CHAPTER IV

THE COMMUNIST THEORY OF THE STATE

I

MODERN social organisation is built upon the division of the world into a number of independent and sovereign States. These present always the phenomenon of a large number of people owing obedience to a small number of themselves organised as a Government. To the latter is confided the ultimate control of the national resources. It makes and administers the laws. The naval and military forces, the police-system, the foreign policy of the State, are set by the terms of its will. The forms of Government may, indeed, vary. In England, the State is a constitutional monarchy of which the Government is chosen indirectly by universal suffrage; in America it is a republic with power divided centrally between a legislature and an executive independently elected by the people as a whole, with local authority controlled upon a similar basis; in Spain and Italy the prevailing system is a dictatorship which, in the case of the latter, masks itself under semi-

constitutional forms. Whatever be the nature of political institutions, their central fact is always the legal duty of the many to obey the few, with the right of the few to exercise the power at their disposal to compel obedience.

What is the *raison d'être* of the State? In the classical theory, it exists, broadly speaking, to secure the good of society as a whole. It provides a plane where men may meet as citizens without regard to differences of race or class or creed. All other associations are partial in character; trade unions, churches, employers' federations, absorb the allegiance only of a few, and exhaust that allegiance but partially. The State differs from all of these in that membership of it is compulsory, and that its Government strives, or ought to strive, to hold a just balance between the different elements in society. It strives by its policy to effect such an adjustment of the relationship between citizens as will enable each of them to realise, if he so desires, the fullest implications of human personality.

Obviously, such a view of the philosophy of the State is a doctrine of ideal ends rather than of assured purposes. The State, like all other human institutions, has a history; and it is not to-day what it was yesterday, or will be to-morrow. To say, for example, that Tudor England sought to provide the conditions under which the average Englishman

could realise the fullest implications of his personality would be to talk plain nonsense; and it is not less obvious that in our own day the vast majority lack, through no fault of their own, any such opportunity. The answer of those who accept the classical view is to argue that while the State has not yet achieved its end, it is in continuous process of doing so. Conditions are better to-day than they were a hundred years ago; they will be better again to-morrow. The political process, on close scrutiny, reveals a continuously closer adjustment of institutions to human desires; and, especially where democratic government prevails, the State is in the hands of the people to mould as they will.

It should be added that this view does not represent the doctrine of thinkers in general, even among those who reject communism. Roughly, it is built upon a belief in the desirability of liberty and equality. Philosophers like Linguet, de Maistre, and Bonald have denied that these are either possible or desirable. They have argued that, on the contrary, the sacrifice of the well-being of the many to the interests of the few is a necessary feature of social organisation; and, in the case of Maistre and Bonald, they offer the consolations of religion to the many as a reward for their subordination. Certainly it must be said that there is this much of truth in their view that at no period in history has

the well-being of the masses been consciously the chief motive in public policy; and if the many are necessarily to be subordinate to the few, it is not improbable that organised religion alone has the authority over men's minds adequate to make them accept their lot.

There is an interesting resemblance between the theory of the State held by reactionaries like de Maistre, and that of Marx and his disciples. Each holds that the subordination, and even suffering of the masses, is a necessary consequence of social organisation, and each holds out a prospect of ultimate benefit to them as a recompense. But whereas with de Maistre and his school, that recompense is found in the next world, the Marxians offer hope in this by picturing the State as an organ of repression and urging that liberation can be won by its overthrow. The analysis by which the communists have reached this position has at least the merit of simplicity. Capitalist society, they argue, is built upon the deliberate exploitation of labour by the capitalist. The latter possesses all, and commands by reason of his possessions; the worker has nothing and obeys because he has nothing. Why is such an order of society tolerated? Mainly, it is said, for two reasons: first, because the capitalist is organised and powerful, and, secondly, because he is able to control the ability of the workers

The chief means by which it maintains its organisation is the State. "In all countries," urges Bukharin, "the State is merely a union of the master class. . . . Everywhere we find that the ministers, high officials, Members of Parliament, are either capitalists, landowners, factory owners, and financial magnates, or else the faithful and well-paid servants of these, lawyers, bank managers, professors, army officers, bishops, who serve the capitalists not from fear but from conviction." The union so composed has, says the communist, broadly two aims. It seeks, in the first place, to secure the capitalist class in the possession of the means of production. For this purpose exists the immense apparatus of law and police, and, in the last instance, the armed forces of the State. In capitalist States the laws of treason and sedition, for example, are, from a communist standpoint, so defined as to make rebellion and urgent criticism of the possessing classes difficult to the point of impossibility. The Criminal Law has been, in general, more severe upon offences against property than upon offences against the person because capitalism is more tender to the interests of property than to those of human life. The second aim is to compete with other States, which, similarly, are organisations of the master-class for a larger share of the results of the productive system. "The capitalist State," Bukharin

concludes, "is a union of the master-class formed to safeguard exploitation. The interests of capital and nothing but the interests of capital—here we have the guiding star towards which are directed all the activities of this robber band."

In technical terms, then, the communist regards the State from two points of view. As an economic organisation he sees it as a society of capitalists for the extraction of surplus-value from the workers; as a political organisation it is for him a society to protect the process of extraction from rebellion by the workers who suffer from that process. Throughout the political process it will be found upon examination that the organs of the State are directed towards no other end. Even the administration of justice, he insists, is deliberately perverted to serve the ends of capitalism. The German State sends Liebknecht to prison because he threatens its security; but it has no difficulty in acquitting the murderer of Liebknecht. So, also, the communist holds, with what may be termed the means of spiritual subjugation which the State possesses. The schools, he thinks, serve as deliberate training-grounds of obedience and order. The children of the workers are taught there the wickedness of rebellion, the splendour of Kingship, the duty of worshipping as heroes the soldiers of the nation. Men who sought the truth, like John Ball,

are execrated, while those who, like Wellington, were the paid servants of reaction, are held up as models to emulate. The Churches, to him, enforce a similar lesson. By insisting that all power comes from God, they seek to make rebellion identical with blasphemy. They teach men to accept their lot without repining instead of calling upon them to throw off their chains. And the Press is always at hand to distort the facts, to insist upon the inevitability and justice of the present régime, to fasten still tighter the chains upon its victims. "The Capitalist State stands on guard and takes good care that there shall be no uprising of the wage-slaves."

The rôle of the State is thus, in the communist view, an essentially simple one. It is "the product," says Lenin, "and the manifestation of the irreconcilability of class-antagonisms. Where, when and to what extent, the State arises, depends directly on when, where and to what extent the class-antagonisms of a given society cannot be objectively reconciled. And, conversely, the existence of the State proves that the class-antagonisms *are* irreconcilable." This view is essential to communist doctrine. Its exponents will have no compromise such as has been sought by reformist socialists with the purpose of showing that the State can seek to reconcile such antagonism. Order, for them, is merely a halt between a collision

which has passed and a collision which is to come; to seek the means of reconciliation is merely to deprive the working-class of the means whereby it can free itself from oppression. For the State being simply the force at the disposal of capitalists, and capitalists being the instruments of oppression, to reconcile the workers to the State is to reconcile them to oppression in perpetuity. When, for example, the Independent Labour Party in England inquired, in 1920, from the Third International whether communism could only be introduced by armed force, the answer they received left no room for doubt. "The workers should prepare," wrote the Executive Committee of the Communist International, "not for an easy parliamentary victory, but for victory by a heavy civil war; should the workers have succeeded in gaining power without this civil war, that would only signify that the necessity of civil war would confront the working-class so soon as it set out to realise its will to defend itself from capitalist exploitation and speculation, so soon as it began to liberate the masses in the colonies now oppressed by British Imperialism."

