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The Irish Potato Famine is known as one of the most disastrous and preventable events in history, caused not just by a simple potato blight, but also by other factors influencing the policies set forth to induce aid by the bourgeois State. Their actions or inactions towards Ireland not only brought about the famine, but also prolonged its devastating effects; and by enacting policies that were geared towards benefitting themselves and the Anglo-Irish landlords, the State exploited the Irish peasantry and created a mass exodus of the Irish people. It is through this exodus however, that the Irish people were truly able to overcome the negative stigmas surrounding them, and further themselves economically in society; from peasant to proletariat and then some.

In 1800, the British Act of Union officially annexed Ireland as a part of the United Kingdom. This was largely due to a rebellion in 1798 against initial English rule, which was quickly put down by the English Army. As Marx states, "The civilization and justice of bourgeois order comes out in its lurid light whenever the slaves and drudges of that order rise against their masters". The act abolished a 500 year independent Irish government in Dublin and allowed access to English capitalists to exploit the Irish markets. In addition, the Penal Laws further stripped the Catholic Irish of their rights, including the banning of the Catholic Church and their Gaelic language. Export trade by the Irish was forbidden, which furthered the profits of private enterprise.

During the 1800s, typical words that may have described an Irish person might have been lazy, stupid, or backward. However, this is not the case, and certainly wasn't in the Middle Ages, where Ireland opened the first hospital in Europe and was a leading studier of medicine and religion. However, it was in 1169 when Ireland was first invaded by the first Earl of Pembroke and then invaded many more times in the years following.

During the late 18th century and early 19th century, the Enclosure Movement was taking place in the British Isles. In it, communal land worked by peasants was taken and transformed into private land for wealthier landlords. Landlords realized that they could use the commons by enclosing them for raising sheep and producing wool for the growing textile industry in order to make a substantial profit. To do this, they went to Parliament, which subsequently posted notices on Parish doors for the peasants to read and voice objections. However, given that most peasants were illiterate, it was not possible for an objection to be risen, and thus inspectors came to see who owned what share of the land. Proof of ownership was required in the form of a written document; however, since most peasants were illiterate, very few kept such a document, if there was even one to begin with. If they could not produce proof, the peasants were evicted from the land that they had worked for generations. If they could produce proof, their land was amassed into one large farm and they were required to enclose it and pay a legal fee. Given that the cost of fencing and the legal fee was more than many could afford, peasants were either forced to sell some of their land to wealthier landowners in order to fence a smaller portion, or were evicted entirely due to the inability to pay their rent. Although this movement did not originate in Ireland, it did lay the foundation of the belief in private landholdings and private enterprise among the Anglo-Irish landlords, who took these practices and utilized them for their own gain.

It was during this time that repeated confiscation of land and estates occurred, leading up to the then current system of landholding in 1840. This system reserved all of the best land for the Anglo-Irish landlords, who exported their crop and livestock to England for great profit, and shelled

out the less desirable land to be rented out by the rural peasantry. The land was primarily fit for growing only potatoes; and one acre of potatoes could feed three times as many people as one acre of grain. Subsequently, the land was thus rented out to three times as many people and subdivided repeatedly until some were living on small strips of land. Thus, the potato became the *only* crop viable to be produced to feed themselves, as planting anything else would leave no extra crop after rent was collected by the Anglo-Irish landlords, and wouldn't be as nutritionally valuable.

Because this land was rented out to three times as many people as necessary, the rural West became extremely overpopulated and over dependent on the potato for food sustenance. Not only did this over dependence lead to mass starvation, but the close proximity in which the people were living contributed to the spread of diseases associated with starvation. Mrs. Cecil Woodham Smith wrote in her book *The Great Hunger* that "All this wretchedness and misery could, almost without exception, be traced to a single source – the system under which land had come to be occupied and owned in Ireland, a system produced by centuries of successive conquests, rebellions, confiscations and punitive legislation".

