

called *The Nationalist*, was founded by friends of Bellamy to spread the ideas. The book had an impact upon such well-known figures as William Dean Howells, Mark Twain, and Thorstein Veblen. The Populist Party was influenced by Bellamy, for an observer at the Convention in 1892 declared that Bellamy's readers "were the brains of the convention. They were college professors, editors, artists, and authors. . . ." ⁷ Bellamy was friendly with all sorts of reformers and intimate with some of the professed socialists. Henry Demarest Lloyd wrote him in 1896, "The movement we are in is International Socialism. . . . Why not recognize it and say so!" ⁸ Bellamy, however, made socialism palatable as a dream to many people without calling it by that name.

What was there about this book that occasioned its great impact? An examination of *Looking Backward* is in order. It is a novel, a romance, a fantasy. It is set in the city of Boston in the year 2000. It has its hero (Julian West) and its heroine (Edith Leete) who give the story its "love" interest. The very clever device for unfolding the story is that the hero was mesmerized in 1887 and slept unbeknownst to anyone until 2000. This device allows the reader to

identify with West as he encounters the surprising changes that have occurred during his long sleep. Boston has been transformed. His first view of the city convinces him of this:

At my feet lay a great city. Miles of broad streets, shaded by trees and lined with fine buildings, for the most part not in continuous blocks but set in larger or smaller inclosures, stretched in every direction. Every quarter contained large open squares filled with trees, among which statues glistened and fountains flashed in the late afternoon sun. Public buildings of a colossal size and an architectural grandeur unparalleled in my day raised their stately piles on every side. Surely I had never seen this city nor one comparable to it before. ⁹

It was Boston all right; the familiar pattern of the Charles River assured him of that. But it was a New City he beheld, located on a New Earth. In short order he was to learn that not only had the change occurred in Boston but also throughout the United States. Beyond that, Europe had been transformed as well, and the rest of the world was in the process of a similar change. Utopia had been achieved.

In this New Age, war has been banished from the face of the earth; universal peace reigns supreme. There is no longer any

⁷ Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 130.

⁸ Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 132.

⁹ Bellamy, *op. cit.*, p. 38.

crime to speak of, only something called atavism — vestigial remains of the criminal mind from another era — which produces occasional antisocial acts. There is no longer any corruption or demagoguery in politics — in fact, there is very little politics. There are no labor problems, nor any other class or group problems. All destructive activities have been banished, and a vast surge of constructiveness and creativeness has emerged. As Dr. Leete, the interlocutor of the story, describes the situation:

"It has been an era of unexampled intellectual splendor. Probably humanity never before passed through a moral and material evolution, at once so vast in its scope and brief in its time of accomplishment, as that from the old order to the new in the early part of this century. When men came to realize the greatness of the felicity which had befallen them, and that the change through which they had passed was not merely an improvement in details of their condition, but the rise of the race to a new plane of existence with an illimitable vista of progress, their minds were affected in all their faculties with a stimulus, of which the outburst of the mediaeval renaissance offers a suggestion but faint indeed. There ensued an era of mechanical invention, scientific discovery, art, musical and literary productiveness to which no previous age of the world offers anything comparable." ¹⁰

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 161.

The Planned Economy

What had wrought all these marvelous changes? It all came about very simply, or so Bellamy would have us believe. All private production of goods and provision of services was taken over by the government. The economy was rationally organized — i. e., planned, money abolished, income equalized, production scientifically planned, competition eliminated, and men bountifully supplied with goods and services. Labor was provided by an industrial army, to which every male was subject from 21 to 45. The industrial forces were organized in great guilds, and the President of the country chosen from these. Professionals had their own organizations.

One might suppose that this drastic alteration in ways of doing things had been accomplished by revolution. Not at all; instead, it came about by peaceful evolution. Let Dr. Leete describe the process once more:

"Early in the last century the evolution was completed by the final consolidation of the entire capital of the nation. The industry and commerce of the country, ceasing to be conducted by a set of irresponsible corporations and syndicates of private persons at their caprice and for their profit, were intrusted to a single syndicate representing the people, to be conducted in the common interest for