Woodrow Wilson makes clear in this article the consequences of rejecting the idea of inherent natural rights for the idea that rights are a positive grant from government.

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...Roundly described, socialism is a proposition that every community, by means of whatever forms of organization may be most effective for the purpose, see to it for itself that each one of its members finds the employment for which he is best suited and is rewarded according to his diligence and merit, all proper surroundings of moral influence being secured to him by the public authority. ‘State socialism’ is willing to act through state authority as it is at present organized. It proposes that all idea of a limitation of public authority by individual rights be put out of view, and that the State consider itself bound to stop only at what is unwise or futile in its universal superintendence alike of individual and of public interests. The thesis of the state socialist is, that no line can be drawn between private and public affairs which the State may not cross at will; that omnipotence of legislation is the first postulate of all just political theory.

Applied in a democratic state, such doctrine sounds radical, but not revolutionary. It is only a acceptance of the extremest logical conclusions deducible from democratic principles long ago received as respectable. For it is very clear that in fundamental theory socialism and democracy are almost if not quite one and the same. They both rest at bottom upon the absolute right of the community to determine its own destiny and that of its members. Men as communities are supreme over men as individuals. Limits of wisdom and convenience to the public control there may be: limits of principle there are, upon strict analysis, none.

It is of capital importance to note this substantial correspondence of fundamental conception as between socialism and democracy: a whole system of practical politics may be erected upon it without further foundation. The germinal conceptions of democracy are as free from all thought of a limitation of the public authority as are the corresponding conceptions of socialism; the individual rights

which the democracy of our own century has actually observed, were suggested to it by a political philosophy radically individualistic, but not necessarily democratic. Democracy is bound by no principle of its own nature to say itself nay as to the exercise of any power. Here, then, lies the point. The difference between democracy and socialism is not an essential difference, but only a practical difference—is a difference of organization and policy, not a difference of primary motive. Democracy has not undertaken the tasks which socialists clamor to have undertaken; but it refrains from them, not for lack of adequate principles or suitable motives, but for lack of adequate organization and suitable hardihood: because it cannot see its way clear to accomplishing them with credit. Moreover it may be said that democrats of today hold off from such undertakings because they are of today, and not of the days, which history very well remembers, when government had the temerity to try everything. The best thought of modern time having recognized a difference between social and political questions, democratic government, like all other governments, seeks to confine itself to those political concerns which have, in the eyes of the judicious, approved themselves appropriate to the sphere and capacity of public authority.

The socialist does not disregard the obvious lessons of history concerning overwrought government: at least he thinks he does not. He denies that he is urging the resumption of tasks which have been repeatedly shown to be impossible. He points to the incontrovertible fact that the economic and social conditions of life in our century are not only superficially but radically different from those of any other time whatever. Many affairs of life which were once easily to be handled by individuals have now become so entangled amongst the complexities of international trade relations, so confused by the multiplicity of news-voices, or so hoisted into the winds of speculation that only powerful combinations of wealth and influence can compass them. Corporations grow on every hand, and on every hand not only swallow and overawe individuals but also compete with governments. The contest is no longer between government and individuals; it is now between government and dangerous combinations and individuals. Here is a monstrously changed aspect of the social world. In face of such circumstances, must not government lay aside all timid scruple and boldly make itself an agency for social reform as well as for political control?

‘Yes,’ says the democrat, ‘perhaps it must. You know it is my principle, no less than yours, that every man shall have an equal chance with every other man: if I saw my way to it as a practical politician, I should be willing to go farther and superintend every man’s use of his chance. But the means? The question with me is not whether the community has power to act as it may please in these matters, but how it can act with practical advantage—a question of policy.’

A question of policy primarily, but also a question of organization, that is to say of administration.