

ON GUN OWNERSHIP

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The monopoly of violence belongs to the state; the state, under socialism, belongs to the proletariat. It has hitherto been interpreted — or at least, it has so been practiced — that particular members and representatives of the proletariat, its elected and volunteer state officials, its police force and military, should carry out the duties of the state — ie enforcing the dictatorship of the proletariat — and thus civilian producers have been, as a general rule, left unarmed. Communal ownership, therefore, has been interpreted to mean that only the *representatives* of the proletariat, the "special body of armed men," a specific subsection of the proletariat, shall bear arms. Does this understanding and practice conform with the principles of Marxism and a materialist understanding of history? We argue here that it does not.

Let us begin with the premise that 3D printing represents the beginning of an irreversible revolution in the production of firearms, of which ammunition is sure to follow. This can of worms has already been opened, and they will not be coaxed back inside. We might ask then: what will gun rights look like under Communism? In a system of communal producers where weapons can be so easily manufactured, and in particular in such a decentralized manner, it would be as impossible to completely regulate the ownership of firearms as to stop the waves of the ocean — even under a planned economy! Any attempt to do so would be both futile and costly. Even under presently existing society, even before the advent of the 3D printer, the capitalist state has never been fully successful in controlling contraband; and further developments in the forces of production — even with developments in the relations of production — shall completely preclude any possibility to do so. Thus, we assert, it cannot be the case that the property relations of firearms shall contract and become more restricted; gun ownership can not simply be made communal, but *personal* ownership too, by necessity of the means of producing them, shall have to be assured.

Let us now see that, not only is it the case that personal ownership of firearms must necessarily follow from this development, but it is also consistent with classical Leninist theory on the abolition of the capitalist police and standing army in favor of a people's army, which has been repeatedly identified as a necessary foundation of the proletarian state. Vladimir Lenin wrote on numerous occasions about the necessity of the arming of the *whole* people. For example, after the 1905 revolution, he wrote:

*"All the separate wishes of the soldiers, worn out by the accursed convict life of the barracks, should be brought together into a single whole. And put together, these demands will read: abolition of the standing army and introduction of **the arming of the whole people in its stead.**"* (The Armed Forces and the Revolution, 1905 — similar content can be found in The Army and the People, 1906)

Then again after and during the October Revolution:

In *State and Revolution*, Lenin identifies the standing army as a unique manifestation of the capitalist state machinery, which he refers to as: "*a 'parasite' on the body of bourgeois society.*" Later, he cites Marx's reflections on the Paris Commune: "*The first decree of the Commune, therefore, was the suppression of the standing army, and the substitution for it of the armed people.*"

And once more, in *April Theses* (1917), the 5th thesis includes: "*The standing army to be replaced by the arming of the whole people.*"

And most decisively:

"The minimum programme of the Social-Democrats calls for the replacement of the standing army by a universal arming of the people... To assert that, while we have a revolutionary army, there is no need to arm the proletariat, or that there would "not be enough" arms to go round, is mere deception and trickery. The thing is to begin organising a universal militia straight away, so that everyone should learn the use of arms even if there is "not enough" to go round, for it is not at all necessary that the people have enough weapons to arm everybody. The people must learn, one and all, how to use arms, they must belong, one and all, to the militia which is to replace the police and the standing army" (A Proletarian Militia, 1917, emphasis added).

And so, we have seen quite decisively that the arming of the entire people is well supported in theory. So we might well ask then, why hasn't this "minimum programme" ever been realized *in the long term*? Well for one, we might speculate that disarmament was meant to disarm counterrevolutionaries, reactionaries, the surviving vestiges of the bourgeoisie, and so forth; but then again, wouldn't the total armament of the people, the masses, vastly overwhelm the armed minority which seeks to overthrow them? Wouldn't the disarmament of only those individuals who demonstrate counter revolutionary organizing be sufficient? Perhaps we might instead speculate that this is the result of a corrupt bureaucracy consolidating power, or, perhaps, we might argue a bit vaguely, that the lack of gun rights under feudalism and tsardom precluded the material basis for the proliferation of firearms as these socialist societies developed from them, and that Lenin failed to foresee this. The most compelling explanation, so far as we are concerned, is that in the conclusion of revolutionary wars, the demobilization of the masses was allowed to follow, which, in the final analysis, is what allowed bureaucratization to set in, that allowed revisionists and opportunists to seize power, and to weaken Communism until it was defeated. Thus, we conclude that even in the conclusion of the revolutionary war, the masses must remain armed, at least as long as the state continues to exist (at least until classes are abolished, until domestic reaction is abolished, until imperialism is globally defeated).

Whatever the reasons are for the eventual disarmament of the people throughout the history of socialism, it should be clear that such an outcome could not reasonably be enforced with this development in the means of producing firearms, and furthermore that such an outcome would be undesirable. *Especially* here in the United States, where personal gun ownership is a sacred right in theory (but a mere privilege in practice) and where large swaths of the masses are already armed, no movement which seeks mass legitimacy could ever hope to

disarm the public. Rather, we should understand the highly infringed-upon “right” of gun ownership as incomplete, with socialism bringing about the conditions to, for the first time, fully realize the actual right of the *entire people* to bear arms (understanding, of course, that 'the people' does not include counterrevolutionaries). In practice, especially where there are fewer guns than people, this could be practiced in the form of communal armories which may help to reduce accidental gun deaths. Wherever firearms are kept, everyone in their vicinity will have to accept communal responsibility for them, rather than continuing to demand that individuals alone be responsible for an item that imposes collective consequences. Furthermore, the arming of the people and the replacement of the police and standing army by the entire proletariat serves as the natural expression of the increasingly popular demand of the American masses to abolish (or ‘defund’) the police. Thus, it is our understanding that such a policy will be necessary to win over the masses, win the revolution, and, furthermore, to defend against counterrevolution.