

# INTRODUCTION

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## I.

The theory of the state is the theory of national government, its origins and current role in society, its diverse forms and functions, its basis of power, and the mechanism by which its policies are determined.

But the state power or government naturally appears differently to different social classes and strata. This is especially evident in the United States, Western Europe, Japan and other established democracies, which openly accommodate a hierarchy of social classes and which promote government as an independent and impartial arbitrator of social peace.

For the upper class in such countries, the millionaires and billionaires of finance and industry, the state is an absolute necessity as the ultimate barrier against anarchy at home and abroad. Although liberal and conservative factions of the upper class may debate reform tactics, fiscal policy, size of government bureaucracy, and so on, none dispute the state's preeminence in the affairs of society, nor the preeminence of high society in the affairs of state. Members of this class generally abide by the "golden rule" of class society, i.e. those who have the gold, make the rules. And modern government is, after all, simply the sum total of those rules, plus the ability to enforce them.

The attitude of the middle classes, the medium businessmen, managers, professionals, intellectuals, technicians, etc., is no so clear-cut. For some, the government is an unnecessary burden of taxation, red tape and unwarranted interference in the business of the middle class: business. For others, the state is their business, i.e. their direct or indirect employer, and so despite certain faults is not subject to criticism. For still others, the state is a necessary evil to maintain law and order, deliver the mail, and restrain the excesses of big business and big labor, but should be reformed (through various and often conflicting plans) for greater efficiency. Ranging from the extreme Right to the extreme Left, the politically active elements of this class generally agree that the state should not serve the interests of the upper class alone, but should serve the people, i.e. themselves, instead.

The experience of rank and file workers, on the other hand, is unique, since in addition to taxation and dealing with the state bureaucracy, the working class often encounters a facet of state power unfamiliar to the middle and upper classes. For striking workers, in particular, the state makes an active appearance in the form of temporary and permanent court injunctions, fines and jail sentences, the riot squads of the police and national militia, and sometimes even as a scab workforce to undercut the strike effort.

Despite the labor relations boards and other liberal attempts to diffuse working class discontent, most common workers recognize that the government is no impartial arbitrator in industrial disputes, but is instead a political machine bought and paid for by

the rich. Hence the indifference of rank and file workers to the political process; their failure to vote (unless browbeaten by trade union officials); and their skepticism towards public office. As a rule, only the middle class strata of the labor force, the trade union bureaucracy and highly skilled, highly paid workers, believe in the democratic process and so lobby for their own craft interests within it.

Because they are most often on the receiving end of government force, the attitude of common workers towards the state is closest to the objective position of state power in general: The state is an instrument for the suppression of one class by another. As we will see below, in its efforts to organize and lead the working class, the socialist intelligentsia has had to acknowledge this truism theoretically. But at the same time, it has had to circumvent it theoretically in order to fulfill its own historical mission.

The variety of modern state systems, from democratic and pluralistic to dictatorial or autocratic, is primarily a matter of form, and not of social content.

A legacy of laissez-faire capitalism, political democracy attempts to achieve social peace through legalized diversity, open but polite competition within the between the social classes. Since the turn of the century, however, the development of monopoly capitalism has for all practical purposes buried laissez-faire, and with it, political democracy. As the unstable solution to this tendency, fascism attempts to achieve social peace through enforced national harmony and outright suppression of the working class. But as the case histories of Germany, Italy, Spain and numerous other countries show, the fascist state system alone is not sufficient to contain class antagonisms, and tends to regress towards democratic reforms as a safety valve.

A stable solution must not only contain class antagonisms, but must give the appearance that the source of class conflict itself has been eliminated. That is the solution offered by the socialist state. Socialism retains capitalist monopoly, social classes, economic inequality, a repressive mechanism, and so on, while declaring that capitalism, classes, inequality and repression have been abolished. And that has given it a tremendous advantage over the democratic and fascist state forms. It has been so advantageous, in fact that the socialist state has matured from an obscure ideology into a world historical power. The main contradiction of modern political life internationally is now posed as a choice between ordinary capitalist or socialist state systems.

But to understand this form of state it will be necessary to understand something of its chief architects, the socialist intelligentsia.

## II.

Modern socialism was founded on and has continued to suffer from a fundamental contradiction that every generation of socialist theoreticians has had to acknowledge but which none have been able to resolve.

This contradiction consists in the fact that although communism is formally a political doctrine of the working class, its main theorists and the vast majority of its most active proponents have been drawn from the middle class. Thus despite the fact that according to socialist theory the working class should provide political and organizational leadership to its allies within the petty bourgeoisie, it is in reality ideologists from the petty bourgeoisie that have taken the leading role in politicizing and organizing the working class.

