

Materialist Conception of History

FOR BEGINNERS

LESSON VII.

In our last lesson, I said that common ownership of land was disputed by some of the capitalists' supporters.

Professor Huxley, who in a noted discussion with Herbert Spencer, acts as a champion of capitalism and calls Rousseau an ignoramus, has given a remarkable proof of his ignorance of the customs of savages, which he discusses with such assurance.

"The confident assertions," wrote the learned professor in the "19th Century" magazine of January, 1890, "that land was originally held in common by the whole nation, were singularly ill-formed. Land was held in private or several property, as the property of the public or the general body of the nation."

Let us see if we can find proof of the common ownership of land.

The German tribes, when first known, were in the lower status of barbarism. They used iron in limited quantities, possessed flocks and herds and cultivated cereals, but had not obtained the idea of private ownership in land. According to the account of Caesar, the arable lands were allotted yearly by the chiefs, while the pasture lands were held in common. When the Spaniards discovered Mexico, the people lived in communal houses, and held the land in common. The Pueblo Indians held their land in common: The Iroquois Indians had communal houses 100 feet by 30 feet by 20 feet high. They stored the food in common, but each household prepared it for its own use. They had neither formal breakfast or supper, but ate when they were hungry.

When the communal houses were divided into private houses containing single families, the communal feasts in remembrance of the dead became religious gatherings. The Mexico Indians had common stores looked after by the women, who kept a year's supply of food ahead.

The Maya Indians cooked their food in common, and carried the food to their dwellings to eat it separately.

One of Alexander's generals, 4th century B. C. (Nearchus), speaking of Egypt, says: "The lands were cultivated in common by tribes or groups of relations who shared the fruits of the crops in common."

The Scotch Highlanders in their clans had communal cultivation of land. We had the common land of Selkirk, where they had their communal riding every year to hold ownership of the land, and English history is full of data concerning the enclosure of the common lands.

There is not a human race or nation known, that has not had its communal village. Eskimo life is based on communism. What is obtained by hunting and fishing belongs to the tribe. An Eskimo cannot own more than two canoes.

The Brazilian natives hunt and fish in common, and having captured game, never leave the spot until they have consumed it.

The Bible shows the distribution of the common lands among the Jews.

The Australian and New Zealand natives were in the communistic stage when discovered.

Originally the Saxon tribes were an association of free communities, owning the land in common. With the common ownership of the land in England under the Mark system all Markmen possessed economic freedom and equality. There were no class wars because there were no classes.

The morals and ideas under this common ownership were vastly different from the morals which spring from the private ownership of the means of production today. All moral codes are a reflection of the existing economic conditions. This communism bred a moral code of equality. The bushmen of Africa who receives a present, divides it up with

the members of the tribe. A captured animal or booty he shares, and keeps the smallest share himself.

Kropotkin, in "Mutual Aid," tells us that the Fuegian, in times of famine, scours around in search of food, and when he finds it, returns to inform the rest of the tribe. The oldest members of the tribe proceeds to portion it out in equal shares.

In the Caroline Isles when a man sets out on a journey he carries no food with him. When he is hungry he enters a house, and without waiting for permission, helps himself. When his hunger is satisfied, he leaves without even saying thank you. He has but exercised a right of the tribe.

Morgan says, in "Ancient Society," "If a stranger entered an Iroquois house, no matter what time of the day, it was the duty of the women to put food before him. If he was hungry he would eat it, if not hungry he tasted it, as courtesy required he should do so and thank the giver. The words *thine* and *mine* have no equivalent in the Indian language."

Kropotkin gives an illustration of Communism in India, and shows that in parts of Siberia, although three centuries under Czarist rule, they still stick to the communist customs.

The communistic trait is so strong in Russia that the colonization of Siberia is a history of hunting and trading guilds. All traders from the same locality going to the town hire rooms and a cook and eat in common, all paying an equal share of the expenses. The gangs of convicts on their way to Siberia had the same organization.

In some of the Caucasian districts of Russia up to the time of the war, even although they divided up the hay when cut, it is noteworthy that whenever the cuckoo announces the coming of spring, everyone in need has the right to go to his neighbor and take the hay he needs for his cattle.

