

Progress of Nationalism in the United States

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PROGRESS OF NATIONALISM IN THE UNITED STATES.

BY EDWARD BELLAMY, AUTHOR OF "LOOKING BACKWARD."

TECHNICALLY, the term Nationalism, as descriptive of a definite doctrine of social and industrial reform, was first used in 1888 by clubs made up of persons who sympathized with the ideas of a proper industrial organization set forth in "Looking Backward," and believed in the feasibility of their substantial adoption as the actual basis of society. Nationalism, in this strict sense, is the doctrine of those who hold that the principle of popular government by the equal voice of all for the equal benefit of all, which, in advanced nations, is already recognized as the law of the political organization, should be extended to the economical organization as well; and that the entire capital and labor of nations should be nationalized, and administered by their people, through their chosen agents, for the equal benefit of all, under an equal law of industrial service.

In this sense of a definite philosophy and a positive programme, Nationalism is a plant of very recent growth. It would, however, be quite impossible to understand the reasons for its remarkable popularity and rapid spread, and equally impossible to calculate the probabilities of its future development, without taking into account the evolutionary processes of which it is the outcome.

The very idea of the nation as an organization for the purpose of using the collective forces for the general protection and welfare, logically involved, from the beginning, the extension of that organization to the industrial as well as to the political affairs of the people. Until the democratic idea became prevalent it was, however, possible for privileged classes to hold back this evolution; and so for unnumbered ages it has been held back. From the period at which the democratic idea gained ascendancy it could be a question of but a short time before the obvious in-

terests of the majority of the people should lead to the democratizing of the national economic system to accord with the political system.

The Nationalist movement in the United States, instead of waiting till this late day, would have arisen fifty years ago as the natural sequence of the establishment of popular government and of the recognition that the national organization exists wholly and only for the promotion of the people's welfare, had it not been for the intervention of the slavery issue. It would indeed be more accurate to say that in a broad sense of the word the Nationalist movement did arise fifty years ago, for in spirit if not in form it may be said to date back to the forties. Those who are not familiar with the history of the extraordinary wave of socialistic enthusiasm which swept over the United States at that period and led to the Brook Farm Colony and a score of phalansteries for communistic experiments, have missed one of the most significant as well as most picturesque chapters of American history. Some of the most eminent persons in the country, and many who afterwards became eminent, were connected with or in sympathy with these enterprises. That Horace Greeley would very possibly have devoted himself to some line of socialistic agitation, had not the slavery struggle come on, will surely be questioned by none who are familiar with his correspondence and early writings, and in this respect he was representative of a large group of strong and earnest spirits.

But slavery had to be done away with before talk of a closer, kinder brotherhood of men was in order or, indeed, anything but a mockery. So it was that presently these humane enthusiasts, these precursors of Nationalism, were drawn into the overmastering current of the anti-slavery agitation. Then came the war, which should be ranked the greatest in history, not merely on account of the extent of the territory and of the vastness of the armies involved, but far more because it issued, as such a war never did before, in the speedy reconciliation of the foes. The reunion of the North and South after the struggle is the best proof of the progress of humanity that history records, the best evidence that the Nationalist motto, "We war with systems not with men," is not in advance of the moral sense of the nation we appeal to.

The din of the fight had barely ceased when the progress of

evolution towards economic Nationalism resumed its flow with an impetus only heightened by its interruption. But social conditions meanwhile had profoundly changed for the worse, and with them the character of the economic controversy, which now became full of rancor and bitterness. The speculative opportunities offered by the war had developed the millionaire and his shadow, the tramp. Contrasts of wealth, luxury, and arrogance with poverty, want, and abjectness, never before witnessed in America, now on every side mocked the democratic ideal and made the republic a laughing-stock.

The panic of 1873, with the seven lean years that followed in its train, ushered in the epoch of acute industrial discontent in this country. Then began the war between labor and capital. The phenomena of the period have been, on the one hand, ever-enlarging aggregations of capital, and the appropriation of the business field by groups of great monopolies; and, on the other hand, unprecedented combinations of labor in trades-unions, federations of unions and the Knights of Labor. Both classes of phenomena, the combinations of capital and of labor, were equally significant of the evolution towards economic Nationalism. The rise of the Knights of Labor, the great trades-unions, the Federation of Trades, and, on the agricultural side, of the Grangers, Patrons of Husbandry, Farmers' Alliances, and many other organizations, were demonstrating the feasibility of organizing the workers on a scale never dreamed of; while on the other side the enormous and ever-growing trusts and syndicates were proving the feasibility of organizing and centralizing the administration of capital on a scale of corresponding magnitude. Opposed as these two tendencies seemed, they were yet destined to be combined in the synthesis of Nationalism, and were necessary stages in its evolution. Both alike, in all their phases, were blind gropings towards completer union, confessions of a necessity of organizing forces for common ends, that could find their only logical result in Nationalism, when the nation should become at once employed and employer, and labor and capital be blended in indistinguishable union.

