

EIGHTEENTH ANNUAL MEETING OF THE AMERICAN
ECONOMIC ASSOCIATION

The assembling of American economists in Baltimore during the holidays took place under extremely favorable conditions.

In view of the ample facilities for publication of scientific writing, what may be termed the movement for association among economists, historians, and other students of political and social institutions, in fact, among scholars generally, may be noted as a matter of considerable interest. Four associations convened in Baltimore. Of these the oldest and largest in membership is the American Historical Association, which assembled for its twenty-first annual meeting. The American Economic Association gathered for its eighteenth, the American Political Science Association for its second, and the newly organized Bibliographical Society of America for its first annual meeting. Organizations of these groups left sociologists no choice in the matter, and they have been brought together by the simple process of exclusion to form an association of their own. In the organization of these associations history has been repeating itself; the chronological order of historical development of the several sciences has not been violated—sociology being the last and least organized. So from year to year the joint program of the associations, reflecting the bifurcations going on in the social sciences themselves becomes more intricate and varied.

At the Baltimore sessions of the Economic Association, papers upon the following topics were read and discussed: "The Present State of the Theory of Distribution," by Jacob H. Hollander; "The Regulation of Railway Rates," by Hugo R. Meyer and B. H. Meyer; "The Love of Wealth and the Public Service," presidential address by F. W. Taussig; "The Case for and against Municipal Ownership," by Frederick C. Howe and Winthrop M. Daniels; "A Quantitative Study of the Labor Movement," by F. W. Farnam; "Violence in Strikes," by T. S. Adams; "The Economic Future of the Negro," by W. E. B. Dubois and Alfred H. Stone.

Needless to say, wide diversity of opinion developed in the discussions upon each of these topics. It is gratifying to note, however, that the prevailing tone of the discussions throughout was one of seriousness, although it may be admitted that some of the discussions degenerated into futile moralizing.

Clearly the live issues taken up in the several sessions were those involving extension of the functions of government in the field of industry, and clearly the trend was sympathetically socialistic. That theory of government which would lift from our political organization all economic responsibility other than that of policing industry and administering justice seems to have lost caste, and this just at a time when our democratic political organization appears to be developing a high degree of unfitness for operating in the industrial world. The willingness of economists to commit themselves to a somewhat radical program is surprising in view of the scanty evidence at hand upon which to base any sound judgment. At this time, it may be submitted, we are asked to accept rather too much upon faith. In the discussions the case for extension of government functions was not at all clearly made out. The argument from present-day corruption and inefficiency of public officials—namely, that the public service will tend to become honest and efficient in proportion as its scope of action is enlarged—is an assumption. It cannot be conceded out of hand that municipal ownership or government regulation necessarily makes for public integrity and increased efficiency. This is the point to be proved. Mr. Daniels' plea for the Scotch verdict of "not proven" on the whole evidence presented for municipal ownership was quite justified. In fact, considerable evidence might be adduced to prove municipal ownership and government control guilty of high misdemeanors and betrayal of public trust—witness, for example, recent disclosures of inefficiency and corruption in the New York department of insurance. It would seem as easy to be honest in little things as in great, and the logical conclusion would seem to be that a municipality which cannot honestly negotiate a franchise cannot honestly do anything until it becomes honest. Certainly some of the arguments for extension run queerly. Politics, we are told, is today so corrupt, and government so incapable of industrial performance generally, that we should greatly enlarge the scope of government action on the general assumption that somehow out of corruption will come sterling integrity, and somehow out of incompetency will come a high degree of efficiency. The Scotch verdict "not proven" stands.

JOHN CUMMINGS.

UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO.