Roland Boer

Socialism in Power

On the History and Theory of Socialist Governance

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For Yang Huilin, my wise mentor

Preface

This monograph concerns the historical development—in practice and theory—of governance in socialist systems. Some years ago now, I began to think of a work that would deal systematically with this question, since there is now more than a century of concrete experience and its associated theoretical reflection. The vastness of the task, however, soon became apparent. On the way, I found myself needing to develop some aspects of the project. The study of Engels became a monograph, entitled *Friedrich Engels and the Foundations of Socialist Governance* (Springer 2021). I also realised that the developments in China required in-depth research and another separate work, which became *Socialism with Chinese Characteristics: A Guide for Foreigners* (Springer 2021). With these tasks completed, I could finally return to the original task. This book is the result.

The book seeks to bring together the historical realities of socialist systems of governance and its associated theoretical reflection, which is framed by the Marxist tradition. In that light, I begin with analyses of the works of Marx and Engels. This is the task of the opening two chapters, in which I emphasise in particular the influence of Engels in establishing the basic principles of socialist governance. From here, I devote three chapters to the Soviet Union, which was the first country in human history to experience socialism in power. The second half of the book moves to East Asia, with an initial chapter devoted to the DPRK (North Korea), before focusing in the remaining chapters on China, which arguably has the most developed form of socialist governance.

From this research, it has become abundantly clear that the form of governance that emerged after proletarian revolutions was and is unlike any other form that has hitherto appeared. This new form is not a version of the Western European "nation-state," not an empire or colonising power, and not a federation. This book in one respect is an examination of what exactly this new form is. Further, there are still too few works available in English that provide a fair assessment of the experiences of socialism in power. The main reason for such a scarcity of English language works is the imposition of a Western liberal framework, and thus the model of the Western capitalist nation-state, on socialist development. Such a model is an ill-fit indeed for countries with very different histories, cultures, and traditions of governance.

This Western liberal model has also influenced a few too many Western Marxist dismissals—for reasons too many to enumerate here—of any actual experience of socialism in power. By contrast, the works that do seek to understand socialism in power on its own terms are still relatively few. I have, of course, made use of the few works that do so, but my primary sources throughout are from the countries in question.

Over the years, I have benefited from many discussions, debates, and feedback on earlier efforts related to this book. Many are comrades, colleagues, and friends in China who have contributed directly and indirectly to the present work. I think particularly of Yang Huilin, who has been a wise and extraordinary mentor in China for a long time now. Also at the Renmin University of China are Zang Fengyu and Zhang Jing, my old friends. Thanks also to Hong Xiaonan, Fang Yumei, Qu Hong, and Song Liang at Dalian University of Technology's School of Marxism. Not to be neglected are the fine scholars at the Academy of Marxism, within the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences: Deng Chundong, Wang Zhongbao, and Liu Zixu are just a few among many. They have provided invaluable feedback, especially when I thought I knew much but actually knew very little, as well as opportunities to present papers and publications in journals. I would also like to thank someone who has become my editor at the Beijing office of Springer: Leanna Li is the epitome of professionalism and efficiency.

In Australia, I thank Colin Mackerras and have valued his immense knowledge and experience of China. Tamara Prosic has debated with me many aspects of developments in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, as has Roger Markwick with regard to the early days of the Soviet Union. I am also deeply grateful to comrades in the Communist Party of Australia, for their lively interest in and engagement with some of the topics discussed here. At the risk of leaving out names, I will not name them here, but they know very well who they are. Among colleagues in Europe, Yiannis Kokosalakis has been invaluable in relation to worker democracy in the Soviet Union, having made available his groundbreaking work (on which I rely in Chaps. 3 and 5) before publication. In relation to the DPRK, Keith Bennett's suggestions have been invaluable in light of his immense and long-standing experience of the country. Stefano Azzarà has urged me to appreciate more than I often do what is actually beneficial from the Western tradition, and Antonis Balasopoulos has pushed me to think through the philosophical implications of the communist project. I also thank Hannes Fellner and Marc Püschel, from among a fine younger generation of Austrian and German Marxist scholars, as well as Kaan Kangal, who works at Nanjing University. Finally, the one who knows most about this work, as I do of hers, is Christina Petterson, for whom I thank for the many years now of working on our common project.

Toongabbie East Roland Boer
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Abbreviations

BRI	Belt and Road Initiative
CPC	Communist Party of China
CPPCC	Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference
DPRK	Democratic People's Republic of Korea
HKSAR	Hong Kong Special Administrative Region
NBS	National Bureau of Statistics of the PRC
NPC	National People's Congress
PLA	People's Liberation Army
PPP	Primary Party Organisations
PRC	People's Republic of China
SAC	State Affairs Committee of the DPRK
SAR	Special Administrative Region
SCIO	State Council Information Office of the PRC
SPA	Supreme People's Assembly of the DPRK
TCM	Traditional Chinese Medicine
WPK	Workers' Party of Korea

Chapter 1
Introduction

The primary task of this introduction is to provide an overview of the argument as a whole. As mentioned, my concern is the practice and theory of socialist governance, which now has a history of more than a century. Some crucial features of the way this study is framed need to be highlighted. First, there is a qualitative difference between a Communist Party seeking power through revolutionary processes and the actual exercise of power. As Lenin observed, gaining power through a proletarian revolution is relatively easy; seeking to construct socialism after taking power is exponentially more complicated. Hence the title of the book, *Socialism in Power*. Second, the tradition of socialist governance is a living tradition, a constant work in progress. It is neither a given, which one can know in advance, nor unchangeable. Third, the agenda for this work in progress is set by the Marxist method. This last point should be obvious, but it needs to be emphasised: the agenda is not set by Western liberal criticisms, but by the Marxist method itself in relation to the developments of socialist governance. By Marxist method I mean Marxism-Leninism as a guide for socialist construction. In this light, there is an important distinction—common in China and elsewhere—between basic principles and specific judgements made in light of specific circumstances. Obviously, the latter are not permanent, but are determined by specific cultural traditions, histories, and problems that need to be solved. What about the basic principles? These remain, but they are not immutable, unchangeable in time and place and simply applied. Instead, they undergo a process of innovation and development, being enriched in the process.

