Wolff: Feudalism, Slavery, Capitalism

Using our brains and our hands, we take things in nature and transform them into something useful to us, such as…

In very small groups or individuals – everybody produced all of what he or she needed

Then, a division of labor emerged, we began to specialize (give examples)

This created a new problem: distribution. Many ways possible such as harvest festivals; group of elders parcel out to others; customary ways of distributing; **the *market* emerged various hundreds/thousands of years ago depending on place, where *bargaining/haggling* takes place. This was generally fought over. Ancient Greeks (eg Plato Aristotle) hated market as it was a disruptive asocial system they thought should be banned.**

**How is it all organized now?**

**We have work to make things, sometimes many people making one or more things:**

**Ways:**

1. A group of people agree on how they will work together, who will do what, etc (collective/community mode communist mode)
2. Some people do all the work, and other people…don’t! eg. slaves and masters. The slave is the property of the master. This is a big new development: conflict over the surplus.
3. Some people produce a surplus, but they are not slaves (feudalism) eg. Europe from ~500 AD to ~1500+ AD. The serf is born on a particular piece of land, and by custom, law, tradition, religion, stays there for life. *Serf* has an obligation to the *lord*. Serf would work, say, three days on the land, and the fruit of that was his to keep. You worked say three days on the lands of the lord, and the fruit of that (the surplus) was the lord’s to keep. On the seventh day, you rested. In Europe, the RC church presided over this. But this ended. The serfs had had it. The most famous moment was that of the French Revolution (1789).
4. Now we have capitalism. It’s different from slavery because you cannot own someone. It’s different from feudalism in that you are not forced to be a serf all of your life if you are born of a serf. In capitalism, we have much more individual mobility and liberty. You, after basic education? Go looking for a job, unlike in feudalism or slavery. Describe deal that employee makes with employer. Wage is yours to live and reproduce on. Employer keeps the surplus value. Yes, employer keeps the surplus you produced, just as the slave owner kept the surplus the slave produced, and just as the lord keeps the surplus the serf produced.

-thus in the heart of the capitalist system is a conflict, a tension. This is because capitalism is a system based on exploitation. Exploitation exists when the people who do the work produce a surplus that other people get and distribute it as they see fit.

5. Is there an alternative to this? (at 33:30)