

# Science, Class, and Politics

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**Lessons From  
The Revolution**

**Liberalism**

**Book Review**

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## Science, Class, and Politics

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# Lessons From The Revolution

It is most important to study the historical lessons of revolutionary episodes; their origins, conduct, and aftermath. In various aspects, all revolutions share a certain commonality and while the distinctive features of particular revolutions are equally significant, this commonality is important in allowing one to develop general views concerning revolutionary processes, observing errors, and aiding in the elimination of those errors in the future. Obviously, every revolutionary upsurge is unique in certain respects: The class content varies, the particular circumstances of the situation are different in different countries and according to the historical period in question. Yet, all revolutions are the same in one overriding relationship--they all reflect the aspirations of oppressed classes which have reached the end of their social rope against the entrenched power of privileged classes.

Oppression is obviously relative in nature. In a feudal society, for example, there are several oppressed classes including that of the capitalists. Even though this class is less oppressed than the lowest strata of the peasantry, it still finds its situation untenable: Either it advances its interests or it stagnates and cannot, therefore, attain its class fruition. And to advance those interests means to run full-tilt against the interests of the feudal ruling class.

As the nascent capitalist class is a minority of the population, it cannot overthrow the feudal

power by itself--it requires allies. These are to be found in the other oppressed classes which may share some of the interests of the capitalists but which are also in contradiction to this class. Hence, we observe a tenuous alliance, one that will be severed whenever it's to the advantage of the capitalists.

If we merely observe the world today, we find that most areas have the same issue contained within their social structures. Various classes are sufficiently angered by the prevailing arrangements to want change. But what change? That depends on which class one examines. And while a revolutionary movement will bring together all dissenting classes, it can only end with the victory of one.

This essay examines some of the lessons of the English Rising of 1381 and the Hussite Movement in Bohemia of the 15th century. Why do we choose these movements? The first reason is that both are rich in examples from which valuable lessons can be drawn. The second reason is that these movements took place in the context of feudal society and drew in alliance a nascent capitalist class, lower nobility, peasants of various gradation, and the proto-working class. As these were revolutions fought by an alliance, they were most important for those currently waging national liberation wars which must end in the domination of one class within that alliance. Thirdly, we use these movements for our base of study because they do not receive much attention. On the assumption that the more one knows the better prepared one is, we suggest that this information would be most welcome.

The point of this essay is not to recount the actual history of these revolutionary movements, but to draw lessons from that history as well as to compare those lessons with other historical risings. We do believe, however, that the formal history should be read for a fuller account as to what actually happened. To this end, we refer the reader to the two primary sources used in this study: R.S. Hilton and E. Fagan, The English Rising of 1381; Josef Macek, The Hussite Movement in Bohemia.

## Lesson Number One

The first lesson is so obvious that it is often overlooked: For a revolution to occur, there must be a revolutionary situation. That is, the major contending classes, in particular the ruled class(es), must be willing to act to change their position. In the final analysis, the underlying motive force for change is economic in nature.

The feudal society of the period had passed its apex of development and had entered its moribund stage. The parasitic ruling class (the feudal lords), living off the expropriation of the surplus produced by other classes, in particular the peasantry (small farmers), had grown increasingly greedy, increasing their rents, dues, and taxes in order to satisfy its growing demand for income. Had feudal society been economically healthy, this, in itself, would not have led to the extent of unrest which it did. However, society was decadent, retrogressive. In a healthy economy, increases in technology could have allowed, through greater productivity, an increase in output which would have permitted an increase in income for all classes (hypothetically). Given the feudal society of the period, however, there was no stimulus for such technological improvement, particularly in agriculture. The peasants well understood that any improvement leading to greater output would result merely in that increase being siphoned off by the lords. Further, the older peasant collective was fragmenting, resulting increasingly in an individualized (petty) production process. Given the small-scale production units, and contrained by the feudal structure, little could be done in the way of improving the process of production.

Hence, in the 13th and 14th centuries, we observe a growing inequality in the distribution of social income: The lords (and large merchants) fattening their pockets at the expense of the majority of the population. How do we know this? After all, quantitative data are difficult to come by for the period (though some do exist).

The first piece of evidence is the severity of the "Black Death", which began in Italy about 1347. Epidemics of the virulence of this sort are not accidental phenomena, nor imported from outside society (as exogenous variables): They are caused by a reduction in nutritional levels which are the result of reductions in income. By the 14th century, the pressure on lower class incomes had reached the point where this income was inadequate to provide sufficient nutritional requirements. In other words, the income levels of much of the population was less than that which allowed biological subsistence. (L. Genicot, "Crisis: From the Middle Ages to Modern Times", p. 674.)

