

**Report
on
Black Death & Trade of labor**

Submitted to
Ajarn Thanasak Jenmana

By

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Abstract

This report aims to determine the relationship between Black Death and trade and labor. We review cause, transmission, spread, symptoms, and consequences of the Black Death. Moreover, we interpret the evidence of the effect of the plague on trade and labor during 1346 and 1353, as well as the impact after the outbreak.

Firstly, we mention labor supply and the failure of federalism; the pandemic contributed bargaining power of peasants to increase since individuals supply less labor which led the power of the upper class in federalism to decline, and result in collapse in federalism.

Secondly, we include the role of relative price change as a consequence of the Black Death; large numbers of depopulation resulted in rise in real wages, hence the per-capita income increased and the living standard also improved.

Thirdly, we mention the industrial revolution as well as the labor movement during that time. It includes the background of the labor union and the role of it that helps the society. There're also some laws and regulations that are significantly related to the topic.

And lastly, we mention about an emerging capitalism after the collapse of feudalism that is affected by Black death. It includes the relevant effect that cause labour became rare and more valuable and the cause of an arising of merchant entrepreneurs.

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Introduction

Black Death, one of the deadliest diseases in history, occurred between 1346 and 1353. It spreaded across Europe and the Middle East, killing approximately one half of European and Middle Easterners leading to a period of great labor scarcity. Although the number of workers declined, it did not change much on the amount of land and tools. So, individuals had more resources to increase productivity. Moreover, the plague had a significant long term effect. For example, the emergence of capitalism after the collapse of feudalism. In the meantime, it had an increase of foreign trade which led to the emergence of a merchant capitalist. The Black Death also gave people's incentive to develop technology in order to replace agricultural systems. Later on, it brought people to the industrial revolution. Essentially, at that time, laborers faced really bad working conditions. For instance, there were overcrowded cities that suffered from pollution, and many workers were forced to work long hours for pitifully low wages. This later resulted in a rise of the labor unions. This research mainly focuses on the pandemic as well as its effect on trade of labor.



Blessed Bernard Tolomei Interceding for the Cessation of the Plague in Siena, oil on copper by Giuseppe Maria Crespi, c. 1735.

1. Black Death

1.1 Causes

Black Death is the most damaging pandemic event in human history about 75 to 200 million people died in Eurasia, peaking in Europe between 1347 and 1351. Black death is believed to be caused by the bacteria *Yersinia pestis* (named after the French physician Alexandre Emile Jean Yersin, who discovered it), which is transmitted to humans by fleas that live on the rodents then fleas bite people and spread the infection through the wound. The infection can also be transmitted through air, direct contact, and contaminated food or materials.

This is the first outbreak of the Black Death in Europe and also the second outbreak in human history (The first outbreak occurred about 800 years ago). The plague caused an emerging of religious, economic upheavals, society, and made a profound impact on European history.

It is estimated that the plague kills 30% to 60% of the population of Europe. The world's population reduced from approximately 450 million to 350–375 million in the 14th century, and it took around 200 years to bring the population back to Europe. In some areas, it took almost 500 years for its population to return. The plague still returned from time to time until the beginning of the 20th century.(Emily Rodriguez, 2020)

1.2 Transmission

The two main factors that were the start of Black Death transmission process were rodents and infected fleas. Apart from rats and fleas, other animals also help the transmission. However, the plague was not only transmitted from animals to animals and animals to humans, infected people could also transfer the disease to other people.

To begin with, the plague started in rodents, especially rats. After rodents were killed by *Yersinia pestis* bacteria, the bacteria was transmitted to fleas that had bitten the infected rodents' blood and transmitted the disease to its new host. Moreover, Black Death was also transmitted from human to another human. In addition, it was easier to transfer from a human to others as in a respiratory form when infected people cough.

In conclusion, Black Death started in dead rodents and was transmitted to other animals by fleas that used to be dead rodents' parasitics. Furthermore, infected humans transferred the disease to others by touching infectious tissues, fluid, and cough droplets. In other words, rodents and fleas were not the carrier but any infected organisms can transfer the disease to other organisms as well.

