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**LENIN AND
STALIN
ON
THE STATE**

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LENIN AND STALIN ON THE STATE

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PUBLISHER'S NOTE

MARXISM is a science developed from human experience in the living process of class struggle. The present selection on the question of the State illustrates this development.

First we have the short lecture in which Lenin gives a general historical account of the State as a form changing in relation to the character and forces of class society but retaining the same essence: the State is always the organ of force by which the ruling class maintains its power. This lecture, delivered to the students of the Sverdlov University in Moscow, also shows us how Lenin went to work as a teacher. He warns the students that they have a difficult subject to tackle, tells them how they can gradually overcome the difficulties and then himself gives them the help of a simple, clear, masterly exposition which remains for us to-day the best theoretical introduction to the question. We see, too, how Lenin goes to work as a Marxist. In his article, *The Teachings of Karl Marx* (Little Lenin Library No. 1, Selected Works, Vol. XI), he tells us that the clue provided by Marxism to the 'seeming labyrinth and chaos' of history is 'the theory of the class struggle'. This clue he himself uses throughout to illuminate the question of the State.

'You will scarcely find another question which has been so confused, deliberately or not, by the representatives of bourgeois science, philosophy, jurisprudence, political economy and journalism, as the question of the State. . . . This question has been so confused and complicated because it affects the interests of the ruling classes more than any other (yielding in this respect only to the foundations of economic science)' (pp. 8-9).

Next in our selection comes the first chapter of Lenin's *State and Revolution*, the book he wrote in August and September 1917, on the very eve of the Bolshevik revolution, leaving it unfinished at the seventh chapter because the political crisis 'interfered' with this work. 'It is more pleasant and useful to go through the "experience of a revolution" than to write about it,' he said in the postscript added in December 1917.

State and Revolution was written for an immediate political purpose: to clear away serious hindrances to advance arising from the misconceptions and dangerous confusion created by false theories of the State. Various elements in the Social Democratic parties had long been busy 'revising' Marx to suit their own outlook. Lenin deals with their arguments in parts of his book. The chapter included here states the basic teaching of Marx and Engels on the State, which they themselves had developed very largely from the experiences of the Paris Commune in 1871. The last section of this chapter (p. 34) brings us to the theory of 'the withering away of the State' and this is followed by the final extract in the volume, where Stalin discusses this theory in the light of living experience, the experience of socialism victorious in one country.

The reader will find it helpful to turn also to the fifth chapter of *State and Revolution*, where Lenin discusses the transition from capitalism to Socialism and the development from Socialism to Communism.

been published in English as a twopenny pamphlet, and is also to be found in Lenin's *Selected Works*, Vol. 11, pp. 639-57. (5s. net.)

2. CLASS SOCIETY AND THE STATE, which is the first chapter of *The State and Revolution*. This book is also available in the *Little Lenin Library*, No. 14 (1s.), in a cheap paper edition (3d.), and in *Selected Works*, Vol. 7, pp. 5-111. (5s.)
3. THE WITHERING AWAY OF THE STATE, by Joseph Stalin. This is an extract from Stalin's speech at the 18th Congress of the C.P.S.U.(B.), and is to be found in *The Land of Socialism To-day and To-morrow*, pp. 44-51. (Now out of print.)

BIBLIOGRAPHY

This volume consists of the following:

1. THE STATE, a lecture given by Lenin to the students of the Sverdlov University on July 11th, 1919. This has previously

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V. I. LENIN

THE STATE

COMRADES, according to the plan adopted by you and conveyed to me, the subject of to-day's talk is the state. I do not know how familiar you are already with this subject. If I am not mistaken, your courses have only just begun, and this is the first time you have had to approach this subject systematically. If that is so, then it may very well be that I may not succeed in the first lecture on this difficult subject in making my exposition sufficiently clear and comprehensible to many of my hearers. And if this should prove to be the case, I would request you not to be perturbed by the fact, because the question of the state is a most complex and difficult one, perhaps one that more than any other has been confused by bourgeois scholars, writers and philosophers. It should not, therefore, be expected that a clear understanding of this subject can be obtained from one brief talk, at a first sitting.

After the first talk on this subject you should make a note of the passages which you have not understood, or which are not clear to you, and return to them a second, a third and a fourth time, so that what you have not understood may be further supplemented and explained afterwards, both by reading and by various lectures and talks. I hope that we may manage to meet once again, and that then we shall be able to exchange opinions on all supplementary questions and to see what has remained most unclear.

I also hope that in addition to talks and lectures you will devote some time to reading at least some of the most important works of Marx and Engels. I have no doubt that these most important works are to be found in the catalogues of literature and in the handbooks which are available to the pupils of the Soviet and Party school; and although, again, some of you may at first be dismayed by the difficulty of the exposition, I must again warn you that you should not be perturbed by this fact, and that what is unclear at a first reading, will become clear at a second reading, or when you subsequently approach the question from a somewhat

different angle. For I once more repeat that the question is so complex and has been so confused by bourgeois scholars and writers that anybody who desires to study this question seriously, and to master it independently, must attack it several times, return to it again and again and consider the question from various angles in order to attain a clear and definite understanding of it. And it will be all the easier to return to this question because it is such a fundamental, such a basic question of all politics, and because not only in such stormy and revolutionary times as the present, but even in the most peaceful times, you will come across this question in any newspaper in connection with any economic or political question.

Every day, in one connection or another, you will be returning to this question: what is the state, what is its nature, what is its significance, and what is the attitude of our Party, the Party that is fighting for the overthrow of capitalism, the Communist Party—what is its attitude to the state? And the chief thing is that as a result of your reading, as a result of the talks and lectures you will hear on the state, you should acquire the ability to approach this question independently, since you will be meeting this question on the most varied occasions, in connection with the most trifling questions, in the most unexpected conjunctures, and in discussions and disputes with opponents. Only when you learn to find your way about independently in this question may you consider yourself sufficiently confirmed in your convictions and able with sufficient success to defend them against anybody and at any time.

After these brief remarks, I shall proceed to deal with the question itself—what is the state, how did it arise, and what fundamentally should be the attitude to the state of the Party of the working class, which is fighting for the complete overthrow of capitalism—the Communist Party?

I have already said that you will scarcely find another question which has been so confused, deliberately or not, by the representatives of bourgeois science, philosophy, jurisprudence, political economy and journalism, as the question of the state. To this day this question is very often confused with religious questions; not only representatives of religious doctrines (it is quite natural to expect it of them), but even people who consider themselves free

from religious prejudice, very often confuse the special question of the state with questions of religion, and endeavour to build up a doctrine—often a complex one, with an ideological, philosophical approach and foundation—which claims that the state is something divine, something supernatural, that it is a certain force, by virtue of which mankind has lived, and which confers on people, or which can confer on people, which brings with it, something that is not of man, but is given him from without—that it is a force of divine origin. And it must be said that this doctrine is so closely bound up with the interests of the exploiting classes—the landlords and the capitalists—so serves their interests, has so deeply permeated all the customs, views and science of the gentlemen who represent the bourgeoisie, that you will meet with relics of it on every hand, even the view of the state held by the Mensheviks and Socialist-Revolutionaries, who reject with disgust the suggestion that they are under the sway of religious prejudices, and are convinced that they can regard the state with sober eyes.

This question has been so confused and complicated because it affects the interests of the ruling classes more than any other (yielding in this respect only to the foundations of economic science). The doctrine of the state serves as a justification of social privilege, a justification of the existence of exploitation, a justification of the existence of capitalism—and that is why it would be the greatest mistake to expect impartiality on this question, to approach this question in the belief that people who claim to be scientific can give you a purely scientific view on the subject. When you have become familiar with this question and have gone into it sufficiently deeply, you will always discern in the question of the state, in the doctrine of the state, in the theory of the state, the mutual struggle of different classes, a struggle which is reflected or expressed in the conflict of views on the state, in the estimate of the rôle and significance of the state.

To approach this question as scientifically as possible we must cast at least a fleeting glance back on the history of the rise and development of the state. The most reliable thing in a question of social science and one that is most necessary in order really to acquire the habit of approaching this question correctly and not allowing oneself to get lost in the mass of detail or in the immense variety of conflicting opinions—the most important thing in order

to approach this question scientifically is not to forget the underlying historical connection, to examine every question from the standpoint of how the given phenomenon arose in history and what principal stages this phenomenon passed through in its development, and, from the standpoint of its development, to examine what the given thing has become to-day.

