

ANOTHER CHAPTER ON MONOPOLY

In preceding pages I have analyzed and discussed some leading and typical forms of natural monopoly. It is easily perceived, upon a view of facts, that monopoly is in the order of nature, and that it predominates over all the most fundamental relations of man to the earth on which he lives. It is not a product of civilization, or a result of the capitalistic organization of society, or an invention of the *bourgeoisie*, as is so often asserted. If then any one desires to declaim against it, he must understand that he is at war, not with human institutions, but with facts in the order of the universe.

Civilization is in fact one long struggle against the natural monopolies which have been described, or, more accurately, it is an attempt to set one of them against another. When man domesticated animals, and made of them beasts of draught and burden, he got one of the natural monopolies on his side as an instrument with which to fight against the monopoly of the land; when he discovered fire, he got a natural force on his side which was of immense help to him in contending with all the other limitations of his position. Wind, falling water, steam and electricity are all natural agents which man has learned to subdue to his service in his contests with nature. Therefore, whatever emancipation from the extremest hardships of earthly existence — whatever liberty — man has won, has been won by civilization, and therefore also, at every new stage, the old natural monopolies have persistently reappeared, only in a much

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modified form. At the same time this civilization has cost mankind many inconveniences and it has, in many respects, involved experiences which we do not like. It has subjected us to drill and discipline; the civilized man is disciplined in his feelings, modes of action, the use of his time, his personal relations, and in all his rights and duties. As civilization goes on the necessity grows constantly more imperative that any man who proposes to pass his life in the midst of a civilized society must find a place in its organization and conform to its conditions. At the same time the civilized man, instead of living instinctively, as his ancestors did only a few centuries ago, has become a rationalizing animal. He reflects and deliberates; he makes deductions and generalizations.

For a century at least he has been fed with a literature saturated with tremendous dogmas about the rights of man, liberty, etc., etc. — dogmas which are adequate to furnish a foundation for unlimited political, economic, and social speculation. The facts of the social order do not correspond with the deductions from these great dogmas. Consequently we have a whole literature of denunciation; of social theory to span the gap between the two; of superficial scholarship about primitive property; of sentimental lamentation and aspiration. In all this there is no apparent appreciation of the difference between what is natural law and what is human institution; what is fruitful investigation of facts and what is idle romancing; and the reigning confusion is shown best of all by the way in which the most powerful and legitimate engines of scientific advance are confused with the abuses of generalization and speculation, and all thrown away together, while whims and fads are eagerly seized, if they have only the ethical or statistical varnish. '

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Now a civilized society exists on an artificial level. The domestic animals which we use are not the ones which nature gave us; they have been brought by the labor and ingenuity of man so far away from their original type that we do not always know what the latter was. The grains, fruits, and vegetables which we eat are not any which nature gave us; we have transformed them out of all semblance to their original types. The clothes which we wear were never given to us by nature; between anything given by nature and the shoes, hats, coats, and dresses which we wear, lies a history of thousands of years of labor, experiment, ingenuity, and caprice. Our houses were not given to us by nature; a modern house has a history thousands of years long when we call to mind the steps of invention and experiment, and the thousand converging lines of discovery and invention of details which have gone to make it. So one might go on indefinitely, but it is plain that the whole environment of a civilized man is artificial. He has cut himself off by his clothes, his house, his fuel, his lights, and so on, from the influence of the natural environment — climate, weather, soil, vegetation — and has made a world for himself on a new plane. The price which he has had to pay for this has been persistent labor and constant accumulation of capital; he has to submit to organization; he has to take a place in the social organization and seek his own welfare as a component in the great organized onslaught made by the race on nature to make her yield the comforts of existence. In doing this he has to sacrifice that liberty which consists in doing as he likes. He has been taught that this liberty is his birthright, and that, together with it, he ought to get ease and comfort; but the man who revolts against society and breaks out of the organization, suffers even

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worse penalties now than he did in the lower forms of society, when a nomad horde or a hunting tribe expelled a dissenter. Likewise the real hardships of our social order come when one is thrown out, or falls out, himself innocent, from the organization.

The ancient classical civilization was founded on an enormous consumption of human power: the whole fabric was maintained by the expenditure of slave power underneath, and the weight of it became so great that the slaves could not and would not increase in numbers sufficiently to bear it, while the ruling body lost the power to conquer more nations and bring in new resources of enslaved men. Modern civilization is built upon machines and natural agents, brought into play through machines, that is, through capital. Herein lies the true emancipation of men and the true abolition of slavery. Then come these two questions: (1) can we keep the advantages and comforts of a high civilization, based on capital, while attacking the social institutions by which the creation of capital is secured? (2) are we prepared to give up the comforts of civilization rather than continue to pay the price of them? No one who forms his judgments on a study of facts can answer the first question in the affirmative; no one who is familiar with current thought will say that people are prepared to give an affirmative answer to the second.

Moreover, in the modern civilized community the path of greatest success is that of distinguished service to the organization. This service is highest when it consists in accumulating capital, in perfecting the organization, in new inventions and constructions, and in skilful use of the apparatus. As this goes on we educate, from generation to generation, men who are capable of more and more comprehensive control. At last a few such

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men, at the head of the great combinations which are essential to the support of our social life on its present grade of comfort, are able, by agreement among themselves, to bring in again the form of monopoly which previously existed, but had for a time been interrupted.

Hence we get "trusts" and "pools"; but here also the question is: whether to deal with the evil by pushing on to the next stage in which the progress of invention, or the modifications of process are likely to bring in competition in a manner disastrous to the monopolies, or to seek a remedy which will arrest the industrial forces in their development on which our social well-being depends.

Finally, we must notice that the monopolists who are the commonest, and also the most unpopular, are the man who has, by the accumulation of capital, raised himself above the grossest wants and hardships of life, and the son of such a man. The former has in this way raised himself into a position of superiority to his fellow-beings; he has also guaranteed the latter against the worst hardships of life and given him "a privileged position," as it is sometimes called for the sake of carrying over to it the odium incurred by artificial superiority and immunity. This case, however, brings me to the family as the stronghold of monopoly.