

Karl Kautsky

From The Dictatorship of the Proletariat

The modern State is a rigidly centralised organism, an organisation comprising the greatest power within modern society, and influencing in the most effective way the fate of each individual, as is especially obvious in time of war.

The State is to-day what the family and community used to be for the individual. If communities were in their way democratically organised, the power of the State, on the contrary, including the bureaucracy and the army, looms over the people, even gaining such strength that at times it acquires an ascendancy over the classes which are socially and economically dominant, thus constituting itself an absolute government. Yet this latter condition is nowhere lasting. The absolute rule of bureaucracy leads to its ossification and its absorption into endless time-wasting formulae, and that just at the time when industrial capitalism is developing, when the revolutionary methods of production which arise from it subject all economic and social conditions to constant change, and impart a quicker movement to industrial life, thus requiring the speediest political adjustments.

The absolute rule of bureaucracy, therefore, leads to arbitrariness and stultification, but a system of production like capitalism, in which each producer is dependent upon numerous others needs for its prosperity the security and legality of social relations. The absolute State gets into conflict with the productive forces, and becomes a fetter on them. It is, then, urgently necessary for the executive to be subjected to public criticism, for free organisations of citizens to counterbalance the power of the State, for self-government in municipalities and provinces to be established, for the power of law-making to be taken from the bureaucracy, and put under the control of a central assembly, freely chosen by the people, that is a Parliament. The control of the Government is the most important duty of Parliament, and in this it can be replaced by no other institution. It is conceivable, though hardly practicable, for the lawmaking power to be taken from the bureaucracy, and entrusted to various committees of experts, which would draft the laws and submit them to the people for their decision. The activities of the executive can only be supervised by another central body, and not by an unorganised and formless mass of people.

The attempts to overcome the absolute power of the State, as here described, are made by all classes in a modern State, with the exception of those which may share in its power, that is all except bureaucrats, court nobles, the State Church, as well as the great bankers who do a lucrative business with the State.

Before the united pressure of the other classes, which may include the landed gentry, the lower clergy, the industrial capitalists, the absolute regime must give way. In a greater or lesser degree it must concede freedom of the Press, of public meeting, of organisation, and a Parliament. All the States of Europe have successfully passed through this development.

Every class will, however, endeavour to shape the new form of the State in a manner corresponding to its particular interests. This attempt is especially manifested in the struggle over the character of the Parliament, that is in the fight for the franchise. The watchword of the lower classes, of the people, is Universal Suffrage. Not only the wage-earner, but the small peasant and the petty bourgeoisie have an interest in the franchise.

Everywhere and under all circumstances these classes form the great majority of the population. Whether the proletariat is the predominant class amongst these depends on the extent of the economic development, although this factor does not determine whether the proletariat comprises the majority of the population. The exploiters are always a small minority of the population.

In the long run no modern State can withstand the pressure of these classes, and anything short of general suffrage in our society to-day would be an absurdity. In capitalist society, with its constantly changing conditions, the classes cannot be stereotyped in fixed grooves. All social conditions are in a state of flux. A franchise based on status is consequently excluded. A class which is not organised as such is a formless fluctuating mass, whose exact boundaries it is quite impossible to mark. A class is an economic entity, not a legal one. Class-membership is always changing. Many handworkers who, under the regime of small industry, think they are possessors, feel like proletarians under large industry, and are really proletarians even when for purposes of statistics they are included with the possessing classes and independent producers. There is also no franchise based on the census which would secure to the possessing classes a lasting monopoly of Parliament. It would be upset by every depreciation in money values. Finally, a franchise based on education would be even more futile, in view of the progress of culture amongst the masses. Thus various factors combine to render general suffrage the only

solution in the society of to-day, and bring the question more and more to the front. Above all, it is the only rational solution from the standpoint of the proletariat as the lowest class of the population. The most effective weapon of the proletariat is its numerical strength. It cannot emancipate itself until it has become the largest class of the population, and until capitalist society is so far developed that the small peasants and the petty bourgeoisie no longer overweight the proletariat.

The proletariat has also an interest in the fact that the suffrage should not only be universal and equal, but also non-discriminatory, so that men and women, or wage earners and capitalists, do not vote in separate sections. Such a method would not only involve the danger that particular sections, who belong to the proletariat in reality, but are not wage earners in form, would be separated from it, but it would also have the still worse result of narrowing the outlook of the proletariat. For its great historical mission consists in the fact that the collective interests of society fall into line with its permanent class interests, which are not always the same thing as special sectional interests. It is a symptom of the maturity of the proletariat when its class consciousness is raised to the highest point by its grasp of large social relations and ends. This understanding is only made completely clear by scientific Socialism, not only by theoretical teaching, but by the habit of regarding things as a whole instead of looking at special interests which are furthered and extended by engaging in political action. Confining the outlook to trade interests narrows the mind, and this is one of the drawbacks to mere Trade Unionism. Herein lies the superiority of the organisation of the Social Democratic Party, and also the superiority of a nondiscriminatory, as compared with a franchise which divides the electors into categories.

In the struggle for the political rights referred to modern democracy arises, and the proletariat matures. At the same time a new factor appears, viz., the protection of minorities, the opposition in the State. Democracy signifies rule of majority, but not less the protection of minorities.

