

AMERICAN POLITICAL THOUGHT
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Supplementary Material

Chapter 8: The Progressive Era – Citizenship and Community

*Samuel Zane Batten, The New World Order (1919)*¹

Born in New Jersey on the eve of the Civil War, Samuel Zane Batten graduated from Bucknell University in Pennsylvania and began a career as a Baptist minister in the mid-Atlantic and the Midwest. He became involved in social reform movements in the late nineteenth century and helped found the Brotherhood of the Kingdom, a core organization in the Social Gospel movement at the turn of the century. He was a prolific author, arguing that Christians had a religious duty to make use of the state to improve the condition of mankind. As the country was exiting World War I, Batten was optimistic that nationalization of industries and active governmental mobilization of economic resources for the war effort marked the end of American individualism. Rather than a return to normalcy, as President Warren G. Harding would promise, Batten hoped the country would transition into a new world order characterized by the “socialization of the nation” and the “democratization of industry.”

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The nation today faces a great new task. In the judgment which has befallen the world secret things are brought to light and hidden defects in society are revealed; the inadequacy of the policies and programs of the nations is shown. In all this the need of a new national policy is suggested. And in the struggle of the nation today we find the hope of a new social order. The nation will never be the same as it was before. A return to the status quo ante is impossible. Changes are coming, and we must prepare for them. What shall these changes be? Shall reaction regain its hold and control the power of industry and life of the nation? If so, there is trouble ahead, with friction, strife, and rebellion. Shall we allow things to drift and trust that they will adjust themselves? We need to remember that moral progress is not automatic; things grow better just as fast and as far as men see the better and strive for it. To allow things to drift is to invite disaster. There is only one course open, therefore. We must understand the changes that right and necessary; we must have an intelligent conception of the laws of social and national life; and we must unite the people in behalf of social justice and progress. . . .

I. The Failure of the Old Individualism. It appears, for one thing, that we have been most neglectful and wasteful of our human resources. We have been intent on the project of developing the natural resources of the nation, and we have done this at an unparalleled rate. But in all this we have been neglectful of higher values and have been wasteful of the most valuable asset, the lives given to us. We have built our cities and developed our industries with little regard for the health, the happiness, the welfare of the people.

It appears that the industrial processes have been regardless of the welfare of the people and the larger life of the nation. Each industry has been controlled by its own managers, usually a few men, whose immediate object was profits. . . . It has worked the spirit and hope out of men and has left life devoid of eternal values.

¹ Excerpt taken from Samuel Zane Batten, *The New World Order* (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1919).

It appears further that special privilege and industrial autocracy have exploited the people and have made a malign influence upon the nation. The control of industry has fallen into a few hands, and these are able to determine the destiny of millions of men. . . . And they have used this power to enrich themselves out of the necessities of the people.

This evil became especially patent in the early stages of the world war. During the past years there has been a marked increase in the cost of living. When the war began what did we find? Practically every group in the land used the war as a plea for raising the price of everything they could control. . . . And so we found individuals and corporations growing enormously rich out of the greatest calamity of the race; they have allowed self-interest to determine their attitude and conduct. Thus the individualistic doctrine, in its negative aspect at least, leads to the reign of capitalism in industry and of self-interest in trade.

In fine, the world war became a veritable Day of Judgment, testing the works of men and nations and revealing the sins of the one and the defects of the other. It became evident that the old individualism had run its course and had produced its natural fruits. Each person was looking out for himself, and few were living for the common good. Each group and class was intent upon its own advantage and indifferent to the general welfare. It became evident that Americans on the whole have been living in pioneer conditions, with each section looking out for itself but with little sense of the whole. . . . Clearly, we were revealed to be an unorganized people, with abundant energy and lofty patriotism, but without coordination of forces or discipline of will.

