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THE WORLD OF LABOUR



LABOUR'S MEDICAL ADVISERS
A DEMONSTRATION IN THE NEW STATESMANSHIP

THE WORLD OF LABOUR

A DISCUSSION OF THE PRESENT AND
FUTURE OF TRADE UNIONISM

BY

G. D. H. COLE

WITH A FRONTISPIECE BY WILL DYSON

WITH NEW INTRODUCTION

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INTRODUCTION TO THE EDITION OF 1919

ANY book about the Labour Movement written before 1914 must necessarily date itself to a considerable extent. The position of Trade Unionism both at home and abroad has been fundamentally changed by the war. When I wrote in 1913, there was no Trade Union movement in Russia, apart from secret and persecuted political societies. To-day, Trade Unionism and Co-operation are almost the only live forces, except purely political and military organisations, in Soviet Russia. When I wrote, German Trade Unionism was the submissive handmaid of German Social Democracy, pursuing strictly constitutional courses under a militaristic and autocratic Empire. To-day, it is swinging from left to right and from right to left, under the alternating impulses of Spartacism and unrepentant Imperialism. Since I wrote, the Belgian movement has been shattered by the war, and to-day, amid the ruins of Belgian industry, the work of rebuilding it has hardly begun. In France, without violent change, Trade Unionism has gained greatly in stability and power; but in the process it seems to have shed a great deal of its earlier Syndicalist idealism, so that it appears at least possible that it has taken permanently a form far more nearly resembling that of British Trade Unionism than when I wrote. In America, where the Government has been busy imprisoning the leaders of the Industrial Workers of the

World, there is a growing movement of unrest, and new forces seem to be arising inside the American Federation of Labour to challenge the ascendancy of Mr. Samuel Gompers. Lastly, in this country, the economic and industrial situation has fundamentally changed, and, even in the midst of the political triumphs of reaction, Labour is revealing in the economic field a new sense of power against which political forces are too weak to stand.

We are living in a world of rapid change—a world in which new forces are constantly coming to light. It is a world which defies summary or analysis, and makes interpretation very difficult. Its events from day to day are an object-lesson in the vanity of human wishes and the shallowness and impotence of human leaders. The powers of the world to-day are not great men or even great nations, but the elemental forces of hunger for food, hunger for blood, hunger for land, touched everywhere with a touch of idealism, high or low, but determined principally by sheer economic compulsions. The movements which count to-day are mass movements, originating—no one knows how—among undistinguished people, and creating their own prophets and interpreters as they spread. Soviets, Workers' and Soldiers' Councils, Workers' Committees and all the rest of the new forces have come into being not so much because idealists (still less because politicians) have created them, as because they arose naturally and inevitably out of the social situation in which men found themselves. They are neither created nor begotten, but proceeding; and that is the firmest guarantee of their vitality.

Before the war, the tendency towards association was growing rapidly throughout our own and other communities. It grew, because slowly men and women

were feeling their way towards the common expression of their common purposes and desires. For a while the war, by breaking up normal groups and creating artificial ones, seemed likely to check its progress; but before long the associative impulse asserted itself inside the new groups. Shop stewards and shop committees in this country, sailors, soldiers and workers in Russia became organised; and the perceptible quickening of the spirit of association has extended not only to the working class, but to salary-earners and professionals of various sorts and degrees of social status.

The political Revolutions in Russia and Central Europe, and still more the actual and attempted economic and social Revolutions which have followed in their train, are only the tops of the universal waves of democratic organisation. The time has not yet arrived at which the new orientation of the Labour Movement on the continent of Europe can be described; and I do not propose to attempt an impossible task. Not only are the conditions still changing so rapidly and dramatically as to make analysis impossible; the operation of the various censorshipships and the disturbance of international communications have made it a hopeless task even to get reliable news about actual events. I must, therefore, perforce leave to some future occasion any attempt to revalue the forces of European Labour in terms of post-war economic power.