The absolute rule of bureaucracy strives to obtain for itself permanency. The forcible suppression of all opposition is its guiding principle. Almost everywhere it must do this to prevent its power being forcibly broken. It is otherwise with democracy, which means the rule of majorities. But majorities change. In a democracy no regime can be adapted to long duration.

Even the relative strength of classes is not a fixed quantity, at least in the capitalist era. But the strength of parties changes even quicker than the strength of classes, and it is parties which aspire to power in a democracy.

It must not here be forgotten, what so often happens, that the abstract simplification of theory, although necessary to a clear understanding of realities is only true in the last resort, and between it and actualities there are many intervening factors. A class can rule, but not govern, for a class is a formless mass, while only an organisation can govern. It is the political parties which govern in a democracy. A party is, however, not synonymous with a class, although it may, in the first place, represent a class interest. One and the same class interest can be represented in very different ways, by various tactical methods. According to their variety, the representatives of the same class interests are divided into different parties. Above all, the deciding factor is the position in relation to other classes and parties. Only seldom does a class dispose of so much power that it can govern the State by itself. If a class attains power, and finds that it cannot keep it by its own strength, it seeks for allies. If such allies are forthcoming, various opinions and standpoints prevail amongst the representatives of the dominant class interests.

In this way, during the eighteenth century Whigs and Tories represented the same landed interest, but one party endeavoured to further it by affiance with the bourgeoisie of the towns at the expense of the Throne and its resources, while the other party conceived the Monarchy to be its strongest support. Similarly to-day in England and also elsewhere, Liberals and Conservatives represent the same capitalist interests. But the one thinks they will be best served by an alliance with the landed class, and forcible suppression of the working classes, while the other fears dire consequences from this policy, and strives to conciliate the working classes by small concessions at the expense of the landed class.

As with the socially and economically ruling classes and their parties, so it is with the aspiring class and its parties.

Parties and classes are therefore not necessarily coterminous. A class can split up into various parties, and a party may consist of members of various classes. A class may still remain the rulers, while changes occur in the governing party, if the majority of the ruling class considers the methods of the existing governing party unsuitable, and that of its opponents to be more appropriate.

Government by parties in a democracy changes more rapidly than the rule of classes. Under these circumstances, no party is certain of retaining power, and must always count on the possibility of being in the minority, but by virtue of the nature of the State no party need remain in a minority for ever.

These conditions account for the growing practice of protecting minorities in a democracy. The deeper the roots which a democracy has struck, and the longer it has lasted and influenced political customs, the more effective is the minority, and the more successfully it can oppose the pretensions of any party which seeks to remain in power at all costs.

What significance the protection of minorities has for the early stages of the Socialist Party, which everywhere started as a small minority, and how much it has helped the proletariat to mature, is clear. In the ranks of the Socialist Party the protection of minorities is very important. Every new doctrine, be it of a theoretical or a tactical nature, is represented in the first place by minorities. If these are forcibly suppressed, instead of being discussed, the majority is spared much trouble and inconvenience. Much unnecessary labour might be saved – a doctrine does not mean progress because it is new and championed by a minority. Most of what arises as new thought has already been discussed long before, and recognised as untenable, either by practice or by refutation.

Ignorance is always bringing out old wares as if they were something new. Other new ideas may be original, but put in a perverted shape. Although only a few of the new ideas and doctrines may spell real progress, yet progress is only possible through new ideas, which at the outset are put forward by minorities. The suppression of the new ideas of minorities in the Party would only cause harm to the proletarian class struggle, and an obstacle to the development of the proletariat. The world is always bringing us against new problems, which are not to be solved by the existing methods.

Tedious as it may be to sift the wheat from the chaff, this is an unavoidable task if our movement is not to stagnate, and is to rise to the height of the tasks before it. And what is needful for a party is also needful for the State. Protection of minorities is an indispensable condition for democratic development, and no less important than the rule of the majority.

Another characteristic of democracy is here brought in view, which is the form it gives to the class struggle.

In 1893 and in 1900 I have already discussed this matter, and give below some quotations from my writings:

Freedom of combination and of the Press and universal suffrage (under circumstances, even conscription) are not only weapons which are secured to the proletariat in the modern State by the revolutionary struggle of the bourgeoisie, but these institutions throw on the relative strength of parties and classes, and on the mental energy which vitalises them a light which is absent in the time of Absolutism. At that time the ruling, as well as the revolutionary, classes were fighting in the dark. As every expression of opposition was rendered impossible, neither the Government nor the Revolutionists were aware of their strength. Each of the two sides was thus exposed to the danger of over-estimating its strength, so long as it refrained from measuring itself in a struggle with the opponent, and of under-estimating its strength the moment it suffered a single defeat, and then threw its arms away.

This is really one of the chief reasons why, in the revolutionary period of the bourgeoisie, so many institutions collapsed at one blow, and so many governments were overthrown at a single stroke, and it also explains all the vicissitudes of revolution and counter-revolution.

