

THE GENESIS OF *STATE AND REVOLUTION*

by Marian Sawyer

Even every cook
we'll teach
to run the state!

V. Mayakovsky, 'Vladimir Ilyich Lenin'

an iron dictatorship—
is the key to victory.

V. Mayakovsky, 'Vladimir Ilyich Lenin'

Mayakovsky's panegyric captures the disparate elements of Lenin's legacy, from the utopian aspirations of *State and Revolution* to the organisational imperatives which preoccupied Lenin before and after **1917**. The utopian elements stemmed from Lenin's rapprochement with Left Marxism in the **annus mirabilis** of **1917**. Because this rapprochement coincided with a surge of maximalist aspirations from below, it issued in the success of the Bolshevik revolution, and the immortalisation of *State and Revolution* as the theoretical manifesto of that revolution.

The tension existing between Lenin's writings of **1917** and the organisational beliefs he expressed before and after this period has often been remarked.' What perhaps has not been sufficiently explored is the extent to which Lenin's position in **1917** arose from a personal reappraisal of Marxist theory (a reappraisal which preceded the February Revolution) rather than from a purely tactical grasp of the revolutionary possibilities entailed by the collapse of Tsarist Russia. In other words, and in another terminology, *State and Revolution* was the product of both a determinate political conjuncture and a determinate theoretical conjuncture.

The background to Lenin's theoretical reappraisal and its far-reaching consequences is to be sought in the left wing of German social democracy, which developed in particular from **1905**. The German Left in **criticising** the bureaucratisation and deradicalisation of the socialist movement drew upon the experience of the **1905** Russian revolution for the answers to these problems. The bureaucratic, centralised and authoritarian forms which the movement had assumed (and the consequent transformation of organisational self-maintenance into a categorical imperative) proved

nothing about the inherent tendencies of mass organisation: they were simply a reflex of the capitalist environment or a logical organisational response to it. The Russian revolution of **1905** revealed that it was possible for the workers' movement to escape from the self-perpetuating forms of dependence inherent in bourgeois modes of organisation. For the Left the events of **1905** demonstrated the ability of the masses in a revolutionary situation to bypass existing forms of organisation and create the structural means whereby the Marxist version of socialism might be realised. In **1905** the masses had spontaneously created revolutionary new forms of direct democracy capable of extending the meaning of popular sovereignty along the lines indicated by Marx; *i.e.*, capable of satisfying the conditions of political self-determination through involving the masses directly in the process of social decision-making.

Kautsky, as the theoretical eminence of German social democracy, had reacted sharply to the interpretation placed on the events of **1905** by Luxemburg and the Bremen Left. Kautsky argued that the Russian revolution took place outside the sphere of parliamentary activity not because the direct action of the masses had superseded a parliamentary system, but because one was not available. This was a proof that political conditions in Russia were not yet ripe for proletarian revolution, rather than being a manifestation of a proletarian form of struggle or the form that a socialist revolution would take.' Kautsky continued:

If we in Germany arrived at the situation in which Russia was in 1905—a war shamefully lost, the army full of anarchy, the peasantry in revolution—then we would need no mass strike... Then the organisations of social democracy and of the unions would manifest themselves as the only unshakeable rocks in the general chaos. Then the hitherto ruling circles would voluntarily cede their power and put themselves under the protection of social democracy, in order to be protected from the fury of the people.³

In **1912** the theoretical differences between orthodox German social democracy and its left wing were clarified and sharpened in the course of debate conducted between the Dutch Marxist (and prominent member of the German Left) Anton Pannekoek and Kautsky on the relationship of the socialist movement to the state. Pannekoek argued that the growing strength of the labour movement was being misdirected and squandered in the struggle to increase parliamentary representation when, under the conditions created by the era of imperialism, parliaments were becoming more and more **powerless.⁴**

Pannekoek, like other members of the German Left, was criticising what was seen as a reification and fetishisation of the organisational forms to which Marx had lent his authority in the pre-Paris Commune **era—i.e.**, parliamentary and union activity. According to the Left these forms reflected the needs of the proletarian movement while the bourgeois

system was still in an ascending phase. By adopting the bourgeois mechanisms of indirect representation, bureaucratic machinery and contractual bargaining, the proletarian organisations served to ameliorate the position of the proletariat within the bourgeois system while the latter was still viable.' In the period of the decline of the bourgeois order, signalled by the growth of imperialism, such forms of proletarian **organisation** became a positive obstacle both to effective action in the interests of the proletariat and to the creation of structures appropriate to a socialist society. Under the conditions of imperialism the proletariat must necessarily resort more and more to extra-parliamentary mass action, creating in the course of the struggle a proletarian power structure that was a real alternative to the bourgeois **state**.⁶ (N.B. the prefiguring of the concept of 'dual power'.)

The crux of the proletarian struggle according to Pannekoek in **1912** was the **annihilation** of state power. 'The struggle of the proletariat is not simply a struggle with the bourgeoisie over the state power as object, but a struggle against state **power**.'⁷ Kautsky's response to this frontal attack on the state-oriented tradition of German social democracy was as follows:

The goal of our political struggle remains the same as it has been up to now: the conquest of state power through winning a majority in parliament and raising parliament to be the master of government. Not, however, the destruction of state power.⁸

Kautsky's affirmation of the state was part of his general position that specialised bureaucracies were intrinsic to modern society, and that democracy and by extension social democracy meant a plurality of bureaucracies not the abolition of bureaucracy. He was violently opposed to the suggestion that the trade union and party bureaucracies (those 'unshakeable rocks') were themselves only transitory institutional forms which might well be destroyed in the simultaneous struggle against the bourgeoisie for the state power and against the state as such ('a masterpiece of social alchemy'). Neither did he share Pannekoek's view that in the bourgeois state the political bureaucracy becomes 'a class in its own right, with its own interests, which it attempts to realise even at the expense of the **bourgeoisie**.'⁹ The corollary of this view was that the proletariat could not simply take over such a bureaucracy for its own ends, because it itself comprised a class of exploiters, with interests antithetical to those of the proletariat.