The second piece of evidence is that the revolts in England and Bohemia were part of a larger history of sporadic uprisings then taking place throughout Europe. In England, a series of disturbances began at the turn of the 14th century. These were of a local type, directed against specific lords and usually were centered around specific grievances rather than a wholesale condemnation of the feudal structure. (R. Hilton, "Peasant Movements in England Before 1381".) We also find the English and Bohemian uprisings occurring during the same time period as those of the Ciompi in Florence (1378), the weavers in Ghent and Burges (1379-82), the Jacquerie of France (1358) and the German peasant war of 1525. (Engels, The Peasant War in Germany)

The revolts in England and Bohemia of the 14th and 15th centuries, then, were part of the general attack on a decadent feudal system and were not mere accidents of history or the work of seditious troublemakers such as John Ball or John Huss--the "Great Man" theory of history. It was the social system itself, resting on exploitation and groaning under the weight of its own incompetence, that generated its opposition. Essentially, feudalism had reached its limits and fundamental change was now underway.

In these revolts, various classes (or segments thereof) played different and contradictory roles. The most consistently revolutionary class consisted of the poor peasants and portions of the middle

peasants who set forth (in turn) primitive communist and petty-bourgeois (individualist) egalitarian programs. Given the increasing extraction of surplus, coupled with the growing fragmentation of the peasantry into three classes as a result of the growth of land as a commodity, the poor peasants had grievances against both the feudal lords as well as the rich, proto-capitalist peasants (kulaks) within their own farming communities. Obviously, the middle peasants who still retained sufficient land from which to make a living did not share the same degree of oppression as the poor, small landholding and landless peasants, but they were sufficiently oppressed to provide a mainstay of the peasant armies. However, and this will be discussed later, this segment of the peasantry was more readily satisfied with the gaining of immediate economic demands.

The kulak farmers and town capitalists (burghers) also had grievances against the feudal nobility and large merchants and did participate in the early portions of the risings. This class was quite satisfied with a purely reformist program which would allow a growth in commodity production and capitalist accumulation but which would not touch the heart of the feudal system. That is, they proposed an arrangement with the nobility which would eliminate constraints on their activities but which allowed the maintenance of the feudal exploitation system--as long as it did not touch them.

Coupled with the lower and middle peasants in revolutionary ardor were the manufacturing journeymen and the town workers. This latter class was the result of the growth in capitalist relations, and during the period, was still in its infancy. Given its youth and size, it had no political program of its own but merely appended itself to the rural poor in ideological affinity.

The journeymen in the craft guilds, while certainly vigorous in their activities, were quite narrow in their outlook. By this time in feudal history, the craft guilds were no longer progressive. The masters, ever desirous of maintaining a monopoly

of both output and skills, increasingly admitted fewer and fewer journeymen into their ranks. In the guild system, the purpose of becoming a journeyman after years of learning the skill as an apprentice was to both sharpen that skill in actual production and to prove oneself worthy of reaching the status of master-craftsman. However, there are limits to the size of any craft and by this time those limits had been reached. Thus, instead of becoming a master after, say, seven years of proven work, one had to wait much longer and, perhaps never come to the end of the road at all. The journeymen, then, had grievances against the master-craftsmen class and promoted the goal of opening the guilds or eliminating them altogether.

The craft guild-masters had grievances as well; increasingly they were becoming dominated by the large merchants who were coming into control of the distribution channels, and in some cases, of the sources of material inputs in the production process. They were quite content, however, to restrict their program to the alleviation of their conditions within the constraints of the feudal system. Hence, this class would likely be "revolutionary" in the early stages of the opposition to feudalism, then quickly attempt to consolidate the reformist gains achieved.

The last revolutionary segment of the population was the lower nobility with the knights at the bottom of this social hierarchy. As the upper nobility consolidated its power, it also consolidated its economic control. The lesser nobility found itself squeezed from two sides. On the one hand, they owed obligations to their "superiors"; on the other hand they found themselves with smaller and smaller holdings from which to generate the revenue to meet those obligations. This segment was purely reformist in nature and set out a program of modifying the then-current feudal relations and obligations to accommodate their immediate interests.

