

**CRG Chair Lecture**

**TEXTS FROM THE VOID:  
THE PRINCE AND WHAT IS  
TO BE DONE?**

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# Texts from the Void: *The Prince* and *What is to be Done?*

## I

*The Prince* was written by Niccolo Machiavelli in 1513, but the small book saw the light of the day only in 1532 five years after the author's death. Machiavelli was an official of the Republic of Florence from 1498 to 1512, when the Medicis were out of power. He was also a diplomat, historian, and author, who besides well-known treatises on history and politics wrote comedies, carnival songs, and poetry. *The Prince* is a work on princes and principalities, while his other main work on politics and political philosophy, *Discourses on Livy* (*Discourses on the First Ten of Titus Livy*, 1517, published in 1531), less famous but important in its own right, is said to have paved the way for modern republicanism. Besides all these, his writings on army and war help us in getting a fuller understanding of the tumultuous time when he thought and wrote.

This was a time when city states of Italy run by families and individuals rose and fell suddenly, as kings of France, Spain, the Holy Roman Empire, and the Pope waged wars for influence, control, and at times acquisition of Italian territory. Alliances changed with mercenary leaders and fortune-seekers changing sides without warning. Armies often consisted of mercenary soldiers. Governments dependent on them were short lived. However, at that time, Florence was one of the greatest centres of ancient scholarship and art. In 1494 Florence had restored the republic; the Medicis had been expelled after they had ruled for about sixty years.

But Florence was not to have a peaceful life with establishment of a republic.

Girolamo Savonarola, a Dominican friar and an ascetic, was known for prophecies of civic glory, advocacy of the destruction of secular art and culture, which he thought was harming religion, denouncement of clerical corruption, despotic rule, and exploitation of the poor, and his calls for renewal of Christianity as a way out of the sinful world. When in 1494 the King of France, Charles VIII, invaded Italy and threatened Florence, Savonarola's prophecies came for greater attention. The friar intervened with the French king, the Florentines expelled the Medicis, and at Savonarola's urging, established "people's rule", which according to him would be the New Jerusalem, a world centre of Christian religion, richer, more powerful, and more glorious than ever. Savonarola launched a vigorous moralistic campaign with the active help of youth of the city. But his impetuosity soon caused his downfall. In 1495, when Florence refused to join the Pope's forces against the French, the Pope summoned Savonarola to Rome. Savonarola disobeyed; he was banned from preaching. He defied the Pope by campaigning for reform with pious theatricals, processions, and bonfires of cosmetics, books, and objects of art and luxury (known as *bonfire of the vanities*). He was excommunicated by Pope Alexander in 1497, who now threatened to place Florence under an interdict. As a consequence, one section of the Florentine population proposed a trial by fire to test Savonarola's divine mandate. The trial turned into a fiasco. Popular opinion turned against Savonarola, who was now imprisoned. The Church and civil authorities condemned and hanged him, and burned his body along with those of his two followers. His cause of religious reform and republican freedom weakened severely thereafter.

This was the milieu, immediate, violent, and contentious, in which Machiavelli stepped into his office. In *The Prince*, Girolamo Savonarola casts a long shadow. Machiavelli does not admit it always, but his theory of armed people, the twist of fortune, the necessity of sagacity, the need for the ruler to be aware of his own strength and limitations in view of the mutations in politics and the flickering nature of popular mood, draws heavily on the tragic life of the friar. Machiavelli of course has no sympathy for Savonarola. For him, the friar was a fool. Machiavelli wrote,

If Moses, Cyrus, Theseus, and Romulus had been unarmed they could not have enforced their constitutions for long—as happened in our time to Fra Girolamo Savonarola, who was ruined with his new order of things immediately the multitude believed in him no longer, and he had no means of keeping steadfast those who believed or of making the unbelievers to believe. Therefore, such as these have great difficulties in consummating their enterprise, for all their dangers are in the ascent, yet with ability they will overcome them; but when these are overcome, and those who envied them their success are exterminated, they will begin to be respected, and they will continue afterwards powerful, secure, honoured, and happy.<sup>1</sup>

Savonarola was an unarmed prophet who had come to a bad end.

There is however one more figure casting a similar shadow over *The Prince*. The figure is of Cesare Borgia, the Duke of Valentino, son of Pope Alexander VI, whose ambitions led to events with which Machiavelli's public life was greatly occupied. Machiavelli never hesitates to cite the actions of the Duke for the benefit of princes who wish to seize states and keep them, and indeed, Machiavelli finds no advice as good as studying the pattern of Cesare Borgia's conduct. He is perhaps, the "hero" of *The Prince*. Yet in *The Prince* Cesare is a tragic figure. The figure is of someone who rises on the fortune of others and falls with them; who adopts the prudent course that should save him, yet succeeds only temporarily; who is prepared for all eventualities, yet his abilities fail to carry him through. Cesare Borgia is cruel, but with reason and foresight.

For, he also knows how to self-protect and what should be best for him. To Machiavelli, it was an extraordinary and unforeseen fatality. He cannot forget that the most famous Borgia dies (1507) at the young age of 31 in a minor skirmish with attackers who did not even know who he was. Savonarola died because of his lack of discerning ability. Cesare Borgia dies because fortune and virtue cannot combine harmoniously in this endlessly ambitious life. One or the other has to fail at some time.

But there is, I think, a third memory that haunts Machiavelli. It is an image, a dream, and a utopia around the glorious years of the Medici rule known as the period of greatness of Florence as under the guidance of the Magnificent Lorenzo de Medici. But then, why did the Medicis lose power? How to make a principedom strong, glorious, and ironically “free”? Hence, a central question, how to make a Principedom inhere the virtues of a republic, and is it not that the leaders of a republic must acquire the strength of a prince? Machiavelli had earlier planned a militia for Florence, and recruited people in it. He distrusted mercenaries. He wanted to make the army a body of citizens, he was able to have four hundred farmers marching on parade, dressed as soldiers, and armed with lances and other small arms. This was the armed people. Yet, fortune had turned against him and once more against Florence. In 1512 the Medicis backed by the new Pope Julius II used Spanish troops and defeated Florence. The Florentine leader Soderini fled. The city-state and the republic were dissolved. Machiavelli was removed from office, imprisoned, tortured, and banished from the city for a year. He retired to his farm estate where he devoted himself to studying and writing political treatises. Questions of rule, power, stability, fortune, virtue, vagaries of time, forms of principedom, republic, fragmentation of the country, roles of cruelty and kindness in politics, and most importantly the role of the citizens in the stability of rule, haunt him. In a letter he writes,



