

# OUR COMMON COUNTRY

*Mutual Good Will in America*

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WITH FOREWORD BY THE EDITOR

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## CHAPTER XI

### SOCIAL JUSTICE

WHEN we all acknowledge that the time and the conditions of the world call for fuller recognition of human rights, the protection of the life of human beings and the conservation of our human resources, it becomes the duty of the women of America, and it becomes my duty, to deal with these matters of social justice upon a high plane of an idealism which is not too proud to work. More, it is our duty to consider without hypocrisy or high-sounding phrases a program of action. And it is my duty to address not only you who are women, now entering by justice, by the principles of sound democracy, and

by the wisdom of a progressive civilization, into citizenship, but also to address every American who is interested in our common welfare.

I pledge myself to support with all that is in me whatever practical policy of social justice can be brought forward by the combined wisdom of all Americans. Nothing can concern America, and nothing can concern me as an American, more deeply than the health, the happiness and the enlightenment of every fellow-American.

I believe that none of us can be safe and happy or reach our finest growth until we have done our utmost to see that all Americans are safe. I believe that, if a wise God notes a sparrow's fall, no life can be so obscure and humble that it shall become of no consequence to America.

Only by reason of the depth and permanence of such belief can be founded our grave duty and our solemn obligation to



consider the subject of social justice without mere emotion, without mere inspirational words, without mere entrancing phrases, without mere slogans, but with that wisdom which is needed when the desire of our hearts and heads must be translated into terms of living action and actual achievement.

The social justice that I conceive is not paternalism. It would be easy to make it so, and dangerous indeed to the best spirit that Americans can have—the spirit of expressing by the individual free will one's own merits, capacity and worth. We do not want government to suppress that expression of free will, even by benevolence, but we do mean to preserve in America an equal opportunity and a preparedness for self-expression therein, even though we use the government to do it.

Social justice, on the other hand, is not a mere sentiment. To my mind a social

justice policy in government can not and should not be confined to a program for the flow of benefits from some uncertain and magic source at the seat of government. I could not even consider a policy of social justice which is conceived, as so many visionaries conceive it, as a right of mankind. I will only consider it as an obligation of mankind.

I refuse to subscribe to the doctrine which has gone so far to delude the world that even citizenship is based upon rights. I believe, and have repeatedly said, that citizenship is based upon obligation.

I will not even approach the consideration of a policy of social justice unless it is founded on the stalwart American doctrine of the duties of every one of us to all of us. The first measure of social justice to which America must always devote herself is the duty of citizenship to vote with conscience, to preserve laws, and to

demand their enforcement. It is the obligation of all true Americans to live clean lives and to engage with head and hand in honest, useful production and toil.

The best social welfare worker in the world is the man or woman who lives righteously and does the task well which he or she is most capable of doing, thereby adding to the sum total of human accomplishment.

The task before us—to build high standards of social justice in 'America—is sometimes badly defined, and I think we all regret that the methods to be pursued have been allowed to fly without definite understanding of their landing places. Social justice, like the phrase, "self-determination of free people," is a slogan which sounds so well that the world is beguiled away from deciding what wise things may be really done about it.

For my part, I have no taste and no

conscience which will allow me to talk to Americans with phrases which I myself can not define and with a program which is not practical and capable of fulfillment.

Let us be practical in our idealism. Let us plan the things we can wisely do, and then do them.

I believe that there is no step more practical, no step which will mean more to the growth of America's social welfare; no step which will guarantee better America's social justice, than one which I now propose to you.

There can be no more efficient way of advancing a humanitarian program than by adapting the machinery of our federal government to the purposes we desire to attain. While others may have their eyes fixed on some particular piece of legislation, or some particular policy of social justice which calls for the sympathetic

interest of us all, I say, without hesitation, that our primary consideration must be the machinery of administration, and when the time comes for us to recognize our administrative government in Washington, we must all stand together for the creation of a department of public welfare.

It is almost useless for us to go on expending our energies in advancing humanitarian policies which we wish put into effect, and it is useless for us to hope for the effective administration of humanitarian policies already undertaken by the federal government, until we have prepared to create an administrative center for the application of our program.

