No. 9

‘The Coming Election-Campaign’

8 January 1912

The beginning of elections to the Fourth Duma is not far-off, and the democratic voter, whose progressive aspirations are not protected by the powers-that-be, and who has no particular enthusiasm for the ‘popular representation’ resulting from 3 June, faces a serious task: to extract from the minimal rights that remain to him a maximum-effect that might in some measure change the face of the current State-Duma through strengthening its left-flank of consistent democrats. The average citizen has to cross himself before the thunder breaks. And to that end, he must first consider all the possibilities he has before him: on the one hand, there is the social recovery that is under way; on the other, all the forms of organised participation in the elections; and finally, the existence of weak points in

1. [The newspaper Obskaya Zhizn’ dealt with social, political-economic and literary themes.]
2. [From Obskaya zhizn’, 8 January 1912.]
3. [The Fourth State-Duma functioned from 15 November 1912, until 6 (19) October 1917.]  
4. [The Russian electoral law of 1907, which governed elections to the Fourth Duma, was extremely complex. Goldenweiser 1914 explained it in some detail, particularly the summary on p. 417.]
the existing electoral law that must be especially utilised in order to provide an opening for growing political activity in the country. The election-law of 3 June and democratic possibilities – to mention them side-by-side may seem ironic, if one recalls the origin of this law, which could more-readily be called a law of democratic impossibilities. However, we must not forget what miracles can result from the activity of the popular masses, who wish to have their say no matter what; and moreover, despite all our negative attitudes to the existing electoral law, we cannot and must not miss the opportunity to avail ourselves of its weak points, as I have mentioned. The fact that these weak points exist can be seen in the experience of the last election-campaign, which occurred in conditions worse than those for the coming elections to the Fourth Duma. Those conditions involved social reaction, an inclination towards boycott amongst an important section of the popular masses and the intelligentsia, and finally, the fact that elections were occurring for the first time under the new law.

What possibilities are there for a democratically-inclined voter to send the kind of candidates he wants to the Fourth Duma?

The most hopeful support for democracy comes, of course, from the workers’ curia, which unfortunately sends only six deputies, in all, to the assembly of provincial electors. One can hardly doubt that in the coming election-campaign, too, all the electors from the workers’ curia will turn out to be conscious defenders of the interests of the proletariat, or that the provincial assembly of electors, whatever its composition in political terms, will volens nolens have to send its class-opponents to the Duma.5

After the workers’ curia, there is the peasant-curia. This curia did not justify itself in the last elections. Indeed, it was enough for there to be a single reactionary among the peasant-electors in order for the majority of the provincial assembly of electors to send him to be a member of the Duma. Moreover, the peasant-curiae exist precisely in those provinces where the muzhik is least enlightened, where he is downtrodden and under the influence of the reactionary gentry. Nevertheless, the peasant retains the possibility of sending a supporter of the compulsory alienation of the land from the hands of the die-hards and the servile spongers of nationalism. This was done by the workers’ curia in the last election, and if the peasant does not do the same, it will be his own fault. The peasantry is dispersed and divided in political terms, and due to its economic position it is difficult to subject it to any organising force. It is difficult to expect it to be independent in the sense that interests us. A wider field of activity is opening here for the democratic intelligentsia, who are in touch with

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5. As we know, according to the existing election-law the electors from the workers’ and peasants’ curia, where they exist, do not elect deputies themselves: rather, this right belongs to the general assembly of provincial electors.