

## **CHAPTER ONE**

*THE STATE AND REVOLUTION ACCORDING TO LENIN*

Researched during World War One and written just prior to the Russian Revolution, Lenin's *State and Revolution* was a product of the open split within the socialist movement between reformist and revolutionary trends. The reformist tendency, which dominated the vast majority of Social-Democratic parties, had advocated a policy of class collaboration during the war and sought to extend Social-Democratic influence only through peaceful, parliamentary means. This reformist policy was, in Lenin's view, an outright betrayal of Marxism and the working class movement. Instead of cooperating with their respective governments for the war effort, the workers in the belligerent countries should strive to overthrow them, and replace the existing bourgeois-parliamentary state apparatus with a new form of working class state.

To give authority to his arguments, Lenin relied on the acknowledged authority of Marx and Engels. Citing some of the major works of Marxism relating to the question of the state, Lenin attempted to show that Marx and Engels had developed a consistent and revolutionary set of principles on this issue, and that "...evasiveness over the question..." by Kautsky and other theoreticians of the Second International had "...resulted in the **distortion** of Marxism and in its complete vulgarization..." (LCN Vol. 25, p.475). The primary task of revolutionary Marxists was therefore to "re-establish what Marx really taught on the subject of the state..." (ibid, p.386) and to thus set the working class movement back on its proper course.

Lenin's analysis in *State and Revolution* begins on the basis of quotations from Engels' *Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* and other works with the following major points.

Firstly, state power is not a neutral social force, an independent arbitrator between hostile social classes, but is an instrument for "...the oppression of one class by another..." (ibid, p.387). This is true historically of all forms of state power, including the modern democratic republics. The latter, while granting political equality between economically unequal classes and governing, at least formally, on the principle of impartiality, are nonetheless the political property of the economically dominant, i.e. capitalist, classes. The tendency to view the state as a neutral apparatus that can be used by any social class powerful enough to influence it is, Lenin writes, characteristic of "...petty bourgeois democrats using near-socialist phraseology..." (ibid, p.388). From the fact that the bourgeois state is designed specifically to perpetuate class oppression, it follows 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..." (ibid). Lenin calls this conclusion "obvious" and "theoretically self-evident," and credits Marx for having formulated it "...on the strength of a concrete historical analysis of the tasks of the revolution..." (ibid).

Secondly, the real basis of state power rests not with a congress, parliament, moral force or law, but with the direct or indirect control of **armed force**: "...A standing army and police are the chief instruments of state power. But how can it be otherwise?" (Ibid., p.389). The degree of armed force necessary to maintain the status quo is determined primarily by the degree of class antagonism. Citing Engels, Lenin demonstrates that the state "...grows stronger, however, in proportion as class antagonisms within the state become more acute..." (ibid, p.390). The armed force of the working class must therefore oppose the

armed force of state power. Marx and Engels' understanding of the necessity for armed struggle was so profound, according to Lenin, that Engels even sang "...a veritable panegyric on violent revolution..." (ibid, p.399) in *Anti-Duhring*, and "...imbuing the masses with **this** and precisely this view of violent revolution lies at the root of the entire theory of Marx and Engels..."(ibid p.400).

Thirdly, since armed force forms the real basis of state power and since loyalty of the army, police, courts, etc., is most often maintained by informal means (personal and business ties between high officials and the upper classes, appointments, bribery, and so on), it follows that the official parliamentary power is simply "...given up to talk for the special purpose of fooling the 'common people'..."(ibid p.423). A Congress or parliament thus has no real, i.e. armed power at its disposal, and is designed primarily to settle tactical disputes among the upper classes and to 'adjust' the class struggle by way of minor reforms. As for the electoral process under capitalism, Lenin writes that Engels was "...most explicit in calling universal suffrage an instrument of bourgeois rule..." and criticized the Social-Democratic reformists for propagating the view that "...universal suffrage 'in the present-day state' is really capable of revealing the will of the majority of the working people and of securing its realization..."(ibid, p.393-94). Thus while suffrage may be useful for propaganda purposes, it does not give the working class any real power to oppose the state. By urging the workers to struggle only through legal, parliamentary means, the reformists in fact disarm the workers, since although the workers may win control of congress through elections, the upper class will still control armed force.

After establishing these fundamental insights on the nature of state power in general, Lenin traces the development of Marx and Engels' views on the tasks of the working class revolution.

