

Marxism and State Communism

The Withering Away of the State

Group(s) of International Communists (G.I.C.)

Holland, 1932

Based on:

'Marx-Engels und Lenin'

Über die Rolle des Staates in der proletarischen Revolution

(Max Hempel in: 'Proletarier' nrs. 4 - 6, 1927)

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From the editors

This text originally appeared as a three part article in **Proletarier**, nrs. 4-6, 1927, a monthly organ of the Berlin tendency of the K.A.P.D. Its author (Jan Appel) signed with his pseudonym 'Max Hempel'. In 1932 a translation in Dutch language appeared as a pamphlet of the *Group(s) of International Communists* (G.I.C.) with the title '*Marxisme en staatscommunisme. Het afsterven van de staat*' ("Marxism and State Communism. The Withering Away of the State"). Appel was himself a founding member of the G.I.C. The publication in Dutch was partly an adaptation.

For this English translation both the Dutch and the German versions have been transcribed and compared to one another. Relevant textual differences are indicated in footnotes. Wherever possible, web references to quoted texts and/or text passages have been added.

The subheadings and text accentuation follow the Dutch edition of 1932. The sparse text insertions in square brackets are from the editors.

A photocopy of **the 1927 article in Proletarier** (in German) is available as a pdf-file at the *Archives Antonie Pannekoek* web site: <http://aaap.be/Pdf/Proletarier/Proletarier-1927.pdf>.

A scanned image of the **G.I.C. pamphlet from 1932** (in Dutch) can be found there as well: <http://aaap.be/Pages/Pamphlets-GIC.html#marx>.

The annotated transcriptions of both versions and this English translation are available in separate language editions from the "*Left Wing*" *Communism - an infantile disorder?* web site: <http://www.left-dis.nl/>.

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Contents

| | |
|--|----|
| The economic revolution begins with the conquest of the means of production..... | 3 |
| Leninist state communism. The wage laborer remains a wage laborer..... | 3 |
| “The association of free and equal producers”..... | 5 |
| The contradiction in the Leninist theory of the state..... | 8 |
| Lenin as a state communist..... | 9 |
| “Nationalization” and “socialization” | 10 |
| How Lenin solves the difficulty in a “simple” way..... | 12 |
| State communism clashes with the council idea..... | 13 |
| A questionable departure from Marxism..... | 14 |
| The unified power of the workers is necessary..... | 15 |
| The lessons of the Paris Commune (1871)..... | 15 |
| The council system according to Marx..... | 16 |
| The question of mass and leaders in the communes..... | 17 |
| The conditions for the withering away of the state..... | 17 |
| Opposition of the two systems..... | 18 |

Marxism and State Communism

The Withering Away of the State

1932 Adaptation by the G.I.C. of Max Hempel's 'Marx-Engels und Lenin'. *Über die Rolle des Staates in der proletarischen Revolution*, in: 'Proletarier' Nr. 4 - 6, 1927 ⁽¹⁾

The economic revolution begins with the conquest of the means of production

As soon as the rule of the working class has become a fact in an industrialized country, the proletariat is confronted with the task of carrying through the transformation of economic life on new foundations, those of communal labor. ⁽²⁾ The abolition of private property is easily pronounced, it will be the first measure of the political rule of the working class. But that is only a juridical act which aims at providing the legal foundation for the real economic proceeding. The real transformation and the actual revolutionary work then only begins.

Leninist state communism. The wage laborer remains a wage laborer

To the extent that this problem is dealt with by the official Marxists, ⁽³⁾ it is considered a foregone conclusion that the state has to accomplish this task. Since the 1917 revolution the Russian Bolshevik Party has consistently implemented the idea of putting the means of production in the hands of the State. ⁽⁴⁾ That this has only succeeded to a limited extent is due to the backward state of social production in Russia; in a sense this is a natural barrier imposed upon the statification of the means of production. Therefore, the question is not whether and to what extent the statification is

1) This adaptation was published in 1932 as a pamphlet in Dutch language by the *Group (s) of International Communists* (Bibliographical data can be found in the editorial of this edition).

2) In the 1927 article: "the conversion of the economy according to new, common (communist) principles"

3) In the 1927 article: "official Marxists"

4) The 1927 article continues: "In this the bourgeoisified social-democracy goes so far as to wanting to already envisage the transformation of the capitalist economy into socialism by the bourgeois state (which the workers should conquer for themselves by means of universal suffrage). It should be noted: this is said in theory, the practice is different.

But as social democracy in 1918 - 1919 was at the helm of the state in Germany (not by universal suffrage), it could not decide whether [the industry] and which industries would be "mature" for statification. In the end it chose private capitalism as the best economic form. Thereby social democratic "Marxism" has practically dropped the problem of the construction of socialism and can therefore no longer be taken seriously. Things are different with the Muscovite social democrats, the Bolshevik Party of Russia. The latter has realized the idea of the statification of the means of production in a consistent way in the course of the Russian revolution since 1917."

feasible, but rather whether **the statification of the means of production** by the victorious working class, as it manifests itself in Bolshevik theory and practice, is **the way leading to communism**.

To this question the development of Russian enterprises under Bolshevik government has given a clear answer. It has now become an established fact that the workers in the statified enterprises have remained **wage** laborers. The state has replaced the former private capitalists, and to this state he sells his labor. The state determines these wages by law and allows the union, which has become itself a state organ, to enact the labor laws. The wage laws actually in force in Russia show 17 wage classes, further piecework, bonuses, etc. ⁽⁵⁾ In one word:

The statified industry is based on the exploitation of labor power like in the production under private capitalism.

The state bureaucracy becomes the ruling class.

In this system Soviet elections are a sham.

The “free” workers finally conquer “co-management” of the workers.

The state itself – which in Russia is called a workers’ and peasants’ state ⁽⁶⁾ – as owner of the means of production is **opposed** to the class of wage laborers. The centralized summit of the state bureaucracy is the legislative and executive organ of the state and, at the same time, the leader of production. It occupies the same place as monopoly capital in private capitalism, and it represents in fact the new ruling class: the state bureaucracy and the peasant class. The workers sell their labor power to the state, but can do so only according to the labor laws, in which the price and the working conditions are set by the state bureaucracy. An unprecedentedly harsh exploitation is prescribed by law and all opposition is in principle suppressed as counterrevolutionary. ⁽⁷⁾ Discipline and subordination to the state complete this compulsory organization. One wonders in vain, in what way the first requirement of communism, “liberation from wage labor” has been accomplished.

On the other hand, in order to influence the economy and politics of the state, the workers, as well as the population as a whole, are referred to Soviet elections and participation in the party and trade union life. However, as the Soviet elections are decisively influenced by the almighty state bureaucracy (and the propertied peasant class), and as the party and the union are powerful instruments of bureaucracy, one will acknowledge that the influence of the proletariat can not be effected in this way. **Practically the latter is reduced to the “co-management” by the workers that the Social Democrats have demanded under capitalism as well.**

5) In the 1927 article: *“The state has replaced the former private capitalists, and to this state he sells his labor power, whereas the state fixes and rules the wages, but only within the limits drawn for it by the free market and competition.”*

6) In the 1927 article: *“is arrogantly called a workers’ and peasants’ state”*

7) The passage from *“It occupies the same place...”* up to *“An unprecedentedly harsh exploitation...”* has been added in the 1932 version.

“The association of free and equal producers”

According to Marx, the state is a special oppressive instrument

- In capitalism: for the suppression of the working class;
- Under the proletarian dictatorship: for holding down the bourgeoisie and the counter-revolution.

However, from this does not derive that in a communist society the state must become the exclusive power in society through central leadership and concentration of the entire economic life in its hands. Quite the contrary, both Marx and Engels have advocated the position that the hallmark of a communist society lies in “**the association of free and equal producers**” and that the state must disappear, when there is nothing left to suppress – thus when the resistance of the bourgeoisie and its ideological influence over the workers have been overcome by them. “The association of free and equal producers” does no longer know a class antagonism and thereby in such a society the state as an instrument of power has become superfluous.

Lenin is the founder of **state communism**. Where he puts up the ground pillar for this theory in “The State and Revolution”, he refers to Marx and Engels. Although this work is written in defense of the proletarian dictatorship against Menshevism, and in this respect constitutes a lasting merit, the shape this dictatorship must take on according to Lenin is in contradiction to the conceptions on the issue of the founders of scientific communism. This can even be shown by the quotations that Lenin selects from the writings of Marx and Engels. Thus Lenin quotes a.o. Engels:

“The state, then, has not existed from all eternity. There have been societies that did without it, that had no idea of the state and state power. At a certain stage of economic development, which was necessarily bound up with the split of society into classes, the state became a necessity owing to this split. We are now rapidly approaching a stage in the development of production at which the existence of these classes not only will have ceased to be a necessity, but will become a positive hindrance to production. They will fall as they arose at an earlier stage. *Along with them the state will inevitably fall. Society, which will reorganize production on the basis of a free and equal association of the producers, will put the whole machinery of state where it will then belong: into a museum of antiquities, by the side of the spinning-wheel and the bronze axe.*”⁽⁸⁾

8) Lenin, “*The State and Revolution*” (Chapter I: Class Society and the State, Section 3. The State: an Instrument for the Exploitation of the Oppressed Class):
<https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1917/staterev/ch01.htm>.

Hempel’s source reference in the 1927 article: “We quote from Lenin, ‘Staat und Revolution’, *Aktions-Verlag, Berlin-Wilmersdorf, 1918*. The page numbers may be somewhat different in different editions. Engels’ work that is referred to has the title: ‘Der Ursprung der Familie, des Privateigentums und des Staats’, *Verlag Dietz Nachf., Berlin*.”

[Remark by the editors: In the 1927 article two further quotations of Engels by Lenin follow. They stem from a paragraph in “[Herr Eugen Dühring’s Revolution in Science \[Anti-Dühring\]](#)”, which has been included in the appendix of this edition: *Two quotations from Engels by Lenin* .]

Engels says in another place, that the means of production will be state-owned. Therefore, Lenin founds his theory on this statement. ⁽⁹⁾

But it must be a peculiar state, because it is only created (dictatorship of the proletariat), to give away, blow upon blow, all of its power, to gradually make itself superfluous.

