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The Historic Role of the State

Voline

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According to the bourgeois sociologists the historic role of the State consists in organizing society, in giving order to the interrelations of groups and individuals, in regulating the entire social life. This is, according to their view, what makes the State not only a useful, but a necessary institution: the only one capable of securing order, progress and civilization for society. The role of the State was and still continues to be progressive and positive in its nature.

This point of view is shared by the state socialists, "communists" included. They, too, attributed to the State a constructive role in the course of human history. And this is maintained by them in spite of the gulf separating them from the state partisans of the bourgeois camp. The gulf is of the following nature: while the latter consider the State as an institution placed above the classes, called upon to reconcile their antagonisms, the socialists and communists maintain that the State is nothing but the instrument of domination and dictatorship of one class. In spite of this difference the socialists also maintain that from the view of the general evolution of mankind, the advent of the State was a progressive feature, a necessity, having organized the chaotic life of the primitive communities and having thus opened up new outlets for civilization.

In conformity with this conception of the State as an instrument of organization, of progress (under certain conditions), the socialists also maintain that the state system can be utilized even now as an instrument of emancipation of the oppressed and exploited classes. It is necessary that in some way the present bourgeois State be replaced by the "proletarian State" which is going to be an instrument of domination of the proletariat over the bourgeois and capitalist elements.

According to the bourgeois ideologists, the role of the State is a constructive and progressive one. But to the socialists this role was progressive only at the beginning; and then it became regressive. The State (like the principle of authority) can, according to them, be an instrument of progress or reaction. All depends upon the given historical conditions. In any case the State, we are told, did fulfill, and is still capable of fulfilling, a constructive role: that of organizing the social life and laying the basis for a better society.

This point of view is conditioned by the Marxist conception of human society, of social organization, of social progress - a conception which is "mechanical" to a certain degree. Such a conception does not take sufficiently in view the creative forces to be found in a potential state within each and every human community, the members of which - that is the individuals - are the vehicles of creative energy. It is such energies which secure and realize true progress of humanity.

Not taking this into consideration, conceiving life and activity in a purely mechanical sense, the socialists cannot therefore conceive the organization, order, evolution and progress of humanity in any other manner but as the intervention and the constant activity of a powerful mechanical factor - the State.

The anarchist conception is based exactly upon the spirit and the energy of the creative process which they believe is within the reach of every human being and every collective group. It denies altogether the mechanical factor, it deems it of no value, of no usefulness at any historical moment, past, present or future.

Hence follows the altogether different anarchist conception of the historical role of the State.

1) Never did the state fulfill any progressive, constructive role. Human society, having started in the form of free communities, had before it the direct course of a free creative evolution. This evolution would certainly have been infinitely richer, more splendid and rapid had its normal course not been checked and shunted off by the coming of the State. The free activity of the creative energies would have led to a social organization incomparably better and more beautiful than the one to which the state led us. The general course of this normal progress was already assuming definite outline when certain natural causes, which now are no longer in existence, brought about wars, the reign of military authority, the establishment of the institution of private property, the historic role of State.

The coming of the latter was therefore nothing but a detour, a backward step. The State then was a part of a complex of deteriorating factors, of monopoly and social regression.

2) Once established, it began to affirm itself in a series of triumphant struggles against the free community. And since then the State has been carrying on and deepening its destructive role. It was the State that brought humanity to the present condition of bestial existence. It was the State which mechanized all human life, falsified its progress, blocked the course of its evolution, stifled its creative growth. And it is this institution with the help of which Lenin and his followers intend to rebuild humanity on new foundations.

For, apart from the above mentioned considerations, we always keep in mind the truth brought forward by Kropotkin and many other impartial historians who proved that the epochs of true progress realized by humanity were always those in which the debilitating power of the State was reduced to a minimum. While on the contrary, the periods of the expansion of the State were

those in which the creative progress of human society was on the point of vanishing.

All the above reasons lead us to formulate certain essential anarchist views on the State.

The State is a passing form of human society destined to disappear sooner or later.

Other forms of social organization free from any element of exploitation are bound to take its place.

The State will never disappear by way of evolution. It has to be abolished by revolution, in the same manner as capitalism.

The means of struggle against the State are the same as those employed against capitalism.

The abolition of capitalism only and the replacement of the bourgeois State by a "proletarian State" is an utopia - it is an absurdity.

The State can never be anything but bourgeois and exploiting in its nature. It is of no use in the true struggle for emancipation.