

THE CONCEPT OF THE STATE

IN MARX AND ENGELS:

A RE-EXAMINATION

This Thesis for the Master of Arts degree by

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B.A., University of Colorado, 1965

Department of

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by

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The Concept of the State in Marx and Engels: A re-examination

Thesis directed by Professor David Hawkins

Much has been said and written about the Marxist view of the state. It is the intent of this analysis to investigate what Marx and Engels had to say about the state and, in particular, what they describe the state as an oppressive instrument. This will of course require some discussion of the relationship between classes and the state.

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Faculty member in charge of thesis.

Much has been said and written about the Marxist view of the state. It is the intent of this analysis to investigate what Marx and Engels mean when they speak of the state and, in particular, what they mean when they describe the state as an oppressive instrument of the ruling class. This will of course require some discussion of the relationship between classes and the state.

When we have arrived at some understanding of what is entailed in the notion of the state as an instrument of oppression, we shall attempt to show that Marx and Engels have a special understanding of the term, "state," and that it is this understanding which allows for forces the Marxists to argue that the state must "wither away" when classes have disappeared. This does not mean, however, that the rule of oppression is replaced by the rule of anarchy. We argue that the classless communist society is not one where the state is absent; rather, a certain kind of state is no longer present. The oppressive state will cease to exist, but a state of

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This abstract is approved as to form and content.

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In this analysis we will concern ourselves with what Marx and Engels had in mind when they spoke of the state and its withering away. Our discussion will not be consigned to the mechanics of the process of the withering; for, we must discuss, in addition, those issues and elements which cause and which antedate the process. We must determine exactly what Marx and Engels understood by the term "state," and we must decide whether their understanding and use of the word

amounted to something quite different from what a traditional or classical theorist like Hobbes meant by the term.

After having determined CHAPTER I. is that Marx and Engels

call the state, we will turn to the question of its role or place in their political theory. We must ask and attempt to

## INTRODUCTION

It is almost certainly true that every beginning student of political science or philosophy is aware of at least something of the writings of Karl Marx and Frederick Engels. Certain aspects of their thinking are, of course, much more familiar than are others and while only a few specialists may know and understand Marx's pioneering analysis of the business cycle, nearly all have at least a casual awareness of such terms as "Dictatorship of the Proletariat," "Surplus Value," "Historical Materialism," and "Withering Away of the State." Yet, as is so often the case with the superficially familiar, such terms seem frequently to be thoroughly misunderstood. state disappears; rather, In this analysis we will concern ourselves with what Marx and Engels had in mind when they spoke of the state and its withering away. Our discussion will not be consigned to the mechanics of the process of the withering; for, we must discuss, in addition, those issues and elements which cause and which antedate the process. We must determine exactly what Marx and Engels understood by the term "state," and we must decide whether their understanding and use of the word

amounted to something quite different from what a traditional or classical theorist like Hobbes meant by the term.

After having determined what it is that Marx and Engels call the state, we will turn to the question of its role or place in their political theory. We must ask and attempt to give a satisfactory answer to the question of what sort of state it is that withers away, and what sort of entity, if any, is to take its place. Finally, we will try to reach some conclusion about what is among the more difficult and obscure aspects of Marxism. Do Marx and Engels actually think that the state is abolished even after the final victory of the proletariat? Will their utopian vision be genuinely apolitical and thoroughly different from what theorists like Hobbes and Rousseau had envisaged?<sup>1</sup> The "realpolitik" of Machiavelli was conditioned not merely by the state of nature. It will be our contention that Marx and Engels are not really suggesting a kind of utopia in which the state disappears; rather, a particular kind of state passes out of existence.<sup>2</sup> Any suggestion that they are dispatching all states is as baseless as the assertion that Hobbes would do away with the state. This is what we hope to demonstrate, and it is to this and to the supporting data that we must now turn.

<sup>1</sup>Ernest Barker, The Politics of Aristotle (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1946), p. xlvi.

<sup>2</sup>J. R. Hale, Machiavelli and Renaissance Italy (New York: Crowell-Collier Publishing Co., 1960), pp. 51-77, 3rd ed.

<sup>3</sup>George H. Sabine, A History of Political Theory (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1961), p. 456.

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In order to understand and to evaluate what Marx and Engels meant when they wrote and spoke of the state, we must, of course, be aware of the fact that CHAPTER II

period and historical milieu. When they write about the state, THE NATURE OF THE STATE FOR MARX AND ENGELS they are talking, almost without exception, about some historical

event. It has by now become almost trivial to speak of important men and their theories as products of their times and of the setting in which they lived. Nonetheless, in assessing the nature and direction of such theories, it is necessary to acknowledge the effect of circumstances contemporary to them.

In political thought and theory this is abundantly clear. Aristotle designed his Politics on the order of the small "polis" whose constitution and physical limitation he knew intimately.<sup>1</sup> The "realpolitik" of Machiavelli was conditioned not merely by an abstract belief about human nature and fortune, but also by a series of Italian wars, his career as a Florentine ambassador, and his relationship to his patrons.<sup>2</sup> In assessing the adequacies or inadequacies of Hobbes' writings, we must always remember the English civil wars and the polemical arguments of Royalists and anti-Royalists.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Ernest Barker, The Politics of Aristotle (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1946), p. xlvii.

<sup>2</sup>J. R. Hale, Machiavelli and Renaissance Italy (New York: Crowell-Collier Publishing Co., 1960), pp. 51-77, 3rd ed.

<sup>3</sup>George H. Sabine, A History of Political Theory (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1961), p. 456.

In order to understand and to evaluate what Marx and Engels meant when they wrote and spoke of the state, we must, of course, be aware of the fact that they too were conditioned by their period and historical milieu. When they write about the state, they are talking, almost without exception, about some historical event or process. When they write, however, they are writing not only as political theorists, but also as political polemicists. The relation between them and the political and economic events of which they speak is a symmetrical one. This is to say that as theorists they are not merely passive. They are not merely acted upon by contemporary events; for, as perspicacious theorists and observers they are also able to seize the opportunity such events provide. The revolutions which they or their contemporaries knew intimately and the economic strain of the industrial revolution were facts which Marx and Engels could select and use in order to support and to objectify their insights. These were, as they must have known, the kind of events required to give their theories and polemics a genuine existence.

These divisions are, as Engels pointed out earlier in our own time we find a somewhat parallel phenomenon in the budding and acceptance of existential philosophy and being the classes of freemen and slaves, overlords and serfs literature. Against a background of the Second World War, the Occupation, and the French Resistance, men like Sartre and Camus were able to unite meaningfully and to gain, at least,

Frederick Engels, The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State, (New York: H. Berr and Co., 1902), p. 206.

a philosophic and literary hearing for "Good Faith," "Bad Faith," and "Authentic Existence."

When Engels and Marx describe the state, they are not indulging in political metaphysics. Rather, they are using events and circumstances familiar to their reading public in order to identify and to criticize an existing or previously existing state of affairs. So it is that Engels describes it in the Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State in a manner generally characteristic of what he or Marx has said of it in some book or paper about a particular event. It is in this work that Engels discusses in some detail the evolution of the state and the manner in which the state emerged from the "gentes" of Rome or Athens or from the various Germanic tribal organizations. He makes it unmistakably clear that the state is a product of historical and social evolution.

It [the State] is simply a product of society at a certain stage of evolution. It is the confession that this society has become hopelessly divided against itself, has entangled itself in irreconcilable contradictions which it is powerless to banish.<sup>4</sup>

These divisions are, as Engels pointed out earlier in the work, the result of economic forces which brought into being the classes of freemen and slaves, overlords and serfs

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<sup>4</sup>Frederick Engels, The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State, trans. Ernest Unterman (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr and Co., 1902), p. 206.

or, more generally, the wealthy exploiters and the impoverished exploited.

In order that these contradictions, these classes with conflicting economic interests, may not annihilate themselves and society in a useless struggle, a power becomes necessary that stands apparently above society and has the function of keeping down the conflict and maintaining 'order.' And the power, the outgrowth of society, but assuming supremacy over it and becoming more and more divorced from it, is the state.<sup>5</sup>

The extent to which any particular state becomes more completely divorced from the society out of which it came coincides with the power of the oppressive class over the oppressed; for, as Engels also says, in order to attempt to subdue these conflicts and to insure order a force or policing power is required.

This public power of coercion exists in every state. It is not composed of armed men alone, but has also such objects as prisons and correction houses attached to it....<sup>6</sup>

This much having been said, there remains a further point which for Marx and Engels is crucial in explaining the nature and function of the state. We have seen that the state, as an institution, was intended to reduce chaos to order. So also are police and prisons necessary if the state is to have the power it requires in the performance of its functions. The question remaining is one whose importance can not be emphasized

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<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 206.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 207.



enough for the Marxist. Who, after all, controls the state as the state controls society? It is the answer to this question which helps to illuminate the position of Marx and Engels with regard to the state. In answering Engels writes that the economically stronger or wealthier class comes to be the dominant or dominating con-political class, and that class "by force of its economic supremacy becomes also the ruling political class and thus acquires new means of subduing and exploiting the oppressed masses."<sup>7</sup> Engels provides us with an example of such oppression and exploitation in his discussion of the coming into being of the Athenian state.

He equates the beginning of this oppression and suppression in Athens with the advent of an economy of exchange and with the existence of private and disposal property. He writes the following of the transition which would beget an Athenian constitution:

Here is the root of the entire revolution that followed. When the producers did no longer consume their own product, then they lost control of it. They did not know anymore what became of it. There was a possibility that the product might be turned against the producers for the purpose of exploiting and oppressing them.<sup>8</sup>

however, is that justice was assured only for the enfranchised

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<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 208.

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<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 135.



With exchange came a medium of exchange: money. With this came debt and the traditional difficulties of the debtor: loss of citizenship and enslavement.

It was Solon who was summoned to rectify the difficulty, and to achieve some kind of balance between the interests of debtor and creditor. It was he who erased these debts and confiscated the property of one group in order to divide it among the members of another. It was he who, while attempting to broaden economic and political equity and equality, established distinct classes, and such class distinction provided for levels of political right and power according to one's economic well-being. Finally, it was Solon and his successors who provided the basis for the coercive police, a police force consisting of slaves for the policing of slaves.

How well this state, now completed in its main outline, suited the social condition of the Athenians was apparent by the rapid growth of wealth, commerce, and industry. The distinction of classes on which the social and political institutions are resting was no longer between nobility and common people, but between slave and freemen, alien and citizen.<sup>9</sup>

In all this we see not only the origin of the Athenian polity, but also a genuine effort to provide some sort of economic and political justice within that state. The point, however, is that justice was assured only for the enfranchised also perpetuates class conflict. Still, it seems reasonable to

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. 143.

citizen. Class distinction had become rigid. Slaves and resident aliens were denied economic, social, and political privilege; for, they were merely in the state, but not of it. Equity existed to protect only the oppressors, not the oppressed. The police, as we have seen, were slaves whose duty it was to check the behavior of fellow slaves. They, too, were an instrument of the dominant class used to exact required behavior from the subservient.

Having said this much of the state, we must also be able to account, as a Marxist would, for those states or periods when there appear elements and principles characteristic of fair and democratic treatment for all classes within the state.

Do such occurrences vitiate the Marxist dialogue on the absolute corruption and oppressive character of the state? This question Engels takes special care to answer. He does not deny that from time to time universal suffrage and the rule of law have been extended to the oppressed as well as to the oppressors, but he argues that we must look closer in order to determine the motives of the oppressors in such apparently equitable behavior.

We have said and will say several times throughout this paper that the state seeks to preserve itself, but in so doing it also perpetuates class conflict. Still, it seems reasonable to argue that the state and fulfillment of the desires of the ruling

class would be doomed if such conflict were constant, open, and violent. The oppressors must preserve themselves and their position, and in order to do this they might be forced to make certain and perhaps tacit concessions to the oppressed majority.

