



The Beast of Property

Johann Most

1884

“Among the beasts of prey man is certainly the worst.” This expression, very commonly made nowadays, is only relatively true. Not man as such, but man in connection with wealth is a beast of prey. The richer a man, the greater his greed for more. We may call such a monster the “beast of property.” It now rules the world, making mankind miserable, and gains in cruelty and voracity with the progress of our so called “civilization”. This monster we will in the following characterize and recommend to extermination.

Look about ye! In every so-called “civilized” country there are among every 100 men about 95 more or less destitute and about 5 money-bags.

It is unnecessary to trace all the sneaking ways by which they have gained their possessions. The fact that they own ALL, while the others exist, or rather vegetate merely, admits of no doubt, that these few have grown rich at the expense of the many.

Either by direct brute force, by cunning, or by fraud, this horde has from time to time seized the soil with all its wealth. The laws of inheritance and entail, and the changing of hands, have lent a “venerable color to this robbery, and consequently

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mystified and erased the character of such actions. For this reason the “beast of property” is not fully recognized, but is, on the contrary, worshipped with a holy awe.

And yet, all who do not belong to this class are its victims. Every off-spring of a non-possessor (poor man) finds every nook and corner the earth occupied at his entrance into the world. There is nothing which is “lordless.” Without labor nothing is produced; and in order to labor, there are required not only ability and will, but also room to work, tools, raw materials and means of sustenance. The poor man must, therefore, by force of necessity, apply to those who possess these things in plenty. And, behold! the rich give him permission to continue his existence. But in return for this he must divest himself of his skill and power. These qualities henceforth his pretended “saviors” use for themselves. They place him under the yoke of labor — they force him to the utmost of his mental and physical abilities to produce new treasures, which however he is not entitled to own. Should he desire to deliberate for long before making so unequal a contract, his growling stomach will soon convince him that the poor man has no time that, for there are millions in the same position as himself and he will risk that, while deliberating, hundreds of others will apply — his chance is gone and he again will be at the mercy of the winds.

It is the lash of hunger which compels the poor man to submit. In order to live he MUST SELL — “VOLUNTARILY” SELL — HIMSELF every day and hour to the “beast of property.”

The bygone times, when the “ruling” classes, on their slave-hunting raids, threw their victims in chains and forced them to work, of which the rulers had all the benefit — the times when christian-germanic robbers stole entire countries, deprived the inhabitants of the soil, and pressed them to feudal service, were indeed terrible enough, but the climax of infamy has been reached by our present “law and order” system, for it defrauded more than nine-tenths of mankind of their means of existence, reduced them to dependence upon an insignificant minority,

and condemned them to self-sacrifice. At the same time it has disguised this relation with all sorts of jugglery so that the thralls of today — the wage slaves — but partially recognize their serfdom and outlawed position, they rather incline to ascribe it to the caprices of fortune.

To perpetuate this state of affairs is the only aim of the “prominent” classes. Though not always united among themselves — one seeking to gain advantage over the other by tricks of trade, cunning in speculation and divers machinations of competition — yet in opposition to the proletariat they stand in one united hostile phalanx. Their political ideal is, therefore — in spite of all liberal phrases — a most powerful, centralized and brutal beadle government

If the poor man, who is momentarily unable to sell himself to an exploiter of labor, or is already flayed to complete helplessness by the “beast of property,” has recourse to begging — then the gluttoned bourgeois terms it “vagrancy,” and calls for police; he demands pillory and prison for the poor devil who refuses to starve between mountains of food.

Should the unemployed apply a little of the much vaunted self-help, that is, should he do in a small way, what the rich do daily with impunity on a grand scale, should he, in fact, steal, in order to live — the bourgeoisie will heap burning coals of “moral indignation” upon his head, and, with an austere visage, hand him over relentlessly in charge of the state, that in its prisons he may be fleeced the more effectively, i.e., cheaper.

When the workers combine in order to obtain better wage, shorter hours of labor, or similar advantages, the money-bags immediately decry it as “conspiracy,” which must be prevented.

When the workers organize politically, it is denounced as resistance to the “divine” order of things, which must be nullified by laws of exception or discrimination.

Should the people finally contemplate rebellion, an unceasing howl of rage raised by the “gold tigers” will be heard throughout the world — they pant for massacres and their

thirst for blood is insatiable.

The life of the poor is valued as nothing by the rich. As the owner of vessels he places the lives of entire crews in jeopardy, when he is to fraudulently obtain high insurance for half decayed hulks. Bad ventilation, deep excavation, defective supports, etc., etc., annually bring death to thousands of miners, but this system of operation saves expenses, therefore augments the gains, and gives the mine owners no occasion to be sorry. Neither does the factory-pasha care how many of “his” laborers are torn and rent apart by machinery, poisoned by chemicals, or slowly suffocated by dirt and dust. Profit is the main thing.

