

Elections and the Capitalist State

Excerpts from a Speech Delivered at the Party School
Summer, 1980

When you talk about the state, even on a theoretical level, you're talking about politics. But today, "politics" has become a dirty word. It has come to be identified with all manner of backroom dealing, demagoguery and personal power plays at the expense of the public welfare. This is what people have in mind when they say "Oh, that's just politics" or "he doesn't mean what he says, he doesn't mean what he says." In fact, this is what bourgeois politics comes down to, especially when applied to elections.

Politics, in general, is a collective effort to devise public policy, and in essence that is a struggle for power, the power to set policy. At bottom, all politics is the struggle for power in the state, for control of the state. And on a historical scale, that is a struggle between classes.

Political parties are organizations representing the interests of this or that class or section of a class. All political parties exist for the purpose of gaining control over the state apparatus, for winning state power for a class. This applies also to the Communist Party USA/Marxist-Leninist. We make no bones about it: We are out to win political power for the working class.

But we don't mean that the way the bourgeois politicians mean it. The Democrats and Republicans, for example, represent factions of the bourgeoisie. They come to the voters and ask us to legitimize the leading position of their faction in the bourgeois state. The bourgeoisie wants to control the state so as to use it selfishly, to defend their form of property and the capitalist mode of exploitation, and to dole out favors to various sets of capitalists.

Nor do we mean "win power" the way the petty-bourgeois politicians mean it. The Citizen's Party, the various social-democratic parties, and Gus Hall of the revisionist CPUSA — all of whom represent the backwards world outlook of the petty producers and tradesmen, the professionals and intellectuals — have in mind that the "little people" of America can increase their "share of power" in the state alongside of the big capitalists. They hold out the hope of bending the existing state to more humane and just uses. They are out to perfect the bourgeois state.

What we mean by the struggle for power is totally different. We seek to lead the working class and its allies to destroy the machinery of bourgeois rule, to smash the capitalist state. We mean to create in its place a totally new machinery of proletarian rule so as to transform society. The proletarian state will suppress the exploiters, dismantle class society, and consciously promote the conditions

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necessary for the emergence of classless society without exploitation of man by man....

A definite class is always the agent of any great historical change. Today it is the historic mission of the proletariat — the working class created by capitalism — to rise in revolution, overthrow the capitalists and establish its own state rule in order to usher in the next stage of social evolution — communist society.

Thus the most basic question of all politics from the Marxist-Leninist point of view is: **Which class will direct the social forces, the material processes, the human energies of society; which class will rule.** The entire aim of the CPUSA/ML is to see to it that the proletariat becomes conscious of its historic role and actually seizes state power through revolution and reconstructs society along socialist lines....

The bourgeoisie teaches us in thousands of open and subtle ways to believe the state is eternal, that it has always existed and always will. The bourgeoisie says

“The state is not eternal. It is a product of history. To put it graphically, if we compress the three million or so years of human existence into thirty years, then the first states arose only about 22 days ago. Clearly, there is something happening in very recent human history that gave rise to the state.”

the state is neutral, that its historical role is to mediate between contending classes and "special interest groups." Thus, according to the bourgeoisie, it is the duty of all citizens, of all social classes, to safeguard the "neutrality" of the state, to little by little clear away the corruption and correct the structural defects. In short, we are supposed to perfect the state — and in practice that means perfecting the bourgeois state.

But history proves this point of view wrong. The state is not eternal. It is a product of history. Human beings have been walking the earth for something like 3 million years. Yet the first states appeared in human societies only about 6,000 years ago.

