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● J. MARTOV

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## FOREWORD TO THE ENGLISH EDITION

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 have visited relentless persecution on them and received their teachings with the most savage hostility, the most furious hatred, the most ruthless campaign of lies and slanders. After their death, attempts are made to turn them into harmless icons, canonize them, and 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 and vulgarizing the *real essence* of their revolutionary theories and blunting their revolutionary edge. At the present time, the bourgeoisie and the opportunists within the labor movement are cooperating in this work of adulterating Marxism. They omit, obliterate, and distort the revolutionary side of its teaching, 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"—joking aside! And more and more do German bourgeois professors, erstwhile specialists in the demolition of Marx, speak now of the "national-German" Marx, who, they aver, has educated the splendidly organized working class for the present predatory war. In such circumstances, the distortion of Marxism being so widespread, it is our first task to *resuscitate* the real teachings of Marx on the State. (*State and Revolution*, page 1.)

**W**ITH THESE splendid sentiments, Lenin began his study of the question of the relation of a socialist revolution to the State—"an urgent problem of the day, being concerned with the elucidation for the masses of what they will have to do for their liberation from the yoke of capitalism in the very near future."

After twenty years of the existence of the "dictatorship of the proletariat" that was previewed by Lenin in his *State and Revolution*, it can be said without fear of exaggeration that the feelings expressed by the great Russian statesman in his most important piece of political writing ring as pertinent today as in August 1917, on the eve of the Bolshevik seizure of power.

That does not mean that Lenin's "very near future" of 1917 is any less the wish-thinker's "very near future in 1938." The "masses"

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for whom Lenin presumed to "elucidate" the question of the State and revolution apparently did not do what they supposedly had to do to liberate themselves from the yoke of capitalism. It is quite obvious now that the great numbers of the population of capitalist society—the "masses" to whom, Lenin preached from the teacher's height—will learn to do what they have to do for their liberation only after a great deal of experience and further disillusionment, and in spite of the very efforts of some of the shrewdest and most talented teachers. After twenty years of the "dictatorship of the proletariat" that is extolled as the real thing by Lenin in his magnificently written *State and Revolution*, the "bourgeoisie and the opportunists" are still cooperating in the work of "adulterating Marxism," "Marxist" professors are still functioning at the task of preparing a "predatory war."

All that is necessary to bring Lenin's impassioned arraignment up-to-date in the last regard, is to strike out "German" and make reference to another national term.

Twenty years after the publication of Lenin's "elucidation" of the question of the relation of a proletarian socialist revolution to the State, the first task is more than ever "to resuscitate the real teachings of Marx on the State." But of almost equal importance today is the task of tearing away, the partly unintentional, partly willful web of confusion thrown over the problem by Lenin and his followers, the erstwhile resuscitators of the "real teachings" of Marx.

History, as it transpired after Lenin had finished his masterpiece on the State, had taught us in practice a lesson that was stressed again and again by Marx in his political writings:

"No social order ever disappears before all the productive forces for which there is room within it have been developed; and new higher relations of production never appear before the material conditions of their existence have matured, in the womb of the old society." (Preface to *Critique of Political Economy*.) Neither by "bold leaps" nor by "legal enactments" can socialism be installed where its prerequisite economic conditions do not exist. "Therefore, mankind always takes up only such problems as it can solve; since, looking at the matter more closely, we will always find that the problem itself arises only when the material conditions necessary for its solution already exist or are at least in the process of formation." The will and the wide socialist understanding essential for the effective abolition of capitalism can only arise under the conditions of developed capitalism. As a result, the "socialist" revolution occurring in the backward countries is always a movement in which the great mass is merely *in revolt* and only a self-styled "vanguard" minority is conscious of any socialist aim. This aim, the conscious minority hope to impose on the majority by means of a "benevolent" dictatorship. Forced by objective facts to abandon the idea of introducing socialism where the

conditions for it do not exist, and where, therefore, the great mass of the population does not want it, the new rulers, the "vanguard" minority who were put in power as a result of the revolution, accommodate themselves in time to the job of administering the social-economic arrangement permitted by the circumstances on hand: capitalism. "Finding power sweet, they develop the century-old technique of intrigue, deception, bribery, and arbitrary violence in order to keep themselves in power. Unable to give the reality of socialism, they learn a new propaganda, which consists, crudely put, of calling unregenerate capitalism by a new name—socialism." (*Socialist Standard*, November, 1934.)

According to Marx, the "first step in the revolution by the working class (the socialist revolution) is to raise the proletariat to the position of the ruling class, to win the battle of democracy." (*Communist Manifesto*.) That is because to be an act for socialism, this revolution can only be "the self-conscious, independent movement of the immense majority in the interest of the immense majority." (*Communist Manifesto*.) "After its victory, the sole organization which the proletariat finds already in existence is precisely the State. This State may require very considerable alterations before it can fulfill its new functions." (Engels: *Letter to van Patten*, April 18, 1883.) For "the working class cannot simply seize the available machinery of the State and set it in motion for its own ends." (Marx: *Civil War in France*, Chapter III.) "At the best the State is an evil inherited by the proletariat after its victorious struggle for class supremacy and whose worse features it will have to lop off at once, as the Commune did, until such time as a new generation, reared under new, free social conditions, will be in a position to rid itself of this State rubbish in its entirety." (Engels: 1891 preface to *Civil War in France*.) The first task of the victorious socialist revolution—the self-conscious movement of the immense majority in the interest of the immense majority—is not "merely to hand over, from one set of hands to another, the bureaucratic and military machine, as has occurred hitherto, but to shatter it; and it is this that is the preliminary condition of any real people's revolution on the Continent." (Marx: *Letter to Kugelmann*, April 12, 1871.)

In order to wield the power of the State in behalf of a socialist transformation of society, the victorious immense majority must immediately make certain fitting alterations in the State.

What alterations?

The bureaucratic and military features of the existing State must be immediately lopped off. The bureaucratic-military machinery of the State must be replaced with greater popular rule, with the extension of democracy. The State must be immediately democratized from top to bottom. As indicated by Marx and Engels, the socialist



revolution begins with this political change: the greatest possible extension of democracy. For no other way can socialism—the common ownership and democratic social control of the means of production and distribution—be made real.

This is true where a socialist revolution is made possible by existing material conditions. But the minority of “vanguard” revolutionizers put in power by the social eruption that has occurred in a backward country, face a different problem, and, objectively, a different aim. In view of the backwardness of the country whose destiny the “vanguard” politicians attempt to fashion, the very hopes and pretensions of the new rulers call not for the “lopping off” but, in the manner of all previous, pro-capitalist, revolutions for the strengthening, for the perfection, of the bureaucratic-military State machinery.

The world has never seen the like of the bureaucratic-military machine that was born of the national Russian revolution. Only now are the State machines fashioned by the Italian Fascists and the German Nazis beginning to rival the bureaucratic-military “perfection” that has been attained in post-revolutionary Russia.

Is Lenin's half naive, half cunning “pre-election” promise of 1917 very unlike the grim Soviet reality of today? It is nevertheless true that the “ideological”\* stuff by means of which the great Soviet hoax is perpetrated (as much at the cost of the international working class as at the expense of the Russian people) is tapped from Lenin's *State and Revolution*.

In his *State and Revolution*, on the eve of the Bolshevik conquest of power, Lenin manipulated craftily some vague formulae found in Marx's *Civil War in France*. “These formulae were sufficiently motivated by the immediate need of the General Council (of the First International) to defend the Commune of 1871 (directed by the Hébertists and the Proudhonists) against its enemies. But they did away almost completely with the margin existing between the thesis of the ‘conquest of political power’ presented by the Marxists and the idea of the ‘destruction of the State’ held by the Anarchists.

“On the eve of the revolution of October, 1917 . . . Lenin used these formulae with such good effect that he accumulated in his theses of *State and Revolution* as many contradictions as were found in the heads of all the members of the Commune: Jacobins, Blanquists, Hébertists, Proudhonians and Anarchists. Objectively this was necessary (unrealized without doubt by Lenin himself) so that an attempt to create a State machinery very similar in its structure to the former military and bureaucratic type and controlled by a few adherents

\* “Ideology” in this case means “rationalization”: the trick of “justifying or concealing the real cause or motive by a reason, accepted by consciousness, which is not in accord with the actual (unconscious) determining facts.”

might be presented to the mass of the population, which was then in a condition of revolutionary animation, as the destruction of the old State machinery, as the rise of a society based on a minimum of repression and discipline, as the birth of a Stateless society. At a moment when the revolutionary mass expressed its revolt against the centuried yoke of the old State by forming ‘autonomous republics of Kronstadt’ and trying Anarchist experiments as ‘direct workers’ control,’ etc.—at that moment the ‘dictatorship of the proletariat and the poorest peasants’ (said to be incarnated in the real dictatorship of the ‘true’ interpreters of the proletariat and poorest peasants: that is, the chosen of Bolshevik Communism) could only consolidate itself by first dressing itself in such Anarchist and anti-State ideology . . .

“Fundamentally, the Anarchist illusion of the destruction of the State covers up the tendency to concentrate all the State power of constraint in the hands of a minority, which believes, neither in the objective logic of the revolution nor in the class consciousness of the international proletarian majority and, with still less reason, that of the national majority.

“The idea that the ‘Soviet system’ is equal to a definitive break with all the former, bourgeois, forms of revolution, therefore serves as a screen behind which—*imposed* by exterior factors and the inner conformation of the proletariat—there are set afoot methods that have featured the bourgeois revolutions. And those revolutions have always been accomplished by transferring the power of a ‘conscious minority, supporting itself on an unconscious majority,’ to another minority finding itself in an identical situation.”

This is J. Martov speaking in 1919. With these words, he has uncovered for us the “catch” hiding behind the splendid sentiments that fill the pages of *State and Revolution*. He has disclosed for us the secret of Sovietism.

Who was Martov? A Russian Marxist whose personality and ideas are so awkwardly avoided in Trotsky's *History of the Russian Revolution*. Plekhanov, Martov and Lenin are the three important names of the Russian revolutionary movement.

Martov died a tubercular, poverty-stricken exile in 1923. To understand the man's peculiar position in Russian history, we must think of Lenin, the successful, practical statesman who “arrived” and is now reposing in embalmed effigy under the magnificent mausoleum on Red Square. We must think of the painted Pharaoh-god in whose name the Russian people labor to hold up a pyramidal structure which, with the aid of verses culled from the dead one's legacy, is described as socialism. We must think of the successfully dead Lenin, whose writings are edited, newly marcelled and reedited, in millions of volumes by hundreds of subsidized publishers all over the world; whose wise sayings and supposed wise sayings are the subject of rapt exegesis by



beviés of learned commentators,\* in whose writings all kinds of parties and partylets—from the powerful concern holding the Russian people in its grip to hundreds of splinter grouplets pothering about in the Bohemian nooks of Europe and America — find their ideological support and spiritual sustenance. Neither Stalin, the vicar of Lenin on earth, nor Fenner Brockway, speaking for the recently Leninized I.L.P. of Great Britain, fail to track down a text in the dead Lenin before enunciating their last message to the “masses.” Lenin, who has become the subject of theses written by doctoral candidates for the license to profess certified Marxism-Leninism! Lenin, now a mythological personage that grave professors in Moscow and elsewhere avow to be the Jesus to whom Marx was but an annunciatory John the Baptist!

Lenin’s “success” offers us a clue to Martov’s character and viewpoint. Martov was one of the founders and collaborators on the *Iskra*, the publication around which the Russian Social Democracy developed. In the break that took place at the Party congress of 1903, he represented the “minority” against the “majority” (Bolshevinstvo), which was led by Lenin. The split was motivated especially by the question of party organization. Martov upheld the Western idea of an inclusive, democratic party in contrast to Lenin’s thesis of a party of “professional revolutionists” controlled militarily by a “central” committee. It is interesting to observe that even in 1903 Martov recognized that a party on Lenin’s style really “belonged” to the Tsarist scene and, playing a dominant role, might seize power in a national revolution. However, Martov always asked: “Power for what?” Transcending Menshevism (which, in contrast to the more truly national-Russian Bolshevik section, dreamt of transplanting the ways and the program of Western reformism to the land of the Tsars), Martov looked for the rise of a real movement for socialism in the advanced countries of the West.

We can understand that a person in his situation had no reason to be very enthusiastic concerning the near future. Martov, a product of the Russian revolutionary movement, was unfortunate enough to be able to see beyond the Russian scene and “Laborism” in general. The event of the Russian Revolution showed again that the habit of probing behind appearances does not go to make a successful politician.

Martov, the clear thinking social scientist, was not a successful politician, dead or alive. He will not go down in history as one of Russia’s great statesmen, say like Ivan the Terrible, Peter the Great, Catherine the Great, Lenin the Great, Stalin the Great. In the midst

\* There is now apparent in radical literary circles a tendency to impute to Lenin all quotable wisdom that used to be credited to Lincoln, Barnum, Engels, Marx, Disraeli and even Pushkin.

of the upheaval of 1917, he located his evaluation of the Russian revolutionary problem in the framework of extended historic development. He saw what lay ahead and said so, thus placing himself in the position of a helpless Jeremiah.

He recognized the Russian Revolution to be a progressive, pro-capitalist, national revolution that cleared the way for the solution of the economic backwardness of the country. He recognized the Russian Revolution as a “bourgeois” revolution, directed in part by the proletariat and impregnated with the utopianism typical of the proletariat of a backward country. He emphasized that the dictatorship of the Bolshevik “professional revolutionists” was not to be confused with the “dictatorship” of the working class, which, according to him, was impossible in a country like Russia. He foresaw that the pretensions to a program of world revolution affected by the Bolsheviks during their “heroic” period served as a sort of camouflage to protect their rule, and would in time give way again to the program of Russian “national socialism,” the traditional and real program of Bolshevism.

We have here an explanation of the plight of his own little group of “Internationalists” who, in the first revolutionary Soviet Congresses, rejected both the Menshevik and Bolshevik positions. Martov stressed that the Bolshevik dictatorship of 1918-1919 was a revolutionary dictatorship which had ridden into power on the crest of the popular protest against adverse conditions and the continuation of the war. While he opposed in speech and writing the Bolsheviks’ strangling of democracy and suppression of civil rights, he indicated that the Bolshevik dictatorship was at its beginning, at least, joined ideologically and socially to the Russian and international labor movement. The man who predicted that Lenin would beget Stalin opposed in his time any attempt to overthrow the Bolshevik dictatorship by force. During the Civil War he called on the labor opponents of the Bolsheviks to join the Red Army, to fight against Denikin, Wrangel and the foreign interventionists.

By the end of 1920, the power of the makeshift parliamentary bodies (soviets) that arose in Russia at the beginning of the Revolution had been entirely replaced, as Martov foresaw, by the rule of the Communist Party. There was no longer any place in the country for a person like Martov. A very amusing instance of Lenin’s Bolshevik “realism” was his public order to the police not to trouble Martov, while, in accordance with private instructions, the Bolshevik Gestapo made Martov understand it would be decidedly more healthful for him to remove himself from the country. For Martov had made himself a nuisance by speaking out against the imposition of capital punishment (contrary to the first Soviet Constitution) on pro-labor non-Bolsheviks who were merely guilty of having different political opinions. And he had spoken out against the habit of the



Bolshevik bureaucratic-military machine of dealing with their political opponents without benefit of trial by jury. For the ideas later expressed in Lenin's famous note to Kursky\* began to be put in practice as soon as the Bolshevik machine had been securely installed in power, and Martov's prestige in the Russian revolutionary movement interfered with the new dictatorship.

But even during his years of exile, Martov (while he pointed out the historic meaning of the new Russian dictatorship that had replaced Tsarism) opposed with untiring propaganda the economic blockade of Russia and the campaign of reactionary vilification then carried on against the Bolshevik government in Western Europe.

What does Martov mean to us? Why have we taken the trouble

\* The note in question was written by Lenin on May 15, 1922. It was addressed to D. I. Kursky, who was Commissar of Justice at that time. It was written in reference to one of the articles of the Soviet Criminal Code under consideration in May, 1922. Here it is:

15 May [1922]  
Com[rade] Kursky;

In my opinion it is necessary to extend the application of execution by shooting (with the substitution of ex[ile] abr[oad] see Art. 1 below) to all phases covering the activities of Mensh[eviks], S[ocial] R[evolutionaries] and the like; a formula must be found that would place these activities in connection with the international bourgeoisie and its struggle against us (bribery of the press and agents, war preparations and the like).

Please return this quickly with your reply.

