

Materialist Conception of History

FOR BEGINNERS

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I have endeavoured to follow the development of society from primitive times, from the scientific Socialist standpoint. Our opponents have accused us of ignoring other factors and putting too much stress on the economic factor. We have not neglected the various other factors, such as the fertility of the soil, the abundance of fish and game in the early period of human society.

Marx points out in "Capital," Vol. I. p. 199, that the earth is the original larder and also the original tool house, supplying primitive man with food and stones for throwing, grinding, pressing or cutting, etc.

In another part of Marx's work he says: "Aside from the more or less developed conditions of social production, the productivity of labor depends on natural conditions. They are all reducible to the nature of man himself such as race etc., his natural surroundings. The outward natural conditions can be divided economically into two great classes; natural wealth in the means of subsistence, such as the richness of the soil, fish, abounding waters, etc., and natural wealth in the means of production, such as useable waterfalls, navigable rivers, woods, metal, coal, etc. In a primitive community the first is of paramount importance, on a higher plane of civilization the second is most important."

We have seen how the invention of bow and arrow as a means of increasing man's food supply, was a great step forward, which was followed by the domestication of animals and agriculture. This greater means of life, allowing man to stretch over a larger surface of the earth, not only enlarged his environment but broadened his mentality.

We studied the effects of natural environment in lesson 8, showing the earlier civilizations arising where the fertility of the soil was greatest, e.g., Peru, Mexico, Egypt, India, etc.

We discovered that the laws, morals, ideas, in all these stages of development, were the ideas of the ruling class. Not however, had we a ruling class until man could produce more than his own keep. The agricultural stage brought about the private ownership of land, while the pastoral stage brought about the private ownership of the herd, and ever since the inauguration of private property in the means whereby people live history has been a history of class struggles.

In these various stages of development we also find that the medium of exchange, or what we call money, is also a reflection of the economic conditions such as the following:

Cattle, during domestication.
Grains and tobacco, during agriculture.
Skins, during the hunting stage.

Metal, because of the cumbersomeness of the above money in the increased and more highly developed means of production.

We also find the religion of the people was a reflex of their economic conditions. Lecky says, in his "History of European Morals":

"St. Appollonius explains Egyptian idolatry with the most intelligent rationalism. The ox, he thought, was in the first instance worshipped for its domestic uses. The Nile because it was the chief cause of the fertility of the soil."

Ed. Clodd speaks of moon worship, in "Animism," having flourished before the agricultural stage; a connection is traced between the Lunar phenomena and the food supply.

"The approach and duration of the periods of supplies of uncultivated foods is measured by the successive re-appearances and gradual changes of the moon, to which the savage attributed his food supply. He regarded the moon as the source of moisture, which is greater at night than in the day time, without which vegetation would perish. In this way the moon was regarded as the efficient cause

of the growth of animals and plants.

"In the agricultural stage that impetus was given to the Sun and Earth worship when the more potent influences of the Sun became recognised."

Our Monday and Sunday are the offspring of the Gods of the Druids of England before the introduction of Christianity, named after the Moon and Sun Gods.

Even Christmas is the relic of the pagan praise of the turn of the year from short day light to longer daylight.

The ancient people of England began their year on the 25th December and called it mother night. In 1644 Puritan England passed an Act of Parliament forbidding any religious services or merriment on Christmas day, on the ground that it was a heathen festival.

Charles II, revived the Christmas celebration, but in Scotland, where Puritanism and Protestantism was more firmly established, we find Christmas is not a holiday even now, outside of Bank holiday. All is "business as usual," with the exception of Bank employees.

The Ancient Peruvians looked upon the ocean as one of their power gods, calling it Mother Sea of Gods, because it yielded the fish which they largely depended on for food. To the Red Indians, heaven is a happy hunting ground which reflects their manner of getting a living. Our good and holy people reflect theirs as a place paved with gold and running with milk and honey, therefore if that does not reflect our methods of living, where these things satisfy our material desires, what other relation can it have to man.

The idea of good and bad, with other morals, are relationships between individuals, tribes and classes, and vary as these relationship change, as a result of the changed methods of production. Prof. Seligman, in his "Economic Interpretation of History" (wherein he quotes various writer who called attention to economic influences), points out that if originality can be properly claimed by those writers and thinkers who not only formulate a doctrine but first recognise its importance and its implications so that it thereby becomes a constituent element in their whole scientific system, there is no question that Marx must be recognised in the truest sense as the originator of the economic interpretation of history.

