
More Than a Municipal Campaign: Speech in Haverhill, Massachusetts (November 27, 1899)

Ladies and Gentlemen, Citizens of Haverhill:—

A year ago the name of Haverhill was flashed around the world. On Wednesday next [Dec. 6, 1899] the magnificent victory achieved then will have been ratified by an increased majority.

This is something more than a municipal campaign. There are issues involved that are of vital and commanding interest to every man, woman, and child in Haverhill, in Massachusetts, throughout the length and breadth of the land.

The competitive system, with its extreme wealth upon the one hand, its abject and widespread poverty upon the other, its political corruption, its economic servitude, its social demoralization is on trial. What pen or tongue, from primeval man to the dullest intellect, can describe the effect of this struggle upon the great mass of the working people? Multiplied millions of them answer to the description of the embruted peasant in the poem of Edwin Markham, a poem fraught with such significance that it blazed the immortality of the author on wings of lightning around the world:

Bowed by the weight of centuries he leans
Upon his hoe and gazes on the ground,
The emptiness of ages in his face,
And on his back the burden of the world.
Who made him dead to rapture and despair,
A thing that grieves not and that never hopes.
Stolid and stunned, a brother to the ox?
Who loosened and let down this brutal jaw?
Whose was the hand that slanted back this brow?
Whose breath blew out the light within this brain? ¹

The capitalist system must answer for this appalling indictment at the bar of humanity.

This is the real issue involved in the campaign now in progress in the city of Haverhill, Massachusetts.

It is no part of my purpose this evening to appeal to your prejudice, to incite your passion. In the little time which is my privilege to spend in your presence I propose to address myself to your reason. Were this simply a contest to secure office, I should have no mission here. I realize the far-reaching effect of the result of this campaign. But few of those who live in Haverhill have any proper conception of the effect the result a year ago had upon the country. It was in the nature of an inspiration to the down-trodden and oppressed everywhere. The man with the hoe for the first time stood erect, brushed the dust of servitude from his knees, took hope, looked upward, began to move everywhere, and from that day to this men and women in every village and town of every state and territory in this country have been massing their forces beneath the conquering banner of economic equality.

Since coming here my attention has been called to an attack in the public press upon the local Social Democratic Party because of its alleged hostility to private property. It has declared that the Social Democratic Party is opposed to private property. It is not true. The present system is opposed to private property. Centralization and combination are the conquering forces of this age. Competition must culminate in combination. In manufacture, it is the great factory that is steadily crushing out the smaller establishment. What becomes of the property of the small manufacturer? Is it confiscated in the socialist program? Not at all. The small manufacturer is engaged in a very unequal struggle. He cannot successfully compete against the great corporation or the trust. He begins to lose ground. In due course of time his profits have been completely destroyed. He closes his doors. The sheriff succeeds him in business. His trade has been usurped. His property has been confiscated. At the end of his life, perhaps in the very sunset, he finds himself confronted by the poorhouse. What has become of his property? It is gone. He has absolutely nothing to show for it. Did the socialist get it? Did the socialist attempt to get it? Oh, no; it was his larger competitor of his own class, and the small manufacturer who is supporting the system that is going to force him into bankruptcy and ruin.

In distribution, the great department store is bringing about the same result. In the smaller cities its influence is not yet completely felt. It is on its way to Haverhill. It will be here in due time. It will not be sidetracked. You may rest assured that it will put in its appearance. There will be a

million or two [dollars], or more, at the back of it, and the owners of this great department store can and will sell more cheaply than a smaller dealer can buy. That is the beginning of the end. In a little while he will close his doors. He will cease to be a businessman. What becomes of him? What becomes of his private property? Is it the socialist party that has expropriated him, ruined him, put him on the street and reduced his family to want? Not at all. It is the present system. In this system we are going to become millionaires or mendicants, with chances a million to one that we become mendicants.

The trust is very conspicuous issue in this local campaign. What do you propose to do about the trust? The people as a rule are opposed to the trust. We make the contention that the position of the socialist is the only logical position with reference to the trust. The trust cannot be dissolved. Monopoly cannot be abolished. The trust is the product of the ages. The individual first, in small business, the firm, the company, the corporation, the trust. The trust is simply the latest phase of the development of industry. It represents concentrated capital, the dismissal of every superfluous man, modern machinery, the discharge of the traveling man, and here let me say that the traveling man as a factor in business will soon be a thing of the past. He is about 40 years old now. He will not live to celebrate his 50th birthday. It is not the socialist that is after him. In proportion as the trust is perfected the traveling man disappears. He came with competition; he goes with competition.

