the political struggle as well… What is in the thoughts of the Milyukovs and Shingaryovs is on R. B.'s tongue! It is precisely two "flexible" flanks that the Cadets need: the Progressists for netting the bourgeois June Third voter, and the "vague" democrats for netting the democratic-minded public. Indeed, this "strategy" follows from the very nature of the Cadet Party. It is the party of the counter-revolutionary liberals, which by fraudulent means has won the support of certain democratic strata, such as a section of the shop-assistants, office clerks, etc." Ibid.

99 Lenin, *The Attitude of the Bourgeois Parties and of the Workers' Party to the Duma Elections* (1906).

100 Lenin, *The Workers' Party Election Campaign in St. Petersburg* (1907).

101 Lenin, *The Trudoviks and the Worker Democrats* (1912).

102 Lenin, *How to Vote in the St. Petersburg Elections* (1907).

103 Donald E. Davis and Walter S.G.Kohn, Lenin's "Notebook on Clausewitz", in David R. Jones, ed., *Soviet Armed Forces Review Annual*. Vol. 1. (1977), Pg 214.

104 Lenin, *Results of the Elections* (1913).

105 Lenin, *Fundamental Problems of the Election Campaign* (1911).

106 Ibid.

107 Lenin, *Reformism in the Russian Social-Democratic Movement* (1911).

108 Lenin, *The Election in St. Petersburg – A Comment* (1909).

109 Lenin, *The Nature and Significance of Our Polemics Against the Liberals* (1912).

110 Karl Marx, *Grundrisse: Introduction*, Chapter 1.

111 Michael Melancon, "Marching Together!": Left Bloc Activities in the Russian Revolutionary Movement, 1900, published in *Slavic Review*, Vol. 49, No. 2 (Summer, 1990), Pg 245.

112 The Erfurt Programme was adopted by the SPD in in 1891. It distinguished between the minimum and maximum goals of socialism, and was criticised by Friedrich Engels for its reformist conception of the capitalist state.

113 For an account of the differences between the Bolsheviks and Mensheviks that led to them becoming

independent parties in 1912, and for a critique of those who dispute this see Paul Le Blanc, *The birth of the Bolshevik party in 1912* (April 17, 2012). Accessed at http://links.org.au/node/2832

114 Lenin, *The Campaign for the Elections to the Fourth Duma* (1911).

115 Eric Blanc, *A Few Lessons from History* (2018). Accessed at https://socialistworker.org/2018/08/15/on-history-and-the-dirty-break

116 Though decidedly uncharitable in his assessment of Lenin's election work, Alfred Levin is closer to the mark when he writes: "Ideologically, temperamentally, and emotionally, Lenin could find no virtue whatever in blocs which included the Kadets." See Levin (1973), Pg 68.

117 Lenin, *The Significance of the St. Petersburg Elections (*1912).

118 Lenin, *Cadets and Democrats* (1912).

119 Lenin, *Once Again About the Duma Cabinet* (1906).

120 Lenin, *The Campaign for the Elections to the Fourth Duma* (1911).

121 Lenin, *Blocs With the Cadets* (1906).

122 Lenin, *The Social-Democratic Election Campaign in St. Petersburg* (1907).

123 Lenin, *Fundamental Problems of the Election Campaign* (1911).

124 Lenin, *Preface to the Russian Translation of W. Liebknecht's Pamphlet: No Compromises, No Electoral Agreements* (1907).

125 Melancon (Summer, 1990), Pg 244.

126 Ibid., Pg 251.

127 It should also be noted that Zinoviev explicitly contrasted Bolshevik hegemony with the theory of permanent revolution. See "lecture two" in Gregory E. Zinoviev, *History of the Bolshevik Party: A Popular Outline* (1974).

