
H.C. Frick and Alexander Berkman

by Eugene V. Debs

Published as "H.C. Frick and Alexander Bergman" in *Locomotive Firemen's Magazine*, vol. 16, no. 9 (Sept. 1892), pp. 779-780. Original has "Bergman" throughout.

Let it be understood in the first place that we abhor the crime of assassination — and regard a man guilty of the crime as a wretch whose depravity defies exaggeration.

Just here we inquire in what consists the difference between H.C. Frick and Alexander Berkman, the would-be assassin? As a matter of course we refer to their moral *make up*.

It is easy to say, Frick is rich in money, while Berkman is poor; that Frick lives in a palace and fares sumptuously, while Berkman is a moneyless tramp; that Frick is a native-born American, a country where it was once declared, "all men are born equal" — while Berkman was born under the rule of the most Christless despotism that now disgraces the earth.

Frick has arrived at a position in which piratically secured millions enable him to associate with cultured men and women, while Berkman, being an exile and poor, has been, by the decrees of fate, required to accept associates quite different. These differences could be indefinitely extended.

Frick is an employer of men, thousands of them, and to a certain extent controls their destiny. He can determine their wages, make their home dark or bright, as he may choose, give them wages by which they may have plenty of food, good dwellings, and proper raiment, or he can so reduce their wages as to prevent them from having such things, make life one long continued struggle against hunger, poverty, squalor, and degradation, while Berkman possesses no such power.

Why proceed further with differences?

In what regards are H.C. Frick and Alexander Berkman similarly constituted? In what respects do the two monsters resemble each other?

To arrive at a just and rational conclusion, we must consider their acts and the motives which prompted them.

H.C. Frick, desiring to gain possession of the Carnegie mills at Homestead, employed a band of 300 Pinkerton assassins. He armed them with the most deadly weapon known to our advanced Christian civilization, the Winchester rifle. Each thug had one of these guns and was provided with a large supply of ball cartridges. Thus armed and equipped, he ordered them to Homestead. Arrived, these thugs proceeded to murder a number of innocent men in the interest of Frick.

It is well to have Frick in this matter painted to life — to see him in all of his surroundings of wealth and power plotting the Pinkerton raid upon Homestead. There is in every movement fiendish depravity, cruelty, and inhumanity that defies characterization. It was savagery and displays the ferocity of his nature, and distinguishes him above all others as a pitiless, bloodthirsty monster.

Such are the human brutes whose acts create assassins in all lands — men who brood over the wrongs inflicted by men in position to exert their power to promote evil in the world and who make the helpless their victims.

They are moral deformities, moral lepers, whose souls are unclean.

Alexander Berkman, the Russian Jew, born where the poor are forever oppressed and forever in the grasp of despotism, thought he saw in Frick a target that he should shoot at — and in doing this he thought he could be of some service to his fellow men. He saw the blood of innocent men on the soul of Frick and concluded to kill him. Had he accomplished his purpose, his own miserable life would have paid the penalty.

In the foregoing we have *Frick* the man responsible for the Homestead murders of workingmen, and Berkman the imported assassin, side by side, and it is possible someone can draw the line and show where there is a preponderance of depravity. If it is found on the side of the outcast Berkman, it will be in order to give the reasons for such a conclusion. But judged by their acts and motives Berkman stands a fair chance of coming out on top.