The leading anti-revolutionary force was, of course, the upper nobility which had at its center the king and the Pope. In particular, the focal

point of both the opposition elements to feudalism and the leadership of the anti-revolutionary classes was the high officials of the Church--the principal ideological and economic power in the Europe of the period. In fact, this remained true into the early 19th century. (Engels, Ludwig Feuerbach) This class was unbending in its conservatism--and rightly so. As it was an entrenched, exploiting class that developed and continued to exist on the basis of the established social system, it wanted to preserve that system unaltered. It saw any change in the status quo ante as a threat to its well-being, not just in the short-run sense of reforms lessening their economic and political power but also in the long-run sense in that the granting of reforms today would lead to the demand for more reforms tomorrow. In other words, the dominant class, once entrenched, sees its society as both necessary and stable. Any change will produce instability that eventually generates total disintegration.

Allied to this class were the large merchants. Contrary to some authorities, the merchant class was not progressive and did not press for fundamental social change. Merchants were not proto-capitalists and the capitalist class, in the main, did not arise out of the merchants. This class had early allied itself with the feudal lords, having been granted monopoly privileges in return for handing over to the lords a portion of the booty gained through trade. As well, its increasing control over the distribution channels gave them more and more power over the craft guilds, allowing them to expropriate directly a portion of the surplus generated in the production process. (G. Unwin, Industrial Organization) Hence, the merchants were quite happy with the existing arrangements and desired the preservation of those arrangements.

In sum, then, we can observe three basic class elements in the revolutionary process. The most revolutionary were those who had nothing to lose through fundamental change--the poor farmers, urban workers, apprentices, and journeymen. Less militant,

but still desiring change of a reformist nature were the lower nobility, craft masters and rich peasants, and town proto-capitalists. The middle peasantry lay somewhere between these two positions. The higher nobility and their lackies and the large merchants stood on the side of reaction. This class nature of the revolutionary process coupled with the particular circumstances of the feudal society of the period provided the context in which the revolution unfolded.

## Lesson Number Two

The second lesson revolves around the ideological contest which necessarily accompanies the struggle for political power. Succinctly, for a revolutionary situation to develop, the ideological control which the ruling class exercises over the lower classes must break down. As well, the ideology developed in the course of the revolutionary period is limited by the class nature of society at the time.

All minority ruling classes rule primarily through fraud--the inculcation of false consciousness or artificial stupidity. As long as the lower classes accept the ruling class' view of the social order, they are incapable of changing that order. With the collapse of the economic foundation of society, the hold fraud has on the underlying population weakens and these classes are forced to think for themselves. Obviously, the better society is understood, the clearer are the ideas developed to promote change and the greater is the realization of objective class interests.

In the England and Bohemia of the period, the ideological center of the feudal ruling-class fraud was the Church. Not surprisingly, the Church was also a focal point of the rebellion by the lower classes and much of the ideological struggle itself took the form of religious criticism with the chief ideological proponents consisting largely of clerics. In England and Bohemia, much of the program for change was set forth by poor priests--John Ball in England,

John Zelivsky\* in Bohemia were notable examples of this segment of the revolutionary population. We also observe a distinctly small group of the higher officials of the Church lending themselves, sometimes unconsciously, to the formation of revolutionary ideology. John Huss, John Wycliffe, Nikolaus of Dresden, Konrad Waldenhausen are cited as representative figures.

It is important to distinguish the role of the poor priests from that of the officials and to distinguish both from charlatans such as Martin Luther who figured so prominently in the German risings. That portion of the poor priests that joined the revolutionary movement was the most radical in its ideas and in its practice. They lived with the poor, shared the same level of subsistence and suffered the same sort of oppression from their superiors as did the lower classes in general. Moreover, they sincerely believed in that part of the Christian dogma which stresses equality. The influence of these priests cannot be overestimated. As figures of authority in the village, they did wield enormous ideological power given that the pulpit was the principal means of official communication during this historical period. Hence, to the extent that the priests shared the same general view as the poor and were able to articulate that view, this segment of the priestly class assumed a leading position in the revolutionary ferment. As well, as they often travelled from village to village in undertaking their duties, they were in a position to organize the movement throughout the country.