Lenin

Lenin's note was published in the *Bolshevik* (Moscow), issue of January 15, 1937, page 63—just before the trial of the 17 (Radek, Sokolnikov, et al). It was accompanied by the following comment by the savants of the Marx-Engels-Lenin Institute:

\* The note to comrade Kursky was written by Vladimir Ilyich on the reverse side of the first page, presented to him in printed form, of the project for the supplementary law in the Criminal Code. Next to paragraph 5 of the law, which dealt with the application of capital punishment for counter-revolutionary expressions against the Soviet (Bolshevik) government, Lenin wrote on the first page, below: "Add the right to substitute for execution exile abroad, by decision of the All-Russian C.E.C. (for a period of years or without limit." It was this postscript that Lenin had in mind in reference to the note to Kursky above.

The note to Kursky emphasized the need for capital punishment for the counter-revolutionary activities of Mensheviks, S-Rs and "the like." Lenin demanded capital punishment for the counter-revolutionary activities of anti-Soviet parties, connected with the war preparations of the international bourgeoisie against the Soviet republic and with other forms of the fight of international capitalism against our country. *That demand of Lenin's is likewise entirely applicable to the Trotskyist-Zinovievist agents of the Gestapo who acted by direct orders of fascism and are a counter-revolutionary gang of bandits, spies and diversionists, vicious enemies of the land of toilers. These scoundrels, murderers of Comrade Kirov, are precisely such enemies of the Soviet republic for whom Vladimir Ilyich demanded severe revolutionary punishment.*

to present to the English speaking workers the writings of this Russian Social Democrat? We have taken the trouble to present the writings of Martov, a Russian Social Democrat, to the English speaking workers because his writings have a definite value in the socialist propaganda of our time.

Martov's usefulness to the still weak international movement for socialism lies precisely in the fact that he is a little more than a Social Democrat and a Russian Social Democrat. It lies in his ability to withstand, at least in part, the drag of the specifically Russian milieu that created Menshevism and Bolshevism, the two wings of Russian "Laborism." It lies in his ability to consider the event of the Russian Revolution from the angle of the future movement for socialism, rather than from the viewpoint of militant or less militant, Westernized or boldly national, historic opportunism. Though he was part and parcel of the Russian revolutionary movement, Martov attempted the feat of evaluating from the angle of historic objectivity the events in which he was himself an actor.

The Russian upheaval has had a curious influence on the international movement for socialism. Introducing themselves under the guise of opposites to the old Social Democratic organizations, the militant Communist Parties, organized in all countries after the Bolshevik victory, tried to hitch the post-War discontent to the wagon of the national Russian Revolution. If popular comprehension of the socialist goal is a necessary condition for the socialist revolution, then the Communist Parties will go down in the history of the labor movement as a force that did a mighty bit to divert, for some time, the attention of the international working class from its task of self-emancipation. In this game of partly unconscious deception, the issue of "Sovietism" has played and continues to play an important role. Martov, writing at the time of the greatest enthusiasm over the prospects of "Soviet" uprisings and "Soviet" governments, shows up this deception. To anybody who can and would read, the essays gathered in this book offer an effective antidote against the Leninist, and "Left Communist,"\* confusion that has addled so many brains since 1918. And that remains a very important need, in spite of the effective work of clarification already achieved by historic experience itself.

In the essays gathered in this book, Martov may be said to perform for the Russian Revolution a service paralleling that done by Marx for the Paris Commune in his *Civil War in France*. I write "paralleling," because the primary need in the case of Martov's study of the Russian Revolution is not to describe the tasks and program of a "people's

\* I am referring to the naive people who, while repudiating Bolshevism, say: "It must be soviets!"—without asking themselves how and where these makeshift representative bodies arose and what purpose they served in behalf of the shrewd politicians who rode them to power.



revolution" but to refute an historic hoax, which, as was seen quite early by Martov, imperils the cause of the increase of the socialist consciousness of the international working class.

Of a necessity, Martov's treatment of the illusions manipulated by the Bolshevik politicians in 1918 also brings out his general political and social stand.

Martov expected the workers themselves to accomplish their emancipation. He believed that with historic experience, the working class would undergo a political and moral development and overcome in time the current utopias and swindles in political theory and practice fostered among them by various sets of "leaders." He understood that the socialist revolution could only take place in countries that were economically ripe for socialism. He understood that the political setup produced by the socialist revolution could never be the Jacobin dictatorship of a revolutionary minority but could only be the expression of the majority rule of the population. He believed that after the proletariat of the countries economically ripe for socialism had once seized power, it could never find itself in a situation where its rule was anything else but the majority rule of the population.

In spite of the object lessons taught by the events of the past twenty years, so many "advanced revolutionists" still find such ideas not "revolutionary" enough. Martov had a pitying smile both for the "revolutionist a la mode," the revolutionary Bohemian, and the "practical" opportunists, the "Kaiser's and King's socialists." His study of the political methods and the historic significance of the Russian Revolution is dedicated to the "increase and development of the socialist consciousness" of the working class of the world. Considered from the standpoint of this purpose, political fashions in Bohemia and current tricks of opportunist "practicalness" are important only as, usually unconscious, means of diverting the attention of the propertyless from their historic task.

The first two sections of this book, *The Ideology of Sovietism* and *The Conquest of the State*, were written early in 1919. They form a compact whole and should be read as such. The first essay appeared serially in the periodical *Mysl* of Kharkov. The introductory section of the second was first published in the issues of July 8 and September 1, 1921, of the *Sozialisticheski Vestnik* (Berlin). The remainder of the second essay appeared for the first time in *Mirovoi Bolshevism* (World Bolshevism), Berlin, 1923, from the text of which the entire present translation was made. The final section, entitled *Marx and the Problem of the Dictatorship of the Proletariat* was first published in 1918 in the *Workers' International* of Moscow, edited by Martov. It deals with the same subject from a more general point of view.

INTEGER.

## PART ONE

### THE IDEOLOGY OF "SOVIETISM"

#### THE MYSTICISM OF THE SOVIET REGIME

THE REVOLUTIONARY movement that is tinged with Bolshevism recognizes soviets as the form of political organization (even the sole form) by which the emancipation of the proletariat can be realized.

According to this viewpoint, the soviet State structure—said to be a phase in the progressive abolition of the State itself in its role as an instrument of social oppression—is the historically motivated product of a long evolution, arising in the midst of class antagonisms when these have reached great acuteness under imperialism. It is described as the perfect embodiment of the dictatorship of the proletariat. Appearing at a time when "bourgeois" democracy is said to have lost all content, the soviet régime is pictured as the perfect expression of real democracy.

However, every perfection has this dangerous feature. Persons untroubled by critical reasoning, persons blind to the nuances of "idle" theory, are impatient to possess themselves of the perfection, without bothering to take note that the perfection in question is supposed to be based on particular historic conditions. Metaphysical reasoning refuses to accept the dialectical negation of the absolute. It ignores the relative. Having learned that the true, the genuine, the perfect mode of social life has at last been discovered, it insists on having this perfect mode applied to daily existence.

We therefore see that, contrary to its own theoretic claims, this perfect political form has become applicable to all peoples, to all social groups. All that is necessary is that the people concerned want to modify the structure of the State under which it is suffering. Soviets have become the slogan for the proletariat of the most advanced industrial countries the United States, England, Germany. They are also the slogan for agricultural Hungary, peasant Bulgaria and Russia, where agriculture is just issuing from primitive structures.

The universal efficacy of the soviet régime reaches even farther. Communist publicists seriously speak of soviet revolutions occurring, or about to occur, in Asiatic Turkey, among the Egyptian fellahin, in the pampas of South America. In Corea, the proclamation of a soviet



republic is only a matter of time. In India, China and Persia the soviet idea is said to be advancing with the speed of an express train. And who dares to doubt that by now the soviet system has already been adapted to the primitive social conditions of the Bashkirs, Kirghizes, Turkomans and the mountaineers of Daghestan?

No matter what Marxist thought may have to say on the subject, the soviet régime, as such, is not only said to solve the antagonism arising between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie under conditions of highly developed capitalism, but is also presented as the universal State form that cuts through the difficulties and antagonisms arising at any degree of social evolution. In theory, the lucky people bursting into soviets are expected to have passed—at least ideologically—the stage of bourgeois democracy. They are expected to have freed themselves from a number of noxious illusions—parliamentarism, the need for a universal, direct, equal and secret ballot, the need of liberty of the press, etc. Only then can they know the supreme perfection incorporated in the soviet State structure. In practice, however, nations here and there, possessed by the metaphysical negation of the course traced by soviet theory, jump over the prescribed stages. Soviets are the perfect form of the State. They are the magic wand by which all inequalities, all misery, may be suppressed. Having once learned about soviets, who would consent to suffer the yoke of less perfect systems of government? Having once tasted the sweet, who would choose to continue to live on bitterness?

In February 1918, at Brest-Litovsk, Trotsky and Kamenev still defended with great obstinace the right of peoples to self-determination. They demanded from victorious Germany that this principle be applied, through the instrumentality of the equal and universal ballot, in Poland, Lithuania and Latvia. The historic value of democracy was still recognized at that time. But a year later, at the congress of the Russian Communist Party, the intrepid Bukharine already insisted that the principle of "self-determination of peoples" had to be replaced with the principle of "self-determination of the laboring classes." Lenin succeeded in obtaining the maintenance of the principle of self-determination—for backward peoples—paralleling in this respect certain philosophers who, not wanting to fall out with the Church, would limit the scope of their materialist teachings to animals deprived of the benefits of divine revelation. But it was not for doctrinal reasons that the Communist congress refused to fall in line with Bukharine. Lenin won out with arguments of a diplomatic order. It was said to be unwise to alienate from the Communist International the Hindoos, Persians and other peoples who, though still blind to the revelation, were in a situation of pan-national struggle against the foreign oppressor. Fundamentally, the Communists were in full agreement with Buk-

harine. Having tasted sweetness, who would offer bitterness to his neighbor?

So that when the Turkish consul at Odessa permitted himself to launch the hoax about the triumph of a soviet revolution in the Ottoman empire, not a single Russian newspaper refused to take the obvious hoax seriously. Not a single publication showed the slightest skepticism concerning the ability of the good Turks to jump over the stages of self-determination, universal franchise, bourgeois parliamentarism, etc. The mystification was quite successful. Mystifications find a favorable soil in mysticism. For no less than mystic is the concept of a political form that, by virtue of its particular character, can surmount all economic-social and national contradictions.

In the course of the congress of the Independent Social Democratic Party of Germany at Leipzig, good men racked their brains to discover how to conciliate "all power to the soviets" with the traditional notions of the Social-Democracy concerning the political forms of the socialist revolutions, especially with the notion of democracy.

For here is a mystery that escapes the understanding of the true-believers of Sovietism with the same persistence that the mystery of the immaculate conception has ever escaped the understanding of the Christian faithful. Sometimes it escaped the understanding of its own creator.

Thus, we have the amusing example of the reception of the news that the soviet idea had triumphed in Hungary. It seemed, at first, that everything was performed according to the rites. But one essential detail was missing. It was reported that the Hungarian "soviet" did not come into being as a result of a fratricidal war of the Hungarian proletariat (we shall see later how important is this detail). It was, on the contrary, the product of the unity of the Hungarian proletariat. Lenin was troubled. In a telegram, the complete text of which appeared in the foreign press, he asked Bela Kun:

"What guarantees have you that your revolution is really a Communist revolution, that it is not simply a socialist revolution, not a revolution by the social-traitors?"

Bela Kun's reply, published in the Russian press, betrayed some confusion and a lack of preciseness. The Hungarian revolutionary power, it appeared, rested in the hands of a group of five persons, two of whom were Communists, two social-democrats and the fifth "in the same category as your Lunacharsky." The mystery had grown thicker.

As a result of the extreme class antagonism between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie, the proletariat overthrows the most complete embodiment of democratic statism. By this act, the proletariat creates itself a new political mode, which is also the specific expression of the dictatorship of the proletariat. Here is the starting point of the "soviet idea."



The political mode thus created is universally applicable. It fits the needs and consequences of all kinds of social change. It can clothe the multiform substance of all the revolutionary acts of the twentieth century. That is the "soviet idea" at the close of its own evolution.

This dialectical contradiction summarizes the mystery of "sovietism," which is a mystery beyond the dogmatic comprehension of thinkers, both on the Left and on the Right.

#### DICTATORSHIP OF THE MINORITY

THE MECHANISM of the popular revolutions of the preceding historic period had the following characteristics.

The role of active factor in the overturn belonged to *minorities* of the social classes in whose interest the revolution developed. These minorities exploited the confused discontent and the sporadic explosions of anger arising among scattered and socially inconsistent elements within the revolutionary class. They guided the latter in the destruction of the old social forms. In certain cases, the active leader minorities had to use the power of their concentrated energy in order to shatter the inertia of the elements they tried to wield for revolutionary purposes. Therefore, these active leader minorities sometimes made efforts—often successful efforts—to repress the passive resistance of the manipulated elements, when the latter refused to move forward toward the broadening and deepening of the revolution. The dictatorship of an active revolutionary minority, a dictatorship that tended to be terrorist, was the normal coming-to-a-head of the situation in which the old social order had confined the popular mass, now called on by the revolutionaries to forge their own destiny.

There where the active revolutionary minority was not able to organize such a dictatorship, or to maintain it for some time, as was the case in Germany, Austria, France in 1848—we observed the miscarriage of the revolutionary process, a collapse of the revolution.

Engels said that the revolutions of the past historic period were the work of conscious minorities exploiting the spontaneous revolt of unconscious majorities.

It is understood that the word "conscious" should be taken here in a relative sense. It was a question of pursuing political and social aims that were quite definite, though at the same time quite contradictory and utopian. The ideology of the Jacobins of 1793-1794 was thoroughly utopian. It cannot be considered to have been the product of an objective conception of the process of historic evolution. But in relation to the mass of peasants, small producers and workers in whose name they demolished the old régime, the Jacobins represented a con-

scious vanguard whose destructive work was subordinated to positive problems.

In the last decade of the 19th century, Engels arrived at the conclusion that the epoch of revolutions effected by conscious minorities heading unknowing masses had closed for ever. From then on, he said, revolution would be prepared by long years of political propaganda, organization, education, and would be realized directly and consciously by the interested masses themselves.

To such a degree has this idea become the conception of the great majority of modern socialists that the slogan: "All power to the soviets!" was originally launched as an answer to the need of assuring, during the revolutionary period, the maximum of active and conscious participation and the maximum of initiative by the masses in the task of social creation.

Read again Lenin's articles and speeches of 1917 and you will discover that their master thought, "all power to the soviets," amounted then to the following: 1. the direct and active participation of the masses in the management of production and public affairs; 2. the obliteration of all gaps between the directors and the directed, that is, the suppression of any social hierarchy; 3. the greatest possible unification of the legislative and executive powers, of the production apparatus and the administrative apparatus, of the State machinery and the machinery of local administration; 4. the maximum of activity by the mass and the minimum of liberty for its elected representatives; 5. the total suppression of all bureaucracy.

Parliamentarism was repudiated not only as the arena where two enemy classes collaborate politically and engage in "pacific" combats, but also as a mechanism of public administration. And this repudiation was motivated, above all, by the antagonism arising between this mechanism and the unbounded revolutionary activity of the mass, intervening directly in administration and production.

In August 1917, Lenin wrote:

"Having conquered political power, the workers will break up the old bureaucratic apparatus; they will shatter it to its very foundations, until not one stone is left upon another: and they will replace it with a new one consisting of the same workers and employees, *against* whose transformation into bureaucrats will at once be undertaken, as pointed out in detail by Marx and Engels: 1. not only electiveness, but also instant recall; 2. payment no higher than that of ordinary workers; 3. immediate transition to a state of things when *all* fulfil the functions of control and superintendence, so that *all* become 'bureaucrats for a time, and *no one*, therefore can become a bureaucrat.'" (*The State and Revolution*, page 103, early Russian edition.)

He wrote of the "*substitution of a universal popular militia for the*



*police*," of the "electiveness and recall at any moment of all functionaries and commanding ranks," of "workers' control in its primitive sense, direct participation of the people at the courts, not only in the shape of a jury but also by the suppression of specializing prosecutors and defense counsels and by the vote of all present on the question of guilt." That is how the replacement of the old bourgeois democracy with the soviet régime was interpreted in theory—and sometimes in practice.

It was this conception of "all power to the soviets" that was presented in the first Constitution—adopted at the third Soviet Congress on the initiative of V. Troutovsky. It recognized the complete power of the communal soviet within the limits of the "volost," the power of the district soviet within the bounds of the "ouyezd," that of the provincial soviet within the limits of the "gubernia," while the unifying functions of each of the higher soviet organs expressed themselves in the levelling of the differences arising among the organs subordinated to it.

Anticipating the argument that such extreme federalism might undermine national unity, Lenin wrote in the same brochure:

"Only people full of petty-bourgeois 'superstitious faith' in the State can mistake the destruction of the bourgeois State for the destruction of centralism. But will it not be centralism if the proletariat and poorest peasantry take the power of the State in their own hands, organize themselves freely into communes, and unite the action of all the communes in striking at capital, in crushing the resistance of the capitalists, in the transfer of private property in railways, factories, land and so forth, to the entire nation, to the whole of society? Will that not be centralism?" (Page 50, early Russian edition.)