Seligman says: "A thing was originally good in the material sense in which we speak of goods and commodities. We speak of a nail being no good without desiring to pass any moral judgment on it. The original meaning of dear was not ethical but economic. A commodity can still be dear although we do not love it."

Lecky says: "Good and Evil is nothing less than pleasure and pain. Man has no natural benevolent feelings. He is first governed solely by his interests."

The killing of the aged in tribal times did not become immoral until they could produce a surplus to feed them. Murder of parents was regarded as an act of mercy when primitive man could only produce his own maintenance. Darwin, when dealing with unconscious selection of Barbarians of their domesticated animals points out that the animal particularly useful to them was preserved during famines, while they killed and devoured their old people (and he quotes the instance of the Barbarians of Tierra del Fuego) as having less value than their dogs.

In England in 1030, during the great famine, human flesh was cooked and sold.

It was put to me once that there was no instance in history where the people ate their own kind, unless it was their rotten dead which they dug up during a famine; embalming in Egypt is believed to be connected with this food supply.

Morgan, in "Ancient Society," tells us of a Mr.

Fison who wrote and told him of the natives of Australia when first discovered; some of the tribes ("The Wide Way Tribe") "ate not only their enemies slain in battle but also their friends who had been killed, and even those who died a natural death, if they were in good condition. Before eating, they skinned them and preserved the skins by rubbing them with mingled fat and charcoal. These skins they praised highly as having great medicinal value.

We find in the "good book" during the famine in Samaria (II Kings 6 ch. 28 to 30 v.), an incident relating to this human flesh-eating practice: "The King said unto her 'what aileth thee?' and she answered: 'This woman said unto me, 'Give thy son that we may eat him today, and we will eat my son tomorrow.' 'So we boiled my son and did eat him, and I said unto her on the next day, give thy son, that we may eat him and she has hid her son.'"

We have illustrations of cattle worship in the "good book," where Jeroboam the rebel afraid the people would go up to Jerusalem to worship, "Took council and made two calves of gold and said unto them, 'It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem; behold thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt.'"

We saw that when women were the economic dominant class the children were named after the women, with the female inheritance.

I believe this is the reason that the so-called supernatural power took on the name of Goddess.

We find that the wise King Solomon angered the God of Israel, not because he practised polygamy with 700 wives and 300 concubines, but because he forgot his god and worshipped the Goddesses of his wives. (I. Kings, CII. V. 5.)

The material law has been denied by clever historians. Bebel, in his "Woman and Socialism," points out that in Numbers, 43, 41, "Jair had a father of the tribe of Juda, but his mother came from the tribe of Manasseh, and Jair is explicitly called the son of Nanasseh and became heir to the tribe." Again he says, (Nehemiah, 7, 63): "There the children of a priest who married one of the daughters of Brazillai, a Jewish clan, are called the children of Brazillai. They are accordingly not called by the father's name but by their mother's name."

Herodotus, the great Greek historian, (484-424 B.C.) whose monumental work earned for him the title of the 'Father of History,' tells us of the Lycians who recognized maternal law.

"Their customs are partly Cretan and partly Carian. But they have one custom that distinguishes them from all other nations in the world. If you ask a Lycian who he is, he will tell his name, his mother's name, and so on in the line of female descent. Moreover, when a free woman marries a slave, their children are free citizens, but if a man marries a foreign woman or a concubine, his children are deprived of all civic rights, even although he be the most eminent man in the State."

Livingstone found this form of matrimony at the Zambesi, Africa, in a tribe called Balonda, where the man went to the village of his wife when married.

Dr. Henry Weistocky, who for many years lived among the Gyptsies of Transylvania, and finally was adopted into one of the tribes, reports that two out of the four tribes in whose midst he lived, the Ashani and the Ishale, observed maternal law. If the migratory Gyptsy marries he enters the clan of his wife, and to her belongs all the furnishings of the household; whatever wealth she has belongs to her and her clan; the man is a stranger. In accordance with maternal law the children also remain in the mother's clan. Similar conditions were found in the German Cameroons, that is, next the French Congo, which has been taken from Germany at Versailles. A German naval surgeon found that only children of the same mother recognized themselves as brothers