1.3 Spread

Black Death had originated in Central Asia, the first recorded case was in China, and spread across Europe in 1346-1353.

In history, The Black Death decimated the army of the Kipchak khan Janibeg while he was besieging the Genoese trading port of Kaffa (now Feodosiya, Istanbul, Turkey) in Crimea (1347). With his forces disintegrating, Janibeg catapulted plague-infested corpses into the town in an effort to infect his enemies. From Kaffa, Genoese ships carried the epidemic westward to Mediterranean ports, whence it spread inland, affecting Sicily (1347); North Africa, mainland Italy, Spain, and France (1348); and Austria, Hungary, Switzerland, Germany, and the Low Countries (1349). A ship from Calais carried the plague to Melcombe Regis, Dorset, in August 1348. It reached Bristol almost immediately and spread rapidly throughout the southwestern counties of England. London suffered most violently between February and May 1349, East Anglia and Yorkshire during that summer. The Black Death reached the extreme north of England, Scotland, Scandinavia, and the Baltic countries in 1350. (Adam Augustin, 26 August 2010)

1.4 Symptoms

The disease was called Black Death because *Yersinia* bacteria turned the human's skin black and sore, whereas other symptoms only included fever. Symptoms begin to show after one to six days after individuals infected by the disease. The *Yersinia* bacteria caused three types of human plague, a serious illness, which are bubonic, septicemic, and pneumonic; harmful levels are in ascending order. First, bubonic plague, most frequently found which contributes to inflammation in lymph nodes. This plague usually comes from an infected rodent or flea that bites humans which is the carrier to transmit bacteria to people. The plague leads to swollen and painful buboes shown on skin; under arms, around neck, or groin. If left untreated, the pathogen could develop to septicemic and pneumonic plague, respectively. Second plague is septicemic; bacteria directly enter and affect the bloodstream. This plague might show on skin or other tissue turning black and die; mostly on fingers, toes, and nose. Lastly, the step that bacteria spread and infect the lung; it is known as pneumonic plague. It results in failure and shock of the respiratory. In addition to pneumonic plague, the disease can be transmitted from person to person by droplets which are uncomplicated to spread because it is usually normal action of individuals such as breathing the air while someone with pneumonic plague coughs. Therefore, this stage of plague can contribute to an epidemic. (Daniel, 2018)

1.5 Consequences

Socio-Economic Effects

As the plague wore on, depopulation greatly reduced the workforce and the serf's labor suddenly became an important – and increasingly rare – asset. The lord of an estate could not feed himself, his family, or pay tithes to the king or the Church without the labor of his peasants and the loss of so many meant that survivors could now negotiate for pay and better treatment. The lives of the members of the lowest class vastly improved as they were able to afford better living conditions and clothing as well as luxury items. Once the plague had passed, the improved lot of the serf was challenged by the upper class who were concerned that the lower classes were forgetting their place. Fashion changed dramatically as the elite demanded more extravagant clothing and accessories to distance themselves from the poor who could now afford to dress more finely than in their previous rags and blankets. Efforts of the wealthy to return the serf to his previous condition resulted in uprisings such as the peasant revolt in France in 1358 CE, the guild revolts of 1378 CE, the famous Peasants' Revolt of London in 1381 CE. There was no turning back, however, and the efforts of the elite were futile. Class struggle would continue but the authority of the feudal system was broken. (Paragraph 3)

Women's Rights

Women gained higher status following the plague. Prior to the outbreak, women had few rights. Women's status had improved somewhat through the popularity of the Cult of the Virgin Mary which associated women with the mother of Jesus Christ but the Church continually emphasized women's inherent sinfulness as daughters of Eve who had brought sin into the world. After the plague, with so many men dead, women were allowed to own their own land, cultivate the businesses formerly run by their husband or son, and had greater liberty in choosing a mate. Women joined guilds, ran shipping and textile businesses, and could own taverns and farmlands. Although many of these rights would be diminished later as the aristocracy and the Church tried to assert its former control, women would still be better off after the plague than they were beforehand. (Paragraph 1) (Joshua J. Mark, April 16 2020)