Why do I use the term "socialist governance" and not, for example, socialist politics or the socialist state? The reason arises from my earlier study of Engels, who argued that any form of the state is a separated public power, with the state in constant tension with and indeed alienated from society. He proposed that in a socialist system a public power would be enmeshed within society, and thus not be a "state" in the sense in which he defined it. That said, from Lenin onwards, we do begin to find the terminology of a "proletarian state" and "socialist state," albeit with the crucial qualifier that it is "entirely new" and "without precedent in history." The emphasis here is on a qualitatively different type of state, one in which urban and

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rural workers are masters through the Communist Party and the state is enmeshed within society. In the relevant chapters, I do study this development, although my preference—influenced by Engels—is for the terminology of socialist governance. I am also influenced by a country I know rather well: China. For example, the three core volumes by Xi Jinping have the English title, *The Governance of China.* The Chinese is 谈治国理政 *Tan zhiguolizheng*, talking about the "management of state affairs' or "governing a country."

I am well aware of the limitations of this work. While I deal with Marx and Engels, the Soviet Union, DPRK, and China, there are many other contexts—from Eastern Europe, through other countries in East Asia, to Latin America and Africa—that are very worthy of study concerning developments of socialist governance, no matter whether the time-frame is shorter or longer. But such a task would require many volumes, the work of other specialists, and is beyond the scope of this work.

Given the nature of publications in our time, I provide here a synopsis of the remaining chapters in the book.

Chapter 2: *Marx's Ambivalence: State, Proletarian Dictatorship and Commune*

This chapter concerns what Marx had to say concerning hitherto existing forms of the state and what might happen to the state under socialism in power, after a communist revolution. The chapter is divided into four sections, the first of which deals briefly with Marx's observations on hitherto existing forms of the state. The second section turns to my main concern, which is what happens after a proletarian revolution. Here I deal with the dictatorship of the proletariat—a term coined by Marx and defended (as we shall see in the next chapter) assiduously by Engels. The third section deals with the commune, based on the experiment in Paris in 1871. The material on the proletarian dictatorship and the commune raises a number of problems, which Marx did not solve and indeed left for Engels to seek a solution. The final section focuses on Marx's fascinating struggle in trying to deal with forms of governance under communism. That he realised such governance is necessary is clear, but that he was also reticent to spell it out in detail is also obvious—not least because he knew that he did not have the experience and thereby evidence to undertake a scientific study of what happens to the state under communism.

Chapter 3: *Friedrich Engels and the Foundations of Socialist Governance*

In this chapter, I summarise the argument of an earlier monograph on this topic (*Friedrich Engels and the Foundations of Socialist Governance*, Springer 2021), since it was actually Engels who provided the basic principles for what socialist governance might be. The chapter begins with a summary of Engels's well-known theory of forms of the state that had existed thus far, which may be formulated in terms of the state as a "separated public power." Of more pertinence for socialist construction are his subsequent proposals. These begin with the explicit identification (not found in Marx) of the Paris commune as the dictatorship of the proletariat, as well as the important role of "force [*Gewalt*]" in the initial exercise of proletarian power. Engels also sought to clarify the crucial theory of the "dying away of the state." In response to the Anarchists, who proposed that the first act of socialist

power would be the "abolition [*Abschaffung*]" of the state, Engels emphasised that the state would die away of its own accord as one of the last results of socialism in power. It would not happen quickly, but would take a long time indeed. The final part of the chapter elaborates on Engels's principles of socialist governance. These are: (1) Public power (*Gewalt*) continues, although it would not be separated from but stand in the midst of society; (2) Since it is not based on class conflict, it would lose its "political character"; (3) Governance entails the administration of things and the management of the processes of production for the sake of the true interests of society; (4) This reality may be seen as a dialectical transformation, an *Aufhebung* of baseline communism.

Chapter 4: *Lenin: Before and After October*

Lenin occupies a unique position, since he experienced both seeking power and exercising power, both the struggle before October and the difficulties of socialist construction after October—albeit too briefly. The chapter is structured around this threshold. It begins with Lenin's pre-October reflections on the state, democracy, and what forms governance might take after a proletarian revolution. At this stage, Lenin was restricted to interpreting the texts primarily of Engels but also Marx, along with the experiences of revolutionary struggle. The second section provides an overview of the practical experiences of the early days of Soviet power, identifying the transitions towards institutionalisation, leadership of the Communist Party, and socialist democracy. The third section examines Lenin's theoretical deliberations on what was happening, seeking to discern the shape of socialist governance in light of rapidly developing conditions. Here, I address—through close attention to "The Immediate Tasks of Soviet Power"—the leadership of the Communist Party, including leadership over and training of the masses of workers and peasants, the need for iron discipline, and the concomitant development of worker democracy. I also address developments in the theory of socialist democracy as the highest form of democracy, and the concept of democratic centralism—which would come to have profound influence in the communist tradition. I close by asking what has happened to the state as—following Engels—a separated public power, and identify the unexpected beginning of a long process of the state's "dying away" from the first moments of the proletarian revolution.

