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**A Short History of the British
Working Class Movement**

A Short History of the
British Working Class
Movement 1789-1925

by
G. D. H. Cole

Volume II. 1848-1900

LONDON: GEORGE ALLEN AND
UNWIN LIMITED & THE LABOUR
PUBLISHING COMPANY LIMITED

X: 96.3

F5.2

Published 1926.

5464

PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN BY THE WHITEFRIARS PRESS, LTD.,
LONDON AND TOWERIDGE.

PREFACE

I HAD intended to complete in this second volume my short survey of the history of the British Working-class Movement. But, as soon as I began to reduce to order my accumulated material, I saw that it would be impossible to do this without making the second volume nearly twice as long as the first. It seemed, moreover, that there was a natural break in the story just about the end of the century. The Victorian age appeared to be a chapter complete in itself, and deserving to be dealt with as a rounded whole. I therefore decided to make a second break about 1900, and to complete my study in three volumes instead of two.

Just as, in the first volume, I was trying to present a coherent account of the successive waves of working-class revolt against the new economic and social conditions created by the Industrial Revolution, so here I have attempted to present a picture of the new working-class movements which, from about 1850 onwards, based themselves on an acceptance of Industrialism, and an attempt to make the best of the new structure of economic society. For a time this acceptance was to a great extent an acceptance, not only of Industrialism, but also of that individualist Capitalism in which the new industrial order was first embodied. Later, it found expression in a Socialism which, hostile to Capitalism, was no less definitely based on accepting Industrialism as the basis of social organisation.

In my first volume I had to stress the unity of the entire Working-class Movement—the common basis and the close actual connection of the early experiments in Trade Unionism, in Co-operation, and in Radical political reform. Here, in dealing with the Victorian era, I have rather to lay stress on the division of the workers' movement into a number of distinct and separate expressions. Co-operation and Trade Unionism drifted apart; independent working-class political action was for a time submerged. The

various working-class movements, pursuing strictly limited aims, rarely felt the need for united effort or community of policy. But, as the "Golden Age" of Victorian Capitalism passes away and gives place to the new age of Imperialism and international economic rivalries, we shall see the aims and attitude of the working-class movements gradually changing, and the idea of united organisation again emerging side by side with the re-emergence of a wider, anti-capitalist aim.

As in the previous volume, I have aimed only at an outline study, and have excluded footnotes and references to sources. I wish to emphasise the point that the books mentioned at the end of each section are no more than a few selected references for further reading, confined for the most part to works which are easily accessible. In this volume, they fail at a good many points to cover the ground, for there are still many uncharted tracts in the history of the workers during the Victorian era. There is no study at all of working-class politics during this period, and no adequate account of Trade Union development. I have been driven, therefore, to a considerable use of old newspapers, pamphlets and reports. Especially have I drawn largely on the valuable collection of books and papers originally made by George Howell, and now housed in London at the Bishopsgate Institute.

G. D. H. COLF.

OXFORD, 1926.

CONTENTS

CHAP.	PAGE
PREFACE	v
I. INTRODUCTORY.	ii
1. The Second Phase.	
2. The "Golden Age."	
II. THRIFT AND ABSTINENCE	29
1. Self-help in the Victorian Era.	
2. The Co-operative Movement.	
3. The Friendly Societies.	
III. TRADE UNIONISM RE-MADE	53
1. Trade Unionism, 1835-1850.	
2. The New Model—The Engineers and the Cotton Operatives.	
3. The Builders.	
4. The Miners.	
IV. POLITICAL MOVEMENTS.	77
1. The London Trades Council and the "Junta."	
2. Working-class Politics in the 'Sixties.	
3. The International Working Men's Association.	
V. THE LABOUR LAWS, 1864-1871	93
1. Master and Servant—Trade Union Conferences.	
2. The Sheffield Outrages and the Royal Commission.	
3. The Labour Laws of 1871.	
VI. THE LABOUR LAWS (<i>continued</i>)—TRADE UNIONISM IN THE 'SEVENTIES	111
1. Labour Representation to 1874.	
2. The Labour Laws of 1875.	
3. The Nine Hours Movement—Joseph Arch.	
4. The Factory Acts—The Plimsoll Line.	

