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WORKERS OF ALL COUNTRIES, UNITE!



Vladimir Lenin

COMRADES, according to the plan adopted by you and conveyed to me, the subject of today's talk is the state. I do not know how familiar you are already with this subject. If I am not mistaken your courses have only just begun and this is the first time you will be approaching this subject systematically. If that is so, then it may very well be that in the first lecture on this difficult subject I may not succeed in making my exposition sufficiently clear and comprehensible to many of my listeners. And if this should prove to be the case, I would request you not to be perturbed by the fact, because the question of the state is a most complex and difficult one, perhaps one that more than any other has been confused by bourgeois scholars, writers and philosophers. It should not therefore be expected that a clear understanding of this subject can be obtained from one brief talk, at a first sitting. After the first talk on this subject you should make a note of the passages which you have not understood or which are not clear to you, and return to them a second, a third and a fourth time, so that what you have not understood may be further supplemented and elucidated afterwards, both by reading and by various lectures and talks. I hope that we may manage to meet once again and that then we shall be able to exchange opinions

on all supplementary questions and to see what has remained most unclear. I also hope that in addition to talks and lectures you will devote some time to reading at least some of the most important works of Marx and Engels. I have no doubt that these most important works are to be found in the catalogues of literature and in the handbooks which are available in your library for the pupils of the Soviet and Party school; and although, again, some of you may at first be dismayed by the difficulty of the exposition, I must again warn you that you should not be perturbed by this fact and that what is unclear at a first reading will become clear at a second reading, or when you subsequently approach the question from a somewhat different angle. For I once more repeat that the question is so complex and has been so confused by bourgeois scholars and writers that anybody who desires to study this question seriously and to master it independently must attack it several times, return to it again and again and consider the question from various angles in order to attain a clear and firm understanding of it. And it will be all the easier to return to this question because it is such a fundamental, such a basic question of all politics, and because not only in such stormy and revolutionary times as the present, but even in the most peaceful times, you will come across this question every day in any newspaper in connection with any economic or political question. Every day, in one connection or another, you will be returning to this question: what is the state, what is its nature, what is its significance and what is the attitude of our party, the party that is fighting for the overthrow of capitalism, the Communist Party — what is its attitude to the state? And the chief thing is that as a result of your reading, as a result of the talks and

lectures you will hear on the state, you should acquire the ability to approach this question independently, since you will be meeting this question on the most diverse occasions, in connection with the most trifling questions, in the most unexpected conjunctures, and in discussions and disputes with opponents. Only when you learn to find your way about independently in this question may you consider yourself sufficiently confirmed in your convictions and able with sufficient success to defend them against anybody and at any time.

After these brief remarks, I shall proceed to deal with the question itself — what is the state, how did it arise and what fundamentally should be the attitude to the state of the party of the working class, which is fighting for the complete overthrow of capitalism — the Communist Party?

I have already said that you will scarcely find another question which has been so confused, deliberately and undeliberately, by representatives of bourgeois science, philosophy, jurisprudence, political economy and journalism, as the question of the state. To this day this question is very often confused with religious questions; not only representatives of religious doctrines (it is quite natural to expect it of them), but even people who consider themselves free from religious prejudice, very often confuse the specific question of the state with questions of religion and endeavour to build up a doctrine — very often a complex one, with an ideological, philosophical approach and argumentation — which claims that the state is something divine, something supernatural, that it is a certain force, by virtue of which mankind has lived, and which confers on people, or which can confer on people, which brings with it, something that is not of man, but is given him from without — that it is a force

of divine origin. And it must be said that this doctrine is so closely bound up with the interests of the exploiting classes — the landlords and the capitalists — so serves their interests, has so deeply permeated all the customs, views and science of the gentlemen who represent the bourgeoisie, that you will meet with relics of it on every hand, even in the view of the state held by the Mensheviks and Socialist-Revolutionaries, who reject with disgust the suggestion that they are under the sway of religious prejudices and are convinced that they can regard the state with sober eyes. This question has been so confused and complicated because it affects the interests of the ruling classes more than any other (yielding in this respect only to the foundations of economic science). The doctrine of the state serves as a justification of social privilege, a justification of the existence of exploitation, a justification of the existence of capitalism — and that is why it would be the greatest mistake to expect impartiality on this question, to approach this question in the belief that people who claim to be scientific can give you a purely scientific view on the subject. In the question of the state, in the doctrine of the state, in the theory of the state, when you have become familiar with this question and have gone into it sufficiently deeply, you will always discern the mutual struggle of different classes, a struggle which is reflected or expressed in a conflict of views on the state, in the estimate of the role and significance of the state.