To put it graphically: Assume you are thirty years old today, and humans first appeared on the

earth the same day you were born. In that case, you've lived all your life until three weeks ago with no state at all. The first states arose in the civilizations of ancient China, Greece, Persia, Egypt, etc. **about 22 days ago.** The capitalist state made its first full-blown appearance with the American Revolution in 1776 — or **less than 18 hours ago.** The first socialist state was established by the Russian Revolution in 1917, or **about five and a half hours ago!** Clearly, there is something happening in **very recent human history that gave rise to the state.**

(Here there followed a fairly detailed account of how the state emerged, along with classes, some 5,000 to 10,000 years ago, on the basis of profound technological developments in the way societies got their living from nature.)

(Stone tools were replaced by metal; hunting and gathering gave way to agriculture and specialized handicrafts; production for use was superseded by production for trade. New leaps in the productivity of human labor were accompanied by a division of mental and manual labor. Inevitably, communities became divided into people who directed labor and people who actually produced, as it became both possible and necessary for some to accumulate social wealth and command the labor of others. Thus did social classes evolve.)

(With the cleavage of society into economically antagonistic classes there arose also that unique institution of class rule — the political state. The state regulates the conflict of classes in a way that ensures the domination of a particular class. The state is a special public power separate from the community as such, but definitely not standing "above classes" nor functioning as a "neutral" "harmonizer" of classes. It legalizes and enforces a definite relation of class oppression. It deprives the oppressed of the means to throw off their oppression, and it protects the property forms — such as slavery, feudal landlordism, or capitalist wage slavery — that are at the heart of all social relations in society in a given stage of development.)

(Every state then, whether or not it includes more or less representative democratic institutions, is essentially the dictatorship of one class over the rest of society).

We are taught in school and by the mass media to look only at the form of government in the U.S. and to conclude that the U.S. state is the freest, most democratic there is and that everything we've just been saying couldn't possibly apply to this country....

(Yet) if there is anything really unique or "superior" about the bourgeois-democratic state system

“The working class is the first and only class in history that can and must actually deliver on the promise of democracy. The proletariat has no private property to protect; it has no relation of exploitation to force upon anyone else; its own emancipation from wage slavery requires that it emancipate the rest of society from exploitation. The proletariat is the only class in modern society that has a material interest in introducing the fullest and most consistent democracy in all spheres of life. It will do this precisely by suppressing the rights of capital.”

that prevails in the U.S., it is that it is the purest and most highly developed state of capitalism. It has most successfully solved the problem of ensuring the continuity of capitalist aims in government by providing an orderly and peaceful succession of capitalist representatives in power, and thoroughly excluding the working class from power.

In no other capitalist country has the state system and the ideology that surrounds it been so successful in preventing the working class from developing a tradition of independent political action. This is the only major capitalist country in the world without a large labor party.

The bourgeois state system in

or of parties in the bourgeois-democratic republic, can shake it"....

Today the objective development of capitalism itself is pushing toward the liquidation of even the democratic trappings of the bourgeois state....

The old, classical, free-enterprise capitalism, by its own inner logic, gave rise to monopoly capitalism nearly a century ago....

Particularly since World War II private monopoly capital has become fused with, intertwined with, identical with, the public apparatus of the state....

The result is that all the contradictions of capitalism are heightened to the extreme. Crisis follows crisis, resistance mounts

“The entire bureaucratic and military apparatus of the state is strengthened and extended as internal class contradictions get more acute and as external rivalry with other states gets sharper. Inflation, the fiscal crises that grip government at all levels, the grinding tax burden, and the growth of “Big Brother” — all are a direct result of the need to maintain and expand the state apparatus to preserve bourgeois rule. Today this state parasite threatens to devour the whole of society. That is why even the bourgeoisie complains about “big government” — even though they need it to stay in power.”

the U.S. is highly refined at diverting the revolutionary struggle of the laboring people into reformist channels "within the system", and then at making sure the reforms are kept essentially harmless to the general interests of capitalism....

In the U.S. there is democracy and self-rule for the capitalists and wage slavery and dictatorship for the workers. The people do not rule themselves. Elections, organized by the bourgeois state, simply allow us to choose which members of the bourgeoisie will get to represent the capitalists in gouging and suppressing us for the next two to four years. The U.S. state is a system of dictatorship of the capitalist class.

