

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

of pottery and weaving).

This started to take place around 15,000 B.C. in a few places in the world, most probably first of all in Asia Minor, Mesopotamia, Iran and Turkestan, gradually progressing into Egypt, India, China, North Africa and Mediterranean Europe. It is called the neolithic revolution because it happened during that part of the Stone Age when the principal tools of work were made of polished stone (the final epoch of the Stone Age).

The neolithic revolution allowed humanity to produce its food itself, and therefore to control more or less its own subsistence. Primitive humanity's dependence on the forces of nature was diminished. It permitted the building up of *food reserves*, which in turn released certain members of the community from the need to produce their own food. Thus a *certain economic division of labour* could develop, a specialisation of jobs, which increased the productivity of human labour. In primitive society there are as yet only the bare outlines of such specialisation. As one of the first Spanish explorers said in the Sixteenth Century about the American Indians: 'They (the primitive people) want to use all their time gathering together food, because if they used it in any other way, they would be overcome with hunger.'

3 *Necessary product and social surplus product*

The primitive conditions of social organisation were overturned as a result of the appearance of a large and permanent surplus of food. As long as this surplus was relatively small and scattered from village to village, it did not modify the egalitarian structure of the village community. It only provided nourishment for a few artisans and officials, similar to those who have been maintained by Hindu villages for thousands of years.

But once these surpluses are concentrated over great areas by military or religious chiefs, or once they become more abundant in the village thanks to the improvement of agricultural techniques, they can create the conditions for the appearance of social inequality. They can be used to feed prisoners captured in war or on pirate expeditions (who would hitherto have been killed for lack of food). These

prisoners can be obliged to work for their captors in exchange for their food: that is how slavery came into existence in the world of Ancient Greece.

The same surplus can be used to nourish a population of priests, soldiers, officials, lords and kings. That is how the ruling classes appeared in the empires of the Ancient East — Egypt, Babylon, Iran, India, China.

A *social* division of labour then completes the *economic* division of labour (specialisation of productive skills). Social production no longer serves in its totality to fulfil the needs of the producers. It is henceforth divided into two parts:

— the *necessary product*; in other words, the means of subsistence for the producers without whose labour the whole society would collapse.

— the *social surplus product*; the surplus produced by the labourers and appropriated by the owning classes.

This is how the historian Heichelheim describes the appearance of the first towns in the ancient world: 'The population of the new urban centres is composed.... mainly of a superior layer living off taxes [that is, appropriating the surplus product of agricultural labour — EM], composed of priests, lords and nobles. Add to this the officials, employees and servants indirectly nourished by this superior layer.'

The appearance of distinct and antagonistic social classes — productive classes and ruling classes — thus gives birth to the state, which is the principal institution for the maintenance of the given social conditions — that is, social inequality. The division of society into classes is consolidated by the appropriation of the means of production by the possessing classes.

4 *Production and accumulation*

The formation of social classes, the appropriation of the social surplus product by one part of society, is the result of a *social struggle* and is only maintained by constant social struggle.

But at the same time it represents an inevitable stage in economic progress, as it permits the separation of the two fundamental economic functions — production and accu-

mulation.

In primitive society, all healthy men and women are mainly occupied with the production of food. In these conditions they can give only a small amount of time to the fabrication and stockpiling of tools, to the learning of complicated techniques (for instance, metallurgy), to the systematic observation of natural phenomena, etc.

The production of a social surplus allows part of humanity to have enough *leisure time* to devote itself to all those activities that help *increase the social productivity of labour*.

These leisure time activities are fundamental to civilisation, to the development of the first scientific techniques (astronomy, geometry, hydrography, mineralogy, etc.), and of writing.

The separation of intellectual and manual labour, which is the product of these leisure time activities, accompanies the separation of society into classes.

The division of society into classes therefore represents a condition of historical progress for as long as society is too poor to allow all its members to dedicate themselves to intellectual labour (to accumulative functions). But a heavy price is paid for this progress. Up until the era of modern capitalism, only the ruling classes profited from the advantages of the growth in the social productivity of labour. In spite of all the technical and scientific progress of the 4,000 years which separate the beginnings of ancient civilisation from the Sixteenth Century, the situation of the Indian, Chinese, Egyptian, or even Greek and Slavonic peasants hardly changed at all during this time.