In a recently published book, *An Introduction to Trade Unionism*, I have tried to describe the present organisation and policy of the Labour Movement in this country; and to that book I must refer readers who desire to know how the actual structure and methods of Trade Unionism have changed during the

last few years. They will find that a beginning, but only a small beginning, has been made of dealing with some of the problems discussed in this book. In general, however, they will find that it is true to say that, despite the great increase in Trade Union membership and power, most of the unsolved problems of 1913 remain unsolved in 1919. Only in two or three directions has real progress been made towards the solution of internal difficulties, and even in these cases the new forces making for progress are still at the stage at which they seem rather to be creating new problems than to be solving old ones.

To some extent, I have already dealt in other books with some of the most important of these new forces. Thus, both in *Self-Government in Industry* and in *An Introduction to Trade Unionism* I have tried to describe the growth of the Shop Stewards' movement in the engineering and kindred industries, and of the similar 'rank and file' movements among other sections such as the railwaymen. These new movements are attempts to solve the problem of internal democracy in the organisation of Trade Unionism. Based mainly upon the workshop or other place of work, they endeavour to build up on that basis a more responsive and democratic type of organisation than has been secured by the accepted forms of Trade Union structure—the branch, the District Committee of branches, the National Executive and the Delegate Meeting. They have arisen naturally and spontaneously among the workers in the shops and other places of work, and their growth has been fostered by the huge aggregation of complicated problems which has arisen in the workshops out of war-time conditions, such as dilution of labour. They have been for the most part unofficial bodies, often quite unrecognised by the Unions to

which their members belong, and often falling out with the National Executives and the constitutional procedure of the Unions. I believe that they will not remain permanently unofficial, but will succeed in bringing about such changes in Trade Union methods of government as will ensure to them an important position in the constitutional machinery of the more democratic Trade Unionism of the future.

Writing in 1913, I dwelt with some emphasis upon the increasing rift between the official and the 'rank and file' elements in the Trade Union world. The permanent official of a Trade Union tends under modern conditions at once to concentrate more and more power in his own hands and to get more and more out of touch with the feeling of his members. The branch organisation of Trade Unionism, built on a basis which fails to ensure any close community of active interest among its members, has too often very little life, and in these circumstances fails to act as an effective instrument of democratic government by expressing constantly the will of the members on matters of industrial concern. Thus, the democratic basis of Trade Unionism becomes unreal; and a lack of democracy in the smaller unit inevitably carries with it an even greater lack of democracy in the larger units of organisation. As already appeared clearly in 1913, the only way of securing real democracy in the national Trade Union movement is by building it up on a basis of real democracy locally.

The importance of the shop stewards' movement lies in the fact that it does pave the way for a solution of this problem. Although hitherto it has seemed to be creating new difficulties by widening the rift between members and officials and by taking power unconstitutionally into its own hands, all these tend-

encies have really been paving the way for a new form of Trade Union organisation. I believe that the future lies very largely with a form of Trade Unionism based upon the workshop and built up throughout its structure on the foundation of the workshop.

The reasons for the growth of these new forms of organisation are to be found not only in the desire to re-establish democracy in Trade Union government, or in the peculiar conditions of war-time industry, but even more in the new direction and orientation of Trade Union policy. The desire to secure a measure of direct control over industry was already becoming marked in the British Labour Movement before the war, and the interest which I felt in its development was indeed the chief motive which first led me to write this book. But what was only an inchoate tendency before the war is already in some of the principal industries a definite and consciously formulated demand. The miners have coupled with their demand for mine nationalisation an equally insistent demand for a half-share in the control of the nationalised mines, both nationally and locally, and in the particular pits. The railwaymen are putting forward an almost identical demand in the case of the railways, and the demand for control is also being strongly pressed in the Post Office and the Civil Service. Nor is the demand confined to State-owned industries or to industries in which State ownership is imminent: it is also being pressed in rather different forms in many other industries, and more particularly in the engineering and shipyard group.

This change or development in policy has affected the various Socialist bodies as well as the Trade Unions. The National Administrative Council of the Indepen-

dent Labour Party has now expressed its economic policy in the following resolution :

" This Conference affirms its belief that the public ownership of the means of production, distribution, and exchange is an essential object of Socialist effort and propaganda, and declares that industrial democracy can only be established through the workers securing control of the means of production and of the organisation and administration of industry."

