THE PSYCHOLOGY OF SO-CALLED COMPENSATION HYSTERIA AND THE REAL BATTLE AGAINST ILLNESS

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In order to fully understand the enormous, large-scale social phenomena of our time, we need to go beyond the research method which is commonly used in these issues.¹ Such research employs statistics and tries to find objective causes through statistical results and correlations. This method needs to be supplemented with an investigation into the psychological origins and the elementary psychological laws that are highlighted in these phenomena. This shift of method is important, for example, in understanding the origins of the presently alarming decline in the birth-rate, a topic which we cannot take up in this essay. It is also important for understanding most of the facts that Professor Bernhard (1912) has recently described as the “undesired consequences of social policy,” especially for understanding those pathological phenomena that have sometimes been given the name “traumatic neurosis” and sometimes the expression “compensation hysteria.”²

We cannot investigate here whether this pathology has really increased so much that, on its account alone, one might reject all or at least a substantial part of socio-political legislation; nor are we able to investigate whether, without accident (and health) insurance, the predispositions for the rise of this new “illness” would not have manifested themselves in (merely other) forms. Nor will we take up here

¹ See footnote for details.
² See footnote for details.
the extent to which some of these phenomena (for example, the prolongation of the convalescence period) are specially linked to the State’s social security for laborers (and office personnel) and not more generally linked to all forms of health insurance, including private insurance. Likewise we cannot examine here how much every kind of insurance is likely in some sense to increase the very disorders against which it protects, and to do so without necessitating that these evils be consciously and willfully brought about. An example of the latter occurs when criminal arson increases with the advent of fire insurance. Similarly we will not examine the socio-political experiments such as those in Switzerland that varied the installments of the compensation payments in order to find means and limits for modifying the legislation so as to prevent “undesirable consequences.”

In any case, even the opponents of Bernhard’s party-position must grant that, along with the socio-economic viewpoint, psychology also can contribute to the discussion of legislative proposals. They must concede, in line with the recent proposal of Alfred Weber,\textsuperscript{3} that now more than ever before the progress of social policy generally will have to take into account those psychological changes in the conditions of the social classes that are to be achieved through the provisions of their policy.

I. First Law: Effect of Prospect

Here we may only glance at those psychological laws that are manifest in that large-scale social phenomenon called compensation hysteria.

A. Distinct from Pretense

Compensation hysteria should be completely distinguished from all forms of either clear or semi-conscious \textit{pretense} of sickness or its prolongation, as well as from all forms of half or wholly conscious, willful occasioning of accidental injury; it thus should also be distinguished from the so-called “compensation addiction” that is only an intensification of these phenomena. Whenever a more or less clear representation, expectation, or hope for some compensation leads to such sham practices and artificial counterfeits for the natural expression of the state of health, or leads to self-harming practices or to a willful slackening of the requisite “caution” which would otherwise be exercised (e.g., when near machines), then it is a question of the \textit{misuse} of the statute, not a question of the effect of the statute on psychic health. Since every statute