

Socialism and The State

Socialist Labour Party of Great Britain



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“Since the advent of civilisation, the outgrowth of property has been so immense, its forms so diversified, its uses so expanding and its management so intelligent in the interests of its owners, that it has become, on the part of the people, an unmanageable power. The human mind stands bewildered in the presence of its own creation. The time will come, nevertheless, when human intelligence will rise to the mastery over property, and define the relations of the state to the property it protects, as well as the obligations and the limits of the rights of its owners. The interests of society are paramount to individual interests, and the two must be brought into just and harmonious relations. A mere property career is not the final destiny of mankind, if progress is to be the law of the future as it has been of the past. The time which has passed away since civilisation began is but a fragment of the past duration of man’s existence; and but a fragment of the ages yet to come. The dissolution of society bids fair to become the termination of a career of which property is the end and aim; because such a career contains the elements of self-destruction. Democracy in government, brotherhood in society, equality in rights and privileges, and universal education, foreshadow the next higher plane of society to which experience, intelligence and knowledge are steadily tending. It will be a revival, in a higher form, of the liberty, equality and fraternity of the ancient gentes.”

— *Lewis H. Morgan.*

“No Revolution ever rises above the intellectual level of those who make it, and little is gained where one false notion supplants another. But we must, some day, at last, and forever, cross the line between Nonsense and Common Sense. And on that day we shall pass from Class Paternalism, originally derived from fetish fiction in times of universal ignorance, to human brotherhood in accordance with the nature of things and our growing knowledge of it; *from Political Government to Industrial Administration; from Competition in Individualism to Individuality in Cooperation; from War and Despotism, in any form, to Peace and Liberty.*”

— *Thomas Carlyle.*

PREFACE

THE following pamphlet claims to be no more than an introduction to the subject of the Political State, a subject that tends to become of more and more importance. Events are moving rapidly towards a struggle between the two great opposing classes in society for control of the governing machinery of the nation, which is the concrete manifestation of the State. If the working class is to win in that struggle, it is vitally necessary that it should understand the nature and function of the State, its powers and its limitations.

The founders of scientific socialism kept this subject in the forefront of their writings from the first. Marx, with the ripe experience of mature age put his opinion on record that the machinery of the modern State could not be used by the working class for the achievement of its emancipation. Political and industrial events since his time have amply multiplied the evidence in support of his view.

Yet, for fifty years, political parties professing Socialism and Marxism have done their level best to distort and conceal this aspect of Marx's teaching. For fifty years they have sought to persuade the workers to place their reliance upon that very State machinery for the achievement of their emancipation which Marx saw clearly could not be used for such a purpose. They have done this, and are still doing it, with the name of Marx upon their lips. Greater treachery could hardly be conceived.

The tragic result is that the masses of workers move in a maze of confusion and have less knowledge on the subject of the State than the professional class. The workers realise the failure of the capitalist class to conduct industry efficiently and see the need for its overthrow, but they know not how to set about the task.

The chaos into which the Labour Movement has now got itself constitutes a damning indictment of the political parties who have usurped the name of Socialism and Marxism, under cover of which they have preached a hotch-potch of anti-Marxian reformism. In this disgraceful work they have been ably assisted by the leaders of the Trades Unions.

The Socialist Labour Parties of America, Canada, Great Britain and Australia are the only bodies which have consistently adhered to the Marxian principle that the State, as an instrument of class rule, is a transitory institution which can never be used to achieve the emancipation of the working class. Standing firmly upon that principle, the Socialist Labour Parties have turned their attention to the historical reasons for the Marxian viewpoint, and to the increasing evidence in support of it

thrown up by political and industrial developments since the days of Marx and Engels.

Amongst other examples of the latter we may take the case of the German Labour Movement. In 1918, that movement became supreme in the State, but unsupported by the industrial power which still remained in the hands of the capitalist class, the Social Democratic Labour leaders could not use their political power to wrest the industries from the hands of the industrial magnates. Even if they could have done so they had neglected to create any institution capable of organising industry successfully. That neglect cost them the loss of their victory. They had ignored the words of Marx and trusted entirely to the use of the State machinery, and the workers of Germany have been, and still are, paying the penalty for that blunder of their trusted leaders. Those leaders fell back upon a capitalist republic, and, to console the workers for their continued wage-slavery, they made great play with a series of showy reforms and labour legislation.

Fifteen years later, in 1933, those labour leaders had another chance. But, alas, the previous failure had taught them nothing, and again they were unprepared with an alternative institution for supplanting the State. They had to surrender to the Nazi Beast and allow him to take control without striking a single blow for freedom. Their much-boasted reforms went for waste paper or became the basis of Dr Leys' infamous "Labour Front."

Another example of the disasters awaiting those who pin their faith to the use of the State for the accomplishment of working-class aims, was the fate of the French Popular Government under M. Blum. Here, also, they were unprepared with any organisation capable of taking power from the capitalist class, if they ever had the intention of doing so. Like their German colleagues, they played with the State and its offices as children play with new toys.

Great boasting was made about their marvellous reforms. Those reforms were later rendered null and void with the approval of M. Blum himself. As in Germany the Social Democratic leaders had been turned out by the Nazis, so in France, the Blum reformers were eventually sacrificed to the wolves of Cagoulardism and Fascism. Germany and France alike provide evidence of the correctness of the Marxian claim regarding the uselessness of the State machinery for the purposes of proletarian revolution.

