

But It All Falls Apart

A Leftist Guide for Seizing the Power of the State

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2019

a review of

Seizure of State Power, Part 3 of *Manual for Revolutionary Leaders* by Michael Velli. Sources of Velli's thought annotated by Fredy Perlman. Black & Red (2019) **BlackandRed.org**

Spoiler alert: This text is not well-intentioned advice for those seeking to lead the working class and seize the power of the state. Quite the opposite. It is a polemic against those who seek such a role.

The complete book (this volume is the final section) is an elaborate political canard originally published in 1972. Admirers of Lenin, Stalin, Trotsky, Mao, and Che were convinced they could play a similar role in mobilizing that era's spontaneous upsurges and catapult their small group into command of students and workers and eventually a state.

Epigones of established authoritarian leaders were avid readers of holy texts written by those they venerated, and were certain they furnished instructions on how to repeat the successes obtained by the authors. Hence, the instructions contained in Velli were sure to be appealing. (Say the name of the author quickly running the first and last names together for insight into the joke.)

Fredy Perlman, best known for his *Against His-story, Against Leviathan*, writing as Velli, instructs revolutionary leaders on how to seize political power and then deal with those they designate as the masses who exhibit an unwillingness to submit to their authority. However, and here is the genius of the text, he mixes in quotes from the above politicians, as well as Hitler and many then-contemporary leftists with their exact words only indicated in the original by italics.

In the first edition, since none of the quotes were attributed, an unsuspecting aspiring leader would think it was all written by a leftist theoretician. So similar is the thirst for power by the dozens of those quoted that it reads as smoothly as though it were a single writer named Velli.

One marvels at what it must have taken to compile the hundreds of quotes before a Google search easily brought forth sought after material. The ones that appear in the book were assembled by going through the tomes of Marx and the gangs which invoked him and from leftist newspaper clippings. There are 252 citations alone in the 153 pages of this third section.

Also impressive is that the original 287-page book was published almost entirely by Fredy and Lorraine Perlman at the Detroit Printing Co-op, which they co-founded along with the Black & Red imprint. Typesetting and layout was done at the Fifth Estate office, and then printed at the co-op on an early 20th century press and equipment.

The book, and its later 1974 edition in which Perlman begrudgingly included footnotes for the quotes (more tedious work!), contained full-color collages, each of which was part of the polemic against the unaware aspiring revolutionary leader. What is so amazing about them besides their content is that the Printing Co-op's ancient, one-color printing press required sending each sheet of pages through the machine four times in order to achieve full color.

One could ask of Black & Red, why bother with this denunciation now? The socialists and communists who only brought about authoritarian governments and state capitalism may have forever discredited the ideal of authentic revolution. The remaining governments still bearing the label, communist, which as a spectre haunted Europe over 175 years ago, are now fully integrated into the world capitalist market exhibiting the same features of exploitation to which they once claimed to be an historic alternative.

The remaining disgraced leftist political sects who still speak with the dead language of Lenin have either become cults or given up the ghost (or spectre) like the recent demise of the International Socialist Organization (ISO).

Seizure of State Power remains important reading because authoritarian leftism in its active phase can be likened to vampires. People rise up with a desire for a new world that they “carry in their hearts” or long for “land, bread, and freedom,” while ambitious middle-class politicians organize to suck the blood from that yearning in order to rule them.

But, there is an authoritarian left zombie phase as well. Even though the party-based commandism of Lenin, Trotsky, and the rest constituted a counter-revolution, it still lurks as the undead, coming out each time there’s an opportunity to feed on the brains of the living.

Capitalism is always marked by crises, and there are sure to be many ahead from the traditional cycles of the economy to the big one looming ahead for the environment.

Forewarned, which is what this book does, is to be forearmed. Seizure of State Power turns the arguments of leftist groups and would-be rulers against them, and with a good bit of humor, it ultimately encourages us to rely on ourselves and not revolutionary leaders.

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