monasteries, and the parcelling out of these lands – either by gift or by sale at low cost – to favoured groups of nobles and gentry. About two thousand monks and nuns throughout England, as well as about eight thousand labourers in the monasteries, were thus dispossessed, for the benefit of a new class of large landholders beholden to the Crown and not likely to permit any return to a Roman Catholic monarchy in Britain.

5.2 Luther's economics

As a man fundamentally opposed to later scholastic refinements or even to the kind of integral, systematic thought of scholasticism, as a man hankering after what he believed to be Augustinian purity, Martin Luther cannot be expected to have looked very kindly upon commerce or upon the later scholastic justifications for usury. And indeed he did not. A confused, contradictory, and unsystematic thinker at best, Luther was unsurprisingly least consistent in an area of secular affairs – economics – in which he had little interest.

Thus, on a crucial question which had vexed scholastics for centuries: whether private property is natural or conventional, i.e. merely the product of positive law, Luther was characteristically anti-intellectual. He was not interested in such questions; therefore they were trivial: 'it is vain to mention these things; they cannot be acquired by thought, ...'. As Dr Gary North has commented, 'So much for 1500 years of debate'.[2] All in all, Richard Tawney's assessment of Luther on these matters is perhaps not an overstatement;

> Confronted with the complexities of foreign trade and financial organization, or with the subtleties of economic analysis, he [Luther] is like a savage introduced to a dynamo or a steam engine. He is too frightened and angry even to feel curiosity. Attempts to explain the mechanism merely enrage him; he can only repeat that there is a devil in it, and that good Christians will not meddle with the mystery of iniquity.[3]

The rest is confusion. Upholding the commandment prohibiting theft meant that Luther had to be, at least in some sense, an advocate of the rights of private property. But to Luther, 'stealing' meant not only what everyone defines to be theft, but also 'taking advantage of others at market, warehouses, wine and beer cellars, workshops...'. In different writings, sometimes even within the same one, Luther was capable of denouncing a person who 'makes use of the market in his own wilful way, proud and defiant, as though he had a good right to sell at as high a price as he chose, and none could interfere', while *also* writing: 'Anyone may sell what he has for the highest price he can get, so long as he cheats no one', and then defining such cheating as simply using false weights and measures.

On the just price, Luther tends to revert to the minority medieval view that a just price is not the market price but a cost of production plus expenses and

profit for labour and risk of the merchant. On usury in particular, Luther tended to revert to the drastic prohibition that the Catholic Church had long left behind. The *census* contract he would ban, as he would *lucrum cessans*; money was sterile; there should be no increase in price for time as against cash payments for goods, etc. All the old nonsense, which the scholastics had spent centuries burying or transforming, was back intact. It is certainly fitting that, as we have seen, one of Luther's great theological opponents in Germany was his former friend, Johann Eck, a Catholic theologian and friend of the great Fugger banking family, who was even ahead of his time in arguing in thoroughgoing fashion in favour of usury.

Yet, despite his opposition to usury, Luther advised the young ruler of Saxony not to abolish interest or to relieve debtors of the burden of paying it. Interest is, after all, a 'common plague that all have taken upon themselves. We must put up with it, therefore, and hold debtors to it'.

Some of these contradictions can be reconciled in the light of Luther's deeply pessimistic view of man and therefore of human institutions. In the wicked secular world, he believed, we cannot expect people or institutions to act in accordance with the Christian gospel. Therefore, in contrast to the Catholic attempt through the art of casuistry to apply moral principles to social and political life, Luther tended to privatize Christian morality and to leave the secular world and its rulers to operate in a pragmatic and, in practice, an unchecked manner.

5.3 The economics of Calvin and Calvinism

John Calvin's social and economic views closely parallel Luther's, and there is no point in repeating them here. There are only two main areas of difference: their views on usury, and on the concept of the 'calling', although the latter difference is more marked for the later Calvinist Puritans of the seventeenth century.

Calvin's main contribution to the usury question was in having the courage to dump the prohibition altogether. This son of an important town official had only contempt for the Aristotelian argument that money is sterile. A child, he pointed out, knows that money is only sterile when locked away somewhere; but who in their right mind borrows to keep money idle? Merchants borrow in order to make profits on their purchases, and hence money is then fruitful. As for the Bible, Luke's famous injunction only orders generosity towards the poor, while Hebraic law in the Old Testament is not binding in modern society. To Calvin, then, usury is perfectly licit, provided that it is not charged in loans to the poor, who would be hurt by such payment. Also, any legal maximum of course must be obeyed. And finally, Calvin maintained that no one should function as a professional money-lender.