Chapter 5: *The Soviet Union as a Multi-National and Anti-Colonial State*

Lenin had only a few years to experience the actual practice of socialist governance, so he was able to see only its nascent forms beginning to emerge. It was in the context of Stalin's long tenure that real developments took place on the ground. These three decades, from the early 1920s to 1953, constitute one of the most formative periods for socialist governance. Given its importance, I devote two chapters to the topic. The present chapter deals with the central role of multiple—and especially minority—nationalities in the structures of socialist governance. It begins specifying why we should use "nationality" and not "ethnic group," and outlines the debates among Marxist parties at the turn of the twentieth century—especially those in Austria-Hungary, Russia, and the Caucasus. Stalin's deeply influential essay, "Marxism and

the National Question" of 1913, was a response to these debates. In this essay, he argues against the proposal that "cultural-national autonomy" should be the determining feature of a federated socialist country; instead, class should be the unifying feature, so much so that the totalising unity of class would provide a more genuine and comprehensive foundation for fostering hitherto unexpected levels of diversity. It was precisely on this principle that the world's first comprehensive policy for minority nationalities was developed in the Soviet Union after 1917. After providing some detail concerning these policies, the chapter then examines how this focus on many nationalities within the Soviet Union led to a crucial insight: in the same way that the liberation of nationalities was enabled through the October Revolution, so also should colonised peoples seek liberation through anti-colonial struggles of national liberation. The final part of the chapter examines how this insight developed in the 1920s, and how it was enacted through the many dimensions of assistance to and indeed fostering of national liberation movements throughout the world. The chapter concludes with a consideration of the internal problem generated in the Soviet Union with the constitutional right for autonomous republics to secede, and how subsequent socialist countries have not followed this example.

Chapter 6: *Soviet Democracy and a "Socialist State"*

This chapter focuses on how the basic features of socialist democracy in the Soviet Union began to emerge in the 1920s and especially 1930s. There are four features: (1) the first and faltering attempts to promote electoral democracy, and especially the campaign for universal, multi-candidate, and contested elections in the later 1930s; (2) the substantial and abiding contribution to consultative democracy through the primary party organisations (PPOs) in the workplace, collective farm, and neighbourhood; (3) in relation to the 1936 constitution, the identification of freedom from exploitation (and thus socio-economic well-being) as a core human right, along with proactive and substantive rights; (4) and the inescapable and dialectical role of the leadership of the Communist Party in socialist democracy. These features would come to be developed much further by other socialist countries. The chapter also deals with the increasing usage of the term "socialist state," as a qualitatively different form of the state. The concern here is with Stalin's reflections in response to debates concerning the state's withering away, and his identification in an all-important speech to the eighteenth congress of 1939 of a second stage of socialism in which socialist state structures have attained relative maturity and stability. After summing up the features of such a "socialist state," I address the contradiction in which the terminology of "socialist state" began to the deployed precisely when it was becoming clearer that the distinction between state and society was blurring and could no longer be applied. In short, the organs of governance were increasingly standing—as Engels already suggested—in the midst of society.

Chapter 7: *The "Korean Style" of Socialist Governance in the DPRK*

With a focus on the Democratic Republic of Korea (DPRK), this chapter signals the move to East Asia. Of potential case studies for analysis, who do I focus on the DPRK? Not only is it the most enduring of all the socialist countries, but it has also

been the target of the greatest amount of Western caricatures and misrepresentations. In this case, it needs to emphasised even more that the agenda should not be set by external criticisms but by those who actually know about the DPRK's system. My primary sources are Korean scholars, as well as a handful of observers who have actually visited the country and studied it carefully (as I have done on two research visits to the country). What do we find? The DPRK reveals significant continuity in governance and political theory to other socialist countries, while at the same time revealing distinct emphases in its "Korean style."

The bulk of the chapter presents details on the practices of socialist governance, after providing some historical background to the emergence of the DPRK's governing structures. First is electoral democracy, which is embodied in the interaction between the people's assemblies and the Democratic Front for the Reunification of the Fatherland. The Democratic Front includes all political parties, mass organisations, and religious groups, and it is here that multiple candidates for elections are put forward, debated, and selected. Only then do elections of the proposed candidates take place for the people's assemblies, including the Supreme People's Assembly, which is the highest legislative body in the country. The second is consultative democracy, where the mass line comes to the fore. I analyse in some detail the Chongsanri method in agriculture and the Taean work system in industry—both named after the places where they were first developed. These methods entail a dialectical approach: the greater the substantive involvement of collective farmers and shop-floor workers in problem-solving and realistic planning, the more significant is the ownership and implementation of decisions and plans by the Party committees and planning commissions. The third concerns the leadership of the Workers' Party of Korea, and here I use the example of the State Affairs Commission (SAC). The country's leader is the chair of the SAC (but not of the SPA and its Standing Committee), which has significant and wide-reaching powers. How does the SAC relate to the whole system of socialist democracy in the DPRK? It is accountable to the SPA, and the whole system, as one scholar puts it, "regulates the order in which the state power is established and exercised." In other words, the significant power of the SAC requires not merely a high level of accountability, but also a robust system of statutory processes through which the WPK leads.

