

Lenin on Democracy: January 1916 to October 1917

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In October 1917, the Russian people experienced the upheaval of revolution for the second time in less than a year. Led by Vladimir Lenin and his Bolshevik Party, the October Revolution marked the formation of the Soviet Union, a nation that came to be synonymous with “totalitarianism”, particularly in the latter half of the 20th century. At a cursory glance, it seems that concepts such as democracy and self-determination would have no place in the ideology of the revolutionaries who were instrumental in creating one of the most repressive states in modern history. Many historians point to Stalin’s purges, the gulag system and the command economy as sufficient evidence to prove this hypothesis. However, they fail to recognize the importance of concepts such as democracy and self-determination to the Bolsheviks, particularly Vladimir Lenin. In the period immediately preceding the October Revolution, Lenin clearly struggled with the relationship between these concepts and the Communist ideology that drove him. The purpose of this paper will be to analyze how Lenin examined democracy and self-determination in his writings between January 1916 and October 1917. This time period is of particular interest as his writings begin to transition from the topic of imperialism to that of democracy and self-determination. While Lenin maintains his criticism of imperialist powers and imperialism in general, democracy and self-determination become his primary focus. However, one of his most famous works, *State and Revolution* (published in September 1917) does not follow the same progression that Lenin developed between January 1916 and September 1917. Instead, depending on the specific topic, he is both inconsistent and

consistent with his previous writings on democracy. This essay will focus on three central topics (the role of self-determination, the role of violence in democracy, and the relationship between democracy and the state). Juxtaposing *State and Revolution* with his other works from this period reveals Lenin to be inconsistent on the topics of self-determination and the role of violence in democracy, while remaining largely consistent with respect to the relationship between democracy and the state.

Self-Determination

In *State and Revolution*, Lenin provides a very limited discussion on the topic of self-determination, even though it takes precedence over all other topics in his writings during the preceding period. In fact, it is only mentioned once in the entire work. He writes, “But Engels did not make the mistake some Marxists make in dealing, for example, with the question of the right of nations to self-determination, when they argue that this is impossible under capitalism and will be superfluous under Socialism”.¹ Occurring in the section dedicated to Marx’s preface to the 1891 edition of *The Civil War in France* Lenin clearly sees self-determination as a concept unbound to any one political system. However, he fails to go into any further detail on the subject in *State and Revolution*. This is perhaps one of the stranger aspects of the pamphlet, as Lenin in fact spent a great deal of time and energy in the year preceding the publication of the work considering this very topic. Unlike other topics in which *State and Revolution* serves to consolidate the arguments he presents in his litany of letters, editorials, etc., an in-depth discussion on self-determination is missing. The simple question is, why? Yet, before addressing this inquiry, it is important to understand Lenin’s full view on this concept.

Lenin’s perception of self-determination is best understood through two documents, both published in 1916. The first, “The Socialist Revolution and the Right of Nations to Self-Determination” was originally written in January and February of 1916, and first published in April 1916 in the magazine *Vorbote* No. 2. The second, entitled “The Discussion on Self-Determination Summed Up” was written in July of 1916 and published in October of the same year in the journal *Sbornik Sotsial-Demokrata* No. 1 alongside a reprint of “The Socialist Revolution and the Right of Nations to Self-Determination.” While the exact reasoning for this joint publication is unknown, it suggests that the content of one cannot be fully understood without the other.

¹ Vladimir Lenin, *State and Revolution*, 1917 (Washington DC: Richard Pipes, 2009), 82.

