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Labor and Liquidators: Revolutionaries and the “Reaction” in Baku, May 1908–April 1912

In the years after 1905, Social Democrats in Russia agonized over the form of struggle in which to engage. The defeats suffered in the revolution and the new legal possibilities offered after 1905 led to strains among the socialists and changed considerably the nature of their debates from the prerevolutionary years as each faction attempted to deal with the potential of a legal labor movement and the actuality of continued police repression. Paradoxically the years of “reaction” were also the seedbed of Russian trade unionism. Many Social Democrats, most notably the so-called *likvidatory* (“liquidators”), believed that the time had come to concentrate on the legal labor movement, to broaden its appeal and deepen its roots among the working class. Others, tied to the traditions of the underground party and the primacy of political work, opposed the new reliance on legal activity. All Social Democrats inside Russia were faced with the reality of economic depression, a decline in labor activism, and political repression. They faced together a strategic dilemma. The deeper they retreated into the underground, the more tenuous their ties with the workers became. Yet the more actively they engaged in trade unionist and other legal activities, the more vulnerable they were to police persecution.

Historians are in general agreement that in the years between the revolution of 1905–7 and the revival of the labor movement in 1912–14 Russian Social Democracy was in disarray. Not only were Bolsheviks and Mensheviks organized separately, but even within each faction there were conflicts and subgroups which threatened to divide further and weaken the Russian Marxist movement. Yet no systematic study of the impact of these divisions on the Russian labor movement itself has been attempted, though the disputes among leading Social Democrats, particularly those in the emigration, have been investigated. By concentrating on the indigenous labor movement in one locale, this article attempts to show the roots of these divisions, particularly *likvidatorstvo*, in worker discontent with past socialist practices, as well as to explain the socialists’ failure to create a legal, Western-style trade unionism. Such an analysis not only provides an explanation for the temporary eclipse of Bolshevism during the years of “reaction” but also offers some clues to its relative success after 1912.

Baku, the oil producing center of the Russian empire, had gained by 1908 a deserved reputation of labor militancy to complement its fame as an

exotic, untamed frontier town. Men of wealth were accompanied by bodyguards (*kochi*), and all, regardless of position, were asked to remove their guns before entering the post office.¹ In such an atmosphere it was strange indeed that some industrialists and labor leaders were interested in establishing legal, Western-style trade unions. The alternative to legality, however, was the constant escalation of even minor strikes into violent outbursts with revolutionary overtones. The memories of arson in the oil fields and political assassinations were still fresh in the minds of the managers.²

Russian oil entered hard times in 1908. Although surpassed as the world's largest oil producer by the United States in 1902, Russia had continued to benefit from the general rise in world demand for oil through 1907. Then the American financial crisis of the fall led to an extended depression in European heavy industry (1908–9). Oil prices began to sink rapidly by 1909 and continued to fall until 1912.³ Russia's exports suffered from the fierce competition of Standard Oil, the European Oil Union, and Shell, who in 1910–11 deliberately lowered prices in an effort to drive Russia out of the market. The older, less efficient Russian companies could not keep up with the productivity of the more advanced Western firms or the newer entrants into the field, like Rumania. Russian output fell each year (except 1910). Even in a peak year (1910) Russia produced only one-third what the United States produced.⁴ By 1914 Baku's production was only a little more than half what it had been in 1901.⁵

The decline in oil prices and contraction of oil production had a devastating effect on Baku's workers and their trade unions. Unemployment rose. In 1908, 5,502 workers were laid off; the next year the figure rose to over

1. K. Zakharova-Tsederbaum, "V gody reaktsii," *Katorga i ssylka*, 1929, no. 11(60), p. 76.

2. The organ of the Baku oil industrialists, *Neftianoe delo* (*Oil Business*), reflected the liberalism of at least some of the oil men when in January 1908 a writer flatly asserted: "That trade unions can play a great role in lessening the tensions between labor and capital, that the trade union movement is a powerful regulating factor in the struggle of labor with capital, and that it is one of the positive sides of the modern workers' movement, we do not doubt, and it is not necessary to prove this to anyone" (*Neftianoe delo*, 10, no. 1 [Jan. 15, 1908], p. 8). The writer's only regret was that in Baku trade unions included only 10 percent of the workers and therefore could not be considered the legitimate spokesmen of the working class as a whole. Barely five months after these liberal sentiments were expressed, Baku oil men revealed a harsher policy toward workers, which was to characterize the difficult postrevolutionary years.

3. P. A. Daniel-Bek, *Russkii neftianoi eksport i mirovoi rynok v period s 1904 po 1911 g.*: *Ekonomicheskii etiud*, ed. P. B. Struve (Petrograd, 1916), p. 89.

4. M. I. Ushakov, *Neftianaia promyshlennost' v Rossii* (St. Petersburg, 1912), p. 198.

5. G. A. Arutiunov, *Rabochee dvizhenie v Zakavkaz'e v period novogo revoliutsionnogo pod'ema (1910–1914 gy.)* (Moscow and Baku, 1963), p. 47.

7,600.⁶ Threatened with the loss of their livelihood, workers lost leverage vis-à-vis management. Strikes continued (in 1908, 368,718 worker-days were lost in strikes), but they were far fewer in number than in the preceding three years, and most of them ended in defeat for the workers.⁷ The factory committees, elected by workers since 1905, lost what authority they had built up. Management simply refused to recognize them as bargaining agents. Trade unions saw their membership dwindle until the ones that had had thousands of adherents counted only several hundred. Unemployed workers often left the city and returned to their villages rather than starve in the grimy streets of Baku.

Gains that the workers had made in the preceding five years were threatened. The new economic pressures on the industry destroyed the nascent liberalism of the industrialists, who now imposed new fines on workers for infractions of petty rules. Workers were forced to work overtime or at night under threat of being fired. The work day was lengthened in some plants by changing from three shifts (of eight hours) to two (of twelve hours). The Caspian Company, in order to avoid paying rent allowances, prohibited its workers from marrying without the company's permission.⁸ Wages were lowered in some factories, and pressure was put on workers to leave the unions. Repression was greatest against the more skilled workers, particularly those who had been active in the labor movement.

The conditions of the Baku workers during the "reaction" have been exhaustively documented by a group of statisticians under the direction of the Bolshevik Alexander Mitrofanovich Stopani (1871–1932).⁹ Over two thousand individual budgets, about 5.7 percent of the 39,340 oil workers, were collected and analyzed in the years before World War I. Stopani found that the workers received payments in addition to their basic wages, sometimes in goods such as water, kerosene, or soap, sometimes in commuting money, rent

6. V. Mirov, "Iz praktiki bakinskogo rabocheho dvizhenii," *Nasha zaria*, nos. 5–6 (May–June 1910), p. 78.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 76.

8. *Bakinskii proletarii*, no. 7, Aug. 27, 1909; I. V. Stalin, *Sochineniia*, 13 vols. (Moscow, 1951), vol. 2 (1907–13), p. 160.

