

'At the words "And the more abrupt the revolution . . ." he stopped, repeated them several times, obviously struggling with them; asked me to help him, re-read the preceding passages, laughed and said "Here I've got completely stuck, I'm afraid, make a note of that -- stuck on this very spot!"'

[6] See for example the article '[Once again on the Trade Unions, the Current Situation and the Mistakes of Trotsky and Bukharin](#)', *Collected Works*, XXXII, 70-107; and the '[Preliminary Draft Resolution of the Tenth Congress of the RCP on the Syndicalist and Anarchist Deviation in our Party](#)', XXXII, 245-248.

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to these questions without considering their *general significance*, beyond the immediate circumstances of the new Soviet Republic.

The importance of this point is obvious: for if (1) Lenin's efforts were directed not simply to resolving immediate problems but also to clarifying general questions concerning the transition to communism, and if (2) he was very unsure about the answers to some of these questions, and often changed his mind and plainly contradicted himself, then it becomes impossible to conclude without further ado *either* that his 'successes' (his 'correct answers' -- including his insistence on the need for the dictatorship of the proletariat) are of relevance only to the special difficulties faced by 'backward' Russia *or* -- the same argument in another, alternative variant, which has recently revived in popularity, but this time among Communists -- that his 'failures', and in particular his supposed tendency to 'underestimate the importance of democracy' can and must be 'corrected' now by those Western European Communists lucky enough (the argument has been applied to France, and would presumably also apply, by the same title, to Britain) to live in countries 'with an old democratic tradition' (*cf.* ch. 4).

The impression which this line of reasoning tries to create is that we can now speak very generally of two 'models of socialism': *on the one hand* the Russian model, based historically, for certain (regrettable) reasons, and in particular because of the primitive circumstances with which it had to contend, on the dictatorship of the proletariat, *and on the other hand* the Western model, which owing to the democratic conditions and/or possibilities existing in France, Italy and Britain, but also in Spain and Japan, etc., will be able to avoid *every form of dictatorship*, including the dictatorship of the proletariat. This general thesis also allows Western Communists to re-assess their attitude to the USSR, which is now considered to be still suffering from the heritage of its primitive origins. It also 'explains', on the same basis, the Soviet government's recalcitrance on the question of the dictatorship of the proletariat itself.

Now what is astonishing about this whole approach to the problem is that, in spite of its 'modern' appearance, its two basic elements -- (1) the use of the abstract contrast between 'dictatorship' and 'democracy', in order to sing the praises of the latter and to condemn the former (and what could be more 'obvious' ?), and

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(2) the treatment of Leninism as the theory and practice of socialism in the specific form determined by the Russian conditions of 1917 -- already, long ago, formed the basis of the Social-Democratic Parties' attacks on Bolshevism and the Bolshevik Revolution. They are for example the two pillars of Karl Kautsky's book on *The Dictatorship of the Proletariat* (1918), to which Lenin replied in the pamphlet [The Proletarian Revolution and the Renegade Kautsky](#). Thus the present-day relevance of Lenin's writings is once again reinforced.

Kautsky uses the identification of Leninism with contemporary Russian conditions in order to *condemn* it (remember that the whole of Social-Democracy, following the Russian Mensheviks, was at this time insisting that the Bolshevik Party had tried to 'take a short cut' to socialism by attempting to establish it in a backward country, i.e. in a land which was not yet sufficiently 'mature', either economically or politically, for socialist revolution), but the same approach can also be used, as it is today by certain Communist theoreticians, to 'excuse' Lenin's shortcomings and to 'explain' his failings and the limits of his teachings -- which must consequently be 'transcended'.