When evening comes, I go back home, and go to my study. On the threshold, I take off my work clothes, covered in mud and filth, and I put on the clothes an ambassador would wear. Decently dressed, I enter the ancient courts of rulers who have long since died. There, I am warmly welcomed, and I feed on the only food I find nourishing and was born to savour. I am not ashamed to talk to them and ask them to explain their actions and they, out of kindness, answer me. Four hours go by without my feeling any anxiety. I forget every worry. I am no longer afraid of poverty or frightened of death. I live entirely through them.<sup>2</sup>

As he distils contemporary history and past accounts of the rise and fall of princes, he finds Aristotle's *Politics* of no help. In understanding the nature of principdoms Polybius is of no help either, for his purpose is different. He does not want to classify rules. His interest is not in any analysis of constitutional change, mixed constitution, separation of powers and checks and balances to limit power, any theory of government as moral force, or how rulers should converse with God and the social world of morals. He knows his Cicero, Seneca, and Marcus Aurelius and draws from all of them when required. Yet he is less concerned with precepts. He is concerned with *situations* that must enable him to understand, how to found a rule and how to secure it? There is no one to guide him in this task, only the fortuitous history. He is lonely in this venture.

And because Dante says it does not produce knowledge when we hear and do not remember, I have noted everything in their conversations which has profited me... I go as deeply as I can into considerations on this subject, debating what a principdom is, of what kinds they are, how they are gained, how they are kept, why they are lost. And if ever you can find any of my fantasies pleasing, this one should not displease you; and by a prince, and especially by a new prince, it ought to be welcomed.<sup>3</sup>

At the age of 58 he dies, in many ways a lonely man in his journey. He wanted to gift the book to Lorenzo, the new Medici ruler of Florence. We do not know if the dedicated copy reached the latter, or the Medici ever read it. The book remained unpublished in his life time. The

book was a mark of, to use Louis Althusser's phrase, "Machiavelli's solitude".<sup>4</sup>

We are now ready to enter *The Prince*.

## II

The first few chapters of the book are in one sense straightforward. But we have to be cautious, their straightforward nature must not lull us, for these chapters are necessary to proceed with the author along the increasingly complicated path of interrelations between elements that decide the destiny of the prince and all other material realities associated with that destiny: thus, the prince as a ruler and an individual, his fortune, his virtue, the nature of his army, nature of the principedom, of his foes and friends, indeed his people, and the nation. He says alerting us as he writes the dedication of the book to Magnificent Lorenzo, Son of Piero de Medici,

Nor do I hold with those who regard it as a presumption if a man of low and humble condition dare to discuss and settle the concerns of princes; because, just as those who draw landscapes place themselves below in the plain to contemplate the nature of the mountains and of lofty places, and in order to contemplate the plains place themselves upon high mountains, even so to understand the nature of the people it needs to be a prince, and to understand that of princes it needs to be of the people.<sup>5</sup>

This is how he begins. What he will be saying in this book is new, because Machiavelli represents the new - an outsider to princely families, and a disbeliever of the ideas of that age. The path he takes is untrodden. The goal he wants to reach - unification of Italy torn asunder by quarreling princes and invading armies from outside - is unknown, unprecedented. An understanding of this future history begins with a new understanding of the present history of rulers, governments, war making, and the art of keeping the citizens loyal, respectful, happy and at times fearful. As he

says repeatedly that it is better to write of things as they actually are, rather than as they are imagined. So, no imaginary representation of politics, no ideology of politics, but politics as an object - a “thing” that is to be known. Politics is an objective reality. It is a practice. Yet this practice tells us of the way fortune has endowed princes or abandoned them, and how princes went on to attain to greater glory - by no means an unending journey. For, politics always approaches closures, and it must wait and begin anew.

Principalities conduct themselves according to the ways they are acquired - inheritance, conquest, union, etc. Some are inherited, some are conquered. In some cases, subjects of the conquered kingdoms rebel against new rulers, in some cases they do not even after the original conqueror has died. How will the principalities - those prior to being conquered had lived under their laws - be governed now? Again, some principalities have been acquired by good fortune, some by valor of the prince and his troops, and some by crime. What are the ways to discern the varying cases, conditions, and fortunes? What are the essential differences between mercenaries and troops consisting of the prince’s own subjects? What are indeed the duties of the prince in respect to military matters? And, finally, how should we measure the power of municipalities? As we noted, these (chapters I-XIV) are straightforward accounts, formulations, and precepts, but they prepare us for the second set of inquiries (chapters 15-23), namely who will be this prince? How should he relate to his subjects? What will be his conduct faced with options, alternatives, or competing avenues of government and life in general? Thus, what are the means to applause or when does a prince earn censure? Similarly, conditions of cruelty and clemency, and therefore whether it is better for the prince to be loved and feared, or why he should avoid flattery, and why he must avoid being hated.

These chapters are the heart of statecraft. The ruler's ambition cannot be to appear as liberal. Liberality is not the essence of successful governance. In Machiavelli's words,

... I say that it would be well to be reputed liberal. Nevertheless, liberality exercised in a way that does not bring you the reputation for it, injures you...

We have not seen great things done in our time except by those who have been considered mean; the rest have failed. Pope Julius the Second was assisted in reaching the papacy by a reputation for liberality, yet he did not strive afterwards to keep it up, when he made war on the King of France; and he made many wars without imposing any extraordinary tax on his subjects, for he supplied his additional expenses out of his long thriftiness. The present King of Spain would not have undertaken or conquered in so many enterprises if he had been reputed liberal. A prince, therefore, provided that he has not to rob his subjects, that he can defend himself, that he does not become poor and abject, that he is not forced to become rapacious, ought to hold of little account a reputation for being mean, for it is one of those vices which will enable him to govern.<sup>6</sup>

Hence the (in)famous formulation,

Coming now to the other qualities mentioned above, I say that every prince ought to desire to be considered clement and not cruel. Nevertheless, he ought to take care not to misuse this clemency. Cesare Borgia was considered cruel; notwithstanding, his cruelty reconciled the Romagna, unified it, and restored it to peace and loyalty...

Upon this a question arises: whether it be better to be loved than feared or feared than loved? It may be answered that one should wish to be both, but, because it is difficult to unite them in one person, it is much safer to be feared than loved, when, of the two, either must be dispensed with... and men have less scruple in offending one who is beloved than one who is feared, for love is preserved by the link of obligation which, owing to the baseness of men, is broken at every opportunity for their advantage; but fear preserves you by a dread of punishment which never fails.

