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## RESEARCH ARTICLE

### REVISITING MARXISM ON REVOLUTION IN THE FACE OF RUSSO-UKRAINE WAR

Dr. Onoyemeakpor, J. A., Assoc. Prof. Okwelum C. O. and Okwelum, A. O.

Southern Delta University, Ozoro, Nigeria

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##### \*Corresponding author:

Okwelum C. O.,

#### ABSTRACT

Since the dissolution of the USSR in 1991, political and ideological interests in Marxism had waned. Academic interest on it had however lingered on. Although Marx and Engels did not anticipate that rural Russia and her Lenin will stage the first successful revolution, the fact of its happening led to tremendous economic development and political explanation on the study of revolutionary Marxism. This work which was premised on doctrinal method sought to revisit the critiques that followed the emergence of socialism in one country. It sought to look back on the era and raise the issues which were considered then as areas of significant disputations that time and further research were to address and resolve especially in the face of the Russo-Ukrainian war since 2022. The work found that Marxism's claim to scientific method has faced serious problem of analysis of predictions and suggestion of goodwill among the citizens of communist states. It found that Marxism was able to give a revolutionary theory to fight capitalism in the context of a divided world prism but has remained unable to surmount it.

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## INTRODUCTION

Many disagreements can lead to war. But of all disagreements, ideological ones are deep. The war between Russia and Ukraine is unique in several ways but one. It is a war between two Marxist states as both broke out of Soviet Russia. The war can be comfortably situated in the desire of Ukraine to go west by joining the NATO countries of Western Europe and forge new relationships and open herself to new economic opportunities. In this desire, Putin reads 'sinister sponsorship' by the west in order to disrupt the ideological balance of the post world war 11 and the post cold war. Russia on the other hand with Putin in control is fixated to 'greater Russia' and as such, territorial sovereignty and rule-based international order cannot be guaranteed (Lister, 2025). In an orchestrated but swift reaction, Putin propped up opposition to joining NATO within Ukraine and Donbas region which is the 'most Russian' part of Ukraine and which is relatively far from Kyiv, the Ukrainian capital, became the crucible of the experiment. Donbas is an industrial power base controlling 16 percent of Ukrainian output but with little love for Kyiv. It is a soft target for Moscow as Putin distributed thousands of Russian passports to the reminders of the people of Donbas after continued state skirmishes and several years of war that started in 2022 and became Europe's deadliest war in 80 years (Ali & Landay, 2025). Framing the people of Donbas before the international community, Putin believes that 'they took up arms to defend their home, their language and their lives'. Putin purportedly recognized Donbas (Donetsk and Luhansk) region as independent states and annexed the region along with the southern regions of Zaporizhzhia and Kherson after organizing sham referenda. Putin argued for the

occupied or annexed territories that 'Russians in Ukraine were being forced not only to deny their roots; generations of their ancestors but also to believe that Russia was their enemy' (Lister). As canvassed by Richard Haass (cited in Toosi, 2025) Putin wants a 'renewed Russian empire' and a deal where Ukraine ceases to be an independent, sovereign country with ties to the west. The US President Trump on the other hand, fears that the war between the two Marxist states may degenerate into a third world war and recognizes that Moscow is so clearly much more powerful than Ukraine and there are no clear signs that Putin is at the end of pushing Ukraine to the precipice. Trump had stated regarding Putin's territorial incursion into Ukrainian Donbas, that 'A big chunk of territory is taken and that territory has been taken'. The land is gone and it is time to consider territorial concession to Moscow for Ukraine to have peace. But Ukrainian sovereignty cannot guarantee this acquisition of territory by Moscow and for western allies of Ukraine, Russian aggression 'cannot be rewarded with territory'. It is merely an imposition of the rule of might and three quarters of Ukrainians object to yielding an inch of land to Russia. President Zelensky puts it to Trump on the map showing the annexed territories in the Oval Office that Ukraine is 'fighting with what is on the map. Who controls what? Not by hearsay, but by reality' (Kirby, 2025). How Zelensky and Ukraine can go remains to be seen; during the administration of G. W. Bush, Moscow took back Georgia, in Barak Obama's administration, she took back Crimea and during Joe Biden's administration she invaded Ukraine taking back Donbas.

