**8-5.8: THE PROGRESSIVE MOVEMENT**

**8-5.8 Focus Question/Activity:**

Compare the Progressive movement in South Carolina with the national Progressive movement, including the impact on temperance; women's suffrage; labor laws; and educational, agricultural, health, and governmental reform.

**8-5.8 Essential Notes:**

The Progressive movement developed first at the city and state level in response to the problems of the growing cities and the changing workplace in the late nineteenth century (8­5.5). Nationally, Progressives wanted to reform corrupt government, end the monopolistic practices of Big Business, improve the conditions of the industrial working class, and address the problems of both immigrants and migrants. Progressivism reached a large audience through the work of 'muckraking' journalists. Progressive mayors and governors were supported by a growing middle class in their localities and Progressivism gained support at the national level with the presidency of Theodore Roosevelt.

In South Carolina, some national issues held little concern. South Carolinians were not interested in solving the problems of new immigrants, since few came to the state. Some southerners, such as Ben Tillman, argued that **disenfranchising** the African American was a progressive reform of government since such an act removed from the body politic a group deemed inferior to whites and not able to make intelligent political decisions. The major issues of the Progressives in South Carolina included child labor, fair treatment for workers, temperance, women's suffrage, and education. Just as with the Populist movement in South Carolina, progressive South Carolinians did not want to align themselves with the national movement or party but rather worked within the Democratic Party.

The problems of the cities of the North prompted Northern progressives to propose reform and the problems of the mill villages prompted South Carolina progressives to support reform. Newspapers in South Carolina such as Columbia's *The State,* like **muckraking** journalists elsewhere, supported child labor reform with articles that described the problems of the workers. Despite the opposition of politically powerful mill owners, progressives were able to pass child labor laws that set the minimum age to work at ten and later raised it to twelve. South Carolina progressives were also concerned with issues of health and literacy as diseases spread through mill villages and mill workers remained largely illiterate. Only one third of South Carolina children went to school at the turn of the century. Of those who attended, one third only attended school for four months or less of the year. Education reforms included a compulsory attendance law, increased funding, and the establishment of an adult school program by the state. However, most reforms were left to the local community. These reforms did not always have the support of mill workers who needed the income their children brought to the family and who resented anyone telling them when their children could work or that they had to go to school or that they should be inoculated (vaccinated) against disease. A state hospital for patients suffering from tuberculosis was established on the outskirts of Columbia during the progressive era. Money was raised by women's leagues to build libraries in communities throughout the state. However, these facilities were separate libraries for African-American and white citizens.

A land grant from the United States government was offered to assist African American farmers but the state would not authorize the purchase of land. Claflin College, an African American institution founded during Reconstruction (8-5.3), offered land and support. Clemson and South Carolina State attempted to provide the state's farmers with the latest in farming techniques and encouraged the diversification of crops. Because of sharecropping and the crop lien system, many South Carolina farmers remained tied to cotton as their cash crop.

Many progressives throughout the nation believed that prohibition of the sale of alcohol or the promotion of temperance in the use of alcohol would curb crime and improve family life. Despite being a socially conservative state, South Carolina was slow to pass temperance legislation because of Governor Tillman's control of the state government. Many socially conservative farmers supported prohibition and voters approved a referendum in favor of prohibition. The legislature passed a prohibition bill, but Tillman substituted the State Dispensary system so that the state would control the distribution of alcohol. By the early twentieth century, many county governments [over twenty out of forty-three] passed prohibition laws that made them "dry" counties. In 1915, the state passed a prohibition law and in 1918 the United States amended the United States Constitution to outlaw the sale and distribution of alcohol. Many South Carolinians continued to make, distribute, or drink illegal alcohol, as did other people throughout the United States.

Although South Carolina women, like women throughout the United States, took an active role in promoting reforms that would improve their communities, they gained little support for securing the right to vote. Women's clubs promoted prohibition, fostered civic responsibility, and pushed for education reforms. Church women established the first tuberculosis treatment center in the state. African American women's clubs promoted better health and education in their communities. Initially the strategy of the national women's suffrage movement was to change the voting laws at the state level. Although there was an Equal Rights Association of women in South Carolina, it rallied little support. Women of South Carolina benefited when women in the suffrage movement began to take a national approach. During World War I, women suffragettes employed assertive tactics in their national campaign, engaging in marching, picketing and being arrested. Ho w e v er, women were not successful until political leaders, including President Wilson, recognized women's contributions to the war effort by supporting a suffrage amendment to the Constitution. The nineteenth amendment was passed by Congress and sent to the states for ratification. Although the South Carolina legislature did not ratify the nineteenth amendment until 1967, South Carolina women were able to vote because of ratification by other states.

Government reform was another cornerstone of the progressive idea throughout the nation. Reform initiatives were based on the expansion of democracy and the limitation of the power of the corrupt political bosses and included support for the secret ballot, primary elections that allowed voters rather than party bosses to select the candidates for office, direct election of Senators, and an income tax to ensure revenue to provide government services. Although South Carolina held the first in the nation primary, other government 'reforms' in South Carolina were designed to limit the voting power of the mill workers. Having all but eliminated the African American vote, middle class South Carolinians used a variety of devices to limit the political power of mill workers. In some places the registrar refused to qualify mill workers. In Columbia, the adoption of the city commission form of government whose members were elected at large rather than from local communities deprived the mill workers of a voice in city government. The annexation of suburbs further diluted the mill workers' vote. Several state governors, like governors throughout the United States, supported a fair tax system including the income tax that could provide needed services to the people. Nationally the sixteenth amendment established the federal income tax. One governor [Robert Cooper] supported raising state taxes to increase spending on public education and supported a law that increased the amount of time students were to spend in school to seven months per year. Another progressive South Carolina governor, Richard Manning, helped to establish a fair tax system that enforced income taxes for all South Carolinians, established schools, improved the administration of hospitals, and paved South Carolina's roads. Despite these efforts, graduation rates from high schools in South Carolina, especially African American high schools, were extremely low due to limited numbers of high schools in the state. In the Progressive Era, many South Carolinians embraced the idea that good government could improve the lives of the state's people. World War I brought an end to the progressive movement but not an end to the problems the movement had tried to address.