

**THE LARGER LIBERALISM;
OUTLINES OF A SOCIAL
PHILOSOPHY FOR THE
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA**

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The Larger Liberalism; Outlines of a Social Philosophy for the United States of America by
Edward Bernard Benjamin

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EDWARD BERNARD BENJAMIN

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EDWARD BERNARD BENJAMIN

Outlines of a Social Philosophy
for the United States of America



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THE LARGER LIBERALISM

INTRODUCTION

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ENTHUSIASTS in any great cause with a past tend naturally to err in relating the present to that past. Thus it is that in estimating the strength of the liberal tendencies of the day, we easily overlook the half century which brought forth such men as Cobbett, Bentham, Place, Owen, Fourier, Saint-Simon, Proudhon, Disraeli, Engels and Karl Marx; and the decade which produced the Webbs, Shaw, Wells and Hobson.

However this may be, the fact stands that probably never before in history has the cause of social reform received a more respectful hearing than at the moment. We are speaking now in particular of social reform as directed towards more equitable distribution of wealth and the improvement of working conditions in industry. This liberalism of the hour has become for the intellectuals of all countries a

vital interest; has attained, indeed, a sort of intellectuality of its own. But this interest extends far beyond any one class. Thus in our own country, the "Reconstruction Report" of the British Labor Party, originally brought out by the *New Republic*, has been written up for the *Saturday Evening Post*, and been made a topic of discussion by the members of the American Economic League. Of special significance is the spectacle of American business men, among them some of our best-known financiers, gravely and considerably debating industrial reforms which twenty years ago would have seemed out-and-out revolution. The faith of organized labor, "Things will be different after the war," apparently has attracted converts from altogether unexpected quarters.

There are several factors accountable for this sudden accentuation of interest in social reform. Partly the phenomenon in question arises as a result of the Russian Revolution, which not half understood by the great mass, has touched the imagination of many, bringing home a realization of what men can be goaded to by suffering and oppression, and a remembrance that the catastrophe of the past lives on in the present. Partly, also, this phenomenon

represents the outgrowth of the spirit of change engendered in all classes by war. People suffer much; they seek to retrieve all. "English troops are coming back . . . arguing that they now have a stake in England—that they have fought for it—and that England means to them a different England than England before the war."¹ "The sons of Oxford and Cambridge, having gone forth to die for the People, will return to live for the People."²

But primarily this new attitude on the part of many members of our society is traceable to the extraordinary conditions of production arising from the war. The warfare of to-day, essentially one of *matériel*, has brought us to a new dependence upon the laboring classes. The acute labor shortage, an outgrowth of the diversion of man power to army and navy, has greatly strengthened the wage-earner's position. In the recognition during the war by the English and American governments of a definite labor interest, we perceive the realization of this fact by the statesmen of both countries. The appointment originally of

¹ Paul A. Kellogg. Address before the Unitarian Club of Boston, April 10, 1918. Reported in the *Boston Herald* of the 11th.

² The Most Rev. Cosmo Gordon Lang, Archbishop of York. Address before Faculty and Students of Harvard University, March 25, 1918.