

Cemil Silahtar

# Party discipline



AN İŞÇİNİN SESİ PUBLICATION

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Translated by Mehmet Toros



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## **Preface**

### **Not any discipline, Leninist disciplin!**

It is a fact of life in this world that the working class and working masses are divided into nations. Over hundreds of years, different geographies, economies and climates have developed in them different national characteristics.

A scientific investigation of the national characteristics and social psychologies of the Turkish and Kurdish peoples living in Turkey would be of great assistance. But no such work exists. For this reason we shall only touch upon one or two aspects relating to our topic by relying on common sense and observation, and paying attention to history.

It has long been said that, "We are a nation of soldiers". It is true. Turkey's geopolitical position and the plunder of the Ottomans developed a strong "military discipline" in the people of Anatolia. This truth becomes very evident when we compare them with Western people.

Another characteristic shaped by history is patience and composure. Our people have struggled for hundreds of years against harsh natural conditions and barbarous ruling classes of world-wide fame. They have suffered profoundly.

This has created in them a deep wisdom and the tendency to keep their views inside until the knife hits the bone.

Alongside these, our people have yet another characteristic developed by history, that of refusing to bow down before wrongs and injustice.

To return to our subject, today the communist movement in Turkey is advancing through difficult straits. Only conformists and those who cannot see the tips of their noses for practical activities can fail to be aware of this. We must steer the ship out of these troubled waters without its hitting and breaking up on the rocks. Nor does that suffice. We must set the ship on the course of revolution. Every communist, every revolutionary, shares the task and the responsibility of solving this problem. The foremost task of greatest importance is to look once more and very carefully at the communist movement of Turkey and its publications, to determine with scientific detachment the contradictions, inconsistencies and differences.

A very important role in overcoming the crisis devolves on the Leninist understanding of discipline. We have all been imbued with the characteristics determined by the conditions of Turkey. This is inevitable. The opportunists and centrists are exploiting the aspects of these characteristics which suit their purposes today. Open discussion and criticism are banned! The strictest ban is on the distribution of *Iscinin Sesi*! Books are confiscated from houses and Leninists who refuse to water down their principles for the sake of striking a bargain with the liberal bourgeoisie and petty-bourgeois socialism are suppressed! Alongside these, the most base gossip! Ridding our movement of these methods characteristic of opportunism will be the greatest step forward in overcoming the present serious difficulties. For this reason, a most important role devolves on the Leninist understanding of discipline.

What does Leninism entail? 1) Open discussion in front of the militants and the masses; 2) Open criticism in



front of the militants and the masses; 3) Iron unity in action; 4) The complete fulfilment of tasks assigned by the party; 5) Not to withhold financial resources from the party. This is Leninist discipline! The rest, pleasing perhaps to the opportunists, is empty.

Thus we see that Leninism unites in itself and raises to a theoretical level, the characteristics of our people, as those of all peoples, which are open to development and advance.

Resistance to wrongs from whomever or wherever they may come. Putting forward the truth without being deceived by the temporary "profits" or "losses" of the moment.

Opportunism proposes discipline that does not rest on ideological unity. Let us give a small example. Look at the publications brought out in Turkey and abroad, better still at different issues of the same publication. Take the subject of the Republican People's Party (RPP). You will find the following contradictory, indeed "antagonistically" contradictory definitions: "The RPP is not a social-democratic party", "The RPP is a bourgeois reformist social-democratic party", "The RPP is bourgeois reformist, not social-democratic", "Social-democracy is bourgeois reformism", "Social-Democracy is not bourgeois reformism, but right opportunism in the working class movement". Now in every Leninist party, there take place open discussion and criticism. Different views are discussed and rights and wrongs brought out into the open. Do the above examples fall into the category of open discussion and criticism? They do not. To profess in every issue that "The attitude of the working class and communists is such-and-such", and this in unsigned articles bereft of criticism of wrong ideas and articles that appeared in the previous issue, is not open discussion, but blind wrangling. Such playing around with these questions of vital importance is **INDISCIPLINE** in the Leninist sense.

At the same time, opportunists and centrists writhing in the mire of the most profound indiscipline, turn around and accuse İçinin Sesi and those who think similarly, of "indiscipline" for saying, "You cannot do this, you cannot play with the future of the people, everything you say enters the consciousness of young comrades"! Moreover, the opportunists and centrists use the methods mentioned above. This being the case, let us note that their understanding of discipline is "bureaucratic discipline", i.e., indiscipline.

We hear that they are calling us "Yurukists" (after Yurukoglu—M.T.) and "linkists" (after "weak link"—M.T.). It is all a foreign language to us. We are Leninists. Our understanding is one of "Leninist discipline" that rests on ideological unity, open discussion and criticism.

This pamphlet by our comrade Cemil Silahtar is a very important contribution on the subject of Leninist party discipline. We believe that it will blow like a fresh breeze in revolutionary ranks.

R. Yurukoglu  
August 1979

## Introduction

The world working class is an integral whole and the world communist movement reflects this whole. For this reason, communist parties are established on the principle of proletarian internationalism. This principle unites a communist party with the general world working class movement.

Proletarian internationalism finds concrete expression in the attitude towards the world socialist system, in particular towards the Soviet Union and the CPSU. It is expressed in the recognition of the Soviet Union as the world revolutionary centre and the vanguard of the world revolutionary movement.

The communist parties are the vanguard detachments of the international revolutionary proletarian army in individual countries. An understanding of Leninist discipline is of crucial importance in the vanguard detachment of the working class, the communist party. For in its struggle to take power, the proletariat has no weapons other than ideology and organisation .

Ideology and organisation are two inseparable parts of a whole. The party can fulfil its role as the vanguard of

the working class and the working people only when it combines ideological with organisational unity and ensures unity of will and action.<sup>(1)</sup>

The communist party is a voluntary union of communists. It consists of the most advanced members of the working class who have grasped revolutionary theory. It is the vanguard detachment of the working class, its ideological and political leader. At the same time, the communist party is a class organisation at the highest level.

With Leninism, the militant revolutionary theory of the party of a new type, of the party which will prepare the working class for revolution, crush imperialism, establish the proletarian dictatorship and build communism, has reached its highest form.

In *What is to be Done?* Lenin outlined the structure of the organisation which will be able to lead the working class to victory. This organisation is the working class party which takes as its guide revolutionary scientific theory. As opposed to the opportunists' definition of the party as a loose collection of broadly based, independent mass organisations, Lenin showed that a strong centralised organisation consisting of professional revolutionaries can overthrow the bourgeoisie and carry out the revolution.

“The party is the politically conscious, advanced section of the class, it is its vanguard. The strength of that vanguard is ten times, a hundred times, more than a hundred times, greater than its members...”

“The political consciousness of the advanced contingent is ... manifested in its ability to organise.”<sup>(2)</sup>

Ideological struggle and organisation are one. They cannot be thought of separately. For organisational unity is built upon ideological unity. Lenin says, "Without revolutionary theory there can be no revolutionary movement." Further, "...the role of vanguard fighter can be fulfilled only by a party that is guided by the most advanced theory."<sup>(3)</sup>

The party, through its ideological and organisational leadership, can organise the working class and carry out the revolution. If it fails to do so, it will lag behind the revolutionary activities of the masses and become tailist.

The communist party is the sum of its organisations. A party member is one who accepts the party programme, regularly pays his dues and works actively in one of the party organisations. But the party is not merely the arithmetical sum of its organisations. It is at the same time a complex system. The party is not five fingers but a fist.