Nevertheless, a prince ought to inspire fear in such a way that, if he does not win love, he avoids hatred; because he can endure very well being feared whilst he is not hated, which will always be as long as he abstains from the property of his citizens and subjects and from their women. But when it is necessary for him to proceed against the life of someone, he must do it on proper justification and for manifest cause, but above all

things he must keep his hands off the property of others, because men more quickly forget the death of their father than the loss of their patrimony...

Returning to the question of being feared or loved, I come to the conclusion that, men loving according to their own will and fearing according to that of the prince, a wise prince should establish himself on that which is in his own control and not in that of others; he must endeavour only to avoid hatred, as is noted.<sup>7</sup>

We must not oversimplify the precept about love and hatred, because what is at stake here is the way power will be constituted and stabilised. It is a process, and the constitution of power will find itself in the process. Hence, the constant dilemma growing out of contrasting possibilities through which power will constitute. It is dangerous journey, there is no static formula, and there is no permanent exemption from the cruelty of dilemmas. The virtue of the prince is an innovation. The formation of power is a play of productive possibilities. The prince's indecisions will cost him, yet he cannot but face moments of indecision because the situation is volatile, it is unfolding. It is dynamic with various combinations and permutations ruling out any once and for all solution to the problem of power. Princedom is a principle of power.

The first set of chapters is thus an attempt to define the prince as the constitutive entity - a configuration towards the new prince. The relation of princedoms to prince prepares the ground for the appearance of the citizens as a crucial element of power of the prince. In the second set of chapters this crucial element leads us to the role of virtue and armament in giving a bodily form to power. What is this bodily form? Of course, the human form of a prince, but one with extra-ordinary beastly qualities of sensing danger and weighing options. Probably recalling Cicero in his mind, he reminds us,

... You must know there are two ways of contesting, the one by the law, the other by force; the first method is proper to men, the second to beasts; but

because the first is frequently not sufficient, it is necessary to have recourse to the second. Therefore, it is necessary for a prince to understand how to avail himself of the beast and the man. This has been figuratively taught to princes by ancient writers, who describe how Achilles and many other princes of old were given to the Centaur Chiron to nurse, who brought them up in his discipline; which means solely that, as they had for a teacher one who was half beast and half man, so it is necessary for a prince to know how to make use of both natures, and that one without the other is not durable. A prince, therefore, being compelled knowingly to adopt the beast, ought to choose the fox and the lion; because the lion cannot defend himself against snares and the fox cannot defend himself against wolves. Therefore, it is necessary to be a fox to discover the snares and a lion to terrify the wolves. Those who rely simply on the lion do not understand what they are about. Therefore, a wise lord cannot, nor ought he to, keep faith when such observance may be turned against him, and when the reasons that caused him to pledge it exist no longer. If men were entirely good this precept would not hold, but because they are bad, and will not keep faith with you, you too are not bound to observe it with them. Nor will there ever be wanting to a prince the legitimate reasons to excuse this non-observance. Of this, endless modern examples could be given, showing how many treaties and engagements have been made void and of no effect through the faithlessness of princes; and he who has known best how to employ the fox has succeeded best.<sup>8</sup>

Only then armed power will win. The historical crisis will be negotiated and power will undergo positive mutation. For Machiavelli, this will be the unification of Italy, the deliverance of the country from aggression, plunder, and incessant squabbles and wars.

The last set of chapters (24-26) thus tells us of the organization of time. Virtue has constructed power, but the effectiveness of this is set against the political misery of the nation. There is no way this contrast can be resolved. This is perhaps the “tragedy” of the political that Antonio Negri hints at in his comments on the text.<sup>9</sup> Will the prince reconcile with others to free Italy? Will the prince forever go on attaining glory? Will not fortune intervene in this dream journey? Machiavelli has always raised difficult and unresolvable questions and tried to suggest the road ahead. Ironically he has thereby shown the possible closures politics will face. Therefore, as commentators have noted, the last three chapters become

an attempt to avoid the problem that has been constructed. Will Italian virtue reappear? All Machiavelli can do is to exhort the Prince with these words,

Although lately some spark may have been shown by one, which made us think he was ordained by God for our redemption, nevertheless it was afterwards seen, in the height of his career, that fortune rejected him; so that Italy, left as without life, waits for him who shall yet heal her wounds and put an end to the ravaging and plundering of Lombardy, to the swindling and taxing of the kingdom and of Tuscany, and cleanse those sores that for long have festered. It is seen how she entreats God to send someone who shall deliver her from these wrongs and barbarous insolence. It is seen also that she is ready and willing to follow a banner if only someone will raise it....

... Further than this, how extraordinarily the ways of God have been manifested beyond example...God is not willing to do everything, and thus take away our free will and that share of glory which belongs to us...

This opportunity, therefore, ought not to be allowed to pass for letting Italy at last see her liberator appear. Nor can one express the love with which he would be received in all those provinces which have suffered so much from these foreign scouring, with what thirst for revenge, with what stubborn faith, with what devotion, with what tears. What door would be closed to him? Who would refuse obedience to him? What envy would hinder him? What Italian would refuse him homage? To all of us this barbarous dominion stinks...<sup>10</sup>

As he concludes, the classicist scholar cannot help but remind the Prince of Petrarch:

Virtue against fury shall advance the fight,  
And it in the combat soon shall put to flight:  
For the old Roman valour is not dead,  
Nor in the Italians' breasts extinguished.<sup>11</sup>

Does Machiavelli at the end, then, leave Italy not to a future defined by the knowledge of wise conduct, but to a future blessed by fortune? What indeed is this “fortune” appearing in the book again and again? Is it the play of fate, or shall we call it the given, the natural, the spontaneous, or, by itself a product of the encounter of fortune and virtue?

The stakes are high, perhaps too high for Machiavelli. Princely power has appeared through successive analyses in its immediacy and restlessness. The historical passage of power must embrace mutation of time; movements as figures of changing time. The great mutation of the power of the prince is caught between the political-military states of Europe and powerlessness of Italy. Hence, the question: How will the nation be constituted in such conjuncture? There is no answer. We only know, the foundation of power must be re-examined and re-founded at each critical moment of time. Machiavelli is aware of the condition of transformation that is endless.

