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## THE DICTATORSHIP OF THE PROLETARIAT ROAD TO TOTALITARIANISM AND A NEW CLASS

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**Abstract:** *THIS PAPER IS DEVOTED TO THE SUBJECT OF THE DICTATORSHIP OF THE PROLETARIAT, ANALYZING WHETHER THIS DICTATORSHIP REALLY BELONGED TO THE PROLETARIAT OR WHETHER IT SERVED OTHER INTERESTS, GIVING RISE TO A NEW RULING CLASS. DID THE LEININIST REVOLUTION SUCCEEDED IN ITS AIM TO PUT THE BASE FOR A STATE AIMING TO BUILD A CLASSLESS SOCIETY, OR IT WAS DIVERTED – VOLUNTARILY OR NOT – TO OTHER AIMS AND FUNCTIONS? BUILDING ON THE THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS OF MARX AND ENGELS, WHO COINED THE TERM “DICTATORSHIP OF THE PROLETARIAT”, LENIN ADAPTED ITS THEORETICAL AND PRACTICAL UNDERSTANDING TO THE CONTEXT OF THE RUSSIAN BOLSHEVIK REVOLUTION. LENINIST THEORIES ARE SPECIAL BECAUSE HE ARGUED THAT A PROLETARIAN REVOLUTION CAN TAKE PLACE EVEN IN A WEAKLY INDUSTRIALIZED STATE LIKE RUSSIA, WHICH IS A DISTORTION OF THE MARXIST THEORY THAT THE PROLETARIAN REVOLUTION SHOULD TAKE PLACE IN HIGHLY INDUSTRIALIZED STATES.*

**Keywords:** BOLSHEVISM, DICTATORSHIP OF THE PROLETARIAT, LENINISM, NEW CLASS, REVOLUTION

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### INTRODUCTION

From the 19th century, the proletariat began to be seen as a revolutionary class, which would change the course of history, which it would end with the final victory in the class struggle against the capitalist bourgeoisie. At the time when the Communist Manifesto was drafted, the bourgeoisie was considered to be the ruling class, emerging from feudalism for several centuries, and exploiting the proletariat, without class consciousness at that time. In Russia the situation was even worse. The Tsar ruled the country autocratically and was the gendarme of Europe, suppressing bourgeois revolutions from 1848, while serfdom was abolished only in the second half of the 19th century and some liberal reforms took place after the Revolution of 1905. At the time of the February Revolution, Russia was



still under tsarist autocracy, which held back the development of capitalism, meaning that, according to Marx, a proletarian revolution could not take place in such a state. Here, however, Lenin came in the forefront, by starting a revolution (the October Revolution) in a state that did not have a well-developed proletariat. This revolution, instead of realizing the ideals foreseen by the communists, led to the emergence of other phenomena, related to a new type of oppression.

The aim of this paper is related to the subject of the dictatorship of the proletariat, analyzing whether this dictatorship really belonged to the proletariat or whether it served other interests, giving rise to a new ruling class. Did the struggle in the spirit of the idea of the dictatorship of the proletariat create the conditions for the establishment of totalitarianism, that is, the strengthening of the state and not its disappearance? The subject of the dictatorship of the proletariat in the works of Marx and Engels was undoubtedly an integral part of their political theory, but the two authors did not elaborate on this subject in depth, opening the way for future controversies (Tucker, 1970, p. 73) and one of those who tried to explain this concept was Lenin. Leninist theories are special because he argued that a proletarian revolution can take place even in a weakly industrialized state like Russia, which is a distortion of the Marxist theory that the proletarian revolution should take place in highly industrialized states.

If the proletariat is simply related to the working class, some conceptual clarifications are needed for other concepts used in this paper, such as *dictatorship of the proletariat*, *exploitation* and *social class*. The dictatorship of the proletariat represented for Lenin the domination of the vast majority over the small exploiting minority that was to be repressed, for the majority representing an instrument of liberation and democracy (Gooding, 2002, p. 77). According to Marx, exploitation occurs when the means of production are owned by one part of the population, while the other part is excluded (Stoian, 2012). And since at the time when Marx wrote his works, the means of production were owned by the bourgeoisie, it follows that this class represented the exploiting class that owned the means of production, thus exploiting the proletariat. The concept of social class can be defined as a category characterized by the identity of the sources from which they derive their income, from salaries, land rent or profit. This definition may be insufficient, so the last criterion is given by who owns the means of production (Kolakowski, 1978a, p. 353).

