

Menshevik leaders' attitude toward WWI

The relationships among the Great Powers are extremely tense between the 19th and 20th century. The old countries Britain, France, Spain and Portugal have taken their share of colonies and have managed to impose their political and economical influence upon large territories. This policy leads to confrontation with the new pretenders for world domination, such as Germany, Japan and the USA. On the other hand, this is the time for the national liberation movements in “dying” empires like the Ottoman Empire and the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Their future holds many unsolved problems which is another reason for creating discrepancy among the Great Powers. It is wrong to view WWI as a clash of imperialistic interests only. The war is a the fight of many nations for national sovereignty and liberation from colonial dependency¹.

The war's consequences for Russia are heavy. The slow capitalistic development of the country and the economic progress observed in 1910-1913 are interrupted. But the most serious aftermath is the October revolution that puts an end to the barely appearing democracy. The war radicalizes the society which is beneficial for the Bolsheviks only. Even Vladimir Lenin says: “If it wasn't for the war, Russia could have lasted many years and even decades without revolutions against capitalism”.

The number of strikes decrease after the beginning of the war activities. The tsarist government knows that a victory shall strengthen the regime for a long time but a possible loss will be followed by reforms, and possibly a revolution. The government has learned its lesson after the Fatherland War and the defeat in the war with Japan which was the catalyst for the revolution in the period 1905-1907. The former minister of Internal affairs P. Durnov is sure that a possible military defeat will lead to people's inclination to „socialist slogans“. It is interesting to examine the reaction of the political parties in the eve of the war. The defeat means reforms and even worse – a revolution. On one hand the war is viewed as an opportunity to

¹ Тютюкин, С. Меньшевизм: страницы истории. Москва, 2002, с. 275.

overthrow the autocracy but on the other hand it is an evitable outburst of a new “Russian revolt” that emerges in 1905².

In the beginning of the XX century, a lot of formations come on the political scene in Russia and each of them sees the future of the country in a different way. One of the most interesting parties (that change radically not only the destiny of Russia but also the destiny of the whole world) is the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party (RSDLP). The article aims at tracing the Menshevik leaders’ reactions in the eve of the war.

It was established in 1898 when its first congress was held and later it split into Bolshevik and Menshevik factions. They become separate political parties in 1917. The aim of this research is to reveal the Mensheviks’ attitude toward the First World War.

Leaders of this movement are eminent revolutionaries and social democrats like Yuliy Osipovich Martov, Georgi Plekhanov, Pavel Axelrod, Alexander Potresov, Fedor Dan and others. Both factions follow the Marxist ideology but there are certain differences between them that result from their interpretation of the ideology.

Russia has always asked itself what way to take in its development – east or west; whether to continue down the path of Peter I or to go back to Moskovskaya Rus³. The Mensheviks are one of the parties working for the democratization in Russia. They try to end the backwardness and make the country a part of western Europe. We could say that they are the Russian version of “democratic socialism” and that would play a practical joke on them. One of the main reasons for their downfall is their ambition to impose in Russia one western ideology without adjusting it to the Russian traditions and mentality what the Bolsheviks are doing successfully. The Mensheviks play a significant role in Russia’s political life in one of the most interesting and fateful periods in its development (1903-1917). They take part in the revolution of 1905-1907, in the elections for the State Duma and take a position on World War I. Unlike the Bolsheviks, the Mensheviks are not a strictly centralized party that follows its leader. They have never represented a united political trend and they break down into multiple groups with unique points of view⁴. The main groups among them are the liquidators led by A. Potresov; the Mensheviks-Parthians of G. Plekhanov; the Mensheviks-Internationalists of Y. Martov. All of them remain loyal to the main principles of Russian social democracy and to Menshevism in particular but

² Тенденции. Война и революция. М., 2004, с. 51.

³ Бердяев, Н. Извори и смисъл на руския комунизъм. С. , 1994, с. 27.

⁴ Тютюкин, С. Меньшевизм как идейно-политический феномен. - Меньшевики. Документы и материалы. 1903- февраль 1917 гг. М. , 1996, с. 15.

they openly state their positions on different issues including their attitudes toward World War I. The Mensheviks think that in the beginning of the 20th century, the world is entering the imperialistic stage of its development which leads to the big capitalist countries showing aggressive foreign policy. Yet they do not consider Russia being such a country and they relate aggression to the tsarist government and to the “syndrome of Russian greatness”. According to them Western imperialism is different from the Russian one⁵.