I hope, that in connection with the question of the state, you will acquaint yourselves with Engels' book, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*.¹ This is one of the fundamental works of modern Socialism, every phase of which can be accepted with confidence, in the assurance that it has not been said at random, but is based on immense historical and political material. Undoubtedly, not all the parts of this work have been expounded in an equally popular and comprehensible way: some of them assume that the reader already possesses certain knowledge of history and economics. But I again repeat that you should not be perturbed if, on reading this work, you do not understand it at once. That hardly happens to anyone. But returning to it later, when your interest has been aroused, you will succeed in understanding the greater part of it, if not the whole of it. I mention this book because it gives the correct approach to the question in the sense mentioned. It begins with an historical sketch of the origin of the state.

In order to approach this question correctly, as every other question, for example, the question of the origin of capitalism, the exploitation of man by man, Socialism, how Socialism arose, what conditions gave rise to it—every such question can be approached soundly and confidently only if we cast a glance back on the history of its development as a whole. In connection with this question, it should first of all be noted that the state has not always existed. There was a time when there was no state. It appears wherever and whenever a division of society into classes appears, whenever exploiters and exploited appear.

Before the first form of exploitation of man by man arose, the first form of division into classes—slaveowners and slaves—there existed the patriarchal family, or, as it is sometimes called, the clan family. Fairly definite traces of these primitive times have

¹ A completely new translation of this book has recently been published by Lawrence and Wishart Ltd.—Ed.

survived in the life of many primitive peoples; and if you take any work whatsoever on primitive culture, you will always come across more or less definite descriptions, indications and recollections of the fact that there was a time, more or less similar to primitive Communism, when the division of society into slaveowners and slaves did not exist. And in those times there was no state, no special apparatus for the systematic application of force and the subjugation of people by force. Such an apparatus is called the state.

In primitive society, when people still lived in small tribes and were still at the lowest stages of their development, in a condition approximating to savagery—an epoch from which modern, civilised human society is separated by several thousands of years—there were yet no signs of the existence of a state. We find the predominance of custom, authority, respect, the power enjoyed by the elders of the tribe; we find this power sometimes accorded to women¹—the position of women then was not like the unfranchised and oppressed condition of women to-day—but nowhere do we find a special category of people who are set apart to rule others and who, in the interests and with the purpose of rule, systematically and permanently command a certain apparatus of coercion, an apparatus of violence, such as is represented at the present time, as you all realise, by the armed detachments of troops, the prisons and the other means of subjugating the will of others by force—all that which constitutes the essence of the state.

If we abstract ourselves from the so-called religious teachings, subtleties, philosophical arguments and the various opinions advanced by bourgeois scholars, and try to get at the real essence of the matter, we shall find that the state really does amount to such an apparatus of rule separated out from human society. When there appears such a special group of men who are occupied with ruling and nothing else, and who, in order to rule, need a special apparatus of coercion and of subjugating the will of others by force—prisons, special detachments of men, armies, etc.—there appears the state.

¹ This is a reference to the form of society known as 'matriarchy', for an account of which the reader is referred to F. Engels: *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*.—Ed.

But there was a time when there was no state, when general ties, society itself, discipline and the ordering of work were maintained by force of custom and tradition, or by the authority, or the respect enjoyed by the elders of the tribe or by women—who in those times not only frequently enjoyed equal status with men, but not infrequently enjoyed even a higher status—and when there was no special category of persons, specialists in ruling. History shows that the state as a special apparatus for coercing people arose only wherever and whenever there appeared a division of society into classes, that is, a division into groups of people, some of whom are permanently in a position to appropriate the labour of others, when some people exploit others.

And this division of society into classes must always be clearly borne in mind as a fundamental fact of history. The development of all human societies for thousands of years, in all countries without exception, reveals a general conformity to law, regularity and consistency in this development; so that at first we had a society without classes—the first patriarchal, primitive society, in which there were no aristocrats; then we had a society based on slavery—a slaveowning society. The whole of modern civilised Europe has passed through this stage—slavery ruled supreme two thousand years ago. The vast majority of the peoples of other parts of the world also passed through this stage. Among the less developed peoples traces of slavery survive to this day; you will find the institution of slavery in Africa, for example, at the present time. Slaveowners and slaves were the first important class divisions. The former group not only owned all the means of production—the land and tools, however primitive they may have been in those times—but also owned people. This group was known as slaveowners, while those who laboured and supplied labour for others were known as slaves.

This form was followed in history by another—feudalism. In the great majority of countries slavery evolved into feudalism. The fundamental divisions of society were now the feudal landlords and the peasant serfs. The form of relations between people changed. The slaveowners had regarded the slaves as their property; the law had confirmed this view and regarded the slave as a chattel completely owned by the slaveowner. As far as the present serf was concerned, class oppression and dependence remained,

but it was not considered that the feudal landlord owned the peasants as chattels, but that he was only entitled to their labour and to compel them to perform certain services. In practice, as you know, feudalism, especially in Russia, where it survived longest of all and assumed the grossest forms, in no way differed from slavery.

Further, with the development of trade, the appearance of the world market and the development of money circulation, a new class arose within feudal society—the capitalist class. From the commodity, the exchange of commodities and the rise of the power of money, there arose the power of capital. During the eighteenth century—or rather, from the end of the eighteenth century and during the nineteenth century—revolutions took place all over the world. Feudalism was eliminated in all the countries of Western Europe. This took place latest of all in Russia. In 1861¹ a radical change took place in Russia as well, as a consequence of which one form of society was replaced by another—feudalism was replaced by capitalism, under which division into classes remained as well as various traces and relics of feudalism, but in which the division into classes fundamentally assumed a new form.

The owners of capital, the owners of the land, the owners of the mills and factories in all capitalist countries constituted and still constitute an insignificant minority of the population who have complete command of the labour of the whole people, and who therefore command, oppress and exploit the whole mass of labourers, the majority of whom are proletarians, wage-workers, that procure their livelihood in the process of production only by the sale of their labour power. With the transition to capitalism, the peasants, who were already impoverished and downtrodden in feudal times, were converted partly (the majority) into proletarians, and partly (the minority) into wealthy peasants, who themselves hired workers and who constituted a rural bourgeoisie.

This fundamental fact—the transition of society from primitive forms of slavery to feudalism and finally to capitalism—you must always bear in mind, for only by remembering this fundamental fact, only by inserting all political doctrines into this fundamental framework will you be able properly to appraise these doctrines and to understand what they refer to; for each of these great

¹ The year in which the serfs were liberated in Russia.—ED.

periods in the history of mankind—slaveowning, feudal and capitalist—embraces scores and hundreds of centuries and presents such a mass of political forms, such a variety of political doctrines, opinions and revolutions that we can understand this extreme diversity and immense variety—especially in connection with the political, philosophical and other doctrines of bourgeois scholars and politicians—only if we firmly hold to the guiding thread, this division of society into classes and this change in the forms of class rule, and from this standpoint examine all social questions—economic, political, spiritual, religious, etc.

If you examine the state from the standpoint of this fundamental division, you will find that before the division of society into classes, as I have already said, no state existed. But as the social division into classes arose and took firm root, as class society arose, the state also arose and took firm root. The history of mankind knows scores and hundreds of countries that have passed through, and are still passing through, slavery, feudalism and capitalism. In each of these countries, despite the immense historical changes that have taken place, despite all the political vicissitudes and all the revolutions associated with this development of mankind, in the transition from slavery through feudalism to capitalism and to the present world-wide struggle against capitalism, you will always discern the rise of the state. It has always been a certain apparatus which separated out from society and consisted of a group of people engaged solely, or almost solely, or mainly, in ruling. People are divided into ruled and into specialists in ruling, those who rise above society and are called rulers, representatives of the state.

This apparatus, this group of people who rule others, always takes command of a certain apparatus of coercion, of physical force, irrespective of whether this coercion of people is expressed in the primitive club, or—in the epoch of slavery—in more perfected types of weapons, or in the firearms which appeared in the Middle Ages, or, finally, in modern weapons, which, in the twentieth century, are marvels of technique and are entirely based on the latest achievements of modern technology.

