

The State and the Proletariat

By D. E. BATT

[From "The Proletarian"]

IN a discussion of the political state, whether from the platform or in the press, it is necessary to explain the terms to be used. Failure to do this lays one open to possible misunderstanding and criticism. With the world in revolt as it is today; with governments crumbling; with the workers in this country manifesting their discontent on every hand, we must all strive to attain a better understanding of the proletarian position. The revolution is spreading throughout Europe, and within a comparatively short time may involve the whole world. Different conditions will, of course, force the workers to adopt slightly different tactics and methods in the various countries but the general line of progress will be very much the same everywhere.

The tactics employed by labor organizations in this country in the past have thoroughly disgusted thinking workmen, and we see in many sections of the country groups forming and striving to express their dissatisfaction with the tendencies of the American labor movement. A few words on the nature and function of the political state may prove of some assistance in clarifying the situation.

The general run of people do not know what the state is, and have a very narrow conception of political action. As these terms are being constantly used let us define them. The state is best defined, perhaps, as "the public power of oppression created and maintained in society by the division of classes." We may define political action as any action taken by or against the state.

The Socialist conception of the state does not, of course, harmonize with that of the ruling class, which deludes itself into believing that its institutions have existed from the beginning of time and will last forever. That has been a failing of all ruling classes. Each thought that its particular system was endowed with perpetuity. "As it was in the beginning, is now and evermore shall be, world without end" has ever been their prayer.

The beginning of the state is plainly discernable to those who will but seek for it. Previous to the introduction of private property rights in the means of wealth production there was no need for a coercive power in society. With the development of the division of labor one person could produce more than was necessary for his maintenance; thus slavery became possible, and society divided into classes. With slavery came also internal conflict, and the necessity for a means whereby that conflict could be controlled and regulated, making possible the development of the economic system despite the conflict of interest between exploiter and exploited. Thus the state came into being, and it will remain until such time as class conflicts cease. We must not regard the state as something imposed upon society from without, but as an institution which developed naturally within. There was need for an organized power in society that the economic system might function in an orderly manner. The chattel slave state was the first to develop. Frederick Engels found in the legends of Greece a clear record of the development of Greek society from communism to a slave society ruled over by the Attic state. In his book "The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State," he traces this development in detail. Space forbids a complete description of the transformation here. For our purpose two important points which he develops are essential.

In primitive communistic society membership was based upon the blood that flowed in one's veins. One owed allegiance to a certain group because of blood relationship. Under the state, however, allegiance was demanded on the basis of the territory in which a person lived. The state was organized upon a territorial basis.

Another important point, and it is very important, was the creation of an armed force outside

of the social organization. Previously, the armed force had been the population itself; all were armed for mutual protection. This special armed force formed the basis of the authority of the state. Armed force, in the last analysis, is the argument which the state uses to secure obedience to its mandates. The police and the standing army were the weapons that the state used to keep the economic system of slavery running; an armed force that was capable of preventing any independent armed action on the part of any section of society.

Due to economic contradictions within and military pressure from without, Greece fell after having reached a very high stage of civilization. Around the Mediterranean many slave states arose and developed to the zenith of their power and passed away. The last and mightiest of these was the Roman Empire.

After the downfall of Rome the development of society took another turn. A period known as the Dark Ages set in. Out of the gentile organizations of the European tribes, influenced by the remains of the Roman Empire, there developed a new state. This was the Feudal State.

Under the Feudal regime the ownership of land was the important thing. The serf was bound to the soil; he was robbed by forced contributions of labor and kind. Within this economic system yet another was developing. Between the feudal lords on the one hand and the serfs on the other was a middle class—known in France as the Bourgeoisie. Eventually their system (capitalism) developed to the point where the conflict with the superstructure was no longer bearable. The bourgeoisie became revolutionary and organized for the conquest of the political state. In this they were finally successful; they secured control of the state and used it to further their own ends.

The state was the strong arm that protected and mothered the capitalist class. In the state the capitalists have the guarantee of their ownership of the tools of wealth production; in it they have a weapon with which to effectively keep the workers in subjection. This weapon the proletariat will have to take from the capitalists if they ever hope to emancipate themselves. Every time the workers get the least bit unruly in their demands for better conditions, the state is there as the weapon that defeats them in their purpose. Anyone who has followed the activities of labor organizations has seen these things happen. The most recent example of the intimidation of the workers by the armed forces of the state was Seattle. There the workers had the city tied up in a general strike but the influence of the government was used to intimidate the workers and force them back to work. It is worth noting at this point that the workers of Seattle in the re-

cent union elections returned the same officials, thus evidencing that their spirit is not broken. In the past the master class has not hesitated to use the most extreme means when mere intimidation has failed to accomplish the purpose, and it is quite certain that they will do the same in the future. The workers will do well to be guided by the experience of their comrades who have taken revolutionary action in the past.

In the Paris Commune (1871) we have the first experiment of the working class in power. Marx in his account of the Commune says that "the working class cannot simply lay hold of the ready-made state machinery and wield it for its own purposes." Because of this statement many form the idea that it is necessary to build up an entirely new state but if we seek a little further we find what Marx meant when he made that statement. He says, "The first decree of the Commune, therefore, was the suppression of the standing army and the police, the physical force elements of the old government, the Commune was anxious to break the spiritual force of repression, the 'parson power,' by the disestablishment and disendowment of all churches as proprietary bodies." "While the merely repressive organs of the old government were to be amputated, its legitimate functions were to be wrested from an authority-usurping pre-eminence over society itself, and restored to the responsible agents of society." We gather from this that Marx considered that the state was merely to change hands and be reorganized to suit the needs of the new ruling class. The anarchist, of course, wants the state abolished out of hand, but this we know can not be done for we must use it as an instrument to destroy the resistance of the capitalist class. In the inauguration of the dictatorship of the proletariat the workers not only forge an instrument of emancipation but also a weapon to be used against the capitalists until their resistance has died out.

When the resistance of the capitalists has ceased, then, and not until then, will the state cease to exist. Once the workers gain control of the state they proceed to centralize the ownership of the social wealth in the hands of the state, that is, the working-class dictatorship. When this centralization of wealth has been completed and all class distinctions have disappeared then the state "dies out"—it is not abolished. It dies out because there is no longer any need for an instrument of repression in society. There is no longer any exploited class. Man at last is free! The first step the accomplishment of this great end is for the working class to raise itself to the position of ruling class in society. "To thoroughly comprehend the historic conditions and thus the very nature of this act, to impart to the now oppressed proletarian class a full knowledge of the conditions and the meaning of the momentous act it is called upon to accomplish, this is the task of the theoretical expression of the proletarian movement, scientific Socialism."

SOCIALIST LITERATURE IS STILL BANNED FROM CANADA

A rumor has been going the rounds that the government ban on Socialist literature, in Canada, notably Chas. H. Kerr's publication and the Western Clarion, the official organ of the Socialist Party of Canada, had been lifted. A telegram of enquiry to Colonel Chambers, chief press censor, elicited from that war-worn veteran the following curt reply:

"Sir: Replying to yours, our reply is in the negative."

Comrades, carry on the propaganda; distribute the "Red Flag" for educational purposes.

SOCIALIST PARTY OF CANADA

PROPAGANDA MEETINGS

SUNDAY, MAY 4

At 8 p.m. Sharp

EMPRESS THEATRE

Corner Gore and Hastings

Speaker..... T. Connors