2. Trade of labor

2.1 Labor Supply and Feudalism

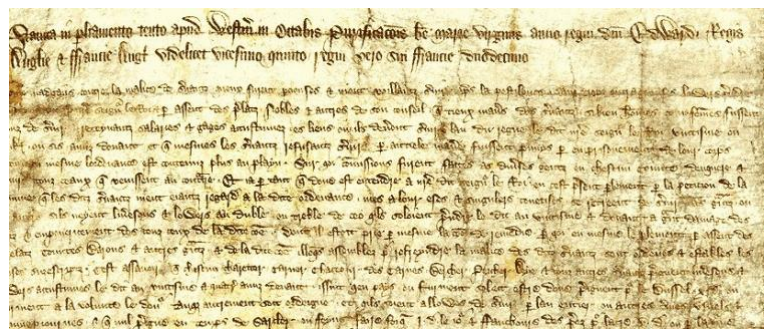
After many people died, the foundation on which feudalism relied upon was broken which led to changes in Europe's economic and social structure. In addition, it resulted in a declining manorial system and collapse in feudalism at the end; the rising middle-class claimed more and more wealth and prestige.

Before the pandemic came, a large number of the population resulted in low wages, kept away from increasing wages, and worked at their village; not considering finding work in other places. The feudal system served the needs of the nobility perfectly. The peasants however were tied to the land, forced to work in order to pay their lord for their land through their servitude. They were effectively slaves, and less opportunity to improve their status.(Victoria, 2018)

During 1347 to 1352, Black Death killed an estimated 25 million people all over the world which more than one-third of European died from the pandemic. The Black Death contributed to the decline of feudalism. The disease had a significant effect on the relationship between lord and peasants. The Black death also arrived at England and there almost thousand villages were abandoned because the individuals knew that the disease was there so they left. The plague did not affect much on lands and agriculture, so lands and agriculture did not change. As population decreases rapidly by the plague, labor has become more scarce; due to the rigid social structure, the remaining upper classes were unskilled in agriculture. Working as peasants was a socially unacceptable behavior for nobility. It leads the lords who own lands to find it more difficult to look for and hire the peasants to do agriculture; harvest crops, and produce goods and services, leading to an increase in demand for workers. The nobility needed workers, and therefore were more likely to pay the higher wages peasants demanded. In order to address the shortage of labour, many nobles started offering better working conditions and higher wages, and peasants could, for the first time, negotiate their conditions and be paid more fairly for the work they did.(Victoria, 2018) Now that peasants received wages for working, this led to a change in economic status. Instead of paying rent with grain and labor, lords had to pay with money; indeed, lords no longer control peasants since, during the crusades, lords lost all the money. So, peasants were able to be their own masters and cheaply own land. This was a triumphant turn of events for the peasant classes, but a rather negative one for the nobility from theory on bounded rationality. (Maren, 2019)

While there was a significant improvement for many peasants, some sections of society did not benefit at all from the impact of the Black Death. The lords realized that they had less control peasants and were afraid of structure

change. So, There were rules that controlled labor supply at that time. In 1349, English law tried to force workers to accept and receive the same wages as in 1346. The reason for the occurrence is European rulers did not want the wages to increase and lose their power to control other people. Moreover, in 1351 under King Edward III, they launched a similar law which was the Statue of laborers in response to a labour shortage and aimed to limit rising wage and movement in search of better conditions for peasants. It said that every healthy unemployed person under 60 years old must work for anyone who wants to hire them. If they were not followed, they had to pay a fine as punishment and the punishment became worse by sending workers who demanded higher wages to prison. (Council for economic education, 1996)



The Picture of The Statute of Labourers was a law created by the English parliament.

