The State and Socialism.

A LECTURE

DELIVERED BY

GABRIEL DEVILLE

in Paris, April 26, 1895.

TRANSLATED BY

ROBERT RIVES LA MOUNTÉ.

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Continued on 3rd page Cover.
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I.

What do the socialists think about the State? How do they regard it theoretically in the present and for the future? What are the practical consequences which result from their views? Such are the questions which I propose to answer here and now, and this answer will be the one which appears to me to be in most perfect harmony with the facts, for conformity to the facts is, and ever must be, the guiding principle of modern scientific socialism, of our socialism.

What is the State?

Here I could easily make a show of learning by quoting a number of definitions drawn from philosophers and writers more or less famous; but such an enumeration would occupy space and time without being of any real advantage to us; for, in most cases, the word State is identified with other words such as society, nation or government, and so these confused definitions would not
be helpful to my hearers or readers as the authors of the definitions did not themselves comprehend the essential distinctions. Do not fancy that this criticism is made by the socialists alone. You will find this same confusion set forth in the work of one of our adversaries, in *La Politique* of M. Charles Benoist,¹ who is the last, so far as I know, who has treated these questions among us.

And so, partly because he is the most recent writer, and has thus been able to profit by the labors of all the others, but more particularly because he has succeeded in avoiding confusions of a nature to obscure the question at issue, from among all the definitions that bourgeois writers have given of the State, I select for the purposes of my discussion that of M. Charles Benoist.

"The State," he maintains, "is the moral personification of the nation endowed with perpetuity and incarnated in institutions, clothed with the power and right of constraint. It may be recognized by these two signs: it makes laws and it levies taxes."²

The State, I will maintain in my turn, is the public power of coercion, created and maintained in human societies by their division into classes, and which, having force at its disposal, makes laws and levies taxes.

The only real difference between these two definitions—but it is a difference of the first importance—consists in the fact that in the latter—i. e. for socialists—the existence of the State in a society is bound up with the existence of classes in that society. Hence, this conclu-

¹Published by Chailley, Paris, 1894, p. 19.
²*La Politique*, p. 25.
sion: before classes came into being there was no State; when classes shall cease to exist there will be no State. While in the former,—i.e. for bourgeois theorists,—the State exists independently of every other social institution and, in particular, of classes. According to M. Charles Benoist, "it is congenital in human societies, and they could not live without it." Contrary to our opinion, the same author thinks that "primitive communities, the embryos of society, contain an embryonic State," and that the State is a "moral personality endowed with perpetuity."

Parenthetically, we remark here again that passion for perpetuity so marked in the ruling, property-holding class and in the economists, their official defenders. According to them, indeed, the situation from which the capitalist profits is simply the realization, the embodiment of eternal verities, and eternal capital must go on eternally breeding more capital. The capitalists, in their insatiable thirst for gain, cry to their God with all zeal and sincerity: "As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be: world without end. Amen"; but this prayer, even though it be granted, is not enough. They require, besides this, the protection of the State. And so they and their theorists have eagerly and emphatically pronounced themselves in favor of its perpetuity, blaming its intervention only when its powers are not exerted in their behalf.

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1 *La Politique*, p. 29.
2 *La Politique*, p. 29.
3 *Idem*, p. 27.
Which of the two—the socialist theory of the State or the bourgeois theory—corresponds the more closely to the reality? I believe that I can prove—at all events, I am going to try to prove—that it is ours. From the definition that I have given of the State, it follows in the first place that the State has not always existed, that there have been societies without a State, but the absence of a State did not prevent these societies from having an organization. My thesis is that a social organization is possible without a State, and that the State appears and subsists only in societies divided into classes.

Some societies without States have continued to exist down to our own times among the Indians of North America. And it was by studying the social regime of these Indians, and of the Iroquois especially, that Morgan was able, by his remarkable work, *Ancient Society*, to enable us at last to clearly understand the primitive societies of Greece and Italy, societies which were based, like the Indian societies, upon the *gens*.

Morgan's work has not been translated into French, but it has been epitomized and perfected by Engels, and the historical details that follow are drawn from this study of Engels.

What was the organization established among the Indians of America, and notably among the Iroquois, i.e. among those of the Indians who developed their social

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1 "In primitive society, a body of blood-kindred, descended from a common ancestor, having a common gentile name, and distinguished by a totem or crest."—*Standard Dictionary.*

2 "L'origine de la famille, de la propriété privée et de l'État."—Engels (translated by H. Ravé).
forms the most highly? Its foundation was the *gens*, just as it was among all the barbarians whose mode of life we have been able to ascertain. At this point it suffices for us to know that the *gens* was a particular grouping of individuals, having a real or assumed common origin, dwelling in the same region, and never marrying members of the same *gens*.

All the members of the Indian *gens* were free and equal, and acted as brothers toward one another. In time of peace they elected a sachem, whose election they could always annul at their pleasure, and whose authority, destitute of any means of coercion, was simply moral. As to the chiefs chosen in case of war, they were charged only with the conduct of expeditions and their appointments, like those of the sachems, were revocable. Sovereignty belonged to the assembly of adults, men and women.

In the tribe, a coalition of a certain number of *gentes*, and in the federation of tribes which was the most highly developed social form of the Indians, the sovereign power was exercised by a coalition of sachems forming either the tribal council, or the federal council, and their deliberations took place in the presence of the members of the tribe or of the federation, who had the right to participate in the discussion. But, the sachems composing these councils could at any moment be recalled by their respective *gentes*. Moreover, in the tribal council all the sachems, and in the federal council, where the vote was by tribes, all the tribes had to agree to render a decision valid.