Reality has cruelly shattered all these illusions. The "Soviet State" has not established in any instance electiveness and recall of public officials and the commanding staff. It has not suppressed the professional police. It has not assimilated the courts in direct jurisdiction by the masses. It has not done away with social hierarchy in production. It has not lessened the total subjection of the local community to the power of the State. On the contrary, in proportion to its evolution, the Soviet State shows a tendency in the opposite direction. It shows a tendency toward intensified centralism of the State, a tendency toward the utmost possible strengthening of the principles of hierarchy and compulsion. It shows a tendency toward the development of a more specialized apparatus of repression than before. It shows a tendency toward the greater independence of the usually elective functions and the annihilation of the control of these functions by the elector masses. It shows a tendency toward the total freedom of the executive organisms from the tutelage of the electors. In the crucible

of reality, the "power of the soviets" has become the "soviet power," *a power that originally issued from the soviets* but has steadily become independent from the soviets.

We must believe that the Russian ideologists of the soviet system have not renounced entirely their notion of a non-Statal social order, the *aim* of the revolution. But as they see matters now, the road to this non-Statal social order no longer lies in the progressive atrophy of the functions and institutions that have been forged by the bourgeois State, as they said they saw things in 1917. Now it appears that their way to a social order that would be free from the State lies in the hypertrophy—the excessive development—of these functions and in the resurrection, under an altered aspect, of most State institutions typical of the bourgeois era. The shrewd people continue to repudiate democratic parliamentarism. But they no longer repudiate, at the same time, those instruments of State power *to which parliamentarism is a counterweight within bourgeois society*: bureaucracy, police, a permanent army with commanding cadres that are independent of the soldiers, courts that are above control by the community, etc.

In contrast to the bourgeois State, the State of the transitional revolutionary period ought to be an apparatus for the "repression of the minority by the majority." Theoretically, it should be a governmental apparatus resting in the hands of the majority. In reality, the Soviet State continues to be, as the State of the past, a government apparatus resting in the hands of a minority. (Of another minority, of course.)

Little by little, the "power of the soviets" is being replaced with the power of a certain party. Little by little the party becomes the essential State institution, the framework and axis of the entire system of "soviet republics."

The evolution traversed by the idea of the "Soviet State" in Russia ought to help us to understand the psychological basis of this idea in countries where the revolutionary process of today is yet in its initial phase.

The "soviet régime" becomes the means of bringing into power and maintaining in power a revolutionary minority which claims to defend the interests of a majority, though the latter has not recognized these interests as its own, though this majority has not attached itself sufficiently to these interests to defend them with all its energy and determination.

This is demonstrated by the fact that in many countries—it happened also in Russia—the slogan "all power to the soviets" is launched in opposition to the already existing soviets, created during the first manifestations of the revolution. The slogan is directed, in the first place, against the majority of the working class, against the political tendencies which dominated the masses at the beginning of the revolu-



tion. The slogan "all power to the soviets" becomes a pseudonym for the dictatorship of a minority. So that when the failure of July 3, 1917, had brought to the surface the obstinate resistance of the soviets to Bolshevik pressure, Lenin tore off the disguise in his pamphlet: *On the Subject of Slogans* and proclaimed that the cry "All Power to the Soviets!" was thenceforward out of date and had to be replaced with the slogan: "All power to the Bolshevik Party!"

But this "materialization" of the symbol, this revelation of its true content, was only a moment in the development of the perfect political form, "finally discovered" and exclusively possessing the "capacity of bringing out the social substance of the proletarian revolution."

The retention of political power by the minority of a class (or classes), by a minority organized as a party and exercising its power in the interests of the class (or classes), is a fact arising from antagonisms typical of the most recent phase of capitalism. It thus offers a difference between the old revolutions and the new. On the other hand, the fact that it is a dictatorship by a minority constitutes a *bond of kinship* between the present revolution and those of the preceding historic period. If that is the basic principle of the governmental mechanism in question, it hardly matters if the exigency of given historic circumstances have made this principle assume the particular form of soviets.

The events of 1792-1794 in France offer an example of a revolution that was realized by means of a minority dictatorship set up as a party: the Jacobin dictatorship. The Jacobin party embraced the most active, the most "leftward," elements of the petty-bourgeoisie, proletariat, and declassed intellectuals. It exercised its dictatorship through a network of multiple institutions: communes, sections, clubs, revolutionary committees. In this network producers' organizations on the style of our workers' soviets were completely absent. Otherwise, there is a striking similarity, and a number of perfect analogies, between the institutions used by the Jacobins and those serving the contemporary dictatorship. The party cells of today differ in no way from the Jacobin clubs. The revolutionary committees in 1794 and 1919 are entirely alike. The committees of poor peasants of today bear comparison with the committees and clubs, composed especially of poor elements, on which the Jacobin dictatorship based itself in the villages. Today, workers' soviets, factory committees, trade union centers, mark the revolution with their stamp and give it its specific character. Here is where the influence of the proletariat in the large industries of today makes itself felt. Nevertheless, we see that such specifically class organisms, such specially proletarian formations, issuing from the milieu of modern industry, are as much reduced to the role of mechanical instruments of a party minority dictatorship as were the auxiliaries of the Jacobin dic-

tatorship in 1792-1794, though the social origins of the latter were entirely different.

Placed in the concrete conditions of contemporary Russia, the Bolshevik party dictatorship reflects, in the first place, the interests and aspirations of the proletarian elements of the population. This would be truer in the case of soviets that might have arisen in advanced industrial countries. But the nature of the soviets, their adaptation to producers' organizations, is not the decisive factor here. We saw that after the 3rd of July, 1917, Lenin envisaged the *direct* dictatorship of the Bolshevik party, outside of the soviets. We see now that in certain places such a dictatorship is fully realized through the channel of revolutionary committees and party cells. All of this does not stop the party dictatorship (direct or indirect) from preserving in its class policy a primordial lien with the proletariat and reflecting, above all, the interests and aspirations of the city laboring population.

On the other hand, as organizational cadres, the soviets may find themselves filled with elements that have a different class character. At the side of the workers' soviets, rise soviets of soldiers and peasants. So that in countries that are even more backward economically than Russia, the power of the soviets may represent something other than a proletarian minority. It may represent there a peasant minority, or any other non-proletarian section of the population.

The mystery of the "soviet regime" is now deciphered. We see now how an organism that is supposedly created by the specific peculiarities of a labor movement corresponding to the highest development of capitalism is revealed to be, at the same time, suitable to the needs of countries knowing neither large capitalist production, nor a powerful bourgeoisie, nor a proletariat that has evolved through the experience of the class struggle.

In other words, in the advanced countries, the proletariat resorts, we are told, to the soviet form of the dictatorship as soon as its élan toward the social revolution strikes against the impossibility of realizing its power in any other way than through the *dictatorship of a minority*, a minority within the proletariat itself.

The thesis of the "finally discovered form," the thesis of the political form that, belonging to the specific circumstances of the imperialist phase of capitalism, is said to be the only form that can realize the social enfranchisement of the proletariat, constitutes the *historically* necessary illusion by whose effect the revolutionary section of the proletariat renounces its belief in its ability to draw behind it the majority of the population of the country and resuscitates the idea of the minority dictatorship of the Jacobins in the very form used by the bourgeois revolution of the 18th century. Must we recall here that this revolutionary method has been repudiated by the working class to the extent



that it has freed itself from its heritage of petty-bourgeois revolutionarism?

As soon as the slogan "soviet régime" begins to function as a pseudonym under the cover of which the Jacobin and Blanquist idea of a minority dictatorship is reborn in the ranks of the proletariat, then the soviet régime acquires a universal acceptance and is said to be adaptable to any kind of revolutionary overturn. In this new sense, the "soviet form" is necessarily devoid of the specific substance that bound it to a definite phase of capitalist development. *It now becomes a universal form, which is supposed to be suitable to any revolution accomplished in a situation of political confusion, when the popular masses are not united, while the bases of the old régime have been eaten away in the process of historical evolution.*

#### DICTATORSHIP OVER THE PROLETARIAT

THE REVOLUTIONARY sectors of the population do not believe themselves able to draw along with them the majority of the country on the road to socialism. Here is the secret of the spread of the "soviet idea" in the confused consciousness of the European proletariat.\*

\* Thus Karl Radek, the apostle, to the benighted West, of the neo-Communist "dialectical" credo, justified the Russian sort of dictatorship:

"In no country can the revolution begin as an action of the majority. Capitalism implies not merely a physical mastership over the means of production, but also a spiritual dominion over the masses of the people; and in the most developed capitalist countries, under the stress of misery and dire need, under the burden of such consequences of capitalism, as this war, the whole body of the oppressed arises. The most active are always the first to rise. It is a minority which carries out the revolution, the success of which depends on the fact whether this revolution corresponds with the historical development, with the interests of the masses of the people, who can shake off the rule of the class hitherto governing them. But first the creative and impulsive force of the revolution is required to rouse the great body of the people to liberate them from their intellectual and spiritual slavishness under capitalism, and to lead them into a position where a defence of their interests can be made. It might fairly be said that every revolution is undertaken by the minority; the majority only joins in during the course of the revolution and decides the victorious issue . . ." (*Socialism from Science to Practice*, page 17, Socialist Labor Press, Glasgow.)

This is, indeed, leading socialism from science to practice. And what "practice!"

Here is the whole of the "art of revolution," presented as *revolutionary* Marxism in the adventurous first years of the Communist International, and still practiced, in the cafés and tea houses of New York and Paris, by the latter-day exponents of "Bolshevism-Leninism," those theoretically ferocious Trotskyites, who in spite of the alarms broadcast by official Communism are really gentle and harmless in practice.—*Translator.*

Now the majority opposing socialism, or backing parties that oppose socialism, may include numerous worker elements. To the extent that this is true, the principle of "soviet rule" implies not only the repudiation of democracy in the framework of the nation but also the suppression of democracy within the working class.

In theory, soviet rule does not annul democracy. In theory, soviet rule merely limits democracy to the workers and the "poorest peasantry." But the essence of democracy is not expressed—either exclusively or in principle—by mathematically universal suffrage. The "universal suffrage" attained by the most advanced countries before the Russian Revolution excluded women, the military, and sometimes young people up to the age of 25. These exceptions did not deprive these countries of a democratic character, as long as inside the majority called on to exercise the sovereignty of the people there remained a degree of democracy consistent with the preservation of the capitalist basis of society.\*

For this reason, denying electoral rights to bourgeois and rentiers, and even to members of the liberal professions—an eventuality admitted by Plekhanov for the period of the dictatorship of the proletariat—does not of itself make the "soviet" régime something absolutely undemocratic. We may even suppose such a measure to be entirely compatible with the development of other features of democracy, which, in spite of the limitation of electoral rights, may really make of the régime "a democracy more perfect" than any previous political form based on the social domination of the bourgeoisie.

The exclusion of the bourgeois minority from participation in State power may not necessarily help to consolidate the power of the majority. It may even hinder this object by tending to impoverish the social value of the popular will expressed in the electoral struggle. That is not, however, sufficient to make the soviet system undemocratic.

What gives the soviet system this character is the suppression of

\* Does Martov suggest that the capitalist class, or rather its political servants, can do away with democracy, with popular representation, as soon as the latter threatens the existing order?

Under capitalism, observed Engels, "the possessing class rules directly through universal franchise" (*Origin of the Family*)—that is, by virtue of the interested, motivated, support of the great majority of the population. Even the master-minds superintending the Fascist, Nazi and Soviet-Communist political superstructures of modern capitalism realize that they do not and cannot rule for any length of time against the will of the overwhelming majority of the population. The working slaves of capitalism cannot, in great numbers, be whipped into performing their tasks, as were the slaves who built the pyramids. There is a mighty difference of technology. So that even the State machinery manipulated by the latter-day "dictatorships" rests on a "democratic," mass basis, which is lovingly cared for by the "dictators."—*Translator.*



democracy also in the relations among the privileged citizens who are called on to become the holders of State power.

The following are the inalienable tokens of a democratic régime, no matter how limited is the circle of citizens to whom they apply:

1. The absolute submission of the entire executive apparatus to popular representation (even though in the case of the soviets it does not comprise all citizens).

2. The electiveness and recall of the administration, of judges, of the police. The democratic organization of the army.

3. The control and publicness of all administrative acts.

4. The liberty of political coalition (though it may mean liberty only for the "privileged," in the mentioned sense of the term).

5. The inviolability of the citizens' individual and collective rights and protection against any abuses on the part of the final agents of State power.

6. Citizens' liberty to discuss all State questions. Citizens' right and power to exercise freely pressure on the governmental mechanism. Etc., etc.

We find in history democratic republics that admitted slavery (Athens, for example). The theoreticians of sovietism have never rejected the democratic principles enumerated above. On the contrary, they have affirmed that on the reduced electoral base of the soviets these principles will develop as they never were able on the more extensive foundation of capitalist democracy. We must not forget Lenin's promise that all the workers would participate directly in the administration of the State, all soldiers in the election of officers, that police and officialdom as such would be suppressed.

The absence of democracy *within* the soviet system presumes that the proletarian (revolutionary) elements building the régime recognize the existence of the following conditions:

1. The working class forms a minority in a hostile population.

2. Or it is itself divided into fractions struggling for power among themselves.

3. Or the two given phenomena exist simultaneously.

In all the mentioned cases, the real reason for the popularity of the "soviet idea" is found in the desire to repress the will of all other groups of the population, including proletariat groups, in order to assure the triumph of a determined revolutionary minority.

Charles Naine, the well-known Swiss militant, writes:

"At the beginning of 1918, we were in a panic. There was no time to delay. Soviets of workers, soldiers and peasants had to be formed in Switzerland immediately and a red guard constituted. The knowing minority had to impose its will on the majority, even by brute force. The great mass, the workers, are in economic slavery. They

cannot accomplish their own liberation. Their minds are formed by their masters; they are incapable of understanding their true interests. It is left to the knowing minority to free the mass from the tutelage of its present masters. Only after this is done will the mass understand. Scientific socialism is the truth. The minority possessing the knowledge of the truth of scientific socialism has the right to impose it on the mass. Parliament is only an obstruction. It is an instrument of reaction. The bourgeois press poisons the minds of the people. It should be suppressed. Later, that is, after the social order will have been totally transformed by the socialist dictators, liberty and democracy will be reconstituted. Then the citizens will be in the position to form a real democracy; they will then be free from the economic régime which, oppressing them, keeps them at present from manifesting their true will." (Charles Naine: *Dictature du prolétariat ou démocratie*, page 7).

Only the blind and the hypocritical will fail to recognize that Charles Naine has presented here, divested of its usual phraseologic ornamentation, the ideology of Bolshevism. It is in this shape that the latter has been assimilated by the masses in Russia, Germany, Hungary, and wherever Bolshevism has made its appearance.

This phraseological ornamentation does not always succeed in hiding. There is, for example, the important statement by P. Orlovsky (V. Vorovsky, later Soviet representative at Rome, killed in Lausanne, May 1923, *ed.*), entitled "The Communist International and the World Soviet Republic." The author proposes to deal with the "crux" of the question of the soviet system.

"The soviet system," he writes, "merely *implies* participation of the popular masses in the administration of the State: but it does not *assure* them either mastery or even a predominant influence (in the administration of the State)."

If we substitute the words "parliamentary democracy" for the term "soviet system," we get as elementary a "truth" as the one expressed by Orlovsky. Indeed, developed democratic parliamentarism assures the masses of the opportunity to participate in State administration. It does not, however, guarantee their political domination.

Here is Orlovsky's conclusion:

"Only when the soviet system has put the effective State power in the hands of the Communists, that is to say in the party of the working class, may the workers and other exploited elements obtain access to the exercise of State power as well as the possibility of reconstructing the State on a new basis, conforming to their needs, etc."

In other words, the soviet system is good as long as it is in the hands of the Communists. For "as soon as the bourgeoisie succeeds in possessing itself of the soviets (as was the case in Russia under Kerensky and



now—in 1919—in Germany), it utilizes them against the revolutionary workers and peasants, just as the Tsars used the soldiery, sprung from the people, to oppress the people. Therefore, soviets can fulfill a revolutionary role, and free the working masses, only when they are dominated by the Communists. And for the same reason, the growth of soviet organizations in other countries is a revolutionary phenomenon in the proletarian sense—not merely in the petty-bourgeois sense—only when this growth is paralleled by the triumph of communism.”

There could be no clearer statement. *The “soviet system” is an instrument which permits State power to slip into the hands of the Communists. The instrument is put aside as soon as it has fulfilled its historic function.* That is never said, of course.