...In fact, it is precisely the apparently democratic form of government in the U.S. that allows the bourgeois to rule all the more completely and barbarically. Engels pointed this out a hundred years ago: "In a democratic republic, wealth exercises its power indirectly, but all the more surely; first, by means of the direct corruption of officials (America); second, by means of an alliance between the government and the Stock Exchange (France and America)." In 1917, summing up the experience of capitalism with bourgeois democracy, Lenin carried this further and concluded: "A democratic republic is the best possible political shell for capitalism and therefore, once capital has gained control of this very best shell..., it establishes its power so securely, so firmly, that no change, either of persons, of institutions,

on every side, the danger of war increases, the bourgeois state exposes itself more and more as the naked rule of capital, and parliamentary democracy becomes a less and less effective method of rule. Inevitably the bourgeoisie turns more and more to fascist forms of rule, dropping the democratic mask....

What all of this means is that the state system of bourgeois democracy is rotting on its feet, due to the very evolution of capitalism itself. Nothing can save bourgeois democracy in the long run. For the U.S. bourgeoisie, the only question is: at what pace will it be necessary to introduce fascist forms of rule. Bourgeois democracy and fascism are two alternate methods of bourgeois rule; they are two forms of the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie.

The proletariat must of course resist the growth of fascism; not by trying to patch up bourgeois democracy, but by fighting to replace bourgeois rule in any form with proletarian rule. No change of bourgeois administrations, no realignment of bourgeois parties in power, can bring genuine democracy for the workers or guarantee avoidance of fascism.

Our task, then, is to destroy the state as we know it entirely and replace it with a totally different kind of state. Our task is to destroy the entire apparatus of bourgeois rule, and replace it with an apparatus of proletarian rule....

But how will the working class gain state power?

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The November Elections...

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possible to say that in the recent period, particularly since 1978, U.S. imperialism has definitely turned a corner, entered a new, more highly aggressive period of expansionism, and settled on a course toward a new imperialist world war.

At the same time, there has been a corresponding turn in domestic events as well, a turn towards fascism. The menace of fascism today is the central political question in the U.S., and the lense through which we must view the significance of the November 4th elections. Fascism will not come to power through bourgeois elections on November 4th, but the elections will provide a barometer of the pace of the fascist menace, the cohesion of the fascist movement and the contours of the fascist program....

The central feature of the rule of monopoly capitalism in the U.S. is the growth and development of the reactionary imperialist state. In the *State and Revolution*, Lenin long ago recognized this development.

"Imperialism — the era of bank capital, the era of gigantic capitalist monopolies, the era of development of monopoly capitalism into state monopoly capitalism — has demonstrated with particular force an extraordinary strengthening of the 'state machine', and an unprecedented growth of its bureaucratic and military apparatus, in connection with the intensification of repression against the proletariat..."

This can be seen in the economic, social, ideological and political balance in the U.S. today....

The periodic economic crisis which has gripped the U.S. economy since late last year is reflected in inflation, unemployment, the decline of productive capacity, trade deficits, the credit and savings crunch, and the severe situation in the auto and steel industries....(Editor's Note: Due to lack of space, these portions of the presentation have been omitted).

While there may be some important economic fluctuations in particular figures, the monopoly capitalists will not easily extricate themselves from this crisis, and seek every opportunity to pass the burden of this crisis on to the workers in a massive decline of living standards....

The consequence of three major economic crises in ten years in the U.S. means that such crises are coming closer and closer together and with ever greater intensity....

The social decay and degeneration of life in the U.S. is everywhere obvious, in the fiscal crisis in the cities, the turmoil in the public schools, the liquidation of small farms, the rise of pornography, child abuse and "wife beating", and countless other effects of the crisis....Both the youth and the aged face special oppression and special hardships in this crisis....

