

# LENIN ON CIVIL WAR: CLASS STRUGGLE AND REVOLUTION AS INSTANCES OF CIVIL WAR

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## **Abstract**

Civil war is a quite recurrent theme in several academic disciplines, from Political Science to Philosophy. The war of “brother against brother” has filled the imaginary of both academics and the general public, as it manifested itself as a recurrent and relatively common phenomenon. In this essay, I propose a genealogical study of Lenin’s concept of revolution as an instance of civil war, with a special focus on the relationship between Lenin’s thought and the Russian Revolutions of 1905 and 1917. I will pay particular attention to *The State and Revolution* as an idiosyncratic example of Lenin’s writings regarding the role of the masses in the revolutionary process. In this work, the role of the revolutionary proletariat in the achievement and maintenance of the socialist state, the exertion of post-revolutionary power and the creation of new social structures are thoroughly studied.

## **Keywords**

Civil war, class struggle, Leninism, Marxism, revolution

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## **Introduction**

Civil war has always been a reality in the history of mankind and a focal point of discussion both in the academies and the political public debate. Recently, the topic resurfaced in full force, as a direct consequence of the drastic reduction of wars between states, which were, in turn, replaced by intra-state wars. Under a post-colonial framework and an international paradigm riddled with fragile and recently independent states, it gradually became a widespread, destructive and organized form of human violence. Since the early 18th century, mass-scaled civil wars were a reality present everywhere around the world, with “*an average of two to four per cent of all countries having experienced civil war at any given moment.*” (Armitage, 2009, p.18). But what, exactly, is civil war? David Armitage

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provides two distinct definitions of the concept, the first one characterized by its formality and strictness, the second one by its more operational format. Political scientists usually use a conventional definition that stipulates that, in any civil war, there “*must be sustained military combat, primarily internal, resulting in at least a thousand battle-field deaths per year, pitting central government forces against an insurgent force capable of ... inflict[ing] upon the government forces at least five percent of the fatalities the insurgents sustain.*”(Small & Singer, 1982, pp. 210-220). This definition distinguishes situations of civil war from other types of warfare, such as terrorism, riots or genocide, while being able to provide quantitative data from which to analyze the phenomenon as an empiric, almost repeatable, instance. There are a few problems with this definition, which mainly revolve around its lack of versatility and the strict quantitative/formal conditions which had to be always applied to often-times very inorganic types of conflict.

In order to overcome these issues, a more versatile definition, advanced by Kalyvas, was presented, which defined civil war as “*armed combat within the boundaries of a recognized sovereign entity between parties subject to a common authority at the outset of the hostilities.*” (Kalyvas, 2006, p.17). This definition is less restrictive and helps creating a standard basis of analysis over the nature and meaning of civil wars, since it defines civil war as collective organized violence within a polity, with the consequence of dividing the sovereignty, causing a struggle for control of the authority over the polity. It is under this second definition that I will work throughout this essay.

Civil war and revolution are often involved in a dualist relation, with the former sometimes being catalogued as a sub-category of the latter. Revolution can traditionally be defined as “*a movement, often violent, to overthrow an old regime and effect complete change in the fundamental institutions of society.*” (Neitzel, 2016, p.1). This “movement” usually aims to overthrow the dominant factions within a polity, while undermining its authority and drastically change how the exercise of sovereignty takes place. The dualist relation between civil war and revolution was created by a panoply of long-lasting preconceptions about these two violent ways to react to political breakdowns. As David Armitage argues:

Civil wars are destructive; revolutions are progressive. Civil wars are sterile; revolutions are fertile with innovation and transformative possibilities. Civil wars are local and time-bound; revolutions have occurred across the world in an unfolding sequence of human liberation. Civil wars mark the collapse of the human spirit; revolutions, its unfolding and self-realization. (Armitage, 2009, p.20)

Much of these preconceptions were created and disseminated by the revolutionary theorists themselves. One of those theorists was Lenin, arguably

one of the main architects of the Russian Revolution. Lenin was no stranger to the study of revolution as a form of civil war, especially if we take into consideration his writings in the aftermath of the (failed) First Russian Revolution of 1905. From 1905 to his ascendancy to power, there was always a clear logic to Lenin's thoughts on class warfare, violence and the state. The persistent themes of his writings included the belief that history progress dialectally through revolutions that negate reactionary violence, his commitment to class struggle (usually precluded by peaceful compromises), the inevitable violence of the revolutionary struggle, his thinking around civil war and the justness of revolutionary violence in the pursuit of justice and peace. Lenin had a simple, brutal and narrow *tout court* view of revolution as civil war. It was precisely this brutish understanding, as well as the tactics and strategies to apply it in accordance with his ideals, that he promoted for the Bolshevik party.