Lenin opens the first of these documents by stating “Victorious socialism must achieve complete democracy, and, consequently, not only bring about the complete equality of nations, but also give effect to the right of oppressed nationals to self determination, i.e., the right to free political secession.”² First, it is important to note that Lenin is only dealing with the role of democracy in the first stage of revolutionary transition, from capitalism to socialism. More importantly though, is his definition of self-determination as “the right to free political secession”. This characterization of self-determination is international both in its scope and goals. At this point, Lenin is still considering the socialist revolution as an international phenomenon rather than one that develops within a particular country. In fact, it is interesting to point out that Lenin deals with the application of self-determination only at the end of the piece, stating “the recognition of the right of the nations oppressed by tsarism to free secession from Russia is absolutely obligatory for Social-Democracy in the interests of its democratic and socialist tasks.”³ While Russia is the major focus of Lenin and the Social-Democrats, it still is a part of the international whole. Therefore, we must understand Lenin’s call for self-determination as international in scope. He goes on to write:

Just as mankind can achieve the abolition of classes only by passing through the transition period of the dictatorship of the oppressed class, so mankind can achieve the inevitable merging of nations only by passing through the transition period of complete liberation of all the oppressed nations, i.e., their freedom to secede.⁴

Here, Lenin reveals what he sees as the end goal of self-determination - the inevitable “merging of nations”. However, what this merging will eventually produce (other than a socialist society), Lenin does not say. In addition, Lenin does not elaborate on how the merging will occur, whether through conquest or some other mechanism. What is evident is Lenin’s presentation of a clear global objective for self-determination.

In order to fully understand the context of the arguments presented in “The Socialist Revolution and the Right of Nations to Self-Determination,” we must turn our attention to Lenin’s second piece on the subject, “The Discussion on Self-Determination Summed Up.” Large segments of this editorial piece critique the arguments of other Marxists, particularly Karl Kautsky and those he refers to as “our Polish comrades,” whom Lenin argues seriously misunderstand the need for

² Vladimir Lenin, “The Socialist Revolution and the Right of Nations to Self-Determination,” January 1916 as taken from:
<http://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1916/jan/x01.html>

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid

self-determination and democracy in the movement towards a socialist society. On the particular topic of self-determination, Lenin takes issue with the Polish assertion that "...the question of such a division [of a socialist cultural zone] will naturally not be decided by individual nations alone and in possession of full sovereignty [as is required by "the right to self-determination"]⁵ but will be determined jointly by all the citizens concerned."⁶ Lenin responds to this argument, writing "All reactionaries and bourgeois grant to nations forcibly retained within the frontiers of a given state the right to "determine jointly" their fate in a common parliament....Our opponents try to evade precisely the point at issue, the only one that is up for discussion - the right to secede."⁷ Through this exchange, it is obvious that Lenin's vision of self-determination occurs outside the realm of current democratic institutions throughout Europe (such as parliaments). This is the final piece of Lenin's perception of self-determination. It is international in its scope and objectives, and exists outside any current western political structure. This is the self-determination that Lenin argues is crucial in bringing about the socialist stage in the Marxist timeline.

Now that we have dealt with both of these documents, we must return to a question that was posed at the beginning of this section- why does Lenin leave out this important discussion of self-determination in *State and Revolution*? When considering this question, two possible answers present themselves. First, it could be that Lenin feared his concept of the right of nations to self-determination could be used against him and the Bolsheviks when juxtaposed with his emphasis on the need for the dictatorship of the proletariat (and their consolidation of power in general). Second, it could be that the ultimate purpose of *State and Revolution* (as a response to both Lenin's intellectual rivals and as an outline for the future as Lenin saw it) might have been lost by a complex discussion of this concept. There is little evidence that can be cited to substantiate either of these claims, but a few clues do exist which give credence to the latter explanation. Though originally written in the nascent stages of the October Revolution, *State and Revolution* was not published until 1918, after the Bolsheviks overthrew the Provisional Government. Therefore, it would be difficult to argue that Lenin was fearful of the political consequences of the arguments he presents. Instead, it is possible that the inconsistency between these two articles and *State and Revolution* is a result of selective inclusion on Lenin's part. Since his discussion of self-determination exists mainly in an international

⁵ Lenin's insertion

⁶ Vladimir Lenin, "The Discussion on Self-Determination Summed Up," July 1916, <http://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1916/jul/x01.html>

⁷ Ibid.

context, it would make little sense to include it in a targeted discussion of how revolution should play out in relation to an individual nation.