We note that Engels says in a democratic state, wealth exerts its power more safely, but no less than in any other state. Here the dominant minority may make concessions; there may be universal suffrage and perhaps equal protection of the law, but of the oppressors so long as they continue to be economically dominant, such concessions don't destroy or seriously hamper the power of that minority; for, it has secured at least the partial ex-

For as long as the oppressed class, in this case the proletariat, is not ripe for its economic emancipation, just so long will its majority regard the existing order of society as the only one possible, and form the tail, the extreme left wing.<sup>10</sup>

In a democracy with its elected officials and its apparent response to public opinion and pressure, the oppressed majority have, on the face of it, gotten the advantage of the traditional democratic trappings, but Engels argues that this too is a sham. Here also wealth is the real criterion for power however disguised it may be. He mentions specifically the situation in the United States:

In such a state, wealth exerts its power indirectly, but all the more safely. This is done partly in the form of direct corruption of all whose officials, after the classical type of the United States, necessity lies in its promise of general security and a commodious

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 211.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 210.

life.<sup>12</sup> States, or in the form of an alliance between government and bankers which is established all the more easily when the public debt increases and when corporations concentrate in their hands not only the means of transportation, but also production itself, of using the stock exchange as a center.<sup>11</sup>

We note that Engels says in a democratic state, wealth exerts its power more safely, but no less than in any other state. Here the dominant minority may make concessions; there may be universal suffrage and perhaps equal protection of the law, but such concessions don't destroy or seriously hamper the power of that minority; for, it has secured at least the partial extension and preservation of the state and hence its control of the state.

The remarks we have made so far are generally typical of what Marx and Engels understood by the term "state." The works written before and after The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State present their views in greater or lesser detail, but these don't diverge significantly from what we find in this work.

We find that the state for both Marx and Engels is an evil, and if it is a necessary evil, it is the necessity of one class in suppressing another. For them, unlike the state

of a theorist like Hobbes, the state is not an evil whose

necessity lies in its promise of general security and a commodious

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<sup>12</sup>Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed. Herbert W. Schneider (New York: International Publishers, 1933), p. 38.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 210.

life.<sup>12</sup> Rather, they think of the state as essential only if one class intends to preserve itself as the dominant one. The state does not exist in order to protect and to define the rights of this or that individual. It is a construct used by the members of the dominant class in order to galvanize their power while, in the long run, divesting the other class of its economic and social well-being. So it is that Marx writes at the beginning of The Civil War in France that "the state power assumed more and more the character of the national power of capital over labor, of a public force organized for social enslavement, of an engine of class despotism."<sup>13</sup>

He was speaking here of a specific situation in a specific historical context, but the essential point is characteristic of states in general and not simply of this or that French regime. For Marx, the state is of necessity a kind of imbalance, and such imbalance, manifested by the subservience of one class to another, is thoroughly characteristic of any state. Implicit in his writings and in those of Engels is the certainty that no state can even be truly democratic or representative; for, the state or polity seems never to serve the interests of all. In

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<sup>12</sup>Thomas Hobbes, Leviathan, ed. Herbert W. Schneider (New York: Dobbs-Merrill Co., 1958), p. 139.

<sup>13</sup>Karl Marx, The Civil War in France (New York: International Publishers, 1933), p. 38.

and unrealistic. Clearly, even the best of polities and societies has its antisocial individual who must be enjoined from taking the lives and property of others. Clearly, law enforcement and corrective institutions must exist in order to deal with such types.<sup>16</sup>

There is little textual evidence that the conventional police force or prison of the community or metropolis were what Marx and Engels had in mind when they objected so strongly to these oppressive organs or tools of the state. There is no very good reason to believe or to suggest that they were unaware of the need for the existence and enforcement of a code of criminal justice. It seems, rather, that they had something quite different in mind when they spoke of these bodies of armed men and their prisons. We find, for example, when Marx discusses the February Revolution in France and the ill-fated Commune that he has a special understanding of a state's police. He writes the following of the Paris Commune and its dealings with the bourgeoisie's police:

Instead of continuing to be the agent of the central government the police were at once stripped

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<sup>16</sup>Ibid., p. 40.

<sup>16</sup>Even More's Utopia recognizes the possibility of legal offense and transgression. One may see, for example, how such offenders are punished. Cf. St. Thomas More, Utopia, (London: J. M. Dent & Sons, 1957), Bk. II, p. 79.



of its political attributes and turned into the responsible and at all times revocable agent of the Commune.<sup>17</sup>

The police power Marx describes here is not the force which acts to insure law and order at and within all levels of society; it is an extension or tool of the oppressive class, and the order it insures manifests itself in the suppression of the working class. The order it imposes is not imposed uniformly upon this conventional police force. Here the police as armed men amount or that individual transgressor, but upon an entire class. The law under which the police or armed men act is the law dictated by the dominant minority. These are the police who act as strikebreakers in suppressing the proletariat, and these, according to Marx, are the armed men who put an end to the Paris Commune. These were the armed men of the bourgeoisie who murdered the innocent and massacred political prisoners. These were the "bloodhounds of order" who changed the Commune into pandemonium.<sup>18</sup> When Engels writes of the state as "nothing but a machine for the oppression of one class by another"<sup>19</sup> and says that the working class must do away with the "repressive machinery previously used against itself," he speaks in the previous paragraph of the nature of this machinery:

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<sup>17</sup>Ibid., p. 40.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., pp. 58-60.

<sup>19</sup>Lewis S. Feuer, ed., Marx and Engels (New York: Doubleday & Co., 1959), p. 362.

It was precisely the oppressing power of the former centralized government, army, political police, bureaucracy which Napoleon had created in 1798 and which since then had been taken over by ever new government as a welcome instrument and used against its opponents.<sup>20</sup>

As we see, it is the police as a political arm of the dominant class which Marx and Engels so oppose, and this is an instrument far different in its purposes and tactics from the conventional police force. Here the police as armed men amount always to a militant enemy of the proletariat.

If what has been said so far is indicative of the Marxist view and understanding of the state, we are prepared to proceed to the next phase of our analysis. We mentioned at the outset that we must decide not only what Marx and Engels meant by the term "state," but also whether their understanding of the state was significantly different from what the term has meant in much important traditional political theory. We may turn now to a brief discussion of that issue.

The broad outline of his political theory is familiar to the most casual student of political theory, and thus requires little explanation.

He begins with the now famous description of the state of nature. In describing that state of affairs, he asserts, initially, that all men are genuinely equal, but for Hobbes equality doesn't mean anything quite like equality of opportunity or right. He means, rather, that men in the state of

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<sup>20</sup>Ibid., p. 360



nature, the pre-political existence, are equally strong or weak. This is simply to say that no man has any special or significant physical or mental advantage over in nature.

### CHAPTER III

#### MARXIST AND THE TRADITIONAL THEORY OF STATE

In order to satisfy ourselves as to the relationship of the Marxist understanding of the state to that of traditional political theory, we have chosen to discuss briefly what seems to be a common and important area of agreement among such significant political theorists as Hobbes and Rousseau. We neither attempt to deny or think it wise to deny the existence of areas in which the political thinking of each of these men is different, but are concerned with showing what these theorists think of as the end or justification of the state; for, in this matter they seem largely to agree.

We begin this discussion with Hobbes and what he says is the purpose and end of the state. The broad outline of his political theory is familiar to the most casual student of political theory, and thus requires little explanation. He begins with the now famous description of the state of nature. In describing that state of affairs, he asserts, initially, that all men are genuinely equal, but for Hobbes equality doesn't mean anything quite like equality of opportunity or right. He means, rather, that men in the state of

nature, the pre-political existence, are equally strong or weak. This is simply to say that no man has any special or significant physical or mental advantage over another in nature. their own

self-preservation For as to the strength of body the weakest has the strength enough to kill the strongest, either by secret machination or by confederation with others that are in the same danger with himself.<sup>21</sup>

to enforce and sustain the consequences of such a covenant, the In the natural state men are without the protection of law state and its civil law have been brought into being.

or civil authority, and each is threatened by the possible loss of life or property. This is, of necessity, only the outline of the transition from the natural to the civil state. No man is truly secure, and all live under the actual or potential threat to their lives and holdings. It is laws of human psychology which make manifest such a transition, is this situation that leads to a condition of war "and such a but for our purposes it is sufficient to indicate that Hobbes war as is of every man against every man."

was certain that man's concern for his preservation, in conjunction with In such condition there is no place for industry because the fruit thereof is uncertain and consequently no culture of the earth...and which is state is worst of all, continual fear and danger of violent death; and the life of man solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short.<sup>22</sup>

Hobbes Because men want to survive and desire the commodious life, they are compelled to band together and to attempt to replace the precariousness of their existence with a state of peace and security. It is man's rationality which reveals to him the laws of nature, and dictates to him the need for active striving to attain such security. Because men want peace and the commodious in the absence of authority to enforce law of contract.

<sup>21</sup>Hobbes, op. cit., p. 105.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., p. 107.

life, they become parties to the social contract and surrender certain of their rights to a sovereign power or body. They, of course, do not and can not surrender the right to their own self-preservation as that would contradict the reason for the covenant. With a covenant and a sovereign power sufficient to enforce and sustain the consequences of such a covenant, the state and its civil law have been brought into being.

This is, of necessity, only the outline of the transition from the natural to the civil state. One could mention Hobbes' laws of human psychology which make manifest such a transition, but for our purposes it is sufficient to indicate that Hobbes was certain that man's concern for his preservation, in conjunction with his rationality, forced him to abandon the natural state in deference to the polity.

There is also much discussion and debate as to whether Hobbes actually accepted or insisted upon the historical state of nature. Again, the resolution of this debate is of no great importance here; though, we might mention the view of an important contemporary commentator of Hobbes, C. B. MacPherson. MacPherson insists that the state of nature is merely a device or an hypothesis which demonstrates the way men would behave in the absence of authority to enforce law of contract.

The state of nature was for Hobbes a condition logically prior to the establishment of a perfect (i.e. completely sovereign) civil society; what

Hobbes, *op. cit.*, p. 139.

he deduced from the state of nature was the need for men to acknowledge the perfectly sovereign state instead of the imperfectly sovereign states they now had.<sup>23</sup>

We have seen implicit in what he has said that the state is not a good in any absolute sense; it is only better--better than the dangerous and insecure state of nature. Yet the state in the Leviathan is a necessary evil and is requisite if men are to secure any sort of peace and stability. With this in mind, Hobbes begins the second part of the work with what he assumes to be the reason for the existence of a commonwealth.

The final cause, end or design of men, who naturally love liberty and dominion over others, in the introduction of that restraint upon themselves in which we see them live in commonwealth, is the foresight of their own preservation--that is to say of getting themselves out from that miserable conditions of war which is necessarily consequent to the natural passion of men....<sup>24</sup>

This is Hobbes' most succinct and perhaps clearest statement of the need for the state. It is a necessary tool used to control aggressive and unrestrained human nature. It is no panacea, and in order to provide peace and security it must take from men many of the rights they had in nature. Still it is an improvement over the prior state, or speaking unhistorically, life under law is, according to Hobbes, far better than a life

<sup>23</sup>C. B. MacPherson, The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1962), pp. 21-22.

<sup>24</sup>Hobbes, op. cit., p. 139.

where law and uniform authority are absent. What Hobbes says of the state as a device for instituting order is not very different from Engels' analysis of the evolution of the state as a power "for keeping down conflict and maintaining order." But Hobbes goes on to say more than this; for, the commonwealth he describes is not fragmented by class division such that only a segment of the population profits while another segment stands to gain nothing. In speaking of the covenant and the commonwealth it begets, Hobbes writes the following:

In This is more than consent or comcord; it is a real unity of them all in one and the same person, made by covenant of every man with every man in such manner as if every man should say to every man, I authorize and give up my right of governing myself to this man, or to this assembly of men, or this condition, that you give up your right to him and authorize all his actions in like manner.<sup>25</sup>

Whether one is a champion or an antagonist of Hobbes' political theory, it seems that at least this point must be granted: The state does not exist for the exclusive benefit of a single group or class. As Hobbes describes it, it is to benefit all men within the commonwealth. It is not the instrument this or that class uses to oppress another class. It is an instrument whose function it is to provide peace and security for all, and not for the few at the expense of the many. Hobbes speaks of

what has become one of the most famous utterances in all of

Western philosophy: "Man is born free; and everywhere he is  
Ibid., p. 142.

a united multitude, and presumably he does not intend by such a phrase that the state is born to instill and perpetuate divisions among men. If it is born of such divisions, its purpose, ideally, is to eliminate them and their consequences. It is this that Hobbes takes to be the end or purpose of the polity. It is this view with respect to the state's function that we must keep in mind as we discuss the relationship between classical political theory and Marxist communism.

