

ALSO BY MICHAEL CURTIS

*The Great Political Theories (Volume 1):
A Comprehensive Selection of the Crucial
Ideas in Political Philosophy from the
Greeks to the Enlightenment*

The Great Political Theories

Volume 2

*A Comprehensive Selection of the Crucial
Ideas in Political Philosophy from the French
Revolution to Modern Times*

EDITED, WITH INTRODUCTION AND COMMENTARY, BY
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things, that many of the prospects of "live political work" *have never* been realised by a single organisation. . . .

. . . a network of agents that would automatically be created in the course of establishing and distributing a common newspaper would not have to "sit around and wait" for the call to rebellion, but would carry on the regular work that would guarantee the highest probability of success in the event of a rebellion. Such work would strengthen our contacts with the broadest strata of the masses of the workers and with all those strata who are discontented with the autocracy and who are so important to have in the event of an uprising. It is precisely such work that would help to cultivate the ability properly to estimate the general political situation and consequently, the ability to select the proper moment for the uprising. It is precisely such work that would train *all* local organisations to respond simultaneously to the same political questions, incidents and events that excite the whole of Russia, to react to these "events" in the most vigorous, uniform and expedient manner possible; for is not rebellion in essence the most vigorous, most uniform and most expedient "reaction" of the whole people to the conduct of the government? And finally, such work would train all revolutionary organisations all over Russia to maintain the most continuous and at the same time the most secret contact with each other, which will create *real* Party unity,—for without such contacts it will be impossible collectively to discuss the plan of rebellion and to take the necessary preparatory measures on the eve of it, which must be kept in the strictest secrecy. . . .

(Extracts from chapters 4 and 5.)

LENIN

The State and Revolution (1917)

The Need for Revolution

The state is the product and the manifestation of the *irreconcilability* of class antagonisms. The state arises when, where, and to the extent that the class antagonisms *cannot* be objectively reconciled. And, conversely, the existence of the state proves that the class antagonisms *are* irreconcilable. . . . According to Marx, the state is an organ of class *domination*, an organ of *oppression* of one class by another; its aim is the creation of "order" which legalises and perpetuates this oppression by moderating the collisions between the classes. . . . if the state is the product of the irreconcilable character of

class antagonisms, if it is a force standing *above* society and "increasingly separating itself from it," then it is clear that the liberation of the oppressed class is impossible not only without a violent revolution, *but also without the destruction* of the apparatus of state power, which was created by the ruling class. . . .

. . . the state is a "special repressive force." . . . It follows from this that the "special repressive force" of the bourgeoisie for the suppression of the proletariat, of the millions of workers by a handful of the rich, must be replaced by a "special repressive force" of the proletariat for the suppression of the bourgeoisie (the dictatorship of the proletariat). It is just this that constitutes the destruction of "the state as the state." It is just this that constitutes the "act" of "the seizure of the means of production in the name of society." And it is obvious that such a substitution of one (proletarian) "special repressive force" for another (bourgeois) "special repressive force" can in no way take place in the form of a "withering away." . . .

The replacement of the bourgeois by the proletarian state is impossible without a violent revolution. The abolition of the proletarian state, *i.e.*, of all states, is only possible through "withering away."

The Dictatorship of the Proletariat

The state is a special organisation of force; it is the organisation of violence for the suppression of some class. What class must the proletariat suppress? Naturally, the exploiting class only, *i.e.*, the bourgeoisie. The toilers need the state only to overcome the resistance of the exploiters, and only the proletariat can direct this suppression and bring it to fulfilment, for the proletariat is the only class that is thoroughly revolutionary, the only class that can unite all the toilers and the exploited in the struggle against the bourgeoisie, in completely displacing it.

The exploiting classes need political rule in order to maintain exploitation, *i.e.*, in the selfish interests of an insignificant minority, and against the vast majority of the people. The exploited classes need political rule in order completely to abolish all exploitation, *i.e.*, in the interests of the vast majority of the people, and against the insignificant minority consisting of the slave-owners of modern times—the landowners and the capitalists. . . .