128 See Trotsky's analysis of this in Leon Trotsky, *The History of the Russian Revolution* (1979), Pg 328-335.

129 Melancon (Summer, 1990), Pg 251.

130 Lenin, *Tactics of the R.S.D.L.P. in the Election Campaign* (1907).

131 Lenin, *The Election Results in St. Petersburg* (1907). Emphasis in original.

132 Lenin, *The Significance of the St. Petersburg Elections* (1912).

133 Nimtz (2019), Pg 144.

134 Lenin, *The Significance of the St. Petersburg Elections* (1907).

135 See R. C. Elwood, *Inessa Armand: Revolutionary and Feminist* (2002), Pg 92-95. Swain suggests that despite these efforts all of the social-democratic deputies to the Fourth Duma, with the exception of Badayev, were elected on a united programme. See Geoffrey Swain, *Russian Social Democracy and the Legal Labour Movement*, 1906-11 (1983), Pg 159.

136 Carter Elwood, *The Non-Geometric Lenin: Essays on the Development of the Bolshevik Party 1910 –1914* (2011), Pg 74.

137 Quoted in Le Blanc (2015), Pg 172.

138 Lenin (April-May 1920).

139 For more on these elections see William Rosenberg, The Russian Municipal Duma Elections of 1917: A Preliminary Computation of Returns, *Soviet Studies 21*, No.2 (October 1969), Pg 131-163.

140 Lenin, *Resolution on Uniting the Internationalists Against the Petty-Bourgeois Defencist Bloc* (1917).

141 The Inter-District Organisation of United Social-Democrats were formed in 1913, with the purposes of uniting the Mensheviks and the Bolsheviks into one party. They formed a bloc with the Bolsheviks at the local council elections, with the two later merging.

142 Lenin, *The Proletarian Party at the District Council Elections* (1917).

143 Lenin, *The Struggle Between S.D.'s and S.R.'s in the Elections in the Worker Curia in St. Petersburg* (1907).

144 See Lenin, *Put Your Cards on the Table* (1912). In preparation for this publication, Lenin requested detailed works concerning the election law: "Please send immediately books on the electoral law of June 3, 1907, or another copy of the handbook of 1910. Also the electoral law with the comments of a lawyer. Consult "your people" and send them promptly. Unless I get them I cannot work on the voter's handbook." Ibid.

145 Lenin, *The Significance of the St. Petersburg Elections* (1912). Emphasis in original.

146 Lenin, *The Results of Six Months' Work* (1912). Emphasis in original.

147 Lenin, *Parties in the Petrograd District Council Elections* (1917).

148 Lenin, *The Boycott* (1906).

149 Lenin, *The Results of Six Months' Work* (1912). Emphasis in original.

150 Lenin, *On the Eve of the Elections to the Fourth Duma* (1912).

151 Lenin, *The Results of Six Months' Work* (1912).

152 Lenin, *The Fourth Duma Election Campaign and the Tasks of the Revolutionary Social-Democrats* (1912).

153 Lenin, *The Election Campaign and the Election Platform* (1911).

154 Lenin, *Questions of Principle* (1912).

155 Lenin (April-May 1920).

156 Lenin, *The Election Campaign and the Election Platform* (1911).

157 Lenin, *The Elections and the Opposition* (1912).

158 Ibid.

159 Lenin, *Results of the Elections* (1913).

160 Lenin, *The Results of Six Months' Work* (1912).

161 Lenin, *The Election Campaign and the Election Platform* (1911).

162 Lenin, *The Significance of the St. Petersburg Elections* (1912).

163 Ibid.

164 Lenin, *Political Parties in Russia* (1912).

165 Information cited in *The Great Soviet Encyclopedia* (1979). Accessed at https://encyclopedia2.thefreedictionary.com/Zvezda

166 Elwood (2011), Pg 45. Lenin at this time stated: "A newspaper is the chief weapon in the election campaign, the chief means for Marxist agitation among the masses." Ibid., Pg 39.

