

THE INCA EMPIRE:  
DESPOTISM OR SOCIALISM

The true character of the Inca Empire is poorly set forth in works dealing with its economic and social structure. Too many historians or sociologists have attempted, in their enthusiasm, to make of it a state corresponding to a modern formula: a socialist, a totalitarian or a welfare state.<sup>1</sup> From the sixteenth century on, how many arbitrary pictures have been drawn, propped up by quotations! In fact, among the chronicles and reports and documents which Spain, that rummager of old papers, has handed down to us, and in the accounts of the Indians them-

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<sup>1</sup> For fear of overburdening the pages of this article with notes, I have preferred to omit the bibliography entirely. However, I wish to make clear my particular debt to my colleague and friend, Professor John Murra, whose work on the economic and social structure of the Inca Empire will inevitably renew our interpretation of the facts.

selves, one finds enough mixed-up assertions and facts to bolster or justify the most diverse interpretations. Reality has frequently been confused with a schematic, abstract order which was the fruit of frequently gratuitous speculations.

Undoubtedly, the Indians who described their system of government to the Spaniards gave them a somewhat idealized image, exaggerating the geometrical order and rigorous discipline which it implied. The perfection attributed to this administrative machine, in its functioning as much as in its intentions, cannot but fail to arouse suspicion in our minds. The Inca Empire as it is usually evoked, escapes history. It is a Utopian republic and not a kingdom of this world which collapsed in a few months under the aggression of a band of adventurers. The terms used to define its institutions, constantly creating false associations, only add to the disease. Even contemporary authors often speak of the Empire of the Sun as did their colleagues of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries who attributed the customs of its inhabitants to legislators as beneficent as they were wise and ingenious.

Professor Baudin, in a celebrated work, *The Socialist Empire of the Incas*, while admitting the traditional character of the rural communities, considers all the other institutions as a form of organization bearing the true trade-mark of socialism, for, as he explains, "it is an attempt at the rationalization of society." For this eminent economist, this organization would seem to respond to a preconceived plan tending "to realize a veritable absorption of the individual into the State, the well-being of the first being assured only in order to redound to the grandeur of the second." He adds: "If we have chosen this title of State Socialism, it is in order to clearly characterize the entire organization as conforming to a certain ideal, put into operation by authoritative means." One of the aims of this article is to confront this concept of the Inca Empire with a new interpretation of the facts.

More recently a Finnish ethnologist, R. Karsten, published a popular work on the Incas, entitled *A Totalitarian State of the Past*, likening the Inca sovereigns to fascist dictators.

The conception of an ideal empire, of a "Welfare State," the result of a rational plan, has found its most extreme formu-

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lation in the pages of a Peruvian historian and ethnologist, Dr. Luis Valcarcel. According to the latter, the genius of the Incas manifests itself especially in economic arrangements. "All of our sources," he says, "permit us to maintain that few civilizations—if any at all—have possessed an organization more likely to prepare man for the maintenance, development and expansion of his existence. The reciprocal relations between the individual and the group, and between the groups and the State, were regulated according to ethic norms, automatically observed, without hesitation, and without shocks. Economics and ethics were inseparable and did not conflict with each other, as in civilizations based upon private property and mercantilism."

"The State, the great single entrepreneur, with its administrative and statistical services, its laws, its precepts, its discipline, its creative dynamism was capable of mobilizing the entire population, eliminating unproductive unemployment and parasitism, and abolishing the distinction among economic, political and technical activities. An analysis of this phenomenon of association reveals to us the socialist character of *Tawantinsuyu*. It is the Peruvian species of the socialist genus."

Does the Inca Empire really belong to "the socialist genus" and are its organizers—the "Sons of the Sun"—really the forgotten precursors of modern socialism? That is what we shall seek to determine in these pages.

To Cunow must go the credit of having been the first to understand that the economic and social structure of the Inca Empire could be explained only in terms of the structure itself, of the innumerable cells which composed it; these cells were the little country communities or *ayllu*, many of which have survived down to our own times. Although there is very often a discussion of these in the old chronicles, their true nature has eluded us. Most authors consider them as patrilinear clans. However, for reasons which we shall develop below, we are rather inclined to define them as strictly localized endogamous lineages, or of related or unrelated family groups, possessing a common territory.

The myth of the great socialist state of the Incas is based upon a rather summary notion of its institutions. The property system, especially, as well as the duties of the subjects toward

the emperor, have been interpreted according to a terminology and spirit only vaguely corresponding to a civilization which was still archaic despite its complexity and subtlety.