Violence and Democracy

Up to this point we have dealt exclusively with Lenin's inconsistencies on the topic of self-determination. While this major inconsistency between *State and Revolution* and his other writings of the time is important, it cannot be used to argue that, on the whole, Lenin's January 1916 to July 1917 writings are fickle with respect to *State and Revolution*. In fact, there are numerous topics in which that pamphlet serves as a consolidation of arguments Lenin makes throughout that time period. One such topic is the role of violence he outlines in democracy. The inclusion of violence as an integral part of democracy makes Lenin's definition of particular interest, as it seems to violate standard western conceptions of the term. It is one of the main reasons that Lenin can be said to be outlining a new conception of democracy in *State and Revolution*, rather than attempting to integrate violence into standard western conceptions of the term. However, Lenin developed this revolutionary idea even before the push for the October Revolution intensified. Instead, *State and Revolution* is merely the culmination and consolidation of Lenin's perception of the role of violence in democracy. I will argue that Lenin addresses this concept sporadically throughout the period of January 1916 to July 1917, with the role violence plays in democracy growing as Lenin begins to consider and eventually outright support revolution against the Provisional Government.

I shall start the discussion of this topic where Lenin finishes: with *State and Revolution*. He begins by stating "Democracy is a state which recognizes the subordination of the minority, i.e., an organization for the systematic use of violence by one class against the other, by one section of the population against another."⁸ However, from this simple definition, an important question arises: what exactly does Lenin mean by "violence"? Here there are two distinct possibilities: intellectual violence or physical violence. Intellectual violence takes the form of concerted attacks in newspapers, journals, literature, etc. by the majority to suppress the minority. On the other hand, physical violence takes the form of the use of military force by the majority to suppress the minority. Understanding which of these two meanings Lenin seeks to convey in his definition is key to understanding this definition of democracy. So, now the question becomes, what is at stake by selecting one interpretation of violence over the other? If we were to assume that Lenin is in fact discussing intellectual violence, it can easily be argued that Lenin's

⁸ *State and Revolution*, p. 86

definition is not a new interpretation of democracy. However, if we understand him to be advocating physical violence, his classification of democracy must be understood as a new conception of democracy. Unfortunately, Lenin gives no definite answer as to his understanding of the word “violence”. Therefore, his underlying meaning must be inferred from a few specific passages in *State and Revolution*.

The first passage that is critical in understanding Lenin’s conception of violence comes from his discussion of the Paris Commune of 1871. He writes, “It is still necessary to suppress the bourgeoisie and crush its resistance. This was particularly necessary for the Commune; and one of the reasons for its defeat is that it did not do this with sufficient determination.”⁹ Here, we find Lenin summarizing one of Marx’s major critiques of the Paris Commune—that it did not go far enough in purging reactionaries from Paris after assuming control. It is unlikely that both Lenin and Marx understand this concept of “sufficient determination” as some type of intellectual campaign against the detractors of the Commune. Instead, it is much more likely that this is a tacit criticism of the Commune leadership’s failure to physically purge seditious elements from their new society. In addition to this, Lenin provides further evidence to suggest he advocates the use of physical violence in a specific quotation of Marx’s from *The Civil War in France*, which states “The first decree of the Commune...was the suppression of the standing army, and the substitution for it of the armed people.”¹⁰ Lenin analyzes this passage, stating, “This demand now figures in the program of every party claiming the name of socialist”¹¹. In this exchange we must understand the Paris Commune as the first real example that ideologues such as Marx and Lenin have to examine the practical applications of their political ideas. Therefore, it is clear that both Marx and Lenin argue that the lack of violent repression on the part of the “armed people” against the remaining bourgeoisie doomed the Commune to failure, and therefore must be rectified in the platforms of all modern socialist parties. However, what is the aim of this violence? Lenin addresses this question, writing:

This [the Commune] is exactly a case of “quantity becoming transformed into quality”: democracy, introduced as fully and consistently as is at all conceivable, is transformed from bourgeois democracy into proletarian democracy; from the state (a special force for the suppression of a particular class) into something which is really no longer the state.¹²

⁹ *State and Revolution*, 44.