As a whole, the beginning of the war causes a drop in the number of international socialist movements which leads to the dissolution of the second International. The war raises a conflict in the people between the doctrines of the orthodox Marxism and the patriotic spirits⁶. The Mensheviks have always been against the war but in the beginning even representatives of the exemplary social democratic party of Germany succumb to the people’s desires. Thus, sticking to the principles of internationalism becomes quite difficult⁷. Yet, it is difficult for the Russian social democrats but not to the western representatives of this political movement.

The beginning of the 20th century sees an improvement of the relationships between the workers and the state in western Europe; socialist parties slowly integrate into the structures of their countries by submitting their internationalist interest to national ones⁸. This is impossible in Russia as the main problem for most social democrats is *how to protect the country without assisting the tsarist government in the war*.

The unwillingness of the tsarist government to conclude a truce with the opposition forces in the name of the country shall return to it like “a boomerang in the form of a strange combination of patriotic ideas with oppositional and revolutionary moods”⁹. The “Statement of social democrat representatives in the IV State Duma regarding the war starting” of 26.VII.1914 reads: “There cannot be a unity of the people and the power when the latter does not execute the will of the people; when the people is enslaved by the power; when the people who bear the whole burden of the war have no rights; when the workers’ and peasants’ press is forbidden; when

⁵ Потресов, А.Н. Критические заметки- Наша заря. 1914, № 7-9, с. 12-128.

⁶ История политических партии России (под ред. А. И. Зевелева и др.) М. , 1994, с. 244.

⁷ Quoted works, p. 245.

⁸ Тютюкин, С. Меньшевизм: страницы истории. Москва, 2002, с. 276.

⁹ История политических партии России (под ред. А. И. Зевелева и др.) М. , 1994, с.246

workers' organizations are destroyed and prisons are full of fighters for peace..."¹⁰. The statement was prepared by the Duma faction of the Mensheviks led by N. Chkheidze. They remain loyal to the anti-war feelings of the social democrats and blame the imperialistic policy for the war of the Great Powers that hide behind "false patriotism". The work atmosphere for the Mensheviks in the IV Duma is quite negative. Most of their leaders are out of the country after the Brussels congress where a decision for the unity of the party is made but later everything fails because of the beginning of the war. The decision made on July, 26th is prepared by the Menshevik representatives in Russia – those who are supposed to know the feelings of the workers. Many of the Menshevik leaders are blamed for not making adequate decisions as living away from the country they lose touch with people's problems. The Statement from July, 26th, 1914 is presented on behalf of all social democrat parties in the 4th Duma – Mensheviks, Bolsheviks and Trudoviks (a faction close to the SR and one expressing the peasants' interests). The Bolsheviks are forced to work together with the Mensheviks as the beginning of the war marks a drop of the number of their members and they have also lost their leader in the Duma (R. Malinovski is out of the country). However, Lenin does not approve of the joint work of the two factions; he believes that the imperialistic war should turn into a civil one. The critical situation occurring in Russia as a result of this international conflict provides Lenin with the chance to quickly assume the power from the Bolsheviks. This becomes clear in his words concerning the beginning of the war – "the best gift from the tsar's family".

Although social democratic parties show unanimity when voting the military credit of the tsarist government, there are certain differences concerning the statement read. The leader of the Trudoviks A. Kerenski gives a speech on behalf of his party in the last moment. He strongly deprecates the war and blames the governments of the warring nations, including Russia, for starting it. The declaration is read by the menshevik V. Haustov in a high patriotic spirit. It says: "... the proletariat is a permanent defender of the freedom and the interests of the people; it shall do its duty and shall protect the cultural welfare of the people from various violations no matter where they come from – from the inside or from the outside"¹¹. On the other hand, the complete denial of the war by the Russian and European proletariat is

¹⁰ Меньшевики. Документы и материалы. 1903- февраль 1917 гг. М. , 1996, с. 350-351.

