**(6:24) New Ideas Transform the World**

**German Peasants Demand their Rights (1525)**

Background: In 1517, a German Monk named Martin Luther precipitated the Protestant Reformation in Europe by challenging the authority of the Roman Catholic Church to speak for the Christian God. His first act of defiance was to post 95 theses on the door of a church in Wittenberg that disputed church practices. To make what he considered to be the “word of God” directly available to ordinary people, Luther translated the Old and New Testaments of the Christian bible into German. While Luther rejected church doctrine and rituals, he did not reject all authority. When German peasants rebelled against what they considered to be unjust feudal practices in 1525 and 1526, Luther accused the rebels of robbery and pillage and claimed they acted like “mad dogs.” He wrote that their statement of principles known as the Twelve Articles was the “devil’s work.”

Instructions: Examine the edited version of the Twelve Articles developed by the German peasant rebels and answer the questions at the end of the text (An original translation is available at http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1850/peasant-war-germany/ch0e.htm, accessed December 16, 2009). As you read consider whether these principles appear to be irrational complaints with “ungodly” solutions, revolutionary demands that threaten the established social order, or legitimate grievances with fair solutions.

1. Each community should choose and appoint a pastor and we should have the right to depose [remove] him should he conduct himself improperly.

2. We are ready and willing to pay the fair tithe [tax] of grain. We will that our church provost, appointed by the community, shall gather and receive this tithe. From this he shall give to the pastor, elected by the whole community, a decent and sufficient maintenance for him and his. What remains over shall be given to the poor of the place.

3. It has been the custom for men to hold us as their own property, which is pitiable enough, considering that Christ has delivered and redeemed us all, without exception. Accordingly, it is consistent with Scripture that we should be free and wish to be so.

4. It has been the custom that no poor man should be allowed to catch venison or wild fowl or fish in flowing water, which seems to us quite unseemly and unbrotherly as well as selfish and not agreeable to the word of God.

5. The noble folk have appropriated all the woods to themselves alone. It is our opinion in regard to wood that has fallen into the hands of a lord whether spiritual or temporal, that unless it was duly purchased it should revert again to the community.

6. Our sixth complaint is in regard to the excessive services demanded of us that are increased from day to day.

7. The lord should no longer try to force more services or other dues from the peasant without payment, but permit the peasant to enjoy his holding in peace and quiet. The peasant should, however, help the lord when it is necessary, and at proper times when it will not be disadvantageous to the peasant and for a suitable payment.

8. We are greatly burdened by holdings that cannot support the rent exacted from them.

9. We should be judged according to the old written law so that the case shall be decided according to its merits, and not with partiality.

10. We are aggrieved by the appropriation by individuals of meadows and fields that at one time belonged to a community.

11. We will entirely abolish the Todfall [inheritance tax] and will no longer endure it, nor allow widows and orphans to be thus shamefully robbed against God’s will.

12. If any one or more of the articles here set forth should not be in agreement with the word of God, as we think they are, such article we will willingly recede [remove] from when it is proved really to be against the word of God by a clear explanation of the Scripture.

Questions

1. What is the first demand of the peasant rebels?

2. What are some of their other grievances?

3. How does the document try to secure the support of those in authority?

4. In your opinion, what is the general tone of these statements?

5. In your opinion, why were social class conflicts during this period expressed in religious terms?

Follow-up Discussion: In your opinion, should the Twelve Articles be considered a precursor of the American Declaration of Independence and Bill of Rights?

**Montesquieu: The Spirit of the Laws (1748)**

Source: Cohler, A., Miller, B., & Stone, H., ed. (1989). *Montesquieu: The Spirit of the Laws* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press), 156-157.

Background: Baron de Montesquieu (1689-­1755) was one of the most influential thinkers of the 17th and 18th century European Enlightenment. As a judge he was particularly concerned with the nature of the law and government. His best-known work is *The Spirit of the Laws*. Montesquieu attributed his ideas on the need to balance conflicting forces in government and society as a protection for liberty to his understanding of ancient Roman government and his interpretation of the English Constitution, which he believed was descended from Germanic traditions. Montesquieu’s ideas on the separation of powers were part of the foundation of the United States Constitution when it was written in 1787. Examine excerpts A – C and answer questions 1 – 3.