The experience in Britain must not be forgotten. We have had two Labour Governments and both were ignominious failures. With the State machinery as

weapon the bureaucracy beat them easily. The Labour Party accomplished nothing. Even such few measures as it got passed, it lacked the courage to enforce. *Such was the fate of the Seven Hours Bill for the miners. The first Labour Government was torpedoed by the bureaucracy with the publication of the spurious Zinoviev letter. The second fared even worse. It was punctured by the May Committee, a committee of which it was the legitimate father. It did not recover from that parricidal blow, but collapsed, as one paper put it, “ like an empty sack that could no longer stand upright.”¹ Like rats scurrying from a sinking ship, its chief leaders ran for their lives to the safe shelter of the Tory Party, Once again, the capitalist Political State, with its Panzer Divisions of trained bureaucrats, showed itself to be an insurmountable barrier to working-class emancipation via the organs of the State.

Despite these experiences, politicians of the Labour and Socialist Parties throughout the English-speaking world, are urging the workers along that same path which led to these previous disasters. Blind to the lessons of history, they seek to deceive the workers with the false theory that Socialism consists only in nationalising this and that industry under the control of governments that are, ever and always, the mere tools of leading capitalist groups.

It is, therefore, vitally necessary that workers should study the Marxian concept of the State, its nature and place in historic development. Brought into existence as an instrument of government and oppression of subject classes, the State can never be the means of emancipating the working class, which means the emancipation of the human race from oppression and exploitation.

Political action is a branch of activity closely allied to that of the Union. It is a vital and necessary activity within capitalist society, but it cannot be the constructive agency of the new society of Socialism, and of its corollary, the social appropriation of the products of social industry.

For that purpose the workers have to create their own organs suitable to the task. It is to the honour of the great American Socialist, Daniel De Leon, that he,

¹ The Labour Premier, Mr Macdonald, had appointed a Parliamentary Committee on National Expenditure, under the presidency of Sir Geo. May. Known as the “May Committee,” its Report insisted upon economics and reduction of expenditure, by which was meant the reduction of the amount expended on unemployment doles. The Government was placed in a cleft stick. To reduce the doles would expose them before the electorate as promise-breakers whilst to repudiate the Committee’s Report required more courage than the entire Labour Party possessed. It was a victory of capitalism’s bureaucracy over the Parliament. The Labour Government was thus punctured by a committee it had itself created.

many years ago, foresaw this problem and turned his investigations to seeking the solution of it. That solution is the creation of an Industrial Union embracing within its ranks the entire body of useful producers irrespective of the grade or nature of the contribution made in the total sum of social usefulness. Only such a Union is capable of taking, organising and operating the industries and, at the same time, of superseding and taking the place of the outdated and corrupt Political State.

Only a working class understanding these issues as well as the necessity of having its own form of administration, is capable of freeing the productive forces from the fetters of capitalist production for profit, and allowing their free development for unlimited production in the future. On the other hand, lacking such a trained and equipped working class we shall sink deeper into the morass of industrial serfdom, deprived of all liberty as already experienced by the workers on the Continent.

Should this booklet, if only in a small degree, contribute to an awakening interest and study of the problem amongst the workers, its purpose will have been achieved.

NATIONAL EXECUTIVE COUNCIL,
Socialist Labour Party of Great Britain.

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CHAPTER I.

“The working class cannot simply lay hold of the ready—made State machinery and wield it for its own purposes.”—MARX.

“Governments are committees of the ruling class intended to safeguard the yoke of capitalist exploitation upon the neck of the working class.”—DE LEON.

“The existence of the State proves that the class antagonisms are irreconcilable.”—LENIN.

PROBABLY no subject causes more confusion than that of the nature and function of the State, and on no subject is confusion more dangerous to the working-class movement. Numbers of books have been written on the State, and for many years politicians with pen and voice have extolled the glories of this institution and advertised the blessings that were to flow from it. If the glory appeared sometimes to be obscured or if the blessings failed to flow the explanation was that the wrong people were in charge of it. Put a new lot (themselves) there and our heaven on earth would begin at once.

For nearly forty years the Socialist Labour Party, in speech and writing, has pointed out the falsity of this conception, and it again draws attention to the necessity of a clear understanding of the State if the working class is to fulfil its historical mission and bring peace and plenty to a world of struggle and ever—increasing misery.

How The State Arose.

Contrary to the popular belief, the State has not always existed. It came into being at a stage in man’s history when the primitive communal society was undermined by the growth of private property and the resulting opposing interests of those who owned, and those who did not own, property. Class antagonisms and struggles arose. So fierce did these become that they threatened the very existence of society itself. An institution was necessary to keep order and restrain the violence of the clashes. That institution was THE STATE.

From the beginning the false claim was made that the State was the representative of all the people and therefore stood above all class divisions, an illusion that has been fostered by all successive ruling classes through every age to

this day. It is diligently cultivated and used by the modern capitalist class through its universities, press and politicians. But it is false. Such an institution will inevitably be manned and administered by the class that is most powerful, the owners of the means by which society lives.

Just as certainly will that class use it in its own class interests. History shows that it has always been so used, and it is certain that so long as class society exists, it will continue to be used as an engine of oppression to keep the subject mass under the domination of the ruling class.

With each step in the progress of mankind which involved the overthrow of one ruling class and its substitution by another, the State has been modified and adapted to the economic conditions prevailing and the needs of the ruling class. In all modern highly industrialised countries it has been so adapted that Marx could aptly say:—"The modern State is but an executive committee for administering the affairs of the whole capitalist class."

The State is an instrument of class rule and serves the interests of the ruling class. Its mere presence is evidence of the fact that class conflict cannot be harmonised. It follows that an institution born of class division and designed to serve the interests of the dominant class cannot at the same time act in the interests of the subject and exploited class. In terms applicable to our own day, the State cannot at one and the same time be an instrument in the hands of the capitalist class to keep the workers in subjection and an instrument for the emancipation of the working class. Where there can be no class rule an institution for class rule is useless.

The Role of the Politician.

The quotation from Marx at the head of this chapter is the fruit of his ripe experience and was written after the working men of Paris had made the experience of the Commune of 1871. The importance of his remark coupled with the experience gained in the heroic struggle of the working men and women of Paris during the Commune is either lost or conveniently forgotten by the parliamentary, self-styled representatives of Socialism. The fact emerging from that historic event was that the existing organs of government, that is to say, the State machinery, could not be adapted to working class needs and that some other form of organisation was required. Do the so-called Socialist politicians ever get down to this, the great need of the hour? Never. They talk glibly about Marx but never heed his teaching. The

only song to be heard from them is, that it is the bad men who hold office who are to blame, and a new set of officials, to wit, themselves, would be able to transform evil into good.

Typical of this was the statement of the Communist Member for West Fife, in the House of Commons on Sept. 20th, 1939, when, dealing with the need for a new Government, he said: "Such a Government must come from this side of the House (the Labour Party side) with all that is best from other parts of the House around it." Here you see the political charlatan who, when he was seeking the votes of the Fifeshire miners, bubbled over with revolutionary froth, but, now that he is elected, throws his revolutionary professions to the winds and openly appeals to the capitalist sections of the House for class collaboration in running the capitalist State machinery. No wonder the capitalists in the House regard him as a harmless individual whilst Labour Party Members look on him as a bit of a nuisance who persists in appointing himself as their bootlicker in general, in the hope that one day they will reward his efforts by admitting him into their reactionary outfit.

The Marxian Socialist position that the emancipation of the working class can only be undertaken by that class itself means nothing to these politicians who, under the label of Socialism, have retarded the real Socialist enlightenment and organisation. of the working class.

Socialism, if it means anything, means the ending of class-divided society along with its repressive Political State. It means the institution of classless society with the necessary organisation for the administration of that new society. It means, as Engels has told us, the administration of the affairs of production in place of class rule and class government.

Any Party claiming to stand for working-class emancipation, and spending any effort to perpetuate, or to operate, the Political State, is deliberately falsifying the whole case for Socialism and, consequently, is unworthy of working-class confidence. For a knave is as bad as a fool, and a fool is as dangerous as a knave.

The State is the antithesis of Socialism. It stands for servitude. Socialism stands for Freedom.

CHAPTER II.

Different Forms of The State.

IT is seen from the foregoing that the State is an institution of class-divided society designed to keep oppressed classes in subjection. Whilst its general nature remains the same, it, like all social institutions, takes different forms in differing stages of evolution. In ancient society it began as the small City State and developed through many changes till it finally reached the form of the World State.

The Roman Empire was the most perfect form of the World State but it was also the last. Economic conditions had reached a point at which the World State became too unwieldy to function effectively. True, an effort was made to re-establish it as the so-called Western Empire, but this was never able to exercise any real power and eventually faded away. It was several centuries before State Power again became effective in the form of the National State, an essentially capitalist form which it retains to-day. For an understanding of this form of the State it will be necessary to briefly examine conditions in the Feudal period in which it germinated.

Feudalism.

In feudal times, each local community was a self-sufficing whole and its needs were supplied mainly from its own sources. Little contact was made with the outside world and local exclusiveness prevailed everywhere. He who did not belong to the community was a stranger, a foreigner. Even if he lived in the village he was still a foreigner unless he held a holding of land in the mark. There was no national language, the various communities having their own dialects. The Nation did not then exist though the king might claim certain territory as his Realm. The villagers were not regarded as the king's subjects, they were serfs of the baron, or lord, of the land on which they lived. They did not think of themselves as Frenchmen, or Englishmen, but rather as the folk of the manor and of the lord who held it, the master of the land who had power of life and death over them.

Political power was shared by (1) the king, chief of the barons and usually the largest landholder among them; (2) the Church, the greatest feudalic landholder in Christendom ; (3) the landholding barons. The king did not rule, at first, by any divine right. He ruled by the more material might of the number of battle-axes he could summon to his aid. He was elected by the barons who regarded themselves as

his equals, his peers. They could, and often did, make war upon him, sometimes making him their prisoner if nothing worse.

Though the king might claim a given territory which he could control with the aid of his barons, his writ could only run just as far, and so long, as he had power to enforce it. Constant struggles took place between him and his barons on this point. Whilst the king knew his own safety lay in enforcing his own control of the administration of justice, the barons fought tenaciously for sole jurisdiction within their own domains.

This was one of the important issues of the Magna Carta the barons extorted from King John at Runnymede. Later ruling classes have successfully maintained the idea that Magna Carta was the basis of popular liberty. It had, in fact, little or no concern for the masses of the people. In part, it was a claim for the “liberty” of the barons to defy the king’s writ and maintain their right to try their serfs in their own baronial courts. The demand for “trial by peers” merely meant that they themselves should only be tried by their fellow barons and not by the king’s royal judges, who were not their peers but only servants of the king. The people had much to lose and nothing to gain from this famous “liberty” of trial by peers. The historian, Pollard, says: “The villeins, who were the bulk of the nation, remained after Magna Carta, as before, in the position of a man’s ox or horse to-day.”