¹¹ Quoted works, p. 350

emphasized. “When the European governments were preparing for a war, the proletariat headed by the German one started joint protests against the war being prepared by the governing circles”¹². This is where the two propositions differentiate – on one hand, they object to all war actions, yet they are ready to protect the people from violation. No matter how hard it tries to stay loyal to the principles of social democracy, the Duma faction of the Mensheviks surrenders to the common patriotic spirit spread all over the country. This is yet another proof that they can better perceive the feelings of the masses as they have stayed in Russia in contrast to the Mensheviks in exile. Though the statement read by V. Haustov is the most critically disposed to the war and government one, especially when compared to the speeches of the bourgeois representatives who support the government, all of the social democrat representatives leave the house at the start of the voting of the military credit. The Organization committee (OC) of RSDLP, close to the Duma faction of the Mensheviks is also working in Russia. Its members discuss the beginning war and oppose to it as they consider the war an imperialistic one that comes as a result of an aggressive foreign policy. In October 1914, OC distributes brochures titled “War and proletariat” in order to clarify the reasons for the war and to stress that the preparations for the war have been long ago started by the governments of the warring countries. The reaction of the world proletariat is also shown. “Under the guidance of the social democrats, the working class in those countries leads a vigorous fight against militarism, secret diplomacy and imperialism. Let’s remind – the fight of the German proletariat against the seizure of Alsace and Lorraine, the fight of the French socialists against the French-Russian agreement meaning war and for a French-German closeness that means peace”¹³. The Mensheviks in OC of RSDLP believe that the conflict between the Great Powers will result in proletariat revolutions and national liberation movements. According to them, a certain situation that could draw together workers from all countries should be used in order to start a fight for an immediate termination of the war.

However, the Russian proletariat should not keep aloof from the action. The Tsar’s government is not less guilty than the rest of the countries and understandably the Mensheviks do not save their criticism toward it. It seems important to them to benefit from the war and to point people’s aggression toward the enemies of the social democrats. For that purpose, “the true nature of the war and the roles of the

¹² Quoted works, p. 350

government and the dominant classes” should be explained. In December, 1914, OC of RSDLP writes another anti-war brochure on the same lines but it is never published. In the brochures the Mensheviks blame the representatives of the Western social democracy for voting the war credit of their governments and thus contributing for the start the war. The most important thing for them is to keep fighting “the chauvinistic spirits and warring nationalism” and also do the best for re-establishing the IIth International. The criticism toward the government also continues: “In the time when Western European governments are trying to attract the working class as they feel its power, our autocracy happens to be loyal to the anti-people traditions and despite the sacrifices that workers and peasants make in order to please the rich classes, it does not want to understand the demands of democracy and is in a hurry to take away the last that is left after the revolution in 1905”¹⁴. This concept of the governments of Western Europe is the reason that urges the Social Democrats to vote a military credit for them – something that could not happen in Russia. The Mensheviks do not want neither Germany’s victory, nor the Entente’s one. According to them, if Germany were to be defeated, its territory would be separated among the victors and that would serve as a reason for another military conflict. In case of an another victory of the Tripartite Pact, on one hand, an end would be put to the democratic forces in France, England and Belgium but on the other hand, it would be a defeat for the reactionary force in Europe – Russia. Nevertheless, OC and the Duma faction of the Mensheviks do not commence anti-war actions as they consider them as being premature and hazardous. Their work stays passive and reduced to publishing some brochures and the attitudes in their group can be defined as internationalist and moderately-pacifists mood¹⁵.

In the beginning of August, 1914, the prominent Belgian socialist E. Vandervelde send a telegram to the Bolsheviks and Mensheviks in the Duma. The telegrams appeals to the Russian social democrats to conform their tactic with the one of their European colleagues. The answer is given not by the faction of N. Chkheidze but by another leader – Al. Potresov. He is one of the first people to propagate Marxism in Russia together with G. Plekhanov, P. Axelrod and others. During the II-th Congress in 1903, RSDLP takes the side of the Mensheviks and later establishes its own faction – “liquidators”. They stand for complete reorganization of RSDLP, annihilating

¹⁴ Quoted works, p. 372.

¹⁵ For more, see: Урилов, И. История российской социал-демократии (меньшевизма). Ч. 4. М., 2008, 270-271.

its illegal activity, refusal of proletariat hegemony in the liberation movement and directing workers' efforts to protection of their own interests and not to the political fight. Liquidators' ideas reach the workers through Vazrajdane newspaper that is published from 1908 to 1910 and Nasha Zarya – 1910-1914. Al. Potresov's attitude toward the war differs from the one of most Menshevik leaders and it is quite closer to the one of G. Plekhanov based on the understanding of patriotism. According to A. Potresov: "Patriotism is an active civil feeling that arises in the transition from feudalism to capitalism; ignoring it as something archaic means that you do not take reality into consideration". He thinks it's wrong to aim at internationalism and skip patriotism as it is thought that Russia can establish socialism without going through capitalism¹⁶ first.

