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BOOK REVIEW

CONTROVERSIAL IDEAS ABOUT THE STATE AND REVOLUTION, A BOOK REVIEW "THE STATE AND REVOLUTION" VLADIMIR ILYICH LENIN, HAYMARKET BOOKS CHICAGO, 2014, 210 PAGES, ISBN: 978-1-60846-498-2

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ABSTRACT

The State and Revolution is a book that was born from Lenin's life experience as the father of Russian revolutionaries. The movement that gave birth to major changes in the future of Russia and the formation of a Soviet state with Marxism-Leninism. In his book,

Vladimir Lenin divides the discussion into six chapters, each of which is divided into several sub-chapters. The method of writing the book uses a descriptive analysis pattern with a contextual approach. In fact, this book has a positive contribution to anti-bourgeois supporters, because of its ideas against bourgeoisie and Western capitalism. But this book is a negative ghost, for lovers of freedom and democracy. Because the true teachings of Leninism require authoritarianism and the absence of freedom for its citizens.

Keywords: State, Revolutions, Marxism-Leninism



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SHORT NOTE

THIS BOOK WAS WRITTEN by Lenin in August–September 1917, with the original Russian title "*Государство революция (Gosudarstvo i revolyutsiya)*", which was later translated into English as "The State

and Revolution.” The book that gives a definitive presentation on the Marxist theory of the state. It is written in the clear and sharp Lenin style, and is the cornerstone of revolutionary Marxism.¹

The author's real name was Vladimir Ilyich Ulyanov (10 April 1870 – 21 January 1924) who was later nicknamed "Lenin" after the Lena river in Siberia.² He served as head of government of the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic (RSFS Russia) from 1917 until his death, and also as head of government of the Soviet Union from 1922 until his death.³ Lenin was politically Marxist and had contributed to his political ideas in Marxist thought known as Leninism. This idea when combined with Marx's economic theory is known as Marxism-Leninism.⁴

As the head of the Bolshevik branch of the Russian Social Democratic Labor Party, he was instrumental in the beginning of the October Revolution of 1917, which resulted in the overthrow of Russia's Provisional Government and the establishment of the Russian Socialist Federative Socialists. Not long after that, Lenin began enacting socialist reforms, one of which was the transfer of property rights to the soviets, including those pertaining to land and buildings (labor councils).⁵ Lenin was pressured into signing a peace

¹ A Riley, *Lenin and His Revolution: The First Totalitarian*. Soc 56, 503–511 (2019); Ziva Galili, “Women and the Russian revolution.” *Dialectical Anthropology* 15 (1990): 119-127.

² Jane Burbank, “Lenin and the Law in Revolutionary Russia.” *Slavic Review* 54, no. 1 (1995): 23–44.

³ Richard Gregor, “Lenin, Revolution, and Foreign Policy.” *International Journal* 22, no. 4 (1967): 563–75.

⁴ K Marx, *Critique of the Gotha Programme in MECW*, v 24. Moscow: Progress Publishers. First written in 1875, (1989); K Marx, and Engels, *F. Manifesto of the Communist Party in MECW* v 6. Moscow, (1984). H Draper, *Karl Marx's Theory of Revolution*. v 1. New York: Monthly Review Press (1977).

⁵ Gizachew Tiruneh, “Social Revolutions: Their Causes, Patterns, and Phases.” *SAGE Open*, (July 2014).

treaty that brought an end to Russia's participation in World War I by threats from the German Empire. In 1921, he launched what came to be known as the New Economic Policy, which was a form of state-sanctioned capitalism that kicked off the process of industrialization and post-Civil War reconstruction in Russia. A year later, the Russian Socialist Federative Soviet amalgamated with other areas that had previously been a part of the Russian Empire to form what would later be known as the Soviet Union. Lenin served as the leader of this new government.

Vladimir Lenin made a significant contribution to the development of the revolutionary program and strategy for the working class throughout the time of imperialism. At the same time, Lenin was simultaneously working to create and implement the organizational practices of Bolshevism. Lenin had the foresight to realize that a mistake in theory would eventually translate into a mistake in practice, and that it was a matter of life and death to arrive at an accurate evaluation of the state and the working class's relationship to it. In his consideration of the issue, Lenin approached this matter with a great deal of caution.

