

CHAPTER TWO

THE DEVELOPMENT OF MARX AND ENGELS' VIEWS ON THE STATE

Through the citations he gives, Lenin makes it appear (and there is no question that he sincerely believed this himself) that Marx and Engels formulated their views on the state with conscientious consistency and firm principles from the *Manifesto* onward. As the most theoretically advanced representatives of the socialist intelligentsia, Marx and Engels were the acknowledged authorities of the movement. Later Social-Democratic theoreticians might ignore or interpret Marx and Engels to suit their own purposes, but they rarely dared to criticize them outright.

In opposing the most open opportunist trends, Lenin therefore accepted the authority of Marx and Engels as his starting point and used it as a lever to strengthen and support his arguments. That was his greatest mistake.

By assuming the authority of Marx and Engels, Lenin also made an opportunist assumption of far greater proportion, an assumption shared by all the various socialist and communist trends: the authority of the middle-class socialist intelligentsia **as a whole** as the legitimate and trustworthy leadership of the working class movement. To have applied the same class criteria to Marx and Engels as Lenin applied to Kautsky and Plekhanov would have meant undercutting the final authority of the intelligentsia, since if even the most theoretically advanced intellectuals were at heart ordinary opportunists, the working class could not intelligently turn to this strata for political education and leadership.

As *State and Revolution* shows, Lenin was not prepared to take things quite so far. He only wished to criticize the opportunist excesses of certain socialist intellectuals, not the opportunist role of the socialist intelligentsia in general. Thus when quoting Kautsky's or Plekhanov's 'loose' formulations, Lenin shows no mercy. They are opportunists and traitors pure and simple. But when he cites Marx and Engels', Lenin becomes the very essence of compassion and human understanding. The program of the *Manifesto* is not opportunist, only "abstract". Marx's letter to Kugelmann does not document some reformist relapse on Marx's part but, on the contrary, is "extremely profound". Engels' parliamentary comments in the Erfurt *Critique* are not to be taken seriously. In short, militant workers who pay attention to such things are reassured that the middle-class intelligentsia **can** provide principled leadership after all, and that despite the efforts of Kautskyite renegades, Marxism is still the key to working class satisfaction.

But let us see what Marx and Engels "really taught on the subject of the state".

A) Marx and Engels' Early Views

Marx and Engels' initial analysis of state power, as expressed, for example, in Engels' *Festival of Nations* (1845), *Communist Confession of Faith* (1847), *Principles of Communism* (1847), and the *Manifesto*, depicts the state as a neutral organ which can indeed be taken over by democratic means, i.e. suffrage, and made into an instrument of working class rule. Although Lenin admits this (LCW Vol. 25, p.404 and p.414), he discounts the class basis of the *Manifesto's* reformist program by referring to it as being "extremely abstract" (Ibid. p.406) or "purely abstract" (Ibid. p.417). The *Manifesto*, Lenin states, "...indicated the tasks,

but not the ways of accomplishing them..."(Ibid.). In reality, however, the *Manifesto* is very specific as to **how** the working class should achieve power and **what measures** it should pursue once it has attained it.

Marx and Engels did not, after all, enter the movement as fully formulated communist theoreticians whose outlook suffered only from a lack of historical experience. On the contrary, they entered it as ordinary middle-class democrats who, like other well-intended democrats of the time (and the present), evolved their theories on the basis of intellectual insight and their own middle-class bias. What is scientifically valid in their writings in relation to the working class is thus permeated, to a greater or lesser extent, with strictly middle-class attitudes, and the program of the *Manifesto* is a case in point.

The *Manifesto* declares that "...the first step in the revolution by the working class is to raise the proletariat to the position of ruling class, to win the battle of democracy..."(MECW Vol. 6, p.504), and that having done so "...the proletariat will use its political supremacy to wrest, by degrees, all capital from the bourgeoisie..."(Ibid.).

Winning the battle of democracy means, as is shown by the *Manifesto's* program and earlier drafts, winning a parliamentary majority and a democratic constitution. Engels' *Draft of a Communist Confession of Faith* phrases it as "...political liberation of the proletariat through a democratic constitution..."(MECW Vol. 6, p.102), while his later *Principles of Communism* calls for "...a democratic constitution and thereby, directly or indirectly, the political rule of the proletariat..." (MECW Vol. 6, p.350).

According to this program, power can be taken by parliamentary means, the existing state machine can be used to abolish the rule of capital, and more remarkable, political power can be won without overthrowing the bourgeoisie outright. Only **after** the working class takes power does it engage in "...despotic inroads on the rights of property..."(MECW Vol. 6, p.504), and by a combination of progressive taxation and nationalization, force the bourgeoisie out of economic existence.

Such a program is especially suited to middle-class interests, since although parliamentary pressure is incapable of effecting the thorough-going changes necessary for a working class revolution, it **is** capable of enforcing minor reforms of capitalism beneficial to the middle strata: nationalization of land, state control of public utilities, tax relief, restrictions on interest rates, etc. The complaints and reformist striving of the middle-class at large are thus spontaneously incorporated into the doctrines of that class's most radical ideologists - the socialist intelligentsia- and are presented to the working class as the rightful focus of its political activity. With the mass of workers organized as voters, the socialist intellectuals, or in Lenin's words, the "petty bourgeois democrats using near-socialist phraseology", would be in a position to wring concessions favorable to the middle-class and thus alleviate the pressure of big capital. At the same time, by restricting the workers to parliamentary politics, the middle-class would face no threat 'from the left', i.e. from an armed and independently organized proletariat. Despite the socialist intellectuals' sincere belief that they are trying to overthrow, not simply reform, capitalism, their persistent class prejudice inevitably draws them towards a program of petty reform.

This parliamentary and largely peaceful path to power as outlined in the *Manifesto* continued to be Marx's and Engels' basic plan for revolution into the 1880's and 1890's.

Their allowance for non-parliamentary tactics and their formulations on “smashing” (up to 1891) were developed as **exceptions** to their general views on the state and were intended to accommodate countries which lacked ‘real’ democratic systems.

The common theme in all their works, however, is that the democratic state can be taken by parliamentary means and its class nature transformed via socialist legislation. This is true despite their occasional observations that political power rests on military might and that the ruling class controls this power by indirect means. Lenin circumvents this fact by, on the one hand, omitting or apologizing for their more overt democratic-reformist views, and, on the other, by emphasizing what is more revolutionary-sounding and more attuned to working class reality.

B) The Experience of the 1848 Revolutions

The experience of the democratic revolutions of 1848 forced Marx and Engels to take a harder line, at least for a brief period, on democratic-parliamentary forms of struggle. Although they did not openly break with their previous views, their writings of 1850-52 constitute an implicit criticism of the *Manifesto*'s program and offer new formulations much further to the left.

The best example of this is given in their 1850 Address of the Central Committee to the Communist League.

Where the *Manifesto* and earlier writings spoke enthusiastically of democracy in general and even equated democracy with communism (MECW Vol. 6 p.5), the *Address* is, as Marx wrote to Engels in 1851, “... at bottom nothing but a plan of war against democracy...” (MESW p.39 IP ed.). Where the *Manifesto* treats the democratic middle-class casually, as a minor threat to the working class, the *Address* cautions that the party of the democratic petty bourgeoisie is “...far more dangerous to the workers than the previous liberal one...” (MESW Vol. 1, p.177). Where the *Manifesto* calls for “...the union and agreement of the democratic parties of all countries...” (MECW Vol. 6, p.519), the *Address* calls for a decisive rejection of such unity and proposes instead the “...independent, secret and public organization of the workers’ party...” (MESW Vol. 1, p.179).

The *Address* implicitly criticizes the program of the *Manifesto* by attacking the efforts of the democrats to make capitalism “...as tolerable and comfortable as possible...” (MESW Vol. 1, p.178) by way of progressive taxation on the rich, public credit, a democratic state structure, abolition of inheritance, worker subsistence guarantees, etc., in short, by means which the *Manifesto* itself proposes as cardinal measures for working class revolution. And instead of offering a list of legislative measures, the *Address* simply urges the workers to always raise demands much further to the left than those the democrats offer.

The most significant break with their parliamentary prejudice, however, is expressed in the *Address*'s call for the creation of “revolutionary workers’ governments” which would exist alongside and opposed to the new democratic governments. The proposed workers’ governments would be authorities “...which are backed by the whole mass of the workers...”

and whose power would be based on armed workers' militia which "...put themselves at the command not of the state authority but of the revolutionary community councils..."(MESW Vol. 1, p.181).

This formulation of an armed dual power, a strategy that utilizes but does not depend on parliamentary tactics, is remarkable in light of the fact that although it most closely approximates the tasks of the working class in the struggle for state power, Marx and Engels thereafter dropped it in favor of more traditional parliamentary-reformist phrases.

Also remarkable is the fact that although Lenin was familiar with the *Address* as early as 1905 (LCW Vol. 8, p.467), he evidently 'forgot' to include it in his analysis of the state. Just how far the significance of the *Address* bypassed him is shown by the fact that after the spontaneous formation of soviets by the Russian workers and peasants in 1917 and their parallel existence with the Provisional Government, Lenin declared that "...Nobody previously thought, or could have thought, of a dual power..."(LCW Vol. 24, p.38).

There are several reasons why it was 'natural' for Lenin to overlook the importance of the *Address* in 1905 and to ignore it altogether in 1917.