The odd result was that hedging his explicit pro-usury doctrine with qualification, Calvin *in practice* converged on the views of such scholastics as Biel, Summenhart, Cajetan and Eck. Calvin began with a sweeping theoretical defence of interest-taking and then hedged it about with qualifications; the liberal scholastics began with a prohibition of usury and then qualified it away. But while in practice the two groups converged and the scholastics, in discovering and elaborating upon exceptions to the usury ban, were theoretically more sophisticated and fruitful, Calvin's bold break with the formal ban was a liberating breakthrough in Western thought and practice. It also threw the responsibility for applying teachings on usury from the Church or state to the individual's conscience. As Tawney puts it, 'The significant feature in his [Calvin's] discussion of the subject is that he assumes credit to be a normal and inevitable incident in the life of a society.'[4]

A more subtle difference, but in the long run perhaps having more influence on the development of economic thought, was the Calvinist concept of the 'calling'. This new concept was embryonic in Calvin and was developed further by later Calvinists, and especially Puritans, in the late seventeenth century. Older economic historians, such as Max Weber, made far too much of the Calvinist as against Lutheran and Catholic conceptions of the 'calling'. All these religious groups emphasized the merit of being productive in one's labour or occupation, one's 'calling' in life. But there is, especially in the later Puritans, the idea of success in one's calling as a visible sign of being a member of the elect. The success is striven for, of course, not to *prove* that one is a member of the elect destined to be saved but, assuming that one is in the elect by virtue of one's Calvinist faith, to strive to labour and succeed for the glory of God. A Calvinist emphasis on postponement of earthly gratification led to a particular stress on saving. Labour or 'industry' and thrift, almost for their own sake, or rather for God's sake, were emphasized in Calvinism much more than in the other segments of Christianity.[5]

The focus, then, both in Catholic countries and in scholastic thought, became very different from that of Calvinism. The scholastic focus was on consumption, the consumer, as the goal of labour and production. Labour was not so much a good in itself as a means toward consumption on the market. The Aristotelian balance, or golden mean, was considered a requisite of the good life, a life leading to happiness in keeping with the nature of man. And that balanced life emphasized the joys of consumption, as well as of leisure, in addition to the importance of productive effort. In contrast, a rather grim emphasis on work and on saving began to be stressed in Calvinist culture. This de-emphasis on leisure of course fitted with the iconoclasm that reached its height in Calvinism – the condemnation of the enjoyment of the senses as a means of expressing religious devotion. One of the expressions of this conflict came over religious holidays, which Catholic countries enjoyed

in abundance. To the Puritans, this was idolatry; even Christmas was not supposed to be an occasion for sensate enjoyment.

There has been considerable dispute over the 'Weber thesis', propounded by the early twentieth century German economic historian and sociologist, Max Weber, which attributed the rise of capitalism and the Industrial Revolution to the late Calvinist concept of the calling and the resulting 'capitalist spirit'. For all its fruitful insights, the Weber thesis must be rejected on many levels. First, modern capitalism, in any meaningful sense, begins not with the Industrial Revolution of eighteenth and nineteenth centuries but, as we have seen, in the Middle Ages and particularly in the Italian city-states. Such examples of capitalist rationality as double-entry bookkeeping and various financial techniques begin in these Italian city-states as well. All were Catholic. Indeed, it is in a Florentine account book of 1253 that there is first found the classic pro-capitalist formula: 'In the name of God and of profit'. No city was more of a financial and commercial centre than Antwerp in the sixteenth century, a Catholic centre. No man shone as much as financier and banker as Jacob Fugger, a good Catholic from southern Germany. Not only that: Fugger worked all his life, refused to retire, and announced that 'he would make money as long as he could'. A prime example of the Weberian 'Protestant ethic' from a solid Catholic! And we have seen how the scholastic theologians moved to understand and accommodate the market and market forces.

On the other hand, while it is true that Calvinist areas in England, France, Holland and the north American colonies prospered, the solidly Calvinist Scotland remained a backward and undeveloped area, even to this day.[6]

But even if the focus on calling and labour did not bring about the Industrial Revolution, it might well have led to another outstanding difference between Calvinist and Catholic countries – a crucial difference in the development of *economic thought*. Professor Emil Kauder's brilliant speculation to this effect will inform the remainder of this work. Thus Kauder:

> Calvin and his disciples placed work at the center of their social theology... All work in this society is invested with divine approval. Any social philosopher or economist exposed to Calvinism will be tempted to give labor an exalted position in his social or economic treatise, and no better way of extolling labor can be found than by combining work with value theory, traditionally the very basis of an economic system. Thus value becomes labor value, which is not merely a scientific device for measuring exchange rates but also the spiritual tie combining Divine Will with economic everyday life.[7]

