

NATION AND WORKING-CLASS



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I.

Communism is the doctrine of the class struggle of the proletariat within capitalist society. Its goal is the destruction of the capitalist world-system and its replacement by the Commune of the world-economy.

Its struggle and mission are international. The very existence of the bourgeoisie and proletariat is determined by the capitalist mode of production. The struggle between bourgeoisie and proletariat moves through nations, tearing them apart with the antagonisms between the classes in enemy camps. But as both classes can only exist so long as capitalist society lasts, at the end of their struggle class-antagonisms in every country will be abolished by the victorious proletariat. By smashing the capitalist form of economy and eradicating the capitalist class-society and wage system, the proletariat abolishes the bourgeoisie and, at the same time, itself as a non-propertied class. In doing so, it deprives class-divisions within nations of their foundations. Communist society sets all working members of a people [*Volk*] alongside one another, free and equal. It arises out of the socialized labor of a classless people, and comes to completion through the federalist integration of the economy of the classless nations [*Völker*] in the World Commune.

The revolutionary struggle of the proletariat, mobilized within the embrace of the bourgeois nations, picks up the revolutionary tendencies extant when it first begins. Where bourgeois society is itself still struggling with feudal forces over the "political structure", the proletariat fights in the foremost battle-lines of the bourgeoisie as the most energetic stratum driving the Revolution forward. After the bourgeoisie triumphs over the feudal world, the proletariat intervenes in the revolutionary struggles which unleash the emerging, reinvigorated groups of the bourgeois class to participate in the power of the state, and while also supporting the bourgeois wings of the revolution in these upheavals, it at the same time campaigns for the implementation of its own class goals in order to broaden its own revolutionary basis of struggle against the entire bourgeois class. It is precisely the course of the bourgeois revolutions which furnishes visible evidence that the bourgeois struggle for emancipation is unfurling the problems of humanity's liberation, but that it is necessary to overcome bourgeois society itself in order to resolve these problems. All of these problems therefore fall automatically within the ambit of proletarian struggle. The most important of them, in which all others intersect as a focal point, is the organization of the nation. For the political manifestation of bourgeois society is the bourgeois state, which attempts to organize the nation as its given basis. And as this organization has had so little success at resolving all the other problems of humanity posed by bourgeois society, but the proletariat must, in order to carry out its own emancipation, conquer and shatter the

bourgeois state, then in this case too it is forced to take up the unsolved problem at precisely the point where the Bourgeois Revolution left it.

The proletariat's position towards the nation has already been clearly defined by Marx and Engels's 1848 Communist Manifesto. It reads: "The workers have no Fatherland. One cannot take from them what they do not have. Since the proletariat must first of all win political supremacy, must rise to be the leading class of the nation, and must constitute itself as the nation, it is itself still national, although by no means in the bourgeois sense of the word.." Being propertyless, as the proletariat are in bourgeois society, means they are also landless. And as landless people they have no Fatherland. By striving to smash bourgeois society in all its political and economic manifestations, the proletariat is directing its class struggle directly against the bourgeois state and thereby against the bourgeois organization of the nation. However, by aligning itself within this bourgeois society as a national class in order to overthrow the bourgeois state and so elevate its national class organization to a national state organization, the proletariat takes possession of the country and of all its possessions. It ceases to be propertyless, landless, Fatherlandless. For it becomes the nation itself, and can no longer be anti-national because it cannot be against itself. It becomes the bearer of the national culture and therefore the bearer of the national idea. This process of transformation begins with the struggle for power itself, with the outbreak of proletarian revolution.

The Paris Commune of springtime, 1871, was the first attempt at establishing the revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat, that is, at creating a proletarian state organization. When Bonapartist France was crushed by war, and the French bourgeoisie, fearful of the arming of the proletariat, made treasonous [*volksverräterische*] agreements with the national enemy, the Parisian proletariat – laborers, artisans, and the nearly possessionless bourgeois underclass of ordinary people – rose to organize revolutionary resistance, and to safeguard the Republic, established after the fall to the *Kaiserreich*, from the clutches of the French bourgeoisie and the foreign conquerors. Because Paris was the capital of a tightly centralized bourgeois nation-state, its proletariat – as they established their rule in the center of said state – was faced immediately with the national question. It is characteristic of the confluence of the national and international perspectives that Marx, as head of the 1863 First International, directly emphasized the importance of national politics to the Commune and thus simultaneously revealed the need for a cohesive national organization for the proletariat's total revolutionary politics. In his publication *The Civil War in France*, written as an address to the General Council of the International, he states: "The Paris Commune should, of course, have served as a model to all the great industrial centers of France. As soon as the communal order of things was introduced in Paris and the secondary centers, the old centralized government in the provinces, too, would have to give way to the self-government of the producers. In a rough sketch of the national organization, which the Commune did not have time to elaborate on further, it explicitly states that the Commune was to be the political form of even the smallest hamlet, and that in the country areas the standing army should be replaced by a peoples' militia