Firstly, Lenin's understanding of the piece-meal development of Marx's and Engels' views on the state was predicated on the belief that their formulations arose only on the "...solid ground of historical experience..."(LCW Vol. 25, p.409). They did not, according to Lenin, "...indulge in utopias..." i.e., offer theoretical projections for taking power, but "...expected the experience of the mass movement..." (Ibid. p.417) to provide the concrete forms.

On the basis of this reasoning, Lenin justifies the democratic prejudice of the *Manifesto*, the theoretical void between 1852 and 1871, Marx's tailing behind the experience of the Commune, and Engels' liberalism towards the German Social-Democrats.

The formulations in the *Address*, however, were only partially based on historical experience, while such issues as the role of petty bourgeois democracy, organizational independence of the working class, and especially the call for an armed dual power were indeed the result of logical reasoning and theoretical projection. Ironically, when Marx and Engels, as in the *Manifesto*, give their middle-class prejudice a free rein, Lenin praises them for fidelity to "historical experience". But when, as in the *Address*, they finally deduce a plan of action actually in tune with historical experience, Lenin cannot comprehend its significance.

Secondly, Lenin believed that Marx developed his theories "...consistently, down to the theory of political power, of the state..." (LCW Vol. 25, p.403). The *Address*, however, clearly exposes the inconsistency of Marx and Engels' views, since in relation to their other works it stands out starkly as a lucid exposition of revolutionary tactics.

The 1850 *Address* is even far superior to Marx's 1852 *Eighteenth Brumaire*, since although the *Brumaire* calls for "smashing" (and then, it should be noted, only for France), it gives no indication as to how the workers' struggle for power should be organized. The call for an armed dual power, however, contains in embryo all the fundamental conclusions that Marx and Engels began to raise only after the Paris Commune. Accounting for the *Address* would thus have forced Lenin to examine the actual development of Marxism more closely and to

explain, for example, why an advanced formulation was evaded not only by Kautsky, Bebel and other leading lights of the Second International, but by Marx and Engels themselves.

And finally in this connection, the *Address* shows that it was not 'history' which prevented Marx and Engels from formulating a truly working class programme in 1848, but simply their own petty bourgeois prejudice. It was that same class prejudice that allowed Lenin, in 1905, to overlook the theoretical importance of the *Address* and, in 1914-17, to forget it existed at all. Once the spontaneous formation of a dual power put the matter squarely before the Social Democrats, Lenin was forced to deal with it theoretically. But it would have been unfortunate, from the standpoint of defending Marxism, to have remembered that the issue had been raised and abandoned some 60 years before.

The defeats of the 1848 revolutions also tempered Marx and Engels' enthusiasm for universal suffrage. Marx's 1850 *Class Struggles in France* treats suffrage not as a lever for winning state power, but primarily as a means of exposing the interests of various classes (MESW Vol. 1, p.222-23), and even declares that suffrage is superfluous in a revolutionary period (Ibid. p.291).

The same sentiment is expressed in his 1852 *Eighteenth Brumaire*. Marx gives a concise criticism of Social-Democracy—"...a coalition between petty bourgeois and workers..." which resulted in the "revolutionary point" being broken off the workers' demands and a "democratic turn" given to them by the middle-class democrats (MESW Vol. 1, p.423) --and mocks the petty bourgeoisie's defense of suffrage (Ibid. p.427).

In discussing Marx's observation in the *Brumaire* that all revolutions perfected the state machine instead of smashing it, Lenin poses a rhetorical question: "... is it correct to generalize the experience, observations and conclusions of Marx, to apply them to a field that is wider than the history of France during the three years 1848-51..." (LCW Vol. 25, p.409). He answers by showing that the France of 1848-51 was indeed a "classic country of the class struggle" and that Marx's observation is therefore a legitimate conclusion for **all** capitalist countries with developed state systems. That is how Lenin covers for Marx.

The fact remains, however, that just as Marx formulated the *Address* in relation to Germany, he wrote of "smashing" only in relation to France. His 1871 letter to Kugelmann in which he refers specifically to the French Revolution and only then generalizes "smashing", not to all capitalist countries, but to "the Continent" proves this. Moreover, between 1852 and 1871 Marx made no attempt to elaborate the most general features of "smashing", even within the narrow framework of 1848-51 France, to pose it as a general theoretical question in relation to the state, nor to indicate how this 'French' solution related to other capitalist countries of the same period.

Lenin attempts to compensate for Marx's lack of imagination in 1852 with an 'innocent' and seemingly objective question in 1917 --'is it correct to generalize?'-- when objectively quite another question should have been posed: Why did not Marx **himself** generalize?

C) The Retreat 1852-1871

The extent to which Marx and Engels retreated from their general conclusions of 1850-52 can be judged by the fact that they, in effect, sat on the question of the state for some twenty years.

In his preparatory work on *Capital*, Marx planned to include a book dealing specifically with the state. But as his 1857 notes show (*Grundrisse* p.108-09, p.263 RH ed.), he intended to analyze only the role of the state in relation to capitalist economics: taxes, the unproductive bureaucracy, state debt, credit, etc. There is no mention of the structure of the state as repressive machinery or of revolutionary tactics.

Likewise, Marx's 1864 *Inaugural Address* to the First International states that conquering "...political power has therefore become the great duty of the working class..." (MESW Vol. 2, p.17). But except for favorable remarks on reviving the Chartist movement and support of the Ten Hours Bill in England **that is all** he says in relation to the state.

Even Marx and Engels' private correspondence during this time, in which they discuss a wide spectrum of subjects in addition to political economy, contains very little on the question of state power.

Marx's letter to Engels of 8-10-69, for example, mocks Wilhelm Liebknecht's stupid fascination with "... the future 'Staat DER Demokratie'..." meaning at one moment "...constitutional England, at another the bourgeois United States, and at the next the wretched Switzerland..." (MESC p.262, IP ed.). "It", "the cow", referring to Liebknecht, has "...not the faintest idea of revolutionary politics..." (Ibid.). Marx and Engels may have laughed themselves silly over Liebknecht's theoretical stupidity, but in reality Liebknecht only expressed **their own** parliamentary views with an open and obscenely opportunist frankness. Marx's smug reference to "revolutionary politics", which he nowhere elaborates, is thus only an attempt to put some distance between his own "near-socialist phraseology" and Liebknecht's.

The fundamental agreement between Marx and Engels and the German Social Democrats on reformist tactics is demonstrated by Engels' 1870 preface to his *Peasant War in Germany*. In the preface, Engels revives the *Manifesto's* parliamentarism by congratulating the German Social Democrats for sending "...workers and workers' representatives into parliament—a fact which neither the French nor the English have so far accomplished..." (MESW Vol. 2, p.163). Engels allows himself this good natured national pride despite the fact that the "workers and workers' representatives" were men of the caliber of Liebknecht and Bebel, i.e. men who were most often the butts of Marx's and Engels' private jokes, and that the Reichstag had, even by Engels' reckoning, no real power.

D) The Paris Commune of 1871

The twenty-year moratorium on “smashing” and the question of the state in general was broken only by the advent of the Paris Commune. Here at last ‘history’, i.e. the various middle-class trends that led the Commune, presented Marx and Engels with material for elaborating particulars on the issue of proletarian state power.

As cited above, Marx’s letter to Kugelmann of 4-71 generalizes “smashing” to Continental Europe as a precondition “...for every people’s revolution...” (MESC p.309 IP ed.). In justifying Marx’s restriction, Lenin argues that since England and the United States did not have developed militaries or bureaucracies in 1871 a revolution was indeed possible without “smashing”.

This argument overlooks the elementary fact that the absence of a developed military-bureaucratic apparatus is simply a reflection of the absence of volatile class antagonisms, and that (as Lenin himself points out earlier in his exposition, quoting Engels) the state power “...grows stronger, however, in proportion as class antagonisms within the state become more acute...” (LCW Vol. 25, p.390). By the time a revolution, even a “people’s revolution”, developed enough momentum to fundamentally threaten the bourgeoisie, the state would no doubt generate a substantial repressive apparatus and thus require extensive “smashing”.

Lenin’s statement that by 1917 Marx’s restriction was “no longer valid” is given as a historically grounded correction, but is in reality nothing but an apology for Marx’s thoughtlessness on the subject.

Likewise, what Lenin calls Marx’s “extremely profound remark” (LCW Vol. 25, p.416) in relation to “people’s revolution” is in fact neither extreme nor profound. Marx was justified in using this phrase, Lenin writes, because the working class did not constitute a majority in any Continental European country. A revolution against the existing order would therefore have to embrace both the proletariat and petty bourgeoisie. The two classes, Lenin expounds, are united “...by the fact that the ‘bureaucratic-military state machine’ oppresses, crushes, exploits them. To smash this machine, to break it up, is truly in the interests of the ‘people’...” (LCW Vol. 25, p.417).

This argument, too, overlooks an elementary fact, namely, that the proletariat and middle-class have quite different reasons for opposing the state, and very different requirements for a new apparatus. The middle-class cannot, after all, remain a middle class if capitalism is abolished outright. It therefore opposes the excesses of larger, monopolized capital, opposes the gigantic growth of the state bureaucracy and the higher taxation required to support it, and longs for a cheap, efficient and inconspicuous government. But it in no way wishes to see an end to the class system in general or to the social privileges which elevate it above the mass of workers.