*The Prince* is therefore elusive as some have noted. It is focused, yet there is something on which we cannot lay our hand firmly. In *Machiavelli and Us*, Althusser wrote, the double take on the book by commentators from Rousseau's time to this day is not a purely external thing to the book.<sup>12</sup> The double viewpoint is internal to the text. The text has come out of a void. It has not provided a solution; it has formulated a problem, which is the beginning of a journey. It has asked us to reconsider the conception of political practice around notions of power, leadership, people, virtue, territory, army, organization, and the conditional existence of an idea, namely, *what we ought to do in politics, and thus how we ought to realise the nation.*

### III

Four hundred years later in a similar situation of emptiness, a book named after a novel by Nikolai Chernyshevsky *What is to be Done?* appeared among Russian revolutionary circles, particularly among the underground



groups. This new book was published from Stuttgart in 1902 with a sub-title, *Burning Questions of our Movement*.<sup>13</sup>

*The book with the original title was published in 1863. Through its narrative mode it had advocated* the creation of small socialist cooperatives oriented toward modern production. It was the intellectual's duty to educate and lead the labouring Russians along the path to socialism bypassing capitalism. Rakhmetov, a character in the novel, became an emblem of the nobility of Russian radicalism. The novel expressed the notion of a society that gains "eternal joy" of an earthly kind. Vera Pavlovna, the protagonist who escapes the control of her family and an arranged marriage to seek economic independence, seeks the utopia through everyday actions and ideas. The book had tremendous influence on critical thinkers in Russia. Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, Plekhanov, Vera Zasulich, all had their responses to the novel and the question.

In the new incarnation of the question, *What is to be Done?* the author, Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, retained the title, added a sub-title to indicate the direction he wanted to take, and made a complete break with the Russian populist past. Yet there was never any doubt that through this break, the book was going to be a response to the political problematic of contemporary Russian situation carrying imprints of the past. Lenin's articles in *Iskra* published before he started writing the book had indicated a new awareness of the "burning questions of our time" - in a form shaped by Russian historical consciousness of changing social conditions and form of transformation. The book now declared, the country needed vanguards to lead the Russians restless for transformation. Who was the vanguard? The proletariat was the vanguard of the society, the party of the proletariat was the vanguard of the proletarians, and professional revolutionaries were the vanguard of the party of the proletariat. Lenin intended the vanguard party to be an instrument of education of the masses. The party would be

organized into cadres of “...persons engaged in revolutionary activities as a profession.”<sup>14</sup> Profession is skill, trade, training, a special kind of consciousness, and complete devotion to the pursuit. These revolutionaries would be willing to sacrifice their lives for the good of the party. Sacrifice, heroism, loyalty to masses, and consistency in the work of educating Russian masses in political struggle against the Tsar and autocracy would enable the revolutionaries to guide Russia through the revolutionary movement to democracy and socialism. Yet, this would not happen easily as the environment was extremely hostile and revolutionaries had to learn the mode of underground work, networking with revolutionary groups located in various cities of the country, and being in constant contact with workers and their struggles. The Tsar’s regime could be undermined only when people had been brought to the cause through education. This was possible if the outlawed educators were not only knowledgeable, they were also stealthy and efficient. Without those attributes they would be caught and prosecuted by the ruling autocracy, imprisoned, exiled, and many eventually killed.

The ideology of socialism will make sense only when we have thought of organization, for the history of socialism is meaningful only when seen in union with the struggle of the working class and semi-proletarian masses. *What is to be Done* in this way became a testament for organization - an issue neglected by the early generation of scholarly Russian Marxists such as Plekhanov and legal Marxists like P. Struve, and on the other hand reduced to a matter of conspiracy by generations of revolutionary terrorists, among whom was Lenin’s elder brother Alexander who died in the cause of overthrowing Russian autocracy. The Populist movement never solidified into a party or organization; Perhaps, a substantial populist party, with the support of the peasantry, had the potential to change Russia. Not only Lenin had picked up the title

provided originally by an agrarian socialist, he also praised the heroism of several militant populist leaders. Yet, the populist movement had failed, and in that background several small socialist groups with varying influence had sprung up in the country. Of these groups, *Narodnaya Volya* was one of the prominent. It was the name of an influential populist movement that combined populism, Marxism, and the politics of selective terror. It was an eclectic politics. Influenced by it, *Rabochaya Dyelo* (*Workers' Dawn*) seemed unable to take a firm stand on anything. On the other hand, there was a trend named "economism" centred round a newspaper called *Rabochaya Mysl* (*Workers' Thought*), which shunned bold political choice. *What is to be Done?* chastised the economists for arguing that the workers were not ready for politics. While the working class may spontaneously gravitate toward socialism, bourgeois ideology also imposed itself on the working class to an even greater degree - hence, the crucial role of the party, not of intellectuals but of the most advanced workers, in winning the rest of the class to socialism. Thus, if the economists were saying that the desirable struggle was a question of possibility-actuality (which is possible, and the struggle which is possible is that which is going on at the given moment), Lenin sought out what existed in order to figure out what would be the next step towards revolution. If the economists blamed the working class for not being revolutionary enough *What is to be Done* turned the table and blamed the socialists for "lagging behind the mass movement." Lenin famously wrote:

Why do the Russian workers still manifest little revolutionary activity in response to the brutal treatment of the people by the police, the persecution of religious sects, the flogging of peasants, the outrageous censorship, the torture of soldiers, the persecution of the most innocent cultural undertakings, etc.? Is it because the "economic struggle" does not "stimulate" them to this, because such activity does not "promise palpable results", because it produces little that is "positive"? To adopt such an opinion, we repeat, is merely to direct the charge where it does not belong, to blame the working masses for one's own philistinism (or

Bernsteinism). We must blame ourselves, our lagging behind the mass movement, for still being unable to organise sufficiently wide, striking, and rapid exposures of all the shameful outrages.<sup>15</sup>

What was then the way out of these ideological confusions? Characteristically, cutting through the knots, Lenin carved out a new path. Driven by his idea of massive political struggles by the Russian masses, he brought on one template two different aspects of revolution, namely, socialist thought and the practical struggle of the masses. Organization became the core of politics that built on the ideology of socialism and the heroism of the Russian masses. In this way, the book became a manifesto. Because of its unambiguous formulation of the question of organization as the key to *politics as practice*, democrats reviled the book; anarchists detested it; and moderates in all forms condemned the book for eternity. Yet *What is to be Done* through its particular combination of different elements of radical politics became a unique book - an answer to the question of revolution in Russia, a manifesto for Russian underground revolutionary activists, and continued to be read by millions as the key text that had launched Russia on the path to a successful revolution fifteen years later. It was a revolution whose experiences are still studied the world over.

Organization of revolutionaries and making them into leaders of the people was thus Lenin's answer to the "burning question" of his time, "What is to be Done"? While Lenin's answer is variously studied, followed, criticized, reviled, and damned, less attention is paid to Lenin's formulation of the problem, which is equally significant as the perspective of the book, indeed of Russian revolution, the *political problematic of revolution itself*.

