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# TRADE UNIONS

## Their Past, Present, and Future

BY  
W. A. APPLETON  
C.B.E.

*Author of 'What We Want and Where We Are,'  
'Trade Unionism,' 'Unemployment.'*



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#### DEDICATION.

THIS book is dedicated to the staff of the General Federation of Trade Unions. In both the industrial and insurance sections their loyalty, *esprit de corps* and appreciation of business principles, have been splendidly encouraging to a chief whose tasks have been difficult.

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## INTRODUCTION

HISTORY is said to be a continuous record of events, and events are the outward and visible manifestations of human emotions, desires, conditions and opportunities. The history of a movement, like the history of a people, deals with a past. Apart from analysis and deduction, it remains narrative, interesting no doubt, but offering recreation, rather than practical value, to the men and women who must perforce live in the present; who are concerned with the past only for the sake of its lessons, and with the future only for the sake and for the lives of their children.

The history of trade unionism is interesting; painfully, entrancingly so; but, unless our reading leads us from the merely emotional appreciation of the records of misery, oppression, bravery and deliverance, to a study of origins, of purposes, of applicabilities and of possibilities, we ought not to be satisfied.

A logical and reasoned exposition of the subject should discuss origination, liberation, realisation, reaction, recovery, achievements, reorientation, tendencies and prospects. This might be possible for the detached student, but for the man who lives in, and by, the hurly-burly, who each day has to deal with the ever-recurring phases and complexities of a movement having its roots in human desire, this detached study and orderly setting forth is next to impossible. He is impelled to discuss things almost as casually as they arise.

Emotions and events, psychology and history; emotions making history, and history helping to reveal, to those who analyse and deduct, the desires and purposes of those who originated and those who continue the movement which to-day agitates the whole of the industrial world, and in its Samson-like strength and blindness threatens to overwhelm society.

If the history of this movement is studied carefully, and without pre-developed animus, it will be seen that the labourer has some historical justification for his antagonisms.

I have long appreciated the narrative value of trade union history, and have sought to understand

its philosophy, but it is more easy to feel these things than to express them in ordered sequence and in accurate language.

To set forth a little of this history and to attract attention to what I have dared to call the philosophy of trade unionism is the purpose of the following pages. Time, space and the ever-changing character of trade union aims and methods forbid anything in the nature of an exhaustive or conclusive statement, but it is permissible to hope that what is attempted will be sufficient to induce others, particularly where they are officially connected, to study more deeply the movement they have to endure or administer. In the case of the official, self-interest as well as duty demands this deeper and more constant study. If he fails to understand, he must also fail in his efforts to direct.

## APPENDIX

**VILLEIN (Saxon)**: the Britons and the criminals; performed base services and received right to cultivate some land; villeins *in gros* or *pure* had no privileges, and were sold with the land; villeins *regardant* or privileged could obtain freedom, and had some political rights; later on they became copyholders and free labourers.

**SOCAGE (Saxon)**: tenant services in money, labour or in kind (as opposed to military service).

**BLACK DEATH (1349)**: Eastern plague; devastated Europe, provoked crisis in labour and serf questions; led to Peasants' Revolt (1361, 1369).

**BLESSED PARLIAMENT (1350)**: dealt with the labour question; Statutes of Labourers and Treason.

**LABOURERS' STATUTES (1351, 1362, 1368)**: fixed the price of labour, and bound the emancipated peasants again to the soil.

**PEASANTS' REVOLT (1381)**: revolution in the manorial system; social revolt; led to emancipation of serfs; new era in the history of labour;

When Adam dolve and Eve span  
Who was then the gentleman?

John Ball's Socialistic text that spurred the peasants to revolt.

**COPYHOLDERS (14th century)**: commutation of labour services for money payment recorded on the manor roll, a copy of which agreement was handed to the emancipated serf or villein.

**FRITH GUILDS (mediaeval)**: benevolent societies bestowing alms, forming insurance societies and punishing fraudulent members.

- GUILDS (mediæval)**: friendly societies; associations of townsmen and craftsmen to protect and advance the interests of their craft, trade or society; became very powerful and ruled both towns and commerce.
- MERCHANT GUILDS (mediæval)**: associations governing the trade and commerce of the towns; the heads of the principal merchant guilds usually formed the Corporation; freedom of the city—freedom to trade.
- 'RIGHTS OF MAN' (1790)**: Paine's reply to Burke's *Reflections*; spread revolutionary opinions; led to repressive measures (Traitorous Correspondence and Seditious Meetings Act and suspension of Habeas Corpus).
- SEDITIONS MEETINGS ACT (1795)**: prompted by fear of revolution.
- APPRENTICESHIP ACT (1564)**: limited labourers' and artisans' wages; artisans to serve a seven years' apprenticeship.
- LABOUR ACTS (1800, 1824, 1825)**: the first condemned combination; the second legalised it; the third defined combinations for *coercive* purposes as illegal.
- FACTORY ACTS (1802, 1819)**: 1833, Shaftesbury's (a twelve hours' day); 1847, Fielden's (a ten hours' day); protecting children and young persons working in factories.
- LUDDITES (1811)**: machinery riots; mechanical inventions had thrown many thousands out of work; famine and distress led to risings, and much machinery was destroyed.
- BLANKETEERS (1817)**: malcontents who started to tramp (with blankets for camping out) from Manchester to Westminster, to present petition for reform; they dispersed in Derbyshire.
- EMPLOYERS' LIABILITY ACT (1882)**: employers liable for accidents to their labourers; a further Bill in 1894 failed.

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