To the extent that the two classes are united in a single “people’s revolution’, that revolution can only be a democratic, not a proletarian-socialist, one, and the new apparatus it builds can only reform and refine capitalism, not abolish it. This is something Lenin

understood very clearly in 1905; at a time when he vigorously opposed any attempt to attribute socialist features to what could only be a democratic, people's revolution.

Curiously, Lenin's argument on this issue in *State and Revolution* goes from "people's revolution", to "the people", to "proletariat and peasantry", to "workers and most of the peasants", and ends up on "free alliance of the poor peasants and the proletarians". Squirreled away in his memory was the old notion that a people's revolution was in fact only a democratic revolution. But Lenin wished to interpret Marx's comments on "smashing" in terms of a proletarian revolution. An alliance of the proletariat and poor, i.e. semi-proletarian, peasants is indeed the social formula for a working class revolution, hence the progression of phrases to arrive at the more acceptable, proletarian variety of "smashing".

Marx's declaration to Kugelmann, as well as his interpretation of the Commune in *The Civil War in France*, nearly exposed one of the best kept secrets of Marxism on the state, namely, that "smashing" is not a peculiar feature of working class revolution, but is also quite agreeable to the petty bourgeois democratic revolution.

Marx's reference to "smashing" in relation to "real people's revolution" means, in fact, exactly what it says. Marx limits his comments to "the Continent" since he still believed that the state structure of democratic republics was a suitable instrument of power, i.e. parliaments there were indeed representative. He refers to people's revolution instead of proletarian revolution since that was in fact what the Commune was. These 'loose' formulations would be tidied up by Engels in his 1891 preface to the Civil War, but the fact remains that Marx formulated a statement on behalf of radical middle-class democracy and not, as Lenin states, "...the tasks of the proletariat during a revolution..." (LCW Vol. 25, p.415).

It is also interesting to note that following his quotation of Marx to Kugelmann, Lenin adds a parenthetical remark to the effect that Marx's letters appeared in Russian translations "...one of which I edited and supplied with a preface..." (Ibid.). In the following sentences he chastises Kautsky for ignoring Marx's remarks on "smashing" and thus presents himself as a long-time defender of Marx and Engels' line.

When we turn to his 1907 preface we find that Lenin, true to his word, does mention Marx's comments on "smashing", but then only as a **paraphrase**. In fact, this "principle lesson of Marxism" is buried in, among other things, the preface's polemic against Plekhanov's lack of support for the 1905 revolution. One can only suppose that in establishing credentials in a Social-Democratic movement, even a paraphrase is worth something (see LCW Vol. 12, p.109).

In his *Civil War in France*, Marx portrays the Commune as being composed primarily of "...working men, or acknowledged representatives of the working class..." (MESW Vol. 2, p.220), and concludes that it was therefore "...essentially a working class government..." (Ibid. p.223). The phrase "acknowledged representatives of the working class" is, of course, only a euphemism for 'middle-class intellectuals'. The Commune showed, according to Marx, that "...the working class cannot simply lay hold of the ready-made state machinery, and wield it for its own purposes..." (Ibid. p.217). It "...breaks the modern State power..." (Ibid. p.222).

The Commune, Lenin adds in his analysis, "...appears to have replaced the smashed state machine 'only' by fuller democracy..." but "this 'only' signifies a gigantic replacement of certain institutions by other institutions of a fundamentally different type..." (LCW Vol. 25, p.419). That is, the measures introduced by the Commune were not simply democratic but proletarian-socialist. Hence Lenin's description of the Commune as a "proletarian, socialist republic" and "one of the greatest proletarian revolutions."

This interpretation of the Commune differs sharply from Lenin's analysis in 1905. At that time the Mensheviks were attempting to gloss over the distinction between democratic and socialist tasks in the 1905 revolution and so raised the slogan of "the Commune" as a rallying point for their own democratic interests.

This put Lenin in an awkward situation. He could not, or rather did not wish to, go directly against Marx's interpretation of the Commune as a working class government or Engels' 1891 statement that the Commune was indeed the dictatorship of the proletariat. On the other hand, he had to show that the Commune was not such a sterling example after all and that Marx and Engels had been perhaps too generous in their praise of it.

In *Two Tactics*, Lenin accuses the Mensheviks of "revolutionary phrase-mongering" and calls the Commune "... a certain workers' government ... that was unable, and could not at the time, distinguish between the elements of a democratic revolution and a socialist revolution, a government that confused the tasks of fighting for a republic with those of fighting for socialism..." (LCW Vol. 9, p.80-81). It was therefore "...a government such as ours should not be..." (Ibid.).

Further, in elaborating the tasks of the democratic revolution ("people's revolution", as he calls it elsewhere), Lenin calls for "...the forcible demolition of the obsolete political superstructure..." and the creation of a "...new superstructure (a 'democratic' as distinct from a socialist dictatorship)..." based on the proletariat and peasantry (LCW Vol. 9, p.128). He thus affirms "smashing", at least in the 1905 revolution, as a precondition for the **democratic** revolution.

A more critical attitude towards the Commune is expressed in *The Paris Commune and the Tasks of the Democratic Dictatorship*. Although the article was evidently written by someone else (see footnote 23, V.I. Lenin *On the Paris Commune*, p.123), it is safe to assume that since Lenin edited it and added a concluding paragraph he agreed with its basic contents.

The article puts the main question in relation to the Commune quite bluntly: "...Was the Commune a dictatorship of the proletariat?" (Ibid., p.115). The question is followed by Engels' 1891 preface to the *Civil War in France*, which answers in the affirmative. But the article counters, "...there are various dictatorships..." (Ibid.). Was it a pure proletarian dictatorship in terms of its membership and practical tasks? "By no means! ..." the article declares, "...the class-conscious proletariat (and only more or less class-conscious at that), i.e. the members of the International, were in the minority; the majority consisted of representatives of petty bourgeois democracy..." (Ibid.).

The article then cites the findings of the historians Gustav Jaechk and Lissagary to demonstrate the predominance of the middle-class in the Commune, the fact that "...most of the highly important ministries were...in the hands of the petty bourgeoisie..." (Ibid. p.117),

and to show that although members of the International participated in the government, they "...had no desire to merge with the Commune..."(Ibid. p.116).

The author then attempts to harmonize the actual middle-class basis of the Commune with Engels' 1891 remarks by stating that "... Hence there is no doubt that, when Engels called the Commune a dictatorship of the proletariat, he had in mind only the participation, and ideologically leading participation at that, of representatives of the proletariat in the revolutionary government of Paris..."(Ibid. p.117). That is to say, Engels was too generous: the Commune was not really a proletarian dictatorship at all. That is the author's implicit conclusion, but it remains only an implication since to refute Engels outright on this point would have meant refuting the bulk of Marxism on the state.

In his concluding paragraph to this article, Lenin emphasizes three points in support of his thesis on a democratic dictatorship.

First, the history of the Commune shows that "...participation of representatives of the socialist proletariat with the petty bourgeoisie in a revolutionary government is in principle entirely permissible..." (Ibid. p.120). This point is raised to rebuke the Menshevik's opposition to participation in a revolutionary democratic government, and thus Lenin implies that the Commune was, after all, just such a government.

Second, Lenin states that "...the real task which the Commune had to carry out was above all to put into effect a democratic, and not a socialist dictatorship, to carry out our minimum program..."(Ibid.). The Commune was portrayed, and portrayed itself to be, a working class, socialist government. Its real task, Lenin states however, was simply democratic. But Lenin remains silent on the fact that the confusion over democratic and socialist tasks, the embellishing of democratic reforms with socialist phrases, was the work not only of the Proudhonists, Blanquists and anarchists, but of Marx and Engels as well.

And third, Lenin urges his readers not to "...take over the word 'commune' from the great fighters of 1871..."(Ibid.), since the Commune had many mistakes as well as successes, but to raise the slogan of the "revolutionary democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry"(Ibid.). He thus puts the Commune and the democratic dictatorship side by side, supporting the latter formulation primarily for being a more precise expression.

As is evident from his 1905 writings, Lenin recognized that the measures of the Commune were only democratic-reformist ones which did not in any way threaten the economic foundations of capitalism. He therefore abstracted from the Commune only what was useful for the impending democratic revolution—restructuring the state apparatus, creation of a popular militia, cooperation between the workers' and democratic parties—and essentially denied that the Commune was socialist. -

But in so doing, Lenin burned a theoretical bridge behind him, since when the question of socialist "smashing" and a socialist government would eventually arise, he would either have to go forward theoretically or, if he intended to remain an orthodox Marxist, go back on his word.

In 1917 that question was raised, and he chose the latter course. In order to arrive at a more favorable interpretation of the Commune, Lenin simply abandoned all doubts as to its authenticity as a proletarian dictatorship and tacitly repudiated his 1905 views. In *State*

and Revolution, Lenin simply repeats all of Marx's conclusions in the *Civil War* and declares with religious devotion that it was indeed a proletarian socialist republic. The measures that he considered as only "fuller democracy" in 1905 are praised as "fundamentally different," socialist ones in 1917. The petty bourgeois class composition of the Commune, which he formerly emphasized in order to covertly refute Engels, is now omitted altogether. And the concept of "smashing", which he previously applied to the democratic revolution, is now treated as a peculiar feature of the proletarian revolution.

