



JE KINDLE-NOTITIES VOOR:

## The Ruling Class

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## 20 Highlights

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Highlight (Geel) | Locatie 1388

Among the constant facts and tendencies that are to be found in all political organisms, one is so obvious that it is apparent to the most casual eye. In all societies—from societies that are very meagerly developed and have barely attained the dawn-ings of civilization, down to the most advanced and powerful societies—two classes of people appear—a class that rules and a class that is ruled. The first class, always the less numerous, performs all political functions, monopolizes power and enjoys the advantages that power brings, whereas the second, the more numerous class, is directed and controlled by the first; in a manner that is now more or less legal, now more or less arbitrary and violent, and supplies the first, in appearance at least, with material means of subsistence and with the instrumentalities that are essential to the vitality of the political organism.

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As we have already suggested, ingrained habits of thinking have long stood, as they still stand, in the way of scientific progress in this matter. The classification mentioned above, which divides governments into absolute monarchies, limited monarchies and republics, was devised by Montesquieu and was intended to replace the classical categories of Aristotle, who divided governments into monarchies, aristocracies and democracies. What Aristotle called a democracy was simply an aristocracy of fairly broad membership. Aristotle himself was in a position to observe that in every Greek state, whether aristocratic or democratic, there was always one person or more who had a preponderant influence. Between the day of Polyb-ius and the day of Montesquieu, many writers perfected Aristotle's classification by introducing into it the concept of "mixed " governments. Later on the modern democratic theory, which had its source in Rousseau, took its stand upon the concept that the majority of the citizens in any state can participate, and in fact ought to participate, in its political life, and the doctrine of popular sovereignty still holds sway over many minds in spite of the fact that modern scholarship is making it increasingly clear that democratic, monarchical and aristocratic principles function side by side in every political organism. We shall not stop to refute this democratic theory here, since that is the task of this work as a whole. Besides, it would be hard to destroy in a few pages a whole system of ideas that has become

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firmly rooted in the human mind. As Las Casas aptly wrote in his life of Christopher Columbus^ it is often much harder to unlearn than to learn. 3.

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Poland offers a characteristic example of the gradual metamorphosis of a warrior class into an absolutely dominant class. Originally the Poles had the same organization by rural villages as prevailed among all the Slavic peoples. There was no distinction between fighters and farmers—in other words, between nobles and peasants. But after the Poles came to settle on the broad plains that are watered by the Vistula and the Niemen, agriculture began to develop among them. However, the necessity of fighting with warlike neighbors continued, so that the tribal chiefs, or voivodes, gathered about themselves a certain number of picked men whose special occupation was the bearing of arms. These warriors were distributed among the various rural communities. They were exempt from agricultural duties, yet they received their share of the produce of the soil, along with the other members of the community. In early days their position was not considered very desirable, and country dwellers sometimes waived exemption from agricultural labor in order to avoid going to war. But gradually as this order of things grew stabilized, as one class became habituated to the practice of arms and military organization while the other hardened to the use of the plow and the spade, the warriors became nobles and masters, and the peasants, once companions and brothers, became villeins and serfs.

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Little by little the warrior lords increased their demands to the point where the share they took as members of the community came to include the community's whole produce minus what was absolutely necessary for subsistence on the part of the cultivators; and when the latter tried to escape such abuses they were constrained by force to stay bound to the soil, their situation taking on all the characteristics of serfdom pure and simple, j

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In the eighteenth century, Montesquieu studied the English constitution and derived from it the doctrine that if a country was to be free, power should curb power, the exercise of the three fundamental powers that he found present in any state being entrusted to separate political organs. Now writers on constitutional law have shown that there can be no such thing as the absolute separation of the three powers that Montesquieu conceived and that there is no reason why the powers in question should be three rather than any other number.

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But that, probably, is not Montesquieu's main defect, which, for that matter, comes out more prominently in the many writers who have drawn on Montesquieu than in Montesquieu himself. With their eyes fixed upon the master's theory, such imitators have been inclined to stress its formal or, so to say, legalistic aspect rather than its substantial or social aspect. They have often forgotten that if one political institution is to be an effective curb upon the activity of another it must represent a political force — it must, that is, be the organized expression of a social influence and a social authority that has some standing in the community, as against the forces that are expressed in the political institution that is to be controlled.

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That is why, in certain parliamentary monarchies, in spite of the letter of constitutions and fundamental charters, we see heads of states, who are supported neither by ancient traditions nor by the all but vanishing prestige of

the divine-right doctrine nor by the influence of the bureaucracy, the army or the economically superior classes, becoming powerless to counterbalance the influence of elective assemblies, who are supported by a belief that they represent the totality of the citizens and actually comprise within themselves a considerable body of capacities, interests, ambitions and energies. That is why in those same countries the courts are proclaimed by word of mouth to be fundamental organs of the state, while in fact they are mere branches of a bureaucracy, depending upon a cabinet that is loyal to the majority in the elective chamber. So they come to lack prestige and independence and are never capable of mustering enough moral and intellectual energy to assert their own importance. For the same

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reason, finally, a number of senates and upper houses have easily been relegated to subordinate positions by lower houses that are functioning at their sides. That is because they are made up of pensioned officials, deputies and assemblymen, who have retired from militant political life, along with a few rich men whose vanities the ministries have found it expedient to flatter. Such bodies, therefore, do not offer adequate fields either for aggressive minds or for ambitious talents.

