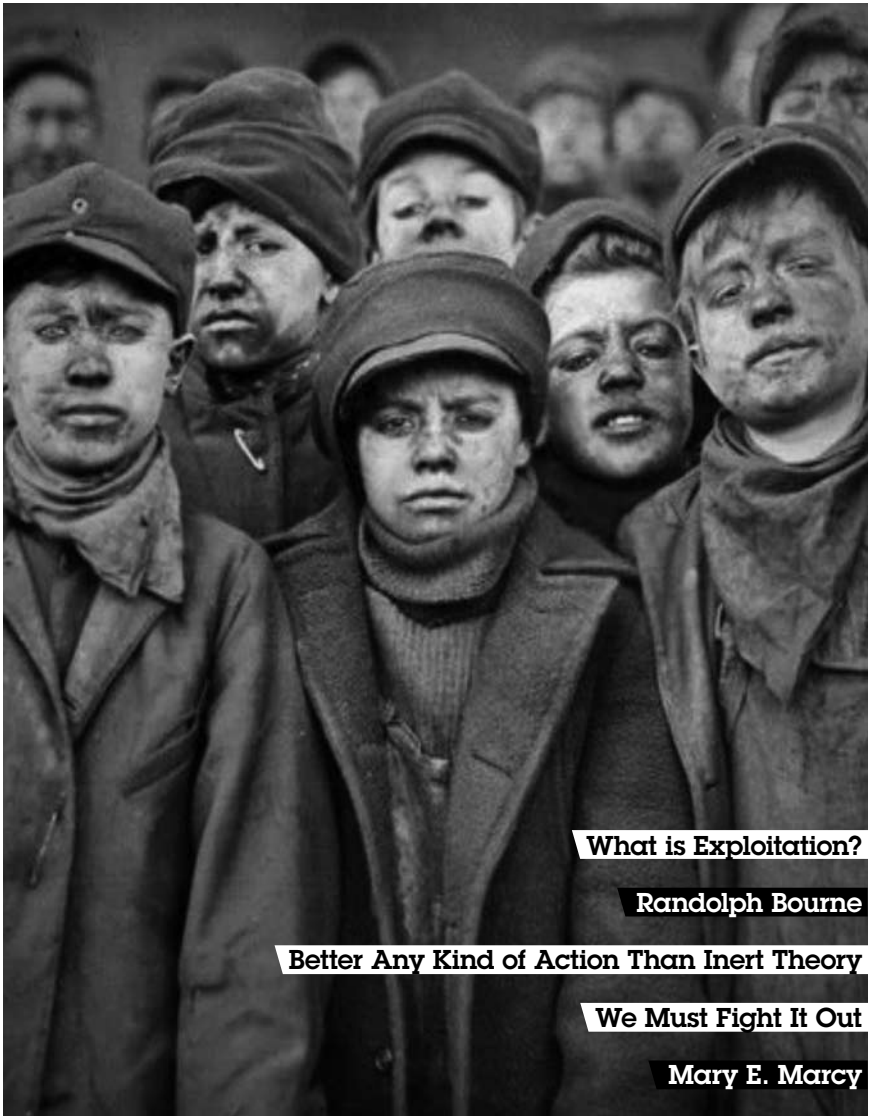


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What is Exploitation?

Randolph Bourne

Better Any Kind of Action Than Inert Theory

We Must Fight It Out

Mary E. Marcy

Radical Reprints

The State



Randolph Bourne

*"War is the health of the State and
it is during war that one best
understands the nature of that
institution..."*

The State by Randolph Bourne

The last and best-known work of the radical essayist *Randolph Bourne (1886-1918)*. Written during the last days of his life and published posthumously in 1918, this anti-state classic examines the mass psychology of war, and the role of war in the growth of State power and the manufacture of political identity — expressed most famously in Bourne's aphorism, *War is the health of the State!*

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What is Exploitation?

