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17.57, Paper 1 – The Revolutionary Year, 1917

June 16th, Youth Workers Struggle to Articulate Their Goals

The Trud i svet organization, or “Labor and Light,” was born from young workers organizing in Petrograd after their increasing disappointment that the Provisional Government and Soviets would not admit youth or explicitly acknowledge their needs. This is similar to the women's movements of the same era. Both women and youth had led and participated in the early marches and demonstrations of 1917, but then saw no concrete recognition for their contributions and felt the need to further organize gender and age-specific agitation groups.

In March of 1917, “Labor and Light” coalesced out of youth agitation and commissions in factories, sweeping up thousands of Petrograd working youth and students. On June 16th, the leadership of “Labor and Light,” headed by a student named Petr Shevtsov, issued a manifesto calling the youth of the city to “elect youths to their district committee who manifest real knowledge.”¹ The manifesto is addressed to “comrade girl and boy-proletarians,” who, based on the organization's own definition, would be between the ages of thirteen and twenty. Some of these people were students, but the organization's constituency consisted mostly of working-class youth. It drew from many political parties: Socialist Revolutionaries, Mensheviks, Bolsheviks, and anarchists all participated in “Labor and Light.” The diversity of its ranks can be explained by the group's goals, which were to advocate for economic and political reforms for young workers, at both the factory and state level.

In addition to appealing to its constituents, “Labor and Light”'s manifesto was speaking to the Provisional Government and the Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies, with which it had had little success securing more legal rights for youth. Though concrete goals - they had secured better wages, working conditions, and inclusion on factory committees - had been achieved in many factories by local commissions connected to “Labor and Light,” the adult government had yet to recognize the

1 Hickey, Michael. Competing Voices from the Russian Revolution. Document 4.22 “The Petrograd Proletarian Youth Organization”. "[Labor and Light](#)", accessed 2/20/12.

youth organization's state-level demands, which were less concrete than those they presented to various factories.² One of the problems with the movement was that it "Consistently... defended the overthrow of tsarism and supported the new institutions of power, eager to subsume its special interests whenever more urgent tasks related to the larger struggle arose."³ The need to support the revolution first and one's own goals second did not harm their ability to influence factory committees but allowed the provisional government and soviets to push their demands for civil and electoral rights aside. Because adult workers often resisted the creation of a youth organization, fearing that it would split the working classes too much,⁴ "Labor and Light" had to demonstrate that it was absolutely in support of continuing from the bourgeois overthrow of the tsar to the next socialist revolution, as evidenced in their statement:

We summon all comrade girl and boy proletarians to labor and to educate themselves. But we also summon them to be ready to rise up at the first call of the proletarian-father—the Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies. Be ready to rush to the barricades if the remnants of vile tsarism or the soulless capitalists should try to strike a last blow.⁵

The author(s) use grandiose imagery, not imploring, not suggesting, but summoning their comrades. Not only do they use this vocabulary in reference to defending the revolution, but also to the people's cause for self-betterment. In this way, the cause of the revolution has been linked in gravity and morally to the betterment of young workers. In direct contrast, the enemy is "vile" and "soulless," words often used with religious connotations. The manifesto is rife with symbolic and patriotic imagery, appealing to the glory of the motherland. It speaks of the lamp of enlightenment, mighty labor as the "true shield" and science as the "true sword" defending proletarian rights, and of the revolution

2 Tirado, Isabel. "The Socialist Youth Movement in Revolutionary Petrograd". *The Russian Review*, JSTOR. <http://www.jstor.org.libproxy.mit.edu/stable/130623?seq=21>, accessed 2/20/12.

3 *Ibid.* p. 135.

4 *Ibid.* p. 141.

5 Hickey, Michael. *Competing Voices from the Russian Revolution*. Document 4.22 "The Petrograd Proletarian Youth Organization". "[Labor and Light](#)", accessed 2/20/12.

wiping "the earth's face clean of the remnants of an uncivilized people."⁶ Through this careful selection of diction, the authors morally justify their revolutionary cause.

