

CHAPTER V  
THE PROGRESSIVE IMPULSE



I • The Urban Scene

From 1860 to 1910, towns and cities sprouted up with miraculous rapidity all over the United States. Large cities grew into great metropolises, small towns grew into large cities, and new towns sprang into existence on vacant land. While the rural population almost doubled during this half century, the urban population multiplied almost seven times. Places with more than 50,000 inhabitants increased in number from 16 to 109.<sup>1</sup> The larger cities of the Middle West grew wildly. Chicago more than doubled its population in the single decade from 1880 to 1890, while the Twin Cities trebled theirs, and others like Detroit, Milwaukee, Columbus, and Cleveland increased from sixty to eighty per cent.<sup>2</sup>

The city, with its immense need for new facilities in transportation, sanitation, policing, light, gas, and public structures, offered a magnificent internal market for American business. And business looked for the sure thing, for privileges, above all for profitable franchises and for

<sup>1</sup>I have followed recent census designations in defining "urban" population as that living in incorporated places having 2,500 inhabitants or more. The rural population grew from 25,226,000 to 49,973,000 while the urban grew from 6,216,000 to 41,998,000. The most rapid rate of growth was shown in the very large cities of 100,000 or more. See *Historical Statistics of the United States, 1789-1945* (Washington, 1949), pp. 16, 25, 29.

<sup>2</sup>Arthur M. Schlesinger: *The Rise of the City* (New York, 1933), p. 64.

opportunities to evade as much as possible of the burden of taxation. The urban boss, a dealer in public privileges who could also command public support, became a more important and more powerful figure. With him came that train of evils which so much preoccupied the liberal muck-raking mind: the bartering of franchises, the building of tight urban political machines, the marshaling of hundreds of thousands of ignorant voters, the exacerbation of poverty and slums, the absence or excessive cost of municipal services, the co-operation between politics and "commercialized vice"—in short, the entire system of underground government and open squalor that provided such a rich field for the crusading journalists.

Even with the best traditions of public administration, the complex and constantly changing problems created by city growth would have been enormously difficult. Cities throughout the industrial world grew rapidly, almost as rapidly as those of the United States. But a great many of the European cities had histories stretching back hundreds of years before the founding of the first white village in North America, and therefore had traditions of government and administration that predated the age of unrestricted private enterprise. While they too were disfigured and brutalized by industrialism, they often managed to set examples of local administration and municipal planning that American students of municipal life envied and hoped to copy.<sup>3</sup> American cities, springing into life out of mere villages, often organized around nothing but the mill, the factory, or the railroad, peopled by a heterogeneous and mobile population, and drawing upon no settled governing classes for administrative experience, found the pace of their growth far out of proportion to their capacity for management. "The problem

<sup>3</sup>The works of the city reformer Frederic C. Howe are still worth study. See *The City: the Hope of Democracy* (New York, 1905); *The British City* (New York, 1907), esp. chapter xv; *European Cities at Work* (New York, 1913), esp. chapter xxi; and *The Modern City and Its Problems* (New York, 1915). On city development see also Lewis Mumford: *The Culture of Cities* (New York, 1938).

25/a

urban boss  
very powerful role

city → result of industrialization  
- constant rise/problems  
Vapid growth → impossible to check  
growth outdid the capacity for management  
↓  
no traditions (unlike Europe)  
provided space for anyone to take command in his hands → informal government party boss  
• corruption, inefficiency, manipulation  
• taking advantage of the ignorant, poor & immigrants

in America," said Seth Low, "has been to make a great city in a few years out of nothing."<sup>4</sup>

The combination of underdeveloped traditions of management and mushroom growth put a premium on quick, short-range improvisation and on action without regard for considered rules—a situation ideal for the development of the city boss and informal government. The consequences were in truth dismal. Lord Bryce thought that the government of cities was "the one conspicuous failure of the United States."<sup>5</sup> Andrew D. White asserted in 1890 that "with very few exceptions, the city governments of the United States are the worst in Christendom—the most expensive, the most inefficient, and the most corrupt."<sup>6</sup>

One of the keys to the American mind at the end of the old century and the beginning of the new was that American cities were filling up in very considerable part with small-town or rural people. The whole cast of American thinking in this period was deeply affected by the experience of the rural mind confronted with the phenomena of urban life, its crowding, poverty, crime, corruption, impersonality, and ethnic chaos. To the rural migrant, raised in respectable quietude and the high-toned moral imperatives of evangelical Protestantism, the city seemed not merely a new social form or way of life but a strange threat to civilization itself. The age resounds with the warnings of prophets like Josiah Strong that the city, if not somehow tamed, would bring with it the downfall of the nation. "The first city," wrote Strong, "was built by the first murderer, and crime and vice and wretchedness have festered in it ever since."<sup>7</sup>

In the city the native Yankee-Protestant American encountered the immigrant. Between the close of the Civil

<sup>4</sup> In the chapter on municipal government he wrote for Bryce's *American Commonwealth*, Vol. I, p. 652.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 637.

<sup>6</sup> *Forum*, Vol. X (December 1890), p. 25.

<sup>7</sup> Josiah Strong: *The Twentieth Century City* (New York, 1898), p. 181.

NEW INHABITANTS OF CITIES - often rural/small-town people brought up in protestant value system  
→ CMES perceived as THREAT TO AMERICAN CIVILIZATION

Josiah Strong (social gospel)

War and the outbreak of the first World War, the rise of American industry and the absence of restrictions drew a steady stream of immigrants, which reached its peak in 1907 when 1,285,000 immigrant entries were recorded. By 1910, 13,345,000 foreign-born persons were living in the United States, or almost one seventh of the total population. The country had long been accustomed to heavy immigration, but the native Yankee was not prepared for the great shift in the sources of immigration, especially noticeable after 1900, from the familiar English, Irish, Scandinavians, and Germans to the peasantry of southern and eastern Europe—swarms of Poles, Italians, Russians, eastern European Jews, Hungarians, Slovaks, and Czechs. The native was horrified by the conditions under which the new Americans lived—their slums, their crowding, their unsanitary misery, their alien tongues and religion—and he was resentful of the use the local machines made of the immigrant vote.<sup>8</sup> For it was the boss who saw the needs of the immigrant and made him the political instrument of the urban machine. The machine provided quick naturalization, jobs, social services, personal access to authority, release from the surveillance of the courts, deference to ethnic pride. In return it garnered votes, herding to the polls new citizens, grateful for services rendered and submissive to experienced leadership.