The book *The State and the Revolution* was written in the heat of the Russian Revolution in the late summer of 1917. Lenin aimed his fire at the reformers for the slave adaptation of the socialist leaders to the interests of the bourgeoisie. These words retained their full force that day, when the self-proclaimed socialists gave themselves cover for the anti-worker's actions of the bourgeoisie.

Lenin was confronted with the skepticism many anarchists had regarding the state. He did not merely advocate for the elimination of all forms of state power or a complete rejection of it. Lenin elaborated on Marx and Engels' theory of the dictatorship of the proletariat, and he advocated for the overthrow of the capitalist state and its replacement with a workers' state that aimed at the expropriation and

oppression of capitalists. Lenin's ideas were influenced by Marx and Engels.

BOOK REVIEW

Chapter 1

Class Society and the State⁶

Lenin created the stage for his side of the debate in the first chapter by allowing Marx and especially Engels to speak for themselves about the genesis and role of the state in society. Engels was particularly influential in Lenin's thinking. In contrast to the distortions of opportunists like Karl Kautsky, he draws on the fundamental tenants of the Marxist viewpoint on the state by offering a number of crucial excerpts from *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* and Engels' *Anti-Dühring*.⁷

Then Lenin divides the chapter into four parts, Lenin outlines the basic conclusion that the state arises from the division of society into classes; that it exists to ensure the domination of the rulers, to possess the upper classes of the exploited masses and not to reconcile the competing classes in society; that it relies on a specialized agency of armed men and physical strength to carry out this function; that in seizing power the proletariat abolishes this state and replaces it with the dictatorship of the proletariat, which in turn will disappear when class antagonisms are removed; and that this is not possible without violent revolution.

⁶ Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, *The State and Revolution*, Chicago: Haymarket Books (2014).

⁷ F Engels, [Preface to the Fourth German Edition (1890) of the Manifesto of the Communist Party] in *Karl Marx Frederick Engels Collected Works (hereafter MECW)*, v 27. Moscow: Progress Publishers. First written in 1890, (1990).

Lenin then evaluated the historical experiences of the numerous revolutions and expanded his position inside the state on the basis of these main concepts. In essence, however, it was precisely these concepts that distinguished revolutionary Marxism from reformism.

Chapter 2:

The Experience of 1848–1851⁸

Lenin takes a more in-depth look at the evolution of Marx's thinking on the question of the state following the French Revolution of 1848 and the seizure of power by Louis Bonaparte in December 1851 in this chapter of his book. Lenin's focus is on the period after the French Revolution.

Lenin demonstrates, through the use of Marx's pre-revolutionary writings as well as Louis Bonaparte's *Eighteenth Brumaire*, that the concept of the dictatorship of the proletariat runs consistently throughout Marx's work. This is in contrast to the fact that revolutionists and opportunists claim that Marx supported the dictatorship of the proletariat. Lenin demonstrates that Marx did not support the dictatorship of the proletariat. Lenin was quoted as saying that the notion that the state is capable of overcoming the class struggle and convincing the minority to meekly surrender to the majority is a petty-bourgeois version of the utopian ideal.

According to Marx, every previous revolution has been merely an improvement on the existing state apparatus, in the form of an ever-growing bureaucracy and army. The task of the proletarian revolution is not to inherit this state but to destroy and replace it with a proletariat organized as the ruling class.

⁸ Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, *The State and Revolution*, Chicago: Haymarket Books (2014).

Chapter 3

The Experience of the Paris Commune of 1871–Marx's Analysis⁹

Having proven, in a general sense, that the working class is unable to simply seize control of an already-built state machine and employ it for its own purposes, the working class must instead strive toward the destruction of the pre-existing bureaucratic apparatus. In addition to this, it is essential to provide a detailed explanation of the specific pieces of machinery that need to be swapped out for other machinery. This comprehension can only come about as a result of the working class's fight for its very existence, and the Paris Commune provides the outside world with a sight of the dictatorship of the proletariat in action.