On the communist hypotheses, therefore, the ideals which the modern State announces are inherently incapable of realisation. The fact of economic exploitation as the basis of the existing social order makes the substance of things like justice, liberty, equality, void

of meaning; they cannot be secured by an organisation of which the purpose is the domination of the majority by the minority, of the oppressed by the oppressors. The root of the modern State is force used to prevent exactly the achievement of the end announced by the State; and, consequently, the only way to its accomplishment is the seizure of that force by those who are now excluded from the benefits it secures. It will be noticed that the unstated metaphysic of communism is a very simple one. The goods at which the State aims are not denied to be goods, it is simply insisted that the organisation which seeks them is a flat contradiction of its aims. And, on the analogy of the Hegelian dialectic, it is only by the negation of the State that men can enter into their kingdom.

Nothing, perhaps, so well illustrates the communist attitude to the State as its analysis of modern democracy. The protagonists of the classic theory point out that in the democratic State each individual citizen has the franchise; he is equal with all other citizens before the law; no barrier stands in the way of his entrance into whatever career he may choose. Since Governments are made and unmade by the electorate, since, that is, they rest upon opinion, it is only necessary to convert the majority of the electorate to communism for the authority of the State to

be used to apply it. Were that to occur, a communist Government would come into office, and if its will were to meet with resistance it would utilise all the legal authority at its disposal to destroy opposition and impose its ideas. Communism is therefore possible of application within the limits of constitutionalism.

The communist does not deny that, at a certain stage in the historic process, the democratic State has a real, though limited value. The criteria it establishes make possible the awakening of the masses to a consciousness of their position. Democracy as the condemnation "of absolutism, aristocratic privileges, and the property qualification" defines the fighting ground between capitalist and proletariat. It provides the opportunity for organising the power of the workers into trade unions and political parties. But this utilisation of the mechanisms of democracy does not imply its acceptance as "an unshakeable principle."

For the more closely it is examined, the more false that principle appears. The idea of natural rights inherent in the individual, and of equal application to all, is merely fiction. "You are deprived," cries Trotsky to the worker, "of the possibility of realising those rights. Conditional and shadowy legal equality has been transformed into the convicts' chain with which each of you is fastened

to the chariot of capitalism." For no amount of ideal right will make the ignorant tiller of the soil the equal of Rothschild. "The landlord, the labourer, the capitalist, the proletarian, the minister, the boot-black, all are equal as 'citizens,' and 'legislators.' The mystic equality of Christianity has taken one step down from the heavens in the shape of the 'natural,' 'legal' equality of democracy. But it has not yet reached earth, where lie the economic foundations of society."

Consider, the communist insists, not the ideal claims, but the actual facts. In the ideal democracy all men are free and equal, to teach, to speak, to write as they please, to vote as they will, to apply communist principles in practice. "There is not," writes Lenin, "a single State, however democratic, which does not contain loopholes or limiting clauses in its constitution, which guarantee the bourgeoisie the legal possibility of dispatching troops against the workers, of proclaiming martial law, and so forth, in case of the disturbance of public order. That is, in case of the 'disturbance' by the servile class of its servile condition." The majority, in fact, has the right to enforce respect for its rights upon the saving condition that it does not exercise it. The American negro is the equal of the Southern white; amendments to the American Constitution guarantee his freedom and his franchise. Yet he dare not

exercise it. The majority of the British electorate desired Home Rule in 1914; they were met with rebellion in Ulster when they sought to give effect to their desire. The American citizen is guaranteed freedom of speech by the Constitution; and the power of the mails and the police power of States and cities is used to suppress it whenever it proves inconvenient to the established order. The masses, everywhere, desire peace; what they receive is a secret diplomacy which makes wars in the interests of capitalist bandits and deludes them with fine-sounding talk of national honour and national interests. No man is barred from access to wealth, or learning, or position; but the fact remains that those who reach them are pitiably few in number.

Or, consider, the communist urges, the mechanisms of justice. All men are equal before the Courts; but they cannot enforce their equality save by the possession of wealth they do not possess. The humble tenant who seeks redress against his landlord, the servant girl who is dismissed without wages or character by her mistress, the workman injured in the course of employment and refused compensation by an employer who argues negligence on his part, all these are but instances of an inequality before the law which gives the lie to the democratic thesis of equality. The hierarchy of courts,

moreover, may well swallow up in the costs of appeal even the pitiful redress the worker has been able to secure. The very fact that special legal institutions have been created which seek to alter the balance the present order maintains is itself proof that the democratic claim is inadequate.[1]

We must remember, further, the growing degeneration of the classical democratic institutions. "In proportion as the mass of citizens who possess political rights increases," writes Lafargue, "and the number of elected rulers increases, the actual power is concentrated and becomes the monopoly of a smaller and smaller group of individuals." "Such," comments Trotsky, "is the secret of the majority." Everywhere, it is evident, legislatures have declined in either authority or prestige. Either, like the English Parliament, they become the creature of the executive, or like the legislatures of France and America, their conflict with the executive prevents them from making an effective policy. The boss in America, the caucus in England, these simply organise masses of voters to carry out the choice upon which they have determined. An American president is not made by the people; they merely select

[1] Cf. for a well-balanced view of the actual position of the law and the poor R. Heber Smith, *Justice and the Poor* (New York, 1920), and E. A. Parry, *The Law and the Poor*. They measure very fairly the degree of truth in the communist indictment summarised above.

one of two men whom a handful of organisers in either party has decided upon as a satisfactory figurehead. The voter cannot be influential in electorates of the modern size; the deputy is little better off. Power in the modern democratic state passes to a small number of efficient wire-pullers who understand how to control the machine. And every legislature is so overwhelmed by business that it has no time to discuss adequately any important question. What, in short, is interesting in representative Government is not its anatomy, but its pathology.

Nor does the communist accept the theory of majority rule that is implied in the democratic hypothesis. What happens, he points out, in the modern State is the conflict of minorities with the mass of the people remaining inert or acquiescent. The real will of the latter is never known. What it might be, if the facts were in its possession is obscured by the miasma of lies and brutality and propaganda which surrounds its life. When, for instance, Kautsky criticised the Bolsheviks for their refusal to call the Constituent Assembly and accept its decision, he forgot that since the latter was formed before the real significance of the November Revolution was known, that decision could not have represented popular desire. The communist, in short, represents what the proletariat would will if all the facts were in its possession. In

refusing to take account of the apparent will that alone can express itself through democratic forms, he is forcing the real will of the worker into action. In Rousseau's terms, he forces the worker to be free.

This view of minority-action is of great importance in the political theory of Bolshevism. Left to the theory of democracy, the people cannot free itself, and yet it wills its freedom. The communist party represents that will. It seeks the end—the social ownership of the means of production—and it cannot, therefore, reject the means. Since constitutional methods cannot secure the end, it follows, on the communist view, that unconstitutional methods must be used.

II

The communist attitude to violence is set in the perspective both of history and of theory. Historically, they take their stand upon the assumption that the State is the embodiment of force. Whatever the temporary equilibrium that may have been attained, its life depends upon the use of armed force to protect its purposes. That is why, for example, it punishes so severely all attempts on the part of the working-class to persuade the army and navy to its cause. Take away from the State its instruments of

repression, and it could not last for a moment. It lives only by the compulsions at its command.