Based on Garcilaso, a picture has been drawn of an Inca economic and social system, thus briefly summed up: the monarchs of ancient Peru, seeking to establish a reign of justice and prosperity among their peoples, once a province was conquered, "divided it into three parts, the first for the Sun, the second for the king and the third for the natives of the country."

The fields of the Sun were cultivated for the needs of the cult and their products served to support a numerous clergy. The domain of the Inca,<sup>2</sup> exploited for the government's profit, were drawn upon as from a safety vault, when disaster struck some province. Finally, the third group of arable lands were annually divided into equal lots, then re-divided among the families of each community according to their members. Each individual's private property was reduced to possession of a hut, an enclosure, some domestic animals, and household goods such as clothes and utensils. All the rest belong to the State. The inhabitants of the Empire worked for the emperor, who, in exchange left the free disposition of the communal lands to them and equitably redistributed a part of the fruits of their labor. If the economic structure of the Inca Empire was carried on in this manner, one would more accurately entitle it State Socialism grafted upon agrarian collectivism. Did the reality correspond to the ideal image here evoked?

As a matter of fact, the Incas combined the most absolute kind of despotism with the greatest tolerance toward the social and political order of its subject peoples. The emperor's will was primary, but this will reached the common man via the intermediary of local chiefs whose authority and privileges were maintained and reinforced. The centralizing tendencies of power harmonized with the practice of indirect government, a good and bad harmony—if such an anachronism may be permitted us.

The most original aspects of Inca civilization—the tripartite

<sup>2</sup> Let us recall that the term, *Inca*, properly refers to the sovereign of the *quichua* Empire of Peru, and his cast—and only by extension to the people subject to him.

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division of the land, the convents of the Virgins of the Sun, the state granaries, the system of statistics transcribed by means of knotted cords, the network of roads—reflect, in great detail, the conception of the subject's obligations toward his sovereign, and a most ingenious exploitation of resource—both in manpower and products—which a brutally imperialist political system had set up for itself in less than a century.

Inca society did not practice slavery in the usual sense of the term. Only much later do we see the emperor and his governors settle upon their domains peasants uprooted from their original communities. Tribute could not consist of money inasmuch as its usage was unknown, even in the rudimentary form in which it was developed in Mexico and Columbia. Gold and silver were valued only as raw materials for ornaments and ritual objects. The Incas certainly would have been able to appropriate a part of the harvest from each village, but they preferred to control the most precious riches: the manpower and energy of the people.

The forced labor system which the Incas imposed within their Empire derives directly from the work-payments out of which they formerly profited when they were only chiefs of rural communities. The peasants for whom they had been, in bygone times, the *koraka* ("elders") followed them to war, cultivated their fields, and, in turns, took it upon themselves to serve them. Having become masters of a great empire the Incas organized it in such a way as to derive the same advantages from it, but on an incomparably vaster scale.

"The tributes (that is to say the taxes)" writes the *licenciado Falcón* "were all personal and no Indian was taxed on his goods." The Inca's subjects were so used to work for the State that for a long time after the conquest they preferred, to the Spaniard's surprise, to be subjected to forced labor "though it might last fifteen days, rather than yield up to the authorities a single bushel of potatoes."

Once a province was conquered, the first task of the officials installed by the Inca was to estimate the resources in manpower and produce. On the basis of the information obtained and transcribed by means of knotted cords, the functionaries went on to the parcelling-out of the lands which would pass to the domain

of the State, and those whose yield were reserved to the cult of the Sun and the principle official divinities.

In appropriating part of the soil of the vanquished, the Incas modified, but did not transform, the existing land system. They twisted it to their advantage and to that of their tutelary gods. In effect, they did not introduce any structural changes: the *ayllu* did not lose their communal property (even if a part of them were confiscated) any more than the *koraka* and the *waka* (idols) lost theirs. The new arrangements which the royal officers inaugurated resulted in incorporating the Inca within each conquered community, since the Incas were satisfied to claim for themselves and for their divinities the rights which had been held from time immemorial by the lineage of chiefs and idols of the region. In this sense, it is less the community which adapted itself to a new organization than the Inca dynasty which, identifying itself in some way with the old order, rooted itself in the community. All the weight of the new land distribution and forced labor levy fell back, then, on the peasant who, over and above his obligations to his chiefs and traditional gods, now had to cultivate the fields of the Inca and those of his imperial divinities.