Nor were there lacking, in the epoch spoken of, very conscious and definite appeals, although partial and inadequate ones, to the national idea as the proper line along which adequate remedies were to be sought. The greenback movement in its argument

that the oppressions and inadequacies of the monetary system could only be removed by taking the issue of money wholly out of the control or influence of private persons and vesting it directly in the nation, was a distinct anticipation of Nationalism. The same idea was very evident in the proposition to reject the gold or silver standard as the basis of money and rest it broadly on the nation's assets and the nation's credit. It is true, indeed, that Nationalism, by making the nation the only storekeeper, and its relations of distribution with each citizen a direct one, excluding middlemen, will dispense with buying and selling between individuals, and render greenbacks as superfluous as other sorts of money. Nevertheless, in the spirit of its appeal to the national idea, Greenbackism was strongly tinctured with the sentiment of Nationalism.

Another of the fragmentary anticipations of Nationalism during the period referred to was the rise of the Knights of Labor. The peculiar merit of this admirable body is the broadly humane basis of its organization, which gives it an ethical distinction necessarily lacking to the mere trades-union. Its motto, "An injury to one is the concern of all," if extended to all classes, would be a good enough one for the most thorough-going Nationalist. The Knights of Labor, like the Greenbackers, believed in the national idea, and in dealing with the most formidable and dangerous class of private monopolies in this country demanded the nationalization of the railroads.

In enumerating the streams of tendency which were during this period converging towards Nationalism, mention should also be made of the various anti-monopoly parties that from time to time arose as local and more or less national parties. The platforms of some of these parties were extremely radical, and the dominant idea in the suggestion of remedies was an appeal to the nation.

Finally came the Henry George agitation. The extraordinary impression which Mr. George's book "Progress and Poverty" produced was a startling demonstration of the readiness of the public for some radical remedy of industrial evils. It is unnecessary to remind my readers that the nationalization of land was Mr. George's original proposition.

The foregoing considerations may perhaps sufficiently indicate how far back in American history the roots of Nationalism run, and how it may indeed be said to have been logically involved in the

very principle of popular government on which the nation was founded.

A book of propaganda like "Looking Backward" produces an effect precisely in proportion as it is a bare anticipation in expression of what everybody was thinking and about to say. Indeed, the seeming paradox might almost be defended that in proportion as a book is effective it is unnecessary. The particular service of the book in question was to interpret the purport and direction of the conditions and forces which were tending towards Nationalism, and thereby to make the evolution henceforth a conscious, and not, as previously, an unconscious, one. The Nationalist who accepts that interpretation no longer sees in the unprecedented economical disturbances of the day a mere chaos of conflicting forces, but rather a stream of tendencies through ever larger experiments in concentration and combination towards the ultimate complete integration of the nation for economic as well as for political purposes. The sentiment of faith and good cheer born of this clear vision of the glorious end, and of the conviction that the seemingly contradictory and dangerous phenomena of the times are necessary means to that end, distinguishes the temper of the Nationalist as compared with that of other schools of reformers.

The first Nationalist club was organized in Boston by readers of "Looking Backward" in 1888. Almost simultaneously other clubs were organized in all parts of the country, something like one hundred and fifty having been reported within the following two years, the reporting having, however, been very laxly attended to. There never was, perhaps, a reform movement that got along with less management than that of the Nationalists. There has never been any central organization and little if any mutual organization of the clubs. Wherever in any community a few men and women have felt in sufficiently strong sympathy with the ideas of the Nationalists to desire to do something to spread them, they have formed an organization and gone ahead, with as much or little communication with other similar organizations as they have desired to have. While these clubs have been and are of the greatest use, and have accomplished remarkable results in leaving entire communities with Nationalism, there has never been any special effort to multiply them or otherwise to gather the whole body of believers into one band. We like to think that

not one in a hundred who more or less fully sympathize with us is a member of a Nationalist club, or probably ever will be until the nation becomes the one Nationalist club.

The practical work of the organized Nationalists for the past four years has, of course, been chiefly educational, consisting in the effort, by lectures, books, and periodicals, to get their ideas before the people. The lack of a central organization on the part of the clubs prevents, very fortunately, the existence of any formal "official" organ. The nearest approach to such a publication was at first the *Nationalist*, a monthly, issued in Boston, which a year and a half ago was succeeded by *The New Nation*, a weekly, edited by the present writer, and devoted to the exposition of the principles and purposes of Nationalism, with the news of the movement.