In many great cities the Yankee found himself outnumbered and overwhelmed. A city like Baltimore, where native children of native parents outnumbered immigrants and their children, was a rarity among the large cities. Far more characteristic of the East and Midwest were Boston, Chicago, Cleveland, New York, Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, and St. Louis, where the native stock was considerably outnumbered by the foreign-born and their

<sup>8</sup> "In those days educated citizens of cities said, and I think they believed—they certainly acted upon the theory—that it was the ignorant foreign riff-raff of the big congested towns that made municipal politics so bad." Lincoln Steffens: *Autobiography* (New York, 1931), p. 400.

## IMMIGRANTS

Central & Eastern Europe

Yankee-protestant towns & cities  
NOT PREPARED FOR SUCH A CHANGE OF IMMIGRATION

poor peasants lived in horrible conditions  
- often dependent on the city boss who provided naturalization, jobs, social services for VOTES

NATIVE YANKEES overwhelmed by foreign population and feared the end of traditional American democracy

hostility towards immigrants

many:  
• mugwumps regretted that both capitalists & immigrant ignore public welfare  
• consequences of unrestricted immigration for U.S.  
↓  
REFORM linked with NATIVISM

children of the first generation.<sup>9</sup> Often the Yankee felt himself pushed into his own ghetto, marked off perhaps by its superior grooming but also by the political powerlessness of its inhabitants.<sup>1</sup> The Irish politician—the established immigrant who knew how to manage—surveyed the situation and found it good, but the Yankee brooded over “the Irish conquest of our cities,” and wondered if it meant the beginning of the end of traditional American democracy.<sup>2</sup> The Mugwump type, resentful of the failure of both capitalist and immigrant to consider the public good before personal welfare, had always been troubled about the long-range consequences of unrestricted immigration and had begun to question universal suffrage out of a fear that traditional democracy might be imperiled by the decline of ethnic homogeneity.<sup>3</sup> Early civic reform was strongly tainted with nativism.

Hostility to immigrants was probably most common near the extreme ends of the political spectrum, among ultraconservatives and among those Progressives whose

<sup>9</sup> See the charts in Frank Julian Warne: *The Immigrant Invasion* (New York, 1913), facing pp. 118-19.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Thomas Bailey Aldrich: “Kipling described exactly the government of every city and town in the . . . United States when he described that of New York as being ‘a despotism of the alien, by the alien, for the alien, tempered with occasional insurrections of decent folk!’” Ferris Greenslet: *Life of Thomas Bailey Aldrich* (New York, 1908), p. 169.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. John Paul Bocock: “The Irish Conquest of Our Cities,” *Forum*, Vol. XVII (April 1894), pp. 186-95, which lists a large roster of cities ruled by the Irish minority. “Philadelphia, Boston, and New York were once governed by the Quaker, the Puritan, and the Knickerbocker. Are they better governed now, since from the turbulence of municipal politics the Irish American has plucked both wealth and power? Surely those who are too scrupulous to contend with him for those rewards should be the last to decry him for his success in securing them.” *Ibid.*, p. 195.

<sup>3</sup> See John Higham: “Origins of Immigration Restriction, 1882-1897: a Social Analysis,” *Mississippi Historical Review*, Vol. XXXIX (June 1952), pp. 77-88; and Barbara Miller Solomon: “The Intellectual Background of the Immigration Restriction Movement in New England,” *New England Quarterly*, Vol. XXV (March 1952), pp. 47-59. For the views of historians see Edward Saveth: *American Historians and European Immigrants* (New York, 1948).

views were most influenced by the Populist inheritance.<sup>4</sup> The Populistic Progressives were frank to express their dislike of the immigrant and to attack unrestricted immigration with arguments phrased in popular and “liberal” language. Many labor leaders stood with them on this issue,<sup>5</sup> and so did a number of academic scholars. Men like Edward A. Ross, John R. Commons, and Edward Bemis, all three of whom were considered radicals and lost academic jobs on this ground, gave learned support to the anti-immigrant sentiment.<sup>6</sup> Ross, formerly a Populist and now one of the leading ideologues of Progressivism, a stalwart member of the La Follette brain trust at the University of Wisconsin, in 1914 wrote a tract on immigration, *The Old World in the New*, that expressed the anti-immigrant case from the Anglo-Saxon Progressive standpoint. Although he discussed the older immigrant stocks with some indulgence, Ross was unsparing with the currently most numerous immigrants from southern and eastern Europe. Immigration, he said, was good for the rich, the employing class, and a matter of indifference to the shortsighted professional classes with whom immigrants could not compete, but it was disastrous for native American workers. Immigrants were strike-breakers and scabs, who lowered wage levels and reduced living standards toward their “pigsty mode of

<sup>4</sup> Thus in the election of 1912 the Taft Republicans adopted a platform that gestured vaguely toward immigration restriction while the Bull Moosers spoke of the necessity to aid, protect, and Americanize the immigrant. The Democratic Party, containing both the urban machines and the more radical agrarians, who stood most sharply at odds on this issue, straddled it by making no reference to the problem.

<sup>5</sup> Of course one reason why the immigrant held so fast to his ethnic loyalties was that he could not develop any class loyalties because he was excluded by the unions. Their attitude confirmed his feeling that he was different. For Samuel Gompers's views on “racial purity,” see Arthur Mann's illuminating essay: “Gompers and the Irony of Racism,” *Antioch Review* (Summer 1953), pp. 203-14.

<sup>6</sup> See, for instance, Commons's *Races and Immigrants in America*; cf. Higham, *op. cit.*, pp. 81, 85.

immigration restriction favored  
by conservatives  
& populist progressives  
labor leaders  
academic scholars (who often lost  
jobs on this ground)

Ross:

immigration disastrous  
to American workers  
- immigrants, strikebreakers  
reduced living standards  
unhygienic; forced crime  
bad morals  
lowered the tone  
of politics

life," just as they brought social standards down to "their brawls and their animal pleasures." They were unhygienic and alcoholic, they raised the rate of illiteracy and insanity, they fostered crime and bad morals; they lowered the tone of politics by introducing ethnic considerations and of journalism by providing readership for the poorest newspapers, the yellow journals; they threatened the position of women with their "coarse peasant philosophy of sex," and debased the educational system with parochial schools; they spurred the monstrous overgrowth of cities, and by selling their votes for protection and favors increased the grip of the bosses upon city politics; they bred in such numbers that they were increasingly dominant over the native stock and thus threatened to overwhelm "American blood" and bastardize American civilization.<sup>7</sup>