II. The Socialization of the Nation. The war which revealed some of the defects in the national life suggested the potent remedy. In the stress and strain of the war it became necessary for the nation to change its policy and take control of the nation's resources. Government was compelled to take over the railroads and steel-mills, to regulate trade and fix prices, to limit profits and determine income. It was compelled to assign men their tasks and establish a stern discipline. In all countries, and in our own no less, the war has profoundly modified the old economic system and has introduced far-reaching innovations in national policies. Methods of state control and national discipline which would once have been regarded as intolerable infringements of the rights of employers and workmen, have been accepted without protests by all parties. Ten years ago no one could have imagined such changes would be possible in our generation. In a few years of crowded and eventful life we have gathered the results of a century of economic evolution. Some of these changes are no doubt temporary and provisional. They were dictated by necessity and were accepted on the understanding that they were temporary. Nevertheless, many of these changes have proved so beneficent and necessary that they must not be allowed to pass. Many of them are permanent and must now become part of the settled policy of the nation. The old prewar order has passed away forever, and we have come into a new world.

In all this the nation has demonstrated the value of social control and the necessity of national discipline. In the past many of our people have been individualists and have feared social control. They have opposed public ownership and management of resources, production, distribution, and transportation on the ground that private management was more efficient and progressive. But the war has changed all this and has revealed the weakness, the inadequacy, the ineffectiveness, the costliness of the old individualistic organization of business. . . .

It is too early in the day for anyone to indicate all of the changes that are coming and to frame the policies that must be adopted. But the nation has gained a sense of direction in national policy, and it has given an illustration of the meaning and value of socialization. Every consideration of right and expediency which justified this action in wartime amply justifies it for all times. The welfare of society is the supreme concern in war and in peace. Private interest must yield when public good is at stake. Every person must hold his property and lie as a social trust and must accept his social obligation. Society must adopt such a policy as shall secure the largest good of the whole people. . . .

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III. The New National Policy. What the nation needs at this time is a well-thought-out, comprehensive plan of social reconstruction which will guarantee freedom, equality, and justice to all. It must ensure a national order governed on democratic principles which shall unify the forces of the nation, develop a national discipline, and express the cooperation for the sake of all. In this program four things are vital:

1. *There must be a change in the spirit and policy of the nation.* The old individualism taught that the individual is supreme and his interests are his final law. It taught that the rule of the game is each for himself and the devil take the hindmost. Thus it sanctified the game of grab and the rule of self-interest.

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The nation must have a new mind and heart and conscience. There must be developed a national spirit of sacrifice and service. We must gain the sense of the whole, and learn to take thought for the common life, and to value every policy and program by this standard. . . . We need the national conviction that one is to seek, not his own advantage, but the profit of the many. We must realize that the good man is a good citizen and lives for the common weal. . . .

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2. *There must be a supervision and control by society of the life and resources of the nation.* We cannot longer permit a few men to gain control of the means of production and distribution and to tax the people in the form of a monopoly price. . . . Society must abolish special privileges of whatever kind, social, political, or economic. It must break the stranglehold of capitalism upon labor, industry, and life. The people must regain the lost right to the earth and its resources. Wo to the autocrats and junkers who oppose the coming of social justice and would keep the people down. . . .

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3. *The processes of industry must come under the direct supervision and coordination of society.* The time was when the individual who wanted to stand on his feet and secure justice had to depend upon his own strong arm. In the progress of man and the development of society we have long since passed this stage. In what we call the state we recognize the principle of social control; and we substitute the general, definite, impartial will for the uncertain, arbitrary, personal will. In a civilized state each person consents to have his interests interpreted and measured by the common will and general welfare. In case of a conflict of wills and interests all parties agree to settle the questions at issue by an appeal to the common welfare and will.

The time has come when men in their economic relations must agree to come under the control of society, and to have their interests interpreted and measured by the common will and welfare. . . .

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4. *We must create a more just and efficient social order.* The present order has failed at many points. It has failed to guarantee the right to life of all human beings. It has failed to ensure equality of opportunity to all and has compelled many to work against heavy handicaps. It is unjust in that it allows a few to exploit the many and deprives many of a real chance in life. It is wasteful on the side of production and unjust on the side of distribution. It has inverted the true order and has turned values topsy-turvy. It makes men the means of producing things, whereas things are only tolerable in so far as they produce men. . . .

Two possible courses are open to us: Either there must be such full social control over the forces and processes of industry as shall safeguard the resources of the nation and the welfare of the people; or there must be the full assertion of the right of eminent domain, the taking over by the people of the resources of the earth with full ownership and operation by society of all the means of production and distribution. Which course will the people take? Some men will prefer one and other men will choose the alternative. But one way or the other society will take, and one way it must take. . . .