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A Centenary Reconsideration of Bellamy's *Looking Backward*

By WARREN J. SAMUELS*

ABSTRACT. *Edward Bellamy's* utopian novel, *Looking Backward*, was a best seller in its time and is an *American classic* today. It launched a *social movement*, influenced *Thorstein Veblen* and a number of other social thinkers and raised questions of pertinence in our day. *Looking Backward* is outstanding in a genre that helps to develop *social values*, particularly regarding *justice*. It is a stinging critique of a status quo that still endures and it gives voice to felt opinions regarding change then and now. Bellamy's *utopia* involved centralization of *power* in a static *economy* and *society* (ideas from which our generation recoils) and, though not foreseen by Bellamy, the creation of a *managerial class*, not wholly different from the *ruling classes* of his day and ours, in *capitalist America* and *State socialist Soviet Union*. But he correctly noted the growth of concentrated power in American society. As *social criticism*, *Looking Backward* is a contribution of the first rank to the effort to understand and improve mankind's society and condition. The advance of the *social sciences* has not made its contribution obsolete.

If, therefore, I nevertheless conclude that I believe that the Welfare State, like Old Siwash, is really worth fighting for and even dying for as compared to any rival system, it is because, despite its imperfections in theory and practice, in the aggregate it provides more promise of preserving and enlarging human freedoms, temporal prosperity, the extinction of mass misery, and the dignity of man and his moral improvement than any other social system

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which has previously prevailed, which prevails elsewhere today, or which, outside Utopia, the mind of man has been able to provide a blueprint for.

JACOB VINER

THE WORLDS OF LITERATURE, social criticism, and political-economic analysis are approaching, in 1987, the centenary of one of the most remarkable and important books in the history of economic thought with regard to the formation of public opinion, Edward Bellamy's *Looking Backward, 2000–1887*.¹ Together with several dozen other contemporary representatives of the genre and also Henry George's *Progress and Poverty* (1879), Bellamy's utopian novel had a profound impact on the political viability of, if not necessity for, the Welfare State, notwithstanding the fact that the future did not materialize as foreseen by Bellamy.² Not incidentally, *Looking Backward* had a profound effect on a number of individuals, not the least of whom was Thorstein Veblen.³ The book also continues to be important because Bellamy, a New England journalist whose success with this book (which sold a million copies within a few years) was something of a surprise to its author, dealt therein with fundamental and abiding questions of economic belief and of the organization and control of the economic system. The purpose of this article is to reconsider *Looking Backward* in the hindsight of virtually a century's knowledge and experience.

I

ALTHOUGH IT AND TO SOME EXTENT its sequel, *Equality*,⁴ became leading political tracts, *Looking Backward* is first and foremost a utopian novel and shares the principal qualities of its genre. First, it was a contribution to the process of the articulation, juxtaposition, clarification, and selection of social values, particularly with regard to justice. It offered a critique, often stinging, of the status quo either as received or as developing. Over the centuries such literature has been an important vehicle in that valuation process, a leading means of influencing, or giving voice to, opinions for or against socio-politico-economic change.

Second, as a fictional account of one utopia—of a good place that is, as yet, no place—it provided a detailed description of a particular society and the belief system on which it is constructed, with special attention to questions of its power structure.

Third, each utopian community tends to be either an extension or a reflection (perhaps in reverse) of the author's own society, a response to its problems, trends, and conflicts. The facts (1) that the Platonist imagination, which seeks and "finds" an ideal derivative from extant reality, can pursue the ideal in many directions and (2) that a given existing society is sufficiently multifaceted to

permit the derivation of diverse and conflicting ideals, account in the West for the coexistence of various communitarian and socialist utopias alongside the equally fictional, if not romantic, focus on a relatively frictionless, welfare-maximizing, automatic-adjustment mechanism called the market.⁵ A heterogeneous status quo and a multiplicity of possible evaluative perspectives or standpoints permit the drawing of diverse and divergent utopias, each both supporting and challenging different elements of the perceived status quo.

Fourth, *Looking Backward* shares with most, but by no means all, of the post-1850 utopist literature, in marked contrast to that of the period 1600–1850, certain substantive characteristics. There is centralization of power. There is primary attention to the organization and control of specifically economic activity. There is an acceptance of industrialization and urbanization. There is an emphasis on the necessity of “proper” institutional arrangements as the *sine qua non* of the good society; that is, the development of ideal personhood and interpersonal relations requires the “right” institutions. There is anticipation of some elements of the theory and practice of the Welfare State.⁶

Fifth, this literature, or certainly the better examples of it, poses quite fundamental questions: the status of the status quo, the division of power in society and economy, the quality of life, the quality of the human beings who are the product of the system, the leadership selection process, the problem of rewards and incentives (and the presumed quality of life and human beings to which the incentives are functional), and the artifactual character of social institutions and their susceptibility to more or less deliberative human redesign and modification. The literature thus contributes ideational and sometimes practical checks on the status quo and its trends through the articulation of values and the possibilities of social change.

Finally, there tend to be common criticisms of this literature and perhaps equally common responses to that criticism.

First, to the typical criticism (contained in a common usage of the word utopian) of idealistic and unrealistic expectations as to how much change is possible, the responses are (1) that through venturesome elevation of horizon and expectations, change can be generated and (2) that much systemic and structural change has in fact transpired (say, during recent centuries).

