Chapter 17

Resolution of the Second RSDLP Congress
‘Minority’

The following document, a resolution drafted and adopted at a meeting of Martov’s supporters during September 1903, demonstrates how soon this grouping decided upon a campaign to overturn the results of the elections to the RSDLP’s leading bodies which took place at the Party’s Second Congress. The document was written at a time when Lenin and Plekhanov still appeared interested in negotiating with them and in appeasing them using the Party-constitutional means of co-opting several of their number onto the Editorial Board and the Central Committee.\(^1\) In stark contrast to these conciliatory efforts, the resolution reveals the intention of carrying the dispute with the elected Party leadership into Russia, with the defeated faction planning on seeking the support of the local committees for its point of view.

The document is of additional interest as it suggests that the ‘Martovites’ were eager to test their own modification to the first paragraph of the Party constitution at the earliest possible opportunity. This can be said for the following reasons. The resolution indicates the creation of an independent literary group within the Party as one of its goals and this group was apparently to function as the head of a factional apparatus directly and militantly opposed to the Party leadership and unwilling to obey its instructions, or those of any other part of the official Party apparatus such as the local committees. The group’s ultimate aim was to prepare its own basis of support within the Party in advance of a Third RSDLP Congress, where it would presumably fight for control of the Party apparatus with the followers of Lenin. Prior to this event, it did not intend to recognise various responsibilities in relation to the central institutions of the Party, calling instead for a ‘boycott’ of the Party’s own official newspaper, Iskra, by refusing to distribute it or to submit anything but protesting articles and letters to it.

\(^1\) Lenin 1960–79, Vol. 7, p. 347. See also Russian Social-Democratic Labour Party 1978, p. 437, where Plekhanov gives the strong impression of support for the re-running of the elections after Martov refused to serve on the Editorial Board; or the notably conciliatory, even apologetic tone of Lenin’s letter to Potresov dated 13 September 1903 N.S., in which Lenin appears desperate to resolve the disagreement (Lenin 1960–79, Vol. 34, pp. 164–6) and Krupskaya 1930, p. 75.
Despite this unusually assertive attitude, it could be said that, provided that the members of such a body ‘offered regular assistance under the direction of (an official) Party organisation’ such as a local committee, its behaviour would not actually be unconstitutional. Indeed, its authors seem to have paid careful attention to the letter of the Party constitution at certain points in the resolution. Thus it seeks the permission of the Central Committee for the literary centre to exist and, despite calling for a ‘boycott’ of Iskra, insists that the group’s members forward all local reports to the paper, as the Party constitution in fact required. In a similar fashion, the resolution does not call for a refusal to obey the decisions of the Central Committee, which would also be clearly unconstitutional, despite the fact that this institution was at this stage made up entirely of ‘Leninists’.

Given this apparent observance of ‘legality’, the disruptive potential of the intended campaign seems to illustrate better than anything the point behind Lenin’s phrasing of the first paragraph of the Party constitution. Had his formula been approved, the existence of a grouping in the Party which had resolved to contribute nothing to the Party’s official work, work such as transporting and distributing the Party’s official literature, raising funds for the official apparatus, recruiting new members to the Party and so forth, whilst at the same time claiming continued membership of the Party with the sole aim of undermining its official leadership and seizing power from this leadership at the earliest possible opportunity – this would have clearly been impossible. This was because, in Lenin’s formula, every member of the RSDLP had to belong to an official Party organisation, and only Congress or the Central Committee could decide which organisations came into this category.

With Lenin’s formula in place, the Central Committee could have therefore refused to recognise the ‘independent literary group’ as a Party organisation. This step would not in itself have implied the expulsion of the Martovites, in so far as all of them belonged to the official RSDLP organisation as well as their faction: most of them were in fact members of the League Abroad. However, following such a decision they would have been obliged to direct their energies rather more towards their ‘personal participation’ in these official organisations, thus reducing, if not entirely preventing, factional activity. Rather than spending most of their time inciting local bodies against the Party leadership at the price of mere ‘regular assistance’, they would actually have had to join these bodies and help carry out their decisions and participate fully in local work, whilst at the same

---

2 Russian Social-Democratic Labour Party 1978, p. 12: ‘11. Every Party organisation is obliged to supply both to the Central Committee and to the Editorial Board of the Central Organ all information regarding every aspect of its activity and all its members’ (paragraph 11 of the RSDLP organisational rules).