Therefore, if we find here a social organization, we
find nothing corresponding to the State, not only as I have defined it, but even as our adversaries define it. For we do not find here the slightest trace of that which constitutes the State according to M. Chas. Benoist—no authority "clothed with force and the right of constraint," and the law, the guiding rule of a certain collectivity, is merely the effective expression of the will of that collectivity, and there are no taxes.

To prove the truth of my thesis—the existence of societies without States—I have referred you to specific facts. To support his—the existence of the State from the origin of societies—M. Charles Benoist contents himself with affirming that "the first military chief was the first State."¹ Now, if it is true that the executive power has most frequently sprung from the institution of a supreme military command, it is false that the military chief has always had any special power whatsoever apart from the direction of the operations of war. In particular, it is false that he was "the guardian of order"² in collectivities based on the gens.

Order in these communities—as has been proved in the case of the American Indians—was admirably maintained spontaneously without any system or apparatus of coercion, notwithstanding the number of common affairs to be adjusted, because their institutions did not give rise to any antagonism between categories of individuals, for all were free and equal. And we know what

¹ La Politique, p. 29.
² Idem., p. 29.
fine men these Indians were, how noble their moral qualities—save where their enemies were concerned—their energy and their dignity.

I must here forestall an interpretation, which the adversaries of socialism often give to our arguments, and point out that the eulogy in certain respects of primitive societies does not at all imply a purpose to revert to the ancient social forms. Let these gentlemen, so hostile to socialism and so proud of their civilization, calm themselves. We do not dream of leading them back to that which they call the state of Nature. It would, indeed, be too great a change for most of them to have to substitute the uprightness and horror of falsehood of the Indian for their dishonest polemical methods.

If I have spoken at such length of the Indians of North America, it is because it has been possible in our day to study among them social forms which have elsewhere disappeared centuries since, and in that way to demonstrate the existence of organized societies without a State. Now, just as the phases of evolution—infancy, youth, mature age, old age—with their special characteristics, follow each other in much the same way in all men whose development is not arrested by special circumstances, in the same way the various human societies—from the point of view of the family, property, religion and politics—pass through analogous phases and, like individuals, make more or less progress along the path of evolution common to them all. And, while, as Marx said, "the country that is more developed industrially only shows, to the less developed, the image
of its own future,”¹ in their turn the more backward countries present to the others the image of their own past. As a matter of fact, in all peoples whose early institutions it has been possible to study, the gens has been found to have been, at a certain stage of development, the social unit.

Notably the gens existed in Greece and at Rome, and, back of the Greek gens and the Roman gens, such as they are known to us, glimpses may be caught, though they disappeared long before, of the characteristic features of the Indian gens. Thus in the Homeric era, where, however, the gens was already modified and where the elements of a new organization were making their appearance, we find still subsisting the sovereignty of the popular assembly and the non-existence of a public power distinct from the assemblage of the adult males and capable of being turned against them. If, on the other hand, we see there the dawn of the establishment of noble families and the appearance in the germ of the principle of heredity in the selection of the military chief, it is obvious, nevertheless, that the chief, the basileus, has only military, religious and judicial attributes. A political or governmental power, analogous to that which essentially constitutes the State, does not yet exist.

How did the transformation take place? How was the State born?

The distinctive mark of the social organization based on the gens is the solidarity of the interests of all its

members. Between them there are no antagonistic situations, and therefore no desire for the repression of some and no power of coercion for the benefit of others. The offspring of social conditions of an extreme simplicity, this organization could not adapt itself to more complex conditions of life. At the best era of the gens, production was very limited and the means of existence depended chiefly on the clemency or rigor of the climate. But while what we call the New World (America) was, before the European conquest, very nearly without any animals suited for domestication, the Old World was abundantly supplied with them. And it seems that this is what enabled it to surpass so prodigiously and so comparatively quickly the inferior degree of culture at which the Indians of America stopped short.

The domestication of animals, their breeding, the formation of large herds, and later on new discoveries like those of iron and its utilization in tilling the ground, together with the development of various handicrafts, systematized and increased production, compared to its former condition, to such an extent that men were able to produce in excess of their needs. Slavery became possible as soon as a greater number of laborers were required by the social conditions realized, and thereafter they made slaves of the prisoners of war whom the Indians either killed or adopted into the gens.

While there was thus created the division between free men and slaves, the free men themselves were divided into rich and poor.

Instead of remaining the common property of the tribe or of the gens, the herds soon became the individual
property of the heads of families. This property in flocks and herds had the peculiarity of increasing in the hands of its holders. The importance of private property and of the principal proprietors increased, and the principle or mode of private appropriation was at last extended so as to include the land. The inequality of wealth, which was the consequence of these facts, created the germ of an aristocracy.

Wealth being from that time the object to strive for, war upon neighboring peoples, solely with a view to pillage and booty, became a permanent fact. The authority of the military chiefs, and especially of the supreme chief, increased. The choice of their successors from among their next of kin—made freely at first by preference—became a regular custom and finally the accepted rule. There was thus formed a category of families, already powerful through their wealth, to whom belonged the more important functions. Then, there were on the one side a minority enjoying hereditary privileges, and on the other side the non-privileged and the slaves. There you have a society divided into antagonistic classes—a servitude, a subordination existing which make a power of domination within the society indispensable, while subjection and domination were unknown and unnecessary in the social organization based on the gens.

For the security of a social order involving the division of the population into classes, a public power calculated to compel the respect of the non-privileged is necessary. "Arm a man," Stendhal said ironically, "and then continue to oppress him, and you will see that he will be
pervasive enough, if he can, to turn his arms against you." The privileged at once suspect this latent perversity. And so as soon as a population is split up into classes, the armed force no longer corresponds to the whole of the male population able to wield arms, and the constituted force can be opposed to the rest of the population. Besides the armed force, the public power, necessary for every society based on the separation of men into classes, includes various means of coercion, such as prisons, etc., that were not to be found in societies built upon the gens.