CONTENTS

CHAP.		PAGE
VII.	THE GREAT DEPRESSION	133
	1. The Coming of Imperialism.	
	2. Conciliation and Arbitration—The "Lib-Labs."	
VIII.	SOCIALISM AND THE DOCK STRIKE	147
	1. The Return of Socialism.	
	2. The Trade Union Revival.	
	3. The London Dock Strike.	
IX.	INDEPENDENT LABOUR	167
	1. The Independent Labour Party.	
	2. Trade Unionism in the 'Nineties.	
	3. The Labour Representation Committee.	
X.	THE CONDITION OF THE WORKERS IN THE SECOND HALF OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY	187

INDEX

- ABERDEEN Trades Council, 77**
 Abraham, William, 142
 Abstinence. *See* Saving.
 Africa, 136
 Agricultural labourers' lock-out, 122 f
 Agricultural labourers' lock-out,
 Federal, 122
 Agricultural Labourers' Union, Na-
 tional, 122 ff.
 Agricultural labourers' unions, 122 ff.,
 133, 152
 Agricultural Organisation Society,
 181
 Agriculture, 23, 29 f., 122 ff., 135, 187
 Allan, William, 56, 60, 73, 78, 113,
 120, 139
 Allen, John, 100
 Amalgamated Trades, Conference of,
 99 ff., 104
 "Amalgamated Societies," 53, 59 ff.,
 63, 65, 79, 96, 98 f., 100 ff., 121, 123,
 124, 139, 161 f.
 American Civil War, 81
 Anarchism, 87 ff., 149 f.
 Anti-Corn Law League, 11, 14
 Applegarth, Robert, 68, 73, 78, 79, 82,
 84, 85, 87, 88, 94, 99 ff., 113, 139,
 141
 Apprenticeship, limitation of, 62
 Arbitration Acts, 140
 Arch, Joseph, 23, 122 f., 142, 152, 167
 Artificers, Statute of, 93

BAKUNIN, Michael, 86, 87, 89
 Bank Charter Act (1844), 22
 Barry, Maltman, 89
 Bass, Michael, 121
 Bastiat, F., 24
 "Bastilles," 31
 Bax, E. Belfort, 149 f.
 Beales, Edmond, 82, 84
 Bebel, A., 86
Beehive, The, 79, 112, 195
 Bell, Richard, 183
 Besant, Annie, 156, 158
 Bessemer process, 134 f.
 Blanc, Louis, 36
 Blanqui, A., 87
 Blatchford, Robert, 167, 195

 "Bloody Sunday," 155
 Boilermakers' Society, 54, 56, 96, 98,
 100, 120, 162, 179
 Boot and Shoe Operatives, National
 Union of, 141, 163, 178
 Booth, Charles, 160, 194
 Bootmakers' Society, 88
 Bowley, A. L., 190
 Bradlaugh, Charles, 113, 141
 Bricklayers, London Order of, 65, 88,
 162
 Bright, John, 17, 82, 136
 Broadhead, William, 98
 Broadhurst, Henry, 87, 112, 114, 137,
 139, 142, 164, 171
 Brougham, Lord, 195
 Buchez, 36
 Builders' Union (1834), 54
 Building Company, London, 67
 Building lock-out, London (1859),
 66 ff., 77
 Building lock-out, London (1872), 121
 Building societies, 31, 45 f., 129
 Building workers, 56, 65 ff., 119 f.,
 121, 191
 Burgess, Joseph, 167
 Burnett, John, 120, 139
 Burns, John, 150, 155, 160, 167, 169,
 171
 Burt, Thomas, 70, 114, 116, 142
 Buxton, Sydney, 160

