

Materialist Conception of History

FOR BEGINNERS

Lesson 22.

AFRICAN CONTINENT

BY PETER T. LECKIE.

IN examining the great development of Capitalist industry from about the '70's and '80's wherein Britain, France and Germany have carved out for themselves spheres of influence in Africa for the exploitation of African resources and native labor, to obtain raw material for their home industries, I will first give an outline of Africa previous to this carving-out process.

European trade on the West Coast and Arab trade on the East Coast is many centuries old. It was from the West Coast, too, the bulk of the slaves were taken, inter-tribal wars being encouraged by the slave traders, and the prisoners captured in the course of time were bought and carried overseas.

It is computed in American records that the British were responsible in the twenty years, 1680-1700 for importing 300,000 Africans into the West Indies and the mainland.

We noticed in an earlier lesson how the Spanish Imperialistic monopoly of the Americas broke down with the rising powers of France and Britain, when Britain secured the monopoly of the slave trade to supply the Spanish Colonies, shown in the Treaty of Utrecht 1713.

This monopoly was conferred by the British Government upon the South Sea Company.

The extension of the slave trade was regarded as a capital object of English commercial policy, and it became the main object of national policy to encourage kidnapping of tens of thousands of negroes and their consignment to slavery. Chatham boasted that his conquests in Africa had placed almost the whole slave trade in British hands. Even Pitt, after the war with France which broke French sea-power, went back upon the position he had previously assumed. The result was that in consequence of the British conquests and under the shelter of the British flag, the slave trade became more active and the English slave trade doubled under Pitt.

From 1666 to 1766 there were three million slaves imported by the British alone into British, French and Spanish-American colonies; one quarter of a million died on the voyage.

Between 1680-1786 slaves imported into British-American colonies numbered two million and one hundred and thirty thousand (2,130,000).

1716-1756 an average of 70,000 slaves per annum imported into the American colonies, or a total of 3,500,000.

1752-1762 Jamaica alone imported 71,115 slaves.

1776 to 1800 an average of 74,000 slaves per annum, or a total of 1,850,000 imported into all the American colonies.

The annual averages of the various countries were:

By the British	38,000
By the Portuguese	10,000
By the Dutch	4,000
By the French	20,000
By the Danes	2,000

The net return to Liverpool in the eleven (inclusive) years from 1783-1793 amounted to £12,294,116. Liverpool monopolized five eighths of the British slave trade and three-sevenths of the total slave trade of the world. There was the double profit of selling the articles of British manufacture, largely cotton goods, disposed of in Africa for the slaves' purchase and the profit from the sale of the slaves to America. Manchester merchants largely profited in these transactions. All opposition exhibited by the Colonists of the North was ignored.

Lord Dartmouth, the Secretary of State for the Colonies in 1775 declared: "We cannot allow the colonies to check or to discourage in any degree a

traffic so beneficial to the nation." He was supported by the monarchy, the aristocracy, and the commercial world and ecclesiastism alike in the defence of the slave trade who all directly benefited financially therefrom.

The consensus of opinion is that the slave fared best under Portuguese, the Danes, the French, and the Spaniards, and worse under the Dutch and the British. The Dutch and British, having accepted the adoption of the religion of capitalism which is Protestantism, had not the same religious scruples about their slaves.

To the Portuguese belongs the credit of making the first attempt to explore the coasts of Africa early in the 15th century, and to trade with the natives in gold and spices. These efforts, prosecuted for some three centuries, resulted in the creation of numerous Portuguese settlements on the West and East Coasts. The British and others followed hard upon the heels of the Portuguese in the attraction of profits from gold and spices with the birth of the slave trade, contemporaneously with much zealous missionary work.

Through concern for India and to obtain a strategic point of importance, Britain was in political occupation of the Cape of Good Hope before the modern scramble for African territory began to protect the interests of her Indian Empire against the French. The desire to occupy Egypt was also influenced because of British interests in India.