In their extolling of work, the Calvinists concentrated on systematic, continuing industriousness, on a settled course of labour. Thus the English Puritan divine Samuel Hieron opined that 'He that hath no honest business about which ordinarily to be employed, no settled course to which he may betake

himself, cannot please God'. Particularly influential was the early seventeenth century Cambridge University academic, the Rev. William Perkins, who did much to translate Calvinist theology into English practice. Perkins denounced four groups of men who had 'no particular calling to walk in': beggars and vagabonds; monks and friars; gentlemen who 'spend their days in eating and drinking'; and servants, who allegedly spent their time waiting. All these were dangerous because unsettled and undisciplined. Particularly dangerous were wanderers, who 'avoided the authority of all'. Furthermore, believed Perkins, the 'lazy multitude was always inclined ... to popish opinions, always more ready to play than to work; its members would not find their way to heaven'.[8]

In contrast to the Calvinist glorification of labour, the Aristotelian–Thomist tradition was quite different:

> Instead of work, moderate pleasure-seeking and happiness form the center of economic actions, according to Aristotelian and Thomistic philosophy. A certain balanced hedonism is an integrated part of the Aristotelian theory of the good life. If pleasure in a moderate form is the purpose of economics, then following the Aristotelian concept of the final cause, all principles of economics including valuation must be derived from this goal. In this pattern of Aristotelian and Thomistic thinking, valuation has the function of showing how much pleasure can be derived from economic goods.[9]

Hence, Great Britain, heavily influenced by Calvinist thought and culture, and its glorification of the mere exertion of labour, came to develop a labour theory of value, while France and Italy, still influenced by Aristotelian and Thomist concepts, continued the scholastic emphasis on the consumer and his subjective valuation as the source of economic value. While there is no way to prove this hypothesis conclusively, the Kauder insight has great value in explaining the comparative development of economic thought in Britain and in the Catholic countries of Europe after the sixteenth century.

5.4 Calvinists on usury

Perhaps because he was considered the greatest French jurist of the mid-sixteenth century, the merit of the contributions of Charles Du Moulin (latinized name, Carolus Molinaeus) (1500–66), has been highly inflated, in his and in later times. A Catholic who later converted to Calvinism and was then forced to leave for Germany, Du Moulin had nothing but contempt for scholasticism, which he attacked vehemently in his highly publicized work, *The Treatise on Contracts and Usury* (Paris, 1546). Whereas Molinaeus officially denounced the prohibition of usury, in actuality his views were little different from those of the contemporary scholastics or indeed of Calvin. While clearly denouncing the view that money is sterile and demonstrating that it is as

productive as the goods bought with it, he hedges his defence of usury sufficiently so that his views are little different from many others. He does maintain that the charge of interest on a loan *per se* is unjust, but ingeniously points out that a lender charges for the utility of the money rather than for the money itself. But Molinaeus attacks the 'cruel usuries' permitted by *lucrum cessans*, and maintains with Calvin that interest may not be charged for loans to the poor. (One wonders that if such a rule were enforced, who in the world would ever lend to the poor, and would the poor then be better off by being deprived of all credit?)

Indeed, it seems that Molinaeus' main contribution was to blacken unjustly the name of poor Conrad Summenhart, a cruel injustice that would last for four centuries. In an act obviously motivated by malice toward scholasticism, Molinaeus took the great Summenhart's arguments against the usury ban and twisted them to make the German theologian a particularly doltish *advocate* of the prohibition. He took Summenhart's initial arguments *for* the prohibition, which he had stated in order to knock down, claimed that they were Summenhart's own, and then plagiarized Summenhart's critique of these arguments without acknowledgment. As a result of this shabby mendacity, as Professor Noonan points out, since 'Du Moulin's writings have alone become famous, Conrad [Summenhart] has appeared to posterity only as Du Moulin caricatures him', i.e., 'as a particularly obstinate and strangely stupid defender of the usury prohibition'.[10]

The honour of putting the final boot to the usury prohibition belongs to the seventeenth century classicist and Dutch Calvinist, Claude Saumaise (latinized name, Claudius Salmasius) (1588–1653). In several works published in Leyden, beginning with *De usuris liber* in 1630 and continuing to 1645, Salmasius finished off this embarrassing remnant of the mountainous errors of the past. His *forte* was not so much in coining new theoretical arguments as in finally willing to be consistent. In short, Salmasius trenchantly pointed out that money-lending was a business like any other, and like other businesses was entitled to charge a market price. He did make the important theoretical point, however, that, as in any other part of the market, if the number of usurers multiplies, the price of money or interest will be driven down by the competition. So that if one doesn't like high interest rates, the more usurers the better!

Salmasius also had the courage to point out that there were no valid arguments against usury, either by divine or natural law. The Jews only prohibited usury against other Jews, and this was a political and tribal act rather than an expression of a moral theory about an economic transaction. As for Jesus, he taught nothing at all about civil polity or economic transactions. This leaves the only ecclesiastical law against usury that of the pope, and why should a Calvinist obey the pope? Salmasius also took some de-

served whacks at the evasions permeating the various scholastic justifications, or 'extrinsic titles', justifying interest. Let's face it, Salmasius in effect asserted: what the canonists and scholastics 'took away with one hand, they restored with the other'. The *census* is really usury, foreign exchange is really usury, *lucrum cessans* is really usury. Usury all, and let them all be licit. Furthermore, usury is always charged as compensation for something, in essence the lack of use of money and the risk of loss in a loan.

