

The Science of Socialism

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ARTICLE VI.—THE NEMESIS OF NATIONS

A complete understanding of the Science of Socialism necessitates a knowledge of the social and economic systems which have prevailed before the rise and growth of modern Capitalism.

Now, history is a science, to be written scientifically and to be studied scientifically. In conjunction with a close and reasoned study of economic institutions. When the history of any past epoch is studied in this manner, we are enabled to discern the more closely the path which must be trod in the days that are to be.

The Socialist approaches any historical epoch armed with what is termed "the materialist conception of history." Engels tells us that:

"The materialist conception of history starts from the proposition that the production of the means to support human life and, next to the production, the exchange of things produced; is the basis of all social structure; that in every society that has appeared in history, the manner in which wealth is distributed and society is divided into classes or orders, is dependent upon what is produced, and how the products are exchanged. From this point of view the *final causes of all social changes and political revolutions are to be sought, not in men's brains, not in man's better insight into eternal truth and justice, but in changes in the modes of production and exchange. They are to be sought not in the philosophy, but in the economics of each particular epoch.*"

That is to say, the political and juridical institutions existing in any given historical epoch are determined by, and can only be explained through the system of production and distribution of wealth which prevails during that historical epoch.

Let us, very briefly, examine the history of the human race from the viewpoint of the materialist conception of history, in order that we may accept the past as our future guide and gain some idea of the historical origin of modern Capitalism.

It is a commonplace among historians that mankind, in the earlier stages of its mundane existence, lived under a system of Communism. All great investigators of that historical period of history known as "Savagery" are agreed upon this fundamental point. Such unquestionable authorities as Tylor, Lubbock, Spencer, Morgan, Bachofen Maurer and others, tell us, in very decided tones, that early man lived and had his social being in a rude form of Communism.

Lewis Morgan, in his great book "Ancient Society," assumes that 100,000 years covers the life of the human race on the earth. Of this period, fully 95,000 years have been lived under forms of Communism. He says that during Savagery and Barbarism the essentials to the production of wealth are possessed in common. Speaking of the first period, he tells us that:

"The property of savages was inconsiderable. Their ideas concerning its value, its desirability and its inheritance were feeble. Rude weapons, fabrics, utensils, apparel, implements of flint, stone and bone and personal ornaments represent the chief items of savage life."

Even during the higher social order known as Barbarism, when "it is evident that a large increase of personal property has now occurred," we find that "the territorial domain still belonged to the tribe in common."...Indeed Morgan says:

"That any person owned lands or houses in his own right, with power to sell and convey in fee-simple to whomsoever he pleased is not only unestablished but improbable. Their mode of owning their lands in common, by gentes, or by communities of persons, their joint-tenement houses and their mode of occupation by related families, precluded the individual ownership of houses and of lands."

Needless to say, during this long period of time when Communism existed, there were constant and fierce struggles between man and the terrible beasts of the jungle, and just as terrible struggles between man and man. Indeed, for the greater part of this historical period wars occupied a very prominent position. The captives taken by the victors, were, at first eaten at huge festive feasts, but it was later discovered, that these captives were much more profitable alive than dead. In other words, we find the rude start of slavery, although it is certain that for a very considerable period of time, the slaves, thus enslaved, were the property of the whole tribe of gentes.

With slavery the accumulation of wealth grew apace, the rude laws of inheritance expanded, money as a medium of exchange was introduced, and a primitive division of labor established. Mankind, thanks to the discovery of the stockade, began to gather into communities for purposes of protection and, as the population increased and the number of slaves grew, the old "gentile" families formed an aristocracy. **We find the genesis of classes.** For it was not long before the laws of inheritance developed so that the slaves, once the possession of the whole gentes, became the property of the "gentile" aristocracy.

It was upon this basis of slavery that the great empires of Egypt, Athens and Rome were established. The magnificence of the free republics of Athens have excited the admiration and inspired the verse of poets and of philosophers. It was Shelley—was it not?—who, in one of these moments of inspiration wrote:

"Let there be light! said Liberty,
And, like sunrise from the sea,
Athens rose! Around her born,
Shone like mountains in the morn,
Glorious states."

but the poet forgot that this liberty of these "glorious states" existed upon an elaborate system of chattel slavery. In Athens, at the very zenith of its power, there were 90,000 free citizens (which includes men, women and children) 365,000 slaves and 45,000 slave police.

The Roman Empire, at the height of its glory, was divided, just as sharply into opposing economic classes. And what glory! History does not give us a finer spectacle of imperial greatness than the Empire of the Caesars. The magnificent roads, the lasting aqueducts, the completeness of the military machine, the far-flung boundaries of its power, the stately edifice of Roman jurisprudence—here is an impressive picture.