Historically, moreover, force has always been the essence of revolution. In the Reformation, for example, religious precepts were victorious to the degree that military power was behind them; and the more bitter the wars waged on their behalf, the more thoroughgoing was the terror used to give them point. The English revolutions of the seventeenth century were both won only by the use of the sword. The classical revolution of 1789, says Trotsky, brought with it "a corresponding classical terrorism"; and it is patent that without the iron dictatorship of the Jacobins the republic would have been destroyed. When the Southern States were defeated at the election of 1860, they did not hesitate to use force to secure the perpetuation of slavery; and in the war that ensued both they and their opponents used every sort of method, constitutional or unconstitutional, to achieve their ends. The failure of the Commune, in 1871, was mainly due to its unwillingness to utilise the force its position required. "The enemy," so Trotsky writes, "must be made harmless, and, in wartime, this means that he must be destroyed." History shows that the capitalist has risen to power, has consolidated his authority, and maintains his pre-eminence in this way. Revolution gives him power; civil

war consolidates his authority: and repression or dictatorship enables him to retain it.

From facts such as these, the theory emerges clearly; and its truth is reinforced by the history of the Russian Revolution. If you desire to conquer, you must have the will to conquer. That will does not mean passing resolutions at conferences, where you convince your friends by your eloquence. It means imposing your will upon an enemy who will use every means at his disposal to defend his entrenched position. Revolution is not exactly war, but its central problem is the same as in war. Its makers must assume the offensive. They must forcibly break the will of the enemy and impose upon him acceptance of the ends for which they are fighting. They cannot assume that the inherent justice of their cause, or the numbers on their side, will persuade a ruthless enemy to surrender without making an effort to win. "The question as to who is to rule the country," writes Trotsky, ". . . will be decided on either side, not by references to the paragraphs of the Constitution, but by the employment of all forms of violence. . . . (There is) in history no other way of breaking the class-will of the enemy except by the systematic and energetic use of violence."

The communist, in fact, is compelled to be realistic. Willing the end, he cannot wipe his hands of the means. The problems before

him are not, unless he condemns, like a Quaker, all forms of violence, questions of principle, but of expediency. He kills and imprisons not for the sake of killing and imprisonment, but because, first, he would himself be killed or imprisoned otherwise, and secondly because thereby he forces millions to accept the consequences of his will. There is no purpose in seizing power if one is to be hurled from it; and it is the clear outcome of history that only determined use of force can avert this. "A revolutionary class," says Trotsky, "which has conquered power with arms in its hands, is bound to, and will, suppress, rifle in hand, all attempts to tear power out of its hands. Where it has against it a hostile army, it will oppose to it its own army. Where it is confronted with armed conspiracy, attempt at murder, or rising, it will hurl at the heads of its enemies an unsparing penalty." If it is said that the terrorism of the communist does not differ from the terrorism of the Tsar, the answer is that the principle for which communists use terrorism is different. "The gendarmerie of Tsarism throttled the workers who were fighting for socialism. Our extraordinary commissions shoot landlords capitalists and generals who are striving to restore the capitalist order. Do you grasp this distinction?" asks Trotsky; "for us communists it is quite sufficient."

No one who has studied at all carefully the history of the Russian Revolution will doubt that the communist means by violence all that the term can imply. By violence he seizes power, and by violence he defends himself from attack. Since he has to impose his will upon the conquered, he takes what he conceives to be the shortest means to that end. He justifies the method by the greatness of the purpose for which he is contending, and by the argument that experience shows no other road to success. Things like the White Terror, the murder of Liebknecht and Rosa Luxembourg, the Allied Blockade, the invasions and civil wars, all make it clear that he has not misinterpreted the nature of the problem that confronts him. He denies accusations, like that of Kautsky, that to use terrorism is to "betray the principle of the sacredness of human life." That is betrayed if one executes a murderer; it is betrayed by war; above all, it is betrayed so long as labour, and therefore life, under the capitalist system, is a commodity to be bought and sold. "As for us," writes Trotsky, "we were never concerned with the Kantian priestly and vegetarian-Quaker prattle about the 'sacredness of human life.' We were revolutionaries in opposition, and we have remained revolutionaries in power. To make the individual sacred we must destroy the social order which crucifies him, and this

problem can only be solved by blood and iron."

The argument that the end justifies the means, however, does not represent the whole of the communist position. "If," it might be said, "the communists use violence and are justified by their purpose in so doing, any other party which has, similarly, a great purpose would be similarly justified." The communist does not accept this view. From his standpoint, the revolutionary violence of communism differs from all other violence by reason of the historic position it exploits. A White Terror in Hungary, for example, is merely the effort of capitalism to postpone the coming of communism. It cannot effect more than a postponement. Since the workers are, historically, the rising, and the capitalists the falling, class in society, revolutionary violence is force used to further the natural evolution of society; violence used against communism is violence used in the service of reaction. "The Red Terror," writes Trotsky somewhat naïvely, "is a weapon utilised against a class, doomed to destruction, which does not wish to perish." This animal, in other words, is naughty; when it is attacked, it defends itself, without realising that its skeleton is needed for a museum of specimens.

It will be noticed how profoundly the communist theory of violence is bound up with its theory of historic evolution. It is not a

justification of violence as such. On the contrary, violence is regarded as a *sæva necessitas*, inevitable simply because the bourgeois State does not surrender without giving battle. It is useless, say the communists, to fight unless you are going to win; and it is useless to win unless you propose to use your victory to serve the interests for which you fought. Your terrorism is justified because you, a rising class, are fighting the bourgeoisie, a falling class, with the weapons they have made an inherent instrument of the conflict. Their violence, on the contrary, is futile, except as retardation, simply because they have not the future on their side. Communism, that is to say, is made superior to capitalism by the logic of history. And, at least in the long run, the assurance of its triumph makes the use of violence worth while because, in the classless state, it is no longer necessary; whereas bourgeois violence, by being only an instrument of postponement, simply increases the amount of force that is necessary to attain the inevitable end.

III

By violence, then, the communist captures the State; and by the replacement of the dictatorship of the capitalist by the dictatorship of the proletariat he consolidates the position so acquired. What is the theory of

communism as to the period of transition intervening between the fall of capitalism and the establishment of a Communist Society?

No question has been more warmly discussed in recent years. Largely speaking, it has assumed the form of a contest over the meaning of Marxism between Kautsky, the leading German socialist, and the Russian communists. Into the details of the debate it would be fruitless here to go. Largely, indeed, it may be said to have arisen because violence had become abhorrent to Kautsky, as to most humane people, through the horrors of the War, and its deliberate use by the Russians made him recoil in horror from the literal meaning of the Marxian record. He sought, therefore, an allegorical interpretation; words, phrases, connotations were subject to an exegesis of which the purpose was to prove that by the dictatorship of the proletariat neither Marx nor Engels meant the abandonment of democratic ideals nor the use of terrorism upon the scale the Russians were willing to attempt. The latter, and especially Lenin and Trotsky, had little difficulty in disposing of Kautsky's argument. No one can read the discussions by Marx and Engels of the period of transition without seeing that though they had no prevision, and could have had no prevision, either of the scale of the struggle, or the instruments it would demand, what they had in mind was

a methodology such as the Russians adopted. In any case, the Russian technique has become the classical formula of communism; and debate upon the meaning of Marx's terminology has to-day little more than an historical interest.