Turning his attention to the question of 'dictatorship', Kautsky argues that since 'the exploiters have always formed only a small minority of the population', the rule of the proletariat need not assume a form 'incompatible with democracy'. Lenin comments: the 'pure' and 'simple' democracy which Kautsky talks about 'is *sheer*

nonsense. Kautsky, with the learned air of a most learned armchair fool, or with the innocent air of a ten-year-old schoolgirl, asks: Why do we need a dictatorship when we have a majority?'<sup>[7]</sup>

An 'innocent' question, because it relies on what seems to be an 'obvious' idea. I should like to ask the reader himself to decide whether it is not the same 'obvious' idea which lies behind the argument now commonly met with in many Western Communist Parties, including the British Party, to the effect that the dictatorship of the proletariat is now out-of-date and the 'democratic road to socialism' now a real possibility because it is nowadays possible to win not just a minority but the 'vast majority' of the people in a broad 'anti-monopoly alliance'. Now I am not denying the need to fight for the broadest possible alliance of the people, nor that

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<sup>[7]</sup> XXVIII, 252 [32-32].

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monopoly (= imperialist) capital constitutes the dominant fraction of the ruling capitalist class and therefore, in an important sense, the principal enemy of the people. But this kind of general consideration is useless if it is not used to draw attention to the urgent need for a concrete analysis of the precise relations of contradiction (antagonistic or non-antagonistic) and of common interest between the working class and the various other social strata and groups among the people, if instead it is employed precisely in order to 'demonstrate', on the basis of the old Social Democratic (= bourgeois) opposition between democracy and dictatorship,<sup>[8]</sup> that whereas Lenin, in the conditions faced by the Bolshevik Revolution -- with a small working class isolated in a sea of peasants, and so on -- correctly insisted on the need for a dictatorship (of the proletariat), Western Europe will be able to take the democratic road to socialism. Thus democracy and dictatorship are interpreted as *forms of government* (parliament *versus* the one-party system, and so on) or as *political or institutional forms* (consent *versus* coercion). Yet on this point Lenin's argument is perfectly clear:

'Bourgeois States are *most varied in form*, but their essence is the same: *all these States, whatever their form*, in the final analysis are inevitably *the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie*. The transition from capitalism to communism is certainly bound to yield a tremendous abundance and variety of *political forms*, but the essence will inevitably be the same: *the dictatorship of the proletariat*' (my emphasis -- G.L.).<sup>[9]</sup>

Of course a simple reference to Lenin can never be a proof. But we can at least ask those theorists who have abandoned and rejected Lenin's position on this matter to admit as much.

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I should like, in order better to illustrate the relevance of the present book to the debate which must take place in Britain, to make reference to a recent article by Jack Woddis (member of the Political Committee of the British Communist Party) in *Marxism*

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<sup>[8]</sup> Cf. Lenin, *The Proletarian Revolution and the Renegade Kautsky* (XXVIII, 232 [p. 6]): 'Kautsky's great discovery of the "fundamental contrast" between "democratic and dictatorial methods" [. . .] is the crux of the matter; that is the essence of Kautsky's pamphlet. And that is such an awful theoretical muddle, such a complete renunciation of Marxism, that Kautsky, it must be confessed, has far excelled Bernstein.'

<sup>[9]</sup> In *The State and Revolution*, ch. 2; XXV, 418 [p. 41].

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*Today*, November 1976, entitled 'The State -- Some Problems'. I do so not in order to engage in a personal polemic, but to make it possible for a serious discussion to take place around the question of the dictatorship of the proletariat (which, by the way, can certainly not be reduced to the simple question of whether or not the term itself figures in the Party Programme or in other publications). Woddis's article has the merit -- so far a rare merit -- that it attempts to take account, not pragmatically but in theoretical terms, of the recent development of capitalism (imperialism) and to consider what changes are correspondingly required in the positions and activity of British Marxists. However, I think that it is not possible to agree with all the points which he makes, and I shall try briefly to show why.

