

**2016-06-06, 13 and 20. From the preparatory notes for Classes 07, 08 and 09 of the introductory course on political economy: ‘The evolution of property and how it rules the world’.**

---

**Class 07:**

The class breaks into groups to read and discuss paras 10-20 of the extracts from *The German Ideology*. For next time, the class is asked to read paras 21-28.

A reading consisting of pages 85-95 of Kevin Shillington’s *History of Africa* (3rd edition) is handed out.<sup>1</sup> A member of the class volunteers to summarise orally the contents of the reading when it comes to be discussed.

Another member of the class volunteers to summarise orally next time the extract from Sagg, *The Babylonians* distributed previously.

=====

**Class 08:**

At the beginning of the class the following passage from *The German Ideology*<sup>2</sup> by Marx and Engels (written 170 years ago) was put on the screen, read, and briefly discussed:

History is nothing but the succession of the separate generations, each of which uses the materials, the capital funds, the productive forces handed down to it by all preceding generations, and thus, on the one hand, continues the traditional activity in completely changed circumstances and, on the other, modifies the old circumstances with a completely changed activity. This can be speculatively distorted so that later history is made the goal of earlier history ... [but this] is nothing more than an abstraction from later history, from the active influence which earlier history exercises on later history.

The further the separate spheres, which act on one another, extend in the course of this development and the more the original isolation of the separate nationalities is destroyed by the advanced mode of production, by intercourse and by the natural division of labour between various nations arising as a result, the more history becomes world history. Thus, for instance, if in England a machine is invented which deprives countless workers of bread in India and China, and overturns the whole form of existence of these empires, this invention becomes a world-historical fact. Or again, take the case of sugar and coffee, which have proved their world-historical importance in the nineteenth century by the fact that the lack of these products, occasioned by the Napoleonic Continental System,<sup>3</sup> caused the Germans to rise against Napoleon, and thus became the real basis of the glorious Wars of Liberation of 1813. From this it follows that this transformation of history into world history is by no means a mere abstract act on the part of ‘self-consciousness’, the world spirit, or of any other metaphysical spectre, but a quite material,

---

<sup>1</sup> 2012 Shillington, *History of Africa* (3 ed), pp 85-95.pdf

<sup>2</sup> The text is taken from the *Collected Works of Marx and Engels*, vol 5, pp 50-51.

<sup>3</sup> [Editors’ footnote:] The Continental System, or the Continental Blockade, proclaimed by Napoleon I in 1806, after Prussia’s defeat, prohibited trade between the countries of the European Continent and Great Britain. This made the import into Europe of a number of products, including sugar and coffee, very difficult. Napoleon’s defeat in Russia in 1812 put an end to the Continental System.

empirically verifiable act, an act the proof of which every individual furnishes as he comes and goes, eats, drinks and clothes himself.

In history up to the present it is certainly likewise an empirical fact that separate individuals have, with the broadening of their activity into world-historical activity, become more and more enslaved under a power alien to them (a pressure which they have conceived of as a dirty trick on the part of the so-called world spirit, etc.), a power which has become more and more enormous and, in the last instance, turns out to be the world market. But it is just as empirically established that, by the overthrow of the existing state of society by the communist revolution (of which more below) and the abolition of private property which is identical with it, this power, which so baffles the German theoreticians, will be dissolved; and that then the liberation of each single individual will be accomplished in the measure in which history becomes wholly transformed into world history.

The class then breaks into groups to continue their paragraph-by-paragraph discussion of the extracts from *The German Ideology* previously distributed.

❖ After the break, report-backs are given to the class by representatives of the groups, leading to a plenary discussion of paras 10-20 of the extracts. Subject-matter discussed included:

- \* 'productive forces' (see RP note on what this means<sup>4</sup>)
- \* 'relations of production'
- \* 'division of labour' (who is doing what work)
- \* conflict of the interests of 'town and country'
- \* para 13: stages of development of the division of labour and the forms of property
- \* 'tribal property' (Marx and Engels mix together pre-agricultural and agricultural stages, thus missing the crucial transformation that provides the basis for modern development)
- \* emergence of slavery (note in this regard the necessity of a reliable surplus in order for slavery to evolve) — what is 'surplus'? : inputs and outputs : use example of maize ('corn') subsistence / surplus
- \* why do Marx and Engels call this stage 'communal property' (or 'communal private property') and 'state property'?
- \* para 18: decay of 'communal property' and the power of the (non-slave) 'people' as private property in land evolves

---

<sup>4</sup> RP note on productive forces: Productive forces are forces of motion and forces of intent. The motive or kinetic forces join with the intentional (or intellectual) forces in the formation and use of implements so as to produce from available materials various objects of utility. Materials themselves are extracted from nature and refined, so as to become part of the productive forces. Both the kinetic and the intellectual forces of production, together with the materials and implements in which they are combined, have undergone a drawn-out but now quite phenomenal development. Along with this technological development — at times retarding it, at other times promoting it, but tending ultimately to succumb and adapt to its power — the social relations of production have evolved.

\* para 20: why an 'opposition' between industry and maritime commerce?

❖ Discussion of the Bronowski video watched in Class 06.<sup>5</sup> (This is woven together with the discussion of the extracts from *The German Ideology* as far as possible. Critical responses provided, especially on Bronowski's ideas about the origins of war, while emphasising his main theme, which is the transformative effects of settled and agricultural life, together with the significance of surplus.)

❖ Discussion of the pages from Saggs, *The Babylonians* distributed previously. (Note the natural basis for the development of property in land, and of inequality of property, described in the text. Note also the role of the priests in the formation of the state and in the development of class stratification together with forms of exploitation based on landed property and tributes.)

At the end:

The class is reminded to read paras 21-28 of the extracts from *The German Ideology*.

Pages 136-158 of Chris Harman's *A People's History of the World* (1999 edition) handed out as reading for discussion in a future class.<sup>6</sup>

=====

### **Class 09**

❖ Discussion of the pages from Shillington, *History of Africa* (3<sup>rd</sup> edition, page 85-95) handed out previously. [Not completed: to be continued in next class.]

Class breaks into groups to read and discuss paragraphs 21-28 of the extracts from *The German Ideology*.

In each instance, class members volunteer to do a recap the next time.

---

<sup>5</sup> Episode 2 'Harvest of the Seasons' from the TV series *The Ascent of Man* by Jacob Bronowski (1969)]

<sup>6</sup> 1999 Harman, pp 136-158 of *People's History*.pdf