In the brief period that has elapsed since the origin of the Nationalist movement, with its clearly defined philosophy and positive purpose, the growth of Nationalism in this country has been accelerated in an extraordinary manner. While it is impossible not to ascribe the acceleration largely to the literature and work of the Nationalists, it is not for a moment intended to imply that this growth is solely attributable to the strictly Nationalist propaganda. Throughout this paper the argument has been maintained that this specific movement is but the outcome of forces long in operation, which, by no means as yet wholly coalescing with strict Nationalism, continue to work consciously or unconsciously towards the same inevitable result.

It is unnecessary, surely, to do more than call attention to the great moral awakening upon the subject of social responsibilities and the ethical side, or rather the ethical soul and centre, of the industrial question, which has taken place within a very recent time. It was but yesterday that the pulpit was dumb on this class of themes, dumb because its hearers were deaf. Now, every Sunday hundreds of pulpits throughout the land are preaching social duty and the solidarity of nations and of humanity; declaring the duty of mutual love and service, whereby the strong are made bondmen to the weak, to be the only key to the social problem. This is the very soul of Nationalism. To be able to present this theme effectively has become the best passport of the clergyman to popular success, the secret of full houses. One of the most hopeful features of the Nationalist outlook from the first has been

the heartiness with which a large contingent of the clergy has enlisted in it, claiming that it was, as it truly is, nothing more than Christianity applied to industrial organization. This we hope to make so apparent that ere long all Christian men shall be obliged either to abjure Christ or come with us.

The recent change in the trend of economic discussion as to the questions involved in the proposition of Nationalism has not been less marked than the moral awakening. Until very recently this country was twenty-five years behind the intelligence and practice of Europe as to sociological questions. That there might be such awkward things as strikes we had, indeed, learned since 1873 ; but that there was any such thing as a great industrial social question, of which these were but symptoms, had not dawned upon the public or on old-fashioned economists, who supposed that wisdom had died with Adam Smith. Remember that it was only a little while ago that "the social evil" was understood to refer exclusively to a special form of vice. It was imagined that there could not be any other social evil of consequence here in America unless, perhaps, it were intemperance in the use of alcoholic stimulants or tobacco. While the "effete monarchies of Europe" might have to rectify their institutions from time to time to keep pace with human progress, we rested in the serene conviction that General Washington and Mr. Jefferson had arranged our affairs for all time, and that negro slavery was the last problem we should have to dispose of. And let it be observed, that these great patriots, in setting up popular self-government, did give us a finality of principle, but that an economic as well as a political method, in order to give effect to that principle, has now become necessary.

Where is now that easy complacency over the social situation which so recently was the prevailing temper of our people ? Economic discussion and the debate of radical social solutions absorb the attention of the country, and are the preponderating topics of serious conversations. Economic papers have the precedence in our periodicals, and, even in the purely literary magazine, they crowd the novel and the romance. Indeed, the novel with a sociological motive now sets the literary fashion, and a course in political economy has become necessary to write a successful love story.

It is not so much the increased volume of economic discussion

that marks the social growth of Nationalism as the fact that its tone is chiefly given by the adherents of the new and humane schools of political economy which, until recently, had obtained but little hearing among us. Up to within a very few years the old school of political economy, although it had long before begun to fall into discredit in Europe, still held practically undisputed sway in America. To-day the new school, with its socialistic method and sympathies, is the school to which nearly all the young and rising professors of political economy belong. The definition of labor as "a commodity," would now endanger the position of an instructor in that science in any institution of learning which did not depend for its patronage upon a reputation for being behind the times. There are a few such yet despite the growth of Nationalism.

The full programme of Nationalism, involving the entire substitution of public for private conduct of all business, for the equal benefit of all, is not indeed advocated by any considerable number of economists or prominent writers. They discuss chiefly details of the general problem, but, in so far as they propose remedies, it is significant that they always take the form of state and national management of business. It would not probably be too strong a statement to say that the majority of the younger schools of political economists and economic writers on that subject now regard with favor state conduct of what they call "natural monopolies," that is to say, telegraphs, telephones, railroads, local-transit lines, water-works, municipal lighting, etc. "Natural monopolies" are distinguished by this school as businesses in which the conditions practically exclude competition. Owing to the progress of the trusts and syndicates, businesses not natural monopolies are rapidly being made artificial ones with the effect of equally excluding competition. If the economists of the "natural monopoly" school follow the logic of their method they are bound, in proportion as the progress of artificial monopolization abolishes their distinction, to become full-fledged Nationalists. I have no doubt they will soon be wholly with us, as in spirit and tendency they now are.

There is a great deal more that might be said of the recent and swiftly increasing movement of moral sentiment and scientific thought towards Nationalism, but the limits of my space compel me to pass on to the consideration of what has been accomplished

in the field of politics and legislation within the four years since its rise as a definitive doctrine.