### **THE RUSSIAN CONTEXT AND THE OCTOBER REVOLUTION**

In order to highlight the context in which the dictatorship of the proletariat was established, the events in Russia in 1917 must also be put under light. First, there was a revolution in February 1917, which overthrew the tsarist regime and installed a Provisional Government in charge. The Provisional Government formulated an advanced program from a democratic and social point of view, but the great military offensive launched ended in disaster and led to the disorganization of the army, turbulence in villages and cities, culminating in an urban social crisis that ended in the collapse of the economy, a rural crisis and with a crisis of nationalities with separatist tendencies (Courtois, 2008, pp. 40-42).

Lenin took advantage of the fact that the Provisional Government continued the war and on 17 April 1917, upon his return from exile, imposed the “April Theses” on the Bolshevik Party, in which he denounced the continuation of the war, adding other ideas such as disagreement over the idea of a parliamentary republic, predicting the seizure of power by the Bolsheviks or the nationalization of land (Courtois, 2008, p. 40). In October 1917, the Bolsheviks gained absolute majorities in the soviets of Moscow and Petrograd and decided to organize an armed revolt, resulting in the occupation and arrest of 13 ministers of the Provisional Government, apart from Kerensky. The Second General Congress of the Soviets, gathered in Petrograd, confirmed the seizure of power by the Bolsheviks, who formed the majority together with the Left Socialist-Revolutionaries. The Mensheviks together with the right-



wing Socialist-Revolutionaries left the congress, and power was transferred to the Soviets. In the following days, the congress issued the decree on land and the decree on peace - which was signed with the Central Powers on 3 March 1918 -, and a Provisional Council of People's Commissars was also elected, consisting exclusively of Bolsheviks and led by Lenin (McCauley, 2010, pp. 13-14).

According to the Marxist predictions, the revolution was supposed to break out in the most industrialized countries, but, paradoxically, it took place in Russia, which at the beginning of the 20th century was one of the most backward countries in Europe (Courtois, 2008, p. 13). Here, however, comes the role of Lenin, who, in addition to predicting a proletarian revolution in backward Russia, where the proletariat represented only 10% of the population in 1917 (McCauley, 2010, p. 64), also managed to put his ideas into practice in this direction. After the Leninist revolution, the power was far from consolidated, the Bolsheviks were going to strengthen their position following the civil war - called by Lenin “the bloody extermination of the rich” -, which broke out after the dissolution of the Constituent Assembly, elected by universal suffrage and which opposed a whole series of opponents. Under the given conditions, only through terror could Lenin maintain power and implement his program of *war communism*, which found its support in such radical measures such as the suppression of currency, private trade, inheritance and private property and introduction of planned economy and mandatory work, measures that led to economic ruin. The grain harvest fell from 78.2 million tons in 1913 to 48.2 million tons in 1920, the index of industrial production fell from 100 in 1913 to 12 in 1921, and inflation rose from an index of 100 in 1913 to 64 million in 1923. In 1921 the civil war was won by the Communists, but at a very high price, determining Lenin to propose, in order to avoid a general failure, the New Economic Policy (Courtois, 2010, pp. 44-46). NEP was as a step backwards for the party, as light industry passed into the hands of those in charge of the NEP, while peasants were allowed to sell to whomever they wished, with only public services, large industry and foreign trade still remaining in state hands (McCauley, 2010, p. 76).

### **THE DICTATORSHIP OF THE PROLETARIAT**

As can be seen from the above definition, the dictatorship of the proletariat represents the transitional period during which classes disappear. Moreover, the state also disappears, which is, according to Lenin, a product of the manifestation of class contradictions that cannot be reconciled. At the same time, Marx also saw in the state an organ through which class domination was exercised and through which one class oppressed another (Lenin, 1954, pp. 380-381). In the book *State and Revolution*, Lenin also argued against those who distorted Marx's theories. Lenin criticized the petty bourgeois for seeing the state as an instrument by which the classes are reconciled and he also criticized Karl Kautsky, saying that he lost sight of the fact that the state, through its character as an expression of class contradictions, stands above society and it moves further and further away from it. It is easy to understand that for the liberation of the subjugated class, not only a violent revolution is enough, but also the destruction of the apparatus of state power created by the dominant class, which embodies that alienation (Lenin, 1954, pp. 381-382).