It is safe to say that such a resolution would have been strenuously opposed by most of the national leaders of the I.L.P. a few years ago.

In view of the growing acceptance among Socialists of the idea of direct control of the industry by the workers through their Trade Unions or Guilds, some things that are written in this book may seem by this time to be mere " floggings of a dead horse ". I do indeed believe that, so far as the Labour Movement is concerned, the internal battle for the idea of workers' control of industry has been fought and won. There are still unregenerate Collectivists, left in the world; but even they are compelled to moderate their language and conceal their dislike of industrial democracy and their distrust of human nature. There are also, of course, still plenty of Trade Unionists and of Trade Union officials who are not even now as advanced as the Collectivists, and still believe in a purely reformist Trade Unionism working permanently within the structure of the capitalist system. But these ' Great Boygs ' have ceased to be more than temporary and occasional obstructions, and there can be no doubt that the active sections in both the Trade Union and the Socialist Movements are now definitely seeking industrial democracy

This is far, of course, from meaning that industrial democracy is actually being achieved or is actually in prospect of achievement. The protagonists of Capitalism and the professional politicians are fully alive to the menace of what they regard as 'industrial Bolshevism', and are doing their best to counter it by every means in their power. Failing of success by the use of force and repression, they are casting about for some method of turning away the wrath of Labour by soft words and specious concessions. It is now generally recognised that, in the words of the Trade Union Memorandum on Unrest submitted to the Industrial Conference of 1919, "Labour can no longer be controlled by force or compulsion of any kind". As an alternative to compulsion, proposals are now being put forward for some sort of partnership between Capital (or rather Capitalists) and Labour in the control of industry. By these means it is hoped that the existing organisation of industry for private profit can be not only preserved, but also strengthened by the granting to Labour of an apparent interest in its maintenance.

This is no mere revival of the old and discredited schemes of profit-sharing and Labour Co-partnership with which I have dealt in this book. It is a proposal, in certain cases at least, for a sort of 'Trust' organisation of industry under huge capitalistic combines, with Labour admitted as a sort of junior partner in the Trust. A proposal on these lines was certainly put about on behalf of the mineowners by the Mining Association of Great Britain as soon as the miners' claim for national ownership and a share in control seemed to be on the point of success. Less ambitious schemes have also been put forward in other cases; and it is clear that these schemes are a new factor to be reckoned with in the industrial situation.

Moreover, the Whitley Report, with its proposal for Standing Joint Industrial Councils in the various industries, may easily be interpreted as a step in the same direction. I do not mean that this was consciously the aim of all, or even a majority, of the members of the Whitley Committee; but it is plain that in certain cases the Whitley Councils are being used to promote a sort of partnership between Capital and Labour. This is especially marked in the case of those Councils—the Pottery Council is one instance—in which the maintenance of selling prices is one of the declared objects. For this object is justified as a means of maintaining profits on the one hand and wages on the other, without the provision of any safeguard for the interests of the consumer.

Of course, not one of these schemes contemplates the real admission of Labour to its proper place in the control of industry. When capitalists to-day offer a share in control, what they really mean is a share in profits and a voice in the ascertainment and maintenance of profits. There could be no better commentary than this on the attitude of the employer in regarding industry as existing for the purpose of making profits. But, when Labour asks for control, it is not with profits or profit-sharing that it is primarily concerned, but with the democratisation of the actual management of industry, and the securing for the organised workers of a real measure of control over the conditions under which they work. Labour's remedy for the curse of profiteering is not a share in profits for itself, but the public ownership of industry combined with a system of democratic control.

It may be that the capitalists are so nervous about the industrial future that they will even be willing to concede to the workers a substantial share in

management, on condition that the profit-making system is preserved and the continuance of dividends ensured. This, indeed, seems to be taking place in Germany as the capitalists make their last throw against the democratic attempts to enforce measures of socialisation. The attitude of the workers to such proposals will depend on the conditions accompanying them. They will be ready to assume all the control which they can secure ; but, in doing so, they will carefully guard themselves against giving any guarantee of dividends to the capitalists. They will refuse to be entangled in the profiteering system, and will press on their demand for the national ownership of industry together with the demand for democratic control.

