

4. The "Dying Out" of the State and Revolution By Force

Engels' words concerning the "dying out" of the state have now such wide circulation, they are so frequently quoted, and they so sharply indicate the nature of the customary misrepresentation of Marxism by opportunism that it is necessary to dwell on them somewhat in detail. The whole passage from which they are taken follows:

"The proletariat will seize the state power and will, as a first step, transform all the means of production into a state possession. By this act, however, it will destroy itself as a proletariat, it will abolish all class distinctions and class antagonisms, and with them also the state. Society as it existed in the past and still exists today, moving as it does within the confines of class hostilities, needed the state, that is, an organization of the exploiting class for maintaining the external conditions of production, that is, a special power for keeping the exploited class by force in the conditions of oppression defined by the given circumstances of production (slavery, serfdom, wage labor). The state was the official representative of the society as a whole, its concentration, as it were, into a corporate personality, but it attained this dignity only insofar as it was the state of that class which, at the given epoch, stood for the entire social system; in ancient times, it was the state of the slave-holders, the citizens of the state; in the middle ages, the feudal nobility; in our day, the bourgeoisie. When the state shall finally become the representative, really, of all society, it will then, by that fact, make itself superfluous. As soon as there shall remain not a single social class that requires to be held in subjection, as soon as there shall disappear, together with class domination, together with the struggle for individual existence, resulting from the present anarchy in production, those collisions and excesses which arise from this

struggle—from that time on, no one will need to be suppressed, and there will be no further necessity for a special power of oppression, for the state. The first act undertaken by a government that will be acting in its capacity of representative of society, will be the seizure as its property of all the means of production in the name of society, and will simultaneously be its last independent act as a state. The interference of state power in social relations will then, in one field after another, become superfluous, and will pass away of its own accord. In place of a government over persons there will arise a control over things and a guidance of the processes of production. The state will not be abolished; it will die. It is from this standpoint that we must evaluate the phrase: "free popular government, a phrase which has, in its day, a certain right to existence as a means of agitation, but which in the last analysis is completely without any scientific foundation. And this enables us also to understand at its proper value, the demand of the so-called anarchists, that the state be abolished between today and tomorrow."

"Anti-Duehring, a Refutation of the Science of Herr Eugen Duehring," 3rd German edition, pp. 302-3.

It may be said without fear of error, that of this whole passage of Engels, so rich in ideas, only one point has really become a staple of socialist thought in the present-day socialist parties, namely, that according to Marx the state will "die," while anarchistic theory, on the other hand, speaks of "abolishing" the state. Reducing Marxism to these terms means making it opportunistic, for this "interpretation" leaves only a vague notion of slow, smooth, gradual transformation, of the absence of crises, and storms, of the absence of revolutions. "The dying out" of the state in this widespread, vulgar, and if I may say it, cheap conception is equivalent absolutely to an attempted omission, if not to a denial, of the revolution.

And yet "this interpretation" is the coarsest misrepresen-