9. A. M. Stopani was responsible for a series of books on the Baku workers, the most important of which is *Neftepromyshlennyi rabochii i ego biudzheth* (Baku, 1916). Other of his studies include *Rabochie v avguste 1907 g.* (Baku, 1907); *Rabochie i sluzhashchie bakinskogo neftepromyshlennogo raiona (obshchie svedeniia i rabochii den')* (Baku, 1908); *Zarabotnaia plata i rabochii den' bakinskikh neftepromyshlennykh rabochikh v sviazi s usloviiami rabot na promyslakh* (Baku, 1910); *Neschastnye sluchai v bakinskikh neftiannykh promyslakh (1907–1910 gg.)* (Baku, 1913); and *Bakinskii neftepromyshlennyi rabochii: Ego zarabotnaia plata i rabochii den'* (Leningrad and Moscow, 1924). A useful summary of Stopani's work is available in A. D. Bok, "Usloviia byta rabochikh v dorevoliutsionnoi Rossii (po dannym biudzhethnykh obsledovaniu)" (Moscow, 1958), pp. 59–95.

allowances, or even baths. On the average about 73.5 percent of the worker's total income came from his basic wage; another 10 percent came from money payments for contract work, overtime, or bonuses; and 16.4 percent came from payments, in cash and kind, for apartments, baths, soap, and so forth.¹⁰ This fragmented system of payment had a paternalistic quality about it. The oil industrialists took away from the worker discretionary power over a significant portion of his income. It also worked to tie workers to management through a system of favors and bonuses, and made it difficult for labor leaders to work out a common pay scale for workers in different firms.

Life was hard for workers and their families, and wages just about paid for food, shelter, and clothes.¹¹ For sanitation, education, and other amenities the Baku oil workers were dependent on the good will of the oil industrialists, who in quasi-feudal fashion governed the oil-field districts where the poorer workers lived. The workers lived in intolerable conditions with little relief from the filth and noise of the oil wells and refineries. One married worker described his living conditions for Stopani: "The work at the oil well is hard and dirty; besides that, you come home tired and there is no place to dry out because there is no heater, and it is hard to dry out with kerosene. The apartment itself is damp; it is getting damper and is filled with some kind of stinking air. You come home late from work (it is already getting dark), and you sit tired in a damp and gloomy apartment. If you have something to read, you read it, then have dinner and go to sleep."¹²

A skilled Russian worker, feeling lost in the multinational environment of eastern Transcaucasia, found other diversions: "We live badly, since there are very few Russians. The majority are Moslems. There are no forms of distraction except getting drunk, cursing, and fighting."¹³ For those workers who had steady jobs the average work week of fifty-five hours and thirty-five

10. Bok, "Usloviia byta," p. 64.

11. The average pay of an oil worker was significantly higher than that of workers in other Russian industries. The average salary in the oil industry was 429 rubles a year; the average salary in Moscow industry was 186 rubles a year for women and 276 for men. One of the highest paid workers in European Russia was the metal worker, but his average salary of 375 rubles a year did not approach that of the Baku oil worker (*ibid.*, p. 71). This higher salary can be explained primarily by the higher cost of living in Baku, but also by occasional shortage of local workers (85 percent of oil workers were not native to Baku), the physical hardship of the work, and, in part, the past successes of the labor movement. Of the expenditures of a worker with a family 90 percent went for material needs. Single workers, however, managed to live on 68.6 percent of their wages and sent more than a quarter (26.1 percent) away to their families in the village (*ibid.*, p. 73). These men, usually less skilled and more poorly paid than the family men, formed groups of four or five to eat together, thus keeping costs down and maintaining some aspect of communality in their exile from home (p. 74).

12. Stopani, *Neftepromyshlennyi rabochii i ego biudzheth*, p. 145.

13. *Ibid.*, p. 147.

minutes left little time for leisure.¹⁴ Every day but Sunday belonged to the company.

Economic depression combined with political repression to pacify the workers and isolate the revolutionary intelligentsia. At first the "reaction" which befell Russia after Stolypin's "coup d'état" of June 3, 1907, seemed to affect Baku less than the rest of the country. The socialists continued to operate in relative freedom and seemed close to a great victory when in May 1908 the civil authorities struck down plans for a government conference between workers and the oil industrialists which was to work out a labor contract for the whole industry.¹⁵ With this blow the delayed "reaction" settled on Baku. Prominent socialists and trade unionist leaders were arrested, among them I. V. Stalin and "Alesha" Dzhaparidze, secretary of the Union of Oil Workers. Others went into hiding or left the city.

In the campaign for the government conference, the Bolsheviks had thrown themselves into the trade unionist movement with little hesitation. Even the most dedicated *komitetchiki* (committeemen), the men who ran the party underground, like Stalin, had joined the fray. But in late 1908 open work among workers became impossible. Armed guards at factory gates refused admission to strangers. Yet retreat into the underground and return to the propaganda circles of the past appealed to no one. Among some *praktiki*, particularly Mensheviks, opposition to the control of the labor movement by the underground party was developing. Perceiving that the workers were primarily interested in economic benefits and improvements in living conditions, these men and women could not reconcile themselves to the Bolshevik priorities of politics first, economics second. A group of "syndicalists" stressing the priority of trade unionism gathered around the newspaper *Gudok* (*Factory Whistle*), while those Mensheviks who held more regard for the party and its politics considered putting out a rival newspaper.¹⁶

The stimulus to this antiparty feeling came in part from the workers themselves. The editors of *Gudok* published a letter from twenty members of the Bolshevik-run Union of Oil Workers severely criticizing the role of the party in the union: "From the very beginning many comrades working in the union gave priority to ends peripheral to the union; they tried to use the union for tasks alien to it; instead of creative work, party elements brought into the union party arguments and dissension, 'the struggle for power,' etc. As a consequence of this, all problems arising in daily life were not decided

14. Mirov, "Iz praktiki," p. 88.

15. See Ronald Grigor Suny, "A Journeyman for the Revolution: Stalin and the Labour Movement in Baku, June 1907–May 1908," *Soviet Studies*, 23, no. 3 (January 1972): 373–94.

16. *Golos Sotsial-Demokrata*, nos. 8–9, July–September 1908, p. 38.

in our interest; they were not even discussed in open meetings. Usually they were decided by party organizations, and the union bodies, through their members, carried out these prepared, factional decisions."¹⁷ The workers also complained that after a while the union board (*pravlenie*) stopped holding mass meetings and even meetings of delegates' councils. Money was spent without the agreement of the elected delegates. As far as these workers were concerned, union democracy had become a fiction, a victim of party interests. They called for the union to become independent of the party and to deal with the "daily struggle for bread."

Discontent with the unions was widespread among workers. In the late summer of 1908 the Bolshevik Union of Oil Workers lost four hundred members in Bibi-Eibat, a working class district, when the leadership tried to "paint the union in party colors."¹⁸ The antipolitical mood of the workers reflected the general attitude of other social classes. A Menshevik writer characterized the atmosphere in the city: "Recently the reactionary trend has penetrated and become strong in society. Not only is sympathy for revolution not to be seen, but just the opposite, dissatisfaction and hatred for it are growing."¹⁹ The Bolsheviks, so closely identified with revolutionary and party politics, were victimized by this new mood. Shaumian wrote to his comrade, Mikha Tskhakaia: "The conditions of work, dear Mikha, have become terribly difficult: they literally crucify us, spit [on us] from all sides, humiliate [us]. Besides this, each day the reaction among the workers (the internal reaction) gains strength; the best comrades among the workers quit us at times. But we are not losing heart. Faith in the future and love for our cause provides us with inexhaustible energy."²⁰ Without support from workers the professional revolutionaries were "starving in the literal sense of the word." The local Bolsheviks could not even manage to raise enough money to buy an overcoat for Stalin, who was being exiled to Siberia.²¹

With shrinking support from the workers, the socialists were in a dilemma. Either they had to change their methods of operation or surrender to the mood of passivity. Yet to emerge from the underground into the open labor movement would expose the few remaining cadres to the police. A Menshevik correspondent reviewed the situation for *Golos Sotsial-Demokrata*: "The trade unionist intellectuals flew off somewhere; there are no party

17. *Gudok*, no. 38, Oct. 23, 1908.

18. *Golos Sotsial-Demokrata*, nos. 8-9, July-September 1908, p. 38; the "neutral" Menshevik Union of Mechanical Workers grew a little during this period, according to Menshevik estimates.

19. *Ibid.*

20. S. G. Shaumian, *Izbrannye proizvedeniia, 1902-1916 gg.*, 2 vols. (Moscow, 1957-58), 1:285.

21. *Ibid.*, p. 287.

workers. Those who remained do not know how to apply their powers to the job as they should. The old form of propaganda (circles) [*kruzhkovshchina*] no longer satisfies or attracts anyone, but the party workers themselves are not well equipped for the new forms. The Menshevik organization shows more life, taking active part in trade union work."²² Railroad workers, he reported, specifically expressed opposition to the circles and requested a workers' club and societies of self-education. The party organizations agreed to these demands. Out of such discontent grew a movement dedicated to depoliticizing the trade unions and shifting the attention of socialist cadres to the legal labor movement. The extreme manifestation of this movement was soon condemned as *likvidatorstvo*.

Late in May 1908 Shaumian wrote to Tskhakaia, then living in Geneva, expressing his concern about those who argued for "neutral" trade unions which would operate completely independently of the party:

Among other things we in Baku share completely this view on the party and unions, i.e., that the unions ought gradually to be imbued with politics and socialism, that all forms of proletarian struggle should be gradually merged into one single whole. . . .

I do not like the expression that our party exists temporarily as an educative organization and that it will cease to exist, disappear, having fulfilled its role. It seems to me that our party more completely represents the class struggle than the unions and that if one speaks about "temporary" existence and about disappearance, they should sooner speak about the unions, insofar as they have not yet been imbued with socialism. The unions will be joined to the Social Democratic Party, and there will be created one class organization for the proletariat, leading the struggle in all its forms and in all fields.²³

Shaumian insisted that the unions be "imbued with politics and socialism," that they recognize the primacy of the party over the unions and the political struggle over the purely economic. But it was precisely this view which was losing favor with workers, who were demanding that their immediate interests be served before those of the revolution.

The question of tactical priorities was by 1909 seriously threatening the unity of the Bolshevik faction, not so much in Baku as abroad among the émigrés. By July 1909 the leadership of the faction in Geneva had split between Lenin's group centered in the editorial board of *Proletarii* and those aligned with A. A. Bogdanov who later began their own newspaper *Vpered!* (*Forward!*). The latter group, highly suspicious of revolutionaries using legal possibilities, included those "left Bolsheviks" who demanded the recall

22. *Golos Sotsial-Demokrata*, nos. 10–11, November–December 1908.

23. S. G. Shaumian, *Pis'ma, 1896–1918* (Erevan, 1959), p. 149.

of Bolshevik deputies in the State Duma, the “recallists” (*otzovisty*), as well as those satisfied with an ultimatum to the Duma faction. The quasi-religious thinking of some members of the *Vpered!* group—the so-called Godbuilders (*bogostroiteli*), which included Gorky and Lunacharsky—was completely rejected by the Leninists. The Social Democrats in Baku were wary of the esoteric disputes among the émigrés and tended to play down their importance. Stalin called the dispute a “tempest in a glass of water,” and Shaumian agreed that the issues were not great enough to warrant a schism.²⁴ Lenin apparently criticized Stalin’s use of this irreverent phrase in a conversation with Ordzhonikidze: “Nihilistic jokes about a tempest in a glass of water showed the immaturity of Koba as a Marxist.”²⁵ For the time being, however, the Baku Bolsheviks sided with Lenin (“We are fully on the side of Ilich”) and decided to give him their mandate at a forthcoming Bolshevik conference.²⁶

As the split widened, the Baku Bolsheviks grew angrier. It reminded them of the period after the Second Congress (1903), but, Shaumian warned, “the old times have already passed” and “these scandals” would have little influence on the life of the party.²⁷ The Baku Committee of Bolsheviks adopted a resolution on August 2, 1909, condemning *otzovism* and *ultimatism*, along with *bogostroitel'stvo*. But the Committee disagreed with the Leninist majority on the editorial board of *Proletarii* about the necessity of “ejecting from our ranks” the supporters of the minority. Baku also criticized Bogdanov for refusing to submit to the decisions of the majority of the editorial board.²⁸ The local Bolsheviks demonstrated their ideological solidarity with Lenin but could not bring themselves to applaud the schism in the Bolshevik faction.

Throughout the years of “reaction” the party organization and its influence continued to wither away. The Baku Committee was one of a mere half dozen Bolshevik committees operating inside Russia in mid-1909. By the end of that year Bolsheviks numbered only three hundred in Baku; by the end of 1911 membership was down to two hundred, and by early 1913 to one hundred.²⁹ Yet despite police infiltration the party continued to exist, as Trotsky’s *Pravda* reported: “Even in the period of the greatest decline, the party organizations existed: the Baku Committee and the Baku [Menshevik] Collective, but without the districts and without ties to the masses; not even because of the police but because of the general collapse. Some kind

24. Shaumian, *Izbrannye proizvedeniia*, 1:267.

25. Il'ia Moiseevich Dubinsky-Mukhadze, *Ordzhonikidze* (Moscow, 1963), pp. 92–94; this sentence was removed in the 1967 edition of this book (see p. 76).

26. Shaumian, *Izbrannye proizvedeniia*, 1:268.

27. *Ibid.*, p. 286.

