

# Oppenheimer has high hopes for the State

By Richard Yates

**The State, by Franz Oppenheimer. Black Rose Books, \$3.95.**

There are two classical theories about the origin of the apparatus of government (i.e., the State). It is a bit shocking to realize that there are two such views. Most of us have encountered only one view—the "consensus theory" of the State. Very few have had a chance to hear about the "conflict theory" of the State.

Franz Oppenheimer's basis of an enjoyable tool for correcting that flaw in our education. His analysis and development of the conflict theory should be of special interest to anarchists because it goes right to the heart of the ugly reality that lies behind State organizations. The State is the organized means whereby the descendants of a conquering class have robbed the conquered class of a portion of their economic production.

Before we explore this view any further, let us sketch the consensus theory of the State.

According to the consensus theory, people were compelled to create a State structure to provide themselves with a means for order and harmony among themselves. Under this interpretation, humanity in its natural state is bound to be involved in a continual series of petty struggles. But at some point in time it comes to realize that this constant skirmishing is counterproductive. Thus, to create an institution, the State, to which it hands over final power over everyone's lives so that they might achieve peace and security.

Anarchists are well acquainted with the criticisms of this theory:

—We are not the naturally rapacious creatures that the consensus theorists have depicted. Kropotkin has taken great pains in his work *Mutual Aid*, to show that the impulse to cooperate and aid other humans is one of the deepest impulses in our nature. Oppenheimer carefully shows that violence and warfare come only with the development of certain kinds of economic activities and social structures.

—The consensus theory assumes that we live as isolated individuals and that it is only with the founding of the State that human society is initiated. But this is sheer fantasy. Oppenheimer cites numerous examples to show that Stateless societies have existed extensively in the past. He argues that these societies failed only in the sense that they were unable to defend themselves successfully in the face of organized plunder by herdsmen and Vikings. The hunters were swept aside and the peasants were subjugated by these more organized societies. The important fact, however, is that society pre-dates the creation of the State.

—The most incredible assumption of the consensus theorists is that some "consensus" or "agreement" can

be struck whereby a people agree to hand over their liberties—and the liberties of unborn generations—to a tyrant, and to do so because one's liberty is not an object that can be passed around. An individual can act as if he were not free, as if the choice to obey were out of his power, but this would only be appearance and not substance. In fact this individual has used this freedom to choose to act in an unfree manner.

A State does work on the basis of a consensus: the citizens consent to obey. But this is merely a consensus of the moment. At any time they may rebel. Contrary to this, the consensus theory takes of a consent to obey in perpetuity. They claim that a people can give up the "right" to rebel.

Franz Oppenheimer's *The State* is an excellent introduction to the "conflict theory" of the origin of the State. The following is a rough sketch of the ideas in his book. (To appreciate the full sophistication of Oppenheimer's thought and the array of data he marshals in his argument, one must read the original.)

## Conflict Theory

First he notes there are only two ways to live. You can produce what you need, or you can rob it from others. —I go on to develop a discussion to call one's own labor and the equivalent exchange of one's labor for the labor of others, the "economic means" for the satisfaction of needs, while the unrequited appropriation of the labor of others will be called the "political means."

Originally we lived solely by economic means. Wenged in the occupations of hunter, herdsman, or peasant. The first steps toward the creation of the State were taken when the more organized herdsmen and Vikings began raiding the peasants. They succeeded in this because their economic life demanded a more closely knit and mobile lifestyle, and this gave them an edge in warfare.

In time the peasants and the raiders reached an "understanding." If the peasants ceased resisting the ravages of the raiders, then the raiders would no longer strip them of all their possessions and ravage their population. As time passed the raiders settled in the midst of the peasants and assumed the role of a dominating class in the newly amalgamated society. The governmental apparatus developed as the organized means whereby the dominating class continued to plunder the toiling peasants. The "political means" of existence has introduced itself into human history.

Oppenheimer has analyzed six stages in the unfolding of the creation of the State. He is careful to note that historical evidence does not show that all emergent states developed in just these six stages. Instead, he argues that the six stages are theoretical constructs that fit very closely with what we

know about the actual development of most States. He tries to show that anomalies arise because of peculiar circumstances.

