

could lead to different conclusions. We are ready to return to the more traditional structure of an 'Introduction to Marxism' if it can be shown, from the evidence of practical experience, that such a method of explanation allows inexperienced militants to assimilate more easily the essence of Marxism. For the moment, we take leave to doubt it.

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International regularly carries articles by Ernest Mandel and other noted revolutionary Marxists such as Denise Avenas, Tariq Ali, Robin Blackburn, Norman Geras, Dick Roberts, and Pierre Frank (whose book *The Fourth International: A Contribution to the History of the Trotskyist Movement* will appear as the second title in this series in June 1978). Recent issues of *International* have also included interviews with Nicos Poulantzas and Fernando Claudin, as well as an ongoing debate with representatives of the Communist Party of Great Britain.

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Chapter 1

Social Inequality and Social Struggle Throughout History

1. Social inequality in contemporary capitalist society

A pyramid of wealth and social power exists in all capitalist countries. In the USA, a Senate Commission has estimated that less than one per cent of American families possess 80 per cent of all shares in companies, and that 0.2 per cent of families possess more than two-thirds of these shares. In Britain, in 1973, the richest one per cent of the population held 28 per cent of all marketable wealth; and the richest five per cent, 50.5 per cent of that wealth (these figures, however, strongly understate the concentration of wealth because they include private dwellings which, for a large part of the population, are not 'marketable wealth' but necessary living conditions). In Belgium one third of the citizens are at the bottom of this pyramid, possessing nothing other than what they earn and spend, year in, year out; they have no savings and no assets. Four per cent of the citizens occupy the top of this pyramid, owning *half* the private wealth of the nation. Less than one per cent of Belgians own more than half the stocks and shares in the country. Among these, 200 families control the big holding societies which dominate the whole of the nation's economic life. In Switzerland, one per cent of the population possess more than 67 per cent of the privately owned wealth.

Inequality of revenue and wealth is not only an economic fact. It implies inequality in chances of survival and death. In Great Britain before the Second World War, the infant mortality rate in the families of unskilled workers was double that in bourgeois families. Official statistics indicate that in France in 1951, infant mortality expressed in deaths per 1,000 births was 19.1 in the liberal professions, 23.9 among employers, 28.2 among commercial employees, 34.5 among

tradespeople, 36.4 among artisans (craft workers), 42.5 among skilled workers, 44.9 among peasants and agricultural workers, 51.9 among semi-skilled workers, 61.7 among unskilled and manual workers. The proportional differences had hardly changed ten years later, although the infant mortality rate had fallen in each category.

Recently the conservative Belgian daily *La Libre Belgique* published a distressing study concerning language formation in the child. This study confirms that the handicap a child in a poor family often suffers during the first two years of its life, and the subsequent cultural under-development imposed by class society, produce lasting consequences with regard to the possibility of handling abstract concepts and assimilating scientific knowledge; consequences which a non-compensatory 'egalitarian' education cannot neutralise. It is an unfortunate fact that social inequality still stifles the development of thousands of Mozarts, Shakespeares and Einsteins among the children of the people even in the epoch of the 'welfare state'.

Nowadays it is not enough just to take stock of the social inequalities which exist in each country. It is even more important to take into account the inequality between a small handful of advanced countries (from the point of view of industrialisation) and the majority of humanity, living in the so-called under-developed countries (colonial and semi-colonial countries).

The USA accounts for nearly half of the industrial production and consumes more than half of a great number of primary industrial materials in the capitalist world. Five hundred and fifty million Indians have less steel and electrical energy at their disposal than nine million Belgians. The real *per capita* income in the poorest countries of the world is only eight per cent of the *per capita* income in the richest countries. Sixty-seven per cent of the world's population receive only 15 per cent of the world revenue. In India in 1970, 20 times as many women per 100,000 births died in childbirth as in Britain.

As a result an Indian's daily calorie intake is only half the daily intake in the West. Average life expectancy, which in the West is more than 65 years, and in some countries reaches

70 years, is barely 30 in India.

2 Social inequality in previous societies

Social inequality similar to that existing in the capitalist world can be noted in all the previous societies which have succeeded one another during the course of history, that is, during that period of humanity's existence on earth of which we have written accounts.

Here is a description of the misery of French peasants towards the end of the Seventeenth Century, taken from the French writer La Bruyère's book *The Characters*: 'One sees certain savage animals, both male and female, scattered about the countryside, black, livid and burnt all over by the sun, attached to the earth which they grub up and turn over with an invincible stubbornness. They have a sort of articulated voice, and when they stand up on their feet, they show a human face. They are in fact men. At night they retire into dens, where they live off black bread, water and roots.'

Compare this picture of the peasants of the epoch to the dazzling feasts given by Louis XIV at the court of Versailles, to the luxury of the nobility and the squanderings of the financiers. It is a striking image of social inequality.

