M. Korn
Marxist Utopia
September 1925

Marie Goldsmith Project. Translated from: Korn, M. “Марксистская утопия [Marxist Utopia].” *Голос труженика/Golos truzenika* [*Voice of the Worker*], September 1925.
Translated by Alexandra Agranovich. Edited by Søren Hough & Christopher Coquard.
This article is part of a translated collection published in 2023 by the Marie Goldsmith Project. These articles were translated by Alexandra Agranovich (Russian) and Christopher Coquard (French) and then edited by Christopher Coquard and Søren Hough with the goal of preserving Goldsmith’s original meaning and stylistic emphases. Modern footnotes by the translator or editors are prefaced “Ed:” while all other footnotes are from Marie Goldsmith. This translation was originally published in Black Flag Vol. 3 No. 2.

theanarchistlibrary.org

Marxist Utopia

M. Korn

September 1925

The realization of the socialist ideal has moved beyond the sphere of dreams and theoretical propaganda, drawing closer to us and becoming our next vital task. And, if it is important to clarify the question of what the most direct paths to the goal are and what the best way to ensure the victory is, it is still more important to consider what should be done **after** the victory to make the results of the revolution last and, more importantly, to make certain that they entail the growth of the people’s well-being and happiness. In this regard, most socialists (by this term, I mean both state socialists of any orientation and the anarchists) have now settled with proclaiming the slogan of “the dictatorship of the proletariat” expecting that the rest will resolve itself. They believe this slogan to mean that the workers are the ones who govern social life, that they become the builders of their own lives, that under “the dictatorship of the proletariat” they have no one exploiting their labor and no masters at all. Is this actually so, and what is the real meaning of this old slogan?

The very words “the dictatorship of the proletariat” involve an ambiguity: a dictatorship is always the unlimited power of one or a few people. How then can the dictatorship of an en-

tire class be imagined? In the only way possible: with the class governing by means of its representatives; with rule as such exercised not by the class but by someone speaking on their behalf, by someone elected by them or merely by someone believing to be entitled to act on behalf of the workers.

In a word, after the revolution, a new power comes to lead society — the power of the socialist party or of one of its more influential factions, and this power takes on the organization of the working class's lives. The part of the proletariat sympathizing with the party in power will enjoy political and economic privileges, and the rest will not only be unable to influence the course of things, but will suffer all kinds of restrictions of their freedom and initiative. In this regard, "the dictatorship of the proletariat" is as fictitious as "the people's power" in the contemporary democratic state. And every critical comment raised against the representative government system, the power of the majority, the parliamentary system, etc. are equally applicable to the so-called proletarian dictatorship. That is why it is so strange seeing attacks against the democratic regimes of Western Europe and North America on the part of those who endown their political ideal with **all** the same drawbacks, and with a few more which the West-European workers have rid themselves of as a result of a long struggle.

But where does this notion of "the dictatorship of the proletariat" come from? This is an old concept and it would be a great mistake to believe that it stems from real life and from the experience of the Russian revolution. It has a purely bookish origin and arises exclusively from Marxist theory as it was proclaimed back in the 1840s.

As it is well-known, Marxism bases its understanding of human history on the idea that all of history is the struggle between different classes which supersede and vie with each other for the governance of society, with supersedence taking place due to technological development and growth of the productive forces of society, and with specific classes inherent

periods. The more insistent we are in striving toward **that goal**, the more of our ideas will come to pass and the shorter any possible transitional period will be.

to each moment of this development. For instance, when society lives mainly on agriculture and its industry and trade are poorly developed, it is the class of big landowners that rules and oppresses the peasant serf class. Afterward, urban industry develops; then the bourgeois class emerges to exploit the wage worker class. And in every epoch, political power is in the hands of the class which has economic control.