The aims, tasks, organisational forms and methods of work of the communist party are stated in its programme and rules. There can be no party without a programme. This is comparable to walking in the dark, without a map or a compass, i.e., virtual non-existence. The communist party's action programme, which will be implemented and followed in the political arena, is prepared according to Marxist-Leninist principles of struggle. The programme shows clearly what we want and what we are fighting for. Thus it must be straight-forward, planned, short, and free of repetition and contradictions. If not, it loses its effect and ceases to be a guide. Anyone who so wishes can take parts from it and interpret it in ways which may be true to the letter, but false to the essence.

The rules set out the organisational principles of the party. The programme and rules are interdependent, constituting an inseparable whole. The revolutionary content

of the tasks put forward in the programme determines the fundamental organisational principles laid down in the rules.

## I. Democratic centralism

The Communist Party is the iron fist with which the working class deals its telling blow. It must be an integral organised whole. This in turn can be achieved only on the basis of the principle of democratic centralism.

Democratic centralism is a fundamental organisational principle which comprises the dialectical unity of democracy and centralism. Centralism is required to form an organisation which strikes simultaneously as one fist; democracy is required to ensure that the blows are struck on the correct principles. Democratic centralism is a vital mechanism which enables the majority to adopt correct positions, ensures unity of will on the correct principles and subsequently imposes unity in action through the submission of the minority to the majority.

Lenin developed this fundamental organisational principle of democratic centralism in the face of resistance from the opportunists. He used this term for the first time at the Tammerfors (December 1905) Bolshevik Conference. The principle of democratic centralism was introduced into the party rules at the 4th Unity Congress

(Stockholm, April 1906), again due to a struggle by Lenin. Later it became one of the terms of a party's admission into the Comintern.

There is an important point which must be mentioned on the subject of democratic centralism: that is the formalistic, and solely formalistic, interpretation which rejects the essence of this principle and robs it of its content. This danger is especially pertinent for parties with young and inexperienced cadres and which are passing through a process of re-establishment.

The formalistic understanding imposes "bureaucratic centralism" in the name of centralism. Lenin defines bureaucracy as follows:

"They talk of bureaucracy... Bureaucracy means subordinating the interests of the work to the interests of one's own career; it means focusing attention on places ignoring the work itself..." (4)

The distortion of democratic centralism in a bureaucratic manner does away with open, comradely discussion and criticism. Mouths are gagged. Ideological dynamism is replaced by discipline based on the fear of "expulsion". Initiative is suppressed. Bureaucratic discipline can reach such excesses as the confiscation of books from homes and the banning of reading and discussion. It can employ methods alien to communism such as destroying and burning books.

This type of behaviour is displayed by leaders who lack self-confidence and place their own careerist interests before the interests of the movement.

Let us now look more closely at the two aspects of democratic centralism, democracy and centralism, in order to avoid a formalistic interpretation which robs this principle of its content.



## Democracy

The first component of democratic centralism is democracy. Lenin describes this at length in *What is to be Done?* He says that formally, democracy entails the right to elect and to be elected, the public functioning of the party and the holding of public congresses and meetings. He explains that a party operating illegally cannot function democratically in these respects and emphasises that, under conditions of repression and terror, this type of democracy is a harmful toy.

Immediately following upon these, Lenin makes a distinction between genuine and toy democracy. He puts as the criteria of genuine democracy, mutual comradesly trust and comradeship among revolutionaries. He stresses that those who fail to fulfil the responsibilities and duties of comradeship will be mercilessly punished in revolutionary public opinion. Thus he indicates the mechanism of genuine democracy, a mechanism which he defended and practiced throughout his life: open criticism and discussion.

Opportunists are distorting this extremely important principle of Leninism. Saying that "An illegal party cannot be democratic", they shift conspiracy from the organisational to the ideological and political sphere. In fact, they are wide-open organisationally, exposing the cadres; but cover their heads when it comes to the ideological and political sphere, banning ideological discussion. Thus they transform conspiracy into a fig leaf veiling opportunism.

It is an obvious fact that the formal aspects of the democratic principle cannot function in Turkey today. But it is even more obvious that open criticism and discussion must prevail at all times, everywhere. It should be understood that, wherever open criticism and discussion are

done away with under the pretext of conspiracy, there is an ideological and political swindle. There is opportunism. Opportunists ban Leninist publications and views because of their own weaknesses. Leninists, on the other hand, expose opportunist views with the strength and confidence derived from their correct position. For this reason Lenin says, "Honesty in politics is the result of strength; hypocrisy is the result of weakness." (5)

Comrade Filatof, Chairman of the Department of the History of the CPSU of the Institute of Social Sciences of the CPSU Central Committee, says: "Anti-communists refer to the CPSU as an organisation which bans free discussion and expression of views".(6) It is probable that the opportunists are influenced by this wide-spread view in trampling on the democratic principle.

The democratic principle of the Leninist teaching of the party entails the right of discussion. This right in turn entails that of criticism. Criticism is the essence, spirit and substance of inner-party democracy, which in turn can develop only on the basis of criticism and self-criticism. Criticism is everything, the essence and spirit of party internal democracy which can develop only on the basis of criticism and self-criticism. The latter are of vital importance for a revolutionary party, in the ideological and organisational development of the party as the leader of the working class and all working people.

"In the past, revolutionary parties came to grief because they feared to discuss their weak aspects and were too much satisfied with themselves."(7)

A party member must freely discuss questions related to party policy and practical work in cell meetings, conferences and congresses, and in party publications. He must freely express his views on all subjects. Whatever his position in the party, every communist has the right to criticise, make proposals and express his views.

Lenin says the following:

“...one can and should advocate one’s views in the party apart from any alteration in the personal composition of the central bodies.”<sup>(8)</sup>

If we look at the history of the CPSU, even in the years of the strictest practice of centralism, during the civil war (1918-1920) and the Great Patriotic War (1941-1945), we see that the democratic principle was never eliminated.

Let us give a telling example. After the Great Patriotic War, the CPSU Central Committee initiated wide-ranging discussions on theoretical questions. In 1950 it was the turn of “language”. The anti-Marxist view known as the “new doctrine” had become dominant in language training. The specialists who propounded this theory had established a tyranny. Pravda initiated an official and open discussion on this question. The experts, the militants and workers begin to discuss. In Pravda Stalin criticises the “specialists” for their anti-Marxist approach to the subject of language and for stifling any criticism in regard to it. He enters into open discussion, attacks and demolishes their theory, in this way proving theoretically that their approach to the subject of language is contrary to Marxism. After this, letters expressing various views begin to arrive. There are some who support Stalin’s arguments, some who oppose and criticise them. Stalin again replies to all of them publicly, offering this lesson while gaining acceptance for the correct view through persuasion: “In general, it must be recognised that no science can develop or grow without freedom of criticism and the struggle of ideas.”<sup>(9)</sup>

There are some points which must be given additional stress when talking about democracy. Democracy must be

a mechanism which ensures that a majority is formed on the correct position. This demands that the party's channels of information function regularly and correctly. The majority should not evolve as a result of manipulations on the part of those at the source of the spring. (Only open discussion can prevent those at the source from establishing a majority suited to themselves. All members should be aware of inner-party information and developments without exception. It is a duty to investigate and establish the correctness of information. Otherwise, the minds of comrades will be filled with distorted information.)

A typical characteristic of opportunists is to spread information which conforms with the opinion they wish to form. Particularly under illegal conditions, conspiracy can easily be a cover for this.

