

**1879**Henry George writes *Progress and Poverty***1888**Edward Bellamy writes *Looking Backward***1899**

National Consumers' League founded

**1906**Upton Sinclair publishes *The Jungle***1870****1880****1890****1900****1910**

# 1 The Origins of Progressivism

## SECTION PREVIEW

### Objectives

- 1 Describe the new reform ideas that took hold at the turn of the century.
- 2 Summarize the methods muckrakers used to bring about reforms.
- 3 List the goals that most progressive reformers had in common.
- 4 **Key Terms** Define: municipal; injunction; home rule; muckraker; Progressive Era; social welfare program.

### Main Idea

At the end of the 1800s, many citizens recognized the need to solve problems resulting from rapid industrialization and urban growth. The appearance of many reform movements caused historians to refer to the period as the Progressive Era.

### Reading Strategy

**Organizing Information** As you read the section, create a list of the reforms that Progressives worked to bring about.

During the last part of the 1800s, rapid industrialization had contributed to the growth of the nation's cities, population, and wealth. This growth had come at a cost, however. Unemployment, unsafe working conditions, and political corruption continued to plague the nation. Many citizens realized that private efforts to address these issues, such as charity and settlement houses, were inadequate. Some argued that the government needed to become more involved in solving the nation's problems.

## New Reform Ideas

The 1880s and 1890s were filled with lively debates about how to reform society. The ideas of journalists Henry George and Edward Bellamy were among the most popular. Socialists, labor leaders, and city government reformers also had many followers.

**Two Leading Reformers** In 1879 Henry George wrote *Progress and Poverty* in an effort to explain why poverty continued to flourish in

such an advanced civilization. George concluded that poverty arose because some people bought and held on to land until its price went up. This practice, known as speculation, prevented others from using the land productively.

To solve this problem, George proposed that the government charge landowners a single tax on the value of the land itself. In the past, landowners had been taxed on improvements to the land, such as houses and cultivation. A single tax would make speculation in land less attractive by increasing the cost of holding land without using it. George's ideas had a powerful effect. "Single-tax" clubs sprang up everywhere. In 1894, club members from Iowa, Ohio, Minnesota, and Pennsylvania migrated to Fairhope, Alabama, to establish a single-tax colony.

In 1888 newspaper editor Edward Bellamy published *Looking Backward*. In this novel a man undergoes hypnosis in 1887 and wakes up in the year 2000. Upon waking, the man finds the United States transformed. In place of harsh working conditions, poverty, and political corruption, he finds a country where



the government has taken over the largest companies. In the novel, the government has also reorganized the companies with the goal of meeting human needs rather than making profits. Wrote Bellamy:



“In a word, the people of the United States concluded to assume the conduct of their own business, just as . . . years before they had assumed the conduct of their own government.”

—Edward Bellamy, *Looking Backward*

Bellamy's novel was a phenomenal best seller. In response to its ideas, hundreds of “Nationalist” clubs formed.

**Socialists** Bellamy's views were related to the widely discussed ideas of socialism. Socialism is an economic and political philosophy favoring public or government control of property and income. Many American socialists in this era wanted to end the capitalist system, distribute wealth more equally, and nationalize American industries. They wished to do so through the ballot box, not through revolution. In 1901 they formed the Socialist Party of America. By 1912 the party had won more than 1,000 **municipal**, or city government, offices.

**The Labor Movement** Like members of the Socialist party, some union members also hoped for fundamental economic change. Unions, however, focused their efforts on the goals of reducing hours and gaining better wages and working conditions.

The union movement grew in the 1890s, but only slowly. Employers discouraged union membership, preferring to deal with individual workers. If unions were successful despite this discouragement, business leaders could count on courts to issue **injunctions**, or court orders, prohibiting workers from going on strike.