## 1. The concept of Civil War in Lenin's thought

Since the early 19th century, Lenin was actively embroiled in a heated debate between "his" Bolsheviks, the Russian Social-Democratic Labour Party and the Mensheviks. There was, however, some consensus between the three groups on the theoretical need to use violence to overthrow autocratic, oppressive regimes. The events of 1905 pushed Lenin towards a more militarized and militant version of Marxism, one that advocated for an unrelenting and forceful class struggle, which would be analogous to the violence of a civil war. The Leninist Bolsheviks progressively abandoned any hopes of gradual compromises with similar groups who, on the other hand, advocated gradual revolutionary paths. Violent class struggle was considered the only viable path for the destruction of autocratic and oppressive regimes. Force could only be met with equivalent force. Lenin labeled this concept "militarized socialism". The term, according to Ryan (2011, p.250), "*seems appropriate in light of the factors mentioned above, and indeed considering Lenin's belief in the necessity of forming an army of the revolutionary people led by a militant party in 1905.*". Lenin's sectarianism was derived from an orthodox interpretation of the works of Marx and Engels, as well as a keen denunciation of the "revisionisms" of his political opponents.

The concept of civil war was, for Lenin, something intrinsically connected with the pursuit of the emancipation of the lower classes:

Any moral condemnation of [civil war] is absolutely impermissible from the point of view of Marxism [. . .] For us, the sole acceptable critique of the various forms of civil war is that advanced from the point of view of military expediency. In an epoch of civil war, the ideal of the party of the proletariat must be that of a belligerent party. (Lenin, 1960, pp. 8-11)

The Marxist-Leninist idea that force can only be met with force, or, in other words, that violence is necessary to overthrow an oppressive regime, was especially relevant in tsarist Russia, a country to which Lenin dedicated much of his thought. Revolutionary violence, used in favor of the proletariat, would have to be applied as an answer to reactionary violence, which manifested itself through the autocratic *status quo* and its supporters. What differentiates Leninism from the ideas of other Marxist authors such as Karl Kautsky (a very well-known opponent of Lenin) was precisely its militant conception of revolution and the *ethos* of violence in the revolutionary process as a means to overcome the systemic and structural violence of oppressive regimes (in Russia's case, the Tsardom). Lenin was an adamant supporter of violence as the only viable way to effectively destroy the structures of power which maintained the domination of the bourgeoisie over the working class:

For the proletariat must never forget that in certain conditions the class struggle turns into armed struggle and civil war and that there are times when the interests of the proletariat demand the merciless annihilation of the enemy in open military engagements. (Lenin, 1960, pp. 451-454)

### 1.1 Lenin and the Russian Civil War

After the events of 1905, Lenin started to spell out the outline of his expectations and plans for the abolishment of the tsarist regime. He expected the ultimate abolishment of the Tsardom to take shape of a two-part full-scale civil war, as an inevitable consequence of the drastic changes that the rise of proletarian force would bring to an ultra-conservative Russia. The first part was the effective overthrow, on part of an alliance of heterogeneous revolutionary forces, of the tsarist regime and its supporting institutions, ending the centralized autocratic monarchy in Russia. The second stage of this civil war would be an *“even fiercer civil war between the bourgeoisie - strengthened by the gigantic development of capitalist progress on the one hand, and the revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry, which would result from elections to the Constituent Assembly, on the other.”* (Getzler, 1996, p.15). It is precisely this second part that qualifies the Leninist interpretation of the Russian Revolution of the post-1917 events as a full-blown civil war and not just simply an incomplete *coup d'état*. In order to gain the upper hand in the ensuing civil war, which involved conflicts between revolutionary factions and the tsarist/reactionary forces, the Bolshevik party-state mobilized *“organized coercion deployed by such institutions as the Cheka, the Red Army and the Party.”* (Eloranta & Osnsky, 2014, p.321).