What was the extent of the Inca's lands and those of the Sun in comparison with those left to the communities? On this question our sources are still vague and even contradictory. Some, like Polo de Ondegardo, give the impression that the Inca reserved for himself the lion's share, while taking care to see that the communities had sufficient for themselves. A precious sixteenth century document reveals to us that in the Chincha valley on the coast of Peru, each group of a thousand households were forced to cede to the sovereign at Cuzco a piece of land producing around ten *fanègues* (20 bushels) of grain. The exact acreage varied according to the nature of the soil. In truth, the Incas did not always expropriate cultivated lands; they often contented themselves with waste or fallow lands which they rendered productive, thanks to irrigation works and terracing. Corn cultivation seems to have been favored, and most of the admirable terracing laid out along the flanks of the valleys were intended for this grain.

The lands consecrated to the cult, whether belonging to a

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single tenant or divided, were relatively large, even if their area did not equal those of the fields belonging to the Inca. That is what caused Polo de Ondegardo to write that "no nation in the world has spent so much for sacrifices, and never have any villages contributed so much land to such a purpose." All these "Gods' Acres," it is true, did not exclusively belong to the Sun, since the sanctuaries and local gods kept the fields which they possessed before the Inca conquest.

But it was in vain that the land was fertile: the subject peoples were no less grievously affected by these confiscations. They did not forget the lands of which they had been despoiled, and in many cases did not fail to reclaim them from the Spaniards after the fall of the Incas.

It is less probable that the Incas intervened in community affairs and that they had sought to regulate the quantity of land returned to each family. Local usages were certainly respected. Whether lands were annually divided or not, the community certainly took account "of the needs of each family." However, "it assigned to it only enough to subsist, even if available land existed" (Polo de Ondegardo). Without day laborers and without slaves, families could only cultivate areas proportional to their actual members. In certain *ayllu*, the parcels were cultivated in turn by the entire community, in others only kinsmen assisted each other.

If a great deal of evidence exists with regard to the obligatory character of the periodic redistribution of the parcels, we also possess examples of lands exploited for generations by the same family. These contradictions are mitigated if one considers them in terms of present day situations. In certain Indian *comunidades* of modern Peru, notably at Chincheros, each year a purely symbolic ceremony of redivision of the lands is carried out, which changes nothing of the actual property relationships. The chiefs of the families affirm their right to their fields by walking around them and by stamping on the soil in the presence of the authorities to whom they offer gifts.

Today the only restrictions imposed upon property rights by indigenous custom to the members of a *comunidad* consists in forbidding the transfer of landed property to strangers in the village. Aside from that, everyone may dispose as he wishes

of the fields which he has inherited from his ancestors or received as a gift from his kinsmen. The villages often possess lands on which parcels are set aside for the young people who wish to settle, or lands which are consigned to dignitaries in compensation for moneys dispensed by them during Patron Saint festivals.

The land system in the Inca Empire, therefore, is characterized by the contrast between communal lands and lands of the Inca and of the Sun; private use of the soil was not ruled out. This had its origin in the land gifts which the Inca made to nobles enjoying his friendship, or to those who had won his favor by military valour or by carrying out great works in the public weal. These generousities were extended to priests and royal concubines when the latter were sent back to their native towns. Lands granted by the Inca were inalienable and non-taxable. They passed on to the heirs of the beneficiary who were obliged to exploit them in common and equally divide the yield. The parts going back to each household were equal. But those who had not participated in the planting lost their rights to the harvest.

Did these gifts operate to the detriment of the community or were they drawn from the royal domain? No text makes this clear. Undoubtedly, there did not exist any rule on this subject and decisions were made according to the circumstances and the region in which the land grant was situated.

The nobleman or functionary who had received a grant of land did not on that account, lose his rights to the communal lands of his *ayllu*. The Inca's favor was, therefore, at the base of a new type of property grafted on the traditional system.

Around Cuzco, especially in the beautiful Yucay valley, the Incas owned great private domains which remained to them even after death, since their products served for the care of their mummies and the servants in charge of them. We don't know how the Incas succeeded in appropriating the most fertile lands of the Cuzco region. Undoubtedly, they had not drawn back in the face of arbitrary confiscations as Pachacutec had done when the Inca dislodged all the Indians settled around the capital within a radius of five leagues and distributed their fields to members of the imperial family.

It is not always easy to distinguish between domains relating



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to royal favor, and hereditary lands of regional chiefs, whose possession had been confirmed by the Inca. Judged in this light, they might seem like deeds of gift. Various privileges were connected with these lordships, such as the right to toll-payments and priority in the seasonable work cycles undertaken under the guise of public forced labor. The lands granted by the Inca did not confer similar advantages upon their proprietors.