The latter two-thirds of Oppenheimer's book is less interesting to us as anarchists. He develops his view that the original State develops through various stages as a feudal state. He devotes a full chapter to an argument that the great States of ancient times were a historical dead end. Instead, he sees the modern State as a development of the feudal State that both preceded and succeeded the great States of antiquity.

Optimistically he argues that the contemporary constitutional State is a higher development of the State

## WOBBLES IN B.C.

# Syndicalists on the Western frontier

By Alan Engler

**"Plunderband and Proletariat—A History of the IWW in B.C." by Jack Scott, New Star Books, \$2.95**

Jack Scott's second book on Canadian labour is a welcome addition to working class history. The book is not an orthodox trade union history. It does not concentrate on resolutions passed in congresses, nor on speeches or correspondence of officials. Instead, Scott writes about the class struggle and the role of the IWW in these struggles.

My criticism of the book is that there is not enough of it. While appreciating the conscientious and painstaking research by the author, on reading the book I could not help feeling frustrated at the meagreness of the material on working class history. Few people realize that in the years before World War I an anti-capitalist movement had achieved a popularity among workers that terrified the ruling classes and convinced even cautious trade union leaders that working class revolution was just around the corner.

This movement which had its greatest success in France, called itself revolutionary syndicalism, after the French word for trade union. Revolutionary syndicalists believed that the reorganization of unions would provide the means to working class power. Sectional or craft unions would have to be replaced by industrial unions which would unite all workers in each industry regardless of craft. These industrial unions would then come together in all-inclusive federations, which would unite the entire class and provide the organization which would replace the rule of capitalism.

In France, revolutionary syndicalists won control of the existing trade union federation. In Britain they fought for the amalgamation of the existing sectional unions, and later syndicalists led the shop stewards movement which hoped to replace conservative officialdom by delegates elected by the rank and file of all unions.

In Ireland (where Jack

Scott was born in 1910) syndicalists inspired by James Connolly, and led by Jim Larkin organized workers into the Irish Transport and General Workers, regardless of craft or industry.

In the United States, Australia, and Canada revolutionary syndicalists organized into the Industrial Workers of the World. Syndicalists in Canada were to achieve their greatest success with the One Big Union after the war. Jack Scott limits his book to the IWW in B.C.

The IWW was founded in Chicago in 1905. It had little impact in Canada east of Alberta, but it led major class struggles in the two western provinces. In B.C. it played its biggest role in strikes of railway construction workers. In 1911 it led a

strike of workers completing the terminus of the new trans-continental railway at Prince Rupert. Scott says "The syndicalist influence of the IWW was apparent in the broad boast of the members that the organization had no leaders—everybody was equal."

The IWW led strikes on the Grand Trunk Pacific, the Kettle Valley Line, the Pacific Great Eastern, and the gigantic strike of 8,000 workers on the Canadian Northern between Hope and Kamloops. The headquarters of this strike, at Yale, was described by a contemporary correspondent as, "the seat of a miniature republic run on Socialist lines and it must be admitted that so far it has been run successfully. The strike committee rules."

Scott also writes about the

clear and compelling account of how Stateless societies have existed and can exist. Oppenheimer offers a solid foundation on which we can build such an analysis.

The power of Oppenheimer's ideas lies in their simplicity. Political theories, at heart, are myths and idealizations. For too long we have lived under the myth that the consensus theorists have pandered. Their view has disposed us to believe that the State is ultimately benevolent despite its voracious and destructive facade. If we master the conflict theory, we will have an intellectual weapon which will help us to expose this incredible lie that the State is in some ultimate sense "benevolent."

Jack Scott spends no time expressing his own opinions about syndicalism. He leaves no doubt though about his sympathies for the working class, and especially for workers in construction, logging, and mining camps, whose experiences he himself shared after coming to Canada as a teenager.



The 1912 Wobblie strike against Canadian Northern Railroad.