The final part of the chapter provides an overview of political theory. Formally, this theory is embodied in three terms: *Juche,* or a people-first philosophy in which the masses are masters of their destiny through the struggles of revolutionary construction, independence, and self-sufficiency; *Songun*, which arose in response to the immense challenges of the 1990s, and identifies the military as the prime revolutionary force that is able to drive economic recovery and preserve sovereignty; *Kimilsungism-Kimjongilism*, as an integrated whole that is notably people-centred, emphasising the creativity of the masses and the concern with improving everyday lives of common people. The chapter closes with some considerations on the unity of opposites (the terminology comes from dialectical materialism), with the unity in practice and ideology running through all levels of society and state—or, as the Chondoist-inspired slogan puts it, "believe in the people as in heaven."

Chapter 8: *China's Whole Process People's Democracy*

This chapter focuses on a speech by Xi Jinping from late 2021, concerning "whole process people's democracy [全过程人民民主 *quan guocheng renmin minzhu*]." It begins with an overview of the development of socialist democracy in China from the beginnings with the anti-colonial struggle of the nineteenth century, through Mao Zedong's new democracy, democratic dictatorship, and democratic centralism, to the full panoply of components that were established during the reform and opening-up. The main concern is to identify the emphases in developing socialist democracy from the time of the CPC's Eighteenth National Congress in 2012 and then the tasks at hand today. There are three main features that arise from this material.

First is the importance of the mass line as the foundation of people's democracy, along with explicating the meaning of the "people's heart" or "people's will" in a socialist context, and the crucial role of democratic supervision. All of this may be seen in terms of "the people as masters of the country [为人民当家作主 *renmin dangia zuozhu*]." The second concerns a signature emphasis of Xi Jinping's tenure as general secretary: developing further a comprehensive rule of law. On this topic, I provide a brief background to socialist rule of law, before dealing with the project of strengthening the constitution and the need for a robust and constantly updated legal system that focuses on incorporating the virtuous or "good laws [善法 *shanfa*]" that are necessary for a socialist legal system. Third is the leadership of the Communist Party, without which socialist democracy would not exist. Here I focus on the development of rule-of-law "statutory procedures [法定程序 *fading chengxu*]" through which the Party's proposals become the will of the people, and how Xi Jinping has ensured the development of democratic centralism for country-wide governance. The conclusion to the chapter seeks to define socialist democracy in light of these three topics as a dialectical conjunction of Communist Party leadership and the people as masters of the country, mediated through the full range or "whole process [全过程 *quan guocheng*]" of democratic and rule-of-law statutory procedures. I also ask how democracy may be evaluated in any of its forms. A final note: this chapter is theoretical, but the three main topics—people's will, rule of law, and Communist Party leadership—will form the topics for case studies in the next three chapters.

Chapter 9: *The People's Will: Stability, Safety, and Harmony in Xinjiang*

Arising from the three main themes of the previous chapter—people's will, rule of law, and Communist Party leadership—this chapter provides a case study relating to the people's heart or will as an inescapable feature of socialist democracy. It does so by focusing on a distinctive feature of China's socialist system in terms of the political and cultural assumptions of stability, safety, and harmony, and then analysing the situation in relation to Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region. The first part provides an overview of the semantic fields of stability, safety, and harmony, and then pays more extensive attention to an important CPC Central Committee document from 2006, entitled *Decision on Some Major Issues Concerning the Construction of a Harmonious Socialist Society*. Coming in the wake of the "wild 90s," the *Decision*

analyses the many contradictions that had arisen and provides a full-spectrum policy response that has particular relevance for the many problems in Xinjiang.

The second part of the chapter tackles the situation in Xinjiang, in light of personal experience and scholarship. It begins with a presentation of two geographical features with immense strategic, political, and economic significance: the Hu Huanyong Line and the Hexi Corridor. This material sets the context for an overview of the historical development of the preferential policies for minority nationalities (the Uyghur nationality is one of 55 in China), after which I deal with the main emphases of these policies in terms of culture, education, governance, and economic development. The latter in particular had until recently lagged considerably in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, where poverty still remained a distinct problem in remote and rural areas. This leads me to deal with the Marxist approach to human rights, for which the core right is socio-economic well-being and common prosperity. The residual poverty in Xinjiang had provided opportunities for the spread of Islamic radicalism in the 1990s, leading to a rise in terrorism, extremism, and separatism. The response has two related steps: first, a resolute focus in restoring stability, safety, and harmony through anti-terrorist and deradicalisation measures; tackling the root cause in terms of economic development, improved job training and opportunities, and education. Here I also address the patterns of growth of Xinjiang's population and the improved choices available to educated and working Uyghur women, as well as the profound effect of the Belt and Road Initiative, which has enabled Xinjiang at last to overcome absolute poverty and set out on the road to common prosperity. Only on the basis of high-quality and balanced development are stability, safety, and harmony possible in the long term.

