Conference of Young Nigerian Democrats

DEMONCRACY DIGEST

Compilation of E-Books on Democracy

Compiled by:
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Iulii Martov

Iulii Martov or Martov, Iulii (1873-1923), also known as L. Martov, pseudonym of Yuly (Iulii) Osipovich Tsederbaum, one of the early prominent leaders of the Menshevik faction of the Russian Social Democratic Labor Party (RSDLP). Martov was born in what is now Istanbul, Turkey, to a middle-class Russian Jewish family and moved at the age of four to Odessa (Odessa), Ukraine (then part of the Russian Empire). He became active in revolutionary politics in his teens as a member of the Bund, a Jewish socialist group. Working with Vladimir Lenin to found the Saint Petersburg Union of Struggle for the Liberation of the Working Class in the mid-1890s, Martov was arrested by the imperial police in 1896 and sentenced to exile in Siberia. Released three years later, Martov soon joined with Lenin, Georgy Plekhanov, and other early Russian Marxists to publish the newspaper Iskra (The Spark) and form a unified Marxist revolutionary party. The Russian Social Democratic Labor Party (RSDLP), originally founded in 1898, was revived through the efforts of Martov and the Iskra group.

During the Second Congress of the RSDLP in 1903, Martov spoke against Lenin’s idea of a highly centralized party made up exclusively of professional revolutionaries who would act on behalf of the working class. The RSDLP split into two factions, with Martov’s supporters called the Mensheviks (from the Russian word for “minority”) and Lenin’s the Bolsheviks (“majority”). During the following years in western Europe, Martov worked with Plekhanov and others on developing a theory in which the revolution to overthrow the monarchy in Russia would be a bourgeois (capitalist) revolution, followed by a regime in which the socialists would be the opposition. According to the theory, the socialist parties would then devote themselves to pressing the government for reforms and to preparing the working masses for a socialist revolution that would occur when economic and other conditions were right.

When he returned to Russia in May 1917, Martov found himself at odds with the Menshevik Party and the Petrograd (now Saint Petersburg) Soviet (Council) of Workers’ and Soldiers’ Deputies, both under the leadership of Irakli Tsereteli. He criticized them for cooperation with the moderate liberals in the Provisional Government and for not bringing an end to Russia’s involvement in World War I (1914-
1918). He also criticized Lenin for being "irresponsible" in his radicalism and pursuit of power. Martov emerged as leader of a left wing of the Mensheviks, the Menshevik-Internationalists, but was unable to develop a broad following. He therefore played a relatively minor role in the revolution of 1917. During the Russian Civil War (1918-1921), Martov was critical of the Bolshevik (Communist) regime but refused to join efforts to overthrow it. In 1920 he again went into foreign emigration, and soon afterward the Bolsheviks outlawed the Mensheviks and other opposition parties in Russia. In exile Martov continued his futile efforts to create a revolutionary alternative to Bolshevism. During his last years, from 1920 to 1923, he was editor of the *Socialist Courier* in Berlin, Germany.

Contributed By:

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