167 Lenin, *Fundamental Problems of the Election Campaign* (1911).

168 Ibid.

169 Lenin, *The Election Campaign and the Election Platform* (1911).

170 Lenin, *Results of the Elections* (1913).

171 Lenin, *The Dissolution of the Duma and the Tasks of the Proletariat* (1906).

172 Leon Trotsky (1979), Pg 328.

173 Lenin, *The Election Platform of the R.S.D.L.P* (1912).

174 Lenin, *The Dissolution of the Duma and the Tasks of the Proletariat* (1906).

175 Lenin, *The Election Campaign and the Election Platform* (1911).

176 Lenin, *Draft Election Address* (1906).

177 Badayev (1987), Pg 28.

178 This vetting was not always entirely successful. Roman Malinovsky—who was elected as a Bolshevik

deputy in 1912—was later exposed as a police spy. See Elwood (2011), Pg 89-100.

179 Badayev (1987), Pg 30.

180 Ibid., Pg 43.

181 Krupskaya's recollection of her election can be found in N. K. Krupskaya, *Reminiscences of Lenin* (2018), Pg 358-361. For the arguments surrounding Trotsky's inclusion on the list for the Constituent Assembly see Nimtz (2019), Pg 353-354.

182 Lenin, *Deputy T. O. Belousov's Withdrawal from the Social-Democratic Group in the Duma* (1912).

183 Lenin, *From the Theses for a Report at the October 8 Conference of the St. Petersburg Organisation, and Also for a Resolution and Instructions to Those Elected to the Party Congress* (1917).

184 Badayev (1987), Pg 28-29.

185 Lenin, *Some Conclusions to be Drawn from the Pre-Election Mobilisation* (1912).

186 Lenin, *The Attitude of the Bourgeois Parties and of the Workers' Party to the Duma Elections* (1906).

187 Lenin, *The Results of Six Months' Work* (1912).

188 Lenin, *Descending Rung by Rung* (1907).

189 Lenin, *The Elections to the Duma and the Tactics of the Russian Social-Democrats* (1907).

190 Lenin, *Results of the elections* (1913).

191 Krausz (2015), Pg 308.

192 Liebman (1980), Pg 399.

193 Tony Cliff, *Lenin Volume 4: The Bolsheviks and World Communism* (1979), Pg 24.

194 Nimtz (2019), Pg 361.

195 Liebman (1980), Pg 398.

196 Lenin, *Letter to Sylvia Pankhurst* (28 August, 1919).

197 Within a year, however, Lenin was coming to the conclusion that a split with the ultra-left over parliament may be necessary: "There is reason to fear that the split with the "Lefts", the anti-parliamentarians…will become an international phenomenon…At all events, a split is better than confusion, which hampers the ideological, theoretical and revolutionary growth and maturing of the party, and its harmonious, really organised practical work[.]" Lenin (April-May 1920).

198 Lenin, Letter to Sylvia Pankhurst (28 August, 1919).

199 Ibid.

200 Ibid.

201 Lenin, *Greetings To Italian, French and German Communists* (1919).

202 Lenin (April-May 1920).

203 Ibid.

204 The CPGB did score some early successes, electing a few communist MPs either as open candidates of the CPGB or through the Labour party.

205 Lenin, *The Tasks of the Proletariat in Our Revolution* (1917).

206 Liebman (1980), Pg 399.

207 Lenin (April-May 1920).

208 Ibid.

209 Ibid.

210 Ibid.

211 Leon Trotsky, On the Policy of the KAPD, in *The First Five Years of the Communist International*, Volume 1 (1972), Pg 142.

212 Ibid., Pg 146.

213 All quotes Ibid., Pg 131.

214 Lenin (April-May 1920).

215 Ibid.

216 Ibid.

217 Ibid.

218 *Minutes of the Second Congress of the Communist International*, Evening Session of August 2nd, accessed at https://www.marxists.org/history/international/comintern/2nd-congress/ch08a.htm

219 Christopher Read, *Lenin: A Revolutionary Life* (2005), Pg 234.

220 Daniel Bensaïd, The return of strategy, *International Socialism*, No.113 (January 2007). Accessed at https://isj.org.uk/the-return-of-strategy/

221 Trotsky (1972), Pg 45-46.

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