Salmasius also had the courage to take the hardest case: professional money-lending to the poor, and to justify that. Selling the use of money is a business like any other. If it is licit to make money with things bought with money, why not from money itself? As Noonan paraphrases Salmasius, 'The seller of bread is not required to ask if he sells it to a poor man or a rich man. Why should the moneylender have to make a distinction?' And: 'there is no fraud or theft in charging the highest market price for other goods; why is it wrong for the usurer to charge the heaviest usuries he can collect?'[11]

Empirically, Salmasius also analysed the case of public usurers in Amsterdam (the great commercial and financial centre of the seventeenth century, replacing Antwerp of the previous century), showing that the usual 16 per cent charge on small loans to the poor is accounted for by: the costs of the usurers borrowing their own money, of holding some money idle, of renting a large house, of absorbing some losses on loans, of paying licence fees, hiring employees, and paying an auctioneer. Deducting all these expenses, the average net interest rate of the money-lenders is only 8 per cent, barely enough to keep them in business.

In concluding that usury is a business like any other, Salmasius, in his typical witty and sparkling style, declared, 'I would rather be called a usurer, than be a tailor'. Our examples of his style already demonstrate the aptness of the great Austrian economist Böhm-Bawerk's conclusion about Salmasius: that his works

> are extremely effective pieces of writing, veritable gems of sparkling polemic. The materials for them, it must be confessed, had in great part been provided by his predecessors...But the happy manner in which Salmasius employs these materials, and the many pithy sallies with which he enriches them, places his polemic far above anything that had gone before.[12]

As a result, Salmasius' essays had wide influence throughout the Netherlands and the rest of Europe. As Böhm-Bawerk declared, Salmasius' views on usury were the high-water mark of interest theory, to remain so for over 100 years.

5.5 Communist zealots: the Anabaptists

Sometimes Martin Luther must have felt that he had loosed the whirlwind, even opened the gates of Hell. Shortly after Luther launched the Reformation, various Anabaptist sects appeared and spread throughout Germany. The Anabaptists believed in predestination of the elect, but they also believed, in contrast to Luther, that they *knew* infallibly who the elect were: i.e. themselves. The sign of that election was in an emotional, mystical conversion process, that of being 'born again', baptized in the Holy Spirit. Such baptism must be adult and not among infants; more to the point, it meant that only the elect are to be sect members who obey the multifarious rules and creeds of the Church. The idea of the sect, in contrast to Catholicism, Lutheranism or Calvinism, was not comprehensive Church membership in the society. The sect was to be distinctly separate, for the elect only.

Given that creed, there were two ways that Anabaptism could and did go. Most Anabaptists, like the Mennonites or Amish, became virtual anarchists. They tried to separate themselves as much as possible from a necessarily sinful state and society, and engaged in non-violent resistance to the state's decrees.

The other route, taken by another wing of Anabaptists, was to try to seize power in the state and to shape up the majority by extreme coercion: in short, ultra-theocracy. As Monsignor Knox incisively points out, even when Calvin established a theocracy in Geneva, it had to pale beside one which might be established by a prophet enjoying continuous, new, mystical revelation.

As Knox points out, in his usual scintillating style:

> ...in Calvin's Geneva...and in the Puritan colonies of America, the left wing of the Reformation signalized its ascendancy by enforcing the rigorism of its morals with every available machinery of discipline; by excommunication, or, if that failed, by secular punishment. Under such discipline sin became a crime, to be punished by the elect with an intolerable self-righteousness...
>
> I have called this rigorist attitude a pale shadow of the theocratic principle, because a full-blooded theocracy demands the presence of a divinely inspired leader or leaders, to whom government belongs by right of mystical illumination. The great Reformers were not, it must be insisted, men of this calibre; they were pundits, men of the new learning...[13]

And so one of the crucial differences between the Anabaptists and the more conservative reformers was that the former claimed continuing mystical revelation to themselves, forcing men such as Luther and Calvin to fall back on the Bible alone as the first as well as the last revelation.

The first leader of the ultra-theocrat wing of the Anabaptists was Thomas Müntzer (c.1489–1525). Born into comfort in Stolberg in Thuringia, Müntzer studied at the Universities of Leipzig and Frankfurt, and became highly learned in the scriptures, the classics, theology, and in the writings of the

German mystics. Becoming a follower almost as soon as Luther launched the Reformation in 1520, Müntzer was recommended by Luther for the pastorate in the city of Zwickau. Zwickau was near the Bohemian border, and there the restless Müntzer was converted by the weaver and adept Niklas Storch, who had been in Bohemia, to the old Taborite doctrine that had flourished in Bohemia a century earlier. This doctrine consisted essentially of a continuing mystical revelation and the necessity for the elect to seize power and impose a society of theocratic communism by brutal force of arms. Furthermore, marriage was to be prohibited, and each man was to be able to have any woman at his will.

