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Social Security - I

Lead: In 1935 the United States became the last major industrial nation to adopt a system of general social insurance. Today Social Security is a national success story, but it did not come easily into being.

Intro.: *A Moment in Time* with Dan Roberts.

Content: One of the great

universal human longings is for security. Over the centuries various schemes have arisen to address fears of economic deprivation, unemployment, illness, disability, death and old age. In Medieval Europe guilds, trade organizations, which regulated production and sales, also provided members relief in times of poverty, sickness or death. The

Christian church, particularly the regular clergy, members of monastic orders, was an on-going source of relief for the poor and destitute.

With the coming of the modern era the state gradually assumed the role of relief provider relinquished by retreating religious and fraternal organizations. Such assumption was slow in coming, however. Despite the

enormous changes in economic life brought on by such things as the industrial revolution, increased urban population, the disappearance of large extended families, and the fact that people were living longer, relief for poverty lagged far behind.

In the United States organized relief efforts from colonial days were patterned after English Poor Laws

which took the place of church relief. Local taxes were raised to support the destitute. Even after the establishment of almshouses and poorhouses in the 1700s and 1800s, relief was made as obnoxious as possible to prevent people from becoming dependent. A few companies provided old age pensions and the Federal government gave

veterans and their widows a small pension in the years following the Civil War, but for the most people did not recognize the need or moral requirement for society as a whole to help the poor. Next time: Depression and the Townsend Plan.

At the University of Richmond, this is Dan Roberts.

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