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Origins and early activities

**Russian Social Democratic
Labour Party**
**Российская социал-
демократическая рабочая партия**



Delegates of the first party congress, 1898

Central Committee	Variable
Founded	1 March 1898
Dissolved	1912
Merger of	SBORK, Jewish Labour Bund, smaller Marxist organizations
Succeeded by	- Social Democratic Labour Party (Bolsheviks) - Social Democratic Labour Party (Mensheviks)^[1]
Headquarters	Petrograd
Newspaper	<i>Iskra</i>
Ideology	Marxist socialism ^[2] Revolutionary socialism ^[3] Social democracy ^{[4][5][6]}
Political position	Left-wing to Far-left
International affiliation	Second International (1889–1912)
Colours	Red
Party flag	
Politics of Russia Political parties Elections	

Before the Second Congress a young intellectual named Vladimir Ilyich Ulyanov joined the party, better known by his pseudonym—Vladimir Lenin. In 1902 he had published *What is to be Done?*, outlining his view of the party's task and methodology—to form "the vanguard of the proletariat." He advocated a disciplined, centralized party of committed activists who sought to fuse the underground struggle for political freedom with the class struggle of the proletariat.^[8]

Internal divisions

In 1903, the Second Congress of the party met in exile in Brussels to attempt to create a united force. However, after unprecedented attention from the Belgian authorities the congress moved to London, meeting on August 11 in a chapel in Tottenham Court Road^[9]. At the congress, the party split into two irreconcilable factions on November 17: the Bolsheviks (derived from "Bolshinstvo"—Russian for "majority"), headed by Lenin, and the Mensheviks (from "Menshinstvo"—Russian for "minority"), headed by Julius Martov. Confusingly, the Mensheviks were actually the larger faction, however the names Menshevik and Bolshevik were taken from a vote held at the 1903 party congress for the editorial board of the party newspaper, *Iskra* ("Spark"), with the Bolsheviks being the majority and the Mensheviks being the minority. These were the names used by the factions for the rest of the party congress and these are the names retained after the split at the 1903 congress. Lenin's faction later ended up in the minority and remained smaller than the Mensheviks until the Russian Revolution of 1917.

A central issue at the congress was the question of the definition of party membership. Martov proposed the formulation "A member of the Russian Social-Democratic Labour Party is one who accepts the Party's programme, supports the Party financially, and renders it regular personal assistance under the direction of one of its organizations."^[10] Lenin, on the other hand, proposed a more strict definition: "A member of the Russian Social-Democratic Labour Party is one who accepts its programme and who supports the Party both financially and by personal participation in one of the Party organizations."^[10] Martov won the vote, and the bolsheviks accepted it as part of the adopted organizational rules.

Despite a number of attempts at reunification, the split proved permanent. As time passed, more ideological differences emerged. According to many historians, the Bolsheviks pushed for an almost immediate "proletarian" revolution, while the Mensheviks believed that Russia was still at too early a stage in history for an immediate working-class revolution. The two warring factions both agreed that the coming revolution would primarily be "bourgeois democratic" in its character. But while the mensheviks viewed the liberals as the main ally, the bolsheviks opted for an alliance with the peasantry as the only way to carry out a popular revolution while defending the interests of the working class. Essentially, the difference was that the bolsheviks considered that in Russia, the tasks of the bourgeois democratic revolution would have to be carried out without the participation of the bourgeoisie.

The Third Congress of the party (1905) was held separately by the Bolsheviks. The Fourth Congress (1906) was held in Stockholm, Sweden and saw a formal reunification of the two factions, (with the Mensheviks in the majority), but the discrepancies between Bolshevik and Menshevik views became particularly clear during the proceedings.

The Fifth Congress of the party was held in London, England, in 1907; it consolidated the supremacy of the Bolshevik faction and debated strategy for communist revolution in Russia. Stalin never later referred to his stay in London.^[11]

Dissolution

The Social Democrats (SDs) boycotted elections to the First Duma (April–July 1906), but were represented in the Second Duma (February–June 1907). With the SRs, they held 83 seats. The Second Duma was dissolved on the pretext of the discovery of an SD conspiracy to subvert the army. Under new electoral laws, the SD presence in the Third Duma (1907–12) was reduced to 19. From the Fourth Duma (1912–17), the SDs were finally and fully split. The Mensheviks had five members in the Duma and the Bolsheviks had seven, including Roman Malinovsky, who was later uncovered as an Okhrana agent.