CAMPBELL, Alexander, 78, 79, 93, 94,
 124
Capital, 86, 148
 Capital, export of, 25, 134, 135
 Capitalism, growth of, 11 ff., 133 ff.,
 191 f.
 Cardroom Amalgamation, 154, 162
 Carpenters, Amalgamated Society of,
 68, 78, 98, 162, 163, 164
 Carpenters, Friendly Society of, 54,
 65
 Carpenters, General Union of. *See*
 Carpenters, Friendly Society of.
 Cartwright, Major, 148
 Champion, H. H., 150, 155, 156
 Chartism, 11, 14, 15, 19, 20, 36, 54,
 60, 81, 86, 99, 111, 148, 196

- Checkweighmen, 69, 141
 Child labour, 12, 16
 Chipping Norton, 122
 Christian Socialists, 36 ff., 61, 99
 Civil Service, 128
 Clauses Acts, 24
Clarion, The, 167, 179, 195
 Clerks, National Union of, 163
 Clothiers' Union, 54
 Clyde engineers' strike (1872), 121
 Clyde Shipbuilders' and Engineers' Association, 119
 Clyde shipyard lock-out (1867), 119
 Coal mines. *See* Mining.
 Coal Mines Acts, 24, 69, 72, 126, 141, 188
 Cobbett, J. M., 94
 Cobbett, William, 12, 111, 194
 Cobden, Richard, 17, 23, 136
 Cobden's French Treaty, 23
 Cohn, 120
 Collecting societies, 44
 Colonial Conference, 136
 Colonies, position of, 136
 Combination Acts, 14, 42
Commonweal, The, 150, 156
 Communist League, 86
 Communist Manifesto, 86
 Companies Acts, 15, 22 f., 37
 Compositors, London Society of, 56
 Conciliation, 57, 72, 95, 96, 133, 139 ff., 161 f.
 Conciliation Act (1867), 57, 95, 139
 Conciliation Board, Iron Trade, 101, 140
 Connolly, T., 100, 113
 Conspiracy and Protection of Property Act, 117
 "Contract" system, 154
 Control of industry, 178
 Co-operative Alliance, International, 181
 Co-operative Company, N.W. of England United, 38
 Co-operative Conference Board, Central, 124
 Co-operative Conference Board, Lancashire and Yorkshire, 39
 Co-operative conferences, 36
 Co-operative Employees, Amalgamated Union of, 163
 Co-operative movement, Consumers, 16 f., 18, 19, 23, 31, 33 ff., 43, 46 f., 124, 133, 180 f., 182, 184, 192 f.
 Co-operative Societies of Producers, 34 f., 46 f., 57, 67, 72, 123 f., 133, 181
 Co-operative Union, 124
 Co-operative Wholesale Societies, 34, 35, 38, 39, 124, 181
 Corn Laws, repeal of, 15, 19, 123, 135
 Corresponding societies, 11
 Corresponding Societies Act, 41 f.
 Cotton famine, Lancashire, 21, 25, 83
 Cotton operatives, 54, 140 f., 192
 Coulson, Edwin, 78, 113
 Crawford, William, 70, 79, 142
 Cremer, W. R., 87, 112, 113, 114, 142, 143
 Criminal Law Amendment Act, 93, 105, 106, 114, 115, 116 f.
 DARWIN, Charles, 194
 De Foe, Daniel, 41, 45
 De Leon, Daniel, 89
 Democratic Federation, 148
 Depression of Trade, Royal Commission on, 135
 Depression, the great, 133 ff., 191
 Derby, Lord, 83
 Diffusion of Useful Knowledge, Society for, 195
 Dilke, Sir Charles, 143
 Disraeli, Benjamin, 83 f., 116
 Dividend on purchases, 33
 Dividing societies, 44
 Dock Labourers, National Union of, 161
 Dock strike (1889), 151, 159 ff.
 Dock strike, Hull (1893), 170, 174
 Dockers' Union, 161, 191
 "Document," presentation of, 61, 66, 119
 Doherty, John, 56, 63
 Dronfield, William, 96
 Druids, Order of, 41
 Drury, John, 56 f.
 ECCARIUS, G. J., 87
 Education Acts, 115, 128
 Education, public, 24, 188 f., 194
 Emigration funds, 62, 123
 Employers and Workmen Act, 117
 Employers' associations, 60
 Employers' Liability Act, 141
 Employers of Labour, Federation of Associated, 115
 Employment of Labour, National Association of United Trades for the, 37, 56 f.
 Engineering and Shipbuilding Employers' Federation, 115
 Engineering and Shipbuilding Trades Federation, 162