It is quite different to-day, at least in countries which possess some measure of democratic government. These democratic institutions have been called the safety valve of society. It is quite false to say that the proletariat in a democracy ceases to be revolutionary, that it is contented with giving public expression to its indignation and its sufferings, and renounces the idea of social and political revolution. Democracy cannot remove the class antagonisms of capitalist society, nor prevent the overthrow of that society, which is their inevitable outcome. But if it cannot prevent the Revolution, it can avoid many reckless and premature attempts at revolution, and render many revolutionary movements unnecessary. It gives a clear indication of the relative strength of classes and parties; it does not do away with their antagonism, nor does it avoid the ultimate outcome of their struggle, but it serves to prevent the rising classes from attempting tasks to which they are not equal, and it also restrains the ruling classes from refusing concessions when they no longer have the strength to maintain such refusal. The direction of evolution is not thereby altered, but the pace is made more even and steady. The coming to the front of the proletariat in a State with some measure of democratic government will not be marked by such a striking victory as attended the bourgeoisie in their revolutionary period, nor will it be exposed to a violent overthrow.

Since the rise of the modern Social Democratic working-class movement in the sixties, the European proletariat has only suffered one great defeat, in the Paris Commune of 1871. At the time France was still suffering from the consequences of

the Empire, which had withheld real democratic institutions from the people, the French proletariat had only attained to the slightest degree of class-consciousness, and the revolt was provoked.

The proletarian-democratic method of conducting the struggle may seem to be a slower affair than the revolutionary period of the bourgeoisie; it is certainly less dramatic and striking, but it also exacts a smaller measure of sacrifice. This may be quite indifferent to the finely endowed literary people who find in Socialism an interesting pastime, but not to those who really carry on the fight.

This so-called peaceful method of the class struggle, which is confined to non-militant methods, Parliamentarism, strikes, demonstrations, the Press, and similar means of pressure, will retain its importance in every country according to the effectiveness of the democratic institutions which prevail there, the degree of political and economic enlightenment, and the self-mastery of the people.

On these grounds, I anticipate that the social revolution of the proletariat will assume quite other forms than that of the bourgeoisie, and that it will be possible to carry it out by peaceful economic, legal and moral means, instead of by physical force, in all places where democracy has been established.

The above is my opinion to-day.

Of course, every institution has its bad side, and disadvantages can be discovered in democracy.

Where the proletariat is without rights, it can develop no mass organisation, and normally cannot promote mass action; there it is only possible for a handful of reckless fighters to offer lasting opposition to the governing regime. But this elite is daily confronted with the necessity of bringing the entire system to an end. Undistracted by the small demands of daily politics, the mind is concentrated on the largest problems, and learns constantly to keep in view the entire political and social relations.

Only a small section of the proletariat takes part in the fight, but it cherishes keen theoretical interest, and is inspired by the great aims.

Quite differently does democracy affect the proletariat, when it has only a few hours a day at its disposal under present-day conditions. Democracy develops mass organisations involving immense administrative work; it calls on the citizen to discuss and solve numerous questions of the day, often of the most trivial kind. The whole of the free time of the proletariat is more and

more taken up with petty details, and its attention occupied by passing events. The mind is contracted within a narrow circle. Ignorance and even contempt of theory, opportunism in place of broad principles, tend to get the upper hand. Marx and Engels praised the theoretical mind of the German working class, in contrast with the workers of Western Europe and America. They would to-day find the same theoretical interest amongst the Russian workers, in comparison with the Germans.

Nevertheless, everywhere the class-conscious proletariat and their representatives fight for the realisation of democracy, and many of them have shed their life's blood for it.

They know that without democracy nothing can be done. The stimulating results of the struggle with a despotism are confined to a handful, and do not touch the masses. On the other hand, the degenerating influence of democracy on the proletariat need not be exaggerated. Often is it the consequence of the lack of leisure from which the proletariat suffers, not of democracy itself.

It were indeed extraordinary if the possession of freedom necessarily made men more narrow and trivial than its absence. The more democracy tends to shorten the working day, the greater the sum of leisure at the disposal of the proletariat, the more it is enabled to combine devotion to large problems with attention to necessary detail. And the impulse thereto is not lacking. For whatever democracy may be able to accomplish it cannot resolve the antagonisms inherent in a capitalist system of production, so long as it refrains from altering this system. On the contrary, the antagonisms in capitalist society become more acute and tend to provoke bigger conflicts, in this way forcing great problems on the attention of the proletariat, and taking its mind off routine and detail work.

Under democracy this moral elevation is no longer confined to a handful, but is shared in by the whole of the people, who are at the same time gradually accustomed to self-government by the daily performance of routine work.

Again, under democracy, the proletariat does not always think and talk of revolution, as under despotism. It may for years, and even decades, be immersed in detail work, but everywhere situations must arise which will kindle in it revolutionary thought and aspirations.

When the people are roused to action under a democracy, there is less danger than under despotism that they have been prematurely provoked, or will waste their energy in futile

efforts. When victory is achieved, it will not be lost, but successfully maintained. And that is better in the end than the mere nervous excitement of a fresh revolutionary drama.

The pernicious features of the method of dictatorship here discussed must now be contrasted with more favourable aspects. It furnishes a striking object lesson, and even if it cannot last it is able to accomplish many things to the advantage of the proletariat, which cannot be lost.

