

Materialist Conception of History

FOR BEGINNERS

Lesson 20.

CHINESE OPIUM WAR: CRIMEA; U. S. A. CIVIL WAR.

BY PETER T. LECKIE

ENGLAND violated for years the laws of China against the importation of opium, which China believed to be demoralizing to her people. China endeavored by vigorous measures to enforce her laws against the opium traffic; she seized 20,000 chests of opium valued at ten million dollars and dumped them into the sea.

England bombarded China's coast and burned miles of territory until China shouted for peace, which was granted by Christian England on condition of the payment of a war indemnity of \$21,000,000 and that England be permitted to introduce her opium into China.

The British government continued persistently to impress upon China the importance and advantage of legalizing the opium traffic, by imposing upon it regular import duties and so to secure a large revenue from its use.

The Chinese, though fully realizing this advantage of raising revenue never wavered in their indignant refusal of the opium traffic.

The heathen Emperor's declaration was:

"It is true I cannot prevent the introduction of the flowering poison. Gain-seeking and corrupt men will, for profit and sensuality, defeat my wishes. But nothing shall induce me to derive a benefit from the vice and misery of my people."

In 1857, a second conflict occurred over the opium question. British forces attacked the Canton from gunboats drawn up in the river, opened fire upon an unarmed, defenceless city with narrow streets crowded with women and children, that some papers of the time asserted a more horrible or revolting crime had never been committed in the ages of barbarian darkness.

The Emperor's palace, with all its curiosities and artistic treasures of centuries was set fire to and destroyed deliberately. Britain obtained a perpetual lease of Hong Kong and five ports were thrown open to British traders.

Redpath says, in his "Universal History":—

"Thus by the law of the strongest, by the law of the cannon was China compelled to expose her teeming millions to the ravages of a life-destroying drug of Turkey, presented by the hand of Christian England. It was the work preparatory to the successful planting of Christian missionaries. The mockery needs no comment."

We have arrived at a revolutionary period when insurrections broke out in almost every country of Europe. A very valuable history of this period is to be found in "The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte," by Karl Marx himself.

The Chartists of England intended to hold a large demonstration and procession, which was frustrated by the military under direction of the Duke of Wellington. McCarthy, in his "Short History of our Own Times," says that nearly two hundred thousand persons were sworn in for the maintenance of law and order, "and it will always be told of an odd incident of that famous scare, that the Prince Louis Napoleon, then living in London, was one of those who volunteered to bear arms in the preservation of order. Not a long time was to pass away before the most lawless outrage on the order and life of a peaceful city was to be perpetrated by the special command of the man who was so ready to lend the saving aid of his constable's staff to protect English society against some poor hundreds of thousands of English workingmen."

The period of 1844 to 1848 was one of strikes, lock-outs and especially 1847, was one of financial panics as a result of the gambling in railway speculation. When a large calico printing firm failed in Kilmarnock, the firm's creditors seized the workers' wages

as part payment of their accounts; the creditors had the law on their side. The smashing of factories and burning their owners' houses, in the forties was no unusual occurrence. The factory condition was such that millowners were magistrates and had employees brought before them for refusing to work when refused an increase of wages which they had asked for. Johnstone's "History of the Working Classes in Scotland," p. 310, gives us one of these incidents:

"A Dundee case, raised in parliament, gives us a light on the factory conditions of this period. Six factory girls in the employment of Messrs Baxter, their ages from 14 to 20 and their wages 5/6 and 6s. a week, had the audacity to ask for an increase of a halfpenny a day; the request was refused; after dinner they did not return to work; by the rules of the mill they could be fined time and half for undertime; but next morning Mr. Baxter, instead of fining the girls, had them arrested and marched through the streets under police escort to a private office where there was a magistrate, one of the Baxter family, and the overseer and manager of the mill. The judicial Baxter there and then sentenced the girls to 10 days hard labor."

Baxter was a free trader and had subscribed £600 to the Anti Corn Law League. The depression of trade waned, and with 1849 becoming prosperous wages rose as the demand for labor increased. The workers were gaining increases and winning strikes up until the outbreak of the Crimean War, which interrupted the supplies of flax, hemp and jute, when wages again fell.

The Crimean War was a conflict of the ambitions of France and Russia over the Turkish Empire, each wanting to peg out spheres of interest and influence on the quivering body of the sick man of Europe, who was supposed to be sick unto death. Great Britain supported the Turks because of the danger of Russia obtaining the possession of the Straits and Constantinople, which would allow a passage for Russia's navy into the Mediterranean Sea which might interfere with Britain's trade routes.