To provide for the support of this public power resources are needed, and this accounts for the appearance of taxes.

We now see how there grew up, along with the influence—at the least predominant—of the aristocracy in the general administration and passing of laws, the repressive and fiscal institutions which, as we have seen, characterize the State.

Thus the State whose non-existence in a society may be demonstrated so long as there are no classes in that society, makes its appearance in a more or less developed form with the existence of classes and the antagonism they involve. The product of a definite social order, it will last as long as the circumstances that have rendered it inevitable.

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1 'De l'amour,' chap. liv.
II.

Undoubtedly the disappearance of primitive communities, of societies based on the *gens*, was a true progress, and yet they produced—as I have just pointed out in the case of the Indians of America—men endued, in general, with a moral superiority which the succeeding social organizations have been unable to attain in a like degree. Here, it seems, there is a contradiction which, as it requires some explanatory comments, leads me to say a word on a question raised before you by our eminent friend Jaurès. I do not pretend that there is any absolute urgency to enter upon this question here; but I hope you will excuse the digression.

In our opinion, he has asked us,¹ is there progress in the march of human development, and, if there is progress, what is its cause? For his part, he finds the required explanation in a predisposition of the human mind to aspire toward the realization of righteousness.

Obviously there has been progress. But it is not through aspiration toward the realization of righteousness that this progress has been accomplished. Although men had from the beginning a more or less confused

¹ "Idealism and Materialism in the Conception of History," a lecture by Jean Jaurès, with a reply by Paul Lafargue, Paris, 1895, pp. 11, 12.
sentiment of justice, progress has been brought about neither by this sentiment nor by the idealist manifestations of the human conscience; and the propositions, which the subject I am discussing to-day have led me to establish, furnish the proof of this.

The extension of private property, as well as the disappearance of the gens, which finally resulted from it constituted, as I have said, an historical progress; but, so far as concerns human dignity and morality, the extension of the one and the disappearance of the other, far from constituting a progress, have resulted in a manifest degeneration. The most despicable sentiments then made their appearance. Greed, hypocrisy and false-speaking, induced by personal interests over-excited at the expense of the primitive solidarity, presided over the ruin of the old organization and the appearance of classes.

From that moment to this, every step forward in the conquest of new productive powers by the genius of man, has been the source of misfortunes for the exploited masses. That which has been a progress from the point of view of the evolution of human intelligence, that which in itself should have been a good, has too often, from the point of view of its immediate effect upon men, been in fact a good for a minority only, and an evil, a source of sufferings for all others. This contradiction, this conversion of blessings into curses, which springs from the exploitation of the majority, is, so long as classes exist, the foundation of the social order, and it will last as long as classes and the exploitation that they imply shall exist. And the dominant idea, if it is neces-
sary to specify one in particular, has been the striving after individual enrichment rather than the tendency toward a more perfect justice.

Yes, there has been progress. Its measure is the degree of knowledge attained; its cause is the mental activity of men exerting itself on the materials provided by the external environment, and developing in proportion to its exertion and to the increase in number and complexity of the materials at its disposition.¹

It would be impossible to attribute a finer role to human intelligence, since man has thus been his own creator. For, by elaborating at any given moment the materials offered him by the external environment, he adds to those materials and in this way makes possible for the better trained, better equipped brain of the future a new and more perfect elaboration. The brain has the faculty of working up the elements drawn from the environment, just as the digestive apparatus has the faculty of digesting. But the power of elaborating and the power of digesting do not necessarily imply elaboration and digestion. In order for these latter to take place, there is requisite something external to man, something more or less substantial, having independent objective reality, which man only assimilates more or less thoroughly and transforms.

The nature of man being given, his action is above all dependent upon the special character of the external environment in which he lives. He can act upon this environment, transform it and increase its resources and

¹ "All history is nothing but a continuous transformation of human nature."—Marx, Misère de la philosophie, p. 144.
thereby act upon those who shall come after him and who will have as their determining environment the new environment which he will have aided in creating. Yet, though he is able thus to modify the environment by which he has been formed, he not only can, of course, have no retrospective effect upon the conditions of which he is himself the product and must simply take the elements of his environment exactly as they are transmitted to him, but besides this, whatever may be the special intentions and purposes that govern his action, the latter leads to unforeseen results. Just as he cannot choose his starting-point, so he cannot control the ultimate result of his innovations.¹

The inventions and not the intentions of men have been the cause of progress. If, in particular, the intention to achieve more perfect justice—which could not have been the motive of many of those whose labors have brought progress to pass—had embodied itself in facts with the advance of progress, those whose situation is such that they must necessarily benefit by every increase of justice, the exploited, ought to have seen the degree of their exploitation gradually falling lower and lower. Now, it is just the contrary that is proven for each of the great periods of history. To take the situation of the exploited masses during the period of the wages-system

¹“Man makes his own history, but he does not make it out of the whole cloth; he does not make it out of conditions chosen by himself, but out of such as he finds close at hand. The tradition of all past generations weighs like an Alp upon the brain of the living.”—Marx, The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte. International Pub. Co., p. 5.
as an example, things, far from going from better to better, have gone from bad to worse.