Let us look closely at the object lesson. This argument obviously rests on the following consideration: Under democracy, by virtue of which the majority of the people rule, Socialism can only be brought about when a majority in its favour is gained. A long and tedious way. We reach our goal far quicker if an energetic minority which knows its aims, seizes hold of the power of the State, and use it for passing Socialist measures. Its success would at once compel conviction, and the majority, which hitherto had opposed, would quickly rally to Socialism.

This sounds very plausible, and sounded so in the mouth of old Weitling. It has only the one defect that it assumes that which has to be proved. The opponents of the method of dictatorship contest the assumption that Socialist production can be brought about by a minority without the co-operation of the great mass of the people. If the attempt fails, it certainly is an object lesson, but in the wrong sense, not by attracting, but by frightening.

People who are influenced by such an object lesson, and not by examining and verifying social relations, thoughtless worshippers of mere success, would, in the case of the attempt failing, not inquire from what causes it did not succeed. They would not seek for the explanation in the unfavourable or unripe conditions, but in Socialism itself, and would conclude that Socialism is realisable under no circumstances.

It is apparent that the object lesson has a very dangerous side.

How has it been represented to us?

We may popularly express the essentials of Socialism in the words: Freedom and bread for all. This is what the masses expect from it, and why they rally to it. Freedom is not less important than bread. Even well-to-do and rich classes have fought for their freedom, and not seldom have made the biggest sacrifices for their convictions in blood and treasure. The need for freedom, for self-determination, is as natural as the need for food.

Hitherto Social Democracy did represent to the masses of the people the object lesson of being the most tireless champion of the freedom of all who were oppressed, not merely the wage-earner, but also of women, persecuted religions and races, the Jews, Negroes and Chinese. By this object lesson it has won adherents quite outside the circle of wage-earners.

Now, so soon as Social Democracy attains to power, this object lesson is to be replaced by one of an opposite character. The first step consists in the suspension of universal suffrage and of liberty of the Press, the disenfranchisement of large masses of the people, for this must always take place if dictatorship is substituted for democracy. In order to break the political influence of the upper ten thousand, it is not necessary to exclude them from the franchise. They exercise this influence not by their personal votes. As regards small shopkeepers, home workers, peasants who are well off and in moderate condition, the greater part of the intellectuals, so soon as the dictatorship deprives them of their rights, they are changed at once into enemies of Socialism by this kind of object lesson, so far as they are not inimical from the beginning. Thus all those who adhere to Socialism on the ground that it fights for the freedom of all would become enemies of the proletarian dictatorship.

This method will win nobody who is not already a Socialist. It can only increase the enemies of Socialism.

But we saw that Socialism not only promised freedom, but also bread. This ought to reconcile those whom the Communist dictatorship robbed of freedom.

They are not the best of the masses who are consoled in their loss of freedom with bread and pleasure. But without doubt material well-being will lead many to Communism who regard it sceptically, or who are by it deprived of their rights. Only this prosperity must really come, and that quickly, not as a promise for the future, if the object lesson is to be effective.

How is this prosperity to be attained? The necessity for dictatorship pre-supposes that a minority of the population have possessed themselves of the power of the State. A minority composed of those who possess nothing. The greatest weapon of the proletariat is, however, its numbers, and in normal times it can only progress on these lines, conquering the political power only when it forms the majority. As a minority it can only achieve power by the combination of extraordinary circumstances, by a catastrophe which causes the collapse of a regime, and leaves the State helpless and impoverished.

Under such circumstances, Socialism, that is general well-being within modern civilisation, would only be possible through a powerful development of the productive forces. Which capitalism brings into existence, and with the aid of the enormous riches which it creates and concentrates in the hands of the capitalist class. A State which by a foolish policy or by unsuccessful war has dissipated these riches, is by its nature condemned to be an unfavourable starting point for the rapid diffusion of prosperity in all classes.

If, as the heir of the bankrupt State, not a democratic but a dictatorial regime enters into power, it even renders the position worse, as civil war is its necessary consequence. What might still be left in the shape of material resources is wasted by anarchy.

In fine, the uninterrupted progress of production is essential for the prosperity of all. The destruction of capitalism is not Socialism. Where capitalist production cannot be transformed at once into Socialist production, it must go on as before, otherwise the process of production will be interrupted, and that hardship for the masses will ensue which the modern proletariat so much fears in the shape of general unemployment.

In those places where, under the new conditions, capitalist production has been rendered impossible, Socialist production will only be able to replace it if the proletariat has acquired experience in self-government, in trade unions, and on town councils, and has participated in the making of laws and the control of government, and if numerous intellectuals are prepared to assist with their services the new methods.

In a country which is so little developed economically that the proletariat only forms a minority, such maturity of the proletariat is not to be expected.

It may therefore be taken for granted that in all places where the proletariat can only maintain itself in power by a dictatorship, instead of by democracy, the difficulties with which Socialism is confronted are so great that it would seem to be out of the question that dictatorship could rapidly bring about prosperity for all, and in this manner reconcile to the reign of force the masses of the people who are thereby deprived of political rights.