This is clearly the attitude adopted by the Miners' Federation of Great Britain towards the proposals put forward by the mining capitalists. These proposals have only caused the miners to reiterate, with increased emphasis, their demand for national ownership and joint control with the State. Mr. Straker's proposals for national ownership and joint control¹ are the miners' reply to the coal-owners' suggestion of an anti-social profit-making Trust of capitalists and Labour.

The social situation in relation to industrial control has not so much changed since I wrote this book in 1913 as advanced in a manner that was foreseen, but with unexpected rapidity. The measures necessary for a solution of the industrial problem remain the same ; it is only that the solution seems far nearer and more immediately possible. There is still no way out of the economic dilemma of modern Society except by the establishment of a system of public ownership combined with democratic administration of industry.

¹ In evidence before the Coal Commission on March 14th.

This change has come about, or this advance has taken place, both because Labour has grown stronger and more conscious of its strength, and because Capitalism, especially in the sphere of finance, is confronted with a situation of extraordinary difficulty. The war has not only impoverished nearly all nations in terms of real wealth ; it has fundamentally altered the distribution of purchasing power among the nations of the world. It has upset markets, and involved international and national finance in complications from which it is very doubtful whether they will succeed in making their escape. They might do so, if nations were Christian enough to forgive one another their debts, and if Governments had the courage to adopt a drastic policy of reducing war debts by the conscription of wealth. But where is the nation or the Government that is likely to pursue such a course ? Vested interests oppose at every turn, even though, in opposing, they are really digging the grave of the whole system on which their continuance depends. I do not mean that Capitalism in this country or in America is about to undergo a sudden and dramatic collapse. It will not do that, except under the impulse of crashes abroad or of Labour at home. But I do mean that the whole structure of Capitalism, imposing as it still seems, has been undermined, and that it will no longer take a very strong push to tumble it over altogether.

Clearly, the most likely force to give it this push is Labour. Apart from the new spirit that is animating the organised workers to-day, the Labour Movement has become, since I wrote, more inclusive and more representative. One of the most important developments of recent years is the progress of organisation among the less skilled workers. This was beginning

in the years before the war, from 1911 onwards; but the war has greatly accelerated the movement towards Trade Union organisation among these sections. This has meant, not only greater strength to these workers in their bargaining with employers, but also a great change in their position within the Labour Movement—a change hastened by dilution and the blurring of the lines of demarcation between skilled and unskilled, which has gone on far more rapidly during the war than at any previous period.¹

Before the war, there were approximately 400,000 workers organised in the general labour Unions, which include the majority of the less skilled Trade Unionists. At present these Unions have a membership of more than a million, and are joined together in a powerful Federation of General Workers which serves as a means of co-ordinating policy until amalgamation can be brought about. There have been numerous discussions on the question of amalgamation, and a number of the smaller Societies have actually been swallowed up; but complete amalgamation has not yet been accomplished among the larger Societies. There is, however, already a close working arrangement between three Societies,² which have joined to form a sort of confederation under the name of the National Amalgamated Workers' Union. This combination has over half a million members. The two largest Societies remaining—the National Union of General Workers and the Dock, Wharf, Riverside and General Workers' Union—have for some time been discussing amalgamation; but no actual scheme has yet been issued. The National Federation of Women

¹ See Ch. VII.

² The Workers' Union, the National Amalgamated Union of Labour and the Municipal Employees' Association.

Workers, which now represents about 50,000, is not connected with the National Federation of General Workers.

Considerable progress has thus been made towards the consolidation of forces among the less skilled workers. Nothing, however, has been done to adjust or alter their relationship to the craft Unions representing the skilled workers. The difficulties described in Chapter VII. of this book remain very much where they were in 1914, except that the war has greatly aggravated the problem, and at the same time greatly increased the strength of the less skilled in comparison with that of the skilled. There is no doubt that the 'industrial Unionist' movement, which desires to have skilled and unskilled organised together in the same Unions, has made great headway as a theory; but there is still little sign, except in the various 'rank and file' movements, of its application in practice.