- Engineering Employers' Federation, 177 f.
 Engineers, 22, 55 f., 187
 Engineers, Amalgamated Society of, 37, 53, 54, 56, 59 ff., 66, 78, 98, 111, 120, 128, 141, 160, 162, 163, 164, 177
 Engineers, Central Association of Employers of Operative, 60
 Engineers' lock-out (1852), 61
 Engineers' lock-out (1897), 178
 Exhibition, the Great (1851), 25

Fabian Essays, 167
 Fabian Society, 167, 168, 182
 Factory Acts, 24, 63, 126 f., 188
 (1833), 63
 (1844), 16, 63
 (1847), 16, 63
 (1850), 63, 126
 (1867), 126
 (1874), 126
 (1878), 127
 (1891), 141
 Factory Acts Reform Association (1872), 126 f.
 Factory reform (general), 14, 63, 126 ff.
 Factory Reform Association, Northern Counties, 141
 "Fair Trade." *See* Tariff Reform.
 Far East, 136
 Fawcett, Henry, 127
 Fearneyhaugh, 97
 Feminism, 127
 Fenwick, Charles, 142
 Financial crisis (1857), 25
 Financial crisis (1866-7), 21, 25, 119
 Findlay, Sir George, 177
 First International. *See* International Working Men's Association.
 Foresters, Ancient Order of, 41, 42
 France, development of, 136
 Free Trade, 14 f., 17, 18, 20, 23, 135
 Friendly societies, 17, 18, 19, 31, 41 ff., 59
 Friendly Societies Acts, 17, 37, 41, 98, 116 f., 129
 Friendly Societies, Royal Commission on (1870), 42, 43

GARIBALDI, 81
 Gas stokers' movement, (1872), 106, 121, 152
 Gas Workers' and General Labourers' Union, 159 f., 161, 191
 George, Henry, 143, 147, 148
 German Socialism, 89, 147, 170
 Germany, development of, 134, 136
 Gilchrist-Thomas process, 134
 Gladstone, W. E., 106
 Glasgow Trades Council, 77, 78, 93, 94
 Gotha Programme, 89, 147
 Graham, R. B. Cunninghame, 142, 155
 Greening, E. O., 112
 Greenwood, Abraham, 39
 Guesde, Jules, 147
 Guild Socialism, 150
 Guile, Daniel, 78, 113
 Gurney's Act, 103

HALES, John, 89
 Halliday, Thomas, 71, 79, 114
 Hammersmith Socialist Society, 150
 Handloom weavers, 30
 Hardie, J. Keir, 137, 153, 154, 156, 167, 168 ff., 182, 183 f.
 Harnott, Richard, 56, 66
 Harrison, Frederic, 99, 100 f., 116
 Hartwell, Robert, 99, 111, 112
 Harvey, James, 143
 Health. *See* Public Health.
 Health, Boards of, 24
 Hodge, John, 154
 Holyoake, G. J., 38, 113
 Home Colonisation Society, 34
Hornby v. Close, 93, 96, 98
 Hosiery Board, Nottingham, 139
 Hosiery Workers' Union, 123
 Hours of labour, 16, 25, 56, 66, 67, 70, 119 ff., 126, 141, 154, 157, 159 ff., 164, 168, 176, 178, 188
 Hours of Labour, Association for Shortening the, 67
 Housing, 188
 Housing Acts, 128
 Howell, George, 78, 82, 84, 87, 102, 105, 112, 113, 114, 116, 128, 142, 167
 Hughes, Thomas, 99, 100 f., 116, 117
 "Hungry Forties," 21, 36
 Hunt, Henry, 111
 Huxley, T. H., 194
 Hyde Park demonstration (1866), 84
 Hyndman, H. M., 137, 147 ff., 155, 157, 171