A. In each state there are three sorts of powers: legislative power; the executive power over things depending on the rights of nations, and executive power over things depending on civil right. By the first, the prince or magistrate makes laws for a time or for always and corrects or abrogates [cancels] those that have been made. By the second, he makes peace or war, sends or receives embassies; establishes security, and prevents invasions. By the third, he punishes crimes or judges disputes between individuals. The last will be called the power of judging, the former simply the executive power of the state.

B. Political liberty in a citizen is that tranquility of spirit which comes from the opinion each one has of his security, and in order for him to have this liberty the government must be such that one citizen cannot fear another citizen. When the legislative power is united with the executive power in a single person or in a single body of the magistracy, there is no liberty, because one can fear that the same monarch or senate that makes tyrannical laws will execute them tyrannically.

C. Nor is there liberty if the power of judging is not separate from legislative power and from executive power. If it were joined to legislative power, the power over life and liberty of the citizens would be arbitrary, for the judge would be the legislator. If it were joined to executive power, the judge could have the force of an oppressor. All would be lost if the same man or the same body of principal men, either of nobles or of the people exercised these three powers: that of making the laws, that of executing public resolutions, and that of judging the crimes or disputes of individuals.

Questions

1. What are the three types of power?

2. According to Montesquieu, how is political liberty protected in a society?

3. In your opinion, are Montesquieu’s conclusions based on insight into the ancient world or observation of his contemporary world? Explain.

**Memoir of General Toussaint L’Ouverture (1803)**

Source: http://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/beard63 (Accessed May 26, 2010).

Background: On June 6, 1802, Toussaint L’Ouverture, the leader of the Haitian revolution that overturned slavery was arrested by French officials and deported from Haiti to France. In his memoir, written while imprisoned in France, Toussaint L’Ouverture defended his actions and demanded fair treatment from Napoleon. He died while a prisoner on April 7, 1803. Read the excerpt from his memoir and answer questions 1 – 3.

“I have neglected nothing at Saint Domingo for the welfare of the island; I have robbed myself of rest to contribute to it; I have sacrificed everything for it. I have made it my duty and pleasure to develop the resources of this beautiful colony. Zeal, activity, courage, I have employed them all. The island was invaded by the enemies of the Republic; I had then but a thousand men, armed with pikes. I sent them back to labor in the field, and organized several regiments, by the authority of Gen. Laveaux. The Spanish portion had joined the English to make war upon the French . . . General Laveaux ordered me to the attack; I carried it . . . The English were entrenched at Pont-de-l’Ester; I drove them from the place. They were in possession of Petite Rivière. My ammunition consisted of one case of cartridges which had fallen into the water on my way to the attack; this did not discourage me. I carried the place by assault before day, with my dragoons, and made all the garrison prisoners . . . I was also exposed to the greatest dangers; several times I narrowly escaped being made prisoner; I shed my blood for my country; I received a ball in the right hip which remains there still; I received a violent blow on the head from a cannon-ball, which knocked out the greater part of my teeth, and loosened the rest. In short, I received upon different occasions seventeen wounds, whose honorable scars still remain . . . As a reward for all these services, I have been arbitrarily arrested at St. Domingo, bound, and put on board ship like a criminal, without regard for my rank, without the least consideration. Is this the recompense due my labors? Should my conduct lead me to expect such treatment? . . . It is from the depths of this dreary prison that I appeal to the justice and magnanimity of the First Consul. He is too noble and too good a general to turn away from an old soldier, covered with wounds in the service of his country, without giving him the opportunity to justify himself, and to have judgment pronounced upon him . . . If I had intended to make war, would I have laid down my arms and submitted? No reasonable man, much less a soldier, can believe such an absurdity.”

