

OUT OF BARBARISM INTO FEUDALISM

(Two Excerpts)

[There is some disagreement among the authorities on the subject as to the name of the barbaric political organizations which, coming after the downfall of Roman civilization, preceded feudalism. The "Mark" and the "Manor" successively in time are the names used by some to designate the social economic and political units of that intervening period. Lafargue calls it "village collectivism" and others may have other names. However, we are primarily concerned with the order and manner of social progression and its determining causes.—Edit.]

Ranks Within the Tribe.

"It must not be supposed that, even among the full tribesmen, equality of rank was the rule. True it is that every free tribesman was entitled to his share of the grazing land, to his hunting in the waste, to his oath of kindred (i.e., to the protection of his immediate relatives,) and to his armor. But it is probable, that from the very first, the chief wealth of the tribe, viz., its cattle and sheep, its camels and goats, were looked upon as individual property; and the tribesmen who were not fortunate enough to inherit or to capture a stock of these was in a somewhat unenviable position. As Ancient Irish Laws put it, he was only a *Fer Midba*, or "inferior man," not a *Boaire*, or "lord of cattle." In fact he was very much in the position of the modern "free" workman, who often finds that his boasted freedom means freedom to starve." Prof. Jenks, "Short History of Politics."

"The village built in the best strategical positions became a centre, in the event of invasion the inhabitants of adjacent villages flocked to it for refuge, and in return for the protection afforded them in the hour of danger, they were called on to contribute towards the cost of repairing the fortifications and maintaining the men at arms. The authority of these village chiefs extended to the surrounding country.

"In this natural manner were generated in the collectivist villages, all of whose members were equal in rights and duties, the first elements of feudalism; they would have remained stable during centuries, as in India, but for the impulse of external events which disturbed them and infused them with new life. Wars and conquests developed these embryonic germs, and by agglomerating and combining them, built up the vast feudal system diffused during the Middle Ages, over Western Europe.

"The medieval conquerors confirmed the local chiefs in their possession of those posts in the villages which were too unimportant to be bestowed as benefices on their liegemen, and in return, made them responsible for the levying of the taxes and the conduct of their dependents, thereby according them an authority they had not previously possessed in the village collectivities. But in every strategical place they installed one of their own warriors, it was a military post which they confided to him; the length of tenure of such posts,

WHEN we analyze the written history of society, we find that we can divide it into three great periods, Chattel Slavery, Feudalism and Capitalism. History is after all merely a record of the struggles of the classes in these periods. All the records that have been preserved covering the events and conditions of life of past ages have been highly colored by historians. The lowest class, whether it be chattel, feudal or wage-slave, has been treated with scorn by those scribes. The historians or chroniclers of antiquity did not consider it worth while, or at least dignified to pay but little more attention to the slaves in their records than they would to beasts of burden. A few stray passages here and there, something from hieroglyphics and slabs unearthed and translated in more recent times, give about all the knowledge we have about the conflicts of the classes. Even today with improved methods of communication, we know very little of what really occurs in the outside world, due to the fact that those in control of the means of information are not desirous of furnishing us with the truth.

The accounts of the uprisings of the under classes of the past are almost unknown to us. That there were uprisings is a certainty. The spirit of revolt never entirely dies out in man no matter to what depths of misery

called benefices, was subject to variation; at first, they were revoked at pleasure, afterwards granted for life, and ultimately became hereditary. The beneficiary tenants took advantage of circumstances to turn their hereditary possessions into alodial property, i.e., into land exempt from all obligations. In France, the early kings were repeatedly obliged to make ordinances against this kind of usurpation. 'Let not him who holds a benefice of the emperor or the church convert any of it into his patrimony,' says Charlemagne in a capitulary of the year 803. But such ordinances were powerless to prevent the conversion of military chiefs into feudal barons. It may be said, therefore, that the feudal system had a dual origin; on the one hand it grew out of conditions under which the village collectivities evolved, and in the other it sprang from conquest. "The feudal barons whether village-chiefs, transmogrified by the march of events, or military chieftains installed by the conquerors, were bound to reside in the country which it was their duty to administer and defend. The territory they possessed and the dues they received in the shape of labor and tithes, were the recompense of services rendered by them to the cultivators under their jurisdiction. The barons and their men-at-arms formed a permanent army, nourished and maintained by the inhabitants whom they directly protected. "In the Romance languages (which include the French, Provençal, Italian, Spanish, Portuguese and Wallachian,) the original name of the feudal lord, the term baron, signified the strong man, a doughty warrior, which well indicates the essentially military character of feudalism. Vassal similarly bore the sense of brave, valiant."—Paul Lafargue.

he sinks. There always remains a spark of revolt in him. Biologically speaking it is another case of self-preservation. The yellowest cur that ever walked on four feet will bite back when cornered. When a man is on the edge of a precipice and when he knows one push will send him to a certain death, the instinct of self-preservation manifests itself and he tries hard to save himself.