Lenin then defines the fundamental aspects of the workers' state at the beginning of an armed people rather than a standing army, which is a summary of Marx's interpretation of his experience. In addition to this, the election of all officials with the right of recall, the limitation of the salaries of officials to labor wages, and the abolition of parliamentarism in favor of workers' councils made up of elected delegates with legislative and executive functions are all things that need to happen. It laid the groundwork for the workers' democracy that exists even to this day.

Chapter 4

Continuation: Supplementary Explanations by Engels¹⁰

Lenin opens this chapter by drawing a clear distinction between Marxist analysis and the anarchist notion that the state can be abolished overnight. The anarchist position holds that the state can be

⁹ Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, *The State and Revolution*, Chicago: Haymarket Books (2014).

¹⁰ Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, *The State and Revolution*, Chicago: Haymarket Books (2014).

abolished overnight. He emphasized that in order for the proletariat to triumph over the inevitable opposition of the bourgeoisie, they had to make use of the state as a temporary instrument. Anarchists are going to deprive the working class a tangible and necessary method of protecting the revolution in the sake of some abstract concept that they believe is more important.

Lenin emphasized the fact that the true workers' state was distinct from all other states in this regard, and he compared it to other states throughout history. Instead of serving a specific power that is placed above society to ensure the control of a small minority, we should do our best to serve society as a whole. The vast majority of people use the state as a tool to subjugate the smaller population groups. Lenin then continued to explain why Marxists should not be considered neutral on the subject of how the bourgeois state ought to be structured. For instance, democratic republics are superior to autocratic monarchies insofar as these conditions make it simpler for working people to organize social revolutions. This makes democratic republics preferable to autocratic monarchies. On the other hand, this in no way suggests that there is any sympathy for the bourgeoisie.¹¹

Lenin also clarified that privileged officials should not be trusted with the administration of the workers' state after he stated that this responsibility should not be delegated to them. Instead, everyone needs to learn how to take turns carrying out different state functions. When the majority of people have acquired the skills necessary to self-manage and genuinely take charge of social production, the groundwork that is necessary for the complete dismantling of the state will have been laid.

¹¹ Gizachew Tiruneh, *"Social Revolutions: Their Causes, Patterns, and Phases."* SAGE Open, (July 2014).

Chapter 5

The Economic Basis of the Withering Away of the State¹²

Lenin addresses the period of time spanning the transition from capitalism to socialism to communism without a state or monetary system in this chapter of his work. Lenin was also critical of the fact that many capitalist nations in the West are referred to as democracies, despite the fact that the vast mass of the population is unable to participate in actual politics other than casting a vote once every few years. Instead, capitalists make use of their wealth and position to exert direct and indirect influence over state institutions in order to better protect the basic interests that underpin their businesses.

The socialist revolution will ultimately result in a democracy that is more inclusive and, more specifically, a democracy that serves the majority rather than the minority. However, as time passes, the conflicts between social classes that were the impetus for the establishment of the state in the first place will become less relevant, and the state, in whatever shape it takes, will become less necessary. People will develop the habit, rather than being compelled to work and obey the law through the use of economic coercion or physical force, of earning for the common good and adhering to the rules of social life. This will eliminate the need for such methods.

In reference to Marx's Critique of the Gotha Programme, he differentiates the earlier stage of communist society, which he refers to as socialism, from the later, more advanced stage. The lowest transitional stage has not completely shed the imprint of its previous existence as a capitalist society. The distribution of social wealth in general is still controlled by the amount of labor done, which means

¹² Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, *The State and Revolution*, Chicago: Haymarket Books (2014).

that equality of living has not yet been achieved to its full potential, despite the fact that class exploitation has been formally eliminated.

However, once capitalism has been expropriated and the profit motive has been abolished, it will be possible to massively accelerate the development of the productive forces, which will lead to a relatively rapid transition to full-fledged communism. This is because the development of the productive forces is directly proportional to the level of economic activity. The idea that each person should be treated according to his or her ability and given what they require should not be completely realized until that time.