In the years of Tsarist repression that followed the defeat of the 1905 Russian Revolution both the Bolshevik and Menshevik factions faced splits, causing further splits in the RSDLP, which manifested themselves from late 1908 and the years immediately following. The Mensheviks split into the "Pro-Party Mensheviks" led by Georgi Plekhanov, who wished to maintain illegal underground work

as well as legal work; and the Liquidators, whose most prominent advocates were Pavel Axelrod, Fyodor Dan, Nikolai Aleksandrovich Rozhkov and Nikolay Chkheidze, who wished to pursue purely legal activities and who now repudiated illegal and underground work.^[12]

The Bolsheviks split threeways, into the Proletary group led by Vladimir Lenin, Grigory Zinoviev and Lev Kamenev, who waged a fierce struggle against the liquidators, ultimatists and recallists; the Ultimatist group led by Grigory Aleksinsky, who wished to issue ultimatums to the RSDLP Duma deputies to follow the party line or to resign immediately; and the Recallist group led by Alexander Bogdanov and Anatoly Lunacharsky and supported by Maxim Gorky, who called for the immediate recall of all RSDLP Duma deputies and a boycott of all legal work by the RSDLP in favour of increased radical underground and illegal work!^[13]

There was also a non-faction group led by Leon Trotsky, who denounced all the "factionalism" in the RSDLP, pushed for "unity" in the party, and focused more strongly on the problems of Russian workers and peasants on the ground. Although the Menshevik Julius Martov was formally a liquidator, a lot of this was out of sentiment as a lot of his closest political friends were liquidators.^[14]

In January 1912, Lenin's Proletary Bolshevik group called a conference in Prague, and expelled the liquidators, ultimatists and recallists from the RSDLP, which officially led to the creation of a separate party, known as the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party (bolshevik). In August 1912, Trotsky's group tried to reunite all the RSDLP factions into the same party at a conference in Vienna, but was largely rebuffed by the Bolsheviks.^[15] The Bolsheviks seized power during the October Revolution in 1917 when all political power was transferred to the Soviets, and, in 1918, changed their name to the (All-) Russian Communist Party. They banned the Mensheviks after the Kronstadt Uprising of 1921.

Foreign affiliations

In 1902 the Tallinn organization of the RSDLP was founded, which in 1904 was converted into the Tallinn Committee of the party. In November a parallel (that is, also directly under the CC of RSDLP) Narva Committee was created. Amongst other radicals, the Estonian RSDLP cadres were active in the 1905 revolution.

At the conference of the Estonian RSDLP organizations in Terijoki, Finland in March 1907 the Bolshevik supporters came into serious conflict with the Mensheviks.

At the Fourth (Unity) Congress of the RSDLP in 1906, the Latvian Social Democratic Workers Party entered the RSDLP as a territorial organisation. After the congress its name was changed 'Social-Democracy of the Latvian Territory'.^[16]

Congresses

Congress	Date	Place	Delegates	Elected Central Committee	Majority faction
<u>1st</u>	13 March – 15 March 1898	<u>Minsk, Russian Empire</u>	9	▪ <u>Stepan Radchenko</u> ▪ <u>Boris Eidelman</u> ▪ <u>Arkadi Kremer</u>	N/A
<u>2nd</u>	30 July – 23 August 1903	Open: <u>Brussels, Belgium</u> Closed: <u>London, UK</u>	51	▪ <u>Gleb Krzhizhanovsky</u> ▪ <u>Friedrich Lengnik</u> ▪ <u>Vladimir Noskov</u>	<u>Mensheviks</u>
<u>3rd</u>	25 April – 10 May 1905	<u>London, UK</u>	51	▪ <u>Leonid Krasin</u> ▪ <u>Vladimir Lenin</u> ▪ <u>Dmitry Postolovsky</u> ▪ <u>Alexei Rykov</u>	<u>Bolsheviks</u>
<u>4th</u>	10 April – 25 April 1906	<u>Stockholm, Sweden</u>	112	▪ <u>Boris Bakhmetef</u> ▪ <u>Leon Goldman</u> ▪ <u>Vasily Denitsky</u> ▪ <u>Pavel Kolokolnikov</u> ▪ <u>Leonid Krasin</u> ▪ <u>Viktor Krokhamal</u> ▪ <u>Natalya Baranskaya</u> ▪ <u>Vladimir Rozanov</u> ▪ <u>Alexei Rykov</u> ▪ <u>Lev Khinchuk</u>	<u>Mensheviks</u>
<u>5th</u>	13 May – 1 June 1907	<u>London, UK</u>	338	▪ <u>Jūlijs Daniševskis</u> ▪ <u>Joseph Dubrovinsky</u> ▪ <u>Felix Dzerzhinsky</u> ▪ <u>Joseph Goldenberg</u> ▪ <u>Joseph Iusiv</u> ▪ <u>Aleksandr Martynov</u> ▪ <u>Viktor Nogin</u> ▪ <u>Nikolai Rozhkov</u> ▪ <u>Ivan Teodorovich</u> ▪ <u>Adolf Warski</u> ▪ <u>Noe Zhordania</u>	<u>Bolsheviks</u>

Electoral history

Legislative elections

State Duma					
Election year	# of overall votes	% of overall vote	# of overall seats won	+/–	Leader
1906	<i>unknown</i> (#3)	3.8	18 / 478 	New	<u>Julius Martov</u>
1907 (Jan.)	<i>unknown</i> (#3)	12.5	65 / 518 	▲ 47	
1907 (Oct.)	<i>unknown</i> (#4)	3.7	19 / 509 	▼ 46	
1912	<i>unknown</i> (#4)	3.3	14 / 434 	▼ 5	

See also

- Factions of the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party
- Socialist-Revolutionary Party
- Zreniye

Footnotes

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