The higher officials who, generally unconsciously, lent their ideological support to the political movement can be considered the latter day equivalent of modern honest liberals. John Huss was certainly not deprived: He was, among other things, Dean and Rector of Charles University. He did, however, strike out against the abuses of the Church and of feudalism in general, though he never argued for the eradication of either. What he promoted was the notion that dis-

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\* We have omitted the Czech accent marks in this account.

honest and corrupt officials and noblemen should be driven out of their respective offices and be replaced with decent folk. Essentially, he demanded reforms so substantial and radical that they could not be seriously considered. The sincerity of Huss, and those like him, can be observed by his refusal to change his position though it cost him his titles, income, and eventually his life when he was burned at the stake in 1415 for heresy.

On the other side of the coin stood the officials of the Church who set forth the basic ideas supportive of the upper classes to which they belonged. Given that the Church represented the greatest feudal power in Europe, these high officials--the clerical equivalent of Kings, Dukes, and Counts--had a vested economic interest in preserving their system intact.

Standing in the middle were individuals such as the German, Luther. Luther represented the lower nobility in its attempt to reform the feudal system in order to achieve a greater share of the feudal benefits. While Luther appeared to be revolutionary in his attack on the Church, he showed his true colors when the peasantry, misunderstanding his politics, flocked to his position (even singing one of his hymns as they marched into battle) and Luther urged the destruction of this rabble. That is, as long as reform could be controlled by the feudal princes, Luther was a reformist. When the political movement went outside the feudal constraints, he quickly retreated to the safe haven of feudal might. (Engels, The Peasant War in Germany, pp. 57-62)

In addition to the various representative segments within the Church, ideological leadership lay with the lawyers and litterateurs (mainly poets). The former, university trained and generally coming from the ranks of the privileged classes, supported the nobility. The latter, again as a general statement, also threw their support to the nobility, presenting feudalism in an idealized, romantic form. The poets normally came from the lesser nobility (Chaucer, for example) and, in any case, depended upon rich patrons for their support.

Given the nature of feudal society in Europe and the weighty role played by the Church, most of the ideological struggle focused on the Church and religious tenets. However, as the Church was inexorably interconnected with feudalism as a whole, religious criticism was necessarily a criticism of society, or, as John Ball once argued: "When Adam delved and Eve span, who was then the Gentleman?" Given this focus, it is important to clear up some confusion in the battle of ideas which has relevance for today.

The first point is that the ruling class will always defend its privileges and will never budge an iota unless it is forced to. Even then, this class will always seek to regain those privileges which were taken away or reduced in significance. There is good reason for this. Given that the ruling class rules on the basis of authority, any relaxing of that authority implies the possibility of further change. And, if carried to the extreme, what is feared is the gradual destruction of that class altogether. Thus, for example, the restriction of the King's rights by the barons and lesser nobles through the Magna Charta of 1215 was seen as dangerous: Such ideas may spill over to the peasant who may insist on their rights as well.

Therefore, the ruling class will always put forward conservative ideas in defense of its interests and support those ideologues who support this class even when their ideas seem to attack the rulers.

For example, given the anti-clericism of the day, it is important to distinguish true critics of society and feudal privilege from those who merely mouthed platitudes to channel dissent into safe waters. One of the favorite tricks of the feudal lords was to encourage and support attacks on themselves by preachers who seemed to criticize the feudal order but really defended a disintegrating society by arguing the need for a balanced (equilibrium) order. That is, they promoted the notion that the fundamental problem was not the very nature of an exploiting society but that classes no longer "knew their places" and salvation

lay with the restoration of a just, balanced system.

Further, it is not unusual to read sermons which seem to be of a revolutionary flavor but, in fact, were quite safe in that they were delivered solely to the rich. To denounce the "sins of the rich" only to the rich was not revolutionary nor dangerous: upper class individuals seem to need periodic sessions of self-flagellation. The same sermons delivered to the poor, on the other hand, would result in the preacher being burned at the stake.

Another aspect of the ideological contest was that many arguments were within the limits imposed by the feudal order simply because they proposed no action to remedy the injustices. The reason why Ball, Zelivsky and others were dangerous is that they laid out the remedy to the problem. Or, as Marx also argued: "The philosophers have interpreted the world in various ways; the point, however, is to change it." (Marx, Thesis XI on Feuerbach)

The above points to modern counterparts, namely to the arguments put forward by the professional liberals. While such members of the intellectual community do argue for minor changes, these changes are limited to those which can be accommodated within the capitalist system, and which are designed solely to placate the population without giving up anything fundamental. Underlying this political program is the thesis that the social system itself is harmonious (balanced), if various dissident elements would just stop making trouble.