Ross's book was an expression by an articulate and educated man of feelings that were most common among the uneducated and among those who were half ashamed to articulate them. Hardly anyone devoted to the ways of the predominantly Anglo-Saxon civilization and political culture of the United States could help giving some troubled thought to the consequences for its future of such heavy immigration on the part of peoples whose ways were so completely different. But more characteristic of the educated Progressive than Ross's harsh judgments and his studied appeal to what he called "pride of race" was the attempt to meet the immigration problem with a pro-

<sup>7</sup> Edward A. Ross: *The Old World in the New* (New York, 1914), *passim*, esp. pp. 219, 220, 226-7, 237, 272, 279-80, 286-7, 304, and chapters vii, ix, x. Cf. some of the nonsense about "race" in William Allen White's *The Old Order Changeth* (New York, 1910), pp. 128-30, 197-9, 252, which, however, takes a more optimistic view of the future. Ross's views should be compared with those of the racist, anti-immigrant faction in the Socialist Party. Ira Kipnis: *The American Socialist Movement, 1897-1912*, pp. 276-88. In 1936, when Ross published his autobiography, he repudiated some of the racist implications of his earlier work. *Seventy Years of It* (New York, 1936), chapter xxvii.

gram of naturalization and Americanization.<sup>8</sup> Moderate conservatives and liberal-minded Progressives alike joined in the cause of Americanizing the immigrant by acquainting him with English and giving him education and civic instruction. One senses again and again in the best Progressive literature on immigration that the old nativist Mugwump prejudice is being held in check by a strenuous effort of mind and will, that the decent Anglo-Saxon liberals were forever reminding themselves of their own humane values, of the courage of the immigrant, the reality of his hardships, the poignancy of his deracination, the cultural achievements of his homeland, his ultimate potentialities as an American, and, above all, of the fact that the bulk of the hard and dirty work of American industry and urban life was his. Those Progressives who were engaged in practical politics in industrial communities also realized that they must appeal to the pride as well as to the interests of the immigrant if they were to have lasting success.

But the typical Progressive and the typical immigrant were immensely different, and the gulf between them was not usually bridged with much success in the Progressive era. The immigrant could not shear off his European identity with the rapidity demanded by the ideal of Americanization. He might be willing to take advantage of the practical benefits of night schools and English-language courses and to do what he could to take on a new nationality and learn about American ways. But even if he felt no hostility, he could hardly fail to sense the note of condescension in the efforts of those who tried to help him.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Edward G. Hartmann: *The Movement to Americanize the Immigrant* (New York, 1948). The Populists who accused businessmen of being indifferent to the immigrant's status in American life were not altogether correct. Such organizations as the North American Civic League for Immigrants received much support from businessmen who were interested in introducing immigrants to American life and keeping them clear of agitators.

<sup>9</sup> For a spirited statement of the immigrant reaction, see Bagdasar K. Baghdigian: *Americanism in Americanization* (Kansas City, Mo., 1921).

or solution to the problem?  
 → Americanization & naturalization  
 of immigrant  
 = moderate conservatives &  
 liberal progressives

↓  
 trying to understand the  
 immigrant  
 applying humane values

but, it was more convenient  
 for the immigrant to  
 get the party boss who  
 asked no questions

More often than not, he rebuffed the settlement worker or the agent of Americanization, and looked elsewhere for his primary contacts with American political and civic life. He turned, instead, to the political boss, who accepted him for what he was and asked no questions.

In politics, then, the immigrant was usually at odds with the reform aspirations of the American Progressive. Together with the native conservative and the politically indifferent, the immigrants formed a potent mass that limited the range and the achievements of Progressivism. The loyalty of immigrant voters to the bosses was one of the signal reasons why the local reform victories were so short-lived. It would be hard to imagine types of political culture more alien to each other than those of the Yankee reformer and the peasant immigrant. The Yankee's idea of political action assumed a popular democracy with wide-spread participation and eager civic interest. To him politics was the business, the responsibility, the duty of all men. It was an arena for the realization of moral principles of broad application—and even, as in the case of temperance and vice crusades—for the correction of private habits. The immigrant, by contrast, coming as a rule from a peasant environment and from autocratic societies with strong feudal survivals, was totally unaccustomed to the active citizen's role.<sup>1</sup> He expected to be acted on by government, but not to be a political agent himself. To him government meant restrictions on personal movement, the arbitrary regulation of life, the inaccessibility of the law, and the conscription of the able-bodied. To him government was the instrument of the ruling classes, characteristically acting in their interests, which were indifferent

The immigrant reaction became most outspoken during the war, when the Americanizers, startled by the sudden realization of the strength of alien loyalties, accelerated their efforts. "The immigrant is by no means stupid," declared an immigrant newspaper in 1919. "He feels the patronizing attitude the American adopts towards him, and therefore never opens his soul." Hartmann, *op. cit.*, p. 258.

<sup>1</sup>I have drawn here upon the perceptive discussion of the immigrant in politics by Oscar Handlin: *The Uprooted* (Boston, 1951), chapter viii.

or opposed to his own. Nor was government in his eyes an affair of abstract principles and rules of law: it was the actions of particular men with particular powers. Political relations were not governed by abstract principles; they were profoundly personal.<sup>2</sup>

Not being reared on the idea of mass participation, the immigrant was not especially eager to exercise his vote immediately upon naturalization. Nor was he interested in such reforms as the initiative, referendum, and recall, which were intelligible only from the standpoint of the Anglo-American ethos of popular political action. When he finally did assume his civic role, it was either in response to Old World loyalties (which became a problem only during and after the first World War) or to immediate needs arising out of his struggle for life in the American city—to his need for a job or charity or protection from the law or for a street vendor's license. The necessities of American cities—their need for construction workers, street-cleaners, police and firemen, service workers of all kinds—often provided him with his livelihood, as it provided the boss with the necessary patronage. The immigrant, in short, looked to politics not for the realization of high principles but for concrete and personal gains, and he sought these gains through personal relationships. And here the boss, particularly the Irish boss, who could

<sup>2</sup>Cf. Henry Cabot Lodge's complaint that the idea of patriotism—devotion to one's country—was Roman, while the idea of devotion to the emperor as the head of state was Byzantine. It was the Byzantine inheritance, he said, that the Eastern immigrants were bringing in. Henry Cabot Lodge: "Immigration—a Review," in Philip David, ed.: *Immigration and Americanization* (Boston, 1920), p. 55.

The boss's code of personal loyalty and the reformer's code of loyalty to civic ideals could not easily be accommodated, with the consequence that when the two had dealings with each other there were irreparable misunderstandings. Thus Woodrow Wilson in New Jersey and Joseph Folk in Missouri were made, respectively, Governor and Attorney General through agreements with bosses, and both turned on their benefactors, Wilson in matters of program and patronage, Folk to the extent of a prosecution for corruption. To bosses Jim Smith and Ed Butler, Wilson and Folk were ingrates and scoundrels. But in their own minds the reformers were justified in placing civic ideals and public commitments over and above mere personal obligations.

