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SYLLABUS SERIES No. 1.

THE BRITISH LABOUR MOVEMENT

(Sixth edition, revised to March, 1925)

A HISTORICAL INTRODUCTION FOR
CLASSES AND STUDY CIRCLES

BY

=====
G. D. H. COLE
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(Author of *THE WORLD OF LABOUR*, etc.)

PRICE SIXPENCE

(SPECIAL TERMS FOR QUANTITIES)

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THE BRITISH LABOUR MOVEMENT

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PREFACE.

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The following syllabus is an attempt to provide a clue to the labyrinth of Labour organisation in Great Britain, by showing how the British Labour Movement has developed in the period since the Industrial Revolution of the Eighteenth Century. It seeks to bring together into a connected story the histories, so often separately, recounted, of the various forms and aspects of working-class organisation, and especially of the three movements the growth of which, during the Nineteenth Century, is the central fact in the story of the British working class. Not in Great Britain alone, but in nearly all civilised countries, the Nineteenth Century was the period of the formation and growth to power of these three movements. It witnessed the rise of Trade Unions expressing the corporate solidarity of the wage-earners, their will to resist oppression, and their desire for the creation of a more free and democratic industrial order. It witnessed the rise of Co-operation, both as a means of protecting the working-class consumers against high prices and profit-making industrialism, and as an expression in the sphere of production, of the desire of workers for independence of the capitalist employer. It witnessed the rise of Socialism, as above all a movement of ideas aiming at the substitution for a Society based on class divisions and competition for the good things of life of a Society based on the principle, "to each according to his needs, from each according to his ability." And out of these movements, and particularly out of Trade Unionism and Socialism, has come political organisation of the workers aiming at the conquest of political power.

In two of these three movements, Great Britain led the way to the rest of the world. British Trade Unionism and British Co-operation, however they may have been surpassed in particular directions by other movements, historically have served as models upon which the workers in other countries have largely based their forms and methods of organisation.

A more than national interest, therefore, attaches to the history of British Labour development. Its story, as told in a brief syllabus such as this, can hardly help seeming often dull and uninspiring. Here can be no adequate account either of the men who have been the makers of the movement in its various phases, or of the prodigious obstacles, deeply rooted in the system, with which they had to cope. Nor can there be any proper exposition of the various theories and ideas which have, at different periods, dominated this or that section of the movement. These things are told in the books to which this syllabus is only intended to introduce the reader, and must be reserved for the lectures, papers, and discussions, which are intended to be based upon it. All that has been attempted is to give, not a mere chronicle of isolated facts, but as far as possible a connected story with a meaning and a quality of suggestion.

Appended to each section will be found a list of the most important books dealing with the questions discussed. This list is necessarily rather lengthy, as the ground covered is very wide. There is, however, no reason for the reader or student to be alarmed by the number of books suggested for further reading. One will find his interest attracted especially by one phase of the movement, one by another. I have had to do my best to give the book which each will find most useful. The list is not a list of books that must be read, but one from which a selection must be made by the individual according to his particular interest.

It is impossible, however, to stress too strongly the need for every member of any class or circle that meets to discuss this syllabus to read for himself as much as he can. If he wants to get a clear picture of the growth of the Labour Movement, there are certain books which he must read. I give the following as an indispensable *minimum* list:—

(a) Some general short economic history of England. The best is: "*The Economic Organisation of England*," by W. J. Ashley, which has the merit of being short and simple, and of giving a good broad outline.

(b) Some book of Nineteenth Century Social History, such as "*The Making of Modern England*," by Gilbert Slater. This is not very good, but it is the best available.

(c) "*The History of Trade Unionism*," by S. and B. Webb.

(d) A book on Co-operation, such as Beatrice Potter's (Mrs. Webb's) "*The Co-operative Movement*," or L. S. Woolf's "*Co-operation and the Future of Industry*."

(e) It is most unfortunate that there is no even reasonably good short book on the Socialist Movement. One of those available should, however, be read by any student who does not tackle Max Beer's books. (See (g) below).

In addition to these, any student who really wants to get a grip of the working-class movement on its historical side ought to make an effort to read certain larger and more specialised books.

(f) "*The Village Labourer*" and "*The Town Labourer*," both by Mr. and Mrs. Hammond, are by far the best written and most informative books on Social History that I have ever read. They deal with the period from 1760-1832. Reading them will be, for any student, not a duty but a pleasure and an inspiring experience.

(g) Max Beer's two volumes on "*The History of British Socialism*," which cover the whole period, are the only really good account of the growth of Socialist theories and policies.

(h) I am at present writing a brief text-book, designed to accompany this syllabus, and to present a general view of the growth of the whole working-class movement—Trade Union, Co-operative, and Socialist—in the light of economic development. This, I hope, will be ready in the autumn in two editions, at 5/- and 2/6.

It would, of course, be possible to continue indefinitely the list of special books. I have set out the above three because they seem to me to stand out head and shoulders above the rest. For others the student is referred to the fuller bibliographies given in the text.

G. D. H. COLE.

October, 1920.

REVISED March, 1925.

A FEW GENERAL BOOKS.

(Included here are only books which do not fall definitely under one or another of the divisions in the syllabus. There are a few repetitions, but not very many).

(A) GENERAL ECONOMIC HISTORIES :—

“The Growth of English Industry and Commerce,” by W. Cunningham. Three vols.

“The Economic Organisation of England,” by W. J. Ashley (brief and simple).

“Economic History of England,” by H. O. Meredith (brief, but difficult).

“Economic History : Select Documents,” by Bland, Brown, and Tawney (for reference).

(There are, of course, many other text-books of varying merits.)

(B) MODERN ECONOMIC HISTORIES :—

“The Making of Modern England,” by Gilbert Slater.

“The Industrial History of Modern England,” by G. H. Perris.

“Industrial and Commercial Revolutions,” by Dr. L. Knowles.

“Life and Labour in the Nineteenth Century,” by C. R. Fay.

“The Evolution of Modern Capitalism,” by J. A. Hobson.

(C) GENERAL HISTORIES OF ENGLAND :—

J. R. Green's “*Short History of the English People*” is still as good as anything as an outline. G. K. Chesterton's “*Short History of England*” gives an interesting and distinctive point of view, but is emphatically not a text-book. There are many short text-books by A. D. Innes, T. F. Tout, and others.

Of larger histories, probably the most useful is G. M. Trevelyan's “*British History in the 19th Century*” (1 volume). The “*Political History of England*,” published by Longman's, has two volumes dealing with the Nineteenth Century. The better history, published by Messrs. Methuen, covers the period in one large volume. The “*Cambridge Modern History*” is useful for reference.