

# Capitalism and Crime

## (May 11, 1912)

Nearly all the crimes that are committed result directly or indirectly from class rule — from one class keeping another in subjection. A great majority of the inmates of our prisons owe their conviction to offenses against property.

The ruling class is the *state* and the state legalizes the institution of private property, without which class rule could not exist.

Under the capitalist system the means of life, essential to all, are the private property of the capitalist class. The working class is a dependent class, a subject class. It is compelled to submit to exploitation and degradation.

The class that owns the property is the class that rules society — the class that writes, enacts, interprets, and enforces the law — in its own interest. The institution of private property, “vested rights,” is sacred to this class and to transgress its property laws is an offense against the state which cannot be too promptly or too seriously punished.

Among the essential institutions of class rule is the jail, the prison. The capitalist system could far better spare its national congress and its state legislatures than its county jails and prisons. Congress and the legislatures consist mainly of and are controlled wholly by representatives of the capitalist class; the jails and prisons are filled by representatives of the working class.

Private property in the means of life enforces exploitation, idleness, poverty, theft, and murder. Under class rule and private property crime graduates steadily from petty larceny to homicide.

The development of private property is followed by a corresponding increase in crime. Hard times multiply crimes!

When men, eager to work, are literally driven to beg, steal, or starve, they are cravens to beg and fools to starve. The man who is denied work and would not steal to keep starvation from his child is unfit to have a child. Such a man has the right to help himself in any way he can after society has shut him out of the right to get an honest living.

Private property builds the public prison — and peoples it.

Capitalism and crime go hand in hand.

Capitalists are beginning to ask, “What shall we do to be saved?” The criminals capitalism has created are beginning to threaten its life.

The largest penitentiaries are still inadequate. Taxes are increasing appallingly. Every city is infested with pickpockets, thieves, burglars, confidence men — all preying on society. They aim to steal, they are prepared to kill. They have nothing to lose and a job to gain. The capitalist state refuses them honest employment, but guarantees them a steady job if they will steal or murder.

Most of the efforts to inform criminals and put an end to crime are wasted. Society as now organized is an effectual bar against both. There is but one way to end crime and that is to abolish class rule and give all men an equal chance to make an honest living. Modern machinery has made this an easy matter. No man need to work more than is good for him — and no normal man will willingly work less.

My heart is with the criminals — all of them. It matters not what they are charged with, they are at least human and no man is more. In a great majority of cases they are the poor, the friendless and homeless, the victims of circumstances they did not create and could not control. I have been close to them and I know them, and I can avouch that if they lived under an honest system and in a decent society they would be honest and decent men and women instead of pariahs and criminals.

These unfortunate victims of class rule become morally diseased. Their moral perceptions are dulled if not destroyed. They deserve a thousand pities. Society should do most for them because it has done most against them and they have suffered most.

Above all, these unfortunate brothers and sisters of ours — mostly of our own despised lower class — ought to be treated with patience and kindness. That is the very least consideration the society that is responsible for them can show its hapless derelicts and if this be denied them then indeed must the ruling class atone for their downfall with its own callous degeneracy. Until society is prepared to open its doors to these despised outcasts and give them a chance to live it is wasting its time trying to reform them.

If I could have my way I am sure that most of them would be reclaimed. All they require is humane treatment. The crimes they committed against society are infinitesimal in comparison with the crimes society has committed against them, and the society of the future — when human beings are civilized — will atone in every way in its power for heartlessly inflicting upon so-called criminals the penalties of its own monstrous crimes.

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