In general, comparatively little progress has been made in the practical task of consolidating Trade Union forces. The majority of the Trade Unionists in the iron and steel industry have joined forces in a single combination—the Iron and Steel Trades Confederation—and an effective Federation has been formed in the building industry between the various National Unions; but in the majority of cases unity is still to seek. The engineering trades and others are discussing amalgamation projects, and the Trades Union Congress has appointed a Committee to consider the whole question of Trade Union structure; but these are mere projects, and their conversion into facts is still confronted with the same obstacles as in 1913. It is safe to say that the movement towards effective combination has made far greater

strides among Employers' Associations than among Trade Unions during the war period.

Perhaps the biggest change that has come over the organisation of the Labour Movement since 1913 is on the political side. The Labour Party in Parliament, even after the Election of 1918, is still very much the same Labour Party as before, except that all the prominent I.L.P. members have been defeated; but the organisation of the Labour Party as an extra-parliamentary body has undergone big changes and very great expansion. The constitution has been broadened so as to admit individual members, and an attempt has been made on a considerable scale to build up a real Party of "workers by hand and brain" with a constructive programme covering the whole ground of national and international policy.

I do not mean to imply that this new policy has yet been carried out in any thoroughgoing way, or that a universal *rapprochement* of manual and brain workers has taken, or is taking, place. Far from it. The results of the change are only slowly becoming manifest, and a considerable section in the Trade Union movement has still to be convinced of the *bona fides* of the brain workers. If the suggested alliance is ever fully consummated, it will certainly not be as the result of a compromise on conservative lines, designed so as not to offend the susceptibilities of either party: it will come only when and because the workers by hand and brain are conscious of an essential unity of economic and social aim. The way to unity is not for the Labour Party to become *bourgeois*, or to adapt its programme to suit the *bourgeoisie*: it is for Labour as a whole to adopt a constructive attitude towards the industrial problem.

Thus, the new Labour Party is really only the politi-

cal expression of new forces which are at work in the economic field. Its chances of ultimate success depend on the success of the movement of industrial and professional organisation which is steadily sweeping the brain workers into the net of Trade Unionism and voluntary association. If manual workers and brain workers can achieve a beginning of economic unity, the success of the movement towards political unity will be ensured.

Doubtless, the immediate spur to organisation among the brain workers, as among the manual workers, has been largely the need for, and the hope of, larger remuneration and more satisfactory conditions. These alone will certainly not suffice to create a stable fellowship of workers by hand and brain. But, caught alike in the 'vicious circle' of wages (or salaries) and prices, the wage-earners and the salariat will, I believe, be forced to seek a common solution by taking the control of industries and services into their own hands.

Thus, the events of the last few years have greatly confirmed my faith in Guild Socialism as the only real solution of the industrial and economic problem. The theory and practice of Guild Socialism are indeed confronted with many unsolved problems of their own, and much hard thinking and actual experience are still required before they reach maturity. But, whatever the obscurities and ambiguities of Guild Socialism may be, I am convinced that the idea of functional democracy has abundantly proved its rightness and its relevancy to the present situation. The application of the principle of democratic self-government, not merely to political organisation, but to every sphere of social activity—to every social function of the community—is the vital social concept of the new age.