The answer to E. Vandervelde's telegram is quite careful and restrained. It starts with the understanding of the Russian proletariat of the reasons that made the western socialists take part in that conflict: "It is your right in this war to protect yourselves from the dangers of the aggressive policy of the Prussian junkers that threaten the democratic freedom and the proletariat's war of liberation"¹⁷. At the same time the radically different situation in Russia is mentioned and the fact that the proletariat there cannot vote a military credit to its government: "But, unfortunately, the proletariat in Russia is not in the position of the proletariat in most of the countries fighting the Prussian junkers. We are facing a more complex and conflicting task than your comrades. The international situation is getting more complicated as another reactionary force – the Russian government is taking part in the current war together with the Prussian junkers and as a result this can concentrate the reactionary tendencies in the world politics...This denies the Social democrats in Russian the possibility to take up the same position as the socialists in Belgium, France and England do and consequently to assume the responsibility for the Russian government before their country and the international socialism. Yet, if we ignore all these conditions, ... we declare that we shall not oppose the war with our actions in Russia"¹⁸.

The liquidators, led by Al. Potresov, refuse to support the tsarist government. They won't vote a military credit and shall continue their fight against it but at the same

¹⁶ For more, see: Потресов, Ал. „Патриотизм и международность“ . – В: Александр Потресов. Избранное. М., 2002, 176-179.

¹⁷ Меньшевики. Документы и материалы. 1903- февраль 1917 гг. М., 1996, с. 351

¹⁸ Quoted works, p. 352.

time they will not be an obstacle to the war. They refuse to participate in revolts in the rear of the Russian army, to spread anti-war slogans and they shall help the wounded soldiers. They consider German militarism the main culprit for the war - “the only obstacle for reaching an international compromise” and view the war as an imperialistic one. It is better for the Entente to win a victory as this shall be “a herald of a historical progressive beginning” that would justify the socialists in those countries for supporting their governments. This is the position that Al. Potresov introduces to the participants of the neutral countries in 1915 and he says: “not opposing the war when opposing the government”. Peace without annexations should be concluded and Russia, Germany and Austro-Hungary should be disarmed and democratized.

Another leader of the Mensheviks – G. Plekhanov, also thinks that the tsarist government should not be hindered but he goes further and calls for voting a military credit.

G. Plekhanov is one of the most controversial leaders of the Menshevik; he is the first one to introduce Marxism to the Russian revolutionaries. He was the teacher of the first social democrats – Lenin, Y. Martov, P. Axelrod, Lev Trotsky. In Geneva he establishes the “Liberation of labour” group which undertakes the difficult task to disseminate the doctrine of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels in Russia. G. Plekhanov is a controversial Menshevik leader as he quite often changes his position. At the IInd Congress he backs Lenin for a more centralized and independent party, for complete hegemony of the proletariat and more decisive actions.

Later he becomes “a staunch opponent of Bolshevism and Leninism and views October, 1917 as a giant mistake and as early as 1904 he warns of the inevitable rebirth if the Bolsheviks into a conspiratorial sect”¹⁹. In 1917 G. Plekhanov withholds from Menshevism, clashes with all its leaders and founds his own group “” Edinstvo” or “Unity”. When the war starts, he is in Paris and sees how “the city of the democratic traditions and four revolutions, the generally acknowledged centre of democracy where the spirit of internationalism literally hovers in the air, finds itself in the power of chauvinistic feeling”²⁰. All this affected the views of G. Plekhanov. “The father of Russian Marxism” takes the side of the Entente, accuses the German social democrats of being traitors and at the same time backs the French socialists for giving a military credit to their government. During the war, G. Plekhanov is a staunch

¹⁹ Тютюкин, С. Политическая драма Г. В. Плеханова. – Новая и новейшая история, 1994, бр. 1, с. 125.

²⁰ Тютюкин, С. Г. В. Плеханов. Судьба русского марксиста. М. , 1997, с. 305.