In moving now to the political theory of Jean Jacques Rousseau and to his Social Contract of 1762 and The Discourse on the Origin of Inequality, it again becomes necessary to stress the fact that he, like Hobbes, is mentioned in this analysis in an effort to determine the extent to which Marx's and Engels' view of the state relates to these earlier and most influential views.

In some sense Rousseau represents the culmination of those political philosophies and theories whose point of departure is the state of nature, and after him the primitive or natural state seems to become a less important methodological approach to formal political philosophy. Employing the state of nature, he begins the first book of the Social Contract with what has become one of the most famous utterances in all of Western philosophy: "Man is born free; and everywhere he is

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., p. 13.



in chains."<sup>26</sup> This sets the tone of what follows; for, Rousseau seems actually to mean that man in the natural state ought to be free, but in fact he is not. Perhaps, he was speaking of man in the state of nature, but of man in the civil state, in which case being born free while being everywhere in chains suggests the problem of the reconciliation of individual freedom with the existence and demands of the state.<sup>26</sup>

Man as he is described in the Social Contract is fettered in and by the state of nature in much the same way that Hobbes' pre-political man was fettered. The natural state represents, once again, a precarious and thoroughly troubled existence; though, Rousseau's account presents us with fewer of the details than that of Hobbes. Nonetheless, men are still concerned with their individual self-preservation and such preservation is never sure in the natural state.

I suppose men to have reached the point at which the obstacles in the way of their preservation in the state of nature show their power of resistance to be greater than their resources at the disposal of each individual for his maintenance in that state.<sup>27</sup>

He goes on to say that in order to gain the freedom they ought to have and to insure their self-preservation, men are

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<sup>26</sup> Jean Jacques Rousseau, The Social Contract, trans. and intro. G. D. H. Cole (New York: C. P. Dutton and Co., 1950), p. xxviii.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., p. 13.

forced to quit the state of nature. The manner in which men leave that state and replace it with another became both the subject and problem of the Social Contract. The major problem is that of developing some common and protective association or organization which will protect each individual and an association of men in which each man, says Rousseau, "regains his original rights and resumes his natural liberty."<sup>28</sup> Furthermore, men must be associated in such a way as to give no man a right or power at the expense of another. The association or organization of men which emerges is the state or republic achieved as a result of the social compact:

Each of us puts his person and all his power in common under the supreme direction of the general will, and, in our corporate capacity, we receive each member as an indivisible part of the whole.<sup>29</sup>

With the birth of the state, men seem for the first time to gain the natural rights which, paradoxically, they were deprived of in the state of nature. Hobbes said, as we have mentioned, that in this natural state all men were essentially equal, and it was largely this equality which was responsible for the difficulties of such a state. Unlike Hobbes, Rousseau thinks of the original compact and of the state which evolves

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p. 15. Cf. Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns, eds., The Collected Dialogues of Plato (New York: Bollingen Foundation, 1953), p. 22. 255-67.



therefrom as mechanisms for making equal the men who are by nature essentially unequal. In the Discourse on the Origin of Inequality, we see how natural inequality, differences in strength and wit, in conjunction with the desire for property, destroys the tranquility of the state of nature and leads to "unequal fortune" and unequal treatment of men. The coming into being of the kind of state described in the Social Contract, a state directed by the "general will" for securing the common good, will remedy the ills of such inequality. He says that the inequality of the pre-political existence is eclipsed, through the social compact, by an "equality that is moral and legitimate, and that men, who may be unequal in strength or intelligence, become equal by convention and legal right."<sup>30</sup>

So it is that Rousseau asserts that authority, right, and duty are all born of a convention: the contract. It is this contract which tames the savageness of men and gives content to such terms as "right" and "obligation." We see with Rousseau and we saw with Hobbes that ideally the state is to heal the breaches among men, and not to perpetuate and worsen them. Like Hobbes he concedes that in theory at least man loses something in the transition from the natural to the civil state. He loses

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p. 22. Cf. Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns, eds., The Collected Dialogues of Plato (New York: Bollingen Foundation, 1961), pp. 255-67.

the liberty he had in nature, as well as the right to everything he could take, hold, and maintain. In their place, he gains civil liberty and genuine ownership of what he could possess in nature only if his strength were sufficient. The civil liberty he gains from the contract is not the function of individual strength or cunning, but is rather guaranteed and limited by the general will.

The general will is one among that class of categories and concepts which have provided commentators infinite possibilities for interpretation. One often reads that it is not entirely clear whether Rousseau meant by the term the force of a majority rule in legal and political decisions or whether he meant something like a plurality or perhaps complete unanimity in such decisions and enactments. While the distinction is undeniably important--especially with respect to the democratic character of the state--it is no more important than the reason Rousseau chooses to use such a term.

We must recall that he introduces the term when he talks of the essence or purpose of the social compact. When men give up the uncertainty and difficulties of the state of nature and agree to live under the direction of the general will, they are, according to Rousseau, doing something more than outlining the structure and procedures of their legislative and judicial bodies. They are gaining not only security and the

rule of law, but are, in an important sense, becoming part of a community.

When we speak here of community, we of course mean something more than a mere collection of individuals held together by the need to survive and their accidental geographic proximity. It is a much more organic notion, and one in which the individuals who agree to live under the direction of the general will are accepting the fact that the collective interests of the community are not equivalent to those of each of the individuals who make it up.

The general will, therefore, represents a unique fact about a community, namely, that it be a collective good which is not the same thing as the private interests of its members. In some sense it lives its own life, fulfills its own destiny, and suffers its own fate.<sup>31</sup>

What emerges from the concept of the general will and the community is a kind of political solidarity. The state is more than an association of individuals, each of whom is concerned exclusively with his survival and property. The polity takes on a character which is not identifiable with the sum of its parts. Rousseau says the following of the newly formed body politic:

At once, in place of the individual personality of each contracting party, this action of

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<sup>31</sup>Sabine, op. cit., pp. 588-89.

bodies association creates a moral and collective body, of the  
composed of as many members as the assembly con-  
polity, tains voters, and receiving from this act its just exercis-  
unity, its common identity, its life, and its  
will.<sup>32</sup> ing of sign power regarding all individuals which is typical

of the It is this and similar utterances which exhibit Rousseau's  
feelings about the state. While it emerges to protect the inter-  
ests and property of each individual, it is somehow more than a  
mechanism, to secure only these ends. This state or "public  
person" serves the interests of all its citizens, but it serves  
also its own interests and seeks to preserve itself and its  
own identity. The social compact not only brings the polity  
into existence, but it also gives it the power it requires to  
survive, and to perpetuate itself. Rousseau writes that "it  
is the power which, under the direction of the general will,  
bears, as I have said, the name of Sovereignty."<sup>33</sup> While it  
may not be clear, the precise manner in which the general will  
acts, its democratic underpinnings seem obvious enough.

Every authentic act of the general will binds  
or favors all the citizens equally; so that the  
Sovereignty recognizes only the body of the nation,  
and draws no distinction between those of whom it  
is made up.<sup>34</sup> havior to which man as they now are, men who live  
of men.

This is the manner in which the legislative and judicial  
Rousseau objects to such procedure in Hobbes as he feels

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that Hobbes' assertions about natural man contradict the very  
<sup>32</sup>Rousseau, op. cit., p. 15.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., p. 28. op. cit., p. 22. Cf. Leo Strauss, Natural  
Right and History (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953),  
p. 268. <sup>34</sup>Ibid., p. 30.

bodies must act with respect to all citizens or members of the polity; for, it is a community of interest and the just exercising of sovereign power regarding all individuals which is typical of the polity Rousseau describes. The fact that the state is different from its members does not absolve it of the need to respond to their wishes and to guarantee the rights of that membership. Having discussed Rousseau's Social Contract, as well as those areas where he and Hobbes generally agree, we must turn now to those areas in which their thinking is dissimilar; here we must make at least a few remarks based primarily upon the Discourse on the Origin of Inequality.

Firstly, we note that Hobbes, according to Rousseau, deduces the character of natural man, man in the state of nature, from his observations of civilized and socialized man.

His state of nature is a statement of the behavior to which men as they now are, men who live in civilized societies and have the desires of civilized men, would be led if all law and contract enforcement were removed. To get to the state of nature, Hobbes has set aside law, but not the socially acquired behavior and desires of men.<sup>35</sup>

Rousseau objects to such procedure in Hobbes as he feels that Hobbes' assertions about natural man contradicts the very

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<sup>35</sup> MacPherson, op. cit., p. 22. Cf. Leo Strauss, Natural Right and History (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953), p. 268. Strauss, op. cit., p. 268.

character of his investigation of man in the state of nature. Hobbes asserts, after all, that primitive or natural man does not exist within society, and life is not only nasty and brutish, but also solitary. Thus Hobbes, in employing the hypothetical state of nature, is unable to give any reliable or accurate account of man's character and behavior prior to the existence of states and societies. Rousseau mentions, for example, that Hobbes exaggerates the number and nature of passions primitive man seeks to satisfy relative to his self-preservation. According to Rousseau, these passions are not natural, but are in reality the consequences of the effect of society upon men.<sup>36</sup>

Leo Strauss comments upon this fault which Rousseau finds in Hobbes, and helps to make clear the precise nature of the difficulty.

Rousseau was brought face to face with a difficulty which embarrasses most present-day social scientists. Not the experience of man, but only a specifically 'scientific' procedure, seems to be able to lead one to genuine knowledge of the nature of man.<sup>37</sup>

If this is an important difference between Hobbes and Rousseau, equally and perhaps more significant is the difference between Rousseau's primitive man and Hobbes' pre-political

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<sup>36</sup>Rousseau, op. cit., p. 222.

<sup>37</sup>Strauss, op. cit., p. 268.



man. For Hobbes, natural man is primarily egoistic, contentious, and rational. The man Rousseau describes in A Discourse on the Origin of Inequality is obviously much different. Having discussed the behavior and nature of primitive man, Rousseau concludes that he, unlike Hobbes' rational being, is really sub-human.

Let us conclude then that man in a state of nature, wandering up and down the forests, without industry, without speech and without home, an equal stranger to war and to all ties, neither standing in need of his fellow-creatures nor having any desire to hurt them, and perhaps not even distinguishing them one from another; let us conclude that, being self-sufficient and subject to few passions, he could have no feeling or knowledge but such as befitted his situation.<sup>38</sup>

Natural man is, in fact, more good than bad. He may dispoil another man of his good, but he will do very little beyond that. He will not attempt to dominate another; for, terms like "dominion," "subservience," and "obedience" have no meaning in the natural state. In the state of nature one man does not depend upon another, and for Rousseau it is dependence and interdependence which beget dominance and servitude.<sup>39</sup>

When Rousseau begins tracing the origins of inequality and man's encounter with novel and problematic situations, he mentions also that it is such encounters and difficulties which force man

<sup>38</sup> Rousseau, op. cit., p. 230.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., p. 233.

to develop his faculties, to think, and to reason. New wants and more sophisticated desires require for their satisfaction still further expansion of reason and the faculties. It turns out that men are unequal in talent and ability, and such inequality is felt by all individuals.<sup>40</sup> As inequality becomes more apparent so also do its effects. Rivalry and competition arise and men seek the goods, service, and control of others.

The new-born state of society thus gave rise to a horrible state of war; men thus harassed and depraved were no longer capable of retracing their steps or renouncing the fatal acquisition state, they had made....<sup>41</sup>

Such precarious existence, reminiscent of Hobbes' state of nature, ultimately forced men into a civil state in order to protect themselves and their property. The reasons for the rule of law were supposed to be for the protection of the weak, restraint of the ambitious, and security for all. In fact, those who suggested such a rule were those most concerned with their own possessions and security.<sup>42</sup>

From only this brief sketch, one may ask with justification how the Disource and Social Contract square with each other; no doubt several explanation of a continuity or reconciliation

Firstly, we mention that Rousseau's writings, like Hobbes' <sup>40</sup>Ibid., p. 247.

he is often singled out as the author of the <sup>41</sup>Ibid., p. 249.

