

V. I. LENIN

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THE STATE  
*and*  
REVOLUTION



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FOREIGN LANGUAGES PUBLISHING HOUSE • MOSCOW

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V. I. LENIN

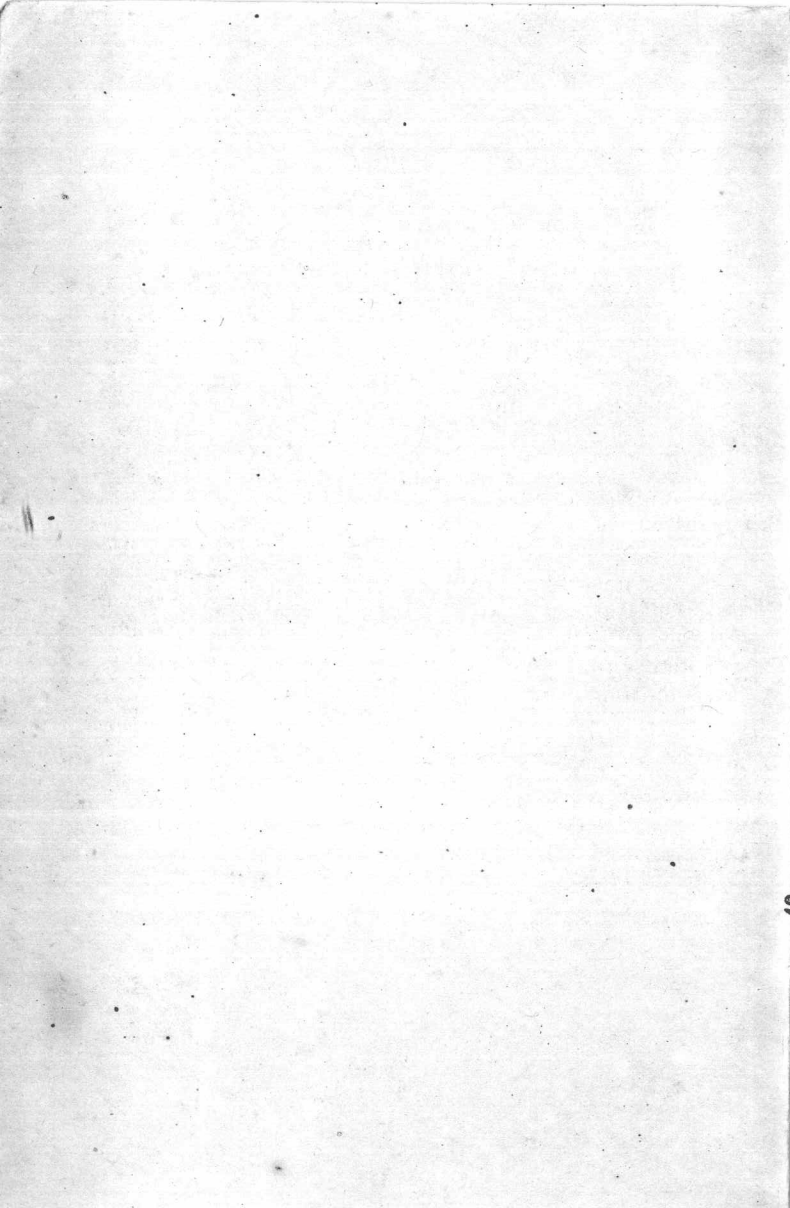
THE STATE  
*and*  
REVOLUTION

*The Marxist Teaching on the State  
and the Tasks of the Proletariat  
in the Revolution*



FOREIGN LANGUAGES PUBLISHING HOUSE

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**PUBLISHER'S NOTE**

The English translation of V. I. Lenin's *State and Revolution* follows the text of the two-volume Russian edition of V. I. Lenin's *Selected Works*, Vol. II, Moscow 1946.