In this brief introduction, I have been able to do no more than point to some of the larger changes which have come about since this book was first written. Those who desire to go more fully into the nature of these changes I must refer to other books in which their various aspects have been more fully worked out. Of my own books, *An Introduction to Trade Unionism* is an attempt to set out briefly the main facts and tendencies of Trade Union organisation at the close of the war. *Trade Unionism on the Railways*, in which I collaborated with Mr. R. Page Arnot, is a sketch of the organisation and attitude of the workers in one of the 'key' industries of the Labour Movement. *The Payment of Wages* is an attempt to describe the methods of payment by results under the wage system which have led to so much controversy in recent years, and to bring out their close relation to the problem of industrial control by the workers. *Self-Government in Industry* is a development of the ideas contained in the later chapters of this book, and an attempt both to expound the philosophy of the Guild Movement and to face some of the difficulties raised by its opponents. *The Meaning of Industrial Freedom*, in which I collaborated with Mr. W. Mellor, is a very short statement of Guild principles viewed from the angle of Trade Unionism. Lastly, *Labour in the Commonwealth* is a general study of the big economic forces at work in the new world, and an attempt to interpret the attitude of the younger generation towards the social problem.

Of books written by other writers, there are a few which I must commend to the notice of readers. Mr. A. J. Penty's *Old Worlds for New* is an extraordinarily live and vigorous study of the Guild problem from the standpoint of a craftsman with a fine appreciation of

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mediæval conditions. Messrs. Reckitt and Bechhofer, in *The Meaning of National Guilds*, have put together the first complete outline and statement of the theory and practice of National Guilds, with a specially good section dealing with Trade Unionism. Mr. Bertrand Russell's *Roads to Freedom* is a most attractive study of the various theories of control, viewed from a standpoint which leaves its author somehow outside each and all of the theories which he describes. Lastly, Mr. L. S. Woolf's *Co-operation and the Future of Industry*, written with a quite remarkable lack of understanding of Guild Socialism, presents from the Co-operative point of view a challenge which Guildsmen have still to take up. The relation of the great Co-operative Movement of consumers to the theory of Guild Socialism is perhaps the most immediate of the unsolved problems before us. It is a problem which will be solved, I believe, by a fuller admission of the functional aptitude of Co-operation within the Guild community, and to that extent by a revision of Guild Socialist theory in its attitude towards the State. That is too large a question to be dealt with here; but it is a question to which I shall return in the near future.

G. D. H. COLE.

LONDON, April 1919.

PREFACE TO THE 1917 EDITION

THAT two new editions of this book should have been called for in time of war is a fact remarkable enough to call for comment. Published in the autumn of 1913, it had been before the public less than a year when war broke out. The immediate effect of the war was to stop its sale. Men's minds were engaged by very different issues, and, for a time, they neither thought nor read about Labour. This, however, was not for long. In the autumn of 1915 a new edition appeared; and now, a year from the date of its publication, that edition too is exhausted.

The explanation is, of course, simple. We have been told, over and over again, that this is an engineers' war. This is to put a narrow interpretation upon the facts; but it is safe to say that in the present war Labour has counted for far more than any other section of the community. Not only has Labour furnished the soldiers: Labour in the workshop has been, and remains, a decisive factor. At every stage of the war's progress we have been dealing with Labour problems: the engineer, the miner, the transport worker, and the agricultural labourer are the most vital groups in a Society organised for war. Labour questions, which in 1914 seemed to have been shelved till after the war, have been with us more than ever. One by one they have risen again, urgently demanding solution or at least temporary adjustment. With

the early part of this history of Labour in war-time I have dealt in a separate book, and I hope, at some time in the future, to take up the tale again and carry it through to the end. In this Preface my purpose is only that of stating in quite general terms how what I wrote about Labour before the war looks under the searchlight of two years' war-time experience.

Some time ago, a well-known newspaper published a series of articles under the title "My Changed Opinions". Various writers were asked to search their souls and explain how their attitude to life, had changed as a result of the war. The general upshot of the series was that the writers had, for the most part, changed their opinions very little. I too am very much in that position. The past two years seem to me to have furnished striking confirmation of the general view put forward in the later chapters of this book. Driven, by the hard necessity of modern war, to intervene in industrial matters to an unprecedented extent, the State has proved itself, in the words of M. Lagardelle, "a tyrannical master". Experience of State intervention has doubled my assurance that the only solution of the industrial problem that is compatible with personal liberty is the control of the industries by the workers engaged in them, acting in conjunction with a democratised State.