“defender” and bases his program on a defensive platform. According to him, the war must be won and no peace treaty should be signed without such a victory. He is at the root of recruiting nine thousand Russian emigrants as volunteers; all of them social democrats (most of whom Bolsheviks). They are all confident that a victory of Germany would mean a defeat for the European democracy and a victory of the Entente – a celebration of the democratic ideas in all European countries, including Russia²¹.

In 1914, a letter of G. Plekhanov to the newspaper “Rechi” (Speeches) was published. The letter clearly shows the author’s attitude to the war – who is guilty and how the aggressor should be punished. G. Plekhanov is convinced that: “Germany has done her best to turn Russia into its vassal in economic dealings and this shall quite badly affect the economic and social-political development of Russia... I crave for a defeat of the perpetrators, i.e. of the attacking countries. And those attacking countries, I strongly believe, are Germany and its ally Austro-Hungary”²². According to G. Plekhanov, a victory of Germany shall have a negative effect on the international labour movement. Russian workers have the right to protect their country as it serves as a victim of the aggressor and they won’t fight the German proletariat but the German bourgeoisie. The revolutionary spirits in Russia will follow the example of France from 1870-1871 only based on insulted patriotic feelings as a reaction of the helplessness of the tsarist government to protect the country from the enemy²³. Initially G. Plekhanov backs the Duma faction of the Mensheviks and he agrees not to vote a military credit to the government but following the first failures of the Russian Army he changes his opinion and advises the social democrats not to vote for a military credit. It takes a very short time for G. Plekhanov to turn from a staunch internationalist and an opponent of militarism into a supporter of the Entente and an enemy of Germany. In the beginning of the war he is skeptical about a possible outbreak of a revolution in Russia but later he does not reject this possibility. According to him the ideal path for the revolution is the “rising one” i.e. the power of the tsarist government should be taken by the Octobrists and the cadets, after that by the middle bourgeoisie parties and finally it should go in the hands of the socialists. According to Stanislav Tutukin, one of greatest researchers of Menshevism, the drama of G. Plekhanov lies in the fact that: “he cannot find the line after which the

²¹ Quoted works , p. 306.

²² Меньшевики. Документы и материалы. 1903- февраль 1917 гг. М. , 1996, с. 353.

²³ For more details, see:Тютюкин, С. Г. В. Плеханов. Судьба русского марксиста. М. , 1997, с. 310-323.

protection of the workers turns into a support of the governing tsarist regime and into a retreat from the principles of internationalism and from the international solidarity of the working class”.

Many of the social democrats detach themselves from G. Plekhanov and do not share his defensive ideas as they consider them being social chauvinistic, opportunist and perfidious. Among the few Mensheviks who support him are Vera Zasulich, Noe Zhordania, L. Deich and others. The largest group opposing G. Plekhanov – the Mensheviks-internationalists - is led by Yuliy Osipovich Martov. Martov is an ideologist of Menshevism and its recognized leader. At the IInd Party Congress he firmly opposes Lenin and insists on establishing a democratic and modern RSDLP. Yuliy Martov does not want a party, consisting of professional revolutionaries and does not approve of using political demagogy. One of the strongest characteristics of the Menshevik leader and consequently of the party is that: “they never divide politics from ethics and do not want to follow the principle the end justifies the means”.

WWI finds Martov in Paris. Several months earlier he takes part in the uniting conference of RSDLP in Brussels together with G. Plekhanov, P. Axelrod, L. Trotsky. In Paris Y. Martov starts work in the newspaper of Russian emigrants “Golos” (“Voice”). Mensheviks and Bolsheviks work for that newspaper. Martov’s attitude toward the war becomes clear in the pages of the newspaper. He is a staunch internationalist and sharply criticizes the war as being an imperialistic one. The people behind the outbreak of the war are the ruling circles and the bourgeois parties of all belligerent countries; he calls for ending the war and concluding a fair treaty with no annexations and contributions²⁴ and starts a big campaign for restoring the International. To Y. Martov there are no aggressors and defenders in the war, he considers it to be unfair and against the people of all countries; he hopes for failure but not defeat and national humiliation of any nation²⁵. He sees no peace and stability if capitalism is preserved as that war won’t be the last one and more dangerous crashes would follow it. There is an alternative to the situation: world wars happening one after another or the proletariat taking the political power in its hands and ending the imperialistic war²⁶. There are many articles in “Golos” newspaper

²⁴ For more, see: : Галили, З. Лидеры меньшевиков в русской революции. М., 1993, с.43.