Various national minorities face increasing national oppression which has obliterated many of the hard-won democratic rights of the last two decades....These developments fully verify the



and the Future of U.S. Imperialism

reality that national oppression is a component part of the imperialist system.

Ideologically, we must note the sharp rise of national chauvinism and white supremacy in the U.S., the spread of all manner of decadent and degenerate theories and tendencies, the promotion of disaster and horror films, punk rock, and the rise of spiritualism, metaphysics and anti-scientific theories of every variety....It is no accident that the imperialist state has promoted a campaign to spread reactionary religious thinking, lavishly funding the so-called "born again" movement....Such organizations as the Moral Majority are training the shock troops for fascism....

What Conclusions Do We Draw?

All of the various tendencies we see economically, politically, socially or ideologically are reflected in the actual political balance of forces....In this light, there are a number of points to recognize about the present situation.

First, there is no doubt today that a growing number of people refuse to participate in the imperialist election circus. Voter participation has plummeted from 62% in 1960 to 53% in 1976, and even less in the 1978 interim Congressional elections. As a consequence, there has been a dramatic rise in reformist and revisionist activity in the recent period, corresponding to both the needs of imperialism and the relatively quiet situation in the class struggle. On many fronts the credibility of the imperialist politicians has eroded....and the props of imperialism are called on to plug the gap.

Second, there is a definite polarization occurring in the U.S. The Right, unmistakably more powerful and more organized than the Left, is accumulating forces rapidly, and indeed, this is one of the functions of such elections. While the Left is splintered, the spontaneous revolutionary movement of the working class is growing. As a result, there is definitely a collision of classes emerging on a scale not seen since the 1930's....

Third, we notice that today the imperialists are increasingly unable to rule and larger and larger numbers of people are unwilling to be ruled. This cannot be interpreted as a class-conscious cleavage, but as mounting spontaneous sentiment, an objective phenomenon....

Fourth, the state is definitely preparing for fascism. Fascization of the state is occurring at break-neck speed. The centralization of power in the executive; the increasing force of the bureaucracy and armed forces; the abolition of countless bourgeois democratic rights on both a national and local state level; the mounting methods of class collaboration between business, government and labor leaders — such as the Tripartite commissions in steel and coal, the National Accord; etc. ... all reflect the efforts at fascization.

Among the bourgeoisie there is mounting disagreement over how to maintain their rule. However, we must recognize that fascism is a question of bourgeois class rule, and merely reflects a change in the form of the state, not in the relations of classes.

Fifth, the fascist forces are moving to consolidate into a single movement with a single fascist program. This is the result of fundamental objective processes, and not the subjective role of any one individual, such as Reagan. But the Reagan candidacy has become the central focus of the fascist movement, and presents a far greater menace to the working class in the future than such overt fascist gangs as the KKK or the Nazi's.

Sixth, therefore, we must recognize that the monopoly capitalist class today occupies an offensive position and the working class is in a defensive position in the class struggle....

What all this means today is that the period ahead in the class struggle, regardless of who gets elected, will mean increased hardships, exploitation and oppression for working people, with an intensity and pace that has not been seen in 50 years in the U.S....

There is nothing more absurd than the wild proclamations of the Maoists such as the Revolutionary Communist Party or the Communist Workers Party (who are more and more becoming look-alike twins) than that a revolutionary situation can be predicted for the 1980's. A sober and factual presentation of the actual motion of classes and balance of class forces leads to the conclusion that a revolutionary situation is not on the horizon in the U.S. in the next few years. This is not a prediction but a material evaluation of the facts. This certainly could change, but the subjective factors of the revolution in the U.S. are very largely unprepared for such a change. In the event

of a genuine revolutionary situation emerging, there is little indication today that the working class would be prepared to wage the battle required for victory....

