

Materialist Conception of History

FOR BEGINNERS

LESSON 10.

IN the civilized countries of the ancient world, of which Rome was the greatest in extent and power, the workers, as a general rule, were chattel slaves. These slaves like those of recent times, —e.g., in South America, did not sell themselves for the day or hour like the modern wage-slave, but were sold for life. The modern workman sells himself piecemeal. The chattel slave had a guarantee of existence, however miserable. The master had an interest in maintaining his property, just as the owner takes care of his horse, to feed and shelter him. The modern worker has no guarantee of existence. He has become the property not of an individual, but of the capitalist class. In a later lesson we will compare the conditions of the various slaves, chattel, serf, and wage-slave.

"Adams' European History," dealing with the fall of the Roman Empire, says:

"The decay of Rome was economic, the universal use of slaves, which is a very wasteful means of production, and the scarcity of laborers, with difficulty of keeping the land cultivated, the right of the master to sell his slave, was forbidden, and the slaves were given access to little pieces of land, which they were required to cultivate, turning slaves into serfs. The state did not do this order to improve the condition of the slave, the sole object was to keep up the food supply."

Engels' "Origin of the Family," points out the universal poverty, because population had been replaced by sheep and oxen, and the decay of the towns forced them into agriculture and serfdom. Engels says: "Slavery died, because it did not pay any longer. But it left behind its poisonous sting by branding as ignoble the productive labor of free men."

Loria's "Economic Foundation of Society" says: "One of the causes of Rome's downfall had been the swollen estates of the nobles. Rich landowners had surrounded themselves with favored body-guards and an army of slaves and field workers. After the collapse of the Empire many of these had been freed, yet still felt the need of a master, remained near the ancestral castle, in which a baron or a lord lived as absolute ruler, knowing no authority but his own, holding a high court of justice in his hall, issuing laws and levying taxes on passing caravans, or ransom for prisoners, sometimes obtained in fair war, sometimes by falling on peaceful travelers. The distinctive feature of feudalism was just this unbridled rule of a military leader and landowner."

Another writer says: "The increased population caused by the barbarians' invasions rendered Roman and German slavery unprofitable and necessitated the substitution of a more productive system."

When the Roman Empire fell, the Empire of Charlemagne rose, but it was not a united government that could be maintained, because of the difficulty of communication from one place to another. The result was, that each locality was thrown upon its own resources to supply, not only what it needed in the way of goods, but also what it needed in the way of government. This economic condition gave local independence to the Count or Baron, and the establishment of feudalism with its form of political organization. The social chaos made central government impossible. When Charlemagne conquered the enemies of Rome after the fall of the Empire, he identified himself with Christianity and finally went to Rome, was crowned by Pope Leo III.; he acknowledged the spiritual supremacy of the church. This was the beginning of the Holy Roman Empire, which led to the contests in after years between Emperors and Popes for the sovereignty of Europe. The linking with Charlemagne changed the church from its anti-militarism to militarism, which led to some of the bloodiest persecution ever recorded in history.

The papal indulgencies stimulated the military spirit, and for two centuries it proclaimed war with the unbeliever and represented the battle field as

the sure road to heaven. I may point out that Emperor Constantine in the year 312, six years after his accession to the throne, realized the Empire was on the verge of collapse. He turned Christian to win the wealthy and influential priests to his side, and get control of the Christian organization. The church was turned from a revolutionary movement into a pillar of wealth and exploitation. "This ambitious Emperor," the historian says, "a baffling combination of good and evil qualities, who founded Constantinople, the murderer of his own wife and son, was keen enough to see the decaying of Rome and the rising force of Christianity, turned Christian, loaded the church with privileges. He authorized the Christian bishops to constitute themselves as arbiters in civil matters, he exempted the church from taxation and yielded portions of the imperial domain. At first the church was a republic, there was little or no distinction between clergy and laymen. A committee of presbyters or elders with a bishop for chairman, administered the affairs of the Christian community. The Bishops began to monopolize the theological discussions and met together at various councils to discuss discipline and dogmas. Rome became the headquarters of the new organization. Christianity was now incorporated, and gradually the elders were turned into priests. The church delegates decided by a free for all fight that Jesus and God was one, at the Council of Nicaea in the year 325. In 381, the council of Constantinople, in another fight, pounded the Holy Ghost into these two to make the trinity. The church came into the possession of lands by the congregations transferring their titles for protection and receiving these lands back in trust for their lifetime. Gradually the people became the serfs of the church. In the year 475 Bishop Salvianus denounced this practice as robbery, but in the 8th century this robbery had become a universally established custom in the dealings between the church and the peasants. Just as the German chiefs, after the downfall of Rome had stolen the land of their followers, so the church stole the land and wealth of its unprotected members. The church property had been originally considered the patrimony of the poor, but the church appropriated the greater part of the fund. Emperor Charlemagne attempted to reintroduce the portion for the poor, but after his death the church came forth with forged documents which pretended to show that the wealth of the church was originally intended for the clergy and that by "poor" was meant only priests that had taken the vow of poverty.

