

LENIN



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as a whole, its embodiment in a visible corporation; but it was this only in so far as it was the state of that class which itself, in its epoch, represented society as a whole; in ancient times, the state of the slave-owning citizens; in the Middle Ages, of the feudal nobility; in our epoch, of the bourgeoisie. When ultimately it becomes really representative of society as a whole, it makes itself superfluous. As soon as there is no longer any class of society to be held in subjection; as soon as, along with class domination and the struggle for individual existence based on the former anarchy of production, the collisions and excesses arising from these have also been abolished, there is nothing more to be repressed, which would make a special repressive force, a state, necessary. The first act in which the state really comes forward as the representative of society as a whole—the taking possession of the means of production in the name of society—is at the same time its last independent act as a state. The interference of the state power in social relations becomes superfluous in one sphere after another, and then ceases of itself. The government of persons is replaced by the administration of things and the direction of the process of production. The state is not 'abolished,' it withers away. It is from this standpoint that we must appraise the phrase 'free people's state'—both its justification at times for agitational purposes, and its ultimate scientific inadequacy—and also the demand of the so-called anarchists that the state should be abolished overnight" (*Herr Eugen Dühring's Revolution in Science [Anti-Dühring]*, pp. 314-15 of the English edition).

It may be said without fear of error that of this argument of Engels' which is so singularly rich in ideas, only one point has become an integral part of Socialist thought among modern Socialist parties, namely, that according to Marx the state "withers away"—as distinct from the anarchist doctrine of the "abolition" of the state. To emasculate Marxism in such a manner is to reduce it to opportunism, for such an "interpretation" only leaves the hazy conception of a slow, even, gradual change, of absence of leaps and storms, of absence of revolution. The current, widespread, mass, if one may say so, conception of the "withering away" of the state undoubtedly means the slurring over, if not the repudiation, of revolution.

Such an "interpretation" is the crudest distortion of Marxism, advantageous only to the bourgeoisie; in point of theory, it is based on a disregard for the most important circumstances and considerations pointed out, say, in the "summary" of Engels' argument we have just quoted in full.

In the first place, Engels at the very outset of his argument says that, in assuming state power, the proletariat by that "puts an end to the state

as the state." It is not "good form" to ponder over what this means. Generally, it is either ignored altogether, or it is considered to be a piece of "Hegelian" "weakness" on Engels' part. As a matter of fact, however, these words briefly express the experience of one of the great proletarian revolutions, the Paris Commune of 1871, of which we shall speak in greater detail in its proper place. As a matter of fact, Engels speaks here of "putting an end" to the *bourgeois* state by the proletarian revolution, while the words about its withering away refer to the remnants of the *proletarian* state *after* the Socialist revolution. According to Engels the bourgeois state does not "wither away," but is "*put an end to*" by the proletariat in the course of the revolution. What withers away after the revolution is the proletarian state or semi-state.

Secondly, the state is a "special repressive force." Engels gives this splendid and extremely profound definition here with complete lucidity. And from it follows that the "special repressive force" for the suppression of the proletariat by the bourgeoisie, for the suppression of the millions of toilers by a handful of the rich, must be superseded by a "special repressive force" for the suppression of the bourgeoisie by the proletariat (the dictatorship of the proletariat). This is precisely what is meant by "putting an end to the state as the state." This is precisely the "act" of taking possession of the means of production in the name of society. And it is obvious that *such* a substitution of one (proletarian) "special repressive force" for another (bourgeois) "special repressive force" cannot possibly take place in the form of "withering away."

Thirdly, in regard to the state "withering away," and the even more expressive and colourful "ceasing of itself," Engels refers quite clearly and definitely to the period *after* "the state has taken possession of the means of production in the name of society," that is, *after* the Socialist revolution. We all know that the political form of the "state" at that time is the most complete democracy. But it never enters the head of any of the opportunists who shamelessly distort Marxism that Engels here speaks of *democracy* "withering away," or "ceasing of itself." This seems very strange at first sight; but it is "unintelligible" only to those who have not pondered over the fact that democracy is *also* a state and that, consequently, democracy will also disappear when the state disappears. Revolution alone can "put an end" to the bourgeois state. The state in general, *i.e.*, the most complete democracy, can only "wither away."

