

A Working Paper Draft

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SOCIO-ENGINEERING PROBLEMS. NO. 48

A series of manuscripts on the social relations of engineering and related philosophical questions dealing with the interaction of science and society. Distribution is limited to reviewers and discussion groups for criticism prior to consideration for possible publication.

HISTORICAL NOTES: I

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"HISTORICAL NOTES: I"

Abstract

Relation of historical events to social problems of our society. Boy Scouts; Depression; General Strike of 1934; Civil Liberties;*** Background Material.*

*The background material is discussed more thoroughly in SEP No. 49.

***This is continued in SEP No. 51, "Historical Notes: II", on Economic and Political Theory, Library Censoring, Co-Op Stores, and Side Effects of the Depression.

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SOCIO-ENGINEERING PROBLEMS

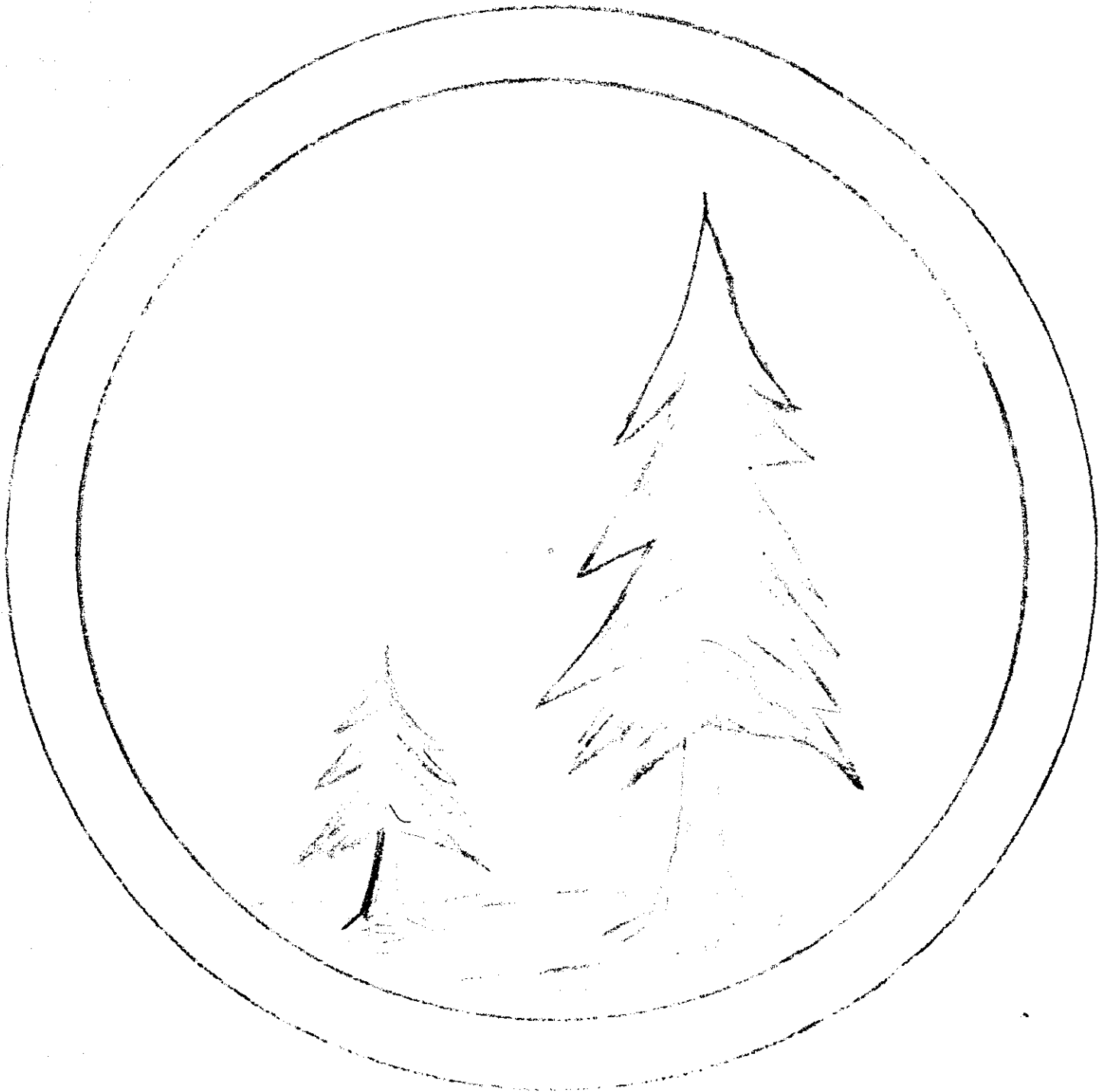
A series of working paper drafts on the subject of the social relations of engineering. My objective at this stage of the series is to make available for discussion various ideas that have occurred to me in the past, but which were unpublished or had very limited distribution. In the present format no formal publication is intended, since many of these notes are fragmentary ideas that may be of more value when other details are filled in.