In some understanding, it is the same as the other two contemporary formulations, namely, "Where to Begin?" and "What to

Do Now?” – formulations that echoed in Lenin’s writings in the Russian revolutionary newspaper, *Iskra*. Organization of revolutionaries, the book declared, is different from organization of workers for economic struggle against the employers and the government. Yet, Lenin said, this is what happens actually; so, when we talk about organization, we literally talk in different tongues.

I vividly recall, for example, a conversation I once had with a fairly consistent Economist, with whom I had not been previously acquainted. We were discussing the pamphlet, *Who Will Bring About the Political Revolution?* and were soon of a mind that its principal defect was its ignoring of the question of organization. We had begun to assume full agreement between us; but, as the conversation proceeded, it became evident that we were talking of different things... What was the source of our disagreement? It was the fact that on questions both of organization and of politics, the Economists are forever lapsing from Social-Democracy into trade-unionism. The political struggle of Social-Democracy is far more extensive and complex than the economic struggle of the workers against the employers and the government. Similarly, (indeed for that reason) the organization of the revolutionary Social-Democratic Party must inevitably be of a kind different from the organization of the workers designed for this struggle... On the other hand, the organization of the revolutionaries must consist first and foremost of people who make revolutionary activity their profession (for which reason I speak of the organization of revolutionaries, meaning revolutionary Social-Democrats). In view of this common characteristic of the members of such an organization, all distinctions as between workers and intellectuals, not to speak of distinctions of trade and profession, in both categories, must be effaced. Such an organization must perforce not be very extensive and must be as secret as possible.<sup>16</sup>

Lenin was clear that no movement could be durable without a stable organization of leaders to maintain continuity. And, the more widely the masses were spontaneously drawn into the struggle to form the basis of the movement and participate in it, the more necessary would it be to have such an organization; and the more stable therefore must it be. Indeed, wider will become the circles of men and women belonging to the working class and other toiling classes of society able to join the movement and perform active work in it. Trade unions, workers’ circles for self-education

and reading of illegal literature, socialist circles, and democratic circles for all other sections of the population, will increase. The active and widespread participation of the masses will not suffer due to the presence of leaders; on the contrary, it will benefit by the fact that experienced revolutionaries will be there to “prepare leaflets, work out approximate plans, and appoint bodies of leaders for each urban district, for each factory district and to each educational institution, etc.”<sup>17</sup>

Indeed, as he clarified, “we must have as large a number as possible of such organizations having the widest possible variety of functions, but it is absurd and dangerous to confuse those with organizations of revolutionaries...” Lenin said, those, who cannot think along this line, are “wretched amateurs.” They will dabble about Lenin’s “undemocratic” views, but they were not revolutionaries. For, “the most grievous sin we have committed in regard to organization is that by our primitiveness we have lowered the prestige of revolutionaries in Russia.” The revolutionary is not a trade union secretary; a revolutionary is like a people’s tribune. Did it mean that Lenin was lowering the status of the workers? He said, “Let no active worker take offence at these frank remarks, for as far as insufficient training is concerned, I apply them first and foremost to myself. I used to work in a circle that set itself great and all-embracing tasks; and every member of that circle suffered to the point of torture from the realisation that we were proving ourselves to be amateurs at a moment in history when we might have been able to say, paraphrasing a well-known epigram: ‘Give us an organization of revolutionaries, and we shall overturn Russia!’”<sup>18</sup>

It was an Archimedean cry. Lenin had found the road to a collective life of revolutionizing Russia. An underground revolutionary newspaper would educate the masses and at the same time it would be the thread that would bind the Russian revolutionary groups into a network,

gradually mould them into a cohesive organization, and become the biggest collective agitator that Russia had ever witnessed. It is not an overstatement to say, that *What is to be Done?*<sup>2</sup> besides *The State and Revolution* went on to become his most influential work in revolutionary Russia.

There are disputes: Was it an educational manifesto for revolutionary education? Was it a blueprint for forming a party? Or, was it an organizational essay calling for the centralization of Marxist activities in Russia under the command of a group of professional revolutionaries? Did the book reflect lack of faith in workers' self-organizational ability and their spontaneous capacity to revolt? Or, was it simply a manual for revolution? Still others see it as a plan to counter modern state apparatuses like organized police force, intelligence machinery, bureaucracy, and bourgeois educational tools. These disputes show, contrary to conventional understanding, this is an unusually open-ended book. It is difficult to lay one's hand firmly on the reasons of its success and its legendary status in revolutionary literature. It has a mysterious core formed by elements like the Russian context of revolutionary dedication amidst conditions of illegality, its ability to respond to the queries and anxieties of the underground revolutionary activists of the time, indeed the history of the question the book attempts to address, and last but not the least its unique character for having transcended the border between theory and practice of politics, or if you will for its gesture, namely, *politics as practice*. In his usual direct and polemical style Lenin wrote in the book that scientific socialism had ceased to be an integral revolutionary theory and become a mixture of ideas diluted with the contents of every new German textbook that had appeared, that the slogan "class struggle" had not impelled the Russian Marxists forward to wider and more strenuous activity, but had served as a soothing syrup, namely that the "economic

struggle is inseparably linked up with the political struggle". In short, the idea of a party had not served as a call for the creation of a militant organization of revolutionaries, but had been deployed to justify playing at "democratic" forms. As he said, referring to the May Day strike in Kharkov in May 1901 followed by other strikes across Russia, that these strikes had proved once again the political capabilities of the Russian workers. They also had demonstrated what was still lacking for the full development of those capacities, namely, a nation-wide organization that was capable of guiding all the separate "outbursts"<sup>19</sup> and ensure a political proletariat with "purpose"<sup>20</sup> standing at the head of the whole people against the autocratic government.