In medieval society, which was dominated by serfdom, the noble lord most often had half the labour or half the harvest of the peasant-serfs at his disposal. Most lords had hundreds if not thousands of serfs on their lands. Each lord therefore profited every year from hundreds if not thousands of peasants.

It was the same in the various societies of the classical East (Egypt, Sumeria, Babylon, Persia, India, China, etc.), societies based on agriculture, but in which the owners of the land were either lords, temples or kings (represented by scribes who were agents of the royal treasury).

The 'Satire of the Professions', written in the Egypt of the Pharaohs, 3,500 years ago, has left us with an image of the peasants exploited by these royal scribes, compared to harmful beasts and parasites by the disgruntled cultivators.

As for Ancient Greece and Rome, their society was based on slavery. That culture was able to reach a high level was partly due to the fact that the citizens were able to

devote a large portion of their time to political, cultural, artistic and sporting pursuits, while the manual work was left to the slaves.

3 *Social inequality and class inequality*

Social inequality is not necessarily class inequality. For example, the pay differential between an unskilled worker and a highly skilled worker does not make these two people members of different social classes.

Class inequality is an inequality which is rooted in the structure of economic life, which corresponds to different economic functions, and which is perpetuated and accentuated by the principal social and legal institutions of the period.

A few examples will make this definition clearer.

To become a big capitalist in Belgium, you need to invest at least a million francs of capital for every worker employed. For a small factory employing 200 workers, a capital of at least 100 million francs is needed. The net earnings of a worker are rarely more than 200,000 francs a year. A worker who worked 50 years without spending a penny of their wages would still not have enough money to become a capitalist. Wage-labour, which is one of the basic characteristics of the structure of the capitalist economy, therefore constantly reproduces the division of capitalist society into two fundamentally different classes: the working class, which can never become the owner of the means of production by means of its earnings; and the capitalist class, which owns the means of production and expands this ownership through a reinvestment of part of its profits.

It is true that, besides the capitalists, some technicians become company directors. But a university education is needed. Over the last few decades only between five and seven per cent of Belgian students have been the daughters and sons of workers. It is the same in most imperialist countries.

Social institutions close all access for the workers to capitalist property, both because of their earnings and because of the system of higher education. These institutions maintain, conserve and perpetuate the class division of

society as it exists today. Even in the USA, where examples of the 'sons of upstanding workers who became millionaires because they worked hard for it' are often complacently cited, an inquiry has shown that 90 per cent of the top managers of important companies come from the middle and big bourgeoisie.

Therefore throughout history we see social inequality crystallised into *class inequality*. In each society we can pick out a productive class which supports the whole of society through its labour, and a dominant class which lives off other people's work:

Peasants and priests, lords and scribes in the Eastern Empires;

Slaves and slave-owners in Ancient Greece and Rome;
Serfs and feudal lords in the Middle Ages;

Workers and capitalists in bourgeois society.

4 *Social inequality in human prehistory*

But history only covers a short period of human life in our planet. It is preceded by prehistory, which is the epoch in humanity's existence when writing and civilisation were still unknown. Until a recent date or even until our own time, primitive people remained in prehistoric conditions. During the best part of prehistoric existence, class inequality was unknown to humanity.

We can understand the fundamental difference between such a primitive community and class society by examining some of the institutions of these communities.

Several anthropologists have mentioned a custom which is found among many primitive peoples, which consists of organising plentiful feasts after the harvests. The anthropologist Margaret Mead has described these feasts among the Papuan tribe of Arapech (New Guinea). Those who have gathered in an above average harvest invite all their family and neighbours, and the festivities continue until most of the surplus has been consumed. Margaret Mead adds: 'These feasts represent an adequate way of preventing any individual accumulation of riches.'

The anthropologist Asch studied the customs and special system of the Hopi tribe, which lives in the southern USA. In

contrast to our society, the principle of individual competition is considered morally reprehensible by this society. Hopi children never keep score, or know who has 'won' in their games and sports.

While agriculture, which occupies a set terrain, is the principal economic activity of primitive communities which are not yet divided into classes, there is often no longer any collective exploitation of the earth. Each family receives fields for work for a certain period. These fields are frequently redistributed to avoid favouring this or that member of the community more than the others. Pastures and woods are exploited in common. This *village community* system, which is based on the absence of private ownership of the land, is found at the origin of agriculture among nearly all the peoples of the world. It shows that at that time, society was not yet divided into classes at the village level.

The generally accepted view holds that social inequality is rooted in the inequality of individual talents or capacities, and that the class division of society is the product of humanity's 'innate egoism' and therefore a result of 'human nature'. This view has no scientific basis. The exploitation of one social class by another is the product of the historical evolution of society, and not of human nature. It has not always existed. It will not always survive. There have not always been rich and poor. There will not always be.

5 *Historical examples of revolt against social inequality*

Class society and the private ownership of the land and other means of production are therefore in no way the products of human nature, but of the society's evolution, of its economic and social institutions. We can see why they came about and how they will disappear.