On the other hand, freedom of discussion and criticism is not unlimited. Marxist-Leninist principles and the party programme set the limits to them.

There is a place in the communist party for insistent discussion and criticism on immediate questions under the guidance of Leninism and the programme, but there is no place for empty chatter which will waste time in the class struggle. At first even this type of chatter, from whomever or whatever establishment it comes, is accorded the right to show that it is chatter. But once this has become clear, both criticism and discussion in this direction are stopped dead. Those who persist are expelled from the party. As in everything else, so too in this, the main criterion is the interest of the class struggle.

Most important is the form taken by discussion and criticism. Criticism is the indispensable rule of party life. Principled criticism and self-criticism enable the timely detection and elimination of shortcomings. For this too, open discussion is required.

Openness is the vital condition for criticism and

discussion, the guarantee of honesty in all respects, from the point of view of both the essence and the limits of the matter. Discussions and criticism behind closed doors are useless. Inner-party discussions and criticisms are carried out in front of party members, in front of the working class and the masses. This process in itself constitutes a fount of consciousness and an example for both the members and the masses. The party marches, it does not stage theatricals or play a role in front of the masses.

Opportunists, centrists in particular, "accept" everything. They cannot reject criticism and self-criticism off-hand. They even talk about open discussion. But especially under illegal conditions, "Unfortunately", they say, "open discussion cannot be put into practice". Then it is necessary to ask: how many months of the 15 years prior to the revolution did the Bolsheviks spend under conditions which can be considered legal? Did they not discuss all questions openly, but without exposing the organisation, under even the most oppressive yoke of tsarism? Do not most of the works of Lenin consist of open criticism and discussion? Openness in discussion cannot be obviated by conspiracy.

Alongside openness, criticism and discussion must be conducted on a principled basis. Discussions must revolve, not around personalities, but around ideas. This is the honourable method. This is principled criticism. Fruitful and serious relations between communists are established on this basis.

Truth is the basis of criticism. The educational and guiding effect of criticism depends on its truthfulness, its discussion of ideas and criticism of mistaken views.

The open and honourable conduct of criticism and discussion, which constitutes the essence of genuine democracy, is so important that we have reserved a separate section for it in the coming pages. Now let us look at centralism.

## Centralism

The other element of the principle of democratic centralism is centralism.

The party has one programme and one set of rules. Centralism implies leadership from a single centre which has been formed by open discussion and which represents the majority.

The degree of centralisation of party organisation varies according to the period and specific conditions. Under illegal conditions, centralism predominates. Under legal conditions, inner-party democracy functions more easily in all respects. However, the party is and must be centralised at all times. In Western Europe in particular, opportunists counterpose legal activity to centralism. Thus arises a liberal understanding of "democracy". Disorder and lack of coordination are defended in the name of democracy.

In the Leninist party of the proletariat, there may be comrades who think differently and defend other ideas, but there can be no disorder or lack of coordination in the activity of the party. Centralism is the centralisation of communist activities. It implies the establishment of a strong leadership, a militant leadership which is ready for the struggle and which can easily adapt to changing conditions. It means the ability of a huge organisation to advance as one when the leadership gives the signal.

Historically, cliques have always been connected with opportunists. When the Bolsheviks assumed the party leadership at the congress, the Mensheviks boycotted the centre. They made capricious demands on the basis of narrow group interests. They obtained power by the shady dealings of unprincipled persons like Plekhanov. Having done so, they did not even accord Bolshevism the right to

exist. They banned Lenin's books and launched a campaign against Bolshevik organisations, thus leading the party into a swamp.

Under these conditions, Bolshevism's first task was to maintain itself in order to be able to defend the correct views and to take the party out of this swamp. For this reason, it turned towards establishing its own organisation. But still Bolshevism never became a clique, for its organisation was not formed on the basis of narrow group interests, nor in order to win positions, but in the spirit of the party and on the basis of the interests of the working class and the revolution. Even on this basis however, it was the opportunists who pushed the Bolsheviks into establishing their own organisation. The responsibility lies with them, the real cliquists, with the added difference that they used the centre for their own cliquish purposes. They became the "ruling" clique, the actual party remaining in opposition for a time.

Just as the limits of democracy are set by the principles of Marxism-Leninism and the party programme, so too are those of centralism. Just as there is no place for useless chatter under the name of "freedom of discussion", neither is there any place for turning the party into one's private farm under the name of centralism.

The leadership cannot treat the party with the idea, "I can do as I like". Nor can it apply a criterion of, "There is no room for views and persons I dislike". The leadership's criterion in making decisions must be the distinction between "right and wrong". Centralism does not mean "I am everything". It does not mean in the least that "I am the constitution". Evaluations and decisions must be unprejudiced and free of careerist ambitions. They must be objective.

The absence of genuine democracy in the party makes centralism arbitrary and despotic. Similarly, in a party where centralism is weak, it is not democracy but

liberalism which has free rein.

Thus we see that democratic centralism is an integral whole. Open discussion and criticism prevent centralism from degenerating and becoming unprincipled. Centralism based on Leninism prevents discussion from becoming empty chatter.

To say that "What Lenin said is true, but these cannot be applied under 'illegal conditions'", is to distort Lenin to suit one's own arbitrary wishes. The essence of Lenin's words remains valid under even the most illegal conditions.

## Democratic centralism and discipline

The January 1977 issue of *Atılım* carried the following quotation from Lenin:

"In regard to principle, we have outlined our views on the importance and the meaning of discipline in the workers' party many times. Unity of action, freedom of discussion and criticism — this is our definition. It is only such discipline that suits the democratic party of the advanced class. The strength of the working class is in its organisation. Without organisation, the proletarian mass is nothing. If it is organised, it is everything. Organisation means unity of action, to act together in practice."<sup>(10)</sup>

As is understood from this passage, discipline is not only an element of centralism. It is also an element of democracy. In short, it is the product of democratic centralism. In other words, discipline demands open



criticism of opportunist errors as much as conformity with decisions in regard to activity.

Lenin wrote *One Step Forward, Two Steps Back* and *Two Tactics* to criticise the opportunist leadership, to expose the errors of the Mensheviks. This is Leninist discipline.

Lenin wrote the following:

"...the iron discipline needed for the victory of the proletariat... how is it tested? How is it reinforced? First, by the class-consciousness of the proletarian vanguard and by its devotion to the revolution, by its tenacity, self-sacrifice and heroism. Second, by its ability to link up, maintain the closest contact, and – if you wish – merge, in certain measure, with the broadest masses of the working people – primarily with the proletariat, but also with the non-proletarian masses of working people. Third, by the correctness of the political leadership exercised by this vanguard, by the correctness of its political strategy and tactics, provided the broad masses have seen, from their own experience, that they are correct. Without these conditions, discipline in a revolutionary party really capable of being the party of the advanced class, whose mission it is to overthrow the bourgeoisie and transform the whole of society, cannot be achieved. Without these conditions, all attempts to establish discipline inevitably fall flat and end up in phrase-mongering and clowning. On the other hand, these conditions cannot emerge at once. They are created only by prolonged effort and

hard-won experience. Their creation is facilitated by a correct revolutionary theory..."(11)

Lenin always considers the question of discipline in connection with the correct consciousness, ties with the masses and the correct politics. The Leninist understanding of discipline does not impede the dynamics of the process whereby truths are put before the masses.

