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- [\[anonyme ou collectif\] Journal of the history of medicine](#)
- [Rosen, Economic and Social Policy in Public Health, in Journal of the History of Medicine, 1953](#)

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societal action or inaction, most often exercised through the agency of government—the *agenda* or *non agenda* of the state as Bentham called them—in regard to economic and social problems.

The foregoing considerations lead directly to the thesis of this study, namely, that economic and social policy has been a fundamental factor in the development of public health. The historical significance of this factor has been profound and broad. In innumerable ways of which we are often unaware, earlier policy continues to affect us. Directly or indirectly, many far-reaching legislative and administrative developments in public health have emerged on the basis of economic and social policy. Indeed, it is no exaggeration to say that it is impossible to understand fully the evolution and meaning of public health, especially in the modern period, without recognition and comprehension of the rôle of economic and social policy. Here it will not be possible to explore this thesis in all its historical ramifications. Instead, we shall endeavor to see how it applies in one case, namely, in some developments of public health in Great Britain from the seventeenth century to the present. Where it appears relevant, attention will also be directed to appropriate points in the evolution of public health in other countries.

II

Mercantilist ideas and practices were as characteristic of England in the seventeenth and earlier eighteenth centuries as of the contemporary continental states.¹ For policy makers in all these countries the important question was: What policy must the government pursue in order to increase the national wealth and the national power? In each country, however, the answer given to the question was an answer in terms of its historical experience, its political structure, and its economic and social circumstances.

That industry was one of the chief means by which a country could attain productivity and wealth appeared clear to public officials, men of affairs, and writers on economics and politics. With the growth of industry in seventeenth century England, production came to be regarded as a matter of central importance in economic activity, and labor, one of the most important factors of production, as an essential element in the generation of national

¹ E. Lipson, *England in the age of mercantilism*. *Journal of Business History* 1932, 4, 691-707. Leo Gershoy, *From despotism to revolution 1763-1789*. New York and London, Harper and Bros., 1944, pp. 39-43; Maurice Dobb, *Studies in the development of capitalism*. London, George Routledge and Sons, 1946, p. 209.



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