## CONTENTS

Page

PREFACE TO THE FIRST EDITION . . . . .	7
PREFACE TO THE SECOND EDITION . . . . .	9
Ch a p. I. CLASS SOCIETY AND THE STATE . . . . .	11
1. The State as the Product of the Irreconcilability of Class Antagonisms. . . . .	11
2. Special Bodies of Armed Men, Prisons, etc. . . . .	16
3. The State as an Instrument for the Exploitation of the Oppressed Class . . . . .	20
4. The "Withering Away" of the State and Violent Revolution . . . . .	25
Ch a p. II. THE STATE AND REVOLUTION. THE EXPERIENCE OF 1848-51 . . . . .	34
1. The Eve of the Revolution . . . . .	34
2. The Revolution Summed Up . . . . .	40
3. The Presentation of the Question by Marx in 1852 . . . . .	48
Ch a p. III. THE STATE AND REVOLUTION. EXPERIENCE OF THE PARIS COMMUNE OF 1871. MARX'S ANALYSIS . . . . .	52
1. Wherein Lay the Heroism of the Communards' Attempt? . . . . .	52
2. With What Is the Smashed State Machine to Be Replaced? . . . . .	58
3. Abolition of Parliamentarism . . . . .	64
4. Organization of the Unity of the Nation . . . . .	72
5. Abolition of the Parasite State . . . . .	76

<b>C h a p. IV. CONTINUATION. SUPPLEMENTARY</b>	<b>Page</b>
<b>EXPLANATION BY ENGELS . . . . .</b>	<b>80</b>
1. <i>The Housing Question</i> . . . . .	80
2. Controversy with the Anarchists . . . . .	84
3. Letter to Bebel . . . . .	90
4. Criticism of the Draft of the Erfurt Program . . . . .	94
5. The 1891 Preface to Marx's <i>The Civil War in France</i> . . . . .	104
6. Engels on the Overcoming of Democracy . . . . .	112
<b>C h a p. V. THE ECONOMIC BASIS OF THE</b>	
<b>WITHERING AWAY OF THE STATE . . . . .</b>	<b>116</b>
1. Presentation of the Question by Marx . . . . .	116
2. The Transition from Capitalism to Communism . . . . .	120
3. The First Phase of Communist Society . . . . .	127
4. The Higher Phase of Communist Society . . . . .	132
<b>C h a p. VI. THE VULGARIZATION OF MARXISM</b>	
<b>BY THE OPPORTUNISTS . . . . .</b>	<b>146</b>
1. Plekhanov's Controversy with the Anarchists . . . . .	147
2. Kautsky's Controversy with the Opportunists . . . . .	148
3. Kautsky's Controversy with Pannekoek . . . . .	158
<b>POSTSCRIPT TO THE FIRST EDITION . . . . .</b>	<b>171</b>
<b>NOTES . . . . .</b>	<b>173</b>

## PREFACE TO THE FIRST EDITION

The question of the State is now acquiring particular importance both in theory and in practical politics. The imperialist war has immensely accelerated and intensified the process of transformation of monopoly capitalism into state-monopoly capitalism. The monstrous oppression of the toiling masses by the State, which is merging more and more with the all-powerful capitalist associations, is becoming ever more monstrous. The advanced countries are being converted—we speak here of their “rear”—into military convict prisons for the workers.

The unprecedented horrors and miseries of the protracted war are making the position of the masses unbearable and increasing their indignation. The international proletarian revolution is clearly maturing. The question of its relation to the State is acquiring practical importance.

The elements of opportunism that accumulated during the decades of comparatively peaceful development have given rise to the trend of social-chauvinism which dominates the official Socialist parties throughout the world. This trend—Socialism in words and chauvinism in deeds (Plekhanov, Potresov, Breshkovskaya, Rubanovich, and in a



slightly veiled form, Messrs. Tsereteli, Chernov and Co., in Russia; Scheidemann, Legien, David and others in Germany; Renaudel, Guesde, Vandervelde in France and Belgium; Hyndman and the Fabians in England, etc., etc.)—is distinguished by the base, servile adaptation of the “leaders” of “Socialism” to the interests not only of “their” national bourgeoisie, but precisely of “their” State—for the majority of the so-called Great Powers have long been exploiting and enslaving a whole number of small and weak nationalities. And the imperialist war is precisely a war for the division and re-division of this kind of booty. The struggle for the emancipation of the toiling masses from the influence of the bourgeoisie in general, and of the imperialist bourgeoisie in particular, is impossible without a struggle against opportunist prejudices concerning the “State.”