The great scramble of European Powers in Africa started in the seventies because of the greatly extended development of capitalist industry. We had that ever recurring period of depression and unemployment, with falling prices. The factors which brought about a falling price was not only the stagnation of gold production, but also the improved means of transportation with the building of railways and oceanic liners opening up large tracts of land in Russia and America, causing a fall in the cost of production of foodstuffs and raw material. The same means of transportation brought into intimate proximity those lands over which, under the spur of gold production since 1851, the capitalistic industry had greatly extended its enormous forces of production in England, France, Germany and the Eastern portion of the United States of America. After the crisis of 1873 the wildest industrial competition broke out among them, which at times reduced prices below the cost of production, which ended in tariff wars to limit the competition of foreigners in the home market. Germany's tariffs of 1879; France 1891; and the U. S. A. McKinley tariff of 1890. The tariff, not being successful in staying off a world depression of prices, brought about a practical means of eliminating competition amongst themselves by the creation of Joint Stock Companies, Syndicates, etc. The machinery in production improved so much in 20 years' time that the trade of Europe reached millions of people more than previously.

Between 1885-1895 the emigration from Britain, Germany, Austria, Russia and Italy was alarming their home governments; anxious to keep this moving population under their own flag they became envious of the colonial expansion of their neighbors.

Therefore, to obtain a means of outlet for their people and manufacturers the eyes of European governments were turned to the Dark Continent. All their possession before 1870 were for the most part confined to seaport towns and adjacent territory, which were used as ports of call and trading centres, or coaling stations. British statesmen, alarmed at the progress of the French on the West Coast, took various measures to counteract it and to strike in while there was yet time. A charter was granted or conferred upon a body of merchants who, under the name of the Royal Niger Company made treaties with hundreds of potentates along the banks of

the Niger, and with other powerful tribes in Northern Nigeria.

The Imperial British East India Company was founded with the result that very large regions in the interior, right up to the great lakes, came under British suzerainty. In the South, the first serious conflict between the Boers and Britain ended, but the the discovery of diamonds and subsequently gold, and the advent of Cecil Rhodes, were destined to change the whole face of affairs.

A third great power, Germany, whose explorers had figured conspicuously in the geographical opening up of Africa, brought about a Colonial Party in Germany. This was opposed by Bismarck until the election of 1884, when Bismarck went over to the Colonial Party in order to be returned to the Reichstag. All this struggle over the dividing of Africa filled the diplomatic world of Europe with bitter quarrels, which were fought by the natives, urged on by the competing religious sects. Uganda ran red with native blood owing to the quarrels between the French Party, composed of French Catholic Fathers, and the British Party composed of Protestant missionaries. King Leopold II. of Belgium, who was attracted by Stanley's discovery of the course of the Congo, summoned the explorer to Brussels and despatched him on behalf of the Christianization Association the king had founded, to make treaties all along the banks of the Congo and its tributaries, expressing profound abhorrence at the exploits of half caste Arab slave traders, whose atrocities had been revealed by several explorers. He appealed to the philanthropists of Europe to applaud his initiative, which he declared to be the moral and material regeneration of sad-browed Africa. When Stanley returned with the treaties in his pocket, the king invited the world to recognize the Association as a free and independent African State.

Britain's chief object at this time was to keep France out of the Congo basin, owing to the differential tariffs by which France opposed British trade everywhere. Lord Granville did not trust Leopold II., and supported the Portuguese Government, which raised counter claims, based upon ancient historical achievements of her explorers. Portugal had claimed it for centuries, and because of French ambitions Portugal was supported by Britain. Although European powers had not contested Portuguese sovereignty, none recognized the claim, but agreed not to occupy this territory. Great Britain refused to recognize Portugal's claim, although the Lisbon Government initiated negotiation for such recognition every few years from 1846, but when France gave one of her explorers power to make treaties with the natives to advocate the French interest in this quarter, Portugal was then successful in obtaining Britain's recognition of her sovereignty.

An Anglo-Portuguese Convention, 1884, established a sort of joint control over the river. The French opposed vigorously with a outcry of opposition from Germany, Bismarck was now in the hands of the German Colonials. The German merchants were afraid the Anglo-Portuguese Convention would hurt their trade. The Woermann Line had a monthly service, and from 1883 to 1884 had sold 1,029,904 pounds of gunpowder, 2,254 tons of liquor, 555 tons of weapons. The traffic in intoxicants alone had increased from 76 tons in January, 1883, to 502 tons in March, 1884. there were also German sailing vessels trading in this region.

France also opposed the Anglo-Portuguese Convention because she knew the treaty was directed against her. When the French and German Governments approached each other to oppose Britain, Britain announced she had abandoned the treaty. Later on a conference was called at which Britain, Belgium, Holland, Portugal, Spain, the U. S. A.

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