The methods of coercion changed, but whenever there was a state there existed in every society a group of persons who ruled, who commanded, who dominated, and who, in order to maintain

their power, possessed an apparatus of physical coercion, an apparatus of violence, with those weapons which corresponded to the technical level of the given epoch. And by examining these general phenomena, by asking ourselves why no state existed when there were no classes, when there were no exploiters and exploited, and why it arose when classes arose—only in this way shall we find a definite answer to the question of the essence of the state and its significance.

The state is a machine for maintaining the rule of one class over another. When there were no classes in society, when, before the epoch of slavery, people laboured in primitive conditions of greater equality; in conditions when productivity of labour was still at its lowest, and when primitive man could barely procure the wherewithal for the crudest and most primitive existence, a special group of people, especially separated off to rule and dominate over the rest of society, had not yet arisen, and could not have arisen. Only when the first form of the division of society into classes appeared, only when slavery appeared, when a certain class of people, by concentrating on the crudest forms of agricultural labour, could produce a certain surplus, when this surplus was not absolutely essential for the most wretched existence of the slave and passed into the hands of the slaveowner, when in this way the existence of this class of slaveowners took firm root—then in order that it might take firm root, it was essential that a state should appear.

And this state did appear—the slaveowning state, an apparatus which gave the slaveowners power and enabled them to rule over the slaves. Both society and the state were then much smaller than they are now, they possessed an incomparably weaker apparatus of communication—the modern means of communication did not then exist. Mountains, rivers and seas were immeasurably greater obstacles than they are now, and the formation of the state was confined within far narrower geographical boundaries. A technically weak state apparatus served a state confined within relatively narrow boundaries and a narrow circle of action. Nevertheless, there did exist an apparatus which compelled the slaves to remain in slavery, which kept one part of society subjugated to, and oppressed by, another. It is impossible to compel the greater part of society to work systematically for the other part of society

without a permanent apparatus of coercion. So long as there were no classes, there was no apparatus like this. When classes appeared, everywhere and always as this division grew and took firmer hold, there also appeared a special institution—the state.

The forms of state were extremely varied. During the period of slavery we already find diverse forms of the state in the most advanced, cultured and most civilised countries, according to the standards of the time, for example, in ancient Greece and Rome, which rested entirely on slavery. At that time the difference was already arising between the monarchy and the republic, between the aristocracy and the democracy. A monarchy is the power of a single person, a republic is the absence of any non-elected power; an aristocracy is the power of a relatively small minority, a democracy is the power of the people (democracy in Greek literally means the power of the people). All these differences arose in the epoch of slavery. Despite these differences, the state in slave times was a slave state, irrespective of whether it was a monarchy or a republic, aristocratic or democratic.

In every course on the history of ancient times, when hearing a lecture on this subject you will hear about the struggle which was waged between the monarchical and republican states. But the fundamental fact is that the slaves were not regarded as human beings—they were not only not regarded as citizens, but not even as human beings. Roman law regarded them as chattels. The law on murder, not to mention the other laws for the protection of the person, did not extend to slaves. It defended only the slaveowners, who were alone recognised as citizens with full rights. But whether a monarchy was instituted or a republic, it was a monarchy of the slaveowners or a republic of the slaveowners. All rights under them were enjoyed by the slaveowners, while the slave was a chattel in the eyes of the law; and not only could any sort of violence be perpetrated against a slave, but even the murder of a slave was not considered a crime.

Slaveowning republics differed in their internal organisation: there were aristocratic republics and democratic republics. In an aristocratic republic a small number of privileged persons took part in the elections; in a democratic republic everybody took part in the elections—but again only the slaveowners, everybody except the slaves. This fundamental fact must be borne in mind,

because it throws more light than any other on the question of the state and clearly demonstrates the nature of the state.

The state is a machine for the oppression of one class by another, a machine for keeping in subjugation to one class other, subordinated classes. There are various forms of this machine. In the slaveowning state we had a monarchy, an aristocratic republic, or even a democratic republic. In fact, the forms of government varied extremely, but their essence was always the same: the slaves enjoyed no rights and constituted an oppressed class; they were not regarded as human beings. We find the same state of affairs in the feudal state.

The change in the form of exploitation transformed the slave state into the feudal state. This was of immense importance. In slave society the slave enjoys no rights whatever and is not regarded as a human being; in feudal society the peasant is tied to the soil. The chief feature of feudalism was that the peasants (and at that time the peasants constituted the majority; there was a very poorly developed urban population) were considered attached, or in fee, to the land—hence the term feudalism. The peasant might work a definite number of days for himself on the plot assigned to him by the landlord; on the other days the peasant serf worked for this lord. The essence of class society remained: society was based on class exploitation. Only the landlords could enjoy full rights; the peasants had no rights at all. In practice their condition differed very little from the condition of slaves in the slave state.

Nevertheless, a wider road was opened for their emancipation, for the emancipation of the peasants, since the peasant serf was not regarded as the direct property of the landlord. He could work part of his time on his own plot; could, so to speak, belong to himself to a certain extent; and with the wider opportunities for the development of exchange and trade relations the feudal system steadily disintegrated and the scope of emancipation of the peasantry steadily widened. Feudal society was always more complex than slave society. There was a greater element of the development of trade and industry, which, even in those days, led to capitalism. In the Middle Ages feudalism predominated. And here too the forms of state differed, here too we find both monarchies and republics, although much more weakly expressed.

But always the feudal landlord was regarded as the only ruler. The peasant serfs were absolutely excluded from all political rights.

Both under slavery and under the feudal system the small minority of people could not dominate over the vast majority without coercion. History is full of the constant attempts of the oppressed classes to rid themselves of oppression. The history of slavery contains records of wars of emancipation from slavery which lasted for decades. Incidentally, the name 'Spartacist'¹ now adopted by the German Communists—the only German party which is really fighting the yoke of capitalism—was adopted by them because Spartacus was one of the most prominent heroes of one of the greatest revolts of slaves which took place about two thousand years ago. For many years the apparently omnipotent Roman Empire, which rested entirely on slavery, experienced the shocks and blows of a vast uprising of slaves who armed and united to form a vast army under the leadership of Spartacus. In the end they were defeated, captured and tortured by the slave-owners.

Such civil wars mark the whole history of the existence of class society. I have just mentioned an example of the greatest of these civil wars in the epoch of slavery. The whole epoch of feudalism is likewise marked by constant uprisings of the peasants. For example, in Germany in the Middle Ages the struggle between the two classes—the landlords and the serfs—assumed wide dimensions and was transformed into a civil war of the peasants against the landlords. You are all familiar with similar examples of repeated uprisings of the peasants against the feudal landlords in Russia.

In order to maintain their rule and to preserve their power, the landlords had to have an apparatus by which they could subjugate a vast number of people and subordinate them to certain laws and regulations; and all these laws fundamentally amounted to one thing—the maintenance of the power of the landlords over the peasant serfs. And this was the feudal state, which, in Russia, for example, or in extremely backward Asiatic countries, where feudalism prevails to this day—it differed in form—was either republican or monarchical. When the state was a monarchy, the rule of one

¹ The Spartacists were the Left Wing of the German Social-Democratic Party, led by Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxembourg.—Ed.

person was recognised; when it was a republic, the participation in one degree or another of the elected representatives of landlord society was recognised—this was in feudal society. Feudal society represented a division of classes under which the vast majority—the peasant serfs—were completely subjected to an insignificant minority—the landlords, who owned the land.

The development of trade, the development of commodity exchange, led to the crystallisation of a new class—the capitalists. Capital arose at the close of the Middle Ages, when, after the discovery of America, world trade developed enormously, when the quantity of precious metals increased, when silver and gold became the means of exchange, when money circulation made it possible for individuals to hold tremendous wealth. Silver and gold were recognised as wealth all over the world. The economic power of the landlord class declined and the power of the new class—the representatives of capital—developed. The reconstruction in society was such that all citizens supposedly became equal, the old division into slaveowners and slaves disappeared, all were regarded as equal before the law irrespective of what capital they owned; whether they owned land as private property, or were starvelings who owned nothing but their labour power—they were all equal before the law. The law protects everybody equally; it protects the property of those who have it from attack by the masses who, possessing no property, possessing nothing but their labour power, grow steadily impoverished and ruined and become converted into proletarians. Such is capitalist society.

