Chapter Two

The Draft Programme of ‘Iskra’ and the Tasks of Russian Social Democrats (1903)

N. Ryazanov

David Borisovich Gol’dendakh (Ryazanov) was born in Odessa in 1870 and executed by Stalin in 1938. Although he played a secondary role in Social-Democratic politics, Ryazanov was without question one of the foremost Marxist scholars of his time. In The Rise of Social Democracy in Russia, the historian John Keep described him as ‘an energetic and talented writer’ who was ‘Lenin’s contemporary and more than his equal in Marxist scholarship’.1 V.A. Smirnova, a Russian biographer writing in 1989, spoke of him as ‘a brilliant individualist’ who combined ‘a thorough approach to scientific problems with the indomitable and volcanic temperament of a fighter, propagandist and fierce debater’.2 His independence of mind was legendary: in his autobiography, Max Beer recalls Lenin’s joking description of the Soviet Union as ‘a dictatorship mitigated by Riazanov’.3

---

1 Keep 1963, p. 85.
2 Smirnova 1995, p. 144. The biographical information that follows comes from this article and from the following sources: Rogovin 1993, pp. 246–57; Rokityanskii 1991; Rokityanskii 1992; Yaroshevskii 1991, pp. 475–95.
Like most Russian revolutionaries of his generation, Ryazanov was either in prison (in the years 1887, 1891–6 and 1907) or in exile during much of the period prior to the revolution of 1917. In 1905–6, he was actively involved in organising trade unions and strikes, first in Odessa and then in St. Petersburg, where he worked closely with Parvus. In 1907, he left Russia for Germany, where August Bebel introduced him to the archives of the German Social-Democratic Party, including the papers of Marx and Engels. At the time, the papers had never been systematically organised or catalogued, with partial exceptions such as Eleanor Marx’s edition of her father’s articles on the Crimean War and Franz Mehring’s edition of Marx and Engels’s early writings. Many papers had been borrowed and not returned; a substantial number were kept by Eduard Bernstein in his own home; others were held by Marx’s daughter Laura and her husband Paul Lafargue in Paris; and numerous letters and other items were scattered in private libraries.

Following the deaths of Paul and Laura Lafargue in 1911, Ryazanov sorted their papers for the archive and added them to other documents found in libraries in London, Paris, Rome, Florence, Germany, Switzerland and Austria. From 1909 to 1917, he worked with the German Social-Democratic Party, collecting and editing the works of Marx and Engels from the 1850s and 1860s, which were published in German in 1917. While conducting this research, writing for German and Austrian party journals, delivering lectures, and gathering material for another project on the history of the First International, Ryazanov discovered some 250 previously unknown articles and items of correspondence by Marx and Engels.

Ryazanov was neither a Bolshevik nor a Menshevik prior to 1917. He participated in the Zimmerwald anti-war conference of 1915, and upon returning to Russia in April 1917 he briefly associated with Trotsky in the non-party Inter-District Organisation (the Mezhraionka) until both men joined

---

4 Zeman and Scharlau 1965, p. 81. Zeman and Scharlau point out that Parvus first introduced Ryazanov to the leaders of German Social Democracy and that the two men had been pupils at the same school in the 1890s (p. 141). We have included two documents by Parvus in this volume: ‘What was Accomplished on Ninth of January’ and ‘Our Tasks’.


6 Franz Mehring (ed.) 1902.

7 Rjazanoff 1917.

8 Smirnova 1995, p. 146.