**Municipal Reform** The spirit of reform was also felt within city governments. Municipal reformers opposed the influence of political bosses. They argued that only a civil service system based on merit instead of favors would keep political appointees out of important jobs enforcing labor laws. Reformers also worked for **home rule**, a system by which cities exercise a limited degree of self-rule. Home rule allowed cities to escape from domination by state governments, which often were controlled by political machines or rural interests.

Municipal reformers sometimes appeared naive in their belief that they could abolish corruption. Some of them also held negative views of immigrants, whom they felt were



In spite of the obstacles facing unions, the International Ladies Garment Workers Union (ILGWU) formed in 1900.

After a strike in 1909, which included 20,000 New York City women garment workers, the ILGWU won the right to bargain collectively, or negotiate contracts with employers. **Economics**

*How did businesses prevent workers from striking?*





responsible for many city problems. Still, their ideas formed an important element of the era's spirit of reform.

## The Muckrakers

Many reformers at the turn of the century worked to bring about change in a systematic manner. Relying heavily on scientific data and expert testimony, they first investigated issues of concern, such as slum or sweatshop conditions. Next, they publicized the results of their investigations. Readers could then put pressure on legislators to pass and enforce new laws. Women's clubs and charitable groups provided a key means of increasing support for reform and pressuring officials to take action.

Journalists also alerted the public to wrongdoing in politics and business. Theodore Roosevelt called such writers **muckrakers**. He took the term *muckraker* from John Bunyan's 1678 book *Pilgrim's Progress*, in which one of the characters was too busy raking filth on Earth to lift his eyes to heaven. While Roosevelt approved of legitimate exposure of wrongdoing, he condemned those who "earn their livelihood by telling . . . scandalous falsehoods about honest men."

Despite Roosevelt's criticism, the muckrakers included many respected writers who identified and exposed real abuses. Lincoln Steffens exposed political corruption in St. Louis and other cities. Ida Tarbell revealed the abuses committed by the huge Standard Oil trust. *The Jungle*, a novel by Upton Sinclair published in 1906, described the horrors of the meatpacking industry. Publication of the book led to the creation of a federal meat inspection program. Wrote Sinclair of the nation's filthy canneries:



"It seemed they must have agencies all over the country, to hunt out old and crippled and diseased cattle to be canned. . . . It was stuff such as this that made the 'embalmed beef' that had killed several times as many United States soldiers as all the bullets of the Spaniards [in the Spanish-American War]."

—Upton Sinclair, *The Jungle*



This cartoon shows that TR himself was willing to wield the muckrake to attack difficult problems. Here, TR tries to clean up the nation's meatpacking industry. **Culture** How did muckrakers use the media to advance reform?

## The Goals of the Progressives

Americans read the muckrakers' novels and newspaper accounts with enthusiasm. Whether angered or sickened by what they read, many Americans were inspired to take action by joining reform organizations. Many of these new reform movements had their roots in earlier reform groups. These included nativists, prohibitionists, purity crusaders, charity reformers, social gospel adherents, settlement house workers, and Populists. Because all these groups were working to bring about "progress" in society, historians refer to the period from about 1890 to 1920 as the **Progressive Era**.

Unlike the socialists and some other reformers, most Progressives did not support sweeping economic and political changes. Many deeply feared the violence of revolution. Most Progressives were Americans of average wealth. They did not want to lose the high standard of living and personal liberty that democracy and a free-enterprise system had given them. Instead Progressives wanted to free the existing government of corruption so that it could be more efficient in an expanded role as guardian of workers and the poor.



## LAD FELL TO DEATH IN BIG COAL CHUTE



Workers of all ages had little protection against workplace hazards—and few benefits when accidents befell them on the job. The fate of injured or killed workers aroused public sympathy and demands for reform. **Government**  
*Why did Progressives push for social welfare programs?*

**An Expanded Role for Government** Many Progressives also argued that government must play a larger role in regulating economic activity. This regulation would prevent businesses from treating workers and competing companies unfairly. Progressives opposed government control of businesses, except for those companies that supplied essential services such as water, electricity, and transportation. They wanted most businesses to operate independently—provided they took workers' needs into account.