So interpreted, the communist view would seem to be upon the following lines. The State arose as an instrument of class oppression; when classes disappear, the State will disappear also, since its *raison d'être* will have gone. "When organising production anew on the basis of a free and equal association of the producers," wrote Engel, "Society will banish the whole State-machine to a place which will then be the most proper one for it—the museum of antiquities side by side with the spinning-wheel and the bronze axe." But the banishment, of course, is not accomplished overnight. The communist has no use for the anarchist demand that the State be destroyed because it is an instrument of coercion, and all coercion bad. The State does not disappear in a flash, it "withers away." But that process is a long one, and no one can set out the limits of its duration.

It is, however, possible to describe the general features which will distinguish the process of change. The proletariat will, as we have seen, take possession of the State by means of revolution. Its first act, when it possesses the authority of the State, is to

socialise the means of production. "But by this very act," wrote Engels, "it ends itself as a proletariat, destroying, at the same time, all class-difference and class-antagonisms, and with this, also, the State. . . . The first act of the State in which it really acts as the representative of the whole of society, namely, the control of the means of production on behalf of society, is also its last independent act as a State. The interference of the authority of the State with social relations will then become superfluous in one field after another, and will finally cease of itself. The authority of the Government over persons will be replaced by the administration of things, and the direction of the processes of production. The State will not be 'abolished'; it will wither away."

This paragraph contains the heart of communist reflection upon the period of transition. In the Russian exegesis, it summarises the experience of Marx and Engels after reflecting upon the meaning of the revolutions and especially the Commune of Paris, they had known. It distinguishes, as a doctrine, between two States. There is the *capitalist* State which exists at the time of the revolution itself; this is simply destroyed. There is, also, the *proletarian* State which exists to see that the destruction of its capitalist predecessor is final; this, little by little, disappears, as its work of destruction is con-

solidated. What, then, is the distinction between the "destruction" of the one and the "withering away" of the other? The central institutions of the capitalist State, it is explained, are the army and the bureaucracy; these are the main instruments by which the Capitalist State had achieved its purpose. They have to be broken in pieces because, from the standpoint of the proletarian revolution, the fact that they were devised for a different end leaves them without meaning. "The Communist learns from the experience of 1871," said Marx and Engels in their preface to the last joint edition of the *Communist Manifesto*, "that the working-class cannot simply seize the available ready machinery of the State and set it going for its own ends." "The next attempt of the French Revolution," wrote Marx to Kugelmann in 1871, "(will be) not merely to hand over, from one set of hands to another, the bureaucratic and military machine—as has formerly occurred—but to *shatter* it."

What, then, replaces the capitalist State as so destroyed? What, in other words, are the features of the proletarian State? It cannot be said that Marx himself gave us any clear answer to the question. In the *Communist Manifesto*, as Lenin admits, we hear only that the proletariat will be organised as the ruling power. In the *Civil War in France* the experience of the Commune enabled Marx

to provide some further details. The standing army is to be replaced by the nation in arms, which means, on communist theory, that part of the nation which accepts, in communism, the real will of society. The police are to lose their political functions and to be made responsible to, and replaceable by, the new State. So also with the officials in different parts of the administration. "From the members of the Council of the Commune down to the humblest worker, everybody in the public services was paid at the same rates as ordinary working-men." Privileges disappeared; the power of the priests was broken; the judiciary lost "its sham independence," and became subject to election and recall. "Democracy," comments Lenin, "carried out with the fullest imaginable completeness and consistency, is transformed from capitalist democracy into proletarian democracy; from the State (that is, a special force for the suppression of a particular class) to something which is no longer really a form of the State."

So far, what is achieved is, first of all, the elevation of the majority to a power which enables it to suppress, instead of being suppressed. Secondly, the reduction of officials to the level of the general population, especially in the matter of wages, enables the ordinary man to secure a full share in discharging the functions of the State. The

abolition, thirdly, of the standing army, and its replacement by the army of the proletariat, ensures the defence of the revolution by men committed to its doctrines. The principles, finally, of election and recall of officials make these directly responsible to the authority which creates them. If this seems to savour of the ideals of primitive democracy, the answer of the communist is that this is necessary in the period of transition from capitalism to communism. For otherwise, neither can every individual in the population share in government, nor can we destroy the glamour of the old government itself. This primitive democracy, moreover, differs from its early prototypes in that on the basis of scientific discovery and organisation, the governmental process can be easily simplified once the means of production are socialised. In 1919, indeed, Lenin even believed that they might be brought within the reach of every literate person.

It goes, of course, without saying that parliamentary institutions must disappear also. Marx in 1871 had already pointed out that the Commune was to have been "not a parliamentary, but a working corporation, legislative and executive at one and the same time"; and Lenin drew therefrom the inference that the Soviet system was a higher form of institution and far more suitable for revolutionary effort. The Soviet was, in

essence, a council of soldiers, workmen, and poorer peasants, which combined, in the communist view, all the advantages of the territorial principle, with the additional benefit of making the natural cell of representation the unit of production to which the proletarian voter belonged. Local soviets combined in a series to produce regional and provincial soviets; these, in their turn, were linked together to form the central soviet assembly which was the main legislative body of the proletarian State. It was rendered flexible by the device of the recall; it was kept revolutionary, first by limiting the electorate to the actual producers, and, secondly, by dominating the elections themselves by the Communist Party. Formal democracy, that is to say, was compelled to give way to what the communist calls " the revolutionary dynamic of living forces "; by which seems to be meant that the exclusion of all non-working-class elements from the electorate, and the control of the remainder by the communists produced an instrument of decision which the latter could make entirely responsive to their will. And this was justified because the communists represented the real will of the electorate, the things they would desire to see done had they been able to achieve communist ideas.

In the transitional period, indeed, the essence of the communist position is that the

rule of the working-classes, or, in the classic phrase, the dictatorship of the proletariat means, and can only mean, the dictatorship of the Communist Party. "The condition of an efficient struggle for the dictatorship of the proletariat," Bukharin told the Fifth Congress of the Third International, "is the existence of a Communist Party, firmly welded together, accustomed to fight, disciplined and centralised. . . . These parties must direct the working-class struggle in every sphere and take advantage of every possibility that offers to bring the workers under their influence." For in the vast medley of associations, economic, cultural, political, there is no other way of maintaining the necessary unity of direction. The Communist Party will, it claims, contain the élite of the working-class. It is, communists say, by all odds the best school for training leaders who can dominate the variety of proletarian organisations. It knows, as no other body can know, how at once to liquidate the class-war and to transform non-partisan associations into bodies which are useful for this purpose. The Communist Party, in short, is in the view of its adherents, proletarian organisation at its best. It is the vital instrument, without which power cannot possibly be maintained. It enforces discipline and organisation upon the masses. It breaks that terrible conservatism of habit in which

tradition otherwise enfolds a society of millions. "Without a party of iron," wrote Lenin, "tempered to the art of conflict, and enjoying the confidence of all the honest elements in the working class, knowing how to observe and to influence the spirit of the masses, such a conflict as ours cannot be conducted."

