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Dictatorship of the Proletariat and State Socialism

Camillo Berneri

5th November, 1936

The Dictatorship of the Proletariat is a Marxist conception. According to Lenin "only he is a Marxist who extends his acknowledgement of the class struggle to an acknowledgement of the Dictatorship of the Proletariat." Lenin was right: the Dictatorship of the Proletariat is, in effect, for Marx no more than the conquest of the state by the proletariat which, organised in a politically dominant class, arrives, by way of State Socialism, at the elimination of all classes.

In the 'Critique of the Gotha Programme' written by Marx in 1875 we read:

"between capitalist and communist society lies the period of the revolutionary transformation of the one into the other. There corresponds to this also a political transition period in which the State can be nothing but the revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat"

In the Communist Manifesto he was already saying:

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"The first step on the path to the workers' revolution is the elevation of the proletariat to the position of ruling class ... The proletariat will gain from its political domination by little by little tearing away from the bourgeoisie all capital, by centralising all means of production in the hands of the State, that is to say in the hands of the proletariat itself organised as the ruling class"

Lenin in 'State and Revolution' only confirms the Marxist theory:

"The proletariat only needs the state for a certain length of time. It is not the elimination of the State as a final aim that separates us from the anarchists. But we assert to attain this end, it is essential to utilise temporarily against the exploiters the instruments, the means and the procedures of political power, in the same way as it is essential in order to eliminate the classes to instigate the temporary dictatorship of the oppressed class"

"The State will disappear in so far as there are no more capitalists, there are no more classes and it is no longer necessary to oppress 'any class'. But the State is not completely dead as long as 'bourgeois rights' which sanctify de facto inequality survive. In order that the State dies completely, the advent of integral communism is necessary."

The Proletarian State is conceived of as a temporary political structure destined to destroy the classes. Gradual expropriation and the idea of State Capitalism are at the basis of this conception. Lenin's economic program: of the eve of the October Revolution ends with this phrase: "Socialism is nothing more than a State Socialist Monopoly".

According to Lenin:

"The distinction between the Marxists and the Anarchists consists of this:

1. The Marxists, although they propose the complete destruction of the State believe that this can only be realised after the destruction of the classes by the Socialist Revolution, and as a result of the triumph of socialism which will come to an end with the destruction of the State; the Anarchists want the complete elimination of the State overnight without understanding what are the conditions which make it possible.
- 2) The Marxists proclaim the necessity for the proletariat of securing political power, of destroying entirely the old machinery of State and of replacing it by a new mechanism consisting of an organisation of armed workers of the type of the Commune; the Anarchists, in calling for the destruction of the machinery of State, do not really know 'with what' the proletariat will replace it nor 'what use' it will make of its revolutionary power; they even go as far as to condemn all use of political power by the revolutionary proletariat and reject the revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat.
- 3) The Marxists want to prepare the proletariat for the Revolution by using the modern State; the Anarchists reject this method.

Lenin was disguising the facts. The Marxists "do not have the complete destruction of the State in mind", but they foresee the nat-

ural disappearance of the State as a consequence of the destruction of the classes by the means of 'the dictatorship of the proletariat', that is to say State Socialism, whereas the Anarchists desire the destruction of the classes by means of a social revolution which eliminates, with the classes, the State. The Marxists, moreover, do not propose the armed conquest of the Commune by the whole proletariat, but they propose the conquest of the State by the party which imagines that it represents the proletariat. The Anarchists allow the use of direct power by the proletariat, but they understand the organ of this power to be formed by the entire corpus of systems of communist administration - corporate organisations, communal institutions, both regional and national - freely constituted outside and in opposition to all political monopoly by parties and endeavouring to reduce to a minimum administrative centralisation. Lenin, in the interests of polemic, arbitrarily simplified the facts about the difference between the Marxists and us.

The Leninist phrase: "The Marxists want to prepare the proletariat for the Revolution by using the modern State" is the basis of Leninist Jacobinism just as it is the basis of Parliamentary Government and Social Reformist Ministerialism.

At the International Socialist Congresses of London (1896) and Paris (1900) it was established that only parties and workers' organisations which recognised the principle of the "Socialist conquest of the public authorities by the proletarian faction organised in a party as a class" could belong to the Socialist International. The split came about at this point, but in effect the exclusion of the Anarchists from the International was only a triumph of Ministerialism, opportunism, and 'Parliamentary Cretinism'.

The anti-parliamentary trade unionists and several communist factions quoting Marxism as authority rejected the pre-revolutionary or revolutionary Socialist conquest of the public authorities.

Whosoever looks back on the history of Socialism after the exclusion of the Anarchists can see for themselves the gradual degen-

eration of Marxism as a political philosophy through the interpretations and practices of the Social-Democrats.

Leninism constitutes, without any doubt, a return to the revolutionary spirit of Marxism, but it also constitutes a return to the fallacies and abstractions of Marxist metaphysics.