

Materialist Conception of History

FOR BEGINNERS

AMERICAN REVOLUTION

Lesson 16.

THE Revolution was a result of the restrictions of American trade placed upon the American capitalist by the home government. All commerce was to be carried on in British ships. The Americans were not allowed to manufacture goods which were manufactured in Britain. Tobacco, cotton and wool, could be sold to England only, and all imports must be bought from Britain and carried in British ships. Even the provinces were prohibited from selling goods such as woollens, ironware, hats, etc., to one another. In Maine, trees over two feet in diameter were to be saved for the Royal Navy. The American capitalist was prepared to maintain that he had the first right to exploit American labor and resources. Now we see through all the bombastic oratory and glamour of the 4th of July; the real origin of Independence and Revolution was economic and materialistic. The tea incident in Boston harbor is taught as an exalted act of patriotism to the American schoolboy. England's policy of compelling the colonies to purchase everything from her, and putting on heavy tariffs made smuggling a profitable and prosperous trade. One fourth of those who signed the Declaration of Independence were well known to be smugglers and contraband traders.

A government tax on tea made smuggling of tea profitable, but when the East Indian Company, the legitimate tea traders, had accumulated 17 million pounds of unsaleable tea in their warehouses and still other cargoes lying in their ships in Boston harbor, they persuaded the home government to remit the tea tax in order to dispose of this accumulation of tea in Boston. This tea became cheaper to the consumer than the smugglers' tea, therefore the smugglers, disguised as Indians, raided Boston harbor and dumped this tea into the water to eliminate the competition of the Indian Tea Company. The stamp duty passed by the home government added fuel to the seething revolt. England also tried to confine the colonists to the seaboard strip of land.

The great George Washington, a government official surveyor, illegally surveyed land outside of the royal grant. A man who was a traitor to his country, liable to be shot if the revolution had not succeeded, has been honored by officials of England during the Great War by placing wreaths on the grave of this rebel. The people were not united. We find workers and farmers opposed to paying the debts that the sea coast merchants and planters had forced upon them during the war. They rose in rebellion in Massachusetts under Daniel Shays in support of the idea that the property of the States had been protected from confiscation by the joint exertions of all, and therefore ought to be the common property of all. Under these conditions the capitalists began to exert themselves. Their delegates to Annapolis and later to Philadelphia were brought together in response to the demands of the business men of the country, not to form an ideal government, but to formulate a practical plan to meet the needs of business. The landed class wanted to become the Senate, but they finally struck a bargain between tariffs and slaves. A. McEllsworth, of Connecticut, said: "Let us not intermeddle; as population increases, poor laborers will be so plentiful as to render slaves useless." While one John Adams declared: "It is of no consequence by what name you call your people, whether by that of freemen or slaves. In some countries the laboring poor men are called freemen, in others they are called slaves, but the difference is imaginary only. What matter it, whether a landlord employing ten men on his farm, gives them annually as much as will buy the necessaries of life or gives them necessaries at short hand?"

When the constitution was formulated by a group

of wage and chattel slave owners, which many people think today was adopted by a majority of the population, there were not more than 120,000 men entitled to vote out of a population of 4,000,000. Even these had not the right to vote direct, but by choosing delegates to the convention. The first draft of the Declaration of Independence had a clause which was to restrain the buying and selling of slaves on the market, but it was dropped out before the Declaration was finally adopted, because it was detrimental to the landed class of the south. Therefore this Declaration, which declares all men to be created free and equal, had dropped out of it the condemnation of the trade in human beings.

The Napoleonic wars in Europe gave America opportunity to monopolize the merchant marine trade; the commercial and financial class of New York and New England were therefore enabled to dominate the government. But by 1816 the rise of the manufacturing class had been able to sufficiently carry a protective tariff. The south favored this tariff, believing it would create a market at home for cotton and build up manufactures in the south. New England, led by David Webster, opposed the tariff and the higher one of 1824, because New England's interests were mainly commercial, and the tariff acted as a restriction on the carrying trade; by 1825 these conditions were reversed. New England merchants had become manufacturers and Webster was now leading a movement for more protection. The south discovered that Europe was her best market in cotton and she desired free trade to obtain cheap manufactures and food to feed and clothe her slaves. If they could establish free trade, it would ensure the American market to foreign manufacturers and secure the foreign market for her cotton. It would curtail home manufacture in the north and force a larger number of the people into agricultural pursuits, multiply the growth and decrease the price of foodstuffs to feed the slaves, and enable them to produce cotton cheaper, to monopolize the world's market for cotton and build up a navy and commerce that would make America rulers of the sea.

