

Lenin

One Step
Forward,
Two Steps
Back

Study
Marxism-
Leninism

One Step Forward, Two Steps Back (5)

Lenin on the two methods of struggle

This is the fifth in a series of Call articles summing up the main lessons of One Step Forward, Two Steps Back, written by V.I. Lenin in 1904. All the member groups of the Organizing Committee for a Marxist-Leninist Party are now studying this book. Readers are invited to send in their comments, questions and articles based on their own study.

Pages cited in this study are from the Progress Publishers edition, which is available from The Call for \$1.50 each. See also Lenin's Collected Works, Vol. 7, p. 203.

This section of the study focuses on Section O, pp. 146-64, "After the Congress, Two Methods of Struggle."

When the Second Congress of the Russian Social-Democratic Labor Party concluded in late 1903, the main task facing the Russian communists was to unite around the Congress decisions, strengthen the Party organization, and prepare to lead the masses in revolutionary struggle.

But instead of working toward this goal, the opportunist Martov and the Mensheviks continued to build their anti-party bloc, which had emerged at the Congress.

In *One Step Forward, Two Steps Back*, Lenin traces the history of the differences between the Mensheviks and the Bolsheviks in an effort to unite the Party around the correct line.

Lenin argued for a disciplined, centralized organization with every member belonging to a basic party unit. Opposing Lenin's view were the Mensheviks, headed by Martov, who argued that anyone could join the Party simply by "declaring themselves" a member.

The question, then, upon the conclusion of the Congress, was: "Would Comrade Martov choose to regard his Congress 'coalition' as an isolated political fact. . . or would he want to consolidate (it). . . and become the actual leader of the opportunist wing of our Party" (p. 147).

The first indication of Martov's intent came when he refused to serve on the editorial board of *Iskra* and led his followers in a virtual boycott of party work. Lenin viewed this refusal as a "step towards splitting the party" in that it objectively removed a number of people from the life and discipline of the Party while they officially remained members. Lenin pointed out that their actions ran counter to their "declarations of loyalty at the Congress." (p. 149).

Faced with this boycott, Lenin repeatedly asked Martov and his fellow Mensheviks to clarify their differences and to explain their withdrawal. But he got no response.

Martov instead set out to sabotage the Party's work.

The Mensheviks wanted an undisciplined party made up primarily of bourgeois intellectuals. When they saw that the Party was going to be a disciplined organization of proletarian fighters, serving the interests of the working class, they became panic-stricken. They lashed out at the Party Central Committee, the Congress decisions, and especially Lenin himself, whom they accused of being a bully and an "autocrat." They complained of "bureaucracy" to cover over their own violations of party rules.

The Mensheviks resorted to name-calling, slander and underhanded methods of struggle. Lenin summed up this method as "disorganizing all the activity of the Party, damaging the work, hampering all and everything 'without statement of reasons'." (p. 156). This method could only wreck party unity.

Lenin exposed the link between the Mensheviks' unprincipled methods of struggle and their opportunist line on organization. At the heart of both was a glorification of the rights of the individual and an "anarchistic denial of the duty of the part to submit to the whole." (p. 164).

In contrast, Lenin's methods of struggle were straightforward and principled. By relying on Marxism and seeking unity on this basis, Lenin and the Bolsheviks eventually isolated and thoroughly exposed the bankrupt opportunism of the Mensheviks.

Lenin's teachings on "two methods of struggle" hold great lessons for our own party-building movement today. Just as in Lenin's time, the forces opposed to building a new party have exposed their opportunism, not only in political line, but also in methods of struggle. Ranting and raving, splitting and blocking are recognized hallmarks of the Mensheviks of today, from the so-called "Revolutionary Wing" to the revisionist Martin Nicolaus.

Like Lenin, we must expose these opportunists and refuse any conciliation with their revisionism. In this way, we too will succeed in building a party worthy of the name.

Questions—

1. How did the Mensheviks reveal their opportunism through methods of struggle?

2. How were the Mensheviks' opportunist methods related to their line on organization?