Letter on the Abolition of the State

written by Wayne Price | September 24, 2010

To the Editors of New Politics:

In your last issue (#49), Jason Schulman takes Marvin Mandell to task for being "too kind to Wayne Price" in his discussion with me about his review of my book, The Abolition of the State. Apparently Jason Schulman believes that it is absurd to advocate abolition of the state. After an anti-capitalist revolution, "We are stuck with the state." He does not only reject anarchism, which wants to immediately eliminate the state, but also the views of Marx and Engels, and even Lenin, who thought that the state would gradually, eventually, be eliminated. This is so, he says, because there are political conflicts to settle, decisions to make and to implement, priorities to determine, and people to coerce. He claims that this requires "police…specialization…[and] hierarchy."

However, most anti-statists do not deny that there will be decisions to argue out, conflicts to deal with, and even some coercion in order to implement decisions — and that some sort of institutions (a polity) will be needed to implement this. In a radically democratic, classless, participatory, communism, we believe that this can be done through some sort of federation of workers' councils and community assemblies, associated with an organized, armed, population (a militia). We do not call this a state because we define the state as a socially alienated, bureaucratic-military, machine, specialized, and hierarchical, standing over and against the rest of society. It is this — and not all forms of social coordination and coercion — which we believe can be eliminated. (I go into some detail about this in my book.)

Our disagreement then, is not about whether to use the term "state" nor whether some form of coordination is necessary. It is whether this socially alienated, bureaucratic-military, institution can be replaced by a self-governing society. I understand that Jason Schulman does not think it can. But that is the issue.

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