In fact, humanity has shown its nostalgia for the ancient community life of clan or tribal communism since the class division of society first appeared. This is expressed in the much dreamed of 'Golden Age' at the very beginning of human existence, a dream described by classical Chinese authors as well as Greek and Latin authors. Virgil explicitly states that at the time of this Golden Age harvests were shared in common, which implies that private property did

not exist.

Many famous philosophers and scholars have thought that the class division of society represented the source of social malaise, and elaborated projects for its replacement.

The Greek philosopher Plato characterised the origin of the ills from which society suffers like this: 'Even the smallest town is divided in two parts, the town of the poor and that of the rich, which are opposed as if in a state of war.'

The Jewish sects which grew up at the beginning of our era, and the Founding Fathers of the Christian Church who followed the same tradition in the Third to Fifth Centuries, were equally strong partisans of a return to the community of goods. St. Barnabas wrote: 'Never speak of your property, for if you partake of spiritual things in common it is all the more necessary to hold material goods in common.' St. Cyprian set forth many entreaties in favour of the egalitarian distribution of goods among men. St. John Chrysostomus was the first to say: 'Property is theft.' Even St. Augustine at first saw that the origin of social strife and social violence is private property, but later modified this view.

This tradition continued throughout the Middle Ages, mainly with St. Francis of Assisi and the precursors of the Reformation: the Albigensians, Cathari, Wyclif, etc. This is what the Englishman John Ball, a pupil of Wyclif, said in the Fourteenth Century: 'Slavery must be abolished and all men must be equal. Those who call themselves our masters consume what we produce....They owe their luxury to our labour.'

Finally we see these projects for an egalitarian society become more precise in the modern epoch with Thomas More's *Utopia* (English), Campanella's *The City of the Sun* (Italian), the works of Vaurasse d'Allais, and Morelly's *The Testament of Jean Meslier* and *The Code of Nature* (French).

Side by side with this spiritual revolt against social inequality, there have been innumerable actual revolts — that is, insurrections of oppressed classes against their oppressors. The history of all class societies is the history of the class struggles which rend them apart.

6 *Class struggle in history*

These struggles between the oppressed class and the exploiting class, or between various exploiting classes, take a variety of forms depending on the society you look at and the precise stage of its evolution.

There were a large number of revolts in the societies of the so-called 'Asiatic mode of production' (the Empires of the classical East).

In China, innumerable peasant uprisings stand out as landmarks in the history of the successive dynasties which reigned over the Empire. There were also a great number of peasant insurrections in Japan, especially in the Eighteenth Century.

In Ancient Greece and Rome, there was an uninterrupted series of slave revolts — the most well-known was led by Spartacus — which contributed considerably to the downfall of the Roman Empire. Among the free citizens there was a virulent struggle between a class of indebted peasants and the usurer-merchants — between those who had property and those who did not.

In the Middle Ages, class struggle set feudal lords against free communities based on petty commodity production, as well as artisans against merchants within these communities, and some urban artisans against peasants who lived near the towns. The most savage class struggles were those between the feudal nobility and the peasantry which was trying to throw off the feudal yoke, struggles which clearly took a revolutionary form with the Jacqueries in France, the war of Wat Tyler in England, that of the Hussites in Bohemia, and the peasant war in Germany in the Sixteenth Century.

History between the Sixteenth and the Eighteenth Centuries is marked by class struggles between the nobility and the bourgeoisie, between master-artisans and journeymen, between rich bankers and traders on the one hand and the unskilled labourers of the towns on the other, etc. These struggles heralded the bourgeois revolutions, modern capitalism and the class struggle of the proletariat against the bourgeoisie.

Chapter 2

The Economic Sources of Social Inequality

1 Primitive communities based on poverty

During the major part of prehistoric existence, humanity lived in conditions of extreme poverty and could only obtain the food necessary for subsistence by hunting, fishing and fruit gathering.

Humanity lived off nature as a parasite, since it was unable to increase the natural resources which were the basis of its subsistence. Humanity could not control these resources.

Primitive communities are organised to guarantee collective survival in these extremely difficult conditions of existence. Everyone is obliged to take part in current production, and everyone's labour is necessary to keep the communities alive. The granting of material privileges to one part of the tribe would condemn another part to famine, would deprive it of the possibility of working normally, and would therefore undermine the conditions for collective survival. This is why social organisation, at this stage in the development of human societies, tends to maintain maximum equality within human communities.

After examining 425 primitive tribes, the English anthropologists Hobhouse, Wheeler and Ginsberg found a total absence of social classes amongst all the tribes who knew nothing about agriculture.

2 The neolithic revolution

It was only the development of techniques of agriculture and animal husbandry which modified this situation of fundamental poverty in any long term way. The technique of agriculture, the greatest economic revolution in humanity's existence, is attributable to women, as are a series of other important discoveries in pre-history (notably the techniques