

## OUTLOOK FOR SOCIAL POLITICS IN THE UNITED STATES<sup>1</sup>

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The term "social politics" is but little employed in this country. Other phrases, however, such as "welfare legislation," "social legislation," "labor legislation," "social reform," "legislation for social and industrial justice," have been employed to express this idea. Social politics, as I understand it, involves the conscious systematic control exercised by the government over the economic and social life of the given society or group. It is contrasted with a "police" system in which the government contents itself with merely preventing violence and fraud. No government has ever practically confined itself to this course, but some governments have come much nearer to it than others, and some have given the idea theoretical assent.

In our own country progress in the direction of a comprehensive social policy has been particularly slow for a variety of reasons which an analysis of the subject discloses.

In the first place, the eighteenth-century political philosophy, under the influence of which federal and state governments were formed, was favorable to a minimum of governmental organization and action. Thomas Paine, for example, regarded society as a blessing, government as an evil. "Society," he said, "is a patron and government a punisher." The structure and powers of government were organized at this time with a view of giving as little power as possible to those in positions of authority. This mechanism was primarily intended to prevent a possible lapse into hereditary aristocracy or monarchy. But the theorists of the time did not distinguish clearly between this specific purpose and the general limitation of the powers of government for all purposes, and in later times the doctrine and the machinery intended to prevent

<sup>1</sup> From Proceedings of the American Sociological Society.

monarchy were applied against all forms of governmental action or interference even in the interest of the community.

Further, the prevailing economic theory of the last hundred years has been unfavorable to the development of policies of social legislation. It would be superfluous to show that economic theory has been until recently of the distinctly *laissez-faire* type. Our political economists have set their faces against interference with the "natural laws" of trade on the ground that such intervention is more likely to hinder than to help social progress. They have magnified the difficulties of governmental action and minimized the advantages of action on the part of the state. It is only within the last few years that the attitude of leading economists in the United States has shifted. In our own day Mr. Walker referred to "those of us who discerned the coming of a storm and removed ourselves and our effects from the lower ground of an uncompromising individualism to positions somewhat more elevated and seemingly secure." Professor James also declared:

We do not regard [the state] as a merely negative factor, the influence of which is most happy when it is smallest: but we recognize that some of the most necessary functions of a civilized society can be performed only by the state and some others most efficiently by the state, that the state in a word is a permanent category of economic life and not merely a temporary crutch which may be cast away when society becomes more perfect.<sup>1</sup>

Little by little the attitude of many of our leading economists, although by no means all of them, has materially changed.

The development of a system of social politics has further been made difficult in our country because of the strict constitutional limitations imposed upon state activities; and because of the narrow interpretation of these limitations by unfriendly courts. It is not necessary to cite at length the array of cases in which the judiciary has wrecked plans for social legislation. Opposition to laws limiting the hours of labor and to workmen's compensation are conspicuous illustrations familiar to everyone. Much the same attitude has been taken in regard to other cases involving conscious and systematic control over the economic and social life of the community by its organized government. The

<sup>1</sup> *Publications of American Economic Association*, I, 26.

political philosophy of the eighteenth century, the economics of the same period, together with narrow legal training and frequent ignorance of, or indifference to, social and industrial questions, has made the courts cold or even hostile to any broad policy which we might characterize by the term "social politics."

The organized system of political corruption has stood in the way of schemes for social betterment and improvement. The greatest loss inflicted upon the community by the genus grafter is not the millions he has stolen. We could almost afford to pension off our grafters and give them what they steal if they would leave us alone to work out plans of social and industrial improvement. The greatest damage they have inflicted upon the community has been their opposition, sometimes open and sometimes covert, to any program of social politics. Through their control of state legislatures, administrators, and sometimes, courts, they have been able to delay, obstruct, cripple, and hamper policies designed to promote the general welfare of the community. Social politics has been in the jackpot of more than one legislature. In this way, even where public sentiment has been aroused to such an extent that historic prejudice against governmental action has been overcome, its waves have been beaten back or driven into other channels. We may properly say that one of the largest single losses inflicted by our organized corruptionists has been the prevention of social and economic progress.