But what if the state concentrates in its hand *“the administration of things and the leadership of production”*, and thereby secures its control over the workers even more by its management of the production system?

If the administrative apparatus lies in the hands of a small party that also disposes of the political power, it is in reality about dominating the broad masses. ⁽¹⁰⁾ Even the excuse that the party is *“the party of the proletariat”*, does not change anything about this. One should always remember that this administrative apparatus, as the Russian example teaches, as **the central organizational apparatus**, can only be directed from the center. Within this apparatus there is no place for *“independent producers”* (the workers). This would not correspond to a central leadership. ⁽¹¹⁾ As a consequence we see that strict discipline, subordination to the commands of the top leadership, has become a religious dogma of Russian economy and politics.

The Soviet elections are supposed to provide – in theory – the safeguard that the state, who takes over the means of production *“in the name of society”*, really manages the affairs, and directs the productive apparatus, in the name of society. Practice shows that the state bureaucracy enforces its plans with all means of power, and that soviet elections result in nothing. Thus influencing state management by Soviet elections does not take place. This is neither the case in the State party (C.P.R.) nor in the union. The state bureaucracy does not permit the emergence of any other policies than its own. It does not need to be said that democracy in this state communism, namely by party and trade union organization and by Soviet elections, can not provide a guarantee for the withering away of the state, which Marx and Engels demanded, and which Lenin pretended imagined as well. ⁽¹²⁾

9) In the 1927 article: *“Engels clearly states that the means of production ought to become state property, the state takes possession of them on behalf of society. Therefore Lenin grounds his theory on this statement as well.”* (“as well” has been left out in the 1932 pamphlet)

10) In the 1927 article: *“...it is about dominating the broad masses.”* (the emphasis *“in reality”* is lacking there).

11) In the 1927 article: *“An intermingling by the “free producers” (the workers) is not possible within this apparatus and, should one allow this, would not be compatible with unified central leadership.”*

12) This paragraph was formulated differently in the 1927 article: *“Soviet elections to the central government should provide the safeguard for this state, that takes over the means of production “in the name of society” - this is demanded by Engels and also by Lenin - to really administer the affairs and lead the production process in the name of society, for the state to wither away in the process of this revolution. It has always to be kept in mind that the whole economy is united in a center [Zentrale], from which it receives its directives, and by which it is dominated. So the soviet elections in the different communes on the spot have no influence at all on the decisive design of the economy. It is decisive for society to be able to exert an influence in its own sense on the central summit of production leadership - which, in this case, is the government at the same time, in order to have the govern-*

Production centralized in one hand defines a new form of domination. As a result the state cannot wither away.

Democracy cannot wither away either. Democracy remains the fig leaf to conceal oppression.

We conclude that this government or central leadership cannot wither away, but on the contrary has to affirm itself ever more, as a consequence of the way it took possession of the means of production. ⁽¹³⁾ It actually means the subordination of the producers, who want to be free, to the government, their economic dependence on the latter and thereby their subjugation. As a consolation, they then have the prospect to shape their own subjugation in accordance with their interests. However, this road is beyond their function as producers, it is the road of democracy.

Undoubtedly, as producers the workers are a power, but as such, they must comply with the central leadership. Outside of the enterprises they would only be a decisive power if they were armed. However, in Russia we see that the workers have been disarmed and that, by contrast, a Red Army has been formed, which is at the disposition of the central government. As a result, in this democracy the workers don't have the least impact. Essentially, it doesn't distinguish itself in any way from bourgeois democracy, and nothing can be done with it against a strong incumbent governing bureaucracy. (That this has become the case in Russia, first of all depends upon the social relations in that country. These have secured victory for Russian state communism. But at the same time one can see from this what a blow it would be for the working class, should an effort be made to impose state communism according to the Russian model in highly developed capitalist countries).

The result of the state taking possession of the means of production according to the theory of Lenin, so the **central organizational leadership and management**, will be a new, strengthening state, namely an instrument of oppression by the ruling bureaucracy. Democracy will then be, as in bourgeois society, the fig leaf meant to cover the new domination over the workers.

Despite this, Lenin has expressed in "The State and Revolution" that this state must wither away, and he even comes to the correct conclusion that democracy must also die:

"(...) in speaking of the state 'withering away', and the even more graphic and colorful 'dying down of itself', Engels refers quite clearly and definitely to the period after 'the state has taken possession of the means of production in the name of the whole of society', that is, after the socialist revolution. We all know that the political form of the 'state' at that time is the most complete democracy. But it never enters the head of any of the opportunists, who shamelessly distort Marxism, that Engels is consequently speaking here of democracy 'dying down of itself', or 'withering away'." ⁽¹⁴⁾

ment really act "in the name of society". "

13) In the 1927 article: "We do not want to examine here whether this is possible at all, and to what degree, but just draw the conclusion that this government or central leadership cannot wither away,..."

14) <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1917/staterev/ch01.htm> - s4.

