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SOME NOTES ON LENIN'S STATE AND REVOLUTION

① Of first importance is the fact that the book was written right on the eve of the November Revolution, that is between the first February Revolution and before the actual Bolshevik Revolution. Lenin's "Afterword" explains that it was written in August and September 1917, and that he had not completed the book because he was "interrupted" by the actual outbreak of the revolution. "It is more pleasant and more useful," he adds, "to live through the experience of a revolution than to write about it."

② Secondly, just as there is no division between theory or books, and practice, so it becomes necessary on the eve of every great crisis to review the past Marxist works in the light of the latest developments. That is just what Lenin did in 1917, review the works of Marx on the 1848 revolutions, and the Paris Commune in 1871, against the background of the Imperialist War of 1914 which saw what Lenin called "the transformation of monopolist capitalism into State-monopoly capitalism", and at the same time saw the collapse of the Second or Socialist International.

③ The book is divided into 6 chapters: First, the analysis of class society and the State; Second and Third the 1848 and 1871 revolutions; Fourth, the dispute with the anarchists as is seen in the work of Engels; Fifth takes up the whole question of the withering away of the state after the Revolution; and the Sixth Chapter deals with the opportunist falsifications of Marx which Marxists call "Vulgarization".

④ The first point of importance that Lenin emphasizes from the start is the fact that the State, or Government, is, in the first instance, a result of class antagonisms. That is since only the class struggle in its final stages can do away with the political rule of the capitalist class, and since the struggle of the classes in the factories themselves are too sharp and no one there can pretend that the interests of the workers and the bosses are the same, the capitalists as a class have their representation in the state which they pretend stands above classes. All of history shows that to be a falsehood. Lenin puts this view clearly when he writes:

* According to Marx, the State is the organ of class domination, the organ of oppression of one class by another.

Moreover, not only politically and economically is the working class oppressed, but the armed forces, the prisons, etc. are all a sign of this class rule.

It is for this very reason that the Marxists, after the revolution, and the period in which Dictatorship of the Proletariat is necessary, foresee the withering away of the state, once there is no exploitation of man by man.

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5) After dealing with the state, Lenin goes on to analyse the 1848 revolutions. He takes up Marx's works "The Poverty of Philosophy" and "The Communist Manifesto" and shows that to the proletariat, the state would become "the proletariat organized as the ruling class".

Once the 1848 revolutions, in which the petty bourgeois played the same treacherous role in relation to the proletariat as we now know to be common, were over, the bourgeois petty bourgeoisie showed their true color. Rather than to give or give any substantial rights to the proletariat that had overthrown feudalism, they returned back to the rule of kings. The crowning of Louis Philippe as Louis Bonaparte in 1831, explained the counter-revolution. Lenin quotes from Marx's analysis of this event, known as "The 18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte", to show the difference between a proletarian and a bourgeois revolution. It is this which led Marx to conclude that the workers couldn't just "take over" the state machinery of the bourgeois but must "smash it up."

6) The experience of the 1871 revolution is of greater importance than the 1848 revolutions, because the 1871 was a truly proletarian revolution and established, though only for a short time, an actual workers republic, the Paris Commune, which served as a model for the 1917 revolution.

11 Lenin then takes up the achievements of the Paris Commune: democratic rule by the workers, the majority of the population; destruction of the standing army and the bureaucracy and replacing it by the armed people and the commune which was not only elected by the people but where every elected official was subject to recall, and could earn a salary as that of every worker, (and no more).

12 No "bossing" except by the people themselves. Here is how Lenin puts the words of the workers themselves:

"We must organize production on a large scale, starting from what has already been done by capitalism. By ourselves, we workers, relying on our own experience as workers, must create an unshakable and iron discipline supported by the power of the armed workers; we must reduce the role of the State officials to that of simply carrying out our own instructions; they must be responsible, revocable, moderately paid "managers and clerks."

And, as Marx put it, the Commune was the form "discovered at last" by the proletarian revolution, under which the proletariat can achieve its economic liberation.

13 In the 4th chapter Lenin deals with the housing question, for even that seemingly simple question cannot be solved by capitalism. And, in the process, he shows that the anarchists who wish "to abolish" the state, even the proletarian state, from the first day of the revolution, only make it easy for the counter-revolution to enter. However, the importance of this particular chapter is to show that the reformists or socialists criticized the anarchists only from the opportunist point of view, and left much that was in their favor out.

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For example, Lenin shows that in a certain sense the Socialists, even when all Marxists were Socialists, erred in their program and in their conception of the state. For instance, the Erfurt Program was considered the model for all socialist parties; yet even in its time Engels criticized it. But the letter was hidden from the party by Kautsky for many years.

That ~~view~~ appeared then as the kind of an argument that is pure hair splitting turned out to be crucial for the revolution. Thus Kautsky said that that the state and trusts can "plan" and hence the disorder of capitalism would disappear at that stage. Engels had objected and said that isn't socialism, and Lenin now supports him in this view:

"This fact must be emphasized because the 'reformist' middle class view that monopolistic capitalism, whether private or State, is no longer capitalism, but can already be termed, "State Socialism" or something of that sort is one of the most widespread errors."

We can see the erroneous view repeated even as late as today, for that is what the English call socialism, state planning, and that is what we must still fight against as capitalist state "planning". It does not do away with exploitation of workers, or imperialist exploitation of the colonies, like Africa.

*) The real economic foundation of the withering away of the state is to abolish exploitation, and Marx in what is known as his "Criticism of the Gotha Program" of the socialists of his day, dealt with it best of all.

Lenin here deals with the transition period from Capitalism to Communism, and with the early and highest stages of communism when the rule of life, so to speak, would be what Marx called "the all-round development of the individual."

*) In the last chapter Lenin takes up the opportunist errors of the Socialists, the German like Kautsky, the Russians like Plekhanov, and the manner in which they all hid the fact, and thus betrayed the workers, that you could not have a workers state, without a workers revolution to smash the exploitative capitalist state.

Before Lenin had a chance to move from this chapter to the one dealing with the 1905 and early 1917 revolutions, the revolution burst forth. Without this previous clarification of his own mind, he could not have given out the very simple slogans that helped win the revolution, because it was in the language of the workers, and for aims for which they were already fighting instinctively.