The conjuncture prior to the 1917 Revolution played a key part in the success of the revolutionary efforts. Authors such as Eloranta and Osnsky highlighted the

contributions of mass-scaled external wars in the success of the Russian Revolution. According to them, *“war is a primary cause, condition, and context of the paradigmatic communist revolutions. To put simply, no mass mobilization war, no communist revolution, especially in a large country.”* (Eloranta & Osnsky, 2014, p.321). Russia was actively participating in World War One, a fact that transformed an already internally fragile country into a ticking time-bomb. Massive casualties, the destruction of the economy, famine and the overall war wariness caused by the war inevitably led to a breakdown of political authority and the failure of the tsarist regime to exercise its sovereignty over an increasingly worrisome and radicalized population.

In 1917, Russia was a country on the brink of a breakdown. As is the case with most countries that collapse under breakdown, the transition to a new regime entailed two different stages: *“an overthrow of the old regime by a coalitional alliance of the oppositional parties and a transition to the constitutional government accompanied by political competition among the parties of the former opposition.”*(Eloranta & Osnsky, 2014, p.321). This transition is usually affected by a variety of externalities and the outcome is often-times incredibly uncertain. Usually, in most post-imperial states, moderate parties and coalitions enjoyed greater popularity than radical parties and were able, more or less peacefully, to become the first governments of the new regime. This wasn't, however, the case of revolutionary Russia. The post-revolution political contest quickly turned into a bloodbath powered by organized military conflicts between different factions, which lasted for five long years.

Lenin's thoughts on civil war reflect his views on violence as a necessary answer to reactionary aggression. In the few months after the beginning of the 1917 Revolution, and anticipating the eminent civil war that was bound to take place, Lenin wrote:

*“(...) civil war is the sharpest form of the class struggle, it is that point in the class struggle when clashes and battles, economic and political, repeating themselves, growing, broadening, becoming acute, turn into an armed struggle of one class against another. More often than not - one may say almost always - in all more or less free and advanced countries the civil war is between those classes whose antagonistic position towards each other is created and deepened by the entire economic development of capitalism, by the entire history of modern society the world over - civil war is between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat.”*  
(Lenin, 1917, p.28)

Lenin was a proponent of the necessity for the definitive assault on the autocracy to be bloody and suggested that the organization of the masses would naturally evolve into armed violent insurrection. Nonetheless, Lenin also considered that violence should not be unnecessarily used and that the

revolutionary movement should only strike at opportune times, a position which he publicly defended multiple times. Authors such as James Ryan argue that Lenin's view on "terrorist" tactics, such as the assassination of high ranking public officers, was more akin to guerrilla actions than simple isolated murder conspiracies. According to James Ryan:

Lenin conceded that terrorism could 'at most' have some small role as one subsidiary method of striking a decisive blow against the autocracy. To clarify, when Lenin spoke of 'terror', he had two aspects in mind — what terrorism was and what it could become if its form changed (i.e., mass 'terror'). The former he defined as 'individual political assassinations', but he would approve apparently guerrilla-type actions with party involvement when controlled by a centralized organization of mass popular activity and as part of mass popular revolutionary upheaval. (Ryan, 2011, p. 253)

This positioning is coherent with Lenin's belief that the masses were able to organize themselves, with the help of the party, without the need to incite them through sporadic acts of gratuitous violence. Only the organized struggle of the proletariat towards the bourgeoisie was considered a legitimate use of violence against the oppressors, since it was the only reasonable and viable mechanism for the annihilation of the enemies of the proletariat. This notion is based on Lenin's interpretation of the *Communist Manifesto*, which portrayed the proletariat as the only true revolutionary class.

## **1.2 The dynamics and characteristics of revolutionary vs. reactionary violence**

The need for violence during and after the first part of Lenin's theoretical civil war (the overthrow of the oppressive regime) was centered on the unreliability of the support of the petty bourgeoisie for the revolutionary cause:

If we really knew positively that the petty bourgeoisie will support the proletariat in the accomplishment of its, the proletariat's, revolution it would be pointless to speak of a 'dictatorship', for we would then be fully guaranteed so overwhelming a majority that we could get on very well without a dictatorship. (Lenin, 1902, ch.4)

What is argued here is that only through the dictatorship of the proletariat (the chief structure for organized violence against the bourgeoisie in the future Leninist revolutionary state) the revolutionary forces will be able to contain the advances of its class enemies and traitors. In the first months of the revolutionary process in Russia, Lenin, throughout his works, actively tried to

detail all the inherently irreconcilable traits of the proletariat/reactionary-bourgeoisie dualist relationship at the moment of the overthrow of the tsarist regime. Lenin did this characterization based on five distinct vectors: spontaneity, aims, political consciousness, forces and tenacity.