Undoubtedly thereby Lenin meant democracy in state communism. Apart from the real development in Russia, which goes in the opposite direction, we are left to oppose by repeating the words of Engels:

“The government of persons is replaced by the administration of things, and by the conduct of processes of production. The state is not 'abolished'. It withers away.”⁽¹⁵⁾

It is clear that the theory of Lenin here is in contradiction with itself.⁽¹⁶⁾

The contradiction in the Leninist theory of the state

The stakes thereby consist in exposing the contradiction in the Leninist theory of the state. If the withering away of the proletarian state and of its democracy are to be achieved, one cannot simultaneously force society politically and economically under the most stringent central leadership of the government. Because this is tantamount to the existence of a new state with greater power and wider competences than the bourgeois state has in capitalism. However, only political infants can believe that the state would release its power at a given time, even that it would be able to do so, without the collapse of the entire central apparatus built for production and administration. On the contrary, it will attempt to confirm its power and will grow into the biggest instrument for oppression society has ever seen.

A new ruling caste evolves in this new state communism. It consists of the leaders that rose up from the working class and of defectors from the bourgeoisie, who put themselves into the service of state communism and who take over the central administration. This is what clearly comes to light in present day Russia. Only a vanishing small part of the Russian workers was able to take a leading position in the administrative machinery of the statified production. In order to start up the economy, one needs to take over the functionaries and the leaders of the capitalist system. These people, legitimized as communists by their integration into the Communist Party, control the production of the country together with competent workers – the leaders. They constitute a new ruling caste and, already at present, use their position of power to take a much better material position than the workers. Touching complaints of Russian workers, that even penetrate into official newspapers – such as the “Pravda” – (which is very telling in today’s Russia) highlight that the bureaucrats only care for their own interests, without heeding the most glaring emergencies of the workers. It comes therefore as no surprise that the word “**Soviet bourgeoisie**” has arisen in Russia itself.

State communism stands in contradiction to the argument that in communism the state must wither away. Only either of two is possible: either state communism, i.e. central organizational leadership and management of production by the state – in that case the state remains, and strengthens its power – or the withering away of the state and of democracy, while society is going over to the association of free and

15) <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1917/staterev/ch01.htm - s4>.

16) The first of three parts of the 1927 article ends here.

equal producers, thereby rendering an oppressive state power superfluous. But in that case the central apparatus for leading state production has to fall.

Lenin as a state communist

It is important to demonstrate that this new state repressive apparatus it is not only born from the practice of Russian state capitalism, but that Lenin has already sharply drawn its main lines in “The State and Revolution” (1917). He writes the following about it:

“A witty German Social-Democrat of the seventies of the last century called the postal service an example of the socialist economic system. This is very true. At the present the postal service is a business organized on the lines of state-capitalist monopoly. Imperialism is gradually transforming all trusts into organizations of a similar type, in which, standing over the “common” people, who are overworked and starved, one has the same bourgeois bureaucracy. But the mechanism of social management is here already to hand. Once we have overthrown the capitalists, crushed the resistance of these exploiters with the iron hand of the armed workers, and smashed the bureaucratic machinery of the modern state, we shall have a splendidly-equipped mechanism, freed from the “parasite”, a mechanism which can very well be set going by the united workers themselves, who will hire technicians, foremen and accountants, and pay them all, as indeed all “state” officials in general, workmen's wages. Here is a concrete, practical task which can immediately be fulfilled in relation to all trusts, a task whose fulfillment will rid the working people of exploitation, a task which takes account of what the Commune had already begun to practice (particularly in building up the state).”

“To organize the whole economy on the lines of the postal service so that the technicians, foremen and accountants, as well as all officials, shall receive salaries no higher than “a workman's wage”, all under the control and leadership of the armed proletariat – that is our immediate aim. This is what will bring about the abolition of parliamentarism and the preservation of representative institutions. This is what will rid the laboring classes of the bourgeoisie's prostitution of these institutions.”⁽¹⁷⁾

Here Lenin plainly says that the central leadership and management of the production in state communism will be based on the model of the postal service, or rather, effectuated in the manner of a state capitalist monopoly. “*Technicians, foremen and accountants, as well as all functionaries*” are then state functionaries, functionaries in the state production monopoly that controls the entire production. “*A mechanism of general public enterprise, which is organized to the example of the capitalist state monopoly*”,⁽¹⁸⁾ that indeed is the characteristic description for State Communism, as developed by Lenin.

It is necessary to point out here that Engels (and Marx in a different place) said: “*The proletariat seizes state power and turns the means of production into state property to begin with.*”⁽¹⁹⁾ It seems as if he says the same thing as Lenin, but he emphasizes, that the means of production “*first*” will be transferred into state ownership, and he

17) <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1917/staterev/ch03.htm>.

18) The GIC probably cites the Dutch translation of ‘*The State and Revolution*’ by Gorter.

19) <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1877/anti-duhring/ch24.htm>.

further claims that taking possession of the means of production in the name of society, at the same time, constitutes the “*last independent act*” of the proletarian state.