¹⁰ Marx, as quoted by Lenin in *State and Revolution*, 43.

¹¹ *State and Revolution*, 43.

¹² *State and Revolution*, 44.

Here, Lenin argues that the purpose of physical violence in democracy is transitioning democracy itself from its bourgeois to proletarian form. These three passages together form the closest approximation of Lenin's perception of the role of violence in democracy. Violence in itself is meant to expunge the remnants of bourgeois society, facilitating the transition from the capitalist to socialist society. This is a topic Lenin was particularly consistent on during the period prior to the October Revolution.

In order to fully understand the development of Lenin's theory of violence in democracy, we must return to a document we have seen before, Lenin's "The Socialist Revolution and the Right of Nations to Self-Determination." In the chapter entitled "The Meaning of the Right to Self-Determination and its Relation to Federation," Lenin writes, "Concretely, this political, democratic demand [of self-determination] implies complete freedom to carry on agitation in favour [sic] of secession, and freedom to settle the question of secession by means of a referendum of the nation that desires to secede."¹³ While he does not even mention either democracy or violence tacitly here, Lenin clearly is beginning to formulate the place of physical "agitation" in his calls for the right to self-determination of nations. In a statement on imperialism, Lenin states, "It would be no less mistaken to delete any of the points of the democratic programme [sic], for example, the point of self-determination of nations, on the ground that it is "unfeasible," or that it is "illusory" under imperialism."¹⁴ Here, Lenin constructs a clear linkage between democracy and self-determination, which may seem obvious, but is in fact particularly important to his argument. He goes on to say:

It would be a fundamental mistake to suppose that the struggle for democracy can divert the proletariat from the socialist revolution, or obscure, or overshadow it, etc. On the contrary, just as socialism cannot be victorious unless it introduces complete democracy, so the proletariat will be unable to prepare for victory over the bourgeoisie unless it wages a many-sided, consistent and revolutionary struggle for democracy.¹⁵

The last sentence of the above quote is perhaps the most telling in relation to Lenin's thoughts on violence during the early months of 1916. While it is important to remember that Lenin is still speaking specifically in an international sense rather than a Russia-specific one, he nonetheless constructs a general relationship between violence and democracy in this editorial. While the term "agitation" is ambiguous enough that it cannot

¹³ "The Socialist Revolution and the Right of Nations to Self-Determination"

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

be used to identify what type (either intellectual or physical) it may promote, if we look at it with respect to Lenin's call for a "many-sided, consistent and revolutionary struggle for democracy," it would not be wrong to state that at the very least, physical violence has a role in his "democratic programme" as early as 1916.

Lenin's next major discussion of the role of violence in democracy occurs in one of his most famous writings of 1917, the April Theses. Seen as the intellectual foundation of the October Revolution, the April Theses (formally titled "The Tasks of the Proletariat in the Present Revolution") were a powerful critique of the Provisional Government and in some ways a call for revolution against its authority. For the purposes of this essay, we shall focus on Lenin's critique of the Provisional Government's policies regarding World War I. Lenin regarded participation in the Great War as participation in a "predatory imperialist war," and argued:

The class-conscious proletariat can give its consent to a revolutionary war, which would really justify revolutionary defencism [sic], only on condition: (a) that the power pass to the proletariat and the poorest sections of the peasants aligned with the proletariat; (b) that all annexations be renounced in deed and not in word; (c) that a complete break be effected in actual fact with all capitalist interests.¹⁶