At the present time we find social welfare bureaus and social welfare undertakings scattered hopelessly through the departments, sometimes the one overlapping the work of the other, and sometimes, indeed, engaging in bickerings between

themselves. The picture is one of inefficiency and of wasted funds.

Let us not only have social justice and social welfare developed to the fullest extent which a wise citizenship will approve, but let us have also the means with which to make social justice and social welfare real and functioning, rather than visionary and inefficient.

I have no doubt that there will be some who will find in this proposal cause for calling me an extremist, but when we have a task to do, which has been dictated by our conscience and approved by our wisdom, let us straightway find the way to do it. I do not say this without a word of caution. I recognize certain dangers which are always presented when government undertakes large and detailed tasks. I have said already that we must avoid paternalism, and that we must avoid it because a paternalistic social welfare program would smother some of the lib-

erties, some of the dignity, and some of the freedom for self-expression of our individuals.

In creating federal departments for the administration of social justice and social welfare, we must avoid the fearful results of bureaucracy. I am inclined to think that as between a bureaucracy of a military power which paid little attention to the regulating of domestic affairs, and a bureaucracy of social rules and regulations, the latter would oppress the soul of a country more. We do not want, and we will not have, either in America. Undoubtedly the great blessings of our Constitution, appearing, indeed, as if our Constitution had been written by the hand of Providence, are the checks which it places upon the development in a national center of a great bureaucratic paternalism. We are momentarily irritated at times when we desire to enact measures, which appear to be dedicated wholly to



the welfare of mankind, when we find that constitutional limitations prevent their legality. But we have been saved through these many years; and will be saved throughout America's continued progress from the growth of too much centralism, too much paternalism, too much bureaucracy, and too much infringement of the individual's right to construct his own life within our American standards of reason and justice.

I would like to point out to all America that there is grave danger at hand when centralized expression begins to take from local communities all the burdens of social conscience. The best that humanity knows comes up from the individual man and woman through the sacred institutions of the family and the home, and, perhaps, finds its most effective application in the community where life is personal, and where there is not an attempt to cut men and women to a given pattern



and treat mankind as a wholesale commodity.

I like to think of an America whose spirit flows up from the bottom and is not handed down from the top. I like to think that the virtue of the family is the combined virtue of its members, and that the virtue of a community is the combined standards of virtues of its citizens. I like to think of a nation whose virtue is the combined virtue of its communities. For such is America ; such may she always be!

So long as her expression flows up from the people, and not down from a centralized autocracy, however that autocracy may label itself, America will live in all her virile strength. When we create in Washington a strong federal government and undertake, even for the most humanitarian purposes, new federal burdens, let us with all reverence pray that we shall never by this means put to sleep the spirit, the sense of duty, and the activities of the

communities and neighborhoods of the United States. I raise these cautions, not because I am doubtful of the wisdom of the federal government doing all that it can to conserve the human resources of the United States, but, on the contrary, because I believe we must move forward upon a sure footing, without undertaking impractical or unwise programs which lead to disillusionment, and in the end retard, rather than accelerate, the expression of American conscience and its application to the welfare of the people.

With these cautions, however, guiding us as we go forward to create, if possible, the right kind of federal machinery for social justice, we will feel more confidence in creating a federal department of public welfare. When making the proposal for a department of public welfare to America, I am aware that I have made a step in advance of any platform. I have chosen to speak to you on the practical

question—the question of how to do the tasks we must do, the things American conscience is calling to have done.

We all know that we face tasks of social justice, which we must undertake with despatch and efficiency. Who can suggest one of these tasks which can supersede in our hearts, or in the rank which foresight and wisdom will give, that of the protection of our maternity?

The protection of the motherhood of America can not be accomplished until the state and the nation have enacted and, by their example, have enforced customs, which protect womanhood itself. I know full well that there are women who insist that women shall be treated upon the same basis that men are treated. They would have a right to take this position in their own behalf, but I insist, and all true Americans must insist, that no woman speaks for herself alone. She is the possessor of our future, and though she be-

comes engaged in the task and services of civilization, we must preserve to her the right of wholesome maternity.