The only organisation standing above the local communities, strong enough to exercise influence over them, was the Catholic Church, the largest landholder in the feudal world. This great feudalic power with its universal property, its universal language and organisation, aimed at world state power and claimed dominion over kings, barons and people.

State power, being thus ineffectively divided between the king, the barons and the Church, prevented any one section from exercising sufficient power to maintain order. Progress was stultified. The force that was making for further progress lay in the groups of handicraft workers and small traders in the towns.

The Rise of Handicraft and Commerce.

The township, like the village, was an exclusive community. The impulse for its development came from outside. Trade with Italy had never quite ceased after the fall of the Roman Empire. Nobles, ecclesiastics, as well as others of the richer class, secured in this way articles of luxury, fine linens, ornaments, &c. Many kept special craft workers at their courts, for the artisan was not at first a producer of

commodities. He was in the service of the community, or, with a feudal lord, or churchman, and produced for their use alone. As in all social change, many factors played a part in the advance that took place. It is enough to say that these artisans formed the starting-point for the growth of handicrafts, and, as the demand for their products increased, they became free producers of commodities, producing for sale instead of for private use.

Attempts were soon made to imitate the fine products of the East. Wherever this succeeded, merchants found it profitable to obtain raw materials and have it worked up at home. This, in turn, led to an increase in the numbers of handicraft workers, and thus, as Kautsky says: “laid the foundations of the capitalist mode of production.” The artisans became an important class in the economic life of the communities. Mercantile capital began to make its appearance and trade grew apace.

This development met with serious obstacles from the political forms of feudalism, and from the claims of barons for sole jurisdiction within their domains which will be mentioned later. In these circumstances the necessities of the artisans and traders of the towns coincided in many ways with those of the king. Both wished to limit the power of the barons. Traders desired stable conditions for trade, and the king wished to enforce his own writ throughout his realm. This would bring those settled conditions the traders sighed for. Succeeding kings saw many other advantages to be gained from cultivating goodwill with the rising commercial towns. There was the possibility of getting financial support which would make them less dependent upon their barons as well as the equally important possibility of obtaining fighting men in their own service. History shows many examples of industrial towns, as for instance, Coventry, supplying both money and fighting men to kings in their wars with their barons.

This assistance was not given without conditions. The merchants, organised in their guilds, knew how to drive a hard bargain, whether with the king or anyone else. They believed in exchange, not in gifts. The king had to purchase their assistance with grants of freedom from feudal restrictions of various kinds. Step by step the trading class was winning power and influence in the political world. The conditions were being laid for the re-establishment of the State in a new form, that of the National State.

CHAPTER III.

The National State.

THE National State, or the capitalist form of the Political State, which is the same thing, did not come into being according to any fixed plan. Like other institutions it took shape little by little in response to needs as they arose.

Handicraft gave birth to trade and then to commerce. Handicraft could exist inside the local community, but the whole world is not big enough for commerce. Local isolation gave way before the needs of trade. Mercantile capital was becoming, what it remained for several centuries, the revolutionary economic force of the period. As early as the thirteenth century, at least one trading expedition had reached as far as China, and, within the next two centuries, the sea route to India had been navigated, while the discovery of America added enormously to the area for expansion.

The Conflict with Feudalism.

This extraordinary expansion and activity, however, accentuated and made more urgent the antagonisms we have already mentioned between the needs of trade and feudal forms, feudal rights and customs.

Commerce needed safety for travel and transport to and from ports and markets. This conflicted with the claims of feudal lords for unquestioned rule within their estates. Trade needed peaceful and stable conditions for its operation, whilst feudalism was by its very nature turbulent and warlike. Trade needed free workers for regularity of production which was impossible of attainment whilst feudal barons claimed absolute rights over the time and labour of the people.

Trade and commerce urgently needed centralised government over wider areas in which equal laws should be enforced, whilst feudal barons would allow no law except that of the sword within their little holdings. And commerce now needed an efficient army to protect its interests abroad, to defeat competitor countries, conquer new markets, as well as to defend the safety of the roads at home against the feudal lords and their warrior retainers.

These and similar antagonisms were springing up everywhere between the merchant class and the existing feudal domination. The need for the *political nation* was already there. Its foundation stones were laid by commerce whose interests it

was destined to serve. Political centralisation under a leader powerful enough and with sufficient force at his back to enforce unity of administration, became the economic necessity of the time.

The king, or prince, was clearly the only possible leader available. For quite other reasons he wished to increase his own power, enforce his own administration~ to be, in fact, the only master within his realm. He was dependent upon his barons not only for support, but for fighting men, and the latter might at any moment be withdrawn by their lord. If he could have his own army independent of the barons his position was infinitely stronger. His interests therefore accorded with those of the merchant class. Each king shrewd enough to see that two and two made four, saw the opportunities and took advantage of them.

Already, in the twelfth century, Henry the First had granted the London Charter. In this we see, as in all later ones, the insistent demand for settled laws. The Charter carried the promise that the king would grant the citizens justice, administered impartially by royal officers. Every townsman could claim to be tried by his fellow townsmen. Trade was to be protected from toll or exaction over the length and breadth of his kingdom.