So, at present, the bourgeoisie governs the whole of political life in Europe and America. But now, the proletariat appears to replace the bourgeoisie, and, consequently, political power passes into its hands, and from this point on, the State serves the interests of the new ruling class and protects it. This regime is the dictatorship of the proletariat. An objection may be raised immediately against this theoretical construct: how can the victory of the proletariat be considered **a change of the ruling class**? Whom will the new class govern, given that the revolution has elevated the most humiliated and exploited class and, therefore, has destroyed any class rule? Marxists have two answers to this: a fundamental and an existential one. The fundamental one is: yes, the classes are eliminated by the victory of the proletariat, and as the State is always the agent of the ruling class, the State eliminates itself. Thus, the future belongs to anarchist society. However, how can this agree with the widespread practice of social democracy, especially, of Russian Bolshevism? Here we come to the other — and the contrary — answer, the existential one. It arises from the Marxist idea of the socialist revolution.

Marxist literature does not abound with descriptions of prospects of the future: their fear of utopias is too great for that. But what we know shows clearly enough that the realization of socialism is supposed to be spread over a whole historical period. During this period, the classes still exist, and capitalist exploitation exists, too, though, **it is mitigated and reduced in favor of the proletariat**. The government favors the proletariat and makes the situation of the bourgeoisie

more and more difficult. Industry becomes more and more nationalized and passes into the State's hands. This is what Lenin in Russia called "state capitalism," necessary for the "transitional period." At the dawn of Marxism, Marx and Engels proposed a number of steps in their *Communist Manifesto* that the State must take during such a period, and fifty years later, Kautsky, in *Social Revolution*, also set forth a plan of measures, such as progressive taxes on big incomes and estates, anti-unemployment measures, nationalization of large property, etc. — in a word, a program that has nothing to do with socialism and is virtually identical to the contemporary minimum programs of social democratic and even simply radical parties.

"The dictatorship of the proletariat" is the political regime of the "transitional" period when socialism **does not yet exist**; and when it comes into being, Marxists say, it will take a **governmentless**[1] political form. This is extremely pleasant to hear and equally unlikely to happen; moreover, this is utterly impossible if the future is as Marxists are shaping it. They justify despotism of State power by the circumstance that capitalism is not yet completely eliminated, and promise freedom as soon as socialism has no more enemies. But what does that mean? In reality, it is not only the true supporters of capitalism, but all socialists of any dissentient orientation that the ruling party considers to be its enemies. From this point of view, the complete triumph of socialism — say, in Russia — requires sweeping elimination not only of all bourgeois-minded populations, but of all Mensheviks, Socialist Revolutionaries, anarchists, syndicalists, perhaps some opposition inside the Communist Party itself, and all discontented city and village residents. As a result of such an unprecedented purge, the country will appear as a band of government officials with a voiceless intimidated

[1] Interestingly, this is still a common idea in Russia. See Stalin's answers to the questions from students of the Sverdlovsk University.

mass underneath. And this very moment will be chosen for the elimination of the State!

First, who will eliminate it? No government has ever given up power other than under pressure: power has always been curbed by revolutions or fear of revolutions. Has it ever happened that a government at the maximum of its political and economic might, a government enjoying such power that not even a despot could dream of (the complete absence of opposition!) would suddenly give it all up voluntarily? This is obviously impossible. Complete freedom right after complete slavery is in general a transition difficult to imagine, but even if we admit the possibility, it requires an uprising, a political revolution. However, Marxist theory does not allow for this: such a revolution, they say, is impossible where there are no classes and, of course, they will not agree that state ownership is nothing more than typical class rule over hired proletarians. In short, the notorious "leap from the realm of necessity to the realm of freedom" is impossible to imagine; it is nothing other than a decoy, something like paradise and bliss in the afterlife.

In reality, the extension of governmental functions during the so-called transitional period cannot lead to anything except atrophy of any social initiative, and, hence, the longer it lasts, the less likely we are to realize the ideal of free communal life. Why, in everyday life, if a person wishes to walk in a certain direction, they never start by walking the opposite way, but in politics, this seems possible and even natural? It is probably so because we believe the words without reflecting on their real meaning and also because such a vague notion as "a transitional period" relieves lazy human thinking from the necessity of searching for new, unconventional paths.

On the way to our ideal, there of course will be periods which we may call transitional, but first, they must always add something to the extent of equality and freedom achieved by society and must not detract anything; and second, in our activities, we must refer to our final goal rather than those interim