In this instance, Lenin adds a particularly specific component to his perception of the relationship between democracy and violence. However, this component must be placed within the political context of April 1917 for its full importance to be understood. After the rise of the Provisional Government in February 1917, the Mensheviks (who officially split with the Bolsheviks in 1912) supported the new government's decision to maintain Russia's presence in World War I, arguing that it was the best way to defend the nascent socialist revolution. For Lenin, such arguments in fact undermined the cause of all socialist revolutionaries. Therefore, the above quote reveals that a truly revolutionary war implies at the very least self-determination on the part of the proletariat (a part of the "democratic programme") on the decision to use violence on behalf of the revolution.

Why is the topic of violence so ambiguous throughout Lenin's writings during this period? Even in *State and Revolution*, his discussion of the topic is vague - far from a call to arms for the proletariat. The reason for this is best understood in the storm of political events that

¹⁶ Vladimir Lenin, "The Tasks of the Proletariat in the Present Revolution," April 7, 1917, <http://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1917/apr/04.htm>

surrounded Lenin between January 1916 and October 1917. The events of World War I and Lenin's analysis of them took a great deal of his time and writings up to the February Revolution of 1917. With a few exceptions (such as "The Socialist Revolution and the Right of Nations to Self-Determination") the main focus of his collected works from 1916 is centered upon the question of imperialism and its relation to the Great War. Between January and June of 1916, Lenin wrote one of his more famous treatises on the subject of imperialism, titled *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism*. However, the onset of the February Revolution (which caught him and many other socialist revolutionaries off guard) signaled a marked change in the litany of topics Lenin discussed in his numerous works. In fact, Lenin's wife Nadezdha Krupskaya noted in her 1933 work *Reminiscences of Lenin*, "A revolution had really take place in Russia. Ilyich's [Lenin] mind went to work at once... He no longer spoke about the conquest of power by the Soviets of Workers' Deputies prospectively, but spoke about concrete preparations for seizing power and arming the workers, about the fight for bread, peace, and freedom."¹⁷ Statements like these, which permeate Krupskaya's recollections of Lenin in the days after the February Revolution, give credence to the argument that physical violence was paramount in Lenin's vision for the rise of proletarian democracy. Therefore we can see the ambiguity of the term "violence" in the definition of democracy presented in *State and Revolution* as a possible political calculation, as the Provisional Government had him under heavy surveillance after the events of the July Days.

Democracy and the State

The final topic that I will discuss is Lenin's treatment of the relationship between democracy and the state. This aspect of Lenin's ideology between 1916 and 1917 is perhaps the most difficult to approach, due to both its complexity and the sheer volume of works that discuss this relationship. As with the previous two sections, I will approach this topic by first outlining the relationship as Lenin sees it in *State and Revolution* and then comparing that to his other works between January 1916 and July 1917, arguing that unlike with self-determination and the role of violence, Lenin stays both consistent and thorough in his treatment of the relationship between the state and democracy during this period.

Lenin opens *State and Revolution* with a powerful definition of the state as "the product and the manifestation of the irreconcilability of class

¹⁷ Nadezhda Krupskaya, *Reminiscences of Lenin*, 1933, <http://www.marxists.org/archive/krupskaya/works/rol/rol21.html>

antagonisms.”¹⁸ He continues, “The state arises when, where, and to the extent that class antagonisms objectively cannot be reconciled. And, conversely, the existence of the state proves that the class antagonisms are irreconcilable.”¹⁹ Along with this condition for the rise of states, he also provides a prediction on their future, stating, “The state in general, i.e., the most complete democracy, can only “wither away.”²⁰ From these two quotes, it is obvious that Lenin perceives the concepts of the state and democracy both as temporary institutions. Democracy is merely a means of transitioning from a capitalist society to a socialist one, and eventually when it develops into a “complete democracy” (a term on which Lenin is again aggravatingly vague) it will give way to a communist society. Lenin wrote on this topic, “But in striving for Socialism we are convinced that it will develop into Communism and, hence, that the need for violence against people in general... will vanish altogether since people will become accustomed to observing elementary conditions of social life without violence.”²¹ The best way to understand these passages is as a timeline, in which the state and democracy eventually wither away and die after their purposes have been fulfilled. However, this entire discussion remains securely in the realm of intellectualism and provides no particular steps that lead to the withering away of the state. What type of democratic institutions should be created, saved, or destroyed in order to place society on this particular path?

