FOUNDATION OF THE STATE

There are basically two kinds of environment in which population pressures are felt. The first is what can be called an '*open' environment*, such as the Amazon basin and parts of sub-Saharan Africa. In such a situation there is so much land open for the taking that surplus persons in hamlet or village that has grown too large for its own subsistence economy can simply migrate to new lands. In such settings, with perpetually expanding frontiers, the only known socio-political organizations are tribal.

But this is not the case in a *'closed' environment*; one limited geographically, say, by large water bodies or by mountains or hemmed in by rival peoples. Here there is no exist for landless younger sons and their families, and an entirely different organisation of society is necessary, one that allows for different kinds of distribution of goods, that identifies people's self-interest with a fixed territory and that prompts them to think in terms of war as a means of defending or expanding that territory. This new mode of organization is the *state*.

All the so-called 'primitive' peoples of the world are organized primarily on the basis of blood ties or kinship. Families, lineages and clans are the channels through which all power in these societies flow. A kinless man is a dead man without access to food, shelter, or protection. In a state, on the

other hand, a person's right and obligations are primarily based upon the fact of his having been born in such-and-such a territory, regardless of his kinship affiliations. Over this territory the state authorities enforce their rule through police powers and the distinction between the governors and the governed thus become intensified.

This is not to say that the move from blood-ties to territoriality has anywhere been absolute. The kinship principle has often been used as a kind of building block in the construction of state bureaucracies. In recent Africa, as well as in the earliest kingdoms revealed by archaeology, the royal house is merely the leading lineage among many contenders and administrative departments and even the priestly hierarchy are staffed through nepotic practices. In the past, entire cities, such as Aztec capital of Tenochtitlan, were organized as though they consisted of locally-based tribes, and the ancient kingdom of Israel was similarly organized. Ancient state religions, such as those of Mesopotamia and China, look very much like projections of the social set-up within the royal household, often providing divine justification for the obvious inequalities between the ruler and the ruled.

In all early civilizations, we know of, there was always a social class that has had greater access to the necessities of life than others. We can see, for examples, in most of these cultures the great store-houses, often attached either to the royal place, or in the case of Mesopotamia, to the temples. The

god-king was the great provider, redistributing grain and other goods to the people as wages for labour and providing sustenance to the non-agricultural specialists. Taxes were sometimes indistinguishable from tribute, as among the Aztec, who had an intricate and far-reaching system of exploiting the lower classes to support the royal household, nobility and army. And the concept of nobility itself, very early in the history of civilization, became identified with the supreme land owning class, for it is an important trait of most civilizations that the tiller of the land be alienated from the land itself. Among so-called primitive tribes, such as the semi-nomadic American Indians of the western plains, it was almost inconceivable that the land actually belonged to somebody. The principle of communality and usufruct privileges did not entirely die out, for in the New World civilizations and even in Europe there were always lands held in common which the freemen of the society could work for their needs.