Lenin's position during this debate can at best be described as inattentive. Lenin certainly was aware of the Pannekoek and **Kautsky** articles in **1912**,¹⁰ but he does not appear to have actually read the Pannekoek article until early **1917**.¹¹ As will be seen below, **Lenin** regarded Kautsky's views on the state as representing Marxist orthodoxy until **January/February 1917**, although he was critical of Kautsky's suggestions that

there might be a peaceful **handover** of state power rather than a revolutionary and *violent* overthrow of the bourgeoisie. He was united with Kautsky in believing that the correct Marxist attitude towards the state was that the state power must be captured by the proletariat and then used to create socialism.

Lenin's acceptance of the orthodox Kautskyan interpretation of the relationship of socialism to the state is reflected in his writings and speeches concerning the Paris Commune in the period up till 1917. Throughout this period Lenin showed no awareness of the text which was the linchpin of the Left positions, the rider attached to the political programme of the *Communist Manifesto* in the Preface written by Marx and Engels in 1872. According to the Preface: '... this programme has in some details become antiquated. One thing especially was proved by the Commune, *viz.*, that "the working class cannot simply lay hold of the ready-made state machinery, and wield it for its own purposes." ' Yet in all his pre-1917 writing Lenin never once acknowledged that the real lesson of the Commune might be that the proletariat required a 'new type of state' to replace the old bureaucratic machine, let alone that the soviet movement in Russia might represent another incarnation of this 'new type of state.' At no time before January 1917 did Lenin recognise any kinship between the soviets and the Paris Commune as harbingers of the institutional forms of the dictatorship of the proletariat.

The events of 1905 found Lenin distrustful of the spontaneous and non-party character of the soviet movement which had sprung into being in the cities. He wrote that:

The Soviet of Workers' Deputies is not a labour parliament and an organ of proletarian self-government at all, but a fighting organisation for the achievement of definite aims.¹²

There was still a relevant lesson to be drawn from the Paris Commune, however, although it was of a limited and specific character:

It is not the word 'Commune'—that we must adopt from the great fighters of 1871; we should not blindly repeat each of their slogans; what we must do is to single out those programmatic and practical slogans that bear upon the state affairs in Russia and can be formulated in the words 'a revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry.'¹³

I.e., Lenin was using the Paris Commune to demonstrate that the proletariat, in alliance with the petit-bourgeoisie might be required to conduct the democratic revolution under their own leadership, not under the leadership of, or in alliance with the bourgeois parties, where the bourgeoisie had already become a reactionary political force. In 1871:

the real task the Commune had to perform was primarily the achievement of the democratic and not the socialist dictatorship, the implementation of our 'minimum programme'.¹⁴

The Commune was also used at this time by Trotsky to prove his thesis that as a result of particular historical circumstances the proletariat might be obliged to take power before the bourgeois democratic republic had been achieved, but like Lenin, Trotsky saw no particular institutional significance in the structure of the Commune.¹⁵

Another and rather different aspect of the Paris Commune which preoccupied Lenin in the aftermath of 1905-1906 concerned the relationship between national wars and civil wars (the Commune was also important for Lenin in showing the necessity of armed civil war at a certain stage of the proletarian struggle). The Paris Commune had demonstrated the way in which national wars could be expected in the future to generate civil war. However the Communards themselves suffered from mistaken patriotic illusions, which contributed to their defeat. According to Lenin in 1908 the Communards should have 'let the bourgeoisie bear responsibility for the national humiliation—the task of the proletariat was to fight for the socialist emancipation of labour from the yoke of the bourgeoisie.'¹⁶

Here was the kernel of the revolutionary defeatism later proclaimed by the Zimmerwald Left. Lenin himself was to propagandise tirelessly on this theme throughout 1915 and 1916, frequently referring in his articles to the example of the Paris Commune. The only way to remove the burden of the imperialist war from the backs of the proletariat was through civil war.

The transformation of the present imperialist war into a civil war is the only correct proletarian slogan, it was indicated by the experience of the Commune and it logically follows from all the conditions of an imperialist war among highly developed bourgeois countries.¹⁷

A true democratic peace could only be achieved by civil war, now that the economic interests of the bourgeoisie were so inextricably intertwined with imperialist policies.

Lenin's stance on imperialism outlined here brought him into a close relationship with European Left Marxism; Anton Pannekoek, for example, was one of the publishers of the theoretical journal of the Zimmerwald Left, *Verbode*. However Lenin only discarded the Kautskyan understanding of the state with great reluctance, and he was preceded in this by his fellow Bolshevik, Nikolai Bukharin.

Bukharin had completed his book *Imperialism and World Economy* in 1915. The propositions he advanced in it (largely a radicalised version of Hilferding and foreshadowing Lenin's more famous pamphlet of the

following year) included the characterisation of the bourgeois state in the epoch of imperialism as 'state capitalism'. According to Bukharin the monopolisation and trustification of the capitalist economy had proceeded rapidly since the publication of Hilferding's work in 1910. The state had become the direct organiser of the economy, regulating production within the nation state and entering into competition with other state capitalisms in the same kind of life or death struggle existing in the era of Marx between individual capitalists. This in turn meant the militarisation of the state and the economy and a mad orgy of armaments. Thus the rule of finance capital implies both imperialism and militarism."