To approach this question as scientifically as possible we must cast at least a fleeting glance back on the history of the rise and development of the state. The most reliable thing in a question of social science, and one that is most necessary in order really to acquire the habit of approaching this question correctly and not allowing oneself to get lost

in the mass of detail or in the immense variety of conflicting opinions — the most important thing in order to approach this question scientifically is not to forget the underlying historical connection, to examine every question from the standpoint of how the given phenomenon arose in history and what principal stages this phenomenon passed through in its development, and, from the standpoint of its development, to examine what the given thing has become today.

I hope that in connection with the question of the state you will acquaint yourselves with Engels' book, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*. This is one of the fundamental works of modern Socialism, every sentence of which can be accepted with confidence, in the assurance that it has not been said at random but is based on immense historical and political material. Undoubtedly, not all the parts of this work have been expounded in an equally popular and comprehensible way; some of them presume a reader who already possesses a certain knowledge of history and economics. But I again repeat that you should not be perturbed if on reading this work you do not understand it at once. That hardly happens with anyone. But returning to it later, when your interest has been aroused, you will succeed in understanding the greater part of it, if not the whole of it. I mention this book because it gives the correct approach to the question in the sense mentioned. It begins with a historical sketch of the origin of the state.

In order to approach this question correctly, as every other question — for example, the question of the origin of capitalism, the exploitation of man by man, Socialism, how Socialism arose, what conditions gave rise to it — every such question can be approached soundly and confidently only if

we cast a glance back on the history of its development as a whole. In connection with this question it should first of all be noted that the state has not always existed. There was a time when there was no state. It appears wherever and whenever a division of society into classes appears, whenever exploiters and exploited appear.

Before the first form of exploitation of man by man arose, the first form of division into classes—slaveowners and slaves—there existed the patriarchal family, or, as it is sometimes called, the *clan* family. (Clan—generation, kinship, when people lived together according to kinship and generation.) Fairly definite traces of these primitive times have survived in the life of many primitive peoples; and if you take any work whatsoever on primitive culture, you will always come across more or less definite descriptions, indications and recollections of the fact that there was a time, more or less similar to primitive communism, when the division of society into slaveowners and slaves did not exist. And in those times there was no state, no special apparatus for the systematic application of force and the subjugation of people by force. It is such an apparatus that is called the state.

In primitive society, when people lived in small family groups and were still at the lowest stages of development, in a condition approximating to savagery—an epoch from which modern, civilized human society is separated by several thousands of years—there were yet no signs of the existence of a state. We find the predominance of custom, authority, respect, the power enjoyed by the elders of the clan; we find this power sometimes accorded to women—the position of women then was not like the downtrodden and oppressed condition of women today—but nowhere do we find a

special *category* of people who are set apart to rule others and, for the sake and purpose of rule, systematically and permanently to wield a certain apparatus of coercion, an apparatus of violence, such as is represented at the present time, as you all realize, by the armed detachments of troops, the prisons and the other means of subjugating the will of others by force — all that which constitutes the essence of the state.

If we abstract ourselves from the so-called religious teachings, subtleties, philosophical arguments and the various opinions advanced by bourgeois scholars, if we abstract ourselves from these and try to get at the real essence of the matter, we shall find that the state really does amount to such an apparatus of rule separated out from human society. When there appears such a special group of men who are occupied with ruling and nothing else, and who in order to rule need a special apparatus of coercion and of subjugating the will of others by force — prisons, special detachments of men, armies, etc. — then there appears the state.