My western friend who runs a prosperous stove-factory has been finding fault with my insistent use of the word “exploitation.” My outlook on life is not sufficiently cheerful, and I am inclined to see malevolence where everything is, as they say at college, healthy, hearty, and happy. Our quarrel rose over the Mesaba strike, and my acceptance of an I.W.W. pamphlet as a plausible account of what was going on there. The accounts of the insecurity of pay, the petty robberies, the reeking houses, the bigoted opposition to labor organization, seemed to me to smell of truth, because I had read the maddening tales of Colorado and West Virginia, and seen with my own eyes in Scranton and Gary and Pittsburgh the way workers live, not in crises of industrial war but in brimming times of peace.

My friend, however, is more robust. He would make no such hasty impassioned judgments. He would judge nothing without “going to the mines, working in them for a year or two, being one of the men, getting their free confidence, then working for a couple of years as a confidential auditor for the company.” Such Olympian judiciality fills me with envy and dismay. I feel that his serenity is the normal mood of healthy activity, facing the modern world. Could he find anything but scorn for those of us who go around with the vestiges of what it is now priggish to call a “social conscience?” To him an industrial strike is like an exciting political contest or the recriminations between “two kid baseball teams.” Both sides, he says, “squawk a good deal about the raw stuff the other side is trying to pull off,” but deep down, his experience convinces him, “they are very uniformly a pretty human bunch.” He hasn’t been to Mesaba, but his friend the Duluth bread-dealer assures him that agitators were the cause of all the trouble. They always are. Trouble, to my friend, is a personal matter. He sees individuals, laboring as happily as they can expect to labor on this far from perfumed earth. He sees their contentment disturbed by “outsiders,” individuals, bitter envious mischievous men who make a business of setting workmen against their employers. He sees the “outsiders” deluding, persuading, intimidating honest workers into stopping work and engaging in careers of lawlessness. He sees the individual employer in natural self-defense fighting for his rights, defending his property, ousting the agitators, carrying the war into his laborer’s camp. From the busy office of his stove-factory, it all looks like a personal quarrel between free and equal individuals. When the state interferes with its militia and its injunctions, it is not flouting individuality, but merely doing its business of maintaining order and defending private property.

Our argument really hinges on whether to the workman all the excitement and deprivation and delusion is not part of the daily business of living.

Our argument really hinges on whether to the workman all the excitement and deprivation and delusion is not part of the daily business of living. I am too tender-minded. What is at the back of my confused hints that there is “something shameful, something consciously brutal” about industrial relations? My friend admits that he has in his shop men who work in places that are noisy and dusty, in hot places, in rooms where paint is being sprayed. He is sorry. He wishes these things did not have to be, and he is remedying them as fast as he can. What he will not admit is that any one is “specifically to blame.” He does not imprison his men. They come freely to him and ask for employment. He “gives them such compensation as makes the jobs attractive to them, in competition with all other jobs in city and country.” He is fair and scrupulous. His company is in business to produce goods at such cost that people can afford to buy them. He cannot make his plant a sanatorium — and when he says this the faintest note of irony steals into his robust voice — for his wage-earners. The stockholders have built a factory and not a philanthropic institution. If the workers did not like his factory, would they send for their brothers and cousins from the old country across the sea? If these “hunkies” in stove-factory and iron mine were being “exploited,” would they not drift speedily away to jobs where they were content? My friend cannot imagine a man being willingly exploited. There are, no doubt, heartless employers; workmen here and there are perhaps subject to oppression. But systematic, prevalent industrial exploitation — and he has worked in all parts of the country and at every level of skill — my stove-factory friend has never seen. And he turns aside from my abstract philosophy to the daily manipulation of stoves and men.

