

The State and the Struggle for Socialism

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No one can understand the main political questions of our time, either in the world at large or internally, without an understanding of the state, and of its connection with classes and class struggle.

Marxist-Leninists take as the corner-stone of their theory of the state Engels' brief definition, that the state is 'an instrument for the oppression of one class by another.'¹ Oppression, of course, implies force. As we shall see further on, force is the central feature of state power as it developed throughout history and as it exists under capitalism today.

Lenin called the question of the state 'the fundamental question of political power', noting that because of this those who serve the capitalist class in the field of ideas deliberately create confusion and mystification around it. They try to inculcate the view that the state is a power standing above society which acts as an impartial mediator between the classes.

We in New Zealand, for instance, have had Arbitration Courts and State tribunals of all sorts which are claimed by economists, judges and so on to decide questions between capitalist employers and wage workers in a 'fair' and 'impartial' way. Bourgeois (and even religious) writers treat the state as a power which has evolved almost without human design so as to enable a just and beneficent control over the affairs of the nation by those appointed to run it.

Historically, however, as we shall see, the state is a product of a society divided into antagonistic classes. The question of political power is not simply a matter of which party gains most seats in a parliamentary election – as bourgeois journalists and politicians would have us believe, but a question of which class shall be the ruling class in the country. The question of the state is fundamental to this because whichever class, or alliance of classes, controls the apparatus of state - i.e., the armed forces and police, plus all the government departments and corporations – in fact holds political power.

Under the capitalist mode of production the principal classes in society are the capitalist class and the working class, or proletariat. Their historically-determined production relations form the basis, the economic structure of capitalist society. The capitalist class owns the means of production, the workers work for this class for wages; having no means of production of their own, they are forced to sell their labour power for what they can get. They are thus an exploited class. The state is part of the superstructure (the most important part) erected on the basis of capitalist production relations to reinforce the power of the capitalists to exploit the workers.

In New Zealand, as in other capitalist countries, whichever party may have gained the most seats at election time, the capitalist class still constitutes the ruling class and consequently the capitalist system is still dominant. A Labour government existed in New Zealand from 1935 to 1949 and for several three-year periods since then, yet the basis of capitalism – the capitalist relations of production - remained unchanged. In the *Communist Manifesto* (1848) Marx wrote: 'The executive (i.e. Cabinet,) of the modern state is but a committee for managing the common

affairs of the whole bourgeoisie.’² That is to say that it is the capitalist class which holds political power; the government merely executes its will. But the capitalist class only achieved power in the first instance by forcibly overthrowing the rule of the feudal aristocracy. It did this first in England and later throughout Europe in a series of revolutions which had to carry out the task of smashing the state power of the feudal aristocracy, and substituting the state power of the capitalist class.

Thus the meaning of Mao Tse-tung’s dictum: ‘Political power grows out of the barrel of a gun’ is simply this, that in a class-divided society the struggle between classes for political power is inevitably decided by armed force. And history bears out the truth of this conclusively. This dictum is as true for the working class in its struggle against the capitalists as it was for the capitalists in their struggle against the feudal lords.

To gain a clear understanding of the state one must use the Marxist-Leninist scientific method of analysis; that is, one must study the thing in its real historical development, seeing how it arose in the first place, what contradictory forces impelled its further development, through what stages it has passed and what principal features make up its essential nature. Engels used this method in his classical work, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*. Although its earlier chapters are not easy to read, this work is a brilliant exposition of the subject. People interested in really grasping the question of the state should read it and return to it several times. Each time they will find themselves with a deepened understanding. The same is true of Lenin’s work, *The State and Revolution*, which further develops the theory of the state in the era of imperialism. Some of the main ideas in these works are presented here in outline.

Classes and Class Struggle

Behind the present day conflict of views on the state lie conflicting class interests, i.e., the class struggle. The bourgeois views on the state are bound up with exploitation and privilege; they are therefore defended to the uttermost by the ruling class and its stooges.

Because the role of classes is the key to the role of the state, let us first consider, what are classes? Lenin gave the following definition: ‘Classes are large groups of people which differ from each other by the place they occupy in a historically determined system of social production, by their relation (in most cases fixed and formulated in law) to the means of production, by their role in the social organisation of labour, and, consequently, by the dimensions and mode of acquiring the share of social wealth that they obtain. Classes are groups of people one of which can appropriate the labour of another owing to the different places they occupy in a definite system of social economy’.³

This definition applies to all the main forms of class society: slavery, feudalism and capitalism, the main classes in each of which consist of slave owners and slaves, feudal lords and serfs, and capitalists and wage workers. What determines whether they are exploiters or exploited, rulers or ruled, is how they stand in relation to the means of production. All exploiting classes, including the capitalists of today, have their economic basis in the private ownership of the means of production. It is this ownership which determines the distribution of social wealth; the exploiters are rich, the exploited are poor.