Second, a quite different and perhaps more powerful and certainly more accurate criticism is that of static construction. It is the rare utopia whose author provides for specific functional mechanisms of systemic and major structural change—and *Looking Backward* is not one. Each utopia is premised on a once-and-for-all reconstruction. The officials within each, such as they are, aside from the discretionary activities ensconced within their administrative duties, have

only to observe an analytical *laissez faire*, that is, to allow the system to run in accordance with its author-determined operating principles. The effective pejorative “utopian” character of most utopias, then, is not their unrealism as to how much change is possible but their neglect of mechanisms of change within their own respective ideal systems. These novels manifest a very human desire to establish *the* right and perfect system and then let it work and have individuals operate within it, with the confidence that it will produce harmony, correct behavior, and the right goals. This is, of course, both a simplistic and disengaging view of the complexity and perennial quality of real-world problems and decision making. It constitutes a premature termination of man’s problem-solving penchant manifest in the utopian writers themselves. As one correspondent wrote to William Beveridge, “*Don’t* want to live in an age when things have been settled. It is far better to have a chance of making a difference to the solutions of problems.”⁷ The typical utopian novel effectuates premature—and unlikely—evolutionary closure. It denies equal opportunity to a utopian writer within that utopia.

Third, although many utopian novels neglect considerations of economic organization and are appropriately subject to criticism on various grounds, many others, such as *Looking Backward*, appreciate the need to organize and administer production and to attend to the problems thereof. Not the least of these is the discipline and control of the human labor force through one or another system of incentives.

Fourth, a related specific criticism is that the novelist, in constructing his utopia, neglects the importance of distribution and incentives. Inasmuch as this criticism tends to be made in the context of existing reward and incentive arrangements (frequently the capitalist or market set but increasingly also that of the centrally planned economy) and is therefore system-specific, the response is that incentives and distribution must be understood in terms of, and functional toward, the institutions and goals of the particular utopia, not some existing system whose passing it is the object of the novelist to hasten. To the related criticism that communitarian or socialist systemic and structural change will have an adverse effect on output, there are two responses. Either the adverse effect is problematical and may not occur or, if there is such an effect, it is considered minor in relation to the hoped-for gains in justice, quality of life, and so on. (The more subtle response is that there will be different definitions of output.)

Fifth, to the charge that the novelist has failed to anticipate opposition by vested interests to the threat to their hegemony offered by the utopian scheme, the response is that to weaken and dislodge such opposition is precisely the

objective of the novelist, the fictional account of the utopia constituting a device to challenge such hegemony (indirectly through fiction and in some circumstances with hoped-for impunity).

A final and frequent criticism is that the novelist has oversimplified human nature and the possible effect on it of changes in social and economic institutions. The response is that human nature *is* subject to social control through various alternative institutions and, however limited the possibility of affecting human nature or, better, behavior, the role of a work of fiction is to underscore that possibility.

It is obvious that the utopian literature has articulated values and possibilities. For a book such as *Looking Backward*, with its focus on political-economic organization, the dual analytical and normative problem becomes: what nature of individualism within what institutional structure? It is with the analytical facet that this reconsideration of *Looking Backward* is largely concerned.

II

A FUNDAMENTAL QUESTION of social science concerns the degree to which the meaningfulness of knowledge resides in its correspondence with and capacity to explicate economic reality—which thereby would constitute its essence and ultimately its cause—the result constituting, at least problematically, a body of more or less hard knowledge, or “truth.” *Looking Backward* is of continued interest partially and perhaps especially because Bellamy treats this question in some detail. In fact, he presents a classic statement of a particular position. He argues that the belief system of 19th century Western society was precisely and only what those words connote; not a body of truth describing and explaining an economic reality given to man but a body of beliefs governing attitudes, behavior, and policy. Part of Bellamy’s genius was to identify, first, as a system of belief, what adherents to that belief system took to be eternal truth, and, second, how important a belief system is to the perception and acceptance of a socioeconomic system. The rationalizations of 19th century society are revealed to be quite relative and situational.⁸ Although the question remains as to whether or how much a belief system comprises a value-laden view of reality *vis-à-vis* reality itself, the very fact that the question—in matters of both social science and general ideology—is asked signifies a relatively open-ended attitude toward socioeconomic problems. The question is not solely that of the grounding of a particular socioeconomic system in some ultimate reality but also of what one wants from the social economy⁹ and how that determination is to be made. The open-minded person must continually recognize that before any system of belief is taken as definitive of social reality it must be contemplated as

reflecting to some degree the existing order of society and its selective perception as to what is natural and reasonable.¹⁰ In helping to accomplish this, *Looking Backward* performed one of the functions of its genre, most likely more effectively in the late 19th century United States than did Marx's writings.