[*Volksmiliz*] with an extremely short term of service. The rural communities of every district were to administer their common affairs by an assembly of delegates in the district capital, and these district assemblies were again to send deputies to the National Assembly in Paris; delegates were to be recallable at any time and bound by the specific instructions of their constituents. The few but important functions still left over for a central government were not to be abolished, as has been intentionally misstated, but instead entrusted to Communal – that is to say, strictly responsible – public officials. The unity of the nation was not to be broken, but, on the contrary, to be organized by the Communal Constitution; it was to become a reality via the destruction of that state power which masqueraded as the embodiment of this unity but which desired to be independent of and superior to the nation, upon which it was but a parasitic excrescence. While the merely repressive organs of the old governmental power were to be amputated, its legitimate functions were to be wrested from an authority that placed itself above society and restored to the responsible servants of that society..."

In this brief outline there is comprised a complete structure of the national proletarian state. If one includes the concept of workplace representation as a foundation, then you get the entire modern council system – which is, as we understand it, organization by self-government from below, on a federalist basis with centralizing intermediate members and a supreme leadership that arises out of the Supreme National Council (still referred to as the "National Assembly" by Marx); a system based on gradation from below, and according to which every elected representative of an organization can be recalled by his sponsors at any time if he violates his binding mandate. All of the objections to this system raised by fanatical advocates for a dictatorship of party rule, e.g. that it is inconceivable for the world's cultured nations, are thus also directed against the Paris Commune, against the First International, and against Karl Marx, whose pupils love to act as the wrens¹ of the proletarian revolution.

Even the constitution of the Russian Soviet Republic cannot avoid explicitly recognizing and specifying the right of nations to self-determination. In Article 1, paragraph 2 of the *Declaration of Rights of the Working and Exploited People*, it states: "The Russian Soviet Republic is established on the principle of a free union of free nations, as a federation of Soviet national republics." If the Moscow office of the Third International presumes that its task is the imposition of the dictatorship of communist party-politicians over all countries, then this is a slap in the face not only to the entire past practice of scientific communism, but also to the fundamental laws of its own proletarian state's constitution.

II.

Although the word "nation" is of Roman origin, antiquity did not use the term in the sense of its modern political meaning; the word instead denoted what we call a territorial association². The word only developed a more comprehensive political meaning in the Middle Ages. The dominion of the German nobility and the free German peasantry extended from the estuaries of the Rhine, Meuse, and Scheldt all the way up to Courland, to the Carpathians, and in the South deep into Italy – a complex of territories, to which Poland and later Hungary and Spain (through dynastic marriages) were temporarily connected, bearing the name Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation. The combination of the terms "state" and "nation" later became a hallmark of the bourgeois era.

The bourgeois class-struggle raises the fight against the supremacy of the feudal lords and against the forms of state and economic organization engendered by them. The feudal economy is a needs-based-economy. Every village, every hamlet, every city produces itself what it uses and consumes. The modest level of exchange traffic that occurs between them relates mainly to non-essential things. A web of tariffs and tolls spans the country in order to maintain the internal cohesion of local economies. The feudal state organization is in accord with these conditions of production. It is based on personal vassalage, in which manorial lords stick together by virtue of the reciprocal and revocable transfer of land use to one another and, at the same time, to the head of state, who possesses the final and highest power of disposal over all land. Regardless of ethnic [*völkischen*] disparities, the feudal state can set its frontiers as far as it is capable of establishing feudal conditions with its aristocratic landholders. The bourgeois form of state and economic organization is fundamentally different from these feudal equivalents. The bourgeois economy is based on exchange. The more necessary and the more general it becomes, the more production adapts to exchange on a larger scale and thus simultaneously acquires a capitalist character – and the more interested this incipient capitalist economy becomes in clearing away internal barriers and in forming large territories with a standard *lingua franca*, with unified values, customs, and laws, and therefore with a leaner, more central administration. An administration which the emerging capital can serve as a domestic market and in which its supremacy over small-scale feudal production is able to develop to its full potential (which in turn, for reasons of competition between the capitalist economies of different nations, must more or less separate from one another). Both from the historical contrasts between the bourgeois and feudal forms of production and state-order, as well as from their respective inner natures, it follows that the amalgamation of the entire people [*Volk*] into a united governmental framework, the amalgamation of all its territorial associations into one great nation, represents the stated objective of bourgeois capitalist politics.