As a matter of fact, we see that the Soviet Republic, after nine months of existence, instead of diffusing general prosperity, is obliged to explain how the general poverty arises.

We have lying before us: *Theses respecting the Socialist Revolution and the tasks of the proletariat during its dictatorship in Russia*, which emanates from the Bolshevist side. A passage deals with “the difficulties of the position”.

Paragraph 28 reads as follows: “28. The proletariat has carried out positive organic work under the greatest difficulties. The internal difficulties are: The wearing out and enormous exhaustion of the social resources and even their dissolution in consequence of the war, the policy of the capitalist class before the October revolution (their calculated policy of disorganisation, in order after the ‘Anarchy’, to create a bourgeois dictatorship), the general sabotage of the bourgeoisie and the intellectuals after the October revolution; the permanent counter-revolutionary revolts of the ex-officers, generals and bourgeois, with arms or without; *lack of technical skill and experience on the part of the working-class itself* (italicised in original), lack of organising experience; the existence of large masses of the petty bourgeoisie, which are an unorganised class, par excellence, etc.”

This is all very true. But it does not indicate anything else than that the conditions are not ripe. And does it not strikingly show that an object lesson on the lines of Socialism is, under these conditions in present-day Russia, not to be thought of? It is a famous object lesson which makes it necessary for theoretical arguments to be set out why that which is to be shown is not possible at the moment. Will it convert those who have hitherto opposed Socialism, and who are only to be convinced by its practical success?

Of course, a new regime will come up against unexpected difficulties. It is wrong to lay the blame for them on this regime, as a matter of course, and to be discouraged by them without closer examination of the circumstances. But if one is to persevere, in spite of these difficulties, then it is necessary to win beforehand a strong conviction of the justice and necessity of this regime. Only then will confusion be avoided. Success worshippers are always uncertain Cantonists.

So we are driven back upon democracy, which obliges us to strive to enlighten and convince the masses by intensive propaganda before we can reach the point of bringing Socialism about. We must here again repudiate the method of dictatorship, which substitutes compulsory object lessons for conviction.

This is not to say that object lessons may avail nothing in the realisation of Socialism. On the contrary, they can and will play a great part in this, but not through the medium of dictatorship.

The various States of the world are at very different stages of economic and political development. The more a State is capitalistic on the one side and democratic on the other, the nearer it is to Socialism. The more its capitalist industry is developed, the higher is its productive power, the greater its riches, the more socially organised its labour, the more numerous its proletariat; and the more democratic a State is, the better trained and organised is its proletariat. Democracy may sometimes repress its revolutionary thought, but it is the indispensable means for the proletariat to attain that ripeness which it needs for the conquest of political power, and the bringing about of the social revolution. In no country is a conflict between the proletariat and the ruling classes absent, but the more a country is progressive in capitalism Mid democracy, the greater is the prospect of the proletariat, in such a conflict, of not merely gaining a passing victory, but also of maintaining it.

Where a proletariat, under such conditions, gains control of the State, it will discover sufficient material and intellectual resources to permit it at once to give the economic development a Socialist direction, and immediately to increase the general well-being.

This will then furnish a genuine object lesson to countries which are economically and politically backward. The mass of their proletariat will not unanimously demand measures on the same lines and also all other sections of the poorer classes, as well as numerous intellectuals, will demand that the State should take the same road to general prosperity. Thus, by the example of the progressive countries, the Cause of Socialism will become irresistible in countries which to-day are not so advanced as to allow their proletariat of its own strength to conquer the power of the State, and put Socialism into operation.

And we need not place this period in the distant future. In a number of industrial States the material and moral prerequisites for Socialism appear already to exist in sufficient measure. The question of the political dominion of the proletariat is merely a question of power alone, above all of the determination of the proletariat to engage in resolute class struggle. But Russia, is not one of these leading industrial States. What is being enacted there now is, in fact, the last of bourgeois, and not the first of Socialist revolutions. This shows itself ever more distinctly.

Its present Revolution could only assume a Socialist character if it coincided with Socialist Revolutions in Western Europe.

That by an object lesson of this kind in the more highly-developed nations, the pace of social development may be accelerated, was already recognised by Marx in the preface to the first edition of **Capital**:

One nation can and should learn from others. And even when a society has got upon the right track for the discovery of the natural laws of its movement - it can neither clear by bold leaps, nor remove by legal enactments the obstacles offered by the successive phases of its normal development. But it can shorten and lessen the birth-pangs.

In spite of their numerous calls on Marx, our Bolshevist friends seem to have quite forgotten this passage, for the dictatorship of the proletariat, which they preach and practise, is nothing but a grandiose attempt to clear by bold leaps or remove by legal enactments the obstacles offered by the successive phases of normal development. They think that it is the least painful method for the delivery of Socialism, for “shortening and lessening its birth-pangs”. But if we are to continue in metaphor, then their practice reminds us more of a pregnant woman, who performs the most foolish exercises in order to shorten the period of gestation, which makes her impatient, and thereby causes a premature birth.

The result of such proceedings is, as a rule, a child incapable of life.