Women are cheaper than men: for this reason the capitalistic vampires with insatiate rapacity seek their blood. Besides, female labor procures them cheap mistresses.

Child flesh is the cheapest: what wonder then that the cannibals of modern society continually feast upon juvenile victims? What care they that the poor little ones are thereby bodily crippled and mentally ruined for life — that thousands of them, miserable and worn out at a tender age, sink into their graves? Stocks rise; that suffices.

As the bourgeoisie, by means of its capital, completely monopolize all new inventions, every new machine, instead of shortening the hours of labor and enhancing the prosperity and happiness of ALL, causes on the contrary, dismissal from employment for some, reduction of wages for others, and an increased and intensified state of misery for the entire proletariat.

When increase of production is accompanied by an augmented pauperization of the masses, consumption must simultaneously decrease and stagnation and crises must ensue. A superabundance of actual wealth in the hands of the few must create hunger, typhus, and other epidemics among the many. The injustice — yea the idiocy — of this state of affairs is evident. The money-bags of course merely shrug their shoulders.

Man at last can enjoy life. The "BEAST OF PROPERTY" is no more!!!

This they will continue to do until a rope well tied over their shoulders will end all further shrugging.

The worker is not only fleeced in manifold ways as producer, but also as consumer. Numberless parasites seek to despoil him of his paltry income.

After products have passed through various exchanges and storage stages, and their prices have been raised by jobbers and brokers' profits, by taxes and custom house duties, they finally reach the retailers, whose customers are almost exclusively the proletarians. The wholesalers "make" (that is, fraudulently obtain) perhaps 10 to 20 per cent profit by their transactions; the retailer is dissatisfied with less than 100 per cent. He makes use of all sorts of tricks for securing this result, especially the most shameless adulteration of food. In close relationship to these swindlers are the numberless poisoners and adulterators of beer, liquors, wine, etc., who render the streets in all our great cities, and industrial centers unsafe with their nefarious traffic. Then there are the tenement-lords, who ceaselessly seek means to embitter the existence of the poor. The condition of the rooms become [sic] steadily worse, the rents higher, and the contracts more galling. The workers are crowded together more and more into rear houses, attics and cellar-holes, full of vermin, and musty. Prison cells are frequently far healthier than these pest-holes.

When the worker is out of employment, he is again at the mercy of hordes of speculators in hunger, who are ready to pounce upon him order to complete his ruin. Pawnbrokers and others of similar ilk advance small sums at high interest on the last possessions of the poor. Their contracts are usually so arranged that they can hardly be kept; the pawned objects [are] forfeited and the poor wretch takes another downward step. The cut-throats, however, amass fortunes in a short time. The beggar is looked upon as quite a well-paying figure by certain sharks. Every copper which he has gathered in is unenviable way arouses the covetousness of the keeper of dirty holes and

vile dens. Even thieves are subject to this capitalistic spoliation. They are the slaves of crafty concealers and “fences,” who receive their stolen goods for a song. Yes even those unfortunate women, whom the present accursed system has driven to prostitution, are shamelessly plundered by keepers of brothels and houses of ill-fame.

This is the lot of the poor from the cradle to the grave. Whether he produces or consumes, whether he exists or merely vegetates, he is always surrounded of (sic) ravenous vampires who thirst for his last drop of blood. On the other hand, the rich man never stops his work of exploiting, though he may be utterly unable to assign a reason for his greed, He that has \$1,000,000 would have \$10,000,000; he that has \$100,000,000 would have \$1,000,000,000.

The greed for wealth is closely associated with the greed for power. Wealth is not only a generator of more wealth, it is also a political power. Under the present capitalistic system venality is an all-pervading vice. It is as a rule a mere matter of price which will buy over who may be of service either by speech or silence, by the pen or by the press, by acts of violence or any other means, to the “beast of property,” which by its golden dictates is the absolute, almighty divinity.

In Europe and America there are several hundred thousand priests and ministers, specially provided for to poison the common sense of the masses. Numberless missionaries wander from house to house spreading senseless tracts, or commit other “spiritual” mischief. In the schools strenuous attempts are made to nullify what little good the training in reading, writing, and ciphering may bring with it. Idiotic maltreatment of “history” excites that blatant prejudice which divides people, prevents them from recognizing the fact, that their oppressors have so leagued together against them, and that all politics, past and present, has the only object in view, that of firmly establishing the power of the rulers, and thereby ensuing (sic) the exploitation of the poor by the rich.

as he may desire. The sum total of necessities and comforts demanded, regulates the quantity of production.