This Charter became the model for those won afterwards by other towns. In other countries it was the same. The famous Middelburg Charter granted by Count William the First of Holland, and Countess Joanna of Flanders, follows it closely, but goes further in its opposition to the power of landholders and their interference with the townsmen. It enacts that if a dispute arises between a Middelburger and an outsider (landholder, for instance) the Schepens (Magistrates) shall arrange it. "If either party refuses submission to them, they must ring the town bell and summon an assembly of all the burghers to compel him."

Another factor tending to make possible the political nation was that of language. Commerce and trade had broken the isolation of the local communities for ever. Local dialects could no longer serve. The universal language, Latin, was unknown to the traders and they fell back on that of the towns which thus began to be the common language of all. It was used in trade documents and slowly became a written language, thereby helping to bind the entire population together and making a further step towards nationality. It was the logical outcome of economic development that Langland and Chaucer wrote their works in English, and Wycliffe translated the Bible into the same tongue.

These tendencies toward political nationality did not go unopposed. Barons and

Church sensed that it was a danger and resisted it. At this point it may be well to emphasise that the Church of Rome was, and is still, essentially a feudal institution. It wielded immense power in the feudal world and claimed kingdoms as its fiefs. Even to-day, its claims to temporal power are feudal in character. It was a much more formidable opponent to nationality than the barons could be. The fact that no Englishman ever held a See in its Church in England until the time of Henry the First shows how little regard it had for nationality. And, in line with its feudal character it retains that opposition to nationality still. The writing of the Catholic, Lord Acton, on Nationality shows it. Though a forlorn hope, Church and barons opposed the development towards the Nation. It was by their efforts that Joan of Arc, the first person to rally French armies under the banner of nationalism, was brought to the stake and done to death.

Economic progress had made the political nation a necessity and it was already being fashioned. It came at a time, and as the result of, economic needs of the new rising commercial class, of infant capitalism in fact. Step by step through the following centuries it took shape according to the needs of capitalism as those needs arose.

The Rise of Parliaments.

Central political administration leads by natural sequence to parliaments. So long as land was the basis of taxation, or rather, of material support to the king, only the lords, spiritual and temporal, were called to the Great Council. With the king's growing dependence upon the mercantile class for support, it was inevitable that they also should be called to it. Edward the First did call them. The great and persistent need of the king was for money. The merchant guilds of the towns could provide it. But they gave conditionally: they had petitions to make to the king. So they came to Westminster to bargain. The king must give them concessions for their money. Slowly they gained their points and eventually got a share in government. But, even to-day, the modern House of Commons, no matter how unanimous its decisions, must present them for the king's approval in the form of a *humble prayer and petition*. Their decisions can only be placed on the Statute Book when the king has granted their petition by attaching his signature.

At the same time the King got more than money. The aid given by this taxable "third estate" enabled him to make firm his own control, and maintain his own army by means of which he finally overcame the power of the landholders, as well

as consolidating his kingdom.

The Church, unable to adapt itself to commercial dominance, continued its resistance until the sixteenth century. A clash was inevitable. Commerce could not tolerate a rival. It was now more universal than the Church itself. The clash came in England with Henry the Eighth's dispute with the Church. Henry, a much greater statesman than historians have painted him, boldly took advantage of the weakness of the Papacy at the time, as well as the support of the commercial class in England, repudiated the authority of the Pope and declared himself head of the Church in England. He did not start a new Church: he merely became head of the existing Catholic Church. The Church of England, adaptable to the capitalist outlook, was not formed till after his death. By his policy he made the kingly power absolute. He was master in his realm, now the English Nation.

Capitalist Supremacy.

About a century passed before the capitalist class, feeling itself strong enough to contest monarchical power, turned their arms against their former royal ally, and eventually by the so-called "glorious revolution of 1688," drove the miserable weakling, James the Second, from the throne and established a limited monarchy with the capitalist class in the dominant position. The same result was brought about in France a hundred years later, when the French Revolution brought a Republic into being. The State had now taken the form of the Political Nation. In the hands of the capitalist class it had become, in the words of Marx: "an executive committee for administering the affairs of the whole capitalist class."

With the revolution of 1688, the Political Nation was practically perfected. In detail it has been modified from time to time as the interests of capitalism required. The remnants of the old feudal landholders have disappeared, or become merged in capitalism, but, in form, the National State remains the same. The National State is the product of capitalism, fashioned and adapted to operate in capitalist society. As the S.L.P. has said before, it is the political form of capitalism.

As a railway engine is built to run on rails and is useless for other purposes, so the national state, with its organs of government, adapted to govern class-divided capitalist society, cannot be used for the revolutionary purposes of the working class. The working class must fashion its own organs, its own instruments, for operating its own classless society of the future.

CHAPTER IV.

The Revolutionary Period of Capitalism.

“From the serfs of the Middle Ages sprang the chartered burghers of the first towns; from these burghers evolved the first elements of the capitalist class.”—MARX.

“The capitalist class has played in history a most revolutionary part.”—MARX.

WE have seen that the rise of handicraft and trade brought in its wake a struggle against feudal power. In the course of the struggle the burghers took advantage of the necessities of the king to purchase from him charters freeing them from feudal exactions, and giving them a measure of self-government. We saw also that in response to their economic and political needs the foundations of the National State were laid. As trade and wealth grew, mercantile capital arose and became a powerful force. That was the infancy of capitalism.