The trust is absolutely the economic master in the fields of economic activity. There is but one dealer in the goods that you must have, and if you want those goods you are required to pay the price fixed by the trust. Did you read the dispatches from Chicago three or four days ago announcing the fact that in the city of Chicago every evening after the Board of Trade adjourns, five men meet and fix the price that is to be paid the farmers of the entire country for their grain next day? They hold the power of life and death. The people are at their mercy, absolutely so. And they represent a very great trust. They have millions of dollars. They levy taxation upon the people; they fix the price of every loaf of bread consumed by the people. What do you propose to do about it? Dissolve the trusts? I am looking for the man that will tell me how he is going to dissolve them. By law? You have been trying to control the corporation by law for the last 30 years and to what extent have you succeeded? If you have been unable to control the corporation by law, how do you expect to control a trust, a

vastly greater aggregation of wealth and power, by law? You propose to harness this great elephant with cobwebs. The trust simply laughs at the statutory enactment.

President Stickney, of the Great Western Railroad, testified before the Industrial Commission at Chicago just a week ago that the interstate commerce law, so far as it attempted to regulate rates on railroads, was a roaring farce; and he added after this that every other law that was designed to curb the rapacity of railroad corporations was likewise a farce. You have not been able, you never will be able, to control corporate capital by law.

We are confronted by one of two conditions. First of all, let it be said that no power on earth can prevent the complete concentration of industries. One industry after another is being completely monopolized. The middle class is disappearing. They are struggling to get into the small capitalist class. About one in a thousand will succeed. The others will be forced down into the overcrowded ranks of the working class, and this process will continue until all the capital of the country is concentrated in the hands of a single syndicate or trust so that we will finally have a trust of trusts. We will have an economic oligarchy. We will not be ruled by a king, by an emperor or a tsar, we will be ruled by economic potentates that will control the people because they control their necessities.

Either this, or the collective ownership of trusts and the operation of all industry in the interest of the whole people. That is to say: capitalism or socialism, slavery or freedom. You will have a chance to vote upon these alternatives next Tuesday.² You may forge your chains still stronger; you may vote to strike the last fetter from the last economic slave on this continent.

There is very much involved in this municipal campaign. I would, if it were in my power, impress upon you its importance and its significance. I have just returned from the Far West. I spent a week in California, and was asked again and again in that coast state, "What about Haverhill?" They understand out there that there has been a very strong combination perfected in Haverhill for the overthrow of the Social Democratic Party. They are as familiar with the situation as most of your citizens are. I said: "I feel quite confident that this combination will succeed — in destroying itself." It represents absolutely no principle, and I challenge contradiction. By some strange magic, the Republican here finds himself in the embrace of a lifelong enemy — the Democrat. Waking up in the morning, they find themselves in the same camp. All of the hostility has been declared off.

They stand revealed as one party, r, to speak more properly, no party at all — for you could not find a trace of the Republican Party with a magnifying glass. The Democratic Party has totally lost its identity, if it ever had any. A citizens' party, they call it. The corporations are very profoundly interested in the success of this citizens' party. The professional politicians are also profoundly interested in its success. It is a new party, for a new and very strange purpose.

You are a Democrat, perhaps. You have been in the Democratic Party for a long while. What purpose have you in forming an alliance with a lifelong enemy at this time? What is the purpose? Does not the answer suggest itself? A combination of these two parties to defeat the Social Democratic Party — that is the purpose, and the only purpose. The “party,” so-called, has no other program. How strangely its nominations were made! We live in a republic. Governments derive their just powers from the consent of the governed. Whence they derive their unjust powers is not stated. These nominations were made, but the rank and file had no voice in the making of them. The program has been made in caucus, and the nominations announced — not, however, subject to the approval of the constituents of these nominees. The contract has been made. The votes are to be delivered, and the question for every self-respecting Republican and Democrat to ask himself is whether he proposes to deliver the goods in fulfillment of the contract made by the politicians. I do believe that when the votes have been deposited and the last ballot has been counted, the announcement will go forth that this unholy compact has been rebuked by such an overwhelming vote that the repetition of it will never again be attempted in Haverhill.