Chapter 6

The Vulgarization of Marxism by the Opportunists¹³

Lenin makes an effort in the final chapter to argue against those adherents of Marxism who want reform rather than revolution by defending the revolutionary Marxist heritage. He did not come back with the idea that the proletariat could either take control of the already bourgeois state or refuse to exercise any form of state authority. It is contingent on its own conditions and can only be conquered by the use of force.

Lenin emphasized that in order for society to function properly under capitalism, bureaucracy is required. This is due to the fact that the working masses are forbidden from engaging in political activity. One of the ways that capitalists keep control of the state is through the use of a loyal bureaucracy. One of the tasks that must be accomplished during the proletarian revolution is the dismantling of the bureaucracy that is associated with the bourgeois state. All functionaries must be replaced with workers who have been elected to the positions, and these workers must be paid the same wages as

¹³ Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, *The State and Revolution*, Chicago: Haymarket Books (2014).

the average worker. When everyone is a bureaucrat for a certain amount of time, then no one else can become a bureaucrat after that.

Lenin, in his critique of Karl Kautsky's revisionist distortions, pointed out that the proletariat's takeover of state power cannot be accomplished only by securing a majority in parliament. This was one of Lenin's main points in his argument. This is only possible if the bourgeoisie are displaced as the dominant social class in the state by the working class, the proletariat, who would then organize themselves as the governing class. This can only be accomplished by violent social upheaval.

Due to the fact that he was preoccupied with the October Revolution, Lenin was unable to successfully complete the book. On the other hand, he mentions in a footnote that experiencing the revolution first-hand was much more pleasurable and gratifying than writing about it afterwards.

BOOK CRITICISM

1. Lenin's Concept of the State

As the proverb states "the experience is the best teacher," the theory of revolution in the ideas of Karl Marx which was conveyed by Vladimir Lenin in his book *The State and Revolution* has indeed produced results with his success in achieving the ideals of total state change. However, there are some things that don't necessarily become real ideas in real life.

When analyzed from Lenin's writings from his book, it will be found several things that have drawn criticism. But this is basically a different perspective from Lenin's understanding. Among these are the concepts of the state, freedom, and the state system.

Lenin started with a quick assumption and established that the state is a body that arises from irreconcilable class antagonisms. Whereas the state is a set of institutions that monitor, control, and enforce the rules of one class over another, so as to ensure a better order to continue exploiting its citizens. Lenin finally showed that the state is about soldiers, police, prisons and courts. Not too much freedom of argument that can be conveyed by citizens. Except for the rules and restraints in the name of revolution.¹⁴

Lenin's argument, which followed Marx's in *The Communist Manifesto*, was that the state was nothing more than a committee tasked with resolving the problems faced by the whole ruling class. The word "whole" best describes this situation. Lenin brought out the nuances in Marx's theory by pointing out that the disintegrating elite in society is rarely headed in the same direction to go. This was one of the ways that Lenin drew out the nuances. The current discussion regarding Europe serves as a good example of how the ruling class will continue to be divided. Conflicts between persons in positions of authority can quickly become contentious. Therefore, states must try and hold, sometimes warring factions and groups together. Failure to do so would be disastrous for those in power as their bickering went too far due to their often diverging economic and political interests. Class divisions often open room for rebellion from below. This was something the state wanted to avoid and therefore required efforts to mediate between the factions within the ruling class.

So the state according to him is like a big house with different rooms with different interests. The crucial room, or basement, is where the special agencies, both armed men and women are placed.

¹⁴ Sarah Washbrook; *The Ambivalent Revolution: Forging State and Nation in Chiapas, 1910–1945*. By Stephen E. Lewis (Albuquerque, University of New Mexico Press, 2005) 283

In this regard, the function of the state according to Lenin is clearly very repressive.