The passive wing of Anabaptists were voluntary anarcho-communists, who wished to live peacefully by themselves; but Müntzer adopted the Storch vision of blood and coercion. Defecting very rapidly from Lutheranism, Müntzer felt himself to be the coming prophet, and his teachings now began to emphasize a war of blood and extermination to be waged by the elect against the sinners. Müntzer claimed that the 'living Christ' had permanently entered his own soul; endowed thereby with perfect insight into the divine will, Müntzer asserted himself to be uniquely qualified to fulfil the divine mission. He even spoke of himself as 'becoming God'. Abandoning the world of learning, Müntzer was now ready for action.

In 1521, only a year after his arrival, the town council of Zwickau took fright at these increasingly popular ravings and ordered Müntzer's expulsion from the city. In protest, a large number of the populace, in particular the weavers, led by Niklas Storch, rose in revolt, but the rising was put down. At that point, Müntzer hied himself to Prague, searching for Taborite remnants in the capital of Bohemia. Speaking in peasant metaphors, he declared that harvest-time is here, 'so God himself has hired me for his harvest. I have sharpened my scythe, for my thoughts are most strongly fixed on the truth, and my lips, hands, skin, hair, soul, body, life curse the unbelievers'. Müntzer, however, found no Taborite remnants; it did not help the prophet's popularity that he knew no Czech, and had to preach with the aid of an interpreter. And so he was duly expelled from Prague.

After wandering around central Germany in poverty for several years, signing himself 'Christ's messenger', Müntzer in 1523 gained a ministerial position in the small Thuringian town of Allstedt. There he established a wide reputation as a preacher employing the vernacular, and began to attract a large following of uneducated miners, whom he formed into a revolutionary organization called 'The League of the Elect'.

A turning point in Müntzer's stormy career came a year later, when Duke John, a prince of Saxony and a Lutheran, hearing alarming rumours about him, came to little Allstedt and asked Müntzer to preach him a sermon. This was Müntzer's opportunity, and he seized it. He laid it on the line: he called

upon the Saxon princes to make their choice and take their stand, either as servants of God or of the Devil. If the Saxon princes are to take their stand with God, then they 'must lay on with the sword'. 'Don't let them live any longer,' counselled our prophet, 'the evil-doers who turn us away from God. For a godless man has no right to live if he hinders the godly'. Müntzer's definition of the 'godless', of course, was all-inclusive. 'The sword is necessary to exterminate' priests, monks and godless rulers. But, Müntzer warned, if the princes of Saxony fail in this task, if they falter, 'the sword shall be taken from them...If they resist, let them be slaughtered without mercy...'. Müntzer then returned to his favourite harvest-time analogy: 'At the harvest-time, one must pluck the weeds out of God's vineyard...For the ungodly have no right to live, save what the Elect chooses to allow them....' In this way the millennium, the thousand-year Kingdom of God on earth, would be ushered in. But one key requisite is necessary for the princes to perform that task successfully; they must have at their elbow a priest/prophet (guess who!) to inspire and guide their efforts.

Oddly enough for an era when no First Amendment restrained rulers from dealing sternly with heresy, Duke John seemed not to care about Müntzer's frenetic ultimatum. Even after Müntzer proceeded to preach a sermon proclaiming the imminent overthrow of all tyrants and the beginning of the messianic kingdom, the duke did nothing. Finally, under the insistent prodding of Luther that Müntzer was becoming dangerous, Duke John told the prophet to refrain from any provocative preaching until his case was decided by his brother, the elector.

This mild reaction by the Saxon princes, however, was enough to set Thomas Müntzer on his final revolutionary road. The princes had proved themselves untrustworthy; the mass of the poor were now to make the revolution. The poor were the elect, and would establish a rule of compulsory egalitarian communism, a world where all things would be owned in common by all, where everyone would be equal in everything and each person would receive according to his need. But not yet. For even the poor must first be broken of worldly desires and frivolous enjoyments, and must recognize the leadership of a new 'servant of God' who 'must stand forth in the spirit of Elijah...and set things in motion'. (Again, guess who!)

Seeing Saxony as inhospitable, Müntzer climbed over the town wall of Allstedt and moved in 1524 to the Thuringian city of Muhlhausen. An expert in fishing in troubled waters, Müntzer found a friendly home in Muhlhausen, which had been in a state of political turmoil for over a year. Preaching the impending extermination of the ungodly, Müntzer paraded around the town at the head of an armed band, carrying in front of him a red crucifix and a naked sword. Expelled from Muhlhausen after a revolt by his allies was suppressed, Müntzer went to Nuremberg, which in turn expelled him after he

published some revolutionary pamphlets. After wandering through south-western Germany, Müntzer was invited back to Muhlhausen in February 1525, where a revolutionary group had taken over.