Continuing his presentation in *State and Revolution*, Lenin makes it appear that following the Commune Marx and Engels revised and corrected their earlier views on the state, and in particular their attitude towards the parliamentary path to power and the particular forms of the future socialist society. Actually their new views, forced on them as it were by the experience of the Commune and the subsequent struggle with other middle-class socialist trends, were simply incorporated into their on-going parliamentary prejudice. "Smashing" and Commune-type reforms did not launch them, as it had launched Lenin, on a new revolutionary career, but merely enriched their stock of militant catch-phrases to impress the likes of Liebknecht and Bebel.

In his 1871 speech to the First International, "Apropos of Working-Class Political Action", Engels argues against the abstentionist policies of the anarchists by arguing that the abolition of classes is possible only by means of the "...political domination of the proletariat..." and that, in turn, can only be achieved by "political action"(MESW Vol. 2, p.245). Political action "...prepares the ground for revolution and provides the workers with the revolutionary training without which they are sure to become the dupes of the Favres and Pyats the morning after the battle..."(Ibid.). The workers' party, he continues, should be independent and have its own policy and employ "...the political freedoms, the right of assembly and association and the freedom of the press—those are our weapons..."(Ibid.). Engels thus equates political action with legal, parliamentary politics alone, an interpretation that is consistent throughout his work and which indicates precisely what sort of revolution he saw in the making.

In citing Marx and Engels' 1872 preface to the *Manifesto*, Lenin states that "smashing" was "...of such enormous importance that they introduced it as an important correction..."(LCW Vol. 25, p.414). He later states that due to the distortions of the opportunists, the meaning of their important correction was not known to the vast majority of the *Manifesto's* readers.

The preface itself states that the passage on "...revolutionary measures at the end of Section II...would, in many respects, be very differently worded today..."(MESW Vol. 1, p.98). Due to the development of industry, the organization of the working class, and especially the Commune, "...this program has in some details become antiquated. One thing especially was proved by the Commune, viz., that 'the working class cannot simply lay hold of the ready-made State machinery, and wield it for its own purposes'..."(Ibid. p.99).

It is a small wonder that 99/100ths, as Lenin puts it, of the *Manifesto's* readers slipped by this "important correction" undetected. Marx and Engels do not, in fact, correct themselves here. They simply imply, i.e. "in many respects...in some details", that there is something lacking in the old program. By treating the *Manifesto's* program so gently they can let its parliamentary path to power and parliamentary 'inroads' against capital stand. And by not

elaborating precisely how “smashing” relates to the program, they allow for any number of reformist interpretations, including Kautsky’s.

Just how enormously **unimportant** and how slight a correction “smashing” actually was is shown by the fact that in the following **five** prefaces to the *Manifesto* (1882, 1883, 1890, 1892, and 1893) there is not a single reference to it, and no mention of certain ‘shortcomings’ of the *Manifesto*’s program. That is how, to cite Lenin once again, “...for forty years Marx and Engels taught the proletariat that it must smash the state machine...” (LCW Vol. 25, p.479).

E) Following the Paris Commune

The last major work by Marx, which Lenin quotes, is his 1875 *Critique of the Gotha Programme*. Although Lenin makes much of the fact that Marx calls the socialist transition period the “...revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat...” (LSW Vol. 2, p.300), Marx himself evades the political forms of this dictatorship by focusing on its strictly economic aspects. That is why Lenin places the *Critique* in a special section, “The Economic Basis of the Withering Away of the State” (Chapter 5), instead of including it in his central chapter, “State and Revolution, The Experience of the Paris Commune” (Chapter 3).

In the *Critique* Marx straightforwardly poses the question: “...what transformation will the state undergo in communist society? ...” (MESW Vol. 3, p.26). More specifically, “...what social functions will remain in existence there that are analogous to present state functions? ...” (Ibid.). But instead of analyzing those social functions, even on the basis of the Commune, Marx simply replies that “...this question can only be answered scientifically...” and offers the phrase “... dictatorship of the proletariat ...” (Ibid.). And that is all.

More remarkable, he then chastises the German Social-Democrats, people who were obviously theoretically incompetent, for not dealing with the question in their program. This is the socialist equivalent of a Christian missionary chastising illiterate natives for not formulating the concrete forms of the after-life.

The Gotha Programme, Marx continues, only contains “...the old democratic litany...” which merely echoes “...the bourgeois People’s Party...” (Ibid.). They are demands “...which in so far as they are not exaggerated in fantastic presentation, have already been realized...” (Ibid.) in the democratic countries.

It follows that if the “democratic litany” has already been realized in republican countries, **other** sorts of demands or tactics should be pursued. But Marx ignores this conclusion, and states instead that raising democratic demands, after all, is predicated on the existence of “...the so-called sovereignty of the people and hence are appropriate only in a democratic republic...” (Ibid.). Since Germany is not a republic, the Social Democrats should not expect to realize their demands, their “...pretty little gewgaws...” (Ibid.), under the status quo. Marx thus mocks the German Social-Democrats for their infatuation with petty democratic

demands, but offers no clear line on the distinction between parliamentary-republican and revolutionary tactics.

As for the future workers' society, Marx's discussion is limited to the economics of socialism (the role of bourgeois right) and communism (offering the general phrase, "from each according to his ability, to each according to his needs"). Marx does not mention the role of the state in this connection, and Lenin's elaboration in *State and Revolution* is strictly his own.

Typical of their relationship with the German Social-Democratic Party, Marx and Engels warned the Germans that if the Gotha Programme were adopted they would publicly dissociate themselves from it (Marx to Bracke 5-5-75, MESW Vol. 3, p.11 and Engels to Bebel 3-18-75 MESW Vol. 3, p.35). When the Germans proceeded to adopt the program, however, Marx and Engels remained silent on the issue and made only the most obscure criticisms in their public works (for example, Engels' oblique criticism of "free people's state" in Anti-Duhring MESW Vol. 3, p.147). On the other hand, Engels continued to champion the leading role of the German Party in the international Social-Democratic movement and congratulated them for their parliamentary successes.

Lenin states that Engels' 1875 letter to Bebel on the Gotha Program contains "...one of the most if not the most, remarkable observations on the state in the works of Marx and Engels..."(LCW Vol. 25, p.439).

Criticizing the German's opportunist formulation on the "free people's state", Engels advised Bebel that since the future proletarian government will only be a state in the process of withering away, the word "state" should be replaced by the German equivalent of the French word "commune". A tremendous revolutionary interpretation on Engels' part, Lenin concludes. But unfortunately, Lenin adds, "... Engels' letter was pigeon-holed thirty-six years..." (Ibid. p.441).

What is most remarkable about this most remarkable observation, however, is that Engels only offers the Social Democrats more clever and scientifically precise phrases, while remaining absolutely silent on the issue of concrete revolutionary tactics. After all, it makes little difference whether the word "state" is replaced by the word "commune", or whether a party calls itself Social-Democratic or Communist, as long as its fundamental outlook and program continues to be based on middle-class democracy. In effect, all that Engels offers is a more sophisticated form of opportunism, a political line that will have more appeal to intelligent workers, but which does not contradict the democratic prejudice of the socialist intelligentsia.

Remarkable too, is the fact that Engels allowed this "most, if not the most" important observation to be pigeonholed for thirty-six years. Throughout his analysis, Lenin makes it appear as if the more principled works of Marx and Engels were suppressed and distorted by the German Social-Democrats, as if, for example, Bebel was solely responsible for keeping Engels' letter from the light of day. In reality, however, it was Marx and Engels themselves who restricted their most relevant comments to private correspondence, failed to engage in public polemic with the Social-Democrats, and even gave them their formal support. There is no great mystery here. They did not take things as far as an open

struggle, since aside from their dislike of Lassallean phrases and Liebknecht's stupidity, they were in fundamental agreement with Social Democracy.

Engels' fullest elaboration on the general theoretical aspects of the state is found in his 1884 *Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*. Lenin quotes extensively from the final section of this work, but, as pointed out above, ignores several obvious conclusions in order to make his defense of Marxism more consistent.

In order to portray Engels as a conscientious revolutionary, Lenin states that he is "...most explicit in calling universal suffrage an instrument of bourgeois rule..." and follows with Engels' observation that suffrage is "...the gauge of the maturity of the working class. It cannot and never will be anything more in the present-day state..." (LCW Vol. 25, p.393). The opportunists, Lenin continues, "...expect just this 'more' from universal suffrage..." (Ibid.). That is, the opportunists advocated a parliamentary path to power, whereas Engels, according to Lenin, advocated a revolutionary path.

Lenin's defense of Engels would be justified, of course, provided that Engels actually did elaborate revolutionary tactics in opposition to the Social-Democratic parliamentarians. But he did not. The remainder of the quotation, which Lenin does not give, simply states "...but that is sufficient. On the day the thermometer of universal suffrage registers boiling point among the workers, both they and the capitalists will know what to do..." (MESW Vol. 3, p.330). Universal suffrage registering a boiling point among the workers means, quite plainly, winning a parliamentary majority.

The only difference between Engels and the Right Social-Democrats in this respect is that the Rights expect a smooth transition to power, whereas Engels **allows** for the possibility of a violent, extra-parliamentary confrontation, but then only after the parliamentary game has been played out.

While there is no question that the capitalists, who know very well how powerless a parliament is and who insure their influence over the army and police by indirect means, will "know what to do" should the workers win a parliamentary majority, there is also no question that the workers, organized by the intellectuals only to show up at the polls every few years, **will have absolutely no idea "what to do"**.