French Revolution, he wrote at a time when the Revolution was <sup>42</sup>Ibid., p. 251.



have been offered. Professor Sabine suggests, for example, that Rousseau's reading of Plato took him from the extreme individualism and anti-political thought of the Discourse to a position where he could praise the state and community as moralizing by agents. This is the later view which we find in the Social theory; Contract. We may also ask ourselves whether, amidst the similarities and differences between the two, there is any truly important area where Rousseau and Hobbes are in agreement.

We would argue that given the very real existence of the state, Rousseau, like Hobbes, is concerned not to abolish it, but to see it improved, and it is largely for this reason that we mention both these theorists. Rousseau is hopeful that the state may truly embody his notions about a great community or society of mutual rather than conflicting interests. Rousseau and Hobbes had still more in common which is of importance for our discussion of the position of Marx and Engels regarding the traditional view of the state, and in order to determine where they stood with respect to that tradition we must ask what Hobbes and Rousseau had in mind, at base, when they spoke of the state.

Firstly, we mention that Rousseau's writings, like Hobbes', were stimulated by the time during which he wrote them. While he is often singled out as the author of the French Revolution, he wrote at a time when the Revolution was

still years away, and the monarchy was relatively firm. He was a bold theorist for the period in which he lived and wrote. As one can tell from a reading of the Social Contract, he speaks in general terms and mentions no particular state or country by name in spelling out the positive elements of his political theory; yet, it is no less obvious that much that he says is to represent a remedy of the abuses of the current monarchy.

His general remarks had such a way of bearing very obvious particular application, and were so obviously inspired by a particular attitude toward the government of his day, that even philosophy became in his hands unsafe, and he was attacked for what men read between the lines of his work.<sup>43</sup>

Like Hobbes, Rousseau was describing a state or polity which he felt represented a substantial improvement over the present one. Both he and Hobbes were describing states which were in some sense ideal, though not utopian. For purposes of this paper we don't imply perfection when he use the word "ideal." Rather, an ideal state is simply one which doesn't exist or doesn't exist in the form described by its theorist. It is, furthermore, a state which its author hopes will one day come into being. Neither the mighty "Leviathan" nor Rousseau's "Republic" was a name or descriptive term for any existing organization

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<sup>43</sup>Rousseau, op. cit., p. x. Sir Leslie Stephen, Hobbes (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1961), pp. 172-83.

or political community; they were descriptive of polities which ought to have existed, but didn't. Hobbes and Rousseau describe, in some detail, civil states and the institutions and relationships which make them up. If men want peace and an end to civil war or the correction of monarchical abuses, then Hobbes or Rousseau would argue for his particular state.<sup>44</sup> We note, however, that the previous sentence was a conditional utterance suggesting that "Leviathan" or the "Republic" has no concrete existence outside the thinking of these men and their defenders. The polities which they describe and the theories of state from which they are derived would, if realized, right particular evils and difficulties which actually existed. Hobbes "Commonwealth" and Rousseau's "Republic" are significantly different from each other, but their purposes, in the broadest sense, are the same; for, each is a description of a state which stands as an alternative and an improvement over an actual state of affairs.

Having reviewed and considered these theories of state in what seems to be a major tradition in political philosophy, it is true that Marx, when he criticizes the state in the work just cited, is speaking not of an abstraction, but of a particular state. We mentioned at the beginning that Marx and Engels, like so many important figures in history, are not only

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid., p. xxvi. See also Sir Leslie Stephen, *Hobbes* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1961), pp. 172-83.

influenced by the times through which they live, but are also determinative of those times. We saw with Hobbes and Rousseau that their formal views represent answers or alternatives to the politics in which they lived. With Marx and Engels we find no less an attempt to correct and amend the abuses of the contemporary situation. They, of course, did not look to the state as an ideal; for, it was the state that they both feared and disliked. We notice however that from a practical point of view the state of which the Marxists spoke and that of the classical theorists were different in a thoroughly fundamental respect. We recall, for example, what Engels wrote in the preface to The Civil War in France:

In reality, however, the state is nothing but a machine for the oppression of one class by another, and indeed in the democratic republic no less than in the monarchy.<sup>45</sup>

While these lines were written as an introduction to a work about a specific struggle and time, we must not conclude that Marx and Engels were addressing their analyses to only a few states or politics of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. It is true that Marx, when he criticizes the state in the work just cited, is speaking not of an abstraction, but of a particular state.

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid., p. 363.

<sup>45</sup> Feurer, op. cit., p. 362.

<sup>47</sup> Engels, op. cit., The Origin of the Family, p. 119.

The centralized state power, with its ubiquitous organs of standing army, police, bureaucracy, clergy, and judicature...originates from the day of absolute monarchy, serving nascent middle class society as a mighty weapon in its struggle against feudalism.<sup>46</sup>

Given passages of this sort, we must not fail to notice that Marx and Engels are speaking not merely of the French Republic, but of the course of history as well. The French Republic is simply a contemporary instantiation of a universal historical trend. When Engels writes of the Iroquois "Gens" in the Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State, he discusses the coming into being of the state and the emergent divided society resulting from the breakdown of the golden age of gentile society. The course of history, the history of the state, has been regrettably consistent:

All during the thousands of years of its existence, the new society has never been anything else but the development of the small minority at the expense of the exploited and oppressed majority. More than ever this is true of the present.<sup>47</sup>

Though Marx and Engels are very much concerned with the existing state of affairs and with the evils it embodies, they are also speaking to a problem more general and universal than any contemporary state. The states which they describe are

<sup>46</sup>Ibid., p. 363.

<sup>47</sup>Engels, op. cit., The Origin of the Family, p. 119.

not abstractions or possibilities; they are real historical entities. One state may differ from another respecting the character and economic basis of the classes involved, but the broad pattern is the same for all states. In this sense ancient and modern history are decidedly similar.

The modern bourgeoisie that has sprouted from the ruins of feudal society has not done away with class antagonisms. It has but established new classes, new conditions of oppression, new forms of struggle in place of old ones.<sup>48</sup>

Marx and Engels do not suggest an ideal state which would alter the course of history, and would serve, like the "great Leviathan," as a base for social and political reformation. Such a suggestion not only runs counter to their historical metaphysics, but also misses the point. It is, after all, the state itself which is responsible for most existing evils, and it is the state with its bodies of armed men, prisons, and tangled bureaucracies which must be changed. Like Hobbes and Rousseau they look to the political and social experience with which they are familiar, but their experience tells them that this is the cause of existing evils, not the cure for them.

The states they describe are thoroughly concrete expressions of the suppression of one class by another. The classical theorists we have discussed argued that the politics they have

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<sup>48</sup> Feuer, op. cit., p. 8.



described would replace chaos with order, anarchy with law and injustice with justice. Their states are a kind of remedy for genuine difficulties, but for the Marxists the state is the seat of such difficulties.

Looked at from this viewpoint, we are in a somewhat better position to assess the extent to which the Marxists are related to more traditional political theory. Rousseau and Hobbes are recommending their respective states as means for social and political stability and improvement. Marx and Engels take an opposite position. They cannot recommend the state which will improve matters, for, the state as they describe and understand it, an instrument of class domination, is largely the source of these social and political inequities.

Hobbes spoke of a state that would make secure the lives and property of the men who composed it. Rousseau argued that the state he envisioned would make unequals equal and would protect with justice all men not just the "fit and the few." These, of course, were proposals, and it seems safe to speculate that Marx and Engels would have welcomed much of the content of such proposals in the absence of class division.

Yet, when Marx talks of the state not as a proposed entity, but as it actually exists, he does not find equality and uniformity under the law. The actual character of private property is, according to Marx, far different from the quixotic



and theoretical statements about it in either Hobbes or Rousseau. Marx believes that property, in the state controlled by the bourgeoisie, exists for only a fraction of the population and that fraction represents the oppressive class.<sup>49</sup> Justice and liberty in such a state are, from the Marxist point of view, guaranteed to the oppressors, but what of the oppressed?

Your very ideas are but the outgrowth of the conditions of your bourgeoisie production and bourgeoisie property, just as your jurisprudence is but the will of your class made into a law for all....<sup>50</sup>

This is the kind of state which has, according to Marx, emerged and has come to dominate the majority of the population. It has become a tool whose sole function is to secure and insure such dominance, and for him and for Engels it is no less inimical to freedom and to general well-being than was the state of nature to Hobbes and Rousseau.

The concepts of a total community and the general will were noble theoretical postulates, but they never came to be in the manner Rousseau described. This is not to say that the state of the bourgeoisie lacks some sort of community or organic as well as political structure. The community is, however an exclusive one, and as such is one of the bourgeoisie. The bourgeoisie holds not only the economic and political power;

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid., p. 333.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., p. 23.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., p. 24.

It has in addition to these its religion, its conservative tradition and what Marx calls its social power,<sup>51</sup> but this community, like the state which the bourgeoisie uses and controls, could only exist insofar as it could dominate and exclude another class much larger than itself. "Society is saved just as often as the circle of its rulers contracts, as a more exclusive interest is maintained against a wider one."<sup>52</sup>

The state as Marx and Engels describe it cannot be, at base, good, constructive or useful in correcting society's ills; for, it is an instrument which promotes and cements class division and the oppression of one class by another. If it is useful or fertile in the long run, it is only so insofar as it serves the interests and requirements of the oppressors. If it is necessary, it is only necessary because the ruling class requires a device for sustaining its dominance.

The state is by its very nature oppressive and exploitative, and as such it is, for Marx and Engels, an evil which has consistently deprived the majority of its condigned share in economic and social well-being. Perhaps the only sense either Marx or Engels could have made of a suggestion that a state is to worse.

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid., p. 333.

<sup>52</sup> Karl Marx, The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte (Moscow: Co-operative Publishing Society, 1945), p. 22.

good is not that it has corrected social evils, but rather that it has been efficient in maintaining the division of classes and the position of the exploiters. One state might be better than another; Rousseau's "Republic" may be an improvement over other forms, but this is no concession that the state may be good.

To say that one state is better or is an improvement over another is simply to say that the one serves the exploiters less well than the other, thus, by dint of its inefficiency, allowing a greater share of political and economic justice to those who are exploited. Still, a better state is not a good state; it is simply less oppressive.

Rousseau and Hobbes could speak meaningfully of the dissolution of their "Republic" and "Commonwealth" and of the changes which make a good state sour and become a bad one, but this a Marxist presumably cannot and would not say. For him the state could not change from good to bad as it could never really have been good. This is simply the nature of the state. It has never served or treated all men equally, and has always been oppressive. The route of transition for the state as conceived by Marx and Engels is not from good to bad, but rather from bad to worse.

We have seen by now what Marx and Engels meant when they spoke of the state, and we have tried to show that their understanding of the term was significantly different from the view

of earlier theorists. Hobbes and Rousseau describe states and state institutions which, if put into practice, would represent improvements over existing politics and institutions. Thus for Hobbes, the sovereign power invested in a monarch would eliminate or at least help to eliminate the difficulties resulting from the division of power between King and Parliament. For Rousseau, direct legislative participation would eliminate the weaknesses and sham of representative government as it existed in eighteenth century France. Marx and Engels also describe the state, but they cannot see it as an instrument for social improvement. It is, after all, responsible for the persistence of these inequities and difficulties which must be eliminated. Unlike Hobbes and Rousseau, they cannot describe and recommend a state; rather, they describe and condemn it. Having made these statements, we must now try to see whether their descriptions and disapproval of the state made Marx and Engels anarchists. Does the hope or assertion that the state, as an oppressive device of a dominant minority, will wither away lead necessarily to the assertion that there is no place for some kind of state in the truly communistic society? It is to these questions we must now turn.

James Joll, *The Anarchists* (Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1964), p. 67.

<sup>54</sup>It is interesting to note that he published an attack on the Republic in 1849 for which he was imprisoned, but in 1851, he welcomed the coup and dictatorship of Louis Napoleon. See Joll, pp. 72-73.