And just here let me say that the Social Democratic Party enters into this campaign with absolute confidence of success. It was never more certain of the absolute justice of its underlying principles. The party is harmonious. It stands before the people without a blemish upon its name. What about its candidate? John C. Chase has held the office of mayor for one year. There has not been one breath of scandal in connection with his administration. His official integrity is as spotless as a star. So with his personal character. In all of the severity of criticism no one has ventured to impugn his honesty of purpose. And what is true of John C. Chase, the first Socialist mayor in the United States, is likewise true of his colleagues. They stand before you asking for your support purely upon the principles

embodied in their platform, and upon the record they have made as representatives of their party.

What is true of the local representatives is likewise true of those who represented you at the capital while the legislature was in session. That brilliant young man, James F. Carey, made a record there well calculated to challenge the admiration and respect, not only of his constituents, but of every citizen of the state. His speech upon "Child Labor" will win for him immortality. His colleague, Louis M. Scates, true to every obligation as the needle to the pole, temporarily defeated — but sometimes defeat is victory, and it is victory in his case, for he largely increased his vote, and he is stronger in the confidence of his fellow citizens than he was before the election;³ and when he stands again, as stand he will, he will be triumphantly elected by the people.

But a single week remains. There remains a week for serious thought, for sober reflection. What is the actual condition with which we have to deal today? We cannot determine these questions by mere local conditions. We must take the general condition of the country at large into account. It is admitted that a few more men are employed, that there is a little more activity than there was. It is also admitted that there never was a time when there was as much centralization, such rapid growth of trusts, and centralization of political and economic power to correspond, as there is today. The condition of the workingman, in the grasp of this stupendous power, grows more precarious day by day. He sells his labor in the cheapest market. The small dealer, confronted by the same power, feels himself steadily losing ground.

In the West they told me that there was unusual activity in New England, especially in Boston. I was much interested in the testimony given by Samuel M. Price, president of the whiskey trust in the city of Washington before the Industrial Commission last week. Mr. Price, who ought to be an authority on the subject, stated that the city of Boston consumed more whiskey than any other city in the united states in proportion to its population. It may be that this has some influence in stimulating the situation. There is unparalleled prosperity — but it is confined to very limited circles; on the one hand, the fortunes mounting skyward.

A certain chosen few are growing enormously rich, Mr. Rockefeller, for example, worth \$350 million. compared with him the richest man in this audience is a beggar on the highway. He has the power to gradually confiscate the holdings of the small dealer in every department of trade. It

is said that we socialists are envious of the success of such men as Mr. Rockefeller; that we would, if we could, destroy him, or, what is worse still, drag him down to our level. We do not envy him. We realize that no man fails so completely in this system as the man who succeeds. John D. Rockefeller is a prisoner for life. He is enslaved by his possessions. He lives on the eighth floor of a big building, in the care of a bodyguard. When he walks abroad he conceals his identity. He is not on terms of peace with his fellow men. He has millions of money, but he is not living a complete life. He is said to be a beneficiary of this system. He is bearing a very heavy burden in the care of his enormous possessions; and he has expressed himself as being willing to pay a million dollars a year if he can find the right man to take care of them for him. There's an opening for some of you — a million dollars a year! Would you change places with him? Who is there to envy him? He is simply trying to find some way of relieving himself from the fruit of his success. The Social Democratic Party would like to help him. It would relieve him of his burden, and it proposes to do so for his benefit as well as for the benefit of the country at large. He has as much too much as others have too little. His life is a complete failure from that standpoint.

Take one of those men who have solved the problem of success. He is 40 years of age, or 50. He ought to be approaching his prime. His hair is white; he is physically infirm; he is in the grasp of decline because he has succeeded under this system. If you are fortunate enough to have succeeded in raising yourself upon the shoulders and backs of your fellow men, your success is not to be envied. You do not hear the melody in the voice of your wife. You do not hear the prattle of our children. You are engaged in this competitive struggle with all your faculties and ability, and the springs of kindness are dried up within your breast. In this competitive strife all that is selfish and hard has been developed in your nature. You are unconscious of it. You are a perverted human being. You have millions, perhaps, and yet you are, from every proper standpoint, a pauper on the highway of life. You are spiritually dead. You are morally petrified. You are intellectually bankrupt.