Each step in the advance of the capitalist class towards economic and political dominance was marked by fierce struggle and by the revolutionary overthrow of every institution, not excepting the Roman Catholic Church, that stood in its way. One king was brought to the scaffold and another driven from his throne, before the capitalist class finally achieved for itself predominant power and the completion of its instrument of rule, the National State. Truly indeed, Marx could say: “The capitalist class in history has played a most revolutionary part.”

In those days of its revolutionary youth, the capitalist class claimed its struggle as one for the whole of the people. The claim had an *appearance* of truth. History had not yet made sharp and clear the division between the capitalist and working classes. It seemed that the capitalist struggle against feudal and royal absolutism was a struggle for the liberty of all. So, the French capitalist class, in 1789, was able to draw to its support the oppressed masses of the people; and the English capitalists secured the aid of workers for its own interests, as in the Reform Bill and Corn Laws agitations. “In all these battles it (the capitalist class) finds itself compelled to appeal to the working class, to call for its aid, and thus to draw it into the political arena. It thus provides the working class with the elements of social education, that is, with the weapons to be used against the capitalist class itself.”—*Marx.*

Those revolutionary days of capitalism, were bound to come to an end. The Nineteenth Century was its golden age. In spite of periodic industrial crises, it was a time of vast expansion. The advance of science gave a tremendous impetus to industry. Steam, Railways, Electricity and Telegraphy opened up possibilities that formerly would have appeared as fantastic dreams.

Productivity increased by leaps and bounds. Markets for the immense mass of new products could be found by subduing “backward nations” and forcing them to open their frontiers for the sale of capitalist commodities. In the words of Marx: “The capitalist class, by the rapid improvement of all the instruments of production, and by constantly facilitating communication, draws into civilisation even the most barbarian nations. . . . It forces all nations, on pain of extinction, to adopt the capitalist mode of production. In one word, it creates a world after its own image.”

But in that very fact lay the Achilles heel of capitalism. The surface of the earth is limited. The time must come when there could be no further expansion, no more “backward nations” to subdue, no more new territories to exploit. At the same time there are no known limits to the expansion of the powers of production. The time must come when alongside of an expanding power of production, markets would dwindle and fade out. Whenever that time should come it would bring a crisis beside which all previous crises would pale into insignificance. That catastrophe loomed in the near distance at the end of the century. Capitalists could plainly see the handwriting on the wall and it extinguished the last spark of their enthusiasm for liberty, democracy and freedom for the working class below them.

Workers’ Political Action.

Another factor had already damped their ardour for democracy. In the latter half of the century the workers had acquired a dim consciousness of the class struggle. Socialist doctrines, if not wholly accepted, had made a considerable impression, and were aided by the intensification of exploitation. The working class was already clamouring for a share of the political control of the State. As Marx had predicted, capitalism, drawing the workers into the political arena to fight its battles, had indeed, given them the “elements of social education, that is, with the weapons to be used against the capitalist class itself.” That alone was enough to put an end to capitalist fervour for democracy.

But, worse was to come. In 1905, British workers elected forty of their own representatives to the Parliament. It is true these representatives were a spineless

crowd, certainly no danger to capitalism. As De Leon has told us, however, capitalists sense danger from afar. Though they had no fear of those particular Labour Members, the mere election of special workers' representatives was a sign of awakening class consciousness among those workers. Once started on that path who could tell where they would stop? They might, one day, go a step further and replace those forty tame poodles with forty virile revolutionists. Such a prospect was not pleasant to Messrs the Capitalists.

The National State, built up by capitalism itself, was showing cracks. Whilst capitalists had been able to, claim to be representative of the whole people, and yet monopolise the governing machinery, the democratic state had worked well—*for them*. Now that the working class was seeking to use political action for itself, political democracy assumed for capitalists quite a different colour. It had clothed itself in the dress of executioner. The weapon they had fashioned in their struggle against feudalism was now transformed into a boomerang. Once again the State machinery must be overhauled. It was now *too* democratic.

Modification of State Machinery.

In a remarkable passage Frederick Engels tells us the irony of history turns everything upside down. "We, the 'revolutionists,' the 'upsetters,' we thrive better with legal than with illegal means in forcing an overthrow. The parties of order, as they call themselves, perish because of the legal conditions set up by themselves . . . while we with this same legality acquire swelling muscles and red cheeks and look the picture of health." And he adds, if we do but refuse to be lured into street battles, the only way they can get at us is by "violation of the constitution, dictatorship, back to absolutism." Have not events in Europe in the last fifteen years shown us how correct was Engels' forecast? Have not the capitalist class everywhere resorted to "violation of the constitution, dictatorship, back to absolutism?"² It may be said there are still great democracies. Let us go a little further and we shall see.

A poacher's well-trained dog never makes a noise when chasing game. His owner would shoot him if he did. It attracts too much notice. Similarly, astute

² In view of the prevalent scribbling of University-trained ignoramuses to the effect that Marxism is obsolete and inapplicable to modern capitalism, the reader is invited to note, from these quotations, to which many more might be added, how thoroughly and how correctly Marx and Engels had analysed capitalist society, and could, by the aid of that analysis, foretell the course of capitalism in these latter days.

capitalists never make a noise when assailing civil liberties. British capitalists were now confronted with the necessity of hamstringing any workers' use of political action. They did not set about it by organising a March on Rome, nor by a Reichstag Fire. Only clumsy, upstart amateurs do those sort of things. They attract too much notice. Far more cunning methods were adopted.

