

Lenin, Vladimir Ilyich. *The State and Revolution*. Unknown Translator. Dover Publications: Mineola, New York, 1987.

V. I. Lenin (1870-1924) worked as a communist agitator and theorist. Lenin studied law; he was arrested, deported to Siberia, and eventually fled to western Europe, where he remained until the political circumstance of Russia became friendlier. Lenin stood among the small cadre of communists who organized the October 1917 revolution, and helped make Russia the world's first constitutionally socialist state. Lenin served as Premier of the Soviet Union from 1922-24. Upon taking power, Lenin transferred state and private lands to local government associations (soviets). Lenin survived two assassination attempts, and responded with the Red Terror in which possibly as many as one million dissenters were purged. Lenin loved cats and bicycling, and was tidy to a fault. He kept his pencils sharpened, and pursued revolutionary fanaticism with unrelenting abandon. The ethical for Lenin was that which served the communist future. All else was irrelevant. Lenin has been criticized as a dictator and mass murderer. Defenders note the limitations on his powers, his friendly demeanor, and unpretentious personality. Lenin wrote *The State and Revolution* in 1917. It is his most theoretical and least polemical work.

Chapter I. Class Society and the State.

1. *The State as the Product of the Irreconcilability of Class Antagonisms.* Marxism is being revised by those who once hated it. German professors, who despised Marx in his lifetime, downplay the communist call for revolution and distort Marx as a supporter of German war efforts. Lenin's first job is to restate unadulterated Marxism. Engels teaches that the state is the tool that emerges when one class oppresses another concerning irreconcilable class economic conflicts. Marx taught that the state can only be overcome by violent revolution.
2. *Special Bodies of Armed Men, Prisons, Etc.* States acquire power to coerce by means of militias and prisons, police, and courts. The underclass acquires its own independent armed militia, and the stage is set for revolution. Where capitalist powers grow, armies bloat and become predatory. The great predatory powers of England and Germany vied for control of the globe in the predatory war of 1914-1917.
3. *The State as an Instrument for the Exploitation of the Oppressed Class.* To support a state, capitalists impose taxes. Capitalists (the *bourgeoisie*) use taxes and other state mechanisms to oppress wage-laborers (the *proletariat*). Capitalists buy compliant officials and forge the marriage of the stock exchange and government. Democratic republicanism obscures capital behind a pretense of popular rule, deluding workers into compliance. So, voting is oppression. Engels argued that many societies existed without state apparatus. States emerged to moderate class conflict. As production proceeds without state action by the coordination of workers, the state become superfluous and capital is revealed as the oppressor it has always been. All states will fall.
4. *The "Withering Away" of the State and Violent Revolution.* Engels teaches that when the wage-laborers seize power, the state dies for lack of rationale. States exist to oppress workers. If workers are in charge, no need for a state remains. This process of withering commences when the workers seize the means of production from capitalists and take collective possession of them. The state is not abolished, as the anarchists would have it. The state fails to thrive and atrophies. Engels anticipates that the capitalist regime will be removed by violent means, a worker's government will take its place, and that government will shrivel and perish in time. In the worker's government, the dictatorship of the workers (proletariat) strips the rich of their wealth. Communists favor democracy so long as capitalists continue to rule. When the workers rule, even democracy will wither away. Removing the capitalists requires force. Force smashes the ossified institutions and makes way for the new. Some confuse violent overthrow of capitalists with the withering of the worker's state. These want to dress up communism as an impotent, dallying dandy.

Chapter II. The State and Revolution. The Experience of 1848-51.

1. *The Eve of the Revolution.* Marx taught that power in the political realm is capitalist response to class clashes. Civil society dwells in a state of barely suppressed civil war, which, when the circumstances warrant, erupts into revolution. The workers must win democracy's battle,

rule over the capitalists, and then wrench their property from them for common control. Lenin elaborates: states organize force against some class. When oppressed classes rule, having thrown off their masters, they will banish oppression. Workers need political power to violently crush capitalists, and to reorganize society as a classless socialist economy.

2. *The Revolution Summed Up.* Marx taught that revolutions that do not raze government machinery, but merely change its masters, accomplish nothing. Lenin takes this to be the core teaching of Marx concerning the state. Would-be communists mistake these teachings. When they seized power, they just went about dividing up the spoils, taking jobs in the superseded administration, and reforming nothing. They were seduced into betrayal of revolution. Communist revolution must smash, not reform, capitalist governmental structures. The problems that afflicted France during its 1848-1851 revolution afflict all capitalist countries. World history presently witnesses the aggregation of worker force to be unleashed against capitalist regimes.
3. *The Presentation of the Question by Marx in 1852.* Marx thought his core insights were that class society is a transient state, that class society leads inevitably to worker control of society, and that worker control leads inevitably to a classless society. Those who claim Marx but water down these ideas distort Marx, and renounce his vision without abandoning his name. History progresses from dictatorship of capitalists to dictatorship of workers.

Chapter III. The State and Revolution. Experience of the Paris Commune of 1871. Marx's Analysis.