What then do I mean by exploitation? And I have to remind my friend that my very first industrial experience was one of those rudimentary patterns of life which, if they are imprinted on your mind early enough, remain to fix the terms in which you interpret the world. The experience was leaving school to work for a musician who had an ingenious little machine on which he cut perforated music-rolls for the players which were just then becoming popular. His control of the means of production consisted in having the machine in his house, to which I went every morning at eight and stayed till five. He provided the paper and the music and the electric power. I worked as a wage-earner, serving his skill and enterprise. I was on piece-work, and everything suggested to my youthful self that it depended only upon my skill and industry how prosperous I should become. But what startled me was my employer’s lack of care to conceal from me the fact that for every foot of paper which I made he received fifteen cents from the manufacturer with whom he had his contract. He paid me five, and while I worked, spent his time composing symphonies in the next room. As long as I was learning the craft, I had no more feeling about our relation than that there was a vague injustice in the air. But when I began to be dangerously clever and my weekly earnings mounted beyond the sum proper for a young person of eighteen who was living at home, I felt the hand of economic power. My piece-rate

was reduced to four and a half cents. My innocence blazed forth in rebellion. If I was worth five cents a foot while I was learning, I was worth more, not less, after I had learned. My master folded his arms. I did not have to work for him. There were neighbors who would. I could stay or go. I was perfectly free. And then fear smote me. This was my only skill, and my timorous inexperience filled the outside world with horrors. I returned cravenly to my bench, and when my employer, flushed with his capitalistic ardor, built another machine and looked about for a young musician to work it, I weakly suggested to an old playmate of mine that he apply for the position.

Enlarge my musician into the employing class of owners and managers and shareholders of factory and mine and railroad, and myself into the class of wage-earners in all these enterprises, and you have the picture of the industrial system which the I.W.W. agitator has in his mind when he writes the Mesaba pamphlet to which my friend took such exception. With my five cents making that huge differential of profit for my employer, and with my

four and a half cents giving his enterprise a productiveness which, if he had incorporated himself, he could have turned into additional capitalization, I was a crude symbol of the industrial system as my mind gradually took in the fact that there was an industrial system. This was my first experience in "exploitation." If there had been fewer musicians available I should have gotten more pay, and if there had been more

available I should probably have gotten even less. But there would always have been a surplus, and I should have always felt the power of my employer to skim it, to pull it towards himself. As long as I continued at work, nothing could have removed my sense of helplessness. Any struggle I might have made would have been only towards weakening his pull, and lessening the amount he was able to skim. He was not robbing me, and no person of sense would have said he was, but our very relation was an exploitation. There was no medium way between exploitation and philanthropy.

My stove-factory friend, however, will have none of this theory. If it is a question of power, he says, then Mike Solomon exploits the stove company when he is able to get three dollars a day, on account of the present demand for labor, when two dollars was wealth to him a year ago. Then I admit that local groups of workers are able — either through lack of competition

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or clever politics or display of force — to exercise temporarily a decisive pull on the surplus and divert more of it to themselves. It is all a question of power. But as long, I tell him, as the employer is entrenched in property rights with the armed state behind him, the power will be his, and the class that does the diverting will not be labor. My friend, however, does not like these Nietzschean terms. He is sure that his workmen have just as much power to exploit him as he has of exploiting them. This is where we differ, and this is why thought will buzz in an angry murky haze over eight-hour bills and individual contracts and collective bargaining as long as millions agree with him. He trusts rights, I trust power. He recognizes only individuals, I recognize classes.

That is why I can never make him understand what I mean by “exploitation.” He thinks of it as something personally brutal. He does not see it inherent in a system, for which no one is “specifically to blame” only because all are equally guilty of short vision and flimsy analysis. And yet as I read his letters and clippings, I wonder if he is not the realist and I the mystic. He punctures my phrases of power and class with a coarse satisfied hunk to whom work and disease and riot are all in the day’s work and who would despise the philosophy which I am so anxiously waving at him. It seems a long way from my dainty music-bench to the iron range, or the stove-factory. One has to feel exploitation perhaps before one understands it. I console myself with the thought that power is itself mystic, and that my friend will have to get hit with some invisible threat of class-force, as some of his frightened friends are now getting hit, before he will analyze any deeper that industrial system of which he is so efficient and loyal an officer.