There was no socialist ideological program during this period; the class which lays the materialist basis for such a program was insufficiently developed to allow for this to occur. There was, however, a communist program, albeit a reactionary one. At this time there were still sufficient remnants of the pre-feudal tribal arrangements which were passed on through the early village communities in the initial stages of feudalism. The poor peasants advocated a return to these egalitarian relationships, throwing out the parasitic classes and segments of the population or, at least making them behave properly.

Usually, the religious counterpart to this was the advocacy of the elimination of corrupt, property-holding Church officials, reducing this segment of the feudal ruling class to that of spiritual counsellors, who would be equal to all other members of society.

Such a program was doomed to failure. Given that it promoted a return to an idealized past, it flew in the face of historical advance. Further, it was predicated on the assumption that individual members of the ruling class were dishonest, corrupt, and vicious rather than setting forth an argument based on class relations. While usually recognizing that the upper nobility constituted a class, the prevailing opinion was that the King stood apart from and above the nobles, that he represented the population as a whole. Thus, while such a program would galvanize a large section of the population into action, it was not suitable to replace existing relations with something fundamentally different.

This left the door open to those classes, or members thereof, who were more cognizant of the true state of affairs and who could, though not necessarily with the degree of finality required, replace current social relations with new ones. In point of fact, the capitalists were insufficiently powerful at the time to destroy feudalism or to place the feudal lords on a social footing below them. They were, however, capable of advancing their interests through allying with the poor and middle peasants, urban workers, etc. and pushing for major reform which would greatly enhance their position. Thus, to the extent they were able to use the political opposition generated by the lowest classes and harness this energy to their own ends, the businessmen were able to strengthen capitalist property relations within the basically feudal state system. This, then, helped to prepare the way for capitalist revolution in the centuries to come.

## Lesson Number Three

In any revolutionary situation, success of the revolutionary class(es) depends to a large degree on the intelligence and behavior of that (those) class(es). The third lesson surrounds the activities and shortcomings of the lower classes in the English and Bohemian risings.

The first point is that individuals who join the revolutionary movement do so for various reasons, one of which is to satisfy individual grievances. It is most important that the leadership of such a movement educate individuals away from such a petty outlook toward that of a class point of view directed toward eliminating the social base of such grievances. If this is not done, then the revolution will dissipate itself in individualist attempts, bordering on terrorist behavior, to solve individual problems: It will be impossible to organize a social effort. To such an end, John Ball addressed the assemblage prior to the attack on London in mid-June, 1381 and specifically warned them against such behavior. He explained how that behavior would endanger the goal of the rising--social equality.

The second point, a derivative of the above, concerns the tactical behavior of the revolutionary forces given its strategic goal of fundamental social change. The revolutionary elements must act in such a manner so as to demonstrate their suitability for leadership and to enlist the support of the majority of the underlying population. That is, revolution is not made by a small group of dedicated revolutionaries but by the mass of people. And this mass must be drawn into the revolutionary movement by the ideas and acts of the leadership.

Thus, in both England and Bohemia, we find that the revolutionary forces were quite discriminating in their attacks on the upper classes, using such acts to demonstrate their long-run intentions and to enlist the support of the population as a whole. Manorial

records which laid the legal base of serfdom were destroyed while records showing various misdeeds were preserved and used to document injustices in public trials. Such platforms provided opportunities to educate the population about the nature of the system which oppressed them.

We also find, contrary to the typical exploiting class view of these movements, that there was no wholesale slaughter, that executions took place only where evidence of foul play was in hand. Moreover, family members of those executed were spared.

In connection with this, the revolutionary armies had to maintain strict discipline. The English and Bohemian forces were not and could not be lawless brigands, but necessarily had to impose the firmest of control on themselves. To this end, looting was forbidden. Rather, and this vividly demonstrated in public display, the personal wealth of the upper class families--gold, jewelry, etc.--was destroyed, while productive wealth such as cattle was sold to the poor at very low prices. We have records of at least one instance in which a peasant, found attempting to cart off silver plate from the house of John of Gaunt (the Duke of Lancaster and uncle to Richard II) was thrown into the flames in which Gaunt's riches were burned. In the same instance, several peasants who had drunk themselves unconscious in Gaunt's winecellar were allowed to die there when the house was fired.

The point of all this was, of course, to develop a better understanding of the tasks at hand and to aid in the organization of an orderly, disciplined force which would not break into disarray the moment an opportunity was offered for individual benefit, but which could see beyond short-run gains and toward the final victory. Such behavior, the very opposite of that practiced by the corrupt, parasitic, money-grubbing upper classes, served as a visible demonstration of the sincerity and integrity of the revolutionary forces.