While Proudhon's writings were numerous and diverse, there is a theme that one finds among them which is important for our purposes. He is opposed to government and to political institutions. He distrusts the state and sees it as a device whose primary purpose is to protect individual

#### CHAPTER IV

#### MARX, ENGELS AND ANARCHISM

In order to decide whether Marx and Engels were actually anarchists with respect to their plans for the state, we must of course come to some understanding of the anarchists' position. We do not have time in this paper to go into any considerable detail regarding anarchism nor can we consider the individual positions of each anarchist. We choose, therefore, to talk briefly of only one, Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, the French anarchist. He is sometimes thought of as the father of anarchism, and was almost certainly the most important influence upon the direction of anarchist theory.<sup>53</sup> It was also Proudhon whom Marx attacked in his work, The Poverty of Philosophy. Proudhon was a slightly older contemporary of Marx, and like Marx, he was dissatisfied with the French Republic under Louis Napoleon.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>53</sup>James Joll, The Anarchists (Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1964), p. 67.

<sup>54</sup>It is interesting to note that he published an attack on the Republic in 1849 for which he was imprisoned, but in 1851, he welcomed the coup and dictatorship of Louis Napoleon. See Joll, pp. 72-73.

involve While Proudhon's writings were numerous and diverse, there is a theme that one finds among them which is important for our purposes. He is consistently opposed to government and to political institutions. He distrusts the state and sees it as a device whose primary purpose is to protect individual property thus calcifying the inequality begotten by wealth. While it is not immediately obvious why the relationship of interests necessarily means the absence of government, the He comments upon the Declaration of Rights of the French Revolution and talks specifically about the provision which makes along with the absence of private property obviate the need for eligibility for public office a function of virtue and talent the state or government; for, according to Proudhon, it is largely alone.

the function of government to protect private property and selfish, Why, the sovereign people, legislators, and reformers see in public office, to speak plainly, only opportunities for pecuniary advancement. And, because it regards them as a source of profit, it decrees the eligibility of citizens.<sup>55</sup>

social It turns out that actions and policies of the government or the state, for Proudhon, amount largely to the legalizing of property, and it is property which further broadens the gulf between those who do and do not have it. In order to eliminate the inequities caused and preserved by the state, the state must itself be eliminated. Society must be reorganized along utterly new and equitable lines. It must be based upon the

interests and interrelation of interests of all the people  
 P. J. Proudhon, *Œuvres complètes*, vol. II, *La Révolution Sociale* (Paris: Librairie des Sciences Politiques et Sociales, 1934), p. 290.

<sup>55</sup> Irving L. Horowitz, ed., The Anarchists (New York: Dell Publishing Co., 1964), p. 105.



involved: as for Proudhon government in any form amounts to op-

pression. En dernière analyse, que tout le monde étant  
gouvernement, il n'y a plus de gouvernement. La  
negation du gouvernement surgit ainsi de sa  
definition: Qui dit gouvernement representatif,  
dit rapport des interets dit absence de gouverne-  
ment.<sup>56</sup>

We mention Proudhon because he is among the most important  
While it is not immediately obvious why the relationship  
of interests necessarily means the absence of government, the  
point may be this. The relationship and interaction of interests  
along with the absence of private property obviate the need for  
the state or government; for, according to Proudhon, it is largely  
the function of government to protect private property and sel-  
fish, individual interest.

It was Proudhon's hope that industrial and economic  
reorganization would eventually replace government, and a new  
social order would come into existence.

L'association libre, la liberte, qui se borne  
a maintenir l'egalite dans les moyens de pro-  
duction, et l'equivalence dans les exchanges,  
est la seule forme de societe possible, la  
seule juste, la seule vraie...le gouvernement de  
l'homme par l'homme, sous quelque nom qu'il se  
dequise, est oppression: la plus haute per-  
fection de la societe se trouve dans l'union  
de l'ordre et de l'anarchie.<sup>57</sup>

the state to disappear or wither away after the revolution

<sup>56</sup> P. J. Proudhon, Oeuvres Completes, vol. IX, La Revolu-  
tion Sociale (Paris: Librairie des Sciences Politiques et  
Sociale, 1936), p. 290.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., vol. IV., Qu'est-ce que la Propriete?, p.  
346.



Thus for Proudhon government in any form amounts to oppression and must be replaced by something else. While it is not always clear how the replacement and transformation are to occur, it is manifest that they do.

We mention Proudhon because he is among the most important anarchists of the period during which Marx and Engels wrote. We are not here concerned with the details of Marx's attack on Proudhon in The Poverty of Philosophy as he addresses himself primarily to the technicalities of the anarchists's economic views. There is, in addition, some evidence that Marx's dealings with Proudhon were less a function of doctrine than of Marx's desire to secure an important figure in the formal growth of European socialism.<sup>58</sup>

We are, of course, concerned to see whether Marx and Engels were themselves anarchists. When they spoke of the withering away of the state and the coming into being of a new social order were they simply echoing or parroting the position of men like Proudhon? We mention the anarchists in order to supply background for the answer to what is at this point our most important question. Do Marx and Engels really expect the state to disappear or wither away after the revolution and emancipation of the proletariat is complete? In short,

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<sup>58</sup> Joll, op. cit., p. 65.

what happens to the state when society has been reconstructed along purely communistic lines? In order to answer this question, we must turn once again to an analysis of the relevant text. only as long as it is required in order to break the re-

sistance. As we said on the first page of this paper, there are many who are aware of the phrase, "withering away" of the state, but what that phrase means is not fully entailed by those few words. There are many equally aware of the fact that there will be a transitional period between capitalistic and communistic economy and society often called the "dictatorship of the proletariat." This too is a neat utterance whose meaning is not as clear as it might be. Lenin, in State and Revolution, suggests interpretations for both of these phrases.

He writes that eventually, when the workers have freed themselves of domination by the minority who make up the bourgeoisie and have taken control of the machinery of government, the dictatorship of the proletariat will have begun. This he argues is merely a period of transition; though, no one can say with certainty how long this transition will last. lines,

along with During the transition from capitalism to communism, suppression is still necessary; but it is the suppression of the minority of the exploiters by the majority of the exploited. A special apparatus, special machinery for suppression, the 'state,' is still necessary, but this is now a transitional state, no longer a

<sup>60</sup> Frederick Engels, Herr Eugen Dühring's Revolution in Science (New York: International Publishers, 1919), p. 314.

transit state in the usual sense.<sup>59</sup> More specifically, he says that this dictatorship and control of the state machinery by the formerly exploited majority lasts only as long as it is required in order to break the resistance of the original exploiters, i.e. to destroy capitalism and to eliminate any vestiges or seeds of class division. According to Lenin, it is this dictatorship of the proletariat which marks the beginning of the withering away of the state; for, the proletariat uses the state machinery to destroy the state itself. This is to say that it uses that machinery to destroy classes and class distinction which, as we have seen, are the primary reasons for the existence of the state which Marx and Engels have described.

It was Engels who used the phrase "withering away," to explain what would happen to the state. He used the phrase in the Anti-Duhring in conjunction with his brief remarks about the coming into power of the proletariat. "The proletariat seizes the State power, and transforms the means of production in the first instance into State property."<sup>60</sup> These lines, along with those of Marx in the Critique of the Gotha Program, show rather precisely Lenin's source for what he says of the

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<sup>59</sup> Lenin, op. cit., p. 74.

<sup>60</sup> Frederick Engels, Herr Eugen Duhring's Revolution in Science (New York: International Publishers, 1949), p. 314.

transitional dictatorship of the proletariat, but Engels says more which bears directly upon the future of the state. Re-

ferring to the lines just quoted he continues:

But in doing this, it puts an end to itself as the proletariat, it puts an end to all class differences and class antagonisms, it puts an end also to the state as the state....As soon as there is no longer any class of society to be held in subjection; as soon as, along with class domination and the struggle for individual existence based on the former anarchy of production, the collisions and excesses arising from these have been abolished, there is nothing more to be repressed which would make a special repressive force, a state, necessary. The interference of the state power in social relations becomes superfluous in one sphere after another, and then ceases of itself. The government of persons is replaced by the administration of things and the direction of the process of production. The state is not 'abolished,' it 'withers away.'<sup>61</sup>

Before analyzing these crucial remarks about the future of the state, we mention also a passage of similar content from the Manifesto of the Communist Party. After Marx and Engels have outlined the ten point program of the proletariat's revolution, they make a few remarks about the fate of the state and political power:

When, in the course of development, class distinctions have disappeared and all production has been concentrated in the hands of a vast association of the whole nation, the public power will lose its political character. Political power,

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid., p. 315. For what are the same thoughts and practically the same wording as this passage, see Socialism: Utopian and Scientific., p. 69.

and how properly so called, is merely the organized power of one class for oppressing another.<sup>62</sup>

description of the state, Engels can easily deduce such consequences. At this juncture, it might appear that Engels, Marx and possibly Lenin are no less anarchistic than a man of Proudhon's

The proletariat, the oppressed majority, seizes property persuasion. A superficial glance at the preceding textual and means of production, but from whom does it seize these? It material would certainly indicate that this was the case. seizes them from the economically dominant and oppressive minority, the bourgeoisie. It is, as we have seen, the class in away of the state, and all of them seem to suggest, using only whose hands the wealth is concentrated. Once the minority has slightly different wording, what Proudhon hoped for. We emphasize, however, the fact that this apparent similarity may dominant class. It has lost the economic power it requires to hide more than it reveals, and citing these passages without sustain itself, and without that it has lost its political power comment and analysis would simply not be sufficient. We are asking, in short, whether these passages really mean that the Marx-Engels and Marx, "the state power assumed more and more the character of the national power of capital over labour...." to be. In order to answer this question, we must look more closely as what Engels and Marx say regarding the ultimate decay of the state. It is the presence of economic differences between one class and another which is primarily responsible for their distrust and hostility toward each other. When the economic differences be-

We read in the text that once the proletariat has seized the state power, and has made private property and production into state property and production, it has sounded the death knell for itself as a class, for classes and class conflict in general, and for "the state as the state." What does he mean will for a time control this production, but its purpose in

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<sup>62</sup> Feuer, op. cit., p. 29.

Marx, op. cit., The Civil War in France, p. 38.

and how is it that such consequences follow? Given the Marxist description of the state, Engels can easily deduce such consequences. ~~gone so also do classes vanish. As economic imbalance and the~~ The proletariat, the oppressed majority, seizes property and means of production, but from whom does it seize these? It seizes them from the economically dominant and oppressive minority, the bourgeoisie. It is, as we have seen, the class in whose hands the wealth is concentrated. Once the minority has been stripped of its economic power, it ceases also to be the dominant class. It has lost the economic power it requires to sustain itself, and without that it has lost its political power as well; for, as we have been told so often in the writings of Engels and Marx, "the state power assumed more and more the character of the national power of capital over labour...."<sup>63</sup>

It is the presence of economic differences between one class and another which is primarily responsible for their distrust and hostility toward each other. When the economic differences begin to vanish so also do the hostility and antagonism. Once the proletariat has converted private property into state property, neither class has exclusive possession of capital and property as the bourgeoisie had had. It is true that the proletariat will for a time control this production, but its purpose in will wither away to the extent that classes and their antagonisms

wither <sup>63</sup>

Marx, op. cit., The Civil War in France, p. 38.



doing this is not that of prolonging itself as a distinct class, and Engels says that once the economic basis for class distinction is gone so also do classes vanish. As economic imbalance and the "individual struggle for existence" based upon that imbalance begin to disappear so also do the classes which were defined in terms of that economic inequity. But without classes and class antagonism, the state, according to Engels, ceases to exist "as the state."

The inference which stems from what we have just said, in conjunction with what we have said earlier in this paper, seems fairly clear. The state is, in the final analysis, defined in terms of classes and class antagonisms; it is the manifestation of the power of one class, a wealthy minority, over another, a deprived majority. When these two distinct poles no longer exist, the state no longer exists and the state's special bodies of armed men and prisons will not be necessary if all traces of class distinction have truly disappeared.

