LEXINGTON AVENUE AT FIFTY-FIRST STREET
NEW YORK CITY

OWEN D. YOUNG

February 3, 1934.

My dear Miss Tarbell:

I apologize for not having replied earlier to your inquiry of January 11 but the problems in the field of monetary legislation have consumed a considerable part of my time during the past two weeks.

My recollection is that I read both "Progress and Poverty" and "Looking Backward" when I was in college. For the first few years after I went to Boston, I gave very little time or thought to economic and social problems. Every minute of time and ounce of energy I had I put into the law, first, to get through the law school, next, to earn a little something by teaching it, and last and most important, to establish a place for myself in its practice.

I think that my college years were the most reactionary of my life, that my whole inclination was to accept things on authority and to learn about them rather than to question them. As I look back on it, I do not think my mind was particularly open to challengers of the accepted order. I suspect that I read "Progress and Poverty" from the standpoint of curiosity and not with any idea that it presented a practical program which might be in any sense used as a substitution for or as an amendment of the accepted tenets of John Stuart Mills and his predecessors. I do not think, therefore, that it made any particular impression on me at the time. Whether or not it did unconsciously create certain grooves in my mental structure which many years later may have influenced my thought

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and action, there is no way of knowing.

As to "Looking Backward", I remember that it made a great impression on me, and a lasting one. I do not think that I ever related thought in those years to any practical program. It seemed to me a perfectly charming piece of ingenious and imaginative speculation, something which one might enjoy but need not worry about. Years later, when I was setting up the Radio Corporation, and began to see dimly the possibilities of this tremendous service (as yet only availed of in small percentage) I recalled "Looking Backward" and the impression which it made on me in college, and then reread it. I should say that was about twelve years ago. It had much greater influence on me then than it did in college, perhaps because I had burst the chrysalis of authority and had come to feel that I could appraise and evaluate on my own account.

I have a notion that any appraisal of such books as these will need to take account of their unconscious influence on young people even more than conscious ones. The youngsters, particularly during the nineteenth century, who came into positions to influence action as distinguished from thought were necessarily those who were not of a revolutionary type of mind. The revolutionists and protestants had little opportunity to work themselves up into positions of power to act in the Victorian age. Therefore, such advances as were made by business and other organizations from within came largely from youngsters who started out in sympathy with the status quo, and as they increased in years and confidence, applied quite unconsciously many of the thoughts and principles with which they

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had been infected in their youth but to which then they had not given very serious thought or to which they may then have given considerable quiet mental opposition. The type of mind which was protestant against authority and therefore open for any alternative must, of course, have accepted with glee all such works as those of Henry George, Bellamy, Karl Marx, and others. Some percentage of these revolutionists who usually are natural propagandists must have had considerable influence on the thought if not the action of the succeeding generation.

Wherever in the world the old order has broken down and the revolutionary type has come into power because of the breakdown, they have been able to influence action mightily, but wherever the slow and orderly processes of evolution have been continued, there the progress has been made through the anti-revolutionary type infected by liberal ideas in their youth which freed themselves into action, and, on the whole, from an evolutionary point of view, pretty effective action.

You asked me for a simple fact to which you do not get a very definitive answer but instead a little blast of philosophy, so forgive me.

Sincerely yours,

Miss Ida M. Tarbell,
120 East 12th Street,
New York.

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