This will not be doubted by those who do not limit themselves to comparing absurdly the mode of life of the laborer of to-day with the mode of life of the laborer of former times. It is ridiculous to draw an argument from a comparison of the life of the working-class only at two different periods—one in which the non-satisfaction of wants is due to the fact that the wants themselves are unknown and unfelt, and the other in which the same wants have been acquired and cannot be satisfied. What should be compared in order to estimate exactly the change for the better or the worse are the respective economic positions of the capitalists and the wage-workers at the two periods. At all events, it cannot be denied by those who have—and I am of the number—the smallest possible tendency to make themselves the apologists of the past, that the wages of the man sufficed in former times for the support of the whole family, and that to-day there must be added to those wages those of the wife and the child to enable the family to live no better relatively to the conditions of life normal now and then.

The result of progress has been to increase the knowledge and power of man, to multiply the forces at his service and to extend the possibility of more comfortable living and fuller development. The possibility of greater comfort, I said, but, alas, the realization of this comfort is possible only to a minority, and for the majority it is too often but a source of new suffering. Such is the contradictory result of progress. And from the dawn
of civilization, from the time when classes and with them the rudiments of this new institution, the State, began to exist, down to the present hour when classes still persist, human development has been unable to escape from this contradiction.

It is certain that if we judge this development in its entirety, from the point of view of the more elevated conception of justice made possible, suggested at the present day by a disinterested observation of the material possibilities, we cannot fail to find that the facts, no longer weighed by the results that they have had to the injury of certain categories of persons, but taken in the mass and considered in themselves, are more nearly in harmony with this conception as we approach more nearly the time when this conception shall be able to impose itself upon humanity, and if this were not so it would be a cause for surprise.

But it is also certain that, under the regime of classes, civilization inexorably implies the exploitation of certain classes by others and that, therefore, the progress accomplished, especially in the mode of production, instead of being immediately beneficial to all, is an assured benefit to a minority only, and is often an immediate ill for many—for all those notably whose former means of existence are destroyed without compensation by a technical improvement. The latter, the exploited, under the blow of this new evil, struggle to rid themselves of it. Frequently, not grasping the cause of this but too real evil, they attribute it to a scientific discovery, to a machine for instance, instead of putting the blame where it belongs, upon the mode of appropriation of the results
of science. This conflict more or less ably waged, which would not exist if the conditions of life for all classes were constantly improving, justifies the words of Marx: "It is the bad side (of human nature) which produces the movement that makes history, by engendering conflict."¹

This conflict is precisely—and here I return to the true subject of this lecture—the efficient reason for the persistence of the State.

¹ Misère de la philosophie, p. 114,
As soon as there are in a society a possessing class and a dispossessed class, there exists in that society a constant source of collisions which the social organization would not long resist, if there was not a power charged with maintaining, to use the consecrated phrase, the "established order," charged, in other words, with the protection of the economic situation of the possessing party, and therefore with the duty of ensuring the submission of the dispossessed party. Now, from its very birth, this has been the role of the State.

An organ of conservation, the offspring of struggles or threats of struggles between conflicting interests, conflicting because of the antagonism of material conditions, born—as we have seen—with the division of society into classes, the State has evolved with the development of that division, i.e., in short, with the economic relations which form the basis of that division; but, under the various appearances it has worn, its object has remained the same because, ever since the appearance of classes, it has always had a privileged economic situation to defend and conflicts to repress. When it is known that the State is a class-instrument it is easy to understand whence comes its character of relative permanence which bourgeois writers point out without explaining.
Thus M. Charles Benoist writes: “In the notion of the State the moderns have introduced a new element—permanence.” Why have the moderns “introduced” this new element? Was it theirs to choose whether to introduce it or not? These are the questions to which in M. Benoist you will find no response. M. Charles Benoist, I repeat, shows that it is there; he does not explain it. “The French State,” he continues, “is the same under this third Republic as under Napoleon I., under Louis XIV., under Henry IV. and under Charles V. It is true the government changes its form by revolutions, and its personnel by the mere lapse of time, but the government is not the State; it is only the envelope and, as it were, the clothing of the State... it changes, while the State does not change. One of the chief traits of the State, perpetuity, or at least long duration, government does not have... Government is that which passes away in the State which abides. Governments, indeed, are like the hours, the successive periods, the phases of the evolution of the State.”

Here we have affirmations exact in substance, if not always in form. Yet, in my judgment, they are comprehensible only to those who know what it is that is permanent in the State and the reason of that permanence, only to those who know, to put it differently, that the State is, under its varying forms, a class-instru-

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1 La Politique, p. 25.
2 Idem., pp. 26, 27.
3 La Politique, p. 57.
4 Idem, p. 58.
ment which has lasted and will last on that account so long as there have been and so long as there shall be classes.

He who understands and admits this, will readily and clearly see, I do not say, and I beg that no one will represent me as saying, the uselessness of changes in governmental forms or constitutions, but the naïveté of expecting from these changes results that it is impossible for them to give. It is now possible to gauge the candor of our inflexible radicals who attach so much importance to pure questions of form and proclaim such a strong intellectual antipathy for our collectivist theory, although they can view with complacency the farcical middle-class attempts to make the State the impartial protector of capital and labor alike.

I have pointed out to you the genesis of the State and shown you its necessary, inevitable character. I have striven, in a word, to justify the terms of the definition given in the first part of this lecture. Whether or not I have succeeded in my task, you must at least have been convinced that the socialist definitions are not arbitrary. Our opponents may very legitimately discuss them and attempt to prove that our terminology is wrong. That which they have no right to do is to attack socialism without taking the pains to know clearly and definitely the meaning that, rightly or wrongly, it gives to the words that it employs. By disdaining this elementary precaution, they expose themselves to the most ridiculous confusion and waste their time in combattng something quite different from that which the socialists defend.
This has happened in the case of capital. In order to understand what we mean by the suppression of capital, one must know that capital is for us a character which the means of production have taken on under given, definite social conditions, and which they may lose without affecting their existence in the slightest. It is just the same in the case of the wage-system and wages. The latter term cannot, according to us, be applied to any system of remuneration whatsoever, but only to a mode of remuneration presupposing surplus-labor. It is just the same finally in the case of the word State, which means, in our opinion, a system of social organization which implies necessarily the division of society into classes.