So it is that Engels says the state becomes superfluous as soon as classes and the need one class has for suppressing another disappear. The state was, in fact, the guardian and hallmark of such division. When these divisions vanish so also must the state as Marx and Engels describe it. The state will wither away to the extent that classes and their antagonisms wither away.



We find also in the Manifesto that after political power, "the organized power of one class for oppressing another," is seized by the proletariat, the existence of classes begins to fade. The proletariat will, for a time, be the ruling class insofar as its being dominant is necessary in order to eliminate those conditions characteristic of the rule of the bourgeoisie. Here again, once private property and capitalistic modes of production have been eliminated, the reasons for class antagonism cease to be. When the causes of such antagonism no longer exist; neither will classes themselves.<sup>64</sup> Because this is so, Marx can say that "the public power will lose its political character"<sup>65</sup> when political or state power, the power one class uses in dominating another, no longer exists.

In these passages from the Manifesto, Anti-Duhring, and Socialism: Utopian and Scientific the point is always the same. After its victory, the proletariat inherits and must for a while use the machinery of the state in order to eliminate those conditions which first made the state necessary. The oppressive state is thus used to destroy the framework upon which it rests. Once this framework begins to crumble so also does the state. We see also in these passages that a point will be reached where

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<sup>64</sup> Feuer, op. cit., p. 29. Origin of the Family, p. 211.

<sup>65</sup> loc. cit. cit., p. 394.

these elements characteristic of the political and economic domination of the bourgeoisie will either be eliminated or reorganized. This will lead in turn to the end of the period in history characterized by class division and classes themselves. Of this stage and of what follows from it Engels write: "These classes must fall as inevitably as they once rose. The state must irrevocably fall with them."<sup>66</sup>

If one insists that Marx and Engels argue consistently that the state will eventually disappear and will find its way "into the museum of antiquities, by the side of the spinning wheel and the bronze ax,"<sup>67</sup> then he must also accept the Marxist conception of the state. Thus the question of whether Marx and Engels were anarchists turns on their conception of the state. If one argues that Marx and Engels thought of the state exclusively and consistently as an oppressive device of the ruling class, then their insistence upon its disappearance would apparently justify the argument that they were anarchists. If, however, it can be shown that they spoke of a state which was not a function of class division and of a future state which could exist and have its legitimate functions in a classless communist society, then the claim that Marx and Engels were

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<sup>66</sup> Engels, op. cit., The Origin of the Family, p. 211.

<sup>67</sup> Feuer, op. cit., p. 394.

anarchists ceases to be sound. In what follows, we will attempt to show that the existence of a truly communist society is not inconsistent with the existence of a state which, because of the absence of classes, is no longer an instrument of oppression.

#### THE STATE IN A CLASSLESS SOCIETY

We argued earlier in this paper that the analysis and characterization of the state given by Marx and Engels does not square in significant respects with what others have said about the nature and function of a state. To speak of the state only as the instrument of one class for oppressing another is to evade, for example, the administrative functions commonly associated with the state. Their description of the state as an instrument for the enslavement of the majority of the population says little of the state as an instrument for carrying out the business of a nation or a people. We are certain, however, that Marx and Engels were aware of the need for carrying out this business. In short, we are asking whether the disappearance of an instrument of oppression really means the disappearance of the state. The evidence actually indicates that Marx and Engels have not just one, but two distinct notions of the state. The one we have been discussing is the more apparent in a general reading of their works, and is the one we talk of when we insist that Marxist doctrine entails the withering away of the state. This is the state as an instrumentality of the

exploiting minority. This is the state which finds its embodiment in the corrupt bureaucracy, special bodies of armed men and prisons.

## CHAPTER V

Still, there is another view of the state about which Marx and Engels speak; though, they present us with almost no detail

as to it. We argued earlier in this paper that the analysis and characterization of the state given by Marx and Engels does not square in significant respects with what others have said about the nature and function of a state. To speak of the state only as the instrument of one class for oppressing another is to evade, for example, the administrative functions commonly associated with the state. Their description of the state as an instrument for the enslavement of the majority of the population says little of the state as an instrument for carrying out the business of a nation or a people. We are certain, however, that Marx and Engels were aware of the need for carrying out this business. In short, we are asking whether the disappearance of an instrument of oppression really means the disappearance of the state. The evidence actually indicates that Marx and Engels have not just one, but two distinct notions of the state. The one we have been discussing is the more apparent in a general reading of their works, and is the one we talk of when we insist that Marxist doctrine entrails the withering away of the state. This is the state as an instrumentality of the

<sup>68</sup>Karl Marx, *Selected Works*, ed. G. P. Dutt, vol. II (New York: International Publishers, 1933), p. 591.

exploiting minority. This is the state which finds its embodiment in the corrupt bureaucracy, special bodies of armed men and prisons.

Still, there is another view of the state about which Marx and Engels speak; though, they present us with almost no detail as to its operation and make-up. This we think is a state which replaces the "state." This is the state which comes into being when the oppressive arm of the bourgeoisie ceases to be. This is the state which removes Marx and Engels from the camp of anarchism, and forces us to modify any categorical assertion that the state must fall if the dream of Marxist communism is to be realized. In what follows we hope to show that it is only a particular kind of state that withers away, and that when that state dies another state of a different sort takes its place.

Such an assertion may appear to be untenable; for, have we not been discussing the eventual disappearance of the state suggested by Marx and Engels in so many of their works? In their informal writings we find similar assertions. In his letter to August Bebel, a letter Lenin mentions in State and Revolution, Engels writes that "with the introduction of the socialist order of society the state will of itself dissolve and disappear."<sup>68</sup> He says further on in the same letter that

<sup>69</sup>Ibid., p. 592.

<sup>68</sup>Karl Marx, Selected Works, ed. C. P. Dutt, vol. II (New York: International Publishers, 1933), p. 591.

at whatever time it is possible to speak meaningfully of freedom, "the state as such ceases to exist."<sup>69</sup> With these apparent counter-examples in mind, we turn to the text in an attempt to show that the state will have its place even after the institution of a truly communistic society.

We look first at what Marx wrote about the Paris Commune in The Civil War in France. Though he was speaking of the Commune and not of the ultimate victory of communism, his remarks about the state cannot be summarily discounted. He mentions the plans the Commune would have implemented had it succeeded. Among them were plans for remodeling of the central government of France.

The few but important functions which would remain for a central government were not to be suppressed, as has been intentionally misstated, but were to be discharged by communal and, therefore, strictly responsible agents.<sup>70</sup>

We mention these lines in an attempt to make clear the fact that Marx recognized that there were certain functions which a government could have under its control. He says further that the repressive institutions of the state were to have been eliminated by the Commune while its "legitimate functions" would have come under responsible direction.

In itself, this much is not sufficient proof that Marx

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<sup>69</sup>Ibid., p. 592.

<sup>70</sup>Marx, op. cit., The Civil War in France, p. 33.



or Engels finds a place for the state in classless society; however, in admitting that the state has some legitimate functions, Marx is at least suggesting that certain elements of the state are not oppressive in themselves. Even granting this point, one may argue that what has been said is inconclusive. The Commune is not precisely what Marx and Engels had envisioned as a truly communistic society. Even if it were, one could argue that the existence of certain state functions does not necessarily entail the existence of the state. In order to probe more deeply into what Marx said of the future state, we turn to what he said on the subject in The Critique of the Gotha Program.

The Critique addressed itself to what Marx felt were inadequacies in the proposed program for uniting Germany's two socialist parties. In the course of his criticism, Marx makes some remarks about the state which for our purposes are important and illuminating.

In the fourth section of his Critique, Marx discusses the German Workers Party and its hope for a "free state." At first, he attacks the notion of a free state, and from the tone of the first few lines, we are led to believe that his remarks will simply buttress what has been said earlier about the oppressive character of the state. This, however, is not the case. This time Marx does not say categorically that the state will

with away or that it must be abolished; rather he writes the following:<sup>72</sup>

Freedom consists in converting the state from an organ standing above society into one completely subordinated to it, and today also the forms of the state are more free or less free to the extent that they restrict the 'freedom of society the state.'<sup>71</sup>

We notice that Marx has not said anything here about the disappearance of the state; he is talking instead of a kind of metamorphosis. Just as in his remarks in The Civil War in France, he is suggesting that the state will and must serve rather than dominate society. Presumably, the last sentence of this passage is tantamount to saying that the relative freedom under any state is a function of the extent to which the "freedom of the state," the oppressive behavior of that state, is restricted. While this passage may be construed as an argument for the withering away of the oppressive state, it by no means asserts that the state taken in some broader sense, the state as it performs "legitimate function," must fall. Marx speaks not of annihilation, but of conversion:

The question then arises: what transformation will the state undergo in communist society? In other words, what social functions will remain in existence there that are analogous to the present functions of the state? This question can only be answered scientifically and one does not

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<sup>71</sup> Marx, op. cit., The Critique of the Gotha Program, p. 576.

get a flea-hop nearer to the problem by a thousand-fold combination of the word people with the word state.<sup>72</sup>

Once again, the text speaks for itself. The state in a communist society will not be a device for maintaining and extending the power of a particular class; for, such a society will of course be classless. This is not to say that such a society would be possible only in the absence of a state. The state which dominated the majority, the coercive arm of the ruling class, will cease to exist, but we have yet to determine what sort of state is to take its place.

Marx says that legitimate social functions will remain in existence; however, he does not tell us what these are. We mentioned earlier, though in a somewhat different context, that with the ultimate disappearance of the oppressive state the government of persons will yield to the administration of things and to the direction of production.<sup>73</sup> Neither Marx nor Engels has been very specific in cataloguing those elements entailed in the performance of social functions and the administering of things. Whatever is entailed, there is reason to believe that in the classless society it will be the state which handles and solves the problems of administration and direction of production

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<sup>72</sup>Ibid., p. 577. Cf. Solomon Bloom, "The Withering Away of the State," *The History of Ideas*, Vol. VII, No. 1 (New York: 1946). Here we find a discussion of the possibility of a future state;

<sup>73</sup>Engels, op. cit., Anti-Duhring, p. 315. It may be like.

and distribution. To document this point, we must again return to the text. <sup>73</sup> In most of their major works, Marx and Engels remind us of the oppressive character of the state, and it is somewhat surprising that this is not the exclusive description of the state found in these works. Those remarks which suggest a less jaundiced view are not as pervasive as those which characterize the state as an instrument of the ruling class; yet, such remarks are to be found. We look, for example, to a short, but important paragraph in Engels' Anti-Duhring for evidence of a rather different state. In the section which concerns us, Engels is discussing the effect of unequal economic distribution and mentions the class division which results. These remarks are followed by some which treat of the state.

Society divides into classes; the privileged and the dispossessed, the exploiters and the exploited, the rulers and the ruled; and the state, which the primitive groups of communities of the same tribe had at first arrived at only for safeguarding their common interests (such as irrigation in the East) and providing protection against external enemies, from this stage onwards acquires just as much the function of maintaining by force the economic and political position of the ruling class against the subject class.<sup>74</sup>

What is crucial in these remarks is Engels' assertion that

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<sup>74</sup>Ibid., p. 169, Cf. Solomon Bloom, "The Withering Away of the State," Journal of the History of Ideas, Vol. VII, No. 1 (New York: 1946). Here we find a discussion of the possibility of a future state; though, there is no indication of what this may be like.

Marx, op. cit., The Civil War in France, p. 17.

the state existed initially in order to protect the common interest, and only later became the guardian of the interests of a dominant minority.<sup>75</sup> Contrary to other accounts, the state emerges here as something other than the outcome of class conflict. He says something similar in his introduction to The Civil War in France:

What had been the special characteristics of the former state? Society had created its own organs to look after the common interest, first through simple division of labor. But the organs at whose head was the state power, had in the course of time, in pursuance of their own special interests, transformed themselves from the servant of society into the master of society....<sup>76</sup>

In this and the previous passage, Engels suggests a view of the state rather different from what we might expect from him and from Marx. Here he says quite clearly that the state was not inherently evil, corrupt or oppressive, but only came to be so with the advent of parochial interests and class antagonism. In both cases, he stresses the initial function of the state as the guardian of the common or collective interests of the society. These remarks about the early state square with what Marx said when he talked of the legitimate social functions of the state. and that he "had no means of coercion at his command."<sup>77</sup> He

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<sup>75</sup>Cf. The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State, pp. 206-208; Anti-Duhring, p. 314; Socialism: Utopian and Scientific, p. 69.