Within the armies, the lower class population found justice in addition to discipline. The Bohemian armies of the great military commander John Zizka--

an impoverished member of the lower nobility and representative of the Burgher "middle class"; the Cromwell of his day--indicates that the poor had their own organizations and ideological leaders and could use these organizations to bring up and redress grievances. There is no necessary contradiction between discipline and justice as long as those striving for justice are the same forces imposing discipline.

The third point is a negative one: The training which the lower class is subjected to under forms of minority-ruling-class societies is that of the inculcation of its own inferiority and respect for its superiors and their institutions. The result of this training is fear of the upper class and a certain gullibility founded on the illusion of upper class integrity. This carries over into the revolutionary process and bodes ill in the actual confrontation of the classes. Regardless of demonstration after demonstration to the contrary, the lower class harbors a reservoir of belief in the good will of the upper class. To the extent that this is so, the revolutionary classes will be deceived and prove incapable of carrying out their revolutionary charge. The point is that the lower class must be taught that the upper class and its lackies will always lie, will always practice deception and will always renege on its promises. It simply cannot be trusted and must always be dealt with ruthlessly. Thus, John Ball, in his address mentioned above warned the armies against believing any promises made by the nobility.

The principal failure of the oppressed classes in the English and Bohemian risings was their inability to understand this point and, thus, they lost their initial advantage developed in the first stages of the revolution. They had a tendency to plant the red flag, then organize a dance while the reactionary forces regrouped.

The basic problem of the revolutionary forces was the belief in the king or, at least, the office of the king. Given their more immediate, direct contact with other members of the nobility, the lower classes were less deceived by these elements. The king, however,

stood as the representative of all the people and surely would act correctly when confronted with the demands and grievances of the poor.

In England, the King (the young Richard II), on the advice of his more astute counselors, twice agreed to the demands of the revolutionary armies--including the demand that serfdom be abolished. The ploy was that once the demands were formally agreed to, the armies would then return home or at least a sufficient portion of it disperse to allow the destruction of the remaining forces. The concessions then could be rescinded. The second time this was attempted it worked. Enough of the revolutionary population was suckered-in by the King's promises, in particular the middle peasants, that the remainder could be readily destroyed. And, given the opportunity, the King's forces struck out with a vengeance, organizing a reign of terror to make the lower classes pay for the humiliation inflicted upon the privileged. Wat Tyler was decapitated, his head brazenly displayed to his troops; John Ball and Litster, another prominent leader, were drawn and quartered, the parts of their bodies sent to the four corners of England.

In Bohemia, the gullibility realized itself in the plan to replace a "bad" king (Sigismund) with a "good" king. Such a demand weakened the organizational thrust against the state apparatus as a whole and thus facilitated the eventual destruction of the revolutionary armies.

## Lesson Number Four

The fourth lessons concerns the fragility of any alliance forged among different classes and the demonstration that the capitalist and other exploiting classes will always use this alliance to the point where it no longer advantages them, then turn on this alliance, physically eliminating the lower classes' leaders as well as their political program. This, of course, is a matter taken up by Lenin in his What Is To Be Done (chapter one) and is of crucial importance in the various national liberation movements today.

The underlying theoretical rationale for what is observed in history is based upon the different class interests. The exploited classes have an objective interest in eliminating exploitation altogether. The exploiting classes who are oppressed through the prevailing class relations have an objective interest in eliminating or taming the prevailing ruling class and its exploitation and oppression, but have no interest in eliminating exploitation. To accomplish the former end, these classes, being a minority of the population, require the assistance of the lower classes and to this extent must put forward a relatively democratic, egalitarian facade--"Fraternity, Liberty, Equality". However, they have the same interest say, as the feudal lords in exploiting the rest of the population--the principal difference being that they prefer a different form of exploitation. Hence, when they've eliminated or ameliorated the rule of the former exploiting class, they will necessarily want to halt the revolutionary movement at that point, turning on their former allies and developing a new alliance with their former enemies. We can see this process very clearly in later, full-fledged capitalist revolutions. (For example, Christopher Hill, The English Revolution of 1640)

The fundamental lesson of the danger of allying with exploiting classes can readily be seen by the historical experience in Bohemia and England. In the former, the alliance by 1423 consisted of three classes, each represented by a political center: Tabor (taken from the mount on which the poor first assembled to propose revolutionary change) was the organization of the poor who functioned as the most radical element in the anti-feudal armies; New Tabor which was the organization of the lesser nobles; and the Prague League, a grouping of the major Czech urban areas under nominal control of the Prague burghers.