With exactly the same opportunist eclecticism Lenin attributes to Kautsky, Engels acknowledges a fact that is obvious to every worker who has given it serious thought, i.e. that the entire electoral-parliamentary apparatus only serves the ruling classes, and at the same time advises the workers that this apparatus must be taken over **before** an open confrontation can occur. In the process, the **main** question—how to prepare for an open class struggle, the creation of a dual power, and in particular arming the working class—is evaded altogether. All real and pressing questions of organizing actual working class power are brushed aside by a 'cute' remark: "both the workers and the capitalists will know what to do".

Although Lenin constantly emphasizes that Marx and Engels developed their views consistently on the basis of solid historical experience, and in particular the experience of the Commune, he politely ignores the fact that although the *Origin* was written some 13 years after the Commune, Engels did not bother to incorporate "smashing", Commune-type measures, or other "enormously important" details into the work. By those omissions

Engels guaranteed that his, as Lenin calls it, “...most popular of Engels’ works...” (LCW Vol. 25; p.386) would remain precisely that—most popular—and that his sociological analysis would remain uncluttered by tactical ‘trivia’.

That Engels had by the 1880’s not entirely forgotten about the Commune is shown by an 1883 letter to van Patten. Arguing against the anarchists, Engels states that “...the working class must first take possession of the organized political power of the state and by its aid crush the resistance of the capitalist class and organize society anew...” (MESW p.416-17 IP ed.). So there is no question as to what is meant by “take possession of the organized political power of the state”, Engels adds that “...this is to be found already in the *Manifesto* of 1847, Chapter II, conclusion...” (Ibid.). That is, by “winning the battle of democracy”, a parliamentary majority, and implementation of radical legislative measures against capital. Engels continues, “...this state may require very considerable alterations before it can fulfill its new functions...” but it is “...the only organism by means of which the victorious proletariat can assert its newly-conquered power...” (Ibid.).

From this it is clear that in Engels’ view, “smashing” does not contradict “winning the battle of democracy”, but goes hand in hand with it. “Smashing” is thus not a correction to, but an extension of, the *Manifesto’s* program.

In fact, there is not one of the program’s ten parliamentary inroads that would not be greatly facilitated by certain democratic alterations in the old state apparatus. But, a point on which Engels is silent here, such alterations and reformist inroads are entirely acceptable to, and even advocated by, the democratic petty bourgeoisie, and the Commune itself (even without Marx’s comments on ‘people’s revolution’) is proof of that.

Engels’ general scenario for revolution at this time thus runs as follows:

First, the workers organize themselves (or rather, are organized by the socialist intelligentsia) into independent political parties and engage in electoral campaigns. Second, since their program is attractive to the masses of workers (and, thanks to the intellectuals, attractive to the masses of petty bourgeois), the Social-Democratic parties make successive parliamentary victories. Third, at some point they eventually win a parliamentary majority, and thus control of the government. It is at this point that Engels parts ways with the Right Social-Democrats. The bourgeoisie may provoke a fight once a parliamentary majority is won, and, in Engels view, everyone will “know what to do”. According to the Right Social-Democrats, on the other hand, a fight is not likely, necessary nor desirable. And forth, once a parliamentary majority is won and secured, the Social-Democrats will proceed to alter the state apparatus to facilitate its consolidation over the big bourgeoisie.

Except for the prospects of a fight, there is very little here in the way of a “...veritable panegyric on violent revolution...” (LCW Vol. 25, p.399), and “smashing” has very little of the revolutionary ‘charge’ that Lenin ascribes to it.

In a letter to Bebel of 11-18-84, Engels makes even more revealing statements on the relation between parliamentarism and the prospects of a violent confrontation.

In discussing the Anti-Socialist Law, Engels points out the hypocrisy of the bourgeois parties for demanding that the Social Democrats renounce violent revolution. “Indeed...”

Engels writes, “...no party has renounced the right to armed resistance, in certain circumstances, without lying...” (MESC p.429). But, he continues, “...the gentlemen can keep calm. With military conditions as they are at present we shall not start our attack so long as there is still an armed force against us. We can wait until the armed force itself ceases to be a force against us...” (Ibid.).

That is how Engels spoke when the state was forcibly suppressing, not just the working class in general, but the Social-Democratic intellectuals in particular; not when it was a matter of intellectualizing on the role of violence in the revolution **a la** his comments in *Anti-Duhring* which Lenin cites, but when it was a matter of apologizing for the fact that the Social-Democrats had made absolutely no preparations for an armed proletarian struggle.

A strange sort of “attack” this is, indeed, that is predicated on a complete lack of armed opposition. Theoretically it must assume that the bourgeois state can **no longer act as a state power**, i.e. as “special bodies of armed men, prisons, etc.” to hold down the oppressed class. And, since regardless of what sort of agitational work the Social Democrats may conduct among the military the bourgeois state would still have a sizeable and loyal armed force, it must further assume that **parliamentary influence alone** is sufficient to neutralize it.

Engels continues: “...Meanwhile the elections have shown that we have nothing to expect from yielding... We have only won respect and become a power by defiant resistance. Only power is respected, and only so long as we are a power shall we be respected by the philistine...” (Ibid.).

With this statement Engels equates the power of Social Democracy with parliamentary power alone, i.e. power to influence affairs within the confines of capitalism, to reform it, but certainly not to overthrow it. Engels adds that “...the iron hand can make itself felt in a velvet glove but it must make itself felt...” (Ibid.). The “iron hand”, i.e. the workers organized under Social-Democratic leadership, can make itself felt in a “velvet glove”, i.e. parliament. But by this metaphor Engels evades the fact that the working class under the leadership of the socialist intelligentsia has no “iron”, i.e. weapons, in its hands, and thus no real revolutionary power.

Further evidence of Engels’ favorable attitude towards electoral politics is found in his 10-28-85 letter to Bebel. Writing about the status of the trade union movement in England, Engels comments that “...universal suffrage—and with the absence of a peasant class and the start England had in industrialization the new franchise here gives the workers as much power as universal suffrage would give them in Germany—universal suffrage is the best lever for a proletarian movement at the present time and will prove to be so here...” (MESC p.442 IP ed.). As we will see below, Engels becomes even more outspoken on behalf of suffrage the closer the German Social-Democrats come to winning a parliamentary majority.

In his 1885 article, “On the History of the Communist League”, however, Engels shows that he is willing to accommodate more revolutionary sounding phrases, depending on what is necessary to compete successfully with the open petty bourgeois democrats.

The 1850 *Address*, Engels writes, “...is still of interest today, because petty-bourgeois democracy is even now the party which must certainly be the first to come to power in

Germany as the savior of society from the communist workers on the occasion of the next European upheaval now soon due... Much of what is said there is, therefore, still applicable today..." (MESW Vol. 3, p.187).

By the party of petty-bourgeois democracy Engels had in mind something on the order of the People's Party, which would come to power to oppose the Social Democrats. Typically, he does not bother to elaborate what, specifically, is still applicable from the *Address*, despite the fact that there is a tremendous difference between relying on suffrage as "the best lever for the proletarian movement" and the *Address's* call for a dual power, "...destruction of the influence of bourgeois democracy upon the workers..." and "...immediate and armed organization of the workers..." (MESW Vol. 1, p.181). Indicative of how very little the socialist intellectuals understand of their actual class position, it was not the People's Party that was called upon to suppress the working class movement in the upheavals of 1918, but the Social Democrats themselves.

The only tendency within the Germany Social-Democracy that Engels openly opposed was the Right wing, whose members predominated in the Party's Fraktion or parliamentary group.

In his 1887 preface to *The Housing Question*, Engels writes that "...a certain petty-bourgeois socialism finds representatives in the Social-Democratic Party itself, and even in the ranks of the Reichstag group..." (MESW Vol. 2, p.298). What makes the trend petty bourgeois is, according to Engels, its attempt to postpone the ultimate aim of socialism and to concentrate instead on "social patchwork" (Ibid.). But, Engels concludes, "...the tendency is quite harmless to the movement, in view of the wonderful common sense of our workers, which has been demonstrated so magnificently precisely during the last eight years of the struggle against the Anti-Socialist Law, the police and the courts..." (Ibid.).

Thus the line of demarcation which Engels draws between petty-bourgeois socialism and authentic Social-Democracy is that the genuine Social-Democrats formally uphold the ultimate aim, i.e. uphold phrases that appeal to the active workers, while the Rights wish to do away with militant phrases altogether. In stating that the Fraktion tendency is quite harmless to the movement, Engels simply affirms that hidden reformism, which advocates socialism but makes no concrete preparations for it, is superior to open reformism, which does not advocate socialism at all. Due to the "wonderful common sense" of the workers, they would naturally gravitate, particularly in active times, to the party that at least **formally** upheld the aim of socialism.

It is on this basis that Engels formulated his criticisms of the Erfurt Programme of 1891. As Lenin writes in *State and Revolution*, "...it is with the opportunist views of the Social Democrats on questions of state organization that this criticism is mainly concerned" (LCW Vol. 25 p.442). Citing Engels' attitude towards the demand for a republic, Lenin adds that due to the importance of the Erfurt Programme to the international socialist movement "...we may say without exaggeration that Engels thereby criticized the opportunism of the whole Second International" (Ibid.). That being the case, it is all the more interesting to see how, specifically, Engels dealt with the German Social Democrats and what formulations he offered to the world movement.