The communist party secures acceptance of its leadership first and foremost by the correct policy which it pursues. The political stand of the party on all matters must be open. There is no place for obscurity, confusion of concepts or a tailist policy. In any case, a tailist movement resembles a man without character. No one follows such a person in difficult times. The masses, the working people, want to see the leadership of the communist party concretely. If the communist party's policy is incorrect, that party cannot establish ties with the working masses.

On the other hand, a party which has become isolated from the masses loses its class consciousness and revolutionary determination. Discipline which is not based on class consciousness results in a show similar to that put on by a man who does up the buttons of his jacket in front of a superior. Personal wrangles and petty schemes take the place of general interests.

Leninist discipline is a means of putting into practice revolutionary principles and theory. It does not create principles for its own sake.

Lenin defines indiscipline as follows:

"...In the view of the Central Committee, it is essential to give all party members the widest possible freedom to criticise the central bodies and to attack them; the Central Committee sees nothing terrible in

such attacks, provided they are not accompanied by a boycott, by standing aloof from positive work or by cutting off financial resources.”<sup>(12)</sup>

For opportunists, “discipline” is either a great burden (if they are not the ones imposing it) or a screen to conceal the truth, depending on the place and the time. And such an understanding of “discipline” resorts to all types of methods. Banning the reading of a book if one is unable to give an ideological answer to the questions it poses. Applying moral and other pressures against anyone who has read the book and declares it to be correct, etc... The logic of opportunist discipline is, “I don’t like your views, so I’ll punish you”. There is no concern for right or wrong. This kind of discipline turns the party into a piece of private property. The struggle against this is an obligatory task of Leninist discipline.

It is necessary to be vigilant against bureaucratic centralism. Opportunists identify discipline with centralism, reducing discipline to vulgar centralism and thus robbing it of its ideological essence.

The best example of the opportunist understanding of discipline is Martov. Before the Second Congress of the RSDLP, which took place in 1903 as the result of Lenin’s efforts to establish a party, he writes, “Factionalism cannot be permitted in a united party”.<sup>(13)</sup> Remaining in the minority after the congress, Martov begins to attack centralism and the central organs, the personal composition of which he dislikes. He accuses Lenin of being bureaucratic and autocratic and begins to defend factionalism.

A more interesting example. When the Mensheviks seized the party leadership, they did not stop at preventing open criticism, but censored Lenin’s articles and banned his books (for example, *One Step Forward, Two Steps*

Back). With the July 1904 declaration they took the decision that Lenin's articles must henceforth be approved by the Central Committee. They refused to publish his articles in *Iskra*. Lenin and the Bolsheviks behaved in a diametrically opposite manner.

The open struggle of ideas in the party both safeguards the purity of revolutionary theory and ensures that unity of action is on the correct basis. Since the Bolsheviks maintained this safeguard to the end, they were able to defeat all opportunist views and lead the revolution to victory. Such is Bolshevik iron discipline.

## Leninist discipline

It is not necessary to talk at length about what is meant by party discipline. Lenin is the example. On this question too, there is a clear line of demarcation between Bolshevism and Menshevism.

The year is 1906. The bourgeois-democratic revolution has lost its initial fire and there is retreat towards the years of reaction. The RSDLP has held its Fourth Congress and the Mensheviks have taken the leadership. A life-and-death struggle is raging inside the party.

Under these conditions the RSDLP Central Committee issues the following declaration:

“In view of that fact that several Party organisations have raised the question of the limits within which the decisions of Party congresses may be criticised, the Central Committee, bearing in mind that the interests of the Russian proletariat have always demanded the greatest possible

unity in the tactics of the RSDLP, and that **this unity in the political activities of the various sections of our Party is now more necessary than ever, is of the opinion:**

**“1. that in the Party press and at Party meetings, everybody must be allowed full freedom to express his personal opinions and to advocate his individual views;**

**“2. that at public political meetings members of the Party should refrain from conducting agitation that runs counter to congress decisions;**

**“3. that no Party member should at such meetings call for action that runs counter to congress decisions, or propose resolutions that are out of harmony with congress decisions.”<sup>(14)</sup>**

The decision of the Menshevik Central Committee is clear: to emasculate and stifle criticism. To accuse those who make criticisms of indiscipline that disrupts unity of action and of selling out the party.

Lenin opposes these resolutions and stresses that, before issuing a statement of such importance, a wide-ranging discussion ought to take place both in the party press and within the party itself, that everyone must express their views on the matter. Providing a thorough exposure of the opportunists' understanding of organisation, Lenin criticises them as follows:

**“In examining the substance of this resolution, we see a number of queer points. The resolution says that ‘at Party meetings’ ‘full freedom’ is to be allowed for the expression of personal opinions and for**

criticism (article 1). but at 'public meetings' (article 2) 'no Party member should call for action that runs counter to congress decisions'. But see what comes of this: at Party meetings, members of the Party have the right to call for action that runs counter to congress decisions; but at public meetings they are not 'allowed' full freedom to 'express personal opinions'!!

"Those who drafted the resolution have a totally wrong conception of the relationship between freedom to criticise within the Party and the Party's unity of action. Criticism within the limits of the principles of the Party Programme must be quite free..., not only at Party meetings, but also at public meetings. Such criticism, or such 'agitation' (for criticism is inseparable from agitation) cannot be prohibited. The Party's political action must be united. No 'calls' that violate the unity of definite actions can be tolerated either at public meetings, or at Party meetings, or in the Party press.

"Obviously, the Central Committee has defined freedom to criticise inaccurately and too narrowly, and unity of action inaccurately and too broadly.

"Let us take an example. The Congress decided that the Party should take part in the Duma elections. Taking part in elections is a very definite action. During the elections (as in Baku today, for example), no member of the Party anywhere has any

right whatever to call upon the people to abstain from voting; nor can 'criticism' of the decision to take part in the elections be tolerated during this period, for it would in fact jeopardise success in the election campaign. Before elections have been announced, however, Party members everywhere have a perfect right to criticise the decision to take part in elections. Of course, the application of this principle in practice will sometimes give rise to disputes and misunderstandings; but only on the basis of this principle can all disputes and all misunderstandings be settled honourably for the Party. The resolution of the Central Committee, however, creates an impossible situation.

"The Central Committee's resolution is essential wrong and runs counter to the Party Rules. The principle of democratic centralism and autonomy for local Party organisations implies universal and full freedom to criticise, so long as this does not disturb the unity of a definite action; it rules out all criticism which disrupts or makes difficult the unity of an action decided on by the Party." (15)

This example from Lenin is clear enough to preclude any distortion. Thus Lenin documents that it is not indisciplined to defend openly views which do not contradict firstly, the party programme, secondly a decision in regard to activity at a specified date, time and place. This document closes the door to the word-of-mouth interpretation of the concept of "unity of action" as the "policy which

lays the basis for unity of action". It reminds once again that principled attitudes should not be distorted. We also remind.



## II. Unity of action

What is the meaning of the Leninist concept of "unity of action"? Let us try to explain this further.

Before entering into an activity, the leadership of the party should listen to the views of the rank-and-file to determine its policy. Until a decision is made, every militant has the right, as much as conditions permit, to enter into discussion, contribute to the decision making and bring any criticism he may have. Once a decision is taken, everyone is duty-bound to work for its full implementation until the action is completed. It is both a right and a duty for a member to repeat his criticism once the action is over, if he is still not persuaded as to the correctness of the decision.

For example, let us assume that the congress of a democratic mass organisation is approaching. The determination of the policy to be applied in the congress must be open to contributions from all militants in so far as illegal conditions permit.