And this magnificence and power had its being because the overwhelming mass of the people over whom the Caesars held sway were chattel slaves. The economic history of the Roman Empire reveals to us the great and growing wealth of the patricians and the increasing poverty and misery of the plebians. The huge slave-worked estates which characterized the closing decades of Roman greatness increased the gap between these two great classes. The tribute levied from slaves increased the luxury and wealth of the aristocracy. Luxury and debauchery, unequalled perhaps in all history, reigned in "the seats of the mighty," while the direst and most hopeless poverty festered below.

But the Nemesis of the Roman Empire was at hand. The great empire fell before the attacks of the barbarians from without and the discontent of the masses from within. The polarisation of wealth resulting from pitiless slavery sowed the seed and reaped the whirlwind.

With the fall of Roman glory, we come to the close of a long and important period in economic evolution. The knowledge of Egypt, the splendour of Athens and the power of Rome existed because the basis of these empires was chattel slavery. No longer were slaves owned in common, they have become the exclusive property of the possessing classes. And the whole of the wealth which those slaves produced was the property of the patricians.

It must be borne in mind that chattel slavery, no matter how much we may deplore its multifarious evils, represented a distinct advance in economic evolution. With those evils, can be found a tremendous increase in man's power to produce wealth, a distinct advance in the machinery of exchange of wealth.

The collapse of the Roman Empire brings us to a period of transition and disruption. Roads fell into disrepair, markets almost disappeared, and there is apparently chaos everywhere. From this period of transition there gradually emerges a new and, in many important respects, a higher economic and social order—Feudalism.

The stern necessities of the age demanded a stern and well-nigh relentless autocracy to evolve order from chaos. We find, then, the rise of a military dictatorship based upon force of arms. Castles, of

tremendous strength, appeared in all directions—the stronghold of the Feudal baron. The possession of land is the reward of military service, the tie which binds baron to king.

The serfs of the Feudal baron, although very much at his mercy, possessed certain definite rights. In the majority of cases they were permitted to work a certain number of days for themselves as against a similar (sometimes greater) number of days for their lord. Moreover, they were required to swear allegiance to their lord and to fight for him in times of war.

In the growing towns, we find, *pari passu*, the serfs, a large body of workmen and free artisans. No matter what dues they might pay to the feudal lords, they were economically free. Organized into democratic guilds, they grew in power and were able to defeat many of the tyrannical inroads of the landed aristocracy and military caste. Thus organized, controlling his own tools and his own products, the artisan, secure in his privileges and safe to rise from journeyman to master-craftsman, was in comparison, economically free.

The power of these guilds increased, trade flourished and political institutions broadened. **It was the age of Individual Production.**

And what a power these guilds of free artisans became! William Morris has told us of the advancement of learning and the development of art which resulted from the endeavors of these gallant fellows. The stately cathedrals and magnificent monasteries of Europe stand as silent witnesses of the skillful architects, decorators and builders who lived in the towns of Feudalism.

Never before nor since, has man had such a glorious opportunity. Owning his own tools, controlling his own product, working in his own home, able to rise from apprentice to master—these men achieved in the domain of art and letters far more than could be accomplished in Shelley's "glorious states."

As above stated, it was an age of individual production. The bootmaker made the whole of the boot and the cotton-spinner the whole of the cloth.

But individual production, no matter what its achievements were in the realm of art, could not long satisfy the new markets opened up by the bold seamen of Devon. Slowly, but gaining impetus with each fresh conquest, **social production displaced individual production.** At first, and very slowly, there is the introduction of a higher division of labor, the recognition of the greater productive power of co-operation over the older individualism. Trade increases, first in the national market, then in the international market. The new markets and the desire for world empire hastens the process, and greater impetus is given to the process of industrial change by the inventions of machines by Watt, Arkwright, Cartwright and Hargraves.

The new machines spell the doom of the old individual production of wealth by the craftsman in his own home. Instead of the spinner weaving his cloth with his own rude tools in his own home, we find a larger and larger number of men and women spinning cotton by the aid of complex machinery in a factory. A man no longer creates a thing, he is reduced to a machine-slave and makes only a small part of a thing.

Expansion of trade and the growth of markets demand the employment of more machinery, the building of more factories, the expenditure of more capital. The new method of factory production means the employment of larger and larger aggregates of machinery, which in turn spell the employment of more and more capital. In other words, we have reached the time when the individual production in small homes gives place to social production in large factories and workshops.

Capitalism, in short, is the highest plane in economic evolution reached by man. He has succeeded in producing wealth beyond the dreams of Fortunatus, of building up a system of wealth production which results in tremendous aggregations of riches. He has almost solved the problem of the social production of wealth, and it remains for him to solve the still greater problem of the social distribution of wealth.

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