

Today's Neo-Feudalism And the Crusades

by Gerald Rose

At the Oct. 9, 2004 conference at Middlebury College on "The Privatization of National Security," sponsored by Felix Rohatyn and George Shultz, Prof. Peter Feaver of Duke University said: "In fact what we are seeing is a return to neo-feudalism. If you think about how the East India Company played a role in the rise of the British Empire, there are similar parallels to the rise of the American quasi-empire."

This was not an imprecise use of language when Feaver called the privatization of the military "neo-feudalism." It is one of those anomalies which seems minuscule, but gives away the show.

As a system, feudalism was more than the use of the majority of the human population as chattel attached to the landed, titled nobility. Feaver was referring to the fact that under feudalism, there were no nation-states. Private armies, chartered as supranational corporations, or quasi-religious orders, roamed Jerusalem, Spain, southern France, and Constantinople to impose an ideology and a system of looting upon its victims. Feaver was not criticizing this; he was praising it as a new model.

Feaver's reference to the British East India Company as feudal was more precise than he perhaps imagined. As documented in *EIR* (March 31, 2006), the British East India Company had a larger standing army than that of the national British Army. The East India Company was a feudal form of organization, chartered by supranational authorities. In the case of the British East India Company, it was a Crown charter with its own army and its own charter to govern beyond the reach of any national authority.

There is no way to understand feudalism except as a dynamic system whose main animating force was the Crusades. To be clear: Feudalism was not a sociological phenomenon. It was a system maintained by the Crusades. In principle, the Crusades were used to crush the rise of secular government that led to nation-states. Through this dynamic, the feudal system imposed an ultramontane, universal dictatorship on behalf of the Black Nobility, led by Venice.

This is the technical meaning of corporatism, in which the state is subordinated to financial interests that rule above the state. Although some consider it impolite to mention this, feudalism is where fascism comes from. When Rohatyn recently burst out with the idea that Franklin Roosevelt did not go to supranational banks to borrow money for basic infrastructure in the 1930s (see article, p. 41), he was referencing

Mussolini and his feudal corporatist state. As we will document, this system is an exact repeat of the developments in which the Black Nobility, dominated by Venetian banking circles, chartered all corporations and gave them the franchise to loot. This is the explicit model advocated by today's Siena Group under the direction of economist Robert Mundell. It goes by the name of Globalization.

It is only a lack of historical insight as to where this system has led, that allows Feaver to get away with this fraud. The system Rohatyn and Feaver are referring to ended in the bankruptcy of the world banking system and the Black Plague, which wiped out one-third or more of the population, not only of Europe, but also of Asia.

What Really Were the Crusades?

Not surprisingly, there is an attempt in the United States to romanticize the Crusades, particularly the crusading orders such as the Knights Templar and Knights Hospitaler, around the cult novel *The Da Vinci Code*. If one wants to rid oneself of such delusions, read some of the greatest works of literature by Rabelais, Cervantes, and Shakespeare, who were disgusted by the utter ecstatic insanity of the crusading knights, who wrecked all good order and government in the Medieval period. The irony, that these Crusades were allegedly doing it for Christ, was such anathema to real Christians, like Shakespeare, Cervantes, and the monk Rabelais, that their prolific pens and minds were inspired to produce the greatest pieces of humor in history.

The initial Crusade was preached in 1095 by Pope Urban II. At the Council of Clermont, the idea arose to liberate Jerusalem and the Sepulchre of Christ from the infidels. It was preached in the open air before a crowd of thousands from the French countryside, who had been organized for a full year by a combination of tours by Pope Urban II and "Peter The Hermit," a populist ranter. There were a good number of nobles there along with their peasants. All those who would go to the Holy Land to liberate it were promised that they would be exempt not only from any sin carried out in the commission of that "liberation war," but also from any sin that they had ever committed! This doctrine later became the practice that with money you could buy such dispensations, which were called "indulgences."

Two things should be emphasized. First, Urban II, before becoming the Pope, was the Prior at the Benedictine Abbey at Cluny, which was a cult center inside the church. Second, he was a retainer of Mathilde of Tuscany, who, along with Hildebrand (who became Pope Gregory VII), created a faction of ruling elites called the Black Guelph. It was this tendency that waged war against the nation-building of Charlemagne and the Hohenstauffen. These two houses were the "Holy Roman Emperors," who opposed the proven forgery of "The Donation of Constantine." This forgery, which was discovered in the 8th Century, was a supposed 4th-Century document written by Constantine himself, in which he supposedly recognized that the highest temporal authority was



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Peter the Hermit (with crucifix), who aided Pope Urban II in recruiting Crusaders.

the Papacy, and that kings were only appendages of the Papacy. This is what is known as the “ultramontane” rule of the church. (During the Council of Florence, Lorenzo Valla proved that the Donation of Constantine was a forgery, with documents provided by the Eastern Orthodox Church, which participated in the Council.)