*The Poverty of Philosophy* and *The Communist Manifesto*, which Lenin describes as "...the first works of mature Marxism..."(ibid, p.401), make general theoretical observations on the state which were later supplemented by the experience of the 1848-51 European revolutions. *The Poverty Philosophy* speaks of the state being replaced by a new proletarian society in which there will be "...no more political power proper, since political power is precisely the official expression of class antagonism in bourgeois society..."(ibid, p.401). The *Manifesto* states that "...the first step in the revolution by the working class is to raise the proletariat to the position of ruling class, to win the battle of democracy (ibid, p.402). Lenin remarks that the *Manifesto's* definition of the future state as being "...the proletariat organized as the ruling class..." was ignored by the leading Social-Democratic parties since it is "...absolutely irreconcilable with reformism..."(ibid). The middle-class socialists, Lenin writes, dream of the "...peaceful submission of the minority to the majority..." as the road to power, and Marx, who "...developed his theory of the class struggle consistently, down to the theory of political power of the state..."(ibid) actively opposed this reformist trend.

The *Manifesto's* equating of winning state power with "winning the battle of democracy" implies, however, that the working class can simply use the existing state apparatus to win and consolidate its political rule. Lenin admits that the *Manifesto* "...leads straight to this conclusion..."(ibid, p.405), but advises his readers that this view was corrected after the experience of 1848-51 and the Paris Commune of 1871. Citing Marx's *Eighteenth Brumaire*, Lenin explains that after 1851 Marx saw that "...all revolutions perfected this machine..." i.e.

the bourgeois state, “...instead of smashing it...” (ibid, p.406). Lenin calls this phrase on behalf of “smashing” a “...tremendous step forward...” for Marxist theory and a necessary correction to the “extremely abstract” (ibid) views of the *Manifesto*. The need to smash the old state apparatus is, Lenin adds, “...the chief and fundamental point in the Marxist theory of the state...” (ibid) and it too was ignored or distorted by the dominant Social-Democratic parties.

It is important to note here that Lenin justifies the contradiction between the *Manifesto* (using the old apparatus) and the *Eighteenth Brumaire* (smashing it) on the grounds that Marx was only being true to historical materialism. Before 1848-51, according to Lenin’s reasoning, it was not possible for Marx to draw the theoretical conclusion that “smashing” was necessary. “It was not logical reasoning...”, Lenin writes, “...but the actual experience of 1848-51, that led to the matter being presented in this way...” (ibid, p.409). Marx “...held strictly to the solid ground of historical experience...” (ibid). So much so, in fact, that even though he concluded in 1852 that the state must be demolished, he did not venture to say what it should be replaced with until after the Paris Commune in 1871. Marx, Lenin writes, “...did not indulge in utopias; he expected the experience of the mass movement to provide the reply...” (ibid, p.417). The significance of Lenin’s reasoning here will become clear when we consider the development of Marx and Engels’ views in greater detail.

During and after the Paris Commune Marx and Engels formulated several additional points on the subject of the state, focusing in particular on the notion of smashing the old state apparatus and on what structure the working class should build to suit its own interests.

In his 1871 letter to Dr. Ludwig Kugelmann Marx wrote that smashing the “...bureaucratic-military machine...is the precondition for every real people’s revolution on the Continent. And this is what our heroic Party comrades in Paris are attempting...” (ibid, p.415). In analyzing this letter Lenin once again points out that “...this lesson...has been not only completely ignored, but positively distorted...” by Kautsky and others. As for Marx’s restricting “smashing” to continental Europe, Lenin states that such a conclusion was justified in 1871. Britain and the United States had no developed bureaucracy nor military at that time, Lenin argues, and a revolution “...indeed was possible without the precondition of destroying the ‘ready-made state machinery’...” (ibid, p.419). By 1917, however, both Britain and the United States had become bureaucratic-military monsters and so “...this restriction made by Marx is no longer valid...” (ibid). As for Marx’s observation that “smashing” was necessary “for every real people’s revolution”, Lenin calls this an “...extremely profound remark...” and defends it on the grounds that 1) the working class was not a majority of the people in any 1871 European country, and 2) a successful revolution would therefore have to embrace both the proletariat and peasantry, i.e. “the people.” Lenin adds that the working class and peasantry are united by their opposition to the state, and that smashing the state is necessary for “...a free alliance of the poor peasants and the proletarians...” (ibid, p.417). Lenin’s justification here is consistent with the one cited above, viz., that the “solid ground of historical experience” and conditions at the time are explanation enough for Marx’s ‘loose’ formulations.

The profound impact of the Commune on Marx and Engels’ thinking is also shown, according to Lenin, in their 1872 preface to the *Manifesto*. In that preface Marx and Engels

state that the *Manifesto's* program has "...in some details become out-of-date..." and that the Commune proved that "...the working class cannot simply lay hold of the ready-made state machinery and wield it for its own purposes..." (ibid, p.414). The preface does not restrict this conclusion "to the Continent" nor does it speak of "real people's revolution," but in referring to this preface in later chapters Lenin assumes that Marx and Engels had generalized "smashing" to all countries and refined it to working class, not "people's," revolutions. As we will see, "smashing" was indeed generalized but not in the form nor by the means that Lenin's analysis implies.