These combined influences of economic theory, political philosophy, constitutional limitation, judicial interpretation, and political corruption have made the practical advance of any policy or policies of social legislation extremely slow. Together they have been able to force the United States far in the rear of the procession of the great industrial states of the world. The remarkable progress made by Germany under Bismarck thirty years ago was almost unnoticed in this country for a quarter of a century, while measures adopted by other European states were ignored by our practical statesmen. English advance in the same direction also passed to a large extent unnoticed, although the recent experiments made under the Lloyd-George régime have attracted far more attention than the Continental undertakings. So it has happened

that our country blazed the trail of political liberty a century and a half ago but now lags far behind the other great industrial states of the world. Germany and England, our keenest competitors in the business world, have far outstripped us in practical measures for the protection of the community and for the promotion of the general welfare in the broad sense of the term. The so-called Manchester school of economics never had much vogue in Germany where the state has for many years been recognized as an agency for the promotion of community welfare. England, the home of the "let alone" policy, has long since abandoned it in theory and in practice.

Notwithstanding the many obstacles interposed and the long delay occasioned, substantial progress has been made in the United States in the direction of a comprehensive social policy during the last ten years. This is evident in city, in state, and in nation alike.

In our city government one of the most striking evidences of a community policy has been the development of city-planning schemes. In New York, Chicago, Boston, Philadelphia, and in practically all the large centers of the country, city plans so-called, have been outlined either by private societies or by public act. These plans involve a careful and comprehensive study of the needs of each local community, with respect to arrangement of streets, parks and public places, transportation, housing and recreation needs, and in short they constitute an attempt on the part of the city to regulate and control its own growth and development. While most of these plans have thus far been only imperfectly executed, yet they show a tendency toward conscious social control through governmental agencies. They have compelled the community to think of itself and of the possibility of regulating by common action at least the physical outlines of the city. In cases like the Pittsburgh Survey, under private auspices, the analysis has gone down more deeply and the remedies prescribed have been correspondingly more fundamental, for in this case we have a description and analysis of social, industrial, and living conditions of men and women.

Many other aspects of city government indicate the development of the social-political idea; as for example, the growth of

parks, playgrounds, opportunities for public recreation, the so-called neighborhood or social center, the educational system now developing, the activities of the health and building department for the protection of the community from unsafe and unsanitary conditions, all indicate the presence of the same general tendency to treat broadly the vital problems of a community. Kansas City has even established a "general welfare board." "Necessity" has been, from time immemorial, "the mother of invention," and the dire necessity of our cities has driven them to many constructive efforts. These, it is true, are not comparable either in breadth of design or in completeness of execution to the plans of Germany or even of English cities, but compared with our situation of twenty-five years ago they indicate a rapid advance in the conception of what the community should and may do for the welfare of its citizens. The treatment of the school problem, the park problem, the sanitary problem, the juvenile court, the city-plan question would all have been impossible under conditions as they existed twenty-five years back. It must be admitted that many of these advances have been made, not by straight frontal attack, but by flanking movements. Nevertheless they have been made step by step and the lines have been pushed forward year by year.

In our state governments the advance in the direction of a distinct system of social-political policy has been made in the field of labor legislation. The last bulletin of the American Association for the Advancement of Labor Legislation contains a summary of the legislation for the year 1912 which is extremely significant to any student of American politics or of American society.

This bulletin gives a review of laws covering the subjects of industrial accidents and diseases, child labor, employers' liability and workmen's compensation, detailed factory and workshop regulations, legislation regarding the hours of labor, old-age pensions, unemployment, and many regulations in regard to hours and conditions of labor for women, and in the case of Massachusetts includes the establishment of a minimum-wage commission. While these laws are in no sense and in no place complete and are not to be compared in completeness of scope or in vigor and efficiency of administration with much European legislation, yet they

constitute a striking advance. They are the forerunners of a general and comprehensive plan of social legislation. They are of significance, not only because of what they actually embody, but for what they foreshadow in the way of future accomplishment. This is particularly true of such acts as the Massachusetts law establishing minimum-wage commissions for women's work and authorizing the payment of old-age pensions for laborers employed by cities and towns; the investigation of the subject of unemployment and the adoption of employers' liability, workmen's compensation, and insurance acts.