28. This resolution has been published in Stalin, *Sochineniia*, 2:170–73.

29. Arutiunov, *Rabochee dvizhenie*, pp. 74–75.

of work was carried on in the trade unions. An awakening in the masses began in 1909 in connection with the discussion of the law to introduce *zemstva* in the Caucasus and also in connection with the discussion by the oil industrialists of the question of settlements and also the campaign for an antialcohol congress."³⁰

With the loss of less-committed cadres, the two Social Democratic organizations shrank down to the original core of old workers. As Shaumian put it: "Both 'collectives' consist almost exclusively of old workers [*stariki*] who do not think of giving way to despair and throwing away their Social Democratic organizations and liquidating them. It is evident that Baku is not favorable to our liquidators. The Baku Menshevik Collective has taken a sharply defined party position up to this time."³¹

One old party worker unwilling to give in to despair was Stalin, who suddenly reappeared in Baku after a daring escape from Siberia in July 1909 and hid deep in the underground. His presence in the city was unknown even to some of his comrades. Occasionally he wrote for the local Bolshevik newspaper, *Bakinskii proletarii* (*Baku Proletarian*). In an important article, usually neglected by his biographers, Stalin analyzed the crisis in the party and its isolation from the broad masses. To win back the masses he advocated "intensified agitation around daily needs linked with the general class needs of the proletariat."³² Clearly his recent involvement in the campaign for the government conference had impressed Stalin in regard to the potential organizing benefits to be derived from apparently limited economic issues. He also called for the "'transfer' of the most important party functions to the advance workers," saying: "Bebels do not drop from the skies; they are trained only in the course of work, by practice, and our movement now needs Russian Bebels, experienced and mature leaders from the ranks of the workers, more than ever before."³³ Stalin's seeming conversion from the *komitetchik* of years past to the advocate of increased workers' participation was neither abrupt nor complete, but he had moved to head off the genuine worker resentment of direction by intellectuals. Perhaps this change of emphasis in Stalin had been motivated by the success with workers' control of socialist organizations that he had witnessed in Tiflis. He did not mention Tiflis as a source for his ideas; rather he spoke of the Central District and the Urals, which "have been doing without intellectuals for a long time," as well as Sormovo, Lugansk (Donets Basin), and Nikolaev, where workers had pub-

30. *Pravda* (Vienna), no. 11, Mar. 18, 1910.

31. *Rabochaia gazeta*, no. 3, Feb. 8 (21), 1910.

32. "Partiinyi krizis i nashi zadachi," *Bakinskii proletarii*, no. 6, Aug. 1, 1909; no. 7, Aug. 27, 1909; Stalin, *Sochineniia*, 2:157.

33. *Ibid.*, pp. 156-57.

lished leaflets and even an illegal organ on their own.³⁴ But no matter what his inspiration, Stalin now outlined a subordinate role for intellectuals, akin to that practiced by the Georgian Mensheviks. Intellectuals were to assist advanced workers, arrange discussion groups in which the theory and practice of Marxism would be studied. Stalin also called for full use of legal possibilities—"from the floor of the Duma and the trade unions to cooperative societies and burial funds"—and the creation of a central party newspaper to be published within Russia by the Central Committee which would link local organizations to the center and end their isolation.

In this article Stalin summed up a long process of personal development while revealing some of his basic predilections. He was still primarily a party man interested in building up that organization. All legal and economic activity was dedicated to serving the party and, in turn, the revolution, for the choice between trade unionism and party work was still perceived, as in the by-gone days of *Iskra's* struggle with the Economists, as a choice between reformism and revolution. Second, he was an activist, rather than a theorist, with some suspicion of intellectuals, including those *teoretiki* abroad who tried to run the party from outside without firsthand knowledge of Russian conditions. The émigrés appeared to many socialists in Russia to be living in an unreal world of philosophical disputes and personal squabbles.

As possibilities for socialist propaganda dried up in late 1908–9, and even trade unionist work became more difficult, the Social Democrats resorted to "cultural" activity. In December 1908 the Baku Committee of Bolsheviks met to discuss raising money for a Red Cross which would aid imprisoned Social Democrats. Such an organization had existed in Baku, but it had recently fallen into the hands of the Socialist Revolutionaries, who aided only members of their own party. The Bolsheviks decided to present two plays to make money. In January or February 1909 Gorky's *Children of the Sun*, in which the author had hoped to throw a bridge across the "deep abyss between the intelligentsia and the proletariat," played to half a house.³⁵ The thespian revolutionaries had more success with a later production of Ostrovsky's *The Guilty Without Guilt*.³⁶

The Mensheviks, too, turned their attention to cultural projects. Early in 1909 their newspaper declared: "In Baku there is no cultural life, almost no social organizations and institutions carrying on the fight with the terrifying backwardness of the broad masses of the population."³⁷ They called for

34. Ibid., p. 158.

35. M. B. Koz'min and L. I. Ponomarev, *A. M. Gor'kii v portretakh, illiustratsiakh, dokumentakh, 1868–1936* (Moscow, 1962), p. 126.

36. N. N. Kolesnikova, *Po dorogam podpol'ia: Iz vospominanii* (Baku, 1966), pp. 93–95.

37. *Bakinskii professional'nyi vestnik*, no. 1, Feb. 21, 1909.

the establishment of workers' clubs and reading rooms and deplored the fact that evening courses for workers, sponsored by the Congress of Oil Industrialists, were being canceled. The industrialists were economizing by closing down educational programs for workers, and the socialists decided to fill the vacuum left by the capitalists. When the Menshevik K. I. Zakharova-Tsederbaum organized the first workers' club in Baku, she was met with skepticism from some underground party workers who feared that the club would draw workers out of the party organizations. But the Nauka (Science) Club proved to be an immediate success and a conduit to nonparty workers. The Bolsheviks soon followed the Menshevik example and founded the Znanie-Sila (Knowledge Is Power) Club in the oil districts, where they were most influential. The Menshevik club, however, proved more popular, attracting greater numbers of workers to its lectures and library.³⁸ This may have been because the more skilled and educated Russian workers lived in Baku proper, while the oil districts were populated primarily by unskilled, uneducated Moslem workers. Besides these clubs, libraries, plays, and lectures, Baku workers also participated in a consumers' cooperative, Trud (Labor), which was founded early in 1908 and soon attracted twelve hundred members. It published its own weekly journal, *Trudovoi golos* (Labor Voice).³⁹ Still another area of the struggle for *kultura* was a campaign directed against alcoholism. "Drunkness is a social ailment created by capitalism," read a Bolshevik resolution.⁴⁰ At the end of 1909 the Baku Committee sent "Saratovets" to Petersburg to attend the antialcohol congress.⁴¹ Even Stalin spoke favorably of the fight against alcohol and saw the congress "as a means of agitating for the democratic and socialist demands of the proletariat."⁴²

The nadir of the Baku labor movement was reached in 1910. In that year the number of workers shrank by 14 percent (nearly seven thousand men).⁴³ Only eleven strikes occurred, of which five were successful.⁴⁴ Workers paid no attention to Social Democratic efforts to organize a May Day demonstration, and the holiday passed for the first time since 1901 without some kind of celebration. The Union of Oil Workers, which in its heyday had had

38. Zakharova-Tsederbaum, "V gody reaktsii," pp. 90-96. By March 1910 Nauka counted 800 members, in mid-April 1,066 members, and by the end of 1911 2,000 members (Arutiunov, *Rabochee dvizhenie*, pp. 171-73). A series of lectures in March 1911 attracted an audience of 1,300 (*ibid.*, p. 166).

39. *Sotsial-Demokrat*, no. 11, Feb. 13 (26), 1911; Stalin, *Sochineniia*, 2:191, 407.

40. Kolesnikova, *Po dorogam*, p. 98.

41. *Ibid.*, p. 99; Saratovets was later arrested and died in prison in 1912.

42. Stalin, *Sochineniia*, 2:192.

43. A. N. Guliev and I. V. Strigunov, eds., *Rabochee dvizhenie v Azerbaidzhane v gody novogo revoliutsionnogo pod'ema (1910-1914 gg.)*: *Dokumenty i materialy*, 2 vols. (Baku, 1967), 1:34.