Only the proletariat—by virtue of its economic rôle in large-scale production—is capable of leading *all* the toiling and exploited masses, who are exploited, oppressed, crushed by

the bourgeoisie not less, and often more, than the proletariat, but who are incapable of carrying on the struggle for their freedom *independently*.

The doctrine of the class struggle, as applied by Marx to the question of the state and of the Socialist revolution, leads inevitably to the recognition of the *political rule* of the proletariat, of its dictatorship, *i.e.*, of a power shared with none and relying directly upon the armed force of the masses. The overthrow of the bourgeoisie is realisable only by the transformation of the proletariat into the *ruling class*, able to crush the inevitable and desperate resistance of the bourgeoisie, and to organise, for the new economic order, *all* the toiling and exploited masses.

The proletariat needs state power, the centralised organisation of force, the organisation of violence, both for the purpose of crushing the resistance of the exploiters and for the purpose of *guiding* the great mass of the population—the peasantry, the petty-bourgeoisie, the semi-proletarians—in the work of organising Socialist economy.

By educating a workers' party, Marxism educates the vanguard of the proletariat, capable of assuming power and of *leading the whole people* to Socialism, of directing and organising the new order, of being the teacher, guide and leader of all the toiling and exploited in the task of building up their social life without the bourgeoisie and against the bourgeoisie. As against this, the opportunism predominant at present breeds in the workers' party representatives of the better-paid workers, who lose touch with the rank and file, "get along" fairly well under capitalism, and sell their birthright for a mess of pottage, *i.e.*, renounce their rôle of revolutionary leaders of the people against the bourgeoisie.

"The state, *i.e.*, the proletariat organised as the ruling class"—this theory of Marx's is indissolubly connected with all his teaching concerning the revolutionary rôle of the proletariat in history. The culmination of this rôle is proletarian dictatorship, the political rule of the proletariat. . . .

He who recognises *only* the class struggle is not yet a Marxist; he may be found not to have gone beyond the boundaries of bourgeois reasoning and politics. To limit Marxism to the teaching of the class struggle means to curtail Marxism—to distort it, to reduce it to something which is acceptable to the bourgeoisie. A Marxist is one who *extends* the acceptance of class struggle to the acceptance of the *dictatorship of the proletariat*. . . .

Further, the substance of the teachings of Marx about the state is assimilated only by one who understands that the

dictatorship of a *single* class is necessary not only for any class society generally, not only for the *proletariat* which has over-thrown the bourgeoisie, but for the entire *historic period* which separates capitalism from "classless society," from Communism. The forms of bourgeois states are exceedingly variegated, but their essence is the same: in one way or another, all these states are in the last analysis inevitably a *dictatorship of the bourgeoisie*. The transition from capitalism to Communism will certainly bring a great variety and abundance of political forms, but the essence will inevitably be only one: *the dictatorship of the proletariat*.

. . . . To destroy officialdom immediately, everywhere, completely—this cannot be thought of. That is a Utopia. But to *break up* at once the old bureaucratic machine and to start immediately the construction of a new one which will enable us gradually to reduce all officialdom to naught—this is *no* Utopia, it is the experience of the Commune, it is the direct and urgent task of the revolutionary proletariat.

Capitalism simplifies the functions of "state" administration; it makes it possible to throw off "commanding" methods and to reduce everything to a matter of the organisation of the proletarians (as the ruling class), hiring "workmen and managers" in the name of the whole of society. . . .

But if there be subordination, it must be to the armed vanguard of all the exploited and the labouring—to the proletariat. The specific "commanding" methods of the state officials can and must begin to be replaced—immediately, within twenty-four hours—by the simple functions of "managers" and bookkeepers, functions which are now already within the capacity of the average city dweller and can well be performed for "workingmen's wages."