This clearly shows that taking possession of the means of production just should initiate another act, which can only be – if we don’t want to turn the teachings of Marx and Engels upside down – “**the association of free and equal producers**”. If taking possession of the means of production by the proletarian state initiates this association, then “*management of affairs*” and “*management of production processes*” will develop, while the associated society of free and equal producers arranges its life itself, on a free economic foundation. Only to the degree at which this association is extending itself, the oppressive force of the state becomes superfluous, the state can and will wither away. At the same time the calling into being of this association, which effectuates the withering away of the state, is the only task of the proletarian dictatorship. Only in this sense we can understand the statement of Marx and Engels. Marx and Engels were careful not to present the taking into possession of the means of production by the state as a “*mechanism of the general public enterprise, organized to the example of the capitalist state monopoly.*”

Such a view is merely the product of “*a witty social democrat*”, but it hasn’t anything to do with Marx and Engels. Here Lenin has appropriated the way the “*witty social democrat*” explains Marxist doctrine, and necessarily took over the rigid, mechanistic conception of socialist society that shows itself in state communism. The state, which holds the monopoly of production, represents society here – in this respect there is not the slightest difference with the social democratic theory of **nationalization**.

“Nationalization” and “socialization” ²⁰

Although Marx made no “picture” of communist industrial life, it may be well known that regulation of production would be established according to him “*not by the state but by the organization of free associations of the socialist society*” a conception which, according to the reformist Cunow, Marx would have derived from the libertarian-anarchist currents of his time, (H. Cunow “*Die Marxsche Geschichts-, Gesellschafts- und Staatstheorie*”, I, p. 309). The management and administration of production and distribution would accrue directly to the producers and consumers themselves and not by taking the detour of the state. The equation of state and society is only an invention of later years. Engels turned against state socialism as well in his ‘*Anti-Dühring*’, in which he says:

“But the transformation, either into joint-stock companies, or into state ownership, does not do away with the capitalistic nature of the productive forces. (...) This solution can only consist in the practical recognition of the social nature of the modern forces of production, and therefore in the harmonising of the modes of production, appropriation, and exchange with the socialised character of the means of production. And this can only come about by society openly and directly taking possession of the productive forces which have outgrown all control

20) This fragment in the original Dutch version corresponds to the chapter with the same title in “*Fundamental Principles of Communist Production and Distribution*”:
<http://www.aaap.be/Pages/Transition-nl-Grondbeginselen-1935.html#II.b>

except that of society as a whole.” (...) Active social forces work exactly like natural forces: blindly, forcibly, destructively, so long as we do not understand, and reckon with them. But when once we understand them, when once we grasp their action, their direction, their effects, it depends only upon ourselves to subject them more and more to our own will, and by means of them to reach our own ends. (...) *With this recognition, at last, of the real nature of the productive forces of today, the social anarchy of production gives place to a social regulation of production upon a definite plan, according to the needs of the community and of each individual.*” (21)

Around 1880-1890 this position was hence still defended by Social Democracy, which, for example, is clearly reflected in a speech held by the old Liebknecht following attempts to put the railways, coal mines and other large industries into the hands of the state. He said:

“The more bourgeois society recognizes that eventually it cannot defend itself against the onslaught of socialist ideas, the closer we get at the moment that state socialism will seriously be proclaimed and the final battle social democracy will have to wage, will be fought under the slogan: “Here social democracy – there state socialism!”

Cunow makes the following remark on this: “*Accordingly, the Congress [of the Social Democratic Party, the editor] also declared itself against the transfer of the enterprises to the state; because social democracy and state socialism were called ‘irreconcilable contradictions’.*” (Cunow, *supra*, p. 340).

However, about 1900, in the struggle for “social reforms” this position was abandoned, and “nationalization”, the bringing to the state or municipality of different branches of business, was presented as an ever closer move toward socialism. In social democratic terminology such enterprises therefore are called “social [or community] enterprises” although the producers have nothing to do with their management and leadership.

The Russian revolution also went completely according to the scheme of “nationalization” of industry. In this case the branches of business that were ‘mature’ joined the central state apparatus as well. In 1917 the producers began to expropriate the owners in different companies, to the great discomfort of those who wanted to lead and manage economic life “from above”. The workers wanted to organize production on new foundations according to communist rules. Instead of these rules they got stones for bread: The Communist Party gave guidelines according to which companies should unite into trusts, so as to get them under central leadership. What could not be included in the central disposal plan was returned to the owners, because these companies were not yet “ripe”. So we see how already the first All-Russian Congress of Economic Councils adopted following resolution:

“In the domain of the organization of production an overall nationalization is necessary. It is necessary to proceed from the implementation of nationalization of individual companies (of which 304 have been nationalized and confiscated) to an effective nationalization of industry. Nationalization should not be “occasional”, and should only come about through the

21) <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1877/anti-duhring/ch24.htm> This quotation is more extensive than in the Dutch edition of 1932. (Editor’s note)

Supreme Economic Council of Plenipotentiaries, with the approval of the Supreme Economic Council.” (A. Goldschmidt, *Wirtschaftsorganisation in Sowjet-Russland*, p. 228).