ILLITERACY, 24
 Imperialism, 133 ff.
 Independent Labour Party, 137, 164, 167 ff., 175, 182 ff., 194
 India, 136
 Industrial and Provident Societies Acts, 37, 38, 124, 129, 180

- Industrial Revolution, 18, 19, 21, 29, 48, 187
 Insurance companies, 44
 International Association (Chartist), 81
 International Labour Congresses, 154
 International Welcome and Protest Committee, 81
 International Working Men's Association, 17, 81, 85 ff., 120, 143, 154
 International Working Men's Association, British Council, 89, 143
 Irish Agricultural Organisation Society, 181
 Irish Home Rule, 148, 155
 Iron industry, re-equipment of, 134 f.
 Ironfounders, Friendly Society of, 54, 56, 98
 Ironworkers' Association, 96

 JONES, Ernest, 81, 82, 111
 Jones, Lloyd, 36, 113, 114, 123
 Joynes, J. L., 148
 Jude, Martin, 54 f., 69
 Judicature Act, 128
 "Junta," The, 78 ff., 82, 99 ff., 103 f., 112, 139
 Justice, 149, 156, 195
 Jute workers, 178

 KANE, John, 79, 82, 100, 101, 114
 Kenney, Patrick, 121
 Kettle, Sir Rupert, 139
 Khaki Election, 183
 Kingsley, Charles, 36
 Knight, Charles, 195
 Knight, Robert, 162, 179
 Kossuth, 81

 "LABOUR Alliance," 170, 182, 184
 Labour Elector, *The*, 156
 Labour Electoral Association, 142 f., 156
 Labour Exchanges, Equitable, 35, 38
 Labour Federation, Eastern Counties, 161
 Labour Leader, *The*, 156, 167, 195
 Labour, National Amalgamated Union of, 161
 Labour Party, 164, 172, 180
 Labour Party, Scottish, 156, 167, 168
 Labour representation in Parliament, 72, 111 ff., 137, 142 f., 147 ff., 156, 169 ff.
 Labour Representation Committee, 137, 172, 182 ff., 191
 Labour representation committees, local, 167

 Labour Representation League,^o 113 ff., 142
 Labour, Royal Commission on (1891), 173 f.
 Labourers, General Amalgamated Union of, 121
 Land and Labour League, 143
 Land reform, 143, 147, 148
 Land Tenure Reform Association, 143, 147
 Lassalle, 86, 87, 89, 147
 Latham, R. M., 113
 Layton, W. T., 190
 Leicester, Joseph, 112, 142, 167
 Liberal-Labour alliance, 12, 49, 82, 84, 85, 113 ff., 118, 137, 141 ff., 147, 149, 156, 167, 171, 180, 182, 183, 193
 Liberator Building Society, 46
 Lichfield, Lord, 101
 Liebknecht, Wilhelm, 86
 Link, *The*, 156, 158
 Linnell, 155
 List, F., 15, 24
 Liverpool Trades Council, 128
 Liverpool Trades Guardian Association, 77
 Livesay, Sir George, 159
 Local Government, 115, 128, 141, 169, 189
 Lock-outs, Conference on (1866), 95
 London Chamber of Commerce, 141
 London County Council, 169
 London Trades Council, 77 ff., 81, 82, 86, 88, 95, 97, 100, 104, 111, 167
 London Working Men's Association (1866), 79, 99, 111, 112, 115
 Lowe, Robert, 24, 83
 Lucraft, Benjamin, 82, 87, 114, 115, 143
 Luddites, 11
 Ludlow, J. M., 36, 43

