State and Revolution

(By LENIN)

CHAPTER 1

CLASS SOCIETY AND THE STATE

1. The State as the Product of the Irreconcilability of Class Antagonisms

Lenin begins by describing what he thought was happening to Marxism during his life time. Once a revolutionary dies (Marx), the ‘oppressing classes’ who relentlessly prosecuted them during their life time now try to convert them into ‘harmless icons’ with the aim of tricking the ‘oppressed classes’. While at the same time they attempt to destroy ‘the *real essence* of their revolutionary theories and blunting their revolutionary edge’.

(The example of Che Guevara has certain parallels with what Lenin describes above. Nowadays Che is admired for his quality of rebelliousness but very few know *why* and against *what* did he rebel and still fewer people are aware of his role as a political figure and a Marxist intellectual. Thus Che is turned into a ‘harmless icon’ on t-shirts and his true ‘essence’ being reduced to a two dimensional image to serve fashion consumerism.)

The bourgeoisie has the help of the ‘opportunists’ in this task of ‘adulterating Marxism’. The previous one-time specialists who claimed themselves to be expert in demolishing Marxism now speak of ‘”national-German” Marx’ (National Socialism), ‘who, they aver, has educated the labour unions which are so splendidly organised for conducting the present predatory war!’ (WWI).

Lenin goes on to explain the ‘historical **role** and **meaning** of state’ (emphasis added)

‘the state is the product and the manifestation of *irreconcilability* of class antagonisms. The state arises when, where and to the extent that the class antagonism *cannot* be objectively reconciled. And, conversely, the existence of the state proves that the class antagonism *are* irreconcilable.’ p.8

The bourgeoisie is forced to recognise that class antagonism exists in the society but bourgeoisie still perceive the state as a reconciliatory body. While Marx argued that if reconciliation of classes were possible the state would not exist. The state being organ of ‘*domination’* is used by one class to oppress the other class. This is done through state’s pursuit of “order” which is a legalised way of oppression. The bourgeoisie believe that state by imposing order reconciles the classes, rather than seeing this for what it is, that is depriving the oppressed class of ‘certain means’ of overthrowing the oppressors.

Lenin sees the Revolution of 1917 posed the practical question of the role and meaning of state. Lenin says that the Mensheviks and Socialist-Revolutionaries sunk to the bourgeois position of state as a reconciliatory body. This therefore showed that they did not possess revolutionary ideas.

State has two main characteristics as ‘organ of class domination’ and ‘a force standing *above* society and “increasingly separating itself from it,”’ (acting as arbiter the liberal notion of state as umpire). Lenin concludes that for the liberation of the oppressed class therefore there is no other choice but to have a ‘violent revolution’ and destroy the state apparatus that is created by the ruling class which enforces the “order”.

1. SPECIAL BODIES OF ARMED MEN, PRISON, ETC.

The nation state which appears to us “natural” is historical, its creation was a struggle against old societies such as tribes and clans (many nations are not homogenous and national borders sometimes divides tribes and clans e.g. Afghanistan-Pakistan border). The creation of state is accompanied by the creation of ‘special bodies of armed men’ (army, police etc). The state arises from the society but becomes increasingly separated from it. The state thus is the **power** apparatus of ruling class.

The old “self-acting armed organisation of the population” is replaced by these “special bodies of armed” i.e. creation of a professional force such as standing army. This Lenin argues is not because of division of labour but because of class antagonism since if the oppressed class could arm itself there would arise a violent conflict. So the ruling class maintain the monopoly of power through the “special bodies of armed men” and the oppressed class attempts at creating a body such as this that will serve the exploited.

The state being in the service of capital in bourgeois society and by extension this means that the “special bodies of armed men” also serve the national capitalists. Lenin argues that the WWI was an imperialist war fought by different national capitalists for expansion.

1. THE STATE AS AN INSTRUMENT FOR THE EXPLOINTATION OF THE OPPPRESED CLASS

The state maintains the “special bodies of armed men” through tax and loan. These bodies are granted authority through the laws that the state passes. As state is the product of class antagonism we see that in different historical stages state has been the instrument of different ruling class e.g. the feudal state being used by the lord to exploit the slave or the serf while in the bourgeois state it is the exploitation of “wage labour by capital” i.e. the exploitation of workers by capitalists.

In the bourgeois society the state is controlled by capital ‘first, by means of “direct corruption of the officials” (America); second, by means of “alliance of the government with the stock exchange.” (France and America)’. Lenin argues that the ‘democratic republic’ (the bourgeois state) is the ‘best’ political form for capital since no change in government, persons, parties or institutions can loosen capital’s grip. Lenin also points out that Engels saw ‘universal suffrage [as it exists under capitalism] as a means of bourgeois domination’. Therefore the argument, put forward by the bourgeoisie that universal suffrage is capable of expressing the will of the majority (i.e. the oppressed class) is quite wrong.

So far we have established that the state came to existence at a certain point in history of human development. Engels argues that now we see that not only “the existence of these classes has not only ceased to be necessary, but is becoming a positive hindrance to production. They will disappear as inevitably as they arose at an early stage. Along with them, the state will inevitably disappear.”… “the whole state machine where it will belong: in museum of antiquities, side by side with the spinning wheel and the bronze axe.” p.15

1. THE “WITHERING AWAY” OF THE STATE AND VIOLENT REVOLUTION

Lenin states that “withering away” of the state is regarded as Marxist opportunism as it appears to argue for the slow reformation of bourgeois state until it disappears as opposed to ‘abolition’ of state that anarchists argue for. However this is a misunderstanding as Lenin goes on to argue that ‘withering away [of the state] refer[s] to the remains of *proletarian* statehood *after* the Socialist revolution’ (p.17). The socialist revolution means the destruction of bourgeois state and not its reformation.