If the transition from capitalism to communism could only be done through a political transformation, manifested by the “revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat”, where the proletariat, in order to liberate itself, had to conquer political power from the bourgeoisie (Lenin, 1954, pp. 452-453), this means that the proletariat had to liberate itself through a revolution, a revolution which found its embodiment in the events of October/November 1917. For Lenin, “in capitalist society we have a wretched, poor, false democracy, a democracy only for the rich, for a minority. The dictatorship of the proletariat, the transition period to communism, will give birth for the first time to democracy for the people, for the majority, parallel to the necessary repression of the minority, of the exploiters” (Lenin, 1954, pp. 456). The dictatorship of the proletariat brings a huge expansion of democracy, which



becomes one for the poor, for the people and the restriction of freedom for categories such as exploiters, capitalists and oppressors, those who had to be suppressed by force in order to rid the world of wage slavery, being clear that where there is repression and violence there is neither freedom nor democracy (Lenin, 1954, p. 455).

As historical facts reveal, neither the poor nor the majority of the people benefited from the revolution, but indeed the exploiting classes were repressed. The proletariat was becoming the dominant class in society and the unions had to become state organizations that would organize the economy on a socialist basis, an idea derived from the logic of the dictatorship of the proletariat. From the Leninist point of view, as soon as the proletariat was identified with state power, it became illogical for the workers to defend their interests against the state (Kolakowski, 1978b, p. 488). With his accession to the helm of the state, Lenin launched the process of destroying the social order, through the slogan “Steal the thieves, rob the robbers!”, which encouraged drunkenness, robberies, rapes and murders committed by criminals released from prisons and the lumpenproletariat. The process continues with the takeover of the State Bank funds by the Bolsheviks at the end of November 1917, envisaging the looting of the 35,000 private safes, and with the first nationalization decree of large banks and industrial enterprises, of 27 December 1917, which inaugurated the monopoly held by the party-state over distribution and production. The state debts that lead the creditors to ruin are also cancelled. Thus begins the process of economic suppression of the middle and wealthy classes, and in order to impose his vision and repress opponents and refractory, on 20 December, Lenin illegally created the CEKA political police, destined to establish mass terror, which would become an instrument of government (Courtois, 2010, p. 44), an idea legitimized by what he argued in *State and the Revolution*, such that the state, as an instrument of repression, is still necessary, but being a transitional state, not a true state (Lenin, 1954, p. 456).

From the Leninist perspective, as soon as the division between classes has disappeared, the institutions designed to maintain it and oppress the exploited classes are no longer necessary (Kolakowski, 1978a, p. 360). Moreover, as soon as exploitation, the main cause of excesses, gradually decreases, the gradual disappearance of the state will begin, followed by, according to Marx, the lower phase and the upper phase of communism (Lenin, 1954, p. 457). In the first phase of communism, the means of production already belong to society, private property no longer exists, but the products are divided according to work, not according to needs, thus leading to inequality and the domination of bourgeois law. In the second phase of communism, the economic basis for the complete disappearance of the state is laid, consisting in a high degree of communist development, where the opposition between physical and intellectual work disappears, the main source of social inequalities, which cannot be removed by capitalist expropriation, and work becomes “the first vital need”. Finally, the state should have disappeared as soon as the principle “from each according to his abilities, to each according to his needs” was put into practice (Lenin, 1954, pp. 461-462).

### **THE RISE OF A NEW CLASS**

Despite these theories, as the leaders of the USSR and other communist states predicted, believing that the state would quickly disappear and that democracy would become stronger, the situation was reversed. Even though industrialization was fast, the standard of living fell, and the differences between physical and intellectual work, as well as those between village and city, grew and did not fade, as was believed. But the greatest illusion resided in the belief in a classless society, the result of the destruction of capitalist property and the collectivization of the USSR (Djilas, 1957, p. 37). All these things, together with the NEP, only contradict what Lenin said about the role of the dictatorship of the proletariat in the process of the disappearance of the state and that the rapid suppression of the capitalist system leads to disaster, hence the need for the tactical movement of the



NEP. Taking into account the historical facts, I argue that in fact Lenin is the craftsman of the revolution, instead of the proletarian class, and through his decisions aimed at repression, such as the establishment of the CEKA, it is clear that it was not the people who ordered the beginning of repression. Through the measures taken by Lenin, the state did not weaken, but strengthened more and more, which was later perfected by Stalin. In fact, by combining his revolutionary passion with the utopian and the scientific, passions aimed at a perfect society, resulting from the destruction of the existing one, the policy being scientifically justified, Lenin laid the foundations of totalitarianism (Courtois, 2008, p. 46).