Immigrants undermined  
PROGRESSIVIST EFFORT

~ their loyalty to the party  
boss (and dependence)  
showered many reforms of  
the progressive

DIFFERENCE Yankee v. Immigrant

~ to a Yankee, politics was  
an issue of right & responsibility  
citizen participation

(BUT)  
to immigrant, often from  
autocratic background,  
citizen's role was a foreign  
concept

see things from the immigrant's angle but could also manipulate the American environment, became a specialist in personal relations and personal loyalties.<sup>3</sup> The boss himself encouraged the immigrant to think of politics as a field in which one could legitimately pursue one's interests. This was, indeed, his own occupational view of it: politics was a trade at which a man worked and for which he should be properly paid. As George Washington Plunkitt, the sage of Tammany Hall, once said, all the machines were agreed "on the main proposition that when a man works in politics, he should get something out of it."<sup>4</sup> The boss, moreover, was astute enough to see that the personal interests that were pursued in politics must be construed broadly enough to include self-respect. Where the reformers and Americanizers tried to prod the immigrant toward the study of American ways, the boss contented himself with studying the immigrant's ways, attending his weddings and christenings (with appropriate gifts) and his funerals, and making himself a sympathetic observer of immigrant life and in a measure a participant in it. Reformers might try on occasion to compete with this, but they lacked the means. The boss, rich with graft, could afford to be more generous; and having doled out many a favor to businessmen, he could draw upon the world of private business as well as the public payroll to provide jobs for his constituents. Where reformers identi-

<sup>3</sup> Ross reported the words of a New England reformer: "The Germans want to know which candidate is better qualified for the office. Among the Irish I have never heard such a consideration mentioned. They ask, 'Who wants this candidate?' 'Who is behind him?' I have lined up a good many Irish in support of Good Government men, but never by setting forth the merits of a matter or a candidate. I approach my Irish friends with the personal appeal, 'Do this for me!'" *The Old World in the New*, p. 262.

Later, as new immigrant groups became more Americanized, they began to resent the Irish tendency to monopolize political leadership, and formed factions of their own, with which the Irish bosses learned to do business.

<sup>4</sup> William L. Riordan: *Plunkitt of Tammany Hall*, ed. by Roy V. Peel (New York, 1948), p. 52. This work, which consists of a record of Plunkitt's utterances, was originally published in 1905. It is instructive to set its basic assumptions alongside those of the reformers.

fied patriotism with knowledgeable civic action and self-denial, the bosses were satisfied to confine it to party regularity, and they were not embarrassed by a body of literature purporting to show that to trade one's vote for personal services was a form of civic iniquity.

While the boss, with his pragmatic talents and his immediate favors, quickly appealed to the immigrant, the reformer was a mystery. Often he stood for things that to the immigrant were altogether bizarre, like women's rights and Sunday laws, or downright insulting, like temperance. His abstractions had no appeal within the immigrant's experience—citizenship, responsibility, efficiency, good government, economy, businesslike management. The immigrant wanted humanity, not efficiency, and economies threatened to lop needed jobs off the payroll. The reformer's attacks upon the boss only caused the immigrant to draw closer to his benefactor. Progressives, in return, reproached the immigrant for having no interest in broad principles, in the rule of law or the public good. Between the two, for the most part, the channels of effective communication were closed. Progressive reform drew its greatest support from the more discontented of the native Americans, and on some issues from the rural and small-town constituencies that surrounded the great cities. The insulation of the Progressive from the support of the most exploited sector of the population was one of the factors that, for all his humanitarianism, courage, and vision, reduced the social range and the radical drive of his program and kept him genteel, proper, and safe.

On some issues, to be sure, especially those, like workmen's compensation, that bore directly on the welfare of the working population, the bosses themselves saw areas of agreement with the reformers. The reformer could preach and agitate over such questions and the machines would help him legislate. Indeed, it was one of the classic urban machine politicians, Al Smith, who made the first effectual bridge between the humanity of the reformers and the humanity of the bosses. But this tendency, which

← BOSS'S ADVANTAGE OVER THE REFORMER

He was pragmatic & close brought concrete benefits to the immigrant

Reformer: abstract, faraway often stood for issue incomprehensible to the immigrants (prohibition women's rights)

abstract

↓  
No common channels of communication

→ the reformers lost access to the most exploited class - for this reason, their reforms often failed to achieve the goal.

← Some common issues  
workmen's compensation

Smith brought to consummation only during his postwar governorship of New York, was of slow development in the Progressive era itself. The uneasy and partial but occasionally effective union between the idealistic reformer and the boss foreshadowed only vaguely a development that was to reach its peak under Franklin D. Roosevelt.<sup>5</sup>

## II • Muckraking: the Revolution in Journalism

To an extraordinary degree the work of the Progressive movement rested upon its journalism. The fundamental critical achievement of American Progressivism was the business of exposure, and journalism was the chief occupational source of its creative writers. It is hardly an exaggeration to say that the Progressive mind was characteristically a journalistic mind, and that its characteristic contribution was that of the socially responsible reporter-reformer. The muckraker was a central figure. Before there could be action, there must be information and exhorta-

<sup>5</sup> Nothing I have said in the text should be taken to imply that the urban machines based upon immigrant support were the first or only ones to develop a spirit of political participation based upon the economics of self-interest. Of course the whole nineteenth-century sectional-interest scramble, with its tariff trading and its pork-barrel procedures, would belie any such notion, and it is worth adding that this political tradition was represented by Anglo-Saxon politicians, many of them with rural backgrounds. The notion that politics should be an area for high-minded and disinterested service was revived (it was by no means new in America among them) by the Mugwump idealists of the late nineteenth century. After them it became a creed with a much broader following during the Progressive era. I have singled out, as a phenomenon of the Progressive era, the antipathy between the ethos of the boss-machine-immigrant complex and that of the reformer-individualist-Anglo-Saxon complex not because I hold it to be the only struggle going on at the time but because it serves as an archetypical illustration of undercurrents of political feeling that were then beginning to be of especial importance. (For later developments in this line see chapter vii, section 2.) We need more studies of the types of political organizations that have flourished in the United States and of the codes of loyalties they have developed to sustain them. Such studies would concern themselves with at least five major variants: not only the immigrant machines and the reform movements, but the durable reform machines, the native interest-politics machines of the mid-nineteenth century, and the modes of government developed by the interlocking local elites of the middle and late eighteenth century.

tion. Grievances had to be given specific objects, and these the muckraker supplied. It was muckraking that brought the diffuse malaise of the public into focus.