<sup>76</sup>Marx, op. cit., The Civil War in France, p. 17.



Both are talking about the state and its functions as they exist before or after class conflict. These remarks appear to support the contention that there is or can be some kind of state that does not require division within society for its existence. We can, in fact, arrive at what may be a fairly accurate picture of something other than a coercive state by looking once more at what Engels says of the Iroquois tribal and social organization in The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State.

In his chapter, "The Iroquois Gens," Engels calls upon the work of the American ethnologist, Lewis Morgan, in order to demonstrate the existence of parallels in the make up of the early Greek, Roman and American Indian social structure. It is up to a competent anthropologist to determine how sound Engels' analysis is; we are concerned with those remarks which pertain specifically to the Iroquois "gentes."

He begins his discussion with a glowing account of the manner in which the Iroquois elected the sachem, the official head during times of peace. In this election, both men and women are allowed to vote and all votes are of equal weight. He mentions also that the sachem's power was of a purely moral nature and that he "had no means of coercion at his command."<sup>77</sup> He talks of the manner in which a sachem may be removed and of the

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<sup>77</sup> Engels, op. cit., The Origin of the Family, p. 104.



rules of each "gens" respecting marriage, devising of property and mutual protection. He talks of the democratic assembly of each "gens." Such assemblies are made up of all the adult male and female gentiles, and each has an equal vote when the assembly makes its decisions and conducts its business.<sup>78</sup> Relying upon Morgan's investigation, Engels emphasizes the freedom, equality, and brotherhood of all those who were part of a "gens,"<sup>79</sup> and talks approvingly of the council for public affairs.

It was composed of all the sachems and chiefs of the different gentes, real representatives because they could be deposed at any moment. It deliberated in public, surrounded by the rest of the tribal members, who had a right to take part in the discussions and claim attention. As a rule any one present gained a hearing on his demand.<sup>80</sup>

Beyond this, Engels describes arrangements for burial, war, ceremonies and the relationship of one "gens" to another.

Having finished with the descriptive details of his account, Engels writes that a study of the Iroquois "gens" provides us with the "opportunity for studying the organization of a society that does not yet know a state."<sup>81</sup> In the next

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<sup>78</sup>Ibid., p. 107.

<sup>79</sup>loc. cit.

<sup>80</sup>Ibid., p. 112.

<sup>81</sup>Ibid., p. 115.

sentence he tells us, as we might expect, that "the state pre-supposes a public power of coercion separated from the aggregate body of its members."<sup>82</sup> Once again, we find Engels equating the state with an oppressive or coercive force which dominates society. This, of course, is consistent with most of his and Marx's pronouncements about the state. When he adulates the "gentile constitution" of the Iroquois, he praises both its efficiency and its equity; yet, equity extends to all and no tools of oppression are required to secure the efficiency of the ruling minority.

It was in No soldiers, gendarmes, and policemen, no nobility, king, regent, perfect or judges, no prisons, lawsuits, and still affairs run smoothly. All quarrels and disputes are settled by the entire community involved in them, either the gens or the tribe or the various gentes among themselves... Not a vestige of our cumbersome and intricate system of administration is needed, although there are more public affairs to be settled than nowadays: the communist household is shared by a number of families, the land belongs to the tribe, only the gardens are temporarily assigned to the households.... These cannot be any poor and destitute--the communist household and gentes know their duties toward the aged, sick and disabled. All are free and equal--the women included.<sup>83</sup>

This is Engels' laudatory account of a social organization which knows no state, but it seems, rather, that such really amounts to the kind of state he describes in the *Anti-gentile society* did not know the state as he and Marx have *Duhring*. The Iroquois "gentes" are certainly an instance of

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., pp. 115-116.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., p. 117.

described it: the oppressive instrumentality of a ruling class. This is significantly different from the bare assertion that it knew no state at all. In support of this point, we can compare what Engels has said of the Iroquois with his remarks about the state which were cited in the Anti-Duhring.

We mentioned this passage earlier in attempting to support the contention that Marx and Engels had some conception of a state different from that one which equates it with an instrument for sustaining the power and position of the ruling minority. It was in this work that Engels mentioned the state as it existed before class division. This was the state "which primitive groups of communities of the same tribe had at first arrived at only for safe-guarding common interests (such as irrigation in the East) and providing protection against external enemies...."<sup>84</sup> Here Engels admits of the possibility of a state which does

not depend, for its existence, upon the presence and hostility of classes. If we consider what he said of the Iroquois and in Engels' works but because what he says in these works is of their society in The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State, we find that their social and tribal organization really amounts to the kind of state he describes in the Anti-Duhring. The Iroquois "gentes" are certainly an instance of "the primitive groups of communities of the same tribe" which

<sup>84</sup> Engels, op. cit., The Origin of the Family, p. 116.

<sup>85</sup> Engels, op. cit., p. 169.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., pp. 113-115.

Engels referred to in the Anti-Duhring. About any particular "gens" Engels writes the following:

Each is complete in itself, arranges its own local affairs and supplements the other depend groups.... stance upon the existence of classes or the oppressive rule of a particular class.

Whenever we find the gens as the social unit of a nation, we are justified in searching for a tribal organization similar to the one described above.<sup>85</sup>

In the passage quoted from the Anti-Duhring, we saw that according to Engels the state, which was composed of these communities, came into being in order to safeguard the common interest and to provide for protection against external enemies. So also in The Origin of the Family, Engels writes of the organization of gentes into tribes and tribes into leagues

and federations. Such larger organizations provided sustenance and protection from any former inhabitants of the region.<sup>86</sup>

We mention all this not as an exercise in anthropology nor in an attempt to point out inconsistencies and peculiarities in Engels' works but because what he says in these works is of crucial importance for our discussion of the state in communist society. By dint of this comparison of what Engels says in the Anti-Duhring and the Origin of the Family and through our discussion of Marx's remarks about the "legitimate functions"

be a different sort of state, a state which serves rather than

<sup>85</sup>Engels, op. cit., The Origin of the Family, p. 116.

<sup>86</sup>Ibid., pp. 113-115.

of the state and the "future state" in communist society, we have been trying to make the following points:

1) Engels and Marx do speak of the state, as well as certain of its functions, which does not depend for its existence upon the existence of classes or the oppressive rule of a particular class.

2) Engels' description of the primitive social organization of the Iroquois 'gens' read in conjunction with his remarks about the reasons for the existence of a state before class division suggests that the federation of 'gentes' and tribes might amount to the kind of state which he says existed before such divisions. Though Engels says that Iroquois society knew no state because it did not 'presuppose a public power of coercion,' we cite our first point and argue that Engels seems either to have forgotten what he said of the state in the Anti-Duhring or is speaking only of a particular kind of state, i.e. the oppressive state serves the ruling class.

It is hoped that these remarks pertaining to the existence of the state outside societies divided and ruled by classes document our contention that Marx and Engels do, in fact, speak of two distinct states. They have described in some detail the state which will wither away when classes cease to be.<sup>8</sup> The nature of the state that represents all of society and exists where classes are absent is never made very precise, and with the exception of the passages we have already mentioned, it is hardly discussed at all. The little Marx and Engels say of the classless communist society will perhaps help us to see that there can be a different sort of state, a state which serves rather than suppresses society.

<sup>89</sup>Feuer, op. cit., p. 129.



What do we know of a society where class antagonisms have disappeared? According to what is said in the Manifesto, there will come into being "an association in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all."<sup>87</sup> In isolation, this passage is not terribly informative; fortunately, Marx and Engels say something more. In The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State, Engels says that when class division has vanished, society will be able to do away with the oppressive machinery of the state, the machinery which galvanizes class division, and will be able to organize production "on the basis of a free and equal association of the producers."<sup>88</sup> As we noted earlier, classless society will replace the "government of persons" with the "administration of things and the direction of the forces of production." Finally, Marx writes in The Critique of the Gotha Program that only when a genuinely communal and cooperative society has been achieved, and only when class division, division of labor,<sup>89</sup> and the opposition of manual and physical labor have all disappeared will one contribute to society to the extent that he is able while receiving from society what he actually requires.

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<sup>87</sup>Feuer, op. cit., p. 29.

<sup>90</sup>Marx, op. cit., The Critique of the Gotha Program, p. 566.

<sup>88</sup>Engels, op. cit., The Origin of the Family, p. 211

<sup>91</sup>John Dewey, The Public and Its Problems, (Chicago: Holt and Co., 1927), p. 129.



Only then can the narrow horizon of bourgeois right be fully left behind and society inscribe on its banners; from each according to his ability, to each according to his need.<sup>90</sup>

These remarks, though few, are more than broadly descriptive of the classless society; they are also descriptive of those legitimate functions of the state which remain after the oppressive state has fallen away. We are not saying simply or rather, simplistically, that one may justifiably claim that a state exists wherever a sufficiently large number of human beings are collected together within the same general boundaries; though, John Dewey says that "temporal and geographical localization" are important, however not sufficient, in attempting to decide what we mean when we talk of the state.<sup>91</sup> We have argued at some length that Marx and Engels speak of a future state and of a state which existed or could exist where the division of society into classes is unknown or has passed from the scene. What do we look to in these brief and incomplete descriptions of a classless society which helps us to justify our claim that such a society and something we may legitimately call a state are not mutually exclusive? We look firstly at the organization of society when a classless society has ceased to be an hypothesis

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<sup>90</sup> Marx, op. cit., The Critique of the Gotha Program, p. 566.

<sup>91</sup> John Dewey, The Public and its Problems, (Chicago: Holt and Co., 1946), p. 39.

and has become a reality.

Once rid of the oppressive machinery which has divided society so long, the new society will be concerned, among other things, with the "administration of things" and with the direction of the forces of production. This may certainly represent a significant improvement over the concerns of one class for dominating another, but how is it to be accomplished? When society was essentially a bourgeois affair the answers to problems of administration were simpler. Then the ruling class dominated the labor force and, therefore, production. It exacted taxes and used a bureaucracy and the oppressive instruments it had at its command in order to administer and to profit from what the proletariat had produced. But all this is to pass, and it is now a classless society which must deal with the problems of administration and production, and such problems will certainly exist. Even the Iroquois, who were anything but an industrial society, required their councils, "sachems," and chiefs in order to make and to implement tribal decisions, as well as to oversee the tribal land and to handle matters of ceremony and defense. Similarly, when Marx speaks of the plans of the Paris Commune, he does not overlook the problems of administration. He tells how the affairs of each rural commune were to be administered by a body of delegates in a central town, and that body would have sent delegates to a still larger

<sup>9</sup>Oscar Jaszi, "Socialism," Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences, XIV, p. 201.

body in Paris.<sup>92</sup> We grant that the Paris Commune was not the exact prototype of a purely communistic organization nor was the administration of the Iroquois "gentes" the same as what would be required in any synthesis of industrial and agricultural society, but these differences do not deny the point we are trying to make. The "administration of things" and the direction of production, whether in a classless society or not, are not simple matters. Perhaps, the cumbersome bureaucracy of the bourgeoisie was abusive and inefficient, but if it vanishes something must take its place. Instead of parliamentarism, there will be some kind of administrative organization made up of representatives of the workers.<sup>93</sup> Administration is to be more equitable and efficient, but Marx and Engels admit that it will still be required. Improved production and distribution of the products of labor will not simply happen; rather, they must be made to happen. If these changes in production and administration are to be made for the good of the entire society, then it seems a justifiable assumption that society will and should have a voice in those matters which affect and improve it; its wishes and grievances must be heard. This, we noted, was the case in the

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<sup>92</sup>Feuer, op. cit., p. 367.

<sup>93</sup>Oscar Jaszi, "Socialism," Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences, XIV, p. 201.

public council of the Iroquois "gens." Presumably, the fact that a society is classless does not entail the absence of those organs and institutions which, like the great council, take account of the popular sentiment. It is, in short, one thing to speak of an association where the free development of an individual contributes to the development of the entire society, but it is quite another matter to determine what society expects or demands from the individual in order that both may profit.