The general category within which this class contradiction is usually dealt with theoretically is the concept of “fusion”. This theory begins on the logical premise that since the mass of workers does not have a scientific understanding of their actual class position and interests, their spontaneous trade union struggles are necessarily limited to minor reforms and concessions within the framework of capitalism. As Lenin stated, without revolutionary theory there can be no revolutionary movement.

But the stultifying conditions of work and life common to most workers prevent them from acquiring the academic, scientific and organizational skills necessary to originate sophisticated political theory and the time needed to implement it. The socialist intellectuals conclude from this that political knowledge must therefore be introduced by people, who due to their privileged social status, do have the necessary intellectual training and leisure time, i.e. themselves. Fusion in their view is accomplished when the leading and most politically militant workers are ideologically cultivated by the radical intellectuals and thus become sufficiently enlightened to lead the mass of workers into struggle.

Since the advanced workers are initially unfamiliar with the fine points of socialist theory and must rely on the intellectuals for their political education, it is the intellectuals who determine the major principles of the movement and establish guidelines for its practical activity.

Although the workers’ objective revolutionary potential is a function of their social position as an oppressed class, their strategic role in production and their socially conditioned collectivity and discipline, the intelligentsia has nothing in the way of material or social conditions to insure a consistent revolutionary outlook. On the contrary, the same social privileges that enable the radical intellectuals to formulate the main principles of socialist theory also engender diverse opportunist views that in the end surround and overwhelm those principles. While separate trends within the socialist movement may admit this of their opponents and in their bitter polemics and mutual recriminations accuse one another of “petty bourgeois opportunism”, none are willing to admit that it is true of the movement as a whole.

Traditionally, the socialist intelligentsia has attempted to rationalize the contradiction between its status as a fraction of the middle class and its declared allegiance to the workers on the grounds that accepting the principles of socialism necessitates a break with middle class outlook. As Marx and Engels warned the German Social Democrats, the intellectuals “... should not bring any remnants of bourgeois, petty bourgeois, etc. prejudices with them but should whole-heartedly adopt the proletarian outlook...” (MESW Vol. 3, p.93).

But since the intellectuals themselves have formulated “the proletarian outlook” and have set the standards for deciding who has or has not whole-heartedly adopted it, such advice

simply indicates that the intelligentsia is to be its own judge. Consequently, what passes for objective and scientific socialist theory has, in reality, no comprehensive objective standards, and is therefore permeated with the class prejudice of its authors.

### III.

This class prejudice is especially evident on the question of the state, since this question concerns the nature of political power in general, the role of the state under capitalism, the measures necessary to abolish it and the general features of the future working class state power. It is precisely for this reason that, relative to the mass of material that has been written on other aspects of socialist theory, it has received such little attention from the socialist intellectuals.

The socialist intelligentsia has instinctively withdrawn from the question of state power since despite its subjective good intentions and aims, its objective class purpose is not the abolish capitalism, but to make it more agreeable to the middle class. Their actual aim is thus not to completely smash the bourgeois state, but to make a place for themselves within it.

Of course, the intellectuals themselves are as unaware of this spontaneous evasion as they are of middle class prejudice in general. In their view, the power of the bourgeoisie will be replaced by the power of the proletariat, wider democracy, economic equality, and so on, and that is sufficient. By thus substituting abstract and general phrases for a consistent analysis of the final aim, the intellectuals insulate themselves from any shocking contradictions and insure their spontaneous class prejudice a free reign. Historically, this tendency has been so strong that prior to Lenin's 1917 analysis in *State and Revolution*, i.e. for some seventy years after modern socialism was introduced by the 1847 *Communist Manifesto*, the socialist movement had no comprehensive work devoted to the question of the state.

In compiling citations from Marx and Engels to support his analysis, Lenin was forced to rely on isolated fragments of their public works and more often on selected passages from their private correspondence, both covering a fifty-year span. But having himself ignored the question of the state for some twenty years, Lenin was too impressed with Marx and Engels' scattered insights to think it peculiar that they had not done a comprehensive analysis earlier on. Instead, Lenin blamed the Right-wing Social Democrats for obscuring and adapting to opportunism a question that Marx and Engels themselves has obscured.

Despite, or perhaps because of, Lenin's spontaneous apologies for Marx and Engels' more parliamentary reformist views and his polite omission of openly opportunist ones, *State and Revolution* represents the highest development of socialist theory on the state.