The time of labor for the individual is limited to a few hours a day, because all those able to work, regardless of sex, take part in production, because useless, injurious, or similar work will not be done, and because technical, chemical, and other auxiliary means of production are highly developed and universally applied. By far the greater part of the day can be spent in the enjoyment of life.

The highest gratification will be found in freely chosen intellectual employment. Some spend their leisure time in the service of their fellow-men, and are busy for the common weal. Others can be found in the libraries, where they apply themselves to literary pursuits, or to gathering the material for educational lectures, or simply for private studies. Others again hasten to the lyceums, open to all, and there hear science. Academies of painting, sculpture, music, etc., offer chances of education for such as follow the fine arts.

Friends of childhood, especially those of the female sex, center about the places of education, where, under the direction of the real mentors of youth, they aid in the rearing and culture of the growing generation.

Teaching will be done only in well ventilated, light rooms, and during fair weather in the open air. And in order to secure the equal development of mind and body, merry play, gymnastics, and work will alternate with the close application of the mind.

Theaters and concert halls will offer free seats to all.

Forced or procured marriages are unknown; mankind has returned to the natural state and love rules unconstrained.

Vice and crime have disappeared with their original causes, private property and general misery.

Diseases to a great extent cease to appear because bad lodging, murderous workshops, impure food and drink, over-exertion, have become things unknown.

wise energetically espouse a reorganization of society, because it appears difficult and arduous to them, need not be of such enervating nature. And now let us take a look at the ideal of our aspirations.

Free society consists of autonomous, i.e., independent Communes. A network of federations, the result of freely made social contracts, and not of authoritative government or guardianship, surrounds them all. Common affairs are attended to in accordance with free deliberation and judgement by the interested Communes or associations. The people, without distinction of sex, meet frequently in parks or suitable halls, not indeed, to make laws or to bind their own hands, but in order to decide from case to case in all matters touching Public affairs, or for appointing individuals to execute their resolves, and hear their reports.

The exterior appearance of these Communes will be entirely different from that of the present cities and villages. Narrow streets have vanished, tenement prisons are torn down, and spacious, well-fitted palaces surrounded by gardens and parks, erected in their places, giving accommodation to larger or smaller associations brought together by identical interests, increasing comforts to a degree which no individual or family arrangement could reach.

In the country the people will be more concentrated. One agricultural commune with city conveniences will take the place of several villages. The uniting farms hitherto separated, the general application and constant improvement of agricultural implements and chemical fertilizers, the growing perfection of the means of communication and transportation, etc., have simplified this process of concentration. The former contrast between city and country disappears, and the principle of equality gains one of its most important triumphs.

Private property exists no more. All wealth belongs to the people or the communal leagues. Everybody, whether able to work or not can obtain from them such articles of necessity

The hawking trade in “loyalty and other intoxicants” is attended to by the inklingers of the daily press, numerous literary perverters of history, by political heelers of the various predominating cliques, rings, combinations and organizations, by parliamentary windbags with seductive smiles, pledges on their lips and treason in their hearts, and hundreds of other politicians of all degrees and shades of villainy.

Whole squads of bushwhackers are specially employed in mystifying the social question. The professors of political economy for instance, play the part of lackeys to the bourgeoisie, extolling the golden calf as the true sun of life, and using falsehood and knavery so “scientifically,” that they make the tanning of workingmen’s hides appear as a benefaction to mankind. Some of those charlatans recommend social reform, or in other words, processes, based on the maxim of washing without wetting; not to mention their celebrated recipes for economizing and educating.

While thus bamboozling the masses the capitalistic knights of plunder continue to perfect their mechanism of power. New offices are created. High positions in these are filled in Europe by the progeny of the former highwaymen (now a “nobleman”) in America by the most crafty office hunters and the most wily thieves, who combine with their original purpose of authoritatively gagging the proletariat, the very pleasant business of till-tapping and forgery on a grand scale. They command armies of soldiers, gendarmes, policemen, spies, judges, prison-keepers, tax collectors, executors, etc., etc. The lower class of the bearded are almost wholly recruited from the ranks of the non-possessors, and are only exceptionally [rarely] better paid. For all that, they display great zeal as spies, eaves-droppers, and poke-noses, as claws, and suckers of the state, which institution is evidently no more nor less than the political organization of a horde of swindlers spoliators, who without the tyrannizing machinery could not exist for one day before the just wrath and condemnation of the oppressed people.