The Incas infringed upon the territorial integrity of the communities not only by deducting, for their own profit and that of their gods, a part of the arable lands but also by entirely confiscating lands belonging to rebel groups. These spoliations were, it would seem, numerous under the reign of the last great Inca Emperor, Huayna-capac, at the beginning of the sixteenth century. The lands taken from their legitimate proprietors passed under the direct control of the Inca or were distributed to his favorites.

Did the Inca possess eminent domain on all the lands of the Empire or only on fallow land, pastorage, or forests? This question, so often debated, might appear idle when one is dealing with an absolute sovereign who may dispose, at his pleasure, of the lives and goods of his subjects. The communities drew part of the natural resources of their territory to the degree that they did not harm the interests of the ruling class. The gold and silver mines as well as the auriferous streams reverted to the Inca, although certain *koraka* or even entire communities seemed to continue the exploitation of them, sending to Cuzco as tribute part of the metal which they had extracted. The coca plantations in the warm valleys belonged to the Inca. He had these cultivated by individuals often guilty of some crime, for work in sub-tropical regions, so laborious and dangerous for mountain folk, was considered a severe punishment.

The Indians had no right to hunt game in their territories, this pleasure being reserved to the Inca and his nobles. From time to time, the latter organized, with the participation of veritable armies, tremendous hunts called *chacu*, in the course of which thousands of animals were captured and slaughtered.

The Incas had reserved ownership to themselves of a great part of the llama or alpaca which constituted the wealth of the inhabitants of the high plateau. Only those animals consecrated

to the cult equalled the number of those belonging to the emperor. The communities of shepherds kept only pitiful herds for themselves. As for the heads of families, they had a right, in general, only to a dozen beasts. According to services rendered, or the favor which they enjoyed with the Inca, the *koraka* were entitled to receive gifts of a more or less great number of animals.

"The communal herd was sheared at a given time and the wool distributed to the villagers, to each according to his needs and his condition, and those of his wife and children. Inspections were made to verify if they had woven clothing out of the wool, and those who proved negligent in this regard were punished." (Ondegardo). All members of the *ayllu* received equal shares. This was true even for those who possessed llama or alpaca herds; and therefore, would have been able to do without such shares, strongly proving that family rights were imprescriptible, even if the result of inequalities.

The wool of the state herds was spun and woven under community supervision; garments and textiles made for the State and for sacrificial purposes. "For great quantities of *kumbi* quality (that is to say, the finest) were burnt."

In fact, the economic unit which the State took into consideration was the family or household and not the individual. If young people, the aged and women were not counted in the distribution of tasks, nevertheless they participated in agricultural work to the degree of their capability. A sector of the field of the Inca or of the Sun was assigned to each one liable to forced labor.

"He who was able, because of the assistance of a large family, to finish more quickly than the others was called a rich man." Work on the fields of the Inca and of the Sun, therefore, represented a periodic obligation whose duration varied from region to region. The order in which agricultural labor was carried out, according to the categories of the lands, has given place to contradictory assertions. Garcilaso de la Vega, in a frequently quoted passage, affirms that the peasants began at the fields of the Sun, and those of the widows, orphans, and soldiers of the army, and ended at the fields of the *koraka* and of the Inca. Texts of a less apologetic character assure us that State forced labor was carried out first.

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The products of the Inca fields and those of the Sun were stored in granaries situated along the roads or in easily accessible places. Part of these on the way to Cuzco served the needs of the Inca and the noble families. The rest were calculated to provide for the functionaries, the army, or work crews. Finally, these granaries were drawn from in order to make available new provisions for the population in the event of a poor harvest.

The tributary peasants were constricted to set up crews, not only to cultivate the fields of the poor and invalids, but those of families whose head was in the army or employed on Inca works. Finally, the rural community watched over the maintenance of the roads and the proper functioning of the irrigation system.

In an agricultural and handicraft State in which the authorities limited the circulation of persons and goods, and in which production was subject to governmental control, allotting the surplus toward public warehouses, commerce would not have been able to develop, in most cases beyond the barter level. Such are the conclusions which would seem to result from an analysis of the entire social and economic set-up of the Inca Empire. Once again, however, the reality is less simple than that. Certainly the Inca or his governors intervened, whenever it suited their purposes, in the trade between one region and another: when a harvest was insufficient within a province, whatever was lacking was supplemented, by official order, from a more favored region. Certain alimentary provisions, not existing in one zone because of climatic reasons, were regularly imported on a reciprocal basis; finally, luxury items manufactured by artisans in the Inca's service were redistributed in the form of gifts. However, to deduce from all this that the State exercised a monopoly on all kinds of commercial activities is an abuse of language and an anachronism. Evidently there had not been any desire among the Incas to restrict the trade which had existed before them. In a country as varied as Peru, where often short distances separate entirely different geographical conditions, a certain amount of barter was in the nature of things. Even before the Incaique epoch, the communities of the colder regions sought to swarm down into the warm valleys in order to maintain a minimum of alimentary variety by means of areas of enclosed land. Besides, one may find very clear allusions in the accounts of