“The Communist Party, that is to say, the party of the working class . . .” The principle is always posed in these words. Not one of the parties—nor even “the most advanced party,” nor the “party most representative of the interests of the proletarian class.” No, but the “only real worker party.”

Orlovsky’s idea is excellently illustrated in the resolutions adopted by the Communist conference at Kashine, published in *Pravda* No. 3, 1919:

“The middle peasant may be admitted to power, even when he does not belong to the party, if he accepts the soviet platform—with the reservation that the preponderant role of direction in the soviets must remain with the party of the proletariat. It is absolutely inadmissible to leave the soviets entirely into the hands of the non-party middle peasants. That would expose all the conquests of the proletarian revolution to the danger of complete destruction, at a moment when the last and decisive battle against international reaction is taking place.”

The Communists at Kashine contented themselves with baring the real meaning of the “dictatorship” only in so far as it applied to the peasantry. But everybody knows that the same solution also disposes of the “middle” worker. We are dealing here with a “worker and peasant” power and not merely with a “worker” power.

What originally made the “soviet idea” so attractive to socialists was, no doubt, their unlimited *confidence* in the collective intelligence of the working class, their confidence in the workers’ ability to attain, by means of the “dictatorship of the proletariat,” a condition of complete *self-administration*, excluding the shadow of tutelage by a minority. The first enthusiasm for the soviet system was an enthusiasm springing from the desire to escape the framework of the hierarchically organized State.

Ernest Däumig (Left Independent) stated in his eloquent report, at the first Pan-German Congress of Soviets, held from the 16th to the 21st of December, 1918:

“The present German revolution is distinguished by its possession of deucedly little confidence in its own forces. We are still suffering from the spirit of military subservience and passive obedience, our heritage from the past centuries. This spirit cannot be killed by mere electoral struggles, by election tracts passed out among the masses every two or three years. It can only be destroyed by a sincere and powerful effort to maintain the German people in a condition of permanent political activity. This cannot be realized outside of the soviet system. We ought to finish, once for always, with the entire old administrative machinery of the Reich, of the independent (German) States, of the municipalities. To substitute *self-administration* for administration from above should become more and more the aim of the German people.”

And at the same congress, the Spartacist Heckert declared:

“The Constituent Assembly (Parliament) will be a *reactionary institution* even if it has a socialist majority. The reason for this is that the German people is completely apolitical. It asks to be led. It has not as yet made the smallest act that might be evidence of its desire to become master of its own destiny. Here in Germany people wait to have liberty brought to them by leaders. Liberty is not created at the base.”

“The soviet system,” he continued, “is an organization confiding to the large masses the *direct task* of constructing the social edifice. The Constitutional Assembly (Parliament), on the other hand, leaves this function to leaders.”

We have struck here against something especially interesting. In the same report that glorifies the soviets as a guarantee of the self-administration of the working class, Däumig gives a rather dark picture of the *real* German soviets, personified in their congress of 1918:

“No revolutionary parliament in history has revealed itself more timorous, more commonplace, meaner, than the revolutionary parliament here congregated.

“Where is the great breath of idealism that dominated and moved the French National Convention? Where is the youthful enthusiasm of March 1848? There is not a trace of either.”

And though he finds the German “soviets” timorous, limited and mean, Däumig seeks the key to all the problems raised by the social revolution in the delivery of “all power to the soviets.” All power to the *timorous* as a means of throwing ourselves boldly beyond the easy formula of universal suffrage! A bizarre paradox? Oh, no! The paradox hides a very precise significance, which if it still remains in the “subconscious” for Däumig, attains conscious expression in P. Orlovsky’s formula: “*With the aid of the soviet system, State power passes into the hands of the Communists.*” Put another way—through



*the intermediary of the soviets, the revolutionary minority secures its domination over the "timorous majority."*

Dæumig's observation was in complete agreement with the facts. In the first Pan-German Congress of Soviets, Scheidemann's partisans and the soldiers held an overwhelming majority. The congress smelled of timidity and meanness of viewpoint. Four and a half years of "class collaboration" and "brotherhood of the trenches" have not failed to leave marks both on the worker in overalls and the worker in military drab.

And just as correct as Dæumig were the Bolsheviks in June, 1917, when they threw up their hands in indignation at the despairing narrow-mindedness that dominated the first Pan-Russian Congress of Soviets, though at its head was a politician like Tseretelli, an individual who had, to an exceptional degree, the ability to raise the mass above its every-day level. We, the Internationalists, who had the pleasure of being a tiny minority at this Congress, also despaired at the timidity and lack of understanding shown again and again by the immense "flow-bog" of the Menshevik and Social-Revolutionary majority in the face of stupendous world events and the most weighty political and social problems. We could not understand why the Bolsheviks, who showed such great indignation at the spirit dominating the Congress, should nevertheless call for "All power to the soviets!" We refused to understand them even when, in view of the existing situation, they organized a demonstration the object of which was to force an assembly of this character to possess itself fully of State power.

I have already mentioned that the fear of making possible the triumph of the "timorous" majority pushed Lenin, after the 3rd of July, 1917, to repudiate, as outdated, the slogan: "All power to the soviets!" We find a German analogy to this in the Spartacist decision to *boycott* the election to the second (April) Pan-German Congress of Soviets.

The consequent course of the Russian revolution cured Lenin of his passing "lack of faith." The soviets fulfilled the role expected of them. The rising tide of bourgeois revolutionary enthusiasm set in motion the worker and peasant masses, washing away their "meanness." Lifted by the wave, the Bolsheviks possessed themselves of the government apparatus. Then the role of the insurrectionary element came to an end. The Moor had accomplished his task. The State that came into being with the aid of the "Power of the Soviets" became the "Soviet Power." The Communist minority incorporated in this State made itself secure, once for always, against a possible return of the spirit of "meanness." The idea slowly engendered in the subconscious reached its full development in the theory of P. Orlovsky and the practice of the Kashine Communists.

Dictatorship as a means of *protecting the people against the reactionary narrowness of the people*—such is the historic point of departure of (19th century) revolutionary communism at the time when the worker class, which it claims to represent, begins to see through the lies and hypocrisy of the liberty proclaimed by capitalism.

Buonarotti, the theoretician of Babeuf's plot of 1796, concluded that as soon as State power was taken over by the communists they would find it necessary to isolate France from other countries by an insuperable barrier—in order to preserve the masses from bad influences. No publication, he declared, might appear in France without the authorization of the communist government.

"All socialists, excepting the Fourierists," wrote Weitling in 1840, "subscribe unanimously to the belief that the form of government called democracy does not suit, and is even prejudicial to, the social organization whose principles are being shaped at this moment."

Etienne Cabet wrote that socialist society could allow, in each city, a *single* newspaper, which would of course be issued by the government. The people were to be protected against the temptation of seeking the truth in the clash of opinions.

In 1839, at the political trial devoted to the insurrection led by Blanqui and Barbes, much was made of a communist catechism found on the accused. This catechism dealt among other things with the problem of dictatorship:

"It is unquestionable that after a revolution accomplished in behalf of our ideas, there will be created a dictatorial power whose mission it will be to direct the revolutionary movement. This dictatorial power will of necessity base itself on the assent of the armed population, which, acting in the general interest, will evidently represent the enlightened will of the great majority of the nation.

"To be strong, to act quickly, the dictatorial power will have to be concentrated in as small a number of persons as possible . . . To undermine the old society, to destroy it at its base, to overthrow the foreign and domestic enemies of the Republic, to prepare the new foundations of social organization and, finally, to lead the people from the revolutionary government to a regular republican government—such are the functions of the dictatorial power and the limits of its duration." (Bourguin, *Le socialisme français de 1789 a 1848, Paris, 1912.*)

One may ask if the doctrine of those that stand for "power to the soviets," in the manner of P. Orlovsky and the Kashine Communists, is much different from that of the Parisian communists of 1839.



## METAPHYSICAL MATERIALISM AND DIALECTICAL MATERIALISM

THE WORKING class is a product of capitalist society. Its mind is subjected to the influence of capitalist society. Its consciousness is developed under the pressure of the bourgeois masters. The school, the church, the barracks, the factory, the press, social life, all contribute to form the consciousness of the proletarian masses. They are all potent factors in the service of bourgeois ideas and tendencies. According to Charles Naine, it was on this observation of fact that the revolutionary socialists, at least in Switzerland, based their belief in the necessity of a dictatorship by a minority of conscious proletarians over the nation and even over the majority of the proletariat itself.

Emile Pouget, the prominent syndicalist leader, wrote:

"... If democratic mechanism were applied in the labor organizations, the lack of will on the part of the unconscious majority would paralyze all action. The minority is not disposed to abdicate its claim and aspirations before the inertia of a mass that has not yet been quickened by the spirit of revolt. Therefore, the conscious minority has an obligation to act without considering the outlook of the refractory mass ...

"The amorphous mass ... numerous and compact though it be, has little reason to complain. It is the first to benefit by the action of the minority ...

"Who could complain against the disinterested initiative of the minority? Certainly not the unconscious folk to whom the militants barely attribute the role of human zeros—and who acquire the numerical value of a zero only when added to the right of a number.

"Here is the enormous difference of method distinguishing syndicalism from democratism. Through its machinery of universal suffrage, the latter puts the function of guidance in the hands of the unconscious, the backward, or worse, their representatives. Democratism stifles the minorities that bear in them the future. The syndicalist method gives diametrically opposite results. The impetus is given by the conscious ones, by the rebels. All good wills are called on to act, to participate in the movement."<sup>1</sup>

The recognition of the inevitable mental enslavement of the prole-

<sup>1</sup> From an article by Pouget: "L'organisation et l'action de la Confédération Générale du Travail" ("The Organization and Action of the General Confederation of Labor") published in the collection of *Le mouvement social dans la France contemporaine*, pages 34-36.

tarian masses by the capitalist class forms also one of the premises of P. Orlovsky's conclusions, given in the preceding chapter.

This idea flows, without doubt, from a *materialist* viewpoint. It is based on the observation that the thought of man depends on the material environment.

This idea characterized many socialists and communists, utopian and revolutionary, at the end of the 18th century and the beginning of the 19th.

We can discover its traces in Robet Owen, Cabet, Weitling, Blanqui. All recognized that the mental enslavement of the masses came from the material circumstances of their existence in the present society. And all deduced from this condition that only a radical modification of the material circumstances of their existence, only a radical transformation of society, would render the masses capable of directing their own destiny.

But by whom will this transformation be realized?

"The wise educators of humanity sprung from the privileged classes, that is to say, individuals freed from the material pressure weighing on the mind of the masses—they will do it!" That was the answer of the social utopians.

"A revolutionary minority composed of men whom a more or less accidental combination of circumstances has enabled to save their brains and will from this pressure, persons who constitute in our society an exception that proves the rule—they will do it!" This was the answer of revolutionary communists like Weitling and Blanqui, and the conception of their epigones of the anarcho-syndicalist type, as Pouget and the late Gustave Hervé.

A benevolent dictatorship for some, a violent dictatorship for the others, such is the *deus ex machina* that was going to throw up a bridge between the social environment producing the mental enslavement of the masses and the social environment that would render possible their full development as human beings.\*

"Man's character," wrote Robert Owen, "is formed by environ-

\* Thus Lenin in his speech on *Economic Construction*, March 31, 1920: "On the 29th of April, 1918 the Central Executive Committee accepted a resolution expressing full approval of the basic ideas given in this report and instructed the praesidium to draft, in the form of theses, these basic problems of the Soviet Power. Now we are repeating what was approved by the Central Executive Committee two years ago in an official resolution! Now we are drawn back to a question that was decided long ago, in a manner approved of and made clear by the Central Executive Committee—namely, that the Soviet Socialist Democracy is in no way inconsistent with the rule and dictatorship of one person; that the will of a class is at times best realized by a dictator, who sometimes will accomplish more by himself and is frequently more needed. At any rate, the principal relation toward one person rule was not only explained a long time ago but was also decided by the Central Executive Committee ... " (*Collected Works*, volume 17, page 89, 1st Russian edition.)—Translator.



ment and education . . . The problem flowing from this is the following: to transform these two factors of character in such a manner that man will become virtuous."<sup>2</sup> (*The New Conception of Society*).

According to Owen, the task of operating this transformation fell to the legislators, to the philanthropists, to the pedagogues.

Whether pacifist or revolutionary, the utopians were only *half* materialist. They understood only in a metaphysical manner the thesis according to which human psychology depends on the material environment. They were hardly aware of the *dynamics* of the social process. Their materialism was not *dialectical*.

The state of correlation binding a given aspect of the social consciousness to a given aspect of social life, which is the determining cause of the former, presented itself in the minds of those people as something congealed, as something immovable. That is why they stopped being materialists and became idealists of the first water as soon as they tried to find out how it was necessary to act practically in order to modify the social milieu and render possible the regeneration of the masses.

Quite a good while ago, in his theses on Feuerbach, Marx observed:

"The materialist doctrine that men are the products of conditions and education, different men therefore the products of other conditions and changed education, forgets that circumstances may be altered by men and that the educator has himself to be educated. This doctrine leads inevitably to the ideas of a society composed of two distinct portions, one of which is elevated above society (Robert Owen for example)."

Applied to the class struggle of the propertyless, this means the following. Impelled by the same "circumstances" of capitalist society that determine their character as an enslaved class, the workers enter into a struggle against the society that enslaves them. The process of this struggle modifies the social "circumstances." It modifies the environment in which the working class moves. This way the working class modifies its own character. From a class reflecting passively the mental servitude to which they are subjected, the propertyless become a class which frees itself actively from all enslavement, including that of the mind.

This process is not at all rectilinear. It does not take in homogeneously all the layers of the proletariat, nor all phases of their consciousness. It will be far from attaining its full development when the combination of historic circumstances permits, or obliges, the working class to tear from the hands of the bourgeoisie the apparatus of political power. The workers are condemned to penetrate into the realm of socialism when they still bear a good share of those "vices of the oppressed," the yoke which Lassalle had so eloquently urged them to throw off. As a result of the struggle against capitalism, the prole-

<sup>2</sup> The quotation is translated from Martov.

tariat modifies the material milieu surrounding it. It modifies this way its own character and emancipates itself culturally. Exercising its conquered power, the proletariat frees itself completely from the intellectual influence of the old society—in the degree that it realizes a radical transformation of the material milieu, which in the last place determines its character.

But only "finally!" Only at the end of a long, painful, contradictory process, which is analogous to all preceding historic processes in this respect. The social creation assumes its form on the anvil of necessity, under the imperious pressure of immediate needs.

The conscious will of the revolutionary vanguard can appreciably accelerate and facilitate this process. It can never *avoid* it.

Some people presume that if a compact revolutionary minority, animated by the desire to establish socialism, seizes the machinery of government, and concentrates in its own hands the means of production and distribution and the control of the organization of the masses and their education,<sup>3</sup> it may—in pursuance of its socialist ideal—create an environment in which the popular mind will little by little be purged of its old heritage and filled with a new content. Only then, it is averred, can the people stand erect and move by their own strength on the road to socialism.

If this utopia could be followed to the end, it would lead to a diametrically opposite result, though we considered it only from the angle of Marx's observation that the "educator has himself to be educated." For the practice of *such* a dictatorship, and the relations established between the dictatorial minority and the mass, "educate" the dictators, who may be everything we want them to be but cannot direct social evolution toward the construction of a new society. We do not need to demonstrate that such an education can only corrupt the *masses*, that it can only debase them.

The proletarian class considered as a whole—we are using the word in its broadest sense, including intellectual workers whose collaboration in the direction of the State and the administration of the social economy is indispensable till the contrary becomes true—is the only possible builder of the new society, and it must consequently be the only successor to the classes that formerly dominated the functions of government. The propertyless will also find it indispensable to benefit by the active aid, or at least, friendly neutrality of the non-proletarian producers, who are still numerous in the city and countryside. This flows from the nature of the social overturn that is the historic mission of the proletariat. This change must manifest itself in every part of the life of society. The proletariat will be able to take in hand the

<sup>3</sup> The suppression of the entire press outside of the official has its partisans and has even been partially tried in Europe under the euphonious label of "socialization of the press."



huge heritage of capitalism, without dilapidating it—it will be able to set in motion the gigantic productive forces of capitalism so that the result is real social equality based on the increase of the general well-being—only by giving proof of the maximum of moral energy it can generate. That, we repeat, is an unavoidable condition, which is, in its turn, subordinated to the greatest possible development of organized initiative on the part of all the elements composing the working class. The latter presupposes an atmosphere that is absolutely incompatible with the dictatorship of a minority or with the permanent satellites of such a dictatorship: terror and bureaucracy.