 MACDONALD, Alexander, 69 ff., 79, 94, 100, 114, 116, 117, 124, 140, 142, 191
 MacDonald, J. Ramsay, 182, 183
 "Machine question," 60 ff.
 Manchester Trades Council, 77, 101
 Manhood suffrage, 81 ff., 83, 111, 148
 Manhood Suffrage and Vote by Ballot Association, 82
 Mann, Tom, 156, 157, 160, 174
 Manning Cardinal, 160
 Marx, Karl, 48, 85 ff., 137, 143, 147, 148
 Master and Servant Acts, 93 ff., 106, 117

- Match girls' strike, 158
 Maurice, F. D., 36
 Mawdsley, James, 171
 Mazzini, 85, 86, 87
 Mechanics' Institutes, 195
 Mechanics, Yorkshire Society of, 54
 Merchant Shipping Acts, 127 f.
 Metal industries, rise of, 22
 Metalliferous Mines Act (1872), 72, 126
 Metropolitan Trades Committee, 98
 Middle class, growth of, 25, 189
 Mill, John Stuart, 113 f., 143
Miner, The (1863), 70
Miner, The (1887), 156
 Miners (general), 22, 54 ff., 69 ff., 94, 95, 124, 163, 172, 175 f., 187, 191, 192
 Miners, Amalgamated Association of, 70 ff., 114, 128, 152
 Miners' Association, National. *See* Miners, National Union of.
 Miners' Association of Great Britain (1841), 54 f., 69.
 Miners' Federation of Great Britain, 73, 140, 153, 162, 163, 175 f., 184
 Miners', National, Union of, 69 ff., 114, 133, 140, 152, 176
 Miners' unions, district—
 Cumberland, 71, 140
 Durham, 55, 69, 70, 71, 72, 73, 121, 123, 140, 141, 152 f., 162, 175 f.
 Federated Area, 175
 Lancashire, 55, 69, 70, 71, 152, 175
 Midlands, 153, 175
 Northumberland, 69, 70, 71, 72, 73, 140, 141, 152 f., 162, 175
 North Wales, 71, 140, 175
 Nottinghamshire, 96
 Scotland, 69, 71, 140, 153, 175
 South Wales, 55, 70, 71, 72, 121, 140, 153, 175 f.
 Staffordshire, 69, 70, 140.
 Yorkshire, 55, 69, 70, 71, 95, 96, 123, 128, 140, 175
 Mines Acts. *See* Coal Mines Acts and Metalliferous Mines Acts.
 Mining Company, Co-operative, 72
 Mining, development of, 22
 Mining strike (1893), 170, 174, 175 f.
 Mitchell, W., 70
 Morris, William, 149 f., 155
 Mundella, A. J., 126, 139
 NATIONALISATION, 143, 147, 148, 149, 154, 168, 169
 a.w.c.
 Navigation Acts, repeal of, 15
 Neale, E. Vansittart, 36
 "New" Unionism (1850), 17, 137, 191
 "New" Unionism (1889), 125, 137, 151, 152 ff., 156 ff., 159 ff., 161 ff., 169, 172, 177, 180, 182, 191, 195
 Newton, William, 55, 60, 111, 113
 Nine Hours' League, 120
 Nine Hours' Movement, 67, 105, 119 ff., 191
 O'BRIEN, Bronterre, 14, 143
 O'Connor, Feargus, 12, 111, 194
 Oddfellows, Orders of, 41, 42
 Odger, George, 78, 81, 82, 85, 86, 102, 104, 112 f., 114, 143
 Organised Trades, United Kingdom Alliance of, 95 f., 119
 "Organisation of Labour," 36
 Osborne Judgment, 118
Our Seamen, 128
 Ouseburn Engineering Works, 123
 Overtime, 60, 61, 62
 Owen, Robert, 11, 12, 20, 36, 39, 48, 54, 63, 194
 Owenism, 20, 33 f., 36, 38, 40, 86
 PAINTERS, Amalgamated Society of, 121
 Painters, Manchester Alliance, 65
 Palmerston, Lord, 83
 Paris Commune, 88, 89, 147
 Parliament. *See* Labour Representation.
 Paterson, Emma, 121, 127
 Peel, Sir Robert, the younger, 15
 Pickard, Ben, 142
 Pickard, W., 114
 Picketing, 104, 105, 117
 Piece-work, 60, 63, 160, 168, 178
 Piece-work, price lists, 61, 63
 Place, Francis, 12
 Plasterers' Society, 68
 Plimsoll, Samuel, 127 f.
 Plimsoll and Seamen's Fund Committee, 128
 Polish Revolt, 81
 Political Union, North London, 82
 Poor Law Amendment Act (1834) 30 f.
 Population, 88
 Positivists, 61, 99
 Potter, George, 67, 79, 84, 94, 99, 112, 113, 114
 Potters' Union, 54, 178
 Pratt, John Tidd, 43
 Price, Richard, 43