The following description of the life of the slaves in ancient Rome furnishes us with some idea of the sufferings the working class of that period had to undergo. "The labor was arduous; men and women, some of whom had been guilty of some criminal act, were sent into the subterranean caverns, stripped entirely of their clothing, their bodies painted, their legs loaded with chains and thus set at work breaking the rocks and carrying it to the mouth of the shaft." Such conditions could not be continued without protest and protest meant battle.

The revolt of Spartacus, the Roman gladiator is one of the most glorious chapters in Roman history. The spirit of revolt apparently was not destroyed by the arduous labor imposed on them by their masters. They withstood Rome's best legions for many years until they were weakened by internal dissensions.

The civilization that was built on the backs of chattel slaves collapsed by its own contradictions. A new society took its place. A new form of slavery came into existence, feudalism. The conditions of the working class during that period was hardly better than its predecessors in the chattel slave period.

To live in his dilapidated hut like a hare in his hollow, with his ear always on the alert, to cultivate out of season, and against his will barren soil; to take refuge at the sound of danger in his master's castle; to encamp there in want and fear, hardly sheltered and poorly fed, a prey to epidemic diseases; later to go out starved and trembling to find his hovel burnt to the ground and his crops destroyed, to repair the damage and begin again with the prospect of another similar catastrophe; such was the life of the serf under the feudal system.

Again the instinct of self-preservation asserts itself. The serf revolts blindly. One of the greatest and most significant revolts of that period was the Peasant's revolt of 1381 in England. The following statement, significant of the social doctrines preached, is attributed to John Ball, one of the revolutionists of that period. It is remarkable for its startling likeness to the statements made at the present time.

"Good people, things will never be well in England so long as there be villeins (Serfs) and gentlemen. By what right are they whom we call Lords, greater than we? On what grounds have they deserved it? Why do they hold us in serfage? They have leisure and fine houses; we have pain and labour, and the wind and rain in the fields. And yet it is of us and out of our toil that these men hold their estate."

And when the serfs in collusion with the handicraft workers of the

cities had practically overrun England, they lost the fruits of their victory by listening to the honeyed words of their king who promised amelioration of their sufferings and the destruction of serfdom. Seeing that the serfs had demobilized their forces, the king is reported to have said: "Villeins you were and villeins you are. In bondage shall you abide, and that not your old bondage but a worse."

The opening of the new world spelled the death of feudalism. Capitalism makes its appearance on the world's stage. Although the serf expected that the new system would put an end to his sufferings, he was doomed to disappointment. The rapid growth of industry upon the basis of capitalism brought poverty and misery among the toiling masses to a degree unparalleled in the history of human society.

The tales of the sufferings of the working class in England may be read in the Blue Books and reports of the various commissions which investigated the state of industrial life in the factories, mines and workshops between 1833 and to date or it may be read in the burning pages of Engels' State of the Working Classes in England in 1844. We hear of little children and young people in factories overworked and beaten as if they were slaves; of diseases and distortions only found in manufacturing districts; of filthy, wretched homes where people huddle together like wild beasts; we hear of girls and women working underground in the dark recesses of the coal mines, dragging loads of coal in cars in places where no horses could go, and harnessed and crawling along the subterranean pathways like beasts of burden. Everywhere we find cruelty and oppression and in many cases the workmen were but slaves bound to fulfil their masters' commands under fear of dismissal and starvation. Freedom they had in name; freedom to starve and die; but not freedom to speak, still less to act as citizens of a free state.

What is true of England, is true of the rest of the world. The conditions of the working class of all civilized countries are such that they in many cases baffle description. Although the earth is fruitful and labor productive enough to satisfy in abundance the needs of every one of its inhabitants, millions continually die of starvation. Christ is said to have been crucified eight hours. There are millions of toilers who are crucified 365 days a year. The spectre of unemployment with its attendants, starvation and misery, stares the worker in the face wherever he goes.

The instinct of self-preservation again asserts itself. All throughout the world the spirit of revolt is flaring up. Capitalism no longer can function and is slowly disintegrating. It is only a question of time when conditions in this country will be so intolerable that the workers will no longer heed the honeyed words of the apologists of capitalism.

Will the working class revolt blindly only to fall into a worse condition of economic slavery? Will that degradation be their lot always?

JOHN TYLER.