This particular issue has less direct bearing on engineering than would be implied by the title of the series "Socio-Engineering Problems." In issue number SEP No. 54 I went back to some of my thoughts of 1937, 1940, 1945, etc. In this issue I push back further to examine certain external events which alerted me to examine the social phenomena around me in a more critical way.

Frederick B. Wood

HISTORICAL NOTES: I¹

These notes are inquiries into some of the historical events which were of some significance in alerting me to the social problems of our society. The awareness of these problems may have promoted my concern for a perspective of the whole of our society, and led me to take more seriously the E.C.P.D. definition: "The engineer may be regarded, therefore, as an interpreter of science in terms of human needs and a manager of men, money, and materials in satisfying these needs." These questions relate to more specific external events which caused me to ask questions about the relative state of application of our religious principles to practice. These notes are written as "questions" instead of "problems," because they are not necessarily current problems, but questions of historical interest. There could well be deeper psychological phenomena which exerted a more significant influence compared to these external events. However such psychological questions are left to the domain of more private discussions.



The two pine trees enclosed by the circle represent the state of unbalance in our civilization where people are struggling to learn how to cooperate without falling into the path of conformity. This could be a growing symbol in which the large tree slows down and the little tree grows faster as we learn to balance security and freedom, emotions and intellect, capital and labor, self-interest and service, present and future, etc. As the symbol grows with time we hope that it approaches more closely the twin pine trees of the trademark of the consumer cooperative movement.

Fig. 1 The Two Pine Trees

Question 0: What influence did various historical events have in alerting me to ask questions and search for a more complete set of relevant facts in regard to the social problems of our society?

Question 1: Of what significance was my participation in the Boy Scouts of America?

I can remember as a small boy I thought that all good people were Republicans or Prohibitionists. The collapse of the stock market in 1929 brought me in closer contact with a truer cross-section of the people of our country. I joined the Boy Scouts in 1930 and found there a representation of different segments of our population (except farmers). The Troop Committee consisted of both Protestant and Catholic men, and included among other professions: a business executive, a banker, and a labor union officer. The ideas of human brotherhood cultivated by our church schools and supported in public schools through learning the examples of our great leaders of the United States such as George Washington and Abraham Lincoln came closer to reality through observing these men from different religious, professional, and economic backgrounds work together to make possible the operation of a neighborhood Boy Scout Troop.

Question 2: Of what general significance did the depression have?

As the depth of depression developed, contradictions developed which were very confusing to me. At one time the scoutmaster who had a Ph.D. was working as a custodian. I observed various WPA, CWA, PWA projects and CCC Camps perform useful work (and some not so useful) for our country and

provide jobs for many men for whom our economic system could not provide work.

Question 3: Of what significance to me was the San Francisco General Strike of 1934?

I can well remember the General Strike of 1934 in San Francisco when I was sixteen years old. Although I was at Boy Scout Camp during some of the deepest crises, I caught the sense of excitement and feeling of tension from visitors who came up to scout camp. When I returned from scout camp I knew something had happened in Berkeley, but I couldn't tell from the accounts in Berkeley Daily Gazette what really happened. The newspaper editor apparently was trying to ridicule people who were protesting some injustice. To find out what was happening, I had to ride my bicycle around town, visit with people in different parts of town, visit San Francisco and observe the longshoreman pickets and the National Guardsmen myself to try to understand what was happening. There were fantastic rumors circulating around which as far as I could tell didn't represent anything that had real prospects of happening. I could not tell whether some one was generating false rumors to cause confusion or whether the confusion was the result of random events coupled with very poor communication between the different groups involved in the strike.

Question 4: What event alerted me to the problem in the U.S.A. of having to exert eternal vigilance to protect our civil liberties?

I was at Boy Scout camp in the Sierras during part of the summer of 1934 during part of the General Strike. When the

truck drivers arrived at camp to bring us back to Berkeley at the end of the camping period, I sensed a feeling of emotional tension in the air. From the comments and reactions of truck drivers, parents, scout leaders and others, I got the feeling that in connection with the General Strike people were operating on their emotional reactions rather than logical reasoning. It was almost as if people were operating on a more primitive level of communication and behavior.