The concept of state capitalism, where the state acquired colossal power through its direct role in production, led Bukharin to start work immediately on the question of state power, and the relationship of the socialist movement to it. If the state had become the direct exploiter of the proletariat, and a 'modern Leviathan' ruthlessly sacrificing the population to the needs of the military machine, then the aim of the socialist movement could not be the traditionally accepted one of capturing this state power. Rather the aims of the movement must be those expressed by the European Left Marxists, the goal of smashing the state machine, of complete and unmitigated opposition to it. At this time Bukharin participated in the publication of a new article by Pannekoek on the theme 'Imperialism and the tasks of the proletariat', and there are many similarities between the latter and the essay Bukharin was to complete by July 1916, 'Towards a Theory of the Imperialist State'. Bukharin submitted this essay to Lenin, who had asked for 'a discussion article' to include in the series *Sotsial Demokrat Sbornik* which he was editing.

Lenin's reactions to this essay must be understood, not only in terms of his own instinctive acceptance of the Kautskyan attitude towards the state (Lenin shared Kautsky's pre-occupation with organisation, and as is well known it was Lenin's adoption of Kautsky's propositions on class consciousness that precipitated the **Bolshevik/Menshevik** split of 1903). The other factor to be taken into account is the hostility and suspicion existing between Lenin and Bukharin at this time due to the latter's position on the question of national self-determination. Bukharin in common with his close associates Piatakov and Bosch opposed Lenin's slogan of national self-determination on the grounds that in the imperialist state of development it was (a) unrealisable because of the internationalisation of the capitalist economies and (b) politically harmful in that it deflected what should have been the outright opposition of the socialist movement to state power (by affirming the nation-state, posing the question 'in a "pro-state" manner').¹⁹ The Left Marxists also opposed Lenin over programmatic **demands** for democracy and reforms, on the grounds that, given the present state form represented an inevitable stage

in the economic development of capitalism, reforms were not possible without destroying the structure of state capitalism itself.

Lenin viewed this stance of his fellow revolutionary internationalists as having 'nothing in common either with Marxism or revolutionary social democracy.'²⁰ Already in March 1916 Lenin wrote of Bukharin that 'The war has driven him to semi-anarchist ideas.''' This was despite the fact that the political conclusions of the Left followed logically from the premises at least partially subscribed to by Lenin, that the imperialist state represented an inevitable stage in the development of capitalism rather than an optional policy. Lenin was the target of considerable criticism among his fellow Bolsheviks for his 'irreconcilable' attitude towards the Lefts, considering the tiny number of those within the Zimmerwald movement who supported his general platform of turning the imperialist war into civil war. This criticism was perhaps the reason for Lenin soliciting a 'discussion article' from Bukharin in the first place; ~~an~~ attempt to mend some fences. And after receiving the article Lenin took two months, in conjunction with Zinoviev to devise what was intended to be an acceptable form in which to reject the article.

Nevertheless when Lenin received Bukharin's essay, with its conclusion that the socialist proletariat must 'outgrow the framework of the state and burst it from within as they organise their own state power' unless the movement was to be absorbed into the state capitalist structure he reacted in an extremely hostile fashion, viewing the political part as 'quite incomplete, and not thought out, ~~useless~~.'²² In his formal reply to Bukharin rejecting the article Lenin wrote that the conclusion that Social-Democracy must intensively underline its hostility in principle to the state power was 'either supremely inexact or incorrect.' Moreover the distinction between the Marxists and the anarchists on the question of the state was 'defined absolutely *incorrectly*.'²³ (Bukharin had written that the essential difference between Marxists and anarchists centred on the question of the need for economic centralisation 'not that Marxists are statists and anarchists anti-statists as many ~~maintain~~.'²⁴)

Bukharin was extremely disappointed at this rejection, but decided to go ahead and publish another version of the article in *Jugend-Internationale*, organ of the Youth International, and in an organ of the German Left entitled *Arbeiterpolitik*. This version again propounded Bukharin's views that the state, which in the pre-imperialist epoch had merely guaranteed the general conditions of the capitalists 'right of exploitation', had now become a 'tremendous, monstrous machine for extortion, which exploits the people directly..²⁵ Where chaos had prevailed previously in the economic sphere, now organisation prevailed, and all these organisations, including the workers' trade unions, political organisations and co-operatives:

have a tendency to fuse with one another and become transformed into one organisation of the rulers. This is the newest step of development, and one which has become *especially* apparent *during the war...* *So there comes into being a single, all-embracing organisation, the modern imperialist pirate state, an omnipotent organisation of bourgeois domination, with innumerable functions,* with gigantic power, with spiritual (various methods of obscurantism: the church, the press, the school, etc.) as well as material methods (police, soldiery). . .²⁶

This spawning of organisation among both the capitalists and the workers, and the subsequent absorption of these into the state organisation, formed the 'present-day monster, the modern Leviathan'. Hence the only way to combat this monster with its capacity for absorbing working class organisations was through mass actions, and the socialist movement must contribute towards these an edifying example of complete opposition to the state. The urgency of this task was illustrated by the experience of the war, which showed 'how deeply the roots of statehood have penetrated into the souls of the workers.'²⁷

Lenin felt impelled to pick up this gauntlet and published a reply the same month (December 1916) in *Sbornik Sotsial-Demokrata*. In this reply Lenin expostulated that:

Socialists are in favour of using the present state and its institutions in the struggle for the emancipation of the working class, maintaining also that the state should be used for a specific form of transition from capitalism to socialism. This transitional form is the dictatorship of the proletariat, which is *also* a state.

