

*This article is part of a translated collection published in 2023 by the Marie Goldsmith Project. These articles were translated by Alexandra Agranovich (Russian) and Christopher Coquard (French) and then edited by Christopher Coquard and Søren Hough with the goal of preserving Goldsmith's original meaning and stylistic emphases. Modern footnotes by the translator or editors are prefaced "Ed:" while all other footnotes are from Marie Goldsmith. This translation was originally published in [Black Flag Vol. 3 No. 2](#).*

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## **The Problems of Tomorrow: Part II — The Dictatorship of the Proletariat<sup>7,8</sup>**

By M. Isidine (Marie Goldsmith)  
November 15, 1919

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The realization of socialism has left the realm of dreams and theoretical propaganda; it has become nearer to us, it has become an urgent problem. And if it is important to answer the question of the methods that lead to this realization, and that are the most suitable to assure its victory, it is even more important to have a clear idea of what must be done immediately *after* victory so that the revolution brings the greatest amount of happiness with the least amount of suffering possible.

The idea of the "dictatorship of the proletariat" currently has a great influence on people's minds. It appears to mean that the workers are now masters of social life, masters of their own destiny, without any exploiters or oppressors above them. It seems to be the direct and immediate realization of socialism. In France especially, where the labor movement has not yet been penetrated by Marxist theory and jargon, this formula leads to misunderstanding. It contains, within itself, a contradiction: a dictatorship "is always the unlimited power" of a single or small group; what can the dictatorship of a class be? It is obvious that a class cannot exercise its authority but through its representatives, through someone it has specifically delegated, or, more simply stated, someone that it believes has the right to act in its interest. In short, a new power is established, the power of the socialist party or of its most influential factions, and this power then takes charge of regulating and legislating the destiny of the working class. And this is not an abuse or a re-interpretation of the concept of a "dictatorship of the proletariat"; it is in fact its very essence. It is completely derived from Marxist theory, from the way that this theory conceives the evolution of society. Let us summarize it in a few words.

By definition, political power lies in the hands of the economically dominant class. The bourgeoisie, after having replaced the feudalists economically, have also taken their place politically, at least in the most industrialized countries of Europe and America. Since then, the entire political activity of the bourgeois class has been aimed at safeguarding its interests and consolidating its domination. But now, in the course of economic evolution, the proletariat is taking the place of the bourgeoisie as the class most capable of

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<sup>7</sup> See the first issue.

<sup>8</sup> Ed: Isidine, M. "Les problèmes de demain - II - La Dictature du Proletariat [The Problems of Tomorrow - II - The Dictatorship of the Proletariat]." *Les Temps nouveaux* [*The New Times*], November 15, 1919.

assuring the development of productive forces; from this point of view alone, political power must also be returned to them. This new State, the State of the proletariat, will henceforth be concerned only with the interests of this specific class, which will in turn become the dominant class. This is the *dictatorship of the proletariat*. A natural objection therefore arises: the dominated class supersedes the dominant class; now, the economic exploitation abolished by elevating the previously most exploited classes brings into existence more strife. Thereafter, new class struggles emerge since previously conceived classes become a thing of the past — and so the cycle continues endlessly. This cyclical contradiction is solved partly thanks to the Marxist conception of the way in which a socialist transformation can be carried out. It begins with the seizure of power by a socialist party; but what does a socialist government do next?

Marxist literature does not abound in future projects: social democrats are too utopia-phobic for that. But the little we know about them is enough for us to understand that socialism will have to be realized gradually, during entire historical epochs. During this period, classes will not have ceased to exist, and capitalist exploitation will not have ended: it will only be attenuated and softened with regard to *the needs of the proletariat*. They then become the class protected by the State, while the circumstances of the bourgeoisie are made increasingly more difficult. And so now here we are, at the dawn of Marxism, and Marx himself, where the *Communist Manifesto* enumerates these gradual measures that the socialist government will have to adopt:

1. Expropriation of landed property and confiscation of land rent for the benefit of the state.
2. Highly progressive taxation.
3. Abolition of inheritance.
4. Confiscation of the property of all emigrants and rebels.
5. Centralization of credit in the hands of the State by means of a national bank with State capital with exclusive monopoly.
6. Centralization, in the hands of the State, of all the means of transportation.
7. Increase of the national factories and of the instruments of production, clearing of the uncultivated lands and improvement of cultivated lands.
8. Compulsory work for all, organization of industrial armies, particularly for agriculture.
9. Combination of agricultural and industrial work.
10. Free public education for all children, abolition of child labor in factories.

