

Hitler's Plan to Plunder Europe

NEWS FROM EUROPE points to a Nazi plan to reduce the conquered countries, particularly France, to an agricultural economy. The Germans are gloating: "With Holland our vegetable garden, France our vineyard, Denmark our dairy, Poland our slaughter-house, the East our wheat fields, the Southeast our orchards, and Italy our little harvest-helper, what more do we want except real coffee and tea?" Apparently the only center of exchange, with a money and credit system giving its rulers a tribute-collecting power, will be Germany. The development of manufactures and services for which agricultural products are exchanged will be *verboten* to these subjugated peoples.

All economic roads will lead to Berlin. That is, if Hitler's scheme works. It won't. Centralized empires have been tried before; they have always disintegrated.

One should read that remarkably informative little book by Franz Oppenheimer—"The State"—properly to evaluate what the Nazis are trying to do. Indeed, this analysis of the historical process of state formation, with its economic interpretation, throws as much light on the present as it does on the past. Every student of sociology, history or economics should be familiar with it.

Oppenheimer points out that the State began when roving bands of huntsmen, herdsmen and seamen discovered that economic satisfactions could be had without working. This political means (robbery) first took the form of loot, exacted by murder; but it was soon discovered that the loot could be continuous if the robbed were enslaved rather than destroyed. Always the slaves were peasants. The agricultural worker was lacking in mobility, sluggish of movement, bound to the soil. War could not better his condition; he found his satisfactions in the economic means (production).

The conquering nomads rendered protective service to the enthralled peasantry. They were the soldiery to whom the agricultural workers willingly

paid tribute for protection against other marauders. But such service required territorial limitations and the settling of the conquerors with the conquered. Ownership of the land became an essential condition of this economy. Over a long period of development the payment of tribute by the peasants took the form of rent for allotted parcels of land.

Somewhere along the line the conquerors discovered the need of a market place where their surplus rent collections (in kind, for thousands of years) could be exchanged for surpluses accumulated by other conquering tribes. The market place became so necessary to their gratifications that its area and the roads leading to it became sacred, the persons and property of tradesmen inviolate. Control of the market place was a particular prerogative of the master tribe.

Later the development of manufactures, the invention of money and, to a large extent, intermarriage changed the details of the relationship between conquered and conquerors. To the former were granted "rights"—eventually congealed into customs and laws—to assure greater production and larger rent payments. The commonality of language and religious rites, plus the danger of invasion, further tended to break down barriers between master and slave classes and to create a community of interests. But always the political means remained; this was, and is, the insuperable barrier. It was greatly accentuated by the invention of money; the cumbersome rent payments in kind were dispensed with, collections became easier and more certain. Also, money payments did away with the rendering of personal services to the chieftains and enabled the latter to employ more dependable servants, including soldiers. The public official and the mercenary necessary to the concentration of power in a king or small predatory group came into the picture with the use of money-rent.

Although the details of the State were modified by changing modes of production, communication

and exchange, with new cultures and new customs, the essential pattern remained the same: the dominating class remained so by the political means of satisfying desires. Rent was always the instrument.

Apparently the Nazi planners are familiar with this historical process. The decentralization of large empires was due to the development of independent market places, the invention of machinery (including weapons) and the intensification of production through the use of capital—so that purely agricultural pursuits became less important to the economy. Mobile labor changes the character and size of empires.

The Hitler plan seems to be to prevent by force the tendency of an agricultural economy to emerge, as population increases, into an economy of manufactures and services. For a time, while the fervor

of the Aryan fiction impels his followers to a fanaticism that must burn out, or as long as the tribute he can collect from the conquered is sufficient to pay the necessary policing cost, he can impose peasantry on millions of Europeans. But the eventual result is predicted in history:

Soldiers will be assimilated, public officials will become integrated with the community, association and sheer cupidity will erode the most stringent supervision. Manufactures and exchanges will spring up wherever the need for them appears.

The development of manufactures portends revolt. Until then the one thing that Hitler may be sure of is—rent. That is, if he can turn back the pages of history and ruralize Europe.

* The State, by Franz Oppenheimer. 302 pp. Clothbound. Price 75c. Henry George School of Social Science, 30 E. 29th St., New York.