It is not by caprice—it seems to me that I have furnished you the proof of this in the case of the State—that socialists give such or such a meaning to such or such a word. Of course, they may be mistaken; but one can reasonably criticize their theories only by using words in the same sense that they do.

At bottom I am not far from thinking that this ignorance of our definitions is wilful ignorance. It must be more easy to refute that which we do not say and which they put in our mouths, than that which we do say and which they ignore. There are some ideas incompatible with the tranquil security of the possessing class, the class controlling production and power. Among these ideas, the ideas of surplus-labor and of the existence of distinct classes are particularly repugnant to those who profit by just those conditions. They feel that the mere divulgation of the secret of their power is an
impairment of that power, and the very truth contained in our definitions appears to them a danger. And so, not content with avoiding this truth in their own definitions, they avoid it—so far as they are able to—in ours. In order to confound us the more triumphantly, they first change the meaning of our words, then, after the words, they travesty our ideas, and then they have no trouble to demonstrate the absurdity of the fabrications they attribute to us.

* * *

We know what the State is. The State, for us socialists, is not any social organization whatsoever. It is, I have said, and I believe I afterward justified the terms of this definition, the public power of coercion created and maintained in human societies by their division into classes, and which, having force at its disposal, makes laws and levies taxes. What should be the attitude of the socialists toward the State? This is the question that I am now going to examine and that is easy to answer if we bear in mind that the State, having been created by the division of society into classes, is inevitably maintained by that division.

As soon as it is understood that the State is not an independent organism, having its own existence without regard to the interlaced economic relations of men, but is necessarily subordinate to the division of society into classes, and, in consequence, to a particular economic situation, no party whatever can reasonably set up, as the immediate goal for its efforts, the abolition of the
State, nor the suppression of the political power that constitutes it. The State, being a consequence, cannot disappear before the disappearance of the social conditions of which it is the necessary result.

Since the disappearance of the State implies the previous modification of the social conditions, of the economic relations, ought the attack to be made directly upon these relations? Let us revert to the conclusions already established: a certain economic situation begot classes; as soon as there were in the population privileged orders, the latter needed means to preserve their position of vantage, to impose upon all respect for their privileges, and hence the State was born. Hence, the economic situation to be transformed, the situation which begets classes, has its guarantee of perpetuity in the State. That is, in other words, it cannot be radically affected, in a general and permanent way, so long as the State shall defend it against the direct attacks that may be made upon it.

In short, one can abolish the State only after having suppressed classes, and one cannot modify the economic relations of which classes are merely the personification, without acting first upon the State. The question formulated just above is solved. It is necessary to act upon the State and not to aim at present at its abolition; to act upon the State because this is the only way in which it is possible to so adjust the conditions and relations of persons as to bring them into harmony with the economic evolution in progress and thus to make possible the suppression of classes; not to aim at present at its abolition, because it cannot be abolished before the
disappearance of classes, a disappearance that it must itself help to bring to pass. The only practical line of conduct for socialists, for workingmen, is, to use the customary expression, the conquest of political power, the conquest of the State. It is the more and more complete control by them of the public powers, that all their efforts must have in view; it is to this object that all their tactics must be devoted.

The struggle of classes with each other has an economic object, but the form of this struggle must necessarily be political; for, between the material position to be ameliorated and the accomplished amelioration, there rises up like a barrier the power of the State which alone, whatever class controls it, can give a general and mandatory character to the results of the struggle. The State makes the law, and it is only by placing oneself on the political ground that one can succeed in participating in the making of law. History and reason agree in proving the truth of this thesis: the struggle of the "lower" classes is really effective only when it assumes a political character.

Not to speak of the past, what do we see, in fact, in the different countries round about us where they have, notwithstanding, long had, less restricted than among us, the possibility of conducting the struggle on the economic ground? In the countries still without universal suffrage, the struggle has been or is to obtain it. In the countries where universal suffrage is in operation, however imperfect the system may be, the masses are soon driven, by the results of relative successes, to apply themselves principally to returning more and more social-
ists to the various elective assemblies. Undeniably, without being a partisan of all or nothing, one does not obtain immediately as much as one could wish, but by what other process could one do better? Much of the success on the economic ground, indeed, is due to the aid of socialists in office, due, in other words, to political action.

Socialists must work for the continuation of this regular movement by which socialist men and ideas permeate more and more the elective bodies, and this implies a constant propaganda among the masses. It is true that circumstances, paying no heed to our will, may impose upon us later on another mode of action, but that is a matter with which we have nothing to do at present. So long as such circumstances have not come to pass, socialism has nothing to gain by departing from legality, and, in any case, it has nothing to gain by manifesting itself under the form of riots or disturbances. I have explained my views on this subject in a former lecture.¹ I will not repeat myself here, but confine myself to showing that the only present task of socialists must be, to swell the ranks of the socialists, both voters and officials.

The great argument against these tactics is the reproach of parliamentarism² flung at their partisans; as if one was responsible for the bad sides of parlia-

¹Socialism, Revolution and Internationalism. International Library Publishing Co.

²The evils necessarily incident to representative and party government.—Tr.
mentarism, because, while parliamentarism exists, one makes use of it! As if conformity to a law or submission to an institution involved their approbation!