Thomas Müntzer and his allies proceeded to impose a communist regime on the city of Muhlhausen. The monasteries were seized, and all property was decreed to be in common, and the consequence, as a contemporary observer noted, was that 'he so affected the folk that no one wanted to work'. The result was that the theory of communism and love quickly became in practice an alibi for systemic theft:

> ...when anyone needed food or clothing he went to a rich man and demanded it of him in Christ's name, for Christ had commanded that all should share with the needy. And what was not given freely was taken by force. Many acted thus...Thomas [Müntzer] instituted this brigandage and multiplied it every day.[14]

At that point, the great Peasants' War erupted throughout Germany, a rebellion launched by the peasantry in favour of their local autonomy and in opposition to the new centralizing, high-tax, absolutist rule of the German princes. Throughout Germany, the princes crushed the feebly armed peasantry with great brutality, massacring about 100 000 peasants in the process. In Thuringia, the army of the princes confronted the peasants on 15 May with a great deal of artillery and 2 000 cavalry, luxuries denied to the peasantry. The landgrave of Hesse, commander of the princes' army, offered amnesty to the peasants if they would hand over Müntzer and his immediate followers. The peasants were strongly tempted, but Müntzer, holding aloft his naked sword, gave his last flaming speech, declaring that God had personally promised him victory; that he would catch all the enemy cannon-balls in the sleeves of his cloak; that God would protect them all. Just at the strategic moment of Müntzer's speech, a rainbow appeared in the heavens, and Müntzer had previously adopted the rainbow as the symbol of his movement. To the credulous and confused peasantry, this seemed a veritable sign from Heaven. Unfortunately, the sign didn't work, and the princes' army crushed the peasants, killing 5 000 while losing only half a dozen men. Müntzer himself fled and hid, but was captured a few days later, tortured into confession, and then executed.

Thomas Müntzer and his signs may have been defeated, and his body may have mouldered in the grave, but his soul kept marching on. Not only was his spirit kept alive by followers in his own day, but also by Marxist historians from Engels to the present day, who saw in this deluded mystic an epitome of social revolution and the class struggle, and a forerunner of the chiliastic prophesies of the 'communist stage' of the supposedly inevitable Marxian future.

The Müntzerian cause was soon picked up by a former disciple, the bookbinder Hans Hut. Hut claimed to be a prophet sent by God to announce that at Whitsuntide, 1528, Christ would return to earth and give the power to enforce justice to Hut and his following of rebaptized saints. The saints would then 'take up double-edged swords' and wreak God's vengeance on priests, pastors, kings and nobles. Hut and his followers would then 'establish the rule of Hans Hut on earth', with Muhlhausen as the favoured capital. Christ was then to establish a millennium marked by communism and free love. Hut was captured in 1527 (before Jesus had had a chance to return), imprisoned at Augsburg, and killed trying to escape. For a year or two, Huttian followers kept emerging, at Augsburg, Nuremberg, and Esslingen, in southern Germany, threatening to set up their communist Kingdom of God by force of arms. But by 1530 they were smashed and suppressed by the alarmed authorities. Müntzerian-type Anabaptism was now to move to north-western Germany.

5.6 Totalitarian communism in Münster

North-western Germany in that era was dotted by a number of small ecclesiastical states, each run by a prince–bishop. The state was run by aristocratic clerics, who elected one of their own as bishop. Generally, these bishops were secular lords who were not ordained. By bargaining over taxes, the capital city of each of these states had usually wrested for itself a degree of autonomy. The clergy, which constituted the ruling élite of the state, exempted themselves from taxation while imposing very heavy taxes on the rest of the populace. Generally, the capital cities came to be run by their own power élite, an oligarchy of guilds, which used government power to cartellize their various professions and occupations.

The largest of these ecclesiastical states in north-west Germany was the bishopric of Münster, and its capital city of Münster, a town of some 10 000 people, was run by the town guilds. The Münster guilds were particularly exercised by the economic competition of the monks, who were not forced to obey guild restrictions and regulations.

During the Peasants' War, the capital cities of several of these states, including Münster, took the opportunity to rise in revolt, and the bishop of Münster was forced to make numerous concessions. With the crushing of the rebellion, however, the bishop took back the concessions, and re-established the old regime. By 1532, however, the guilds, supported by the people, were able to fight back and take over the town, soon forcing the bishop to recognize Münster officially as a Lutheran city.