The application of this program will be done in a peaceful or violent way, according to the circumstances, but in any case it will be done with the help of strong political power. Defining political power as “the organized power of one class for the oppression of another,” Marxism thus envisages, as its ultimate goal, a society that is only an “association of men” without any power. It is indeed a march toward anarchy, but by way of its opposite, an all-powerful State.

Fifty years later, Kautsky, in *The Social Revolution*, proclaims that “the conquest of political power by a hitherto oppressed class, that is to say, the *political revolution*, constitutes the essential nature of the *social revolution*.”<sup>9</sup> He then indicates a series of legislative measures intended to operate little by little, with or

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<sup>9</sup> Ed: Karl Kautsky (1854 – 1938) was a leading orthodox Marxist philosopher and politician who was a steadfast proponent of social democracy. He spent most of his life in Germany and was a friend of Friedrich Engels. Kautsky opposed the Bolshevik revolution in Russia which rendered him a rhetorical target of figures such as Vladimir Lenin (The Editors, “Karl Kautsky”).

without financial compensation, the “expropriation of the expropriators”: progressive taxation on large incomes and fortunes, measures against unemployment, the nationalization of transportation and of large landed property, etc.

What is the possible regime of this “dictatorship of the proletariat”? A State stronger than it ever was, because it holds in its hands the whole economic life of the country; it is the master of everything and can literally deprive every citizen of their livelihood at any given moment. As a means of fighting any opposition, it is very effective. The workers are the employees of the State; and it is therefore against it that they must assert their rights. The struggle against this gigantic employer becomes very intense; strikes quickly turn into political crimes. A workers’ control council could be created, but it will only be exercised to the extent that the employing State will allow it. It is however possible that the workers could enjoy other advantages of a political nature from this situation, such as the exclusive right to vote, for example, or in being privileged in the distribution of products. But, if we reflect carefully on it, these advantages do not constitute any progress because they do not bring any justice into society and only serve to give rise to more hatred. Instead of abolishing the bourgeoisie *as a class* and placing each member of the bourgeoisie in a situation where they could and should provide useful work, they are allowed (even if only “temporarily”) to live off the work of others, but are also furthermore punished by being deprived of certain things to which they are entitled as human beings.

The bourgeoisie must be put into a situation where it is impossible for them to harm; the class must be deprived of its armed forces and of everything that constitutes its economic domination. Repressive measures which target only individual members of the bourgeoisie are a useless means of revenge. It is also a dangerous slope: we think that we are doing revolutionary work, but instead, we are contributing nothing toward the construction of a new life. Furthermore: this civil war against the internal enemy, against an evil that we have neglected to entirely uproot, increases the prestige of the militaristic elements of society, of the leaders of military brigades of all factions that dominate both sides. The struggle therefore becomes uniquely a question of military strength. And in all evidence, any and all construction of our future finds itself postponed to calmer times. But we are missing the opportunity, the people are getting tired, and the danger of reaction increases...

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That is why, regarding the method of implementation, we propose a different method in opposition to this view towards the realization of socialism.

The opposition between these two points of view dates from the early days of the International, from the dispute between Marx and Bakunin. It was Bakunin who first proclaimed in his “The Policy of the International” that true socialism differs from “bourgeois socialism” in that the former affirms that the revolution must be an “immediate and direct implementation concerning the entirety of all aspects of social life,” while the latter affirms that “the political transformation must precede the economic transformation.”<sup>10</sup> The tendency that continued the tradition of the first Federalist International — our tendency — developed and clarified this idea of a direct economic revolution in the years that were to follow. First in *Le Révolté*, then in *La Révolte*, Kropotkin showed by historical examples that the progress

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<sup>10</sup> Ed: This article was published in the newspaper *L'Égalité* in 1869.

of humanity is due to the spontaneous activity of the people and not because of the action of the State; and, at the same time, he developed the program of free communism, the principle “to each according to his needs,” which is the only one that is compatible with a stateless society.<sup>11</sup> He also showed that the economic revolution cannot be realized *little by little* and by fragments, and that one would thus only end up disrupting the economic life without allowing space to rebuild it on new foundations; that the communist distribution must be, in the interest of the revolution, inaugurated immediately after a victory. He juxtaposed his “Conquest of Bread” against the other idea of “Complete Power” and showed the necessity, for the socialists, to actively look for new avenues outside the tired old formulas.