Transfer of Power.

First of all there began a series of Acts of Parliament having as their object the transfer of power from the House of Commons into the hands of the Executive. We cannot give a complete list of these, but shall mention a few. The National Insurance Act, the Mental Deficiency Act, The Treaty of Peace Act (embodying objectionable features from D.O.R.A.), the Emergency Powers Act, 1920, the Children's Act of 1926, the Trades Disputes Act of 1927, the Disaffection Acts, and so on.

The most far-reaching of these was the Emergency Powers Act of 1920. This places it within the power of the King, that is to say, in the power of the Cabinet, at any time, to declare a state of emergency to exist. They can then suspend constitutional liberties and govern by Regulations framed by the Executive. Thus the great achievements of "the glorious revolution of 1688," Habeus Corpus included, can be legally sabotaged. And this was no war-time measure. Passed in 1920, it was put into operation against the striking miners in 1921.

Alongside of this we have seen a steady arrogation of power in the hands of the Cabinet at the expense of private Members of the House of Commons. The Cabinet was not a constitutional body. Not that it was illegal, but that it had no place in the Constitution. Even to-day, a Cabinet Minister cannot be appointed, though he is nominated, by the Prime Minister. He must receive the insignia of his office direct from the King, to whom he must also resign it. He is the King's Minister. By precedent after precedent, the Cabinet has acquired a recognised standing. Its powers can only increase at the expense of those of the House of Commons.

There is yet another method by which Parliament is deprived of power. It has become a custom for chief Ministers to visit foreign States and make agreements with them. On their return the Parliament is faced with an accomplished fact which it can only endorse.

This method of depriving Parliament of any say in the matter had been exceptional. Now it has become the custom. It will be remembered how this worked

out at the time of Munich. The leaders of both Liberal and Labour Parties appealed to the Prime Minister to call the Parliament together six days before he went to Munich, so that the *representatives of the people* could be consulted on any decisions to be made. And it will be remembered that he peremptorily refused to do so. Without consulting Parliament, he went to Munich, where Czecho-Slovakia was slaughtered to make a Hitlerian holiday, and he came back with his worthless agreement claiming he had “secured peace for our time.” The Parliament was faced with an accomplished fact. What could it do? Nothing. A few months later he went to Rome, and again, he did not seek the advice, nor consult with the representatives of the people in Parliament. Nor did he disclose to the Parliament his intentions or consult its members on the policy he proposed to pursue. What had become of Parliamentary Government procedure? And, what was the precise difference between the representatives of “democratic” Britain and of “totalitarian” Italy?

Thus, since the entry of workers’ representatives to the Parliament, there has been a steady but consistent limitation of the powers of the parliamentary representatives of the citizens. The State machinery is being adapted to forestall any attempt to secure working class aims through legislation. It might be well if the pure and simple political Socialist parties, who naively believe they can establish Socialism by Parliamentary enactment alone, would ponder on these developments.

Incidentally, one might ask, what are the Labour Party Members of Parliament doing while this process is going on? What opposition do they offer to it? None. They have neither the courage nor the desire to challenge it. They are ready at all times to collaborate with the Government and surrender anything they are asked to surrender. In a recent debate in the House, when, from the Liberal, not from the Labour Benches, the Government was challenged on certain Regulations made under the recent Emergency Powers Act, some Labour Members took part in the debate. The best answer that could have been made to them was that, tauntingly Rung in their faces, by the Home Secretary, when he said:

“These are drastic powers, but I would point out that they are powers which the House knew that it was entrusting to the Secretary of State when it passed the Act without a Division.”

The Act was passed, as he said, without a Division. Not a vote was recorded against it. After the Labour Members had thus, without question, given the

Government powers to frame those Regulations, they had no ground for complaint of the Regulations when the Government had framed them. Could anything more pusillanimous than this Labour Party be imagined?

Thus the State, in the days of capitalism's decadence and decay, is being modified to emasculate any opposition of the people's representatives to the Executive and is approximating more and more to the substance of totalitarianism. As a contributor to *THE SOCIALIST* has said: "There is no need of a March on Rome, when the seat of power is already won."

CHAPTER V.

WE have now traced the growth of the State and shown that it arose as an instrument of class rule and class oppression, that it has fulfilled that function through the ages, and that, with the birth of capitalism, it was slowly modified and adapted to the needs of the present system of class exploitation. In our day it has become a highly centralised and effective weapon in the hands of the ruling class. By its means that class can and does compel the submission of the working class.

The so-called Democratic State has precisely the same power .to subject the working class to its yoke as any totalitarian state. Let us never be deceived by names but judge always on realities. The National State, democratic or totalitarian, is an engine of repression in class-divided societies, wherever there is a ruling and a ruled class. Since Socialist society knows no classes nor class rule it can have no need or function for the State.

With that in mind it should be easy to grasp the importance of the words of Marx when, after the experience of the Paris Commune, he wrote:

“The working class cannot simply lay hold of the ready-made State machinery and wield it for its own purposes.”

That is perfectly true. Working-class victory will throw upon that class the serious responsibility of organising and continuing in operation the industries of the land. The very life of the population depends upon that, and any pure and simple political party that would seek to overthrow the existing capitalist system without first providing for the continuance of industry would do so at its peril and would be guilty of criminal treachery to the working class.

Capitalist Development.