As the reader will see below, Lenin's analysis of the dictatorship of the proletariat is based largely on the experience of the Paris Commune of 1871, a radical government that was objectively (and even by Lenin's reasoning in 1905) not a proletarian but a middle class

democratic state. Consequently, the furthest that any socialist intellectual has been able to penetrate on the question of the future workers' state has been something on the order of a radical, middle class democracy, an intellectual limit that despite superficial differences is consistent with the democratic reformist platform of the *Communist Manifesto*.

In the more than seventy years since the publication of *State and Revolution*, socialist theoreticians have not only been unable to carry Lenin's analysis further, but have even retreated theoretically to more ordinary forms of democracy.

The Soviets, which Lenin viewed as the contemporary expression of the Commune and as a universal form of proletarian dictatorship, were by the mid-1930's phased out of socialist theory and replaced by a more traditional parliamentary "people's democracy". Likewise, the categories of "smashing" the bourgeois democratic state, the combination of executive and legislative functions in the new worker's state, the replacement of a standing army by an armed worker's militia, and so on, were either theoretically eliminated or adapted to ordinary parliamentarism. Even the catchphrase "dictatorship of the proletariat" is a deal breaker for the majority of communist parties.

Such retreats from the militant democratic ideals of *State and Revolution*, however, are not as significant as they might seem. Although by October 1917, Lenin promoted the Soviets as organs of proletarian power, they were in fact organs of middle class democracy, as much as the "people's parliaments" of contemporary Eastern Europe or China. Structurally, the Soviet or Commune form is much more attuned to middle class democratic ideals than is bourgeois-parliamentarism, but its class character remains the same. In both the Soviet and "people's parliament" forms, it is the middle class, and particularly the intelligentsia, that plays the leading role, staffs the party and state bureaucracy, and exercises the power of state.

The disunity and factional strife within the communist movement over this and lesser questions is therefore not at all a matter of principle, but simply of preference, and this in turn constitutes the movement's essential unity.

#### IV.

The primary failure of the theses offered in *State and Revolution* lies not in the particular measures Lenin recommended, but in his general faith in the socialist intelligentsia and his belief that structural reforms were sufficient to organize a worker's state. The combination of executive and legislative functions into a unified authority, the reduction of government salaries to the level of worker's wages, the right of recall of public officials, and the creation of a popular militia are in themselves unobjectionable. But these measures alone are insufficient to alter the class character of the state. As long as the middle class, either in the form of the socialist intelligentsia or as ordinary middle class representatives, is allowed a role in the state, it will in fact dominate and ultimately control it.

On the other hand, nothing would be changed if a definite group or strata of workers simply assumed state managerial duties and a middle class lifestyle as full-time

bureaucrats. The middle class would only be reproduced from within the ranks of the workers themselves, a tactic that Stalin refined through the 1930's. In one of his finer moments, Lenin offered a theoretical solution to this problem by advising that bureaucracy could be overcome only by turning everyone into a bureaucrat, i.e. by sharing out state duties on a rotating basis so that no one would come accustomed to a privileged, bureaucratic existence. Unfortunately, this proposal for operation of the socialist state never materialized.

A working class government would have to be staffed by workers who remained workers, i.e. who spent the bulk of their socially necessary time in active production, and whose participation in state affairs would be limited to the time absolutely required. One avenue of middle class careerism would thus be sealed off, and with it the ability of the middle class to make itself indispensable to government.

Likewise, other middle class occupations would necessarily be absorbed into working life or abolished outright depending on how essential those functions were to a productive existence. The middle class under capitalism perpetuates the deformation of the economy by acting as a sop of life essentials as well as a vast array of useless commodities and services. It puts very little into the general social wealth, but draws a great deal out of it. By eliminating unnecessary areas of production suited only to middle class appetites, expanding the production of essential goods, and forcing the former middle class to take a productive role, the total social labor time necessary to maintain a healthy standard of living for society would decrease. And this in turn would allow more free time and resources for worthwhile technological and scientific pursuits. No doubt after a few days of factory work, even the most unimaginative bureaucrat or professor would offer excellent proposals for rationalizing production, improving safety, and increasing productivity so as to reduce the hours of work.

Manual labor is a punishment only for those who try to avoid it. For the production of human existence, however, it is an absolute social necessity. Since everyone eats, requires shelter, and consumes a wide spectrum of tangible use values, everyone should be willing to take an active part in their production. It is questionable whether this objective obligation will ever become social consciousness, especially among those intellectuals who already consider turning a clever phrase to be real work.