Fourthly, after formulating his famous proposition that "the state withers away," Engels at once explains concretely that this proposition is directed equally against the opportunists and the anarchists. In doing this, however, Engels puts in the forefront the conclusion deduced from the proposition, the "state withers away," which is directed against the opportunists.

One can wager that out of every 10,000 persons who have read or heard about the "withering away" of the state, 9,990 do not know, or do not

remember, that Engels did not direct the conclusions he deduced from this proposition against the anarchists *alone*. Of the remaining ten, probably nine do not know the meaning of "free people's state" or why an attack on this watchword contains an attack on the opportunists. This is how history is written! This is how a great revolutionary doctrine is imperceptibly falsified and adapted to prevailing philistinism! The conclusion drawn against the anarchists has been repeated thousands of times, vulgarized, dinned into people's heads in the crudest fashion and has acquired the strength of a prejudice; whereas the conclusion drawn against the opportunists has been hushed up and "forgotten"!

The "free people's state" was a program demand and a popular slogan of the German Social-Democrats in the 'seventies. The only political content of this slogan is a pompous philistine description of the concept democracy. In so far as it hinted in a lawful manner at a democratic republic, Engels was prepared to "justify" its use "for a time" from an agitational point of view. But it was an opportunist slogan, for it not only expressed an embellishment of bourgeois democracy, but also a lack of understanding of the Socialist criticism of the state in general. We are in favour of a democratic republic as the best form of state for the proletariat under capitalism; but we have no right to forget that wage-slavery is the lot of the people even in the most democratic bourgeois republic. Furthermore, every state is a "special repressive force" for the suppression of the oppressed class. Consequently, *no* state is a "free" or a "people's state." Marx and Engels explained this repeatedly to their party comrades in the 'seventies.

Fifthly, this very same work of Engels', of which everyone remembers the argument about the "withering away" of the state, also contains a disquisition on the significance of violent revolution. Engels' historical analysis of its role becomes a veritable panegyric on violent revolution. This "no one remembers"; it is not good form in modern Socialist parties to talk or even think about the importance of this idea, and it plays no part whatever in their daily propaganda and agitation among the masses. And yet, it is inseparably bound up with the "withering away" of the state into one harmonious whole.

Here is Engels' argument:

"That force, however, plays yet another role [other than that of a diabolical power] in history, a revolutionary role; that, in the words of Marx, it is the midwife of every old society which is pregnant with the new; that it is the instrument by the aid of which the social movement forces its way through and shatters the dead, fossilized, political forms—of this there is not a word in Herr Dühring. It is only with sighs and groans that he admits the possibility that force will perhaps be necessary for the overthrow of the economic system of exploitation—unfortunately, because all use of force,

them. Long before me, bourgeois historians had described the historical development of this class struggle, and bourgeois economists the economic anatomy of the classes. What I did that was new was to prove: 1) that the *existence of classes* is only bound up with *particular, historic phases in the development of production* [*historische Entwicklungsphasen der Produktion*]; 2) that the class struggle necessarily leads to the *dictatorship of the proletariat*; 3) that this dictatorship itself only constitutes the transition to the *abolition of all classes* and to a *classless society*.”*

In these words Marx succeeded in expressing with striking clarity, first, the chief and radical difference between his doctrine and that of the foremost and most profound thinkers of the bourgeoisie; and, second, the essence of his doctrine of the state.

