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Edward Bellamy's Contributions

Edward Bellamy's *Looking Backward* is known as one of the most influential books in American history between the 1880's and the 1930's, according to Edward W. Younkins in his article "Taking a Look at Edward Bellamy's *Looking Backward*." Younkins continues describes *Looking Backward* as a blueprint for the future as well as a potential option for social change. Bellamy outlines a society in which every man and woman works. If people do not contribute, they are essentially committing suicide because they will have no means to support themselves. The government owns everything and only pays for the work individuals contribute to society. People who are on unemployment will have an opportunity to work. Those who choose to live off the government will be forced to work. The benefits to having every man and woman work would help the government and society.

Bellamy's *Looking Backward* was written in the nineteenth century. During this time, in order to survive, people were forced to start work at a young age. Money and work were hard to come by, and the job options were not under the best conditions. Children younger than twelve often worked in factories or sold newspapers or trinkets on the streets. School was a luxury for some poor families because they needed the children's income. Therefore, illiteracy rates actually rose during the early stages of the Industrial Revolution, even though public schools were more widely available. In the book *Utopia* by Thomas More, he states, "For if you suffer your people to be ill-educated, and their manners to be corrupted from their infancy, and then punish them for those crimes to which their first education disposed them, what else is to be concluded from this, but that you first make thieves and then punish

them ?” (76). In the nineteenth century jobs with good wages were hard to come by; today, jobs that pay more than minimal wage are still hard to come by.

A lack of private jobs within the United States is leading to more welfare dependency, but the government could put welfare recipients to work in order for them to maintain their benefits. The twenty-first century has shown the rapid decline in available jobs, jobs that pay livable wages, and lower educational standards. The recent lack of available jobs means more individuals are on welfare but the government could put welfare recipients to work. In 2010 at the University of California in Santa Cruz William Domhoff’s article, “Wealth, Income, and Power,” approximately eighty-nine percent of the financial wealth is held by twenty percent of the population in America; the remaining eighty percent of the population possess eleven percent of the wealth. The lack of jobs and money leads to welfare. According to an online article in *Forbes*, by Roy Avik, there are some states paying up to \$50,820.00 per year to persons on welfare in the United States (3); that is a substantial amount of money.

The United States has thirty-nine states that are paying well above minimum wage for individuals on welfare. During an interview with Ron Haskins done by Roger McShane, Harkins claims welfare has a five year time limit. Harkins goes on to say that people can make more money from welfare if they work. Harkins suggest, even if individuals have a “hamburger flipping job” that pays ten thousand dollars per year, welfare will double their income through income tax credit, child tax credit, food stamps, and medical previsions for their children. At the end of his interview, Harkins noted that there is a growing group of people who, he claims, are at the bottom of the education list and have depression or some sort of mental health issues but do not qualify for disability benefits. He refers to this group as “female- headed families.” Harkins explains members of this group find it hard to keep a job and raise a family. According to Harkins they are the ones the government has not dealt with well though several options were attempted.

This growing group of people should be made to work for their benefits, even if it would only be for a few hours a day. The government could create a community work program. If welfare recipients fail to comply or perform to a standard their benefits would be discontinued and they would be forced to reapply. Nursing homes are overrun with elderly individuals who desperately want and need social interaction. There are never enough people on staff or hours in a work day for Nurses to socialize with the residents. People on welfare, who cannot get a job or will not work, should be made to go into these facilities to just talk to the residents. Recipients could go around locally to wash and clean outside the homes of disabled or elderly individuals. The government could also put welfare recipients to work cleaning up the city or town streets where they live. This would be cost effective for the town or city and possibly free up money by reducing the number of paid laborers. That money could be put to use educating the youth.

Having better educated people in society would lead to more jobs and harder working people. According to *Psychology and Psychiatry Journal* by researchers at Barts and London NHS Trust, "Employment is associated with health benefits over unemployment, but the psychosocial characteristics of work also influence health" (1). Being more educated would help the government and economy. People will examine their options to vote for official candidates and would look closely before choosing programs because of their level of education. An article by Daniel T. Lichter and David J. Eggebeen entitled "The Effects of Parental Employment on Child Poverty," denotes "child poverty rates have increased by about one-third over the past [fifteen] years, and children in other industrialized nations... experience much lower poverty rates, especially among those living in female-headed families"(633). This line suggests Harkins, growing group of people that the government is not handling well are breeding more people that mimic their parents. The goal of having every man and woman work would benefit the government. Higher education leads to better employment which leads to better

mental health and less crime. The poverty level will decrease, and with that, the welfare strain on the government will decrease.

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