2. Controversy of Leninist Ideas in the Modern Era

Lenin's ideas contained in his book later developed into a new understanding and theory called the Theory of Leninism. Several countries were fascinated by this notion and adopted it in their national life, such as North Korea, Cuba, Vietnam, Cambodia, and the People's Republic of China. However, some countries even reject it and claim that it is not in accordance with the freedom of human life, even considering it as anti-religious and tends to lead to atheism, such as democracies in the West and also Indonesia after the G30S/PKI.¹⁵

In theory, Lenin shifted Marx's analysis of capitalism from advanced capitalist economies to dependent colonial countries. He combined political economy, geopolitics, political organization and the sociology of social structure to form an innovative revolutionary praxis. The expansion of Western capitalism shifted social and political contradictions to countries moving from feudalism to capitalism. Lenin was right in his assessment of the social forces supporting the bourgeois revolution. But he gives an overly optimistic prediction for the disintegration of monopoly capitalism and only a partial analysis of the working class in the developed capitalist countries.¹⁶ Lenin's political approach required a redefinition of the balancing forces and class alliances and a shift in focus from the semi-

¹⁵ AM Aji, NR Yunus, GRA Putra, *Communism and its influence on the emergence of atheism*. PalArch's Journal of Archaeology of Egypt/Egyptology. 17 (9) 2020, 411-424.

¹⁶ Xueguang Zhou and Liren Hou. "Children of the Cultural Revolution: The State and the Life Course in the People's Republic of China." *American Sociological Review* 64, no. 1 (1999): 12-36.

periphery to the 'strongest link' in the capitalist chain. A 'Return to Lenin' is not to adopt his policies but an impetus to rediscover the socialist sociological vision that stems from the hopes of the Enlightenment and Marx's analysis of capitalism.¹⁷

In his book, Lenin shows his hatred for capitalism. According to him Capitalism is a system of geo-political competition, and armed forces can be used to defend, expand or destroy the territory they live in. The arrogance of capitalism to control the natural wealth in the country, even in other areas. This is what causes conflicts between nations in the form of endless wars. However, the anti-capitalism movement and the campaign for socialism cannot necessarily be fully justified. Because in reality socialism does not always guarantee complete welfare for all citizens, even citizens are only used as a tool to fulfill the political ambitions of the political elite.¹⁸

This book is controversial in global political discourse. However, this controversial idea then gave rise to new ideas as a form of truth as a result of the rebellion of thought. This can be seen from the existence of questions and discussions about the relationship between the proletariat and the state as an important question posed by class revolutionary action. This question was very important that day because of the state of the world in war and the existence of a state revolution. However, the fact that the problem of national defense then became a natural matter of the defense of the bourgeois state, and the national problems of a country depended on the support of other countries.

¹⁷ David Lane, V.I. *Lenin's Theory of Socialist Revolution*. *Critical Sociology*. 2021, Vol. 47(3) 455–473. ps://doi.org/10.1177/0896920520958451

¹⁸ Revolutionary Perspectives. *Bukharin's Review of Lenin's 'The State and Revolution'*. Magazine of the Communist Workers' Organisation Affiliate of the Internationalist Communist Tendency. Series 4, No 11, Winter 2018

After his death, Marxism–Leninism developed into several new branches of thought such as Stalinism, Trotskyism, and Maoism. Lenin is still a controversial world figure. His detractors gave him the label of dictator because he was considered to have violated many human rights during his tenure, while his supporters opposed this opinion by arguing that Lenin's powers were limited and giving him the title of defender of the workers. However, Lenin had a major role in the international communist movement and became one of the most influential figures in the world in the 20th century.

CONCLUSION

THE DELIVERY OF the contents of the book written by Vladimir Lenin is seen in his doctrinal and campaign style, to raise public awareness and follow his ideas and thoughts. This book, which was written in the era of revolution, conflict and violence, provides a heat of assertiveness and dominant power. But finally, the readers can be wise with their belief to think creatively in order to achieve freedom and modernity. This book by Lenin boldly demonstrates this distinction. The reader in this condition cannot blame the author for citing extensively the works of Marx and Engels. Because basically these two figures made the new school of Leninism grow and develop. This work at least provides input and evaluation to Western capitalism. This is where the war of discourse between capitalist understanding, and social groups looks real.

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*While the State exists,
there can be no freedom.
When there is freedom
there will be no State.*

Vladimir Lenin

Estado y revolución

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