I cannot dwell on it in detail. You will return to this question when you come to discuss the programme of the Party—you will then hear a description of capitalist society. This society advanced against serfdom, against the old feudal system, under the slogan of liberty. But it was liberty for those who owned property. And when feudalism was shattered, which occurred at the end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth century—it occurred in Russia later than in other countries, in 1861—the feudal state was superseded by the capitalist state, which proclaims liberty for the whole people as its slogan, which declares that it expresses the will of the whole people and denies that it is a class state. And here there developed a struggle between the Socialists, who are fighting for the liberty of the whole people, and the capitalist state

—a struggle which has now led to the creation of the Soviet Socialist Republic and which embraces the whole world.

To understand the struggle that has been started against world capital, to understand the essence of the capitalist state, we must remember that when the capitalist state advanced against the feudal state, it entered the fight under the slogan of liberty. The abolition of feudalism meant liberty for the representatives of the capitalist state and served their purpose, inasmuch as feudalism was breaking down and the peasants had acquired the opportunity of owning as their full property the land which they had purchased for compensation or in part by quit rent—this did not concern the state: it protected property no matter how it arose, since it rested on private property. The peasants became private owners in all the modern civilised states. Even when the landlord surrendered part of his land to the peasant, the state protected private property, rewarding the landlord by compensation, sale for money. The state, as it were, declared that it would fully preserve private property, and it accorded it every support and protection. The state recognised the property rights of every merchant, industrialist and manufacturer. And this society, based on private property, on the power of capital, on the complete subjection of the propertyless workers and labouring masses of the peasantry, proclaimed that its rule was based on liberty. Combating feudalism it proclaimed freedom of property and was particularly proud of the fact that the state had supposedly ceased to be a class state.

Yet the state continued to be a machine which helped the capitalists to hold the poor peasants and the working class in subjection. But externally it was free. It proclaimed universal suffrage, and declared through its champions, preachers, scholars, and philosophers that it was not a class state. Even now, when the Soviet Socialist Republics have begun to fight it, they accuse us of violating liberty, of building a state based on coercion, on the suppression of certain people by others, whereas they represent a popular, democratic state. And now, when the world Socialist revolution has begun, and just when the revolution has succeeded in certain countries, when the fight against world capital has grown particularly acute, this question of the state has acquired the greatest importance and has become, one might say, the most

burning one, the focus of all political questions and of all political disputes of the present day.

Whatever party we take in Russia, or in any of the more civilised countries, we find that nearly all political disputes, disagreements and opinions now centre around the conception of the state. Is the state in a capitalist country, in a democratic republic—especially one like Switzerland or America—in the freest democratic republics, an expression of the popular will, the sum total of the general decision of the people, the expression of the national will, and so forth; or is the state a machine that enables the capitalists of the given country to maintain their power over the working class and the peasantry? That is the fundamental question around which all political disputes all over the world now centre.

What do they say about Bolshevism? The bourgeois press abuses the Bolsheviks. You will not find a single newspaper which does not repeat the current accusation that the Bolsheviks violate popular rule. If our Mensheviks and Socialist-Revolutionaries in their simplicity of heart (perhaps it is not simplicity, or perhaps it is the simplicity which they say is worse than robbery) think that they discovered and invented the accusation that the Bolsheviks have violated liberty and popular rule, they are ludicrously mistaken. To-day, not a single one of the rich newspapers in the wealthy countries, which spend tens of millions on their distribution and disseminate bourgeois lies and the imperialist policy in tens of millions of copies—there is not one of these newspapers which does not repeat these fundamental arguments and accusations against Bolshevism, namely, that America, England and Switzerland are advanced states based on popular rule, whereas the Bolshevik Republic is a state of bandits in which liberty is unknown, and that the Bolsheviks have violated the idea of popular rule and have even gone so far as to disperse the Constituent Assembly.

These terrible accusations against the Bolsheviks are repeated all over the world. These accusations bring us fully up against the question—what is the state? In order to understand these accusations, in order to examine them and have a fully intelligent attitude towards them, and not to examine them on hearsay but with a firm opinion of our own, we must have a clear idea of what the state is. Here we have capitalist states of every kind and the theories in

defence of them which were created before the war. In order to proceed to answer the question properly we must critically examine all these doctrines and views.

I have already advised you to turn for help to Engels' book, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*. This book says that every state in which private property in land and in the means of production exists, in which capital prevails, however democratic it may be, is a capitalist state, a machine used by the capitalists to keep the working class and the poor peasants in subjection; while universal suffrage, a Constituent Assembly, parliament are merely a form, a sort of promissory note, which does not alter matters in any essential way.

The forms of domination of the state may vary: capital manifests its power in one way where one form exists, and in another way where another form exists—but essentially the power is in the hands of capital, whether there are voting qualifications or not, or whether the republic is a democratic one or not—in fact, the more democratic it is the cruder and more cynical is the rule of capitalism. One of the most democratic republics in the world is the United States of America, yet nowhere (and those who were there after 1905 probably know it) is the power of capital, the power of a handful of billionaires over the whole of society, so crude and so openly corrupt as in America. Once capital exists, it dominates the whole of society, and no democratic republic, no form of franchise can alter the essence of the matter.

The democratic republic and universal suffrage were a great progressive advance on feudalism: they have enabled the proletariat to achieve its present unity and solidarity, to form those firm and disciplined ranks which are waging a systematic struggle against capital. There was nothing even approximately resembling this among the peasant serfs, not to speak of the slaves. The slaves, as we know, revolted, rioted, started civil wars, but they could never create a class-conscious majority and parties to lead the struggle, they could not clearly realise what they were aiming for, and even in the most revolutionary moments of history they were always pawns in the hands of the ruling classes. The bourgeois republic, parliament, universal suffrage all represent great progress from the standpoint of the world development of society. Mankind moved towards capitalism, and it was capitalism alone which,

thanks to urban culture, enabled the oppressed class of proletarians to learn to know itself and to create the world working-class movement, the millions of workers who are organised all over the world in parties—the Socialist parties which are consciously leading the struggle of the masses. Without parliamentarism, without elections, this development of the working class would have been impossible. That is why all these things have acquired such great importance in the eyes of the broad masses of people. That is why a radical change seems to be so difficult.

It is not only the conscious hypocrites, scientists and priests that uphold and defend the bourgeois lie that the state is free and that it is its duty to defend the interests of all, but also a large number of people who sincerely adhere to the old prejudices and who cannot understand the transition from the old capitalist society to Socialism. It is not only people who are directly dependent on the bourgeoisie, not only those who are oppressed by the yoke of capital or who have been bribed by capital (there are a large number of all sorts of scientists, artists, priests, etc., in the service of capital), but even people who are simply under the sway of the prejudice of bourgeois liberty that have taken up arms against Bolshevism all over the world because of the fact that when it was founded the Soviet Republic rejected these bourgeois lies and openly declared: you say that your state is free, whereas in reality, as long as there is private property, your state, even if it is a democratic republic, is nothing but a machine used by the capitalists to suppress the workers, and the freer the state, the more clearly is this expressed.

Examples of this are Switzerland in Europe and the United States in the Americas. Nowhere does capital rule so cynically and ruthlessly, and nowhere is this so apparent, as in these countries, although they are democratic republics, no matter how finely they are painted and notwithstanding all the talk about labour democracy and the equality of all citizens. The fact is that in Switzerland and America capital dominates, and every attempt of the workers to achieve the slightest real improvement in their condition is immediately met by civil war. There are fewer soldiers, a smaller standing army in these countries—Switzerland has a militia and every Swiss has a gun at home, while in America there was no standing army until quite recently—and so when there is a strike

the bourgeoisie arms, hires soldiery and suppresses the strike; and nowhere is this suppression of the working-class movement accompanied by such ruthless severity as in Switzerland and in America, and nowhere does the influence of capital in parliament manifest itself as powerfully as in these countries. The power of capital is everything, the stock exchange is everything, while parliament and elections are marionettes, puppets. . . . But the eyes of the workers are being opened more and more, and the idea of Soviet government is spreading wider and wider, especially after the bloody carnage through which we have just passed. The necessity for a merciless war on the capitalists is becoming clearer and clearer to the working class.