We organise large-scale production, starting from what capitalism has already created; we workers *ourselves*, relying on our own experience as workers, establishing a strict, an iron discipline, supported by the state power of the armed workers, shall reduce the rôle of the state officials to that of simply carrying out our instructions as responsible, moderately paid "managers" (of course, with technical knowledge of all sorts, types and degrees). This is *our* proletarian task, with this we can and must *begin* when carrying through a proletarian revolution. Such a beginning, on the basis of large-scale production, of itself leads to the gradual "withering away" of all bureaucracy, to the gradual creation of a new order, an order without quotation marks, an order which has nothing to do with wage slavery, an order in which the more

and more simplified functions of control and accounting will be performed by each in turn, will then become a habit, and will finally die out as *special* functions of a special stratum of the population. . . .

To organise the *whole* national economy like the postal system, in such a way that the technicians, managers, book-keepers as well as *all* officials, should receive no higher wages than "workingmen's wages," all under the control and leadership of the armed proletariat—this is our immediate aim. This is the kind of state and economic basis we need. This is what will produce the destruction of parliamentarism, while retaining representative institutions. This is what will free the labouring classes from the prostitution of these institutions by the bourgeoisie.

. . . democracy is *not* identical with the subordination of the minority to the majority. Democracy is a *state* recognising the subordination of the minority to the majority, *i.e.*, an organisation for the systematic use of *violence* by one class against the other, by one part of the population against another.

We set ourselves the ultimate aim of destroying the state, *i.e.*, every organised and systematic violence, every use of violence against man in general. We do not expect the advent of an order of society in which the principle of subordination of minority to majority will not be observed. But, striving for Socialism, we are convinced that it will develop into Communism; that, side by side with this, there will vanish all need for force, for the *subjection* of one man to another, and of one part of the population to another, since people will *grow accustomed* to observing the elementary conditions of social existence *without force and without subjection*. . . .

But the dictatorship of the proletariat—*i.e.*, the organisation of the vanguard of the oppressed as the ruling class for the purpose of crushing the oppressors—cannot produce merely an expansion of democracy. *Together* with an immense expansion of democracy, which *for the first time* becomes democracy for the poor, democracy for the people, and not democracy for the rich folk, the dictatorship of the proletariat produces a series of restrictions of liberty in the case of the oppressors, the exploiters, the capitalists. We must crush them in order to free humanity from wage-slavery; their resistance must be broken by force; it is clear that where there is suppression there is also violence, there is no liberty, no democracy. . . .

Democracy for the vast majority of the people, and suppression by force, *i.e.*, exclusion from democracy, of the ex-

plorers and oppressors of the people—this is the modification of democracy during the *transition* from capitalism to Communism.

Only in Communist society, when the resistance of the capitalists has been completely broken, when the capitalists have disappeared, when there are no classes (*i.e.*, there is no difference between the members of society in their relation to the social means of production), *only then* "the state ceases to exist," and "*it becomes possible to speak of freedom*." Only then a really full democracy, a democracy without any exceptions, will be possible and will be realised. And only then will democracy itself begin to *wither away*. . . . people will gradually *become accustomed* to the observance of the elementary rules of social life that have been known for centuries and repeated for thousands of years in all school books; they will become accustomed to observing them without force, without compulsion, without subordination, without the *special apparatus* for compulsion which is called the state. . . .

Finally, only Communism renders the state absolutely unnecessary, for there is *no one* to be suppressed—"no one" in the sense of a *class*, in the sense of a systematic struggle with a definite section of the population. We are not Utopians, and we do not in the least deny the possibility and inevitability of excesses on the part of *individual persons*, nor the need to suppress *such* excesses. But, in the first place, no special machinery, no special apparatus of repression is needed for this; this will be done by the armed people itself, as simply and as readily as any crowd of civilised people, even in modern society, parts a pair of combatants or does not allow a woman to be outraged. And, secondly, we know that the fundamental social cause of excesses which consist in violating the rules of social life is the exploitation of the masses, their want and their poverty. With the removal of this chief cause, excesses will inevitably begin to "*wither away*." We do not know how quickly and in what succession, but we know that they will wither away. With their withering away, the state will also *wither away*. . . .

(Extracts from chapters 1, 2 and 3.)