Bellamy's challenge to the belief system of 19th century society—his argument that it was only a system of belief—commences with the first chapter; class structure and struggle ("the labor troubles") are viewed from the perspective of the idle rich. This sets the tone for the juxtaposition throughout the book between (to use Parrington's apposite language) the plutocratic and the democratic interpretations of property and the police power of the State.¹¹ Bellamy candidly writes of "the immemorial division of society into the four classes, or nations, as they may be more fitly called, . . . of the rich and the poor, the educated and the ignorant."¹² These were "classes which in many respects regarded each other as distinct races." More typically, however, he distinguished solely between rich and poor, the propertied and the nonpropertied. Julian West, the hero of the saga, lived on the inherited wealth of his great-grandfather, not recognizing "that interest on investments was a species of tax in perpetuity upon the product of those engaged in industry which a person possessing or inheriting money was able to levy."¹⁴ Bellamy compared

society as it then was to a prodigious coach which the masses of humanity were harnessed to and dragged toilsomely along a very hilly and sandy road. The driver was hunger, and permitted no lagging, though the pace was necessarily very slow. Despite the difficulty of drawing the coach at all along so hard a road, the top was covered with passengers who never got down, even at the steepest ascents. These seats on top were very breezy and comfortable. Well up out of the dust, their occupants could enjoy the scenery at their leisure, or critically discuss the merits of the straining team. Naturally such places were in great demand and the competition for them was keen, everyone seeking as the first end in life to secure a seat on the coach for himself and to leave it to his child after him.¹⁵

Although "commiseration was frequently expressed by those who rode for those who had to pull the coach, especially when the vehicle came to a bad place in the road, as it was constantly doing, or to a particularly steep hill," "it was firmly and sincerely believed that there was no other way in which Society could get along, except the many pulled at the rope and the few rode, and not only this, but that no very radical improvement even was possible, either in the harness, the coach, the roadway, or the distribution of the toil." Moreover, there was "a singular hallucination which those on the top of the coach generally shared, that they were not exactly like their brothers and sisters who pulled at the rope, but of finer clay, in some way belonging to a higher order of beings who might justly expect to be drawn. . . . The strangest thing about the hallucination was that those who had but just climbed up from the ground, before

they had outgrown the marks of the rope upon their hands, began to fall under its influence."¹⁶ All in all, the system of belief celebrated an order of things in which "money alone commanded all that was agreeable and refined in life."¹⁷

It was a society dominated by "the concentration of capital in greater masses than had ever been known before," with the effect that "the individual laborer . . . was reduced to insignificance and powerlessness . . ."¹⁸ Although "capital had been proved efficient in proportion to its consolidation," it was joined to a plutocracy before which the rest of society necessarily bowed down.¹⁹ Power and belief system reinforced each other, obscuring "the obvious fact . . . that no business is so essentially the public business as the industry and commerce on which the people's livelihood depends, and that to entrust it to private persons to be managed for private profit is a folly similar in kind, though vastly greater in magnitude, to that of surrendering the functions of political government to the kings and nobles to be conducted for their personal glorification."²⁰

One of the beliefs of that society was that individuals were in principle capable of self-support and received income in proportion to their self-support. The illusory nature of the belief in self-support Bellamy challenged on the basis of a social inheritance of knowledge, machinery, and institutions "which represent nine parts to one contributed" by the individual to the value of his or her product.²¹ The illusion of the principle of self-support did, however, enable this dispossession of the unfortunate and the crippled to whom insult was added to robbery when a few crusts of help were called, demeaningly, charity.²²

In addition, other people were permitted to do things for you "which you despised them for doing," and one "accepted services from them which you would have been unwilling to render them."²³ It was a system of "galling personal dependence upon others as to the very means of life,"²⁴ a "wolfish society."²⁵ All this was joined to a wealth-making machine which seemed admirable,²⁶ but in fundamental respects it was "like a system for preventing production." Its central feature was "to entrust the business of providing for the community to a class whose interest it was to starve it" in the interest of commanding famine prices.²⁷ It was a system in which the economists reached the "despairing conclusion" that business instability, unemployment, and crises could not be prevented or controlled,²⁸ a system in which "selfishness was [the] only science."²⁹ Waste from mistaken undertakings, from the competition and mutual hostility of those engaged in industry, from periodic gluts and crises, and from idle capital and labor at all times was accepted as a matter of course, not seen as unnecessary waste.³⁰

It was a society "founded on the pseudo [sic] self-interest of selfishness, and

appealed solely to the anti-social and brutal side of human nature . . .”³¹ “It was the sincere belief of even the best of men at that epoch that the only stable elements in human nature, on which a social system could be safely founded, were its worst propensities. . . . In a word, . . . they believed, that is, that the anti-social qualities of men, and not their social qualities, were what furnished the cohesive force of society.”³² There was thus maintained “the last vestige of the serfdom of man to man” in a society dominated by the motives of “the fear of want and the lust of gain.”³³ The rosebush of humanity, which could have been placed in more propitious and productive soil, here produced largely noxious results,³⁴ under the belief that this was all that was possible.

A similar point of view was later given a new voice by John Maynard Keynes, who hailed the “return to some of the most sure and certain principles of religion and traditional virtue—that avarice is a vice, that the exaction of usury is a misdemeanour, and the love of money is detestable, that those walk most truly in the paths of virtue and sane wisdom who take least thought for the morrow,” rather than pretending “that fair is foul and foul is fair; for foul is useful and fair is not.”³⁵ A quite different reaction was elicited from professional economist contemporaries of Bellamy, however. Thus, for example, General Francis Amasa Walker wrote: “I must deem any man very shallow in his observation of the facts of life and utterly lacking in the biological sense who fails to discern in competition the force to which it is mainly due that mankind have risen from stage to stage, in intellectual, moral, and physical power.”³⁶

III

IF BELLAMY'S CRITIQUE of the 19th century status quo and its dominant system of belief is from the perspective of the dispossessed at the bottom of society, of those providing the power for the stagecoach in his famous analogy, the new order of society is described and lauded in *Looking Backward* as promotive of the interests of the masses—of all persons—in a classless society. After an overview of the character and structure of the new order I will focus on several points critical to a centenary reconsideration and understanding of the book: technology, the arrangements for the simultaneous liberation and control of the human labor force, the use of government, and the system of labor management of industry.