But there was a time when there was no state, when general ties, society itself, discipline and the ordering of work were maintained by force of custom and tradition, or by the authority or the respect enjoyed by the elders of the clan or by women — who in those times not only frequently enjoyed equal status with men, but not infrequently enjoyed even a higher status — and when there was no special category of persons, specialists in ruling. History shows that the state as a special apparatus for coercing people arose only wherever and whenever there appeared a division of society into classes, that is, a division into groups of people some

of whom are permanently in a position to appropriate the labour of others, where some people exploit others.

And this division of society into classes must always be clearly borne in mind as a fundamental fact of history. The development of all human societies for thousands of years, in all countries without exception, reveals a general conformity to law, a regularity and consistency in this development; so that at first we had a society without classes — the original patriarchal, primitive society, in which there were no aristocrats; then we had a society based on slavery — a slaveowning society. The whole of modern civilized Europe has passed through this stage — slavery ruled supreme two thousand years ago. The vast majority of peoples of the other parts of the world also passed through this stage. Among the less developed peoples traces of slavery survive to this day; you will find the institution of slavery in Africa, for example, at the present time. Slaveowners and slaves were the first important class divisions. The former group not only owned all the means of production — the land and the implements, however primitive they may have been in those times — but also owned people. This group was known as slaveowners, while those who laboured and supplied labour for others were known as slaves.

This form was followed in history by another — feudalism. In the great majority of countries slavery in the course of its development evolved into serfdom. The fundamental division of society was now into feudal landlords and peasant serfs. The form of relations between people changed. The slaveowners had regarded the slaves as their property; the law had confirmed this view and regarded the slave as a chattel completely owned by the slaveowner. As far as the peasant serf was concerned, class oppression and depen-

dence remained, but it was not considered that the feudal landlord owned the peasants as chattels, but that he was only entitled to their labour and to compel them to perform certain services. In practice, as you know, serfdom, especially in Russia, where it survived longest of all and assumed the grossest forms, in no way differed from slavery.

Further, with the development of trade, the appearance of the world market and the development of money circulation, a new class arose within feudal society — the capitalist class. From the commodity, the exchange of commodities and the rise of the power of money, there arose the power of capital. During the eighteenth century — or rather, from the end of the eighteenth century and during the nineteenth century — revolutions took place all over the world. Feudalism was eliminated in all the countries of Western Europe. This took place latest of all in Russia. In 1861 a radical change took place in Russia as well, as a consequence of which one form of society was replaced by another — feudalism was replaced by capitalism, under which division into classes remained, as well as various traces and relics of serfdom, but in which the division into classes fundamentally assumed a new form.

The owners of capital, the owners of the land, the owners of the mills and factories in all capitalist countries constituted and still constitute an insignificant minority of the population who have complete command of the labour of the whole people, and, consequently, command, oppress and exploit the whole mass of labourers, the majority of whom are proletarians, wage workers, that procure their livelihood in the process of production only by the sale of their own worker's hands, their labour power. With the transition to capitalism, the peasants, who were already disunited and downtrodden

in feudal times, were converted partly (the majority) into proletarians, and partly (the minority) into wealthy peasants who themselves hired workers and who constituted a rural bourgeoisie.

This fundamental fact — the transition of society from primitive forms of slavery to serfdom and finally to capitalism — you must always bear in mind, for only by remembering this fundamental fact, only by inserting all political doctrines into this fundamental framework will you be able properly to appraise these doctrines and understand what they refer to; for each of these great periods in the history of mankind — slaveowning, feudal and capitalist — embraces scores and hundreds of centuries and presents such a mass of political forms, such a variety of political doctrines, opinions and revolutions, that this extreme diversity and immense variety can be understood — especially in connection with the political, philosophical and other doctrines of bourgeois scholars and politicians — only by firmly holding, as to a guiding thread, to this division of society into classes, this change in the forms of class rule, and from this standpoint examining all social questions — economic, political, spiritual, religious, etc.