Thus the Communist Party gave no guidelines according to which the workers themselves could add their enterprise to the communist sector, it gave no guidelines according to which the administration and management of the production process would indeed be transferred to society; for her the liberation of the workers was not the work of the workers themselves, but the implementation of communism was a function of the “men of science”, of the “intellectuals”, of the “statisticians” and how all those learned men may still be called. The Communist Party believed that it was sufficient to dislodge the old generals of industry and to take the Right of Command over labor in its own hands, in order to lead everything into the safe haven of communism! The working class was just good enough for sweeping away the old rulers of work – and to put new ones in their place. Its function did not reach further and could not have reached further, because the basis for self-organization was not given by providing generally applicable rules of production. ⁽²²⁾

How Lenin solves the difficulty in a “simple” way

Lenin has been certainly aware that the concentration of the entire production in the hands of the State monopoly, which is based on the most stringent organizational centralism, means **a strengthening of state power**. However, when *“The State and Revolution”* was written, he could not in any way have foreseen the actual development in Russia. Here it was necessary – as the Bolsheviks wanted to remain in power – to strengthen state power as much as possible, so to build a monopoly over production, without taking into account any other purpose. Thereby the situation in Russia itself has developed Lenin's theory of State Communism. The way to make the state increasingly stronger, closer, was gradually prescribed to those who had taken Russian state power. This process, which was started as a *“mechanism of the general public enterprise, organized to the example of the capitalist monopoly of the state”* had to become increasingly opposed to the *“free and equal producers”*.

Russia has developed the best example of Leninist state communism in reality, not as its bearers wished but as it had to develop.

Lenin could neither foresee all details of the actual outcome, but it was still clear to him that the proletarian state is a coercive institution as well. Moreover, he puts this in the foreground several times. Lenin now tries to solve the contradiction in an original way, how this state, that is still – according the theory of Lenin – a permanent institute of central leadership and management of overall production, will make itself redundant, will die down. In *“The State and Revolution”* Lenin proposes:

“We, the workers, shall organize large-scale production on the basis of what capitalism has already created, relying on our own experience as workers, establishing strict, iron discipline backed up by the state power of the armed workers. We shall reduce the role of state officials to that of simply carrying out our instructions as responsible, revocable, modestly paid

22) Here the fragment identical to *‘Fundamental Principles’* ends.

“foremen and accountants” (of course, with the aid of technicians of all sorts, types and degrees). This is our proletarian task, this is what we can and must start with in accomplishing the proletarian revolution. Such a beginning, on the basis of large-scale production, will of itself lead to the gradual “withering away” of all bureaucracy, to the gradual creation of an order – an order without inverted commas, an order bearing no similarity to wage slavery – an order under which the functions of control and accounting, becoming more and more simple, will be performed by each in turn, will then become a habit and will finally die out as the special functions of a special section of the population.”⁽²³⁾

One recognizes clearly a mechanical organization to the extreme: in the economic field – as producers – the workers must adapt to the most severe discipline of state production monopoly, and obey the state officials. These state officials are the “employers” who find their supreme leadership in the government. The workers have as well their supreme representation in government. By means of political democracy (Soviet elections – party activity) they can influence government and thereby control production with its state officials.

We repeat that in such a system all power is concentrated in government, that the workers are more severely oppressed in this society than under capitalism, that democracy here is turned into a joke again and that the prosperity of such society finally depends on the good will and capacities of the governmental men and their administration. Under such circumstances, the state with its democracy must give itself firmer foundations, rather than be redundant and die down, as Lenin wants as well. Lenin assures us that in despite of this the state will die, yes, that this would happen precisely because of this stringent organization. But he gives no argument for this but the quoted obscure reasoning that *“the functions of control and accounting, becoming more and more simple, will be performed by each in turn, will then become a habit and will finally die down as the special functions of a special section of the population.”*

As already said, this is obscure, because if one can imagine this in general, then only in fantasy. To present the leadership of the state production monopoly (system ‘postal service’ or trust) as **functions of supervision and accounting that can be made very easy**, is turning things on their head.

Therefore we should stigmatize this argument of Lenin as a phrase without content, by which he disposed himself of conclusions that follow from the teachings of Marx and Engels about the withering away of the state – and that were troublesome for Lenin himself as well.

State communism clashes with the council idea

If one tries to follow the thoughts of state communism, one will soon find two peculiarities. First, state communism considers all problems only as mechanical ones. It

23) <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1917/staterev/ch03.htm - s3>. Italics after ‘we’ added by editor, as found in the Dutch original by GIC and in Lenin Werke, Dietz Verlag, Berlin 1981, Bd. 25, p. 439. According to the latter edition Lenin writes *“Let’s organize as workers ourselves large-scale production...”*.

sees everything solely from the point point of view how this and that area can be controlled **by organization** and can be placed under a central leadership and management.

That leads them to consider the carrying through of communism as the continuation of the concentration of business, as this already happens under capitalism. But what does the organization of production created by the concentration of capital mean? What does it mean, on the one hand, seen from the angle of the wage laborers and from the position of the capitalists on the other? **It is the control of labor, the organized control of the wage laborers.** The Marxist analysis of capitalism does not leave the slightest doubt about it. For Marx the social position of the capitalist as regarding the wage-laborer is characterized by his disposition over labor, over the workers in the production process.