44. Arutiunov, *Rabochee dvizhenie*, p. 159.

nine thousand members, was now down to twenty. The union building was closed. Five secretaries in a row had been arrested, several of them exiled. The Menshevik Union of Mechanical Workers was open, but—in Shaumian's words—"is also living out its days."⁴⁵ Still, early in 1911, the Mensheviks' "neutral" union had 129 members.⁴⁶ Though both unions had suffered during the "reaction," the Menshevik union managed to attract a few more workers than the originally larger Bolshevik union. Membership figures and the local press indicate that what was left of the legal labor movement was largely run by the Mensheviks, while the underground party was dominated by the Bolsheviks, who outnumbered their rivals by two or three to one.⁴⁷ The legal labor organizations were in the hands of older workers, rather than intellectuals or younger workers. A Menshevik reporter wrote: "The new contingent of activists from the ranks of the workers, pulled into the movement in the years 1905–1906, are not to be seen in Baku. Could they be in the illegal organizations? There among those working with the printing press were sixteen and seventeen year olds. In the legal societies you see only workers of the generation of the 1890s–1900. But what hits you in the eye is that the leadership of these societies is exclusively in the hands of the workers themselves."⁴⁸ Among union workers there was complete indifference to party affairs. Yet they understood that they must maintain the labor organizations in the face of the repression and the indifference of the masses. Such legal organizations made up of workers disenchanted with the Social Democratic practice of the past were potentially fertile ground for the trade unionism and democratic inclinations of the *likvidatory*.

Likvidatorstvo in Baku was a movement of generals without an army. *Praktiki* with considerable reputation worked in the city—men like M. A. Larin, S. O. Ezhov (Martov's brother), and D. Koltsov—but with little palpable effect on the workers in the oil districts, where the Bolsheviks were entrenched. The liquidationist critique of party practice, however, touched a sensitive nerve, and the pain was felt by those who had spent the last decade in the underground. One of the most gifted of the *likvidatory* was a former underground man, the Armenian Bogdan Knunians (1878–1911), a veteran of both the Caucasian movement and the revolutionary days in St. Petersburg. Knunians had been a Bolshevik since the Second Congress (1903), which he had attended. After the collapse of the Petersburg Soviet of 1905, he was arrested and exiled to Siberia. He escaped abroad, and early in 1908 returned

45. Shaumian, *Izbrannye proizvedeniia*, 1:295–96.

46. *Baku*, no. 1, Jan. 1, 1911; Arutiunov, *Rabochee dvizhenie*, p. 164.

47. *Sotsial-Demokrat*, no. 12, Mar. 23, 1910; Stalin, *Sochineniia*, 2:187.

48. *Golos Sotsial-Demokrata*, no. 23, November 1910; this article was probably written by Muravsky (identified by Boris Nicolaevsky).

illegally to Baku, where he made contact with his comrades. But soon afterward he left the Bolshevik organization and began working in the legal labor movement, writing for the Menshevik *Gudok* and *Bakinskii professional'nyi vestnik* (*Baku Trade Union Bulletin*) and lecturing in the Nauka Club. Steadily he gravitated toward *likvidatorstvo*. On September 29, 1910, he was arrested. While in prison he contracted typhus and died on May 14, 1911. Bolsheviks and Mensheviks alike attended his funeral, and Shaumian, a long-time friend, wrote the obituary for *Rabochaia gazeta*.⁴⁹

Knunians spent the last months of his life chronicling his odyssey from Bolshevism to *likvidatorstvo*. The Menshevik journal *Nasha zaria* posthumously published Knunians's last thoughts on his career as a revolutionary. He began by characterizing the party in which he had spent his adult life:

By our world view we were a party of the working class, but by our composition almost exclusively an organization of the socialist intelligentsia. By our goals we were a class, socialist organization; in line with Russian life we became the ideological force of the bourgeois revolution in the absence of bourgeois political organizations. By our organizational plans we were a mass, democratic party given our tasks; in fact, by necessity we turned into an organization of conspiratorial circles, led by special cadres of professional revolutionaries recruited from the ranks of the radical intelligentsia. We strove for organized class warfare but were forced to carry on all work in the underground, outside the structured class organizations which we were not strong enough to build.⁵⁰

Knunians argued that while Russians in the emigration were the most orthodox Marxists, those within Russia placed priority on efficacious work rather than Marxist theory. Before 1905 the Bolsheviks represented the party *stikhii* (elements), the actual people engaged in the revolutionary movement, while the Mensheviks were the upholders of Marxist thought. Ideologically Bolsheviks developed under Menshevik influence, but in practice Mensheviks acted *po-bol'shevistski* ("in a Bolshevik manner").⁵¹

The year 1905 represented a break with the party's past, according to

49. *Rabochaia gazeta*, no. 6, Sept. 22 (Oct. 5), 1911; Shaumian, *Izbrannye proizvedeniia*, 1:343–45. In the several Soviet accounts and collections of documents concerning Knunians there is no mention of his conversion to Menshevism and his writings on *likvidatorstvo*. See, for example, O. G. Indzhikian, *Bogdan Knunians* (Erevan, 1961), p. 238; Indzhikian merely says that Knunians made certain mistakes and "wavered on questions of party tactics" after his return to Baku. This is explained by "his very long absence from direct party work, his sick condition, and the influence of Reaction." The same verdict is rendered in the preface to B. M. Knunians, *Izbrannye proizvedeniia, 1903–1911 gg.* (Erevan, 1958), p. 9.

50. B. Radin-Knunians, "Odin iz itogov," *Nasha zaria*, no. 5 (May 1911), p. 52.

51. *Ibid.*, pp. 53–54.

Knunians. In that year the Bolsheviks developed their own ideology out of party practice—the theory of the *democratic* revolution replaced that of the *bourgeois* revolution. Bolsheviks, said Knunians, moved away from Menshevik theory (and Marxism) but closer to Menshevik practice, for now they came out from underground and engaged in legal activities. Still Bolsheviks tended to be patriotic in their attitudes toward the old party organizations and resisted attempts to liquidate them.⁵²

Knunians concluded his first article with the claim that *likvidatorstvo* was an effort to bring Marxist theory (the notion of the coming bourgeois revolution) in line with Marxist practice (work toward creating a self-conscious working class): “Marxist thought is on the side of the ‘liquidators.’ Also on their side is the practice of the workers’ movement insofar as it appears now. This is the first time in the course of our workers’ movement that the Marxist-*praktiki* are not in contradiction with Marxist ideology. In this is the guarantee that, despite all the abnormal, oppressive external conditions of the moment, the workers’ movement will enter onto the real road of organized struggle, and Social Democracy will turn into a real workers’ party.”⁵³

Knunians, like the other *likvidatory*, had concluded from practice that a party in which most of the work was done by intellectuals could not give the workers the self-confidence and self-sufficiency that they needed in order to develop a mass labor movement. He wrote: “The stupidest school for the education of a social activist is the conspiratorial organization. The weak development of a feeling of responsibility, the inability to deal with the public opinion of that milieu in which one must act, the exaggeration of the role of personality, not being used to constant control—all these are the products of the underground from which the great majority of us are not free. . . . The new workers’ organizations, we repeat, are a good school for us intellectuals.”⁵⁴ Lenin’s *Chto delat’?* (*What Is To Be Done?*), once the “gospel of all *praktiki*,” had, according to Knunians, turned the party into an organization of professional revolutionaries, not into a workers’ party. Knunians argued that the “entire struggle of the workers, economic strikes as well as political demonstrations,” was not the product of intellectual manipulation but for the most part had been purely spontaneous in character: “Planned struggle and consequently serious preparation of massive demonstrations have not occurred here until recent years.”⁵⁵

52. *Ibid.*, pp. 57–58.