But the bourgeois state has proved itself unable to achieve this goal. Not even France, which struggled for the establishment of the national state over centuries of warfare, was able to consolidate all the territorial associations of the French people as a nation

under one state system. This inability is also grounded in the very nature of the capitalist economic system. Competition and the exchange-based economy are the guiding principles which establish and differentiate its economic areas from those of feudalism. Just as how in the feudal world the general best interest of society took a back seat to the personal interests of the feudal lords, so it now takes a back seat to the material interests of commodity-owners. If bourgeois freedom and equality have turned out merely to be the freedom of exploiters to exploit the non-propertied classes equally, then how is the nation which emerged out of the bourgeois class struggle any different from an organization for the systematic implementation of a bourgeois-capitalist economy – one which doesn't take into consideration the general human interests of the country's residents, but merely the exploitation-interests of the wealthy and the commodity-owners? And this principle, which governs the relations between the inhabitants of every capitalistically-organized country, naturally also prevails with the same absoluteness over the relations capitalist nations maintain between one another.

To the degree that the bourgeoisie takes possession of state power, state politics becomes a condensation of its economic interests vis-à-vis foreign powers. This also turns the question of determining national borders into a question of power-politics in the service of the economic-interests of capital. Where capitalist interests demand the control of estuaries and economic centers, mineral resources and thoroughfares, there the relevant borders are enforced, provided only that the capitalist bourgeoisie possesses the power to assert its special interests against its own and foreign peoples. With the development of world trade and global economy the struggle begins for the mastery of the seas, for the mastery of the ports and coasts, a struggle which closely intertwines the continental interests of the bourgeoisie in their own countries with their overseas interests, and which makes state politics on the home continent dependent upon the balance of power in foreign parts of the world. In their greed to secure monopoly and hegemony for themselves, competing bourgeoisies tear apart peoples who belong together; they corral together fragments of foreign peoples into a single state; they create artificially small states which are neither viable in themselves nor have a right to exist, states which owe their existence to the jealousy of the greats. And as the central administration of the bourgeois state corresponds to a centralized military apparatus, so the existence of this army as a means of capitalist politics exacerbates the tendencies towards the fragmentation and rupturing of weaker peoples, because when determining national borders the potential offensive or defensive military considerations (in addition to economic special interests) are crucial.

As little as bourgeois society is capable of realizing human freedom and equality, it is no more capable of organizing peoples into a national framework. While it has violated and suppressed the parts of its own nation that it has crammed into its state mechanism, it has at the same time forced parts of foreign nations inside this same state framework for reasons of economic special interest, thereby tearing apart other peoples – and all without its being able to prevent parts of its own nation in turn from being split off from the national body [*Volkskörper*] and forcibly incorporated by other states. And, incapable as it is at organizing nations, it thus corrupts the concept of the nation by

turning the question of belonging to a people into a question of belonging to a state, thereby transmuting the concept of the Nation into that of Nationality. This corruption also occurs inevitably, because the capitalist classes can only assert themselves against the proletariat of their own countries and in battle with one another via the machinery of power in their own states; because the state-politics of the capitalist era is not able to capture undivided nations, but in the best of cases can only capture more or less large fragments of nations, and consequently does not progress beyond the creation of nationalities. As in a bourgeois state the nation is transformed into a Nationality even if the bourgeois state only organizes members of one people, so the liberation of nations is therefore dependent upon the smashing of the bourgeois states. Only with their destruction is the concept of Nationality nullified, and the broken and fragmented peoples permitted to reunite into Nations – and only proletarian revolution opens the way for this.

III.

Inherent within Germany's proletarian revolution, as a legacy of the territorial fragmentation that set the seal on the 17th century's Thirty Years' War, is the elimination of the chaos of individual states, something the bourgeois revolution did not dare to do.

The political impotence of imperial power after the breakdown of the medieval empire, and the displacement of Germany from the world's oceans and the great highways of international commerce which excluded the country from participating in the capitalist world development that began following the discovery of America and the maritime route to India – these prevented a central power developing here which could break the territorial power of the hereditary princes [*Fürsten*] and the nobility and create a centralized state with its own centralized military power. While in the West absolute monarchy arose and subjugated the nobility, despite sometimes having to endure control through bourgeois organs; while in the East despotic tsarism, from a tightly-organized and consolidated central core, subjugated the expansive regions of the later Great Russian Empire one after another, forcing upon them with every means possible a terroristic dictatorship under the bloody regime of the *knouts*,³ which allowed any attempt at an independent folk-culture to be crushed by the police and Cossack hordes wherever it emerged; in Germany the independent sovereignty of the territorial lords, the nobility, and a part of the cities was preserved.

After the Thirty Years' War determined the final defeat of German imperial power through the cooperation of the hereditary princes with foreign nations, the peace treaties of Münster and Osnabrück guaranteed the right of the German territories to be able to conclude treaties with foreign powers independently of the powers of the Reich, thus completely delivering over the Reich to the rival interests of foreign countries.

As it had already been riven with devastation by foreign armies in the Thirty Years' War, it was now reduced for centuries into being the playground for foreign economic interests, the open ground on which the battles for supremacy in Europe and for superiority in the colonies and on the seas were fought. The West Rhenish areas were lost. France tore Alsace and Lorraine free from the body of the Reich, while Holland and later Belgium became a bone of contention between England and France – and only the rivalry of both these states, England's need to secure its position on the Channel against France through buffer states, saved them from sharing the fate of Alsace-Lorraine and likewise being incorporated into the French monarchy.