The socialization theories of all currents of social democracy all concentrate on the same point of control over the working class. That labor must be dominated, is obvious for them and that this requires a strict central organization (because it is about a social, inseparably linked system), is likewise [considered] “natural”.

But it is equally important that State Communism puts decisive weight on **the capacities of the leaders.** Very certainly this is a result of central organizational bundling, because now everything depends on the ability and firmness of principle of the leaders placed in the center, to which the mass must subordinate in the strictest discipline.

One must admit to the Bolsheviks, that the working class only conquers power if it is a closed Unity, ready for struggle. However, whether this can be accomplished along the way of organizational discipline and subordination to a central command, is another question that will not be investigated now.

We draw attention to this phenomenon, because it shows how state communism can be understood. **Decisive is that here all “leader”-problems are opposed to the council idea.**

A questionable departure from Marxism

The whole tactics of the workers' organizations that are part of the 3rd International, that therefore see their purpose in State Communism, depart from the view of encompassing great masses by putting them under central leadership. Once the organization has been created, the leader is the main thing. However, thereby the success of the proletarian revolution is highly conditioned upon the ability of leaders – a dubious deviation from Marxism.

This issue of leadership, that we encounter every day in the tactics of the parties and organizations of the 3rd International (we only mention the trade union question, parliamentarism and the organizational questions in the C.P. itself), has in state communism been transferred to the economic field as well. In this view the ability and the

attitude of the leader determines the fate of such a society to a large extent. Likewise the glorification of Lenin and others, a sick worship of persons, can be explained.

“The emancipation of the workers must be the work of the workers themselves.” These words do not lose their validity when considering the economic liberation of the workers. The most skilled leaders, even when the workers follow them in absolute discipline, can not take over its own liberating work from the proletariat. Moreover, if the proletarian dictatorship petrifies to the relationship of leader to mass, as expressed in State Communism, then this leadership develops, despite all democracy, into a new ruling caste, on which society becomes dependent.

The unified power of the workers is necessary

When Russia, the country where a determined, heaven storming, revolutionary vanguard, who led a gloomy, dull mass of millions into revolution, has given birth to the doctrine of State Communism; when this doctrine, as the flaming fire signal of the first successful proletarian revolution, roused the enthusiasm of the workers in all countries, then its rigid bureaucracy, its re-established state power by the monopolizing of production, delivers the evidence that the final emancipation of the working class **cannot be brought about by state communism**, not by leaders to whom the mass is obedient by discipline, but only by the own strength of the workers themselves.

Of course, the united power of armed workers must crush the bourgeoisie, because only in this way the concentrated power of the bourgeois state can be vanquished. But here it's the workers themselves, armed on the basis of the enterprises, who constitute the new state power.

The political unity of the workers' state, led by Councils or Soviets, whose head constitutes the Council Government, is **a necessary consequence of this struggle**. The abolition of private ownership of means of production and its declaration to “State” - or more accurately: social property, has to be effected by the proletarian State, thus by the government.

The lessons of the Paris Commune (1871)

But now State Communism deviates from Marxism, because by organizing State Possession under the central organizational leadership of government, it dispossesses the immediate producers from the means of production and puts them in the hands of government.

Marx and **Engels** however, demanded the transfer of the means of production into social property, social production by association, that is to say: **association of free and equal producers**. However, as we will demonstrate below, this is completely different from the central organization of production drawn to itself by the state.

In his “Civil War in France” Marx has drawn lessons from the Paris Commune (1871), this first attempt to establish the power of the workers. Lenin in “The State and Revolution” serves himself with various quotations from it, to defend the dictatorship of the proletariat against the Social-Democrat Marx-falsifiers. We want to use the same quotations that Lenin utilized, to demonstrate that by “dictatorship of the proletariat” Marx meant something quite different from what it has become in Russia.

“The first decree of the Commune, therefore, was the suppression of the standing army, and the substitution for it by the armed people.”

“The Commune was formed by the municipal councilors, chosen by universal suffrage in the various wards of the town, responsible and revocable at any time.”

“The Commune,” Marx wrote, “was to be a working, not a parliamentary, body, executive and legislative at the same time....”

“Instead of deciding once in three or six years which member of the ruling class was to represent and repress [ver- and zertreten] the people in parliament, universal suffrage was to serve the people gathered in communes, as individual suffrage serves every other employer in the search for workers, foremen and accountants for his business. ⁽²⁴⁾

The council system according to Marx

Marx thus gave a striking characteristic of the proletarian council system, as it now has become standard tenet of all revolutionary workers' parties. It must be well kept in mind that the Council appointed according to this exposition can be directly deposited by its voters at any time, just like employers appoint or dismiss workers, foremen and accountants. The voters, the workers, are in this case complete masters of their "business"! How completely different the construction of the Commune was thought of, compared to central Russian State Communism, is shown by the following sentences from Marx:

“In a brief sketch of national organization, which the Commune had no time to develop, it states explicitly that the Commune was to be the political form of even the smallest village....” The communes were to elect the “National Delegation” in Paris.

“... The few but important functions which would still remain for a central government were not to be suppressed, as had been deliberately mis-stated, but were to be transferred to communal, i.e., strictly responsible, officials.”

