

# Materialist Conception of History

## FOR BEGINNERS

Lesson 24—South Africa and the Boer War.

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TO understand the South African history, let us hark back some considerable distance in the history of capitalist development. Such a review will show the prophetic clearness of Karl Marx's masterly generalisation that, the means by which people make their living, decides how they must think and act in all their relations of life. The discovery of South Africa arose out of the struggle for economic supremacy among Portuguese, Dutch, French and English from the 15th and 16th centuries. We recall that the cause which led to the expedition of Columbus, led to the expedition around the Cape of Good Hope in the endeavour to find a sea route to India after the land route was blocked through the capture of Constantinople by the Turks in 1453.

The discovery of such a route led to the establishment of the American Republic and also the Union of South Africa. The country was first discovered by the Dutch in 1486. The Boers (who were Dutch peasants) made a settlement at the Cape in 1652, and it was placed by Holland a few years later in the charge of the Dutch East Indian Co., for the purpose of administration, pretty much in the same way as Rhodesia was placed in the hands of the British South African Co. The Dutch East Indian Co. made a settlement at Cape Town merely for the purpose of a port of call, whither ships passing on the way to India might call for supply of vegetables and fresh meat. The Hottentots who were, and still are the predominant native tribe of the Cape of Good Hope province, showed a natural disinclination to be robbed of their land and their cattle, and many wars between them and the Dutch occurred on that account. As a result, the Dutch East Indian Co. encouraged settlers to come to the Cape so that they might breed cattle independently of the natives. These settlers received military protection against the natives on condition that they supplied the company's ships with provisions at rates laid down by the company.

The settlers continued to increase in numbers and began to chafe under the artificial restriction of prices imposed by the company. Trouble also grew with the natives as the settlers spread over the country, which fact, together with dissension among the colonists themselves, brought about the easy conquest of the country by the British.

The Dutch had an easy living as the Hottentots were their slaves.

The British took over permanently all the Dutch interests of the Cape in 1806, partly by conquest and, latterly, partly by purchase.

The Boers were forced out of the Cape in 1836 but they were not destined to enjoy possession of their new promised land.

The gold mines brought unscrupulous adventurers into the gold fields who foisted worthless scrip on a gullible public. Of gold there was plenty, but one writer says, "It is safe to say that legitimate gold mining never made the colossal fortunes of South African millionaires."

The gold mine owners, before a Boer Commission in 1897, demanded cheaper labor by increasing the Native Hut tax, but Kruger refused by passing a law to confiscate the mines and work them if the mine owners refused to do so. Kruger was not animated by any humanitarianism in refusing the mine owners' demands to exploit the natives; he wanted the Boer farmer to keep control of the cheap native labor on their farms. There being a possibility of Britishers outnumbering the Boers, Kruger gave them a restricted franchise in order to prevent this political danger. The mine owners, not being able to bribe Kruger to their way of thinking, prostituted

the press and bribed the British Government by getting up a huge corruption fund.

Petitions were sent out appealing for help from the British Government, signed at the rate of one shilling per signature. One could sign as often as he pleased. Here we had a war because the Britisher would not get the vote, which meant changing his allegiance from the British Crown, something not only unknown but also absurd, as all countries endeavour to keep their moving population under the home flag. The sheer force of numbers defeated the Boers, and he it noted Botha was chosen by the mine magnates to be the first Premier, and DeWett, who opposed him most bitterly more than once, hinted at his alleged treachery in betraying the Boers into the mine owners' hands.

Jos. Chamberlain and Milner waxed emotionally over the wickedness of the Boers towards our black brothers but, strange to say, one of the first enactments of the Milner regime was to double the native hut tax.

As for the mine owners, they reduced their pay from 9 to 5 dollars a month. The policy of the Cape has been to break up the tribal system, so we are told, "to bring out the individuality of the Kaffir."

The Glen Grey Act was passed as it was deemed best to use means to persuade the natives to learn to work.

All the young idle males under the Act are to pay a labor tax of 10 shillings per head per annum, the proceeds of which are devoted to industrial schools to train the natives to work.

One writer, defending the introduction of Chinese labor after the Boer War says: "On all hands the scarcity is apparent, and abundance of this prime commodity (labor) ought to be provided at all hazards . . . with the enforcing of the Squatter's law No. 21 of 1895 and the breaking up of locations to increase the amount of labor available."