The disintegration of the territory of the Reich into small and minute scraps of independently sovereign land, the incessant deal-making by religious and secular rulers with the Western Powers, these made any attempt at organizing military defense along the Reich's frontiers illusory from the outset. A new consolidation of the Reich could only be undertaken from the East. This is where two military monarchies emerged out of the struggle with the foreign powers which had settled themselves on the soil of the Reich. In the north, Brandenburg took up the fight against Sweden and Poland, understanding how to prevent the total surrender of Pomerania by taking advantage of

the antagonisms between these two countries; it also took possession of the Duchy of Prussia. In the southeast, Austria formed a dam against the Turkish flood, which sometimes even battered against the gates of Vienna. These two centers developed into larger state structures by erecting a tightly-centralized administration and a firmly-organized army in their respective areas. The entirety of later German history is necessarily arranged around these states. Between them both the struggle for hegemony in Germany unfurled, which – so long as the German imperial crown lay with the Austrian ruling house – could only be waged by Brandenburg-Prussia as a struggle against the German Reich-constitution. If this struggle ultimately revolved around a new consolidation of the Reich, in a time when every foreign antagonism was reflected within Germany, the ensuing conflicts between Prussia and Austria became the crossroads for every foreign interest in Germany. Thus the Silesian Wars indeed became crucial for Prussia's ascendance in Germany, as they led to the definitive break with the until then French-oriented policy of the Prussian crown. But as Prussia was completely exhausted and owed its avoidance of an otherwise certain defeat only to Russia's refusal to continue the war, the emerging great state became politically dependent upon country-devouring tsarism, which was just preparing to extend its borders directly to Germany through the division of Poland.

The French Revolution used the politics of absolute monarchy against Germany as it did against England, with the heightened strength which the great promise of freedom, equality, and fraternity gave to the first modern mass armies. After all, revolutionary France was a country that could not only begin an economic revolution on its own soil but could also carry it out, and which as a result could bring considerable progress to its eastern neighbors in terms of political liberation and economic organization so long as its war policy could be determined by the goal of securing the revolution. With the fall of the Jacobins, whose government was dominated by petite-bourgeoisie and workers and whose historical mission consisted of unleashing the power of the masses to organize a revolutionary defense, a purely capitalist state organization prevailed in whose policies all capitalist tendencies began to take effect immediately. The last decades of absolute monarchy had brought about the sudden decline of a colonial position which was more substantial than that of the English, the remnants of which the Jacobins deliberately relinquished. After settlement was made in the War of the First Coalition through Prussia retiring from the coalition in 1795, the capitalist government of France began the struggle to reclaim its colonial world position, thereby opening up that era of wars with England which only came to a conclusion with the downfall of Napoleon. In these wars, the struggles of both powers assumed a purely imperialistic character. While French policy sought to establish a European federation under French military hegemony in order to impose a boycott of its competitor's products upon the continent, thereby choking its rivals and shattering their world power, England's endeavors were to bring about one continental coalition after another, while at the same time unreservedly asserting its dominance on the seas and in the colonies. And again Germany found itself the focal point of this gigantic struggle. Country and people became vague pawns in the chess game of French politics. The creation of the Confederation of the Rhine, the division of Prussia, the incorporation of the North Sea Coast into the French Empire

which preceded the assimilation of the Netherlands and the left bank of the Rhine river, the occupation of the ports and estuaries of the Baltic Sea up to the Russian border – all of this served the French effort to shut down and cripple English trade, while at the same time French industry was secured against possible competition from annexed areas by a rigid system of highly-protected tariffs, which at the same time empowered it to compete with the English legacy. This policy, which served France's capitalist special interests, was combined with the ruthless plundering of all occupied territories and the oppression of their populations for France's war purposes while their maritime trade was bound by the blockade which England had imposed upon every sea. This policy of imperialistic exploitation of foreign forces inevitably provoked a political and military reaction from the occupied territories, which was only furthered by the reforms initiated directly or indirectly by Napoleon. So long as its military rule remained unshaken, France could overlook with the superior smile of the victor the unrest among those peoples it had subjugated. The first major defeat, which its armies suffered on a battlefield far from their own base of operations and which left their defeated forces separated from France by mutinous nationalities, inevitably brought about a complete collapse.