Socialist society is still class society, but with certain basic differences from capitalism. It is society under the rule of the working class, whose aim is to abolish exploitation and therefore to abolish classes. It is therefore a society in transition to a higher form, i.e., classless society.

The capitalists like to pretend that capitalism is eternal. The fact is, however, that for the greater part of human history mankind lived in tribal society under a system of primitive communism, a system without classes, in which acceptance of the authority of the elders did not require a special coercive force but was freely given, and questions of paramount importance were decided by the tribal assembly. In those times there was no state. Nor did the notion of male superiority exist. Women took part in decision-making on terms of full equality with men.

They had an honourable place within the tribe, not only because they did their full share of work on an equal footing with the men, but also because the only sure way to reckon descent was through the mother. It was the development of private property giving rise to the problem of individual inheritance which in turn brought about a male-dominated type of family – the patriarchal family – the emergence of which Engels described as ‘the world-historic defeat of the female sex’. 4

In the lower stages of primitive communism the means of production were too undeveloped to permit labour power to do more than barely maintain itself. Consequently there was no economic point in having slaves. Slave owning could be advantageous only if the slaves were able to produce more than they themselves required in order to live. The domestication of animals in the old world – sheep, goats, cattle, horses, pigs, camels and donkeys – was the decisive step in bringing about this condition. Such animals were a source of basic foodstuffs in the form of meat and milk. Their upkeep and tending required far less labour than former occupations. Labour could for the first time produce a regular surplus above the amount needed for its own maintenance.

Within the tribes themselves the ownership of the herds passed from the larger grouping of families such as the clan, to the heads of the patriarchal families. ‘The family did not increase as rapidly as the cattle. More people were required to tend them; the captives taken in war were useful for just this purpose, and, furthermore, they could be bred like the cattle itself.’ 5

Here was the economic basis on which slavery appeared, undermining and overthrowing primitive communism. ‘..... On the threshold of authenticated history,’ says Engels ‘we find that everywhere the herds are already the separate property of the family chiefs, in exactly the same way as were the artistic products of barbarism, metal utensils, articles of luxury and, finally, human cattle - the slaves’. 6

Most of the old world went through an evolution from primitive communism to slave society, from a society where there were no economic classes to a society where classes and class antagonisms were the rule. Private property in the means of production replaced social, common ownership. A class of slave-owners grew up and existed by exploiting the labour of the slaves who were their private property just as were the herds of sheep or cattle. A slave had no legal rights; his owner could work him till he dropped, could kill him, punish him or sell him as he pleased. Although ousted in the greater part of the world, slave systems have existed down into

modern times in some parts of Africa, for instance, and in parts of China and Tibet before liberation.

With the appearance of classes comes the division of society into rulers and ruled. Because of antagonistic class interests a special apparatus of coercion grows up, apparently standing outside of and above society, but utilised by the ruling class to maintain its privileges, economic and political. This apparatus, the state, consists of special bodies of armed men, prisons, courts, etc. It is used by the ruling class against other classes that might endanger its position.

Thus the essence of the state consists precisely in this, that it is an instrument for the oppression of one class by another.

The State As The Outcome of Class Antagonisms

Slave society in the ancient world was ousted by feudalism in the period following the fall of the Roman Empire; feudalism in turn was overthrown by capitalism in the epoch between 1650 and 1850. Each of these three great social systems represents a form of society based upon antagonistic classes. They cover a long period of historical development which has witnessed a great variety of forms of government: aristocratic and democratic, monarchical and republican. They have also thrown up many and diverse political ideas and institutions.

Only by utilising the concept of the class struggle as the guiding thread can one comprehend the main features of this development and find one's way through what would otherwise be a welter of confusion. This concept is the key to understanding the nature of the state, from its early history as it developed under slave society until today. Without private property – no economic classes; without classes – no state, no special group of rulers with an armed force at its disposal.

To the simple question – why should such an instrument of force be necessary to the rulers?, the simple answer is that no class will accept permanent exploitation by another class except under compulsion. This was true of the slaves in ancient times, of the serfs in bondage to the aristocrats in feudal Europe, and it is true today of the modern wage slaves - the proletariat.

The city states of ancient Greece each covered only a small territory with a small population. Consequently the state apparatus was likewise small and comparatively weak. Nevertheless, because slave society was dominant in Greece (Athenian democracy itself was based on slavery) some public power was necessary to enforce the slave owners' right not only to exploit the slaves but also to rule society, which included other strata besides the slaves. In Athens, a seafaring power, a navy and a citizens' militia grew up on the basis of the new economic development stemming from private property and the class divisions to which it gave rise. To this power was added a police force made up – strangely enough – of slaves.

In feudal times the kingly power and the armed retainers and bailiffs of the nobles, along with their castles and dungeons, were the instrument which compelled the serfs and small peasants of medieval society to suffer their lives out in semi-slavery on the aristocratic estates. Despite repression by the feudal lords, feudal society was many times shaken by serf and peasant revolts.