It may be said that it is unfair to generalise from the abnormal experience of war-time; but I do not think that this is altogether true. In war-time, the State takes on a shape which makes manifest the characteristic merits and defects of State control. Something must be allowed for purely abnormal legislation designed solely to meet war emergencies; but if we make these allowances, we are, I think,

entitled to argue from the State at war to the State at peace.

If war has taught us nothing else, it should at least have made us heartily ashamed of our industrial system. After two years of war, we have still an industrial machine which is fundamentally inefficient, and moreover liable at any time to serious breakdown. The rotten fabric of capitalist control has been stayed and girdered by emergency legislation; but this has not served to conceal its rottenness. The pre-war organisation of industry has failed us; and the fundamental question is not how it is to be restored, but what is to be put in its place.

With this general indictment many schools of critics of present-day conditions will agree. But there are at least three different schools animated by different philosophies and putting forward different suggestions for industrial reconstruction. One school will tell us that the only solution lies in the definite assumption, once for all, by the State of direct responsibility for the conduct of industry, and that industry must be nationally owned and controlled in the interests of the nation. This school includes Socialists and anti-Socialists, or at least Labour men and anti-Labour men. The aims and claims of bureaucracy have expanded immensely during the war: the Collectivist tendency has become, not simply more marked, but more definitely hostile to Labour. Everything, therefore, that was said against the Collectivist solution before the war seems to me to need saying with double emphasis to-day.

There is, however, a new school of thought in the field which is, fundamentally, far more dangerous than Collectivism. This school is no less firm in its insist-

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ence that industry must be organised on a national basis; but the method by which it proposes to accomplish this is indirect. Taking, usually, as its special province the economic "war after the war", it demands the mobilisation of national resources in order that British industry may dominate the world market and British capitalism triumph. To national ownership and administration of industry it is opposed; but it demands in their place the national recognition and organisation of private capitalism. The war has brought into existence a plentiful crop of mammoth capitalist organisations such as the British Empire Producers' Organisation and the British Industries' Federation; it has kindled in the minds of many class-conscious advocates of capitalism the hope of a new era of capitalist expansion, in which private profiteering will be carried on more than ever under State license and State protection. We have been told by a writer in the *Times Trade Supplement* that "we must munitionise all our industries". Surely, if words have a meaning, this can only signify that we are to give to private employers State protection and State recognition, and a new power over the community based on the assumption that production for profit is a public service. Fine phrases about the co-operation of Labour in this new organisation of capitalist exploiters does not serve to disguise the ideal behind. State recognition for the private employer, State subventions for research and expansion in the interests of the capitalist, State provision for the training of efficient wage-slaves, probably State regimentation of Labour by repressive legislation—these are the ideas which, openly or in disguise, seem to be animating the advocates of national capitalism.

It may be said that, without open recognition, the

State, as far as it has done anything, has done all these things in the past. That is true enough; but full recognition and conscious organisation of such a system would make a great difference. They would, in fact, give a new lease of life to capitalism when it is already discredited by its failure even to do its job efficiently.

Perhaps the most typical example of this new form of State-aided capitalism is to be found in the methods, adopted or projected, of State control of mines and shipping. Instead of nationalising these services outright, our politicians have preferred to adopt methods of control which leave the capitalist structure of industry untouched, and, while claiming from the owners something by way of excess profits, practically assure to them more than their pre-war rates of profit, and, in addition, very greatly extend their control over the workers whom they continue to employ. When the Government took over the South Wales coalfield, it assumed, not "ownership", but "possession", and its first and significant instruction to the coalowners was to "carry on as usual". Broadly speaking, it is true to say that the only real change introduced by control was that the coalowners acquired a new security for their ownership and their profits, while the men were subjected to a new and more severe discipline to be exercised through their employers. The vicious principle of the Insurance Act, by which the State endows the employer with disciplinary and responsible powers over his workers, has been carried many stages further during the war. A new feudalism is being created, in which the capitalist stands between the State and the workman as the lord stood between King and vassal. State control based on a guaranteed capitalism is a more complete form

of the Servile State than seemed possible in this country before the war.