The anarchists want to 'abolish' the state, 'blow it up' (*sprengen*) as Comrade Nota-Bena [Bukharin] expresses it in one place, erroneously ascribing this view to the ~~socialists~~.²⁸

Then follow Lenin's crucial remarks in which he sums up his (un-reconstructed) views on the state and announces his intention to publish an article himself on the subject. As is now history, in the course of researching this article (the publication of which was interrupted by the February Revolution) Lenin came to repudiate all his previous views on the state. The intended reply to Bukharin, which became an affirmation of Bukharin and Left Marxism, was contained in the famous blue notebook, which after its peregrinations through Stockholm and Helsinki was to transcend sectarian controversy and form the bulk of *State and Revolution*. Meanwhile here are the views of Lenin in December 1916:

His [Bukharin's] remark about the 'state idea' is entirely muddled. It is un-Marxist and un-socialist. The point is not that the 'state idea' has clashed with the repudiation of the state, but that opportunist policy (i.e. the opportunist, reformist, bourgeois attitude towards the state) has clashed with revolutionary Social-Democratic policy towards the bourgeois state and towards *utilising* it against ~~the~~ bourgeoisie to overthrow the bourgeoisie). ~~These~~ are entirely different things. We hope to return to this very important subject in a separate ~~article~~.²⁹

Thanks to the publication in *Leninskii Sbornik* XIV of the contents of the blue notebook we can follow in detail Lenin's conversion to Bukharin's views on the state as he copied out extracts from Marx and Engels in the reading room of the Zurich Library. The extracts are organised under the heading 'Marxism and the State' with a boxed sub-heading reading 'More precisely: The Tasks of the Proletarian Revolution in Relation to the State'. It is necessary constantly to remind oneself that this notebook was written in Zurich to settle a theoretical point with Bukharin and the Left, and although it provided Lenin with his revolutionary programme in March and April it in fact preceded the collapse of Tsarism and the inauguration of the revolution. In fact *State and Revolution*, which as already stated, substantially was contained in the blue-covered notebook bore a similar chronological relationship to the 1917 revolution as the Communist Manifesto did to the 1948 revolution while foreshadowing much more accurately the political shape of the revolution (though not its outcome).

Almost at the beginning of the notebook we find Lenin rediscovering Marx's *Eighteenth Brumaire* from the point of view of its analysis of the state: 'The "state machine" is a bureaucratic—military machine in the majority of capitalist states (now it's 1917 it is possible to say in *all*). In France it is possible to see with "particular", "*classical*" purity the outlines of the *universal* capitalist process—on the one hand the creation of this machine. . . on the other hand "the purest expression of it". . . and the closest approach to the struggle for its "demolition" [underlined twice by Lenin]. And it is just the question of this "demolition", "break up", "smashing" that both the opportunists and the Kautskyites systematically *ignore!!*

Marx says in 1852: "break up", "demolition".

Marx says in 1871: "*smashing*".³⁰

Throughout the notebook one finds Lenin heavily emphasising and annotating the comments he discovers in Marx and Engels on the need for the proletarian revolution to *smash* the existing state machine and substitute for it their own form of state, which is already only a 'half state' (substituting popular forms of administration for the old bureaucracy, etc.) and which will itself wither away as full communism is reached. There are constant references to Kautsky's (and to a lesser extent Plekhanov's) suppression or over-looking of the need to smash the existing state apparatus, and there is an attempt à la Pannekoek to link the *bureaucratisation* of the socialist parties with policies aiming at the perfection of the bureaucratic state machine rather than its *destruction*.³¹

Lenin's comments on Bukharin are comparatively very mild. For example Lenin notes that Bukharin had been asked in August 1916 to let his thoughts about the state ripen: 'But he *did not let* them ripen, he put them in print as *Nota Bene*, and in doing this both unmasked the Kautskyites and *helped* them through his mistakes.' But in essence

Bukharin is closer to the truth than **Kautsky**.³²

But more importantly, and here Lenin was going beyond what either Bukharin or the German Left had to offer at this time, Lenin already in these **January/February** notes began identifying the soviets created in the 1905 revolution with the new form of state which the proletariat would introduce. In one jump Lenin had come to understand Marx and Engels' injunctions about destroying the existing, innately oppressive structures of power and their identification of the Paris Commune as an attempt to smash these structures of power, and had himself identified the soviets as structurally akin to the Paris **Commune**. As seen above, it was not until this moment, in the course of attempting to refute Bukharin's interpretation of the Marxist attitude to the state, that Lenin came to evaluate the Commune in terms of an **alternative** to the bourgeois state form (rather than in terms of its sociological composition and its policies).

In his comments on the *Civil War in France* Lenin observes that in one sense the Russian revolution (of 1905) was already broader than the Paris Commune, in that it comprised soviets of workers, of railwaymen, of soldiers and sailors, and also of *peasants' deputies*.³³ Quite early on in his attempt to disprove Bukharin's views on the relationship between anarchist and Marxist views of the state (ultimately separated only by the Marxist demand for economic centralisation) Lenin jotted down the following: [as elsewhere, abbreviated words given in full according to the Lenin Institute edition]:

How are the communes [obshchiny] unified, bound up together? Not at all, say the anarchists (A). Through a bureaucratic and military caste say (and do) the bourgeoisie (B). Through a union of organised and armed workers ('in the soviets of workers' deputies!'), says Marxism.³⁴

The German Left, and in particular Pannekoek ('Pannekoek.. . is *almost* right' Lenin tells Armand on 27 February 1917) had identified the mass actions of the 1905 revolution as the means by which the bourgeois state would be both destroyed and superseded. They had not, however, specified the soviets as organs corresponding to the federation of the communes proclaimed and acclaimed in 1871 as the (political) form at last discovered in which the economic emancipation of labour would take place.