We no longer are speaking of a small group. Twelve million women in the United States, forty per cent. of them between fifteen and twenty years of age, are engaged in paid occupations or professions. Such an army of potential maternity demands from America careful and adequate protection in the conditions which surround their labors. For such an army there must be an increasing enlightenment in industry and business which will tend to break down distinctions of sex in matters of remuneration, and establish equal pay for equal work. The needs of such an army, engaging in the tasks of America, probably can not be understood by men alone. In the administration of federal and state laws, and in the educational services which will assist industry and the public, and the women themselves,

to understand the needs of women, we will require the services of the most capable women we can get upon federal and state boards of employment, labor adjustment and, indeed, wherever the welfare of maternity and the welfare of American childhood, directly or remotely, are involved.

There is a growing and a probably wise sentiment in America in favor of an eight-hour day everywhere for women. The federal government has set the example in a policy which looks toward the protection of our best human resources. Justice and American standards demand that women who are employed should be paid a living wage, and it is entirely unfair to the state which fulfills its obligations to humanity in any piece of humanitarian legislation affecting industry, if other states, by failing to perform their obligation, gain a temporary advantage in costs of production. I believe that one of the principal

functions of the department of public welfare will be to enlighten and educate local action, so that we may have throughout our states an increasing sense of obligation to meet a national standard of social justice.

I desire particularly to emphasize the need of safeguarding the prosperity of the American farmer, so that he may compete with industry in obtaining labor. I am hearing constantly voices raised in behalf of the women in industry. I desire to raise mine now in behalf of the women on the farms of the United States, who in the labor shortage of this year have gone into the fields—young girls and old women—to give a service which, if it had not been given, would have deprived us this year of an adequate food supply. There must be labor, normal labor, available to farm as well as factory.

One of the important organizations under a department of public welfare

might well be the children's bureau which now exists, but whose work, already proved so useful, must be extended and made still more capable of educating and assisting in pre-natal care and early infancy. It is for us a grim jest, indeed, that the federal government is spending twice as much money for the suppression of hog cholera as it spends for its entire program for the welfare of the American child.

We are not doing, however, enough for the future citizens of America if we allow women to injure, by industry or ignorance, their maternity, or if we allow infancy itself to go unprotected from disease and unintelligence. Among sixteen important countries of the world, thirteen show a lower death rate for mothers than the United States, and six show a lower death rate for very young children. Nearly a quarter of a million babies—practically a number equal to the entire



casualty list of our men in the great war—die every year.

It will not be the America we love which will neglect the American mother and the American child. The program to prevent abuses of child labor, already greatly advanced, represents the progress of legislation toward wise prevention, which will receive the sanction of constitutional law. When we first legislated to remedy the abuses of child labor, approximately one out of five children between the ages of ten and fifteen in the United States was a wage-earner. I do not say that among them there were not many exceptions, whose labors were of such a nature as to fit them to become better men and women, but I do say that in the mass, their labor represented the theft of their right to childhood, to happiness, to health, and of their right to prepare to embrace our equal opportunity, to realize for America their capacity and worth as future citi-



zens. This condition we could not neglect, and we can not neglect the problems of child labor in this country. Even if it were not upon humanitarian grounds, I point out to you that the protection of American maternity and childhood represents economic thrift. Indeed, it represents the saving of our blood, our posterity, and the future strength of our nation.

Next to maternity and childhood, I believe that our attention must be centered upon our national health. Between twenty-five and thirty-three and one-third per cent. of the young men examined in our first draft for war were found to be defective, or physically unfit. Examinations of children in the public schools of America disclose that fifty per cent. of them are suffering from physical delinquencies, most of which proper attention would remedy before maturity. I believe, therefore, that we must undertake

with great seriousness the problem of our national health. I am alert to the danger of too much oppressive bureaucracy in any great federal health bureau, but I want to see the various agencies grouped together in a department of public welfare. I want to see their principal function, that of stimulating, by research and education, the communities and local governments of the United States to the most active and sufficient campaign against low standards of physical well-being. We must attack, first, a low standard of health among children; secondly, the invasion of diseases which attend a low standard of morals; and thirdly, the invasion of epidemics, and the neglect of the chronic diseases of maturity, many of which are due to a failure on the part of individuals to adjust their living and habits to an artificial civilization.