Chapter 10: *Governing the Country According to Law: The Case of the Hong Kong Storm*

The second case study that arises from my treatment in chapter eight concerns the rule of law, with a particular focus on the Hong Kong National Security Law that was promulgated in June 2020 and came into effect at the beginning of 2021. I do not see the need to reprise my earlier treatments of rule of law itself, so will address directly the situation of Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (SAR). The chapter begins with an overview of the longer history of Hong Kong as a part of China stolen by the British Empire in the nineteenth century and its development as a trade hub—of all manner of commodities legal and illegal—and use as a lever to destabilise the rest of China, economically, politically, and culturally (through religious missionaries). The second part deals with the long and complex negotiations of the 1980s and 1990s concerning Hong Kong's long overdue return to the mainland, with an emphasis on the continual obstructions by the British imperial negotiators. This leads to treatment of the innovative "one country, two systems" solution proposed by Deng Xiaoping, with reference to three SARs, in Hong Kong, Macao, and Taiwan island. Next, I move to the structural and economic problems of Hong Kong SAR since 1997, which developed a warped economy characterised by oligopoly capitalism, vast income disparities, sluggish economic growth, a polarised political landscape, and an educational system that sought to promote decaying Western liberal assumptions.

These compound problems and tensions provided the causes of the "Hong Kong storm [风波 *fengbo*]" that burst forth in 2019–2020, with unrest, riots, violence, and widespread destruction. This was also fanned by foreign interference that sought—once again—to use Hong Kong SAR as a destabilising lever, now in terms of a "colour counter-revolution." The final part focuses on the comprehensive analysis and measures taken, including economic, political, educational, and media reform, although my particular concern is with the Hong Kong National Security Law itself. This was a comprehensive rule-of-law solution to the immediate problems, and, with effective implementation, brought the unrest to a rapid end. The conclusion considers the longer term goals of Hong Kong SAR's democratic reforms and economic development, and indicates that the pioneering project of "one country, two systems" has already gained valuable experience for the time when Taiwan island too becomes a special administrative region.

Chapter 11: *Party Building: Strengthening the Construction of a Marxist Party*

The final case study that arises from chapter eight concerns Party building, which is a key feature of effective leadership by the Communist Party. For a Party of almost 100 million members, the level of organisation for such an active Communist Party is beyond the imagination for those who live in countries with populations smaller than even the CPC. Building and strengthening the Party, improving its theoretical knowledge in Marxism, leading on all fronts, building honest and clean governance, ensuring deep links with the masses, engaging actively with and deeply involved in communities and workplaces—these and many more are the tasks and responsibilities of Party branches. The resources for these tasks are also immense, so I need to be selective.

In this chapter, my interest is in local or grassroots Party branches, since these are the foundation of the whole Party: "Attaching importance to and strengthening the construction of Party branches is the distinctive feature of a Marxist party." The first part analyses in some detail the *Regulations for the Work of Branches of the Communist Party of China*, which was issued in trial form in 2018 and is currently undergoing comprehensive testing and the gathering of feedback from concrete experience. While providing an overview of the *Regulations*, I am particularly interested in five topics: (a) the dialectical nature of Party branches, in the sense that resolute and unified adherence to the Central Committee is coupled with full-scale democratic practices, energy, and creativity; (b) the ten types of Party branches, which require some explanation and occasionally draws on personal experience; (c) the tasks and responsibilities of such branches, especially since the *Regulations* signalled a root-and-branch renewal of the base-level, the very foundations of the CPC; (d) comprehensive democratic practices, in terms of elections, consultation, and democratic supervision that has a "spicy taste"; (e) and the increased responsibilities of Party branch secretaries, which I leave for a separate section later in the chapter.

The second section of the chapter selects one type of grassroots Party branch out of a large number: the enterprise Party branch. I do so by drawing on the immense resources at the premier site, 党建 *Dangjian*, which simply means *Party Building*. After a brief overview of the site's content and structure, I begin by analysing some

examples of branches in non-public enterprises, before turning to the comprehensive Marxist educational activities of grassroots branches in state-owned enterprises. Since the centenary of the CPC was celebrated on 1 July, 2021, the material I have researched primarily concerns historical study and activities in a number of different branches. The final topic of this section deals with the fact that the working masses—industrial workers, miners, railway employees, and so on—are the members of enterprise branches, and that a major responsibility concerns the well-being of the staff and working masses in the enterprise.

The third and fourth sections concern the Party branch secretary and the role of trade unions. The branch secretary is a major concern of the *Regulations*, but I have held the treatment to this point since there has been a distinct focus on improving the skills and qualities of such secretaries. After dealing with the *Regulations* on this matter, I turn to two insightful pieces, the first of which identifies the main problems that arose from appraisals of branch secretaries and the solutions in terms of identifying potential secretaries, nurturing and training them, and assisting branch secretaries in the many tasks of theoretical improvement, engagement with production and decision-making in the enterprise, and assisting branch members in all respects. The other study is an anonymous first-hand account of a new Party branch secretary and the challenging tasks of renewing and growing the branch. The final section of the chapter broaches the topic of trade unions in a socialist system, especially since such a role is somewhat more difficult to understand for those who are accustomed to the antagonistic nature of class-based struggles in capitalist systems. Here, I draw on a key document from the All-China Federation of Trade Unions, which should be a must-read text for all who are interested in the topic.

Chapter 12: *Conclusion: On Communism and the Common Good*

The concluding chapter draws together the main insights that have arisen through this study, stressing the continuities and identifying the new developments. In doing so, I emphasise a number of points. First, it is clear that governance and the common good are inescapably connected. But how is the common good to be understood? For the Marxist tradition, and indeed for cultures in East Asia, the common good is primarily social, and it is only through the social that the individual may flourish. Second, how can the common good be fostered? The answer, from the history I have examined, is a strong and active state, albeit not one in the traditional sense. As Losurdo has pointed out, this reality arose from contexts of either failed-state conditions (Russia) or anti-colonial struggles for national liberation (Asia, but also Africa). In these contexts the state continues to be seen positively, as a vital feature of all dimensions of socialist construction. Third, the reality of socialist political systems is an ongoing one. This should be obvious, but unlike the half century of stagnation of Western nation-states, the nature of socialist governance is a work in process, a constantly elaborated and renewing tradition. It is in this sense that one may begin to understand the increasing confidence in countries such as China that the socialist political system has not merely a latent superiority in comparison to capitalist political systems, but that this latency is now becoming apparent and is being realised.