First of all we examine the teachings of Marx and Engels on the State and dwell in particular detail on those aspects of this teaching which have been forgotten or have been subjected to opportunist distortion. Then we deal specially with the one who is chiefly responsible for these distortions, Karl Kautsky, the best-known leader of the Second International (1889-1914), which has met with such miserable bankruptcy in the present war. Finally, we shall sum up the main results of the experiences of the Russian revolutions of 1905 and particularly of 1917. Apparently, the latter is now (the beginning of August 1917) completing the first stage of its development; but this revolution as a whole can only be understood as a link in a chain

of Socialist proletarian revolutions being called forth by the imperialist war. Hence, the question of the relation of the Socialist proletarian revolution to the State acquires not only practical political importance, but also the importance of a most urgent problem of the day, the problem of explaining to the masses what they will have to do in the very near future to free themselves from the yoke of capitalism.

*The Author*

August 1917

## PRÉFACE TO THE SECOND EDITION

The present, second edition is published almost without change, except that section 3 has been added to Chapter II.

*The Author*

Moscow

December 17, 1918



## CHAPTER I

### CLASS SOCIETY AND THE STATE

#### 1. THE STATE AS THE PRODUCT OF THE IRRECONCILABILITY OF CLASS ANTAGONISMS

What is now happening to Marx's teaching has, in the course of history, happened repeatedly to the teachings of revolutionary thinkers and leaders of oppressed classes struggling for emancipation. During the lifetime of great revolutionaries, the oppressing classes constantly hounded them, received their teachings with the most savage malice, the most furious hatred and the most unscrupulous campaigns of lies and slander. After their death, attempts are made to convert them into harmless icons, to canonize them, so to say, and to surround their *names* with a certain halo for the "consolation" of the oppressed classes and with the object of duping the latter, while at the same time emasculating the *essence* of the revolutionary teaching, blunting its revolutionary edge and vulgarizing it. At the present time, the bourgeoisie and the opportunists within the working-class movement concur in this "doctoring" of Marxism. They omit, obliterate and distort the revolutionary

side of this teaching, its revolutionary soul. They push to the foreground and extol what is or seems acceptable to the bourgeoisie. All the social-chauvinists are now "Marxists" (don't laugh!). And more and more frequently, German bourgeois scholars, but yesterday specialists in the annihilation of Marxism, are speaking of the "national-German" Marx, who, they aver, educated the workers' unions which are so splendidly organized for the purpose of conducting a predatory war!

In such circumstances, in view of the unprecedentedly widespread distortion of Marxism, our prime task is to *re-establish* what Marx really taught on the subject of the State. For this purpose it will be necessary to quote at length from the works of Marx and Engels themselves. Of course, long quotations will render the text cumbersome and will not help at all to make it popular reading, but we cannot possibly avoid them. All, or at any rate, all the most essential passages in the works of Marx and Engels on the subject of the State must without fail be quoted as fully as possible, in order that the reader may form an independent opinion of the totality of the views of the founders of scientific Socialism and of the development of those views, and in order that their distortion by the now prevailing "Kautskyism" may be documentarily proved and clearly demonstrated.

Let us begin with the most popular of Engels' works, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State*, the sixth edition of which was published in Stuttgart as far back as 1894. We shall have to translate the quotations from the German

originals, as the Russian translations, although very numerous, are for the most part either incomplete or very unsatisfactory.

Summing up his historical analysis, Engels says:

“The State is, therefore, by no means a power forced on society from without; just as little is it ‘the reality of the ethical idea,’ ‘the image and reality of reason,’ as Hegel maintains. Rather, it is a product of society at a certain stage of development; it is the admission that this society has become entangled in an insoluble contradiction with itself; that it is cleft into irreconcilable antagonisms which it is powerless to dispel. But in order that these antagonisms, classes with conflicting economic interests, might not consume themselves and society in sterile struggle, a power seemingly standing above society became necessary for the purpose of moderating the conflict, of keeping it within the bounds of ‘order’; and this power, arisen out of society, but placing itself above it, and increasingly alienating itself from it, is the State.” (Pp. 177-78, sixth German edition.)