First, Lenin is adamant in his conviction that parliamentarism should be abolished. He writes in *State and Revolution*, “To decide once every few years which member of the ruling class is to repress and crush the people through parliament- such is the real essence of bourgeois parliamentarism, not only in parliamentary-constitutional monarchies, but also in the most democratic republics.”²² At a cursory glance, it may seem that Lenin is railing against representative institutions in general, but this is not the case. In fact, he is merely stating that the way in which these parliamentary bodies are structured is inherently repressive to the “people.” He argues that “the way out of parliamentarism is not, of course, the abolition of representative institutions and the electoral principle, but the conversion of the representative institutions from talking shops to “working” bodies.”²³ But what shape do these working bodies take? While he does not state outright what these “working bodies” should look like, he does give an outline of their structure in a

¹⁸ *State and Revolution*, p. 3.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 15.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 47.

²² *Ibid.*, 47.

²³ *State and Revolution*, 48.

response to his ever-present SR rival, Kautsky. Kautsky argued that certain large-scale machine industries, such as the railways, would require a bureaucratic organization to maintain their functionality, even in the socialist society. Lenin, taking up this position, rails against Kautsky, and argues that bureaucracies should not rule these industries, but instead workers should “elect delegates who will form a sort of parliament,” continuing:

The whole point is that this “sort of parliament” will not merely “draw up the working regulations and supervise the management of the bureaucratic apparatus,” as Kautsky...imagines. In socialist society the “sort of parliament” consisting of workers’ deputies will, of course, “draw up the working regulations and supervise the management” of the apparatus”- but this apparatus will not be “bureaucratic”...they [the workers] will replace it [the bureaucracy] by a new one consisting of the very same workers and office employees against whose transformation into bureaucrats measures will at once be takes as specified in detail by Marx and Engels...²⁴

From this passage, we must assume that Lenin’s main issue regarding parliamentarism is in fact its reliance on bureaucracy as a means of curtailing the political will and power of the people. In this sense, we can see Lenin as having both utilitarian and anti-utilitarian tendencies. He is utilitarian in the sense that he is willing to use different forms of the state in order to achieve its dissolution. On the other hand, he despises the use of bureaucratic institutions, which do not provide any positive steps towards achieving a socialist state.

Now we must address the form the relationship between the state and democracy in Lenin’s body of work from January 1916 to July 1917. From the very beginning of this period, it is clear that Lenin’s formulations on this relationship remained constant up to the publication of *State and Revolution*. In the introduction to “The Socialist Revolution and the Right of Nations to Self-Determination,” Lenin writes, “Of course, democracy is also a form of state which must disappear when the state disappears, but this will take place only in the process of transition from completely victorious and consolidated socialism to complete communism.”²⁵ Since the withering away of the state is one of the major tenets of the Marxist conception of history, it is not strange that this concept is a constant theme in Lenin’s works. What is more interesting is the fact that Lenin’s criticism of Kautsky on the subject remained wholly the same as well. In “The Discussion on Self-Determination Summed Up,” Lenin states, “We deliberately stressed, in the first thesis, that

²⁴ Ibid., 116-117.

²⁵ “The Socialist Revolution and the Right of Nations to Self-Determination”

democracy is a form of state that will also wither away when the [sic] state withers away. And until our opponents replace Marxism by some sort of “non-state” viewpoint their arguments will constitute one big mistake.”²⁶ This disagreement between Kautsky and Lenin is one that transcends the bounds of this paper, but is still important in the implications it holds for Lenin’s perception of the relationship between democracy and the state. Unlike the other topics covered in this paper, the discussion of this relationship is continuous through a great deal of Lenin’s collected works, and is therefore extremely significant in understanding some of the subtle differences between Lenin and other Marxists, such as Kautsky.