5 The reasons for the failure of all past egalitarian revolutions

As long as the surplus produced by human society, the social surplus product, is not sufficient to liberate the whole of humanity from repetitive, mechanical and tiring labour, any social revolution which tries to re-establish equality is condemned to failure. It can find only two solutions to social inequality:

(a) It can deliberately destroy any social surplus and return to extreme, primitive poverty. In this case, the reappearance

of technical and economic progress would provoke the same social inequalities whose eradication had been sought.

(b) It can dispossess the old possessor class in favour of a new one.

That is essentially what happened with the insurrection of Roman slaves under Spartacus, with the first Christian sects and monasteries, the various insurrections under the Chinese Empire, the revolution of the Taborites in Fifteenth Century Bohemia, with the communist colonies established by the immigrants in America, etc.

Without pretending that the Russian Revolution ended up in the same situation, the reappearance today of accentuated social inequality in the USSR can fundamentally be explained by the poverty of Russia immediately after the revolution, by the insufficient level of development of the productive forces, and by the isolation of the revolution in a backward country after the failure of the revolution in Central Europe in the years 1918-1923.

An egalitarian society founded on abundance and not poverty — and that is the aim of socialism — can only be developed on the basis of an advanced economy in which the social surplus product is so high that it allows all producers to liberate themselves from constantly punishing labour, granting sufficient leisure time to the whole community so that they can collectively fulfil the managerial tasks of economic, social and political life (the function of accumulation).

Why has it taken 15,000 years of social surplus production for humanity to be able to experience the necessary expansion of production which allows us to envisage a socialist solution to social inequality? The answer lies in the fact that as long as the propertied classes appropriate the social surplus product in natural form, in the form of use values, their own consumption, *unproductive consumption*, imposes a limit to the growth of production that they wish to bring about.

The temples and kings of the Ancient East; the slave-owners of Ancient Greece and Rome; the Chinese, Indian, Japanese, Byzantine and Arab lords and merchants; the feudal nobles of the Middle Ages — none had any further

interest in increasing production once they had amassed in their castles and palaces enough goods, *objets d'art* and luxurious clothes. There is an absolute limit to the possibilities of individual consumption and the acquisition of luxuries (for instance, the social surplus product in the feudal society of the Hawaiian Isles takes the exclusive form of food, and because of this, social prestige depends.... on body weight).

It is only when the social surplus product takes the form of money — of surplus value — and when it no longer serves merely for the acquisition of consumer goods but also for that of means of production, that the new ruling class — the bourgeoisie — acquires an interest in the unlimited growth of production. Thereby the necessary social conditions are created for an application of all scientific discoveries to production — in other words, the conditions necessary for the appearance of modern industrial capitalism.

Chapter 3

The State, Instrument of Class Domination

1 The social division of labour and the birth of the state

In primitive classless societies, administrative functions were carried out by all the members of the tribe. Everyone carried arms. Everyone took part in assemblies which took all decisions concerning the life of the community and the relations of the community with the outside world. Internal conflicts were also settled by the members of the community.

Of course, one should not idealise the situation within these primitive communities which lived under clan or tribal communism.

The society was very poor. Life was a constant struggle with the forces of nature. The morals, customs, and rules for the settlement of internal and external conflicts resulted, even though they were collectively applied, from ignorance, fear and magical beliefs. However, it is necessary to emphasise the fact that society collectively governed itself within the limits of its knowledge and possibilities.

It is therefore not true that the notions of 'society', 'collective human organisation' and 'the state' are practically identical and can be found mutually interlinked throughout humanity's existence. On the contrary, for thousands of years humanity lived in societies quite ignorant of the existence of a state.

The state was born when the functions which were previously undertaken by all members of a society became the prerogative of *a separate group of people*:

- an army distinct from the mass of armed citizens;
- judges who took over from the mass of citizens the task of judging their equals;
- hereditary chiefs, kings and nobles in place of representatives or leaders of a particular activity, elected