Progressives also believed that government ought to increase its responsibility for human welfare, or well-being. Workers had little protection against low wages, unemployment, or workplace hazards. Progressives proposed that government

protect workers from such circumstances. They also wanted government to develop more **social welfare programs**, which would help ensure a basic standard of living for

all Americans. These programs included unemployment, accident, and health insurance. Some also favored a social security system that would aid the disabled and the elderly. Progressives expected that government would rely on experts and scientists to plan efficient programs, which professionals, not politicians, would manage.

**Women Work for Reforms** As social worker Jane Addams explained in a 1910 *Ladies' Home Journal* article, women had a special interest in the reform of American society:

### AMERICAN VOICES

“Women who live in the country sweep their own dooryards and may either feed the refuse [trash] of the table to a flock of chickens or allow it innocently to decay in the open air and sunshine. In a crowded city quarter, however, if the street is not cleaned by the city authorities no amount of private sweeping will keep the tenement free from grime; if the garbage is not properly collected and destroyed a tenement house mother may see her children sicken and die of diseases.”

—Jane Addams

In short, Addams argued that women in cities could not care for their families without government help. Progressive women did not all agree on how to reform society. Many focused on outlawing alcohol; others on reforming conditions in the workplace. Whatever their focus, many women agreed that they needed the right to vote. The cause of women's suffrage was important to many Progressives.

Because women and their children were workers, labor issues were also important to progressive women. Florence Kelley became a leader in the work for labor reform. She came from a prominent Pennsylvania family. Her father, William Darrah Kelley, was a fifteen-term member of Congress. Her great-aunt, Sarah Pugh, had a strong influence on her. An abolitionist and suffragist, Pugh had once refused to use cotton and sugar because slave labor produced them.

After completing her education at Cornell University in New York, and at the University of Zurich in Switzerland, Kelley became a resident in Jane Addams's Hull House in Chicago. When federal officials asked Addams to investigate labor conditions in the neighborhood, Addams recommended Kelley for the job. “Hull House was . . . surrounded in every direction by home

### Main Idea CONNECTIONS

*Why did many Progressives argue that government must play a larger role in regulating economic activity?*



work carried on under the sweating system," Kelley wrote later. "From the age of eighteen months few children able to sit in high chairs at tables were safe from being required to pull basting threads." Once, Kelley reported, a public official who was supposed to visit a sweatshop refused to enter, fearing contamination from one of the many diseases, such as tuberculosis, that raged through the tenements at that time.

Largely through her efforts, in 1893 Illinois passed a law prohibiting child labor, limiting working hours for women, and regulating sweatshop conditions. The governor put Kelley in charge of enforcing it. She became so frustrated by the district attorney's refusal to prosecute cases that she earned a law degree in order to take legal action herself.

In 1897 a new governor replaced Kelley as factory inspector with a political friend who did nothing to enforce the 1893 law. It was this experience that drew Kelley into municipal reform. Kelley believed that a civil service system would keep unqualified political appointees out of important regulatory jobs.

Kelley also served as general secretary of the National Consumers' League (NCL). The NCL was organized in 1899 to unite local consumers' leagues. Through the leagues, women investigated the conditions under which goods were made and sold. They also encouraged consumers to purchase goods only at shops that did not employ children or require overtime. Leagues insisted that factories obey state factory inspection laws. Later they insisted that they pay a minimum wage. Under Kelley's leadership,

the NCL spearheaded national movements to outlaw child labor and protect workers, especially women. When criticized over this issue, Kelley would ask why "seals, bears, reindeer, fish, wild game in the national parks, buffalo" and numerous other creatures were worthy of government protection, "but not the children of our race and their mothers."

Kelley's legacy lasted long after her death in 1932. In 1954 Supreme Court justice Felix Frankfurter said that Florence Kelley "had probably the largest single share in shaping the social history of the United States during the first thirty years of this century."