The reader who is familiar with socialist theory will understand from these speculations that the requirements of a worker's government as outlined here are much closer to what Marxism defines as the communist stage of society, and not the socialist transition period. According to Marxist theory, the primary division of labor between manual and mental functions can only be overcome on the eve of communist society, and so will likely persist throughout the interim phase of socialism. Hence Marx and Lenin's allowance for a middle-class stratum of socialist engineers, socialist technicians, socialist doctors, etc. and their attempts to win the professionals over to the movement in advance of the revolution.

But the division of labor between manual and mental skills carries with it the division of society into classes, and unless this fundamental form of the division of labor is abolished, social classes cannot be abolished. To the extent that the middle class is allowed to live and function as a class, to the extent that its role in production is limited to paper shuffling and

interoffice conspiracies, it will persist as an occupationally and economically privileged class, and consequently as a politically privileged class as well. The top priority of a worker's government must therefore be to socially integrate manual and mental skills, and so dissolve the material basis of class privilege and class oppression.

## V.

However, as noted above, the actual, practical expression of the Marxist-Leninist line on the state has been the establishment of governments that, apart from their socialist pretensions, differ very little in substance or form from ordinary capitalist states.

Like the earlier bourgeois democratic revolutions against feudal autocracy, these governments were delivered by popular revolutions against economic monopoly and in the semi colonial countries, against imperialism. Just as radical bourgeois democrats and the most militant strata of the middle class led the earlier bourgeois democratic revolutions, their modern counterparts, the socialist intelligentsia, led the socialist revolutions. And just as the parliamentary republics of the United States, England and France eventually matured into imperialist and politically autocratic powers, the larger socialist states have matured into social imperialist powers.

The parliamentary republic may have been the most suitable shell for laissez-faire capitalism, but the socialist republic has become the best shell for modern monopoly capitalism. It is a thousand times more suitable because it claims to be precisely the system that the workers have yet to accomplish. While the ordinary capitalist governments must defend the indefensible idea that the worker's interests can be fulfilled under capitalism, the socialist governments can simply declare that capitalism and class oppression have already been abolished and that the worker's interests are already being attained.

In reality, the same middle class striving that in its initial stages gives rise to the most passionate democratic ideals, that is characterized by uncompromising hostility against all political reaction, and that proclaims social and economic equality for all, is inevitably transformed into the worst democratic hypocrisy, the most uncompromising reaction, and promotes an even more sophisticated social and economic inequality.

## VI.

The following work traces the development of the Marxist view of the state from the earliest works of Marx and Engels through the contemporary people's democracies.

The first chapter summarizes Lenin's views in *State and Revolution* so that the reader who is unfamiliar with Lenin's analysis can become acquainted with the major points. Lenin's stated purpose was to "... reestablish what Marx really taught on the subject of the

state..." (LCW Vol. 25, p.386). But in fact Lenin only reestablished from the works of Marx and Engels those teachings that coincided with his own more consistent views.

The second chapter is therefore devoted to a chronological survey of Marx and Engels' writings on the state, including works that Lenin did not have access to and those with which he was familiar but for obvious reasons omitted. The emphasis throughout this section is on those citations that relate to developed capitalist states and to the dictatorship of the proletariat, since pre-capitalist and historically particular forms (Bonapartism) do not play a significant role in the present discussion. As should be evident from this chapter, Lenin's generous praise of Marx and Engels and his favorable interpretation of their more overtly middle class declarations was not due to lack of material or simple naïveté. By promoting Marx and Engels and forcing their contradictory views into a consistent outlook, Lenin was objectively promoting the socialist intelligentsia as the rightful and trustworthy leader of the working class movement. To expose the opportunist inconsistencies and Marx and Engels, i.e. of the foremost minds of the socialist intelligentsia, would have been to deprive all the radical intellectuals of their ultimate authority among the workers. And while Lenin wished to undermine Kautsky and other specific intellectuals, he could not question the legitimacy of the intelligentsia as a whole.

The third chapter compares the basic theses of *State and Revolution* to Lenin's other writings during and after the 1917 revolutions, as well as his earlier works around 1905. The confusion of socialist and democratic tasks, a criticism that Lenin raised in 1905 against the Paris Commune, is here worked out in minute detail. While Lenin's 1905 line on the democratic revolution is more logical than his later views, he ignored the concrete forms of the proposed revolutionary democratic state. During 1917 he began to deal concretely with those forms, but confused them with the features necessary for a socialist state. The task of sorting out Lenin's views during the Russian revolution is further complicated by the fact that his 1917 positions not only contradict his 1905 views, but are internally inconsistent as well.

Chapter Four covers the major positions of the Third (Communist) International on the state through the various Congresses and Executive Committee resolutions. Throughout this period, less competent theoreticians assumed the task of adapting Lenin's radical democratic phrases to an increasingly more parliamentary orientation, and eventually formulated a general line on the parliamentary transition to socialism and people's democracy.

The main features of the post-World War II people's democracies of Eastern Europe and China are outlined in the fifth chapter, along with the theoretical modifications introduced by the 20<sup>th</sup>, 21<sup>st</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup> Congresses of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. Although the polemics of the "antirevisionist" Marxist-Leninists pinpoint Khrushchev's innovations as a definite turn to opportunism, his theses were completely in line with the basic tenets that Marx, Engels and Lenin themselves had previously accepted.

The survey concludes at the mid-1960's, since the subsequent ideological split between Chinese and Russian trends, the drift of Western European communists to open reformism, and the recent liberalization in Eastern Europe and Russia, are already accounted for in the general guidelines laid down by socialist theory over the past 150 years.



As should be evident from the text, the words “socialist” and “communist” in most cases apply to theoreticians or political lines that are in fact not at all proletarian, but simply middle class. How the intellectuals view themselves and what they are in reality are two very different things. But since hanging every fraudulent socialist and communist in quotes would clutter the text unnecessarily, the words are allowed to stand on their own, on the assumption that the reader will appreciate the fiction.

Despite the extensive quotations used and the attention necessarily given to the historical development of the question, the following work was intended to establish only the most essential points necessary for the criticism. Serious readers are urged to study, at their own risk, the mass of primary material from which the citations were taken and make their own conclusions. For an intellectual, however, this will prove to be a difficult task. Theoretical opportunism is so successful within the intelligentsia precisely because it harmonizes so well with their already established class prejudices. The natural tendency of the socialist intellectuals, then, is to overlook any intimidating contradictions, inconsistencies or theoretical faux pas, and to get on with the business of saving all and sundry while making their individual marks on history.

## VII.

The central (and for the socialist intellectual, most abrasive) conclusion from this analysis is that Marxism-Leninism is not a proletarian, but a middle class ideology, and that what has occurred in the socialist movement over the past hundred plus years has been a historical counter-revolution against the working class.

The very people, who, with the best of intentions and often at personal sacrifice, gave themselves to the cause of working class emancipation, have in reality been the leading force in an objective class effort to perpetuate their own social privileges over the mass of workers. Where the communist parties, the vanguard detachments of the middle class, have taken state power, they have instituted a kind of “capitalism with a human face”, an officially benevolent dictatorship that enforces class peace through bribes and subsistence guarantees, but which ultimately rests, like all bourgeois governments, on the power of armed force.

But as the strike movement and spontaneous outbursts in Eastern Europe, Russia and China show, even socialist opportunism cannot contain class contradictions indefinitely. The class struggle within socialist states is necessarily at a higher stage, since the contradiction cannot be phrased in traditional terms, i.e. capitalists versus workers, but must seek new ones.

Objectively, the contradiction in those countries is between middle class privilege and the workers’ interests, and the workers are driven to a more conscious understanding of this so long as they continue to defend themselves and push their struggle to the fore. Political criticism, which would first and foremost expose the role of the socialist intelligentsia,

would accelerate this process, but formulating it will require something more than trade union discontent.

The modern state apparatus of both ordinary capitalist and state-capitalist socialist societies are so monolithic and intricate and so involved in the daily lives of their citizens that they make themselves seem essential for dealing with the complexities of contemporary industrial life. But modern living is complex only because it is done in a distorted environment. If it were only a matter of producing and distributing life essentials, fulfilling the needs of the working population, and enforcing participation in labor, governmental functions would be reduced to simple accounting and control that could be performed by every literate workers. Work, the supreme requirement of a healthy existence, would then be rational, well rounded and fulfilling.

Such simplicity is impossible under capitalism precisely because capitalism is predicated on social classes, class privileges, and a complex state apparatus to suppress class antagonisms. Bureaucrats breed bureaucracy, the military breeds militarism, specialists breed further specialties, businessmen breed more busy business, and intellectuals never tire of more intellectualizing. The middle and upper classes perpetually reproduce themselves, their social power and insatiable appetites, and so reproduce the fundamental irrationality of the system and its tendency towards automatic self-destruction.

Should the mass of workers ever begin to appreciate this, no sophisticated ideology, not even a "proletarian" one, will restrain them.