Marx talks of an early stage of communist society and mentions the individual laborer who, having contributed a quantity of labor to society, receives a certificate which entitles him to draw on or to consume a quantity of the total production. The same amount of labor he has given to society in one form, he receives back in another.<sup>94</sup>

On its face, this amounts to a simple exchange or transaction, and no doubt it would appear to be this simple if one failed to mention what is necessary in order for such an exchange to occur. It is simply not the case that communist society emerges fully developed the moment that classes have finally disappeared and that with it comes a blueprint for the kind of cooperation that makes even the simplest transaction.

<sup>94</sup>Marx, op. cit., Selected Works, p. 563. This mode of exchange, characterized by giving to each according to his contribution, will ultimately be replaced by apportioning according to one's needs.

possible. We note, for example, that the certificate must be a sound medium of exchange. It must, like currency, have the backing which makes it acceptable and useful. What in the classless society will guarantee it? Will good faith and the memory of the struggle of the proletariat be sufficient? There are, of course, problems of administration connected with the transaction. Where does one take his certificate and from whom is he to receive it? By whom and on what basis is it decided that he has received an increment of consumption from society proportional to what he has contributed? These are rather specific questions; yet, they are questions whose answers must be located among the administrative processes of early communist society.

Apart from these administrative matters, there must exist some sort of agreement among the members of society prior to any exchange or transaction. There must exist cooperation before these kinds of cooperative exchange are possible. Society must at some time come to an agreement respecting the manner in which transaction, production and distribution will be handled. But how does society come to agree and to implement its decisions? Once again it requires institutions through which to objectify and to work out the results of its cooperation. It is such organs and institutions which are charged with administering the "legitimate functions" of the state.

On the ashes of the old state rises a commonwealth, devoted to the tasks of production and

we must other social concerns, and united by the conviction that the way to deal with nature and to develop human beings in all directions is not through competitive atomism, but through co-operative effort....<sup>95</sup>

In short, we prefer the approach of John Dewey:

One might grant that a truly communistic society entails the existence of certain governmental or state functions in carrying out its business, but does this mean that the state must exist as well? Clearly, if the Marxist vision were ever realized, the state as an instrument of oppression would have no place. We are at this point asking whether the classless communist society described by Marx and Engels is incompatible with the existence of a state which serves, rather than dominates society. We think that the two are not incompatible, and in what follows shall try to show why this is so.

It was argued earlier in this paper that much of the confusion surrounding the Marxist doctrine of the state stems from the description Marx and Engels most frequently give of the state. This is the characterization of the state as the suppressive device of the dominant class. If this were all that Marx and Engels meant when they spoke of the state, then the state would be an impossibility in classless society. In order to determine whether there is another kind of state or, rather, something we could willingly call a state in a communist society,

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<sup>95</sup> M. M. Bober, Karl Marx's Interpretation of History (2nd. ed., Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1950), p. 275.



we must avoid thinking of states purely as oppressive or as case  
"brooding" omnipresent entities utterly separate from society.

In short, we prefer the approach of John Dewey: the problems

and progress. The concept of the state, like most concepts  
which are introduced by 'The,' is both too rigid  
and too tied up with controversies to be of ready associated  
use. It is a concept which can be approached by  
a flank movement more easily than by a frontal  
attack.<sup>96</sup>

Society pools its assets in labor, natural wealth,  
While we are not specifically concerned with Dewey and his  
philosophy, certain of his remarks are relevant to the issue of  
the state's place in a classless communist society. His concept  
of the "public" is in many ways analogous to what other theorists  
have said of society or the "community," but what he writes about  
the relationship of the state to society or "public" helps to  
clarify what we mean when we speak of the state. Dewey says  
that "the lasting, extensive and serious consequences of asso-  
ciated activity bring into existence a public."<sup>97</sup> We find in  
the writings of Marx and Engels that a classless society depends  
largely upon the existence and extent of co-operation or co-  
operative actions. The members of a communist society like the  
one described by Engels and Marx have both needs and obligations.  
Contributing to society and receiving from it entail the wishes  
and decisions of those who make it up, but it must somehow come

<sup>96</sup> Dewey, op. cit., p. 8.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., p. 67. p. 275.

associated activity of which Dewey speaks. It is also the case that the concern for the individual becomes society's concern, and conversely the individual is concerned about the problems and progress of the society. The replacement of competition by co-operation multiplies and strengthens the bonds of associated activity.

Society pools its assets in labor, natural wealth, capital, and science; calculates the diverse needs of its members; and apportions the resources among multiple industrial channels, to insure an uninterrupted and rich flow of products for every want....<sup>98</sup>

We have argued that the existence of society or of the "public" requires the existence of administrative and directive functions in order that the business of society may be carried on. Co-operation becomes meaningful when it ceases to be only an ideal and is objectified in the making and implementing of decisions and policy. The yield of successful co-operation must be administered even in a classless society where all, not merely a few, are to profit from the total labor and output of the society. Communist society does not escape the requirements of administration and supervision; neither Marx nor Engels suggested that it could. It cannot ignore the wishes and decisions of those who make it up, but it must somehow come

<sup>98</sup>On Authority," In Feuer's anthology, pp. 443-446, and 481-485.

<sup>98</sup> Bober, op. cit., p. 275.

to know and to evaluate those wishes.<sup>99</sup>

The point of all this is simply that a communist society, like any other society, needs administration and supervision in order to satisfy its wants and requirements. How does this relate to the existence of the state in such a society?

We refer once again to Dewey who says that where we find "the organization of the public effected through officials for the protection of the interests shared by its members," there we also find the state.<sup>100</sup> What Dewey says of the state and its relationship to common interests or ends is, of course, nothing very new. We find something similar throughout much of the history of political theory. We are often led to believe, for example, that Hobbes thought of the state exclusively as a device for bringing about peace, stability, and self-preservation, but we should also recall that the state is bound up with something called the "commodious life" and with providing those things which are in the common interest and which are not available outside the state. He tells us of the pre-political condition and of the absence of the elements of the common good:

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<sup>99</sup>For a discussion of the need for administration and authority, see Engels' letter to Theodor Cuno and his essay, "On Authority," In Feuer's anthology, pp. 443-46, and 481-85.

<sup>100</sup>Dewey, op. cit., p. 67. 23.

In such condition there is no place for industry, because the fruit thereof is uncertain; and consequently no culture of the earth; no navigation or use of commodities that may be imported by sea; no commodious building; no instruments of moving and removing such things as require force; no knowledge of the face of the earth; no account of time; no art; no letters; no society....<sup>101</sup>

Rousseau, like Hobbes, is aware of the state's relationship to the public interest or the common ends of society's members:

The first and most important deduction from the principle we have so far laid down is that the general will alone can direct the State according to the object for which it was instituted, i.e. the common good; for if the clashing of particular interests made the establishment of society necessary, the agreement of the very interests made it possible....It is solely on the basis of common interest that every society should be governed.<sup>102</sup>

Finally, we mention Edmund Burke and what he says of the common interests of society. In his Reflections on the Revolution in France, Burke talks of the function and nature of state and society:

Subordinate contracts for objects of mere occasional interest may be dissolved at pleasure--but the state ought not to be considered as nothing better than a partnership agreement in a trade of pepper and coffee, calico or tobacco, or some other such low concern, to be taken up for a little temporary interest, and to be dissolved by the fancy of the parties....It is to be a partnership in all science; a partnership in all art; the common good finds its expression in the cooperation of

<sup>101</sup>Hobbes, op. cit., p. 107.

<sup>102</sup>Edmund Burke, Works, Vol. II (London: Henry G. Boh, 1885), p. Rousseau, op. cit., p. 23.

a partnership in every virtue, and in all perfection.<sup>103</sup>

In the writings of each of these theorists, we find in the midst of all their differences an element of agreement: the state exists not only or not exclusively to serve and to protect the various interests of each individual, but also those of the entire society. With Hobbes and Rousseau, we find that the common good may often be different from what any particular individual thinks is in his personal interest; though, on the whole the best interests of society will square with those of its individual members. So we see that in the Leviathan peace and security are bought at a price insofar as the individual is deprived of his right to take whatever he can maintain. Nonetheless, in divesting himself of the right to everything, he has secured his continued self-preservation.

In the writings of Marx and Engels it appears that ultimately the individual's wishes and good and those of society will be substantially the same; thus, the conditions which lead to the free development of the individual will benefit society as well, and of course society's goals will be of direct benefit to each of its members. In the Marxist communist society, the common good finds its expression in the cooperation of

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<sup>103</sup> Edmund Burke, Works, Vol. II (London: Henry G. Boh, 1885), p. 368.

all members of the society, and it turns out that society's goal is the complete emancipation and development of its members.

The possibility of securing for every member of society, through social production, an existence which is not only fully sufficient from a material standpoint and becoming richer from day to day, but also guarantees to them the completely unrestricted development and exercise of their physical and mental faculties--this possibility now exists for the first time, but it does exist.<sup>104</sup>

In a truly communist society the ideals and interests of that society are the same; for, society's concern is for the individual and its ideal is his continued development and improvement. This is the nature of the public interest in the classless communist society, and it is the existence of the state which makes possible the achievement of what is in the public interest. We mentioned earlier the complexities of administration, distribution, and production in the society envisioned by Marx and Engels, and argued that these matters would require careful direction if that society is to realize the social and distributive justice towards which it aims. The administration of things is a difficult matter in any society, but when a society's ideals and material improvement depend upon the equitable administration and production of things, it becomes vital that such administration approaches perfection. It is interests when it chooses to develop itself and its members

<sup>104</sup> Engels, op. cit., Anti-Duhring, p. 171.



in the meeting of such a society's demands that we find the province of the state.

We are not saying, as Burke may have said, that society and the state are identical. Rather, the state in the communistic society turns out to be very much like what Marx and Engels said it would become; it is the servant of society. When communist society has set for itself its goals or aims, i.e. the liberation and improvement of each of its members, and has delegated to some or all of its members the authority required to conduct society's business so as to realize its aims and interests, we find the state. When Marx and Engels make the renovation of production and more equitable share in the total wealth necessary conditions for the improvement of that society and its individuals, they are also forced to concede that such a society cannot be achieved the the mechanics of production and consumption are not adequately administered. Society, whether classless or not, will require its organs or institutions through which to make its decisions and in order to determine whether this or that alternative serves the public interest best. We are not here confusing or equating "state" and "government," but are saying rather than when even classless society chooses, as it must, to administer and govern its affairs in the public interest; when it chooses to develop itself and its members to the fullest extent and does this by a more equitable

107. Lenin, op. cit., pp. 42-43.

administration of the fruits of society, it has admitted the state. Institutions for the administering of production

A public articulated and operating through representative officers is a state; there is no state without a government, but also there is none without the public.<sup>105</sup>

The business of society may be administered by occupational delegations of the workers<sup>106</sup> or by special representative officials.

Without representative institutions we cannot imagine democracy, not even proletarian democracy; but we can and must think of democracy without parliamentarism.... It is most instructive to notice that, in speaking of functions of those officials who are necessary both in the Commune and in proletarian democracy, Marx compares them with the workers of 'every employer,' that is, of the usual capitalist concern with its 'workers and managers.'<sup>107</sup>

Lenin, like Marx and Engels, is conceding the need for government and administration in a truly classless society; for, without them it could neither mature nor survive. The state does not vanish from the scene; rather, its oppressive role is converted into one of service, and it comes to serve not part, but all of society. It no longer stands over society; for, it has become the guardian of the common interest. The state's

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<sup>105</sup>Dewey, op. cit., p. 67.

<sup>106</sup>Jaszi, Encyclopaedia of the Social Sciences, op. cit., p. 201.

<sup>107</sup>Lenin, op. cit., pp. 41-42.

organs are no longer prisons, disproportionate taxes, and bodies of armed men. Institutions for the administering of production and the making of decisions in the interest of the entire society will have replaced the bureaucracy whose concern was for the ruling class. The oppressive state will wither away, but a new state emerges and is required in order to make a reality of the slogan: "from each according to his ability, to each according to his need."

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