In answer to the question as to what is to replace the smashed state machine, Lenin quotes extensively from Marx's *Civil War in France* and depicts the Commune's measures for reorganizing the state as a "...gigantic replacement of certain institutions by other institutions of a fundamentally different..." i.e., proletarian, "...type..." (ibid, p.419). These measures were, in brief: 1) replacement of the standing army by an armed popular militia; 2) all state officials to be elected by universal suffrage and subject to recall; 3) salaries of public officials to be kept to the level of workmen's wages; and 4) the combination of executive and legislative functions.

Because these reform measures were adopted by a new government in which "...the majority of its members were naturally working men, or acknowledged representatives of the working class..." (ibid, p.419, Lenin quoting Marx), Lenin refers to the Commune as "...one of the greatest proletarian revolutions..." (ibid, p.396), as a "...proletarian, socialist republic..." (ibid, p.418), and faults it only for not having taken a more determined offensive against the bourgeoisie. With the Commune, "...history placed on the agenda..." (ibid, p.409) material for analyzing the specific forms of the future proletarian state, and Marx, who "...did not set out to discover the political forms of this future stage..." (ibid, p.432) prior to 1871, could at last formulate its basic features on the basis of solid historical experience.

In citing supplementary material written after 1871, Lenin raises a number of points to further reinforce his argument that Marx's and Engels' views on the state were integral and consistent in principle and had been obscured by the leaders of the Second International.

Lenin quotes Engels' 1875 letter to August Bebel to demonstrate the absurdity of the German Social-Democrats' propaganda phrase, "free people's state." Engels advised the German comrades to replace the word "state," inasmuch as it was used to refer to the future workers' state, with the word "Gemeinwesen," or community. This would indicate, Engels wrote, that the workers' state is no longer a state power proper, but only one in the process of withering away. Lenin calls this last remark "...the most theoretically important statement Engels makes..." and regrets the fact that "...unfortunately, Engels' letter was pigeonholed for thirty-six years..." (ibid, p.441). In fact, Lenin adds, although Bebel replied that he was in agreement with Engels, he continued to use the phrase "People's state" in his propaganda thereafter.

Further on the subject of inappropriate phrases, Engels wrote in 1894 that the title "Social-Democrat" was not accurate for a party whose economic programme "...is not merely socialist in general, but downright communist..." (ibid, p.454, Lenin quoting Engels). In his elaboration of Engels' statement, Lenin explains that "...the abolition of the state means also the abolition of democracy..." (ibid, p.455) since even democratic majority rule is a form of

social coercion and communists aim to replace all forms of social coercion by social consensus. It was on the basis of Engels' remarks that Lenin subsequently urged the left-wing socialists to forsake the title "Social-Democrat" and adopt "communist" instead.

The last two major works by Engels that Lenin cites are his 1891 criticism of the German Social-Democrats' *Erfurt Programme* and his 1891 preface to Marx's *Civil war in France*.

In criticizing the German's *Erfurt Programme*, Engels made several attacks on the Social Democrats for omitting the demand for a democratic republic. Lenin observes that since the *Erfurt Programme* was a model for the other Social-Democratic parties, Engels' remarks should be taken as a criticism of the "...opportunism of the whole Second International..." (ibid, p.443).

Engels agreed that due to the reactionary nature of the German government "...it was impossible legally to include in the programme the demand for a republic..." (ibid, p.444), but cautioned that somehow the issue had to be raised. The Right opportunists were gaining ground in the Social-Democratic press, Engels wrote, and were propagating the view that "...the present legal order in Germany [is] adequate for putting through all Party demands by peaceful means..." (ibid). Engels declared that "...precisely because there was no republic and no freedom in Germany, the dreams of a 'peaceful' path were perfectly absurd..." (ibid).

Lenin adds that Engels was careful "...not to tie his hands..." theoretically and allowed for a peaceful path to power "...in republican or very free countries..." (ibid). In downplaying Engels' statement that "one can conceive" of such a peaceful path, Lenin attaches a parenthetical exclamation "(only 'conceive!)", as if to show that Engels himself did not really believe in the possibility of a peaceful, parliamentary assumption of power.