In the course of the free construction of the new society, the proletariat will reeducate itself and eliminate from its character those traits that are in contradiction with the great problems it will have to solve. This will be true about the working class taken as a whole as well as about each of its component elements. It is evident that the duration of this process will vary for each of these elements. To remain on the firm ground of political reality, the political action of the socialists will have to reckon with this fact. It will have to take into account the slow pace of the necessarily progressive adaptation of the entire class to its new milieu. Every attempt at forcing this process artificially is certain to yield the opposite results. Many compromises will be found absolutely inevitable in order to suit the march of history to the intellectual level attained by the different elements within the working class at the moment of the fall of capitalism.

But the final goal justifies only those compromises that do not lead to results that are in opposition to this goal. Only those compromises are justified which do not bar the road to the goal. For that reason, it is impossible to consider too pronounced compromises made either with the destructive tendency or with the conservative inertia that are typical of one or another section of the working class.

A compromise made with the enemy class is nearly always fatal to the revolution. A compromise that guarantees the unity of the class in its struggle against the enemy can only advance the revolution—in the sense that it opens up wide possibilities for the spontaneous, direct action of the mass.

True, this result will be obtained at the price of a movement that is slower, more sinuous, than the straight line which a minority dictatorship can trace in the task of revolution. But here as in mechanics what is lost in distance is made up in speed. The gain is made here by overcoming rapidly the inner psychological obstacles that arise in the way of the revolutionary class and hamper it in its attempt to achieve its aims. On the other hand, the straight line, preferred by the doctrinaires of the violent revolution because it is shorter, leads in practice to the maximum of psychological resistance and that way to the minimum creative yield of the social revolution.

## PART TWO

### DECOMPOSITION OR CONQUEST OF THE STATE

#### MARX AND THE STATE

THE VERY partisans of the “pure soviet system” (an expression current in Germany) do not themselves realize, as a rule, that the cause which is fundamentally served by the methods of contemporary Bolshevism is the organization of a minority dictatorship. On the contrary, they usually begin by looking around sincerely for political instruments that might best express the genuine will of the majority. They arrive at “sovietism” only after repudiating the instrument of universal suffrage—because it does not seem to furnish the solution they are seeking.

*Psychologically* the most characteristic thing about the rush of the “extreme leftists” toward “sovietism” is their desire to jump over the historic inertia of the masses. Dominating their *logic*, however, is the idea that soviets constitute a new, “finally discovered,” political mode. This, they say, is the specific instrument of the class rule of the proletariat, just as the democratic republic is according to them the specific instrument of the rule of the bourgeoisie.

The idea that the working class can only come to power by using social forms that are absolutely different, even in principle, from those assumed by the power of the bourgeoisie, has existed since the dawn of the *revolutionary* labor movement. We find it, for example, in the fearless propaganda of the immediate predecessors of the Chartist movement: the construction worker James Morrisson and his friend, the weaver James Smith. At the time when the advanced workers of the period were only beginning to conceive the idea that there was the need of seizing political power and to win universal suffrage in order to accomplish the latter, Smith was already writing in his journal, *The Crisis*, April 12, 1834:

“... We shall have a real House of Commons. We have never yet had a House of Commons. The only House of Commons is a House of Trades, and that is only beginning to be formed. We shall have a new set of boroughs when the unions are organized: every trade shall be a borough, and every trade shall have a council of representatives to conduct its affairs. Our present commoners know nothing of the interests of the people, and care not for them... The character of the Reformed Parliament is now blasted, and like a character of a woman



when lost, is not easily recovered. It will be replaced with a House of Trades."<sup>4</sup>

Morrison wrote in his publication, *The Pioneer*, May 31, 1834:

"The growing power and growing intelligence of the trade unions, when properly managed, will draw into its vortex all the commercial interests of the country, and, in so doing, it will become, by its own self-acquired importance, a most influential, we might almost say *dictatorial*, part of the body politic. When this happens, we have gained all that we want: we have gained universal suffrage, for if every member of the union be a constituent, and the Union itself becoming a vital member of the State, it instantly erects itself into a House of Trades which must supply the place of the present House of Commons, and direct industrial affairs of the country, according to the will of the trades that compose the associations of industry . . . With us, universal suffrage will begin in our lodges, extend to the general union, embrace the management of trade, and finally swallow up the political power."<sup>5</sup>

Substitute Soviet for Union, executive committee ("ispolkom") for council of representatives, Soviet Congress for House of Trades, and you have a draft of the "Soviet system" established on the basis of productive cells.

In his polemic against the *trade-union* conception of the dictatorship of the proletariat, B. O'Brien, who later headed the Chartists, wrote: ". . . Universal suffrage does not signify meddling with politics, but the rule of the people in the State and municipality, a Government therefore in favor of the working man."<sup>6</sup>

Basing itself largely on the experience of the revolutionary labor movement in England, the 1848 communism—scientific socialism—of Marx and Engels, identified the problem of the conquest of State power by the proletariat with that of the organization of a rational democracy.

The *Communist Manifesto* declared: "We have already seen that the first step in the working-class revolution is raising the proletariat to the position of a ruling class, the conquest of democracy."

According to Lenin the *Manifesto* poses the question of the State "still extremely in the abstract and employing ideas and expressions that are quite general" (*State and Revolution*, page 29, Russian ed.). The problem of the conquest of State power is presented more concretely in *The 18th Brumaire*. Its concretization is completed in *Civil War in France*, written after the experience of the Paris Commune. Lenin is of the opinion that, in the course of this development,

<sup>4</sup> Quoted by M. Beer in his *History of British Socialism*, page 265 of German ed.

<sup>5</sup> M. Beer, page 266.

<sup>6</sup> M. Beer, page 266. From *Poorman's Guardian*, Dec. 7 and 21, 1833.

Marx has been led precisely to that conception of the dictatorship of the proletariat which forms today the basis of Bolshevism.

In 1852, in *Eighteenth Brumaire*, Marx wrote:

"Every previous revolution has brought the machinery of State to a greater perfection instead of breaking it up."

On the 12th of April 1871, in a letter to Kugelmann, he formulated his viewpoint on the problem of revolution as follows:

"If you look at the last chapter of my *Eighteenth Brumaire*, you will see that I declare the next attempt of the French Revolution to be not merely to hand over, from one set to another, the bureaucratic and military machine, as was the case up to now, but to shatter it. That is precisely the preliminary condition of any real people's revolution on the Continent. It is exactly this that constitutes the attempt of our heroic Parisian comrades."

In this spirit, Marx declared (*Civil War in France*) that the Commune was: "a republic that was not merely to suppress the monarchic form of class domination but the class State itself."

What was then the Commune?

It was an attempt to bring about the effective and rational establishment of a democratic State by destroying the military and bureaucratic State apparatus. It was an attempt to establish a State based entirely on the power of the people.

As long as he speaks of the destruction of the bureaucracy, the police and permanent army, as long as he speaks of the electiveness and recall of all officials, of the broadest autonomy possible in local administration, of the centralization of all power in the hands of the people's representatives (thus doing away with the gap between the legislative and executive departments of the government, and replacing the "talking" parliament with a "working institution"); as long as he speaks of all of this in his defence of the Commune, Marx remains faithful to the conception of the social revolution he presented in the *Communist Manifesto*, in which the dictatorship of the proletariat is identified with the "conquest of democracy." He therefore remains quite logical with himself when in his letter to Kugelmann, quoted above, he stresses that the "destruction of the bureaucratic and military machine" is the "preliminary condition of any real people's revolution *on the Continent*" (our emphasis.)

On this point, it is interesting to compare the experience gathered by Marx and Engels from the events of 1848 with the conclusions drawn by Hertzén. In his *Letters from France and Italy*, Hertzén wrote:

"When universal suffrage is found alongside the monarchic organization of the State, when it is found alongside that absurd separation of power so glorified by the partisans of constitutional forms, when it is found alongside a religious conception of representation, alongside a police centralization of the entire State in the hands of a cabinet—



then universal suffrage is an optical illusion and has about as much value as the equality preached by Christianity. It is not enough to assemble once a year, elect a deputy, and then return home to resume the passive role of administered subjects. The entire social hierarchy should be based on universal suffrage. The local community should elect its government and the department (province) its own. All proconsuls, made sacred by the mystery of ministerial unction, ought to be done away with. Only then will the people be able to exercise effectively all their rights and proceed intelligently with the election of their representatives to a central parliament." The bourgeois republicans, quite on the contrary, "wanted to maintain the cities and municipalities in complete dependence on the executive power and applied the democratic idea of universal suffrage to only one civic act." (Hertzen, *Works*, Pavlenkov ed., vol. 5, pp. 122-123).

In other words, Hertzen, like Marx, denounced the pseudo-democratic bourgeois republic in the name of a republic that was genuinely democratic. And like Hertzen, Marx rose against universal suffrage to the extent that it was no more than a deceptive appendix attached to the "monarchic organization of the State," a legacy of the past. He opposed it because he was for a State organization built from top to bottom on universal suffrage and the sovereignty of the people.

Commenting on Marx's idea, Lenin observes (*State and Revolution*, page 367, Russian ed.):

"This could be conceived in 1871, when England was still the pattern of a purely capitalist country, without a military machine and, in a large measure, without a bureaucracy. That is why Marx excluded England, where a revolution, even a people's revolution could be imagined, and was then possible, without the preliminary condition of the destruction of the State machine since the latter was available, all ready, for it."

Unfortunately, Lenin hurries to pass over this point without reflecting on all the questions posed for us by Marx's restrictions.

According to Lenin, Marx admitted a situation in which the people's revolution would not need to shatter the available ready State machinery. This was the case when the State machinery did not have the military and bureaucratic character typical of the Continent and could therefore be utilized by a real people's revolution. The existence, within the framework of capitalism and in spite of the latter, of a *democratic apparatus of self-administration*, which the military and bureaucratic machine had not succeeded in crushing, was evidently exceptional. In that case, according to Marx, the people's revolution should simply take possession of that apparatus and perfect it, thus realizing the State form that the revolution could best use for its creative purposes.

It is not for nothing that Marx and Engels admitted theoretically the possibility of a *pacifist* socialist revolution in England. This theoretic possibility rested precisely on the democratic character, capable of being perfected, which the British State presented in their day.

Much water has flowed under the bridges since then. In England, as in the United States, imperialism has forged the "military and bureaucratic State machine" the absence of which had constituted, as a general feature, the difference between the political evolution of the Anglo-Saxon countries and the general type of capitalist State. At the present time, it is permissible to doubt if this feature has been preserved even in the youngest Anglo-Saxon republics: Australia and New Zealand. "Today," remarks Lenin with justification, "both in England and in America the 'preliminary condition of any real people's revolution' is the break-up, the shattering of the 'available ready machinery of the State.'"\*

The theoretic possibility has not revealed itself in reality. But the sole fact that he admitted such a possibility shows us clearly Marx's opinion, leaving no room for arbitrary interpretation. What Marx designated as the "destruction of the State machine" in *Eighteenth Brumaire* and in his letter to Kugelmann was the destruction of the *military and bureaucratic apparatus* that the bourgeois democracy had inherited from the monarchy and perfected in the process of consolidating the rule of the bourgeois class. There is nothing in Marx's reasoning that even suggests the destruction of the *State organization as such* and the replacement of the State during the revolutionary period, that is during the dictatorship of the proletariat, with a social bond formed on a *principle opposed to that of the State*. Marx and Engels foresaw such a substitution only at the end of a process of "a progressive withering away" of the State and all the functions of social *coercion*. They foresaw this atrophy of the State and the functions of social coercion to be the result of the prolonged existence of the socialist régime.

It is not for any idle reason that Engels wrote in 1891, in his preface to *Civil War in France*:

\* It is as if Martov, writing in Russia, immediately after the World War, actually thought that by 1919 all democratic State machinery, developed up to then in England, Australia, New Zealand, the United States and other points west, had been replaced with military-bureaucratic institutions. Something as similar is taken as an uncontradictable fact by the well-read and right-thinking Soviet citizen of 1938. In Martov's case, the error is not accounted for altogether by the post-War blockade of Russia. We have already noted that no more than his compatriot Lenin did Martov—also a product of the Russian revolutionary movement—see clearly the relation between capitalism and popular, "democratic," political mass support. Yet how much insight into what is really the same problem is shown by him in the immediately preceding *Metaphysical Materialism and Dialectical Materialism*.—Translator.



"In reality, the State is nothing more than a machine for the oppression of one class by another, and indeed in the democratic republic no less than in the monarchy; and at best an evil inherited by the proletariat after its victorious struggle for class supremacy whose *worse sides* the proletariat, just like the Commune, will have at the earliest possible moment to lop off, until such time as a new generation, reared under new and free social conditions, will be able to throw on the scrap-heap all the useless lumber of the State."

Isn't this clear enough? The proletariat lops off "the worst sides" of the democratic State (for example: the police, permanent army, the bureaucracy as an independent entity, exaggerated centralization, etc.) But it does not suppress the democratic State as such. On the contrary, it creates the democratic State in order to have it replace the "military and bureaucratic State," which must be shattered.

"If there is anything about which there can be no doubt it is that our party and the working class can only gain supremacy under a political régime like the democratic republic. *The latter is, indeed, the specific form of the dictatorship of the proletariat, as has been demonstrated by the French revolution.*"

That is how Engels expresses himself in his critique of the draft of the Erfurt program. He does not speak there of a "soviet" republic (the term was, of course, unknown), nor of a commune-republic, in contrast to the "State." Neither does he speak of the "trade-union republic" imagined by Smith and Morrisson and by the French syndicalists. Clearly and explicitly, Engels speaks of the democratic republic, that is, of a State democratized from top to bottom, "an evil inherited by the proletariat."

This is stated so clearly, so explicitly, that when Lenin quotes these words, he finds it necessary to obscure their meaning.

"Engels," he says, "repeats here in a particularly emphatic form the fundamental idea which, like a red thread, runs throughout all Marx's work, viz., that the Democratic Republic *comes nearest* the dictatorship of the proletariat. For such a republic, without in the least setting aside the domination of capital, and, therefore, the oppression of the masses and the class struggle, inevitably leads to such an extension, intensification and development of that struggle that, as soon as the chance arises for satisfying the fundamental interests of the oppressed masses, this chance is realized inevitably and solely in the form of the dictatorship of the proletariat, of the guidance of these masses by the proletariat."<sup>8</sup>

However, Engels does not speak of a political form that "comes nearest the dictatorship," as is interpreted by Lenin in his commentaries.

<sup>7</sup> The version found in one English edition is "the nearest jumping-board to."—*Translator*.

<sup>8</sup> *State and Revolution*, page 66, Chapter IV.

He speaks of the only "specific" political form in which the *dictatorship can be realized*. According to Engels, the dictatorship is forged in the *democratic republic*. Lenin, on the other hand, sees democracy *merely* as the means of sharpening the class struggle, thus confronting the proletariat with the problem of the dictatorship. For Lenin, the democratic republic finds its conclusion in the dictatorship of the proletariat, giving birth to the latter but destroying itself in the delivery. Engels, on the contrary, is of the opinion that when the proletariat has gained supremacy in the democratic republic and thus realized its dictatorship, *within the democratic republic*, it will consolidate the latter by that very act and invest it, for the first time, with a character that is genuinely, fundamentally and completely democratic. That is why, in 1848, Engels and Marx identified the act of "raising the proletariat to a ruling class" with "the conquest of democracy." That is why in *The Civil War*, Marx hailed, in the experience of the Commune, the total triumph of the principles of people's power: universal franchise, electiveness and recall of all officials. That is why in 1891, in his preface to *The Civil War*, Engels wrote again:

"Against this transformation of the State and the organs of the State from the servants of society into masters of society—a process which had been inevitable in all previous States—the Commune made use of two infallible expedients. In the first place, it confided all administrative, judicial and educational functions to men chosen by universal suffrage, and it reserved to itself the right of recalling them at any time, upon the decision of their electors. In the second place, all officials, high or low, were paid only by wages not surpassing the wages received by other categories of workers."

Thus, universal suffrage is an "infallible expedient" against the transformation of the State "from a servant of society into its master." Thus, only the State conquered by the proletariat under the form of a basically democratic republic can be a real "servant of society."

Is it not plain that when he speaks this way and identifies, at the same time, *such* a democratic republic with the *dictatorship of the proletariat*, Engels is not employing the latter term to indicate a *form of government* but to designate the *social structure* of the State power? It was exactly this that is stressed by Kautsky in his *Dictatorship of the Proletariat* when he says that for Marx such a dictatorship was not a question "of a form of government but of its nature." An attempt at any other interpretation leads perforce to the appearance of a flagrant contradiction between Marx's affirmation that the Paris Commune was an incarnation of the dictatorship of the proletariat and the emphasis he laid on the total democracy established by the Paris Communards.

