

The state today

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[“How the State Arose”](#) traced the evolution of the state — the army, courts, cops, prisons and tax collectors — from its formation 4,000 years ago. This state has consistently served the privileged classes — first slave owners, then feudal lords and, today, the capitalists.

The U.S. has developed one of the most expensive states in human history. The federal budget for the military alone exceeds \$2.7 trillion, not counting the hidden budgets of paramilitary organizations like the CIA, or the cost of past wars in the form of military pensions and interest on the national debt. To this already enormous figure must be added the billions spent from the state and local treasuries on police, prisons and courts.

This vast apparatus is necessary to serve and protect the power of the handful of billionaires who rule this country. The character of the state as a tool of the bosses is reaffirmed every time striking workers are jailed by the courts; it is reaffirmed every time a young unarmed Black man dies at the hands of a racist police officer. Every time a country is “shocked and awed” into submission, this character is displayed for the world to see.

The state has become almost completely merged with the capitalist class itself, creating a virtual shuttle service from boardrooms to government office, and providing a conduit of limitless funds from the government coffers to the bank accounts of finance and industry executives.

The ruthlessness of the capitalist state has been revealed many times in recent years — in Iraq and Afghanistan, where imperialist bombs and gunfire have killed

countless children; in New Orleans and the Mississippi Delta, where the Black survivors of Hurricane Katrina faced an assault on their livelihoods by the same government that failed to protect them from the disaster; and in Oakland, Calif., where Oscar Grant, an unarmed young Black man, was shot dead by police as he lay handcuffed and face down on the platform of a train station.

The Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 demonstrated the capacity for the existence of a new kind of state — a workers' state. This revolution abolished capitalism in Russia, just as slavery and serfdom had been overthrown before. All wealth, except personal property, was made the common property of all workers. The economy was planned to meet human needs, not the profits of the few.

The Soviet state existed in the historic interests of the entire world's working class and oppressed. Despite its deficiencies, and its eventual defeat in 1991, the Soviet state was an inspiration for socialist revolutions in China, Cuba, Vietnam and other countries around the globe. Even today, after many of these countries have experienced counterrevolutions or have turned toward the market, millions around the world are fighting and dying for the establishment of a new state of this kind. Workers and the poor in countries as varied as the Philippines, Venezuela, Nepal, and India struggle daily for a workers' state like the one Cubans have been building since 1959.

As the economic crisis in the U.S. escalates more and more, workers at home will start to demand a new state as well.

The state has always been an instrument of dictatorship: of the slave owner over the slave, the feudal lord over the serf, the capitalist over the workers and oppressed. The workers' state maximizes democracy for the working class as it exercises a dictatorship over the remnants of the former capitalist ruling class.

The growth of socialism holds the promise of abolishing all class antagonisms. The

overthrow of capitalism worldwide will set the stage for the gradual disappearance of the state as the world currently knows it. It will provide the conditions for the world's wealth, produced in abundance by modern technology, to be shared in common. Capitalism's demise will unlock the potential for humans to live in a modern, peaceful society, without any need for the old state's instruments of suppression.

Additional reading

- [The State and Revolution](#) – by V.I. Lenin
- [The State: A Lecture Delivered at the Sverdlov University](#) – by V.I. Lenin

- Return to [What is Marxism?](#)