Disputes on the significance and legacy of the book occurred even in the revolutionary period in Russia and Lenin was aware of this. He wrote later in 1907,

The basic mistake made by those who now criticise *What Is to Be Done?* is to treat the pamphlet apart from its connection with the concrete historical situation of a definite, and now long past, period in the development of our party. This mistake was strikingly demonstrated, for instance, by Parvus (not to mention numerous Mensheviks), who, many years after the pamphlet appeared, wrote about its incorrect or exaggerated ideas on the subject of an organization of professional revolutionaries. Today these statements look ridiculous, as if their authors want to dismiss a whole period in the development of our Party, to dismiss gains which, in their time, had to be fought for, but which have long ago been consolidated and have served their purpose.<sup>21</sup>

Lenin in fact rarely thereafter revisited his own work of the first two three years of the century. His writings more and more focused on revolutionary institutions of the masses. The revolutionary politics of leadership had been secured. It was necessary now to focus on constant radicalization of the masses. *What is to be Done?* stands on this threshold of revolutionary practice. Practice must materialize in a platform where leadership, direction, organization, masses, movements, and radicalization



will meet towards the actualization of revolution. Yet, notwithstanding Lenin's clarification, disputes have flared up continuously over its theoretical legacy, even when critics have admitted that this is a book on organization.<sup>22</sup> Hence, the question: What is in the politics of practice, propounded by Lenin, that reflects back on theory? What is here at stake that we cannot define properly?

#### IV

To consider this question we must first take note of the series of displacements in strategic thought that occur in the book through improvised polemical statements.

- First, politics must be freed from the primacy of economic considerations. Thus, politics replaces trade union struggles as the main plank of revolutionary mobilization. Political practice is autonomous.
- Second, spontaneity means natural, given, that which already exists; but revolution does not happen, it is not given, it is made.
- Third, and this for the same reason, while trade union activities will continue and be supported by the socialists, true organs of the working class will not be the trade unions, but factory councils, reading clubs, solidarity platforms, political associations of workers, (all these developing into soviets), etc. Workers are militants, but they will need revolutionary leadership to become revolutionary workers.
- Fourth, a revolutionary leader is not a trade union secretary, but "tribune of the people".
- Fifth, and it follows, Russia cannot be content with socialist thought, but will need and indeed Russia is yearning for the

broadest mass awakening and upsurge against the Tsar's rule - Russian autocracy, the root of Russia's misery.

- Sixth, leaders will be professional revolutionaries, for whom revolution is the goal of life, and who are inspired by the tradition of Russian valour in the fight against autocracy.
- Seventh, conspiracy is replaced by organization of an "underground", which will be the basis of an all-Russian political struggle.
- Eighth, an all-Russian newspaper will create an organization out of a network.
- Ninth, all formulations about socialist advance in Russia must crystallise into a struggle to overthrow the Tsarist autocracy.
- Finally, this central political aim will unlock the revolutionary potential of Russia; this is because masses are more advanced than the leaders. They deserve revolutionary leadership.

These formulations helped visualise formation of new institutions, such as a new type of party able to work in Russian conditions, underground centres, workers' councils, an all-Russian revolutionary newspaper, harnessing workers' political energy and dynamism, etc. All these were linked to the task of achieving clarity and were at the same time a result of gaining clarity. In sum, achieving clarity was the answer to the question, *What is to be Done?* Hence are these famous last lines to the book,

The history of Russian Social-Democracy can be distinctly divided into three periods:

The first period embraces about ten years, approximately from 1884 to 1894. This was the period of the rise and consolidation of the theory and programme of Social-Democracy. The adherents of the new trend in Russia were very few in number...

The second period embraces three or four years—1894-98. In this period Social-Democracy appeared on the scene as a social movement, as the upsurge of the masses of the people, as a political party. This is the period of its childhood and adolescence. The intelligentsia was fired with a vast and general zeal for struggle against Narodism and for going among the workers; the workers displayed a general enthusiasm for strike action. The movement made enormous strides ...

The third period, as we have seen, was prepared in 1897 and it definitely cut off from the second period in 1898 (1898-?). This was a period of disunity, dissolution, and vacillation. During adolescence a youth's voice breaks. And so, in this period, the voice of Russian Social-Democracy began to break, to strike a false note... But it was only the leaders who wandered about separately and drew back; the movement itself continued to grow, and it advanced with enormous strides... The leaders not only lagged behind in regard to theory ("freedom of criticism") and practice ("primitiveness"), but they sought to justify their backwardness by all manner of high-flown arguments. Social-Democracy was degraded to the level of trade-unionism...

When the third period will come to an end and the fourth (now heralded by many portents) will begin we do not know. We are passing from the sphere of history to the sphere of the present and, partly, of the future...

In the sense of calling for such a "replacement" and by way of summing up what has been expounded above, we may meet the question, What is to be done? with the brief reply:  
Put an End to the Third Period.

*What is to be Done* is thus neither a book of theory, nor a book of mere organizational statements. This is what gives it its elusiveness. In it you find theory imbricated in the exposition of practice, and in theory the exposition of a politics that is woven around the materiality of political practice, and redefining of Russian revolution. An influential commentary initiated by Lars T. Lih finds the book primarily as an educational pamphlet, an exhortation for a different kind of pedagogy.<sup>23</sup> However, if it were so, why then the unease among political thinkers around the book? The same interpretation sees it as an attempt to realize in Russia the "German dream" that is the dream of building a party in Russia along the German line - disciplined, politically mobilized, working class following

with socialist leaders, and socialism as the goal. On the basis of two paragraphs in *What is to be Done?* Lih in fact goes as far as to say that the book is an “Erfurtian drama”.<sup>24</sup> Lenin had poetically and dramatically transposed the message of the Erfurt Programme of German Social Democracy (1891) onto Russian radicalism – the idea of a disciplined party, educating Russian working class, and bringing in the ideology of socialism from without. Yet, the Erfurt Programme in which the German model of party building was congealed, was criticized by both Engels who was still alive at the time of Erfurt Congress and later by Lenin in *State and Revolution* (1918) for being banal and insipid. The Erfurt Programme spoke of all correct things, like capitalism, socialism, working class, demand for improvement of living conditions, etc., but left out the question of organization – the cold sword of power on which the fortune of a revolution hang. Typically, it said, “The struggle of the working class against capitalist exploitation is necessarily a political struggle. Without political rights, the working class cannot carry on its economic struggles and develop its economic organization. It cannot bring about the transfer of the means of production into the possession of the community without first having obtained political power. It is the task of the Social Democratic Party to shape the struggle of the working class into a conscious and unified one and to point out the inherent necessity of its goals.”<sup>25</sup> Distinct from the Erfurt programme, *What is to be Done* struck a new voice, and gave birth to Bolshevism, which could be interpreted as the politics of revolutionary organization. Historians have interpreted Bolshevism as Jacobinism in Russia as distinct from a politics of what Lenin termed “passive revolution”.<sup>26</sup>

*What is to be Done?* belongs to a different world, leagues away from the world of political correctness. It was and still reads like a book on political urgency – an impending social upheaval on which the working

class must put its stamp. The book was not wrong in this sense. Strikes erupted all over Russia even as the book was being printed and distributed. The revolution of 1905 saw the emergence of soviets as new organs of power. The book spoke of power that would speed up revolution. Indeed, the politics of revolution would constitute the power that Lenin dreamt of crystallising into an organization. Such power was in other words constituent power. When critics accused Lenin of dreaming, he wrote in the closing chapter of the book,

“We should dream!” I wrote these words and became alarmed... Comrade Krichevsky... (asks)... sternly: “... I ask, has a Marxist any right at all to dream, knowing that according to Marx, mankind always sets itself the tasks it can solve and that tactics is a process of the growth of Party tasks which grow together with the Party?”