This ultramontane doctrine was imposed by the “Crusades.” The actual policy articulated by the Pope was a radical break with the previous Augustinian concept of the “just war.” In this latter view, although an individual Christian was called upon to turn the other cheek, and under no circumstances to kill his neighbor, there were situations, such as when tens of thousands of people were under attack, when Christians should defend themselves with armed might. The only circumstance under which this may be done, was for defense; such acts must not be taken out of revenge, or desire for territorial advantage, or to loot the resources of another country. The only goal of such a war was to impose a “just peace,” not only for oneself, but for those whom one had to fight. (Also there had to be some chance of one winning such a fight.)

This concept was defined in very beautiful terms by Rabelais. In the first paragraph of Gargantua’s “Address to the Vanquished,” Rabelais identifies this idea of a “just peace”:

“Our fathers and grandfathers, and ancestors from time immemorial have been of such a nature and disposition that as a memorial to the victories and triumphs they have won in battles they have fought, they have preferred to erect monuments in the hearts of the vanquished by a display of clemency, than to raise trophies in the form of architecture in the land they have conquered. For they have valued the lively

gratitude of men, won by their liberality, more highly than mute inscriptions on arches, columns, and pyramids, which are subject to the injuries of climate and all men’s spite. . . .”

Gargantua then elaborates on the “clemency” and “generous treatment” extended to barbarians who had “pillaged, depopulated, and sacked” regions of the state, or practiced piracy, or who simply were “defeated in fair naval battle.”

This is just the opposite of the attitude of the Crusades.

Fraud

The entire religious justification of the Crusades to liberate the Holy Land was a fraud. The tipoff was that the first act of the Crusaders, even before they got to the Holy Land, was to set off a series

of pogroms against the Jews of Europe, to steal their property to pay for part of the Crusades, and to kill a large number of Jews, just to get into the right spirit before the Crusaders got to the Holy Land. These pogroms were to last centuries, and the arguments for the Crusades were the justification for hardcore anti-Semitism. (That is why it was so ironic that the neocon Israeli Bibi Netanyahu preached such a Crusade against Muslims, in front of the America-Israel Public Affairs Committee in Washington, D.C., recently. That meeting of AIPAC, addressed by Vice President Dick Cheney and Netanyahu, was pretty much a “Madhatters’ Ball.”)

Also, the idea that the Crusades were liberating Jerusalem from the Muslims, or that this had anything to do with religion, was exposed by the reality that most of the Crusades had nothing to do with the Holy Land. There were Crusades in Spain against the Moorish and Jewish populations. There were Crusades against “heretics” in southern France (the Albigensian Crusade). But the Crusade that gave the show away was the fourth Crusade against Constantinople, which was the largest Christian city in the world at the time.

The Fourth Crusade: Venice’s Role

It was during the Fourth Crusade (1202-1204) that Venice consolidated its power internationally. Venice was the banker for the Papacy and the key beneficiary of the Crusades. In the breakup of the Roman Empire into the Western Empire, whose seat was Rome, and the Eastern Empire, whose seat was Constantinople, the Roman side of the Empire was being overrun by pagan tribes. So some of the Roman nobility took their money and retainers and escaped to the lagoons of Venice, a location that was defensible because it was approach-

able only by water. From there, they established the largest banking empire in history. (This empire, still intact today, created the international Synarchy organization, as *EIR* has documented in many locations.) How did Venice consolidate such enormous power? It did it through the Crusades.

If you look at the logistics of the Crusades to the Holy Land from Europe, there are only two routes available. One was over land, by way of Constantinople, and the other was by sea, by way of Venice. Venice had built up, for the purpose of mercantile looting and defense, the largest fleet in the world. Its shipyard, called “The Arsenal,” was by far the largest in Europe. While preparing for the Fourth Crusade, it had 19,000 full-time workers.