**Statement of the Problem:** After dismantling the Union of Soviet Socialist Russia (USSR) on 26<sup>th</sup> December, 1991 by Declaration No.

142-N an anti-thesis occurred in the Marxist world in 2014 when war broke out between Russia and Ukraine. The dissolution of 1991 was presaged by years of internal dissensions, political stalemate and economic backslide. Mr. Gorbachev applied the master stroke and dissolved the Union. Ukraine was a significant third member to the declaration for separation. The other two were Russia and Belarus which were later joined by eight others. Having separated and come thus far, why should there be skirmishes between Russia and Ukraine? A full scale war between them since 2014 presupposes that Marxism did not bring any enduring peace and legacy to the people of the space and their leadership. What principles of socialism did not gum but snapped amongst the republics leading to the face off and what leadership failures could have presaged the war?

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Conceptual clarifications

**Revolution:** Capitalism is not be transformed by mere theoretical assaults or piecemeal tinkering (Carter, 1972 p. 9), but under the impact of mass, proletarian action (Duncan, 1973 p 166). Carter has submitted that Lenin distinguished between two stages in the concept of the withering away of the state to be the stages of socialism and communism. Marxism, in essence, is a theory and programme of revolution. The revolutionary idea is the keystone of its theoretical structure (Tucker, 1969 p. 3) such that, of all the 'instruments of production, the greatest ... is the revolutionary class itself' (McLellan, 1971 p. 198). Revolution is basically 'a social, an economic, a technological, a political, a legal and an ideological phenomenon' for Marxists (Tucker, p. 5). While a social revolution, to Kautsky (cited in Tucker, p. 11) is 'the conquest of political power by a previously subservient class and the transformation of the juridical and political superstructure of society, particularly in property relations' to Engels (cited in Macfarlane, p. 170) it is the 'act whereby one part of the population imposes its will upon the other part by means of rifles, bayonets and cannons'. However, a proletarian revolution is the 'overthrow of the bourgeois state and the establishment of a proletarian dictatorship, accompanied by the forcible seizure and socialization of private property in the means of production' (Tucker, p. 25). Thus to Gerassi (1971, p. 765), 'a popular revolution' is one 'by and for the popular classes' whose 'ultimate aim is to bring all classes into one, that is, destroy the class state'. A revolution is the festival of the oppressed and exploited classes.

Marxism, as a socialist doctrine, seeks a radically new state of the world and of man in the world, which is to be achieved through revolutionary upheavals (Tucker, pp. 4-5). However, it reluctantly subscribes to the imposition of the revolution from above. Certain preconditions must be attained by capitalism before a revolution can occur. Its occurrence though, is the result of the conscious efforts of the proletariat and the development of the contradictions in the socio-economic and political spheres to revolutionary crises situations. These have been captured captivantly by Wolfenstein (1967 p. 106) when he saw revolution as the 'politics of rapid and usually violent social change, either because the society is already in the throes of upheaval or because the revolutionary actors desire political power in order to make sweeping changes in the very nature of society or both.

**Preconditions of Revolution and Socialism:** Marcuse (1958, p. 19) and Szajkavski (1981, p. 32) have outlined three prerequisites for a revolution and socialism as follows: a high level of technological and industrial production; the growth of productivity beyond the limits of private control, and the growth of the political organization of the laboring classes. These qualitative changes will gain momentum until they explode the prevailing structure ushering in a qualitatively different society. It is a realistic assumption that the bourgeois state and legal order will not pass a death sentence on the bourgeoisie, their property, class relations etc overnight. It follows that the intrinsic definitions of the state and law as parts of the superstructure of society which act for the politically and economically dominant ruling class will remain for, to Trotsky, the road to socialism lies