The principal features of the system described in *Looking Backward* are public ownership of the means of production, market socialism, income equality, the industrial army (consideration of which is deferred to a subsequent section), and the welfare program.

The marked consolidation of industry observed in the late 19th century, which Bellamy attributed to efficiencies of scale rather than to the machinations of high corporate finance,³⁷ was extended by him to “the final consolidation of the entire capital of the nation” into one Great Trust,³⁸ as he called it. Its operation was for the benefit of all the people and without the incurrence of waste, and its purpose was to produce as much goods as possible, given the other features of the new system.

All individuals receive the same income, but “personal taste determines how the individual shall spend” that income.³⁹ Absent private ownership of capital and land, inheritance is limited to personal assets.⁴⁰ In the new system “everyone might seek a moderate well-being with reasonable expectations of success;”⁴¹ “abundance was assured to all and immoderate possessions made impossible of attainment.”⁴²

The allocation of resources to production is made on the basis of upward flowing estimates, with continuing adjustments, derivative of projected consumer demand.⁴³ Production is strictly on the basis of consumer sovereignty; absent unequal income distribution, demand reflects relative utility equally for all.⁴⁴ With equal incomes, prices reflect not wage differentials but varying hours, “the relative number of hours constituting a day’s work in different trades”⁴⁵ (see below).

Although Bellamy’s new order is definitely not a Welfare State grafted onto an essentially capitalist system, as in the 20th century United States, he stressed that in addition to income equality “the nation guarantees the nurture, education, and comfortable maintenance of every citizen from the cradle to the grave.”⁴⁶

Bellamy was aware that the new system would lack something markedly evident in the old. Without private capital and the needs and practices of finance capitalism, there would be a very limited financial system. Money would be used only as a unit of account. In the absence of private capital and complex buying and selling arrangements, there would be little need for business law; law would be largely a matter of a few maxims, and there would be no lawyers.⁴⁷

IV

STUDENTS OF THORSTEIN VEBLEN and John Kenneth Galbraith will find in *Looking Backward* a number of now familiar themes centering primarily on technology. Running throughout the book is the distinction, now perceived as Veblenian but which Veblen may well have learned from Bellamy, between industrial and pecuniary pursuits, between making goods and making money. There also is an acceptance of technology and of what Veblenians call the machine process. As Joseph Dorfman, the premier interpreter of Veblen, put it, “Bellamy believed

not in fighting monopolies or the machine process, but in making them the means of achieving the socialist State."⁴⁸ Implicit in this is the marriage of science and utopia.⁴⁹ In addition and perhaps more striking there is a Galbraithian technological imperative: "The new order must come about speedily as a necessary consequence of two forces: the compulsion of economic fact, and the stimulus of ideas,"⁵⁰ that is, the technological imperative of economies of scale and the adoption of a new belief system and the concomitant repudiation and discarding of the old, with power and belief both being important to the evolutionary process.

V

IT SHOULD BE OBVIOUS that although self-interest likely will be differently formed and constituted (or perceived), individuals in the new order will pursue their self-interest, the point being that its pursuit, however specified, will be undertaken within a radically different set of institutions. Much the same thing can be said of freedom. Although it is possible to see posed by *Looking Backward* the "basic issue of security or freedom as the ultimate objective of American Society,"⁵¹ it also is possible to interpret the new order as a different pattern of freedom and control, including a different structure of freedom to act as distinct from freedom from action, from that of 19th (and 20th) century America.

If Bertrand de Jouvenel is correct that all societies encompass some system for the control and discipline of the human labor force,⁵² it is perhaps easier to understand at least one point Bellamy is making. Although he denigrated the status of labor under capitalism as wage-slavery, and although his system is demonstrably radically different in its organization of labor and production, it is still a system of the control and discipline of the human labor force. Thus, arguments critical of the pressures placed on labor in his system tend to ignore the coercive pressures on labor in a conventional market economy, just as arguments critical of the use of the State in Bellamy's system tend to ignore the fundamental legal elements in the organization and operation of the conventional market economy, ideological myths to the contrary notwithstanding. This is a very subtle and complex matter. His treatment of labor in the new system clearly evidences the importance of the observation made by de Jouvenel. It also demonstrates Bellamy's realism in matters of labor organization. While he is quite radical in his reorganization, he is not utopian in the pejorative sense, as he does not believe that incentives will be totally irrelevant. Furthermore, it indicates that his new system, like any system, must be understood as encompassing both freedom and control, thus placing in perspective—perhaps rendering as myopic—the criticisms of those who see in his Industrial Army

a regime of regimentation. But this still leaves him open to the Proudhonian charge that he only substitutes one monopsonistic state employer-exploiter for the many capitalist employers-exploiters, a theme to which I shall return.