Napoleonic foreign domination had brought about an era of bourgeois reform in those parts of the German west and south which belonged to the Confederation of the Rhine, partly benefiting the emergence of industry, and partly benefiting the evolution towards bourgeois forms of state. In Prussia the plight of the state likewise compelled reforms, expressed through the granting of limited self-government and commercial freedom to the cities, and through the introduction of universal conscription. The old Reich and emperorship [*Kaisertum*] silently disappeared. Numerous minor hereditary princes had forfeited their independence and been amalgamated into the large states which Napoleon had created and sometimes elevated into kingdoms. Alongside Prussia and Austria, the third German power was the complex of countries which had been united under Napoleon in the Confederation of the Rhine, and which left behind an entity of southern German interests after the withdrawal of those Rhenish-Westphalian territories falling to Prussia. Among the German intelligentsia, the aspiration for national unity began to make itself felt as a retroactive effect of the ideology of the French Revolution. All in all, however, German conditions were too economically and politically undeveloped to allow the emergence of a strong bourgeois class which could have put its economic interests behind such an ideology in order to bring it to fruition through a struggle against the princes. Thus the conclusion of the Napoleonic Wars did not facilitate the establishment of German unity, but instead the reorientation of German inner conflict, which found its most appropriate political expression in the League of Princes, in the German Confederation, and in its most worthy creation, the Frankfurt Bundestag;⁴ at the same time, Prussia's dependence upon Russia remained unchanged, and England, through its influence in Hanover and Brunswick, retained its ability to interfere in the internal affairs of Germany at any time.

IV.

The German Revolution of 1848 was unable to establish for Germany those state conditions which are the prerequisite for the full development of bourgeois-capitalist society. The power of the princes was never destroyed, nor were the German bourgeoisie organized as a class. The Revolution's half-measures result from the fact that it was far more a retroactive product of capitalism's worldwide development than it was the result of a consolidation of capitalism domestically. Even if the impetus emanating from France led to a popular uprising against outmoded privileges, it lacked the cohesiveness of a revolutionary class which, with its own goals and concentrated strength, could have spurred the movement onwards to such an extent that it could smash the existing foundations of the state and establish that unified, republican form of state in accordance with the interests of an ascendant capitalist economy. Consequently, the leadership of the Revolution fell into the hands of revolutionary ideologues, while the sponsors of industrial development, blanching at the explicit proletarian class objectives which the working-classes of the French Republic had sought to achieve, took refuge in the open arms of princely Reaction. With this, the German bourgeoisie finally relinquished their claim to building their own state in order to consign themselves utterly to the political leadership of the princes. The hereditary princes were called upon to carry out the unification of Germany which progressive industrial development demanded.

Thus, the particular form of Germany's unification was decided for it by the special interests of the princes. It was not a cohesive, bourgeois, organized popular organization [*Volksorganisation*], as arose in France and England, but instead only a Princes' League which laid out prior governmental and ethnic [*völkische*] conflicts in a new form. In accordance with the division of Germany into three parts, the princes' work of unification was carried out in a struggle between Prussia and Austria for the German south. Prussia's victory in the year 1866 finally secured predominance for this state in a Germany from which the German parts of Austria had to be excluded, because their inclusion was incompatible with the interests of the ruling houses. The German south, stripped of its backing from Austria, was too weak on its own to resist a Prussian state which had recently amalgamated across the entire north the individual states of the "North German Confederation". The faint glimmers of revolutionary and national consciousness in the bourgeois ideologues ensured they were thereby lured in by Bismarck when he bestowed upon the League a parliament formed by general and equal elections, a parliament whose only flaws were that the *Bundesrat*⁵ stood above it and that it had little say in domestic policy and no say whatsoever in foreign policy, while being completely deprived of control over the army, the real instrument of power in the League. After the war with France in 1871, this League of Princes gave rise to the German Reich, which as a league of individual German nobles recognized the King of Prussia as supreme warlord with the title of Kaiser, and which, precisely because it was not a popular organization but merely a League of Princes from the outset, was destined to be but a historical interlude. If the bourgeois revolution in Germany did not have the strength to enforce the formation of a state in accordance with its own interests,

reassurance lay in the fact that simply the first blows of the proletarian revolution would be able to shatter a super-state which could not even meet the requirements for a fully-developed bourgeois society.

The German Reich, as an ascendant industrial state, was only able to pursue a policy which corresponded with the interests of capitalism's expansion. It sought to counter the difficulty of asserting itself in the global marketplace as the young rival of older capitalist states with a system of high protective tariffs, which facilitated the continuous growth of domestic prices and the undercutting of prices on the world market, thereby at the same time giving the political marriage between the agrarian German nobility and the industrial bourgeoisie an economic basis of interest. If the worldwide economic development of capitalism corresponded with the need of all industrialized countries to bring colonies into their possession – because without their own colonial assets, competition on the world-market threatened to make overseas raw materials much more expensive – the capitalist classes of Germany viewed the lack of overseas possessions as a major disadvantage, for Germany did not have a single colony when its industrial boom began. From the capitalist perspective, Germany acted logically when it placed the entire military and political power of the state behind its quest for colonial acquisition. This aggressive attitude, the result of capitalist Germany's position in the world, expressed itself through the particular nature of its imperialism, from which political lines were dictated by the appetite for expansion of a prodigiously growing industry. Whoever understands the development of world history as a logical, organic process, which inevitably takes place via contradictory forces, can only shrug his shoulders over the moral tirades with which the bourgeoisies of the capitalist and imperialist bandit-states have greeted the advances of a hungry competitor. Only revolutionary proletarian politics, which bears the responsibility for crushing world imperialism, is justified in passing judgement over those methods of violating every people which have been a necessity of life for imperialists of all countries and a precondition for the existence of domestic capitalism.