The very thought of these stern questions sends a cold shiver down my spine and makes me wish for nothing but a place to hide in. I shall try to hide behind the back of Pisarev.

“There are rifts and rifts,” wrote Pisarev of the rift between dreams and reality. “My dream may run ahead of the natural march of events or may fly off at a tangent in a direction in which no natural march of events will ever proceed. In the first case my dream will not cause any harm; it may even support and augment the energy of the working men.... There is nothing in such dreams that would distort or paralyse labour-power. On the contrary, if man were completely deprived of the ability to dream in this way, if he could not from time to time run ahead and mentally conceive, in an entire and completed picture, the product to which his hands are only just beginning to lend shape, then I cannot at all imagine what stimulus there would be to induce man to undertake and complete extensive and strenuous work in the sphere of art, science, and practical endeavour.... The rift between dreams and reality causes no harm if only the person dreaming believes seriously in his dream, if he attentively observes life, compares his observations with his castles in the air, and if, generally speaking, he works conscientiously for the achievement of his fantasies. If there is some connection between dreams and life then all is well.”<sup>27</sup>

Revolutionaries have a right to dream! This was the full meaning of Lenin’s famous Archimedean cry: “Give us an organization of revolutionaries - and we will turn Russia around!” Yet the paradox cannot

be missed. *Revolution had to be produced and for that Russia had to turn around.* But already Russia was turning around precisely through the emergence of an organization of revolutionaries. There is thus an aporia. The power that will constitute Russia had been already imagined and constituted. Yet this had to go through periodic reconstitution. Political power itself, Lenin was to realize two decades later, must be subjected to renewed constitution. Or, to put it differently, political organization that produces power will have to face the power of politics. Lenin became aware of the contradiction as Russia was overwhelmed for years in the violence of organization. If the entire society was organized along a line of politics, what remained of society to work upon? The question of organization is complex. Organization has to unite in itself two contradictory elements: organization of the social negation and of emancipation.<sup>28</sup> Just as the Prince had to have ideally both fortune and virtue. A party of the proletariat led by the revolutionaries will negate the reality of vacillation, petty bourgeois fantasies, and state terror. But organization has to suggest at the same time the path of emancipation. This unity cannot be achieved through any theoretical or scientific formulation. It is a practical question. In the collective life of the societies the unity can be realized only through practical activity. The unity is thus always perched precariously on historical time itself.

Five years after he had published *What is to be Done?* Lenin wrote with great perspicacity, "To maintain today that *Iskra* exaggerated (in 1901 and 1902) the idea of an organization of professional revolutionaries, is like reproaching the Japanese, after the Russo-Japanese War, for having exaggerated the strength of Russia's armed forces, for having prior to the war exaggerated the need to prepare for fighting these forces. To win victory the Japanese had to marshal all their forces against the probable maximum of Russian forces. Unfortunately, many of those who judge our

Party are outsiders, who do not know the subject, who do not realise that today the idea of an organization of professional revolutionaries has already scored a complete victory. That victory would have been impossible if this idea had not been pushed to the forefront at the time, if we had not “exaggerated” so as to drive it home to people who were trying to prevent it from being realized.” He continued, “*What is to be Done?* is a summary of *Iskra* tactics and *Iskra* organizational policy in 1901 and 1902. Precisely a “summary”, no more and no less... *Iskra* fought for an organization of professional revolutionaries. It... finally created this organization in 1903. It preserved it in face of... all the convulsions of the period of storm and stress; it preserved it throughout the Russian revolution; it preserved it intact from 1901-02 to 1907. And now, when the fight for this organization has long been won, when the seed has ripened, and the harvest gathered, people come along and tell us: “You exaggerated the idea of an organization of professional revolutionaries!” Is this not ridiculous?... *What is to be Done?* repeatedly emphasises this, pointing out that the organization it advocates has no meaning apart from its connection with the “genuine revolutionary class that is spontaneously rising to struggle”. But the objective maximum ability of the proletariat to unite in a class is realised through living people, and only through definite forms of organization...”<sup>29</sup>

The aporia of the historicity of politics is brought out dramatically in a great work of politics like this, indeed in all great political works, that promises and at the same time suggests paradoxes in that promise. In this sense among others, *The Prince* and *What is to be Done* share the same ground. We must ask clearly, what connects the two?

## V

While we may suggest several themes connecting the two books separated by four centuries, we may note at least the following, such as the moment of a conjuncture when the book is born, milieu of a theoretical emptiness or at least a theoretical banality prompting the book to address the most pertinent but the most difficult question of the time - thus giving theory a new turn, stress on politics as an autonomous science, and an emphasis on the organization of power.

Antonio Gramsci famously invoked “the modern prince” to reflect on the party of the proletariat. To Gramsci, Machiavelli’s *The Prince* is a “live work”; political ideology and political practice are fused in the “dramatic form of a myth”. It is neither a “utopia” nor a “learned theorising.” The modern prince is a “myth-prince”, the modern prince “cannot be a real person, a concrete individual. It can only be an organism, a complex element of society in which a collective will, which has already been recognized and has to some extent asserted itself in action, begins to take concrete form.”<sup>30</sup> Gramsci is thus critical of a party that is not linked organically to the labouring masses. Elsewhere in *The Modern Prince* he is critical of so-called parties made up of what he calls as “volunteers’, and in a certain sense *declassés*” that “have never or almost never represented homogeneous social blocs,” but are instead “the political equivalent of gypsy bands or nomads.” They are the “vanguard without armies to back them up, ‘commandos’ without infantry or artillery”, they have the “language of rhetorical heroism”.<sup>31</sup> Sects proliferating over the years prioritize their own small-group needs and “purity” at the expense of possibilities for real struggles that help politicize masses. The party on the other hand will move forward to draw together



massive “social blocs” capable of bringing revolutionary change. The modern prince, the party of the proletariat, must have a “part devoted to Jacobinism”, must embody “collective will and of political will in general, in the modern sense: will as operative awareness of historical necessity, as protagonist of a real and historical drama.”<sup>32</sup>

