In late 1920, with the end of the Civil War in sight, the Bolsheviks faced an exasperating economic and political situation. The Civil War and the policy of War Communism had exhausted the country. Most peasants as well as the industrial workers on whom Lenin and the Bolsheviks counted for support recoiled from the government and its economic experiments. The country exploded in large-scale rural rebellions, strikes, industrial disturbances, and mutinies, of which the most threatening was that of sailors at Petrograd's Kronstadt naval base.

There were also arguments and clashes inside the ruling party itself during the end of 1920 and the beginning of 1921. Several opposition groups, particularly the Democratic Centralists and the Workers' Opposition, challenged Lenin's leadership. The Workers' Opposition constituted the most serious threat since they demanded an independent role in government for trade unions as the workers' advocates. Disagreements among top party leaders intensified in the last months of 1920, and Lenin agreed to an open discussion at the session of the Party Central Committee on December 24. The discussion ranged over all the principal issues of the country's future.

The next day Trotsky, in his article "The Role and Tasks of the Trade Unions," raised questions about economic development, the management of the economy, social rights, administrative centralization, and democracy. A discussion began at the meeting of the Bolsheviks attending the Eighth Congress of Soviets on December 30, 1920. Lenin, with the support of Zinoviev, then a candidate member of the Central Committee, opposed Trotsky's proposals for using army units in industry and transportation and integrating trade unions into the state machine (ogosudarstvlivaniie prosoiuzev). Lenin took a more moderate stance. Although the idea of the New Economic Policy had not yet ripened in his political thinking, he rejected proposals for the
full militarization of labor. With an eye on the dissatisfied workers, he also rejected the idea of making trade unions state institutions, although in fact he was very close to Trotsky's view of them as "transmission belts" to carry out the party-government's policies.

Disputes and Opposition in the Party, 1920–1921

38

From The Party Crisis
January 21 (February 3), 1921

On January 14, 1921, Lenin and other members of the Central Committee signed the draft of the resolution that they wished to propose to the upcoming Tenth Party Congress. The draft, which concerned trade unions, became known as "The Platform of the Ten." In reply, the Workers' Opposition and the Democratic Centralists produced a platform of their own, in which they sought a role for workers in the management of industry and state administration. They also urged a partial democratization of the party. During the trade-union discussion, Trotsky aptly noted that Lenin's defense of trade unions was largely rhetorical. Lenin expressed his view of the "party crisis" in an article with that title in Pravda on January 21, 1921. His position is remarkable for his denial of the right of Trotsky and others to discuss openly the party's problems, for his denunciation of opponents for forming a "faction," and for his refusal to make any concession to trade union independence. He condemns the Workers' Opposition as "syndicalist," referring to activists who thought trade unions should lead the anticapitalist struggle. Reading this document raises the question: Who, under these rules, could challenge the party elite's hegemony over society?