The Capitalist State

In a number of brilliant works such as the *Communist Manifesto* (in collaboration with Engels), the *Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, *The Civil War in France* and the *Critique of the Gotha Programme*, Marx analysed the history and role of the state under capitalism, and the tasks of the workers in relation to it. Lenin defended Marx's teachings against the opportunists and revisionists of his time and further developed them in the epoch of imperialism, modern monopoly capitalism.

Summing up Marx's views on the development of the capitalist state, Lenin wrote: 'The centralised state power that is peculiar to bourgeois society came into being in the period of the fall of absolutism (i.e. absolute monarchy which grew up in the decline of feudalism; RN). Two institutions are most characteristic of this state machine; bureaucracy and a standing army. In their works, Marx and Engels repeatedly mention the thousand threads which connect these state institutions with the bourgeoisie.' (7)

Both bureaucracy – a host of government officials – and the standing army are institutions which are parasites on the body of society. In countries with parliaments, possession of the bureaucratic-military state machine is the main prize for which the bourgeois parties contend. In New Zealand, Britain and Australia, where there is a permanent civil service, there are nevertheless plenty of plums of office to be distributed after an election victory. Appointments to High Commissions, embassies, positions on all sorts of Government boards and commissions, directorates on this or that Government (so-called 'independent') corporation in banking, industry, commerce, TV and radio – all become the object of a great shareout, while the foundations of capitalist society remain untouched. In the USA where there is no permanent civil service and consequently many more Government posts change hands, the distribution of spoils is even more pronounced.

During the epoch of imperialism which was ushered in at the turn of the 20th century, the state underwent enormous development. The great growth of the socialist movement internationally brought to the capitalist ruling class in all the economically advanced countries a great fear of revolution. To guard against this possibility they enormously strengthened the power of the military and the police. Before this, during much of the 19th century, Britain and the US were relatively free from the prevailing European militarism and bureaucracy. Marx therefore considered that a people's revolution might be possible in England without first smashing the ready-made state machinery. Imperialism changed all that. Lenin wrote: 'Today, in 1917, in the epoch of the first great imperialist war, Marx's exception is no longer valid ... Both England and America ... have today plunged headlong into the all-European, filthy bloody morass of bureaucratic-military institutions to which everything is subordinated and which trample everything under foot. Today, both in England and America, the 'essential thing' for 'every real people's revolution' is the smashing, the destruction of the ready-made state machinery ...'

The Dictatorship of the Proletariat, the State Power of the Working Class

Lenin made fundamental contributions to the Marxist theory of the state, in particular to the theory of the dictatorship of the proletariat. Not only had he thoroughly absorbed the teachings of

Marx and Engels on the state and, as well, deeply studied previous revolutions from the Marxist standpoint; he also had a wealth of practical experience in the successful establishment of the Soviet state from 1917 on, and in the dress rehearsal for it in 1905. He gave this general definition of the dictatorship of the proletariat in 1919:

‘The dictatorship of the proletariat is not the end of class struggle but its continuation in new forms. The dictatorship of the proletariat is class struggle waged by a proletariat that is victorious and has taken political power into its hands against a bourgeoisie that has been defeated but not destroyed, a bourgeoisie that has not vanished, not ceased to offer resistance, but that has intensified its resistance. The dictatorship of the proletariat is a specific form of class alliance between the proletariat, the vanguard of the working people, and the numerous non-proletarian strata of the working people (petty bourgeoisie, small proprietors, the peasantry, the intelligentsia, etc.), or the majority of these strata, an alliance against capital, an alliance whose aim is the complete overthrow of capital, complete suppression of the resistance offered by the bourgeoisie as well as of attempts at restoration on its part, an alliance for the final establishment and consolidation of socialism.’ (9)

During the course of his revolutionary activity Lenin pointed out hundreds of times that in periods of crisis there are only two alternatives – either the dictatorship of the proletariat or the dictatorship of the capitalist class. As he showed with great clarity in his writings on the state, the ‘freest’ of parliamentary republics are in fact no more than concealed dictatorships of the capitalist class, which wields state power behind the screen of parliamentary democracy. Even in small New Zealand, history has shown the correctness of this view. In the last 50 years New Zealand has had only one major strike struggle which has embraced a really substantial section of the industrial workers, namely the Waterfront struggle of 1951. It did not take the capitalist government of S.G. Holland long to declare a state of emergency and to introduce emergency regulations amounting to martial law, thus temporarily throwing off the parliamentary screen in order to more thoroughly crush the strike by means which included the use of the state forces on the waterfront.

The concept ‘dictatorship of the proletariat’ was fought for by Marx and Lenin against both the opportunists and the anarchists, the latter being representatives of a petty-bourgeois trend in socialism who asserted the possibility of advancing directly from capitalism to communism simply by ‘blowing up’ the state machine. While they denounced exploitation the anarchists did not understand its cause and hence understood neither class struggle nor the necessity of suppressing the bourgeoisie after its overthrow. The notion that it was possible to skip the historical stage of transition lying between capitalism and communism, and that the bourgeoisie would tamely submit to a leap into communism without being under the compulsion of a workers’ state was – and is today – simply utopian, petty-bourgeois dreaming.