Lest this be thought too strong a condemnation take note of the following. The development of capitalism has brought production from simple manufacture to the great modern industry of to-day where mammoth machinery now performs the work previously done by hand and where the worker, instead of performing the whole operation, by a system of intense sub-division of labour merely performs a small part of the process.

This division of labour has taken away all meaning from such terms as

watchmaker, engineer, bootmaker, and so on, these workers now doing only an insignificant part instead of doing the whole job. The extent of this development may be gauged by a statement of Mr Rowse, official of the Ministry of Munitions, to the effect that in some cases productivity had increased 700 times since the last war, and also, from the fact of a girl operating a machine, engaged on aeroplane parts, doing a job in three and a half minutes which formerly occupied a man thirty-nine hours.

This enormous growth of productivity is achieved only by the adoption of mammoth machinery and rationalised mass production. That machinery can only, be set in operation by the thoroughly organised *social labour* of vast masses of workers. Every industry is interdependent on all others. Witness the slowing up and stoppage of transport, electric power, and all industries dependent upon them in the great mining strikes of the 'twenties. Industry is the life blood of modern society and its stoppage spells famine and chaos.

This holds whether in capitalist or Socialist society. With the advent of Socialism the workers will need an organisation ready and capable of organising and operating the vast productive machinery of the country. Failure would spell disaster. Are we then too strong in our condemnation of the scatterbrained pure and simple political parties who prattle of overthrowing capitalism without the slightest idea in the world of how they are going to organise and operate the gigantic productive machinery of the country.

The working class cannot afford to challenge the capitalist system without an organisation capable of operating the industries for society.

What is Necessary?

What then is the workers' Industrial Organisation to be? Clearly the governmental machinery of the State cannot be wielded for the purpose. It could not even take possession of the industries to say nothing of operating them. It is an agency of class repression, not of class emancipation. With a working-class victory its function will be gone. As Engels justly wrote :

“We are now rapidly approaching a stage of evolution (now reached) in production, in which the existence of ~lasses has not only ceased to be a necessity, but becomes a positive fetter on production. Hence these classes must fall as inevitably as they once arose. The State must irrevocably fall with them. *The society that is to reorganise production on the basis of a free*

and equal association of the producers will transfer the machinery of state where it will then belong: into the Museum of Antiquities by the side of the spinning wheel and the bronze axe.”

There is the key. By its victory the working class constitutes itself a “society that is to reorganise production on the basis of a free and equal association of the producers.”

The only instrument, or organ, for such reorganisation of industry yet devised is the Socialist Industrial Union. A Union of the *whole* working class having its roots in the industries of the land, based on the output of the various productive plants and built into one integral whole. The working class organised for taking possession of and operating industry for society. It alone is capable of undertaking the task of organising production and continuing industry when the victorious working class have by the decision of the ballot brought its efforts to success. There is no other known method of accomplishing its further duty of organising industry than the Industrial Union.

Industry Now Run by Workers.

It should be noted that industry to-day is not organised by the capitalist stockholders. From the managerial office down to the day labourer, industry is organised and operated by employees. Those employees who operate industry for the capitalist to-day can organise it for society to-morrow. The Industrial Union would organise all these employees along the lines of the industry they operate. The total of all industries comprises the whole industry of the country.

That is the instrument by means of which the working class can safeguard its political victory and continue the industrial processes for the social wellbeing. Without it the political victory will be as De Leon said, a flash in the pan. The political victory unsupported by the industrial organisation of the workers will become a usurpation as in Russia, or a servile submission to capitalism as it did in Germany in 1919. The necessity of fashioning the Socialist Industrial Union is the urgent need of our time.

The State Incompatible With Socialist Society.

The National Political State divides the country into geographical constituencies for governmental and administrative purposes. This political division

reflects the needs and purposes of the Political State. Regardless of occupation citizens are mixed pell-mell according to the geographical position of residence. It is an effective means of government and class domination. It takes no regard of the important factor of industry or its organisation.

This geographical division is incompatible with the Socialist structure of society in which the industries will be socially owned and controlled by society itself, and in which the chief function of central administration and social organisation will be that of production for the supply of human needs. In such society the need will be for industrial and not geographical constituencies. The useful workers will vote in the industries to which their labour contributes.

The State, together with all its apparatus, will disappear with the class divisions that gave it birth. Pure and simple politicians and parties who glibly talk of a Socialist State, and of instituting Socialism by means of the existing State machinery, are simply talking nonsense. When Mr Wm. Gallacher, M.P., in the House of Commons, refers to Russia as “the great Socialist State,” he merely demonstrates his colossal ignorance of Marxian principles, and of the one man he has for twenty years professed to be a follower, Lenin. Otherwise he would never utter such blatant nonsense.

The hall-mark of progress towards Socialism is the weakening of the State, and Russia has moved far from the course visualised by Lenin when, in tribute to the great American Socialist, Daniel De Leon, he said: “Industrial Unionism, that is the basic thing, that is what we are building.” With his keen insight Lenin at once recognised the valuable contribution made to Socialism by De Leon’s formulation of the concept of Industrial Unionism. So impressed was he by it that he said: “De Leon was the only man who had advanced Socialist Science since Marx and Engels.” All the world now knows how far the dominant caste in Russia have departed from Lenin’s ideas.

In the Socialist Industrial Union form of organisation lies the way to the emancipation of the working class. It is the only form of organisation having its roots in, and corresponding to, the productive industries of the time, thus making possible

THE WORKSHOPS TO THE WORKERS.