It is often said and written that the core of Marx's theory is the class struggle; but this is not true. And from this error very often springs the opportunist distortion of Marxism, its falsification to make it acceptable to the bourgeoisie. For the doctrine of the class struggle was created *not* by Marx, but by the bourgeoisie *before* Marx, and generally speaking it is *acceptable* to the bourgeoisie. Those who recognize *only* the class struggle are not yet Marxists; they may be found to be still within the boundaries of bourgeois reasoning and bourgeois politics. To limit Marxism to the doctrine of the class struggle means curtailing Marxism, distorting it, reducing it to something which is acceptable to the bourgeoisie. Only he is a Marxist who *extends* the acceptance of the class struggle to the acceptance of the *dictatorship of the proletariat*. This is where the profound difference lies between a Marxist and an ordinary petty (and even big) bourgeois. This is the touchstone on which the *real* understanding and acceptance of Marxism should be tested. And it is not surprising that when the history of Europe brought the working class face to face with this question in a *practical* way, not only all the opportunists and reformists, but all the Kautskyites (people who vacillate between reformism and Marxism) proved to be miserable philistines and petty-bourgeois democrats who *repudiated* the dictatorship of the proletariat. Kautsky's pamphlet, *The Dictatorship of the Proletariat*, published in August 1918, *i.e.*, long after the first edition of the present pamphlet, is an example of petty-bourgeois distortion of Marxism and base renunciation of it *in practice*, while hypocritically recognizing it *in words* (see my pamphlet, *The Proletarian Revolution and the Renegade Kautsky*, Petrograd and Moscow, 1918).

Present-day opportunism in the person of its principal representative, the ex-Marxist, K. Kautsky, fits in completely with Marx's characterization of the *bourgeois* position quoted above, for this opportunism limits the field of recognition of the class struggle to the realm of bourgeois relation-

* *The Correspondence of Marx and Engels.—Ed.*

only to postpone the Socialist revolution until human nature has changed. No, we want the Socialist revolution with human nature as it is now, with human nature that cannot dispense with subordination, control and "foremen and clerks."

But the subordination must be to the armed vanguard of all the exploited, of all the toilers, *i.e.*, to the proletariat. Measures can and must be taken at once, overnight, to substitute for the specific "official grandeur" of state officials the simple functions of "workmen and managers," functions which are already fully within the capacity of the average city dweller and can well be performed for "workmen's wages."

We ourselves, the workers, will organize large-scale production on the basis of what capitalism has already created, relying on our own experience as workers, establishing strict, iron discipline supported by the state power of the armed workers; we shall reduce the role of the state officials to that of simply carrying out our instructions as responsible, revocable, modestly paid "managers" (of course, with the aid of technicians of all sorts, types and degrees). This is *our* proletarian task, this is what we can and must *start* with in carrying out the proletarian revolution. Such a beginning, on the basis of large-scale production, will of itself lead to the gradual "withering away" of all bureaucracy, to the gradual creation of an order, an order without quotation marks, which will be different from wage-slavery, an order in which the functions of control and accounting—becoming more and more simple—will be performed by each in turn, will then become a habit and will finally die out as the *special* functions of a special section of the population.

A witty German Social-Democrat of the seventies of the last century called the *post-office* an example of the Socialist system. This is very true. At present the post-office is a business organized on the lines of a state *capitalist* monopoly. Imperialism is gradually transforming all trusts into organizations of a similar type, in which, over the "common" toilers, who are overworked and starved, there stands the same bourgeois bureaucracy. But the mechanism of social management is here already to hand. Overthrow the capitalists, crush the resistance of these exploiters with the iron hand of the armed workers, smash the bureaucratic machine of the modern state—and you will have a mechanism of the highest technical equipment, free from the "parasite," capable of being wielded by the united workers themselves, who will hire their own technicians, managers and bookkeepers, and pay them *all*, as, indeed *all* "state" officials in general, ordinary workmen's wages. Here is a concrete, practical task, immediately possible of fulfilment in relation to all trusts, a task that will free the toilers from exploitation and take into account what the Commune had already begun to practise (particularly in the field of state construction).

Our immediate object is to organize the *whole* national economy on the lines of the postal system, so that the technicians, managers, bookkeep-

the abolition of classes. Marx chooses the sharpest and clearest way of stating his position against the anarchists: after overthrowing the yoke of the capitalists, should the workers "lay down their arms," or use them against the capitalists in order to crush their resistance? But what is the systematic use of arms by one class against the other, if not a "transitory form" of state?

Let every Social-Democrat ask himself: is *that* the way he has been putting the question of the state in controversy with the anarchists? Is *that* the way the vast majority of the official Socialist parties of the Second International have been putting it?