²⁵ . Савельев, П. , С. Тютюкин. Юлий Осипович Мартов (1873-1923): человек и политик. – Новая и новейшая история, 1995, №5, с. 131.

²⁶ Quoted works, p. 132.

written by L. Trotsky who displaces Y. Martov in 1916 from the leader position and gradually imposes his radical views. Both felt sympathy one toward another yet they had many differences which led to their frequent quarrels. In 1915 Y. Martov adopts Trotsky's slogan "Neither a victory, nor a defeat!". Though Lenin and the Mensheviks' leader are irreconcilable opponents regarding their policy, there are quite many cases when their opinions coincide. This happens during WWI. Lenin even admits that: Voice is the best socialist newspaper in Europe and Martov does what each and every Russian revolutionary-internationalist is obliged to do under these circumstances: to criticize and expose tsarism, to abuse "its" ministers, to fight all types of nationalism and chauvinism and not to allow the imperialism of the Entente". The Menshevik believes that all great powers that try to impose their economic interests are guilty of starting the war. He calls for a fight against the social-chauvinists and national patriots of all countries. In the autumn of 1914, Y. Martov and Lenin are ready for a joint fight against social-chauvinism. Yuliy Osipovich even writes to P. Axelrod: "We could probably bring views closer with Lenin rather than with Plekhanov as he is ready to take the role of a fighter against the opportunism in the International"²⁷. However, he adds that they prefer working alone in a "Menshevik strength". Actually, the leaders of social democracy in Russia are still enemies despite some moments of closeness in views regarding the reasons for the war. Y. Martov discusses Lenin's splitting tactic in the international social movement and considers Bolsheviks' "defeatism" inadmissible from a moral and ethical point of view. The Menshevik leader desires a quick end of the bloodshed and he raises a slogan for an anti-imperialist revolution in the world and a democratic revolution in Russia. But in the first place he wants peace, then a revolution while Lenin is trying to make peace through a revolution²⁸.

The Bolsheviks' aim is to turn the imperialistic war into a civil one as they think the number of casualties will be less and a new just society would arise. Y. Martov rejects the civil war as he considers it to be more destructive and cruel and he hopes Russian people will respond to the socialists calling for peace²⁹. Though the Mensheviks' leader platform is more acceptable, Russia chooses to follow Lenin's path and a war lasting nearly two years begins. Yuliy Osipovich differs from both

²⁷ Письма П. Б. Аксельрода и Ю. О. Мартова. 1916-1922. Бенсон, 1920, с. 303.

²⁸ Савельев, П., С. Тютюкин. Юлий Осипович Мартов (1873-1923): человек и политик. – Новая и новейшая история, 1995, №5, с. 132.

²⁹ Quoted works, p. 132.

Bolsheviks and Mensheviks and as I mentioned he is in opposition to G. Plekhanov. This becomes clear in his letter “Russian Marxism and the war” to the editorial office of “Nasha zarya” newspaper. In the letter the author criticizes the standpoint of the liquidators and tries to point out the mistakes their leader makes. He starts with: “obviously this is the reason why we live in completely different circumstances, why we assess things differently and why we react in a different way.”³⁰ Y. Martov specifies the reasons for the war in his letter: “the world has become cramped for the capitalist economies and they cannot divide the earth into equal, independent and peacefully competing pieces of the common share.”³¹

The First World War was a result of the antagonism of England and Germany and of the fact that they do not manage or do not want to settle the conflict in a peaceful manner. As a fighter for maintaining the International, the Menshevik leader points out the causes for its disintegration. According to him, the socialists are facing a dilemma: “Either military defeat, leading to economic and political oppression of the Fatherland, or breaking down the conditions for its current progress, or military victory as a condition for the existence of the Fatherland and its progress regardless of the consequences from the victory for the other countries”³². Upon accepting the dilemma the socialist party goes into crisis which leads to disintegration of the international organization. In his letter Y. Martov comes to the conclusion that the main mistake of G. Plekhanov and others is the fact that they are trying to solve the problem in the way French and German did but the socialists in Russia are facing a different situation. Looking at the war as a dilemma – either victory of Germany or France, they want to achieve democracy and socialism through the rout of Berlin and the Germans want the same through the rout of Moscow³³. Y. Martov finds the slogan which Al. Potresov raises a contradictory one. According to him: If there is serious inner resistance and opposition, it, without doubt, must oppose to a war which leads to antidemocratic policy. There is one step from “lack of counteraction” to stopping or mitigating the oppositional fight, to “Burgefrieden” (civil peace), established by the Germans or to the policy of “union nationale” (national unity) of the French³⁴. In spite

³⁰ See Martov’s article on his position on the war, „Война и российский пролетариат“ – В: Мартов Ю. О. Избранное. М., 2000, 322-349; Меньшевики. Документы и материалы. 1903- февраль 1917 гг. М. , 1996, с. 359.