For German politics, its offensive strength and its defensive weakness were grounded in the fact that there was no cohesive popular organization in Germany which could assert its influence over the methods and aims of warfare and politics itself. While Bismarckian policy attempted to secure the backing of both England and Russia after the founding of the Reich had eliminated the foreign influence which until then had been paramount, in the era of Wilhelm II a power politics prevailed which was unilaterally oriented from the military perspective; it rejected bourgeois methods of compromise and maneuvered Germany into the isolation in which it found itself upon the outbreak of the Great War. Defeat became inevitable when, by reversing the previous policy for the organization of national defense (which could only be implemented through the ruthless application of revolutionary means), it could not succeed in mobilizing that power of the masses which in imperialist armies is only manifest as living material. The fate of the German bourgeoisie – which had refrained from establishing its own powerful popular organization, and which, for better or worse, had intertwined its existence with the fortunes of the German League of Princes – the fate of this bourgeoisie was sealed,

whether the revolutionary power of the masses overthrew the dynasties in order to transform the imperialistic war of plunder into a revolutionary war of defense, or whether imperialist rule collapsed completely on the battlefields. Either way, the disintegration of the League of Princes left the bourgeoisie powerless, and it became the mission and the historic duty of the proletariat to erect a new state of its own while clearing away the imperialist rubble.

V.

The disintegration of the League of Princes extinguished the development which Germany had gone through since the beginning of the 1848 Revolution. Those organs of power born out of the Revolution, the councils, put all power into the hands of the people and army immediately after the 1918 November uprising. As little as they were obliged to concern themselves with the settled frontiers of the shattered German Confederation, it was entirely natural to adopt a national policy without any regard for those dynastic interests which had hitherto prevented the creation of a popular organization and which now lay dashed to pieces on the ground.

Social-democratic fakirs, along with their independent auxiliaries of howling witch-doctors and Spartacist illiterates, fancied that the point of the Revolution was to replace the expelled princes while preserving the crumbling machinery of state, to replace the state bureaucracy with their own party-political annexes in order to seat the politicians of all the parties of the workers' movement before the feeding-troughs of the state administrations. They really believed that they were helping when they, as fauns in swimming trunks, sounded the peace-shawm of international Wilsonism.⁶ Instead of comprehending that the Revolution necessitated a completely new organizational structure for Germany, and that this could only be accomplished by consolidating the revolutionary organs of power and thus the revolutionary class itself, they instead attempted to master an apparatus that, even in the hands of those who had themselves assembled it, could no longer hold state and economy together. The total internal collapse resulting from this politics of blind fools, which sparked off the struggle of all against all through economic chaos, corresponded to the complete surrender of the country to the jackals of the League of Nations. The vultures of world finance, who as helpless nitwits recoil before the might of the Russian Revolution, by their own admission did not believe in the first few weeks that they could squeeze out of a revolutionized Germany what the criminal cowardice of the social-democratic *Erzbergerei*⁷ delivered over to them. Spurred on by the pacifist and Wilsonist sales-pitch from the independent shells for Entente politics, the social-democratic government, in coalition with the German agencies of international finance-capital, ratified the Peace of Versailles – although it had to realize that the attempt to implement the Treaty would forever wipe Germany off the face of the world map as an independent state, and would force its people to be scattered across the Earth in their millions as cannon-fodder and cultural-fertilizer.⁸ A natural outcome from these social-democratic state-acrobatics is the Treaty of Spa, which will at least yield something: That, after two years of the Revolution's enervation and emasculation, the German working-class will rise once again to finish off the rapacious bandits who in their most sordid self-interest have realized how to prevent the consolidation of the Revolution and thus the emergence of a new state.

Every state organization consists of a political-bureaucratic administrative apparatus and a concentrated mass of people who are subordinate to that apparatus. The prevailing class in a state is that which holds this apparatus in its hands, and which thus determines

the organizational form of the people. In order to do so, it must possess real power over the country; in other words, over its weaponry. For any reconstruction of the state, therefore, the organization of armaments is a precondition and a foundation. By seizing power, the proletariat organizes the arming of all workers, who create their own organs for controlling the weapons which have passed over into their disposal. Proletarian dictatorship is based upon the organization of weaponry. Equality in the right to bear arms is in accordance with equality in all political rights. This equality in power and rights precludes within the working-class any violation by groups with their own special-interests. Out of the armed working-classes come the councils, the proletarian dictatorship's means of rule. By integrating them across the country and by tiering them from the bottom-up, the dictatorship is organized. The dictatorship of the working-class is thus a form of government which is based upon the organization of real power. The resulting state draws up its own laws and enforces their acceptance and implementation with every instrument of state power. Just as there is no hope of internal resistance against so phenomenal a power as the organization of the armed working-class, so is this state equipped with the means to nip in the bud any arbitrary acts by individuals and by political special-interest groups.

