Articles from Poslednie Izvestiia

The following two articles are taken from Poslednie Izvestiia, the news sheet of the London-based Foreign Committee of the Bund, both of which produced objections by Lenin in the form of the articles ‘Concerning the Statement of the Bund’ and ‘Does the Jewish Proletariat Need an Independent Political Party?’ The substance of this disagreement was the Bund’s desire to reorganise the RSDLP along the lines of a federation of Social-Democratic organisations, each of which represented a distinct national or ethnic group within the Russian empire, a proposition to which Iskra was firmly opposed. This aim on the part of the Bund was reflected in its policy of trying to set up new branches wherever Jewish workers were to be found, regardless of the preferences of local RSDLP organisations and regardless of the fact that some Jewish workers and activists had evidently joined these ‘integrated’ organisations. Opposing such integration, the Bund considered the Jews to be a separate nation requiring its own Social-Democratic organisation, despite the fact that the Jewish population did not occupy a particular geographical space, a belief which caused them to organise in districts where other Social-Democratic groups were already active and at times to compete with them for Jewish recruits. This rivalry naturally stood as an obstacle in the way of the Bund effectively co-operating with other elements in the RSDLP in institutions such as the Organising Committee of the Second RSDLP Congress, and co-operation in this respect was only obtained at the price of a public argument between the Bund and Iskra, the Bundist side of which is reproduced here.

The first of the articles reflects the rivalry between local RSDLP organisations in the southern region and the Bund for the attentions of the Jewish proletariat, an issue with its origins in the decision of the Fourth Congress of the Bund to expand its operations into this area of the country. The Ekaterinoslav Committee, in publishing a manifesto directed at Jewish workers urging them to reject Zionism and to unite politically with non-Jewish workers, appears to have caused offence by failing to mention the activities of the Bund. In the eyes of the author of the article, this silence undermines the manifesto’s argument in so far as the Bund’s

2 See Chapter 13 in the present collection, Resolution 12.
3 This manifesto has not been located. Lenin, in the article, ‘Does the Jewish Proletariat Need an Independent Political Party?’ expresses regret that it could not be re-printed in Iskra for reasons of space (Lenin 1960–79, Vol. 6, p. 329).
existence serves as the most convincing proof that there is not one homogeneous Jewish community with united interests, as was claimed by the Zionists. Apart from that, any attempt to hide the scale of the Jewish labour movement plays into the hands of anti-Semitic elements in the non-Jewish working class, a danger the authors believe the Ekaterinoslav Committee has underestimated.

The second article develops the idea expressed in the 15th resolution of the Bund’s Fourth Congress that the RSDLP should be reorganised as a federation of nationality-based Social-Democratic parties. In order to facilitate this reorganisation, its author argues that the forthcoming Congress of the RSDLP should be regarded as a founding Congress, which representatives of all the currently existing Social-Democratic parties operating within the Russian Empire should attend. According to this plan, the decisions of the First Congress would no longer be considered to be in force, the justification for this being that the RSDLP as an actually-existing organisation had long since ceased to exist, as it lacked central institutions. This argument represented a new departure in the thinking of the Bund, as the organisation had previously affirmed both its adherence to the RSDLP and its respect for the decision of its First Congress. It seems to coincide with the casual announcement in the first article that the Bund was in fact an ‘independent political party’ of Jewish workers, a choice of words which provoked a strong protest on the part of Lenin, rather than merely a section of the RSDLP ‘autonomous in questions relating exclusively to the Jewish workers’, as the First RSDLP Congress had decided.

The context of this change of emphasis, which amounted to the suggestion that, if only temporarily, the Bund had actually broken away from the RSDLP, is well indicated in the second article. The key question was that of the participation of the Bund in the Organising Committee, which had supposedly been cast into doubt following the mislaying of a request to send delegates addressed to the Jewish organisation. In reality, this ‘accident’ can only be regarded as the product of a much deeper problem, namely the manoeuvring by both the Bund

---

4 See Chapter 13, Resolution 15.
5 At this stage, this would have included: the RSDLP, the Bund, the Social-Democratic Party of the Kingdom of Poland and Lithuania and the Labour Party of Finland. Lenin examines the manifesto of a League of Armenian Social Democrats in one article from this period (Lenin 1960–79, Vol. 6, pp. 324–7), but as the article makes clear, the Armenian League considered itself part of the RSDLP.
6 See Chapter 13 (Resolution 15) and Kommunisticheskaia Partiia Sovetskogo Soiuza 1970, p. 41 and p. 43.