³¹ Quoted works, p. 359.

³² Quoted works, p. 361.

³³ Quoted works, p. 636.

³⁴ Quoted works, p. 366-367.

of his attempt to change the attitude of A.I. Potresov and G. Plekhanov, Y. Martov fails to do it. To them he remains “a cosmopolite, far away from the understanding of the real interests of Russia, a dreamer and a political romanticist who will never be close to ordinary Russians”³⁵. The views of Y. Martov shape the left Menshevik-international wing in the Menshevik faction.

Close to the position of Y. Martov is one of his closest men among the Mensheviks – P. Axelrod. Not accidentally he is called “a patriarch” and “an apostle” of the Russian social democracy who carries out “an amazingly consistent and orderly political course” without “failures and zigzags” which are observed in some of the leaders of Menshevism. Being one of the most staunch followers of the international idea is one of his characteristics. He has a great desire to turn Russian social democracy into a modern party, close to the ideas of the western socialists. P. Axelrod is that leader of Menshevism who is the greatest opponent of the policy carried out by the Bolsheviks and Lenin and he never takes their side.

He views the war as a “failure of Imperialism”. He does not accuse the German proletariat and their party in betrayal, he does not condemn the French socialists that they take part in the government and vote for war credit. As a true internationalist he thinks that as long as there is “Fatherland” the working class will face the issue of patriotism and self-defense. In other words – he argues with Lenin – it will not be Marxism but cynicism³⁶. Pavel Borisovich approves of the tactics of the socialist faction in the State Duma. He does not agree with G. Plekhanov that the defeat of Russia in the war will be disastrous. On the contrary – it is impossible to wish for a victory for Russia as it will be a disaster for the world because it will strengthen the regime of the Tsar³⁷. He does not want the defeat of neither of the fighting parties because it will lead to pursuit of revenge and new conflicts. These views of P. Axelrod about the war draws him closer to Y. Martov and they both enter the Foreign Secretariat of the Menshevik Organizational Committee. But there are some discrepancies between them – Y. Martov sees a connection between the problem of democratic peace and an inevitable revolution, he criticizes the German socialists and does not believe that the IInd International will recover its former state.

³⁵ Тютюкин, С. Меньшевизм: страницы истории. Москва, 2002, с.288-289; За този проблем пише и Л. Хеймсон, Меньшевизм и еволюция российской интеллигенции. – Россия-XXI, №3-4, 1995, 144-149.

³⁶ Савельев, П. Аксельрод: человек и политик (1849?-1928). – Новая и новейшая история, 1998, №3, с. 179-180

³⁷ Голос, 22 декабря, 1914.

Regardless of their differences Y. Martov and P. Axelrod stick together in the policy they follow regarding not only their attitudes toward the war.

So far it became obvious that there is not a simple answer of the question which group predominates in the Menshevik circle in the beginning of World War I. If documents on the issue are traced and especially the ones with the Menshevik seal, we will see that most of them remain loyal to the ideas of the Internationalism. They want an immediate end of the war, continuation of the fight against tsarism and they do not join neither of the war coalitions. Their disunion does not allow them to play a more important role in the labour movement in Russia and during the war a decrease in the number of Mensheviks and a consolidation among the Bolsheviks is observed. As a whole the Menshevik organizations remain passive in the beginning of the war conflict and their job is simply reduced to publications of anti-war brochures and taking part in conferences. The tense situation in Russia should also be taken into consideration – authorities tighten the regime more and more, workers are overwhelmed by patriotic feelings and minimize their static activity.

In the beginning of World War I the Menshevik leaders are facing the difficult task to balance between their socialistic beliefs and their patriotic feelings, between their desire to help the motherland without giving credit to tsarism.

The greater part of them remain loyal to the consistent policy of the faction regarding war conflicts, namely: ending the war, signing a peace without annexations and contributions; and a revolution to overthrow the autocracy and to establish democratic peace.