The anarchist movement as a whole was inspired by these fundamental ideas. Their field of action was especially expanded from the moment when the workers’ movement in France, slowed down after the fall of the Commune, started to breathe the revolutionary spirit once again. First, under the influence of F. Pelloutier, and then consequently with the numerous anarchists who entered the unions, was born the great movement of revolutionary syndicalism, which, during the first ten years of the twentieth century, carried within it the seeds of all of the hopes for workers’ emancipation.<sup>12</sup> Syndicalism has already accepted the idea of the immediate takeover of the means of production, and, even more, has made it more precise: the means by which they are to be realized already exist, they are the unions. The general strike, the prelude of revolutionary expropriation, became the final goal. Let us recall that in this respect its preparation seemed at a given moment a work so important and so urgent that the *Voix du Peuple* opened (around 1902, if I am not mistaken) a specific section in which the unions were invited to indicate what each one of them could do in the immediate days after victory to assure the continuity of the production in their respective fields, to establish relationships with other unions and consumers, etc., etc. This initiative, which did not seem to have found sufficient popularity, was nonetheless very important; even more important would be the task of taking it up again now that we are closer to practical achievements.

Thus was, from that time until the war, the fundamental character of revolutionary syndicalism. From France, it spread to other countries, to other international workers’ movements. Anarcho-syndicalist ideas penetrated into the writings of sociologists, jurists, economists; even scholars foreign to the labor movement began to find that the renovation of economic life with, as its foundation, a free association of producers, is perhaps not utopian, that it is perhaps in this way that capitalism will be overthrown and that a new form of political existence will be inaugurated in the State.

The war stopped this evolution and made the course of things deviate toward another direction. The State suddenly became stronger, its competence expanded; the workers’ organizations, on the contrary, slowed down their struggles or directed them, because of practical difficulties, toward more immediate achievements. The reformist tendency became preponderant.

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<sup>11</sup> Ed: “From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs.” This slogan (and variations thereof) has been closely associated with socialism and communism since the first half of the nineteenth century. Although it rose to prominence following Karl Marx’s use of the phrase in the 1870s, its connection to the socialist movement is much broader and more historical.

<sup>12</sup> Ed: Fernand Pelloutier (1867 – 1901) was a French Marxist labor organizer who turned to anarchism in the 1890s. According to the anarchist Marc Pierrot, Goldsmith’s radical student group, the ESRI, was friendly with Pelloutier (Pierrot, “Marie Goldsmith”).

The revolutionary spirit reappeared in the world with the Russian revolution, but in a different form: that of State Socialism.

The time has not yet come to draw definitive conclusions from the communist experiment tried in Russia; we do not know many things and it is difficult for us to evaluate the role of the different factors in its successes and failures. But what we can say is this: what we know does not affect our fundamental point of view. We do not intend to develop here all the arguments that make us believe that the governmental apparatus is unfit to carry out a social revolution, that only the action of the workers' groups, which have become in turn producer groups, are solely able to accomplish such tasks. This demonstration has been made in our literature many times. But we believe it useful to recall the general conclusions.

We think, as we have always thought, that immediately taking possession of the land and the instruments of production and the management of the economic life by peasant and worker organizations is more likely to assure the material well-being of Society than will State decrees.

We think that this mode of social and political transformation is better suited to mitigate conflict and avoid civil war because it includes greater freedom and greater varieties of organization than the simple introduction by authority of some unitary reform.

We think that the direct participation of the population in the construction of new economic forms makes the victories of the revolution more stable and better ensures their endurance.

We think, finally, that in addition to economic and political conquests, a higher stage of civilization has been prepared from both the intellectual and moral perspectives.

The French workers possess a sufficient heritage of ideas and experience of struggle to find the path that leads most directly toward total emancipation. To proclaim the fall of capitalism and the reign of socialism is a great thing, and we give credit for this to the socialist government of Russia. But we also want socialism to be put into practice, we want a new era to open up before humanity, and we want no weapons to be provided to the reactionaries through the faults of the socialists. For this reason, we who work in France must take advantage of the moment when there is still time *to prepare* ourselves by studying what the workers' organizations can and must do "the day after" the revolution.

We consider of the utmost importance the most serious and complete discussion of all questions concerning the reorganization of the economy toward the moment when the workers will finally be able to make themselves masters of their own destinies. This is not a mere question of debate, nor even of propaganda; it is rather a question of careful study. It is no longer enough to say that such and such an order of things is desirable, nor even to demonstrate it: it is now necessary to indicate the practical measures which are *immediately* realizable with the means we presently have at our disposal.

It is to this undertaking to which we now call upon our comrades.

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