When famine hit, it wasn't evenly distributed among the people due to regional patterns of development. Areas where there were modernized or industrialized techniques, such as Ulster, were not hit as hard by the famine. However, places where there was an increasing amount of poor and malnourished people, were hit the hardest, in terms of mortality rate, such as Connaught. So while the western part of Ireland anguished, the eastern side modernized and induced long-term economic change. However, when officials were sent to assess the situation in Ireland, they only went as far as Dublin to see the effects, thus not seeing the phenomenally worse portions of the country. This, in turn, caused a misguided notion of the situation and thus affected the amount of aid sent to the suffering countryside. However, because of ideologies based on providentialism and moralism, effective aid was hardly given in the first place.

Thomas Malthus, an English cleric and scholar, believed that food production would always remain lower than population growth, thus meaning that the population would eventually have to be reduced either by means of prudence or natural disaster in order for there to be enough food. His stance on birth control was that it was "wicked" and believed a famine to be more ideal and helpful. Furthermore, he considered charity to be dangerous and vouched for it to be kept strictly under control. His ideas spread throughout and became influential in the dealings of the famine. One man, Charles Edward Trevelyan, the permanent head of the treasury, took his ideas to heart and set forth actions that mimicked these ideas.

Trevelyan believed in laissez-faire, which is the belief that little governmental interference in the economy was necessary. This in turn, gave the bourgeoisie a viable excuse to not give a massive amount of food aid, as the prices of food would increase and dissatisfy the bourgeoisie landowners and private businesses. So, when a new government was established after the Peel administration, Trevelyan took it under himself to repeal the aid that was set forth. The corn that the Peel administration had purchased and stored in Ireland to be resold at reduced prices became no more, as private enterprise had to supply the food instead. To essentially "seal the deal," merchants then asked for assurance that there would be no more governmental food aid; and this assurance was readily given by Trevelyan, who not only promised this, but also vowed that there would be "no more interfering with the legitimated profits of private enterprise". Furthermore, the government decided to not cease their exporting of goods from Ireland to Britain, which substantially made matters worse for the Irish. In total, all of the food and means of living that were taken could have fed the Irish twice over, but still "in 1845 and 1846 about 3,251,257 quarters of corn, 257,257 sheep, 480,827 swine, and 186,483 oxen were all exported to Britain" (New World Encyclopedia). Cecil Woodham Smith wrote that "no issue has provoked so much anger or so embittered relations between the two countries [England and Ireland] as the indisputable fact that huge quantities of food were exported from Ireland to England throughout the period when the people of Ireland were dying of starvation".

In summary, the state was enacting policies that benefitted the ruling class, i.e. the bourgeois society. As Marx states in the Manifesto, "The executive of the modern state is but a committee for managing the common affairs of the whole bourgeoisie," as was apparent during this time.

In accordance to their ideologies, the state set forth "aid" that was not beneficial to the Irish people on the basis that any beneficial actions would go against the root beliefs of capitalism. In essence, when the state enacted "paid public works" as a means for the Irish to buy food, they were simply meaningless tasks masqueraded as public works projects. No houses, hospitals, or improvements to existing roads were assigned to these workers, as they would be taking away from private contractors, who could make money off of such projects. Rather, roads that went from "nowhere to nowhere" were built, as well as bridges that spanned non-existing rivers. Not only were these projects completely useless, but they failed to even solve the core problem of how the Irish would buy food given that they had no income from their now desolate farms, and were evicted from their homes as they could not pay rent. Rather, the works caused the starving laborers to expend all of their energy doing back breaking wage labor, and prevented them from focusing on producing another crop or returning to their farm land. Furthermore, the little food that they could buy was not nearly enough to make up for the caloric content that they had expended doing the work, as it was sold at market value rather than at a reduced price.

Since the Irish were not able to work on their farms, they were subsequently evicted by their landlords. The landlords, who primarily lived in England, wanted to adapt to modern English methods of agriculture to their farmlands as a means of increasing profit. So, when the Gregory Clause was introduced to amend the Poor Law in June 1847, the landlords nicknamed it the "Eviction-made-easy Act". In it, it stated that "any desperate Irishman who applied for benefit had to give up the right to all but one quarter acre of his tenancy in exchange for a mere pittance with which to feed his family. This meant that he and his family would soon be doomed to eviction as it was impossible to exist on such a tiny sliver of land let alone raise the rent to pay the landlord" (Whittaker). Essentially, this act allowed for landlords to evict their tenants off of the estate quicker, clearing the land for livestock and grain agriculture in order to increase their profits.