In most of the old countries this system has naturally reached its point of culmination in the outer form. The entire disciplinary apparatus of the state concentrates in a monarchic power. Its representatives “by the grace of God” are, in accordance, the very quintessence of villainy. In them all vice and crime common to the ruling classes is developed to a monstrous degree. Their most agreeable occupation is a wholly murder (war); when they rob, and they do it often, they always rob entire countries and hundreds, even, thousands of millions. Incendiarism on a colossal scale serves to illuminate their atrocities. They adhere to the notion, that mankind exists for them to kick, cuff, and spit upon. At the best, they make it worth their while to select the most attractive women and girls from among their “subjects” to satiate their beastly lusts. The others have the right to “most obediently” die like dogs.

By direct blackmail these crowned murderers of Europe annually pocket \$50,000,000. Militarism, their pet progeny, annually costs \$1,000,000, not taking in consideration the loss of life and labor. An equal sum is paid as interest on \$20,000,000,000 of state-debts, which scoundrels have incurred in a comparatively short time. Monarchism in Europe then cost annually \$2,050,000 000 that is to say, more than 10,000,000 of workers, the supporters of 50,000,000 of people, earn as wages in the same time. In America the place of the monarchs is filled by the monopolists. Should monopolism in the alleged “free” United States of America develop at the rate it has in the last quarter of a century, there will remain free from monopolization only daylight and air, Five hundred million acres of land in the United States, about six times the area of great Britain and Ireland, have been divided within a generation by the railroad companies and the great landlords of Europeo-aristocratic origin. Within a few decades Vanderbilt alone amassed \$200,000,000; several dozen of his competitors in robbery bid fair to outdo him.

or who have inadequate or unhealthy quarters; after the great purification there will be no want for desirable homes.

Until everyone can obtain suitable employment, the Commune will guarantee to all the necessities of life. Committees on supplies will regulate the distribution of confiscated goods. Should there be a lack of anything, which might be the case in respect to articles of food, these must be obtained by proper agents. Taking such things from neighboring great estates by armed columns of foragers would be a most expeditious way of furnishing them.

The preparation of provisions will be done effectively by communal associations of workmen, organized for that purpose.

The immediate organization of the workers according to the different branches of trade, and of placing at their disposal the factories, machines, raw materials, etc., etc., for co-operative production, will form the basis of the new society. The Commune will — at least for the present — be supposed to mediate and regulate consumption. It, therefore, enters into contracts with individual workers associations, makes periodical advances to them, which may consist in drafts upon the communal wares collected and stored, and thereby give the death stroke to the old monetary system.

Good schools, kindergartens, and other institutions for education must be founded without delay. The education of adults, which then will then be possible, must not be neglected or postponed. Truth and knowledge will be taught in all churches, where no priestly cant will be tolerated. All printing presses must be put in operation to produce books, papers and pamphlets of educational value by the million, to be distributed everywhere, particularly in regions not yet liberated from thrall-dom. All law books, court and police records, registers of mortgages, deeds, bonds, and all so-called “valuable documents” must be burned. These indications only serve to show that the period of transition, which generally dismays those who other-

Therefore organize and enlarge everywhere the Socialistic revolutionary party before it be too late! The victory of the people over its tyrants and vampires will then be certain. Instead of here developing a “programme” it is, under present conditions, of far greater importance to sketch what the proletariat must probably do immediately after the victorious battle to maintain supremacy.

Most likely the following must be done: In every local community where the people have gained a victory, revolutionary committees will be constituted. These execute the decrees of the revolutionary army, which, reinforced by the armed workmen, now rule like a new conqueror of the world.

The former (present) system will be abolished in the most rapid and thorough manner, if its supports — the “beasts of property” and horde of adherents — are annihilated. The case standing thus: If the people do not crush them, they will crush the people, drown the revolution in the blood of the best, and rivet the chains of slavery more firmly than ever. Kill or be killed is the alternative. Therefore massacres of the people’s enemies must be instituted. All free communities enter into an offensive and defensive alliance during the continuance of the combat. The revolutionary communes must incite rebellion in the adjacent districts. The war can not terminate until the enemy (the “beast of property”) has been pursued to its last lurking place and totally destroyed.

In order to proceed thoroughly in the economic sense, all lands and so-called real estate, with everything upon it, as well as all movable capital will be declared the property of the respective communes. Until the thorough harmonious reorganization of society can be effected, the proclamation of the following principles and measures might render satisfaction.

Every pending debt is liquidated. Objects of personal uses which were pawned or mortgaged will be returned free. No rents will be paid. District committees on habitation, which will sit in permanence, allot shelter to those who are homeless

San Francisco was settled hardly thirty years ago, to-day it harbors eighty-five millionaires! All the wealth of this great republic, although established but a century, its mines, its coal-fields, its oil wells, etc., etc. has been “taken” from the people and are the property of a handful of daring adventurers and cunning schemers.