When I got back to Berkeley I found that a group of people were protesting something at the City Hall. I could not make any sense out of the description given in the Berkeley Daily Gazette. I found it necessary to ask a lot of questions of various people to get any consistent facts about what had happened in Berkeley. On July 17th a group of unidentified men marched on Finish Comrades Hall in Berkeley armed with axes, baseball bats, etc., and entered the building, smashed all the furniture including the piano. They then built a bonfire of the broken furniture and books in the yard and left. (1)

The alarming feature of this incident was that I realized that here in America, the "Land of Freedom and Justice," human beings could get excited and organize groups like the Fascists in Italy and the Nazis in Germany. Furthermore I was disturbed by the protection given the illegal band by the police and the newspaper.

Eventually the American Civil Liberties Union filed suit against against the City of Berkeley for the damages to the

Finish hall and if I recall correctly, after preliminary hearings, the City of Berkeley settled for the damages. Even this was a frightening experience to have what I had read about happening in Europe happen in my own home town, there are two important distinctions between the United States and the European situations. One, we have a Constitution and system of courts which effectively enforce the law, and Two, there exist voluntary organizations like the American Civil Liberties Union which take action when there is a breakdown of our legal system in respect to civil liberties.

Since then I have always had an interest in civil liberties which must always be protected with eternal vigilance. Even the most perfectly planned legal system with checks and balances must have some citizen watchdogs to be alert for situations where the human beings in the legal system fail to live up to the spirit of the United States Constitution.

1. Note: For published references on this incident, refer to references 1 and 2 in the next section of this issue.

REFERENCES

1. "25th Anniversary: How the ACLU of No. Calif. Got Started," Amer. Civil Liberties Union News, 503 Market St., San Francisco, vol. XXIV, No. 11, Nov. 1959, p. 2.

"Following is a portion of the talk given by Ernest Besig, Executive Director of the ACLU of Northern California, at its twenty-fifth anniversary celebration on October 17. .

The ACLU had its beginnings on July 2, 1917 as the Civil Liberties Bureau of the American League Against Militarism. When the League disbanded, upon our entry into the First World War, the Bureau continued as an independent body...

. . . (details of several starts and foldings-up in West)

On July 16, 1934, the San Francisco Bay Area was jarred by a general strike, which ended four days later. It was followed by an anti-red hysteria which resulted in police and vigilante raids on radical headquarters and arrest of alleged radicals.

Vigilante committees raided union halls and..... In San Francisco, headquarters of the International Workers Order and I.W.W. were raided and the furnishings smashed, while in Richmond, the photographic Studio of W.H. Prater was destroyed. In Berkeley, the Finnish Comrades Association hall was raided by the so-called Berkeley Nationals and much of the building was wrecked while police waited nearby.

After these incidents occurred, the national office sent Chester S. Williams and Ernest Besig from Los Angeles to organize a protest against the vigilante terrorism. On September 14, 1934 - twenty-five years ago - he sent a letter to prospective members urging them to support re-establishment of a Northern California Committee of the A.C.L.U. The letter asserted that we were faced with a recurrence of the suppression and violence of post-war days and the development of a spirit of fascism. "In 18 counties," he said, "ordinances prevail which make assemblage of three or more persons illegal without police permit. Organized groups, claiming patriotic motives, are urging the passage of more than a dozen laws to aid in the suppression of minority opinion - all of which contradicts the very foundations of constitutional democracy with its grant of free assemblage. To combat this growing menace, the Northern California Branch of the ACLU is being re-organized."

2. The Open Forum, Published by the ACLU, San Francisco, October 1934.

"On the basis of the state law, making cities and counties liable for damages sustained in a riot, the Civil Liberties Union is bringing suits on behalf of individuals and organizations for property damages caused by vigilantes and police in recent raids.

2. FINNISH COMRADES HALL CASE: The Finnish Workers in Berkeley have maintained a hall and cultural center for twenty-five years. On July 17th, their hall was raided by scores of vigilantes wearing armbands marked "B.N.", which stands for Berkeley Nationals. Warned of the intended raid, they unsuccessfully appealed for police protection fifteen minutes before the raid occurred.

Damages being sought amount to \$6,000 and organization has already recovered \$1500 from the insurance company on a policy covering the building against riot damage.

The living quarters of the caretaker were invaded and things generally smashed with clubs and axes, including a washing machine, radio, and all the dishes. Three pianos were completely demolished, musical instruments left a twisted mess, stage scenery torn to shreds, chairs broken, windows knocked out, and the walls hacked by axes.

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