Additionally, the extreme radicalization of youth workers participating in "Labor and Light" caused them to align primarily with the Soviet, rather than the provisional government. They had found ways to work with factory committees and district-level soviets, so perhaps they thought their appeals for civil rights would reach a more sympathetic ear in the Petrograd Soviet rather than the vaguely centrist provisional government. Though the young members of Trud i svet have carefully aligned their goals with the larger direction of the revolution, at the level of realistic needs, they had trouble convincing adult leaders to take them more seriously rather than simply lauding the fervor of youth publications.

As Isabel Tirado explains in "The Socialist Youth Movement in Revolutionary Petrograd," there was "...a basic tension between particularistic generational interests and the pull towards integration with the general workers' movement. Consistently, the youth movement defended the overthrow of tsarism and supported the new institutions of power, eager to subsume its special interest whenever more urgent tasks related to the larger struggle arose."⁷ According to Tirado, Trud i svet was the first youth organization and the least radical. These workers were relatively educated, often born in the city and rapidly filling in adult roles as men were mobilized for war. Their demands on the interim leaders, "the proletarian-father" and socialist ministers, was to directly support "future proletarians" with education and work. The organization "...aimed at developing enlightened and conscious citizens, capable of acting as advocates for their own rights."⁸

This manifesto was released at a time when a rival youth organization, which would eventually become the Bolshevik-aligned Socialist League of Young Workers (SSRM, which eventually evolved

6 Hickey, Michael. Competing Voices from the Russian Revolution. Document 4.22 "The Petrograd Proletarian Youth Organization". "[Labor and Light](#)", accessed 2/20/12.

7 Tirado, Isabel. "The Socialist Youth Movement in Revolutionary Petrograd". The Russian Review, JSTOR. <http://www.jstor.org.libproxy.mit.edu/stable/130623?seq=21>, accessed 2/20/12. p 135.

8 Tirado, Isabel. "The Socialist Youth Movement in Revolutionary Petrograd". The Russian Review, JSTOR. <http://www.jstor.org.libproxy.mit.edu/stable/130623?seq=21>, accessed 2/20/12. p 142.

into the Komsomol), was attacking Trud i svet's popular base and tenets. Though it articulated high-level education goals, "Labor and Light" did not publish *how* it planned to achieve its founding goals, which focused more on economic and civil rights, such as wage-parity for youth. Due to its hierarchical organization, "Labor and Light" also only sustained vague links between its base and the district committees. This disjoint was similar to the one between the populace at the time and the Provisional Government. Despite their ability to work with and influence factory-level committees, the "Labor and Light" leadership was unable to publish clear enough plans in their manifesto to retain their popular base. It proclaims, "Proletarian-fathers, it is your duty to give your proletarian sons the lamp of mighty science and the diploma of a skilled-worker!"⁹ Unlike the nascent SSRM or even contemporary thinkers, such as psychologist Vladimir Bekhterev, who posited traveling schools for Russia,¹⁰ Trud i svet formulated no specific suggestions or plans other than demanding grammar schools, a university for young workers, and polytechnical and industrial trade schools.¹¹ This, finally, was their downfall. Though indecision was endemic in party platforms at the time, and despite their material successes, "Labor and Light" was unable to bring reality into their manifesto and thus eventually lost popular sway with working youth to the more aggressive, politically polarized SSRM.

9 Hickey, Michael.

10 Hickey, Michael. Competing Voices from the Russian Revolution. Document 4.19 "Academician V. Bekhterev". "[Free Russia Must Be Enlightened](#)", accessed 2/20/12.

11 Tirado, Isabel. "The Socialist Youth Movement in Revolutionary Petrograd". The Russian Review, JSTOR. <http://www.jstor.org.libproxy.mit.edu/stable/130623?seq=21>, accessed 2/20/12. p 140.

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