On the other hand, the peasants were distrusted and angered towards the nobility since they ignored peasants' requests. It resulted in an outburst of rebellion and violence that made the nobility shocked because of the unexpected situation; rights and liberties that even a monarch cannot violate. Even the peasants' revolt did not succeed, but it made the nobility change their action. Without compliance from individuals, nobility realize that they cannot exercise their power and no violence occurred. Finally, the upper class stopped trying to regulate peasant wages. The manorial system could no longer function profitably due to the increased economic power of the peasants, increased power of the middle class, and consequently, during the following decades, the feudal system declined. (Maren, 2019) In addition, many peasants and some serfs abandoned feudal manors and moved to towns and cities, seeking better opportunities. This led to a weakening of the manor system and a loss of power for feudal lords which are nobles, and knights, and shift power to common people. (Bardstown, 2012)

2.2 Role of relative price changes

This section focuses on how the Black Death contributed to the economy after the outbreak. While the standard narrative of the economic impact of the Black Death is that it raised real wages relative to payments to land or capital, in the very short-run it caused a breakdown in markets and economic activity more generally. Crops went unharvested and building projects stopped. For example, in England the plague arrived in 1348 and the immediate impact was to lower real wages for both unskilled and skilled workers by about 20% over the next two years. Estimated per capita GDP decreased from 1348 to 1349 by 6%. (page 8)

Wages were impacted by institutional responses to the shock. In England, the Statute of Laborers was passed in 1349 and imposed strict limitations on nominal wages. These limitations were highly effective in limiting nominal wage growth during the 1350s, though of declining effectiveness thereafter. Similar restrictions were imposed elsewhere in Europe (Heckscher, 1955). In Florence, wages were permitted to rise for urban workers, but not for rural laborers who saw their real wages fall as they had to purchase basic commodities at “hyper-inflated prices” (Cohn, 2007a, 468). Individuals who left their farms to seek new work were fined. This is also reflected in the data in Figure (b). Between 1348 and 1350, the real wages of unskilled workers in Florence increased by 87% while skilled workers real wages increased by 27%. Reflecting the fact that economic activity was seriously disrupted, however, per capita GDP decreased by around 1.5%. (paragraph 2, page 9)

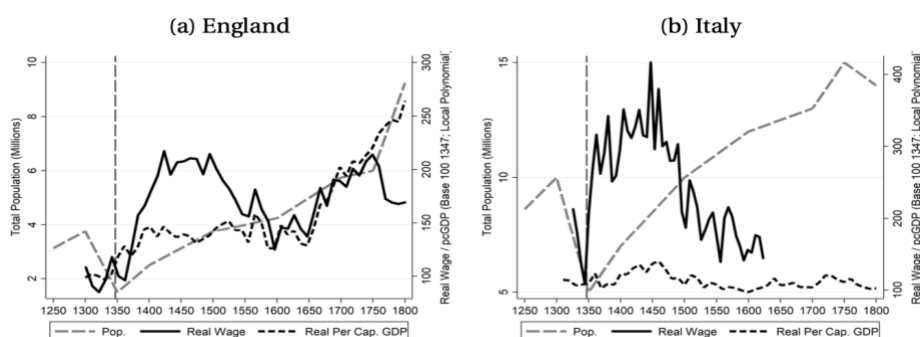
Moreover, prices played an important role in determining the behavior of real wages. In England, the nominal wage was largely fixed by decree. However, because of the supply shock combined with an increase in the money supply due to the large population losses, the prices of goods skyrocketed (Munro, 2005). For example, the consumer price index for England created by Allen (2001) experienced a steady increase of 27% between 1348 and 1350. In Northern Italy, prices increased by 19%. Alvarez Nogal et al. (2020, 14) attribute the decrease in the real wage in Spain to prices arguing that, “. . . in the short term the general trends shows that the decrease of real wages that we observe was not a consequence of decreasing nominal wages, but of a rapid increase in prices that did not fall in Spain as rapidly as they did in other parts of Europe.” (paragraph 3, page 9)

Depending on the initial conditions in different regions, real wage and per capita GDP responded differently in the fifty years after the Black Death. England is perhaps the clearest case illustrating the conflicting Malthusian and

Smithian forces. As illustrated in Figure (a), while real wages increased dramatically in the years running up to 1400, per capita GDP, while increasing, did not keep pace. In Northern Italy, by contrast, both real wages and per capita GDP increased by similar amounts in the 50 years after the arrival of the plague—suggesting the standard Malthusian approach is a more appropriate framework for understanding the plague’s impact. (paragraph 3, page 10)