First of all, Woddis suggests that *the reason why Lenin insisted on the need to 'smash the State'* was that he realized the impossibility -- in the conditions inherited from 'old Russia' -- of winning a majority of the people for socialism. It follows that, in cases where it is indeed possible to win such a majority, it would be unnecessary to smash the State, or at least that to talk in such terms would 'serve to hide the essence of the question' (p. 341). *But this was not Lenin's reason.* It is clear that his argument is not intended to apply only to the particular conditions of the Russian Revolution but to *all revolutions* against capitalist rule, because it is *directly implied by his general conception of the State*. For example, in ridiculing Kautsky's position ('Workers, fight! -- our philistine "agrees" to this [. . .] Fight, but *don't dare win* ! Don't destroy the State machine of the bourgeoisie . . .') he comments that: 'Whoever sincerely shared the Marxist view that the State is nothing but a machine for the suppression of one class by another, and who has at all reflected upon this truth, could never have reached the absurd conclusion that the proletarian organizations capable of defeating finance capital must not transform themselves into State organizations. It was this point that betrayed the petty bourgeois who believed that "after all is said and done" the State is some thing outside classes or above classes.'<sup>[10]</sup>

This is the crux of the whole question: the idea that the State or any part of it is or might be *above classes, above the class struggle*. This is, however, the position adopted in effect by Woddis, when

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<sup>[10]</sup> XXVIII, 261 [pp. 44-45].

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he argues in the following terms: 'The non-coercive sides of the State in Britain today are far more comprehensive, more diverse, and have a far larger personnel than the State in old Russia. Our State institutions embrace extensive economic functions and the nationalized industries, as well as education, the health services, social services, and so on. In essence what is required in these State sectors is a democratic transformation and forms of democratic control, not any "smashing" of such bodies which, under socialism, can really serve the people's interests once the essential democratic changes have been made.'<sup>[11]</sup>

If you turn to Appendix II of Lenin's *The Proletarian Revolution and the Renegade Kautsky* you will find that he refutes precisely this argument, as put forward on that occasion by the Belgian Socialist Emile Vandervelde. Like Woddis, Vandervelde distinguished between the coercive side of the State, 'the State as the organ of authority', *the State 'in the narrow sense'*, and the non-coercive sides, the State 'as a representative of the general interests of society', *the State 'in the broad sense'*. His programme was therefore 'the transformation of the present State as the organ of the rule of one class over another into [. . .] a people's labour State, by the conquest of political power by the proletariat.'<sup>[12]</sup> What does Lenin say about this programme, about the idea that the aim of the conquest of State power is to put an end to the capitalists' use of the State as a means of coercion, the State 'in the narrow sense', but at the same time to develop and expand the non-coercive sides of the State, the State 'in the broad sense'? He remarks, precisely in reply to this idea: 'The Kautskys and Vanderveldes say nothing about the fact that the transitional stage between the State as an organ of the rule of the capitalist class and the State as an organ of the rule of the proletariat is *revolution*, which means *overthrowing* the bourgeoisie and *breaking up*, smashing, their State machine'. The reason is that they 'obscure the fact that the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie must be replaced by the dictatorship of *one class*, the proletariat'. Thus, their denial of the need to 'smash' the capitalist State (for the sense of this expression, see below) follows directly from their general conception of the State, from their attitude to the dictatorship of the proletariat. Lenin concludes:

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<sup>[11]</sup> p. 341.

<sup>[12]</sup> Quoted by Lenin, XXVIII, 324 [p. 136].

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'Like Kautsky, Vandervelde quotes Marx and Engels with great zeal, and like Kautsky, he quotes from Marx and Engels anything you like *except* what is absolutely unacceptable to the bourgeoisie and what distinguishes a revolutionary from a reformist. He speaks volubly about the conquest of political power by the proletariat, since practice has already confined this within strictly parliamentary limits. But as regards the fact that after the experience of the Paris Commune, Marx and Engels found it necessary to supplement the partially obsolete

[Communist Manifesto](#) with an elucidation of the truth that the working class cannot simply lay hold of the ready-made State machinery, but must *smash* it -- *not a single word* has he to say about that! Vandervelde and Kautsky, as if by agreement, pass over in complete silence what is most essential in the *experience* of the proletarian revolution, precisely that which distinguishes proletarian revolution from bourgeois reforms. Like Kautsky, Vandervelde talks about the dictatorship of the proletariat only to dissociate himself from it.'<sup>[13]</sup>