The practice of exposure itself was not an invention of the muckraking era, nor did muckraking succeed because it had a new idea to offer. The pervasiveness of graft, the presence of a continuous corrupt connection between business and government, the link between government and vice—there was nothing new in the awareness of these things. Since the 1870's, exposure had been a recurrent theme in American political life. There had been frequent local newspaper crusades. Henry Adams and his brother Charles Francis had muckraked the Erie ring and the "Gold Conspiracy"; the *New York Times*, *Harper's Weekly*, and Thomas Nast had gone after Tammany in the seventies. There had been a great deal of exposure in the nineties, when Parkhurst and the Lexow Committee were active in New York, and W. T. Stead's *If Christ Came to Chicago* had caused a sensation in that city. Henry Demarest Lloyd's *Wealth against Commonwealth*, published in 1894, was a brilliant piece of muckraking. Hamlin Garland's Populist novel, *A Spoil of Office*, showed how general was the familiarity with state corruption. Indeed, during the last three decades of the nineteenth century, literally dozens upon dozens of novels were published which have been designated, because of their concentration upon corruption, "premuckraking" novels.<sup>6</sup>

What was new in muckraking in the Progressive era was neither its ideas nor its existence, but its reach—its nationwide character and its capacity to draw nationwide attention, the presence of mass muckraking media with national circulations, and huge resources for the research that went into exposure. The muckraking magazines had circulations running into the hundreds of thousands. They were able to pour funds into the investigations of their

<sup>6</sup> John Lydenberg: *Premuckraking*, unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Harvard University, 1946.

muckraking  
had a long history

but only in Progressive  
era it reached national character  
& national reach

teachers, that by his life and his works he should bear witness unto the truth." <sup>9</sup> This was a penetrating comment upon the meaning of the reform literature as a kind of symbolic action. For, besides such material accomplishment as they had to show for themselves, the Progressive writers could claim that they had provided a large part of the American people with a necessary and (as they would have said) wholesome catharsis.

<sup>9</sup> William Allen White: "Roosevelt, a Force for Righteousness," *ibid.*, Vol. XXVIII (January 1907), p. 393.

CHAPTER VI  
THE STRUGGLE  
OVER ORGANIZATION



I · *Organization and the Individual*

Progressivism, at its heart, was an effort to realize familiar and traditional ideals under novel circumstances. As I have emphasized, the ordinary American's ideas of what political and economic life ought to be like had long since taken form under the conditions of a preponderantly rural society with a broad diffusion of property and power. In that society large aggregates had played a minor role. Corporate businesses were then just emerging, and they had not yet achieved the enormous size and national scope which they acquired during the closing decades of the nineteenth century, when the Progressive generation was still growing up. Political machines, though an important feature of American life since the days of Aaron Burr, had not played the massive managerial role that they now assumed in American cities and states, and in any case had appeared less formidable threats to civic virtue and democratic politics than they now seemed to be in the corrupting presence of the great corporations. The American tradition had been one of unusually widespread participation of the citizen in the management of affairs, both political and economic.<sup>1</sup> Now the growth of the large cor-

<sup>1</sup> On the historic roots of this participation, see the illuminating essay by Stanley Elkins and Eric McKittrick: "A Meaning for Turner's Frontier, Part I: Democracy in the Old Northwest," *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. LXIX (September 1954), pp. 321-53.

U.S. tradition  
- day to day participation  
of citizens in political  
decision-making  
management of affairs



poration, the labor union, and the big impenetrable political machine was clotting society into large aggregates and presenting to the unorganized citizen the prospect that all these aggregates and interests would be able to act in concert and shut out those men for whom organization was difficult or impossible. As early as 1894 William Dean Howells, who had grown up in a small Midwestern community, remarked that the character of American life had undergone a drastic change. "The struggle for life," he said, "has changed from a free fight to an encounter of disciplined forces, and the free fighters that are left get ground to pieces between organized labor and organized capital."<sup>2</sup> Ray Stannard Baker, writing in *McClure's* almost a decade later, pointed out that a number of well-knit local combinations of capital and labor had recently been organized, and gave voice to the fears of the potential victims: "The unorganized public, where will it come in? The professional man, the lecturer, the writer, the artist, the farmer, the salaried government employee, and all the host of men who are not engaged in the actual production or delivery of necessary material things, how will they fare? . . . Is there any doubt that the income of organized labor and the profits of organized capital have gone up enormously, while the man-on-a-salary and most of the great middle class, paying much more for the necessities of life, have had no adequate increase in earnings?"<sup>3</sup> The central theme in Progressivism was this revolt against the industrial discipline: the Progressive movement was the complaint of the unorganized against the consequences of organization.

Of course there was a problem underlying this effort that did not escape the most astute contemporaries, including many who sympathized deeply with the Progressives. The processes of modern technology and machine industry

<sup>2</sup> Howells: *A Traveler from Altruria* (Edinburgh, 1894), p. 164.  
<sup>3</sup> Ray Stannard Baker: "Capital and Labor Hunt Together," *McClure's*, Vol. XXI (September 1903), p. 463; cf. the remarks of Mr. Dooley [Finley Peter Dunne]: *Dissertations by Mr. Dooley* (New York, 1906), p. 64.

Progressivism  
 = Struggle  
 of the  
 unorganized  
 X Organized.

WILSON

Progressivism  
 X  
 consequences  
 of  
 organization

—not to speak of the complex tasks of civic life—make organization, specialism, hierarchy, and discipline utterly necessary. The Progressives, object though they might to the many sacrifices of traditional values that the new society demanded, did not seriously propose to dismantle this society, forsake its material advantages, and return to a more primitive technology. Nor did they always make the mistake of thinking that the revolt against organization could go on without itself developing new forms of organization. They were trying, in short, to keep the benefits of the emerging organization of life and yet to retain the scheme of individualistic values that this organization was destroying. In order to understand them sympathetically, then, it is important to think of them not as stupid or incapable men who fumbled a simple task, but as men of reasonable and often indeed of penetrating intelligence whose fate it was to attempt, with great zeal and resourcefulness, a task of immense complexity and almost hopeless difficulties.