through a period of the 'highest possible intensification of the principles of the state.' In the interim also, the descriptive – coercive definitions of the state and law as the instruments for the oppression and domination of proletarian class by the bourgeoisie stands for according to Marx (cited in Miliband, 1979 p. 145) after every revolution marking a progressive phase in the class struggle, the purely repressive character of state power stands out in 'bolder and bolder relief' and only the dying out of political power, an event contemporaneous with degeneration of classes will undermine the phenomenon. However, the proletarian state is a lesser vice and a necessary violence. Lesser violence because to Lenin (1964, p. 474), only the bourgeoisie need a 'highly complex machine' for the suppression of the majority while they can be suppressed by a relatively simpler machine because of its class composition; necessary evil because of the historical role to be played by the State. Further, as laws are essentially regulators of social relations, they will persist, but the content of such relations would become different from those obtainable in bourgeois society. This is why Vyshinsky (cited in Opolot, 1981 p. 108) holds that law is designed to 'guard, secure and develop social orders advantageous and agreeable to the dominant class'; in this case, the proletarian class.

**Socio-economic and political basis of Socialism:** Socialism is 'a political and economic theory of social organization based on ...governmental ownership and democratic management of the ...means for the production and distribution of goods.' It 'aims to replace competition by co-operation and profit seeking by social service, and to distribute income and social opportunity more equitably than they are now believed to be distributed' (Webster's New International Dictionary, cited in Fried and Sanders, 1964 p. 1). For Gromyko (1983 p. 11) 'socialism liquidates all forms of exploitation of man by man and establishes public ownership of the means of production, thus guaranteeing dynamic, crisis-free economic development, and the elimination of unemployment and poverty; it grants political freedom and civil rights to all citizens and creates the necessary prerequisites for all round development of the individual so that he can work for the benefit of society. Socialism brings the peoples peace, it is incompatible with enslavement'.

However, socialism does not only consist of collective ownership, production and consumption of social wealth, 'it also involves collective government and defence of the society with the participation of all' (Ayu& Ibrahim, p. 6). As a result, the goal of a stateless millennium, for Marxists, is not to be imminent after the abolition of the bourgeois order; they envision an intervening state as a sine-qua-non to the libertarian utopia (Avrich, 1973 p. 80).

**Dictatorship of the Proletariat:** The revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat is independent and superior to all social classes as being the dominant force in society. Yet, it is the representative of the armed masses and their rule. What it entails, however, has bred passionate controversies among commentators and Marxists. While James (1937 p. 133) opines that no more 'vicious mistake ... can be made than the too prevalent habit' of using the term as though it is 'synonymous with the personal dictatorship of Lenin or worst still a Stalin', Maclellan (pp. 202-203) asserts that it is a concept Marx associated with 'dictatura' where power is legally concentrated in the hands of a single man during a limited period in a time of 'crisis' and not 'dictatorship' as contemporarily understood and used in the manner James complains of. While McDonald (1962, p. 361) and Hal Draper (cited in Miliband, 1979 p. 144) argue that it is a 'social description' than a form of government machinery, Miliband holds, and correctly too, that it is both. While Kautsky (cited in Macfarlane, p. 179) argues that it is 'a condition' and not 'a form' of government as a form is merely the activity of a single person or organization than the people, Lenin (p. 470) asserts, and correctly too, that 'he is a Marxist who extends the recognition of the class struggle to the recognition of the dictatorship of the proletariat which is 'a power won and maintained by violence of the proletariat against the bourgeoisie, power that is unrestricted by laws' (Raymond, 1968 p. 226) Stultifying Kautsky further, Bukharin (1979, p. 40) states, 'in

fact Marx was writing about something greater than “a form of government”, he was describing a new, and distinctive type of State’.

**Purpose of the State Redirected:** The historical role of the proletarian state lies in the fact that when it ‘announces the dissolution of the existing social order, it only declares the secret of its own existence’; when it ‘demands the negation of private property, it only lays down as a principle for society what society has already made a principle’ for its class and what it already ‘involuntarily embodies as, the negative result of society’ (Lefebvre, 1969 p. 183.) Although the dissolution naturally leads to the dissolution of classes, the State and law, it is not, per se, the objective of the transition period as it connotes anarchism. Rather, it is the destruction of the State as ‘over’ society and letting society as a whole to ‘take over the functions previously performed by the State’ (Lefebvre).