In this Fourth Crusade, the Venetians led the Norman Chivalry to attack Constantinople. So, this Crusade had nothing to do with Muslims, Jews, or religion. It was an attack on a Christian city, which was looted and burned to the ground.

The Venetians started the Fourth Crusade by convincing everyone that they were going to attack Egypt, so everyone piled onto boats, and the Doge of Venice, Dandolo, guided the ships toward Constantinople, using a very flimsy pretext to attack the city. Constantinople had 400,000 people. Venice, which had only 60,000, was the third- or fourth-largest city in the world, and I wouldn’t call it Christian either.

In the course of the Fourth Crusade, Venice and the Norman nobles killed several thousand Christians, and took everything that was movable to Venice. The two famous lions that stand in front of the largest church in Venice, Saint Mark’s, were stolen from Constantinople. And the top of Saint Mark’s Church in Venice has Byzantine domes which were stolen from Constantinople.

The Norman knights, who ran the operation, and the French kings and others, owed 85,000 gold florins to Venice, which is an enormous amount of money. And so, Venice bankrupted both the knights who fought the Crusade, and the countries that funded the knights who fought the Crusades—the English kings, French kings, Sicilian kings, and others.

Through this Crusade, Venice established the Venetian Empire. The Crusades consolidated the power of Venice by crushing all the potential nation-states. It was simply a pretext to get rid of these states: Any king who would not send his knights and vassals to fight, had a Crusade preached by the Pope against him. (This is referenced by Shakespeare in *King John*.) The Benedictine-run Papacy was an internal policing apparatus, using the Church, to loot all the peasants, all the knights, and all the kings, to fund the Crusades.

This process was set in motion because, until the Crusades, there were very strong city-building tendencies, which were referenced by the alliance in the East by Harun Al Rashid and the Baghdad Caliphates, and in the West by Charlemagne. These tendencies, like those of Abbey Suger and Abelard in the great Cathedral-construction movement in France, which was continued by the Hohenstauffen Holy Roman Emperors, represented a mortal threat to the Venetian interests, for the

idea of the city-builders was to develop the populations of Europe.

As Dante Alighieri points out in both *De Monarchia* and *De Vulgari Eloquentia*, secular governments and a literate language in the vernacular (not Latin), along with a common history, define a people. To have a people speaking a literate language, Dante said, was the fundamental question in governing human beings. This tendency was the exact opposite of the “Donation of Constantine” ultramontane Venetian-Papacy faction. The Crusades wiped out the tendency toward nation-states, until it emerged again in the wake of the 15th-Century Italian Renaissance.

The Untold Story

The most devastating aspect of this Fourth Crusade was that Venice consolidated control of all the trade routes with the East. The work done by Paul Gallagher, published in *Fidelio* magazine (Winter 1995), points out the most devastating irony: Do you know who became the Venetian allies after the Fourth Crusade? The Mongol Empire, led by the infamous Khans. The Mongols were the fascist policing apparatus of the entire East. They worked with Venice to loot China, to loot the Caucasus, to loot Kiev, and to loot the Holy Land; Venice was able to consolidate its trade with this Khan Dynasty in the wake of the Fourth Crusade.

What Gallagher develops is a very important historic insight into how, by the manipulation of the money supply of gold and silver by the Venetian banking houses, in coordination with the control of the Eastern production of gold, by the Mongol Khans, the Venetians created a monopoly of both precious metals. By the Mongols selling gold at a certain price to Venice, and Venice’s replacement by silver currency in Europe of the previous gold currency, Venice locked up the market in gold, and forced debt contracted by the western kings, in silver, to be repaid in gold. They also set the price for the gold/silver ratio. The rates of return on the Venetian gold were so great that they bankrupted every kingdom in Europe, and detonated mid-14th Century the bankruptcy of the famous Bardi-Peruzzi bank. This currency looting caused a worldwide banking crisis, and as a direct result of the physical looting of the East by the Mongols, and the Venetians looting Europe, it left Europe and Asia vulnerable to the spread of the Black Death.

Full Cycle

So, although it seemed a minor point in Feaver’s talk, the question of feudalism is not some historical curiosity. In a recent discussion, Lyndon LaRouche commented that, as we see in *EIR*’s recent work on the Black Nobility, Michael Ledeen, and Robert Mundell, today’s situation is not only analogous to feudalism, but the same Black Nobility families that imposed feudalism on the nascent potentials for nation-states in the period of the Crusades are today attempting to impose such a feudal-fascist order on the United States.