It was not destined to remain so for long, however. From all over the north-west, hordes of Anabaptist enthusiasts flooded into Münster, seeking the onset of the New Jerusalem. From the northern Netherlands came hundreds

of Melchiorites, followers of the itinerant visionary Melchior Hoffmann. Hoffmann, an uneducated furrier's apprentice from Swabia in southern Germany, had for years wandered through Europe preaching the imminence of the Second Coming, which he had concluded from his researches would occur in 1533, the fifteenth centenary of the death of Jesus. Melchiorism had flourished in the northern Netherlands, and many adepts now poured into Münster, rapidly converting the poorer classes of the town.

Meanwhile, the Anabaptist cause in Münster received a shot in the arm, when the eloquent and popular young minister Bernt Rothmann, a highly educated son of a town blacksmith, converted to Anabaptism. Originally a Catholic priest, Rothmann had become a friend of Luther and the head of the Lutheran movement in Münster. Converted to Anabaptism, Rothmann lent his eloquent preaching to the cause of communism as it had supposedly existed in the primitive Christian Church, holding everything in common with no Mine and Thine and giving to each according to his 'need'. In response to Rothmann's reputation, thousands flocked to Münster, hundreds of the poor, the rootless, those hopelessly in debt, and 'people who, having run through the fortunes of their parents, were earning nothing by their own industry...'. People, in general, who were attracted by the idea of 'plundering and robbing the clergy and the richer burghers'. The horrified burghers tried to drive out Rothmann and the Anabaptist preachers, but to no avail.

In 1533, Melchior Hoffmann, sure that the Second Coming would happen any day, returned to Strasbourg, where he had had great success, calling himself the Prophet Elias. He was promptly clapped into jail, and remained there until his death a decade later.

Hoffmann, for all the similarities with the others, was a peaceful man who counselled non-violence to his followers; after all, if Jesus were imminently due to return, why commit against unbelievers? Hoffmann's imprisonment, and of course the fact that 1533 came and went without a Second Coming, discredited Melchior, and so his Münster followers turned to far more violent, post-millennialist prophets who believed that they would have to establish the Kingdom by fire and sword.

The new leader of the coercive Anabaptists was a Dutch baker from Haarlem, one Jan Matthys (Matthyszoon). Reviving the spirit of Thomas Müntzer, Matthys sent out missionaries or 'apostles' from Haarlem to rebaptize everyone they could, and to appoint 'bishops' with the power to baptize. When the new apostles reached Münster in early 1534, they were greeted, as we might expect, with enormous enthusiasm. Caught up in the frenzy, even Rothmann was rebaptized once again, followed by many ex-nuns and a large part of the population. Within a week the apostles had rebaptized 1 400 people.

Another apostle soon arrived, a young man of 25 who had been converted and baptized by Matthys only a couple of months earlier. This was Jan

Bockelson (Bockelszoon, Beukelsz), who was soon to become known in song and story as Johann of Leyden. Though handsome and eloquent, Bockelson was a troubled soul, having been born the illegitimate son of the mayor of a Dutch village by a woman serf from Westphalia. Bockelson began life as an apprentice tailor, married a rich widow, but then went bankrupt when he set himself up as a self-employed merchant.

In February 1534, Bockelson won the support of the wealthy cloth merchant Bernt Knipperdollinck, the powerful leader of the Münster guilds, and shrewdly married Knipperdollinck's daughter. On 8 February, son-in-law and father-in-law ran wildly through the streets together, calling upon everyone to repent. After much frenzy, mass writhing on the ground, and the seeing of apocalyptic visions, the Anabaptists rose up and seized the town hall, winning legal recognition for their movement.

In response to this successful uprising, many wealthy Lutherans left town, and the Anabaptists, feeling exuberant, sent messengers to surrounding areas summoning everyone to come to Münster. The rest of the world, they proclaimed, would be destroyed in a month or two; only Münster would be saved, to become the New Jerusalem. Thousands poured in from as far away as Flanders and Frisia in the northern Netherlands. As a result, the Anabaptists soon won a majority on the town council, and this success was followed three days later, on 24 February, by an orgy of looting of books, statues and paintings from the churches and throughout the town. Soon Jan Matthys himself arrived, a tall, gaunt man with a long black beard. Matthys, aided by Bockelson, quickly became the virtual dictator of the town. The coercive Anabaptists had at last seized a city. The Great Communist Experiment could now begin.

The first mighty programme of this rigid theocracy was, of course, to purge the New Jerusalem of the unclean and the ungodly, as a prelude to their ultimate extermination throughout the world. Matthys called therefore for the execution of all remaining Catholics and Lutherans, but Knipperdollinck's cooler head prevailed, since he warned Matthys that slaughtering all other Christians than themselves might cause the rest of the world to become edgy, and they might all come and crush the New Jerusalem in its cradle. It was therefore decided to do the next best thing, and on 27 February the Catholic and Lutherans were driven out of the city, in the midst of a horrendous snowstorm. In a deed prefiguring communist Cambodia, all non-Anabaptists, including old people, invalids, babies and pregnant women were driven into the snowstorm, and all were forced to leave behind all their money, property, food and clothing. The remaining Lutherans and Catholics were compulsorily rebaptized, and all refusing this ministration were put to death.