All this is evident in the great deal Bellamy has to say about labor in the new system, which can only be summarized here. In Bellamy's new order workers enjoy a general voluntarism—self-selection—with regard to their occupations and jobs. All persons are educated; education no longer functions to reproduce class structure.⁵³ All must work between the ages of 21 and 45 and engage in three years' common labor. Those with demonstrated aptitude may pursue hard professional training until the age of 30.⁵⁴ Individual service is expected in proportion to one's power. Grading of performance is undertaken which, while it has no effect on income, for all receive the same, does have a role regarding placement.⁵⁵ For those who need it, there is an incentive system of honors.⁵⁶ Refusal to work is punished by solitary confinement.⁵⁷ There is a corps of invalids whose work is fitted to their strength.⁵⁸ Those justifiably unable to work receive the same income as everyone else.⁵⁹ In the new system, "The worker is not a citizen because he works, but works because he is a citizen."⁶⁰ The adjustment of supply to demand for workers in various occupations is adjusted not through wage-rate differentials which yield unequal incomes, (for all, to repeat, receive equal incomes), but through adjusting the required number of hours of work.⁶¹ (Of course, the constant, equal money wage coupled with a varying number of hours of work yield varying, differential hourly wage rates. It is Bellamy's point, however, that equal income be guaranteed and not left to the vagaries of the market as in the old wage system.) Neither the menial nor the invidious quality of labor is present; work has a recognized ubiquitous dignity.⁶² In Bellamy's view, his system would abolish the wage system forever.⁶³ It is replaced by one in which the individual, given his health, must work but in doing so is able to select "the harness which sets most lightly upon himself, find that in which he can pull best."⁶⁴ Indeed, after a half-term of service the individual can settle for half-income without further work.⁶⁵ But no one has a right to a particular job and no employing unit has an obligation to hire anyone; still, if individuals work at their personal capacity, the individual endowment of each is a collective good.

For persons who are essentially self-employed—writers, editors, artists, clergy, and so on—the system is somewhat more complex but simple in outline. There is a market for such services, and employment is directly a matter of consumer demand, with payment through the universal credit card system, along with indemnification to the nation (perhaps through payments from others specifically for that purpose) equal to the cost of support and supplemented by an honors

system.⁶⁶ Although great emphasis is placed on the creative use of one's post-working years, the choice among interests and activities is left to the individual.⁶⁷

As for women, Bellamy's new order provides for maternity leave, remuneration equal to that of men, and equal industrial status and opportunity. However, women have a separate organization, with leaders of their own choosing, and perhaps their own occupations. He makes a point of their being "under an entirely different discipline" and declares that "We have given them a world of their own, with its emulations, ambitions, and careers . . ." ⁶⁸ Although this arrangement may not suit a modern feminist in rationale or practice, Bellamy did believe that in the 19th century "women were more than any other class the victims of [that] civilization."⁶⁹ Women are no longer to be dependent on their husbands for maintenance; earned distinction, not support, is what women now seek in husbands;⁷⁰ and "Marriage does not exempt women from labor service."⁷¹

VI

IT CLEARLY IS POSSIBLE to see in Bellamy's utopia a form of Statism,⁷² a system of authoritarian State socialism,⁷³ a system of regimentation.⁷⁴ It also is possible to envision that society as one in which all individuals achieve their natural rights without regimentation,⁷⁵ as one in which there would be less interference with personal liberty than in capitalist society.⁷⁶ It *is* ironic that the solution to felt tyranny in the private concentration of capital⁷⁷ lies for Bellamy in the further consolidation of capital in The Great Trust.

Freedom and social control, however, are multifaceted and kaleidoscopic. Bellamy argued that with the transformation of the economic system there would be less for government to do and fewer if any pressures placed on government by special interests. Absent private ownership of capital, absent income derived from buying and selling, and absent income derivative through market positions secured by manipulating government, there would be little of the hitherto conventional activity for government to do. Government would be pacified, and official corruption would be eliminated by removing all opportunities.⁷⁸ Law would largely be a matter of a few maxims; there would be negligible legislation, less politics. New laws are proposed by one Congress and enacted by the following one. Most of the past functions of government would be absent.⁷⁹ There would not be the waste associated with public debt and military expenditures.⁸⁰ Government would be involved in a decentralized administration negligible in scope and function, being essentially executory with regard to fulfilling consumer demand.⁸¹

If government administration of economic affairs seems to involve more

government than in the prior order of society, it was Bellamy's view that the new system involved, ultimately, less government because all would benefit, more or less equally, from government. It would be serving all, not merely the privileged few. There would be achieved an individualism (albeit differently constituted) for all, not for the few. What seems from one perspective the submersion of the individual in the mass is from another the greater diffusion of opportunity for all individuals to develop their capabilities. There ultimately is involved a set of interpersonal comparisons as to legal and nonlegal social control and the reward and incentive system enconced therein. The continued religious mysticism and spiritualism (albeit without an institutionalized or established church) may be anathema, or at least ironic, to some. The imagery of militarism (the industrial army) may be repugnant, especially after two world wars and the recent instance of the Polish government and military, ostensibly ruling on behalf of the proletariat, crushing worker-organized Solidarity because it was a challenge to the Party. But any assessment of the use made of government in Bellamy's new order must avoid the implicit premises of system-specific selectivity and both recognize and give adequate effect to the complexity of all considerations of freedom and control. There is, however, an important question of particular contemporary, if not perennial, concern—Bellamy's underestimation of the consequential role of administration and its implications (to which I will return).