By 1421, the burghers or proto-capitalists were satisfied with the situation. The poor's military wing had been able to force many concessions from the nobility: The property of exiled Germans had been confiscated; political power in the cities rested with the burghers; and the economic constraints

against accumulation had been significantly reduced. Hence, this class was quite ready to abandon its previous democratic demagogy and stated principles and stop the social movement at that point. By 1433, the burghers were able to reach a secret agreement with the nobility through the Church which maintained their privileges while selling out the peasantry and other lower classes. Following the Battle of Lipany (1434) organized by the Burgher/Baron alliance to break the military back of the popular armies through a sneak attack, this agreement was put into force in the 1436 Compacta for Hussite Bohemia.

Hikulas Biskupec, former Bishop of Tabor, summed up the behavior of the burghers quite aptly:

"We have learnt from the example of many that as long as they were poor they never or hardly ever wanted to stay at home in the towns, but would rather say: 'I will never miss a battle, I shall always go and fight!' But as soon as they have filled their purses, bundles and bags with gold, they leave their army at the first opportunity and turn idlers, take to feasting and drinking, put on fine clothes, marry and grow fat with pleasure-seeking."  
(Macek, pp. 73-74)

In England we see the same sort of development. Following the capture of London by the "rebel" forces, the burghers took control of the city government, used the peasant army's presence to settle old scores with rival (and usually foreign) businessmen, and wrested large amounts of property from their dispossessed rivals and from the London nobility. It was now time to call a halt to the festivities. The peasants, apprentices and town workers wanted to push further, however. As well, the billeting of the army in town required some sort of taxation. Who was to pay for all this?

The proto-capitalists, formerly allied with the peasants and welcoming their overthrow of established authority in London and surrounding environs, now saw these allies as a threat: They wanted to go too far.

Rather than risking a further unsettling of the economic and political order, the burghers preferred a restoration of the old order, albeit with the changes effected still in place. At least this would provide stability. Thus, they went to the King's Council and offered their support to the feudal lords. And it was this act which, partially at least, encouraged the lords to launch their counter-attack, murder Wat Tyler and destroy the rebel forces.

## Lesson Number Five

One cannot mistake an exploiting class for a section of humanity, and treat it in a humane fashion. If this is the case, it will cut the lower classes' throats at the first opportunity. When a revolutionary process begins, the ruling class members and their allies are put on the defensive. This irritates them. Given any opportunity to restore their privileged position, they will do so, and they will attempt this restoration by any means at their disposal. It is vital, therefore, to develop an understanding of the nature of a minority ruling class and learn to deal with that class accordingly. Succinctly, any minority ruling class, because it is a privileged class and lives at the expense of the underlying population, is contemptuous of the lower classes, habitually lies, cheats, steals, and exists on the basis of force and fraud. Given any quarter, or demonstration of humanity, it will turn on its opponents with a ferocity akin to that of a wounded animal. After all, its privileges are at stake.

In England, following the peasants' victory in London, the lords were in a weak position. Had the peasant army at that point carried its operations through to fruition, destroying the lords and their lackeys, it would have won the day. But it did not. This gave the upper class time to organize its counter-offensive.

Heeding the Earl of Salisbury's advice, the King's Council combined its twin tactics of fraud and force. They pretended to negotiate fairly, appeared to concede to the demands of the lower classes, then, when the

peasants seemed satisfied and began to demobilize their armies, struck them with all the force at their disposal. To play out this game, the King even issued false Charters to the peasants which seemed to give them political authority but, in fact, was merely a trick to put them off. After all, if the King and barons continued to exist politically, it was they who held real power.

The tactics of the English lords were quite different from those initially developed by their Bohemian counterparts. Following the fall of Prague to the rebels, the nobility, with the Pope's blessing, refused to negotiate and organized a crusade against the Praguers, hiring mercenaries to do their fighting. These holy murderers were ordered to go on a terrorist rampage intended to frighten the Hussites into submission. Hence, they killed anyone speaking Czech, burned, pillaged and generally did what mercenaries do best. But the lords had erred in their strategy. The Hussite forces were still organized and were still on the offensive. Consequently, they crushed the lords' and the Vatican's forces. The lords had refused to bargain with them, thus softening them up, but instead had brought down on them a hired army. The grievances of the lower class were not even addressed. Hence, the lords' actions angered the lower classes and drove more of the population into the ranks of the Hussite armies.