When I was in New York recently I went to the Waldorf-Astoria to see some of the beneficiaries of this system. I went there at midnight because I knew they had reversed the order of nature and turned day into night; and I saw them under the influence of electric light, men and women whose fathers amassed millions, who themselves never did a day's work;

and they seemed entirely artificial to me — waxen images. I said to myself: “Under this social system they have become reduced to a state that makes it impossible for them to enjoy life.”

In Boston last night I told them of the great dog festival that was held in New York a short time ago, where one lady had three pet dogs, each with a \$40,000 collar around its neck; and those three dogs were lodged at the Gilsey House, a very select hotel, had spacious apartments and special servants to attend to them, and were bathed in perfume three times a day; and when I read about it I said, “My heart goes out to the dogs.” I concluded it was a case that appealed to the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals. And then I reflected upon the fact that just a dozen blocks from there, in the Bowery, in Mott Street, in those narrow, filthy streets, the rows of tenements, the miles of misery, the squares of squalor, were thousands of children in wretchedness and rags. I thought about this, and I said to myself that with all the energy at my command I propose to wage war on the social system in which the lapdogs of the rich are the social superiors of the children of the poor.

This also is involved in this campaign — great moral issues that appeal with ever increasing force to every voter here and elsewhere. There are those to whom it seems to be impossible to rise above self-interest. They do not know to what extent they have been influenced and improperly influenced under the system in which they live. They do not realize that in the march of the great economic force the time has come when a great change in human affairs is about to take place — a change as wide as humanity. This movement is organizing for the purpose of rescuing humanity from the thralldom of all the ages. What an awakening there is everywhere! How completely the people are aroused! But a little while ago it was the working class who met on the third or fourth floor of some building. The busy world was utterly ignorant of their existence. It was scarcely possible for them to get their movements before the public. Today we find men and women in every walk of life who are interested and vitally interested in the solution of this great economic problem.

There is a cause or it. It is not a mere matter of accident. People are beginning to inquire into the whys and wherefores of things. They are beginning to ask some questions, and they are insisting that these questions shall be intelligently answered.

This movement is an abolition movement, vastly larger and more important than that which had its origin three-quarters of a century ago In the

inception of that great abolition movement there were thousands of excellent people everywhere who were intensely hostile to it. I have but a dim recollection of it, but I remember that in my childhood and abolitionist was regarded as a very vicious human being who ought to be suppressed by law. The great mass, then as now, did not express their honest convictions. This was reserved for a few. There was a Lovejoy who had moral courage enough to stand boldly for the right of free speech. He was hooted, dragged through the streets, and murdered; and the state of Illinois applauded. If you go down the Mississippi River today you will see a magnificent monument bearing the inscription "To the Memory of Lovejoy, a Martyr in the Cause of Human Freedom."

There was another champion of the rights of man who began to assert his convictions with wondrous power. His name was Wendell Phillips. He did not ask "Is this movement popular? Can I afford it?" He had the moral courage to be hissed by the professors and the students at Ann Arbor University. He had convictions. He had courage equal to them. He stood magnificently erect, just as the representatives of this noble abolition movement stand today. He won an immortality of gratitude and glory. Just a little while before his eloquent lips were silenced in death I heard some of the story of his persecution. The world was against him, but he had faith in himself and he had faith in his conquering mission. He knew that he was right. He had the spirit of that reformer who, when told the whole world was against him, said: "Then, thank God, I am against the whole world."

So it was with William Lloyd Garrison. Not long ago I was in Newburyport, Massachusetts. My attention was called to the fact that it was there that he was first attacked. The whole community was against him. The abolition movement was intensely unpopular, as unpopular as it was righteous. And then I had imagination enough to pursue William Lloyd Garrison as he went to the city of Boston, the center of culture and intelligence and refinement. I had imagination enough to see the greater mob that pursued and attacked him there. Then I saw him, in all his glory, expand to the proportions of magnificent manhood in the presence of the angry mob. He stood erect, and he said: "I will not equivocate. I will not excuse. I will not retract a single inch. I will be heard." And these words are inscribed upon his monument today.

