



TRADE UNIONISM

1. Trade Unions and the Party

In a short book called *What Is To Be Done?*, written in 1902, Lenin explained his idea of a party of a new type — one able to lead the revolution for freedom and the building of socialism.

Lenin divided working class politics into trade union politics and revolutionary politics. On their own the workers would fight for better pay and conditions. But Lenin wanted not just better pay for the workers, but an end to the whole system in which a few capitalists own all the wealth, while the workers must sell their labour to live.

For such a socialist revolution, a revolutionary theory is necessary. This theory can only be provided by those who have made a scientific study of how capitalism works, who understand the ideas of Marx and Engels and the nature of a communist society. This revolution can only be led by a party of professional revolutionaries — people who devote their lives to making revolution. The revolutionary party — the part of a new type — has to be secret, highly disciplined and centralised.

The trade union movement, on the other hand, has to be as big, as broad and as open as possible. Trade unions arose out of the conditions which workers faced when factories were first built. They were created by the workers themselves, as a weapon to be used in their struggles, to make it possible for workers to protect themselves against the united power of the bosses, the government and the courts.

The strength of the workers lies in the fact that workers are many and the bosses and their allies are few. Workers found that on their own, as individuals, they could not succeed. Only by coming together with the other workers in the factory, could they win better wages and other improvements.

The unity of workers does not come about on its own. Workers all over the world have found that trade unions are

necessary to unite workers in struggle. The slogan **Unity is Strength** is the basis on which trade unions are formed.

'Trade unions', wrote Lenin, 'are an indispensable *school of communism*' — a school that trains workers to organise and prepares them for the role they must play in bringing about the socialist revolution and in the building of a socialist society.

There are many organisations which call themselves trade unions: yet they have different ways of working, they do different things and have different policies. Are they all trade unions? How must a trade union work and what must it do? Which trade union policies are correct and which are wrong? What are the tasks of trade unions in the struggle for national liberation?

In this series we will be looking at these questions to understand the role trade unions must play to increase the strength of the working class movement: a strength which 'lies entirely in its political consciousness and its mass character'.



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