Force must be applied sparingly if it is to be effective and then only to the extent that fraud has failed to achieve its purpose. As well, such force as is used must always be covered over with a large dose of fraud. Even the German fascists reverted to a modified parliamentarianism (the chief fraud in modern capitalist society) after its short-run goal of physically eliminating working-class leadership had been accomplished.

To be effective, the upper class must split the opposition forces, following the standard practice of divide and rule. This is less easily done in revolutionary situations given that for a revolution to occur, the lower classes must be sufficiently aware

of existing conditions and sufficiently angered by those conditions to allow it to shake off its former ruled state and strike out against the upper-class authority.

As seen above, the lords' divisive tactics focused on breaking the alliance among the peasants, lesser nobility, and the proto-capitalists. The lords conceded various points to their fellow (though lesser) exploiters, weakening their resolve, and drawing them away from the poor. This obviously created confusion within the ranks of the revolutionary forces. Individuals who had previously fought in their ranks and who had counseled them on strategy and tactics now were advising them to go home, to accept what had been offered by the King and to be grateful that they were still alive.

The lower class population must learn to think for itself, must develop its own theoretical leadership and must be constantly watchful of weak allies who will turn traitor when given the least opportunity. The role of the Social Democrats in the modern period is quite similar to that played by the timid "middle classes" of the English and Bohemian risings.

The last point of this lesson is that the upper class will always organize counter-revolution. This is to be expected. A class that sees its privileges lost or even threatened will fight to restore these privileges. Given the least quarter, the minority class will unleash a bloodbath in order to teach the undesirables a sound lesson. This white terror is based upon two major underlying characteristics of a ruling class. First, such a class holds the rest of the population in utter contempt. The ruling class is the superior class given that this class is that which determines what is superior. Hence, the rest of the population is inferior. Second, any attempt to overthrow the rule of the minority is a blow to its pocketbook. This will necessarily unleash the vilest reaction imaginable.

Consider the following statement offered to the peasants by Richard after the lords had broken their promises and defeated the peasant armies outside London:

"O most vile and odious by land and sea, you who are not worthy to live when compared with the lords whom ye have attacked; you should be forthwith punished with vilest deaths were it not for the office ye bear. Go back to your comrades and bear the king's answer. You were and are serfs, and shall remain in bondage, not that of old, but in one infinitely worse, more vile without comparison. For as long as we live, and by God's help rule over this realm, we shall attempt by all our faculties, power and means to make you such an example of offence to the heirs of your servitude as that they may have you before their eyes as in a mirror, and you may supply them with a perpetual ground for cursing and fearing you, and fear to commit the like."

(Hilton and Fagan, p. 177)

As an example of the latter point, we can point to the actions of Walworth in the destruction of these armies. It has been recorded that this nobleman was one of the most ferocious in his attack on the peasants and took particular pleasure in displaying Wat Tyler's head to the assembled in order to make his point. Now, why should the good Walworth be so angered. When the peasants took London, they destroyed the brothels of that city. And who was the principal brothel owner? Walworth, Lord Mayor of London.

## Conclusion

Quite obviously, both movements failed to achieve their goals, at least insofar as the lower classes were concerned. The basic reasons for this are set forth in Hilton and Fagan, Chapter 12 and rest on the very nature of the fragmented peasant class itself. Nevertheless, important gains were made, in particular the modification of feudal society and the destruction of serfdom in its old form which paved the way for the eventual capitalist development and consequent capitalist revolutions of subsequent centuries.

In addition to the basic reasons, applicable to peasant society, there were secondary reasons applicable to all lower classes who hope to improve their position through a fundamental reconstruction of society. Some of these have been examined above. We must learn from history if we are to succeed in this reconstruction. Not only success but failure must be critically examined and evaluated. Within the lessons of history lies the knowledge which, when correctly understood, can serve as a guide to the present and the future. In this sense, then, those heroic, good revolutionaries of the past still live and continue their work through the political thrust of a class which they helped to create--the working class. But, if we allow those old fighters to remain silent, if we do not seek out their advice, then we condemn the present revolutionary class to repeat the errors of its historical parents. And all the benefits of this knowledge then fall to the capitalists.■

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