the conquistadores to trade going far beyond local exchanges. Otherwise, how can one explain the duties at the entrances of towns and the toll houses at bridgeheads? Doesn't the capture by Pizarro's captain, Bartholomeu Dias, of an enormous raft loaded with merchandise prove that, despite their subjugation by the Incas, the coastal peoples had not abandoned all maritime traffic? For the same reason, there is the question of the markets, especially at Cuzco, capital of the Empire. Undoubtedly, they did not serve only for barter, nor were they important only in the economy of a restricted region. And finally, even if one were to ignore these facts, the abundance of objects of pure Incaic style gathered from the equator to Chile would seem to suggest the survival of strong ancient commercial resources which the Incas had not tried to suppress in order to assure their monopoly.

#### ORGANIZATION OF WORK

Collective ownership of the land, aid to the aged and sick, lands of the gods, lands of the chiefs—such institutions existed long before the reign of the Incas; their origins are lost in the night of time. Since Cunow, no sociologist who has examined the question has doubted it. If property relationships do not make the Inca Empire a socialist state, which of its institutions deserve such a characterization? To put it otherwise, which institutions introduced by the Incas might pass as original creations?

Without adopting the thesis of Garcilaso de la Vega, in whose eyes the Incas are heroic civilizers, making wars only to spread the benefits of a generous and equitable administration, it would be worth while to find out what there was in the servitude imposed on the vanquished that would be of profit to the ruling class and justify its thirst for conquest?

Conquered populations were subjected to tribute essentially consisting of personal services. Insofar as the Incas owned a portion of the soil, they were inevitably led to require that the conquered lands be worked collectively by the members of the community. Without peasant hands, the lands incorporated into the domain would have been of no value.

Tributes also allowed for all the forced labor (*mita*) which the Inca or his governors imposed when there was great need

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for manpower. In this regard, war is similar to state forced labor. Guarding and maintaining the caravansaries (*tambo*), situated along the imperial roads, fell upon the communities as well as the responsibility to provide each postal relay with two couriers always ready to bear messages transmitted to them. In breeding zones, the *ayllu* had to take care of the Inca herds and those of the Sun. Undoubtedly, shepherds were assigned to carry out their functions in turn.

In principle, women did not count among the persons obliged to these tributary duties, although in practice they escaped nothing since part of the burden of forced labor in cultivation fell on them and they wove the materials which the State needed for its depots. They often accompanied their husbands to war in order to bring food and provisions to them. Villages furnished servants for the chiefs or for the Inca court and were required to present to an Inca official all little girls from eight to ten years old. The prettiest of them were sent to a "convent" where under the direction of an elderly woman, they busied themselves in various tasks, particularly in the weaving of fine materials in vicuna wool. When they achieved the age of puberty they had to undergo a new inspection. The most beautiful were incorporated into the Inca's harem, or given as concubines to the nobles and high functionaries. The others assigned to a sanctuary became servants and priestesses. Finally, some of them were destined as human sacrifices.

In addition to the obligations toward the Inca or his governors were added personal services which, as we have noted, were due local chiefs whose peasants continued to cultivate the fields and guard the herds. At least in the Chincha valley, each group of one hundred households delegated a man to serve the Lord as a domestic. How long this service lasted is unknown to us; we may assume it was brief, if the present *hacienda* system, which has maintained this kind of work-payment reflects an ancient practice.

Peasants cultivating Inca lands or those of the Sun, as well as those employed in public works, were fed from state granaries during the period of their compulsory labor. Similarly, with regard to the soldiers "who marched to war furnished with provisions, arms, shoes and clothes issued by the Inca depots."

This has been interpreted as an instance of Inca paternalism; however, it is only the application on a governmental planned level of a rural tradition as strict today as it was four centuries ago: an individual benefitting from his neighbors' help must provide for their needs as long as they work for him. According to custom, he must show himself generous and make a veritable festival out of the work from which he profits. The compulsory labor accomplished for the Inca became identified in some way with peasant mutual aid. It was always carried out with the accompaniment of dances and singing, in short, in an atmosphere of thanksgiving in which the Spaniards saw the result of wise measures calculated to maintain the people in good humor.