The process in which the bourgeois state is overthrown and replaced by the socialist state does not entail the “withering away” of the state. Since one “special repressive force” (bourgeois state) is replaced for another “special repressive force” (socialist state).

The socialist state will be a ‘democracy’ and as class antagonism disappears since the seizure of the means of production then the state becomes unnecessary, as state is only needed for the oppression of one class by another. Thus state even as democracy will “wither away”.

Lenin argues that the Marxist view of state is equally critical of Anarchist position (abolition of state) and opportunist position (reformism). Therefore it is a misconception that Marxists understanding of state is only opposed to the Anarchists’ understanding of state.

(‘… That force, however, plays another role (other than that of a diabolical power) in history, a revolutionary role; that, in the words of Marx, it is the midwife of every old society which is pregnant with the new; that it is the instruments with whose aid social movement forces its way through and shatters the dead, fossilised political forms”.’p.19)

The above quote Lenin says is combined with false interpretation of “withering away” of the state is used to say that Marxists want slow reformation of bourgeois state as the bourgeois state will give birth to the new society i.e. the socialist state. This Lenin argues is a distortion of Marxism by opportunist and false Marxists. Lenin argues that Marxism is precisely the opposite as the above quote explains force is required to destroy the bourgeois state through a violent revolution as no ruling class will be willing to give up without a struggle. The “withering away” of the state only refers to the socialist (or proletariat) state that will be established after the revolution.

CHAPTER 2

THE EXPERIENCES OF 1848-1851

1. On the Eve of Revolution
2. State is a power used by one class to oppress another class(es). Class antagonism makes existence of state necessary.
3. The proletariat must destroy the bourgeois state through revolution and establish a socialist state – *“the state, i.e., the proletariat organised as the ruling class.”*
4. As state exists for oppression of one class by another, then which class the proletariat suppress? The previously exploiting class the bourgeois class. This is done through the taking over of the means and mode of production thus putting an end to exploitation of the majority by the minority.
5. While capitalism disintegrates other classes at the same time it creates and concentrates a specific class in the cities and towns, the proletariat. It is the historical duty of this class to bring about the socialist revolution and to “lead” and “guide” the other oppressed classes towards socialism.
6. While proletariat construct their state, is the ‘break-up and destruction’ of bourgeois state necessary at the beginning or rather use that state machinery?

**Discussion**

1. Results of the Revolution
2. ‘All revolutions which have taken place up to the present have helped to perfect the state machinery, whereas it must be shattered, broken to pieces.’
3. The proletariat must first conquer the ‘political power’ and transform the bourgeois state into a state where “proletariat [is] organised as the ruling class”. The proletariat state will then “wither away”.
4. The ***origin*** of ‘centralised’ state of bourgeoisie is found towards the end of ‘absolutism’ and the two major institutions of this state being – the ‘standing army’ and ‘bureaucracy’ (i.e. public service). These two institutions like a “parasite” live on the bourgeois society.
5. The bourgeois revolutions have developed, perfected and strengthened these institutions. The petty bourgeoisie take up employment in these institutions and therefore form an allegiance with the ‘big bourgeoisie’, since this gives them a more privileged position than the majority of population (workers and peasants).
6. The process of transformation of state described above has been going on in different forms and at different speed across many countries e.g. the “parliamentary power” in the ‘republican countries’ (France and USA) but also in ‘monarchies’ (England and Scandinavian countries).
7. What we see has been happening is the expansion of capitalism reaching its ‘latest stage’ i.e. ‘the era of banking capital, the era of gigantic capitalist monopolies, the era of transformation of monopoly capitalism into state monopoly-capitalism’. At this stage we see unprecedented growth of “state machinery” and increased repression of the proletariat.
8. So what will the proletariat put in place after the destruction of the bourgeois state?

**Discussion**

1. The Formulation of the Question by Marx in 1852
2. Recognition of the existence of ‘class struggle’ does not make one Marxist but it is the recognition of the following points distinguishes one as Marxist:

“**(1)** that the existence of classes is connected only with certain historical struggles which arise out of the development of production; **(2)** that class struggle necessarily leads to the dictatorship of the proletariat; **(3)** that this dictatorship is itself only a transition to the abolition of all classes and to a classless society.”

1. Therefore the recognition of the class struggle by opportunists does not lead them to the recognition of the necessity of ‘*transition* from capitalism to Communism’ and also the destruction of bourgeois state.
2. The proletariat state will constitute the ‘dictatorship of proletariat’ (a term coined by Marx and Engel after the Paris Commune of 1871). This state will be ‘democratic’ for the majority i.e. the proletariat but ‘dictatorial’ for the minority i.e. the bourgeoisie.
3. It must be remembered that in any class society ‘the dictatorship of a single class is necessary’ be it dictatorship of proletariat, bourgeoisie or feudal lords. Therefore existence of state means that there will be a dictatorship of one class over other class(es).
4. Only in ‘classless society’ there will be no class antagonism, thus no state and therefore no dictatorship of any class. This ‘classless society’ is the Communist society.

**Discussion**