It is easy to criticize parliamentarism and to criticize it justly, but criticism does not prevent it from existing. Modify the machinery of parliamentarism if you can just as much as you may be able to, and I can see no objection, but rather the contrary. Nevertheless it is to be feared that those who are unwilling to deceive themselves about the modifications at present possible, will soon see that it would be just as easy to accomplish at once the substitution of the socialist society for the capitalist society as to secure, under the capitalist regime, any radical changes in parliamentarism. Is it worth while, then, to undertake special campaigns to secure improvements which, however valuable they would be in another environment, are none the less at present either impracticable or of secondary importance?

To seek to accomplish a thorough-going reform of parliamentarism in an environment in which parliamentarism is the governmental form of the capitalist society is equivalent to aiming immediately and before all else at the abolition of the State, and we have seen what must be thought of that aspiration. If we take advantage of all favorable opportunities to effect all possible reforms and improvements in the working of the parliamentary or representative system, we will do well, provided that we do not allow ourselves to be turned aside from the real object of our endeavors, viz., the more and more complete conquest of the political power to be used to give effect to the economic demands of the workers.
Those who strive to keep the workingmen out of the field of political action do not suspect, of course, that they are thus playing the game of the ruling class. By shouting, "No politics!" they are merely echoing the rallying cry that the bourgeoisie has always given to the working-class. The property qualification for the suffrage and the absence of remuneration for office-holders, such as members of the English Parliament, have been nothing but means to keep workingmen out of politics. These means are no longer efficacious. Are those who call themselves socialists ambitious to accomplish, for the profit of the bourgeoisie, what they, by themselves, have finally failed to effect?

In the presence of living issues, the socialists of to-day can no longer confine themselves to academic discussion. The necessity of formulating practical, incontrovertible conclusions forces itself upon them, so that I must enter upon the examination of certain tactics much urged at this time in opposition to those, the correctness of which, I believe, I have just demonstrated.
To compel the capitulation of the capitalist society and its organic protector, the State, some socialists have recently imagined that the political struggle was insufficient and that the recourse must be had to the "general strike." Let us talk of the general strike.

I begin by declaring that I will make no attempt to solve the question as to whether there ought or ought not to be strikes. The question cannot present itself in this way. The strike is the inevitable product of an economic environment based on antagonistic interests and, even though it should wish to, socialism could not suppress the strike, any more than it can, at once, suppress the State or the capitalist society. The only weapon of the working-class on the economic ground, the only means of defense or attack which it has for the protection of its immediate material interests, the strike is a right which the workingmen are right in jealously guarding. But if socialists should use every effort to maintain intact this right for the workers, for all the workers, it is not their business to incite them

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1 This section is devoted by Deville entirely to the consideration of the "general strike." As I believe the latter has few advocates in America, I have taken the liberty of abridging this section.—Tr,
to make use of it. It is not for them either to provoke or inhibit strikes. It is for those immediately interested, those who will have to endure the consequences of their decision, to decide, without pressure of any kind from the non-interested. When those whose interests are at stake have pronounced themselves in favor of a strike, we ought to aid them to gain every possible advantage from the situation in which they have placed themselves. That is, generally speaking, what is and what should be the conduct of socialists so far as concerns strikes.

Having posited this so as to forestall, so far as possible, all false interpretations, I will add that the strike is a weapon, the effectiveness of which we should be careful not to exaggerate, no matter what our point of view may be. Under the most favorable circumstances it may have been able to compel some employers to yield; it has never been able to produce the slightest radical change in the employing system. To look at it more in detail, there have been numerous strikes, great resistance-funds have been amassed and spent, countless efforts and dollars have been expended, and what has been the result attained? Here or there, there have been obtained some ameliorations; but even where these ameliorations have not been merely ephemeral, they have not been incompatible with the increasing prosperity of capital.

The strike is no longer a means on the general efficacy of which one can still cherish illusions. It has passed long since from theory into practice. We have seen, in the United States and England chiefly, tremendous
strikes disposing of enormous resources, prepared and
carried on with an incomparable talent for organization,
and to what have they led? In the United States
socialism is indisputably much more backward than in
Europe. In England, where the strike was formerly
lauded as a panacea, they have come to understand its
dangers and defects so thoroughly that, on the whole,
hostility to it is becoming more and more general, and
political action is growing in favor at its expense.

The experiment has been tried. On the economic
ground, the struggle is too unequal for the working-
class. However great its sacrifices, its self-denial and its
energy, it loses the battle more often than it wins it,
and when it does win it, the advantages that it reaps
do not alter the fact that the victory is very expensive
and precarious. On the political ground, on the con-
trary, the laborer can not only meet the capitalist on a
footing of equality, but, as the working-class is more
numerous than the bourgeois class, it enjoys a real
advantage; so that on the political ground it is for
socialism a mere matter of propaganda and time. Do
you honestly believe that we would not be far nearer
our goal to-day if there had been devoted to the political
struggle half, and only half, of the efforts and
money that have been expended on strikes that have
failed?

Under these conditions, a socialist faction wishes to
generalize the strike—a weapon good, at the most, only
in particular cases—and to set the general strike before
the proletariat as their goal.
If I have made my meaning clear, by reason of the simple fact that it is an economic struggle, that it diverts, in part, if not altogether, the workingman from the political struggle which is the true struggle for him to engage and persevere in, the general strike should be immediately rejected by all minds conscious of the facts and their consequences, by all those who reason without prejudice and “do not pay themselves with words.”

Moreover, even though one were to disregard this consideration, the system of the general strike would not bear scrutiny. We have shown the impotence of the strike as a means of emancipation. To generalize the strike—conceding the possibility of this—would not reduce this impotence, but rather the contrary.