Among the community obligations toward the Inca, manufacturing services also figured. Each household delivered to the tax collector a predetermined number of manufactured products: fabrics, clothing, shoes, ropes, etc. The raw materials came from the regional warehouses. The only contributions of the workers were their time and effort.

The richness and luxury of the Incas, a subject about which reports of the conquest never stop talking, as well as the technical or artistic quality of the objects abounding in our museums, maintained a large class of artisans—goldsmiths, weavers, potters and sculptors. If a great many of the objects of daily use were made at home by the peasants, the same does not hold true for luxury items—jewels, fine cloth, ceramics—all highly skilled work. We are poorly informed regarding the conditions of these artisans. Some of them worked directly for the court, while others were earmarked for workshops of the provincial governors or local princes. According to custom, imperial functionaries presenting themselves before the Inca paid him homage with a valuable gift. They could not have fulfilled this obligation if the work of artisans had not been at their disposal. These workers and artists separated from the land were fed and maintained at the Inca's expense or at the expense of the dignitaries employing them; furthermore they were excused from forced labor. The Virgins of the Sun who wove richly decorated vicuma cloth might also be considered among the artisans gathered into workshops. The situation of these individuals who during their lives worked for the court or a functionary is comparable to

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that of the artisans of ancient Egypt who, at the will of the Pharaoh, were attached to his person, to a monarch or to an important official. The condition of the artisans was not essentially different from that of the *yana*, a category of persons whose status is hardly clear and frequently contradictory. These *yana* at times seem like actual slaves and at times like privileged officials. In fact, torn away from their communities, they depended entirely upon those whom they served. Some were prisoners of war, others criminals or relatives of criminals who had been reduced to this state because of collective responsibility. Most of the *yana* were young people whom the rural communities sent to the Inca or to his representatives as servants. Many of them became valets, personal guards and palanquin bearers. Others fulfilled similar functions with the governors or assisted them in their administration. Their intimacy with these powers offered some of them the chance to carve out careers and achieve important posts. As a reward for their zeal, some of them received women and even *yana* to serve them. What we know of these *yana* recalls the condition of ministers in the Middle Ages who, like them, often managed to exercise considerable power despite being serfs.

However, the privileged *yana* were the exception. Most of them established on the private property of the Inca or nobles were attached to the soil like the *colonos* in the *haciendas* of modern Peru. The always important role which the *yana* played in the Empire may be explained only if their labor output be adjudged more satisfactory than that attained by the traditional forced labor system. In withdrawing some of their members from the communities, the Inca weakened them and made the first draft of a revolution which, if it had been continued, would have changed the structure of the Empire. Of an assemblage of rural communities enjoying considerable autonomy he would have created a kind of pre-feudal empire wherein nobles and officials would have possessed large domains exploited by serfs and slaves. But at the moment of the Spanish conquest such an evolution whose effects would probably have been felt only much later was scarcely sketched out.

The rents in kind accumulating in the granaries and Inca depots were used for numerous purposes. Part of the products

were sent to Cuzco although the largest part remained on the spot for the maintenance of officials, of the army and of work crews. Undoubtedly, provisions were drawn from these granaries, and distributed to the population when they were menaced by famine as a result of a poor harvest.

By virtue of a system here described, the communities of the Empire were self-sufficient and produced a surplus, thanks to which the caste of nobles and body of civil servants lived in ease and luxury. This surplus was so considerable that it made it possible to raise veritable armies of workers for the enormous constructions undertaken by the Inca, to carry out war against numberless peoples and to indemnify the artisans. Part of the rents received by the Inca were regularly re-distributed in the form of presents to the nobles surrounding him, to the officials serving him with zeal, and to chiefs and local princes whose fidelity and devotion it was important to purchase. Such acts of generosity repeated on a large scale and sanctioned by custom have led us to believe in the existence of an Incaique *Welfare State*. But, in fact, here again the Inca was only conforming to a mode of behavior which was perfectly normal on the part of chiefs of many archaic societies, especially in Indian America. He who commands must be generous under pain of losing the support of his subordinates. The Indian cacique as a good father of the family watches over these, to see that no one is hungry or unclothed even if his solicitude results in great personal sacrifices.