- Prior, J. D., 139
 Professional classes, rise of, 25, 189
 Profit-sharing, 159
 Protection of Labour, National Association of United Trades for the, 37, 56 ff., 65, 95, 105, 139
 Proudhon, P. J., 87
 Public Health Acts, 24, 128
 Puddlers' strike (1865), 79
- "QUITTAANCE paper," 55
- RADICAL clubs, 147 f.
 Railway Clerks' Association, 177
 Railway Servants, Amalgamated Society of, 121, 152, 161, 162, 176 f.
 Railway Servants, Scottish Society of, 176
 Railway Workers' Union, General, 161, 176
 Railways Act (1893), 176
 Railways, building of, 21 f., 25, 65
 Ratcliffe, Henry, 43
 Redemption societies, general, 38
 Reform Act (1832), 11, 14
 Reform Act (1867), 84, 111, 116
 Reform Act (1884), 123, 141
 Reform agitation ('sixties), 81 ff., 87, 111 ff.
 Reform Association, Leeds Working Men's, 82
 Reform Association, Midland Counties, 82
 Reform Association, National, 82
 Reform League, National, 82, 83 ff.
 Reform Union, National, 83, 84
 Reform Union, Northern, 82
 Reynolds, G. W. M., 82
Reynolds' Newspaper, 195
 Roberts, W. P., 55, 82, 93
 Rochdale Pioneers, 20, 31, 33, 38, 39
 Rogers, J. E. Thorold, 143
 Rose, George, 41
 Rowlands, James, 142
 Russell, Lord John, 83
- SAILORS' and Firemen's Union, 154, 161, 167, 174
 Saving, 12, 15 f., 30
 Savings banks, 44, 45, 47
 Saw Grinders' Union, 97 f.
 "Scotch cattle," 55
 Self-help, 29 ff.
 Sexton, James, 161
 Shaftesbury, Lord, 128
 Shaw, G. Bernard, 167, 182
 Sheffield, Organised Trades of, 56
 Sheffield outrages, 93, 96, 97 f., 100, 139
 Sheffield Trades Council, 77, 95
 Shipping, development of, 21 f., 134.
See also Merchant Shipping.
 Shipping Federation, 174
 Shipton, George, 113, 117, 121, 142
 Shop Assistants' Union, 163
 Short-time committees, 63, 126
 Siemens process, 134
 Single tax, 147
 Sliding scales, 71, 72, 133, 140, 141, 152 f., 175
 Smiths, "Old" Society of, 54
 Social Democratic Federation, 89, 137, 148 ff., 155 ff., 168, 182, 183, 194
 Socialism abroad, 89, 147
 Socialism, growth of, 89, 137, 143, 147 ff., 164, 168 ff., 184, 193
 Socialism, municipal, 169
 Socialism, Owenite, 39
 Socialist League, 149 f.
 Solly, Henry, 46, 112
 Spencer, Herbert, 194
 Spinners' strike, Preston (1853), 61
 Spinners' Union (1834), 54
 Spinners' Union, (modern), 61, 96, 121, 126, 162, 174
 Steam Engine Makers' Society, 54, 56
 Steam Engine Makers', Society of Journeymen, 54, 55, 60
 Steam-power, 21
 Steel, 134
 Steel Smelters' Union, 154
 Stevedores' Union, 160
 Stonemasons' Society, 54, 56, 58, 65, 66, 100, 121
 Suez Canal, 134
 Syndicalism, 150
- TAPP Vale decision, 117
 Tailors, Amalgamated Society of, 96
 Tariff Reform, 136, 155
 Tariffs, 134
 Tea Operatives' and General Labourers' Union, 154, 160, 161
 Ten Hours Act, 16, 40, 63
 Textile Factory Workers' Association, United, 154
 Textile Workers, General Union of, 154
 Thorne, Will, 159
 Threlfall, T. R., 142
 Thrift, 29 ff., 47
 Tillet, Ben, 154, 160, 161
 Towers, John, 70
 Trade Union Acts, 93, 103 ff., 116 ff.