The difficulties, springing from an organization and resources which have scarcely ever—as perfect and large as they have been—been equal to the requirements, would be, by the very extent of the strike, largely increased. The dangers springing from exasperation, always possible and actually but too pardonable, would increase in their turn with the growth of the numbers involved in the strike. Who can guarantee that all the strikers would preserve their calm self-restraint in the face of the measures habitually taken in such cases by all governments and which would in this case necessarily be aggravated—displays of military power, provocations by the police, arrests, condemnations, brutalities and injustices of every kind? Who can guarantee that the blow of a

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1 This French idiom is so expressive, I cannot persuade myself to English it.—Tr.
stone or a club, thrown by a striker in a very com-
prehensible access of wrath would not be the signal for
a new massacre of the workers?

But even if all these dangers and difficulties were
avoided or overcome, the proletarian movement would
inevitably be overwhelmed. The partisans of the general
strike have not, I suppose, the assurance to count on
success at the first attempt. They must necessarily,
however confident they may be in their ultimate success,
face the eventuality of a check: on any ground to say
struggle implies saying possibility of defeat. But, while,
on the political ground, a check, for from depressing
courage, tends rather to stimulate it, a defeat on the
economic ground is disastrous. The facts are there to
prove that a conquered strike has resulted, in various
places, in a diminution of the number of militant prole-
tarians.

In a political check, one's pride or vanity is wounded;
one is vexed, I will not say at being beaten, for it may
chance in this matter for one to be very emphatically
beaten and yet satisfied, but at the insufficiency of the
result attained; one wishes for revenge and one works
for it with enthusiasm. In the economic check, in the
failure of a strike, one is a victim of real sufferings;
there is added to the material sufferings of the conquered
striker the moral suffering of seeing his loved family
and comrades suffer bootlessly; discouraged and dis-
consolate, he vows not to renew the conflict in order
that he may never again witness such a spectacle, and
he withdraws from the movement. This effect would be
produced far more powerfully by a check or failure of a general strike, as the attempt would have given birth to greater hopes; this would be a terrible blow for the socialist party—a blow that would greatly retard its progress.¹

¹The rest of this section is devoted by Deville to demonstrating with great force the impossibility of the general strike. I omit it for the reason given in note at the beginning of the section.—Tr.
V.

I believe I have shown the impotence of the strike in general and of the general strike in particular as a substitute for political action for the emancipation of the proletariat. Considering it then as proven that the first task and duty of the latter is the conquest of the public powers, let us see what should be the attitude of the socialists in the various elective bodies.

They must always undertake the defense of the disinherited in our social environment, not only take a hand in all reforms of all kinds, but agitate for and bring into effect as soon as possible, by adapting themselves to circumstances, every measure calculated to afford immediate relief to the working-class, to the wage-slaves, to all the exploited of the capitalist regime, by restricting their exploitation. We have never been of the number of those who say: "All or nothing!" and still less of those who say: "From bad to worse!" We always accept everything which leads us from bad to better, merely insisting upon not halting along the road but upon continuing to go forward from better to better aiming at the well-being of all, conformably to the economic con-

1 Typifying the attitude of those who look to increasing misery to goad the toilers into socialism.—Tr.
ditions which render its attainment finally possible. To
do each moment everything of this kind that is feasible,
without ever losing sight of our goal—that is what ought
to be the rule of conduct of socialists elected to office.

Ought they in addition to this general tendency to
have, as some maintain, a particular tendency to advance
deliberately toward the absorption by the present State
of the various branches of industry? In my opinion
the question ought not to be asked in this categorical
fashion, as one's opinion on the advantages of increasing
the number and bulk of the public services in the
capitalist environment must vary with the varying cir-
cumstances.

Yes, the conversion of such or such branches of
industry into public services directly dependent upon the
State, may be a good thing in one case and a bad thing
in another. It all depends, in fact, among us, on the
color of the majority that makes the law. An additional
public service being that much additional power
for the State, we must strengthen the positions which
are more or less in our own hands and not those which
are in the hands of our enemies. Let us first effect
our entrance into the place; we will strengthen it after-
ward. You see, all roads lead us to the same inevitable
conclusion: the first thing to do is to effect our entrance
in larger and larger numbers into the elective assemblies.
For what I have said about the State is equally applicable,
though in a less degree, to the departments and the
municipalities—in a less degree because not only is the
sphere of action smaller but especially because the power
is less, and it is this which gives their signal importance to legislative elections.

Though socialism succeeds in extending the public services when it is to its advantage to do so, or in exacting various social reforms, this does not constitute State socialism, it is simply a more or less complete infiltration of socialism into the State. Socialists, in fact, do not expect to accomplish serious reforms while the State is wholly in the hands of their opponents. They expect to do this only after the State shall be more or less fully in their own hands. Pure socialism tends to bring the social means of production under the control of society, which is not an organism severed from the individuals composing it any more than the individuals are not conceivable apart from it, and whose enlarged action, wholly intentional and voluntary, is the very condition of a more ample, a more real liberty of all the individuals. Statism tends to turn everything over to the State which is a body apart from individuals and above them. The distinction has, it must be confessed, no great practical interest in France at present, because we have universal suffrage and the Republic and therefore the State is independent of the masses of the nation only on account of the ignorance of those masses. Let this ignorance be dissipated—and this is the tendency of the socialist propaganda—and the mass of the nation will have a direct influence on the State, which means that they will use the State as a means of action, and it is for

1 Undemocratic, reactionary socialism such as was used as a buffer by Bismarck.
this that they must make the conquest of the State. To understand this is to be able to do it.