53. *Ibid.*, p. 59.

54. B. Radin-Knunians, “Staroe i novoe (okonchanie),” *Nasha zaria*, nos. 7–8 (1911), p. 39.

55. B. Radin-Knunians, “Staroe i novoe,” *Nasha zaria*, no. 6 (1911), p. 22.

Before 1905 the workers did not understand the Social Democrats, Knuniants went on, but they had come to look upon them as their protectors. But with the end of the revolution the workers realized that their earlier exaggerated faith in the party had been misplaced and that they had to rely on their own powers. Therefore workers left the party: "By 1909 we already see our old organizations almost liquidated."⁵⁶ But leaving the party did not mean leaving Social Democracy, for workers now entered legal labor organizations. Experience has demonstrated, concluded Knuniants, that in order to overcome the current crisis the Social Democrats must now build up a party from below, not a new organization of professional revolutionaries centralized and directed from above, but an organization to aid the proletariat "in the difficult task of creating local organizations, a local press, with new activist cadres from the workers themselves."⁵⁷

As can be seen from Knuniants's writings, *likvidatorstvo* was not so much an attack on the party and political activity in general as a specific attack on the underground party led by professional revolutionaries. In Knuniants's words: "'Liquidators' (incidentally the title is completely absurd but is justified in relation to the old organization) do not liquidate the political organization of the proletariat altogether, do not deny the necessity for such an organization; they are critical only of the old roads traveled by the party and point out new ones."⁵⁸ The *likvidatory* were not denying the need for a political organization, but they held that a new party, legal and open, must be given priority over the illegal, conspiratorial party of the past. The *Menshevik-likvidatory* did not deny the need for some illegal activity, but they intended to re-emphasize legal activity in which workers themselves could genuinely control their own affairs. The Leninists considered such goals utopian and detrimental to the preservation of the underground. Lenin perceived an acute danger in this shift toward legality, and although he wished to exploit all possibilities, legal and illegal, he firmly believed that in the tsarist police state the only revolutionary road toward the defeat of autocracy lay underground. To him the *likvidatory* seemed headed toward exclusively legal activity—that is, reformism. It was not simply for polemical purposes that he linked them to the revisionists and opportunists of West European socialist parties.⁵⁹

Although convincing to some party intellectuals like Knuniants, the

56. *Nasha zaria*, nos. 7–8 (1911), pp. 34–35.

57. *Ibid.*, p. 42.

58. *Nasha zaria*, no. 6 (1911), p. 18.

59. Martov was also aware of such a danger. He wrote to Potresov on June 17, 1909: "Great care must be taken not to slip into a real 'liquidationism' of all elements of politics, and consequently of party-mindedness." This letter is in the Nicolaevsky Collection at the Hoover Institution, Stanford, California. The citation is from Israel Getzler, *Martov: A Political Biography of a Russian Social Democrat* (Cambridge, 1967), p. 125.

liquidationist critique of party practice seemed extreme to many party members and workers who had already spent nearly a decade working closely with the underground organization. Besides this lingering loyalty, workers could also see that the local Bolsheviks were increasingly willing to engage in legal activity. The divisions in the Social Democratic movement were not nearly as sharp in Baku as in the emigration. All kinds of socialists worked together, although the annoying insistence of the *likvidatory* on avoiding underground work led the Bolsheviks and their sympathizers to exclude them when the city organizations of Bolsheviks and Mensheviks merged in February 1911. Divided since 1907, the Bolshevik Baku Committee and the Menshevik Leading Collective united on a platform which reasserted the traditional reliance on the illegal organization and the necessity of a struggle against the *likvidatory*.

Both the Committee and the Collective continued their separate existences, but now a Central Committee of nine Bolsheviks and seven Mensheviks and an Executive Committee of five were to direct the party locally.⁶⁰ The Bolsheviks, who made up a majority of the united organization, fell in general into the category of "Leninists." There were no *Vperedisty*, and the few "conciliators" succumbed to the will of the majority.⁶¹ Among the Mensheviks, however, three tendencies competed. Besides the *likvidatory*, there was a small group of virulently antiliquidationist Plekhanovites, the so-called *Men'sheviki-partiitsy* (Party Mensheviks), and those Mensheviks who fell in between, willing to work with the *likvidatory* in legal activities but operating within the newly united party organization.⁶² This latter group considered *likvidatorstvo* to be a kind of misunderstanding, yet was willing to distribute liquidationist literature while calling for the resurrection of the party and working within the underground.⁶³

60. The Bolshevik members of the Baku Committee were S. G. Shaumian, A. S. Enukidze, V. M. Kasparov ("Slava"), Kazi Magomed, A. I. Dogadov, M. A. Karagezov, S. T. Iakushev, and G. N. Azatian. Arutiunov gives only eight names for nine positions, which leads one to believe that the ninth position was held by the police spy, Miron Chernomazov. See *Sotsial-Demokrat*, no. 24, Oct. 18 (31), 1911; Arutiunov, *Rabochee dvizhenie*, p. 100. Chernomazov later worked in St. Petersburg on the newspaper *Pravda* from May 1913 to February 1, 1914, when he was dismissed on suspicion of being a police agent. In November 1916 the Bureau of the Central Committee of the RSDRP ordered all party organizations not to have relations with Chernomazov. He was arrested on March 7, 1917, by the new revolutionary government. See the article by M. Muranov in *Pravda*, no. 8, Mar. 14 (27), 1917, p. 2.

61. Some Bolsheviks, such as "Alesha" Dzhaparidze, were willing to invite all Social Democrats, regardless of their position on the underground organization, to join a united party. See A. M. Raevsky, *Alesha Dzhaparidze: Politicheskii siluet* (Baku, 1931), pp. 25–26. Such "conciliationist" views were also expressed by Viktor Nogin on a visit to Baku in May 1910. But the "hard" Leninists, like Shaumian, were able to prevent such broad-based unity.

62. *Sotsial-Demokrat*, no. 28–29, Nov. 5 (18), 1912.