By Randolph Bourne

Randolph Bourne (1886-1918) was an essayist who frequently wrote for “progressive” and radical journals, such as The New Republic, the Atlantic Monthly, The Masses, and The Seven Arts. Today he is best known for his unflinching criticism of World War I, and of his former “progressive”



colleagues who supported the war. After the United States government entered the war, his anti-war articles were blackballed by several of his former “progressive” publishers and Bourne was forced to eke out a living by publishing in small radical and literary journals. He began work on wartime essays such as “A War Diary,” “War and the Intellectuals,” and “The State,” which examined the political function of war in the growth of State power and the pro-war enthusiasm of “progressive” intellectuals who had formerly professed peace principles.

Better Any Kind of Action Than Inert Theory

When the war in Europe first broke out, some of us believed that it was only some overwhelming elemental instinct that could cause men to leave the security of their homes to face death and disease at the front. We attributed their swift advances to the hunting instinct or to social stampede, or to mob psychology. We could not believe that anything short of primal instinct or “original tendency” could so sweep men off their feet and carry them into the horrors of war.

But, as a matter of fact, we find that the women were not caught in the whirl and borne to the front, and instinct is not a respecter of persons. The girl baby inherits the hunting and fighting tendencies of her father as does the boy. On what basis would we explain the fact that the primitive emotion passes her by and infects the male only?

At the very onset we find that acquired habits played a very important role in the conduct of the people of the people of Europe. The women refrained from going to war because it was their *habit* or custom to abstain from war.

And when we look closely we find almost an utter lack of enthusiasm, an amazing lack of emotion among the soldiers. They went toward France like men going to work in a factory; they discharged their guns like “hands” running a machine in a steel mill.

All the movements for improving the condition of the working class, all movements for the emancipation of the proletariat are based on the premise that the human animal seeks pleasure and avoids pain. He *has* sought pleasure and avoided pain, or he would not have lived to reproduce himself.

When we realize how persistently and under what adverse circumstances men cling to life at normal times, one would imagine that only universal and fundamental causes could force them to go to war.

It is doubtless true that few men expect to be killed when they are mobilized. Every soldier believes in the invincibility of the army of which he forms a part. But when hundreds of thousands of soldiers are suffering the hardships of cold, hunger, wounds and death in the trenches, human instinct, or the “original tendencies of man” would lead us to expect them to right-about-face and homeward march.

Perhaps most of the readers of the *Review* agree with Dr. Jacques Loeb that men are unwilling to sacrifice their lives for an *idea*, the histories of the lofty (?) claims of the men themselves notwithstanding. It is incomprehensible to us that men should die for patriotism or justice or religion or any other abstract *idea*.

To us it seems that it has been an *acquired* characteristics - namely the

**Discipline and
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inaction on the part
of the working class**

habit of taking orders, of obedience, imposed by discipline - that has sent 5,000,000 Germans to the battle front; the *habit* of mental inhibition - inactivity. The same may hold good of Russia and Belgium and France to a large extent.

In other words, it would seem that *habit*, engendered by discipline, is the cause of the war becoming a *fact*. Without this habit of mental inertia, of doing what one is told to do, of following a leader, of obeying a command, the desires of the capitalist class for new conquests would have remained fruitless.

If we wish to avoid the German result, we must avoid the German *cause*. The German Social Democracy was cut from the same piece of cloth as the German military system and the German government. The rank and file were fostered in party *inaction*, were taught and compelled to trust to the leaders who have drawn them into the pitfalls of war. Party discipline, obedience to majority rule, means obedience to political compromisers. It means the crushing out of all healthful activity not in line with the advancement of political office-seekers.