The viewpoint of Marx and Engels was that the bourgeois state machine must be smashed and replaced by the armed workers, organised as a proletarian dictatorship to suppress the bourgeoisie and prevent it from restoring capitalism. The workers then proceed to make the privately-owned means of production state or public property and to carry out the abolition of class differences by reorganising political and social life on the new basis of socially-owned means of production.

The bourgeois state, then, is abolished. But what of the proletarian state? In Engels' famous phrase, it 'withers away'. According to Engels, 'The first act in which the state really comes forward as the representative of society as a whole – the taking possession of the means of production in the name of society – is at the same time its last independent act as a state. The interference of the state power in social relations becomes superfluous in one sphere after another, and then ceases of itself. The government of persons is replaced by the administration of things and the direction of the process of production. The state is not 'abolished', it *withers away*.' (*Anti-Duhring*, Part 3, Chapter, 2; 'Socialism: Theoretical')

True to their scientific method of materialist dialectics Marx and Engels never arbitrarily invented solutions to problems but always waited until historical experience had provided the material necessary for their solution. This was their method in regard to the question of the state.

The State and Historical Experience

The Communist Manifesto (1848) declares the necessity of the proletariat capturing political power in order to overthrow the bourgeoisie, and the need to transform the state into 'the proletariat organised as the ruling class.' As a result of the historical experience of the European bourgeois revolutions of 1848-1851, Marx reached a vital conclusion. Whereas previously all revolutions had only perfected the state machine, the task was to smash it up. Lenin called this conclusion 'the chief and fundamental thesis in the Marxian doctrine of the state.' (10)

The point of this teaching is that the state machine as developed and perfected by capitalism is an instrument for the suppression of the working class. The workers have no interest in maintaining such an instrument. They are not concerned with achieving political power in order to carve up the plums of office, but so as to accomplish the abolition of classes and therewith of class exploitation altogether. The smashing of the bourgeois state machine is absolutely essential in order to achieve this aim.

As to what replaces the smashed state machine, Marx again did not deal with this question concretely until historical experience provided the solution to the problem, which it did in 1871. In that year the revolutionary workers of Paris seized power and established the Paris Commune, which lasted six weeks until destroyed by the capitalist counter-revolution.

Here was the first example in history of the dictatorship of the proletariat. From this experience Marx drew the further vital conclusion that 'the working class cannot lay hold of the ready-made state machine and wield it for its own purposes.'⁽¹¹⁾ Marx was speaking here of the European continent, where the governing bureaucracy everywhere was staffed by open supporters and servants of capital and their bootlickers among the petty bourgeoisie, and where the military and police were officered by the upper classes or their representatives. (Although there were temporary exceptions outside of Europe, this situation becomes more or less universal under capitalism.) Such bitter enemies of the workers would only sabotage any real encroachment on capitalist rule which they were called on to carry out. The Paris workers recognised this, and in a short space of time created an entirely new state apparatus, a workers' state. Whereas the capitalist state is an instrument of the *minority* to suppress the exploited *majority*, the Commune was this majority organised as the state to suppress the exploiters.

Though it lasted only six weeks, the Paris Commune of 1871 provided great historic lessons for the workers, above all on the question of the state, which were summed up by Marx. They were taken to heart by Lenin and the Bolsheviks, and successfully applied in the socialist revolution of 1917.

It was the profound analysis of such historical experience of class struggle that led Marx and Engels to the conclusion which they upheld all their lives: that wherever a military-bureaucratic state machine existed, the working class could never achieve a socialist society except by means of violent revolution. Lenin was equally categorical: 'The substitution of the proletarian state for the bourgeois state is impossible without a violent revolution.'⁽¹²⁾ Stalin, too, firmly adhered to this view. All modern history has shown that it is still absolutely true.

After Marx's death capitalism soon developed into monopoly capitalism, imperialism, in which the plunder of the colonies was to yield immense profits to the monopolists of the big powers. The ruling class was able to use a small fraction of these profits to bribe an upper layer of the workers with extra pay and other concessions, forming them into a labour aristocracy (which, incidentally, is still with us.) Many of the leaders of the old European socialist and social-democratic parties became part of this grouping. They buried and distorted the revolutionary teachings of Marx and Engels on the state, asserting that a peaceful transition to socialism was possible. Lenin carried out an intense struggle against them, exposing their treachery to the working class, at the same time restoring the revolutionary content of Marxism. Mao Tse-tung has done the same in this era in regard to the distortions and treachery of modern Soviet revisionism. The Marxist-Leninist standpoint on the state is perfectly clear, namely, that in any more or less developed capitalist country – including New Zealand – there is no possibility of peaceful transition to socialism by parliamentary means; that the working class cannot win power except by forcibly smashing the existing state machine and replacing it with a proletarian state, the dictatorship of the proletariat.