It is therefore quite clear that Lenin's insistence on what he calls 'the main point, namely, the *smashing* of the old, bourgeois democratic State machine' is directly linked to his insistence on the need for the dictatorship of the proletariat. But since this latter insistence applies, as he says, to *all* bourgeois States -- not just Russia in 1917! -- because '*all* these States, *whatever their form*, are inevitably the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie', and because the transition from capitalism to communism will always, in essence, '*inevitably be the same : the dictatorship of the proletariat*', it follows that from Lenin's viewpoint the need to 'smash' the capitalist State *also* holds for *all* such States, however developed their 'non-coercive sides' may be.

It is true that there are in Britain, as elsewhere, small 'Marxist' groups, whose positions are characterized by a kind of 'anti-parliamentary cretinism', and which constantly confuse and discredit the issue by associating it with the idea of the masses storming parliament in a repeat of the attack on the Winter Palace in Petrograd. *But that is not its meaning*. Far from it! In a moment we shall see why.

The whole problem of Woddis's position lies, if I may say so, precisely in his conception of the dictatorship of the proletariat,

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<sup>[13]</sup> XXVIII, 320 [[The Proletarian Revolution and the Renegade Kautsky](#), p. 131]. (Cf. pp. 74-77, below.)

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even though the term itself hardly figures in his article. The reason is that he associates Lenin's notion of this dictatorship *exclusively* with the use of *coercion*, with the *violent* smashing of the existing State machine, and thus with the installation of another, equally coercive machine (now directed against other classes, of course, and especially but not only against the old exploiting classes). Thus the dictatorship of the proletariat is once again identified with a particular 'form of government' -- a dictatorial, coercive form, lacking a 'democratic parliament', 'free elections', freedom of speech and association, universal and constitutionally guaranteed civil rights, and so on. But Lenin explicitly points out (1) that 'the form of government has absolutely nothing to do with it'<sup>[14]</sup> and (2) more specifically that in examining the question of the dictatorship of the proletariat we are not dealing with 'a special question, such as the franchise', but with a much more general problem (how in general can the proletariat exercise its dictatorship over the old exploiting classes?). Thus he remarks that in the pamphlet *The State and Revolution* 'I did not say anything at all about restricting the franchise. And it must be said now that the question of restricting the franchise is a nationally specific and not a general question of the dictatorship' (XXVIII, 255-56 [p. 37]); and a little later: 'The disenfranchisement of the bourgeoisie is not a necessary and indispensable feature of the dictatorship of the proletariat'. But Kautsky, against whom Lenin is arguing here, 'is exclusively interested in the formal, legal aspect of the question' (273 [p. 62]). This is the crucial point: the dictatorship of the proletariat is not to be defined in terms of a particular *system of institutions* (= in formal, legal or *constitutional* terms -- i.e. as a *non-constitutional*, basically *coercive* system) but as *genuine mass democracy, whatever the institutional forms* in which this democracy is realized and developed.<sup>[15]</sup>

But in that case, it might be asked, what is the meaning of

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<sup>[14]</sup> XXVIII, 238 [[The Proletarian Revolution and the Renegade Kautsky](#), p. 13].

<sup>[15]</sup> Though it is not any kind of institution which can, at a particular moment, play the role demanded by the development of mass democracy. There is no doubt, for example, that at a certain moment, in any given revolutionary process, parliamentary institutions (to the extent that they already exist) will become hindrances to this development, even if at an earlier moment they have played a very necessary role. The particular moment at which this occurs can only be decided by reference to the specific circumstances. But in any case the problem of institutions, though enormously important, is not the main problem.