The impressive mass of the buildings erected by the Incas, the enormous blocks of their cyclopic structures, the audacious laying out of mountain roads—if all this arouses admiration in us for the sovereigns who ordered such works they evoke in us no less an awareness of the hard labor of the workers employed in their construction. Most of the chroniclers agree, however, about the spirit of justice with which the division of work was carried out. It seems, in fact, that the number of peasants drawn for the forced labor crews was very small in comparison with the rest of the population. It has been calculated that if the Sacsahuaman fortress, the most colossal edifice realized by the Incas had really been built by 30,000 men, these only represented 1.9% of the total number of subjects, that is to say, adult



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men between twenty and fifty years of age, if one assumes that the entire Empire had a total population of eight millions, and of 3.8% if one accepts only half of this figure.<sup>3</sup>

The Inca administrative system seems to have been principally conceived in order to assure the efficacious functioning of different types of forced labor, whether these had as their aim the providing for the maintenance of the ruling caste or whether they were assigned to great public works or war. The Inca's authority was exercised over the whole hierarchy of civil servants, from those who were veritable viziers chosen among his intimates, down to the humble foreman overseeing the labor of a five man crew.

The utilization of these enormous resources in manpower and products was scarcely possible without a census and regularly taken inventories. To satisfy this need, the Incas had created a core of special officials, the *quipu-camayoc* who transcribed by means of knotted cords the results of their counting. This care for exact information cannot help but bring to mind the role played by statistics in states with more or less planned economies. However, one must not allow oneself to be deluded by words. The census of the population, divided according to age groups, and the estimate of wealth produced by forced labor responded to very simple needs. The Incas could not have undertaken their conquests nor constructed so many palaces and fortresses without being informed about the available manpower and the necessary resources for the undertaking. Thanks to the *quipu* which, if they do not lend themselves to calculations, represented nonetheless very precise numbers, a rudimentary type of planning was possible. The projects conceived by the sovereign could be carried out with a certain order and a certain economy.

To make things easier for the census takers, the decimal system to which the *quipu* conformed was applied to state administrative sections. The entire masculine population between the ages around twenty-five and fifty were distributed in groups of 10, 100, 500, 1000, and 10,000, each of which was placed under the authority of an official of corresponding rank. At the

<sup>3</sup> These very hypothetical estimates have been made by Mrs. Sally Falk Moore in her book *Power and Property in Inca Peru*, Columbia University Press, 1958, p. 64.

head of this hierarchy was the provincial governor who, in theory, was supposed to control, according to the census, 40,000 tributary groups, or about 200,000 persons. These administrative units were supposed to correspond to the lineages (*ayllu*), to the tribes, and to the former provinces—the *pachaca* (hundred), for example, was synonymous with *ayllu*. Until now, no one has managed to explain how this rigid numeration could have been adapted to traditional social structures.

It is difficult to believe that here we have to do with anything else but bureaucratic fictions, to gross approximations whose only usefulness was to facilitate the census in a given region and the raising of troops and work crews. However, one cannot overlook Santillan's account, which insists on the methods employed by Inca officials in order to assign to new ten-year periods individuals who were supernumeraries in the old census. This tendency to count by masses rather than by units is not limited to the Incas but is also found in other civilizations of the same type.

The evidence of our sources is unanimous: the Incas avoided crushing their subjects under the weight of too-heavy tributes, and, as a rule, distributed personal services equitably. Despite its implacable discipline their government appears to us paternalistic by comparison with the truly ferocious régime which the Spaniards introduced into Peru. Perhaps we are baptising with the name of wisdom and political sense that which was only respect for norms of behavior and archaic traditions to which the Incas adapted themselves like the smallest community chief. Was not the structure of the imperial *ayllu* identical with that of other Andean *ayllu*, and did not their conceptions of the chief, as well as that of community rights, fit into the general ethic held by peoples of the same stock? What was at the beginning a simple confederation of agrarian communities in a Sierra valley was transformed into a hegemony over immense territories without fundamentally altering the primordial relationships between the ruling and ruled groups. In the mountainous region the relatively fertile earth derived its main value from the manpower available for its exploitation. Masters of an empire, the Incas imposed the obligations of work with much severity and made it a moral duty. Undoubtedly, the only condemnable idleness was that which harmed the state and which

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constituted for this reason an undisciplined act, almost a rebellion.

To read the numerous works treating of the Incas one would gather the impression that at the time of the Spanish conquest, their civilization had reached a dead point and that their empire had become inert in its rigidity and perfection. If one objectively examines the sources, devoting oneself to the exegesis of Spanish documentation without neglecting the teaching of modern ethnography, one would perceive that the Empire's institutions were in full evolution, and that in this apparently so-harmonious system, the Incas had introduced innovations which would sooner or later have modified the structure of their state.