Marx speaks here of the object lesson which one nation may afford another. Socialism is, however, concerned with yet another kind of object lesson, viz., that which a highly-developed industry may furnish to an industry which is backward.

To be sure, capitalist competition everywhere tends to displace old-fashioned industrial methods, but under capitalist conditions this is so painful a process that those threatened by its operation strive to avert it by all means. The Socialist method of production would therefore find in existence a number of processes which are technically obsolete; for example, in agriculture, where large-scale production has made little progress, and in places is even receding.

Socialist production can only develop on the basis of the large industry. Socialist agriculture would have to consist solely in the socialisation of what large-scale production already exists. If good results are thereby obtained, which is to be expected, provided the social labour of freely-organised men is substituted for wage labour, (which only produces very inadequate results in agriculture) the conditions of the workers in the large Socialist industry will be seen to be more favourable than those of the small peasants, and it may then be anticipated with certainty that the latter will voluntarily pass over to the new productive methods, when society furnishes them with the necessary means. But not before. In agriculture the way for Socialism is not prepared by Capitalism in any adequate measure. And it is quite hopeless to try to convince peasant proprietors of the theoretical superiority of Socialism. Only the object lesson of the socialisation of peasant agriculture can help. This, however, presupposes a certain extension of large-scale agriculture. The object lesson will be the quicker and more effective according to the degree of development of large-scale industry in the country.

The policy of the petty bourgeois democrats, which has been taken up by Social Democrats of the David school, and in some respects made more extreme, that is, the destruction of any large-scale agriculture and its partition into small-scale industry, is sharply opposed to Socialism as applied to agriculture, and therefore to Socialism as applied to society generally.

The most striking feature of the present Russian Revolution is its working out on the lines of Eduard David. He, and not Lenin, has given the Revolution its peculiar direction in this respect. That is the Socialist instruction which it imparts. It testifies, in fact, to its bourgeois character.

We have seen that the method of dictatorship does not promise good results for the proletariat, either from the standpoint of theory or from that of the special Russian conditions; nevertheless, it is understandable only in the light of these conditions.

The fight against Czarism was for a long time a fight against a system of government which had ceased to be based on the conditions prevailing, but was only maintained by naked force, and only by force was to be overthrown. This fact would easily lead to a cult of force even among the revolutionaries, and to over-estimating what could be done by the powers over them, which did not repose on the economic conditions, but on special circumstances. Accordingly, the struggle against Czarism was carried on secretly, and the method of conspiracy created the manners and the habits proper to dictatorship, and not to democracy.

The operation of these factors was, however, crossed by another consequence of the struggle against Absolutism. We have already referred to the fact that, in contradistinction to democracy, which awakens an interest for wider relations and *greater* objects side by side with its constant preoccupations with momentary ends, Absolutism arouses theoretical interest. There is to-day, however, only one revolutionary theory of society, that of Karl Marx.

This became the theory of Russian Socialism. Now what this theory teaches is that our desires and capabilities are limited by the material conditions, and it shows how powerless is the strongest Will which would rise superior to them. It conflicted sharply with the cult of mere force, and caused the Social Democrats to recognise that definite boundaries were set to their participation in the coming Revolution, which, owing to the economic backwardness of Russia, could only be a bourgeois one.

Then the second Revolution came, and suddenly brought a measure of power to the Socialists which surprised them, for this Revolution led to the complete demobilisation of the Army, which was the strongest support of property and bourgeois order. And at the same time as the physical support collapsed, the moral support of this order went to pieces, neither the Church nor the Intellectuals being able to maintain their pretensions. The rule devolved on the lower classes in the State, the workers and peasants, but the peasants do not form a class which is able itself to govern. They willingly permitted themselves to be led by a Proletarian Party, which promised them immediate peace, at whatever price, and immediate satisfaction of their land hunger. The masses of the proletariat rallied to the same party, which promised them peace and bread.

Thus the Bolshevik Party gained the strength which enabled it to seize political power. Did this not mean that at length the prerequisite was obtained which Man and Engels had postulated for the coming of Socialism, viz., the conquest of political power by the proletariat? In truth, economic theory discountenanced the idea that Socialist production was realisable at once under the social conditions of Russia, and not less unfavourable to it was the practical confirmation of this theory, that the new regime in no way signified the sole rule of the proletariat, but the rule of a coalition of proletarian and peasant elements, which left each section free to behave as it liked on its own territory. The proletariat put nothing in the way of the peasants as regards the land, and the peasants put no obstacle in the way of the proletariat as regards the factories. None the less, a Socialist Party had become the ruler in a great State,

for the first time in the world's history. Certainly a colossal and, for the fighting proletariat, a glorious event.

But for what can a Socialist Party use its power except to bring about Socialism? It must at once proceed to do so, and, without thought or regard, clear out of the way all obstacles which confront it. If democracy thereby comes in conflict with the new regime, which, in spite of the great popularity which it so quickly won, cannot dispose of a majority of the votes in the Empire, then so much the worse for democracy. Then it must be replaced by dictatorship, which is all the easier to accomplish, as the people's freedom is quite a new thing in Russia, and as yet has struck no deep roots amongst the masses of the people. It was now the task of dictatorship to bring about Socialism. This object lesson must not only suffice for the elements in its own country which are still in opposition, but must also compel the proletariat of other capitalist countries to imitation, and provoke them to Revolution.