Centralized planning is a significant attribute of the socialist state although to Myrdal (cited in Lefebvre, p. 126), this may be a ‘factual mistake’ if related to Marx and Marxism. However, while the bourgeois state merely oversees the conditions of capital accumulation, the proletarian state enters the arena of economic activities. It is one in which the control of the whole apparatus of production and the guidance of all productive operations is to be in the state itself. Although, to Lefebvre (p. 126), since Marxism is ‘fundamentally anti-state’ the theory that the State is to be ‘the manager of economic life’ and the ‘universal controller and provider’ is anti-Marxism as it was developed by Lassalle ‘whom Marx fought bitterly’. It should be pointed out that this was not, as Lefebvre shows, the core of the disagreement, but Lassalle’s flirtation with Bismarck. Therefore, as James puts it, the ‘real task’ of the State is ‘to increase production and create abundance’ through a ‘series of economic transformations extending over many years’ that can forestall the danger of the restoration of private ownership of the forces of production.

In Marxist political analysis, no aspect receives so much attention than the State and law as political power of a class rule over another. In the early stages of socialism, when class enemies of the proletariat still subsist, the new state will apply its apparatuses for the purpose of protecting its property. The State would thus become a ‘contingent of armed men’ and guaranteed economic and cultural reconstruction of the new society’ (Macfarlane, p. 175). As James puts it, the first business of the new state is to ‘dispossess the rich and suppress their inevitable attempts at restoration’. This was stated succinctly by a Russian Public Prosecutor (cited in Lord Percy, 1954 p. 50) thus, ‘there is no place for freedom of speech for the foes of socialism. Every sort of attempts on their part to use to the detriment of the State – that is to the detriment of all the workers – the freedom granted to the workers must be classified as a counter-revolutionary crime’.

According to Chou-Hsin-Min (cited in Opolot, 1981 p. 111), a foremost Chinese jurist, the socialist law is a sharp weapon for carrying out class struggle in the hands of the broad masses of the laboring people led by the proletariat’ and adds Opolot, ‘its primary task is to suppress the enemy, protect the revolutionary order and ensure the success of socialist construction’. As Mao (cited in Opolot) and Lewis (1964, p. 34) put it, ‘the courts, policy and army are instruments with which one class oppresses another, and such state apparatuses must be strengthened to consolidate the people’s democratic dictatorship in China’. The class character of the State and law in the transition epoch is sharpest put by Lenin (cited in Carr, 1970 p. 85): ‘our courts are class courts against the bourgeois our army is class army against the bourgeoisie’. Schapiro (1972, p. 47) has opined that foe Marxists, ideology (a system of representation of ideas and concepts) is a fraud by the bourgeoisie which only the proletariat can put to an end. It has been canvassed, how the bourgeois state and law are alienated social power. In socialism, this withers away as civil society merges with the state and private man merges with citizen of the State, and majority rule prevails to ensure the general interest of the people. The Simonian imprint is realized as workers constitute the state as kings, princes and generals. Elimination of social class makes individuals stand not only equal

among themselves as equality means equality of economic power but equal before the law as ‘equality is prejudice if it is not understood to mean the abolition of classes’ (Gerassi). The law receives the clearest de-ideologization under socialism. The hallmark of bourgeois argument that the judge is unbiased and independent; that the law is immutably certain and universal etc is of course fallacious for legal elites in class societies are the embodiment, indeed, the ‘vestal virgins’ of the prevailing irrational values and are ‘not supermen’ (Evans, 1956 p. 141 and Ehrman, 1976 p. 55). According to Szabo (cited in Ehrman, p. 27), a Hungarian jurist, ‘the purpose of legislation’ in socialism ‘is not to camouflage the will of the ruling class’ or is the judge made the pivot of the legal system which is the error of bourgeois law. Indeed, Soviet judges are elected and may not be jurists (cited in Rene, 1978 p. 182). These go to buttress Krylenko’s assertion (cited in Opolot, p. 121 and Topornin, B. cited in Gabriel, pp. 11 – 12) that ‘our judge is removable as he is an organ of the state power’. Accordingly, while there is rule by law, there cannot be rule of law for reverence of the law and its administration for their own sake is a ‘bourgeois fetish’ (Dias, 1985 p. 399).