The party, moreover, must have a single mind and will. Its power therefore depends upon the absence of faction within itself. "As the civil war becomes the more fierce," it is laid down, "the Communist Party can only accomplish its task by being highly centralised. Its discipline must be of iron, and almost military in character; and it must be ruled by a central committee with wide powers." This does not, indeed, imply that there is to be no discussion or difference of opinion in the party; no one who knows the history of the Russian communists can doubt that their policy is arrived at after debate as eager and vivid as that of any party in the normal bourgeois State. What its discipline means is that there must be no dissent from decisions once they have been taken. To be beaten in debate means to accept the results of defeat and to co-operate as loyally with your conquerors as if it was your own view which had prevailed. "In the Second International," says Stalin, "the parties thereto can admit sectionalism; Communists cannot permit themselves this luxury since their

object is power." That is why, at the tenth meeting of the All-Russian Congress of Soviets, Lenin carried a resolution " for the immediate dissolution of all groups based on one or another platform under penalty of immediate exclusion from the Party," and it is a logical inference that all opportunists who incline to doubt, or to alliance with non-communist elements in society, must be similarly excluded. " Hesitation when the call to battle comes," wrote Lenin, " may lose everything . . . therefore the loss of those who hesitate, so far from weakening, actually strengthens the party, the movement, and the revolution."

IV

The communist, then, marches to power by an assault upon the bourgeois State. Once captured, it is transformed by a dictatorship which is, in fact, the iron rule of the Communist Party. It then becomes the transitional proletarian State which is to " wither away " as the advent of communism renders it otiose. What are the methods of transformation? Here, at least, the observer has a task of great difficulty. There is a distinction of primary importance between the programme of communist transition and the actual changes accomplished; and there is ground for genuine disagreement as to whether

the actual achievement may be regarded as the preparation for the ultimate ideal. For some communists, indeed, the new economic policy of Lenin, whereby a large measure of private trading was admitted, was definitely a break with the legitimate practice; for Lenin himself, it was a necessity in the light of the actual situation, but a necessity which was itself purely temporary in character. And, in any case, the original theory remains as the foundation to be adapted to particular situations. Any communist revolution, it may be said, will have to insist at least upon certain things. It will have to confiscate all great industrial enterprises like electricity, railways and engineering. It will have to nationalise the great landed estates, while leaving to the peasantry sufficient land to neutralise their possible hostility to the new régime. The banks must be taken over, and with them the gold reserve; small depositors may be granted interest. All wholesale commerce must be nationalised; and foreign trade must become a monopoly. The State debts should be repudiated. The working-class must monopolise all important journals and printing-presses. As a general rule, small, or medium-sized businesses need not be nationalised, partly because the new State will rarely, at least at first, be able to run them, and partly because it is futile to think of establishing communism at one blow.

Measures must be taken to associate intellectual technicians with the new régime and to neutralise the peasant-class; the poorer peasants should be carefully organised, while care must be taken to repress any possible opposition from the richer. So, also, with the poorer bourgeoisie of the towns; and its goodwill can probably be bought by leaving to it what it has, by granting it economic freedom, and protecting it from the need to hire capital at usurious rates of interest.

What is the position of the individual worker in the transitional State? We must note, first, the obligation to labour; "He that will not work shall not eat," is the elementary rule of communist society. And to end the anarchy of capitalism, the economic life of that society must be organised as a whole. The worker cannot choose what he will do; he must labour as the State decides. His protection will be found in the safeguards provided by the different labour organisations to which he will belong. These will discuss on his behalf questions like wages and hours of labour, the sanitary condition of factories and so forth. They must, of course, function under the ægis of the Communist Party; for, otherwise, they cannot effectively fulfil their rôle in the transition period. The worker will have technical education at his disposal; and efficient work, as in the Taylor system, will win a special reward. But of industrial self-

government in the sense, for example, that guild socialists use the word, there can be no question. "No board of persons who do not know the given business," writes Trotsky, "can replace one man who does know it. . . . A board in itself does not give knowledge to the ignorant. It can only hide the ignorance of the ignorant." Direct management by the individual is necessary to evoke responsibility, initiative and rivalry in the capacity for service. The workers' protection is found in criticism of results, in publicity of accounts and productivity, in the power, through trade union or political party, to make his wants felt at the source of authority. He is, in short, organised for the benefit of society instead of being exploited for the benefit of the capitalist. "Socialist economy," writes Trotsky, ". . . is founded on the thinking worker endowed with initiative." It is the business of organisation, when it discovers this initiative, to give it room for action in the background of the rules laid down by those who control the State. The individual, in other words, is subject to the technical situation; the technical situation is not the creature of the individual. Thereby, as the process of education achieves its end, a communist economy is constructed side by side with the State, ultimately to replace it. But until that stage is reached, the "road to Socialism," as Trotsky says, "lies through a period of the

highest possible intensification of the principle of the State."

To the outsider, it may be observed, this looks not unlike the rigorous suppression of the individual personality. In a sense, this is true; but it is important to realise the communist answer to the charge. It argues, first, that his position is at least superior to what it is in a capitalist economy. There, at least, he can neither in fact choose what he will be, nor can he be assured of employment. In the transitional proletarian State, he may not choose, but he is assured of being maintained so long as he is willing to work. And the fact that he cannot choose is offset by the knowledge that the work he does counts in the degree of its quality towards the coming of the ideal; while the ability he shows may open to him a larger avenue of power. His standards, moreover, are set for him not by the will of the employer but by the will of the proletariat as the latter is interpreted by the communist dictatorship with a view to the needs of the situation. Should he, finally, belong himself to the Communist Party, he can have his share in moulding the views of those in whom power is vested.

So much may be said upon the industrial side. But it must not be forgotten that communism, even in the period of transition, claims to bring what may be termed spiritual advantages to the proletariat. Exactly as

capitalist control of the means of production is suppressed, so, also, is capitalist monopoly of education. In every aspect of life, it is necessary, if the proletariat is genuinely to direct the new society, that it should be fully trained to the largest tasks. This means not only the instruction of specialists, but also the general raising of the level of working-class culture. In the arts, the sciences, in politics, it must have the first right to the training at the disposal of authority. Such education must, of course, from its earliest stages be definitely communist in spirit. In bourgeois society, education was intended to prevent the workers from realising that they were slaves; in the proletarian State it must be used to teach them that they can be masters. "In the realm of the mind, in the psychological sphere," says Bukharin, "the Communist school must effect the same revolutionary overthrow of bourgeois society, must effect the same expropriation that the Soviet Power has effected in the economic sphere by the nationalisation of the means of production. The minds of men must be made ready for the new social relationship. If the masses find it difficult to construct a Communist society, this is because in many departments of mental life, they still have both feet firmly planted upon the soil of bourgeois society." Education, in short, is to become an instrument of propaganda for the communist regeneration of society.

Closely allied to this educational effort must go a campaign against the bourgeois superstition of religion. It is necessary here, the communist admits, to go carefully, since above all in the working-class, the power of religion has been immense. But Marx's famous phrase, "religion is the opium of the people," sets the temper of communist purpose. Religion and communism are incompatible since social development, as the laws established by historic materialism have shown, is not affected by supernatural forces. There is, moreover, an incompatibility between the commands of most religions and the tactics of communism. Christianity, for example, with its emphasis upon the duty of submission to the powers that be, and its precepts of self-abnegation stands definitely in the way of an offensive against the bourgeoisie.