Whatever forms a republic may assume, even the most democratic republic, if it is a bourgeois republic, if it retains private property in land, mills and factories, and if private capital keeps the whole of society in wage slavery, that is, if it does not carry out what is proclaimed in the programme of our Party and in the Soviet Constitution, then this state is a machine for the suppression of certain people by others. And we shall place this machine in the hands of the class that is to overthrow the power of capital. We shall reject all the old prejudices about the state meaning universal equality. That is a fraud: as long as there is exploitation there cannot be equality. The landlord cannot be the equal of the worker, the hungry man the equal of the full man. The proletariat casts aside the machine which was called the state and before which people bowed in superstitious awe, believing the old tales that it means popular rule—the proletariat casts aside this machine and declares that it is a bourgeois lie. We have deprived the capitalists of this machine and have taken it over. With this machine, or bludgeon, we shall destroy all exploitation. And when the possibility of exploitation no longer exists anywhere in the world, when there are no longer owners of land and owners of factories, and when there is no longer a situation in which some gorge while others starve—only when the possibility of this no longer exists shall we consign this machine to the scrap-heap. Then there will be no state and no exploitation. Such is the view of our Communist Party. I hope that we shall return to this subject in subsequent lectures, and return to it again and again.

July 11, 1919.

CLASS SOCIETY AND THE STATE

1. THE STATE AS THE PRODUCT OF THE IRRECONCILABILITY OF CLASS ANTAGONISMS

WHAT is now happening to Marx's doctrine has, in the course of history, often happened to the doctrines of other revolutionary thinkers and leaders of oppressed classes struggling for emancipation. During the lifetime of great revolutionaries, the oppressing classes relentlessly persecute them, and treat their teachings with malicious hostility, the most furious hatred and the most unscrupulous campaign of lies and slanders. After their death, attempts are made to convert them into harmless icons, to canonise them, so to speak, and to surround their *names* with a certain halo for the 'consolation' of the oppressed classes and with the object of duping them, while at the same time emasculating the revolutionary doctrine of its content, vulgarising it and blunting its revolutionary edge. At the present time, the bourgeoisie and the opportunists in the labour movement concur in this 'revision' of Marxism. They omit, obliterate and distort the revolutionary side of its doctrine, its revolutionary soul. They push to the foreground and extol what is or seems acceptable to the bourgeoisie. All the social-chauvinists are now 'Marxists' (don't laugh!). And more and more frequently, German bourgeois professors, erstwhile specialists in the extermination of Marxism, are speaking of the 'national-German' Marx, who, they aver, trained the labour unions which are so splendidly organised for the purpose of conducting a predatory war!

In such circumstances, in view of the incredibly widespread nature of the distortions of Marxism, our first task is to *restore* the true doctrine of Marx on the state. For this purpose it will be necessary to quote at length from the works of Marx and Engels. Of course, long quotations will make the text cumbersome and will not help to make it popular reading, but we cannot possibly avoid them. All, or at any rate all the most essential, passages in the works of Marx and Engels on the subject of the state must

necessarily be given as fully as possible, in order that the reader may form an independent opinion on the totality of views of the founders of scientific socialism and on the development of those views, and in order that their distortion by the now prevailing 'Kautskyism' may be documentarily proved and clearly demonstrated.

Let us begin with the most popular of Engels' works, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, the sixth edition of which was published in Stuttgart as far back as 1894. We must translate the quotations from the German originals, as the Russian translations, although very numerous, are for the most part either incomplete or very unsatisfactory.

Summing up his historical analysis, Engels says:

'The state is therefore by no means a power imposed on society from the outside; just as little is it "the reality of the moral idea", "the image and reality of reason", as Hegel asserts. Rather, it is a product of society at a certain stage of development; it is the admission that this society has become entangled in an insoluble contradiction with itself, that it is cleft into irreconcilable antagonisms, which it is powerless to dispel. But in order that these antagonisms, classes with conflicting economic interests, might not consume themselves and society in sterile struggle, a power apparently standing above society became necessary for the purpose of moderating the conflict and keeping it within the bounds of "order"; and this power, arising out of society, but placing itself above it, and increasingly alienating itself from it, is the state.'¹

This fully expresses the basic idea of Marxism on the question of the historical rôle and meaning of the state. The state is the product and the manifestation of the *irreconcilability* of class antagonisms. The state arises when, where and to the extent that class antagonisms *cannot* be objectively reconciled. And, conversely, the existence of the state proves that the class antagonisms are irreconcilable.

It is precisely on this most important and fundamental point that distortions of Marxism, proceeding along two main lines, begin.

¹ Frederick Engels, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, Chap. IX.—Ed.

On the one hand, the bourgeois ideologists, and particularly the petty-bourgeois ideologists, compelled by the pressure of indisputable historical facts to admit that the state only exists where there are class antagonisms and the class struggle, 'correct' Marx in a way that makes it appear that the state is an organ for the *conciliation* of classes. According to Marx, the state could neither arise nor continue to exist if it were possible to conciliate classes. According to the petty-bourgeois and philistine professors and publicists—frequently on the strength of well-meaning references to Marx!—the state conciliates classes. According to Marx, the state is an organ of class *rule*, an organ for the *oppression* of one class by another; it creates 'order', which legalises and perpetuates this oppression by moderating the collisions between the classes. In the opinion of the petty-bourgeois politicians, order means the conciliation of classes, and not the oppression of one class by another; to moderate collisions means conciliating and not depriving the oppressed classes of definite means and methods of fighting to overthrow the oppressors.

For instance, when, in the Revolution of 1917, the question of the real meaning and rôle of the state arose in all its magnitude as a practical question demanding immediate action on a wide mass scale, all the Socialist-Revolutionaries and Mensheviks immediately and completely sank to the petty-bourgeois theory that the 'state' 'conciliates' classes. Innumerable resolutions and articles by politicians of both these parties are thoroughly saturated with this purely petty-bourgeois and philistine 'conciliation' theory. Petty-bourgeois democracy is never able to understand that the state is the organ of the rule of a definite class which *cannot* be reconciled with its antipode (the class opposite to it). Their attitude towards the state is one of the most striking proofs that our Socialist-Revolutionaries and Mensheviks are not socialists at all (which we Bolsheviks have always maintained), but petty-bourgeois democrats with near-Socialist phraseology.

On the other hand, the 'Kautskyan' distortion of Marxism is far more subtle. 'Theoretically', it is not denied that the state is the organ of class rule, or that class antagonisms are irreconcilable. But what is lost sight of or glossed over is this: if the state is the product of irreconcilable class antagonisms, if it is a power standing *above society* and 'increasingly alienating itself from it',

it is clear that the liberation of the oppressed class is impossible, not only without a violent revolution, *but also without the destruction* of the apparatus of state power which was created by the ruling class and which is the embodiment of this 'alienation'. As we shall see later, Marx very definitely drew this theoretically self-evident conclusion from a concrete historical analysis of the tasks of the revolution. And—as we shall show fully in our subsequent remarks—it is precisely this conclusion which Kautsky has 'forgotten' and distorted.

2. SPECIAL BODIES OF ARMED MEN, PRISONS, ETC.

Engels continues:

'As against the ancient *gentile* organisation, the primary distinguishing feature of the state is the division of the subjects of the state *according to territory*.'

Such a division seems 'natural' to us, but it cost a prolonged struggle against the old form of tribal or gentile society.

'... The second is the establishment of a *public power*, which is no longer directly identical with the population organising itself as an armed power. This special public power is necessary, because a self-acting armed organisation of the population has become impossible since the cleavage into classes. . . . This public power exists in every state; it consists not merely of armed men, but of material appendages, prisons and coercive institutions of all kinds, of which gentile society knew nothing. . . .'¹

Engels further elucidates the concept of the 'power' which is termed the state—a power which arises from society, but which places itself above it and becomes more and more alienated from it. What does this power mainly consist of? It consists of special bodies of armed men which have prisons, etc., at their disposal.

We are justified in speaking of special bodies of armed men, because the public power which is an attribute of every state is not 'directly identical' with the armed population, with its 'self-acting armed organisation'.

¹ *Ibid.*—Ed.

Like all the great revolutionary thinkers, Engels tried to draw the attention of the class-conscious workers to the very fact which prevailing philistinism regards as least worthy of attention, as the most common and sanctified, not only by long standing, but one might say by petrified prejudices. A standing army and police are the chief instruments of state power. But can it be otherwise?

