

The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State

By C. M. O'Brien.

MARX intended to coordinate the discoveries of Louis Henry Morgan together with his own materialist conception of history, but illness, then death (1883) prevented. So his co-worker Engels published (1884), "The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State,"* and in 1891 he completely revised the fourth edition. It is hoped that the following sketch will assist those who may be induced to study this excellent little book.

Until 1861, the historical development of the family had not been recognized.

"The patriarchal form of the family, described more exhaustively by Moses than anybody else, was not only . . . considered to be the most ancient, but also identical with the family of our times. . . ." (Engels).

It was admitted that some ancient nations and some present-day savages did not trace descent to the father, but to the mother. Oriental polygamy and Indo-Tibetan polyandry were known; and that a period of sexual license might have existed. Since then many writers have furnished much data, but by erroneous construction most of them have added considerable confusion.

The American Indians lived in pairing families, a loose monogamy, easily dissolved, which did not conform to their method of expressing their kinship or relation to each other. The form of marriage, expressed but not practised by the American redskins, was in vogue in Asia and in modified form among numerous tribes of Africa, Australia, and in Hawaii, though the latter was in process of decline. This form of group marriage is called punaluan, but in turn, it was not in keeping with the method of expressing kinship which suggested a more primitive form. This consanguin family must have existed though it is not now in practise anywhere. There exist several other forms of class and group marriages, and all of them indicate a preceding simpler form of marriage in promiscuity, unrestricted in the sense that barriers drawn later on by custom did not exist.

The forms of the family change, but the method of expressing kinship lingers for a long time.

"It is the same with political, juridical, religious and philosophical systems in general." (Marx).

"By thus constructing backward the history of the family, Morgan, after forty years of careful study, furnished the key to an understanding of the evolution of ancient societies including the family. Which has the same signification for primeval history that Darwin's theory of evolution had for biology, and Marx's theory of surplus-value had for political economy." (Engels).

Other animals have societies that are not so permanent. Jealousy among the males causes them to dissolve, each mating season. Humans do not have sabre teeth or great claws, neither were they ever as fleet of foot or as strong as many of their enemies. An individual as relatively defenceless as was evolving man could not afford to be jealous. Such defencelessness had to be replaced by the united strength of continued co-operation. Freedom from jealousy was the first condition for the formation of large permanent groups. Jealousy, like individual sexlove, is a by-product of our one-sided monogamy. Long inbreeding tends to degeneracy, hence they began to restrict sexual intercourse, first, between those of different generations then, of the same generations, then of the same generation, to the second and more remote degrees.

In this way the gens was formed with maternal lineage. Morgan and Engels have nothing but praise for this social unit of savage and barbarian tribes. "One of the strictest rules was that men and women of the same gens must not marry each other. When two or more gentes that were closely related formed a phratry within the tribe, then the above rule applied to that phratry.

"Among other savages and barbarians of the lower and middle stages, sometimes even the higher-stage women not only have freedom, but are held in high esteem." (Engels).

Taming of animals and cultivation of soil increased men's economic power, and maternalism yielded to paternalism, the pairing family and finally monogamy were gradually established. The various forms of group marriage correspond to savagery, the pairing family to barbarism, and our one-sided monogamy to private property, slavery and civilization. As mortgage clings to private property, so prostitution clings to one-sided monogamy.

Can prostitution be abolished without abolishing monogamy? Yes! Previous to civilization production was very limited, but it was controlled by the producers.

"To win it back on the basis of man's present gigantic control of nature and of the free association rendered possible by it, that will be the task of the next generation."

Again, "a race of men who never in their lives have had any occasion for buying with money or other economic means of power the surrender of a woman; a race of women who have never had any occasion for surrendering to any man for any other reason but love, or for refusing to surrender to their lover for fear of economic consequence."

Again, "Since sexlove is exclusive by its very nature—although this exclusiveness is at present realized for women only—marriage founded on sexlove must be monogamous."

And again, "Not only will it (monogamy) not disappear, but it will rather be perfectly realized." (Engels).

And Morgan writes:

" . . . the family has passed through four successive forms, and is now in the fifth . . . it is the creature of the social system, and must reflect its culture. As the monogamian family has improved greatly . . . it is at least supposable that it is capable of still further improvement. . . . Should the monogamian family in the distant future fail to answer the requirements of society, assuming the continuous progress of civilization, it is impossible to predict the nature of its successor"

During the long period of the evolution of human society through low, middle and high savagery, to low, middle and high barbarism, the different social systems are determined partly on the development of labor, partly on that of the family. The less labor is developed, the more society is under the domination of sex ties.

Until the middle stage of barbarism is reached, the evolution of human society in all parts of the world is much the same; thenceforth labor becomes ever more the determining factor. And the different natural resources of the two great bodies of land, tameable animals on the eastern, few such animals on the western, so cultivation of cereals leads the population of each hemisphere to divergent development.

With the advent of civilization the units of society are no longer sex relations, but geographical boundaries. A complete revolution. The family is subordinate to property.

"Property and office were the foundations upon which aristocracy planted itself. Whether this principle shall live or die has been one of the great problems with which modern society has been engaged through the intervening periods . . . Since the advent of civilization, the growth of property has been so immense, its forms so diversified, its uses so expanding and its management so intelligent in the interest of its owners, that it has become, on the part of the people, an unmanageable power. The human mind stands bewildered in the presence of its own creation. The time will come, nevertheless, when human intelligence will rise to mastery over property. . . . The interests of society are paramount to individual interest. . . . A mere property career is not the final destiny of mankind, if progress is to be the law of the future as it has been of the past, the time which has passed away since civilization began is but a fragment of the past duration of man's existence: and but a fragment of the ages yet to come. The dissolution of society bids fair to become the termination of a career of which property is the end and aim; because such a career contains the elements of self-destruction. . . . the next higher plane of society . . . will be a revival, in a higher form . . . of the ancient gentes." (Morgan).

*EDITOR'S NOTE.—"The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State." See Literature Price List.

Class Consciousness

JUDGING by the remarks one hears on the job and in other places, most of the workers seem very lately to have been men of independent means, and many of the superior ones are waiting hopefully, like Micawber, for "something to turn up" to land them in a position of security, if not of ease.

In keeping with the American tradition that every boy may become president, the wage-slave is prone to look upon his present condition as a transitional period between office boy and great man, as a sort of purgatorial test of his fitness to direct affairs in reality. Petty minded, his class vision is obscured by hopes of becoming a petty trader or contractor where his hours of effort will not be restricted by interfering unions.

The labors of all statisticians have in his case been in vain. He dreams of independence through small enterprise, while every statistical report shows further concentration of capital. These figures, taken from the report of the Industrial Relations Committee (U.S.A.), are illuminating. They refer to 1913, before the war had lent its impetus to systematic concentration:—Two per cent. of the people own sixty per cent. of the wealth; thirty-three per cent. own thirty-five per cent., while sixty-five per cent. own five per cent. of the wealth. These facts of wealth distribution, supplied by the U. S. government, are indicative of an antagonism between the two per cent., who own, and the sixty-five per cent., who do not own.

The struggle between employer and employee is ever becoming more sharply defined. All working class intelligent action must begin with a recognition that while capitalism lasts, our position will remain static within the category of the sixty-five per cent. who own five per cent. We must draw sharp the lines of the class struggle, and keep our attack ever towards the ownership of the means of wealth production, now controlled by the two per cent.

The working-class road to emancipation lies, not in petty bourgeois enterprise or in a fair day's wage, but in the abolition of the wages system. We fight for working-class supremacy. Education along class lines is our method.

Close up the ranks.

WM. REYNOLDS.