Lenin sums up his findings on the question of the state in the following way:

One could perhaps express the whole thing in a drastically abbreviated fashion as follows: the replacement of the old ('ready made') state machine and of parliaments by soviets of workers' deputies and their mandated delegates. This is the essence of it!!³⁵

This theoretical leap by Lenin in January-February 1917 was *in no way* connected with the re-emergence of a soviet movement in Russia. The latter only occurred (and only at first in **Petrograd**) concurrently with the Revolution of 27 February, **rumours** of which did not reach Lenin in Zurich until 2 March (both dates given according to the Julian Calendar). Lenin had written to **Kollontai** on 17 February saying that he had already almost finished preparing the material for the article on the state.

The traditional (and incorrect) assumptions about the connection of Lenin's change of theoretical stance and events in Russia are **succinctly** aired in Perry Anderson's latest book, *Considerations on Western Marxism*:

In 1917, the re-emergence of Soviets in Russia persuaded Lenin that workers' councils were the necessary revolutionary form of proletarian power, by contrast with the universal forms of capital power in Europe, and he produced the first real development of Marxist political theory by his famous interpretation of them in *State and Revolution*.³⁴

With the onset of the February Revolution and the spontaneous re-appearance of soviets, Lenin was able to apply immediately his new-found understanding of the state. In the 'April Theses' Lenin was already calling for a 'commune state', in which the police, (standing) army and (non-elective) bureaucracy would be replaced by officials elected through the soviets, paid workmen's wages and revocable at any time.³⁵ Fresh from the Zurich Library, Lenin was able to announce that the soviets represented the only possible form of revolutionary government if one recalled 'what Marx and Engels said in 1871, 1872 and 1875 about the experience of the Paris Commune and about the *kind* of state the proletariat *needs*.'³⁶ The move back from the higher forms, already **half-superseding** the state, found in the **commune/soviets** to the bourgeois parliamentary republic would damage irreparably the proletarian revolution: 'The concrete Marxist proposition requires that institutions now as well as classes be taken into **account**.'³⁷

Lenin used the Paris Commune to prove that Marx had withdrawn his approval from the bourgeois parliamentary system as the instrument to be used by the proletariat in the struggle for socialism (not that Marx had lapsed in the heat of the moment into a temporary aberration, as Bernstein argued). The leaders of the Second International, from Kautsky to Plekhanov, had been mistaken in directing the political energies of the proletariat towards the parliamentary arena. They had misguided the proletariat because they had not assimilated the lessons of the **Commune**—i.e. the need to smash the bourgeois state, which was oppressive by its nature regardless of its class composition, and to replace it with qualitatively different institutions of public power.

These propositions were linked by Lenin with a proposition concerning

dual power (alternative structures of power competing for mass allegiance) which as we have seen was foreshadowed in Pannekoek's 1912 article examined by Lenin in January/February 1917. Lenin argued that the soviets must *compete* with the Provisional Government rather than co-operate with it, on the grounds of their superior claim to democratic legitimacy as well as on the basis of their different class composition. The soviets resembled the Commune in that they represented a higher type of democracy, where the organs of administration and justice were no longer composed of privileged non-elective officials, divorced from popular scrutiny and control and non-democratic in essence. The soviets encouraged instead mass participation in the making and execution of social decisions. Thus just as the Paris Commune had contested the legitimacy of the Versailles Government, so must the soviets attempt to undermine the support of the Provisional Government, on the grounds of their own more direct and accountable representation of the popular will.³⁸

Lenin's swerve to the left, first publicly enunciated in the April Theses, caused a furore among the Bolsheviks, many of whom viewed it as 'almost a betrayal of accepted Marxist ideology'.³⁹ The Bolsheviks who were by definition united in the organisational belief that the proletariat could not on their own achieve socialist consciousness and needed the guidance of a professional party, were being urged to consider the spontaneously appearing soviets (in which the Bolsheviks occupied only a minority position) as constituting the '*only possible*' form of revolutionary government. Furthermore, Lenin was urging 'the necessity of transferring the entire state power to the soviets of Workers' Deputies, so that the people may overcome their mistakes by *experience*'.⁴⁰ The Bolsheviks were familiar with the arguments of *What is to be Done?* in which Lenin had mounted a withering attack on the concept of political participation as an educative *experience*.⁴¹ *Inter alia*, Lenin had observed in the Bolshevik credo that:

In Mr and Mrs Webb's book on the English trade unions there is an interesting chapter entitled 'Primitive Democracy'. In it the authors relate how the English workers, in the first period of the existence of their unions, considered it an indispensable form of democracy for all the members to do all the work of managing the unions; not only were all questions decided by the vote of all the members, but all official duties were fulfilled by all the members in turn. A long period of historical experience was required for workers to realise the absurdity of such a conception of democracy and to make them understand the necessity for representative institutions on the one hand, and for full-time officials on the other. . . . Let us take also Kautsky's book on *parliamentarism* and legislation by the people. There we find that the conclusions drawn by the Marxist theoretician coincide with the lessons learned from many years of practical experience by the workers who organised 'spontaneously'. **Kautsky** strongly protests against Rittinghausen's primitive conception of democracy. . . . he attacks the '**socialism**' of anarchists and litterateurs, who in their 'striving for effect' extol direct

legislation by the whole people, completely failing to understand that this idea can be applied only relatively in modern society.⁴²

In January/February 1917 Lenin had reversed his opinions about 'primitive democracy', noting, with great emphases, that this was an expression used by 'opportunists like Bernstein' to describe the replacement of the bourgeois state and parliament by organs such as soviets of workers' deputies and their mandated officials. Lenin added that: '*On the basis of socialism* "primitive democracy will not be primitive!"⁴³