In criticizing the German's failure to raise or even to imply the demand for a republic, Engels writes that opportunism within the Party is fostering the notion that socialism can be peacefully achieved within autocratic Germany without smashing "...the fetters of the still semi-absolutist..."(MESW Vol. 3, p.434) political order. But the fact that the Party cannot even legally raise the demand for a republic proves "...how totally mistaken is the belief that a republic, and not only a republic, but also communist society, can be established in a cozy, peaceful way..."(Ibid. p.435). It is on the basis of such phrases that Lenin emphasizes Engels' revolutionary qualities.

Engels continues with the observation that "...One can conceive that the old society may develop peacefully into the new one in countries where the representatives of the people concentrate all power in their hands, where, if one has the support of the majority of the people, one can do as one sees fit in a constitutional way..."(Ibid. p.434), as in France, the United States and Britain. But in Germany, "...the Reichstag and all other representative bodies have no real power..."(Ibid.). If the German Party cannot legally demand a republic, Engels concludes, it should at least demand "...the concentration of all political power in the hands of the people's representatives..."(Ibid. p.435).

Lenin attempts to brush aside Engels' allowance for a peaceful, parliamentary path to power in democratic republics by stating that Engels was only being "...careful not to tie his hands..." and by following Engels' "one can conceive" with an exclamatory "... (only 'conceive'!) (LCW Vol. 25, p.444). Despite Lenin's generous interpretation, however, Engels' thesis on a peaceful parliamentary path to power is something more than an open-minded theoretical possibility.

Engels quite explicitly states that in democratic republics the "...representatives of the people concentrate all power in their hands..." that if one wins a majority "...one can do as one sees fit in a constitutional way..." that the Reichstag is worthless precisely because it has "...no real power...", and that the Germans should therefore demand that all political power be concentrated "...in the hands of the people's representatives..." (MESW Vol. 3, p.434-35). If one believes that a congress or parliament does indeed have "all power", i.e. control over the military, police, courts, prison, etc., in its hands, then one cannot only "conceive", but formulate and actively advocate, the taking of state power by a parliamentary majority. That is precisely what Marx and Engels advocated from the *Manifesto* onwards, and that is precisely what Lenin attempted to conceal from himself and his readers.

To understand what a leap in reasoning Lenin had to make in order to defend Engels, we need only cite Lenin's own views on the power of parliament, given some twenty pages before his selective perusal of the Erfurt *Critique*. In the democratic republics, Lenin writes, "...the real business of 'state' is performed behind the scenes and is carried on by the departments, chancelleries and General Staffs. Parliament is given up to talk for the special purpose of fooling the 'common people'..."(LCW Vol. 25, p.423). Since this attitude towards parliament was for Lenin a theoretical commonplace, an elementary truism of class reality, it is no wonder that he refused to take Engels' parliamentary remarks seriously and chose instead to 'read' Engels in a revolutionary light.

It is important to note that, as in the *Critique of the Gotha Programme*, Engels' criticism of the Erfurt makes no attempt to provide an alternative draft. Although Marx and Engels considered themselves to be representatives "...so to speak of the great general staff of the Party..." (MESC p.434), they were content to harass the Germans 'from the left' and to leave the drafting of party programs to theoreticians like Kautsky who, even in their own estimate, had "...absolutely no idea of what really scientific work means..." (MESC p.440) By thus following a policy of inner-Party diplomacy, private and limited criticisms, and by not fully developing their own programmatic views, Marx and Engels could maintain unity and a degree of influence with the Social-Democrats aimed only at eliminating their opportunist excesses.

To provide a tidy ending to his analysis of "smashing", Lenin calls Engels' 1891 preface to *The Civil War in France* "...the last word of Marxism on the question..." (LSW Vol. 2, p.292) of the state. While Engels' preface does provide additional material on the state, the truly 'last word' was spoken in his 1895 preface to *Class Struggles*, a citation that Lenin, for reasons which will become clear below, omits altogether.

In the 1891 preface to *Civil War*, Engels writes that the demands of the Communards "...were more or less unclear and even confused..." but at bottom amounted to "...the abolition of the class antagonism between capitalists and workers..." (MESW Vol. 2, p.179). They were proletarian demands since "...almost only workers, or recognized representatives of the workers, sat in the Commune..." (Ibid. p.184). To give the Commune this interpretation, Engels explains later that its members divided roughly into a majority, the Blanquists and a minority, members of the International "...chiefly consisting of adherents of the Proudhon school of socialism..." (Ibid. p.186). Given Marx and Engels' long-standing definition of Blanquists and Proudhonists as representatives of petty bourgeois socialism, the Commune was in fact not proletarian, but middle-class. The "more or less unclear and even confused" demands of the Communards were thus not at all aimed at the abolition of classes, but only, as Engels spontaneously admits, at the abolition of class **antagonism**. Needless to say, in *State and Revolution* Lenin does not bother citing Engels' comments regarding the Blanquists and Proudhonists as recognized representatives in line with his critical attitude in 1905, but only goes along with Engels' more favorable remarks.

Lenin enthusiastically quotes Engels' statement in the preface that because the Parisian workers were armed "...the disarming of the workers was the first commandment for the bourgeois..." (MESW Vol. 2, p.179). Lenin comments that "...The essence of the matter— among other things, on the question of the state (has the oppressed class arms?)-- is here remarkably well grasped..." (LCW Vol. 25, p.449). It is precisely this point, he continues, "...that is most often evaded both by professors influenced by bourgeois ideology and by petty-bourgeois democrats..." (Ibid.).

On the surface nothing seems objectionable about this. Lenin is merely upholding and reinforcing a fundamental thesis of class struggle. But that is not all that Lenin is doing. By congratulating Engels for his "concise", "expressive" and "remarkably well grasped" observations about 1870's France, Lenin avoids mentioning the fact that Engels did not apply nor advocate this "essence of the matter" to the 1880's and 1890's world movement.

If the arming of the working class is indeed such an essential matter (and in the struggle for power it is **the** most important matter), then it follows that the armed organization of the proletariat should be a centerpiece of revolutionary strategy. For Engels, however, it was not. On the contrary, his views on the prospects of armed struggle, particularly in the 1890's, range from dismal to outright defeatism.

On the question of “smashing”, Engels writes that the Commune recognized the need to “...do away with all the old repressive machinery...” and then generalizes this principle to all forms of bourgeois states. The state, he explains, “...is nothing but a machine for the oppression of one class by another, and indeed in the democratic republic no less than in the monarchy...” (MESW Vol. 2, p.189). The working class will have to “...lop off at once...” (Ibid.) the worst aspects of the state to suit its own interests. If the democratic republic is, obviously, just a particular form of class oppression, it follows, just as obviously, that some “smashing” will be called for.

Curiously, Lenin does not refer to this generalized interpretation of “smashing”. All he mentions is the fact that although a democracy is also an oppressive machine, it is still preferable to an autocracy. That is, he sidesteps the issue by raising another. If he admitted, on the basis of Engels' remarks or on the basis of the 1872 ‘correction’ to the *Manifesto*, that “smashing” applied to democratic republics as well, then **his own** interpretation of “smashing” would no longer harmonize with Marx's and Engels'.

His apology for Marx's 1871 restriction of “smashing” to Continental Europe, for example, would fall flat, since even the limited military and bureaucracy of the United States and England of the 1870's would have to be “smashed”, a popular militia formed, parliamentarism abolished, workmen's wages paid within the government, officials recalled, etc. And if he acknowledged that Engels upheld a peaceful, parliamentary path to power in the democracies, he would also have to acknowledge that “smashing” would likewise occur in a peaceful, parliamentary way. Somewhere along the line, no doubt, revolutionary sentiment would be lost.

In order to escape this predicament, Lenin simply identifies “smashing” with violent revolution and makes violent revolution, in turn, a function of the powerlessness of parliament and the bourgeoisie's unofficial control over armed force. Anything contrary to this standpoint in the writings of Marx and Engels conveniently slips through his consciousness unnoticed.

On the theme of ‘recognized representatives of the workers’ and the class basis of the future workers’ state, Engels' 10-24-91 letter to Bebel is particularly enlightening.

After discussing the prospects of the German Social-Democrats coming to power by 1898, Engels comments that in order to run the factories “...we need people with technical training, and masses of them...” (MESC p.493). In the past, recruiting such people might have strengthened the Right wing of the Party, but now the Social Democrats can “digest them” with little problem. “I foresee...” Engels foresees, “... that in the next eight or ten years we shall recruit enough young technicians, doctors, lawyers and schoolmasters to enable us to have the factories and big estates administered on behalf of the nation by Party comrades. Then, therefore, our entry into power will be quite natural and will be settled up quickly—relatively...” (Ibid.).

That is, the same class of petty bourgeois technicians and professionals who currently run things **will continue to run things**, but as Party comrades. The difference being that whereas formerly the middle-class held a favored social position due to capitalism, it will in the future hold a favored social position due to socialism.