Since real wages and per capita GDP rose following the initial outbreak, and the subsequent recurrences of bubonic plague that followed. But the extent to which these developments were driven by demographics remains disputed. Similarly, economic historians disagree on the degree to which the post-Black Death era was a “golden age” for workers. (section 3.2, page 17)

After the initial disruption caused by the Black Death, in England, real wages increased until the mid- 15th century before decreasing as the population recovered. The initial increase in per capita GDP was more modest for reasons we discussed earlier as was the decline in the late 16th century. Eventually and starting in the 17th century, real wages and per capita GDP began to rise permanently as England experienced Smithian growth driven by trade and commercialization prior to the Industrial Revolution. In Northern Italy, real wages and per capita GDP also rose following the Black Death (though not as sharply as in England). They also began to decline once the population started to recover in the 16th century. The difference between England and Northern Italy is that in Northern Italy this decline continued unabated until the 19th century. Real wages increased but per capita incomes declined. (paragraph 2, page 17) (Remi Jedwab, Noel D. Johnson, and Mark Koyama, 4 August 2020)



2.3 Movement of labor

2.3.1 Industrial Revolution

England is the birthplace of the Industrial Revolution. Britain had a long history of producing textiles like wool, linen and cotton. But prior to the Industrial Revolution, the British textile business was a true “cottage industry,” with the work performed in small workshops or even homes by individual spinners, weavers and dyers. Starting in the mid-18th century, innovations like the flying shuttle, the spinning jenny, the water frame and the power loom made weaving cloth and spinning yarn and thread much easier. Producing cloth became faster and required less time and far less human labor. More efficient, mechanized production meant Britain’s new textile factories could meet the growing demand for cloth both at home and abroad, where the nation’s many overseas colonies provided a captive market for its goods. In addition to textiles, the British iron industry also adopted new innovations. Chief among the new techniques was the smelting of iron ore with coke instead of the traditional charcoal. This method was both cheaper and produced higher-quality material, enabling Britain’s iron and steel production to expand in response to demand created by the Napoleonic Wars and the later growth of the railroad industry.

(History.com editors, October 29, 2009)

From the pandemic, Black Death led to an improvement in agricultural technology, status of women, and increased wages. This process helped industrial revolution. The labor movement first began during the time period of the Industrial Revolution, in the 19th century. At the time, working-class people were often exploited by wealthy owners and treated horribly. The dominant ideology of the Industrial Revolution centered on individualistic values such as classical liberalism and laissez-faire capitalism. Both of these systems promoted the idea that the government should play as little a role as possible in the economic lives of the people. As such, there were very few government regulations in place to protect workers and the wealthy owners were allowed to exploit them in various ways. For example, during the Industrial Revolution, working-class people faced horrible working conditions, such as: crowded and cramped workspaces. Out of this emerged different socialist movements that focused on improving the lives and conditions for industrial workers. In the decades that followed, labor unions continued to provide an important role. Today, Labor unions remain an important part of many modern democratic societies. They continue to fight for the same things that workers did in the Industrial Revolution, and have played a vital role in improving life for workers. formed and used unions in order to protest for a variety of things, including: shorter hours of work, higher rates of pay, safe working conditions, basic education and healthcare. Many of them achieved these goals, by pressuring the

government to step in to set regulations on different aspects of industrial work. The first major legislation created to place limits on child labor were a series of Factory Acts passed by the British parliament throughout the 1800s. These acts limited the number of hours that children could work and placed regulations on workplaces in terms of safety and cleanliness. For example, by 1819, the Factory Acts limited the workday for British children at 12 hours. By 1833, child labor was further regulated when it became illegal for children under 9 years old to work, and children over 13 were not allowed to work more than 9 hours a day. The labor movement obtained more victories for working-class people in the form of minimum wage laws, caps on hours worked, mandated lunch breaks, and regulations on health and safety. As well, once child labor was banned, governments across the industrial world were persuaded to establish public education systems in order to teach youth that were too young to work. All of the victories combined to improve the overall lives of working-class people. (History Crunch Writers, October 29, 2009)

2.3.2 Capitalism (After the feudalism deteriorated, capitalism has become the main economic system in the Western world)

Since the transmission during that time, the Black Death changed Europe forever. After the collapse of feudalism, European production technology is higher resulting in higher yield per capita. Therefore, labor wages have increased accordingly. At the time, the rich landowners have suffered more economic damage than the working class. As a result, the labor transforms into the determinant of an inequality in society.