The differences in the spontaneous nature of each force were caused by the disparity between the origins of the respective armed forces. While the revolutionary proletarians were able to directly organize themselves in an organic and decentralized manner, the reactionary forces were often created out of conspiracies, treasons and frauds of high military officers, which aimed to force part of the army to work for their cause. The comparison was highlighted by Lenin in one of his first pamphlets of the Russian Civil War era:

It is beyond all doubt that the spontaneity of the movement is proof that it is deeply rooted in the masses, that its roots are firm and that it is inevitable. The proletarian revolution is firmly rooted, the bourgeois counter-revolution is without roots—this is what the facts prove if examined from the point of view of the spontaneous nature of the movement. (Lenin, 1917, p.30)

Lenin was proud to admit that “his” Bolshevik party laid down its aims, end-goals, and strategies in an open and transparent way, either through public debate, pamphlets or propaganda. Reactionary forces, on the other hand, were labeled as imposters and opportunists who would use the facade of a token support for revolutionary demands in order to instrumentalize the factions within the civil war, as well as the proletarians and the poor peasantry:

As far as the aims of the movement are concerned, the facts tell us that the proletarian civil war can come out with an open exposition of its final aims before the people and win the sympathies of the working people, whereas the bourgeois civil war can attempt to lead part of the masses only by concealing its aims; this is the tremendous difference in them as far as the class-consciousness of the masses is concerned. (Lenin, 1917, p.31)

Another key difference between both movements was their willingness to accept reforms and parliamentary disputes. Lenin moved towards an analysis of the potential strength of the proletariat in either situation. He argued that the use of parliamentary power weakened the revolutionary cause, as it deceived the proletariat into thinking that the intensive suppression of bourgeois reactions to the revolution could be organized and contained by the use of institutional systems of decision-making. Lenin argued, instead, that direct action and extra-parliamentary organization were the instances where revolutionary proletariat could galvanize at its full force:

A comparison of the data on the "parliamentary" (...) (and of the) mass movements fully corroborates, in respect of Russia, an observation often made in the West, namely, that the revolutionary proletariat is incomparably stronger in the extra-parliamentary than in the parliamentary struggle, as far as influencing the masses and drawing them into the struggle is concerned. This is a very important observation in respect of civil war. (Lenin, 1917, p.33)

The strength of the enemies of the revolution was based on the amassment of wealth, as they were supported by the wealthy bourgeoisie class and by outside powers. Lenin believed that the revolution would gain its strength from the individual commitment of revolutionaries to the cause, which he proved by demonstrating the capacity of revolutionary movements to outburst even in heavily anti-Bolshevik areas:

(...) still he (Alexey Kaledin) has not aroused a mass movement in his "home" region, in a Cossack region far removed from Russian democracy in general. On the part of the proletariat, on the contrary, we observe spontaneous outbursts of the movement in the very centre of the influence and power of anti-Bolshevik, all-Russia democracy. (Lenin, 1917, p.34)

Finally, Lenin leaned towards the question of the tenacity of each movement. The revolutionary proletariat, during the revolutionary process, was persecuted both ideologically, since it did not dominate the mass press or the propaganda forces in Russia, and through direct repression, which included thousands of arrests and the suppression of newspapers and pamphlets, as well as the destruction of Bolshevik-dominated printing-plants and propaganda production sites. Nonetheless, the revolutionary forces were still able to mobilize, even with more force than before. The proletariat could not be shaken or subjugated, since the *"only possible means of struggle against the proletarian revolutionary trend are ideological influence and repressions"*. (Lenin, 1917, p.35). Those means were, as shown, not successful in decelerating the progress of the organically organized revolutionary forces. After comparing the characteristics between revolutionary and reactionary forces, Lenin summarized their diametrically opposed principles:

Summing up the results of the analysis in which we compared the data furnished by the history of the Russian revolution, we arrive at the conclusion that the beginning of the proletariat's civil war has revealed the strength, the class-consciousness, deep-rootedness, growth, and tenacity of the movement. The beginning of the bourgeoisie's civil war has revealed no strength, no class-consciousness among the masses, no depth whatsoever, no chance of victory. (Lenin, 1917, p.37)

## 2. *The State and Revolution* as the guideline for the revolutionary *praxis*

Lenin's *The State and Revolution*, almost entirely written before the events of 1917, had a double purpose. On the one hand, this work can be seen as a restatement of Marx's and Engels' theory of the state. Lenin had a clear and defined objective throughout this work: expound the fundamental nature of the proletarian revolution, the form of this revolution and the methods it should necessarily adopt in order to fulfill the goal of ending the oppressive tsardom regime and the bourgeoisie political order overall. This was necessary in order to pave a way to allow for a socialist order to take its place. On the other hand, *The State and Revolution* can be seen as a "(...) *theoretical work looking into the future, a sort of prophecy that attempts to depict the new socialist order, the future utopia.*" (Barfield, 1971, pp. 45-46). Either way, Lenin set out to show mainly two different things: why a revolution was the only viable way of overthrowing the bourgeois state as a means to institute a socialist society and why this revolution had to be a violent one. In other words, the role of the state had to be studied and explained in order to delineate a path for the revolutionary masses. This was precisely what his book set out to do:

The question of the relation of the socialist proletarian revolution to the state, therefore, is acquiring not only practical political importance, but also the significance of a most urgent problem of the day, the problem of explaining to the masses what they will have to do before long to free themselves from capitalist tyranny. (Lenin, 1918, p.4)

At first glance, *The State and Revolution* appears to be quite antithetic to most Lenin's works, both in spirit and in program, especially in regard to the actual policies and mechanisms for the implementation of the goals of the Revolution. The role of proletarian masses is clearly more exalted than that of the party, the latter being almost entirely omitted in this work. There is a strong emphasis on the spontaneous abilities present in the working class, instead of its capacity for organization and discipline (catalyzed by the guidance of the Bolshevik party), that usually characterized Lenin's more "practical" works. As Rodney Barfield explains:

Whereas Lenin had argued earlier that full capitalist development must precede socialism and had branded the narodnik "leap across the centuries" as utopian, in *The State and Revolution* he put forward his own utopian "leap" but tried to eliminate it from the ranks of utopian schemes by providing for a brief period of transition from capitalism to communism. He admitted that it would be impossible to destroy all officialdom at one blow - that would be utopian. But to break up the old bureaucratic machinery and replace it with a new and different apparatus, an apparatus that would gradually "wither away" as its

functions were replaced by the "natural" cooperation of all members of society - that was not utopian. (Barfield, 1971, p.46)

## 2.1 The state as the organization of violence between classes

As is the case of most Marxists works, the question of the organized violence of the bourgeoisie-dominated state is extensively studied in *The State and Revolution*. Lenin defines the state in quite simple terms: "*The state is a special organization of force: it is an organization of violence for the suppression of some class.*" (Lenin, 1918, p.17). The bourgeois state's existence is solely based on coercion, perpetuated by a social class's desire to control other social classes within society, especially in light of the irreconcilable interests of the bourgeoisie and the working classes. As long as the state is sustained by this desire, the coercion over the working classes will not disappear, even if that state is a democratic republic:

(...) if the state is the product of the irreconcilability of class antagonisms, if it is a power standing above society and "alienating itself more and more from it", it is clear that the liberation of the oppressed class is impossible not only without a violent revolution, but also without the destruction of the apparatus of state power which was created by the ruling class and which is the embodiment of this "alienation". (Lenin, 1918, p.7)

The destruction of the apparatus of the state is a central theme of *The State and Revolution*, with Lenin arguing that the *locus* of endemic oppression of the working class would only end if the bourgeois state was completely destroyed and replaced by a socialist state, something that did not happen in "*all previous revolutions (that) perfected the state machine, whereas it must be broken, smashed.*" (Lenin, 1918, p.19). The socialist state, i.e., the dictatorship of the proletariat, was Lenin's interpretation of Marx's and Engels' thoughts in the *Communist Manifesto* on the role of the state in the establishment of communism. After establishing the need to smash the (bourgeois) machinery of the state, Lenin addressed the need for the continued (and organized) use of violence as a mechanism to achieve the systematic abolition of the remnants of the bourgeoisie power in the socialist state:

The proletariat will use its political supremacy to wrest, by degree, all capital from the bourgeoisie, to centralize all instruments of production in the hands of the state, i.e., of the proletariat organized as the ruling class; and to increase the total productive forces as rapidly as possible. (Lenin, 1918, p.16)

Lenin vividly rejected the anarchists' suggestions that the workers should immediately lay down their weapons as soon as they overthrow the bourgeois regime. Instead, he suggested that "(...) *we (the revolutionary proletariat) must temporarily make use of the instruments, resources, and methods of state power against the exploiters, just as the temporary dictatorship of the oppressed class is necessary for the abolition of classes.*" (Lenin, 1918, p.36). The argument here is that once the bourgeois state is destroyed and replaced by a different kind of state, i.e., the dictatorship of the proletariat, the power relation between classes within the new state will be inverted, with the majority of the revolutionary forces working to suppress the reactionary response. Lenin argues that this transitional state is bound to disappear as soon it fulfills its role of suppressing the enemies of the revolution. In Hans Kelsen's words:

(...) the dictatorship of the proletariat is a state and at the same time it is no state. In complete conformity with Marx and Engels, Lenin maintains that the coercive power of proletarian state is to be exercised only against the former bourgeoisie, and that as soon as the bourgeoisie is completely abolished the coercive machinery of the state will disappear. (Kelsen, 1955, p.52)

## 2.2 The dictatorship of the proletariat as an instance of civil war

The transitional period between the old and the new regime would be entirely dedicated to a war between two factions within the polity. These factions, the revolutionary proletariat and the reactionary forces, would be embroiled in a conflict for control of the authority over the polity. The initial phase of this conflict would be what Marx called the "lower" stage of Communist society. Barfield, while addressing Lenin's *The State and Revolution*, summarized this stage:

The lower stage would involve the abolition of the standing army, which would be replaced by the armed masses; the abolition of all private property, which would be replaced by the social ownership of all property and the means of economic production; the election of all "officials" by direct vote, subject to immediate recall. (Barfield, 1971, p.46)

Lenin took a very active role in drafting the Soviet constitution of 1918 and was one of its staunchest supporters. Of particular interest is the very punitive and clear Article 23 which reads "*Being guided by the interests of the working class as a whole, the Russian Socialist Federated Soviet Republic deprives all individuals and groups of individuals of rights which could be utilized by them to the detriment of the Socialist Revolution.*" (R.S.F.S.R., 1918). Other articles of the Soviet constitution entail similar constitutional goals. Turning outwards, it becomes quite obvious that this is an explicit declaration of war on the

bourgeois capitalist world and its supporters, with the existence of the socialist state as the chief structure to fight that war. Lenin unquestionably indicated that what he understood of the mode of acting of the dictatorship of the proletariat was that it should use coercion and violence to protect the interests of the revolution and the proletarians themselves, while thwarting counter-revolutionary efforts and advancing the interests of the now emancipated masses. However, Lenin was also confident that the use of violence to overthrow violence itself was justified in order to achieve a peaceful, non-oppressive society and that this violent state of affairs (the civil war between revolutionary and reactionary forces) would be quickly overcome. As Evans explains:

He (Lenin) does argue that the state will begin to wither away at once with the beginning of socialism, in the sense that, because the majority will for the first time exercise coercion over a relatively small minority, less coercion will be necessary to protect the new relations of production. (Evans, 1987, pp.16-17)

It is important to note that some of the characteristics of the bourgeois state would be maintained during the transitional (socialist) state, as Lenin conceded that the masses would not change their habits overnight and must be reeducated during the lower stage of communism. This problem arises out of the fact that the masses were not:

(...) entirely free from traditions or vestiges of capitalism. Hence the interesting phenomenon that communism in its first phase retains "the narrow horizon of bourgeois law". Of course, bourgeois law in regard to the distribution of consumer goods inevitably presupposes the existence of the bourgeois state, for law is nothing without an apparatus capable of enforcing the observance of the rules of law. (Lenin, 1918, p.52)

This view of a "withering state" is entirely consistent with Marx's and Engels' writings and Lenin, through his interpretation of those authors, was able to justify the need to use the "new" socialist state, led by a vanguard party, to lead and guide the masses through the stages of communism.