The proletarian state is a popular organization which does not recognize any special power beyond that of the people. By arming itself as a class, the proletariat creates its class-organization and utilizes the power acquired through weaponry to expand this class-organization into a popular organization. The arming of the proletariat shatters the capitalist state and, along with it, the foundations of the bourgeoisie's organization as a class, thus nullifying their political influence. Their monopoly over the means of production is eliminated, their economic organizations liquidated, the entire economy comes under society's control. In order to render the reemergence of bourgeois class-rule impossible, the proletariat quashes all privileges which the bourgeoisie possessed within bourgeois society. With this the bourgeoisie thus ceases to exist as a class, and the remaining individuals of this broken class are left outside the proletarian class-framework. The proletariat incorporates these *déclassé* into its class-organization by requiring each individual to perform socially-useful work. All former bourgeois professions which already provided socially-useful work in the capitalist economy – professions such as doctors, technicians, teachers, and specialists of all kinds, which gain heightened significance in a socialized economy – carry out their work under the public control affiliated with council organs.

As the framework of the proletarian organization expands through the incorporation of the former bourgeois professions, the democratic basis of the state dictatorship is broadened to the same extent. The prerequisite for the equal status of those engaged in the former bourgeois occupations is their voluntary integration into the social system which the proletariat creates; in cases where resistance is given or sabotage is practiced, the necessary punitive actions and security measures naturally take place. That in a social organization of labour all people who fundamentally refuse to participate in social work – because they were as speculators, coupon-cutters,⁹ swindlers, or profiteers previously accustomed to an unearned income – are beyond national civil rights and are

rendered mere objects of the state authority is due to the simple fact that, in a state based upon the organization of labour, all rights are conditional upon participation in socially-useful work.

The proletarian class-struggle takes place in all countries as a struggle against the bourgeoisie and against the state through which the rule of the bourgeoisie is accomplished. But wherever the proletariat has gained power and brought their bourgeoisie to its knees, the preconditions for the creation of a national popular organization arise concurrently with the proletarian state. Ensuing from the armed class-organizations of the proletariat, the objective of the voluntary or forcible integration of the bourgeoisie into the proletariat is the mutual permeation of the proletarian and bourgeois classes, the dissolution of their differences into a higher social unity.

VI.

The complete realization of the Organization of Nations by the proletariat abolishes capitalist state borders; it nullifies nationalities and accomplishes the national unity of peoples. For the first time in history, peoples step onto the scene as self-contained cultural entities. Commonality of language, commonality of history, commonality of economic relations, and thus commonality of culture – from now on these become the basis for their arrangement and for the borders of their amalgamation. So long as this Organization of Nations is not realized over the whole world, union in each country still retains that state form which can only perish with the implementation of the World Commune in a worldwide classless society.

The complete realization of the national popular organization initially breaks against the resistance from the capitalist classes of other countries, who cannot permit the proletariat the achievement of national unity without surrendering themselves. But the proletarian class-struggle does not end with the suppression and dissolution of the bourgeoisie of their own country. The victory of the proletariat in one country, on the contrary, is a precondition for the downfall of the bourgeoisie in all countries. The victorious proletariat of one country hence supports the liberation-struggle of proletarians in all countries with every means of state power, in order to help them achieve victory, to establish their state, to accomplish their own national organization of peoples.

Proletarian revolution, carried out over the entire world, leaves the peoples freed from exploitation and servitude as a free association of national economic communes, as the Federation of Nations through whose union the World Commune is realized.



Translator's Notes

¹ "*Wrens of the proletarian revolution*" – The German word for 'wren', *Zaunkönig*, literally translates as 'king of the fence', implying that the wren is the king of his own small garden domain. The word probably also derives from a story in North European folklore where the little wren attains the status of king of the birds through a mixture of wits, trickery, and deceit. Use of the word by the authors is likely intended to declaim against the sectarianism of Marxism, with the various groups squabbling over ideological differences (including those, such as the KPD, who advocated for a "party-dictatorship" rather than a syndicalist or council state) depicted as 'wrens', tiny rulers of their own little kingdom, all claiming to be the true inheritors and interpreters of Marx's will.

² "*Territorial association*" – The German word used for this phrase is '*Landsmannschaft*', meaning a formally-structured organization for people who have a common national or ethnic origin and who are living outside the borders of their homeland. The first universities in Europe began to appear in the 12th and 13th centuries, established in France, Italy, and Europe – Germans attending these universities organized themselves into *Landsmannschaften*, and out of these fraternal organizations evolved groups called 'Nations'. The Nations were more codified and guild-like in structure than *Landsmannschaften*, although they still had their own social character. Members paid dues, followed their Nation's strictures, pledged to act collectively, and worked to protect and promote the interests of their fellow-members (who were all of the same ethnicity, or at least spoke the same language). The Nations were early contributors to the development of pan-German nationalism; they also helped lay the foundation for the politicization of later German student fraternities, which played a significant part both in the liberal-nationalist revolution of 1848 and in the later popularization of the National Socialist movement.