The conflict with religion has two sides. It is, relatively speaking, easy in the transition period to separate the Church from connection of any kind with the State, and, by inference, to abolish its relation to, and influence in, the schools. By making religion a purely private matter, and offering it no assistance from public authority, its prestige is visibly shaken at the outset. The nature of education in the schools, moreover, works to render the minds of the children "immune to all those religious fairy-tales which many grown-ups continue to regard as truth." But this is only one aspect of the problem. More difficult is it to

fight the deeply-rooted prejudices which cling to life long after their exposition as folly. Here, in the communist view, a long period of slow erosion lies ahead. Religion, in this sense, will ultimately die partly by deliberate propaganda against it, partly also by the general diffusion of education, which is, in the long run, fatal to its authority. But, above all, the communist relies upon victory as a result of the change from capitalist to communist society. The former favoured religious prejudice simply because the nature of its processes was so largely hidden from the worker. He did not know what was happening or why it occurred. It was easy to tell him, and easy for him to believe, that all was due to the will of God; and thus to persuade him to accept beliefs and support an organisation which purported to possess a monopoly in God. But with the coming of communism the processes of social organisation will no longer be mysterious. The worker will see not only the little piece of work he performs, but the whole system of relationships of which it is a part. "Throughout the entire mechanism of social production," writes Bukharin, "there will be no longer anything mysterious, incomprehensible, or unexpected . . . the mere fact of the organisation and strengthening of the communist system will deal religion an irrecoverable blow. . . . The transition from the society which makes an end of

capitalism to the society which is completely freed from all traces of class-division and class-struggle, will bring about the natural death of all religion and all superstition."

The communist, it should be added, does not conceal from himself that the victory of the proletarian State depends largely upon its ability to display a superior economic productivity to that of its capitalist predecessor. Lenin and Trotsky, above all, have been insistent that the first task of the proletarian government is to overcome the natural laziness of man. "The problem before the social organisation," says Trotsky, "is just to bring 'laziness' within a definite framework, to discipline it, and to pull mankind together with the help of methods and measures invented by mankind itself." To this end a variety of means, compulsion, propaganda, payment by results, demands for volunteers, surrender of the normal standard conditions are to be used. Trotsky himself even attempted the actual militarisation of labour, though, it appears, with inadequate success. They bring to this task the same superb self-confidence which distinguishes their effort elsewhere. They assume, in the first place, that the mere fact of a transition to communism will, of itself, evoke new effort from the worker. They deny that compulsory labour is wasteful, once the bourgeois ideology has disappeared. The new sense of equality,

the constructive character which the effort of each man acquires in the new conditions, makes obsolete all earlier discussion about the higher premium to be put upon "free" labour. The explanation to the worker of why he must work harder under the new régime than under capitalism is sufficient to secure from him a full response. For he will realise that the system of wages will disappear as increasing productivity enables the State to guarantee to all the workers the necessaries of life. He will labour the more earnestly to achieve that end. Compulsory labour is the road to communism. The new State will perish unless that is understood; and the need to understand it will evoke the will to a successful conclusion.

V

Let us assume, at this point, that the problems of the proletarian State have been solved. The resistance of the capitalist enemy has been completely liquidated; the production of the new régime is satisfactory; the moment, in fact, has arrived when the "withering-away" of the State has so far advanced, that complete communism is obviously possible. What will be the dominant features of the new society? To what criteria are we to refer for an understanding of its nature?

We are here, of course, in the realm of prophecy; and, with wisdom, neither Marx nor his disciples attempted to emulate the detailed and unconvincing Utopias fashioned by their predecessors. They were unanimous that the time required for the disappearance of the State would be long, and that it will depend upon the development of productivity by the new institutions. But, quite rightly, they insist that neither time nor form for the completion of the new order can be given. All that it is possible to say is that the character of the new society will be set by the formula: From each according to his powers; to each according to his needs. The new society will come, says Lenin, " when people have become accustomed to observe the fundamental principles of social life, and their labour is so productive that they will voluntarily work *according to their abilities*. . . . There will then be no need for any exact calculation by Society of the quantity of products to be distributed to each of its members, each will take freely ' according to his needs.' "

We are not, further, to assume either " the *present* productive powers of labour," nor " the present unthinking man in the street, capable of spoiling, without reflection, the stores of social wealth, and of demanding the impossible." The day of compulsion will have gone. Men will give freely of their best, and receive, equally freely, the best in return.

We do not know the outlines of this new society in any greater detail. We can assume that the proletarian dictatorship has been an immense education for the masses. They will have grown accustomed, in the first phase of the revolution, to all men working, and to equal pay. They will have seen the reduction of governmental operations to simple functions which anyone can understand. "The whole of society," writes Lenin, "will have become one office and one factory, with equal work and equal pay." Class-distinction and economic exploitation will have gone. Public functions will have been converted from the acts of a State into merely administrative functions.

When that stage arrives, we may expect the formal end of the State. It is perhaps best, for the sake of accuracy, to explain the situation in Lenin's own words. "When all," he writes, "or be it even only the greater part of society, have learned how to govern the State, have taken this business into their own hands, have established a control over the insignificant minority of capitalists, over the gentry with capitalist leanings, and workers thoroughly demoralised by capitalism—from this moment the need for any government begins to vanish. . . . For when all have learned to manage, and really do manage, socialised production, when all really do keep control and account of the idlers, gentlefolk,

swindlers, and such-like 'guardians of capitalist traditions,' the escape from such general registration and control will inevitably become so increasingly difficult, so much the exception, and will probably be accompanied by such swift and severe punishment . . . that very soon the *necessity* of observing the simple, fundamental rules of any kind of social life will become a habit. The door will then be open wide for the transition from the first phase of Communist society, to its second higher phase, and along with it, to the complete withering away of the State."

One cannot, of course, criticise the impalpable, and it will be sufficient, at the moment, to bring out the unstated assumptions of this view. The use of fear is to bring submission; with submission willl emerge new habits that destroy the oppression and acquisitiveness characteristic of capitalist society. Freedom from exploitation will make possible a greater willingness to work well. Education will achieve an understanding of social needs sufficient to make unnecessary the institutions of compulsion characteristic of the old régime. The new society will ultimately be richer than the old because of the new powers it can realise; and it will not need to read the terms of its contract with its members as though this were Shylock's bond. The reader of Hippolyte Dufresne's vision of the new society in M. Anatole France's *Sur la Pierre Blanche*

has, perhaps, an adequate insight into its conditions.

Two other remarks may be made. It is important to remember that the communist regards this new society as the outcome of a long evolution; he offers it as an ideal to be achieved by a later generation than our own. It comes when grim conflict is over, and the lesson of suffering has been learned. When, secondly, he explains that government will be unnecessary, he is not pinning his faith to a Godwinian anarchy. He believes in organisation as much as any of his critics. But he believes in an organisation which has grown out of an acceptance of natural law from below, not from a capitalist law imposed from above. The State which withers away does not leave men in a relationship of primitive discreteness. It is the capitalist State as the organ of exploitation that disappears, and, with it, the habits engendered by the capitalist State. The regulations which take their place are built upon consent instead of force; and since, to the communist, force and the State are synonymous, he feels justified in speaking of its obsolescence.

VI

The first comment one is tempted to make upon communism as a theory of the State is that, like most philosophies, it is strong in

what it affirms, and weak in what it denies. Obviously enough, its criticism of the assumptions of the classical theory of the State is, in part at least, well founded; the margin between the ideal and the real is a large one. It is, moreover, true that no ruling class in history has so far surrendered its privileges, or utilised its authority for the common good, without a struggle. Men cling to power even after the grounds which make its tenure intelligible have passed away; and there is a real basis for the assumption that the holders of power in a capitalist State are no exception to the rule. And, not less certainly, there is substance in the communist criticism of formal democracy; the mere conference of universal suffrage and the creation of representative institutions will not, of themselves, secure the kind of State which adequately safeguards the claims of men upon the common good.