In the federal field much less has been accomplished, although legislative activity in this direction is not wholly lacking. The policy of the federal government in regard to a protective tariff, in respect to internal improvements, in the wholesale distribution of land may all be classified under the broad term of "social politics." The avowed purpose of fostering manufacturing by governmental action, of settling a vast territory by practically free grants of government land, and of stimulating and developing industry and agriculture by governmental grant and bonus are all evidences of national welfare work on a gigantic scale. Curiously enough, however, the opposition to these movements, particularly in the case of tariff and internal improvements, has been based, not on theoretical grounds, but largely on the constitutional principle of state's rights. At the same time those who have been most active in promoting these policies have often been the theoretical opponents of the economic doctrine of *laissez faire*. The manufacturer who demanded at Washington governmental action to protect his industry was often found at the state capital denouncing state interference with the conditions of his employees. We have often seen men bitterly opposing social politics in the abstract while encouraging and practicing it in the concrete.

The conservation policy of the United States government stands upon a somewhat different basis. In this case we have a consciously designed policy of preserving the natural resources of the country. This was based partly upon the desire to avoid evident waste of assets and partly upon a desire to prevent control by special as opposed to general interest. The broad policy of pre-

serving and protecting of water-power, timber, minerals, and other similar resources of the country has been an illustration on a huge scale of what is properly known as social politics.

In other directions also the federal government has advanced. A conspicuous illustration of this has been the limitation of the hours of labor in public work or public contracts, and the regulations in regard to hours of labor on railroads; laws compelling the adoption of certain safety appliances on railroads, together with the employers' liability and workmen's compensation acts. The last Congress provided for the establishment of a children's bureau, and created a commission on industrial relations with broad powers of investigation, including an inquiry into the general condition of labor in the principal industries of the United States, into existing relations between employers and employees, into the effects of industrial conditions on public welfare and the rights and powers of the community to deal therewith, into conditions of sanitation and safety, into associations of employers and wage-earners, methods of collective bargaining, methods for maintaining satisfactory relations between employers and employees, bureaus of labor, and finally: "The commission shall seek to discover the underlying causes of dissatisfaction in the industrial situation and report its conclusions thereon." This inquiry may prove to be the beginning of a comprehensive social policy on the part of the United States, or of course it is possible that it will bear no fruit at all. It is significant in this connection that in his recent volume on *Social Reform and the Constitution* Professor Goodnow has stated that in general there is less constitutional difficulty in the way of a national policy of social reform than is found in the various states. For example, he has indicated that there are no constitutional objections, so far as the federal government is concerned, to the establishment of far-reaching plans of social insurance, while in the separate commonwealths these same measures might encounter fatal constitutional objections. Professor Goodnow says:

Who, in view of the history of the public domain, will venture to say that the constitution limits the power of Congress to dispose of the public funds as it sees fit in order to promote what it considers to be the "public welfare of the United States," to provide for which the constitution specifically says the taxing power may be used.