63. Boris Ivanovich Nicolaevsky, who had arrived in Baku in September 1911, was

With party unity partially achieved, it was not long before the two oil workers' unions, which had been negotiating for years, decided to merge.⁶⁴ This was a defeat for the local *likvidatory*, who had consistently opposed joining with the Bolshevik union. A party worker from Baku wrote, perhaps somewhat prematurely: "Interest in the illegal organization, in illegal literature, the enrollment into the ranks of the illegal Social Democratic organization of new members—all this makes it possible to conclude that the period of stagnation, of collapse, is beginning to pass."⁶⁵

With the Bolsheviks and some Mensheviks cooperating and the unions unified, the small group of Baku *likvidatory*, now isolated from the Social Democratic organizations and many active workers, made an attempt to broaden their base.⁶⁶ In the summer of 1911 a prominent Baku trade unionist, D. Koltsov (B. A. Ginzburg), returned from a conference of *likvidatory* in Berne and soon gathered seven comrades together into an "initiative group" for an agitational campaign against the Bolsheviks and their ally, Plekhanov. The group, which included M. A. Larin, Zaitsev, and Volsky, worked briefly in the trade unions, then in the hands of their opponents, and in the elections to the city *duma*. To increase their support the *likvidatory* called a conference of local Mensheviks to hear a report on the "correct tendency in Marxism." Thirteen people attended, among them several Party Mensheviks, but instead of the promised report the organizer of the meeting spoke of practical problems in local work. Members of the audience, including workers, demanded to hear the report, but the organizer refused: "Earlier the workers blamed us intellectuals for our love of word games; and now you yourselves have begun to engage in this." The meeting was not a notable success. Shortly afterward the Executive Committee of the united party organization unanimously condemned the "initiative group" and its activities, and ordered its members not to cooperate with it. The group soon fell apart.⁶⁷

For all their dedication to legal trade unions, the *likvidatory* in Baku were not able to dominate them or even win much of a following. While the evidence is scanty, it seems to point to a loose connection between the legal labor unions and the party underground. With their merger and their renewed

a leading member of this conciliationist Menshevik group. He was willing to work with all factions, but the "hard" Leninist Shaumian refused to work with him. See interview with B. I. Nicolaevsky, no. 11, in the Menshevik Project, Columbia University, pp. 13–20.

64. Arutiunov, *Rabochee dvizhenie*, p. 168.

65. *Sotsial-Demokrat*, no. 24, Oct. 18 (31), 1911.

66. When meetings were held in connection with the forthcoming All-Russian Congress of Artisans, the *likvidatory* found that the Party Mensheviks refused to cooperate with them. Only after the Bolsheviks declined to work with the Party Mensheviks on certain projects did the latter reluctantly agree to join the *likvidatory* in some legal activities. See *Prilozhenie k no. 24 Golosa Sotsial-Demokrata*, February 1911, p. 4.

67. *Sotsial-Demokrat*, no. 26, Apr. 25 (May 8), 1912; *Rabochaia gazeta*, no. 7, Dec. 22, 1911 (Jan. 4, 1912).

interest in legal activities the "party" Social Democrats were able to reassert their traditional leadership over the moribund labor movement. The reassertion of the primacy of the party was clearly a victory for the staunchest party men, the local Bolsheviks. Their attention turned now to the sticky problem of which socialist tendencies would be tolerated within the newly united organization.

Lenin rejected any unification of the party which included factions which failed to value both illegal and legal work and sought the preservation and development of the underground party. He opposed the *Vperedisty* on the left as well as the *likvidatory* on the right. In order to gain support for a party conference which would adopt his narrow concept of party unity, Lenin called a meeting of Bolshevik members of the Central Committee in Paris, May 28 to June 4, 1911 (June 10–17). There an organizational commission, *Zagranichnaia Organizatsionnaia Komissiiia* (ZOK), was formed. Shaumian, then in Baku, and Stalin, then in prison, were nominated members of the commission, whose function was to form a counterpart in Russia (ROK) and lay the ground for a party conference. To this end "Sergo" Ordzhonikidze was sent to Russia in August. He soon arrived in Baku, where on August 6 he held a meeting with ten party members in Balakhany. The Baku Bolsheviks and, after some hesitation, the Party Mensheviks approved the decision to call a party conference.⁶⁸ An agent of Trotsky's group, "Fritz," tried to interest the local socialists in the broader, conciliationist conference to be held later in Vienna, but to no avail.⁶⁹

The position of the Baku party organization had hardened in the course of 1911. Whereas earlier in the year, at the time of unification, various Mensheviks, excluding the *likvidatory*, had been included in the party, by September the Leninists and Plekhanovites were demanding that "conciliationist" Mensheviks and Bolsheviks take sides—as Shaumian put it—"either with us, that is, with the Russian Social Democratic Workers' Party, or with the *likvidatory*, against the RSDRP. There is no other path."⁷⁰

With Baku and Tiflis mandates in hand Suren Spandarian and Ordzhonikidze traveled to Prague in January 1912 to participate in the party conference.⁷¹ The composition of the conference was representative only of those

68. *Rabochaia gazeta*, no. 7, Dec. 22, 1911 (Jan. 4, 1912); Arutiunov, *Rabochee dvizhenie*, p. 134.

69. The resolution of the Baku organization was published in *Sotsial-Demokrat*, no. 23, Sept. 1, 1911; Shaumian, *Izbrannye proizvedeniia*, 1:340–41. See also G. A. Arutiunov, "Uchastie zakavkazskikh bol'shevistskikh organizatsii v podgotovke VI (Prazhskoi) Vserossiiskoi konferentsii RSDRP," *Teghekgagir* ("Newsletter" of the Academy of Sciences of the Armenian SSR), 1957, no. 11, p. 92.

70. *Rabochaia gazeta*, no. 7, Dec. 22, 1911 (Jan. 4, 1912).

71. Another delegate from Baku, Dmitrii Stepanovich Egorov, was imprisoned and died before he could attend.

Social Democrats who agreed with Lenin on the "narrow" reunification of the party, eliminating the *Vperedisty*, the *likvidatory*, and all Mensheviks except the Plekhanovites.

The new Leninist faction with its own Central Committee was disproportionately weighted with Caucasians. Of the nine members of the Central Committee three were from the Caucasus and had worked most recently in Baku. The oil center was a model of the kind of party unity Lenin favored.⁷² Baku supplied Lenin with his "hardest" followers. They were accustomed to underground life and work, completely dedicated to the politicization of the labor movement, yet willing and able to use legal labor institutions. Throughout the years of "reaction" they had refused to go along with those socialists who saw the legal labor movement as the main arena for activity. For the Leninists of Baku all legal and illegal activity was directed toward the same end—the destruction of the autocracy.

Unfortunately for the Baku Bolsheviks, just as their victory over *likvidatorstvo* seemed complete (by the end of 1911) and the new Leninist center was formed in Prague (in January 1912), the party organization in Baku collapsed under the blows of the police. On September 30, 1911, the Baku Bolshevik leadership was arrested, and the Baku Committee ceased to function. For a time the conciliationist Mensheviks gathered around Boris Nicolaevsky became the effective leaders of what party activity went on in Baku. At the same time, however, activists working in legal cultural organizations, like the Nauka Club, were arrested, and their clubs closed.⁷³ The Social Democratic movement retreated back into the underground. The remnants of the Bolshevik faction hesitated to re-establish their central committee until an organizer arrived from abroad.⁷⁴

In March 1912, Stalin, once again hiding in Baku after escaping from Siberian exile, called a meeting of party workers to which he invited Mensheviks. The Mensheviks, who claimed that they had been trying for four months to find Bolsheviks whom they might co-opt to their Leading Collective, declined the invitation for fear of arrest, and asked Stalin to remain in Baku a little longer until conditions became more favorable for meeting. Stalin regarded such behavior by the Mensheviks as schismatic and held his meeting on March 29. The conference decided to call on the Mensheviks to form a Leading Collective together with the Bolsheviks and to run a joint campaign

72. See the resolution passed by the conference of Bolshevik groups abroad, held in Paris, December 27–30, 1911: "Our duty is to support the unity between Bolsheviks and Mensheviks being established in Russian practice, examples of which are the organizations in Baku, Kiev, Ekaterinoslav, etc." (cited in Arutiunov, *Rabochee dvizhenie*, p. 107).