But it is one thing, and it is not a new thing, to affirm the imperfections of the present social order. It is different, and much more dubious, to argue that the only way to alter those imperfections is by violent upheaval, and that, even ultimately, from violent upheaval is born an idyllic society. Revolutions rarely succeed in achieving their original aim; they cannot tread a path that is indicated by an *a priori* system of conditions. Those who direct them may be compelled to give way before demands which destroy their

original demands. The leaders who seize power for one end may choose to maintain power for quite different ends. Or they may be unable to meet the forces of counter-revolution, and the new condition may be worse than the first. The means, moreover, involved in the use of violence may so enter into the original end as completely to transform its nature. "The revolutionary leader," wrote Lord Morley, of Cromwell, "treads a path of fire." At least it is certain that he cannot know where he is going. The forces he is compelled to loose limit his direction and alter his possibilities at every turn. He is confronted, broadly speaking, by three problems. There is the problem of initial success—the actual seizure of power. There is the problem, secondly, of consolidating the positions that have been gained; after ten years the Russian government is still in this phase of revolutionary effort. There is the final problem of creating the new society in terms of the promised ideal. Each of these phases involves considerations which the communist is inclined, perhaps too easily, to brush aside.

The preparation for revolution is a qualitatively different problem in our own day from what it was in the days of the Paris barricades. It was possible for civilians, as in 1871, to hold up a military force hardly better or differently equipped from itself; that was the

experience from which Marx drew his conclusions. It is possible for a civilian population in a mood of defeat to destroy a régime which the forces at the disposal of the government no longer uphold; and, as was demonstrated long ago by Cromwell, a military force which is dissatisfied with its civilian superiors can easily become their master. That was Lenin's circumstance in 1917, and he took advantage of his position with consummate insight. But for a party of men in the position of communists in the modern State the position is very different. Unless they are the majority, and, consequently, the government, the hostility of the army and navy is certain. Nor can they obtain, on any large scale, the necessary equipment for insurrection. They would have to obtain control of the national arsenals; and that would mean the dispersion of forces in any case small by hypothesis. They would have to possess, and know how to use, the weapons of chemical and aerial warfare; and their possession of them alone would argue, under modern conditions, a government devoid of authority. They would have to meet in the people at large at least a mood of acquiescence. They would have to guarantee a supply of food which, in any but a predominantly agricultural society, would be practically impossible if the state credit were seriously impaired—as that of Russia was impaired—

by the revolution. Even if we regard a general strike as a revolutionary weapon, the difficulties in the way of its success are overwhelming. It might succeed as a protest against war, by arousing emotions of determination that would be irresistible. But upon any other issue, it seems tolerably certain that, once again, the army and navy must be in the control of the strikers if success is to be assured. For a modern army can supply all services connected with transportation; it can secure the distribution of food, and the problem of fuel is no longer dependent upon the mining of coal. The communist theory of a secretly armed minority assuming power at a single stroke, is, in fact, unthinkable in the modern State if the army and navy are loyal to the government. It would have to imply either a government so weak that it had practically ceased to be a government at all, or, what is perhaps equivalent, a population actively sympathetic to the revolutionary minority. The resources of publicity in modern civilisation make impossible the preparations in private of the gigantic effort implied in the communist thesis.

But this is only the beginning of the problem. States, as the communist realises, are not independent of other States. England, for example, with her dependence upon foreign trade could not undergo a successful revolution unless her neighbours view its

results with benevolence. America is unlikely to adopt such an attitude, and the rupture of Anglo-American trade would be fatal to an English revolution. If Russia then came to the assistance of England, we should merely see a world-war in which there would be disaster equally from victory or defeat. Certainly the outcome, on any showing, would so impair the resources of civilisation as to make the advent of communism a matter for the Greek Kalends.

Nor is this all. The sectionalism a revolution implies will be only partially determined by economic considerations. In a country like America, for example, there would be at least three other factors of vital importance. An American communist revolution would have to cope with problems of distance which would probably render it abortive at a very early stage. It would not, as in France, be a matter of the immense impact of the capital on the life of the nation; a communist rising in Washington, even a simultaneous rising in New York and Boston, would be a headline in the newspapers of the Pacific coast. To control the whole continent would involve controlling the most complicated and extensive railway system in the world; and to do that successfully implies a degree of sympathy with the revolution which would render its occurrence unnecessary. Yet even if that difficulty could be surmounted, a complex of

national differences would have to be assuaged. German, French, English, Irish, Polish, these have their special characteristics which the American capitalist has been able to exploit to their common disadvantage; it is difficult to see how an appeal to the communist minority of each would result in the transcendence of these differences. Even then, the religious problem remains; and the hold of the Churches, particularly, upon the mind of the Latin peoples, would not be easy to loosen. And even if it be argued that the day of such prejudices as nationality and religion is passing—which may be doubted—and that the barriers built by economic difference are alone important, the communist conclusion is surely dubious. For in a period of universal suffrage, it ought then to be possible to capture the seat of power at the polls, and throw upon the capitalist the onus of revolt against a socialist democracy. For that would associate with the socialist government not only its active supporters, but that large section of people in every modern community who, desiring to be let alone, believe profoundly in constitutionalism; and while at the best it would retain the services of the army and navy, at the worst it would so divide them as to neutralise its greatest opponent.

There are other aspects of the problem which, it may be argued, the communist does not adequately consider. There is, in the

first place, the general result upon society of the practice of violence, particularly in the light of the destructive nature of modern warfare; and, in the second, there is the special psychological result upon the agents of the opposing forces in a revolution. The communist does not meet this merely by insisting that the use of violence is inevitable and that it will be worth while. Such an attitude fails to weigh sufficiently the necessary substance of a political psychology and is the corollary of a determination which the facts hardly justify. For it is obvious that if revolution is justified to the communist merely because that is *his* logic of history, it will be justified also in any other people with a cause which they deduce from *their* logic of history; and no community can then hope either for security or order. Every argument, that is to say, which justifies a communist revolution justifies also a Fascist revolution, at least to those who are convinced Fascists. The war has shown clearly that the impulses of savagery which are checked by peace are, when loosed, utterly destructive of the foundations of a decent existence. If life became an anarchic jacquerie, civilisation could quite easily be reduced to the State where, as in Mr. Wells' imaginary but far from impossible picture, some aged survivor may tell of an organised Europe as a legend which his grandchildren cannot hope to understand.

Violence on the grand scale, in fact, so far from proving an avenue to communism, would be the one kind of existence in which the impulses demanded by a communist society would have no hope of emergence. For the condition of communism is the restraint of exactly those appetites which violence releases; and the communist has nowhere shown how this difficulty can be met except by affirming that dictatorship will destroy them. That is the argument from the power of repression; and it is sufficient answer to argue that the survival of communism in a world of capitalist repression is itself proof that repression is futile.