The expulsion of all Lutherans and Catholics was enough for the bishop, who began a long military siege of the town the next day, on 28 February.

With every person drafted for siege work, Jan Matthys launched his totalitarian communist social revolution.

The first step was to confiscate the property of the expelled. All their worldly goods were placed in central depots, and the poor were encouraged to take 'according to their needs', the 'needs' to be interpreted by seven appointed 'deacons' chosen by Matthys. When a blacksmith protested at these measures imposed by Dutch foreigners, Matthys arrested the courageous smithy. Summoning the entire population of the town, Matthys personally stabbed, shot, and killed the 'godless' blacksmith, as well as throwing into prison several eminent citizens who had protested against his treatment. The crowd was warned to profit by this public execution, and they obediently sang a hymn in honour of the killing.

A key part of the Anabaptist reign of terror in Münster was now unveiled. Unerringly, just as in the case of the Cambodian communists four-and-a-half centuries later, the new ruling élite realized that the abolition of the private ownership of money would reduce the population to total slavish dependence on the men of power. And so Matthys, Rothmann and others launched a propaganda campaign that it was unchristian to own money privately; that all money should be held in 'common', which in practice meant that all money whatsoever must be handed over to Matthys and his ruling clique. Several Anabaptists who kept or hid their money were arrested and then terrorized into crawling to Matthys on their knees, begging forgiveness and beseeching him to intercede with God on their behalf. Matthys then graciously 'forgave' the sinners.

After two months of severe and unrelenting pressure, a combination of propaganda about the Christianity of abolishing private money, and threats and terror against those who failed to surrender, the private ownership of money was effectively abolished in Münster. The government seized all the money and used it to buy or hire goods from the outside world. Wages were doled out in kind by the only remaining employer: the theocratic Anabaptist state.

Food was confiscated from private homes, and rationed according to the will of the government deacons. Also, to accommodate the immigrants, all private homes were effectively communized, with everyone permitted to quarter themselves anywhere; it was now illegal to close, let alone lock, doors. Communal dining-halls were established, where people ate together to readings from the Old Testament.

This compulsory communism and reign of terror was carried out in the name of community and Christian 'love'. All this communization was considered the first giant steps toward total egalitarian communism, where, as Rothmann put it, 'all things were to be in common, there was to be no private property and nobody was to do any more work, but simply trust in God'. The workless part, of course, somehow never arrived.

A pamphlet sent in October 1534 to other Anabaptist communities hailed the new order of Christian love through terror:

> For not only have we put all our belongings into a common pool under the care of deacons, and live from it according to our need; we praise God through Christ with one heart and mind and are eager to help one another with every kind of service.
>
> And accordingly, everything which has served the purposes of selfseeking and private property, such as buying and selling, working for money, taking interest and practising usury...or eating and drinking the sweat of the poor...and indeed everything which offends against love – all such things are abolished amongst us by the power of love and community.

With high consistency, the Anabaptists of Münster made no pretence about preserving intellectual freedom while communizing all material property. For the Anabaptists boasted of their lack of education, and claimed that it was the unlearned and the unwashed who would be the elect of the world. The Anabaptist mob took particular delight in burning all the books and manuscripts in the cathedral library, and finally, in mid-March 1534, Matthys outlawed all books except the Good Book – the Bible. To symbolize a total break with the sinful past, all privately and publicly owned books were thrown upon a great communal bonfire. All this ensured, of course, that the only theology or interpretation of the scriptures open to the Münsterites was that of Matthys and the other Anabaptist preachers.

At the end of March, however, Matthys's swollen *hubris* laid him low. Convinced at Eastertime that God had ordered him and a few of the faithful to lift the bishop's siege and liberate the town, Matthys and a few others rushed out of the gates at the besieging army, and were literally hacked to pieces. In an age when the idea of full religious liberty was virtually unknown, one can imagine that any Anabaptists whom the more orthodox Christians might get hold of would not earn a very kindly reward.

The death of Matthys left Münster in the hands of young Bockelson. And if Matthys had chastised the people of Münster with whips, Bockelson would chastise them with scorpions. Bockelson wasted little time in mourning his mentor. He preached to the faithful: 'God will give you another Prophet who will be more powerful'. How could this young enthusiast top his master? Early in May, Bockelson caught the attention of the town by running naked through the streets in a frenzy, falling then into a silent three-day ecstasy. When he rose again, he announced to the entire populace a new dispensation that God had revealed to him. With God at his elbow, Bockelson abolished the old functioning town offices of council and burgomasters, and installed a new ruling council of 12 elders, with himself, of course, as the eldest of the elders. The elders were now given total authority over the life and death, the