73. *Sotsial-Demokrat*, no. 26, Apr. 25 (May 8), 1912.

74. Arutiunov, "Uchastie," pp. 97–98.

for the upcoming elections to the Fourth State Duma. Indeed, the conference agreed to cooperate with *likvidatory* during the elections, though this contradicted the resolutions of the Prague Conference.⁷⁵ Cautiously the local Bolsheviks made overtures to the Baku Mensheviks. In their desperate straits, with their leadership gone, and with the *likvidatory* no longer a threat, the local Bolsheviks recognized that joint work by Social Democrats was imperative. It was a small transgression; in all other aspects the conference approved the Leninist resolutions adopted in Prague.

Stalin left Baku on April 1, 1912, for Petersburg, where he began working on the legal Bolshevik newspaper, *Pravda*. A new era was beginning in the history of the Russian labor movement. The period of "reaction" was coming to an end and a "new revolutionary upsurge," as Soviet historians characterize it, was beginning. When news of the infamous massacre of workers in the Lena Gold Fields reached Baku, workers organized meetings, collected money for the families of the victims, and sent angry letters to Social Democratic newspapers.⁷⁶ These first flickers of the reviving labor movement would not burst into flame, however, for another year, not until the massive strike of oil workers in July 1913. The "reaction" lingered longer in Baku than in central Russia. Arrests continued to plague the socialists, and none of them were immune; *likvidatory* suffered along with the Bolsheviks. Only in 1913 did the Social Democratic organization, exhausted and discouraged by their failures since 1908, begin to revive. Early that year the Baku Committee was re-established by the local Bolsheviks.⁷⁷

Efforts to expand the legal labor movement during the "reaction" had proved impossible. The failure of the *likvidatory* among the oil workers cannot easily be explained, but tactical reasons seem at least contributory to their isolation and the victory of the Bolsheviks by the outbreak of World War I. First, the *likvidatory* were exposed to the same harassment from the government as the revolutionaries, but they were more exposed to the police because of their open activity. The underground provided reserve cadres and a place of retreat for the party men. Second, the industrialists in their recalcitrance toward the unions made it difficult for the *likvidatory* to demonstrate the

75. *Sotsial-Demokrat*, no. 26, Apr. 25 (May 8), 1912. This article, written by Stalin, is not included in his *Sochineniia*, but it has been published recently in Guliev and Strigunov, *Rabochee dvizhenie v Azerbaidzhane*, pp. 201–2. Arutiunov argues that Stalin's actions at this conference prove that at this time he was a "conciliationist" willing to merge the Bolshevik organization with the Menshevik organization, which was then led by *likvidatory* (*Rabochee dvizhenie*, p. 201). In fact, the Baku Mensheviks were led by those moderates who were willing to cooperate with *likvidatory* while continuing to work within the underground party organization.

76. Arutiunov, *Rabochee dvizhenie*, pp. 222–23.

77. *Sotsial-Demokrat*, no. 31, June 15 (28), 1913.

effectiveness of collective bargaining as an alternative to more militant tactics. In general the benefits of legal and moderate action were not impressive. And third, the Bolsheviks, realizing their own losses due to neglect of legal activity and high-handed treatment of workers, rallied around a strategy based on both legal efforts and preservation of the illegal underground. The workers had made it abundantly clear that they would no longer tolerate being subordinated to the political interests of the intelligentsia. Even a *komitetchik* like Stalin got the message and came out for more worker participation within the party and exploitation of legal possibilities.

In Baku the Mensheviks had been torn by the Party Mensheviks on the left and the *likvidatory* on the right, while the Bolsheviks had remained relatively united around an antiliquidationist, anti-*Vperedist*, and pro-Leninist position. The Bolsheviks had adopted a policy of exploiting legal possibilities as early as 1907–8, thus blunting some of the liquidationist arguments, though old ways of operating, particularly intellectual dominance over workers, created opposition among workers in the unions. Still, many Mensheviks, rejecting the reformist liquidationist tendency, were forced to adopt an essentially Bolshevik position putting the party above unions and to join the Bolshevik-dominated underground. The Bolsheviks by joining with some of the Mensheviks increased their influence in the fragile legal labor organizations, while the *likvidatory*, faced by a common front of Social Democrats, soon lost their tenuous hold on labor allegiances.

All these struggles among the socialists occurred against the background of labor passivity. All factions were affected by the lack of initiative by workers but in different ways. The Bolsheviks had to endure criticism of their emphasis on politics and the party's dominance of labor organizations, but their hold on the underground remained intact. The Mensheviks benefited from worker interest in the legal institutions, but given the reluctance of workers to resist the repressive policies of the government, they were unable to extend the activity of these organizations into politics. For Mensheviks as well as Bolsheviks the last refuge in the face of the continuing governmental repression was the party underground. The *likvidatory*, on the other hand, tended to neglect the party and politics only to find that in a period of "reaction" the independence and initiative of workers necessary to form vital trade unions had been subdued by fear. *Likvidatorstvo* remained an idea whose time had not come. A West European style of labor movement proved impossible in Baku, not only because of the radical intelligentsia's traditions of the underground party but primarily because the workers themselves were economically too vulnerable and politically insecure. If the *likvidatory* hoped all this would change with the industrial growth and labor activity already under way in 1912, they were to be bitterly disappointed, for in the years before World

War I, as the labor movement revived, it was the Leninists, not the *likvidatory*, who benefited.⁷⁸

The experience of the Social Democrats of Baku demonstrated that in Russia at that time the maintenance of an underground party organization was an advantage, indeed an absolute necessity, for those working in the labor movement. Continuity and preservation of cadres were possible only with support from an illegal organization. Given the passivity of the workers and the hostility of both government and the industrialists, the period of "reaction" proved to be a time for patience and conservation, rather than development of an expanded legal labor movement. The underground provided the place of retreat for the loyal remnants of Social Democratic practice. They would emerge only in 1913 and 1914 to find in the prolonged economic struggles that mass base and ultimately the political significance in the labor movement that earlier they had looked for in vain.

78. For a general discussion of the "revolutionary upsurge" in Russia on the eve of World War I see Leopold H. Haimson's seminal article, "The Problem of Social Stability in Urban Russia, 1905-1917," *Slavic Review*, 23, no. 4 (December 1964): 619-42; 24, no. 1 (March 1965): 1-22. For a brief account of that period in Baku see Ronald Grigor Suny, *The Baku Commune, 1917-1918: Class and Nationality in the Russian Revolution* (Princeton, 1972), pp. 51-58.