The workers develop initiative in *action* and initiative renders one and all capable of thinking and acting as real factors in the revolution.

Discipline and leadership mean mental and physical *inaction* on the part of the working class; mean men that lack initiative and may be led astray, that *will* be led astray.

No labor movement is a healthy movement when it has become wholly harmonious. Absolute freedom of expression and activity are necessary to healthy growth. Better a thousand premature or futile strikes every year than a rank and file that moves only in obedience to the word of command from leaders.

The workers develop initiative in *action* and initiative renders one and all capable of thinking and acting as real factors in the revolution.

Down with discipline! And away with *habits* of obedience to both Kaiser and labor leader! Absolutism is as fatal in the labor movement as it is in the scientific world. All that encourages men to break the routine of their lives, every machine that replaces men and women in the factories, everything that jars them loose from the ruts of existence, the wrenches them away from their accustomed grind, is a thought stimulator, a stimulator to action, a blessing in disguise. The *economic jolt* is the greatest of all teachers!

It was not any one *idea* that made the war a fact. it will not be any one *idea* that will free the working class. But rather the common human needs of the worker made acute by the breaking of old-time habits of life and thought. It is this breaking of old ties and old *habits* that create revolutionary *initiative*. The more flux the revolutionary movement is allowed to become (so

long as it retains its distinctly working-class character) the more vital will it become. the oftener every member *functions* in an organization (we do not here refer to the mere paying of dues), the oftener will he *desire* to function or take part. Every movement gains *momentum through action*.

We should encourage rebellious activity on the part of the workers everywhere and at all times. *Activity* always adds to the strength of the movement, brings new workers in to the ranks. We do not learn inaction through activity but how *best* to act in order to win. Action tested in the fires of experience finds the best tactic.

The war itself may prove an aid to the revolutionary movement by destroying old habits of life and thought. When the factory worker finds his job destroyed, his old associates gone, he will evolve new ideas and a new line of conduct in harmony with the new conditions. Torn from his old moorings, he may develop into a real revolutionist, provided he does not again permit himself to

**Every act of rebellion
and revolt will make us
better fighters for the
overthrow of capitalism.**

be drawn in the old hard and fast organization that demands unquestioned obedience from its members. Questioning and rebellion in *any* organization is a sign of life. Unless some one rebelled or disagreed the sons would know even less than their fathers, and progress would mean a word only. Let us greet the rebels, the hotheads, with more patience. The hope of the working class lies in those who are eager to do and dare.

Let us remember that *discipline* and party *obedience* mean *unpreparedness* and inaction and that rebellion means *initiative* to think and to *act*. And above all we must remember that the revolutionary movement gains strength, experience, equipment and *momentum to attack and resist through action alone*.

Better any kind of *action* than *inert theory!*

February 1915

We Must Fight It Out

These last few months have upset many of our old ideas. They have taught us that even we all-wise socialists have much to learn. They have shown us that we cannot count on plastering the Earth with our ideas and looking for the Co-operative Commonwealth the next day. In fact, if we have learned anything, we have come to see that *ideas*, even *right* ideas, are not all it is going to take to make the revolution.

Perhaps some of us are thinking that it is barely possible that we may not be able to *think* the workers out of wage slavery. They thought a long way in France and Germany (apparently), but when they came to cash in their

ideas we find they amounted to very little in plain brass tacks. Their ideas did not prevent them from being led into war. Perhaps our ideas will not prevent us from being dragged, or forced or deceived into war.

But all these jolts and jars and shakings-up are good for us. They are teaching us that we do not know *all* about it. They are preventing the Socialist Parties from becoming *fixed*

institutions. And *fixed* things neither grow nor progress.

And some of us are beginning to suspect that perhaps instead of *thinking* our way out of Poverty, we

Revolt! Revolt again! And again Revolt!

may have to *fight* our way out. If *ideas* alone are not enough to save us, what more do we need? Perhaps it is this very jolting, these shocks and breakings of habit. Perhaps we had to be thrown into the water before we would even *try* to swim.