Moreover, Lenin had been led by his research into the question of Marxism and the state (and by his new acceptance of the Paris Commune as an operational model for the structure of a proletarian dictatorship) to espouse specific policies, such as workers' control in industry (even though in a qualified version) for which there was no precedent in his previous political programmes. Lenin's espousal of workers' control in 1917 was anticipated by the N.B. with which he annotated in January/February Engels' description of the preparations made by the Commune to hand over closed-down factories to co-operative societies of their former

Not only did Lenin appear to be importing semi-anarchist ideas into the Bolshevik party, but he also was proposing to change the name of the party itself, to conform to these semi-anarchist ideas:

the second part of the name of our Party (Social-Democrats) is also scientifically incorrect. Democracy is a form of state whereas we Marxists are opposed to every kind of state.⁴⁵

Throughout 1917 the Paris Commune (in its Marxist interpretation)⁴⁶ served as a constant frame of reference for Lenin, in his realignment of the Bolshevik party with the wave of maximalist demands to topple the parliamentary regime and transfer power to the soviets. During his two months hiding in Finland, in the aftermath of the July days, Lenin wrote out from his notes in the blue book the text of *State and Revolution*—abandoning it only to return to Petrograd in October to implement its precepts.

The actual publication of the pamphlet was delayed by the turmoil of the revolution until early 1918. Already by this time Lenin's brief rapprochement with Left Marxism was over, and the enthusiastic response to the latter to the appearance of the pamphlet brought heated replies from Lenin in ' "Left Wing" Childishness and the Petty-Bourgeois Mentality' (May 1918). According to Lenin the ' "Lefts" have no idea of iron proletarian discipline and how it is achieved' and they fail to understand that until a German revolution is forthcoming 'Our task is to study the state capitalism of the Germans, to spare *no effort* in copying it and not

shrink from *dictatorial* methods to hasten the copying of it.⁴⁷ Bukharin's review of *State and Revolution* had wrongly emphasised the tasks of smashing the old state machinery which were the 'tasks of yesterday', and had ignored the 'line of proletarian discipline' which was essential for the 'tasks of tomorrow', the build-up of large-scale *production*.⁴⁸

In general 1918 saw Lenin moving rapidly away from the theoretical propositions of *State and Revolution* in his political practice. One-man management was reintroduced; factory committees were subordinated to the trade unions, which in turn became part of the state apparatus; the vanguard role of the Bolshevik party (mentioned only twice in passing in *State and Revolution* and once more substantively, but then indirectly) was heavily reasserted. The dictatorship of the proletariat was impossible except through the Communist party. Lenin himself never revised his apotheosis of the communestate, which was already only a half-state that was so constituted that it began to wither away *immediately*,⁴⁹ but his *practical* accommodation of the leading role of the *party/state* in the construction of socialism led to subsequent *theoretical* justifications by **Trotsky** and Stalin. **Trotsky**, who never minced his words wrote in support of Lenin's position that: In this 'substitution' of the

power of the party for the power of the working class there is nothing accidental, and in reality there is no substitution at all. The Communists represent the fundamental interests of the working class.⁵⁰

In support of **Lenin's** practical policies in regard to the proletarian half-state **Trotsky** wrote:

Just as a lamp before going out, shoots up in a brilliant *flame*, so the State, before disappearing, assumes the form of the dictatorship of the proletarian, *i.e.* the most ruthless form of State, which embraces the life of the citizens authoritatively in every *direction*.⁵¹

I.e. Trotsky argued that it was not the *bourgeois* (imperialist) state which represented the zenith of state power but the *proletarian* state ('no organisation except the army has ever considered itself justified in subordinating citizens to itself in such a measure'). In Stalin's Report of the Sixteenth Congress of the CPSU one finds (ironically) a *reprise* of Trotsky's formulation:

We stand for the withering away of the state. At the same time we stand for the strengthening of the dictatorship of the proletariat, which is the mightiest and the strongest state power that has ever existed. The highest development of state power with the object of *preparing* conditions for the withering away of state power—such is the Marxist formula.⁵²

Meanwhile Bolsheviks on the Left were still fighting a rear-guard action

to implement *State and Revolution*. At the Seventh Party Congress in March 1918, even before Lenin had begun to advocate state capitalism, and was still describing Soviet power as 'a new type of state without bureaucracy, without police, without a standing army',⁵³ Bukharin was unsuccessfully attempting to get an explicit statement of this attitude towards the state recorded in the theoretical part of the Party Programme:

The old social-democrat opportunists... conducted the struggle with the anarchists the whole time in the wrong way. We should not maintain that point of view, that the socialist state is upheld by us—that is nonsense which was repudiated by Marx and Engels. The merit of comrade Lenin's book *State and Revolution* consists in the fact that there all this is brilliantly uncovered. This must be said in the programme. That is—the character of the socialist structure from the economic aspect and the annihilation of the whole political **super-structure**.⁵⁴

When Lenin rescinded his 1917 decree on workers' control Bukharin again invoked *State and Revolution* in protest:

It is good that the cook will be taught to govern the state; but what will there be if a Commissar is placed over the cook? Then he will never learn to govern the state.⁵⁵

Soon after this Bukharin reconciled himself to the concept of the constructive functions of a centralised socialist state, in place of the self-destroying transitional state he had previously envisaged. Nonetheless he still tried to keep alive the vision of the future anticipated by Lenin in 1917, the society where:

today I work in an administrative capacity. . . tomorrow I shall be working in a soap-factory, next month perhaps in a steam laundry and the month after in an electric power station.