When we consider, therefore, the development in our urban communities, the results obtained in the several states of the Union, and the legislation completed and in prospect in our federal government, it seems likely that we may expect a régime of social politics in the United States within our day and generation. It is a striking fact that in the year 1912 a political party was organized on a platform strongly emphasizing social and industrial justice. Some of these measures have been championed for many years by the Socialist party, which, however, because of its weakness in America, was unable to make a deep impression. The Progressive party, polling at the last election over four million votes, adopted a sweeping program of social legislation. They declared in terms, both in state and in national platforms, for effective legislation looking to the prevention of industrial accidents, occupational diseases, overwork, and involuntary unemployment, for the fixing of minimum safety and health standards for various occupations, for the prohibition of child labor, for minimum-wage standards for working women, for the establishment of an eight-hour day for women and young persons, for one day's rest in seven for all wage-earners, for an eight-hour day in continuous (twenty-four) industries, for publicity as to wages, hours, and conditions of labor, for standards of compensation for death by industrial accident and injury and trade disease, for "the protection of home life against the hazards of sickness, irregular employment and old age through the adoption of a system of social insurance adapted to American use." And in order to carry out this program the Progressive party pledged itself to use all powers of federal and state government, not only up to the limit of the Constitution, but later by amendment of the Constitution if found necessary.

The causes of this recent and rapid development in American political thought and in American political policy are numerous. Among them a few may be mentioned. The rapid growth of great cities has forced many of these problems to the attention of the community in a striking manner. In congested cities like New York and Chicago the "let alone" policy of government becomes untenable and impossible. The state or the city must regulate individual conduct for the protection of safety, health, and life.



When the fathers founded the Republic the United States was a rural nation. At that time only 3 per cent of the population lived in cities, while the census for 1910 showed 46.3 per cent of our people living in urban communities. In a number of states like Massachusetts, New York, and Illinois more than 50 per cent of the population is urban. This fact has operated powerfully to bring about the development of social policy within the city and to force the recognition of it in state and in nation.

Again, the rapid growth of great industries in the United States has tended to precipitate this problem. Large-scale industry has made it almost impossible for an individual workingman to protect himself in respect to wages, hours, or other conditions of labor. He has therefore been driven into some form of organization, and to organized demand for state intervention to protect him. Organized labor has been an important factor throughout the land in the formulation of, and the agitation for, social legislation. Labor has never taken any effective form as an organized political party in this country but has carried on a vigorous propaganda for labor legislation.

The development of the doctrine of conservation during the last ten years, applied as it has been to forests, mines, and water-power, has strongly affected the general conception of the scope and purpose of government. The idea of conservation by the government of interests belonging to the whole society has been extended to the conservation of human resources as well. Having familiarized the public with the idea of conserving timber as a matter of national economy, it was an easy step to the idea of conserving human beings and human energy as a matter of practical economy as well as humanity.

Almost at the same time the so-called efficiency doctrine appeared and was widely heralded in industry. The accountants, the teachers of shop management like Taylor and Emerson, the industrial engineers and doctors have begun a study of the conservation and effective application of human energy which has had a pronounced effect upon social thinking. They have extended the study of organization and machinery to the human machine

itself and endeavored to find out what possibilities lie in the human being in the way of accomplishment and achievement. This has doubtless been a minor element in the general process, but approaching the subject from the side of private business, it has unquestionably been an influence which cannot be ignored.

Another reason for the development of these policies is the advance of science, whether in the form of public sanitation or of social science. Much of the advance made in the field of labor legislation has been made possible by a study of industrial hygiene. The effects of modern industrial methods and processes upon life, safety and health have been studied and made plain during the last ten years and in response to this there has come a flood of legislation. Detailed investigations like those of Miss Josephine Goldmark have contributed materially to the development of social policy. The argument presented to the Supreme Court of Illinois in defense of the ten-hour labor law for women was much more like a treatise on industrial hygiene than a legal argument. It dealt more with a discussion of medical facts than with precedents gleaned from the law books. Concrete studies of the effect of child labor upon later development, of the effects of bad working conditions for women upon the future of the race, of overstrain and overwork in all occupations have made much easier the pathway of social legislation. The clearer these studies have been and the more graphically the results have been presented, the more quickly and decisively have results been secured.

On the other hand, the study of the anatomy and physiology of society has helped to give not only detailed information but a point of view necessary to the formulation of a comprehensive policy. The scriptural phrase "We are all members of one body" has been translated into the language of social science by the studies of hundreds of observers and the analyses of trained minds. We now begin to know in a scientific sense how and why we are all members of one body.

