

The Consequences of Ideas

Lesson 19: Progressivism

I. Progressivism as a part of Statism

- a. The goal of the Statist is to foster, nourish, and contribute to the **growth** of a centralized, bureaucratically-administered state. Over the last 100 years, true believers of this philosophy have done just that.
- b. Those of the Statist mindset have created an intellectual basis and mass acceptance favoring the growth of the state, expansion of state power, and an ever increasing **dependency** on state-run programs.
- c. Statists reject the traditional notions of civil society and personal responsibility, particularly the Founders' doctrine of limited government and seek to replace traditional **values** with new ones.
- d. The label most often linked to the Statist agenda in the United States is the **Progressive** movement. Some refer to progressivism as progress **away from** the US Constitution.
- e. For the last 100 years progressives have spread their ideas, programs and policies almost **without** notice into the fabric of American social and political policy.
- f. The Progressive Era (roughly, **1901-1921**) was the beginning, in the United States, of the growth in the role of government in the 20th-century.
- g. The rise of Progressivism coincides with the Victorian era faith in Progress, the certainty that the world was progressing toward ever greater political freedom and the **perfection** of humanity.
- h. **World War I** brutally ended that euphoric optimism and created a disillusioned generation with millions of its young men lying in European battlefield cemeteries.
- i. That opened the door for the 1920's clarion call of the **intellectual** elite toward the ranks of Communism and the 1917 Russian Revolution as the messianic solution to the world's problems.
- j. Progressives in the US supported various efforts to **improve** industrial working conditions and curtail the power of big business, through federal regulation of business, regulatory commissions, and antitrust laws.
- k. During this period the income **tax** system that we have today, federal food and drug regulation, the Federal Reserve Board, and government management of conservation were all brought into existence.
- l. This was also the **beginning** of zoning laws, federal regulation of alcohol, immigration restriction and the military draft. The roots of Progressivism spread broad and deep into American society.
- m. The enactment of these policies during this period is not an accident: all of them intentionally **increased** the role of government in society and were the outcome of a rise of Statist political philosophies across the Western World.
- n. Progressive ideas and programs are almost always **packaged** so as to appear that state power must be increased for allegedly egalitarian reasons and for the **betterment** of the common man.
- o. Whether these policies have egalitarian effects, and whether they are truly enacted for egalitarian purposes, and how egalitarian the results are is a matter of fierce **debate**.
- p. What is beyond debate, however, is the fact that with the implementation of each progressive idea, the government grows and individual liberties are **lost**.
- q. Also beyond dispute is the fact that progressivism is contrary to the intent of our Founding Fathers and the U.S. Constitution because Progressives are **collectivists** and the Founders were Individualists.

II. Progressives in the Fabric

- a. Progressives are today's liberal socialists and liberal Republicans and in many respects Progressivism is more a **religious** state of mind embedded in our social fabric than a national political party.
- b. Before television, Americans read more and what they read changed their ideas. For example, popular writers William James, and John Dewey, made the case for agnosticism in the face of the new **scientific age**.
- c. Both James and Dewey preached through their writing that, in keeping with Darwin's theory, the world and our knowledge of it is continually **evolving**.
- d. Dewey was immensely influential in public education and is responsible for moving education away from teaching fixed bodies of knowledge (reading, math, science, history) to the **social sciences**.
- e. Dewey authored the foundations of Progressive education, which teach that pupils learn by "**experience**," that is, they are to be conditioned to communal living under socialism by emphasizing "group projects".
- f. To the enlightened **elite**, evolution of society requires that fixed principles of morality or timeless religious truths be replaced by a higher level of consciousness as we approach the perfection of the collective.
- g. Inspired by Soviet education after the 1917 Russian Revolution, Dewey and a group of fellow socialists opined that individualism is to be **shunned** because it is evidence of selfishness and greed.
- h. Teddy Roosevelt became the first activist President; embracing many social justice causes and was the first to raise **environmentalism** to a level of national concern.

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- i. He believed that whatever he decided as US President was right for the Western Hemisphere. In laying the groundwork for the Panama Canal, he fomented revolution in Columbia in order to gain access for the canal route.
- j. During Roosevelt's Presidency socialist writers advocated for a strong leader who, in their opinion, should override Congress and state legislative bodies to impose intellectuals' vision of socialized regulation to perfect society.

III. Progressives in the Court

- a. In 1902, Oliver Wendell Holmes was appointed to the Supreme Court. Before his appointment he wrote that the 700-year traditions of English and American common law were outmoded and needed to evolve.
- b. It was his opinion that law had to evolve in keeping with Darwin's doctrine of evolution. At Harvard, Holmes organized a group to promote "scientific" socialism.
- c. In his essays and legal opinions, Holmes flatly rejected the ideas of natural law which were the basis of the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution.
- d. He maintained that the law is no more than whatever a judge declares it to be and that, "the life of the law has not been logic; it has been experience."
- e. Holmes wrote: "The law should develop with social experience and should permit the National State to experiment with social planning".
- f. Neither did Holmes's socialist colleague, Louis D. Brandeis, argue from principles of established law, but produced massive volumes of social statistics to argue his cases on the basis of social justice.
- g. Social justice, he believed should trump established law. He also strongly favored regulation of the economy; arguing that state-run enterprises always were preferable to privately-run businesses.
- h. Private business was to be looked upon with suspicion, whereas state-run business would be more efficient, productive, and beneficial to the people.
- i. Agreeing with Holmes, Brandeis declared that the economy should be regulated "to meet changing social and economic needs."
- j. Benjamin N. Cardozo, generally sided with liberals Louis Brandeis and Harlan Stone in approving New Deal social planning during the Presidency of FDR.
- k. He wrote the majority opinion upholding Social Security legislation that permanently derailed the American notion of individual responsibility for one's own economic wellbeing espoused by our Founders.

IV. The New Deal

- a. 1929 – As the Great Depression began; President Hoover unsuccessfully tried three years of social engineering to prevent job layoffs and wage reductions.
- b. His government intervention worked against natural economic laws which would have been the only way out of a recession without inflation. With no success, he lost to Franklin Roosevelt in the 1932 election.
- c. FDR fulfilled campaign promises and began centralization of power in Washington; instituting New Deal programs modeled directly on Mussolini's Fascist State Corporatism.
- d. FDR was the first American President to attempt to manage the entire economy with French and Soviet-style regulation. None of it succeeded; the Depression was as bad in 1938 as in 1933, when FDR took office.
- e. The entrance of the U.S. into the Second World War ultimately allowed the US to work its way out of the Depression in spite of all the government attempts to regulate the economy back to health.

V. Application

- a. In your opinion, does it really matter if we "progress" away from the US Constitution and the intention of our Founders with regard to the limits they placed on the role of Government?
- b. Are there Biblical reasons for concern if our legal system "evolves" and the State takes over total responsibility for the economy, health care, welfare, housing, and labor, etc.? What is the underlying issue?
- c. *1 Thess 5:1-6 But of the times and the seasons, brethren, ye have no need that I write unto you. For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night. For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape. But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief. Ye are all the children of light, and the children of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness. Therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober. KJV*