So with Gerrit Smith;⁴ so with John Greenleaf Whittier; so with Harriet Beecher Stowe. An abolitionist informs us that in her day friends called upon Harriet Beecher Stowe in the city of Hartford, and sought by

all the influences at their command to prevent her from giving Uncle Tom's Cabin to the world. Had she been one of the moral cowards that are so numerous, had she trimmed her sails to catch the popular breeze, Uncle Tom's Cabin would never have dignified and glorified the emancipating literature of the world.

This movement is not yet popular. It is founded in the principles of eternal justice. It is in harmony with the perpetual growth of society. Socialism is not a dream. It is not the product of the visionary socialist. It is the next inevitable stage in the eternal march of evolution. It means a higher humanity, a nobler civilization. Competition means war. Society in a competitive state consists simply of a mass of warring units. Take care of yourself. Be absolutely selfish, no matter what becomes of your fellow man. Build up, if you have got to do it on the ruin of your weaker neighbor. And the only attempt at justification of this capitalistic condition is that it results in the survival of the fittest. If this is to continue forever there is no difference between the human being and the beast in the jungle. They devour each other; so do we. We differ simply in methods.

The poor miner, toiling 600 feet underground, day after day, to earn a miserable 80 or 90 cents a day that scarcely serves to keep his rebellious soul within his protesting body, is being devoured. The poor girl who works in the sweatshops of Boston or Chicago or New York, in the basement or the attic of a tenement where there is scarcely any light, no ventilation, filth and rags, is being devoured, and her sunken cheeks and hollow eyes bear testimony to the barbarity of the competitive system.

Is this to continue forever? Fortunate it is that this system carries within itself the seeds of its own dissolution, the elements of its own overthrow. We are on the eve of the crisis. We are approaching the beginning of the end. The transition is very painful.

When I was in San Francisco I picked up a daily paper and read that a boy, 19 years of age, had committed suicide because, after three weeks of continuous search, he was unable to find employment. He had some self-respect. He had destroyed himself. How many are there who have any proper conception of the enormity of this social crime? Suicide has increased 300 percent in the United States during the past six years. A man in a normal state of mind and heart does not commit suicide. It is the wretched workingman who is driven to despair; it is the small struggling businessman, who is fighting against his impending ruin, that commits suicide. Why is it that all our jails, reformatories, almshouses, and asylums

are crowded to their utmost capacities? There is reason for it. And every student of sociology knows the process is: first, idleness; and then degradation and then despair, and then — desperation. Poverty is the most prolific parent of all the vices and the crime that curse this world.

“The poor you have always with you.” When the man of Galilee, the carpenter of Nazareth, uttered those words, he uttered them in rebuke and not in commendation. There is absolutely no excuse for enforced poverty in this day. The average producing capacity of the worker has increased about 20 fold in the last 40 years. The worker today produces 20 times as much as he did 40 years ago. Why doesn't he have 20 times as much? Why doesn't he enjoy 20 times as much? Why is he not relieved of 19/20ths of his burden? The reason is self-evident. He does not produce for himself. He produces for a master; and he can only work when it is profitable to his master that he should work. He has nothing but his labor, and he is compelled to sell that for what he can get for it, and is thus reduced to the position of a slave.

The same struggle is going on in the middle class — each trying to ruin and destroy the other. We are told to love our neighbor as ourselves, but it is hard to love the man who tries to swallow you. Talk about Christian nations, about the Golden Rule, about brotherly love! These things are absolutely impossible in a state of society in which each man's interests are diametrically opposed to each other's.

We have classes in this country. The one class owns the machinery and the other the labor. The owners of the machinery have got to have cheap labor, and the owners of the labor have got to have high wages; and here they stand arrayed against each other in irrepressible conflict. It is this that constitutes the class struggle. Let me call your attention to the fact that these classes were not created under socialism, nor by socialist agitation. These classes are the product of the competitive system, in which a man must be a master or he must be a slave. I can sell to a corporation my labor-power, and if I do I sell to that corporation what else? I traffic in my intellect. I can get what is called a higher situation, become a professional man. I can be employed by some great capitalistic newspaper. I can prostitute my intellectual faculties. I can write columns of editorials that are repugnant to my sense of justice. But I scorn to do it. I would not be an instrument of the oppression and the degradation of my fellow men.