The Crimean War, like all wars, had its profiteers and its blunders. Food was sent where it could not be landed. Trussies for hay were filled with manure and cargoes of boots were all for the left foot. Turkey was preserved from disaster to prevent a Russian outlet to the Mediterranean.

After the Crimean War came the second war with China over the opium, which I have already drawn your attention to. General Sir William F. Butler's "Life of General Gordon," says

"In the long service of English wars with China which began 1839-40, opium was from first to last the cause of the trouble."

We come down now to the Civil War in America between the North and South to control the political power and give expression to their economic interests. A book entitled "Cotton is King," says:

"If they, the slaveholders, could establish free trade, it would assure the American market to foreign manufacturers, would secure foreign markets for cotton, repress home manufacturers, force a large number of North men into agriculture, multiply the growth and diminish the price of provisions to feed and clothe their slaves at lower rates, produce their cotton at one-third of the former prices and rival all other countries in its cultivation, monopolize the cotton trade throughout the whole of Europe and build up a commerce and a navy that would make us rulers of the seas."

The Union of the States of America in the first place was economic. Judge Millar, quoted by Bryce in vol. 1 of "American History," says:

"It is not a little remarkable that the suggestion which finally led to the relief, without which as a nation we must have perished, strongly supports the philosophical maxim of modern times, that of all the agencies of civilization, and progress, commerce is the most efficient. What our deranged finances, our discreditable failure to pay our debts, the sufferings of our soldiers could not force the several states to attempt, was brought about by a desire to be relieved from the evils of an unregulated and burdensome commercial intercourse."

Montgomery's "Leading Fact of American History":—

"The States quarrelled with each other about boundary lines, about commerce, about trade. If a farmer took potatoes from New Jersey to New York he might have to pay 10 to 15 cents tax a bushel. If a New York merchant

sent boots to New Jersey he might be taxed 10 cents a pair before he was allowed to sell."

"The Union gave every citizen of the United States equal rights in all States to buy and sell in all parts of the country. Thus entire freedom of trade was secured throughout the country."

The Civil War, in short, was a political struggle to secure possession of the big stick, the State.

The northern capitalists wanted to build railroads, and collect tariffs.

The southern slave owners wanted free trade and the right to hunt down fugitive slaves.

The north was so far from abolishing slavery that it passed a resolution, December, 1860, prohibiting any future amendment interfering with the slave traffic within the bounds of any existing state.

The south did not secede to maintain slavery but to repudiate the two to four million dollar debt.

The south proposed to abolish slavery to get European support when the war was going against them.

The negro was changed from a chattel slave to a wage slave because it was more profitable. Like all other wars we had the workers fighting on both sides a quarrel which was none of their business.

The Civil War was won because of the higher developed means of producing wealth by the north.

The McCormick reaping machine, which allowed the women and children of the north to be employed while the men fought was one of the superior economic advantages.

The usual war graft was employed. \$17,000,000 out of a \$50,000,000 million order, shoddy uniforms, rotten leather and adulterated rations were sold to the government, and the northern capitalist fattened on the life blood of their fighting slaves. Here was laid the foundation stone of the wealth and power of the majority of today's fortunes. It was stated upon the floor of Congress that "the movement of armies had been conducted more with a view to carry on trade than to strike down rebels."

A glance at the south adds further proof of the superiority of wage slaves to chattel slaves as a means of exploitation. In a short time the rails of the street railroad at Richmond were taken up to make armour for a gunboat and the old ploughs, spades, axes and stoves were gathered from the plantations to be made into weapons of war. The south being a one crop country, depending on foreign trade, had its industrial life paralyzed the moment the blockade was applied.

The only sign of working class opposition to the war was the uprising against the exemption clause of the draft, which enabled the wealthy to escape from military service, and New York was in the hands of a mob for a few days in 1863. The plutocracy arose immediately after the war. Iron, steel, bank and railroad interests, using illegal methods of calling the roll, omitting the representatives of the Southern States (although present), and proclaiming a military dictatorship over the Southern States. This same class is howling today because of the revolutionary ideas of the workers.

The Republican party lived on the glory of the emancipation and enfranchisement of the negro, conferred by their tender conscience, yet the solid republican states of Ohio, Kansas, Minnesota and Connecticut, between 1865-1867 defeated by referendum measures granting the suffrage to negroes residing in these states, but they needed the southern negro vote to obtain the political power from 1867 to '76. When the Republican party became strong enough to control political power without the negro vote they did not protest against the disenfranchising of the southern negro.

After the Civil War, when industry fell to pieces owing to over-production and the panic of 1873, we saw its effect in a reduction in wages and a few small unions swept out of existence. The first Centennial celebration of Independence (1876) found

(Continued on page 7)