In 1903 Milner appointed a commission to enquire into the adequacy or sources of labor for the mines. The Commission reported 129,000 laborers were necessary and Central and South Africa could not supply them. On the 8th February, 1904 an ordinance was carried in the Transvaal legislative council for the introduction of indentured labor from outside of Africa south of 12 degrees north of the equator. It met with great opposition in Africa and Britain, and the mine owners came forward with a petition for Chinese labor, bearing signatures (at a shilling a time of course) of over half the white population. That a great number of signatures were forged goes without saying. The first shipment of Chinese was from Hong Kong, reaching Durban 20th June 1904. Ultimately 60,000 Chinese were employed on the Rand. The experiment was successful in so far as obtaining cheaper labor and subsequently cheapened Kaffir labor, but other assertions e.g., the employment of more white labor were completely falsified. White labor found less instead of more labor. The proportion of Whites to colored of all races was 10 to 59, in May 1904, and in 1906 was 10 white to 84 colored. That was because the Chinese proved adept pupils at skilled work, although clauses stated "only unskilled work to be done. . . cannot do any skilled work. . . Therefore no competition with the white man."

We are told unnameable vice was rampant in the Chinese compound in addition to gambling, opium eating, murder and robbery. The parsons and Holy Willies ignored these vices although they were well known until the mine owners discovered that the Chinese were not so profitable as expected.

Then they began to howl out against the moral cesspool of the Rand. Thus the spectacle of the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Right Rev. Father in God, speaking of Chinese labor as a regrettable necessity. The word regrettable might be thought to have some reference to the moral aspect of the sub-

ject, but in reality he was only giving us a spiritual interpretation to the economic fact that the Chinese in the mines, having higher tastes than the Kaffir, took twice the expense to feed, and at the end of their contract there was the expense of repatriation. Therefore the time had come for the removal of such a moral cesspool, entailing such expense to the mine owners, and causing such offence to the puritan feelings of our brethren in God.

All supporters of the Chinese question in Africa were frank in admitting its economic necessity.

Mr. Skinner, manager of the Durham Roodepoort mine, spoke of the most suitable Chinese from Southern and Northern China as being of the better class of coolies because "they are docile, law abiding, and industrious and will carry out whatever contract they entered into and perform the tasks assigned to them." (14th Feb. 1903). It must not be thought that all the Chinamen returned to China, 10,000 out of the 60,000 were left on the Rand a few feet under the ground. Neither graves or names will ever be known.

The most remarkable thing happened with the disappearance of the Chinese; 130,000 natives were soon procured by the very people who asserted that South Africa could not supply them. The reason is not far to seek. In 1903 the Kaffir would not work for 9 dollars a week, but was now willing to work for 5 dollars.

The Kaffir was being paid twice what the Chinese laborers received, and refused to accept a reduction in wages, which was one of the first moves after the war.

It came about because of the money saved during the war. The natives were doing all kinds of work on both sides for high wages. There being no maps of the country to guide the armies, directions were obtained from the natives. They also had still enjoyed almost unrestricted freedom in their commercial reserves. He bought cattle which was his only means of exchange in the commune, and with them bought wives who did all the labor, in agriculture, so that the character and customs of the tribal system render work, under the circumstances, unnecessary, and undesirable from his point of view. They lived a happy life tending cattle and growing corn. The cessation of the tribal wars gave Christian missionaries an opportunity of visiting the reserves for the purpose of evangelizing them, inculcating obedience to authority and expounding the doctrine of the blessedness of labor, not for self but for others. This is a very necessary teaching of capitalism. The best exponents are Christian missionaries. Along with the missionary came the trader, the bible, and brandy bottle, followed by the bayonet, these being the indispensable adjuncts of capitalist civilization.

Some of these servants of the most high taught discontent. That seems another contradiction, seeing Christianity and capitalism preach contentment. However, the poor native was taught and made discontented with his happy healthy life so that he might elevate his tastes to yearn for higher things, such as the products of capitalist production. Shoddy goods were imported and sold to the Kaffir at a princely profit, but the raw native, not possessing much ready money (as his wealth consists of land, herds and crops) our Christian friends therefor, as an additional stimulus to make the Kaffir industrious, get their paternal government to cap a heavy hut tax on the native, well knowing in order to be able to pay it he would be forced to leave his reserve and work in the mines for hard cash.

In this way the Natal Government goaded the Zulus into revolt in 1906, but what chance had the Zulu with his heathen weapons against a Christian Maxim gun!

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