The Fantasy of a Parliamentary Road

In 1956 at the 20th Congress of the Soviet Communist Party Khrushchev revived the opportunist theory of a parliamentary road to socialism. Lenin had repeatedly denounced such a view as opportunism and a betrayal of revolution. Stalin had upheld Lenin's views. Khrushchev's claim was that changes in the world situation resulting from World War II had now made it possible for a workers' party to acquire a stable majority in parliament and proceed to a peaceful transition to socialism.

Lenin had written:

'Only scoundrels and simpletons can think that the proletariat must win the majority in elections carried out under the yoke of the bourgeoisie, under the yoke of wage slavery, and that only after this must it win power. This is the height of folly or hypocrisy; it is substituting voting under the old system and with the old power, for class struggle and revolution.' ('Greetings to Italian, French and German Communists,' Coll. Wks. Vol. 30 p58)

In fact, nowhere in history has any peaceful, parliamentary transition to socialism taken place. There were not the slightest grounds for Khrushchev's claim. Khrushchev as much as said: the bourgeoisie will not resort, dare not resort to using the armed forces of the state against the proletariat in order to maintain its supremacy. In the world situation of the time, after years of cold war during which in many countries the bourgeoisie **had** used violence against the workers and the communist movement this was not only sheer fantasy; it was treachery to communism.

Before World War II the Communist Party of Germany got 6 million votes in the Reichstag elections of 1932. Result – the imperialist bourgeoisie organised to bring Hitler to power. He used the state forces to destroy the Communist Party, the trade unions and even suppress the Social Democratic Party.

In 1936 the Spanish reactionaries, with armed aid from Hitler and Mussolini, launched civil war against the Republican regime and established fascism. The Republican regime – in which the communists were only one group of a united front – had not done more than bring in some democratic reforms, but this was enough.

Despite the defeat of the fascist alliance in World War II, the situation in the world in 1956 was far from one where the bourgeoisie would be afraid of following such pre-war examples as Germany and Spain. US imperialism had long since guaranteed its aid to every capitalist and reactionary regime which carried out suppression of communism or national liberation.

In British Guiana in the 1950's, where an avowed socialist party did win a majority, the British Government despatched a naval force to crush it.

In Kerala, an Indian state election was won by the Communist Party. The central government refused to accept it and forced it out of office.

In France, where the Communist Party had become the largest party in parliament in 1946, the bourgeoisie simply changed the electoral laws in 1951 and again in 1958, so that from 182 seats in 1946 the Communist Party seats were reduced to 10 by 1958.

There is nothing to stop the capitalists in other countries from adopting similar methods. Even if these fail, there is always the capitalist state to fall back on.

Add to this that genuinely revolutionary parties are illegal in many countries and one can see the bankruptcy of Khrushchev's assertion of a parliamentary road.

If there were need to reinforce the correctness of these views, it is only necessary to call to mind the military-fascist coup d'état of May, 1987, in Fiji. Then a small group of soldiers under the command of a Colonel Rabuka arrested and imprisoned the constitutionally-elected Labour-National Federation government headed by Fijian chief Timoci Bavadra and immediately replaced it by military rule which was later 'constitutionalised' by some diplomatic sleight-of-hand. The Bavadra government had been returned on a programme of mild reforms – certainly not socialism – but which were aimed at improving the lot of all workers, irrespective of ethnic origin, and which early on had announced its intention of refusing to harbour nuclear warships.

However, the Government had no real power to carry out its programme, because the army and police - i.e., the state machine – were almost entirely composed of ethnic Fijians, trained and brought up in the tradition of serving British imperialism, which was hostile to even mild reforms and particularly to a nuclear-free stance. A military dictatorship was at once installed.

No doubt the C.I.A. (with on-the-side British agreement) covertly organised the whole affair, including the overnight fanning of sufficient ethnic hatred to enable it to engineer a coup, principally in order to maintain the Pacific as an American nuclear lake. It should be remembered that when it comes to organising, secretly-sponsoring, advising, arming and maintaining military-fascist coups, the C.I.A. has no competition worth speaking of.

Once again it was proved - for those who doubted it or were ignorant of history - that political power comes out of the barrel of a gun. Furthermore, it has been proved that in the face of a hostile state power backed by an imperialism which regards its interests as threatened, the working class is blocked from achieving even mild constitutional reforms, let alone socialism.

Never has an oppressed class won power through the vote, nor is there the slightest sign of such a thing happening today.

In this issue we continue our article on the nature and role of the state apparatus or, (to use Lenin's apt description) the bureaucratic-military state machine.