These, as yet, scarcely-indicated tendencies, however, are sufficient to permit us to imagine an epoch in which, after repeated gifts, the nobles and high officials would have ended by carving out vast lordships for themselves. The Inca then would have been able to satisfy the ambition of his aides only by dispossessing a growing number of communities whose members would have changed status from freedom to servitude. Among those people uprooted from their *ayllu* were the specialized artisans, servants or tenants, Virgins of the Sun and the *mitima*, farmers transferred to conquered territories. They formed a new category of men whose status was not determined by blood ties, weakening, in proportion, the traditional communities.

Civic officials to whom land had been granted would have also been able to form a new class whose mentality and mode of life would no longer conform to the ideas of old Andean society. If the Empire's evolution had not been brutally interrupted by the Spanish conquest, would it have transformed itself into a kingdom with a structure similar in many ways with that of the late Roman Empire or the decadent Carolingians? With the multiplication of large domains, would not the ruling class have constituted a powerful aristocracy and would it not have been opposed to the central power? The number of *yana*, domestic servants of the great and tenant farmers on their properties, would certainly have augmented at the expense of free peasants. These, of course, are only conjectures based on limited clues but these do reveal the possibilities of transformations which would have operated in a directly-opposed sense to the idea of a "Socialist State of the Sun."

Let us consider the political and economic system described here in terms of the famous definition of Socialism by Bertrand Russell. For him, socialism essentially means common ownership of land and capital under a democratic form of government. It implies production for use and not for profit and distributed, if not equally to all, at any rate according to inequalities justified only in the public interest.

The Inca Empire hardly corresponds to these qualifications. Subjected to the despotism of a caste, its aristocratic tendencies were emphasized as a result of the consecration which the authority of the petty kings and local chiefs had received from the conquerors. Besides, in addition to the traditional privileges enjoyed by the *koraka*, were added those deriving from their status as Inca officials. An increasing distance separated them from their former subjects. Agrarian collectivism existed only on the level of the rural communities (*ayllu*) and represented an ancient system whose equivalent may be found in the Old as well as the New World. Therefore, it is certainly a peculiar anachronism to apply a term applicable only to industrial societies to the collective property of archaic societies.

Production was only partially influenced according to the needs of the subjects, the entire surplus reverting to a ruling caste and to its administration. Certainly a part of the excess was re-distributed under the form of provisions and material allocated to work crews and soldiers or as presents made to noblemen, clergy, and officials. Assistance to the aged and to the sick which one would be tempted to compare with our social security was an obligation of the village and not of the state. This responsibility simply expressed the old group solidarity still present today among primitive farmers of the Amazon and the peasants of modern Peru.

Socialism, as its theoreticians have emphasized, is not limited to state ownership but implies that the latter be put to the service of the collectivity. In the Inca Empire the tribute paid in personal services and wrought objects profited a caste whose riches and power were growing.

The classical tradition, extolled by the Spanish chroniclers, was imposed on modern historians and sociologists, who, vying with each other, compared the Inca Empire to ancient Rome, to

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modern states, and to Utopian Republics, but hardly ever dreamed of comparing it with States which existed or still exist among people characterized, for good or evil, as "primitive."

There exists more than one analogy between the Inca Empire and the ancient kingdom of Dahomey. The latter was founded after successive conquests made by the sovereigns of Abomey. It was endowed with an internal organization which has often been offered as an example of the administrative genius which a people in a state of archaic civilization are capable of. Like the Incas the kings of Dahomey respected the autonomy of the agrarian communities and permitted the traditional leaders to remain in power. Just like the Indian caciques, these were integrated into a hierarchy of civic officials who, on the highest echelons, were recruited into the royal family. The ruler of Dahomey also took care to be informed concerning the resources of his state and undertook census-taking of the population, divided into age groups. Taxation and the raising of troops were managed with the greatest rigor. The State was feared and obeyed. The king's envoys, the *recadères* exercised the same authority as the *tokoyrikoq*, the inspectors of the Inca. The women which the villagers furnished the king were enrolled in a woman's brigade instead of being enclosed in "convents" to serve the nobles and the gods according to Peruvian usage. These analogies are pointed out only as examples. They serve to demonstrate that a bureaucratic type of administration might very well develop among a people without a system of writing, whether they be American or African.

The conquistadores accustomed to fight "naked and savage" Indians were dazzled by the manifestations of high civilization among peoples whom they were naturally inclined to treat as irrational barbarians. Nothing astonished them so much as the discipline ruling the Empire. Later, the old order seemed even more just and humane to the degree that the rule introduced by the Spaniards was marked by wretchedness and cruelty. By contrast with the horrors of the conquest and colonization, the Inca despotism was melded in memory into an age of gold. And so it was, to the degree that the Cuzco emperors, respecting millenary customs, managed their subjects, and under the *pax Incaica*, guaranteed their well-being and their happiness.