From the point of view of the vast majority of Europeans of the end of the nineteenth century whom Engels was addressing, and who have not lived through or closely observed a single great revolution, it cannot be otherwise. They completely fail to understand what a 'self-acting armed organisation of the population' is. To the question, whence arose the need for special bodies of armed men, standing above society and becoming alienated from it (police and standing army), the West European and Russian philistines are inclined to answer with a few phrases borrowed from Spencer or Mikhailovsky, by referring to the complexity of social life, the differentiation of functions, and so forth.

Such a reference seems 'scientific'; it effectively dulls the senses of the average man and obscures the most important and basic fact, namely, the cleavage of society into irreconcilably antagonistic classes. Had this cleavage not existed, the 'self-acting armed organisation of the population' might have differed from the primitive organisation of a tribe of monkeys grasping sticks, or of primitive man, or of men united in a tribal form of society, by its complexity, its high technique, and so forth; but it would still have been possible.

It is impossible now, because civilised society is divided into antagonistic and, indeed, irreconcilably antagonistic classes, the 'self-acting' arming of which would lead to an armed struggle between them. A state arises, a special force is created in the form of special bodies of armed men, and every revolution,¹ by destroying the state apparatus,² demonstrates to us how the ruling class strives to restore the special bodies of armed men which serve *it*, and how the oppressed class strives to create a new organisation of this kind, capable of serving not the exploiters but the exploited.

¹ The original manuscript read: 'great revolution.'—Ed.

² In the original manuscript there followed the words: 'reveals to us the naked class struggle.'—Ed.

In the above argument, Engels raises theoretically the very question which every great revolution raises practically, palpably and on a mass scale of action, namely, the question of the relation between special bodies of armed men and the 'self-acting armed organisation of the population'. We shall see how this is concretely illustrated by the experience of the European and Russian revolutions.

But let us return to Engels' exposition.

He points out that sometimes, in certain parts of North America, for example, this public power is weak (he has in mind a rare exception in capitalist society, and parts of North America in its pre-imperialist days where the free colonist predominated), but that in general it grows stronger:

'It [the public power] grows stronger, however, in proportion as the class antagonisms within the state become more acute, and with the growth in size and population of the adjacent states. We have only to look at our present-day Europe, where class struggle and rivalry in conquest have screwed up the public power to such a pitch that it threatens to devour the whole of society, and even the state itself.'¹

This was written no later than the beginning of the 'nineties of the last century, Engels' last preface being dated June 16, 1891. The turn towards imperialism—meaning by that the complete domination of the trusts, the omnipotence of the big banks, a colonial policy on a grand scale, and so forth—was only just beginning in France, and was even weaker in North America and in Germany. Since then 'rivalry in conquest' has made gigantic strides—especially as, by the beginning of the second decade of the twentieth century, the whole world had been finally divided up among these 'rivals in conquest', i.e. among the great predatory powers. Since then, military and naval armaments have grown to monstrous proportions, and the predatory war of 1914–17 for the domination of the world by England or Germany, for the division of the spoils, has brought the 'devouring' of all the forces of society by the rapacious state power to the verge of complete catastrophe.

¹ *Ibid.*—Ed.

As early as 1891 Engels was able to point to 'rivalry in conquest' as one of the most important distinguishing features of the foreign policy of the Great Powers, but in 1914–17, when this rivalry, many times intensified, has given birth to an imperialist war, the rascally social-chauvinists cover up their defence of the predatory interests of 'their' bourgeoisie by phrases about 'defence of the fatherland', 'defence of the republic and the revolution', etc.!

3. THE STATE AS AN INSTRUMENT FOR THE EXPLOITATION OF THE OPPRESSED CLASS

For the maintenance of a special public power standing above society taxes and state loans are needed.

'... Possessing the public power and the right to exact taxes, the officials now exist as organs of society standing *above* society. The free, voluntary respect which was accorded to the organs of the gentile organisation does not satisfy them, even if they could have it.'¹

Special laws are enacted proclaiming the sanctity and immunity of the officials. 'The shabbiest police servant' has more 'authority' than all the representatives of the tribe put together, but even the head of the military power of a civilised state may well envy a tribal chief the 'unfeigned and undisputed respect' the latter enjoys.

Here the question of the privileged position of the officials as organs of state power is stated. The main point indicated is: what puts them *above* society? We shall see how this theoretical problem was solved in practice by the Paris Commune in 1871 and how it was slurred over in a reactionary manner by Kautsky in 1912.

'As the state arose out of the need to hold class antagonisms in check, but as it, at the same time, arose in the midst of the conflict of these classes, it is, as a rule, the state of the most powerful, economically dominant class, which, through the

¹ *Ibid.*—Ed.

medium of the state, became also the dominant class politically, and thus acquired new means of holding down and exploiting the oppressed class. . . .¹

It was not only the ancient and feudal states that were organs for the exploitation of the slaves and serfs, but

‘. . . the contemporary representative state is an instrument of exploitation of wage labour by capital. By way of exception, however, periods occur when the warring classes are so nearly balanced that the state power, ostensibly appearing as a mediator, acquires, for the moment, a certain independence in relation to both. . . .’

Such, for instance, were the absolute monarchies of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the Bonapartism of the First and Second Empires in France, and the Bismarck regime in Germany. Such, we add, is the present Kerensky government in republican Russia since it began to persecute the revolutionary proletariat, at a moment when, thanks to the leadership of the petty-bourgeois democrats, the Soviets have *already* become impotent, while the bourgeoisie is *not yet* strong enough openly to disperse them.

In a democratic republic, Engels continues, ‘wealth wields its power indirectly, but all the more effectively’, first, by means of the ‘direct corruption of the officials’ (America); second, by means of ‘the alliance between the government and the Stock Exchange’ (France and America).

At the present time, imperialism and the domination of the banks have ‘developed’ both these methods of defending and asserting the omnipotence of wealth in democratic republics of all descriptions to an unusually fine art. For instance, in the very first months of the Russian democratic republic, one might say during the honeymoon of the union of the ‘Socialist’ S. R.’s and the Mensheviks with the bourgeoisie, Mr. Palchinsky, in the coalition government, obstructed every measure intended for the purpose of restraining the capitalists and their marauding practices, their plundering of the public treasury by means of war contracts. When Mr. Palchinsky resigned (and, of course, was replaced by an exactly similar Palchinsky), the capitalists ‘rewarded’ him with

¹ *Ibid.*—ED.

a ‘soft’ job and a salary of 120,000 roubles per annum. What would you call this—direct or indirect corruption? An alliance between the government and the syndicates, or ‘only’ friendly relations? What rôle do the Chernovs, Tseretellis, Avksentyevs and Skobelevs play? Are they the ‘direct’ or only the indirect allies of the millionaire treasury looters?

The omnipotence of ‘wealth’ is thus more *secure* in a democratic republic, since it does not depend¹ on the faulty political shell of capitalism. A democratic republic is the best possible political shell for capitalism, and, therefore, once capital has gained control of this very best shell (through the Palchinskys, Chernovs, Tseretellis and Co.), it establishes its power so securely, so firmly, that no change, either of persons, of institutions, or of parties in the bourgeois-democratic republic, can shake it.

We must also note that Engels very definitely calls universal suffrage an instrument of bourgeois rule. Universal suffrage, he says, obviously summing up the long experience of German Social-Democracy, is

‘. . . an index of the maturity of the working class. It cannot and never will be anything more in the modern state.’

The petty-bourgeois democrats, such as our Socialist-Revolutionaries and Mensheviks, and also their twin brothers, the social-chauvinists and opportunists of Western Europe, all expect ‘more’ from universal suffrage. They themselves share and instil into the minds of the people the wrong idea that universal suffrage ‘in the *modern* state’ is really capable of expressing the will of the majority of the toilers and of ensuring its realisation.

Here we can only note this wrong idea, only point out that Engels’ perfectly clear, precise and concrete statement is distorted at every step in the propaganda and agitation conducted by the ‘official’ (i.e. opportunist) Socialist Parties. A detailed elucidation of the utter falsity of this idea, which Engels brushes aside, is given in our further account of the views of Marx and Engels on the ‘*modern*’ state.

Engels gives a general summary of his views in the most popular of his works in the following words:

¹ The original manuscript read: ‘on the individual defects of the political mechanism.’—ED.

