

Introduction

The American Fund for Public Service was incorporated in 1922 to support radical social and economic causes. Founding monies of nearly \$1 million came from an inheritance initially rejected in 1920 by Charles Garland, the twenty-one-year-old son of a Wall Street broker. Refusing to accept money he had not earned from a system he considered exploitative of the poor and the working class, Garland was urged by many radicals, including A. Philip Randolph and Upton Sinclair, to put his inheritance to good work and to provide assistance to organizations and individuals who could help spread his beliefs about the dangers of capitalism and private property, inequity, and injustice.

In 1921, Roger Baldwin, founder of the American Civil Liberties Union, approached Garland through a mutual acquaintance and persuaded him to accept his inheritance and to entrust it to Baldwin and a group of like-minded progressives for disbursement to organizations striving for social and economic freedom. Baldwin tentatively named the organization the National Service Fund.

It was not until 1922, however, that the American Fund for Public Service was finally incorporated. Baldwin recruited the board of trustees members mainly from the ACLU National Committee, whose members included William Z. Foster, Harry F. Ward, Albert DeSilver, James Weldon Johnson, Robert Morss Lovett, Mary McDowell, Frances Perkins, Judah Magnes, Scott Nearing, and Norman Thomas. The board of directors, as it was eventually organized, represented a wide variety of left-leaning causes: labor, the Socialist and Communist parties, civil rights, and minority groups. Over the next two decades, many of these groups benefited from the philanthropy of the American Fund.

Between 1922 and 1941 the Fund gave nearly \$2 million to a variety of left-wing organizations and enterprises, including labor unions; cooperative schools for workers; radical publications; bail and legal defense funds; and civil liberties, penal reform, and minority rights groups. Although the Fund's stated purpose was "to promote the well-being of mankind throughout the world, and to use as means to that end research, publications, the establishment and maintenance of charitable, benevolent and public educational activities, agencies and institutions," one chronicler of the Fund's history, Gloria Garrett Samson, argues that the Fund chose to be pragmatic rather than propagandistic and thus sacrificed an opportunity to consolidate and advance radical causes. In *The American Fund for Public Service: Charles Garland and Radical Philanthropy, 1922–1941* (Greenwood Press, 1996), she contends that by being dedicated to activism rather than to theory, the board of directors failed to articulate a "comprehensive social philosophy" to direct its decisions. By favoring research and publications over organization and coalition building, the board missed its chance to give struggling workers the means to apply ideology to overcome the capitalist hegemony. Still, before liquidating the Fund in June 1941, the directors had made significant contributions to the civil rights struggle and to workers' education. By disbursing almost \$2 million to nearly one hundred organizations, the American Fund for Public Service helped to keep radical causes alive during decades of postwar conservatism, economic boom, and depression.