Let us assume that the decision has been taken in spite of criticism from some comrades and that the

decision has bound the militants to an unprincipled policy in the congress and required them to follow the lead of petty-bourgeois socialists who have no base such as TIP (the Workers' Party of Turkey). The militants were unable to establish any political influence at the congress due to the desire to appear agreeable to the Republican Peoples' Party. In the end, the congress was lost as a result of the mistaken policy on alliances and unprincipled attitude adopted beforehand.

During the implementation of this decision, no militant can make any criticism detrimental to unity of action, either in the meeting of his party organisation or cell, or outside the party. He cannot say, "Let us not collaborate with a handful of TIP members". He exerts every effort to carry out the decision. However, once the congress is over and the concrete action has come to an end, it is his right and duty to call attention to and criticise the error of this decision, even in the event that the congress was won.

Those comrades who argued against the decision at the beginning cannot be accused of indiscipline if they once again criticise and stress the error of the decision. Open criticism before the taking of a decision and after the completion of a certain activity cannot be muffled by sophistry in regard to unity of action. Those comrades cannot be accused of indiscipline. Such an attitude hinders the development of the party.

The party leadership is obliged to answer criticisms on a Marxist-Leninist basis.

Let us give another example. Let us assume that the Central Committee decided to establish defence committees for protection against fascist attacks. This decision was also supported by the rank-and-file. But after a while, some leading comrades left aside the implementation of this decision and began attacking those who defended it as adventurists and leftists. Now the Central Committee took a decision. This means it is obliged to put it into practice.

To do the opposite and to accuse those who defend its implementation of adventurism, means to disrupt unity of action. It means arbitrary leadership that makes discipline a crime.

### **III. Open ideological struggle is the sole guarantee of ideological and organisational unity**

Open political and ideological struggle within the party is one of the fundamental elements of the Leninist approach to organisation. It is a party norm which must be protected like the apple of one's eye. Party unity can be assured only with this principle.

#### **What do we understand by unity ?**

For revolutionary struggles, for the victory of the working class, the proletariat must establish its ideological unity based on the principles of Marxism-Leninism and consolidated in concrete organisational unity. For this, open ideological struggle is necessary. Lenin applied this principle throughout his life. As early as 1900, he says the following in his struggle against the "Economists":

**"Without struggle there cannot be a sorting out, and without a sorting out there cannot**

be any successful advance, nor can there be any lasting unity.

“...an open, frank struggle is one of the essential conditions for restoring unity.

“Yes, restoring! The kind of ‘unity’ that makes us conceal ‘Economic’ documents from our comrades like a secret disease, that makes us resent the publication of statements revealing what views are being propagated under a social-democratic cover — such ‘unity’ is not worth a brass farthing, such ‘unity’ is sheer cant, it only aggravates the disease and makes it assume a chronic, malignant form. That an open, frank and honest struggle will cure this disease and create a really united, vigorous and strong Social-Democratic movement (Communist —C.S.) — I do not for a moment doubt.”(16)

Unity cannot be achieved without clearly separating the wheat from the chaff, without disclosing and discussing differences. Because if differences of opinion arising on small points are not discussed and channeled in the right direction, if they are ignored and allowed to grow, at the end “unity” disappears altogether. Independent groups spring up which are harmful and destructive wherever they may be, whether among the rank-and-file or in the leadership.

Most importantly, if tailism is being conducted in the name of Leninism, it is the duty of every communist to expose it. To oppose and get angry at this exposure, raising an outcry about disrupting “unity”, reflects lack of principle. This type of unity is unity made of sand that will dissolve altogether. Such unity has nothing to do with discipline. The ideological and organisational unity of the

party cannot be ensured by lifeless mechanical methods and discipline without content.

Discipline rises on the basis of the ideological and organisational unity of the party, and at the same time is a means of maintaining and consolidating this basis. To limit the open discussion of ideas in the name of party unity or "discipline" tends to separate organisation from ideology, to cut off its life-blood. In the end, it swallows both organisational unity and unity of action. It is not the open struggle of ideas that undermines the effectiveness of the party, but leaving it to drown in its own mistakes, blocking the channels to correct them. It is the duty of every militant to open these channels, to sweep away all obstacles and discover what is correct. The Bolsheviks did this and, in the process, purged the organisation of opportunism.

Lenin not only applied these principles himself, but at the same time struggled for their application in the world communist movement as a whole. Abandoning the content of the principle of democratic centralism, the application of an empty discipline and the banning of discussion, lead to the emergence of factions within the party and damage party unity. Lenin proposes the following measure against this danger:

"What is it that needs to be done for a rapid and certain cure? All members of the Party must make a calm and painstaking study of 1) the essence of the disagreements and 2) the development of the Party struggle. A study must be made of both, because the essence of the disagreements is revealed, clarified and specified (and very often transformed as well) ... A study must be made of both, and a demand made for the most exact, printed documents that can

be thoroughly verified. Only a hopeless idiot will believe oral statements. If no documents are available, there must be an examination of witnesses on both or several sides and the grilling must take place in the presence of witnesses.”<sup>(17)</sup>

Lenin poses the problem as clearly as this. All party members have the right to learn about the struggle within the party. A party member is obliged to learn the minutest details, to acquire a thorough knowledge of the differences of opinions and to express his views on these matters. Otherwise, he is using his party membership for nothing, has no relation with the party whatsoever.

These stipulations have not changed today. It is empty day-dreaming to think that the class struggle remains outside the communist party today, that it is not reflected in the party. It is naive to say that “the leaders know”, and to approach everything with one’s eyes shut. At the time of Lenin too, the party of the working class of Russia was the RSDLP. Parties known in the whole world as those of the working class, were the social-democratic parties affiliated to the Second International. Thus, Bolshevism was “revolutionary Marxism” born in the struggle against opportunism within the international social-democratic movement. The task of Leninist revolutionaries is to follow Lenin’s example and wage an uncompromising struggle against opportunist views that appear in the movement. Failure to do this means failure to fulfil communist responsibility towards the working class. Lenin always defended the same principles in the inner-party struggle, whether he was in the minority or in the leadership. Contrary to the lies being circulated, after the revolution Lenin and Stalin encouraged the widest possible open ideological discussion within the party, and first theoretically defeated the wrong ideas that appeared.

The open struggle waged against opportunism within

the party before the revolution led the working class to revolution; after the revolution, it led socialism to victory in the Soviet Union. It is impossible to silence opportunism without open ideological struggle. To remain silent against opportunism means, in the Leninist sense of discipline, indiscipline.

Let us go back in time again. In 1904 there was a revolutionary situation in Russia. The Mensheviks pulled the party back and tied it to the tail of the bourgeoisie. In this situation, the Bolshevik organisations issued an appeal to all party organisations emphasising that the party must gather its forces:

“A united Party organisation, a consistent revolutionary Marxist line, decent and dignified bounds to the internal struggle in the Party so as to prevent its becoming disruptive and hampering positive work — these are urgent demands of the entire working-class movement of Russia...

“The first step towards this end, in our opinion, is to establish the fullest clarity, frankness, and outspokenness in the relations between the various groups, trends, and shades in our Party.”<sup>(18)</sup>

When an incorrect ideological tendency emerges, it is necessary to wage an open struggle against it. Even if it tries to hide its true colours, it is essential to pull off its mask and expose it. If it is a seed, it must be crushed while it is still only a seed. There can be no ideological struggle behind closed doors, only quarrels over positions and slander. This type of activity demoralises the militants and the masses, and undermines the influence of the party. It discourages the masses from action. The ties between the party and the masses begin to dissolve.