This is not the case everywhere, because everywhere the political evolution has not progressed so far as it has in France. In places where it is otherwise, for example in Germany, where the State is independent of the nation, and where socialism is powerful, there has developed a certain doctrine under the name of State socialism and, there, this distinction, which has no great interest among us, is very important, all the more because State socialism has been conceived precisely in order to supply the State with a means of combatting pure socialism which is the only socialism, and to arrest its expansion.

This “dike” has never been very effective, moreover, according to M. Leon Say, who, making, as do all those conversant with the subject, the distinction I have just made, said in an address at Amiens: “The State socialism of Prince Bismarck and of the German professors commonly known as the economists (socialists) of the chair, has not impaired the force of the socialist current; it has, on the contrary, rendered it more formidable, and the bureaucratic dike with which it was intended to block its progress may well be swept away some fine day, in spite of the pains taken and the scientific precautions used in building it.”¹ Therefore, let us not confound State socialism with the infiltration of socialism into the State, and let us endeavor to increase this infiltration as much as possible until socialism shall

¹ *Journal des Débats*, Nov. 1894.
be mistress of the State. That day will be, not the last day of the State, but the first day of the last phase of its evolution.

The disappearance of the State, as I have said, implies the disappearance of classes, i.e., the previous modification of social conditions. This modification must be brought about by law, and it is this legislative task that the socialist State will have to accomplish. Between the time when the class-conscious majority of the proletariat, the socialist party, shall take possession of the State in order to give practical effect to its programme, to realize the suppression of classes, and the time when that suppression shall be actually accomplished, there will be an intervening period which will be the socialist phase of the State. During this period, the State will be as always government by a class, but it will be government by that class by which classes, henceforth useless and detrimental, will be suppressed.

In the hands of the socialist party or—what is the same thing—of the organized proletariat, the State will have to regulate the situation of persons and material wealth on the basis of the socialization of capitalist property, and it will control and adjust this situation through the instrumentality of the law. It will act just as the State acted in the last century\(^1\) in the case of the property of the nobility and the clergy, just as the present State acts. It is a tradition of the Revolution that what

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\(^1\) This refers to the French Revolution.—Tr.
a law has done a law can undo, and that there is no possible appeal from the decision of the legislative body.

When the socialization of capitalist property shall have been effected, and legally effected, there will no longer be any economic subordination of some to others, there will be no more classes, and the State, made a necessity by the existence of classes, can at last be suppressed or, rather, it will disappear of itself when it shall have accomplished its task of transformation.

This is not equivalent to saying that the socialist society will have no organization. But the future social organization, when antagonistic classes no longer exist, when constraint no longer has to be exercised over some for the benefit of others, will not be a State any more than the means of production will be capital after they shall have lost the power of exploiting the labor of others, or than the future remuneration will be what we call wages when it shall no longer presuppose surplus-labor. These two latter changes will be the result of the suppression of the character of capital which is to-day stamped upon the principal means of production.

It is needless for me to talk of the future organization, and I limit myself to pointing out the general lines along which it will develop. In the transition period in which the transformation will be accomplished through conscious adaptation of measures to facts, there will still be a State, but that State will be a socialist State. In the following period, the political rule of the men who constituted the State in the transition period, will have
become a business administration of affairs. Instead of government there will then be simply a business administration.

Freemen and equals, the producers will decide in common everything concerning production, and henceforth, instead of being the puppets of economic forces beyond their control, they will rule these forces in accordance with their good pleasure. Far from being compelled to submit to a social organization which makes and modifies their conditions of existence without any regard to their wishes, as is the case at present, they will have, for the first time, the kind of social organization which they shall wish—a wish guided by knowledge of the causes and effects of social phenomena. Men will at last be their own masters. The unconscious development of humanity will be followed by a conscious development. Progress, instead of being as before a frequent source of sufferings, will be the source of universal prosperity. Inventions and discoveries—the parents of material prosperity—when introduced into actual practice, will no longer be perverted by social institutions and forced to have effects wholly different from those justly foreseen, intended and expected. The universalization of material comfort and the general comprehension of the conception of social solidarity which will be brought home to the mind of the individual by the perception of the social foundation of his prosperity, will be the starting-point of an intense and vigorous intellectual and ethical development inspired in the individual as in society by the vision of the good, the welfare, the greatest possible welfare of all, and having
as its natural consequence the most untrammelled blossoming of individuality, and the freest possible realization of the aspirations of each individual.

* * *

To conclude, I am going to sum up this lecture and the results that, I believe, have been correctly reached.

After defining the State by attributing to it a beginning and an end, I investigated the beginnings of the State; I pointed out to you its genesis and I showed that the establishment of the State was a step forward.

At this point, in order to avoid any misapprehension and to reply at the same time to a question raised in this very place, I explained to you what it was that from our point of view constituted this progress, what were its constituent elements and what its consequences.

Bound up, I have tried to demonstrate, with the division of society into classes, the State is a mode of social organization which can persist only so long as that division shall last, and the goal, to attain which all socialist efforts should be directed, is the conquest of the State, the capture of the public powers.

Discussing the objections brought against this thesis, I was led to explain my views on the general strike and to reject it as a socialist weapon.

Therefore, we must work without ceasing to elect more and more socialists to office, to permeate and saturate the State more and more with socialist ideas, until, in the hands of the socialist party or the class-conscious, organized proletariat, the State with all its powers, and espe-
cially that of law-making, becomes the instrument, which it is destined to be, of the economic transformation to be accomplished. When that transformation is completely accomplished, there will then be, instead of persons to be constrained, only things to be administered, and on that glorious day there will still be a social organization, but it will no longer be a State.

GABRIEL DEVILLE.
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