Engels enlarges on the same ideas in even greater detail and more popularly. First of all he ridicules the muddled ideas of the Proudhonites, who called themselves "anti-authoritarians," *i.e.*, repudiated every sort of authority, every sort of subordination, every sort of power. Take a factory, a railway, a ship on the high seas, said Engels—is it not clear that not one of these complex technical units, based on the employment of machinery and the ordered co-operation of many people, could function without a certain amount of subordination and, consequently, without a certain amount of authority or power?

"When I put these arguments up against the most rabid anti-authoritarians," writes Engels, "they were only able to give me the following answer: 'Ah! that is true, but here it is not a case of authority which we confer on delegates, *but of a commission!*' these gentlemen think that they have changed the thing by changing its name. . . ."

Having thus shown that authority and autonomy are relative terms, that the sphere of their application varies with the various phases of social development, that it is absurd to take them as absolutes, and adding that the sphere of the application of machinery and large-scale production is constantly becoming enlarged, Engels passes from the general discussion of authority to the question of the state:

"... If the autonomists," he wrote, "would confine themselves to saying that the social organization of the future will restrict authority to the limits in which the relations of production make it inevitable, we could understand each other, but they are blind to all facts which make the thing necessary, and they hurl themselves against the word.

"Why don't the anti-authoritarians confine themselves to crying out against political authority, against the state? All Socialists are agreed that the state, and with it political authority, will disappear as the result of the coming social revolution, *i.e.*, that public functions will lose their political character and be transformed into the simple administrative functions of watching over real social interests. But the anti-authoritarians demand that the po-

leave, so to speak, exclusively for the anarchists "to work out." And in dealing with this question, Engels takes the bull by the horns; he asks: should not the Commune have made *more* use of the *revolutionary* power of the *state*, that is, of the armed proletariat organized as the ruling class?

Prevailing official Social-Democracy usually dismissed the question of the concrete tasks of the proletariat in the revolution either with a philistine sneer, or, at best, with the sophistic evasion: "wait and see." And the anarchists were thus justified in saying about such Social-Democracy that it had betrayed its task of educating the working class for the revolution. Engels utilizes the experience of the last proletarian revolution precisely for the purpose of making a very concrete study of what the proletariat should do in relation to the banks and the state, and how it should do it.

3. Letter to Bebel

One of the most, if not the most, remarkable observations on the state in the works of Marx and Engels is contained in the following passage in Engels' letter to Bebel dated March 18-28, 1875. This letter, we may observe in passing, was, as far as we know, first published by Bebel in the second volume of his memoirs (*Aus meinem Leben*), which appeared in 1911, *i.e.*, thirty-six years after it had been written and mailed.

Engels wrote to Bebel criticizing the very draft of the Gotha Program which Marx also criticized in his famous letter to Bracke. Referring particularly to the question of the state, Engels said:

". . . The free people's state is transformed into the free state. Taken in its grammatical sense a free state is one where the state is free in relation to its citizens and is therefore a state with a despotic government. The whole talk about the state should be dropped, especially since the Commune, which was no longer a state in the proper sense of the word. The "people's state" has been thrown in our faces by the anarchists too long, although Marx's book against Proudhon and later *The Communist Manifesto* directly declare that with the introduction of the Socialist order of society the state will dissolve of itself [*sich auflöst*] and disappear. As, therefore, the state is only a transitional institution which is used in the struggle, in the revolution, in order to hold down one's adversaries by force, it is pure nonsense to talk of a free people's state; so long as the proletariat still *uses* the state, it does not use it in the interests of freedom but in order to hold down its adversaries, and as soon as it becomes possible to speak of freedom the state as such ceases to exist. We would therefore propose to replace the word "state" everywhere by the word *Gemeinwesen* [*community*], a good old German word which can very well represent the French word *commune*." (P. 322 of the German original.)

ests common to the whole of society could not be looked after otherwise than as they have been looked after in the past, that is, through the state and its well-paid officials. And people think they have taken quite an extraordinarily bold step forward when they have rid themselves of belief in hereditary monarchy and swear by the democratic republic. In reality, however, the state 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; and at best an evil inherited by the proletariat after its victorious struggle for class supremacy, whose worst sides the victorious proletariat, just like the Commune, cannot avoid having to lop off at the earliest possible moment, until such time as a new generation, reared in new and free social conditions, will be able to throw the entire lumber of the state on the scrap-heap."

