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Why I Am a Communist

Johann Most

February 20, 1892

One of the principal features of the development of modern industrial production is the ever-increasing organization of the laboring force and of the means of production. The result is that with less “hands” a continually growing amount of commodities is being produced. From this last it might be concluded that man should be thus enabled to satisfy all his intellectual and physical wants with a decreasing exertion of his physical powers. Yet, no such result is apparent. On the contrary, all progress in the direction of facilitating the process of production has the effect of reducing the number of laborers employed, and of challenging those who are out of employment to increase the intensity with which they compete among themselves; and, consequently, the amount of compensation of which the producer is being deprived by the machinery of capitalism is growing continuously, with a tendency of being reduced to a minimal rate, representing that standard which is unavoidably necessary to procure those scanty commodities without which human being would be actually starved. Thus a state of affairs is characterized in which gigantic wealth is amassed in the hands of a continually centralizing and decreasing number of capitalists, while, in the opposite proportion the masses of the people

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are being pauperized. Such a condition is unbearable for any length of time, much more so as it is becoming more aggravating with its growth, and in this way it creates a formidable opposition.

This disproportion has not been caused by any accident, but it is the natural consequence of the institution of private property.

It has, from its inception, made the poor dependent upon the rich. But, dependence means the opposite of freedom, known as slavery, serfdom, and wage-system, of which the latter is the most unbearable, because it is an outgrowth not of a lack of commodities, but of an ever-increasing superabundance of wealth, making our present civilization a questionable institution in itself.

The absurdity of such a course of events will soon be apparent when we are confronted by a situation under which there are a small number of gigantic owners whose commodities cannot be purchased to any great extent, because the purchasing power of the masses has been impaired, and those engaged in the process of production, who live from hand to mouth, and finally a mass of people willing and able to work, but unable to sell their labor, and existing as the mere dregs of society. In other words, we are approaching a time when society will, not from want, but in consequence of superabundance, be so very miserable as to become bankrupt intellectually, morally and in every other way. At that moment the question, "What's to be done?" will not only be asked, but those asking it will demand that it be properly answered. Mankind must, as the race will not tolerate its own destruction, look out for a new system to be carried into effect at once. And that new system cannot consist in giving up the substantial achievements already accomplished, but simply in their application for the general welfare. There will be no retrogression nor falling back upon the unorganized individual mode of production; on the other hand, the means of production now used by organized labor, but held by private owners who wield them for the purpose of despoiling the laboring masses, will be transferred into the possession of the community. And such a

transfer means nothing short of abolishing private property, and of establishing the collectivism of wealth, of Communism.

Because I see the necessity of such an economic development, decuated from present and past event I am a Communist.

There are some misconceptions attached to the real meaning of Communism. There are some who, more or less, believe it to be some kind of Utopia, while others see in it, at least, an all-fixing machinery of State. And yet, neither the one nor the other is necessarily to be connected with the idea of Communism.

Modern Communists do not think of such Utopias as imagined by all those idealists from Thomas More down to Edward Bellamy; and they do not propose to shape, in advance, the mode of action by the people of future ages. Modern Communism is satisfied with proclaiming its principle of common possession of all wealth, and of the economic philosophical evidence that mankind, if developed in another direction, could not possibly make any progress.

And, as to the State, the scientifically educated Communist does not see what that institution could have to do with Communism.

All scientific research upon the field of history has shown that the State, in all its different forms, as known heretofore, has resulted from the institution of private property, as a means of protecting the same under given conditions. How, then, should anything having for its object the preservation of private property be expected to take under its wings the directly opposite institution of private property? An instrument needed by those whose comfort and luxury are possible only when the masses of the people are oppressed, and despoiled of what they need, cannot be subservient, or even indispensable, to those having emblazoned upon their banner the principle of equality and liberty, a fact that cannot be denied in regard to the contemporaneous Communists.

A society which had been developed intellectually to such a degree as to break the shackles of slavery imposed by the rules of private property and its adhering extremes of wealth and pauperism, and enabled to achieve such an emancipation only by simultane-

ously breaking the yoke of economic and political oppression, cannot come to the conclusion of enslaving itself by the erection of another building of State.

All conceivable objects of mankind can be accomplished by voluntary agreement, not the compulsory mandates of the State, but need, not laws, but the virtues of a complete liberty, born by reason and solidarity, and grown upon the soil of equality, will be the incentives directing all action. And, such a condition also means the absence of all personal rulers, to wit: Anarchism.

Communism, far from being antagonistic to Anarchism, thus forms the necessary foundation of the latter, its everlasting basis.

Without the abolition of private property there is no equality possible and without equality no real independence, while independence is the first condition of liberty, of Anarchism.

The question how to organize the society in the future, therefore, cannot involve whether it shall be Communism or Anarchism; but it is rather evident that these two will have to exist together, in order to prevent the new world from again suffering under the evils degrading the present world.

To avoid such misapprehensions I do not call myself simply a Communistic Anarchism. If you ask me how such an object may be achieved, I freely and openly declare by the Social Revolution. Thereby I do not make an arbitrary proposition, but I only draw my conclusions from the course of history up to the present day, when I declare that such a great social transformation cannot take place without the appearance of violent actions.

I know something of history, and I know that no ruling-class ever gave up peaceably the privilege it had held. I know something of the monopolists and capitalists of this and other countries, and I know the fight that will bring about better conditions will be terrible. Some say those ideas will do for the Old World, where kings and emperors oppress the people, but not for America.

However, I take the official statements, and I find some 2,000 millionaires and 10,000 other capitalists possessing two parts out of

three of the wealth of the United States, i.e., sixty thousand million dollars, the production of all the rest of the people, and I ask: are these millionaires simply lucky? No, they are the representatives of modern tyranny, and the politicians are their tools, and all the rest of the people are slaves, and will remain so until they are ready to free themselves.

The history of America is short. There have been but two principal events. One was when Americans wiped out English domination, the other was the abolition of black slavery. These two things were done, not by voting, not by petition, but by drawing the sword. We now have white wage-slavery, and I hope the third great event of American history will be the abolition of that.