If you examine the state from the standpoint of this fundamental division, you will find that before the division of society into classes, as I have already said, no state existed. But as the social division into classes arose and took firm root, as class society arose, the state also arose and took firm root. The history of mankind knows scores and hundreds of countries that have passed through or are still passing through slavery, feudalism and capitalism. In each of these countries, despite the immense historical changes that have taken place, despite all the political vicissitudes and all the

revolutions associated with this development of mankind, in the transition from slavery through feudalism to capitalism and to the present world-wide struggle against capitalism, you will always discern the rise of the state. It has always been a certain apparatus which separated out from society and consisted of a group of people engaged solely, or almost solely, or mainly, in ruling. People are divided into ruled, and into specialists in ruling, those who rise above society and are called rulers, representatives of the state. This apparatus, this group of people who rule others, always takes possession of a certain apparatus of coercion, of physical force, irrespective of whether this violence over people is expressed in the primitive club, or, in the epoch of slavery, in more perfected types of weapons, or in the firearms which appeared in the Middle Ages, or, finally, in modern weapons, which in the twentieth century are marvels of technique and are entirely based on the latest achievements of modern technology. The methods of violence changed, but whenever there was a state there existed in every society a group of persons who ruled, who commanded, who dominated and who in order to maintain their power possessed an apparatus of physical coercion, an apparatus of violence, with those weapons which corresponded to the technical level of the given epoch. And by examining these general phenomena, by asking ourselves why no state existed when there were no classes, when there were no exploiters and exploited, and why it arose when classes arose — only in this way shall we find a definite answer to the question of the essence of the state and its significance.

The state is a machine for maintaining the rule of one class over another. When there were no classes in society, when, before the epoch of slavery, people laboured in prim-

itive conditions of greater equality, in conditions when productivity of labour was still at its lowest, and when primitive man could barely procure the wherewithal for the crudest and most primitive existence, a special group of people, specially separated off to rule and dominate over the rest of society, had not yet arisen, and could not have arisen. Only when the first form of the division of society into classes appeared, only when slavery appeared, when a certain class of people, by concentrating on the crudest forms of agricultural labour, could produce a certain surplus, when this surplus was not absolutely essential for the most wretched existence of the slave and passed into the hands of the slaveowner, when in this way the existence of this class of slaveowners took firm root—then in order that it might take firm root it was essential that a state should appear.

And it did appear—the slaveowning state, an apparatus which gave the slaveowners power and enabled them to rule over the slaves. Both society and the state were then much smaller than they are now, they possessed an incomparably weaker apparatus of communication—the modern means of communication did not then exist. Mountains, rivers and seas were immeasurably greater obstacles than they are now, and the formation of the state was confined within far narrower geographical boundaries. A technically weak state apparatus served a state confined within relatively narrow boundaries and a narrow circle of action. Nevertheless, there did exist an apparatus which compelled the slaves to remain in slavery, which kept one part of society subjugated to and oppressed by another. It is impossible to compel the greater part of society to work systematically for the other part of society without a permanent apparatus of coercion. So long as there were no classes, there was no

apparatus like this. When classes appeared, everywhere and always as this division grew and took firmer hold, there also appeared a special institution—the state. The forms of state were extremely varied. During the period of slavery we already find diverse forms of the state in the most advanced, cultured and civilized countries according to the standards of the time—for example, in ancient Greece and Rome, which rested entirely on slavery. At that time the difference was already arising between the monarchy and the republic, between the aristocracy and the democracy. A monarchy is the power of a single person, a republic is the absence of any nonelected power; an aristocracy is the power of a relatively small minority, a democracy is the power of the people (democracy in Greek literally means the power of the people). All these differences arose in the epoch of slavery. Despite these differences, the state of the slaveowning epoch was a slaveowning state, irrespective of whether it was a monarchy or a republic, aristocratic or democratic.

In every course on the history of ancient times, when hearing a lecture on this subject you will hear about the struggle which was waged between the monarchical and republican states. But the fundamental fact is that the slaves were not regarded as human beings—not only were they not regarded as citizens, they were not even regarded as human beings. Roman law regarded them as chattels. The law of manslaughter, not to mention the other laws for the protection of the person, did not extend to slaves. It defended only the slaveowners, who were alone recognized as citizens with full rights. But whether a monarchy was instituted or a republic, it was a monarchy of the slaveowners or a republic of the slaveowners. All rights under them