“... National unity was not to be broken, but, on the contrary, [was to be] organized by the communal constitution; it was to become a reality by the destruction of state power which posed as the embodiment of that unity yet wanted to be independent of, and superior to, the nation, on whose body it was but a parasitic excrescence. While the merely repressive organs of the old governmental power were to be amputated, its legitimate functions were to be wrested from an authority claiming the right to stand above society, and restored to the responsible servants of society.” ⁽²⁵⁾

24) <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1917/staterev/ch03.htm> - s3.

25) <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1917/staterev/ch03.htm> - s3.

The question of mass and leaders in the communes.

Unambiguously and clearly it states here that the “*few but important functions which would still remain for a central government*” are to be exercised by communal officials who are strictly responsible at any moment to their immediate constituents. The executive officers of the Central Government are not **state** officials, but **communal** officials, not responsible to the government of the State, but to their direct voters in the Commune. Assuming the possibility of such an order (i.e. the central social functions are exercised by communal and therefore responsible officials of the Commune, which guarantee the unity of the country or society), also a withering away of the state can be imagined. But in such an order a state does no longer exist at all, because what still can be called a central government has no separate power, because it is in the hands of the Communes. The establishing of **the commune- or council system** in the whole country would thus be the simultaneous elimination of the parasitic State. “*The merely repressive organs of the old governmental power were to be amputated, its legitimate functions were to be wrested from an authority claiming the right to stand above society, and restored to the responsible servants of society*”. Once such an order has actually been carried through, the state has really died off, whereas society does not need it anymore.

The conditions for the withering away of the state

It's clear that this situation cannot exist under the dictatorship of the proletariat. Only when the former legitimate functions of State Power, now to be called the central functions of society, can be transferred to the communal officials, a State Power – here proletarian dictatorship – will be unnecessary. Whether these functions can be transferred depends on the commune exercising these central functions voluntarily and that these functions and measures to hold together society will find no resistance. The former State Power must, as it were, come to life in the Communes, by creating a voluntary centralization for the exercise of the central functions and the monitoring of the resulting measures.

But because the main central functions of proletarian dictatorship consist of the abolition of private property and, furthermore, of all privileges, by transferring the means of production into social possession (by association of free and equal producers), **all individuals that can lose these privileges or private property, or only their ideology**, will resist to these central functions. The functions of the new social order can therefore not be transferred to these persons or classes; as long as this resistance exists proletarian dictatorship is necessary. However, those Communes by which this resistance has been overcome, (for example when there is a large majority of workers who are loyal to Communism), could take over these functions themselves. Otherwise the gradual withering away of the state is unthinkable.

But from this also follows that the proletarian state must be aware of depriving itself of all power from the beginning, by reassigning power into voluntary centralization,

i.e. transferring it to the Communes. **To create these conditions is the task of the dictatorship, becoming superfluous is its goal.**

Opposition of the two systems

According to Marx, the few but important functions of the central government will be transferred to communal officials (strictly responsible to the Commune). Thus, when the local communal self-government has become a matter of course, the central state power is superfluous by voluntary centralization of Communes. **Lenin** agrees with this line of thinking and even makes it his own. However, according to the theory of **state communism** (also developed by Lenin), all means of production are state owned, centralized in “the manner of a State Capitalist monopoly”. This organizational “**mechanism of the general public enterprise**” presumes the leadership of the government. It is therefor an instrument of power of the State and not of the Communes.

And the functions of this monopoly, this organizational “mechanism of the general public enterprise”, are exercised by officials that are responsible **to the central government and not to the communes**. A more glaring contrast than that which is reflected between the two systems, is unthinkable.

Both views, however, Lenin thought to unite in his writing “The State and revolution” and that this is possible, is the creed of all supporters of the 3rd International even today.

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Translation by F.K., 25-5-2016.

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Two quotations from Engels by Lenin

Source: "The State and Revolution"

"The proletariat seizes from state power and turns the means of production into state property to begin with. But thereby it abolishes itself as the proletariat, abolishes all class distinctions and class antagonisms, and abolishes also the state as state. Society thus far, operating amid class antagonisms, needed the state, that is, an organization of the particular exploiting class, for the maintenance of its external conditions of production, and, therefore, especially, for the purpose of forcibly keeping the exploited class in the conditions of oppression determined by the given mode of production (slavery, serfdom or bondage, wage-labor). The state was the official representative of society as a whole, its concentration in a visible corporation. But it was this only insofar as it was the state of that class which itself represented, for its own time, society as a whole: in ancient times, the state of slave-owning citizens; in the Middle Ages, of the feudal nobility; in our own time, of the bourgeoisie. When at last it becomes the real representative of the whole of society, it renders itself unnecessary."

"The first act by which the state really comes forward as the representative of the whole of society — the taking possession of the means of production in the name of society — is also its last independent act as a state. State interference in social relations becomes, in one domain after another, superfluous, and then dies down of itself. The government of persons is replaced by the administration of things, and by the conduct of processes of production. The state is not 'abolished'. It withers away." (Herr Eugen Dühring's Revolution in Science [Anti-Dühring], pp.301-03, third German edition.)"

<https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1917/staterev/ch01.htm#bk03>