It is not possible to discuss in detail all of the measures of social justice which

sooner or later the people of this country will probably have to consider and adopt and put into action, or reject as impracticable. But I do conceive an obligation of government, to devote grave attention to another group of problems which are all humanitarian, and which are of vital importance to our future.

I have spoken of my attitude toward industrial peace. I have stated my full belief in labor unionism and in the practise of collective bargaining, and I have also tried to emphasize a belief, which I feel deeply, that industrial peace, though it may be attained by adjustment and conciliation, can never stand upon its firmest foundation until a higher sense of loyalty to the task permeates the workers, and a higher sense of humanitarian brotherhood permeates the employers of America. I do not think of this reawakening of a higher conscience upon both sides in terms of generalities, and I regard it as

being one of the humane functions of which our government is capable to saturate the industrial life of our country with a spirit which will tend to reunite parties of discord.

We are often presented with conditions which result in industrial controversy, but which may not be charged to either side. I speak specifically of two examples: The first involves the unrest, the discontent, which arises from unsteady employment. It is not a condition to be remedied alone by federal employment bureaus filling in the gaps of unemployment, but rests largely upon conditions of industry which make for seasonal production and periodic closing and opening of industrial plants and occupations. I am enough of an optimist to believe that government can assist in the abolition of this most unfortunate condition. I am even enough of an optimist to believe that the government can take a large part in a sec-

ond and, perhaps, even more important campaign. I believe that many of our workers are engaged in tasks which have been so specialized that the men and women themselves have become almost pieces of mechanism. This has produced a condition in which many of our workers find no self-expression. In such a condition, men and women are drained dry of the impulse to create.

Without any false notions as to the possibilities of turning back progress so that the day of less specialization may return, I none the less believe that it is our duty as a whole people to see if we can not make every job in the country a small business of its own. No matter how simple the job, be sure that it plays a dignified and an essential part in our welfare. The man who does it must learn to realize it; and more than that, he and his employer must combine to make every job, no matter what it is, a friend of the man who does

it—a friend because the man who does the work has learned an interest in it, so that just as if it were his particular individual business he may understand how he may improve that job, so that he may understand its unit costs, its bookkeeping, its purposes, its relation to other jobs, and to the whole fabric of our national production, and so that the job may become, as much as possible, day by day, an expression of human being.

This is our program of social justice. I have not attempted to make it complete; who can do so? This is my program for a department which as an effective government agency will further social justice. I have not attempted to describe it in detail. No one can describe it in detail before it becomes a working organization; but I believe that I have voiced the conscience and the common sense of America when I say that we must pay new attention to the conservation of our human resources.

I must not fail to speak of one of the measures of social justice and social welfare not often catalogued in this manner, but perhaps more important than any we have considered. I refer to the enforcement of law. It will not be my business to decide what laws shall be. It will be legitimate for me to invoke public opinion for their enactment, but such a call to public opinion must be based more upon the duty of the executive of the nation to give facts to the people than upon his desire to give opinion, theory and propaganda. The enforcement of the law is an executive responsibility and must be undertaken by the executive without regard for his personal approval or disapproval of the law, which it has been the people's will to enact. Whatever your achievement may be in the world, your concern, as mine, is principally with the American home and you, with me, will realize that we must have throughout the land a



respect for law-abiding principles. We must all condemn without qualification the failure of enforcement of prohibition, just as we must all condemn the failure of established authority to prevent outrages of violence, such as lynching.

I appeal to you as to enforcement of law because I regard the enforcement of law as a fundamental principle of the American conscience, and if I am to distinguish between men and women, I will attribute to the women of America the major part in the preservation of that conscience.