A word ought to be said about the leadership selection system. Bellamy's is not a worker participation system. Absent private capital, there are no private employers, thus no management system in which workers participate as outsiders. It is intended to be a worker self-managed system. All (with the exception of the infirm) work, and all receive income as a matter of right. Administration is largely self-executing and a matter of jobs like any other activity, not by the divine right of kingship or of capital. The higher administrative ranks, for these there must be, are elected by those who have served and are past 45 years of age. The President is selected from among the past heads of the ten departments after having left office. The self-employed—the membership of the liberal professions—can vote for but not serve as President. There is an active inspectorate.⁸²

VII

IN BELLAMY'S DISCUSSION of the theory and evolution of The Great Trust, Julian West's instructor about the new order, Dr. Leete, tells him that "In a word, the people of the United States concluded to assume the conduct of their own business, just as one hundred odd years before they had assumed the conduct

of their own government, organizing now for industrial purposes on precisely the same grounds that they had then organized for political purposes.”⁸³ This involves one of the most critical points made by Bellamy, namely, that political democracy without economic democracy may be unsatisfactory. Historically, socialist movements and systems of thought may be interpreted as saying, and often did explicitly say, that the economy and not just the polity had to be made responsive to the interests of all persons. Indeed, without economic democracy political democracy was a facade insofar as effective power and opportunity were concerned. But in another respect this involves a simplistic or at least question-begging point. All peoples not dominated by a foreign power can be said to have assumed the conduct of their own government, whether in political or economic affairs or both. The critical question concerns the structure of power through which that conduct, that control, is organized and executed. Bellamy’s emphasis, and that of all socialist movements and theories, is on a structure of power and control beneficial to *all* people, not just a privileged few. That is the gravamen of the statement quoted earlier in this paragraph from *Looking Backward*. But the further question involves the determination both of what is beneficial (and, correlatively, what is wasteful) and of the decision-making process (and actual decision makers) by which that and other specific questions may be worked out.

Bellamy, not alone among writers of utopian novels and of social criticism, considerably underestimated the scope and consequence of the decision making which necessarily would have continually to be undertaken in the system of economic administration described in *Looking Backward*. I am *not* raising the argument by Ludwig von Mises and Friedrich von Hayek as to whether the administration of a centrally planned economy can work at all or in an “economically rational” manner. I have neither the need nor the desire to do so. But the more general point implicit in their argument is well taken. Administration necessarily involves decision making concerning the definition of output, the identification of waste (a matter repeatedly stressed by Bellamy),⁸⁴ the menu of consumer choices, the development of technology (the determination of research and development activity), the determination of relative aggregate consumption as compared with saving and therefore investment, the use of alternative production techniques, and, *inter alia*, costing and pricing for use in decision making.

So far as I can see, then, and quite aside from Bellamy’s specific arrangements concerning leadership selection, there would be a tendency in the world he describes and lauds for a managerial class to emerge. It would either have its own viewpoint on critical developmental and administrative issues or comprise

the arena in which such issues were resolved. The fact, more or less, that these personnel were trained experts in a technocracy-meritocracy (notwithstanding the fact that all had the same income) would only cast luster on their performance of the managerial, decision-making role. In other words, there would be greater necessity and opportunity for leadership and authority—call it the exercise of technical expertise *or* tyranny—than Bellamy explicitly contemplates.

There are technical elements involved in the kinds of decisions listed above but there also are subjective and normative elements. These decisions will govern—and in large part give effect to antecedent, often implicit, normative premises—as to whose interests are to count. Systems of preference aggregation or of public choice may not necessarily and typically do not yield identical choices, and there inevitably is considerable power play as well as differences of premises and policy conclusions among technical experts. Whether in State socialism (or State capitalism), or the corporate system, or the mixed economy, or Bellamy's new order, the common institutional phenomenon tends to be a managerial class, more or less open to mobility. It seeks and, for those in office or position, acquires considerable autonomy and control over technical decision making (and hence is seen as above mere "politics") and thus prospective economic performance.

There are at least three sides to the argument I am suggesting. First, there is a tendency for a new technocratic elite to arise. It has power, its own view of the world, and a perception of its role that is likely to differ significantly from that played by the ordinary run of workers. The elite is likely to believe that all important decisions are largely technical in character and therefore should be determined by such as themselves. Second, the mass of workers will be in a subordinate position, a modern version of the straining team whose tasks and merits as so many factor inputs are discussed by those in superordinate positions, a situation in which a sense of exploitation no less intense than under capitalism may develop.⁸⁵ Third, as in any case of market socialism, conflict likely will develop between the center and the operating units.

Bellamy's book, then, raises the problem of whether there is a feasible non-hierarchical alternative to the historic ones of the hierarchic and power-laden corporate system or a hierarchic and power-laden State.⁸⁶ For all the evident or putative Statism in *Looking Backward*, Bellamy's intent, and to some extent his achievement, was actually quite libertarian. But the prospect of a meritocratic⁸⁷ managerial class—trained, emergent, and restaffed from the general population, perhaps not unlike that observable in both the West and the East in the late 20th century—raises serious questions about how truly democratic Bellamy's new order likely would prove to be. That order, for all its effort at autonomy,

would face if not yield to the tendency toward hierarchy evident in all societies. This problem is every bit as important as that of individual freedom in the face of social control (of which, of course, it may be seen as analytically one facet) and that of continuity *vis-à-vis* change, specifically the absence of any mechanism for systemic change. The irony is that the managerial administrative class will constitute the institutional mechanism for change, but change will likely not be systemic, or at least not deliberately, except insofar as greater hierarchism evolves so as to fundamentally alter the system from that designed by Bellamy.

Not alone in the literature, *Looking Backward* posed, and in some measure answered, certain questions but failed either to pose or to solve others, the most important being whether his new order can avoid a managerial class and a belief system which obfuscates the superordinate power position thereof. Bellamy seems not to have been aware of the problem or not to have given it much credence. In that, he is not alone. Far from arguing that Bellamy was utterly simplistic, I am arguing that he was incomplete. We *may* now know that our choice is not between plutocracy and democracy but between one system of freedom and control, one structure of autonomy and hierarchy, and another. Economies are managed even when they are thought not to be.