Lincoln said: “For the reason that I object to being a slave, I protest against being a master.”⁵ The one is just as immoral, just as degrading as

the other. Were I compelled to make my choice I would rather be a slave than a master, upon the principle that I would rather be the victim than the beneficiary of a wrong. I stand, therefore, in your presence a socialist, and a member of the Social Democratic Party, because I believe that the earth is the equal heritage of every human being who inhabits it. I understand perfectly, as does every other social democrat, that if I succeed in this competitive system it is because I have destroyed my weaker brother; that he who amasses the largest fortune has simply succeeded in ruining and destroying the largest number of his fellow creatures. If you succeed, somebody else fails. Success is the fruit of failure. A perfectly sane, self-respecting man does not want to succeed in that way.

This struggle to secure the means of life makes anything like security an impossibility. You may be worth \$30,000 or \$40,000 today, and you may die in the poorhouse. You do not know. You cannot guess. Everything is insecure and in doubt; and when you fail and fall your successful competitor rushes in over your prostrate body, and what becomes of you?

But even if you do reach your destination in safety, what is to become of your son? Carry this question home with you, and answer it to yourselves at your leisure. This is also one of the issues involved in this campaign. What do you propose to do with your son, or rather, what is he going to be able to do for himself? When you were young, a boy could learn a trade. He could build up gradually. He could go into business with a capital of \$500, and build up gradually. There were no trusts in the country, capitalized at \$8 million. But your son? Is he going to learn a trade? What trade? Every trade is crowded to overflowing. whatever trade he learns he will find that the machine is there in advance of him. The machine is to take full possession. Skilled labor will become common labor. In this system of private ownership the man will be under the machine. The machine, instead of being a blessing, becomes an instrument to enslave humanity.

Perhaps you want your son to take up some profession. What profession? In Boston there are scores of doctors that are not making a respectable living; lawyers without number, picking their teeth, waiting for a victim. In New York they have actually had to pass a law restraining lawyers from questionable practices to create cases for themselves. There is no chance for a lawyer except in exceptional cases, unless he becomes a corporation lawyer; and he must sacrifice all the scruples of the profession, if it has any nowadays to find ways for evading the laws that were enacted for the interest of the people. In this day a lawyer will work for one side

or the other, if there is enough money in it, entirely irrespective of the right or justice of the case. If you are a criminal, if there is money enough in it, he will work to clear you; and if you are innocent, he will work to convict you, if there is money enough in it.

The avenues for making a living are rapidly closing up. I advise you to invest what little you have in socialist propaganda; stand by the representatives of the Social Democratic Party. It is going to triumph. You will add your name to the roll of honor. Vote to achieve this victory, and the sons who bear your name will be proud of it to their last breath.

We appeal to you only upon the ground that our principles are eternally right; that our candidates are above reproach; that our principles being right and our candidates having acquitted themselves to your unqualified satisfaction, it is to your interest of your wives, of your children, of your firesides, of your city and your country to vote with us, to achieve this victory that shall give heart of hope to the struggling masses throughout the whole civilized world.

I thank you all for the patience with which you have listened to me, and my heart from now until Tuesday next, will be attuned to the harmonious notes of certain victory.

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¹ Opening lines from "The Man with the Hoe" (1898), by C. Edwin Markham (1852-1940).

² The Haverhill city election which re-elected Social Democrat John C. Chase as Mayor was held Dec. 6, 1899.

³ The 1899 Massachusetts state election was held on Nov. 7, 1899, one month prior to the Haverhill city election. In it, Social Democrat Louis M. Scates was defeated by a Democratic-Republican fusion candidate, managing to simultaneously increase his vote and lose the race. In the second election Scates ran successfully for Haverhill City Council, winning a seat in ward 6.

⁴ Gerrit Smith (1797-1874) was an abolitionist and politician from New York.

⁵ Lincoln's line was actually: "As I would not be a *slave*, so I would not be a *master*. This expresses my idea of democracy. Whatever differs from this, to the extent of the difference, is no democracy." From "Fragment on Democracy," circa Aug. 1, 1858.