In the previous chapter, I attempted to explain the Vperedist split, led by Bogdanov, from the Bolshevik faction of the RSDLP. In contrast to earlier interpretations, I tried to show that Bogdanov did not part from Lenin over their differences of philosophy (orthodox-Plekhanovist materialism versus Mach’s empiriocriticism). Nor did they separate because Bogdanov dissented from the Bolsheviks’ decision to participate in the Duma, although it is true that Bogdanov and Lenin did assess that participation differently. I argued, instead, that what they split over was their general political approach or outlook: specifically, over Bogdanov’s desire to have the Bolsheviks place their emphasis on paedagogical/propagandistic tasks. That did cause them to differ not only on how to assess participation in the Duma, but much more generally on the value of the Bolsheviks’ day-to-day work in connection with the workers’ mundane practical activities, ‘where they were at’.

My concern with the Bolshevik-Vperedist split is part of a broader effort to understand Bogdanov’s ideas in relation to those of Lenin. My methodological point of departure is that the ideas of these men, and the several generations of intellectuals of which they are a part, are best grasped in relationship to their political practice. This is because they were not concerned to solve intellectual problems \textit{qua} intellectual problems. They were, above all, concerned with the Russian workers’ movement and with helping
that movement to develop fruitfully, and their ideas, however theoretical and complex, were shaped for this end. Specifically, their ideas were aimed at party-political organisations through which their connection with the workers’ movement was mediated. I do not deny that one can ask other questions about the ideas of these men. But I do assert that an absolutely indispensable way to understand them – to be able to say in what ways they are similar, in what ways they differ, what distinctions are important – is through a detailed account of the interrelationships of their ideas to their political interventions; political interventions which led up to, brought about, and resulted from the Vperedist-Bolshevik split. I believe some of my central differences with my critics can be traced to the primacy I give to these men’s practices as an indispensable, if not the only, key to understanding their ideas.

My point of departure was that the political unity of Bogdanov and Lenin in the Bolshevik leadership from 1904 to 1909, despite their clear philosophical differences, was predicated on an overriding agreement on the tutelary role of intellectuals in the Party in helping the proletariat come to revolutionary Social-Democratic consciousness, a conception they shared with most of the leading thinkers of West-European Social Democracy, as Aileen Kelly rightly recognises.1

Andrzej Walicki2 devotes much space to spelling out differences among Lenin and Bogdanov and Western European Social-Democratic leaders on the role of the intellectual. I agree, for the most part, with his account of these differences, but do not agree with his assessment of its relevance. For I was in no way attempting to argue that Bogdanov shared with Lenin, let alone with all the other European Social-Democratic thinkers, an identical view on the nature of and the reasons for the tutelary role of the intellectuals vis-à-vis the working class. My point was that, despite their differences, what was of overriding importance was their agreement on the need for this tutelary role: most important, Lenin and Bogdanov agreed, as did the rest of European Social Democracy, that the workers could not, out of their own activity, come to revolutionary consciousness. It was this point of agreement that was central, and not their differences, for it overrode their differences and in practice brought Bogdanov and Lenin together on the need for a party like the Bolshevik Party and in their common participation in that party.

Walicki asserts that Bogdanov and Lenin were so sharply opposed in their understanding on the role of the intellectuals vis-à-vis the working class that it drove them apart. Zenovia A. Sochor3 even claims that Bogdanov opposed

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