Whatever may be our opinion as to the present status of the science of society or the possibilities of future development of that science, no impartial observer can fail to perceive that study of

the structure and laws of society has been and will continue to be of great value in helping the public to treat more broadly the great questions of social policy.

The chief objection to these policies of social legislation comes from two diametrically opposite groups. On the one hand, there are the "standpatters," and on the other, the extreme socialists and the group known as the syndicalists, industrial trade unionists, in our country best represented by the Industrial Workers of the World. The standpatter, so-called, opposes these measures because he does not consider that any material change in the industrial or political order of things is urgently necessary. He believes that on the whole satisfactory progress is being made in the increase of the social product and in its distribution. He invokes once more the economic theory of *laissez faire* and the political philosophy of the eighteenth century. In our country, unfortunately, honest conservatism is not unfrequently linked with crooked privilege and criminal politics. The alliance of conservatism with graft and privilege has made its position strong from one point of view and vulnerable from another. In so far as corrupt methods may be successfully employed, this alliance has strengthened conservatism, but in so far as the moral sense of the community has revolted against corrupt practices in the public service, and has tended to associate conservatism and corruption, its general position has been greatly weakened.

Certain socialistic writers have attacked the present plan of social reform in Germany, England, and the United States on the ground that they are not fundamental but superficial. They have declared, as Mr. Walling does in his volume on *Socialism as It Is*, that the purpose and effect of these measures will be to preserve capitalism as it is, to maintain the system in a better and more human form, but nevertheless to continue the so-called capitalistic scheme fundamentally undisturbed. They have argued that these plans as thus far worked out involve nothing more than a highly intelligent efficiency system on the patriarchal basis, and while they have not directly opposed these measures, they have not regarded them as fundamental or as final. Mr. Walling has been particularly bitter in his attacks upon this whole policy. He

denounces what he calls the "capitalistic reform program" and the activities of the so-called revisionists, reformers, and German Social Democrats of the Berger type. "The new reform programs," says he, "however radical, are aimed at regenerating capitalism, and the net result will be to establish another form of economic feudalism, patriarchy, or paternalism." Quoting another writer, he says: "The new feudalism will care for and conserve the powers of the human industrial tool as the lord of the manor looked after the human agricultural implement."

The so-called syndicalists, on the other hand, prefer "direct" methods to political methods. They repudiate parliamentary and political action and prefer such methods as the general strike and *sabotage*.<sup>1</sup>

Certain of their leaders denounce not only reform but state socialism and democracy itself. They regard as one of their chief objects the abolition of the state. The syndicalist distrusts the state and believes that political forms and institutions have outlived their usefulness and cannot be adapted to new social relations.

No one can of course predict what the final form or effect of these various measures of social policy will be. For our purposes it is sufficient to point out the enormous development of rational social legislation in the United States in recent times. It is adequate for this immediate purpose to show the pronounced change in economic and political theory and the altered attitude of the public mind as evidenced in party platform and in practical legislation as well. It is sufficient to show that during the last fifty years these great changes have been wrought. It is safe to assume that during the next generation the conscious rational treatment of social and industrial problems by society acting through its organized governmental agencies will continue in increasing measure. This is likely to develop most rapidly in cities, but will characterize both state and national activity, and it is not at all impossible that under our constitutional system the national government may lead the way in policies of this nature. The cramped consti-

<sup>1</sup> See W. E. Walling, *Socialism as It Is*, chap. v; Louis Levine, "The Standpoint of Syndicalism," *Annals of the American Academy of Social and Political Science*, XLIV, 114.

tutional situation of the state compared with the powerful situation of the nation may prove decisive. The practical question is whether these changes shall be made scientifically, wisely, and with sufficient deliberation to insure the maintenance of the social equilibrium, or whether they will be made ignorantly, rashly, and with the blind fury that characterizes revolutionary movements. The mutterings and rumblings of discontent are a warning that changes must come and that the real choice lies, not between change and no change, but between rational and gradual change on the one hand, and sudden and revolutionary change on the other.