Chapter 2
Marx on the State, Proletarian Dictatorship and Commune

2.1 Opening Remarks

The analysis of socialism in power must begin with Marx, even though we will find in the next chapter that Engels had far more to say on this question, especially in dealing with the problems Marx was unable to solve. Indeed, the focus of this chapter is an unresolved contradiction in Marx's thought concerning what would happen to state power after a proletarian revolution. This is the contradiction between the proletarian dictatorship and the commune. To put it sharply, the dictatorship of the proletariat was to be centralising, taking control of the forces of production and comprehensively reshaping economics and society, and using strong and repressive measures to deal with the former ruling class and the inevitable counter-revolution; the commune, by contrast, was to be decentralising, was opposed to repressive "state power," and is imagined to be a free association of equal workers.

The structure of the chapter is as follows. After a brief presentation of Marx's thought on hitherto existing forms of the state, I focus mostly on how Marx wrote of both the proletarian dictatorship and the commune, and how he offered a number of tentative suggestions as to how this contradiction might be resolved. In closing, I give detailed attention to Marx's fascinating struggle in dealing with the forms of governance under communism. He clearly realised that such governance is necessary, but he was also reticent to spell it out in detail. Why? He knew very well that he did not have the experience and thereby evidence to undertake a scientific study of what happens to the state under communism.

A final introductory observation: by and large, studies of Marx's theory of the state—insofar as it can be pieced together—focus overwhelmingly on the capitalist state. While this is an understandable tendency in light of Marx's economic studies of capitalism, it also constitutes a retreat. Apart from an occasional sentence evoking Marx's somewhat euphoric description of the Paris Commune, there is very little indeed concerning what Marx had to say about the state after a proletarian revolution, let alone what governance in a socialist system might be. The reasons for such a retreat are many, but they are not my concern here (Losurdo 2008; 2017). Instead,

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my interest is precisely on what Marx had to say about socialist governance, about socialism in power.

2.2 Hitherto Existing Forms of the State

Marx's observations on forms of the state that have appeared in human history may be summarised in five key points, most of which would come to be developed more fully in the later work of Engels (see the next chapter).

2.2.1 Key Points on Earlier State Forms

First, the state is a product of the economic realities of mode of production, private property, division of labour and especially classes and class conflict. Although Marx describes this ground as *bürgerliche Gesellschaft* (bourgeois society)[1] in the critique of Hegel,[2] already by the first rough outline of historical materialism in *The German Ideology* (1846a, 33–34, 311; 1846b, 46–47, 329), a class-based economic analysis emerges.[3] In sum, hitherto existing forms of the state are the products of class struggle, which would become a core Marxist position.

Second, the dominant class determines the nature of the state. This determination may be more direct, as the Manifesto puts it: the "executive of the modern State is but a committee [*Ausschuß*] for managing the common affairs of the whole bourgeoisie"

[1] It is important to retain the terminology of the German *bürgerliche Gesellschaft*, since it reminds us that Marx is speaking of "bourgeois society." Unfortunately, the term is usually translated and thereby neutralised as "civil society," even to the point of a later German back-translation as *Zivilgesellschaft* (Kocha 2004, 67). Crucially, for Hegel and Marx, this *bürgerliche Gesellschaft* includes economic activity, although in later developments of the concept "the economy" was excluded. Although Marx (1843b, 105; 1843a, 95) already suggests that Hegel's formulae should be located in the hybrid situation of the Prussian empire, where a bourgeois state had not yet emerged, in *The German Ideology* he and Engels specify: "The term '*bürgerliche Gesellschaft*' emerged in the eighteenth century when property relations had already extricated themselves from the ancient and medieval community. *Bürgerliche Gesellschaft* as such only develops with the bourgeoisie [*Die bürgerliche Gesellschaft als solche entwickelt sich erst mit der Bourgeoisie*]" (Marx and Engels 1846a, 36; 1846b, 89). For a detailed analysis of the terminology in the works of Marx and Engels, see my earlier study (Boer 2018).

[2] In the Critique of Hegel, Marx returns to this point repeatedly (1843b, 9, 23–24, 39–40, 79, 87, 90–91, 116; 1843a, 9, 24–25, 43–44, 88, 96, 99–100, 125–126) and it also appears in *The Holy Family* (1845a, 120; 1845b, 113). For a detailed assessment of Marx's intense engagement with Hegel, see Leopold (2007, 17–99).

[3] That the state arises from class struggle became an assumed position, appearing frequently in later works (Marx 1859b, 100–101; 1859a, 262–264; 1894b, 766–767; 1894a, 777–778).

(Marx and Engels 1848a, 464; 1848b, 487).[4] Or the determination may be indirect, since the class in question may not be—due to internal contradictions and tensions—always in immediate control. Yet this class's systemic framework sets the terms for all acts and policies. This emphasis comes to the fore particularly in Marx's analysis in "The Eighteenth Brumaire," where he observes that while Louis Napoleon was trying to break the bourgeoisie's political power, at the same time "by protecting their material power, he generates anew their public and political power" (Marx 1852a, 186; 1852d, 194).[5] I will have more to say on this study by Marx below, but we may note here the way working-class political parties within capitalist systems must inevitably conform to the structures of the capitalist state already established by the bourgeoisie.

Third, the state is separated from and relates to society in an antagonistic manner. This position already appears in the critique of Hegel: "In short, he [Hegel] presents everywhere the conflict between bourgeois society [*bürgerliche Gesellschaft]* and the state" (Marx 1843b, 80; 1843a, 73). Throughout the study of Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*, Marx emphasises this point again and again, coming to focus—especially in "On the Jewish Question"—on the internalisation of this struggle in terms of the tension between being a private individual and the citizen of a state (Marx 1844e, 148–149, 161–163; 1844d, 153–154, 167–168; see also 1843b, 86–87, 119; 1843a, 77–78, 109).

Related is the fourth point: since the state is separated from bourgeois society (by which Marx meant economic and social forces), the state has a degree of autonomy that varies in light of specific conditions. This autonomy is may be encapsulated in two observations, one concerning the French absolute monarchy as an "executive power [*Exekutivgewalt*], with its enormous bureaucratic and military organisation" that had complex forms of representation and transformation (Marx 1852a, 178; 1852d, 185), and the other concerning bourgeois or "vulgar democracy" as the "last form of state of bourgeois society [*bürgerlichen Gesellschaft*]" in which "the class struggle has to be fought out to a conclusion" (Marx 1875c, 22; 1875a, 96).

These points may be summarised in a sentence or two: hitherto existing forms of the state have arisen from the socio-economic realities of class struggle and are determined by the class in power; these forms of the state are separated from, have various degrees of autonomy from, and relate antagonistically with society (bourgeois society in the case of the capitalist state). These points are quite well known and I see no need to elaborate further, despite the tendency of Marxist analyses in Western

[4] *The German Ideology* on at least one occasion tends in this direction: "the state is the form in which the individuals of a ruling class assert their common interests" (Marx and Engels 1846a, 62; 1846b, 90). This approach is sometimes labelled "instrumentalist," but this is a misleading simplification.

[5] As *The German Ideology* observes, the "social power" of a ruling class has "its *practical*-idealistic expression in each case in the form of the state," meaning that "their power must be constituted as the *state* [*als Staat konstituieren*]" (Marx and Engels 1846a, 69, 311; 1846b, 52, 329). Emphasis in the original. This point arises out of a detailed polemic against Max Stirner's approach to the state (and private property and law), in the crucial long chapter on Stirner in which Marx and Engels first developed the rudiments of historical materialism. For useful outlines of and engagements with Stirner's philosophy, see Beiser (2011) and Leopold (2006).

contexts to restrict analysis to the capitalist or bourgeois state (Miliband 1965; Jessop 1978; 1982, 1–31).

2.2.2 *Historical Emergence of the Bourgeois State*

Of more interest here is the fact that Marx has a preference for historical narratives, each of which has its own variations. Yet all of these historical accounts seek to show how the bourgeoisie came to dominate the new state form in Europe.

The first example appears in "On the Jewish Question," with its manifold dialectical turns and intriguing historical shifts. The immediate context is Marx's response to Bruno Bauer's claim that "political emancipation" would be achieved when people have dispensed with their particular religious claims, when the "Christian state" was abolished and a thoroughly secular and atheistic state established (Bauer 1843a; 1843b). Marx replies by arguing that the "Christian state"—the final form of the absolutist state after the Congress of Vienna (1814–1815)—does not disappear with the secular bourgeois state, but that the bourgeois state is the full dialectical realisation of the "Christian state." In order to make this point, Marx turns not to France or elsewhere in Europe, but to the United States of America. A curious move, since the United States never experienced the absolutist state, let alone the final phase of the latter as the "Christian state" (Boer 2019). It may have begun as a white supremacist racial state, based on genocide and slavery (Losurdo 2008), but an absolutist state in the European sense it was not. Marx's move may well be due to the fact that United States was seen by many in Europe as a harbinger of the future, precisely because it did not seem to have a history comparable to Europe. Marx is not so enthused, pointing out that in the United States religion had become a private affair, exercised by any citizen while the state itself was ostensibly secular. This is the full resolution of the contradictions of the absolutist "Christian state," which is actually not Christian at all. Instead, the fully realised Christian state is "the *atheistic* state, the *democratic* state, the state which relegates religion to a place among other elements of bourgeois society [*der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft*]" (Marx 1844e, 151; 1844d, 156). Or as *The Holy Family* puts it, "the politically perfected, modern state that knows no religious privileges is also the fully developed *Christian* state" (Marx and Engels 1845a, 117–118; 1845b, 111).

A second and relatively brief example appears in *The German Ideology*, although here we move into territory that was to become Engels's forté (see the next chapter). The narrative here suggests that the state may have been relatively independent under feudal or absolutist forms, and it remained so to an unprecedented level in the hybrid situation in Prussia of that time due to the inability of one class to attain dominance. As the bourgeoisie slowly gained wealth and power, and as the state became increasingly indebted, the state lost its independence and became subject to the bourgeoisie—and so a bourgeois state (Marx and Engels 1846a, 178, 344–345; 1846b, 195, 361). Third is the relatively brief account in the "Manifesto," which provides greater complexity concerning the various alliances undertaken by the European bourgeoisie as its power

grew. Originally oppressed under feudalism, it began to achieve self-governance in scattered medieval communes or in urban republics. Then, it moved to being a "third estate" (French monarchy) and "cornerstone" of absolute monarchies, in opposition to the nobility. Only with a world capitalist market was the bourgeoisie able to conquer "exclusive political sway" through the "modern representative State," which now manages its common affairs (Marx and Engels 1848a, 464; 1848b, 486).