Numerous distortions of the teachings of Marx and Engels on the state were made by opportunist leaders of social-democratic parties following the death of both. Lenin brilliantly carried on Marxism into the era of imperialism, monopoly capitalism. He fought all his life against those who pretended to be Marxists but buried Marx's teachings or adapted them to the interests of imperialism, the monopoly capitalists. Principal among these revisionists was Karl Kautsky.

He was the chief advocate of the revisionist thesis of the possibility of a peaceful transition to socialism, which Marx and Engels had considered impossible without at least a 'slaveholders' rebellion' even in the most 'democratic' states, Britain and the USA.

Marx had drawn vital lessons from the historical experience of the French workers' uprising of 1871 known as the Paris Commune, principally that the workers could not lay hold of the capitalist state machine but had to smash that of the capitalist class and erect in its place a workers' state - the dictatorship of the proletariat. This teaching was suppressed by revisionism even before World War 1, but it was vital to the working class both theoretically and practically. Lenin had to wage a lengthy ideological and practical struggle against Kautsky and Co. to restore the teachings of Marx on the state. In a short article such as this we cannot give the full content of Lenin's defence and further development of Marxism on the question of the state. Those who want to understand political theory cannot do better than to study Lenin's brilliant work: 'The State and Revolution'. Now read on.

Who Is and Who Is Not a Marxist?

Compare the experience of Chile in the 1970s., a hundred years after the Commune. Here the Allende group of opportunists won a parliamentary majority and declared a course for a so-called peaceful, parliamentary transition to socialism. Ignoring the fact that Chile had a typical capitalist state machine, Allende asserted that the Chilean armed forces (that is, the main component of the state) had a tradition of non-interference in civil affairs and would accept constitutional change. He then attempted to legislate some reforms and restrictions on capital, expecting to 'wield the ready-made state machine' for this purpose, which was by no means the wholesale seizure of capitalist property. Nonetheless, the result – readily predictable by Marxist-Leninists – was the installation of a military-fascist dictatorship by the armed forces and police: i.e., the state.

The capitalist press regularly described Allende as a Marxist. To see why he was not, one must understand the essential thing that constitutes a Marxist.

In a letter to Wedemeyer written in 1852, Marx wrote: 'And now, as to myself, no credit is due to me for discovering the existence of classes in modern society, nor yet the struggle between them. Long before me, bourgeois historians had described the historical development of this class struggle, and bourgeois economists the economic anatomy of the classes. What I did that was new was to prove: (1) that the existence of classes is only bound up with particular historical phases in the development of production; (2) that the class struggle necessarily leads to the dictatorship of the proletariat; (3) that this dictatorship itself only constitutes the transition to the abolition of all classes and to a classless society.' (13)

In Lenin's time the idea was put about by opportunists that the class struggle was the main thing in Marxism. This also happens today. But as Marx's letter shows, the theory of the class struggle was developed by bourgeois writers before him. Thus the class struggle is acceptable to the bourgeoisie. Thus, people who go no further than accepting the class struggle are still within the framework of bourgeois politics. On this basis Lenin defined a Marxist as 'one who extends the acceptance of the class struggle to the acceptance of the dictatorship of the proletariat.' (14)

This is a very important definition which exposes all reformist, revisionist and opportunist views on the state. It implies the necessity of the forcible seizure of power - i.e. – violent revolution – by the proletariat, for the establishment of such a dictatorship cannot be accomplished except by the smashing of the capitalist state machine.

By testing Allende with this touchstone it is immediately evident that whatever else he was, he was certainly not a Marxist.

He Who Rejects Proletarian Dictatorship Rejects Socialism

In so far as the dictatorship of the proletariat begins the abolition of classes, it follows that it also begins the abolition of the state, which is an instrument of class rule. However, this cannot take place at one stroke. The state, as Engels put it, 'withers away' because the building of a communist society is a long historical process. For quite a long time after a successful

revolution, as Lenin pointed out, the overthrown bourgeoisie is actually stronger than the working class. It has the backing of international capital; it has money, experience in management and the support of most technical experts; it draws strength from continued small-scale production (which can only be ousted gradually under socialism) and from the force of habit of small commodity producers. Without its own state i.e. the proletarian dictatorship, the working class would soon be overthrown by the capitalists. The experience of the Soviet Union since Khrushchev has shown that even forty years after a socialist revolution the bourgeoisie can stage a comeback and restore capitalism if class struggle is not firmly maintained under the dictatorship of the proletariat.

Allende in Chile was but following in the footsteps of the Soviet revisionists, who from 1956 on through the 'sixties thoroughly revised the basic Marxist-Leninist views on the state and emasculated their revolutionary content as a necessary accompaniment to the restoration of capitalism in the USSR. Not only did they revive the opportunist theory of peaceful transition to socialism, claiming that it could be achieved in the capitalist countries by parliamentary means; they also declared that the Soviet Union no longer had need for the dictatorship of the proletariat but had achieved a 'state of the whole people'. Contrast these views with those of Lenin, whose famous work 'The State and Revolution' is not only a polemic against the opportunist theory of peaceful transition and peaceful revolution, but is also a further development of Marx's views on the dictatorship of the proletariat. He writes: 'The essence of Marx's doctrine of the state is assimilated only by those who understand that the dictatorship of a single class is necessary not only for class society in general, not only for the proletariat which has overthrown the bourgeoisie, but for the entire historical period between capitalism and "classless society", communism.'⁽¹⁵⁾

Thus, in Lenin's view, dispensing with the dictatorship of the proletariat before achieving communism is but opening the floodgates to capitalism, as indeed took place under Khrushchev and Brezhnev.