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They do not represent important social forces.

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The great vice of Islam, the real cause of its political inferiority, lies neither in its dogma nor even in its morality, but in its habit of confusing the spiritual with the temporal, the religious law with the secular law. The Koran is Bible and Code in one—it is the word of the Prophet that takes the place of law. Ordinances and customs are therefore consecrated to eternity by religion, and because of that fact alone every Mussulman civilization is necessarily stationary. 1

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To supplement that analysis, which is both keen and exact, one might add that in countries where Mohammedan populations are independent the sovereign is almost always a caliph, or vicar of the Prophet, or at least derives his authority nominally or actually from a caliph. In view of that, no believer can deny him absolute obedience without impugning the legitimacy of the caliphate's authority and initiating a religious reform. That is why, as we saw above (chap. III, §5), civil wars and revolutions among Mohammedans have as a rule taken some religious reform as their pretext, or some claim to the vicarate of the Prophet. That was the case in the conflicts between the Ommiads, the Abbassids and the Fatimids, which drenched the early history of Islam in blood. That was the case in the struggles that upset northern Africa and Spain in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, and in very recent movements that have disturbed those countries. Of course, in all such struggles, considerations of an altogether worldly character figured, along with the religious motive.

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The most complete despotisms to which Christian peoples have ever been subject arose in Byzantium and in Russia, where the secular rulers succeeded most completely in bringing ecclesiastical authority under their direct control. The English, on the other hand, are greatly indebted for their liberties to the Puritans and to other nonconformists.

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So the terms "Guelph" and "Ghibelline" supplied pretext and occasion, rather than cause, for intestine struggles in the medieval Italian communes; and the same may be said of the terms "liberal," "clerical," "radical" and "socialist," which were bandied about by the factions that used to compete for administrative posts in the little towns of southern Italy. At moments of exceptional intellectual apathy, pretexts—even the most frivolous pretexts—may occasion serious conflicts within great and highly civilized societies. In Byzantium, during and after the reign of Justinian, the city streets were often stained with blood by struggles between two parties, the Greens and the Blues (the "Prasinians" and the "Venetians").

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The various enterprises in practical communism that were launched in the course of the nineteenth century, from Owen down to Fourier and Lazzaretti, never failed to find large numbers of persons willing and eager to sacrifice their worldly goods. When one of these political or religious "founders" happens to be a fighter, as Jan Ziska was, he manages to inspire his followers with an absolute certainty of victory and hence with uncommon courage.

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First and perhaps foremost among the extrinsic causes is the fact that, so far, all the institutions that have been functioning in Europe have been based on other doctrines, some of which are different from the doctrine we are here concerned with, and, so to say, irrelevant to it, while others are directly antithetical to it. Representative governments now prevail almost everywhere in countries of European civilization. Some of them are modeled along the lines laid down by Montesquieu, who saw the essence and guarantee of political liberty in a tripartite separation of sovereign powers. More numerous are governments that follow the principle of Rousseau, that those powers only are legitimate which represent the will of the numerical majority of citizens, while the right of suffrage is regarded as an innate right from which no individual can reasonably and properly be barred.

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Now in itself the democratic system probably has greater powers of self-preservation than other systems. That is because its natural adversaries have to make a show of accepting it if they wish to avoid its consequences to a greater or lesser extent. All those who, by wealth, education, intelligence or guile, have an aptitude for leading a community of men, and a chance of doing so—in other words, all the cliques in the ruling class—have to bow to universal suffrage once it is instituted, and also, if occasion requires, cajole and fool it.

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On no other condition can they participate in the control of the state and reach positions from which they can best defend the interests of their particular clique. The fact, then, that the natural adversaries of democracy are obliged to pay official homage to it prevents them from openly declaring themselves followers of theories that explicitly deny the possibility of democratic government as commonly understood. And the same fact also impedes the formation of the coalitions of sentiments and interests that are necessary if a doctrine is to become an active force capable of transforming institutions—if it is to penetrate people's minds and so take hold of them as to modify the trend of a society at all appreciably. Michels has very properly stressed the point that, in countries which have representative governments, conservative parties are obliged to pay homage to democratic doctrines. 1

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The conclusion of the second assumption of historical materialism, and indeed of the doctrine as a whole, seems to us utterly fantastic—namely, that once collectivism is established, it will be the beginning of an era of universal equality and justice, during which the state will no longer be the organ of a class and the exploiter and the exploited will be no more. We shall not stop to refute that Utopia once again. This whole work is a refutation of it. One should note, however, that that view is a natural and necessary consequence of the optimistic conception of human nature which originated in the eighteenth century and which has not yet completed, though it is coming pretty close to completing, its historical cycle.

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According to that idea, man is born good, and society, or, better, social institutions, make him bad. If, therefore, we change institutions, the seed of Adam will be, as it were, freed of a choking ring of iron, and be able to express all their natural goodness. Evidently, if one is going to reason in that fashion one will go on and reason that private property is the prime and sole cause of human selfishness. Aristotle argued much more soundly, in his day, that selfishness is the cause that makes private property inevitable. Combatting the communistic theories of Plato, the Stagirite declares that private property is indispensable if the individual is expected to produce and therefore provide for his own needs and the needs of his family and city. 1 The justification that St. Thomas offers for private property in the Summa is almost identical. We do not believe there could be a better one, as long as the human being loves himself and his own family more than he loves strangers.