The tactics of the Party today are based upon this scientific evaluation of the class struggle and the actual motion of class forces in the world and in the U.S. In this period, revolutionary propaganda and revolutionary action must be boldly combined, to strengthen the revolutionary class consciousness of growing numbers of workers, to draw in to struggle countless more workers and to train and steel the CPUSA/ML and the revolutionary mass organizations for the large class battles ahead of them.... That is why the building of the Party in this period is a question of forging real revolutionary cadre to build a real revolutionary center to the working class movement....

We are confident that the No Vote November 4th effort of our Party is a correct and extremely important implementation of the united front tactic of the Party....

We promote no illusions that those millions who will refuse to vote on November 4th have rejected imperialism. But their refusal to vote, their refusal to participate in the election circus, is an important step toward class consciousness. We already know that the largest number of those not voting are workers.

We can take a step out of the crisis on November 4th by denying the imperialists any moral victory, by swelling the ranks of those who refuse to vote. This great refusal does not weaken the so-called "democratic system", but exposes the fraud of imperialist democracy for what it really is, an enslaving dictatorship of the rich monopoly capitalists over the working majority....

The Capitalist State

(Continued from page 5)

...Elections, parliamentary democracy, in the bourgeois state, are instruments of bourgeois rule. Elections certainly can and should be used by the working class. But the utilization of the bourgeois electoral system, as Engels said, is "the gauge of maturity of the working class. It cannot and never will be anything more in the present-day state." We know from long experience ourselves that elections within the present U.S. state system are not really "capable of ascertaining the will of the majority of the toilers and of securing its realization." (Lenin) How, then, can they possibly be the road to power?....

Our Party is convinced, and history proves, that the working class must seize power, in armed battle against the bourgeois state machine. Only a fool would try to predict exactly how that will happen. In the complex social conditions of the U.S., and facing the most powerful state the world has ever seen, a state controlled by a very experienced, highly skilled and ruthless bourgeoisie — in these conditions of the U.S., it will certainly take ingenuity to

In the last two decades there has been a remarkable surge in the development of the revolutionary and democratic forces in the U.S. This is sure to continue, though there will certainly be further valleys and still higher peaks. History has proven and events in our lifetime demonstrate that U.S. imperialism, the bulwark of world imperialism and reaction, will not be brought down in a day, in an election, nor in a decade. But it will fall. This year we have an opportunity to build up the independent action and experience of the working class in the No Vote November 4th mobilization. We must be certain to utilize this opportunity to the utmost, to prepare for the future battles ahead....

Our Program makes the call: Socialist Revolution!

"This is the only road that can win better conditions of life, genuine democracy, peace and equality for the proletariat and its allies.

This is the only road out of the crisis of capitalism, the only road out of exploitation and oppression, the only road that can prevent imperialist world war and put an end to the savage dictatorship of the bourgeoisie and world reaction.

Working men and women of the U.S., rise up and wage the class struggle! Rise up as an army to fight for the dictatorship of the proletariat!

Workers of all nationalities, oppressed nations and national minorities, small farmers and revolutionary people of the U.S., unite in the struggle against the bourgeoisie! Build the CPUSA/ML and follow the lead of the proletariat and its Party on the road of socialist revolution and liberation!

Rally to the banner of the CPUSA/ML! Fight for the dictatorship of the proletariat! ■

find the path by which the working class will arrive at the revolution.

We can say this much, though: it will require that the workers be united and organized as a class, under the leadership of its own vanguard communist party; it will require that the revolutionary proletariat rally to its side all the honest and progressive elements of the other oppressed classes and strata in American society; finally, it will require an armed insurrection....

The working class is the first and only class in history that can and must actually deliver on the promise of democracy. The proletariat has no private property to protect; it has no relation of exploitation to force upon anyone else; its own emancipation from wage slavery requires that it emancipate the rest of society from exploitation. The proletariat is the only class in modern society that has a material interest in introducing the fullest and most consistent democracy in all spheres of life. It will do this precisely by suppressing the rights of capital.... ■