Chapter 1

Programme of *Rabochee Delo*

*Rabochee Delo* was founded in April 1899 following an ideological and organisational conflict within the Union of Russian Social Democrats Abroad between the supporters and the opponents of the ‘Emancipation of Labour’ group, who had for a long time exerted significant influence over the Russian Social-Democratic emigration, and the Russian Social-Democratic movement as a whole.

Various short lived organisations claiming the title ‘Union of Russian Social Democrats’ existed during the 1880s and early 90s, which connected a number of illegal reading circles inside Russia with the émigré ‘Emancipation of Labour’ group on a loose federal basis. The Plekhanov group provided its sympathisers in Russia with learned and theoretical literature,\(^1\) and the latter on at least one occasion attempted to produce an agitational newspaper directed towards a broader working-class audience.\(^2\) The latest of several attempts to re-establish this ‘Union’ had been undertaken by Lenin and two colleagues in 1895, as a result of which the ‘Emancipation of Labour’ group started to produce the journal *Rabotnik*,\(^3\) whilst the St. Petersburg ‘Union of Struggle for the Emancipation of the Working Class’ worked on a newspaper also entitled *Rabochee Delo*, but which had no other connection to the later theoretical journal.\(^4\) This attempt to produce a Social-Democratic newspaper on Russian soil failed, as had all previous efforts, and as a result the ‘Emancipation of Labour’ group started to produce its own newspaper-like supplement to

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\(^{1}\) These included: the ‘literary-political miscellany’ *Sotsial-Demokrat*, four issues of which appeared from 1888–92; numerous pamphlets by Plekhanov such as *Socialism and Political Struggle* (1883) and *Our Disagreements* (1885) and *The Tasks of Socialists in the Fight Against Famine in Russia* (1892); a series of translations into Russian of works by Marx and Engels published as part of the series ‘Library of Contemporary Socialism’; the *Programme of the ‘Emancipation of Labour’ Group* (1884) and the *Draft Programme of the Russian Social Democratic Union* (1887) (See Harding and Taylor 1983, pp. 44–107; Plekhanov 1923–7, Vol. 2, pp. 21–405 and Vol. 3, pp. 11–45 and pp. 214–421; Plekhanov 1961, Vol. 1, pp. 49–368).

\(^{2}\) *Rabochii* (1885) was to have been the newspaper of the St. Petersburg circle organised by Dimitar Blagoev (1856–1924).

\(^{3}\) Three ‘double issues’ (Nos. 1–2, Nos. 3–4, Nos. 5–6) of *Rabotnik* were published by the ‘Emancipation of Labour’ group between 1896–9, the first two in the name of the Union of Russian Social Democrats, the last one in the name of the RSDLP.

Rabotnik, Listok Rabotnika\textsuperscript{5} in Geneva. These publications were printed and smuggled into Russia with a group of émigré sympathisers who around this time started to style themselves the ‘Union of Russian Social Democrats Abroad’, a definite organisation designed to furnish the various ‘Unions of Struggle’ (in St. Petersburg, Kiev, Ekaterinoslav and Moscow) with both theoretical and agitational Social-Democratic literature, whilst offering these organisations several forms of practical and organisational assistance: fund-raising, the reception of refugees and recruitment from the numerous Russian-student ‘colonies’ in Europe.

As with the earlier reading circles and the later, more activist ‘Unions of Struggle’, this ‘Union Abroad’ appears to have been organisationally distinct from the ‘Emancipation of Labour’ group. The former seems to have engaged solely in literary and publishing work, whilst the Union dealt with the above-mentioned practical matters. Nonetheless, the greater part of its active membership was sympathetic to ‘Emancipation of Labour’ group views. Consequently, the recognition by the First Congress of the RSDLP of the ‘Union Abroad’ as its official émigré section, without any reference to the ‘Emancipation of Labour’ group, may have caused disquiet among the supporters of the latter, as they believed the Union’s recognition had been earned as much in consequence of the efforts of the literary circle as the practical efforts of the Union itself. Whilst the formal incorporation of the ‘Emancipation of Labour’ group into the Union Abroad partially dealt with this problem, this produced the expectation that any leading activists of the RSDLP who found themselves abroad should be admitted to the Union, and the democratic assumption that this new influx should have the right to influence ‘Emancipation of Labour’ group literature, a right which does not appear to have been exercised prior to the foundation of the RSDLP. Such developments were opposed by Plekhanov, who wanted to defend the intellectual independence and reputation of the ‘Emancipation of Labour’ group at all costs, especially in relation to the supposedly ‘Economist’ views of the newer members of the Union, who soon became a majority in the organisation.

Nonetheless, the demands of the latter were satisfied through a Union Abroad Congress held in October 1898, an event which precipitated the surrendering by the ‘Emancipation of Labour’ group of its literary responsibilities and the liquidation of Rabotnik and Listok Rabotnika.\textsuperscript{6} It seems that these resignations were viewed

\textsuperscript{5} Ten issues of Listok Rabotnika were published by the Union of Russian Social Democrats from 1896–8. Issues 1–8 were edited by the ‘Emancipation of Labour’ group, the last two (a double issue following the First Congress of the Union in November 1898) by the grouping in the Union that went on to found Rabochee Delo.

\textsuperscript{6} One double issue of Rabotnik (5–6) is dated after this First Congress, though most of the work towards it had been done before the meeting, as did one ‘double issue’ (9–10) of Listok.