

## LETTERS

TO THE EDITOR:

I have some objections to Alfred B. Evans, "Rereading Lenin's *State and Revolution*," (*Slavic Review*, Spring 1987). He quotes Lenin as saying he might be "bumped off," when that and similar American underworld jargon did not come into colloquial parlance until the gangster movies of the 1930s, usually starring James Cagney or Edward G. Robinson. Also, Evans mistakenly quotes Lenin as saying that the state would "wither away." Lenin simply reiterated Engels's "*der Staat stirbt ab*," translated into Russian as "*gosudarstvo otmiraet*," or "the state dies off." Does "wither away" mean "die off," or whatever Engels meant by *absterben*? I don't think so.

These items may seem trivial, but they reveal Evans's general reluctance to grapple with primary materials, relying far too greatly upon translations into English, upon the musings of writers who never really studied Lenin, and upon very superficial delvings into the main body of Lenin's work, not to mention the writings of Marx and Engels, as well as European, German, and Russian history.

In explaining the ambiguities in Lenin's tract, his paper should have dealt with these themes:

Lenin wrote *State and Revolution* as the theoretical blueprint for the regime of a European revolution, controlled by a victorious German army, which, in the course of the war, would, he hoped, have become a revolutionary force of armed proletarians. He had visions of becoming the leader of that German-dominated international conglomerate. (Evans notes that Lenin returned to his native country only *after* his work on the state, based on a restudy of Marx and Engels, was completed—which was well before he had any idea that the March revolution was impending. But Evans was unable to relate this significant fact to his analysis.)

It was only the rapid leftward movement of the Russian revolution, zooming with violent intentions past his moderate April Theses timetable, which compelled Lenin, right after the July Days' fiasco, and against his better judgment, to prepare his notes, compiled in Switzerland, to serve him in a prospective seizure of power in Russia. At that time, as the Russian army collapsed, he wanted desperately to be in the position to make a peace at any price with the onrushing German army (showing no signs of rebelling) before the Kaiser's generals would sweep his vital Petrograd base of action from under his feet.

The bizarre idea of using the concept of a "dictatorship of the proletariat," its function totally unilluminated by Marx and Engels, as a framework for a governing body, arose entirely in the mind of the founder of the Bolshevik party. But that elitist organization had been designed in the Russia of 1900 for the purpose of leading illiterate proletarians, although by 1905, adding *Two Tactics to What Is To Be Done?* Lenin had brought the peasantry, too, under his umbrella in the hope of establishing a dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry. In short (and I recommend Evans read my *Geopolitics of Leninism* [1982] for details) the necessary continuation of the leading role of the party *beyond* its seizure of power in 1917, but lacking popular support, could only mean the establishment of a dictatorship *over* the proletariat and the peasantry, culminating in the mess currently inherited by Gorbachev.

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PROFESSOR EVANS REPLIES:

Please allow me to express my appreciation for Stanley Page's comments. The difference between his expectations and mine may in large measure be attributed to contrasts between the habits of different academic disciplines. For example, the use of sources in a historian's biography of Lenin is characteristically not the same as that in a political scientist's study of the devel-