For all that, Bellamy, in his treatment of questions of technical economic concern, certainly transcended the naive moralism of his New England religious upbringing, although the latter, laden with Victorian gentility, is amply evident in the book. The power of *Looking Backward* rests in its identification and treatment of deep systemic problems of organization and control; in its penetration of the veil of belief systems, persuading us to do likewise in respect to his new order; and in the continued timeliness of those problems and that penetration—for example, regarding worker management—in the late 20th century. That worker managed systems, as well as individualistic, private property, capitalist systems, may yield a managerial class and managerialist belief system, and also encompass governance necessarily involved with more than “mere” passive administration, are lessons not yet fully learned nor, perhaps, not yet fully reached. But more generally, as D. P. O’Brien has written of Lord Overstone, who died in 1883, “If both economics and society have progressed since his day, many of the problems which troubled him are still unanswered.”⁸⁸ *Looking Backward* is more than a touching utopian novel. It is a premier contribution to the continuing noble Platonic effort both to understand and to improve society and the condition of mankind. The advance of social science has not dated its contribution.

Notes

1. All citations will be to the Modern Library Edition, New York, 1951. Introduction by Robert L. Shurter. The epigraph is from Jacob Viner, “The United States as a Welfare State,” in E. O.

Edwards, ed., *The Nation's Economic Objectives* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1964), p. 166; quoted in Eugene Rotwein, "Jacob Viner and the Chicago Tradition," *History of Political Economy*, Vol. 15, (Summer 1983), p. 277.

2. Useful discussions of Bellamy, the book, and the derivative Nationalist movement may be found in Sidney Fine, *Laissez Faire and the General-Welfare State* (Ann Arbor: Univ. of Michigan Press, 1956), pp. 295–301; Vernon Louis Parrington, *The Beginnings of Critical Realism in America, 1860–1920* (New York: Harbinger, 1930, 1958), pp. 302–15; Merle Curti, *The Growth of American Thought*, 3rd edition (New York: Harper & Row, 1964), pp. 609–10; Ralph Henry Gabriel, *The Course of American Democratic Thought*, 2nd edition (New York: Ronald Press, 1956), pp. 221 ff; and Frank E. Manuel and Fritzie P. Manuel, *Utopian Thought in the Western World* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1979), pp. 761–64.

3. Joseph Dorfman, *Thorstein Veblen and His America* (New York: Viking, 1934), pp. 68 ff and 388; see also Lewis A. Coser, *Masters of Sociological Thought*, 2nd edition (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1977), pp. 289–90.

4. Edward Bellamy, *Equality* (New York: D. Appleton and Co; 1897). The book is a continuation of the narrative and an elaboration of the argument of *Looking Backward*, in part taking up certain objections to his argument, such as the Malthusian population issue.

5. See George Will, "In Defense of the Welfare State," *The New Republic*, May 9, 1983, p. 25.

6. This and other paragraphs in this section in part reflect Glenn Negley and J. Max Patrick, *The Quest for Utopia* (Garden City: Doubleday Anchor, 1962), chs. 1, 2, 16.

7. R. Dunn Gardner to William H. Beveridge, April 21, 1906, quoted in Jose Harris, *William Beveridge* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1977), p. 74.

8. Arguably this applies to Bellamy's new order of the year 2000, as well, but the point is obscured, if not negated, in the absence of a mechanism of systemic change.