Evidently the revolution is not going to be easy as some of us prophesied. The capitalist class has not done developing its own supremacy. At least stronger capitalists have not yet thrown out, or fought out, or squeezed out the smaller capitalists of the world. The new monarchs mean to supplant the old ones. The capitalist king is coming to replace the Czar and the Emperor.

And perhaps this further development bears in its accomplishment a constant measure of *aid* to the revolution.

Anyway, study as we may - history, economics, biology - much of our progress is going to be *chance* progress, blind luck discovery that comes from *constant struggle*. The wisest among us have failed in the war in Europe. Sometimes the capitalist way may do *more* for us *than our own way*. I do not know. I only know that we shall never get anywhere on our own initiative unless we revolt, unless we rebel, unless we struggle.

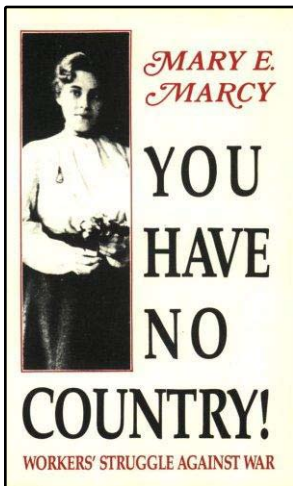
The class war will have to be *fought out*. And every act of rebellion and revolt will make us better fighters for the overthrow of capitalism, fighters with weapons tried and found effective. Revolt! Revolt again! And again Revolt!

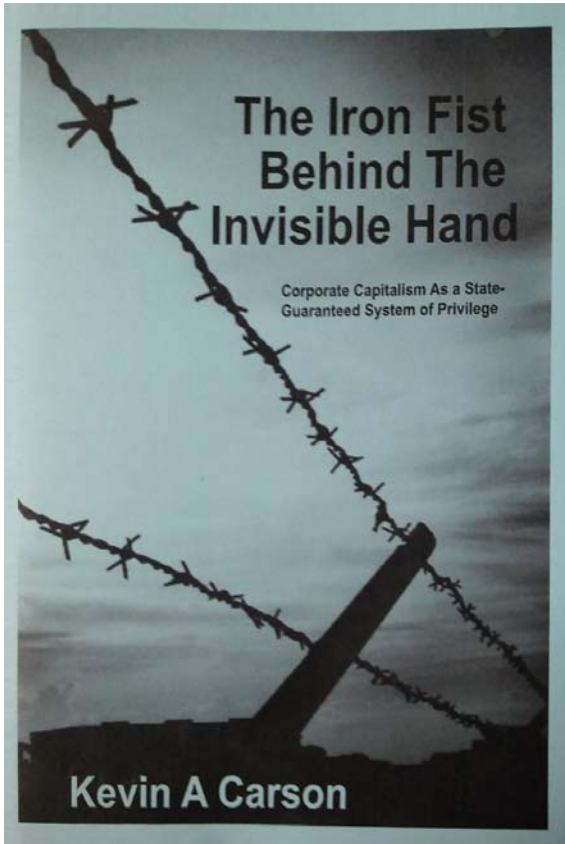
April 1915

By Mary E. Marcy

“One of the clearest minds and greatest souls in all our movement.” — Eugene V. Debs

A leading figure in the Left Wing of the Socialist Party during the First World War, Mary E. Marcy (1877-1922) was managing editor of the International Socialist Review, the most popular and influential revolutionary journal of the period.





The Iron Fist Behind The Invisible Hand

by C4SS writer and researcher Kevin A. Carson

All these forms of slavery together probably amount to half our working hours. If we kept the full value of our labor, we could probably maintain current levels of consumption with a work-week of twenty hours. As Bill Haywood said, “for every man who gets a dollar he didn’t sweat for, someone else sweated to produce a dollar he never received.” — Kevin Carson

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