After the collectivization process ended, which had among its objectives the destruction of the peasantry - as a class independent of power - by suppressing the kulaks - i.e. its elite - (Courtois, 2008, p. 47), in the Constitution of 1936, Stalin announced the end of the existence of the exploiting class, the capitalists and other classes of old origin being truly destroyed, but a new class was to be formed (Djilas, 1957, pp. 37-38). The new class, called bureaucracy, more correctly political bureaucracy, besides the fact that it presented all the characteristics of the previous ones, it also had some characteristics of its own, although its origin was similar to that of other classes, coming from the revolution. The bureaucracy, unlike the other classes, came to power after new economic models were introduced into the old society, being created only after gaining power, having its origins in the Bolshevik-type party, although Lenin did not suspect this. More precisely, the representatives of the new class came from those professional revolutionaries, who in fact composed its core, and who, as Trotsky remarked, in the pre-revolutionary period, they represented the basis for the future Stalinist bureaucracy. What was not foreseen, however, was the formation of a new class of exploiters and owners, who enjoyed economic privileges and preferences due to the administrative monopoly they had (Djilas, 1957, pp. 38-39).

The members of the new class could be represented by people like Lenin, Stalin - who first held unimportant administrative positions, such as that of General Secretary-, Felix Djerzinsky - the founder of CEKA-, Trotsky - the founder of the Red Army -, Kamenev, Zinoviev - who were later purged by Stalin-, Khrushchev, Brezhnev or finally Gorbachev. Apart from the last three figures, all of them contributed to the outbreak and development of the Bolshevik revolution. These bureaucrats advanced in positions within the party-state and, by designating some of them as successors, it could be argued that this class ensured its continuity through the continuous training of the cadres who would lead the state. By forming out of the party and using it as a base, the new class grew stronger, while the party weakened, the process being unnatural, as classes normally give rise to parties (Djilas, 1957, p. 40).

The social origin of this new class resided in the proletariat, acting as a champion of the working class and, in its anti-capitalist character, depends on workers. The traditional belief of the proletariat in the society without exploitation and the proletarian struggle are factors by which the new class is supported and most importantly, the new class cannot consolidate its power and achieve industrialization without the contribution of the working class, which sees in industrialization the salvation from poverty. Finally, the new class establishes its power and authority, being interested in the poor and the proletariat only to the extent necessary to maintain dominance over the most rebellious and aggressive social forces, as well as for the development of production. The monopoly which the new class establishes over the whole of society, in the name of the working class, is in fact a monopoly over the latter and which manifests itself primarily intellectually, over the vanguard of the proletariat, then over the proletariat as a whole. Without industry, in which the interests and power of the new class lie, it cannot consolidate (Djilas, 1957, p. 42). The new class derives its power from a specific form of ownership, of collective fashion, in which it holds a monopoly over the distribution of material goods (Djilas, 1957, p. 45). So, through this monopoly it has on the distribution of goods, the new



class obviously also has a monopoly on the proletariat, which receives as much as the representatives of the new class want, being able to withdraw resources as they please.

### CONCLUSION

The main conclusion of this paper is that the dictatorship of the proletariat and the disappearance of the state predicted by Marxist-Leninist thought did not happen, but on the contrary, Lenin actually acted in the name of this idea to seize power and establish terror. During the Bolshevik Revolution, it was not the proletariat that decided its fate, but in fact Lenin ruled the destinies of Russia, using the idea of violent repression of opponents to legitimize the terror exercised by the CEKA and to establish a totalitarian regime, in which the voice of the Bolshevik Party was the only one that mattered. Perhaps the failure of a true proletarian revolution is also due to the fact that the revolution took place in Russia, a country that had a poorly developed proletariat. Through the measures taken by Lenin and then Stalin, the state did not weaken, but strengthened, which makes its disappearance impossible, being able to say that only the first phase of communism was achieved, the second being prevented by the strengthening of the state. From the bosom of the proletarian revolution, a new class was born in society, with origins in the revolutionary class described by Lenin, who exercise their monopoly over the proletariat through the distribution of goods. Therefore, simultaneously with the development of totalitarianism, the fate of the proletariat did not register the great expected successes, and the classes were not abolished, but only replaced the exploiting classes of the bourgeoisie with the new dominant class, of the political bureaucracy, which was formed from the party.



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