This little passage is truly a 'classic of Marxism' since it clearly reveals the affinity between the socialist intelligentsia and the rest of the middle-class intelligentsia. The petty bourgeois ideals, as expressed here by Engels, is to relieve the pressure of big capital on the middle-class by taking political power, and to then rearrange things democratically for the well being of "the nation", i.e. the middle-class plus a few reforms for the workers. By having the middle-class administrators and professionals (who **make** themselves 'indispensable' to production) quietly slip into the arrangement as Party comrades, the petty bourgeoisie disappears as a class with contrary interests to the workers. Socialism is thus achieved, for the common good of all, but particularly for the common good of the middle-class, which is thus able to perpetuate its existence as a privileged class above and administering over the working class.

In two letters to Paul Lafargue a year later (1892), Engels attempts to untangle the contradiction posed by a parliamentary assumption of power and the prospects of armed resistance by the bourgeoisie.

Referring to the destructive effects of the then new fragmentation shells, Engels writes on 11-3-92 that "...the era of barricades and street fighting has gone for good; if the military fight, resistance becomes madness. Hence the necessity to find new revolutionary tactics. I have pondered over this for some time and am not yet settled in my mind..." (ELC Vol. 3, p.208).

What is particularly interesting about this letter is that it contains essentially the same idea that Engels expressed to Babel (11-18-84), i.e. that the Social Democrats should not fight as long as an armed force, the military, opposes them. By the time of his letter to Lafargue, Engels had been pondering over this question for **eight years**, and still had not come up with "new revolutionary tactics". And indeed **he could not** as long as he invested parliamentary politics as a realistic and viable road to power. Some ten days later, Engels, evidently not pondering quite so hard, writes Lafargue in support of the latter's parliamentary campaign.

"Do you realize now..." Engels asks, "...what a splendid weapon you in France have had in your hands for forty years in universal suffrage; if only people had known how to use it! It's slower and more boring than the call to revolution, but it's ten times more sure, and what is even better, it indicates with the most perfect accuracy the day when a call to armed revolution has to be made..." (Ibid. p.211).

Suffrage, which in less fruitful times was simply an "instrument of bourgeois rule", now becomes, on the eve of a parliamentary majority, a "splendid weapon". It is "ten times more sure" than the call to revolution because, if we interpret the call to revolution to mean real revolutionary propaganda and organization, it requires ten times less of both the socialist intellectuals and their electorate. Standing for public office or showing up at the polls does not, after all, demand much in the way of revolutionary commitment, discipline or training.

But to show Lafargue that he has not completely given up on revolution, Engels adds that parliamentary success will indicate when an actual call to armed struggle must be made. In light of Engels' attitude towards possible armed conflict ("if the military fight, resistance is madness"), this "call" is really only an empty phrase. In reality, it would make little difference whether the Social Democrats gave a call to armed revolution or not, since they had made absolutely no efforts to arm the revolution all along.

The same letter adds that "...it's even ten to one that universal suffrage, intelligently used by the workers, will drive the rulers to overthrow legality, that is, to put us in the most favorable position to make the revolution..."(Ibid.). Here Engels states an idea that is developed more explicitly in his 1895 preface to *Class Struggles*.

The most favorable position, according to Engels, is the defensive one. The Social-Democrats should continue with their parliamentary electoral work, win a parliamentary majority, and this in turn will force the bourgeoisie to abolish parliament, i.e. "overthrow legality". The bourgeoisie's actions thus being patently illegal, the Social Democrats will have every right to "make the revolution", whatever that may mean.

Given that the laws of a capitalist state are drafted by and enacted for the benefit of the economically dominant classes, Engels' concern with the legality and propriety of making the revolution may at first seem incongruous. But however fraudulent bourgeois legality may be, respect for 'the law' is a pressing matter for the middle-class, for the professionals, technicians, doctors, lawyers, etc. who, in Engels' view, are to administer the new state. Winning these class comrades to the cause required, therefore, that the Social Democrats act in a respectable and philistine fashion, a feat that, given the middle-class backgrounds of the Social Democrats themselves, was fairly easily accomplished.

Engels concludes his letter by urging Lafargue to continue with his "...'victories and conquests'..." on the electoral front and states that "...you will find that it is the Germans who will applaud you the most warmly..."(Ibid.). Quite right.

The Lafargue Correspondence (Vol. 3) has as an appendix an interview with Engels in 1893 reprinted in the French *Le Socialiste*. After assuring the correspondent that the Marxists have no "...preconceptions regarding the detailed organization of the society of the future..." (ELC Vol. 3, p.393), Engels discusses the significance of the German Social-Democrats' electoral gains.

The time is drawing near, Engels states, "...when our Party will be called upon to take over government..."(Ibid.). If the Party wins half of the voters (three and a half million out of seven), the "...German Empire cannot go on in its present form..."(Ibid.).

Applying this line of reasoning to the likelihood of armed confrontation by the state, Engels tells the correspondent not to forget that "...the figure of our electors gives us the figure of our supporters in the army. Having already a million and half out of ten million electors is round about a seventh of the population in favor of us, and we can reckon that out of six soldiers we have one. When we have three million and a half votes—and that is not very far off—we shall have half the army..."(Ibid.). As soon as we have a majority, Engels concludes, the army will not fire on us.

This desperately optimistic logic is the natural outcome of Engels' long-standing faith in parliamentarism. In the first place, a parliamentary majority of "workers" representatives, or of any other sort of representatives, effects only parliament and thus has only a cosmetic impact on government. The real affairs of state continue to be conducted, as they have been all along, through extra-parliamentary means. Secondly, electoral figures for the population at large have no direct relation to political sympathies within the military. Engels must establish such a direct relationship in order to convince himself and the workers that parliamentary success will bring them to power after all and that the working class need not bother with preparations for armed struggle on its own.

The same parliamentary optimism is expressed in a 3-14-93 letter to an American Social Democrat named Wiesen. Evidently Wiesen had complained about the Social Democrats' reliance on parliamentarism to achieve state power and asked Engels to clarify. Engels answers in support of parliamentarism by stating "...I do not see what violations of the social-democratic principle is necessarily involved in putting up candidates for any elective political office...even if we are aiming at the abolition of this office itself..." (MELA p.250). Some may think "...that the best way to abolish the Presidency and the Senate in America is to elect men to these offices who are pledged to effect their abolition, and then one will consistently act accordingly. Others may think that this method is inappropriate; that's a matter of opinion..." (Ibid.).

Engels admits that there may be instances in which reliance on parliamentary means "...would also involve a violation of revolutionary principle; I fail to see why that should always and everywhere be the case..." (Ibid.). The main thing, he adds, is the conquest of political power and "...if we agree on that, the difference of opinion regarding the ways and means of struggle to be employed therein can scarcely lead to differences of principle..." (Ibid.).

With this advice Engels not only advocates a peaceful, parliamentary "smashing", an idea already expressed in his criticisms of the Erfurt Programme, but attempts to write off the left-wing opposition to parliamentarism as a mere "difference of opinion". If disputes over revolutionary strategies do not really involve matters of principle, then it follows that both Right and left tendencies should coexist in the same Party. With the left wing thus contained, it would pose little threat to Social Democracy as a whole.

F) The Last Words of Marxism on the State

Engels' last remarks on the question of the state are given in his 1895 preface to Marx's *Class Struggles in France*. In this work Engels "sings a veritable panegyric" in honor of universal suffrage, and, as if to provide suitable contrast, offers the most depressing analysis on the prospects of armed struggle.

After praising the German Social-Democrats as "...the strongest, best disciplined and most rapidly growing Socialist Party..." (MESW Vol. 1 p.195) in the international movement, Engels writes that the Germans "...supplied their comrades in all countries with a new

weapon, and one of the sharpest, when they showed them how to make use of universal suffrage..."(Ibid.).

Engels explains that this extraordinary weapon had been ignored by other Social-Democratic parties, and that the revolutionary workers in the Latin countries, for example, "...had been wont to regard the suffrage as a snare, as an instrument of government trickery..."(Ibid.). That is, as an "instrument of bourgeois rule", as Engels himself had called it some ten years before.

But "...it was otherwise in Germany, The *Communist Manifesto* had already proclaimed the winning of universal suffrage, of democracy, as one of the first and most important tasks of the militant proletariat, and Lassalle had again taken up this point..."(Ibid.). With this statement Engels clearly upholds the *Manifesto's* parliamentary program, not as an 'abstraction,' as Lenin portrays it, but as the very concrete call to electoral politics that Marx and Engels originally advocated.

The Germans, Engels continues, "...have used the franchise in a way which has paid them a thousand fold and has served as a model to the workers of all countries..."(Ibid.). It has been "...transformed by them from a means of deception, which it was before, into an instrument of emancipation..."(Ibid.). In oblique reference to his statement in the *Origin* that suffrage is only a "...gauge of the maturity of the working class..." and nothing more, Engels now states that "...if universal suffrage had offered no other advantage than that it allowed us to count our numbers every three years...", facilitated the growth of the Party, served as "...our best means of propaganda...", and so on, "...it would still have been much more than enough..."(Ibid. p.196). Where Lenin chastises the opportunists for expecting "...just this 'more' from universal suffrage..."(LCW Vol. 25, p.393), Engels proceeds to elaborate "just this 'more'".

"...But it did more than this by far...", Engels declares. With the Germans' use of suffrage, "...an entirely new method of proletarian struggle came into operation... It was found that the state institutions, in which the rule of the bourgeoisie is organized, offer the working class still further opportunities to fight these very state institutions. (MESW Vol. 3, p.196). And because of this, "...the bourgeoisie and the government came to be much more afraid of the legal than of the illegal action of the workers' party, of the results of elections than of those of rebellion..."(Ibid.).