In another part of Russia (the Kabyles) although they have private property, if anyone kills a sheep on a day which is not a market day, the village bell crier announces it, and all the sick and pregnant women of the village may partake of it. Kropotkin tells us that when the peasants are broken down in misery they will migrate in communities, and build houses and till the soil in common.

Not only did communism maintain equality, it developed a fraternity and liberality that would shame the alleged brotherliness and charity of Christianity, and which elicited the admiration of all observers before the people had been deteriorated by booze, bible and brutal commercialism, and various other diseases of civilization.

A missionary named Heckewelder, who lived among the Indians, 1771-1786, says: "They believed a great spirit gave all things to all men, whatever liveth or groweth. They would lie down with an empty stomach rather than have it laid to their charge that they had neglected their duty to a stranger or the sick, because they had a common right to be helped out of the common stock, for the meat that was taken from the woods was common to all, before the hunter took it. Hospitality was not a virtue with them, but a duty."

Dr. D. R. G. Briton, speaking of the religion of primitive peoples, says: "All tribal religions preach a dualism of ethics, one for the members of the tribe who are bound together by ties of kinship, and by union to preserve existence, the other for the rest of the world. To the former (own tribe) are due: aid, kindness, justice, truth, and fair dealing; to the latter enmity, hatred, injury, falsehood and deceit. The latter is just as much a duty as the former, and is just as positively enjoined by both religion and tribal law."

We did not have to go to primitive people to see this dualism. We had it illustrated during the war. In Ottawa, for instance, a recipient of the V.C., was placarded to be at a meeting, who had

killed 58 Germans. He was under arrest some time after for killing a man at home. We have quite a number of our savage traits with us yet, with all our boasted civilization.

The manufacturing class of England brought forth a swarm of economists, ministers, and other publicists, the general principles of whose teaching was a reflex of the code developed by the factory lords. It was Nassau W. Senior, the first political economist of Oxford, who sought to prove that the factory laws would be disastrous because all profit was made in the last hour of the day. The others who opposed were Bright, Cobden, Roebuck, Joseph Hume, and even John Stuart Mills, although he recognized that "upper class" morality was being brought to bear on the subject. In his essay on liberty, he says: "Wherever there is an ascendant class a large portion of the morality emanates from its class interests, and its class feelings of superiority, and the morality between the planter and the negroes, princes and subjects, has been for the most part the creation of these class interests and feelings."

The High Church of England, for instance, took the side of the landowners, while the evangelicals, non-conformists and independents generally sided with the factory lords.

Under feudalism, when land was the dominant factor in the exploitation of labor, it was unlawful to lend money for interest. Up to the reign of Edward the II. the common law, seconded by the municipal law, permitted no Christian to take interest. Luther said: "Every usurer was a thief." By the Mosaic law no usury, no interest, was to be exacted on any pretence. Luke VI, 35: "Lend hoping for nothing to gain." Now the banker and financiers are the pillars of the church. Law is also a reflection of economic conditions. Locke says: "Where there is no property there is no injustice."

And again: "No property no law."

Maine, in his "Ancient Law," sees in economic development the cause of the modern renaissance of Roman law, and of the substitution of individualistic law for feudal law.

Stein expresses himself thus: "Property is the principal factor in the development of law."

Savign recognizes "that the earlier re-establishment of Roman law in Italian cities was due to the flourishing conditions of the cities. It was not by chance, but through the necessary course of events that Roman law was re-established and passed to German and French cities to correspond to like needs." In speaking of the legal system established in Italy towards the close of the barbarian invasions he says: "Had landed property been taken away from the Romans the preservation of the Roman Constitution would have therewith become impossible." Therefore property expresses law and property is an expression of economic conditions, so that law is not the gift of the gods any more than other ideas. The lawyers of France claimed that water rights belonged to the agriculturists in as much as manufacturers could substitute other power, but today these considerations have lost all authority because the manufacturing industries have become supreme.

Even our criminal law is an expression of the prevailing conditions. Thus an agricultural state has heaviest penalties against invasions of landed property, while capitalist or commercial countries punish more severely the crimes of forgery and the issuing of false money.

I have endeavored to point out that ideas, laws and morals are a reflection of the means of production. Our next lesson will be on natural environment and its effects on the human race.

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