The wave of de-mystification has received practical dimension in the establishment of ‘peoples’ court’. Cuba, ‘as a transitional move to the abolition of law’ embarked on the establishment of ‘popular tribunals’ which were, according to Blas Roca (cited in Opolot, p. 117), a Cuban jurist, to ‘edify and consolidate the new society of socialism and communism, to educate new mwn and to ensure and perfect the rules of socialist community’. As Fabgen (cited in Opolot) observes, these courts are to speed up adjudication, demystify and popularize the law and involve the people in revolutionary social justice and morality. Although Lord Percy (pp. 52 – 53) likens all of the foregoing characterizations to an Anglo-American Juvenile Court procedure, and a retreat to the ‘dooms of primitive judge-law-giver sitting under a village tree or at the city gate’, the Russian Article 3 of the Judiciary Act of 1938 puts it comprehensively as follows: ‘By all their activities, the courts shall educate the citizens ... in the spirit of strict and undeviating observance of Soviet laws, of care for socialist property, of labour discipline, of honesty towards state and social duty of respect for the rules of socialist community life’.

**Why the State and law exist in Socialism:** In the lower stages of socialism, lapses and imperfections would linger to account for the presence of the State and law. Central to this view are the subsistence of the remains of the bourgeoisie and social excesses of individuals that will call for regulation. These imperfections and low level of industrial and technological development inform the social tag: ‘from each according to ability, to each according to work’. However, Marxist tenor of analysis for why the State and law will not wither away in socialism is bifurcated and controversial and goes to the heart of Marxism that ‘no definite answer’ has been proffered (Cain & Hunt, 1979 p. 64). James (p.134) favours and correctly too economic reductionism and not Pashukanism which is the ‘most persuasive’ doctrine of the withering away of the State for Schapiro. There is thus the orthodox and the variant schools. The former consists of most Marxists but Pashukanis who flag-bears the latter. Though an argument popularly applied in legal analysis, the connectedness of the law with the state makes it plausible to transfer the argument to the analysis of the State. To the orthodox school (class reductionist) class is the compendium of social phenomenon and through its binoculars can the analysis be made. For them, why the State and law will not wither away is explicable in the subsistence of social classes in the early stages of socialism. This view receives Marx’s and Engels backing and is more handy and popular. Leading the conversation in this school, Marx (cited in Macfarlane, p. 170) declares, ‘as long as the proletariat fights against them (the bourgeoisie) it must employ coercive measures.’ Following, Engels asserts, ‘as long as the proletariat still uses the State, it does not use in the interest of freedom but in order to hold down its adversaries. The Pashukanist (economic reductionist) school argues that the State and law are inherently bourgeois categories which will not wither away in socialism until all bourgeois socio-economic relations (essentially commodity exchange relations) have atrophied. That is, the gradual disappearance of juridical elements in human relations’ (Opolot, p.

109 and Ilumoka, p. 7). Since the State and law regulate and protect these relations, they must stay as long as the relations exist. Thus, it will be incorrect to espouse the un-flourishing of bourgeois categories of State and law and the flowering of proletarian types (Kamenka, 1972 p. 171). Pashukanism to Cain and Hunt (pp. 146 & 204) is not 'wrong' because it is excessive economic reductionism (which may be creditable in classical Marxism), but because it argues that law, and by extension the State, is to be found only within the capitalist mode. Cain and Hunt (p. 64) further observe that the resolution of the seeming divergence 'rejects the view of Marxism as a completed project' and establishes it as a 'continuing project with rich seams, to be opened up and developed'.

## CONCLUSION

The concept of the withering away of the State and law is premised on the theory of economic determinism. The State and law are considered as part of the superstructure of the society whose nature is determined by the economic base. Cogent conditions are outlined before the attainment of a socialist state. The Russo-Ukrainian war directly strikes at the soul of Marxist experimentation in political governance and ideological cohesion in nation building. The desire to fall back to NATO by Ukraine is a significant detour in the march towards the realization of communism. That the United States is the stabilizing factor in the disagreement between two Marxist states is also significant in the understanding of the practical and theoretical reconciliation of the doctrine of Marxism on the conception of the withering away of the state.

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