9. P. xviii.

10. P. 47.

11. Parrington, *op. cit.*, pp. 310–11.

12. Pp. 1–2.

13. P. 125.

14. Pp. 2–3.

15. P. 3.

16. Pp. 4–6.

17. P. 6.

18. P. 38.

19. Pp. 40–41.

20. P. 42. For a partly comparable view, see Will, *op. cit.*, p. 21.

21. P. 107.

22. P. 108.

23. P. 124.

24. P. 214.

25. P. 226.

26. P. 186.

27. P. 189.

28. P. 190.

29. P. 199.

30. Pp. 187 ff.

31. P. 225.

32. P. 230.
33. P. 233.
34. Pp. 235–36.
35. John Maynard Keynes, *Essays in Persuasion* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1936), pp. 371–72. Keynes was not alone in having views congruent, at least in some important respects, with those of Bellamy. The conservative Henry Pratt Fairchild wrote to Frank Albert Fetter of their shared “views as to the destructive character of the modern financial and industrial corporation.” Apropos of the term “profits,” wrote Fairchild, “I use that term to apply specifically to the rewards of ownership of business, and differentiate them sharply from the rewards that come from rendering any kind of service. To me, the ownership of a business, particularly of a corporatively organized one, seems the most impotent source of income that exists as far as the stimulation of useful activity is concerned. I do not in the least discard the idea that people must be rewarded for what they do, and will work harder for large rewards than for small ones. I do believe, however, that the exclusive appeal of monetary rewards is much over-estimated, and that people can be induced to strive just as diligently for rewards of an entirely different sort as they now do for money.” H. P. Fairchild to F. A. Fetter, June 6, 1934; Fetter Papers, Lilly Library, University of Indiana.
36. *Atlantic Monthly*, Vol. 65 (1890), p. 262, quoted in Gabriel, *op. cit.*, p. 223. See also Frank H. Knight, *The Ethics of Competition* (New York: Kelley, 1951), chapters 1–2.
37. P. 40.
38. P. 41.
39. P. 85.
40. Pp. 92–93.
41. Curti, *op. cit.*, p. 510.
42. P. 233. Compare Edwin Cannan: “The best use coincides roughly at present with the most profitable use, and the coincidence is likely to become more exact as the grosser imperfections of the distribution of wealth are gradually removed.” Cannan, *The Economic Outlook* (London: King, 1922), p. 34; *cf.* p. 51.
43. Pp. 146 *ff.*
44. P. 151.
45. P. 150.
46. P. 70.
47. Chapters 9, 19, 22; on the criminal justice system see Chapter 19.
48. Dorfman, *op. cit.*, p. 68; see also Coser, *op. cit.*, p. 289.
49. George Kateb, ed., *Utopia* (New York: Atherton Press, 1971), p. 33.
50. Parrington, *op. cit.*, p. 312; see *Looking Backward*, Chapters 5, 26.
51. P. xvii.
52. Bertrand de Jouvenel, *On Power* (Boston: Beacon, 1962), p. 177.
53. P. 180.
54. Chapter 7.
55. P. 99. Concerning the problem of evaluation in accordance with a general, uniform norm of achievement as opposed to achievement in relation to individual power or capability, see Joseph H. Carens, *Equality, Moral Incentives and the Market: An Essay in Utopian Politico-Economic Theory* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1981).
56. Chapters 7, 12.
57. P. 101.
58. P. 104.

59. Pp. 105 ff.
60. P. 106.
61. Pp. 50–52. Bellamy does not consider the problem of designing rules to govern, in the event of a unit (within the Great Trust) confronting a fall in the demand for its product, whether it will lower employment or cut the hours of workers. (More generally, presumably local managers can contribute to global maximization by maximizing local profits within constraints.)
62. Pp. 124–128.
63. P. 128.
64. P. 108.
65. P. 137.
66. Chapters 15, 26. For the credit card system and national physical distribution system, see Chapter 9.
67. P. 159.
68. Pp. 210–11.
69. P. 211.
70. Pp. 214, 218.
71. Manuel and Manuel, *op. cit.*, p. 764.
72. T. B. Bottomore, *Critics of Society* (New York: Vintage, 1969), p. 33.
73. Karl Pribram, *A History of Economic Reasoning* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1983), p. 208.
74. Coser, *op. cit.*, p. 290.
75. *Ibid.*, p. 592.
76. Fine, *op. cit.*, p. 298.
77. P. 38.
78. Chapter 6.
79. Chapter 19.
80. Pp. 44, 184.
81. Chapters 7, 17.
82. Pp. 152–57.
83. Pp. 41–42.
84. Chapter 22, for example.
85. It should be noted that there are multiple sources of such a predicament for labor; for example, population growth, large states, urbanization (population density), and other demographic factors also operate to reduce the significance and power of individual workers.
86. See Warren J. Samuels, “A Critique of Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy,” in Charles Wilber, ed., *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy After Forty Years* (Notre Dame: Notre Dame Univ. Press, 1983). For the view that *Looking Backward* represents an alternative to large-scale capitalism and to bureaucratic socialism, see John L. Thomas, *Alternative America* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1983). For the view that Bellamy’s critique reflected neither American realities nor the workers’ views of those realities, see Aileen S. Kraditor, *The Radical Persuasion* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Univ. Press, 1983). Apropos Bellamy’s Puritan, middle-class orientation and his libertarianism (*vis-à-vis* the coercive nature of traditional economic and political arrangements), see, for example, Daniel Aaron, *Men of Good Hope* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1951), pp. 95, 109, 115; and Parrington, *op. cit.*, *passim*. For an example of modern attention to the problems of self-management and associationism, see David Schweickart, *Capitalism or Worker Control?* (New York: Praeger, 1980), and Branko Horvat, *The Political Economy of Socialism* (Armonk, N.Y.: M. E. Sharpe, 1982). For the view that *Looking Backward* involved

authoritarian socialism, see Arthur Lipow, *Authoritarian Socialism in America: Edward Bellamy and the Nationalist Movement* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1982).

87. Manuel and Manuel, *op. cit.*, p. 763.

88. D. P. O'Brien, ed., *The Correspondence of Lord Overstone* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1971), Vol. 1, p. 47.

Courses on Using Census Data

THE BUREAU OF THE CENSUS is offering six training courses for users of census data. The courses run from one to five days and are given on different dates in different parts of the country. Tuition fees range from \$40 to \$150. For information, write Dorothy Chin, User Training Branch, Data User Services Division, Bureau of the Census, Washington, D.C. 20233.

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The Preconditions of Eternal Peace

LIBERAL PACIFISM demands peace because it considers war useless. That is a view understandable only from the standpoint of the free-trade doctrine as developed in the classical theory of Hume, Smith and Ricardo. He who wants to prepare a lasting peace must, like Bentham, be a free trader and a democrat and work with decisiveness for the removal of all political rule over colonies by a mother country and fight for the full freedom of movement of persons and goods. Those and no others are the preconditions of eternal peace. If one wants to make peace, then one must get rid of the possibility of conflicts between peoples. Only the ideas of liberalism and democracy have the power to do that.¹

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1. From *Nation, State, and Economy* (1919), Leland B. Yeager, trans. (New York and London: New York Univ. Press, 1983).