During colonial times, the English merchants found one of the main sources of income was the trading in slaves to the colonists. We saw in a previous lesson that the foundation and rise of industrial England was largely due to this monopoly. As soon as slave running became profitable, the slave breeding states began to object to further importation of slaves, but the slave trade received support from Massachusetts and Connecticut, because they manufactured rum, which was taken to Africa and exchanged for slaves. It was from this trade that the Puritan fathers received a large portion of their wealth. Peter Fannell was one of those traders and the Fannell Hall, "the cradle of liberty," was built from the profits of the smuggling of rum and capturing slaves. Slaves began to rise in price because of the demand for them in the cotton and sugar industries, sometimes as high as 4,000 dollars being paid. Think of it, you wage slaves, when a carload of wage slaves nowadays is not worth 50 cents.

This rise in price of slaves brought the viewpoint of their expensiveness. The labor of clearing land, ditching and hewing forests was done by the Irish, who travelled around under contractors. The landlords thought they were dear, but consoled themselves because it cost them nothing although they died, and it was better using Irishmen than the good field slaves on work of so severe employment. By this time it began to dawn on the ruling class that slave labor was more expensive than free labor. The "London Economist," 1853, said: "Slaves are costly instruments of production. A slave population hampers its owners in many ways, and there is some reason to believe that the low price at which slave-raised products is sold is the consequence of the necessity of its owner to sell in order to maintain his people. The responsibility of the owner of

free labor is at an end when he has paid the covenanted wages, and his greater advantages in the open market, is exemplified in that there are more fortunes made by the employers of free labor than by slave labor." The millionaires are the employers of free labor, and were not found amongst the slave owners. The small profits of the slave owners could not compete with the larger profits from wage labor unless they could control the government. Therefore a struggle went on between the employers of free laborers and the slave owners, which culminated in the Civil War, which we will deal with when we come up to the period of 1860.

John Wesley maintained an appearance of friendship to the Revolution, but on returning to England sided with the English government, and his preachers in the States refused to take the oath to the Republic. France joined the colonies against Britain and Spain joined France in seizing Gibraltar. Russia, Sweden and Denmark entered an armed neutrality to prevent their ships being searched at sea. Troops were taken from Ireland to fight the colonies, and as France threatened the invasion of Ireland, the Irish raised a voluntary army chiefly of Protestants to protect Ireland. This force increased to 100,000 men. With such an army, the Irish so long oppressed by restrictions on their trade, followed the example of the Americans that they had the right to export whatever goods they desired to other countries. The home government, harassed on every side, complied with a Bill in 1780 giving the Irish the right to export wool and glass, and another Bill two years later repealed the law which gave the English parliament power over any Bills passed by the Irish parliament. (I will deal with the Irish question in a future lesson.) The English government began to arrange peace with America, France and Spain, which was not an easy matter as Spain claimed Gibraltar. France claimed Bengal, both of these places being very valuable to Britain. Fortunately for England Admiral Rodney met the French fleet going to seize Jamaica, which he utterly defeated, and raised the siege of Gibraltar a few months later. These victories gave England that honorable peace you hear so much about. The Treaty of Versailles, 1783, was signed, giving Spain Florida and Minorca; England kept Gibraltar, and France received nothing, England getting Canada, Nova Scotia and Newfoundland. The United States received their independence.

Just as we saw the reflection of the rising capitalist class immediately after the English Revolution of 1688, in Banking Acts, etc., so we find that although the colonies were founded on charters granted to trading companies, commercial corporations were little known in America till after the Revolution. In 1781 was chartered the first bank, the North American in Philadelphia, and about the same time began the turnpike road, canals, insurance and manufacturing companies. In 1791 the Federal Government chartered the Bank of the United States. Therefore we see the expression and reflection of the new economic conditions which brought about the American Revolution. Immediately following the American Revolution came the French Revolution, another product of the new economic conditions, wherein the old institutions were out of harmony with the new mode of production and exchange.

We will take up the French Revolution in our next lesson.

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