In this quasi-Hegelian conceptualisation, there is a particular theory of immanence, whose seeds Gramsci had inherited from Lenin. We find in *The Modern Prince* the long shadow of *What is to be Done?* The modern prince is de-individuated. The gesture is towards the party as the prince of our time symbolising collective will. The shadow however is broken or of you like refracted. As you read *The Modern Prince*, you feel, not the party *per se*, but modern revolutionary politics is the prince, guiding the society ahead. The organizational immediacy strikingly present *What is to be Done?* is absent in the Modern Prince, hence except in a note there is no reference to *What is to be Done?* Perhaps the book was not available in prison. Perhaps the book was available but for reasons of censorship he had to avoid reference to the book. In any case, remember, *What is to be Done?* formulates the notion of the immediacy of revolutionary politics in course of polemicising over the details of organizational issues.<sup>33</sup> The upsurge of radicalised masses forms the background, which makes the question of organization sharper, immediate, urgent. Politics is going ahead; the prince is lagging behind. Without organization, the prince is not modern, the prince is in Lenin’s word, “primitive”, depending too much on fortune and too little on virtue, attaining capacity, ability, and power of judgment. Constituent power must wrestle with adverse conditions to constitute the revolutionary subject.

*The Modern Prince* written by a Leninist Gramsci went a long way in making *The Prince* relevant to our political work. Yet, Lenin’s polemical book of 1902 left for revolutionaries still other frontiers to

approach. Bourgeois political scientists and management specialists have spoken incessantly of the politics of organization. After 1902 we learnt to think in a different way: the question of organising politics. The context in which Lenin wrote *What is to be Done?*<sup>9</sup> was vastly different from the context of *The Prince*. Likewise, our context is vastly different from Lenin's time when he wrote the book. We cannot burden Lenin with providing answers to the "burning questions of organization" of our time. However, the question raised by him in the book will remain fundamental: How to organise politics?

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> Nicolo Machiavelli, *The Prince*, trans. W.K. Marriott, The Project Gutenberg eBook, 1998, chapter 6 - <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/1232/1232-h/1232-h.htm#chap06> (accessed on 25 November 2023); all citations from *The Prince* hereafter from the same edition.

<sup>2</sup> *The Letters of Machiavelli: A Selection*, ed., and trans. A. Gilbert (New York: Capricorn Books, 1961), Letter 137 (pp. 139-143), p. 142

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, Letter 137, p. 142

<sup>4</sup> Louis Althusser, *Machiavelli and Us*, ed. Francois Matheron and trans. trans. Gregory Elliott (London: Verso, 1999), Appendix, pp. 115-130

<sup>5</sup> *The Prince*, dedication - <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/1232/1232-h/1232-h.htm#pref06> (accessed on 26 November 2023)

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, Chapter 16 - <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/1232/1232-h/1232-h.htm#chap16> (accessed on 26 November 2023)

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, Chapter 17 - <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/1232/1232-h/1232-h.htm#chap17> (accessed on 26 November 2023)

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, Chapter 18 - <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/1232/1232-h/1232-h.htm#chap18> (accessed on 26 November 2023)

<sup>9</sup> Antonio Negri, *Insurgencies: Constituent Power and the Modern State*, trans. Maurizia Boscagli (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), p. 55

<sup>10</sup> *The Prince*, Chapter 26 - <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/1232/1232-h/1232-h.htm#chap26> (accessed on 26 November 2023)

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> *Machiavelli and Us*, pp. 5-7, 30-31.

<sup>13</sup> V.I. Lenin, *What is to Be Done? Burning Questions of Our Movement* (1902) in *Lenin Collected Works* (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1961), Volume 5, pp. 347-530; all excerpts in this article are taken from the PDF version prepared by Chris Russell for the Marxists Internet Archive -

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<https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/download/what-itd.pdf> (accessed on 12 November 2023)

<sup>14</sup> In this connection, see the discussion by Robert Mayer, “Lenin and the Concept of the Professional Revolutionary”, *History of Political Thought*, Volume 14 (2), Summer 1993, pp. 249-263

<sup>15</sup> *What is to Be Done?* p. 43

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 70-71

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 80

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, citations in this paragraph are from pp. 80-81

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 17

<sup>20</sup> In *What is to be Done?* “purpose” remains an oft-recurring word indicating a virtue, as opposed to the “primitiveness” of the revolutionaries.

<sup>21</sup> V.I. Lenin, “Preface to the Collection “Twelve Years”” (1907) in *Lenin Collected Works* (Moscow, Progress Publishers, 1972), Volume 13, pp. 94-113 - <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1907/sep/pref1907.htm> (accessed on 28 November 2023)

<sup>22</sup> A good example is the collection of articles in Werner Bonefeld and Sergio Tischler (eds.), *What is to be Done? Leninism, anti-Leninist Marxism and the Question of Revolution Today* (Aldershot: Ashgate Pub., 2002)

<sup>23</sup> Lars T. Lih, *Lenin Rediscovered: What is to be Done? in Context* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2008)

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, chapter 7, “Lenin’s Erfurtian Drama”, pp. 387-432

<sup>25</sup> “The Erfurt Programme, Minutes of the Party Congress of the Social Democratic Party of Germany: Held in Erfurt from October 14-October 20, 1891”, Berlin, 1891, pp. 3-6 - <https://www.marxists.org/history/international/social-democracy/1891/erfurt-program.htm> (accessed on 3 December 2023)

<sup>26</sup> V.I. Lenin, “The Crisis of Menshevism” (1906), in *Lenin Collected Works* (Moscow, Progress Publishers, 1965), Volume 11, pp. 341-364

<sup>27</sup> *What is to Be Done?* p. 110

<sup>28</sup> This is noted by Johannes Agnoli, “Emancipation: Paths and Goals” in *What is to be Done? Leninism, Anti-Leninist Marxism and the Question of revolution Today* (pp. 187-195), p. 194; however, typical of Western anti-Leninist scholars, Agnoli immediately after noting this contradicts the question of organization.

<sup>29</sup> “Preface to the Collection “Twelve Years””, *op. cit.*

<sup>30</sup> Antonio Gramsci, “The Modern Prince” in *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, eds. and trans. Quentin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith (Hyderabad: Orient Longman, 1996), pp. 128-129

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 203-204

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 130

<sup>33</sup> This is one more aspect of the originality of Lenin’s thesis on organization and his refusal to accept the “German model” on which Lars T. Lih spends quite an amount of attention in explaining the book.



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