The longest account appears in "The Eighteenth Brumaire," where Marx argues that that the bourgeoisie does not need to exercise direct power to promote its agenda. It can gain and lose parliamentary control, or act as an executive for a late imperial pretender (Louis Napoleon) who was an apparent champion of the peasants and "lumpenproletariat," while at the same ensuring that the form of the state that emerged secured the growth of capital and profit. At a crucial moment, the opposition between state power and society becomes crystal clear, and this is when the bourgeoisie can achieve its goal. Marx describes this eventual achievement—riven with contradictions—as the "unlimited despotism of one class over other classes," the interweaving in closest fashion of the "extensive state machine" with the "material interests of the French bourgeoisie," and the "centralisation of the state that modern society requires" (Marx 1852a, 105, 132, 185; 1852d, 111, 139, 193).[6]

The final example appears in "The Civil War in France," in a section where Marx attempts to provide some background for the Paris commune. Here he writes specifically of "state power," emphasising the increasing centralisation and repressive nature of this power. Initially the absolutist state, with its centralisation in terms of a standing army, police, bureaucracy, clergy and judiciary, was a "mighty weapon" in the hands of the bourgeoisie against feudalism (Marx 1871e, 137).[7] In the bourgeois state that followed (after the French revolution), state power fully reveals its repressive face.[8] Thus, a parliamentary system means "direct control by the propertied classes," which enabled "class terrorism" and a "national war-engine of capital against labour" (Marx 1871e, 138). Even though the bourgeoisie was subsequently driven out of direct control of power during the phases of the French empire (and indeed Prussian empire), it became even more adept at advancing its agenda even when not in direct control. As noted earlier, Louis Napoleon simply could not avoid a spate of policies that strengthened the economic and indeed systemic power of bourgeoisie. Thus, imperialism is both "the most prostitute and the ultimate form of the State power," which "full-grown bourgeois society had finally transformed into a means for the enslavement of labour by capital" (Marx 1871e, 139).

To sum up: these historical narratives touch on each of the points identified earlier, but they move in a clear direction: the bourgeoisie's final ability to set the agenda for the state, thereby determining the state's nature. This agenda is implicitly

[6] For an insightful analysis of the complexities of this text, see Jessop (2007, 83–100). For a comparable account of the trials and tribulations of the bourgeoisie in relation to the state under Napoleon Bonaparte, leading to its "political enlightenment," see *The Holy Family* (Marx and Engels 1845a, 130–131; 1845b, 122–124).

[7] Since this text was originally published in English, I cite only the English version.

[8] Duly stressed by Poulantzas (1969, 76), although he skips the repressive role of the dictatorship of the proletariat.

economic, securing the many dimensions of the state to ensure the dominance of capital, although Marx tends not to spell out the details. Crucially, this dominance does not need to entail direct hold on political power, since the bourgeoisie had learnt through its long emergence that it could achieve the desired effect indirectly. Policies such as uniform weights and measures, exchangeable currencies, effective border control, efficient policing, communication, and infrastructure would ensure the secure transport of goods across countries. By the time we come to the "farce" of the reign of Louis Bonaparte, he simply could not avoid instituting more and more measures to ensure the bourgeoisie's economic and political dominance. Given that the very nature and purpose of the bourgeois state is to exploit the proletariat, it should be no surprise that Marx would later conclude that the proletariat "cannot simply lay hold of the ready-made State machinery, and wield it for its own purposes" (Marx 1871e, 137).[9]

2.3 Dictatorship of the Proletariat

Since it is clearly impossible to take over the state form of capitalism in the context of a socialist system, a question arises: what is to take its place? Marx's theoretical answer entails two proposals that sit rather uncomfortably with one another: the dictatorship of the proletariat and the commune. In what follows, I deal first with the proletarian dictatorship and then with the commune, after which I examine Marx's unresolved struggles in relating the two.

The first mention of the dictatorship of the working class or proletariat was in a series of articles published in *Neue Rheinische Zeitung* from January to October in 1850, although we have come to know the collated articles as "The Class Struggle in France, from 1848 to 1850" ("Die Klassenkämpfe in Frankreich 1848 bis 1850"). This was the title proposed by Engels, after he had gathered the articles, wrote an introduction and added a fourth chapter of his own, and saw to the publication of the whole as a book (Marx 1895). I will have more to say concerning the circumstances of this process of editing and publication below, since here I focus on the key propositions concerning the proletarian dictatorship, with the majority of citations coming from this work by Marx.[10] A few references will also be made to some works from 1871 to 1875, in the context of the struggles with Bakunin and the Anarchists.

[9] Or as Marx and Engels put it in a review of the bourgeois socialism of Girardin (1850c, 196–197; 1850b, 333): "The bourgeois state is nothing more than the mutual insurance of the bourgeois class against its individual members, as well as against the exploited class, insurance which will necessarily become increasingly expensive and to all appearances increasingly independent of bourgeois society, because the oppression of the exploited class is becoming ever more difficult".

[10] Since the text now appears in critical editions in light of cross-checking between the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung* and the book of 1895, I cite the text from these critical editions.