Lenin's insistence on the need to 'smash' the capitalist State as a first step in the establishment of this dictatorship? We already have the key to the answer. Just as it is wrong to identify the dictatorship of the proletariat with a form of government based exclusively on violence and coercion, so it is wrong to identify the process of breaking up the capitalist State with a series of violent blows directed against particular institutions. The need, the vital necessity of 'smashing' or 'breaking up' the State machine can only be understood in terms of the need to break up 'the system of social relations which provides the bourgeois State apparatus with its astonishing capacity for resistance' (Balibar, ch. 4), to break up the *division of manual and intellectual labour* which has *not only survived* the contemporary development of the capitalist State and in particular of what Jack Woddis calls its 'non-coercive sides' (which 'in Britain today are far more comprehensive, more diverse, and have a far larger personnel than the State in old Russia,') but has actually been *deepened and extended* by that development. The need to 'smash' or 'break up' the capitalist State -- i.e., the need to destroy this division of labour, itself both the source and the reflection of deep-rooted class contradictions -- is therefore, if anything, *greater than ever* in our own day, greater than it was in Lenin's own time.

But this brings me to another, related point. To abandon the idea of 'breaking up the old State'<sup>[16]</sup> -- provided that this idea is properly understood, and not confused with the notion of brute force -- is to close one's eyes to the real, material contradictions deriving from and expressed in this division of labour, and thus to blind oneself and others to the grave problems which must arise from the continued existence of this division of labour and its accompanying contradictions *after the revolution* (even when this revolution is based on the 'consent' of the people as 'expressed in

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<sup>[16]</sup> Jack Woddis: "The "rare exception" [winning a majority of the people] has now become the real alternative for the people in Western Europe [. . .] Talking in terms of "smashing" the State can, I believe, serve to hide the essence of the question [. . .] What is required in these State sectors [the "non-coercive sectors" -- G.L.] is a democratic transformation and forms of democratic control, not any "smashing" of such bodies . . ." (pp. 340-41). Cf: Lenin, XXV, 489-90 [[The State and Revolution](#) , p. 136]: 'Kautsky abandons Marxism for the opportunist camp, for this destruction of the State machine, which is utterly unacceptable to the opportunists, completely disappears from his argument, and he leaves a loophole for them in that "conquest" may be interpreted as the simple acquisition of a majority.'

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an electoral majority').<sup>[17]</sup> Consequently, it helps to create the impression that any contradictions which happen to surface in this period must actually have not so much a *material* as an *ideological* cause, and are therefore to be treated as problems of (a lack of political consciousness, hang-overs from the bad, old capitalist days, when the monopolists -- controlled the 'mass media', etc. (Jack Woddis: 'Years of propaganda by the ruling class . . . have deceived the majority of working people . . .').<sup>[18]</sup> The consequence: the principal means of struggle under socialism would also be ideological, in order to correct or straighten out false ideas. In this connexion I ought, in parenthesis, to mention the fact that this curiously idealist picture of socialism, coupled with its accompanying idealist notion of *ideology* (*ideology = deception*), is nowadays sometimes 'legitimated' by the (mis)use of a term drawn from the writings of Antonio Gramsci, the term *hegemony*. Thus it is argued that Gramsci, in drawing attention to the important role played by the propaganda, educational and cultural system in the maintenance of the State power of the ruling class, made it possible to 'correct' Lenin's 'one-sided' emphasis on the coercive function of the State, *including the proletarian State*, and thus opened the way to the 'modern' non-coercive and democratic conception of socialism now being developed in the Western European Communist Parties. Jack Woddis too presents something like this argument (pp. 333-34). Its force derives however only from the attribution to Gramsci of an equally idealist notion of ideology, i.e. from an idealist 'interpretation' of his concept of hegemony and therefore of his whole work.

Why do I talk about an *idealist* conception of ideology? Because in effect this conception is completely isolated from the Marxist theory of class struggle in the economy, in politics and in ideology, and misrepresents or even destroys the relations between these forms of the class struggle. We have already seen an example: for if you avoid, ignore and thus effectively deny the contradictions involved in the division of manual and intellectual labour, in the socialist State apparatus but also outside it, you make it impossible to understand the symptoms and expressions of these contradictions except as ideological remnants of an earlier historical

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<sup>[17]</sup> Woddis, p. 342.