- Trade Union benefits, 59 f.
 Trade Union membership, 163, 179, 192 f.
 Trade Union Political Union, 82
 Trade Unionists, growth of, 14, 53 ff., Cp. III., 119 ff., 152 ff., 159 ff., 173 ff.
 Trade Unions, General Federation of, 179 f., 191
 Trade Unions, Royal Commission on, 88, 97 ff., 116
 Trades Council, London. *See* London.
 Trades Councils, 68, 77 ff., 94, 98, 103, 114, 143, 163, 171, 182
 Trades Union, Grand National Consolidated, 53
 Trades Union Congress, 72, 80, 93, 94, 99 f., 102, 112, 115, 127 f., 142, 153, 154, 157, 163 f., 168, 169 f., 171 f., 172, 179, 182, 193
 Trades Union Congress Parliamentary Committee, 104 f., 115, 116, 137, 140, 154
 Trafalgar Square demonstrations, 155 f.
 Transport, development of, 21
 Trollope, Messrs., 66
 Track Acts, 141
 Typographical Association, National, 56
 Typographical Association, Provincial, 56
 UNEMPLOYED agitation, 150 f., 155
 Unemployment, 24, 133, 149, 150 f., 159, 172
 "Union shops," 35
 United States, development of, 134
 United Trades, National Association of. *See* Protection and Employment.
 University Extension Movement, 129
 WAGES, movement of, 16, 24, 30, 133, 163, 187 ff.
 Wallace, Alfred Russel, 143
 Wealth, growth of, 189
 Weavers' Amalgamation, 62, 126, 154, 162
 Weavers' strike, Padliham (1859), 62
 Webb, Beatrice and Sidney, 167, 169, 194
 Weiler, Adam, 154
 Westcott, Bishop, 175
 Whitbread, Samuel, 45
 Willke, Alexander, 183
 Williams, J. E., 155
 Wilson, J. Havelock, 154, 167, 171
 Wilson, John, 142
 Winter, Thomas, 95
 Women's labour, 12, 16, 127, 162
 Women's Protective and Provident League, 121
 Women's Trade Union League, 121
 Wood, G. H., 190, 192
 "Working-class Ltd.'s," 23, 35
 Working Men's Associations, Society for Promoting, 36
 Working Men's Club and Institute Union, 46, 112
 Working Men's School Board Central Committee, 114
 Workmen's Compensation Act, 141
Workmen's Times, 167