Even beyond this issue, a further point must be raised. The communist assumes the seizure of power, and a period of rigorous control until the people are prepared for communism. But he is ignorant of the time the dictatorship is to last, nor does he explain why those who control it may be expected to accede to its termination. It is a commonplace of history that power is poisonous to those who exercise it; there is no special reason to assume that the communist dictator will in this respect be different from other men. Indeed no group of men who exercise despotic authority can ever retain the habit of democratic responsibility. That is obvious, for example, in the case of men like Sir Henry Maine and Fitzjames Stephen, who, having

learned in India the habits of autocracy, become impatient, on their return to England, of the slow process of persuasion which democracy implies. To sit continuously in the seat of office is inevitably to become separated from the minds and wants of those over whom you govern. For any governing class acquires an interest of its own, a desire for permanence of power, a wish to retain the dignity and importance of its functions; and it will make an effort to retain them. That, after all, is only to insist that the exercise of power as such breeds similar habits in its operators. The corollary of dictatorship appears to be that which follows from all other systems—that it is incapable of voluntary abdication. The only way to prevent this is to educate the people in government by associating them with the act of governing. But this is to postulate the undesirability of dictatorship

Further difficulties remain. It is not easy to see why the transition period between capitalism and communism should create the atmosphere out of which the latter develops, if, as in Russia to-day, the small trader, the specialist paid at a special rate, the peasant owning and working his own land, a system of special interests is created which may counteract the education in communist ideas which goes on alongside with them. Nor must we omit the effect on the people in this

period of the absence of liberty and equality. The communist may be right in denying their reality to-day; and he may, further, be justified in insisting that their absence explains the dumb acquiescence of the multitude in a system which denies them their rights. But in the transition period they must either acquiesce or be destroyed by the dictatorship; that alternative surely is only the exchange of one tyranny for another, neither of which will breed the habits of freedom. And if it be said that communist tyranny is conceived in the interest of all, the answer obviously is that the interest of all can only be known when all share in proclaiming it; and it is the purpose of the dictatorship exactly to prevent this by the suppression of views and movements it dislikes. It prefers its own view of what men ought to think and do to what, in fact, they do think and do. Historic experience suggests that this cannot produce an erect-minded people; and it suggests further that all attempts to force a people into a Procrustes' bed of preconceived ideas, however well-intentioned, is doomed to failure. The experiment, after all, is not new in history; it is the old attempt to insist that certain laws are too important ever to be legitimately revoked. Calvin in Geneva, the Jesuits in Paraguay, were the victims of the same illusion; and their effort was a warning rather than an example.

Nor can it be said that the communist indications of the ultimate goal are very enlightening. There is the problem, first, of seeing exactly how a system which comes as the harbinger of all those evils from which we are seeking release can prove the forerunner of their antithesis; unless, indeed, we insist, upon *a priori* grounds, upon assuming the objective reality, as a social process, of the Hegelian dialectic. Nor, secondly, is it easy to see why the destruction of capitalism should result in a classless society. It might, on the contrary, mean a society divided into a class of directing communists, and the rest; or, as Mr. Bertrand Russell has suggested, a class which insisted upon short hours of labour and a low productivity and one which desired longer hours and a high rate of reward. Marx and Lenin were doubtless right in arguing that a new system of production will emphasise new tendencies in human nature. But we cannot say without experience either that they will be better tendencies or that they will be precisely the tendencies a communist society requires. That affirmation is no more than a prophecy which may be justified in the event; we are even entitled to attempt experimental proof of its truth. But we are not entitled to assume that it has about it anything of the rigorous exactitude of scientific law.

The governing rule of the communist

society, we are told by Marx and Lenin, will be the formula, "From each according to his powers, to each according to his needs." For the purposes of rhetoric that is doubtless an admirable canon; but it is worth pointing out that it is incapable of precise meaning. For we cannot measure powers, especially in the realm of intellectual effort; and the only criterion of needs that is possible is one that assumes a rough identity between men and the insistence that the claim of this identity upon the social product is the first charge we must recognise. We require, in brief, an objective test of powers and needs; and this means the discovery of a social average which rejects the individual differences of which, by implication, the communist formula professes to take account.

It is, moreover, worth while to remark that most communist writers immensely overestimate the simplicity of politics. Their picture of institutions which have been rendered so simple in their operation that the average man can understand them at once, fails to take account of the complexity of society and builds upon the belief that the average man is generally and continuously interested in the methods by which it moves along its way. It is obvious that the division of labour, whatever the distribution of the product, and the nature of the services to be maintained if the scale of life is to remain at

its present level, do not permit simplicity. It is one thing to grasp the principle that the supply of electricity must be nationalised because it is too important to remain in private hands; granted a decent level of education, no one supposes that the ordinary citizen can mistake the character of the argument. But it is a very different assumption, and much more questionable, that the average man can, without prolonged investigation, decide which of a variety of systems of nationalisation is suitable to the service of electricity supply. And, whatever the type of society, those willing to attempt such examination are likely to be few. Man is not by nature a political animal. He gives his attention rather to the results than to the methods of institutions; and he gets interested in methods less for their own sake than because of dissatisfaction with their outcome. That the degree of his interest, and its continuity, may be largely increased by institutional improvement need not be denied. But it is a long step from that belief to a vision of a society which is widely devoted to the constant scrutiny of its political process.

It may be quite true, as the communist argues, that social justice is unattainable through the ordinary institutions of representative government. No one, certainly, who is careful of historic truth will argue that its victory is likely to be easy. But we are

not entitled to act upon the assumption of its impossibility until we have made much further experiment than has so far been attempted. We can at least say of the alternative to the trial of parliamentarism that it involves a long epoch of bloody war in which success is problematical and defeat disastrous; and we can say of parliamentary government that it has notable successes to its credit. The rights it has established are shadowy and unsubstantial compared to any programme of adequacy. This is certainly the main strength of the communist indictment. Yet it is surely obvious that there is no justification for the resort to violence until the resources of reason have been exhausted. The resort to violence, even if it be successful, means trusting the officials who control the application of violence. It does not mean liberty; it does not mean equality; and it does not mean justice. It means the despotic application of power by men whose intentions, however admirable, are the creatures of circumstances. The chance that the transformation of values so necessary to the attainment of justice will take place as a result of blood and iron is a very tenuous one. The barbarian invasions of Rome did not produce a great epoch of enlightenment; they produced the dark ages. The Thirty Years' War impeded constructive effort in Germany until the threshold of the nineteenth century. The

idealism of 1914 has perished before the greater strength of the destructive forces released in the struggle. That is why it is permissible to doubt whether the method of violence is ever the midwife of justice. That wrong can be wiped out with wrong is a gospel to which we are not entitled to resort until we despair utterly of civilisation; and when we have resorted to it, it is probable that there will be no civilisation of which to despair.

Nothing of this, it should be added, implies that the communist prediction of conflict is impossible of realisation. The evils which have led to its diagnosis are real, and their remedy alone is a specific against economic war. For a point is reached in the development of any social system where men will refuse to accept longer a burden they find too great to bear; and in that moment, if they cannot mitigate, they will at least destroy. The condition, in fact, upon which a State may hope to endure is its capacity for making freedom more widespread and more intense. It is not easy to achieve that end. Men prefer sacrifice by others to the surrender of their own desires. To choose equality, in Matthew Arnold's phrase, has been the exception in history; and societies have fallen because they have lacked the courage to flee from greed. It may be that a similar experience will be ours. If it is, the fault will lie neither at the door of the communist, nor of the ordinary

man. The former has been a warning to the rulers of the modern State that consistent reformation is the only effective answer to the challenge of the extremist; and the latter is too patient and long-suffering to revolt unless there is real justice on his side. The communist theory of the State, that is to say, has so much of justice on its side that the proof of its wrongness lies, above all, in the demonstration that its ideals can be realised by alternative means. That requires effort rather than assertion; and the effort must be forthcoming soon, if it is to reach its appointed end.