However, although the landlords were hoping to make a profit off of their endeavors, the exact opposite happened. The Irish Poor Extension Act was signed into law on June 8, 1847 and essentially blamed the landlords for the whole famine and stipulated that all landlords would hold the entire responsibility of famine relief, including cost. So, the bourgeois used the petty-bourgeois as a scapegoat. As Marx states in the Manifesto, "[The school of Socialism] pointed out the inevitable ruin of the petty bourgeois and peasant, the misery of the proletariat, the anarchy in production, the crying inequalities in the distribution of wealth, the industrial war of extermination between nations, the dissolution of old moral bonds, of the old family relations, or the old nationalities". The Anglo-Irish, petty bourgeois landowners, although hoping to make profit, were subsequently "bled dry" because of this act. They went bankrupt due to high taxation from the State, and had little to no income in sight as all of the Irish peasantry and farmers were either in the work houses catching disease, or immigrated to America when they were offered passage by the landowners themselves who hoped to clear the land for profit. According to the new law, the landowners had to raise 10 million pounds to support the paupers as relief; and because there was no income coming in, the army was sent to shake out money from the already poor Irish people. This included taking anything of value that they had, including clothes. Only one million pounds were extracted this way, leaving the Irish in an even greater state of destitute and a greater state of hatred towards the ruling class. Furthermore, to enforce the laws, the landlords, now very much in debt, forcibly ejected any remaining tenants, about 500,000, in order to save on taxes. This, being winter, was almost certain death for the Irish. Yet, rather than a decrease in taxes, the bourgeoisie increased them, and at that point, many petty bourgeois just decided to emigrate.

Of those that immigrated to America and survived the trip on the severely cramped and

unsanitary coffin ships, many settled in large port cities on the East Coast. Unaccustomed to the large-scale farming in the Americas, many took on any jobs or wage labor that they could find. Men loaded ships at docks while women took jobs as servants or worked in textile factories. However, pay was low and anti-Irish sentiments among the American people began to grow. Many were afraid that the Irish would take away their unskilled working jobs as they were willing to work for significantly less pay. However, such sentiments eventually shifted due to a focus on the Civil War instead; which many immigrants fought bravely in. This was the start of the Irish potentially moving up in class, going from pauper and peasant to proletariat. Admittedly, not an impressive change, but still significantly better than starving to death as an Irish peasant.

After the Civil War, Irish laborers were able to find new and better paid work due to more industrialized conditions. Building railroads and working in mines led to organizing trade unions and strikes for better working conditions and pay. Some even became involved in state politics, which helped many new immigrants assimilate into American society more naturally.

In effect, The Great Potato Famine changed Irish society and demographics substantially. Although the famine was eventually solved through an increase in railways, the devastating effects brought about by bourgeois greed were already too great to be solved in a small matter of time. The population of Ireland plummeted, and went from 8 to 9 million people at its peak, to about 4.4 million within 65 years, and has never fully recovered to this day. Roughly 1 million of the populous had died due to starvation, malnutrition, or related illnesses associated with the famine; and was not quickly replenished due to a desolate fertility and birth rate. As Marx states, “each new crisis in the class struggle between the appropriator and the producer brings out [bourgeois justice] more glaringly,” as was seen in the asinine “relief” efforts that the State and Anglo-Irish landlords put forth against the Irish peasantry. The only way that the Irish escaped this monumental exploitation was through emigration overseas; and even then they were still exploited by capitalist society. However, many were able to escape it and find wage labor, thus improving their quality of life, even minimally. It is through this consequence that the Irish were able to advance their social class from peasant to proletariat, and then some. They were able to remove themselves from the shackles placed upon them by the bourgeois State and replace them with looser ones in America.

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