Engels warned the Germans not to forget the fundamentals of Socialism on the question of the state in general in connection with the substitution of a republic for the monarchy. His warnings now read like a lecture to Messrs. Tsereteli and Chernov, who in their "coalition" practice revealed a superstitious belief in and a superstitious reverence for the state!

Two more points. First: the fact that Engels said that in a democratic republic, "no less" than in a monarchy, the state remains a "machine for the oppression of one class by another" does not signify that the *form* of oppression is a matter of indifference to the proletariat, as some anarchists "teach." A wider, freer and more open *form* of the class struggle and of class oppression greatly assists the proletariat in its struggle for the abolition of all classes.

Second: why will only a new generation be able to throw the entire lumber of the state on the scrap-heap? This question is bound up with the question of overcoming democracy, with which we shall deal now.

6. Engels on Overcoming Democracy

Engels had occasion to speak on this subject in connection with the question of the term "Social-Democrat" being *scientifically* wrong.

In a preface to an edition of his articles of the 'seventies on various subjects, mainly on "international" questions (*Internationales aus dem Volksstaat*), dated January 3, 1894, *i.e.*, written a year and a half before his death, Engels wrote that in all his articles he used the word "Communist" *not* "Social-Democrat," because at that time it was the Proudhonites in France and the Lassalleans in Germany who called themselves Social-Democrats.

"For Marx and me it was therefore quite impossible to choose such an elastic term to characterize our special point of view. Today

cipation, the proletariat must overthrow the bourgeoisie, conquer political power and establish its revolutionary dictatorship.

Now the question is put somewhat differently: the transition from capitalist society—which is developing towards Communism—to a Communist society is impossible without a “political transition period,” and the state in this period can only be the revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat.

What, then, is the relation of this dictatorship to democracy?

We have seen that *The Communist Manifesto* simply places the two ideas side by side: “to raise the proletariat to the position of the ruling class” and “to win the battle of democracy.” On the basis of all that has been said above, it is possible to determine more precisely how democracy changes in the transition from capitalism to Communism.

In capitalist society, under the conditions most favourable to its development, we have more or less complete democracy in the democratic republic. But this democracy is always restricted by the narrow framework of capitalist exploitation, and consequently always remains, in reality, a democracy for the minority, only for the possessing classes, only for the rich. Freedom in capitalist society always remains about the same as it was in the ancient Greek republics: freedom for the slave-owners. Owing to the conditions of capitalist exploitation the modern wage-slaves are so crushed by want and poverty that “they cannot be bothered with democracy,” “they cannot be bothered with politics”; in the ordinary peaceful course of events the majority of the population is debarred from participating in social and political life.

The correctness of this statement is perhaps most clearly proved by Germany, precisely because in that country constitutional legality lasted and remained stable for a remarkably long time—for nearly half a century (1871-1914)—and Social-Democracy during this period was able to achieve far more in Germany than in other countries in the way of “utilizing legality,” and was able to organize a larger proportion of the workers into a political party than anywhere else in the world.

What is this largest proportion of politically conscious and active wage-slaves that has so far been observed in capitalist society? One million members of the Social-Democratic Party—out of fifteen million wage workers! Three million organized in trade unions—out of fifteen million!

Democracy for an insignificant minority, democracy for the rich—that is the democracy of capitalist society. If we look more closely into the mechanism of capitalist democracy, everywhere, in the “petty”—so-called petty—details of the suffrage (residential qualification, exclusion of women, etc.), in the technique of the representative institutions, in the actual obstacles to the right of assembly (public buildings are not for “beggars”!), in the purely capitalist organization of the daily press, etc., etc.—we see restriction after restriction upon democracy. These restrictions, exceptions, exclusions, obstacles for the poor, seem slight, especially in the eyes of one who has never known want himself and has never been in

out any exceptions, be possible and be realized. And only then will democracy begin to *wither away*, owing to the simple fact that, freed from capitalist slavery, from the untold horrors, savagery, absurdities and infamies of capitalist exploitation, people will gradually *become accustomed* to observing the elementary rules of social intercourse that have been known for centuries and repeated for thousands of years in all copy-book maxims; they will become accustomed to observing them without force, without compulsion, without subordination, *without the special apparatus* for compulsion which is called the state.