Since German Social Democracy **had** no plans or organization for rebellion, it is no small wonder that the bourgeoisie was much more afraid of the Party's electoral work.

In reference to state institutions offering "further opportunities to fight these very state institutions", Engels conceals the fact that these particular institutions, i.e. national and local parliamentary bodies, are not the ones in which "the rule of the bourgeoisie is organized". The rule of the upper classes is not invested in popular assemblies, in talk-shops, whose Political mood may vary with the current bias of the electorate, but in the military, police, prisons, courts, etc., i.e. in the official repressive apparatus. That Engels understood this very well is shown by the fact that in his writings on the prospects of armed struggle he was not so obtuse as to suggest that a Social-Democratic parliament would be able to maintain control over the military by ordinary constitutional means. Just the opposite. He knew that a parliament has no real power over the military and so

suggested that the military be neutralized by the **moral** influence of a Social-Democratic parliamentary majority. That is, he offered the unarmed workers his 'best wishes', and nothing more.

Thus, far from having an integral and profound understanding of the state, Engels' views were necessarily eclectic. One can readily understand why Lenin did not wish to include this work, in particular, in his analysis of the state.

Following his statement that the bourgeoisie is much more afraid of elections than rebellions, Engels yields up the fruit of his long pondering over the question of armed conflict.

The conditions of the struggle, according to Engels, have "...essentially changed..."(Ibid., p.196). Old-style rebellion and street fighting have become "...to a considerable extent obsolete..."(Ibid.). Besides, Engels argues, even the rebels of 1848, who were out-matched militarily, relied more on moral influence and "...shaking the steadfastness of the military..."(Ibid., p.197) than on actual military victories, and "...this is the main point which must be kept in view likewise when the chances of possible future street fighting are examined..."(Ibid.).

To drive home this latter point, Engels discourses for four paragraphs on the dismal prospects of working class rebellion. The chances for street fighting even in 1849 were "...pretty poor..." and now "...all the conditions of the insurgents' side have grown worse..."(Ibid., p.198). The guns legally available to the workers are no match for the armaments of the military. The streets are too wide for barricades. And so on. In short, these problems are too immense and the odds so bad that an armed rebellion would be downright suicidal.

Engels, however, has a revolutionary reputation to maintain, and even in such a black mood does not want to sound like an ordinary pacifist.

He therefore asks, "...does that mean that in the future street fighting will no longer play any role? Certainly not. It only means that the conditions...have become far more unfavorable for civilian fighters..."(Ibid. p.199). This disadvantageous situation must therefore be compensated for by "...other factors..."(Ibid.). And those other factors are, in Engels' text, the tremendous influence, power and prestige of the several hundred Social-Democrat parliamentarians. Engels thus does not rule out an armed conflict altogether; he simply presents, as he sees it, the conditions that **in effect** rule it out.

Engels warns his Social-Democratic readers that the bourgeoisie is attempting to provoke the Party into warfare in "...the street, where we are certain of defeat in advance..."(Ibid.). But, "...we are not so stupid..."(Ibid.). Even the leftists in the Latin countries are beginning to realize that "...old tactics must be revised..."(Ibid., p.200). Everywhere the German model is being imitated and the "...unprepared launching of an attack has been relegated to the background..."(Ibid.). This latter point is particularly amusing, considering the fact that even the left-wing Social Democrats were not so stupid as to advocate an **unprepared** attack. Perhaps Engels meant to say that the prepared launching of an attack had been put in the background, as indeed it was.

The spread of the German model does not mean, Engels reassures the leftists, that the other Social-Democratic parties have renounced their "...right to revolution..." (Ibid., p.201). But by this time Engels had forgotten that this 'precious' right is absolutely worthless if the revolution is not actually prepared, armed and trained. On the other hand, revolutionary-sounding phrases must be maintained in some form, even if only as "the right to revolution", if the socialist intelligentsia is to attract a large stock of working class voters.

In further defense of the Germans' parliamentary activity, Engels writes that German Social-Democracy occupies "...a special position..." and has "...a special task..." (Ibid.). The several million voters who show up at the polls periodically to place their "X" next to Social Democracy are "...the decisive 'shock force' of the international proletarian army..." (Ibid.). The growth in voters "...proceeds as spontaneously, as steadily, as irresistibly, and at the same time as tranquilly as a natural process..." (Ibid.). A very pleasant phenomenon. It is so pleasant, in fact, that every effort should be made to not "...fritter away this daily increasing shock force in vanguard skirmishes, but to keep it intact until the decisive day..." (Ibid.).

Engels does not explain how it is possible to fritter away **voters**, people who are only committed to show up at the polls, in vanguard skirmishes, or how such an electorate actually constitutes a shock force of revolutionary struggle. But his implication is clear. Everything, especially restless elements of the working class, is to be **restrained**, held back, and essentially stockpiled until a hypothetical "decisive day". **Then**, of course, the voters, pencils in hand, may be unleashed.

On the question of legality, which was raised in private correspondence with Lafargue in 1892, Engels now writes that "...if we are not so crazy as to let ourselves be driven to street fighting..." then the bourgeoisie will have to "...break through this fatal legality..." (Ibid.) themselves. The German state, Engels explains, is like all modern states "...a product of contract..." between the rulers and the ruled. "If one side breaks the contract, the whole contract falls to the ground; the other side is then also no longer bound..." (Ibid.). Directing this legal sermon to the bourgeoisie, Engels warns, "...if, therefore, you break the constitution of the Reich, the Social-Democracy is free, and can do as it pleases with regard to you. But it will hardly blurt out to you today what it is going to do then..." (Ibid.).

With such a proprietary attitude it naturally did not occur to Engels that the only contractual arrangement that applies to the working class under capitalism is the contract of wage-slavery, a contract that is not entered into freely, but which is forced on the workers by the need to survive and is enforced, in turn, by the power of state.

Even to win the most elementary economic reforms, workers often "break legality", disobey court injunctions against strikes, assault scabs, and even fight the police and state militia. Workers may fear the power of state, but they are in no way bound by contract to it, have no respect for it, and certainly do not, unless influenced by trade union bureaucrats or socialist intellectuals, engage in petty moral arguments about which side is responsible for violating the bourgeoisie's precious legality.

Legality is, however, a burning question to the vast strata of the middle-class, whose interests are indeed served by bourgeois law and order. They desire, above all else, a steady and tranquil improvement of their economic and social condition, an improvement that is predicated on the smooth development of capitalist relations, and so seek to

increase their influence by legal and constitutional means. The left wing of the middle-class, i.e. the socialist intelligentsia, may resort to revolutionary phrases to prove their sincerity and to win working class support, but in the end rely on the “ten times more sure” (and ten times more safe) tactics of legal work. It is precisely this class standpoint that Engels expresses with such clarity above.

Engels recognizes, but immediately retreats from, the likelihood of armed struggle in the event of a Social-Democratic majority. He avoids dealing concretely with this likelihood by, on the one hand, stating that armed struggle would be unfavorable for the workers and would have to be compensated for by the moral influence of the Social-Democratic majority, and, on the other hand, offering the banal and theoretically useless observation that armed resistance by the bourgeoisie would be illegal. The workers are thus urged to wait and see whether the bourgeoisie is going to be law-abiding or not, to refrain from vanguard skirmishes, and to warehouse their voters until the “decisive day” arrives. In the meantime, no one must “blurt out” to the bourgeoisie what Social Democracy will do once that day finally comes.

By his comments, however, Engels has already ‘blurted out’ what the Social Democrats will do: they will do nothing at all. They will simply hope for the best, hope that the troops with their devastating military might will not obey orders, will not fire on the Social-Democratic deputies, and will instead allow the transfer of power to proceed with constitutional tranquility. In the meantime, the working class will remain unarmed and imbued with respect for bourgeois propriety, and that, to borrow Lenin’s phrase, “...in itself would be a major victory for opportunism...”.

The middle-class would thus be in the very best position to exert itself against the two classes that press it on either side. Against the big bourgeoisie, by using its popular majority to civilize capitalism, to eliminate the excesses of the monopolies and the banks, and to buy its way out of armed confrontation through assorted compromises. And against the working class, which lacking arms and independent political organization would pose no real threat.

Typical of the temper of the German Social-Democrats, even Engels pessimistic remarks on armed struggle were considered to be too intimidating for mass consumption. In printing Engels’ preface, Liebknecht therefore edited out or abridged all references to street fighting, armed conflict, the “decisive day”, etc., i.e. all of Engels’ militant but quite meaningless gestures.

In a 4-3-95 letter to Lafargue, Engels complains that “...Liebknecht has just played me a fine trick. He has taken from my introduction...everything that could serve his purpose in support of peaceful and anti-violent tactics at any price... But I preach those tactics only for the Germany of today and even then with many reservations. For France, Belgium, Italy, Austria, such tactics could not be followed as a whole and, for Germany, they could become inapplicable to-morrow...” (ELC Vol. 3, p.373).

But Engels, of course, really had no room to complain. The tactics outlined in his preface do not, after all, stipulate reservations and the German model was, in fact, upheld as a sterling example for the Social Democrats in other countries. In editing Engels’ introduction, the German Social Democrats simply emphasized what was most essential in his analysis, i.e.

peaceful and anti-violent tactics. And those were the tactics that, with Engels' support, they had been following all along.