All the old-line Communist parties which followed the Soviet revisionists have gone further down the road of betrayal ever since.

The Italian Communist Party produced in the 'fifties a phoney theory of 'structural reform' which substituted the parliamentary road and peaceful transition for the socialist revolution and the dictatorship of proletariat. It gained votes, but has betrayed socialism and communism.

Similarly the French Communist Party has publicly declared itself against the dictatorship of the proletariat, thus avowing their treachery to Marxist-Leninist teachings.

At the same time that the Khrushchev clique which had usurped power in the USSR were pushing the country ever further along the capitalist road, so they exerted pressure on the East European 'people's democracies' to take the same road. By the early 'sixties they had firmly established revisionism*. In many Western communist parties opportunism and revisionism were rife, and Khrushchevism became dominant. Today the parties which followed Khrushchev, Brezhnev, Gorbachev and Yeltsin are utterly discredited.

In New Zealand the Jackson-Andersen group of opportunists left the Communist Party in order to follow the Soviet revisionist line of a peaceful parliamentary road. In 1965 they formed the Socialist Unity Party for this purpose and have followed the same path of betrayal as the European revisionists. Today in the era of capitalist restoration that party has vanished.

In the struggle against modern revisionism the leading role was played by the Communist Party of China with Mao Tse-tung at its helm. As we have seen, a central feature of the struggle was the Marxist-Leninist doctrine of the state.

After Mao's death in September 1976, a new Party chairman, Hua Kuo-feng, was appointed. He restored Teng Hsiao-ping (Deng Xiaoping) to posts from which he had been demoted. Deng soon ousted Hua and became top dog. He understood the role of the state well enough.

Hua had organised new bourgeois elements in the government to carry out a forcible coup d'état to seize control of the state apparatus. However, Deng soon gained control himself. Since then China has gone even faster down the capitalist road than did the Soviet Union. Foreign banks and industrial enterprises have sprung up, along with stock exchanges. The ideology of revolutionary communism and the works of Mao Tse-tung (including the great polemic against the Soviet revisionists) have been suppressed. Peoples' communes have been dissolved and private enterprise is now the norm. All this has been done in the name of 'building socialism'. These are the tactics of modern revisionism. Today the imperialists throughout the world recognise China is a capitalist country and are investing huge sums in its economy. The ruling party may be called the Communist Party but everyone knows it is a sham, a signboard hung out to deceive the masses.

The State in New Zealand

The state in New Zealand is a typically modern capitalist state, with a governing bureaucracy backed by substantial-enough military forces and police. It has grown from small beginnings in 1840, the year of formal annexation by Britain.

In the early decades of settlement which followed annexation, the main state force was comprised of British regular troops backed by a settlers' militia. The chief role of this state was suppression of the resistance of the Maoris to the great land robbery practised upon them. However, it also ensured the protection of capitalist investment and property from the immigrant wage workers.

By 1856 a bourgeois parliamentary system was established, with a property franchise to ensure capitalist domination.

By 1870, British forces were withdrawn and were in due course replaced by New Zealand armed forces.

In the period between 1880 and the outbreak of World War I in 1914 the main features of the present-day state were firmly established. They were years both of frenzied imperialist rivalry between the big capitalist powers and of sharpening internal class struggle. In connection with

both of these developments the bourgeois state machine underwent a substantial growth. On the one hand a growing bureaucracy was needed to administer various reforms which were introduced in order to damp down class struggle. These included, besides old-age pensions and limitation of working hours, an Arbitration system brought in in 1894 and proclaimed ever afterwards to be an 'impartial' arbiter between capitalists and workers. On the other hand, in 1903 a big expansion of the armed forces took place when the bourgeois government of Seddon sent troops to help British imperialism during the Boer War. A further vast expansion took place in 1914 in the imperialist world war, just after the bourgeoisie had crushed the 1913 Wellington waterfront strike with state forces expanded by special police.

Thus the features and role of the military-bureaucratic state machine examined by Marx and Lenin were in full flower in New Zealand by World War I. Subsequent developments have only served to re-emphasise the correctness of the Marxist-Leninist theory of the state in relation to New Zealand. The state in New Zealand today is a vast parasitic excrescence, a tool in the hands of foreign and domestic monopoly capital for the suppression of the working class and the maintenance of capitalist private property. Its armed forces are closely linked with those of British and US imperialism, likewise its intelligence service, whose principal role its former head has admitted to be, "countering internal subversion."