Let us proceed. Upon the further ripening of the revolutionary situation in Russia, and the deterioration of the position of the party, the Bolsheviks called for a congress.

The Mensheviks took notice of neither the congress nor the appeal. They "raised the banner of 'revolt against Leninism'" (19) Lenin says the following about this revolt:

"A revolt is a splendid thing when it is the advanced elements who revolt against the reactionary elements. When the revolutionary wing revolts against the opportunist wing, it is a good thing. When the opportunist wing revolts against the revolutionary wing, it is a bad business." (20)

Upon the Mensheviks' seizure of the party leadership through various plots, and their attempt to take over ideological leadership as well, a revolutionary worker wrote a letter to Lenin emphasising that it is a revolutionary duty to rise up against opportunism:

"Could the opportunists be allowed to predominate in the ideological leadership? What would we ... do if that happened, would we have to agree with it? No, it would be our duty to take away its right to predominate and give that right to a different body; and if that were not done for any reason, whether a sense of Party discipline or anything else, we would all deserve to be called traitors to the Social-Democratic workers' movement." (21)

Clearly, it is not indiscipline to fight for the protection of the correct ideology. It is a right.

The Bolsheviks practiced this right to the end; they did not give in to the Mensheviks. They persistently defended the decisions of the Second Congress and fought for the predominance of the party spirit. They waged a constant struggle against cliques. For what led to cliques was the anti-Marxist opportunist views of the Mensheviks. It is obligatory to fight against and expose opportunist views under all conditions. It would be pure stupidity today to think that, just because a party defends Leninism in its programme and everything else, its leaders could absolutely never become renegades. It would mean forgetting renegades like Kautsky and Plekhanov. For example, let us suppose that a cadre which claims to defend Leninism took over the party leadership and then began to rule the party like a family farm. It started to place the cadres, not according to their ability, experience and devotion to the party, but according to relations of favouritism and parasitism. It trampled upon the party rules, expelling and admitting to the party whomever it wished. What would happen in such a situation? Who will speak for the party? The concept of the party militant does not refer to someone who only runs from one action to another and leaves the thinking to his leader. Opposition to such a leader in the name of the party is a Leninist duty, an obligation of revolutionary discipline. Because what determines discipline is correct consciousness.

Let us return again to the history of the RSDLP. Opposing the plots hatched after the Second Congress, Lenin resigned from the central organ. As a representative of the Central Committee, he gave the following warning to the editorial board of the *New Iskra* (Menshevik):

“As the representative of the CC, I consider it necessary to point out to the editors that there are absolutely no grounds for raising the question of lawfulness, etc., on the

basis of heated speeches at lectures or on the basis of literary polemics... If the editorial board sees these polemics as attacks upon itself, it has every opportunity of replying. It is hardly reasonable to resent what the editorial board regards as sharply worded statements in the polemic, when no mention is made anywhere of boycott or any other disloyal (from the viewpoint of the CC) form of activity. We would remind the editorial board that the CC has repeatedly expressed its full readiness to publish, and made a direct proposal to publish, immediately both Dan's letter and Martov's 'Once Again in the Minority', without being at all put out by the very sharp attacks to be found in these documents." (22)

From these words of Lenin, we draw lessons in regard to both open discussion and discipline.

In its central organ *Atılım*, the TKP also emphasised the importance of the ideological struggle with the following quotation:

"Lenin says that, 'We must ensure that the Congress decisions are discussed on the widest possible scale. We must demand from every party member a conscious and critical attitude towards these decisions. We must ensure that working class organisations openly declare whether or not they support this or that decision. If we are resolved to apply democratic centralism genuinely and seriously, and to draw the working masses into conscious resolution

of party problems, we must conduct this discussion in the press, in meetings, in associations and groups.' (Collected Works, Russian edition, Vol.13, p.64)<sup>(23)</sup>  
(Our translation from the Russian and our emphasis)

Open ideological and political struggle ensures the vitality of the party, its development and consolidation on the correct path and the correct policy. It ensures the elimination and correction of mistakes and the development of correct methods.

## Conspiracy and open discussion

The operation of the party under even the most secretive conditions does not contradict the principle of open struggle. No one can say that Lenin and the Bolsheviks worked under legal conditions. Such an assertion would be ridiculous. An organisation where all problems are openly discussed, where there is a wide-ranging struggle of ideas, and the reasons for mistakes are carefully examined, is a living organisation. Such an organisation is strong. A party ready to accept its mistakes cannot be broken. If all problems are not discussed openly, if it is said that this would undermine conspiracy, then how will the mistakes be brought out? How will these mistakes be overcome and the party be strengthened? Without openness, the conspiratorial logic cannot be defeated.

Lenin said that conspiracy must not be allowed to degrade the political struggle.<sup>(24)</sup> The conspiratorial logic reduces everything, the inner-party struggle, the class struggle, the concepts of the front and unity of action, to a conspiracy. It always makes secret calculations, draws up

plans and lays traps. These calculations and traps include portraying the open and honourable inner-party struggle as indisciplined and divisive. They aim at gagging open criticism.

It must be the duty of the party organisation to stimulate constructive criticism, to take seriously all observations meant to correct and eradicate mistakes. It is against the party spirit to cover up or fail to heed criticisms. Whatever the motives may be, this leads the party to ruin.

Lenin says, "All the revolutionary parties that have perished so far, perished because they became conceited, because they failed to see the source of their strength and feared to discuss their weaknesses. We, however, shall not perish, because we are not afraid to discuss our weaknesses and will learn to overcome them."<sup>(25)</sup>

The attitude of a revolutionary party towards its mistakes is the main criterion of its maturity and understanding of its tasks.

"A political party's attitude towards its own mistakes is one of the most important and surest ways of judging how earnest the party is and how it fulfils in practice its obligations towards its class and the working people. Frankly acknowledging a mistake, ascertaining the reasons for it, analysing the conditions that have led up to it, and thrashing out the means of its rectification — that is the hallmark of a serious party; that is how it should perform its duties, and how it should educate and train its class, and then the masses."<sup>(26)</sup>

The exposing and discussing of errors down to the smallest detail can take place only if the inner-party struggle is not obstructed. The party can develop itself

only in this manner, can only in this way purify itself and become a strong unity composed of active elements. The closing and consolidation of the ranks can be achieved only in this manner. This is how the party wins the trust of the masses and fulfils its vanguard role in society.

## Communist morality

Lenin always defended political morality and honesty and never compromised on this subject. In contrast, the opportunists always resorted to deception as conformed with their nature. Morality is essential in inner-party struggle. Slander, talking behind backs and mud-slinging do not lead to anything except gossip.

“Wednesday was the third day of the League Congress. Martov yelled hysterically about ‘the blood of the old editorial board’ (Plekhanov’s expression) being upon us, and that on the part of Lenin there was something in the nature of intrigue at the Congress, etc. I calmly challenged him in writing (by a statement to the bureau of the Congress) to make his accusations against me **openly** before the whole Party; I would undertake to publish **everything**. Otherwise, I said, it was mere Skandalsucht. Martov, of course, ‘nobly withdrew’, demanding (as he still does) a court of arbitration; I continued to demand that he should have the courage to make his accusations **openly**, otherwise I would ignore it all as pitiful tittle-tattle.”<sup>(27)</sup>

As practiced by the Menshevik Martov, slanders and hiding from the masses only show the ideological weakness of those responsible. It shows also that they are capable of any immoral behaviour. There is an interesting and educational event in the history of the RSDLP which is even more enlightening on this subject. After the Mensheviks were coopted to the central organ in July 1904 with the help of Plekhanov, three conciliatory members of the Central Committee also got together to take some decisions. They "invited" neither Lenin (Lenin was at the time a member of the CC) nor Osipov, the other member of the CC who could take part in the meeting. They spread the rumour that the latter had resigned. Their aims were clear, to sell the party to the Mensheviks. In their decisions, they recognised the legitimacy of the Iskra editorial board coopted by Plekhanov, and coopted three new conciliatory members to the Central Committee.