'The state, therefore, has not existed from all eternity. There have been societies which managed without it, which had no conception of the state and state power. At a certain stage of economic development, which was necessarily bound up with the cleavage of society into classes, the state became a necessity owing to this cleavage. We are now rapidly approaching a stage in the development of production at which the existence of these classes has not only ceased to be a necessity, but is becoming a positive hindrance to production. They will fall as inevitably as they arose at an earlier stage. Along with them, the state will inevitably fall. The society that organises production anew on the basis of the free and equal association of the producers will put the whole state machine where it will then belong; in the museum of antiquities side by side with the spinning wheel and the bronze axe.'¹

We do not often come across this passage in the propaganda and agitation literature of present-day Social-Democracy. But even when we do come across it, it is generally quoted in the same manner as one bows before an icon, i.e. it is done merely to show official respect for Engels, and no attempt is made to gauge the breadth and depth of the revolution that this relegating of 'the whole state machine . . . to the museum of antiquities' presupposes. In most cases we do not even find an understanding of what Engels calls the state machine.

4. THE 'WITHERING AWAY' OF THE STATE AND VIOLENT REVOLUTION

Engels' words regarding the 'withering away' of the state are so widely known, they are so often quoted, and they reveal the significance of the customary painting of Marxism to look like opportunism so clearly that we must deal with them in detail. We shall quote the whole passage from which they are taken.

'The proletariat seizes the state power and transforms the means of production in the first instance into state property. But in doing this, it puts an end to itself as the proletariat, it puts an end to all class differences and class antagonisms, it

¹ *Ibid.*—Ed.

puts an end also to the state as the state. Former society, moving in class antagonisms, had need of the state, that is, an organisation of the exploiting class, at each period for the maintenance of its external conditions of production; that is, therefore, for the forcible holding down of the exploited class in the conditions of oppression (slavery, villeinage or serfdom, wage-labour) determined by the existing mode of production. The state was the official representative of society 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.'¹

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

¹ Frederick Engels, *Herr Eugen Dühring's Revolution in Science* [*Anti-Dühring*], Part III, Chap. II ('Socialism: Theoretical').—Ed.

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 the 'abolition' of 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, vulgarised, 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 programme 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 opposed 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 rôle 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 rôle [other than that of a diabolical power] in history, a revolutionary rôle; 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, fossilised, 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, forsooth, demoralises the person who uses it. And this in spite of the immense moral and spiritual

impetus which has resulted from every victorious revolution! And this in Germany, where a violent collision—which, indeed, may be forced on the people—would at least have the advantage of wiping out the servility which has permeated the national consciousness as a result of the humiliation of the Thirty Years' War. And this parson's mode of thought—lifeless, insipid and impotent—claims to impose itself on the most revolutionary party which history has known!'¹

How can this panegyric on violent revolution, which Engels insistently brought to the attention of the German Social-Democrats between 1878 and 1894, i.e. right up to the time of his death, be combined with the theory of the 'withering away' of the state to form a single doctrine?

Usually the two views are combined by means of eclecticism, by an unprincipled, or sophistic, arbitrary selection (or a selection to please the powers that be) of one or another argument, and in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred (if not more often), it is the idea of the 'withering away' that is specially emphasised. Eclecticism is substituted for dialectics—this is the most usual, the most widespread phenomenon to be met with in present-day official Social-Democratic literature on Marxism. This sort of substitution is not new, of course, it is observed even in the history of classic Greek philosophy. In painting Marxism to look like opportunism, the substitution of eclecticism for dialectics is the best method of deceiving the masses; it gives an illusory satisfaction; it seems to take into account all sides of the process, all tendencies of development, all the conflicting influences, and so forth, whereas in reality it presents no consistent and revolutionary conception of the process of social development at all.

We have already said above, and shall show more fully later, that the doctrine of Marx and Engels concerning the inevitability of a violent revolution refers to the bourgeois state. The latter *cannot* be superseded by the proletarian state (the dictatorship of the proletariat) in the process of 'withering away'; as a general rule, this can happen only by means of a violent revolution. The panegyric Engels sang in its honour, and which fully corresponds to Marx's repeated declarations (recall the concluding passages of

¹ *Ibid.*, Part II, Chap. IV ('The Force Theory—Conclusion').—Ed.

The Poverty of Philosophy and *The Communist Manifesto*, with their proud and open declaration of the inevitability of a violent revolution; recall Marx's *Critique of the Gotha Programme* of 1875, in which, almost thirty years later, he mercilessly castigates the opportunist character of that programme)—this panegyric is by no means a mere 'impulse', a mere declamation or a polemical sally. The necessity of systematically imbuing the masses with *this* and precisely this view of violent revolution lies at the root of the *whole* of Marx's and Engels' doctrine. The betrayal of their doctrine by the now predominant social-chauvinist and Kautskyan trends is brought out in striking relief by the neglect of such propaganda and agitation by both these trends.

The substitution of the proletarian state for the bourgeois state is impossible without a violent revolution. The abolition of the proletarian state, i.e. of the state in general, is impossible except through the process of 'withering away'.

J. STALIN

THE WITHERING AWAY OF THE STATE

It is sometimes asked: 'We have abolished the exploiting classes; there are no longer any hostile classes in the country; there is nobody to suppress; hence there is no more need for the state; it must die away. Why, then, do we not help our socialist state to die away? Why do we not strive to put an end to it? Is it not time to throw out all this rubbish of a state?'

Or further: 'The exploiting classes have already been abolished in our country; socialism has been built in the main; we are advancing towards communism. Now, the Marxist doctrine of the state says that there is to be no state under communism. Why, then, do we not help our socialist state to die away? Is it not time we relegated the state to the museum of antiquities?'

These questions show that those who ask them have conscientiously memorised certain propositions contained in the doctrine of Marx and Engels about the state. But they also show that these comrades have failed to understand the essential meaning of this doctrine; that they have failed to realise in what historical conditions the various propositions of this doctrine were elaborated; and, what is more, that they do not understand present-day international conditions, have overlooked the capitalist encirclement and the dangers it entails for the socialist country. These questions not only betray an underestimation of the capitalist encirclement, but also an underestimation of the rôle and significance of the bourgeois states and their organs, which send spies, assassins and wreckers into our country and are waiting for a favourable opportunity to attack it by armed force. They likewise betray an underestimation of the rôle and significance of our socialist state and of its military, punitive and intelligence organs, which are essential for the defence of the socialist land from foreign attack. It must be confessed that the comrades mentioned are not the only ones to sin in this underestimation. All the Bolsheviks, all of us without exception, sin to a certain extent in this respect.

Is it not surprising that we learnt about the espionage and conspiratorial activities of the Trotskyite and Bukharinite leaders only quite recently, in 1937 and 1938, although, as the evidence shows, these gentry were in the service of foreign espionage organisations and carried on conspiratorial activities from the very first days of the October Revolution? How could we have failed to notice so grave a matter? How are we to explain this blunder? The usual answer to this question is that we could not possibly have assumed that these people could have fallen so low. But that is no explanation, still less is it a justification; for the blunder was a blunder. How is this blunder to be explained? It is to be explained by an underestimation of the strength and consequence of the mechanism of the bourgeois states surrounding us and of their espionage organs, which endeavour to take advantage of people's weaknesses, their vanity, their slackness of will, to enmesh them in their espionage nets and use them to surround the organs of the Soviet state. It is to be explained by an underestimation of the rôle and significance of the mechanism of our socialist state and of its intelligence service, by an underestimation of this intelligence service, by the twaddle that an intelligence service in a Soviet state is an unimportant trifle, and that the Soviet intelligence service and the Soviet state itself will soon have to be relegated to the museum of antiquities.

What could have given rise to this underestimation?

It arose owing to the fact that certain of the general propositions in the Marxist doctrine of the state were incompletely worked out and inadequate. It received currency owing to our unpardonable heedless attitude to matters pertaining to the theory of the state, in spite of the fact that we have twenty years of practical experience in matters of state which provide rich material for theoretical generalisations, and in spite of the fact that, given the desire, we have every opportunity of successfully filling this gap in theory. We have forgotten Lenin's highly important injunction about the theoretical duties of Russian Marxists, that it is their mission to further develop the Marxist theory. This is what Lenin said in this connection:

'We do not regard Marxist theory as something completed and inviolable; on the contrary, we are convinced that it has

only laid the corner-stone of the science which socialists *must* further advance in all directions if they wish to keep pace with life. We think that an *independent* elaboration of the Marxist theory is especially essential for Russian socialists, for this theory provides only general *guiding* principles, which, *in particular*, are applied in England differently from France, in France differently from Germany, and in Germany differently from Russia.' (Lenin, *Collected Works*, Russian Edition, Vol. II, p. 492.)