In addition to Lenin’s criticism of Kautsky, his criticism of parliamentarism remains consistent as well, particularly in his April Theses. His fifth thesis calls for “Not a parliamentary republic - to return to a parliamentary republic from the Soviets of Workers’ Deputies would be a retrograde step - but a republic of Soviets of Workers’ Agricultural Labourers’ and Peasants’ Deputies throughout the country, from top to bottom.”²⁷ His April Theses foreshadow not only his argument against parliamentarism but also the concept of “working bodies” that he explicates at some length in *State and Revolution*. He ardently opposes the creation of a parliamentary system under the Provisional Government and suggests a government based around the soviets instead. One interesting aspect of this debate (in terms of application) is the role of the Constituent Assembly. In the April Theses, Lenin claims:

I attacked the Provisional Government for not having appointed an early date or any date at all, for the convocation of the Constituent Assembly, and for confining itself to promises. I argued that without the Soviets of Workers’ and Soldiers’ Deputies the convocation of the Constituent Assembly is not guaranteed and its success is impossible.²⁸

The debate over the Constituent Assembly is one that would plague Lenin long after he assumed his place as the undisputed ruler of the Soviet Union. Here we have an instance of Lenin expressing support for the assembly he would later disband due to politically unfavorable conditions. But what does Lenin’s support for the Constituent Assembly (an inherently parliamentary institution) mean for his larger attack on parliamentarism? Does it undermine his arguments in *State and Revolution*? To answer these questions, we must return to the specific mechanism of parliamentarism that Lenin spends a great deal of effort deriding:

²⁶ “The Discussion of Self-Determination Summed Up”

²⁷ April Theses

²⁸ Ibid.

bureaucracy. It is possible that Lenin saw the Constituent Assembly as a way to bring the Soviets (the nascent “working bodies”) to a greater level of political power. However, since he spends little time discussing the Constituent Assembly in *State and Revolution*, it is difficult to determine how exactly this institution would fit into the theoretical model he constructs.

In sum, Lenin’s discussion of the state and democracy is perhaps his most consistent, both in message and scope between January 1916 and October 1917. Critics of Lenin, such as Richard Pipes have maintained that *State and Revolution* in particular is “of little value as an inquiry into the political and social role of the state,” instead useful only in “providing an insight into Lenin’s political thinking on the eve of his seizure of power in Russia.”²⁹ This characterization of Lenin’s final major work before the October Revolution is misguided. Instead, *State and Revolution* must be broken down topically to gauge its usefulness. On the topic of the state and democracy, Lenin provides a valuable summation of his ideas on the relationship between the two, useful both in capturing his political conceptions right before his ascension to power and as part of a larger discussion on the topic that occurs throughout his lifetime.

To conclude, it is obvious that in the lead up to the October Revolution, Vladimir Lenin was forced to deal with a great number of problems concerning both the theoretical and practical application of a socialist revolution in Russia. In a period of twenty months he wrote a litany of editorials, treatises, and letters dealing with everything from Marxist theory to personal crises. In particular, he wrote important works dealing with the concepts of violence in democracy, self-determination, and the relationship between democracy and the state. They reveal a man whose intellectualism spans a much greater range than the simple the authoritarian he is sometimes portrayed to be. The argument accepted by many scholars that democracy and the society Lenin outlined during this period are mutually exclusive, is a vague and unfounded interpretation of Lenin’s political philosophy. In many of his works, he attempts to break down generally accepted western conceptions of such topics as democracy and reinterprets them, rather than simply labeling them as bourgeois.

²⁹ Richard Pipes, Introduction to *State and Revolution*, xi.

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