Long before the Progressives arose, some Americans had seen that organization had its disadvantages and dangers, but it was in the Progressive era that the social types expropriated and alienated by the new organization reached a new peak in numbers and a pitch of restiveness such as they have not shown since. Many historians have pointed out that Progressivism appealed powerfully to small businessmen who were being overwhelmed or outdistanced by great competitors. It also appealed—as all the rhetoric about the trusts and the consumer made evident—to the new middle class of technicians and salaried professionals, clerical workers, salespeople, and public-service personnel that multiplied along with the great corporations and the specialized skills of corporate society. This was by far the most rapidly growing stratum in the population. From 1870 to 1910, when the whole population of the United States increased two and one-third times, the old middle class—business entrepreneurs and independent professional men—grew somewhat more than two times; the

American society however  
 required organization

Progressives didn't want to dismantle  
 such society + were aware, that  
 for the sake of their survival,  
 they might have to organize too.

Progressives appealed  
 to small businessmen, white collar  
 middle class professionals

the fastest growing  
 stratum

quite educated  
 & no political org.  
 HAD THEIR OWN AMERICAN DREAM

working class, including farm labor, grew a little more than three times; the number of farmers and farm tenants doubled. But the new middle class grew almost eight times, rising from 756,000 to 5,609,000 people. When we compare the latter figure with the 3,261,000 independent enterprisers and self-employed professionals, we have some notion of the relative strength of these two strata of the population from which Progressivism drew so much of its urban following.<sup>4</sup>

A large and significant political public had emerged that was for the most part fairly well educated, genteel in its outlook, full of aspiration, and almost completely devoid of economic organization. It had no labor unions, no trade associations; its professional societies were without bargaining power. It had only political means through which to express its discontents. While it could not strike or fix prices or support expensive lobbies, it could read the muckraking magazines, listen to the Progressive orators, and vote. I suspect that this class was recruited in very large measure from people who had either risen upwards or moved sideways in the social scale—of Yankee farmers' sons who had come to the city, of native workmen's children aspiring to white-collar respectability—of people, in short, who had been bred upon the Horatio Alger legend and the American dream of success and who had not given up hope of realizing it. Today the white-collar class is more apathetic and more self-indulgent; it hopes chiefly for security, leisure, and comfort and for the enjoyment of the pleasures of mass entertainment. But in the Progressive era this class still lived within the framework of the old ambitions.<sup>5</sup> While it resented the swollen wealth of the

<sup>4</sup> The new middle class had risen from 33 per cent of the entire middle class in 1870 to 63 per cent in 1910. I have followed the computations of Lewis Corey: "The Middle Class," *Antioch Review* (Spring 1945), based upon *Population: Comparative Occupational Statistics for the United States, 1870 to 1940*, published by the United States Bureau of the Census. For a critical view of the new middle class today, see C. Wright Mills: *White Collar* (New York, 1951).

<sup>5</sup> The decline of career aspiration and the growing tendency to seek comfort and interpret life from the standpoint of the consumer is the

tycoons and the crass impersonal conditions of economic life under the corporate economy, it none the less maintained a half-suppressed feeling of admiration and envy for the captains of industry who had after all done no more than fulfill the old dream of heroic personal ascendancy. This may explain why the very journals that ran the devastating muckrakers' exposures of the predations and excesses of the corporations also published hero tales about the outstanding figures of American industry. It may also explain why the same Progressive periodicals, and even the Socialist periodicals,<sup>6</sup> that pilloried the evils of American society, tore into its established ideas, and offered blueprints for progress and reform were full of little individualistic advertisements intended to tell clerks how they could improve themselves and "get ahead"—so that simply by moving one's eye from left to right, from one column to the next, one could pass from the world in which the Beef Trust or Standard Oil was being exposed and denounced, to the world in which "You Too Can Be a Certified Public Accountant."

The discontent over the trusts expressed familiar ideals of entrepreneurship and opportunity which great numbers of Americans were quite unwilling to abandon. In the old society upon which American ideas of the right and the good had been founded, the fluid capital of the middle classes had commonly found an outlet in investments over which the investors exercised a large measure of control.

theme of Leo Lowenthal's suggestive study: "Biographies in Popular Magazines," in Paul F. Lazarsfeld and Frank Stanton, eds.: *Radio Research 1942-1943* (New York, 1944), pp. 507-48.

<sup>6</sup> Daniel Bell points out how common in the columns of the *International Socialist Review*, the chief magazine of American Socialism, were the advertisements instructing readers in the art of "DOUBLING OR TRIPLING YOUR MONEY THROUGH CLEAN HONEST INVESTMENT," or earning \$300 a month selling cream separators. Socialists seem to have been very fond of real-estate promotions and gold-mine stocks. Daniel Bell: "Marxian Socialism in the United States," in Donald Drew Egbert and Stow Persons, eds.: *Socialism and American Life* (Princeton, 1952), Vol. I, pp. 298-9. On the middle-class character of American Socialism, see David A. Shannon: "The Socialist Party before the First World War," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, Vol. XXXVIII (September 1951), pp. 279-88.

Middle class  
 → the largest & fastest growing  
 → had their American dream  
 → were progressives, but at the same time, they were not so much critical about the rich & powerful, as they hoped to achieve their status  
 ↓  
 Muckrakers } wanted both  
 magazines } → muckracking  
 but at the same time  
 advice on how to become  
 rich

CRITICISM OF TRUSTS  
 → trusts prevented individual entrepreneurship & opportunity  
 → fluid capital among the middle class would be normally invested, however, the existence of trusts prevented such investments

The typical business unit of the early and middle nineteenth century was owned by an individual or a small group, was limited in size by the personal wealth of the individuals who controlled it, and was managed either directly by them or by their agents. As the corporate form of organization grew and a large market in corporate securities was developed, the savings and investments and insurance of the substantial middle class, and with these more and more of the power to make the vital economic decisions of society, passed into the hands of the masters of corporations and the investment bankers. The restlessness of the Progressive era owed much of its force to a class of substantial property-owning citizens whose powers of economic decision had been expropriated by the system of corporate organization.