*Florence Kelley*

### Resistance to Progressive Reforms

To protect vulnerable citizens, Progressives backed increased levels of government control over people's lives. They thought government should have some say in housing, health care, and even in the content of the movies people watched. This aspect of progressivism aroused resistance, often among the very people Progressives hoped to help. For example, Progressives saw child labor laws as critical to social progress. Employers who relied on cheap child labor, however, opposed the laws. In addition, poor families who could not survive without sending their children to work also objected. Such disputes added to the perception that Progressives were insensitive to the poor.

## SECTION 1 REVIEW

### Comprehension

- 1. Key Terms** Define: (a) municipal; (b) injunction; (c) home rule; (d) muckraker; (e) Progressive Era; (f) social welfare program.
- 2. Summarizing the Main Idea** Summarize the diverse goals of the progressive reformers.
- 3. Organizing Information** Create a chart with two columns, one labeled *Problem* and the other labeled *Progressive Solution*. Complete the chart using information from this section.

### Critical Thinking

- 4. Analyzing Time Lines** Review the time line at the start of the section. How does each of the events on this time line reflect the spirit of the Progressive Era?
- 5. Recognizing Ideologies** What beliefs about the role of government lay at the heart of the Progressive Era?

### Writing Activity

- 6. Writing a Persuasive Essay** Write a letter to the editor of a 1905 newspaper arguing why it is important for the paper to publish the muckrakers' articles.



## Testing Conclusions

**T**esting conclusions means checking statements or opinions to see whether or not they are supported by known data. Data that are known to be valid can be used as criteria for testing a conclusion. If the data support the conclusion, then you have reason to believe that the conclusion is sound. Use the following steps to test the validity of conclusions.

**1. Study the conclusions to recognize the type of data that is necessary to verify them.** If supporting data are provided, decide if they are useful for testing the conclusions. Read the conclusions at right, examine the data in the tables, and answer the following questions: (a) Upon what information are the conclusions based? (b) Is there a relationship between the conclusions and the evidence provided?

**2. Decide on the criteria by which the conclusions could be tested.** Some conclusions are based upon trends and must be tested against data that cover a period of time. Other conclusions are more specific and may need exact data for verification. (a) Does Conclusion 1 deal with a trend or with a specific point in time? (b) Would data covering a period of time be needed to support Conclusion 2?

**3. Test the conclusions by comparing them with the data.** Decide if the data support or contradict the conclusions and whether additional information is needed to determine the validity of some conclusions. (a) Do the facts support or contradict Conclusion 3? (b) Do you agree with Conclusion 4?

### Conclusions:

1. The twenty-year period between 1900 and 1920 saw a steady and significant growth in union membership.
2. By 1920, union workers earned more money than nonunion workers while working fewer hours.
3. In terms of a percent of the work force, more workers were union members in 1910 than in 1920.

4. The reason why the vast majority of workers did not join labor unions in the early 1900s was that work stoppages led to pay stoppages and decreased earnings.

### TEST FOR SUCCESS

According to the data, is the following conclusion valid or not? "In 1900 builders claimed more union members than any other industry."

**Work Force and Labor Union Membership**

Year	Total Workers	Total Union Membership	Percentage of Work Force in Unions
1900	29,073,000	868,000	3.0
1910	37,371,000	2,140,000	5.7
1920	42,434,000	5,048,000	11.9

**Union Membership by Industry**

Year	Building	Textiles	Public Service
1900	153,000	8,000	15,000
1910	459,000	21,000	58,000
1920	888,000	149,000	161,000

**Average Union and Nonunion Hours and Earnings in Manufacturing Industries**

Year	Union		Nonunion	
	Weekly Hours	Hourly Earnings	Weekly Hours	Hourly Earnings
1900	53.0	\$0.341	62.1	\$0.152
1910	50.1	\$0.403	59.8	\$0.188
1920	45.7	\$0.884	53.5	\$0.561

Source: *Historical Statistics of the United States, Colonial Times to 1970*