³ "*Knouts*" – in German, '*Knuten*'. A kind of multi-thong whip which originated with the Tatars and was widely-used in imperial Russia as a form of corporal punishment, particularly for political dissidents. In the rest of Europe the *knout* became a symbol of the harshness and brutality of Russian society and its autocratic regime, hence its invocation here by the authors.

⁴ "*Frankfurt Bundestag*" – Another name for the federal assembly of the German Confederation, located in Frankfurt and intended to act as a representative body for the various members of the loose alliance of states and cities which constituted the Confederation. Its delegates were not elected, but instead appointed by the aristocratic governments of the Confederation's member-states. The Assembly was dissolved along with the German Confederation after the Austro-Prussian war of 1866 broke up the union. Its existence as a physical representation of the division between German states, along with its inability to prevent warfare between them, is why the authors mention it as a manifestation of "German inner conflict".

⁵ "*Bundesrat*" – The "Federal Council" of Germany, effectively its upper house of parliament. *Bundesrat* members during Bismarck's era, as today, were delegated by state government authorities rather than popularly elected. Bills had to be accepted by both the *Reichstag* and the *Bundesrat* to become law. As Prussia through its sheer size dominated the *Bundesrat*, and as Bismarck was Minister-President of Prussia as well as Chancellor of the North German Confederation, this meant that representation within the Confederation was subordinated to the interests of the Confederation's largest and most powerful member.

⁶ A complicated series of images in this sentence. Fauns were creatures from Greek mythology, humanoids with horns and the furry hindquarters and tail of a goat. Fauns in myth and story were often treated as comic figures, and were commonly depicted in artwork as holding or playing the shawm – a woodwind instrument associated with hunters and woodsmen. The shawm became popular with Europeans during the Middle Ages, finding its way into rituals and ceremonies, and the concept of a "peace shawm" entered the German language as an occasionally-appearing equivalent to the Biblical "trumpet of peace". The mention of "swimming-trunks" is a reference to a famous photograph on the cover of issue no. 34 (August 1919) of the *Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung* – the photo was of President Friedrich Ebert and Minister of Defense Gustav Noske (both Social-Democrats) wearing swimming-trunks and bathing in the Baltic Sea. Germans at this time were not used to seeing their leaders depicted so casually, and the image caused a scandal which was subsequently played upon by communists and nationalists – the fact that the two semi-dressed leaders of the new Germany were rather

portly and physically unimpressive also helped feed prejudices that Weimar Germany itself was a flabby and unhealthy state. Altogether the authors' depiction of the social-democrats here as fauns in bathing-trunks, blowing the shawm of Wilsonism, is intended to denote how ridiculous and out of their depth they were in 1918-19 when negotiating Germany's surrender and the establishment of the new Republic.

⁷ "*Erzbergerei*" – A reference to Mattias Erzberger, a prominent Centre Party politician who was involved in armistice negotiations with the Allies in 1918 and was one of the signatories of the Treaty of Versailles. Erzberger came to be a kind of living symbol for Germany's defeat, surrender, and 'betrayal' to the League of Nations, Wilsonism, and Western liberal-capitalism. "*Erzbergerei*" thus became a kind of catch-all word to describe the new breed of colorless, incompetent, inherently traitorous political officials who supported the status quo – hence "social-democratic *Erzbergerei*" encompasses all those SPD members who delivered Germany over to the "vultures of world finance" through their acquiescence to the Versailles Treaty. Erzberger was eventually murdered in a '*Feme*' assassination on 26 August, 1921, by members of the nationalist underground movement Organization Consul.

⁸ "*Cultural fertilizer*" – in German "*Kulturdünger*". A nationalist term with racial connotations. Germans who settled abroad in large numbers were described by some writers as "*Kulturdünger*", since their inherently superior qualities as a race and culture acted as a kind of 'fertilizer' for beneficial, civilized qualities within the societies in which they settled. Despite the positive biologicistic connotations to the term, it still was often used with negative connotations, as it is here; it was regarded as a travesty by many Germans that so many millions of the *Volk* were forced by economic insecurity to emigrate abroad, thus fertilizing the nations of foreign peoples rather than their own Fatherland with the positive qualities of the German race.

⁹ "*Coupon-cutters*" – "*Cuponabschneider*" in the original German text (possibly a misspelling or antiquated spelling of *Kuponabschneider*). In socialist terminology at the time this was a contemptuous term for those who earned their income not through honest labour but through permanent receipt of the dividends or interest associated with share or bond certificates ('coupons').