Lenin's text demonstrates that when he really permitted himself to make contact with the viewpoint of the creators of scientific socialism,



he rose above a simplistic conception of the dictatorship of the proletariat, and did not then reduce it to *dictatorial forms of organization of power* and did not then fasten to the term the meaning of a definite "political structure." In the quotation from *State and Revolution* reproduced above, Lenin puts an equals sign between "dictatorship of the proletariat" and "the guidance of these masses by the proletariat." The equation corresponds entirely to the conception held by Marx and Engels. It is exactly this way that Marx represented the dictatorship of the proletariat under the Paris Commune when he wrote "this was the first revolution in which the working class was openly acknowledged as the only class capable of social initiative, even by the great bulk of the Parisian middle-class—shop-keepers, tradesmen, merchants—the wealthy capitalists alone excepted." The voluntary acceptance by the great population of the hegemony of the working class engaged in the struggle against capitalism, forms the essential basis of the "political structure" that is called "dictatorship of the proletariat." Similarly, the voluntary acceptance by the popular masses of the hegemony of the bourgeoisie permits us to designate the political structure existing in France, England and the United States as the "dictatorship of the bourgeoisie." This dictatorship is not done away with when the bourgeoisie finds it worth while to offer to the peasants and the petty bourgeois, whom it directs, the appearance of sovereignty, by granting them universal suffrage. Similarly, the dictatorship of the proletariat that Marx and Engels had in mind can only be realized on the basis of the sovereignty of all the people and, therefore, only on the basis of the widest possible application of universal suffrage.<sup>9</sup>

Therefore, when we consider the opinions of Marx and Engels on the dictatorship of the proletariat, on the democratic republic and on the "State that is an evil," we are obliged to arrive at the following conclusion:

<sup>9</sup> In 1903, as is known, George Plekhanov declared, that when the revolutionary proletariat has realized its dictatorship, it may find it necessary to deprive the bourgeoisie of all political rights (including the right to vote). However, to Plekhanov this was one of the *possibilities*, one of the *contingencies*, of the dictatorship of the proletariat. In my pamphlet *The Struggle Against Martial Law within the Social-Democratic Labor Party of Russia*, I tried to interpret Plekhanov's words as presenting an example *admissible only in logical abstraction* and therefore used by him to illustrate the thesis: "The safety of the revolution is the supreme law and takes precedence over any other consideration." I expressed the belief that Plekhanov himself probably did not presume that, after they had acquired power, the proletariat of countries that were *economically ripe for socialism* could find themselves in a situation where it was not possible for them to support themselves on the willing acceptance of their direction by the people but, on the contrary, had to deny to the bourgeois minority, by force, the exercise of political rights. In a private conversation with me, Plekhanov objected to my putting such an interpretation on his words. I understood then that his conception of the dictatorship of the proletariat was not free of a certain kinship with the *Jacobin dictatorship by a revolutionary minority*.

To Marx and Engels, the problem of the taking of political power by the proletariat is bound up with the destruction of the bureaucratic-military machine, which rules the bourgeois State in spite of the existence of democratic parliamentarism.

To Marx and Engels, the problem of the dictatorship of the proletariat is bound to the establishment of a State based on sincere and total democracy, on universal suffrage, on the widest local self-administration, and has, as its corollary, the existence of the effective hegemony of the proletariat over the majority of the population.

In that regard, Marx and Engels continue and extend the political tradition of the Mountain of 1793 and the Chartists of the O'Brien School.

It is true, however, that it is possible to discover in the works of Marx and Engels the traces of other ideas. These appear to offer ground to theses according to which the *forms*, and even *institutions*, that may embody the political power of the proletariat, take on an essentially new character, opposed in principle to the forms and institutions that embody the political power of the bourgeoisie, and opposed in principle to the *State* as such.

These ideas belong to a special cycle and merit a separate study. We shall deal with them in the following chapter.

#### THE COMMUNE OF 1871

WHEN HE considered the Commune in his writings, Marx could not merely present his views on the dictatorship of the proletariat. The uprising had many enemies. The first thing to be done was to defend the Commune against the calumny of its enemies. It was natural for this circumstance to influence Marx's manner of dealing with the slogans and ideas of the movement that produced the events of March 1871.

Because the revolutionary explosion which led to the seizure of Paris by the armed people on March 18, 1871 was the expression of a fierce class struggle, it also provoked a conflict between the democratic-republican population of the large city and the conservative population of the provinces, especially that of the rural districts.

During the preceding two decades, the "backward" peasantry of France helped to crush revolutionary and republican Paris by supporting the extreme bureaucratic centralism of the Second Empire. As a result of this, the revolt of the Parisian democracy against the national representatives sitting at Versailles, appeared at first as a struggle for *municipal autonomy*.<sup>10</sup>

This circumstance gained for the Commune the sympathy of many

<sup>10</sup> "The 18th of March took the aspect of a rebellion of Paris against provincial oppression," writes Paul Louis, the historian of French socialism. *Histoire du socialisme français*, 2nd ed., page 308.



bourgeois radicals, people who were for administrative decentralization and wide local autonomy. For some time, this aspect of the Paris Commune of 1871 hid the real nature and historic meaning of their movement even from the most outstanding Communards.

In his book of recollections of the International, the anarchist Guillaume tells how immediately after the outbreak of the revolt, the Jura Federation sent their delegate Jacquault to Paris, in order to learn what would be the best way of helping the uprising, which the Jurasians considered to be the beginning of a universal social revolution. Great was the surprise of the men of Jura when their delegate returned with a report of the total lack of understanding shown by E. Varlin, the most influential of the "left" militants among the French Internationalists. According to Varlin, it appears, the uprising had a purely local aim—the conquest of municipal liberties for Paris. According to Varlin, the conquest of these liberties was not expected to have any social and revolutionary repercussions in the rest of Europe. (*L'Internationale, Souvenirs*, vol. II, page 133.)

It is understood that this could have been said only during the first days of the Commune. Soon the historic scope of their revolution started to become visible to the Paris proletariat. It is nevertheless true that the Commune never completely freed itself from the bourgeois conceptions that wanted to limit its aims to questions of municipal autonomy.

It is this lack of *ideological* clarity in the Communards' minds that Marx later attacked in a letter to Kugelmann. In this letter, Marx mentions a demonstration staged against him by the Communard refugees in London, and takes the occasion to recall that it was he, however, who had "saved the honor" of the revolution of 1871. Marx "saved the honor" of the Commune by revealing its historic meaning, a meaning that the Communard combatants themselves were unaware of.

But the Commune was influenced by other ideologies besides that of bourgeois radicalism. It also bore the imprint of Anarchist Proudhonism and Hébertian Blanquism, the two tendencies that fused in the general French working class movement. The representatives of these currents of thought sought in the Paris Commune a content that was diametrically opposed to that which the democratic bourgeoisie wanted to put into it. The semblance of identity between the social revolutionary and the bourgeois radical viewpoints was only due to the fact that both took a common stand against the bureaucratic and centralizing leanings of the State apparatus left by the Second Empire.

During the last few years before the Commune, the French Blanquists managed to make some contact with the working people of their country. They partially passed beyond the bourgeois Jacobinism under whose influence (and the influence of the Baboeuf school) they grew up. While they did not cease to draw their political inspiration from

the heritage of the 18th century revolution, the most active representatives of Blanquism became more circumspect in regard to the Jacobin forms of democracy and revolutionary dictatorship. They tried to find for the proletarian movement of their time an ideological support in the revolutionary tradition of the "Hébertists," the extreme Left of the *sans-culotte* of the French Revolution.

In 1793-1794, Hébert and his partisans found support among the real *sans-culotte* of the Parisian faubourgs, whose vague social and revolutionary hopes they tried to interpret. By means of this support, the Hébertists strove to turn the Paris Commune into an instrument by which they might exert pressure on the central government. Making use of the direct help of the armed populace, the Hébertists wanted to transform the Paris Commune of 1794 into a center possessing total revolutionary power. As long as Robespierre had not as yet reduced it to the level of a subordinate administrative mechanism (and he did that by crushing the Hébertists and sending their chiefs to the guillotine), the Commune of 1794 really represented the active revolutionary elements among the Parisian *sans-culotte*, by whom it had been chosen. Up to then, it incarnated the instinctive desire of the masses of the city poor to impose their dictatorship on rural and provincial France with its backward political conceptions.<sup>11</sup>

The Commune, as the instrument of the revolutionary will and the direct revolutionary action of the propertyless masses, contrasted to the democratic State, became the political ideal of the young Blanquists during the latter years of the Second Empire.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>11</sup> It is to Hébert's Commune of Paris and that of Lyon that belongs the credit of initiating the extreme acts of political terror (the September executions, the expulsion of the Girondins from the Convention) and the measures of "consumers' communism" by which the cities, deprived of resources, attempted to force the petty bourgeoisie of the villages and the outlying provinces to provide them with foodstuffs. It is in the Communes of Paris and Lyon where the expeditions of the "army of provisioning" started. There were organized the "committees of poor" for the purpose of appropriating grain from the contemporary "kulacks," whom the jargon of the period called "aristocrats." The two Communes of the French Revolution imposed contributions on the bourgeois and "took charge" of the stocks of commodities produced by industry during the preceding years (especially at Lyon). From these organizations emanated the requisition of residences, the forcible attempts to lodge the poor in houses considered too large for their occupants, and other equalitarian measures. If in their quest for historic analogies, Lenin, Trotsky and Radek had shown a greater knowledge of the past, they would not have tried to tie the genealogy of the Soviets to the Commune of 1871 but to the Paris Commune of 1793-94, which was a center of revolutionary energy and power very similar to the institution of their own time.

<sup>12</sup> In his letter to Marx, July 6, 1869, (*Correspondence*, vol. IV, page 175), Engels mentions Tridon's pamphlet, *Les Hébertistes*, in which the author presents the arguments of that wing of Blanquism:

"It is ridiculous to suppose that the dictatorship of Paris over France—the rock on which *the first revolution was wrecked*—can simply be reproduced and meet with a different fate."



In the course of the Revolution of March 18, another political trend, that of the Anarcho-Proudhonians, became visible. It moved alongside the "Hebertian" current, at times mingling with it.

Both tendencies saw in the "commune" a lever of revolution. But to the Proudhonians, the commune did not appear to be a political, and specifically revolutionary, organization that, pitted against the just as political, and more or less democratic, State, was to obtain the effective submission of the latter by means of the dictatorship of Paris over France. They opposed every form of the State as an "artificial"—that is, political—grouping, established on the basis of the subordination of the citizenry to an apparatus, even under the fallacious guise of popular representation. The "commune" they had in mind was the "natural" social organization of producers.

According to their outlook, the commune was not merely to rise *above* the State, or subject the latter to its dictatorship. It was also to *separate* itself from the State, and invite all the 36,000 *communes* (cities and villages) of France to proceed the same way, thus decomposing the State and substituting for it a free federation of communes.

"What does Paris want?" asked *La Commune* on April 19, and it answered its own question as follows:

"The extension of the absolute autonomy of the Commune to all the localities of France, assuring to each its rights, to every Frenchman the complete exercise of his faculties and aptitudes as a human being, citizen and worker.

"The autonomy of the Commune will be limited to the right of equal autonomy of all the communes participating in the pact. Such an association will assure French unity."

Logically flowing from this stand was a *federalist* program in the Proudhon-Bakuninist spirit, recognizing a voluntary and elastic pact as the only tie between the communes and excluding the complicated apparatus of a general State administration. The Communards were quite pleased when they were nicknamed "Federalists."

"On the 18th of March," wrote the Bakuninist Arthur Arnould, a member of the Commune (*Popular History of the Commune*, page 243), "the people declared that it was necessary to escape the vicious circle, that it was necessary to destroy the evil in the egg that the thing to be done was not merely to change masters, but no longer to have any. In a miraculous recognition of the truth, seeking to reach the goal by all the roads leading to it, the people proclaimed the autonomy of the Commune and a federation of communes.

". . . For the first time, we were to interpret the real rules, the just and normal laws, which assure the true independence of the individual and the communal or corporative group, and to effect a bond between the various homogeneous groupings, so that they might enjoy, at the same time, union, in which there is strength, . . . and autonomy, which

is indispensable to . . . the infinite development of all the original capacities and qualities of production and progress."

This communal federalism appeared to the Anarcho-Proudhonians to be the organization in which the economic relation of the producers would find their *direct* expression.

"Each autonomous grouping," continues Arnould, "communal or corporative, depending on circumstances, will have to solve, within its own framework, the social question, that is, the problem of property, the relation between labor and capital, etc.

Note the restriction: "communal or corporative, depending on circumstances." The viewpoint of the Federalist-Communard approaches quite closely to the outlook which, in 1833, led Morrisson and Smith to their formula of a "House of Trades;" which at the beginning of the twentieth century, gave rise to the doctrine of Georges Sorel, Edmond Berth, Di Leone and others, on the replacement of the "artificial" subdivisions existing in the modern State by a federation of "natural" corporative (occupational) cells; and which, in 1917-1919, created the conception of the "soviet system."

"Communal groupings," comments Arnould later, "correspond to the ancient political organization. The corporative grouping corresponds to the *social* organization." (Our emphasis.) Thus the communal organization was to serve as a *transition* between the State and the "corporative" federation.

This opposition of a "political" organization to a "social" organization presumes that the "destruction of the State machinery" by the proletariat will immediately reestablish among the producers "natural" relations, which supposedly can only manifest themselves outside of political norms and institutions. This contrast underlay the social-revolutionary tendencies that were in favor among the Communards.

"Everything that the socialists stand for, and which they will not be able to obtain from a strong and centralized power, no matter how democratic, without formidable convulsions, without a ruinous, painful and cruel struggle—they will get in an orderly manner, with certainty, and without violence, through the simple development of the communal principle of free grouping and federation."

"The solution of these problems can belong only to the corporative and productive groupings, united by federative ties, and therefore free from governmental and administrative—in other words, *political* (our emphasis) — shackles, which till now have maintained, by oppression, the antagonism between capital and labor, subjecting the latter to the first." (*Ibidem*, page 250, *Russian translation*.)

That is how *the most advanced* of the Communards—the combatants who were closest to the social-revolutionary class movement of the French proletariat of the time—conceived the substance and scope of the Commune of 1871.



Charles Seignobos is obviously wrong when he states (in his note on the Commune, found in the *History of the 20th Century* by Lavis and Rambaud) that the revolutionaries renounced their initial aim—the seizure of power in France—and rallied to the cause of the autonomous commune of Paris, because they found themselves isolated from the rest of France and had to pass to the defensive. The latter circumstance merely helped the triumph of the Anarcho-Federalist ideas in the development of the Commune. If in the program of the Communards, the Hébertist conception of the Commune as the dictator of France ceded ground to the Proudhonian idea of an apolitical federation, it is because the class character of the struggle between Paris and Versailles came out in the open. At that time, the class consciousness of the proletarians in the small industries of Paris gravitated entirely around the ideological opposition of a “natural” union of producers within society to the “artificial” unification of the producers within the State. We have seen how, at the beginning, Varlin presented the Commune as a thing of pure democratic radicalism. In its proclamation of March 23, 1871, the Paris section of the International declared that—

“The independence of the Commune is the guarantee of a contract whose freely debated clauses will do away with class antagonism and assure social equality.” This means the following. After the State and the power of constraint exercised by the State had collapsed, it becomes possible to create a simple “natural” social bond among the members of society—a bond based on their economic interdependence. And it is precisely the commune that is destined to become the framework within the limits of which this bond can be realized.

“We have demanded the emancipation of the workers,” continues the proclamation, “and the communal delegation is the guarantee of this emancipation. For it will provide every citizen with the means of defending his rights, of controlling effectively the acts of the mandatories charged with the administration of his interests, and of determining the progressive application of social reforms.”

It is easily seen that for the Anarchist idea of a *commune of labor*—that is, a union of producers, as contrasted to a union of citizens within the State—the proclamation discreetly substitutes the idea of a *political* commune, the prototype of the modern State, a State microcosm, inside of which the representation of interests and the satisfaction of social needs become specialized functions, just as (though certainly in a more rudimentary form) in the complicated mechanism of the modern State. P. Lavrov understood this quite well. He thus notes in his book on the Commune (P. Lavrov: *The Paris Commune*, page 130, Russ. ed.):

“In the course of the 19th century, the unity of communal interests disappeared entirely before the increased struggle of classes. As a moral entity, the commune *did not exist at all* (emphasis by Lavrov). In each commune (municipality) the irreducible camps of the proletariat

and the big bourgeoisie faced each other, and the struggle was further complicated by the presence of many groups of the small bourgeoisie. For a moment, Paris was united by a common *emotion*: irritation with the Bordeaux and Versailles Assemblies. But a passing emotion cannot be the basis of a political régime.”

He adds (p. 167):

“The effective autonomous basis of the régime, to which the social revolution will lead, is not at all the political commune, which admits inequality, the promiscuity of the parasites and laborers, etc. It is formed rather by a *conjointly responsible* grouping of workers of every kind, rallied to the program of the *social revolution*” (our emphasis).