In support of the demand for a democratic republic, Engels wrote that to advocate a peaceful path in absolutist Germany, "...where the government is almost omnipotent and the Reichstag and all other representative bodies have no real power..." (ibid), was in fact to defend absolutism and mislead the working class. Engels further explained that "...if one thing is certain it is that our party and the working class can only come to power in the form of the democratic republic..." (ibid, p.445). Lenin calls this last remark a "...fundamental idea which runs through all of Marx's works..." (ibid). The democratic republic, Lenin explains, is necessary because it allows for a more extensive unfolding of the class struggle than autocratic forms of government.

And finally, Lenin quotes Engels' 1891 preface to *The Civil War In France*, calling it "...the last word of Marxism..." (ibid, p449) on the question of the state.

In the preface Engels summed up the experience of the Paris Commune and reaffirmed the revolutionary nature of the measures it adopted. Engels indirectly chastised the German Social Democrats who believed that they had "...taken quite an extraordinarily bold step forward..." in supporting the idea of a democratic republic. But, Engels stated, even the democratic republic is still an instrument of class oppression. The victorious proletariat "...will have to lop off as speedily as possible..." (ibid p. 453) the worst aspects of the democratic state to suit its own purposes. With this phrase, Engels definitely generalized "smashing" to all, even democratic, countries.

As for Engels' remark that the republic, too, is a state of class oppression, Lenin cautions that this fact should not be used as an excuse for indifference as to what form of government the bourgeoisie had. The democratic republic, he writes, is still preferable to an autocracy since it allows for "...a wider, freer and more open form of the class struggle..." (ibid, p.454). Of interest, too, is Lenin's remark in this passage that in 1891 Engels "...saw only the very feeble beginnings of opportunism in his party..." (ibid p.450). Although this comment is made in defense of Engels' "extreme caution" in dealing with the German Party's opportunism on the question of religion, it is clear that Lenin saw this as characteristic of Engels' attitude towards the Social-Democrats on other questions as well.

In the fifth chapter of *State and Revolution*, Lenin supplements the political analysis of the state with an elaboration on the economic characteristics of socialism and communism. Citing Marx's comments in the *Critique of the Gotha Program*, Lenin examines the role of economic inequalities during the socialist transition period and cites the factors that will eventually make inequalities and thus the state's social coercion unnecessary. Although Lenin initiates his analysis with citations from Marx, the most theoretically valuable passages on the nature of workers' state power are Lenin's own elaborations on systematic accounting and control, the elimination of bureaucracy through a comprehensive sharing of bureaucratic tasks, and the participation of all citizens in the business of state.

In the final section of his work, Lenin applies the basic principles he has abstracted from Marx and Engels to the writings of Georgi Plekhanov and Karl Kautsky, two theoreticians which in Lenin's view did the most to falsify the Marxist attitude towards the state.

Plekhanov's *Anarchism and Socialism*, Lenin writes, completely ignored Marx and Engels' teachings on the state, and so failed to raise the principal line of demarcation between the anarchists and the Marxists. Plekhanov's "...evading the question of the state, and disregarding the whole development of Marxism before and after the Commune, meant inevitably slipping into opportunism..." (ibid p.476). In fact, Lenin adds, Plekhanov's failure to even raise the issues of "smashing" and the nature of the future workers' state was "...in itself ...a victory for opportunism..." (ibid). What opportunism needs most of all "...is that the two questions just mentioned should not be raised at all..." (ibid). We will see later how these comments stand in relation to Lenin's own works prior to 1917.

The Kautskyite distortion of Marxism, according to Lenin, is characterized by eclecticism on the question of the state and an attempt to obscure Marx and Engels' most principled conclusions. Kautsky affirmed the class nature of the state and the irreconcilability of class antagonisms, but rejected "smashing" as a necessary condition for revolution. In his struggle against the open Right opportunists of the Social-Democratic movement, Kautsky "...betrayed very considerable vacillation..." (ibid p.477) and evaded the question of "smashing" by seeking "...refuge behind the 'indisputable' (and barren) philistine truth that concrete forms cannot be known in advance!!..." (ibid p.479). Further, Kautsky's 1909 *Social Revolution* "...speaks of the winning of state power—and no more..." (ibid). Lenin calls this "...a concession to the opportunists, inasmuch as it admits the possibility of seizing power without destroying the state machine..." (ibid) and criticizes Kautsky for reviving a thesis which Marx and Engels had declared obsolete in 1872.

In opposing the views of the left-wing Social-Democrats in 1912, Kautsky wrote that “...the aim of our political struggle remains, as in the past, the conquest of state power by winning a majority in parliament and by raising parliament to the rank of master of the government...” (ibid, p.489). On the contrary, Lenin replies, the task of the class-conscious working class is not to ‘shift the balance of forces’ by parliamentary means, but “...to overthrow the bourgeoisie, to destroy bourgeois parliamentarism...” and to fight for “...a democratic republic after the type of the Commune...”(ibid p.490).