This was assuredly a train of thought of outstanding boldness and fascinating glamour for every proletarian and every Socialist. What we have struggled for during half a century, what we have so often thought ourselves to be near, what has always again evaded us, is at length going to be accomplished. No wonder that the proletarians of all countries have hailed Bolshevism. The reality of proletarian rule weighs heavier in the scale than theoretical considerations. And that consciousness of victory is still more strengthened by mutual ignorance of the conditions of the neighbour. It is only possible for a few to study foreign countries, and the majority believe that in foreign countries it is at bottom the same as with us, and when this is not believed, very fantastic ideas about foreigners are entertained.

Consequently, we have the convenient conception that everywhere the same Imperialism prevails, and also the conviction of the Russian Socialists that the political revolution is as near to the peoples of Western Europe as it is in Russia, and, on the other hand, the belief that the conditions necessary for Socialism exist in Russia as they do in Western Europe.

What happened, once the Army had been dissolved and the Assembly had been proscribed, was only the consequence of the step that had been taken.

All this is very understandable, if not exactly encouraging. On the other hand, it is not so conceivable why our Bolshevik comrades do not explain their measures on the ground of the peculiar situation in Russia, and justify them in the light of the pressure of the special

circumstances, which, according to their notions, left no choice but dictatorship or abdication. They went beyond this by formulating quite a new theory, on which they based their measures, and for which they claimed universal application.

For us the explanation of this is to be found in one of their characteristics, for which we should have great sympathy, viz., their great interest in theory.

The Bolsheviks are Marxists, and have inspired the proletarian sections coming under their influence with great enthusiasm for Marxism. Their dictatorship, however, is in contradiction to the Marxist teaching that no people can overcome the obstacles offered by the successive phases of their development by a jump, or by legal enactment. How is it that they find a Marxist foundation for their proceedings?

They remembered opportunely the expression, “the dictatorship of the proletariat”, which Marx used in a letter written in 1875. In so doing he had, indeed, only intended to describe a political *condition*, and not a *form of government*. Now this expression is hastily employed to designate the latter, especially as manifested in the rule of the Soviets.

Now if Marx had somewhere said that under certain circumstances things might come to a dictatorship of the proletariat, he has described this condition as one unavoidable for the transition to Socialism. In fact, as he declared, almost at the same time that in countries like England and America a peaceful transition to Socialism was possible, which would only be on the basis of democracy and not of dictatorship, he has also shown that he did not mean by dictatorship the suspension of democracy. Yet this does not disconcert the champions of dictatorship. As Marx once stated that the dictatorship of the proletariat might be unavoidable, so they announce that the Soviet Constitution, and the disfranchising of its opponents, was recognised by Marx himself as the form of government corresponding to the nature of the proletariat, and indissolubly bound up with its rule. As such it must last as long as the rule of the proletariat itself, and until Socialism is generally accomplished and all class distinctions have disappeared.

In this sense dictatorship does not appear to be a transitory emergency measure, which, so soon as calmer times have set in, will again give place to democracy, but as a condition for the long duration of which we must adapt ourselves.

This interpretation is confirmed by Theses 9 and 10 respecting the Social Revolution, which state:

(9) Hitherto, the necessity of the Dictatorship of the Proletariat was taught, without enquiring as to the form it would take. The Russian Socialist Revolution has discovered this form. It is the form of the Soviet Republic as the type of the permanent Dictatorship of the Proletariat and (in Russia) of the poorer classes of peasants. It is therefore necessary to make the following remarks. We are speaking now, not of a passing phenomenon, in the narrower sense of the word, but of a particular form of the State during the whole historical epoch. What needs now to be done is to organise a new form of the State, and this is not to be confused with special measures directed against the bourgeoisie, which are only functions of a special State organisation appropriate to the colossal tasks and struggle.

(10) The proletarian dictatorship accordingly consists, so to speak, in a permanent state of war against the bourgeoisie. It is also quite clear that all those who cry out about the violence of the Communists completely forget what dictatorship really is. The Revolution itself is an act of naked force. The word dictatorship signifies in all languages nothing less than government by force. The class meaning of force is here important, for it furnishes the historical justification of revolutionary force. It is also quite obvious that the more difficult the situation of the Revolution becomes, the sharper the dictatorship must be.

From the above it is also apparent that Dictatorship as a form of government is not only to be a permanent thing, but will also arise in all countries.

If in Russia now the newly-acquired general freedom is put an end to again, this must also happen after the victory of the proletariat in countries where the people's freedom is already deeply rooted, where it has existed for half a century and longer, and where the people have won it and maintained it in frequent bloody revolutions. The new theory asserts this in all earnestness. And stranger still it finds support not only amongst the workers of Russia, who still remember the yoke of the old Czardom, and now rejoice to be able to turn the handle for once, even as apprentices when they become journeymen rejoice when they may give the

apprentices who come after them the drubbing they used to receive themselves – no, the new theory finds support even in old democracies like Switzerland.

Yet something stranger still and even less understandable is to come.