This new environment of competition in the peasant classes led to greater social mobility and also raised the nature of capitalism. People were more able to gain wealth and easily improve their class status, and trade was controlled by competition in the market, not by the wealthy and the leader classes. As a consequence, there is an arising of merchant entrepreneurs who trade in goods with their production on a scale only available to those with significant sums of capital. This is exactly the meaning of capitalism which said, “capitalism is an economic system in which private individuals or businesses own capital goods. The production of goods and services is based on supply and demand in the general market—known as a market economy—rather than through central planning”. (Marguerita Cheng, April 6, 2020)

The concept of a waged worker signalled a crucial stage in the development of capitalism. Its introduction was the final stage in the “buyer uppers” transition from merchant, (making money from trade), to capitalist (deriving wealth from the ownership and control of the means of production).

Importantly, the hundred-year transition from feudalism to primitive capitalism had strong state support. The regionally based feudal economies and the power of the aristocracy ran counter to the interests of this alliance between capitalism and the increasingly centralised state. The state gained the wealth it desperately needed to maintain its growing bureaucracy and standing army, by tapping into capitalism through taxes, customs, duties and state loans. In return, it conquered colonies, fought for dominance of the world's markets, and took measures against foreign competition and the power of the aristocracy. Such measures included bans on the import of manufactured goods, restrictions on the export of raw materials destined for competitors, and tax concessions on the import of raw materials. Restrictions on exporting raw materials hit the aristocracy particularly hard as agricultural produce is, by its very nature, raw materials. Thus, bureaucrats and capitalists defeated the aristocracy - though a section did survive the transition from feudalism by forming an alliance with the new capitalists.

It is worth noting here that the alliance between the state and capitalism occurred across Europe, though in different forms. Instance, in Germany, where capitalism was much less developed and therefore weaker, the more powerful state was able to exercise much more control. This was an early indication of the development of the social market in Germany under which the state has much more power. In Britain, capitalism was much more developed and so was able to exert much more influence, leading to the development of the free market system, under which the state has far less influence. (Solidarity Federation, 2012)

Summary

In summary, we will discuss whether the positive effects of Black Death outweigh negative impacts on trade of labor. The following paragraphs will illustrate the negative and positive impacts of the plague.

To begin with the negative consequences, the Black death killed a large number of people which resulted in a decline in labor supply. Hence, the productivity also decreases, in turns, this led to an increase in wage which is good for the workers not the employers. The rise in real wages relative to payments to land or capital caused a breakdown in markets and economic activity more generally. Furthermore, during the industrial revolution, labors faced bad working conditions

On the other hand, the plague had a lot of advantages. Firstly, the Black Death raised bargaining power of the workers. So, they had more opportunities to make more money and own land. Since common people gained more power, the nobility power fell and the inequality declined which led to the failure of feudalism. Secondly, labor unions played an important role in improving working conditions for workers. It is used in order to protest for a variety of things such as shorter working hours, basic education, and health care. Thirdly, the plague raised both real wages and per capita GDP in European countries which meant that most people had better living standards and quality of lives. Lastly, capitalism brought people toward production function development. It increased foreign trade, which led to the emergence of a new class of merchant capitalist. Therefore, this led to many European countries growing rich from attempting to boost their share of trade by establishing colonial empires. These transformations lead to the change in social relations. Society rapidly evolved into two social classes, the industrial capitalist and the waged worker.

To conclude, because of the plague, the world started to develop new technology and change from farming to industrial revolution which is a long term benefit that humans receive from it. Moreover, capitalism plays a vital role in world economics. It obviously showed that the impact of the disease provides a long term opportunity for common people to raise their status.

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