Then there will be no need for the coercive machinery of state:

Just as in an orchestra all the performers watch the conductor's baton and act accordingly, so here all will consult the statistical reports and will direct their work accordingly.⁵⁶

Despite the protests of the various incarnations of the Left Opposition and the **full-scale** revolt of Kronstadt in 1921 under the slogan of all power to the soviets and not to the (bureaucratic dictatorship of the) Communist Party, Lenin inexorably pulled down the blind on the vision of *State and Revolution*. The year 1921 signalled the end of the eponymous soviets as significant organs of popular control within the Soviet state.⁵⁷ Lenin's

experience of popular initiative in 1917 and 1918 did not endear it to him, and the re-assertion of the role of the vanguard party together with the bureaucratic expedients resorted to in the Civil War period meant the withering away of the commune state as an operational concept.

This withering away (rather different from the withering away originally projected) did not of course mean the death of *State and Revolution* which went into edition after edition and translation after translation. But in the year which passed from Lenin's notes on Marxism and the State to the actual appearance of the pamphlet it had ceased to be an operational guide and had become a theoretical justification of a regime already in power. It is the legitimating functions of this document which have been pre-eminent ever since, its functions in demonstrating the socialist legitimacy of the Bolshevik Revolution, the blood line between 1871 and 1917. It was only with the onset of the Cultural Revolution in China in 1965 that the arguments of *State and Revolution* have again been treated as a categorical imperative—the need for the proletarian dictatorship to be a 'basic negation' of state power, in order to prevent the recrudescence of the gulf between rulers and ruled and the inherent exploitation involved in this relationship. Thus *State and Revolution*, from being the manifesto of a would-be Commune who found it eventually a hindrance in attempting to teach his comrades the realities of power, became, first, part of the symbolism which bound the Russian experiment to the revolutionary tradition of Western Europe, and eventually a measuring rod according to which the Soviet state was judged by a rival socialist power and found lacking.

Rut the subsequent fates of this document do not affect the historical significance of its genesis. It was the real conjunction of a theoretical moment with the appearance of the conditions of its realisation. This conjuncture proved to be fleeting and evanescent—after this high noon the shadow fell again between idea and reality. Nonetheless *State and Revolution* cannot be dismissed as the temporary accommodation by a sublime politician to an unhelped revolutionary situation. It represents the meeting of the aspirations of a Western socialist tradition with the half-submerged aspirations of a people in motion. It was that moment in which theory and aspiration are fused, in the social poetry of which Sorel spoke.

NOTES

1. See, for example, Robert V. Daniels, 'The State and Revolution: A Case Study in the Genesis and Transformation of Communist Ideology', *The American Slavonic and East European Review*, Vol. XII (1953), pp. 22-43; D. Tarschys, *Beyond the State: The Future Policy in Classical and Soviet Marxism*, Stockholm, 1971 ('The Commune-State: Lenin's Instant Utopia', pp. 110-134).
2. Karl Kautsky, *Der politische Massenstreik*, Berlin, 1914, p. 197 ff.

3. Ibid., p. 202 ff.
4. Anton Pannekoek, 'Massenaktion und Revolution', *Die Neue Zeit*, Jg. XXX (1912), ii, p. 541 f.
See Pannekoek's later presentation of this argument in his *Weltrevolution und Kommunistische Taktik* (Vienna, 1920) in *Pannekoek et les conseils ouvriers*, ed. S. Bricianer, Paris, E.D.I., 1969, p. 176 f.
6. Pannekoek, 'Massenaktion und Revolution', loc. cit., p. 544 f.
7. Ibid., p. 543 f.
8. Karl Kautsky, 'Die neue Taktik', *Die Neue Zeit*, Jg. XXX, ii, p. 732.
9. Anton Pannekoek, *Die Taktischen Differenzen in der Arbeiterbewegung*, Hamburg, Verlag 0, 1973, pp. 86-87. This work is an attempt to show that on the one hand reformist and on the other hand anarchist tendencies stemmed from the entry of non-proletarian elements into the labour movement. These elements which entered the movement because of their common opposition to capitalism were (a) the petit-bourgeoisie and (b) the 'new middle class'. A third element whose aims differed from the industrial proletariat as a whole was the 'labour aristocracy'.
10. Lenin to L.B. Kamenev, 6 September 1912, *Collected Works*, Vol. 43, p. 297.
11. Lenin to Inessa Armand, 27 February, 1917, Ibid., p. 613.
12. V.I. Lenin, 'Socialism and Anarchism' (November, 1905), *Collected Works*, Vol. 10, p. 72.
V.I. Lenin, concluding paragraph to 'The Paris Commune and the Tasks of the Democratic Dictatorship' (17 July, 1905), *Collected Works*, Vol. 9, p. 141.
14. Ibid.,
15. L. Trotsky, Preface to Marx, *The Paris Commune*, St. Petersburg, 1906, pp. X-XI. One of the ten different editions of the *Civil War in France* which appeared in Russia at this time, including ones edited by Lunacharsky and Lenin.
16. V.I. Lenin, 'Lessons of the Commune' (1908), *Collected Works*, Vol. 13, p. 476.
17. V.I. Lenin, 'The War and Russian Social Democracy (1914)', *Collected Works*, Vol. 21, p. 34.
18. N. Bukharin, *Imperialism and World Economy*, London, Merlin Press, 1972, p. 127.
19. Theses and Program of the Bukharin-Piatakov Group, November 1915, in O. Gankin and H. Fisher, *The Bolsheviks and the World War*, Stanford U.P., 1960, p. 220. The full quotation reads: 'The task of Social Democracy at the present time is a *propaganda* of *indifference* with respect to the "fatherland", to the "nation", etc., which presupposes the posing of the question not at all in a "pro-state" manner (protests against a state "disintegration") but on the contrary, posing it in a sharply expressed revolutionary manner with regard to the state power and to the entire capitalist system.'
20. Lenin to Zinoviev, August, 1917, *Collected Works*, Vol. 35, p. 228. At this time it was not lack of funds which prevented the publication of the article although Lenin advised Zinoviev to give this reason (*Collected Works*, Vol. 43, p. 570). Tucker's suggestion along these lines is based on a mis-reading of Lenin to Kollontai, 27 February, 1917, written *after* Lenin had revised his assessment of Bukharin on the state but was held up by lack of funds from printing the article, (in *Sbornik 4 not Sbornik 1* for which funds were available). See Tucker, op. cit., p. 27.
21. Lenin, 'The Nascent Tendency of "Imperialist Economism"', Reply to Bukharin, Gankin and Fisher, op. cit., p. 229.
22. Lenin to Shliapnikov, March 1916, Gankin and Fisher, op. cit., p. 241.