The conciliators opposed the Third Congress that was called to discuss the position into which the party had fallen. It was clear that if the Congress was convened, the wrongs they had committed would mean the loss of their seats. They decided to dissolve the Central Committee's Southern Bureau which was agitating for the convening of the congress. They withdrew Lenin's right to represent the Central Committee abroad and prohibited him from publishing his articles without the permission of the Central Committee Collegium, imposing censorship. They prohibited the publication of *One Step Forward, Two Steps Back*.

In contrast to this arbitrary leadership, the attitude of Lenin was principled and honest. He defended the view that neither he nor the conciliatory CC members who had organised all these, could represent the Central Committee until the matter of Osipov's membership of the Central Committee had been clarified. He issued this call for an

honest struggle:

“Let us train the Party to discuss its internal disagreements in an honest and dignified way.”(28)

## Open discussion in the press

Lenin ascribed great importance to open discussion and open criticism of ideas and views which did not focus on personalities and to their open publication. He showed great care in using party publications in this manner. For the sincere, frank and free exchange of ideas leads to the correct solution of problems that arise. The central organ must be open to communists to freely express their views and engage in openly, comradely polemics with each other. Defending the open publication of differing ideas on a Marxist basis and in full view, Lenin said, “Indeed, we regard one of the drawbacks of the present day movement to be the absence of open polemics between avowedly differing views, the effort to conceal differences on fundamental questions.”(29)

The central organ and other publications must be organs of discussion. On this matter Lenin said:

“...we desire our publications to become organs for the discussion of all questions by all Russian Social-Democrats of the most diverse shades of opinion. We do not reject polemics between comrades, but, on the contrary, are prepared to give them considerable space in our columns. Open polemics, conducted in full view of all Russian Social-



Democrats and class-conscious workers, are necessary and desirable in order to clarify the depth of existing differences, in order to afford discussion of disputed questions from all angles..."<sup>(30)</sup>

It is clear here that communists must accord space in their publications to the views of their comrades, that the press must be a platform for discussion. Differing views bring liveliness to the press. Lenin always defended, practiced and insisted on this view. The CPSU has always maintained this principle and continues to do so. The example we gave above is proof of this.

The tone of discussions may be, and often is, sharp and angry. For we are talking here about genuine discussion. At the same time, the ideas under discussion must be put forward openly and in a clear manner. We should not have to search between the lines to understand what is being said. Everything must be concrete. Comrade Temel Bartinli explained this very well in *Iscinin Sesi*:

"In a letter to the Central Committee of the Russian Social-Democratic Labour Party on the question of the language used in revolutionary newspapers, Lenin expressed the importance he ascribed to such a spirit: 'There is something fresh in the tone and character of the exposition', he said, 'A splendid fighting spirit.'" (Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol.36, p.149)

"Lenin always defended the use of a sharp and angry tone from the point of view that it imparts liveliness to the press. He expressed his views on this matter in a letter to the editor of *Pravda*: 'Since when has an angry tone against what is bad,

harmful, untrue harmed a daily newspaper? On the contrary, colleagues, really and truly on the contrary. To write without "anger" of what is harmful means to write boringly." (Lenin, Collected Works, Vol.35, p.47)

"The necessity for the politics and tone of the newspaper to be open was something that Lenin always insisted upon." (31)

Let us show the principled position which Lenin adopted on this question as on all others with another example.

The following was the Leninist position towards the Mensheviks who, unhappy with the results of the Second Congress, refused to recognise the central bodies, and towards Martov's refusal to take part in the editorial board of the central organ:

"Dissatisfaction with the personal composition of the central bodies, whether due to personal resentment or to differences of opinion which particular Party members may consider serious, cannot and must not lead to disloyal actions. If, in the opinion of any person, the central bodies are committing mistakes, it is his duty as a Party member to point to these mistakes in the full view of the entire Party membership, and above all, to point them out to the central bodies themselves." (32)

Lenin wrote a letter to Martov calling on him to join the editorial board once again:

"If, however, your withdrawal is due to any divergence between your views and

ours, we would consider a detailed exposition of such differences extremely useful in the interest of the Party. Moreover, we would consider it highly desirable that the nature and extent of these differences should be made clear to the whole Party as soon as possible through the pages of the publications edited by us.

“...we are ready to co-opt you as a member of the editorial board of the Central Organ so as to give you every opportunity to officially state and defend all your views in the highest Party institution.”<sup>(33)</sup>

Lenin relates the development of events as follows:

“The new editorial board...invited all the former editors to contribute, which invitation, of course, was at first made without any ‘formalism’, by word of mouth. It met with a refusal. We then wrote an ‘official document’ (what bureaucrats!), addressed ‘dear comrades’, requesting them to contribute in general, and in particular to set forth their differences in the columns of the publications of which we were the editors. The reply was a ‘formal’ statement to the effect that they did not wish to have anything to do with *Iskra*. And, in fact, for months on end none of the non-editors did any work for *Iskra*. Relations became exclusively formal and bureaucratic — but on whose ‘initiative?’”<sup>(34)</sup>

Rejecting Lenin’s proposals, Martov demanded that

the decisions of the congress be repudiated and that the other three Mensheviks who had been members of the editorial board before the congress be reinstated to the central organ. In the end, when Plekhanov went back on his word and complied with these demands, Lenin was left with no choice but, acting in a principled and honourable manner, to resign from the central organ.

Lenin opposed and fought against those who rejected these principles and censored all views other than their own.

Later, when the Mensheviks had seized the central organ, they tried to obstruct an open ideological struggle and refused to publish articles by Lenin. At this point, when censorship was imposed on the open publication and discussion of ideas, the Bolsheviks established their own publishing houses. This was not indiscipline but the practice of the right to ideological struggle which had been withdrawn. For the columns of the *New Iskra* were closed to the Bolsheviks. This was how the Mensheviks understood discussion of ideas. Their approach was either to censor views they did not like or, when this failed, to punish those who published "without my permission". This demonstrates lack of principles. Lenin writes the following:

"As you may already know from our Party literature, the new Central Committee simply ejected our pamphlets (and even the covers of pamphlets already set up) from the Party printing office, thus turning the latter into the printing office of a circle... We found ourselves faced unavoidably with the necessity of expanding our publishing activities and setting up our own transport arrangements. ... In starting this organ, which will probably be called *Vperyod*, we

are acting in full agreement with the mass of the Bolsheviks in Russia, and in full harmony with our conduct in the Party struggle. We are resorting to this weapon after a whole year spent in trying every, absolutely every way that is simpler, more economical for the Party, more perfectly in accordance with the interests of the working-class movement. We are by no means abandoning the struggle for a congress..."(35)

It is a basic principle that the communist press must be a platform for open discussion.

## Discussion in front of the masses

The disguised forms of the inner-party struggle have a demoralising effect. The mass party, the party of a class is responsible to that class. It must be open with it.