Engels also deals with this robbery in his "Origin of the Family." We will strike up against the church all through history, because it controlled a good deal of the land upon which the serfs were exploited.

Feudalism was inaugurated in England by William the Conqueror, who invaded the country in 1066. The feudal era lasted from the 10th to the 14th century. Feudalism had spread into all lands conquered by the Teuton tribes, before it reached England. William of Normandy introduced it into England in its perfection. He as conqueror, claimed the right to all the land and gave to whomsoever he pleased estates, on condition of receiving in return military service or money. The Normans' first thought was building castles, which became the Barons' residences. The typical feudal castle was an enormous building, either round or square, without ornaments or architectural style, and generally built on a hill. It was pierced by a few loop holes, from which arrows could be shot, and had a single gate opening on a moat which could only be crossed by a drawbridge. It was crowned with a battlement where pitch or melted lead could be thrown on the heads of attackers.

Kropotkin, in "Mutual Aid," says: "The chief of a tribe was elected and only had authority in battles, but as progress in industry advanced in trades and callings, these were handed down from father to son, so those chosen as chiefs or judges evolved

in family descent. The Norman families of Europe held this position. The chiefs' house became the place of defence just like the Baron's castle."

Herbert Spencer says: "Baron in the Roman language means, a strong man, doughty warrior; this indicates the military character of feudalism."

The military duties in defence of the feudal communities interfered with the agricultural pursuits of the community, therefore they paid in kind, and inaugurated a standing army. Previous to this settled state, William the Conqueror raised an army by the soldiers receiving an equal share of the spoils.

When Pope Innocent III. wanted to raise an army against the Albigensis in the 12th century it was only necessary for them to be promised a division of the spoils.

William the Conqueror took a census of the country and its economic condition, which is tabulated in the Domesday Book, to ascertain the capabilities of the country in regard to military defence and for taxation. The Manor system that prevailed when William the Conqueror took control, had developed to the stage where feudalism begins—William putting his Norman barons in the place of the Manor Lords. Before going further we might as well give a summary of the previous economic condition of England.

The Roman invasion, in Julius Caesar's reign, B. C. 55, was for the purpose of obtaining slaves for the Roman market and ravaging the fertile plains making the inhabitants pay tribute to Rome. Under Roman rule trade prospered through the development of the natural resources. "Roman writers," De Gibbon says, "speak of the rich natural products in minerals, especially tin, and its numerous flocks and herds of cattle. In the middle of the 3rd century there were 59 cities and 10,000,000 of a population, a figure which it did not again reach until the 19th century."

When the Romans left Britain in 410 A.D., trade and towns decayed and England became a battleground of various continental tribes; the Jutes 449, Saxons 447. After this mixture of race became settled, they were disturbed by the invasions of the Danes, who were forced through the barrenness of the cold north to improve their conditions, and became pirates and sea rovers through economic necessity. Although Egbert became Lord of the Saxons in 827 it was not until Edgar's reign, 958-975, that England became united, but internal strife prevented any great growth of trade and commerce. The separate communities endeavored to supply their own wants. As salt was largely required to salt their meat for winter, and it could not be universally procured, local markets arose on the boundary line, marked by a boundary stone, the origin of the market cross. There the various communities used to barter with one another.

The population was mostly agricultural, and a landless man was outside the pale of social life. The tribes which made up the English nation at this time held land in common. Each tribe cleared land and, separated by a fixed boundary mark, each member had a house and a common share in the land. The land was of three kinds.

1st—The forest or waste lands, for rough pasture, and uncultivated.

2nd—Pasture land, sometimes enclosed and sometimes open, in which each man looked after his own hay and stacked it for winter; this was divided up into allotments for each member.

3rd—The arable land was also divided into allotments for each markman.

To settle any dispute relating to the division of the land, they met in a common council. This was a democratic institution based on the economic methods of production. Then there arose the Manor system, which is believed to have been gained by the lord of the manor giving protection against invasions of other tribes. The lord owning the land, the people carried on agriculture collectively, but instead of a democratic community of government, it became autocratic. The land was divided up in

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