It would be misleading to imply that the development of the corporation eliminated profitable direct small-scale investments. Quite the contrary, for the urbanization of the country brought a growing need for the work of service industries that are usually organized in small units, and such lines of enterprise continued to offer much opportunity for small investors who were satisfied to operate profitably on a small scale in marginal lines of business. But such enterprises could not absorb more than a part of middle-class savings; and after 1870 the decisive and strategic lines of enterprise that called the tune for the economy as a whole, that afforded the richest profits and aroused the highest excitement in the entrepreneurial imagination, passed increasingly under the corporate form of organization. Confined in the pre-Civil War period to a few types of industries, the business corporation had taken a new lease on life as a consequence of the Civil War. The necessities of war finance and the success of Jay Cooke in reaching the domestic investor with government securities had awakened men to the possibilities of a domestic investment market. In the period after the war this market had grown swiftly, spreading from the railroad and banking fields into public utilities, mining and quarrying, manufac-

corporation - mining, railroad, banking, quarrying, manufacture, merchandise

beg & mid  
 (19)  
 X corporation  
 the power of decision-making passed in corporations masters & investment bankers  
 BUT  
 growth of corporation ≠ elimination of small business

turing, and eventually merchandising. By 1900 there were estimated to be 4,400,000 stockholders in American corporations; by 1917, 8,600,000.<sup>7</sup>

One area in which middle-class savings became a focus of poignant conflict was that of life insurance. As a major pivot of finance, life insurance was a product of the post-Civil War era. Life-insurance protection in the United States, which amounted to \$5.47 per capita in 1860, rose to \$40.69 in 1885, and to \$179.14 in 1910.<sup>8</sup> The aggregate of insurance in force rose by 577 per cent between 1870 and 1896, while the total admitted assets of the insurance companies rose by 958 per cent.<sup>9</sup> With these changes in the size of the business came internal changes in company policy. The adoption of the so-called deferred-dividend contract made available to the insurance managers large undistributed surpluses that did not have the legal status of liabilities in the companies' accounts. These surpluses, supposedly to be distributed at the end of stated periods to policy-holders, were drawn upon by the managers of some of the large companies and used for speculative purposes through subsidiary companies. The exposure of these life-insurance practices in the work of the New York State legislature's Armstrong Committee and in such books as Burton J. Hendricks's *The Story of Life Insurance* made it painfully clear to the policy-holding public that even in the citadels of security they were being shamelessly and ruthlessly gulled.<sup>1</sup>

A thought most galling to middle-class investors was that the shrinkage of their own power and the growth in the power of the "plutocracy" were based upon their own sav-

<sup>7</sup> A. A. Berle and G. Means: *The Modern Corporation and Private Property* (ed. New York, 1947), p. 56.

<sup>8</sup> Shepard B. Clough: *A Century of Life Insurance* (New York, 1946), pp. 3, 6.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 128-30.

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, chapter xii; Marquis James: *The Metropolitan Life* (New York, 1947), chapters viii and ix; Merlo J. Pusey: *Charles Evans Hughes* (New York, 1951), Vol. I, chapter xv; and Douglass North: "Capital Accumulation in Life Insurance between the Civil War and the Investigation of 1905," in William Miller, ed.: *Men in Business* (Cambridge, 1952); pp. 238-53.

Life INSURANCE

middle class  
 → shrinkage of their own power  
 ↓  
 growth in power of plutocracy

ings—that, as Louis D. Brandeis put it, “the fetters which bind the people are forged from the people’s own gold.”<sup>2</sup> The American had been brought up to accept as “natural” a type of economy in which enterprise was diffused among a multitude of firms and in which the process of economic decision, being located everywhere, could not be located anywhere in particular. Now it was shocking to learn that this economy had been self-destructive, that it was giving way to small bodies of men directing great corporations whose decisions, as Woodrow Wilson protested, were “autocratic,” who could concentrate in themselves “the resources, the choices, the opportunities, in brief, the power of thousands.” The poor stockholder, Wilson continued, “does not seem to enjoy any of the substantial rights of property in connection with [corporate stocks]. He is merely contributing money for the conduct of a business which other men run as they please. If he does not approve of what they do, there seems nothing for it but to sell the stock (though their acts may have depreciated its value immensely). He cannot even inquire or protest without being told to mind his own business—the very thing he was innocently trying to do!”<sup>3</sup> The Pujo Committee investigators underlined this argument when they revealed that none of the witnesses that appeared before them was able to mention a single instance in the country’s history in which stockholders had either successfully overthrown the management of any large corporation or secured an investigation of its conduct.<sup>4</sup>

People readily acknowledged that in spite of all this they were prosperous. But many of them could not help feeling that this prosperity was being obtained on false pretenses, that it was theirs in disregard of sound and ancient principles, and that for this disregard they would in good time come to grief. It had been their tradition to believe that

<sup>2</sup> Louis D. Brandeis: *Other People’s Money* (1914; ed., National Home Library Foundation, 1932), pp. 12–13.

<sup>3</sup> Woodrow Wilson: “The Lawyer and the Community,” *North American Review*, Vol. CXCII (November 1910), pp. 612, 617–18.

<sup>4</sup> Brandeis, *op. cit.*, p. 41.

Stockholder has no control over his money invested → other people make decisions for him.

prosperity and economic progress came not through big or monopolistic businesses—that is, through the gains and economies of organization—but rather through competition and hard work and individual enterprise and initiative. They had been brought up to think of the well-being of society not merely in structural terms—not as something resting upon the sum of its technique and efficiency—but in moral terms, as a reward for the sum total of individual qualities and personal merits. This tradition, rooted in the Protestant ethic itself, was being wantonly defied by the system of corporate organization.

In 1905 Judge Peter S. Grosscup of the United States Circuit Court of Appeals published in *McClure’s* an article that reveals, coming as it did from a man of impeccable conservatism,<sup>5</sup> how widespread this concern was. Although Grosscup acknowledged that the nation was enjoying a prosperity and power such as it had never seen before, he expressed his fear that it was losing its soul. It was the intangibles that worried him. Neither the prosperity nor the power was in danger, but “the soul of republican America . . . is individual opportunity. . . . The loss that republican America now confronts is the loss of individual hope and prospect—the suppression of the instinct that . . . has made us a nation of individually independent and prosperous people.” The country was in the midst of a trend that, if not deflected, would eventually reach a point at which “the acquisition of property, by the individuals who constitute the bulk of the people, will cease to be one of the opening and controlling purposes of their lives. This means that, as a republican political institution, America will have lost the spirit which alone promises its life. It means social and, eventually, political revolution.” The

<sup>5</sup> A McKinley Republican and a distinguished jurist, Grosscup had been one of two judges issuing the injunction against Debs and other American Railway Union officials in 1894, and he had been among those calling on President Cleveland to use troops in the Pullman strike. He also was presiding judge of the Circuit Court of Appeals that reversed District Judge Kenesaw Mountain Landis’s imposition of a \$29,240,000 fine on Standard Oil for accepting rebates.

prosperity: traditionally brought thru hard work individual enterprise

NOT thru monopolies & big business  
→ Such prosperity is regarded as almost inappropriate.

wellbeing of society = in moral terms  
sum of total individual qualities & personal merits  
not only in structural terms.