Consider, for example, the classical formulation of the theory of the development of the socialist state given by Engels:

'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*.' (Herr Eugen Dühring's *Revolution in Science* [*Anti-Dühring*], English Edition, p. 315.)

Is this proposition of Engels' correct?

Yes, it is correct, but only on one of two conditions: (1) *if* we study the socialist state only from the angle of the internal development of the country, abstracting ourselves in advance from the international factor, isolating, for the convenience of investigation, the country and the state from the international situation; or (2) *if* we assume that socialism is already victorious in all countries, or in the majority of countries, that a socialist encirclement exists instead of a capitalist encirclement, that there is no more danger of foreign attack, and that there is no more need to strengthen the army and the state.

Well, but what if socialism has been victorious only in one country, and if, in view of this, it is quite impossible to abstract oneself from international conditions—what then? Engels' formula does not furnish an answer to this question. As a matter of fact, Engels did not set himself this question, and therefore could not have given an answer to it. Engels proceeds from the assumption that socialism has already been victorious in all countries, or in a majority of countries, more or less simultaneously. Consequently, Engels is not here investigating any specific socialist state of any particular country, but the development of the socialist state in general, on the assumption that socialism has been victorious in a majority of countries—according to the formula: 'Assuming that socialism is victorious in a majority of countries, what changes must the proletarian, socialist state undergo?' Only this general and abstract character of the problem can explain why in his investigation of the question of the socialist state Engels completely abstracted himself from such a factor as international conditions, the international situation.

But it follows from this that Engels' general formula about the destiny of the socialist state in general cannot be extended to the partial and specific case of the victory of socialism in one country only, a country which is surrounded by a capitalist world, is subject to the menace of foreign military attack, cannot therefore abstract itself from the international situation, and must have at its disposal a well-trained army, well organised punitive organs, and a strong intelligence service—consequently, must have its own state, strong enough to defend the conquests of socialism from foreign attack.

We have no right to expect of the classical Marxist writers, separated as they were from our day by a period of forty-five or fifty-five years, that they should have foreseen each and every zigzag of history in the distant future in every separate country. It would be ridiculous to expect that the classical Marxist writers should have elaborated for our benefit ready-made solutions for each and every theoretical problem that might arise in any particular country fifty or one hundred years afterwards, so that we, the descendants of the classical Marxist writers, might calmly doze at the fireside and munch ready-made solutions. But we can and should expect of the Marxists-Leninists of our day that they

do not confine themselves to learning by rote a few general tenets of Marxism; that they delve deeply into the essence of Marxism; that they learn to take account of the experience gained in the twenty years of existence of the socialist state in our country; that, lastly, they learn, with the use of this experience and with knowledge of the essence of Marxism, to apply the various general theses of Marxism concretely, to lend them greater precision and improve them. Lenin wrote his famous book, *The State and Revolution*, in August 1917, that is, a few months before the October Revolution and the establishment of the Soviet state. Lenin considered it the main task of this book to defend Marx's and Engels' doctrine of the state from the distortions and vulgarisations of the opportunists. Lenin was preparing to write a second volume of *The State and Revolution*, in which he intended to sum up the principal lessons of the experience of the Russian revolutions of 1905 and 1917. There can be no doubt that Lenin intended in the second volume of his book to elaborate and develop the theory of the state on the basis of the experience gained during the existence of Soviet power in our country. Death, however, prevented him from carrying this task into execution. But what Lenin did not manage to do should be done by his disciples.

The state arose because society split up into antagonistic classes; it arose in order to keep in restraint the exploited majority in the interests of the exploiting minority. The instruments of state authority have been mainly concentrated in the army, the punitive organs, the espionage service, the prisons. Two basic functions characterise the activity of the state: at home (the main function), to keep in restraint the exploited majority; abroad (not the main function), to extend the territory of its class, the ruling class, at the expense of the territory of other states, or to defend the territory of its own state from attack by other states. Such was the case in slave society and under feudalism. Such is the case under capitalism.

In order to overthrow capitalism it was not only necessary to remove the bourgeoisie from power, it was not only necessary to expropriate the capitalists, but also to smash entirely the bourgeois state machine and its old army, its bureaucratic officialdom and its police force, and to substitute for it a new, proletarian form of state, a new, socialist state. And that, as we know, is exactly

what the Bolsheviks did. But it does not follow that the new proletarian state may not preserve certain functions of the old state, changed to suit the requirements of the proletarian state. Still less does it follow that the forms of our socialist state must remain unchanged, that all the original functions of our state must be fully preserved in future. As a matter of fact, the forms of our state are changing and will continue to change in line with the development of our country and with the changes in the international situation.

Lenin was absolutely right when he said :

‘The forms of bourgeois states are extremely varied, but in essence they are all the same : in one way or another, in the final analysis, all these states are inevitably the *dictatorship of the bourgeoisie*. The transition from capitalism to communism will certainly create a great variety and abundance of political forms, but in essence there will inevitably be only one : the *dictatorship of the prolétariat*.’ (Lenin, *The State and Revolution*.)

Since the October Revolution, our socialist state has passed through two main phases in its development.

The first phase was the period from the October Revolution to the elimination of the exploiting classes. The principal task in that period was to suppress the resistance of the overthrown classes, to organise the defence of the country against the attack of the interventionists, to restore industry and agriculture, and to prepare the conditions for the elimination of the capitalist elements. Accordingly, in this period our state performed two main functions. The first function was to suppress the overthrown classes inside the country. In this respect our state bore a superficial resemblance to previous states whose functions had also been to suppress recalcitrants, with the fundamental difference, however, that our state suppressed the exploiting minority in the interests of the labouring majority, while previous states had suppressed the exploited majority in the interests of the exploiting minority. The second function was to defend the country from foreign attack. In this respect it likewise bore a superficial resemblance to previous states, which also undertook the armed defence of their countries, with the fundamental difference, however, that our

state defended from foreign attack the gains of the labouring majority, while previous states in such cases defended the wealth and privileges of the exploiting minority. Our state had yet a third function : this was the work of economic organisation and cultural education performed by our state bodies with the purpose of developing the infant shoots of the new, socialist economic system and re-educating the people in the spirit of socialism. But this new function did not attain to any considerable development in that period.

The second phase was the period from the elimination of the capitalist elements in town and country to the complete victory of the socialist economic system and the adoption of the new Constitution. The principal task in this period was to establish the socialist economic system all over the country and to eliminate the last remnants of the capitalist elements, to bring about a cultural revolution, and to form a thoroughly modern army for the defence of the country. And the functions of our socialist state changed accordingly. The function of military suppression inside the country ceased, died away ; for exploitation had been abolished, there were no more exploiters left, and so there was no one to suppress. In place of this function of suppression, the state acquired the function of protecting socialist property from thieves and pilferers of the people's property. The function of defending the country from foreign attack fully remained ; consequently, the Red Army and the Navy also fully remained, as did the punitive organs and the intelligence service, which are indispensable for the detection and punishment of the spies, assassins and wreckers sent into our country by foreign espionage services. The function of economic organisation and cultural education by the state organs also remained, and was developed to the full. Now the main task of our state inside the country is the work of peaceful economic organisation and cultural education. As for our army, punitive organs, and intelligence service, their edge is no longer turned to the inside of the country but to the outside, against external enemies.

As you see, we now have an entirely new, socialist state, without precedent in history and differing considerably in form and functions from the socialist state of the first phase.

But development cannot stop there. We are going ahead, towards communism. Will our state remain in the period of communism also?

Yes, it will, unless the capitalist encirclement is liquidated, and unless the danger of foreign military attack has disappeared. Naturally, of course, the forms of our state will again change in conformity with the change in the situation at home and abroad.

No, it will not remain and will atrophy if the capitalist encirclement is liquidated and a socialist encirclement takes its place.

That is how the question stands with regard to the socialist state.

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