23. Lenin to Zinwiev, August 1916, *Collected Works*, Vol. 35, p. 228.
24. Lenin to Bukharin, August-September 1916, *Collected Works*, Vol. 35, p. 231.
25. N.I. Bukharin, 'K teorii imperialisticheskogo gosudarstva', repeated in 'The Imperialist Pirate State', **Gankin** and Fisher, op. cit., p. 237 fn. 153.
26. N.I. Bukharin, 'The Imperialist Pirate State', loc. cit., p. 237.
27. Ibid., p. 238.
28. Ibid, p. 239.
29. Lenin, 'The Youth International: A Review', *Collected Works*, Vol. 23, p. 165.
30. Ibid, p. 166.
31. Lenin, 'Marksizm o gosudarstve', *Leninskii Sbornik* XIV, p. 222.
32. Ibid., p. 258.
33. Ibid, p. 312.
34. Ibid, p. 238.
- 34a. Ibid., p. 314. The emphases are those of Lenin, who also placed eight vertical 'emphases on the margin beside this passage and the words 'Nota bene'.
- 34b. E. Anderson, *Considerations on Western Marxism*, London, NLB, 1976, p. 116.
35. V.I. Lenin, 'April Theses', *Collected Works*, Vol. 24, pp. 23-24.
36. Ibid, p. 26.
37. Ibid, p. 32.
38. Lenin, 'The Dual Power' and 'The Tasks of the Proletariat in Our Revolution', *Collected Works*, Vol. 24, pp. 38-41; 57-88.
39. N.I. Bukharin, 'Lenin kak Marksist', *Ataka*, Moscow, 1924, p. 269.
40. Lenin, 'April Theses', loc. cit., p. 23.
41. Lenin, *What is to be Done?*, *Collected Works*, Vol. 5, pp. 478-479.
42. Ibid, p. 481. The Kautsky work referred to is *Der Parlamentarismus, die Volksgesetzgebung und die Sozialdemokratie*, Stuttgart, Dietz, 1893. In 1904 Lenin edited the Russian translation of another Kautsky book, *Die soziale Revolution*. In 1917 he discovered (from his own edition of it) that Kautsky talks here only in terms of conquering state power: 'not mentioning the problem of "smashing the bureaucratic-military machine"', or of "annihilating the state", not even a word about the struggle with "the superstitious belief in the State. . . (Lenin, 'Marksizm o gosudarstve', p. 352).
43. Lenin, 'Marksizm o gosudarstve', p. 314.
44. Ibid, p. 320.
45. Lenin, 'The Tasks of the Proletariat in our Revolution', loc. cit., p. 85.
46. Lenin's understanding of the Paris Commune was chiefly derived from Marx and Engels, and to a lesser extent from the writings of G. Lefrancais and the classic *History* of Prosper Lissagaray—written after Manr had rejected him as a son-in-law.
47. Lenin, ' "Left-Wing" Childishness and the Petty-Bourgeois Mentality', *Collected Works*, Vol. 27, pp. 329-334. In the international sphere Lenin was still talking in 1919 about the Ratebewegung of the soviets as the basis of the transitional state 'which immediately begins to prepare the complete withering away of any state, (*Collected Works*. Vol. 27, p. 467) but by 1920, with the fading of revolutionary hopes, Lenin dropped the anti-state theme and wrote ' "Left-Wing" Communism, an Infantile Disease'.
48. Ibid, p. 552.
49. Lenin, *The State and Revolution*, Peking, Foreign Languages Press, 1970, p. 121.
50. L. Trotsky, *Terrorism and Communism*, (1920), Ann Arbor Paperback, 1961, p. 109.
51. Ibid., pp. 169-170.
52. Stalin, *Works*, Vol. 12, p. 381.

53. Lenin, 'Report on the Review of the Programme and on Changing the Name of the Party', *Collected Works*, Vol. 27, p. 133. At the same Congress Lenin described the consolidation and development of Soviet power in terms of 'Transition *through* the Soviet state to the gradual abolition of the state by systematically drawing an even greater number of citizens, and subsequently *each and every* citizen into direct and daily performances of their share of the burden of administering the state.' (*Ibid.*, p. 156).
54. *Sed'moi ekstremnyi s'ezd RKP/b: Stenograficheskiĭ otchet*, Moscow, Gos. izd. pol. lit., 1962, p. 160.
55. *Protokoly zasedanii vserossiiskogo tsentral'nogo ispolnitel'nogo komiteta*, p. 234, translated in S. Cohen, *Bukharin and the Bolshevik Revolution*, London, Wildwood House, 1974, p. 75.
56. N. Bukharin and E. Preobrazhensky, *The ABC of Communism*, (1919), ed. E.H. Carr, London, Penguin, 1970, pp. 116, 118.
57. See Olga A. Narkiewicz, 'Political Participation and the Soviet State', in G. Parry ed., *Participation and Politics*, Manchester U.P., pp. 169-217.