
Capitalism Hurts People Physically:
Speech at the Atlanta Federation of Trades Hall
(January 8, 1898)
[excerpt]

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Debs came to the South and to this city for the purpose of organizing the Social Democracy. In his talk he outlined the meaning and intention of socialism, and arraigned the present social system in bitter and scathing terms. Continuing, he said:

I wish I had the power to express all I feel on this question. I wish that I could transport this audience to the Bowery of New York, to Mott Street and to other thoroughfares leading to the great cesspool of humanity, where thousands of little children are huddled together on the streets.

The capitalists do not care for the condition of these people. The capitalists are the beneficiaries of these poor victims of the social system. But even the capitalists are afraid to some extent. They fear lest their children fall into this hell of hells. They are striving and piling up millions and millions to guard against such an emergency. They are insuring their lives for fabulous sums in order that their descendants may be protected.

And, therefore, this question should be thought of and discussed by all men of the present day, for none of us, no matter how rich we may be, know at what day or hour our riches will be swept away and we and our families will be left in poverty.

The present social system is hurting many physically as well as otherwise. Do you know that nearly 500,000 infants die annually in this country, and almost all of these die for want of proper food and fresh air? How many well-formed men and women do you see on the streets of a great city? Not many. Go out on the streets of Atlanta.

Now, Atlanta is not what might be called a great city, but it is a city, and the conditions I speak of are found there. Go out on the streets and look for specimens of manhood. First you see the capitalist, stooped with worry and too much brain work; then the laborer, overworked in every fiber. Here is the fellow that is not worked enough. One is overworked and

the other underworked. Here goes a clerk hurrying to his work. He is nervous and afraid he will be late. Once in a while you will find a fine-looking man, but only on rare occasions.

The day of socialism is coming. It is coming as surely as the sun of God will rise tomorrow morning. It is coming despite the fact that ministers who favor it are being socially ostracized and despite the war that is being waged on it by a capitalistic press. The moneyed men are paving the way for socialism. We working people have but to stand aside and prepare ourselves to take hold when the proper time arrives.

One way to do this is to read books bearing on the subject — books that will make you think. To begin with, I know of no better volume than *Merrie England*,¹ which sells for six cents. It is a book that will do you a world of good, and you will never miss the sum.

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¹ Robert Blatchford, *Merrie England*. “Social Democracy Edition,” with introduction by Eugene V. Debs. Chicago, IL: Charles H. Kerr & Co., 1897. Debs’s introduction is dated Dec. 1, 1897. First published in England by *The Clarion* in 1894, this popular propaganda title was “adapted for America” and printed and reprinted in the United States by various companies beginning in 1895. Debs would himself publish an edition of the book through his Debs Publishing Co. in 1899.