Conclusions

We have seen so far that:-

- (1) The state is an organ of class rule, a machine for the oppression of one class by another. Under capitalism it is organised violence against the working class. It is the main weapon of the capitalists for maintaining their class rule and the privileges which stem from it. This military-bureaucratic machine is staffed in all positions of consequence by people whose careers and privileges are bound up with the maintenance of capitalism, and who consequently fully support it.
- (2) This machine cannot therefore be taken over by the working class and wielded for its own purposes; i.e., for dispossessing the capitalists of the means of production and putting these under social ownership. It therefore has to be smashed by means of a violent revolution.
- (3) In place of the capitalist state the working class must organise its own state power, the dictatorship of the proletariat, in order to suppress the bourgeoisie and carry out the measures needed to construct socialism and communism. It is necessary to maintain this proletarian dictatorship right up to the higher phase of communism or the bourgeoisie can stage a comeback and restore capitalism.
- (4) History has shown repeatedly that no privileged class will ever voluntarily hand over its power and privileges and peacefully walk off the stage of history. Slave society had to be broken up and the state machinery of the slave-owning class smashed before feudalism could become the established order. Likewise, the feudal land-owning aristocracy never gave up its state power peacefully; it had to be overthrown by revolutionary armed force. Even then the aristocracy frequently attempted to seize back its old powers.

The struggle for socialism - in Russia, in Europe, in China and elsewhere - has shown that the bourgeoisie is even more desperate in its resistance to basic social change. Only a working class party that thoroughly understands this can successfully lead the workers in achieving the dictatorship of the proletariat and the transition to socialism, and in preventing a restoration of capitalism by internal as well as external forces. This latter question is given fuller treatment in a separate pamphlet in this series.

NOTES

¹ Frederick Engels: Introduction to 'The Civil War in France' Marx-Engels Selected Works (1951) Volume 1, p440.

² Marx & Engels: 'The Communist Manifesto' M-E Sel. Wks. Vol. 1, p35.

³ Lenin: 'A Great Beginning' Sel. Wks. (12-vol. edition) Vol. 9, p433.

⁴ Engels: 'The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State' M-E Sel. Wks. Vol.2, p198.

⁵ Ibid. p196.

⁶ Ibid. p195.

⁷ Lenin: 'The State and Revolution' Sel. Wks. Vol. 7, pp28-29.

⁸ Ibid. p37.

⁹ Lenin: "Foreword to the Published Speech 'Deception of the People with Slogans of Freedom and Equality'" Coll. Wks., Vol.29, pp380-381.

¹⁰ Lenin: 'The State and Revolution' Sel. Wks. Vol. 7, p28.

¹¹ Karl Marx: 'The Civil War in France. Chapter 3' M-E Sel. Wks. Vol. 1, p268.

¹² Lenin: 'The State and Revolution' Sel. Wks. Vol. 7, Chap. 1, Section 4, p21.

¹³ Karl Marx: Letter to J.Wedemeyer, March 5, 1852. M-E Sel. Wks. Vol. 2, p410.

¹⁴ Lenin: 'The State and Revolution' Vol. 7. Chap 2, Section 3, p33.

FURTHER READING

(1) F. Engels: 'The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State.' Marx-Engels Selected Works, Vol. 2. Also as a separate pamphlet.

(2) K. Marx and F. Engels: 'The Communist Manifesto' M-E Sel. Wks. Vol.1, and as separate pamphlet.

(3) K. Marx: 'The Civil War in France' M-E Sel. Wks. Vol. 1 and as a separate pamphlet.

(4) V.I. Lenin: 'The State and Revolution' Coll. Wks. Vol. 25, in various Sel. Wks. and as a separate pamphlet.

(5) J. Stalin: 'On the Problems of Leninism' Now very hard to get. Originally published in English under the aforementioned title, and published in a collection of the same name in 1943. Also in Vol. 8 of J. Stalin: Works, Under the title : 'Concerning Questions of Leninism' (Begun as an edition of his collected works but publication stopped under Khrushchev when Vol. 14 had been issued, going up to the year 1934)

(6) 'The Proletarian Revolution and Khrushchev's Revisionism' The 8th Comment on the 'Open letter of the CPSU. Prepared under the direction of Mao Tse-tung by the editorial departments of 'People's Daily' and 'Red Flag'. Published as a separate pamphlet and in 'The Polemic on the General Line of the International Communist Movement'. Both now hard to get as suppressed under Teng's revisionist regime.

* Revisionism: The replacement of revolutionary Marxist-Leninist ideology and politics with those of the new bourgeois class which was now in power. Khrushchev's abolition of the dictatorship of the proletariat signalled its replacement by a state of the new bourgeoisie made up of highly-paid technical and professional people, state officials and managers, corrupted party cadres and a labour aristocracy. Ma Tse-tung correctly labelled their system 'phoney communism, real capitalism'.