The “sovereignty of the people” falls prostrate into the dust before the influence of these money kings, railroad magnates, coal barons and factory lords. These fellows carry the whole United States in their pockets, and that which is vaunted as untrammelled legislation and free legislation is a farce, a delusion and a snare.

If this be the condition of the green wood, what may we not expect of the decayed timber? If this young American republic, with its nearly boundless territory and its almost inexhaustible [sic] natural resources has been so fatally corrupted and ruined in such a short time by the capitalistic system — why be surprised at the results of long continued abuses of similar nature in servile, rotten Europe? Indeed it seems as though this young American republic had for the present but one historical mission, of demonstrating beyond controversy to the people on this side of the Atlantic as to those on the other by the presentation of bare, tangible facts what an outrageous monster the “beast of property” really is, and that neither the condition of the soil, the vastness of domain, nor the political forms of society can ever alter the viciousness of this beast of prey; but to the contrary, it proves, that the less a necessity naturally exists for individual greed and rapacity, the more dangerous to, and obtrusive upon society it becomes. It is not voracious to satisfy its wants — it devours for the sake of devouring only!

Let those who labor to live understand, that this monster cannot be tamed, nor be made harmless or useful to man; let them learn to know, that there is but one means of safety: unrelenting, pitiless, thorough, war of extermination! Gentle overtures are for naught; scorn and derision will be the result, if by peti-

tions, elections, and like silly attempts the proletariat hopes to command the respect of its sworn enemies.

Some say, general education will bring about a change; but this advice is as a rule an idle phrase. Education of the people will only then be possible, when the obstructions thereto have been removed. And that will not take place until the entire present system has been destroyed.

But let it not be understood that nothing could or should be done by education. Far from it. Whoever has recognized the villainy of the present conditions, is in duty bound to raise his voice, in order to expose them, and thereby open the eyes of the people. Only avoid to reach this result by super-scientific reflections. Let us leave this to those well meaning scientists, who in this manner tear the mask of humanity from the “better class” and disclose the hideous countenance of the beast of prey. The language of and to the proletariat must be clear and forcible.

Whoever thus uses speech will be accused of inciting disturbance by the governing rabble; he will be bitterly hated and persecuted. This shows that the only possible and practical enlightenment must be of an inciting nature. Then let us incite!

Let us show the people how it is swindled out of its labor force by country and city capitalists, how it is euchered out of its meagre wages by the store, house, and other lords; how priests of pulpit, press, and party seek to destroy its intellect; how a brutal police is ever ready to maltreat and tyrannize it, and with a soldiery to spill its blood. Patience at last must forsake it! The people will rebel and crush its foes! The revolution of the proletariat — the war of the poor against the rich, is the only way from oppression to deliverance!

But, some interpose, revolutions can not be made! Certainly not, but they can be prepared for by directing the people’s attention to the fact that such events are imminent [sic], and calling upon them to be ready for all emergencies.

Capitalistic development, of which many theorists assert that it must proceed to the total extinction of the middle class, (small bourgeoisie), before the conditions favorable to a social revolution are at hand, has reached such a point of perfection, that its farther progress is almost impossible. Universal production (in civilized countries) can only be carried on, industrially as well as agriculturally, on a grand scale, when society is organized on a Communistic basis, and when (which will then be a truism) the reduction of the hours of labor keeps pace with the development of technical facilities, and augmented consumption with production.

This is easily comprehended. By wholesale production from 100 times more may be produced than the producers need in goods of equivalent value, and there lies the rub. Until lately, this surplus value has been but little noticed, because by far the greater portion of this so-called profit has been in turn capitalized, that is, used for new capitalistic enterprises, and because the industrially most advanced countries (the “beast of property” in those countries) export enormous quantities of merchandise. Now, however, the thing is beginning to weaken mightily. Industrialism has made great progress the world over, balancing exports and imports more and more, and for that reason new investments of capital becomes less profitable, and must, under such circumstances, soon prove entirely unremunerative. Universal crises must ensue and will expose these glaring incongruities.

Everything therefore is ripe for Communism; it is only necessary to remove its interested inveterate enemies, the capitalists and their abettors. During these crises the people will become sufficiently prepared for the struggle. Everything will then depend on the presence of a well trained revolutionary nucleus at all points, which is fit and able to crystalize around itself the masses of the people, driven to rebellion by misery and want of work, and which can then apply the mighty forces so formed to the destruction of all existing hostile institutions.