Questions

1. How does Toussaint L’Ouverture defend his actions?

2. Why does he believe his treatment is unjust?

3. In your opinion, should Toussaint L’Ouverture be recognized as a major global champion for human rights? Explain.

#### General Ludd’s Triumph

**Source:** Thompson, E. 1963. *The making of the English working class*. NY: Vintage (534, 547)

**Instructions:** This song was sung by British weavers called “Luddites” as they destroyed new textile machinery at the end of the 18th and the beginning of the 19th centuries. Historians believe there actually was no person named General Ludd but that the name “General Ludd” came to symbolize discontent with industrial change. The Luddites rose in scattered rebellion against industrial progress that had undermined their skills and standard of living leaving them and their families unemployed and impoverished. Read the song and answer questions 1-4.

The guilty may fear but no vengeance he aims

At the honest man’s life or Estate,

His wrath is entirely confined to wide frames

And to those that old prices abate.

These Engines of mischief were sentenced to die

By unanimous vote of the Trade

And Ludd who can all opposition defy

Was the Grand Executioner made.

Then the Trade when this arduous contest is o’er

Shall raise in full splendor its head,

And colting and cutting and squaring no more

Shall deprive honest workmen of bread.

Chants no more your old rhymes about bold Robin Hood,

His feats I but little admire.

I will sing the Achievements of General Ludd,

Now the Hero of Nottinghamshire.

**Questions**

1. Why are British weavers complaining about industrial change?

2. According to this song, who are the guilty and who are the honest men?

3.. In your opinion, why did displaced weavers invent General Ludd?

**Condition of the Working Class in England**

The following information on life expectancy in England was reported by Frederick Engels in his book *Condition of the Working Class in England* (1844).

“In 1840 in Liverpool the average age at death of the ‘gentry and professional persons’ was 35 years, of ‘tradesmen and their families’ 22 years and ‘labourers, mechanics and servants’ was actually only 15 years. The main reason for the high death rate is the heavy mortality among infants and small children. If both parents go to work for their living, or if either parent is dead, the child is so neglected that its health inevitably suffers. In Manchester nearly 54 per cent of the workers’ children die before attaining their fifth birthday. Only 20 per cent of the children of the middle class die before they are five. In the rural districts rather less than 32 per cent of all children die before they are five.”

Questions

1. What was the average age at death of the ‘‘labourers, mechanics and servants” in Liverpool, England in 1840?

2. According to Engels, why is the average age at death so low for this group of people?

3. In your opinion, does the situation described by Engels exist in the world today? Explain your answer.

**Ideas from the Communist Manifesto**

by Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, Germany, 1848

1. A specter (monster) is haunting Europe, the specter of Communism (total economic and social equality).

2. All the powers of old Europe have entered into a holy alliance to exorcise (drive out) this specter; Pope and Czar, Metternich and Guizot, French Radicals and German police-spies.

3. Where is the party in opposition that has not been decried as communistic by its opponents in power?

4. The history of all hitherto (already) existing society is the history of class struggles (battles between social groups). Freeman and slave, patrician and plebian, lord and serf, guild-master and journeyman, in a word, oppressor and oppressed, stood in constant opposition to one another, carried on an uninterrupted, now hidden, now open fight.

5. A fight that each time ended either in a revolutionary reconstruction of society at large, or in the common ruin of the contending classes.

6. The bourgeoisie (capitalists, businessmen), during its rule of scarce one hundred years, has created more massive and more colossal productive forces (factories) than have all preceding generations together.

7. Modern bourgeois society is like the sorcerer (magician), who is no longer able to control the powers of the nether world (hell) whom he has called up by his spells.

8. The weapons with which the bourgeoisie felled feudalism to the ground are now turned against the bourgeoisie itself. It has called into existence the men who are to wield these weapons, the modern working-class, the proletarians (ordinary people who work for a living).

9. Of all the classes that stand face to face with the bourgeoisie today, the proletariat alone is a really revolutionary class.

10. Let the ruling classes tremble at a Communistic revolution. The proletarians have nothing to lose but their chains. They have a world to win. Working men of all countries unite!

Questions

1. With which of these ideas do you agree? Explain why.

2. With which of these ideas do you disagree? Explain why.

3. In your opinion, what is the historical impact of the ideas contained in the Communist Manifesto?