The immediate propositions of the Nationalists are on two lines. First the nationalization of inter-State business, and business in the products or service of which people in more than one State are interested. Second, the State management or municipalization of businesses purely local in their relations. In the former line the rise within two years of a third national political party, pledged to a large part of the immediate purposes of Nationalism, is certainly the most notable phenomenon. The People's Party was formed at Cincinnati on February 22, 1891, and ratified and indorsed at St. Louis, May 19, 1892, by a convention representing the great Farmers' Alliances, white and colored, of the West and South, and also the Knights of Labor and other artisans' organizations. The platform adopted at St. Louis as that on which the People's Party's Presidential candidates are to be nominated and supported by these allied organizations, demands nationalization of the issue of money, nationalization of banking by means of postal savings-banks for deposit and exchange, national ownership and operation of the telegraphs and telephones, national ownership and operation of the railroads, and declares the land with its natural resources the heritage of the nation.

Remember that this platform voices the enthusiastic convictions and determination of many million voters belonging to organizations which have already carried several State elections, and which, as now united, may carry in the Presidential election, as their opponents concede, four or five States, and, as they themselves expect, twice or thrice that number. If you would estimate the probable growth of Nationalism in the next six months, remember that during that period the demands of this platform and the arguments for them will be stated and reiterated weekly by the eight to ten hundred farmers' papers of the South and West, and dinned into their ears by regiments of orators. About half the farmers' weeklies of the West, it should be added, not only support the St. Louis platform, but take every occasion to declare that the adoption of the whole Nationalist plan, with the industrial republic as its consummation, is but a question of time. "Talk about Nationalism," said one brawny farmer at the St. Louis convention, "why, west of the Mississippi we are all Nationalists."

In tracing the rise of this third party, it may be interesting to note that it was in the trans-Mississippi States, in the newly-admitted States and the Territories, and on the Pacific coast, where the People's Party now has its main strongholds, that the reception of "Looking Backward" was most general and enthusiastic. The growing economic distress in the great grain States had no doubt much to do with this readiness for a radical industrial solution, but the bold, adventurous temper of the people, perhaps, even more. To a race of pioneers which had hewn mighty States out of the wilderness and the desert within the lifetime of a generation, there was nothing to take the breath away in a proposal to reconstruct industry on new lines.

I have left myself little space wherein to speak of what has been done for Nationalism in the line of the municipalization of local businesses. The Nationalists of Boston and vicinity, in 1889, circulated petitions for the passage of a bill by the Legislature permitting municipalities to build and operate their own lighting plants, gas or electric. The bill failed in the Legislature of 1889-90, passing the House but being lost in the Senate. The Nationalists resumed the fight the next year on petitions bearing 13,000 names. The bill became a law after a bitter fight, in which the Nationalists, backed by the labor organizations and a strong popular sentiment, were opposed by a combination of the electric and gas companies representing \$35,000,000 of capital.

Prior to that date, public lighting, although long a matter of course in Great Britain and Europe, was almost unknown in America; a striking illustration, by the way, of the incomprehensible manner in which America has lagged behind monarchical and aristocratic states in the practical application of its own patented idea of popular government.

Up to the passage of the Municipal Lighting Bill in 1891 by the Massachusetts Legislature, less than a dozen American towns had tried public lighting, and few people had even heard of their experiment. In the one year since then, sixteen towns and cities in Massachusetts alone and as many in Ohio have taken steps towards public-lighting works, while a host of municipalities in the rest of the Union are following their example.

If the Nationalists had done nothing more than point out the way of deliverance from the gas-meter, they would surely have

deserved well of the American people, but in doing that they have done more—they have set the people thinking along the line of municipal self-help.

The American citizen is not unintelligent as to questions of profit and loss. Give him the A B C of a business proposition and he can usually be trusted to go through the alphabet without further assistance. Once convince him that public-light service means, as a matter of demonstration and experience, as it does, a saving to the consumer of from 30 to 50 per cent., and he will commence to scratch his head and ask why the same rule doesn't apply to water-works and transit systems.

By turning over such functions to private companies aiming only at the largest possible profits, instead of discharging them directly, cities and towns subject themselves to a needless tax, aggregating more, in many cases, than the total tax levy for nominally public purposes, as if, indeed, any purpose could be more public than lighting, water supply, and transit. Wherever a private company can make a profit on serving the community (leaving aside watered stock) the people themselves, who take no profit from themselves, can do it just so much cheaper. All we Nationalists want to do is to get people to reason along the line of their collective interests with the same shrewdness they show in pursuing their personal interests. That habit once established, Nationalism is inevitable.

EDWARD BELLAMY.