The expression "the state *withers away*" is very well chosen, for it indicates both the gradual and the spontaneous nature of the process. Only habit can, and undoubtedly will, have such an effect; for we see around us millions of times how readily people become accustomed to observing the necessary rules of social intercourse if there is no exploitation, if there is nothing that causes indignation, nothing that calls forth protest and revolt or evokes the necessity for *suppression*.

Thus in capitalist society we have a democracy that is curtailed, wretched, false; a democracy only for the rich, for the minority. The dictatorship of the proletariat, the period of transition to Communism, will for the first time create democracy for the people, for the majority, in addition to the necessary suppression of the minority—the exploiters. Communism alone is capable of giving really complete democracy, and the more complete it is the more quickly will it become unnecessary and wither away of itself.

In other words: under capitalism we have a state in the proper sense of the word, that is, a special machine for the suppression of one class by another, and of the majority by the minority at that. Naturally, the successful discharge of such a task as the systematic suppression of the exploited majority by the exploiting minority calls for the greatest ferocity and savagery in the work of suppression, it calls for seas of blood through which mankind has to wade in slavery, serfdom and wage labour.

Furthermore, during the *transition* from capitalism to Communism suppression is *still* necessary; but it is now the suppression of the exploiting minority by the exploited majority. A special apparatus, a special machine for suppression, the "state," is *still* necessary, but this is now a transitory state; it is no longer a state in the proper sense; for the suppression of the minority of exploiters by the majority of the wage-slaves of *yesterday* is comparatively so easy, simple and natural a task that it will entail far less bloodshed than the suppression of the risings of slaves, serfs or wage labourers, and it will cost mankind far less. And it is compatible with the extension of democracy to such an overwhelming majority of the population that the need for a *special machine* of suppression will begin to disappear. The exploiters are naturally unable to suppress the people without a very complex machine for performing this task; but *the people* can suppress the exploiters even with a very simple "machine," almost without a "machine,"

without a special apparatus, by the simple *organization of the armed masses* (such as the Soviets of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies, we may remark, running ahead a little).

Finally, only Communism makes the state absolutely unnecessary, for there is *nobody* to be suppressed—"nobody" in the sense of a *class*, in the sense of a systematic struggle against a definite section of the population. We are not utopians, and we do not in the least deny the possibility and inevitability of excesses on the part of *individual persons*, or the need to suppress *such* excesses. But, in the first place, no special machine, no special apparatus of repression is needed for this; this will be done by the armed people itself, as simply and as readily as any crowd of civilized people, even in modern society, parts two people who are fighting, or interferes to prevent a woman from being assaulted. And, secondly, we know that the fundamental social cause of excesses, which consist of violating the rules of social intercourse, is the exploitation of the masses, their want and their poverty. With the removal of this chief cause, excesses will inevitably begin to "*wither away*." We do not know how quickly and in what order, but we know that they will wither away. With their withering away the state *will also wither away*.

Without indulging in utopias, Marx defined more fully what can be defined *now* regarding this future, namely, the difference between the lower and higher phases (degrees, stages) of Communist society.

3. The First Phase of Communist Society

In the *Critique of the Gotha Program*, Marx goes into some detail to disprove Lassalle's idea that under Socialism the worker will receive the "undiminished" or "whole proceeds of his labour." Marx shows that from the whole of the social labour of society it is necessary to deduct a reserve fund, a fund for the expansion of production, for the replacement of "used up" machinery, and so on; then, also, from the means of consumption must be deducted a fund for the costs of administration, for schools, hospitals, homes for the aged, and so on.

Instead of Lassalle's hazy, obscure, general phrase ("the whole proceeds of his labour to the worker") Marx makes a sober estimate of exactly how Socialist society will have to manage its affairs. Marx proceeds to make a *concrete* analysis of the conditions of life of a society in which there will be no capitalism, and says:

"What we have to deal with here [in analysing the program of the workers' party] is a Communist society, not as it has *developed* on its own foundations, but, on the contrary, as it *emerges* from capitalist society; which is thus in every respect, economically, morally and intellectually, still stamped with the birthmarks of the old society from whose womb it emerges."