Lenin gave this warning to Swiss communists:

"Nor can we avoid hard struggle within the party. It would be sheer make-believe, hypocrisy, philistine 'head-in-the-sand' policy to imagine that 'internal peace' can rule within the Swiss Social-Democratic Party. The choice is not between "internal peace" and 'inner party struggle'. ...

"...The real choice is this: either the present concealed forms of inner-party struggle, with their demoralising effect on the masses, or open principled struggle between the internationalist revolutionary trend and the Grutli trend inside and

outside the party.

“...the Grutli trend ... will be forced openly to combat the Left, while both trends will everywhere come out with their own independent views and policies, will fight each other on matters of principle, allowing the mass of party comrades, and not merely the ‘leaders’, to settle fundamental issues — such a struggle is both necessary and useful, for it trains in the masses independence and ability to carry out their epoch-making revolutionary mission.”<sup>(36)</sup>

It is the duty of every militant to express his thoughts and participate in the taking of decisions on matters of principle and in the discussion of principles. At the same time, as Lenin showed, the Party leadership must open these discussions to the rank-and-file, taking great care that they are presented correctly.

The frank and principled struggle must be open to the broad rank-and-file both within and outside the party. The discussion must be open not only to party members, but to the working class and working people as well. To hide the struggle from the masses means to hide the party. It is pure naivety to fear the discussion of ideas among the masses and to think that the latter will say, “These people are not working, they are bickering”. A secret undercover struggle demoralises the masses. It is even more harmful if the struggle is conducted in such a way in order to preserve internal peace. This is to blunt the revolutionary abilities of the militants and the masses. Lenin says that “all dirty linen” must be washed in full view of public opinion. To those who may try to take advantage of the open inner-party struggle and rejoice that “They have split”, Lenin says the following:

“No, gentlemen ‘judges’, we do not envy you your formal right to rejoice at the sharp struggle and splits within the ranks of Social-Democracy. No doubt, there is much in this struggle that is to be deplored. Without a doubt, there is much in these splits that is disastrous to the cause of socialism. Nevertheless, not for a single minute would we care to barter this heavy truth for your ‘light’ lie. Our Party’s serious illness is the growing pains of a mass party. For there can be no mass party, no party of a class, without full clarity of essential shadings, without an open struggle between various tendencies, without informing the masses as to which leaders and which organisations of the Party are pursuing this or that line. Without this, a party worthy of the name cannot be built, and we are building it. We have succeeded in putting the views of our two currents truthfully, clearly and distinctly before everyone. Personal bitterness, factional squabbles and strife, scandals and splits – all these are trivial in comparison with the fact that the experience of two tactics is actually teaching a lesson to the proletarian masses...”(37)

The masses and the party militants must know what the party leaders and party organisations say, what they think and which trend they defend. Otherwise, Lenin says, the class party cannot become a mass party. How and when will this principle be applied if these views are not put forward but hidden under the cover of secrecy? This cannot be assured – and it is the duty of the party to

assure it — except by open discussion in front of the masses. The masses must know the views of their leaders and organisations.

One last point on the question of openness. After disclosing in detail his ideological and organisational differences with the Mensheviks, Lenin said, “We consider these differences important, but, given the opportunity fully to defend our views, the views of the old Iskra, we would not consider these differences of themselves to be a bar to working together in one Party”.<sup>(38)</sup> (Our emphasis) This attitude shows the great and principled value Lenin ascribed to open discussion within the party and in front of the masses. This is also the attitude of all Leninist communists!



## IV. An exercise

After this brief look at Lenin's teaching on party discipline, what if we now perform a little exercise using an imaginary example?

Let us imagine ourselves in a distant country, on paradise island. A party member with the requisite authority has written a book about the country. Can this be considered indiscipline? Under what conditions could it be so considered?

If the book comes out against the party programme, this is indiscipline. If it says for instance, that the concept of the dictatorship of the proletariat has lost its meaning, become obsolescent; if it proposes that the workers and the masses of the people do not like this concept and that we should replace it by the term, working class political power, this is indiscipline. It is distorting Leninism. If the book defends the party programme however, it cannot be a matter of indiscipline. It is indiscipline if the book conducts propaganda counter to a party decision on action at a definite time, date and place; for example, if it calls for a boycott of the approaching elections when the party

has taken a decision to participate in them.

Let us assume that the elections are approaching, but the party has not yet stated a definite position. Whatever the book proposes, this cannot be indiscipline. Nor is it indiscipline if, immediately after the elections, the book declares that the party's position was wrong.

Let us probe a little deeper into the contents of the book. If it says, for example, that, "Leninism is peculiar to Russia; it is not valid for paradise island", this is indiscipline. It is again indiscipline if the book's author comes out in opposition to the nationalisation of the banks as proposed in the programme.

It may be that a book does not contradict a decision on a certain action, the programme or the basic principles of Marxism-Leninism. It may not constitute indiscipline, but it is still wrong. For instance, let us assume that the book claims there is a revolutionary situation on paradise island; that this is an incorrect application of theory and that in fact there is no revolutionary situation. What is to be done? The matter is discussed in front of all party members, the working class and the masses. It is brought out into the open.

Now let us assume that the book does not contradict the programme, a decision on a specific action, or Marxism-Leninism. It says there is a revolutionary situation on paradise island and in fact there is. Indeed this view has been expressed in party documents. However, some comrades in the party leadership have changed their minds and now say there is no revolutionary situation. They are not fulfilling their duties. Instead they accuse the book's author of indiscipline, saying that the "book contradicts the party's policy which lays the basis for unity of action". They ban the book and spread ugly rumours about its author. Instead of initiating an open and honourable discussion, they fill the party central organ

with empty articles having an "ideological" appearance. They refuse to accord the same right to views that the book is correct. They use the party hierarchy and their authority in a biased way to create false impressions among the rank-and-file. Now who is being indisciplined? It is clear, very clear.

Let us approach from another angle. First, the methods used in the imaginary example we gave above accord with neither communist morality nor the Leninist understanding of discipline. They erode the honour of the party and demoralise the militants. Hindering open discussion by imposition from above is contrary to discipline in itself. But doing so against a book the content of which is correct, is contrary to Leninism. It is an indication of opportunism.

Secondly, it is every communist's duty to criticise if a party leadership says there is no revolutionary situation when there is, if it fails to fulfil its duties. Not to criticise would be indisciplined. The book is fulfilling a duty required by the party rules. Those who accuse it of indisciplined are themselves being indisciplined.

Bourgeois propaganda always tries to present Leninist methods as identical with Machiavellianism. This is wise propaganda from the point of view of the bourgeoisie, for Machiavellianism entails such unprincipled methods that it erodes even the correct principles of those who use it. It turns greater leaders on their heads. The bourgeoisie infects the workers' movement with this microbe in order that it may spread and cause disease.

Leninism has its own principled methods. We must embrace these methods which entail first and foremost openness — open criticism and open discussion. They are far removed from intrigues and manoeuvres. These methods of Leninism also include the way to find the truth and to correct mistakes. As Lenin said, "Publicity

is a sword that heals the wound it itself makes". Let us strap on our Leninist sword.

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### Chapter III

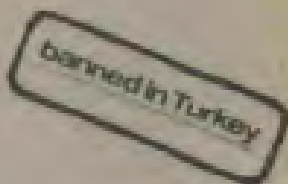
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R. Yürükoğlu

Introduction by William Pomeroy



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