P. Lavrov speaks clearly of a “confusion of two notions: 1. the autonomous political commune (municipality), the ideal of the Middle Ages, in the struggle for which the bourgeoisie solidified itself and grew strong during the first stages of its history; and 2. the autonomous commune of the proletariat, which is to appear after the economic victory of the proletariat over its enemies, after the establishment, *within* the community, of a social solidarity that is inconceivable as long as the economic exploitation of labor by capital continues, and, therefore, as long as class hatred within each community is inevitable. When we analyze the demands of communal autonomy, as they were generally formulated in the course of the struggle in question, we may ask what relation could the unquestioned socialists of the Paris Commune see between the fundamental problem of socialism—the struggle of labor against capital—and the slogan of the ‘free commune’ which they inscribed on their flag?”

The paradox indicated by Lavrov consists of the following:

The very possibility of the process of transforming the capitalist order into a socialist order is subordinated to the existence of a social form whose mould, we believe, can only be furnished by a more or less developed socialist economy. This confusion is typical of the Anarchists. If it is obvious that the destruction of the basis of private economy, the transformation of the whole natural economy into socialist economy, will do away with the need of having an organization rise above the producer in the shape of the State—the Anarchists deduce from this that “the destruction of the State, its “decomposition” into cells, into “communes,” is a *prerequisite condition* for the social transformation itself. There existed in the ideology of the Communards a juxtaposition of Proudhonian, Hébertist and bourgeois-autonomist notions. So that in their discussions, they passed with the greatest of ease from the political “commune”—a territorial unit created by the preceding evolution of bourgeois society—to the “corporative” commune—the free association of workers, which we may imagine will be the social grouping when a socialist order has been achieved and the col-



lective effort of one or two generations will have rendered possible "the progressive atrophy of the State" as predicted by Engels.<sup>13</sup>

The interesting exposition made Dunoyer, one of the witnesses who appeared before the inquest commission appointed by the Versailles National Assembly after the fall of the Commune (quoted by Lavrov in his *Paris Commune*, page 166), suggests the following conclusion:

The "communalist" ideas, as they were conceived in the minds of the workers, merely represented an attempt to transplant into the structure of society the forms of *their own* combat organization.

"In 1871, the grouping of the workers within the International by sections and federations of sections was one of the elements that contributed toward the spread of the commune idea in France." The International "possessed a ready made organization, where the word 'Commune' stood for the word 'Section' and the federation of communes was nothing else than the federation of sections."

Compare this statement with the citations that we made, in the preceding chapter, from the writings of the English trade-unionists of 1830, whose programs called for the replacement of the parliamentary bourgeois State with a "Federation of Trades." Let us recall the analogous theses of the French syndicalists in the 20th century. And let us not forget that in our time, working people take to "the idea of the soviets" after knowing them as combat organizations formed in the process of the class struggle at a sharp revolutionary stage.

In all the "commune" theses we discover one recurring point. It consists in spurning the "State" as the instrument of the revolutionary transformation of society in the direction of socialism. On the other hand, Marxism, as it developed since 1848, is characterized especially by the following:

In accordance with the tradition of Babeuf and Blanqui, Marxism

<sup>13</sup> We find today (1918-1919) among the Bolsheviks in Russia, and in Western Europe, the same confusion, with their specific "political form" that is supposed to accomplish the social emancipation of the proletariat. Also for these people, the question is said to be one of replacing the territorial organization of the State with unions of producers. Indeed, at first that was described to be the essence of the republic of soviets. This substitution is presented to us, at the same time, 1. as the natural result of the functioning of an achieved socialist régime and 2. as the prerequisite condition necessary for the realization of the social revolution itself. The confusion overflows all boundaries when an attempt is made to remedy it by resorting to the new notion of a "Soviet State." The latter is supposed to incarnate the organized violence of the proletariat and, in that capacity, prepare the ground for the "withering away" of all forms of the State. But at the same time, it is, in principle, supposed to be opposed to the State as such. The Paris Communards reasoned the same way. They permitted themselves to imagine that the Commune-State of 1871 was something whose very principle was the opposite of any form of the State, while, in reality, it represented a simplified modern democratic State functioning in the manner of the Swiss canton.

recognizes the State (naturally after its conquest by the proletariat) as the principal lever of this transformation. That is why already in the 60's the Anarchists and Proudhonians denounced Marx and Engels as "Statists."

What then was the attitude taken by Marx and Engels toward the experience provided by the Paris Commune, when the proletariat tried for the first time to realize a socialist "dictatorship?"

#### MARX AND THE COMMUNE

THE PROUDHONISTS and the Anarchists were not greatly addicted to the study of economics. They had a naive, almost simplistic, conception of what would follow the seizure of the means of production by the working class. They did not realize that capitalism has created, for the concentration of the means of production and distribution, so huge an apparatus, that in order to lay hold of these means, the working class would require effective administrative machinery extending over the entire economic domain that was previously ruled by capital. They had no idea of the immenseness and complexity of the transformation that would come as a result of a social revolution. And only because they did not understand all these things was it possible for them to think of the autonomous "commune" — itself based on "autonomous" productive units — as the lever of such a transformation.

Marx was well aware of the preponderant role played by Anarcho-Proudhonism in the movement that brought forth the Paris Commune. In a letter to Engels (June 30, 1866), he refers ironically to "Proudhonian Stirnerianism," which is inclined to "decompose everything into small groups or communes that are expected to come together again in some kind of union, but of course, not in the State." (*Correspondence*, vol. III.)

In 1871, however, Marx faced the task of defending the Paris Commune against its enemies, who were drowning it in blood. He faced the task of justifying, in the shape of the Commune, the first attempt of the proletariat to seize power. If the Paris Commune had not been crushed by exterior forces, this effort would have led the workers beyond its first aims and shattered the narrow ideological bounds that repressed its vigor and denatured its content.

We can, therefore, understand why in his apology of the Commune, Marx could not even pose the question whether the realization of socialism is conceivable within the framework of autonomous, city and rural, communes. In face of the existing division of labor, economic centralization and the degree of development of the powerful means of production already attained at that time—merely to pose the question would have been tantamount to a categorical rejection of the claim that the autonomous commune could "solve the social question."



We can understand why Marx avoided the question whether a Federalist union of communes could assure systematic social production on the scale customary to the preceding capitalism. We can understand why Marx touches only lightly on one of the most serious problems of the social revolution: the relationship between the city and the country, and merely declares, without any supporting evidence, that "the Communal Constitution (organization) would bring the rural producers under the intellectual lead of the central towns of their districts, and there secure to them, in the working man, the natural defenders of their interests." But would it be possible to hold the socialist economy in the framework of a federation of autonomous communes while this federation permitted the economic direction of the country by the city? Marx could permit himself to "adjourn" all these questions. He could assume that such problems would automatically find their solution in the process of the social revolution and would, at the same time, cast out the Anarcho-Communist illusions that prevailed in the minds of the workers at the beginning.

But Marx did not merely remain silent on such contradictions of the Paris Commune. It is undeniable that he attempted to solve them by recognizing the Commune as "the finally discovered political form, permitting the economic emancipation of labor," and thus contradicted his own principle, that the lever of the social revolution can only be the conquest of *State power*.

"The Communal Constitution," declared Marx, "would have restored to the social body the forces hitherto absorbed by the parasite feeding upon and clogging the free movement of society." (*Civil War in France*.)

"The very existence of the Commune, as a matter of course, led to local municipal liberty but no longer as a counter-weight against the power of the State, which thenceforward became useless." (Our emphasis.)

Thus, the "destruction of the bureaucratic and military machine" of the State, dealt with in Marx's letter to Kugelmann, changed imperceptibly and came to stand for the suppression of all State power, of any apparatus of compulsion in the service of the social administration. The destruction of the "power of the modern State," the Continental type of State, became the destruction of the State as such.

Are we in the presence of an intentional lack of precision, enabling Marx to gloss over, in silence, the weak points of the Paris Commune at a moment when the Commune was being trampled by triumphant reaction? Or did the mighty surge of the revolutionary proletariat of Paris, set in motion under the flag of the Commune, render acceptable to Marx certain ideas of Proudhonian origin? No matter what is the case, it is true that Bakounin and his friends concluded that in his *Civil War in France*, Marx approved of the social revolutionary

path traced by them. So that in his memoirs, James Guillaume (Guillaume: *The International*, Vol. 11, p. 191) observes with satisfaction that in its appreciation of the Commune the General Council of the International (under whose auspices *Civil War* was published) adopted in full the viewpoint of the Federalists. And Bakounin announced triumphantly: "The Communist revolution had so mighty an effect that despite their logic and real inclinations, the Marxists—with all their ideas overthrown by the Commune—were obliged to bow before the insurrection and appropriate its aims and program." Such statements are not free from exaggeration. But they contain a grain of truth.

It is these, not very precise, opinions of Marx on the destruction of the State by a proletarian insurrection and the creation of the Commune that Lenin recognizes as the basis of the new social-revolutionary doctrine he presumes to reveal. On the top of these opinions of Marx, Lenin raises the Anarcho-Syndicalist canvas, picturing the destruction of the State as the immediate result of the conquest of the dictatorship by the proletariat, and replacing the State with that "finally discovered political form," which in 1871 was embodied in the Commune and is represented today by the "soviets"—since "the Russian revolutions of 1905 and 1917, in different surroundings and under different circumstances, have been continuing the work of the Commune and have been confirming Marx's analysis of history." (*State and Revolution*, page 53, Russian text.)

Already in 1899, in his well-known *Principles of Socialism*, Eduard Bernstein observed that in the *Civil War* Marx appears to have taken a step toward Proudhon. "In spite of all points of difference that existed between Marx and the 'petty bourgeois' Proudhon, it is nevertheless true that on this question their currents of thought resemble each other as closely as possible." Bernstein's words throw Lenin into a great fit of anger. "Monstrous! Ridiculous! Renegade!" screams Lenin at Bernstein, and he takes the opportunity to revile Plekhanov and Kautsky for not correcting "this perversion of Marx by Bernstein" in their polemics against Bernstein's book.<sup>14</sup>

But Lenin could have attacked on the same count the "Spartacist" Franz Mehring, unquestionably the best student and commentator of Marx. In his *Karl Marx: The History of His Life* (Leipzig, 1918), Mehring declares explicitly, leaving no room for doubt:

"As ingenious as were some of Marx's arguments (on the Commune), they were to a certain extent, in contradiction with the conceptions championed by Marx and Engels for a quarter of a century and previously formulated by them in the Communist Manifesto.

<sup>14</sup> Of course, Lenin, too, wrote a great deal on the subject of Eduard Bernstein's book, without taking the trouble of correcting that "perversion."



"According to these conceptions, the decomposition of the political organization referred to as the 'State' evidently belongs among the final accomplishments of the coming proletarian revolution. It will be a *progressive decomposition*. That organization has always had as its principal purpose to assure, with the aid of the armed forces, the economic oppression of the working majority by a privileged minority. The disappearance of the privileged minority will do away with the need of the armed force of oppression, that is, State power. But at the same time Marx and Engels emphasized that in order to achieve this—as well as other, even more important, results—the working class will first have to possess itself of the organized political power of the State and use it for the purpose of crushing the resistance of the capitalists and recreating society on a new basis. *It is difficult to reconcile the General Council's lavish praise of the Paris Commune, for having commenced by destroying the parasitic State, with the conceptions presented in the Communist Manifesto.*" (Page 460. Our emphasis.)

And Mehring adds: "One can easily guess that Bakounin's disciples have utilized the address of the General Council in their own fashion."

Mehring is of the opinion that Marx and Engels clearly saw the contradiction existing between the theses presented in the *Civil War* and their previous way of posing the problem as a question of the conquest of State power. He writes: "Thus, when, after Marx's death, Engels had the occasion to combat the Anarchist tendencies, he, for his part at least, repudiated these reservations and resumed integrally the old conceptions found in the Manifesto."

What are the "old conceptions found in the Manifesto?" They are the following:

1. The working class seizes the State machinery forged by the bourgeoisie.

2. It *democratizes* this machinery from top to bottom. (See the immediate measures which, according to the Manifesto, the proletariat of that time would have had to enact when it seized power.) It thus transforms the machinery formerly used by the minority for the oppression of the majority into a machine of constraint exercised by the majority over the minority, with a view of freeing the majority from the yoke of social inequality. That means, as Marx wrote in 1852, not merely "to seize the available ready machinery of the State" of the bureaucratic, police and military type, but to *shatter* that machine in order to construct a new one on the basis of the self-administration of the people guided by the proletariat.

Lenin put to his use the inexact formulae found in *Civil War in France*. These formulae were sufficiently motivated by the immediate need of the General Council to defend the Commune (directed by the Hébertists and the Proudhonists) against its enemies. But they did

away almost completely with the margin existing between the thesis of the "conquest of political power" presented by the Marxists and the idea of the "destruction of the State" held by the Anarchists. On the eve of the revolution of October 1917, in his struggle against the republican democratism practiced by the socialist parties which he opposed, Lenin used these formulae with such good effect that he accumulated in his *State and Revolution* as many contradictions as were found in the heads of all the members of the Commune: Jacobins, Blanquists, Hébertists, Proudhonians and Anarchists. Objectively, this was necessary (Lenin himself did not realize it, without doubt) so that an attempt to create a State machine *very similar* in its structure to the former military and bureaucratic type and controlled by a few adherents<sup>15</sup> might be presented to the masses, then in a condition of revolutionary animation, as the destruction of the old State machinery, as the rise of a society based on a minimum of repression and discipline, as the birth of a *Stateless* society. At the moment when the revolutionary masses expressed their emancipation from the centuries-old yoke of the old State by forming "autonomous republics of Kronstadt" and trying Anarchist experiments such as "workers' control," etc.—at that moment, the "dictatorship of the proletariat and the poorest peasants" (said to be incarnated in the real dictatorship of the supposed "true" interpreters of the proletariat and the poorest peasants: the chosen of Bolshevik Communism) could only consolidate itself by first dressing itself in such Anarchist and anti-State ideology. The formula of "All Power to the Soviets" was found to be most appropriate to express mystically a tendency that agitated the revolutionary elements of the population at that time. This slogan presented to the revolutionary elements of the population two contradictory aims: 1. the creation of a machine that would crush the exploiting classes in the benefit of the exploited; but 2. which would, at the same time, free the exploited from *any* State machinery presupposing the need of subordinating their wills as individuals or groups to the will of the social entity.

No different in origin and significance is the "Soviet mysticism" now current in Western Europe (1919).

In Russia itself the evolution of the "Soviet State" has already created a new and very complicated State machine based on the "administration of persons" as against the "administration of things," based on the opposition of "administration" to "self-administration" and the functionary (official) to the citizen. These antagonisms are in no way different from the antagonisms that characterize the capitalist class State.

<sup>15</sup> Let us recall that Lenin said that if 200,000 proprietors could administer an immense territory in their own interests, 200,000 Bolsheviks would do the same thing in the interest of the workers and peasants.



The economic retrogression that appeared during the World War has *simplified* economic life in all countries. One of the results of this simplification is the eclipse, in the consciousness of the masses, of the problem of the organization of production by the problem of distribution and consumption. This phenomenon encourages in the working class the rebirth of illusions that make it believe in the possibility of laying hold of the national economy by handing over the means of production directly—with the aid of the State—to single groups of workers (“worker control,” “direct socialization,” etc.)

From the ground provided by such economic illusions, we see rise again the fallacy that the liberty of the working class can be accomplished by the *destruction* of the State and not by the *conquest* of the State. This belief throws back the revolutionary working class movement toward the confusion, indefiniteness and low ideological level that characterized it at the time of the Commune of 1871.

On one hand, such illusions are manipulated by certain extremist minorities of the socialist proletariat. On the other hand, these groups are themselves the slaves of these illusions. It is under the influence of this double factor that these minorities act when they seek to find a practical medium by which they might elude the difficulties connected with the realization of a real class dictatorship—difficulties that have increased since the class in question has lost its unity\* in the course of the war and is not capable of immediately giving battle with a revolutionary aim. *Fundamentally, this Anarchist illusion of the destruction of the State covers up the tendency to concentrate all the State power of constraint in the hands of a minority, which believes neither in the objective logic of the revolution nor in the class consciousness of the proletarian majority and, with still greater reason, that of the national majority.*

*The idea that the “Soviet system” is equal to a definitive break with all the former, bourgeois, forms of revolution, therefore, serves as a screen behind which—imposed by exterior factors and the inner conformation of the proletariat—there are again set in motion methods that have featured the bourgeois revolutions. And those revolutions have always been accomplished by transferring the power of a “conscious minority, supporting itself on an unconscious majority,” to another minority finding itself in an identical situation.*

\*“Unity in what?” one may ask. Certainly not unity on the basis of socialist understanding, on the basis of a wide movement for the abolition of the existing system! That was never lost, nationally or internationally, because it has yet to become a fact. Paraphrasing Marx (his letter to Bolte, 23rd of November, 1871), it can be said that if “revolutionary minorities” cast their nets, with a measure of success and some historic justification, it but indicates that the working class has not yet ripened for an independent historic movement. The “revolutionary minorities” will find their fishing mighty poor when the working class reaches that maturity.—Translator.