PROTESTANT ETHIC

Nation might be prospering, but it is losing its soul/spirit

Progressivism

THREAT:  
Acquisition of property will cease to be one of the controlling & opening purposes of their (people’s) lives.

the ability to acquire property & thus to move up the ladder →  
basic element of the moral discipline of individualist society

widespread apprehension about corporations was not merely a consequence of anxiety over high prices. It was rather the result of an "intuitive perception that, somewhere, something is wrong—that in the face of the future there is a disturbing, even sinister look." What was wrong was that the corporation was putting an unbearable strain on the institution of private property, upon which the civilization of the world rested; for it was the desire and the hope of acquiring private property upon which the entire moral discipline of an individualist society must rely. The nation was at a crossroad leading on one side to corporate paternalism and on the other to state socialism—both fatal to individual liberties. Fortunately there was another path that could still be taken: "Individual Opportunity—the opportunity, actual as well as in theory, to each individual to participate in the proprietorship of the country."

Grosscup proposed, in short, to reverse the entire process by which the individual had been expropriated. This he thought could be done if the matter was taken out of the hands of the states and vested in the federal government, if "stock-jobbing" and stock-watering were prevented (that is, if the corporation was "regenerated"), and if the "road to proprietorship" was opened to the wage-earners of the country.<sup>6</sup> How such proprietorship could be made possible he did not say.

Grosscup was expressing an attitude toward economic life that was to appear with increasing frequency down to the end of the Progressive era. While the great theoretician and technician of this protest was Louis D. Brandeis, its master spokesman in politics was Woodrow Wilson, whose campaign speeches in 1912 provide us with a magnificently articulate expression of the whole impulse. Like Grosscup's article, Wilson's evocative speeches express the tendency of the middle-class public to think of the economic order not quite so much as a system organized for the production and distribution of goods as a system intended to stimulate

<sup>6</sup> Peter S. Grosscup: "How to Save the Corporation," McClure's, Vol. XXIV (February 1905), pp. 443-8.

and reward certain traits of personal character. The public to which Wilson appealed had been brought up on the nineteenth-century ideal of opportunity and the notion that success was a reward for energy, efficiency, frugality, perseverance, ambition, and insight. In their thinking, people competed—or ought to compete—in the exercise of these qualities, and success ought properly to go to those who had the most of them. The metaphor they most often and most significantly used in describing their economic ideal was that of a race—"the race of life," as it was commonly called. What Wilson was pointing to—and what he refused to accept as a governing principle for American industry—was the fact that this race was no longer being run. It had once been true that a man could "choose his own calling and pursue it just as far as his abilities enable him to pursue it." America had been committed to "ideals of absolutely free opportunity, where no man is supposed to be under any limitations except the limitations of his character and of his mind . . . where men win or lose on their merits." By various means the new system of organization had destroyed this body of ideals. But: "America will insist upon recovering in practice those ideals which she has always professed."<sup>7</sup>

Wilson saw that Americans were living under "a new organization of society," in which the individual had been "submerged" and human relations were pervasively impersonal. Wilson's hero, the rising individual entrepreneur of classical economics and of earlier days of diffused property management, had been done in by just such impersonal organization. This entrepreneurial hero—referred to by Wilson as the "beginner," the "man with only a little capital," the "new entry" in the race, "the man on the make"—was the figure for whom he was particularly solicitous. For Wilson was profoundly interested, he said, in "the constant renewal of society from the bottom," upon which the genius and enterprise of America had always depended. And while it was true that the country was still prosperous,

<sup>7</sup> Wilson: *The New Freedom* (New York, 1913), pp. 14-15, 30.

protestant values

energy, efficiency  
frugality, perseverance  
ambition, free opportunity  
COMPETITION → the race of life

TRADITION

Wilson criticized that the race was no longer run

- in new organization of society, individual submerged
- human relations impersonal

Wilson

the "middle class is being more and more squeezed out by the processes which we have been taught to call processes of prosperity. Its members are sharing prosperity, no doubt; but what alarms me is that they are not *originating* prosperity." The real treasury of America lay in the ambitions and energies that were not restricted to a special favored class but depended upon the inventions and originations of "unknown men." "Anything that depresses, anything that makes the organization greater than the man, anything that blocks, discourages, dismays the humble man, is against all the principles of progress."<sup>8</sup> According to the ideals of individualism, then, the acknowledged power and prosperity of the country had been achieved by means that must in the long run be considered retrogressive. For was it not true that the big fellows had narrowed and stiffened the lines of endeavor, cut the little man off from credit, and shut the markets against him?<sup>9</sup> This process had gone so far that men were about to forget "the ancient time when America lay in every hamlet, when America was to be seen in every fair valley, when America displayed her great forces on the broad prairies, ran her fine fires of enterprise up over the mountainsides and down into the bowels of the earth, and eager men were everywhere captains of industry, not employees; not looking to a distant city to find out what they might do, but looking about among their neighbors, finding credit according to their character, not according to their connections, finding credit in proportion to what was known to be in them and behind them, not in proportion to the securities they held that were approved where they were not known."<sup>1</sup>

While the worst forebodings of the Progressives were not to be realized, one must see with sympathy the view of affairs taken by the men of their generation whose historical consciousness had been formed on the American experience with individual enterprise. The drama of American history

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 3, 5, 6, 15-18, 82, 85, 86-7.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 14-19.

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 18-19.

had been played out on a continent three thousand miles wide and almost half as long. Great political issues had been fought out over this terrain, great economic risks taken on it, fantastic profits exacted from it. The generation that had not yet passed from the scene had produced and admired, even as it resented and feared, a Carnegie, a Rockefeller, a Hill, a Harriman, a Morgan. America had engendered a national imagination keyed to epic dimensions, a soul unhappy without novelty and daring, raised on the conquest of a continent, the settlement of an immense domain, the creation within the life span of one man of a gigantic system of industry and transportation. Its people had pioneered, improvised, and gambled their way across the continent. And now were its young men to become a nation of employees, at best of administrators, were they to accept a dispensation under which there was nothing but safe investment, to adapt themselves passively to a life without personal enterprise even on a moderate scale? How, then, was the precious spiritual bravura of the whole American enterprise to be sustained? And if it could not be sustained, what would become of America? The Progressives were not fatalists; they did not intend quietly to resign themselves to the decline of this great tradition without at least one brave attempt to recapture that bright past in which there had been a future.

## II · *The State and the Trusts*

The Progressive case against business organization was not confined to economic considerations, nor even to the more intangible sphere of economic morals. Still more widely felt was a fear founded in political realities—the fear that the great business combinations, being the only centers of wealth and power, would be able to lord it over all other interests and thus to put an end to traditional American democracy. Here Wilson eloquently expressed a fear that troubled a great many men who did not fully share his burning interest in creating economic opportuni-

*Would America  
become a nation of employees?*