The higher stage of communism would come in the aftermath of the "class civil war" and involved much more than just politics and economics, as it was intrinsically tied with the social, cultural and psychological characteristics of the population. It is a stage where every citizen, free from bourgeois oppression and reactionary forces, would be able to perform his functions to the limit of his abilities and receive according to his needs. Lenin believed that it was only natural that citizens "*become accustomed to observing the necessary rules of social intercourse when there is no exploitation, when there is nothing that arouses indignation, evokes protest and revolt, and creates the need for*

*suppression.*" (Lenin, 1918, p.52), meaning that labor would be pleasant, productive and, above all, faced with naturality. Without the need for personal material profit as an incentive, social relations would be pacified. Nonetheless, as Barfield's analyses in Lenin's work:

This stage would be achieved only after the masses subordinated individual desires to the interests of the whole society, only after man's competitive instincts were transformed into a spirit of voluntary cooperation. When this stage of social harmony had been reached, society would witness the "withering away of the state," the "special functions of a special stratum" having become the everyday tasks of every citizen. (Barfield, 1971, p.47)

## Conclusion

The revolutions of 1905 and 1917 were powerful catalyzers of Lenin's optimism towards the success of the Bolshevik party and the revolutionary masses. These two events justified the hope that he always had in mankind and provided concrete proofs about his thoughts on how a proletarian revolution should take place and about his assumptions on human nature. Leninism thought understands the concept of revolution through a narrow concept of civil war in where there is no neutrality nor compromises, characterized by the question of "Who devours whom?". The materialization of the socialist state as an instrument of class struggle provided the empowered masses with a way to fight back oppression. Through a civil war, the revolutionary proletariat could monopolize the use of state-instruments in order to crush the remaining bourgeois reactionaries, while constitutionally disenfranchise entire categories of citizens who were labeled as enemies of the revolution. Although admittedly only a transitional state, Lenin himself conceded that this state would last through "*an entire epoch of fiercest civil war*" (Lenin, 1960, p. 405).

One of the key aspects of Lenin's study of civil war was his conception of revolution as a just and moral civil war, since it served as an eschatological purpose – the deliverance of a new stage of development for mankind, one which was free from capitalist oppression. Lenin's words on the 1905 events demonstrate this perfectly:

Revolution [. . .] is a life-and-death struggle between the old Russia, the Russia of slavery, serfdom, and autocracy, and the new, young, people's Russia, the Russia of the toiling masses, who are reaching out towards light and freedom, in order afterwards to start once again a struggle for the complete emancipation of mankind from all oppression and all exploitation. (Lenin, 1905a, p.29)

Leninism viewed the revolutionary struggle as an exercise of self-defense on part of the oppressed and it was this stance that justified Lenin's willingness to resort to and even support violent methods of struggle against regimes that were keen on keeping the masses in chains, while maintaining the privileges of an elite by means of terror and coercion towards the masses. This war, waged in name of the masses and galvanized by revolutionary ideals, would be a war against violence itself, in a definitive last stand for the emancipation of the proletariat. The revolutionary civil war of liberation was, for Lenin:

(...) the only lawful, rightful, just and truly great war. This war is not waged in the selfish interests of a handful of rulers and exploiters, like any and all other wars, but in the interests of the masses of the people against the tyrants, in the interests of the toiling and exploited millions upon millions against despotism and violence. (Lenin, 1905b, ch 3.)

Violent and strong coercive means were not just efficient; they were also natural and inevitable steps of the revolutionary transformations, especially in Russia. The origins of militant Leninism, which aimed to provide a practical vision on how a revolution should proceed in Russia (and even in other countries), were quite apparent in Lenin's thought since the early 19th century and were successfully implemented in 1917. His conceptualization of revolutionary civil war as a way to negate and overcome bourgeois violence is an idea that resonated until contemporaneity and still has a considerable mass of followers today. It was Lenin's approach to class struggle that resignified the concept of revolution as a subset of civil war. Revolution became, indeed, a synonym of civil war.

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