1. *Wherein Lay the Heroism of the Communards' Attempt?* Parisian communists attempted an overthrow of government in 1871. Marx warned against it, but extolled its heroism when it came to pass and failed. Marx used the setback for the Paris Communards to teach that revolutionaries must break apart, not wrest control of, government mechanisms. What should replace smashed state bureaucracies?
2. *What Is to Supersede the Smashed State Machine?* Medieval authorities developed into the empire state. Its opposite is the commune. This is the form of existence that will supersede the state. It looks like just another form of administration. But, in fact, it is wholly new, not a state at all. The capitalists are crushed, not by a police minority, but by the majority workers. Oppression by the majority is not oppression, but democracy at work. The Commune stops paying representatives, removes all privileges, subjects all officials to recall at any time, pays everyone workers wages, regardless of their task, and suppresses the capitalists. Taken together, these reforms make for cheap government.
3. *The Abolition of Parliamentarism.* The Commune operates not as a legislature, but as direct democracy. It is both law-making and law-enforcing. Parliaments are undone when changed from places to talk into places to work. Parliaments talk, misleading the people with their prattle, while behind doors the work of government proceeds invisibly. Communism promotes democracy without parliaments. We cannot replace everything immediately, but we can smash it so there is room for something new to grow. When workers replace bureaucrats, large scale production will flourish, the bureaucracy will wither and die, technicians will be hired at worker's wages for expertise, and an order different from wage-slavery will emerge.
4. *The Organization of National Unity.* Lenin excoriates Bernstein for attributing Proudhon's anarchist federalism to Marx. They agreed on the need to smash existing authorities. They disagreed concerning the sequel. Marx preferred centralized authority.
5. *The Abolition of the Parasite State.* Marx argued that the workers would revolt to smash the oppressor states, and then organize themselves into a workers' government. Marx deduced this from the Paris Communards. Interpreters of Marx have obscured him by their yammer.

Chapter IV. Continuation. Supplementary Explanations by Engels. Marx addressed the Paris Commune experience. So too did Engels.

1. *"The Housing Question."* Engels addresses problems practically. Facing a housing shortage, confiscate capitalist's residences and tenant workers in them. This thrust is practical, unlike the anarchists, who dream that the state will vanish overnight.
2. *Controversy with the Anarchists.* Anarchists want states to vanish. Marx wanted to use state power to crush the capitalists so classes would be abolished in society. Then, and only then,

can the state be allowed to wither away. As Engels says, revolutions are hyper-authoritarian. They start with coercion on threat of death, and continue by the terror of arms. Revolutions are not anarchistic. Anarchists are non-revolutionary.

3. *Letter to Bebel*. Engels proposed to do away with the word “state” and replace it with the German “*Gemeinwesen*,” which means “community.”
4. *Criticism of the Draft of the Erfurt Program*. Engels argues that democratic republicanism is that form of state best suited to the revolution.
5. *The 1891 Introduction to Marx’s “Civil War in France.”* Engels enumerates lessons of the Paris Commune. He argued against disarming the workers after revolution, treating religion as a private matter. Government officials must be elected, subject to recall, and paid worker’s wages. States exist only to oppress. Socialist revolution will inherit the state that preceded it. When a new generation emerges who is free from capitalist indoctrination, the whole state will be scrapped.
6. *Engels on Overcoming Democracy*. Social democrats want to use the state to effect certain social goals. Communists want to overthrow the state in favor of communism. Democracy too is on the chopping block.

Chapter V. The Economic Basis of the Withering Away of the State.

1. *Marx’s Presentation of the Question*. Lenin takes the apparent differences between Marx and Engels on the withering of the state to be illusory.
2. *The Transition from Capitalism to Communism*. In capitalism, freedom extends to the slaveholders and to no others. Workers are kept so exhausted they cannot effectively participate in democracy. Democracy represents the rich minority. Marx said that for workers, democracy determined which capitalist would misrepresent workers in parliaments. Dictatorship of workers creates democracy for workers for the first time. When capitalists have been crushed, then even democracy will wither. Civility will govern all actions, once coercion has vanished, and the state will be no more. There will be problematic individuals, but the armed workers will put them down. Withering of the state will come in phases.
3. *The First Phase of Communist Society*. When communist society emerges from capitalist society, it will bear similarities to capitalism. These features are a stain indicating the first phase of communism. There will be wealth inequalities, but systematic exploitation of classes will be impossible, because the state now owns the factories and fields. Treating men equally is also unjust. Men are not equal in ability or need, so one cannot distribute goods according to the sum of work performed. Communism exceeds capitalism in that it delivers equal goods for unequal labor according to needs and abilities of the workers.
4. *The Higher Phase of Communist Society*. When the state withers away, communism will take from each according to ability and deliver to each according to his need. Reaching this position will take a long time of indefinite duration. Socialism is just Marx’s lower or first phase of communism. Democracy delivers formal equality (abolition of classes), but communism achieves actual equality (from each according to ability, to each according to need). Democracy is a necessary interim step toward communism. The armed workers, who will not trifle with the indolent, will keep order, and soon all will have the habit of working productively. The gateway to higher communism will swing open.

Chapter VI. The Vulgarization of Marxism by the Opportunists. In the run-up to the Russian Revolution of October 1917, disputes among Marxists confused them.

1. *Plekhanov’s Controversy with the Anarchists*. Plekhanov confused matters by failing to clearly follow Marx’s discussion about smashing the capitalist state and the worker’s state that follows it. Plekhanov muddled things with the anarchists.
2. *Kautsky’s Controversy with the Opportunists*. Kautsky vacillated in his disputes with distorters of Marx. The opportunists argued that Marx urged against revolutionary zeal in destroying capitalist hegemony. Kautsky failed to directly contradict them. He supported old ideas of the state and bureaucracy.
3. *Kautsky’s Controversy with Pannekoek*. Pannekoek criticizes Kautsky for his passivity and inactivity. Anarchists want to destroy the state and replace it with nothing. Communists, after destroying the capitalist state, replace it with a worker’s state, which they anticipate will

wither away as the workers habituate in their new-found powers. Kautsky seems to neglect the revolutionary part of communist revolution. Communists must smash capitalist control and rebuild on better foundations, the dictatorship of the workers.