Communist Society

The first phase of Communism . . . still cannot produce justice and equality; differences, and unjust differences, in wealth will still exist, but the *exploitation* of man by man will have become impossible, because it will be impossible to seize as private property the *means of production*, the factories,

machines, land, and so on. In tearing down Lassalle's petty-bourgeois, confused phrase about "equality" and "justice" in general, Marx shows the *course of development* of Communist society, which is forced at first to destroy *only* the "injustice" that consists in the means of production having been seized by private individuals, and which *is not capable* of destroying at once the further injustice consisting in the distribution of the articles of consumption "according to work performed" (and not according to need)

And so, in the first phase of Communist society (generally called Socialism) "bourgeois right" is *not* abolished in its entirety, but only in part, only in proportion to the economic transformation so far attained, *i.e.*, only in respect of the means of production. "Bourgeois right" recognises them as the private property of separate individuals. Socialism converts them into common property. *To that extent*, and to that extent alone, does "bourgeois right" disappear. . . .

The economic basis for the complete withering away of the state is that high stage of development of Communism when the antagonism between mental and physical labour disappears, that is to say, when one of the principal sources of modern *social* inequality disappears—a source, moreover, which it is impossible to remove immediately by the mere conversion of the means of production into public property, by the mere expropriation of the capitalists. . . .

The state will be able to wither away completely when society has realised the rule: "From each according to his ability; to each according to his needs," *i.e.*, when people have become accustomed to observe the fundamental rules of social life, and their labour is so productive, that they voluntarily work *according to their ability*. "The narrow horizon of bourgeois rights," which compels one to calculate, with the hard-heartedness of a Shylock, whether he has not worked half an hour more than another, whether he is not getting less pay than another—this narrow horizon will then be left behind. There will then be no need for any exact calculation by society of the quantity of products to be distributed to each of its members; each will take freely "according to his needs." . . .

Until the "higher" phase of Communism arrives, the Socialists demand the *strictest* control, *by society and by the state*, of the quantity of labour and the quantity of consumption; only this control must *start* with the expropriation of the capitalists, with the control of the workers over the capitalists, and must be carried out, not by a state of bureaucrats, but by a state of *armed workers*.

. . . democracy means only *formal* equality. Immediately

after the attainment of equality for all members of society *in respect of* the ownership of the means of production, that is, of equality of labour and equality of wages, there will inevitably arise before humanity the question of going further from formal equality to real equality, *i.e.*, to realising the rule, "From each according to his ability; to each according to his needs." By what stages, by means of what practical measures humanity will proceed to this higher aim—this we do not and cannot know. . . .

(Extracts from chapter 5.)

TROTSKY

The Revolution Betrayed

Soviet Bureaucracy and Bonapartism

We have defined the Soviet Thermidor as a triumph of the bureaucracy over the masses. . . . The revolutionary Vanguard of the proletariat was in part devoured by the administrative apparatus and gradually demoralized. . . . The tired and disappointed masses were indifferent to what was happening on the summits.

. . . The strength of the compulsion exercised by the masses in a workers' State is directly proportional to the strength of the exploitative tendencies, or the danger of a restoration of capitalism, and inversely proportional to the strength of the social solidarity and the general loyalty to the new régime. Thus the bureaucracy—that is, the 'privileged officials and commanders of a standing army'—represents a special kind of compulsion which the masses cannot or do not wish to exercise, and which . . . is directed against the masses themselves. . . .

The present Soviet society cannot get along without a State, nor even—within limits—without a bureaucracy. But the cause of this is by no means the pitiful remnants of the past, but the mighty forces and tendencies of the present. The justification for the existence of a Soviet State as an apparatus of compulsion lies in the fact that the present transitional structure is still full of social contradictions, which in the sphere of *consumption*—most close and sensitively felt by all—are extremely tense, and forever threaten to break over into the sphere of production. The triumph of socialism cannot be called either final or irrevocable.

The basis of bureaucratic rule is the poverty of society in objects of consumption, with the resulting struggle of each