A complete democracy is to be found nowhere, and everywhere we have to strive after modifications and improvements. Even in Switzerland there is an agitation for the extension of the legislative powers of the people, for proportional representation and for woman suffrage. In America the power and mode of selection of the highest judges need to be very severely restricted. Far greater are the demands that should be put forward by us in the great bureaucratic and militarist States in the interests of democracy. And in the midst of these struggles, the most extreme fighters raise their heads, and say to the opponents: That which we demand for the protection of minorities, the opposition, we only want so long as we ourselves are the opposition, and in the minority. As soon as we have become the majority, and gained the power of government, our first act will be to abolish as far as you are concerned all that we formerly demanded for ourselves, viz., franchise, freedom of Press and of organisation, etc.

The Theses respecting the Socialist Revolution are quite unequivocal on this point:

(17) The former demands for a democratic republic, and general freedom (that is freedom for the bourgeoisie as well) were quite correct in the epoch that is now passed, the epoch of preparation and gathering of strength. The worker needed freedom for his Press, while the bourgeois Press was noxious to him, but he could not at this time put forward a demand for the suppression of the bourgeois Press. Consequently, the proletariat demanded general freedom, even freedom for reactionary assemblies, for black labour organisations.

(18) Now we are in the period of the direct attack on capital, the direct overthrow and destruction of the imperialist robber State, and the direct suppression of the bourgeoisie. It is therefore absolutely clear that in the present epoch the principle of defending general freedom (that is also for the counter-revolutionary bourgeoisie) is not only superfluous, but directly dangerous.

(19) This also holds good for the Press, and the leading organisations of the social traitors. The latter have been unmasked as the active elements of the

counter-revolution. They even attack with weapons the proletarian Government. Supported by former officers and the money bags of the defeated finance capital, they appear on the scene as the most energetic organisations for various conspiracies. The proletariat dictatorship is their deadly enemy. Therefore, they must be dealt with in a corresponding manner.

(20) As regards the working class and the poor peasants, these possess the fullest freedom.

Do they really possess the fullest freedom?

The “Social Traitors” are proletarians and Socialists, too, but they offer opposition, and are therefore to be deprived of rights like the bourgeois opposition. Would we not display the liveliest anger, and fight with all our strength in any case where a bourgeois government endeavoured to employ similar measures against its opposition?

Certainly we should have to do so, but our efforts would only have a laughable result if the bourgeois government could refer to Socialist precepts like the foregoing, and a practice corresponding with them.

How often have we reproached the liberals that they are different in Government from what they are in opposition, and that then they abandon all their democratic pretensions. Now the Liberals are at least sufficiently prudent to refrain from the formal abandonment of any of their democratic demands. They act according to the maxim; one does this, but does not say so.

The authors of the Theses are undeniably more honourable; whether they are wiser may be doubted. What would be thought of the wisdom of the German Social Democrats, if they openly announced that the democracy, for which they fight to-day, would be abandoned the day after victory. That they have perverted their democratic principles to their opposites, or that they have no democratic principles at all; that democracy is merely a ladder for them, up which to climb to governmental omnipotence, a ladder they will no longer need, and will push away, as soon as they have reached the top, that, in a word, they are revolutionary opportunists.

Even for the Russian revolutionaries it is a short-sighted policy of expediency, if they adopt the method of dictatorship, in order to gain power, not to save the jeopardised democracy, but in order to maintain themselves in spite of it. This is quite obvious.

On the other hand, it is less obvious why some German Social Democrats who are not yet in power, who furthermore only at the moment represent a weak opposition, accept this theory. Instead of seeing something which should be generally condemned in the method of dictatorship, and the disfranchising of large sections of the people, which at the most is only defensible as a product of the exceptional conditions prevailing in Russia, they go out of their way to praise this method. as a condition which the German Social Democracy should also strive to realise.

This assertion is not only thoroughly false, it is in the highest degree destructive. If generally accepted, it would paralyse the propagandist strength of our party to the utmost, for, with the exception of a small handful of sectarian fanatics, the entire German, as also the whole proletariat of the world, is attached to the principle of general democracy. The proletariat would angrily repudiate every thought of beginning its rule with a new privileged class, and a new disfranchised class. It would repudiate every suggestion of coupling its demand for general rights for the whole people with a mental reservation, and in reality only strive for privileges for itself. And not less would it repudiate the comic insinuation of solemnly declaring now that its demand for democracy is a mere deceit.

Dictatorship as a form of government in Russia is as understandable as the former anarchism of Bakunin. But to understand it does not mean that we should recognise it; we must reject the former as decisively as the latter. The dictatorship does not reveal itself as a resource of a Socialist Party to secure itself in the sovereignty which has been gained in opposition to the majority of the people, but only as means of grappling with tasks which are beyond its strength, and the solution of which exhausts and wears it; in doing which it only too easily compromises the ideas of Socialism itself, the progress of which it impedes rather than assists.

Happily, the failure of the dictatorship is not synonymous with a collapse of the Revolution. It would be so only if the Bolshevist dictatorship was the mere prelude to a bourgeois dictatorship. The essential achievements of the Revolution will be saved, if dictatorship is opportunely replaced by democracy.