This expresses with perfect clarity the basic idea of Marxism on the question of the historical role and the meaning of the State. The State is the product and the manifestation of the *irreconcilability* of class antagonisms. The State arises when, where and to the extent that class antagonisms objectively *cannot* be reconciled. And, conversely, the existence of the State proves that the class antagonisms are irreconcilable.

It is precisely on this most important and fundamental point that the distortion of Marxism, proceeding along two main lines, begins.

On the one hand, the bourgeois and particularly the petty-bourgeois ideologists, compelled under the weight of indisputable historical facts to admit that the State only exists where there are class antagonisms and the class struggle, "correct" Marx in such a way as to make it appear that the State is an organ for the *reconciliation* of classes. According to Marx, the State could neither arise nor maintain itself if it were possible to reconcile classes. According to the petty-bourgeois and philistine professors and publicists it appears—very frequently they benignantly refer to Marx to prove this—that the State does reconcile classes. According to Marx, the State is an organ of class rule, an organ for the *oppression* of one class by another; it is the creation of "order," which legalizes and perpetuates this oppression by moderating the conflict between the classes. In the opinion of the petty-bourgeois politicians, order means precisely the reconciliation of classes, and not the oppression of one class by another; to moderate the conflict means reconciling classes and not depriving the oppressed classes of definite means and methods of struggle to overthrow the oppressors.

For instance, when, in the Revolution of 1917, the question of the significance and role of the State arose in all its magnitude as a practical question demanding immediate action on a mass scale, all the Socialist-Revolutionaries and Mensheviks immediately and completely sank to the petty-bourgeois theory that the "State" "reconciles" classes.

Innumerable resolutions and articles by politicians of both these parties are thoroughly saturated with this petty-bourgeois and philistine "reconciliation" theory. That the State is an organ of the rule of a definite class which *cannot* be reconciled with its antipode (the class opposite to it), is something the petty-bourgeois democrats will never be able to understand. Their attitude towards the State is one of the most striking manifestations of the fact that our Socialist-Revolutionaries and Mensheviks are not Socialists at all (a point that we Bolsheviks have always maintained), but petty-bourgeois democrats with near-Socialist phraseology.

On the other hand, the "Kautskyan" distortion of Marxism is far more subtle. "Theoretically," it is not denied that the State is an organ of class rule, or that class antagonisms are irreconcilable. But what is lost sight of or glossed over is this: if the State is the product of the irreconcilability of class antagonisms, if it is a power standing *above* society and "*increasingly alienating* itself from it," then, it is clear that the liberation of the oppressed class is impossible not only without a violent revolution, *but also without the destruction* of the apparatus of State power which was created by the ruling class and which is the embodiment of this "alienation." As we shall see later, Marx very definitely drew this theoretically self-evident conclusion as a result of a concrete historical analysis of the tasks of the revolution. And—as we shall show in detail further on—it is precisely this conclusion which Kautsky . . . has "forgotten" and distorted.



## 2. SPECIAL BODIES OF ARMED MEN, PRISONS, ETC.

Engels continues:

“... In contradistinction to the old gentile (tribal or clan) organization, the State, firstly, divides its subjects according to territory. . . .” Such a division seems “natural” to us, but it cost a prolonged struggle against the old form of tribal or gentile society.

“... The second distinguishing feature is the establishment of a public power which no longer directly coincided with the population organizing itself as an armed force. This special public power is necessary, because a self-acting, armed organization of the population has become impossible since the cleavage into classes. . . . This public power exists in every State; it consists not merely of armed people but also of material adjuncts, prisons and institutions of coercion of all kinds, of which gentile (clan) society knew nothing. . . .”

Engels further elucidates the concept of the “power” which is termed the State—a power which arose from society, but places itself above it and alienates itself more and more from it. What does this power mainly consist of? It consists of special bodies of armed men which have prisons, etc., at their command.

We are justified in speaking of special bodies of armed men, because the public power which is an attribute of every State does not “directly coincide”