## PART THREE

### MARX AND THE DICTATORSHIP OF THE PROLETARIAT

IN HER polemic against Edouard Bernstein, Rosa Luxemburg declared, quite correctly, that “there never was any doubt for Marx and Engels about the necessity of having the proletariat conquer political power.”<sup>16</sup> However, the conditions under which this conquest was to be accomplished did not appear the same to Marx and Engels at different periods of their life.

“At the beginning of their activity,” writes Kautsky in his *Democracy or Dictatorship*, “Marx and Engels were greatly influenced by Blanquism, though they immediately adopted to it a critical attitude. The dictatorship of the proletariat to which they aspired in their first writings still showed some Blanquist features.”

This remark is not entirely accurate. If it is true that Marx, putting aside the petty-bourgeois revolutionarism that colored the ideology and politics of Blanquism, recognized the Blanquists of 1848 to be a party representing the revolutionary French proletariat, it is no less true that there is nothing in their works to show that Marx and Engels found themselves at that time under the influence of Blanqui and his partisans. Kautsky is right when he points out that Marx and Engels always took toward the Blanquists a wholly critical attitude. It is undeniable that their first conception of the dictatorship of the proletariat arose under the influence of the *Jacobin* tradition of 1793, with which the Blanquists themselves were penetrated. The powerful historic example of the political dictatorship exercised during the Terror by the lower classes of the population of Paris served Marx and Engels as a point of departure in their reflection on the future conquest of political power by the proletariat. In 1895 (in his preface to *Class Struggles in France*), Engels drew the balance of the experience that his friend and he had gathered in the revolutions of 1848 and 1871: “The time has passed for revolutions accomplished through the sudden seizure of power by small conscious minorities *at the head of unconscious masses.*” When he said this, Engels recognized that in the first period of their activity, the question for him and Marx was exactly that of the conquest of

<sup>16</sup> *Reform or Revolution*, page 46. English ed.



political power "by a conscious minority at the head of unconscious masses." In other words, the problem that seemed to face them was the duplication, in the 19th century, of the experience of the Jacobin dictatorship, with the role of the Jacobins and the Cordeliers taken by the conscious revolutionary elements of the proletariat, supporting themselves on the confused social fermentation of the general population.

By adroit politics, which, because of its knowledge of the practice and theory of scientific socialism, the vanguard would be able to carry on after its seizure of power, the broad proletarian masses would be introduced to the problems current on the day after the revolution and would thus be raised to the rank of conscious authors of historic action. Only such a conception of the dictatorship of the proletariat could permit Marx and Engels to expect that after a more or less prolonged lull, the revolution of 1848—which began as the last grapple between feudal society and the bourgeoisie and by the same internal conflicts occurring between the different layers of bourgeois society—would end in the historic victory of the proletariat over the bourgeoisie.

In 1895, Engels recognized the inconsistency of this conception. "As soon as the situation calls for the total transformation of the social order, the masses must participate in it directly, and they must have an understanding of what is at stake and what must be won. This is what the history of the last half-century has taught us."

That does not mean to say, however, that in 1848 Marx and Engels did not entirely realize what were the necessary historic premises of the socialist revolution. Not only did they recognize that the socialist transformation could only come at a very high level of capitalism, but they also denied the possibility of keeping political power in the hands of the proletariat in the case that this imperative condition did not first exist.

In 1846, in his letter to M. Hess, W. Weitling described his break with Marx in the following words: "We arrived at the conclusion that there could be no question now of realizing communism in Germany; that first the bourgeoisie must come to power." The "we" refers to Marx and Engels, for Weitling says further on: "On this question Marx and Engels had a very violent discussion with me." In October-November of 1847, Marx wrote on this subject with clear-cut definiteness in his article: "Moralizing criticism."

"If it is true that politically, that is to say with the help of the State, the bourgeoisie 'maintains the injustice of property relations' (Heinzer's expression), it is no less true that it does not create them. The injustice of the property relations . . . does not owe its origin in any way to the political domination of the bourgeois classes; but on the contrary, the domination of the bourgeoisie flows from the existing relations of production . . . For this reason, if the proletariat overthrows the political domination of the bourgeoisie, *its victory will only be a point in*

*the process of the bourgeois revolution itself* and will serve the cause of the latter by aiding its further development. This happened in 1794, and will happen again as long as the march, the 'movement,' of history will not have elaborated the material factors that will create the *necessity* of putting an end to the bourgeois methods of production, and, as a consequence, to the political domination of the bourgeoisie." (*Literary Heritage*, volume II, p. 512-513. Our emphasis.)

It appears therefore that Marx admitted the possibility of a political victory of the proletariat over the bourgeoisie at a point of historic development when the previously necessary conditions for a socialist revolution were not yet mature. But he stressed that such a victory would be transitory, and he predicted with the prescience of genius that a conquest of political power by the proletariat that is premature from the historic viewpoint would "only be a point in the process of the bourgeois revolution itself."

We conclude that, in the case of a notably "premature" conquest of power, Marx would consider it obligatory of the conscious elements of the proletariat to pursue a policy that takes into consideration the fact that such a conquest represents objectively "only a point in the process of the bourgeois revolution itself" and will "serve the latter by aiding its further development." He would expect a policy leading the proletariat to limit voluntarily the position and the solution of the revolutionary problems. For the proletariat can score a victory over the bourgeoisie—and not for the bourgeoisie—only when "the march of history will have elaborated the material factors that create the *necessity* (not merely the objective *possibility!*—Martov) of putting an end to the bourgeois methods of production."

The following words of Marx explain in what sense a passing victory of the proletariat can become a point in the process of the bourgeois revolution:

"By its bludgeon blows the Reign of Terror cleansed the surface of France, as if by a miracle, of all the feudal ruins. With its timorous caution, the bourgeoisie would not have managed this task in several decades. Therefore, the bloody acts of the people merely served to level the route of the bourgeoisie."

The Reign of Terror in France was the momentary domination of the democratic petty bourgeoisie and the proletariat over all the possessing classes, including the authentic bourgeoisie. Marx indicates very definitely that such a momentary domination cannot be the starting point of a socialist transformation, unless the material factors rendering this transformation indispensable will have first been worked out.

One might say that Marx wrote this specially for the benefit of those people who consider the simple fact of a fortuitous conquest of power by the democratic small bourgeoisie and the proletariat as proof of the maturity of society for the socialist revolution. But it may also



be said that he wrote this specially for the benefit of those socialists who believe that never in the course of a revolution that is bourgeois in its objectives can there occur a possibility permitting the political power to escape from the hands of the bourgeoisie and pass to the democratic masses. One may say that Marx wrote this also for the benefit of those socialists who consider utopian the mere idea of such a displacement of power and who do not realize that this phenomenon is "only a point in the process of the bourgeois revolution itself," that it is a factor assuring, under certain conditions, the most complete and radical suppression of the obstacles rising in the way of this bourgeois revolution.

The European revolution of 1848 did not lead to the conquest of political power by the proletariat. Soon after the June days, Marx and Engels began to realize that the historic conditions for such a conquest were not yet ripe. However, they continued to overestimate the pace of historic development and expected, as we know, a new revolutionary assault shortly after, even before the last wave of the tempest of 1848 had died away. They found new factors that seemed to favor the possibility of having political power pass into the hands of the proletariat, not only in the experience gathered by the latter in the class combats during the "mad year" but also in the evolution undergone by the small bourgeoisie, which seemed to be pushed irresistibly to a solid union with the proletariat.

In his *Class Struggles in France* and later in *The Eighteenth Brumaire*, Marx noted the movement of the small democratic bourgeoisie of the cities toward the proletariat, a movement that took definite form by 1848. And in the second of the indicated works, he announced the probability of similar movement on the part of the small peasants, hitherto deceived by the dictatorship of Napoleon III, whose principal creators and strongest support they were.

"The interests of the peasants," he wrote, "are no longer confused with those of the bourgeoisie and capital, as was the case under Napoleon I. On the contrary, they are antagonistic. That is why the peasants now find a natural ally and guide in the city proletariat, whose destiny it is to overthrow the bourgeois order." (*The Eighteenth Brumaire*, German edition, p. 102.)

Thus the proletariat apparently no longer had to wait to become the absolute majority in order to win political power. It had grown large as a result of the development of capitalism, and it benefitted besides by the support of the small propertyholders of the city and country whom the pinched chances of making a living moved away from the capitalist bourgeoisie.

When, after an interruption of twenty years, the revolutionary process was revived to end in the Paris Commune, it was in this new fact that

Marx thought he saw an opportunity favoring the solution of the last uprising by the effective and solid dictatorship of the proletariat.

Marx wrote in *Civil War in France*:

"Here was the first revolution in which the working class was acknowledged as the only class capable of social initiative, even by the great bulk of the Paris middle-class—shopkeepers, tradesmen, merchants—the wealthy capitalists alone excepted . . . This mass, belonging to the Third-Estate, had assisted in 1848, in crushing the workers' insurrection, and soon after, without the least ceremony, was sacrificed to their creditors by the then Constituent Assembly . . . This mass now felt it was necessary for it to choose between the Commune and the Empire . . . After the errant band of Bonapartist courtiers and capitalists had fled Paris, the true Third-Estate Party of Order, taking the shape of the "Republican Union," took its place under the flag of the Commune and defended the latter against Thiers' calumnies. (*Civil War in France*, Russian edition, *Boureviestnik*, pp. 36-37.)

Already in 1845, at the time when he was only groping his way to socialism, Marx indicated in his *Introduction to the Criticism of Hegel's Philosophy of Law* the necessary conditions permitting a revolutionary class to lay claim to a position of dominance in society. For that, it must be recognized by all the masses oppressed under the existing régime as "the liberating class par excellence." This situation is possible when the class against which the struggle is led becomes in the eyes of the masses "the oppressing class par excellence." In 1848 this situation certainly did not exist. The decomposition of small property was not yet far enough advanced.

The situation appeared quite different in 1871. By that time, Marx and Engels had undoubtedly freed themselves from the influence of the Jacobin tradition and, therefore, from their conception of the dictatorship of a "conscious minority" acting at the head of unconscious (not understanding) masses (that is, *masses which are simply in revolt*, J. M.). It is precisely on the fact that the ruined small propertyholders grouped themselves knowingly around the socialist proletariat that the two great theoreticians of scientific socialism based their forecast of the outcome of the Parisian insurrection, which, as we know, began against their wishes. They were correct concerning the city petty-bourgeoisie (at least, that of Paris). Contrary to what happened after the June days, the massacre of the Communards in the month of May, 1871 was not the work of the entire bourgeois society but only of the *big* capitalists. The small bourgeoisie participated neither in putting down the Commune nor in the reactionary orgy that followed. Marx and Engels were however, much less correct concerning the peasants. In *Civil War*, Marx expressed the opinion that only the isolation of Paris and the short life of the Commune had kept



the peasants from joining with the proletarian revolution. Pursuing the thread of reasoning of which *Eighteenth Brumaire* is the beginning, he said:

"The peasant was a Bonapartist, because the great Revolution, with all its benefits to him, was in his eyes, personified in Napoleon. Under the Second Empire this delusion had almost entirely disappeared. This prejudice of the past could not withstand the appeal of the Commune which called to the living interests, the urgent wants of the peasantry. The worthy Rurals knew full well that if the Paris of the Commune could communicate freely with the departments (provinces), there would be a general rising of the peasants within three months . . . (Page 38.)

The history of the Third Republic has demonstrated that Marx was mistaken on this point. In the 70's, the peasants (as, moreover, a large part of the urban petty bourgeoisie in the provinces) were still far from a break with capital and the bourgeoisie. They were still far from recognizing the latter as the "oppressing class," far from considering the proletariat as "the liberating class" and confiding to it the "direction of their movement." In 1895 in his preface to *Class Struggles*, Engels had to state: "It was shown again, twenty years after the events of 1848-1851, that the power of the working class *was not possible*," because "France had not supported Paris." (Engels gave also as a cause of the defeat, the absence of unity in the very ranks of the revolting proletariat, which, in proof of its insufficient revolutionary maturity, led it to waste its strength in a "sterile struggle between the Blanquists and Proudhonians.")

But no matter what was the error in Marx's evaluation, he succeeded in outlining very clearly the problems of the dictatorship of the proletariat. "The Commune," he said, "was the true representative of all the healthy elements of French society, and therefore the truly *national government*. (*Civil War*, page 38, emphasis by Martov.)

According to Marx, the dictatorship of the proletariat does not consist in the crushing by the proletariat of all non-proletarian classes in society. On the contrary, according to Marx, it means the welding to the proletariat of all the "healthy elements" of society—all except the "rich capitalists," all except the class against which the historic struggle of the proletariat is directed. Both in its composition and in its tendencies, the government of the Commune was a working men's government. But this government was an expression of the dictatorship of the proletariat not because it was *imposed* by violence on a non-proletarian majority. It did not arise that way. On the contrary, the government of the Commune was a proletarian dictatorship because those workers and those "acknowledged representatives of the working class" had *received the power from the majority itself*. Marx stressed the fact that "the Commune was formed of municipal councillors, chosen

by universal suffrage in various wards of the city . . . By suppressing those organs of the old governmental power which merely served to oppress the people, the Commune divested of its legal functions an authority that claims to be above society itself, and put those functions in the hands of the responsible servants of the people . . . The people organized in Communes (outside of Paris) was called on to use universal suffrage just as any employer uses his individual right to choose workers, managers, accountants in his business."

The completely democratic constitution of the Paris Commune, based on universal suffrage, on the immediate recall of every office-holder by the simple decision of his electors, on the suppression of bureaucracy and the armed force as opposed to the people, on the electiveness of all offices—that is what constitutes, according to Marx, the essence of the dictatorship of the proletariat. He never thinks of opposing such a dictatorship to democracy. Already in 1847, in his first draft of the Communist Manifesto, Engels wrote: "It (the proletarian revolution) will establish first of all the democratic administration of the State and will thus install, directly or indirectly, the political domination of the proletariat. Directly—in England, where the proletariat forms the majority of the population. Indirectly—in France and in Germany, where the majority of the population is not composed only of proletarians but also of small peasants and small bourgeois, who are only now beginning to pass into the proletariat and whose political interests fall more and more under the influence of the proletariat." (*The Principles of Communism*, Russian translation under the editorship of Zinoviev, p. 22.) The first step in the revolution, by the working class, declares the Manifesto, "is to raise the proletariat to the position of a ruling class, to win the battle of democracy."

Between the elevation of the proletariat to the position of a ruling class and the conquest of democracy, Marx and Engels put an equals sign. They understood the application of this political power by the proletariat only in the forms of a total democracy.

In the measure that Marx and Engels became convinced that the socialist revolution could only be accomplished with the support of the *majority* of the population accepting *knowingly* the positive program of socialism—so their conception of a class dictatorship lost its Jacobin content. But what is the positive substance of the notion of the dictatorship once it has been modified in this manner? Exactly that which is formulated with great precision in the program of our Party (the Russian Social-Democratic Labor Party), a program drafted at a time when the theoretic discussion provoked by "Bernsteinism" led Marxists to polish and define with care certain expressions which had obviously lost their exact meaning with long usage in the daily political struggle.

The program of the Social-Democratic Labor Party of Russia was the only official program of a Labor Party that defined the idea of the



conquest of political power by the proletariat in the terms of a "class dictatorship." Bernstein, Jaures and other critics of Marxism insisted on giving the expression: "dictatorship of the proletariat" the Blanquist definition of power held by an organized minority and resting on violence exercised by this minority over the majority. For this reason the authors of the Russian program were obliged to fix as narrowly as possible the limits of this political idea. They did that by declaring that the dictatorship of the proletariat is the power used by the proletariat to crush all resistance which the exploiting class might oppose to the realization of the socialist and revolutionary transformation. Simply that.

*An effective force concentrated in the State, which can thus realize the conscious will of the majority despite the resistance of an economically powerful minority—here is the dictatorship of the proletariat. It can be nothing else than that in light of the teachings of Marx. Not only must such a dictatorship adapt itself to a democratic régime, but it can only exist in the framework of democracy, that is, under conditions where there is the full exercise of absolute political equality on the part of all citizens. Such a dictatorship can only be conceived in a situation where the proletariat has effectively united about itself "all the healthy elements" of the nation, that is, all those that cannot but benefit by the revolutionary transformation inscribed in the program of the proletariat. It can only be established when, historic development will have brought all the healthy elements to recognize the advantage to them of this transformation. The government embodying such a "dictatorship" will be, in the full sense of the term, a "national government."*

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