I have said that there are three schools of thought struggling to secure the realisation of their respective ideals of industrial reconstruction. The two schools so far described are both prophets of social and industrial reaction—the second infinitely more dangerously reactionary than the first. The third school alone can claim the allegiance of those who believe in human freedom and in the widest possible diffusion of responsibility and self-government. It is not a new school, and its tenets are expressed too clearly in this book to call for restatement here. I want only to see whether the events of the war have in any way served to modify the point of view advanced before the war.

For the ideal of National Guilds, the war has meant a material set-back and a moral advance. Trade Unionism has been weakened materially by the surrender of rights and powers which are in some cases essential to its fighting strength. On the other hand, increasingly the events of the war have led those who care for freedom, whether in the Trade Union movement or outside, to a clearer understanding of the need for a division of the supreme power in Society. They have seen, with fear and mistrust, the overwhelming claims advanced on behalf of even a capitalist State in every sphere of life; and many of them are looking eagerly for some form of social organisation capable of holding the State in check. This, under the conditions of a modern industrial Society, they can find only in the Trade Union movement.

How, then, is Trade Unionism to be strengthened? This should be the first consideration for every man and woman who desires the preservation and advance-

ment of civil and industrial liberty. The answer must be that Trade Unionism can only assume the rôle of equality with the State if it takes on a new purpose, and comes to be animated by a unifying and constructive idea. The lamentable flabbiness, the fatal indecision, the childlike gullibility of Trade Unionism during the war have all arisen from the fact that the Trade Unions have, as a whole, neither ideas nor policy. There are weakness and lack of science enough in the machinery of Trade Unionism; but the fundamental weakness is not in the machine, but in the manning of it. If there were in the minds of Trade Unionists a constructive programme for Labour, defects in Trade Union structure and government could soon be remedied, and the potential power of Labour would express itself in terms of actual achievement. The idea of capitalism in industry can be overthrown only by a rival idea: a Labour movement that is dominated by capitalist ideology or by no ideology at all cannot stand.

Those who imagine the profiteer in the guise of a "fat man lifting the swag" are often too little awake to the real character of the class-struggle as a conflict of ideas. They do not realise that the capitalist mind is permeated with the idea of "divine right", and that the capitalists do in truth believe themselves to be indispensable servants of the public. In their eyes, the relation between master and workman is a natural and inevitable relation: they believe profoundly that their "enterprise" is the foundation of national prosperity and a good title to autocracy in industry. If, then, they are to be overthrown, the conception of industrial autocracy must be off-set by that of industrial democracy, and there must be in the minds of Trade Unionists no less clear a conception of "divine

right", the right of self-government in industry as well as in politics.

How profound is the clash of ideals in industry becomes yearly more manifest. The growth of the demand for control on the side of the workers is now receiving a good deal of attention from both friends and foes : but the parallel attempt on behalf of capitalism to systematise and make scientific the autocratic conception has not as a rule been seen in its proper perspective. Scientific Management is the last state of a capitalist autocracy turned bureaucratic in self-preservation. In its infancy as yet in the country, it represents a deliberate attempt not merely to shut out the majority of the workers from all self-direction and responsibility, but also to make more absolute the cleavage between the classes of directors and directed. It is the diametrical opposite of National Guilds : the one would diffuse responsibility and authority throughout the industrial population ; the other would concentrate these things in the few "most capable" hands. To advocates of Scientific Management, democracy in industry appears as the cult of incompetence ; to National Guildsmen, Scientific Management is a natural manifestation of the Servile State.

It is in Scientific Management that State-aided capitalism would find an instrument of oppression to its hand. The name may be absent ; but there will certainly be an attempt to introduce the reality. Already this is being manifested in the cry against "restriction of output" which never ceases to be heard in the capitalist press. It is a specious cry ; for "restriction of output" has an ugly sound, and it is obvious that, other things being equal, the greatest possible output is to be desired. It is a popular cry ; for it is represented to the consumer that he is hurt by

a policy which forces up prices and means that there is less to go round. But what the critics of "restriction of output" seldom say in so many words is the meaning they attach to the phrase. Do they confine it to definite "ca' canny," *i.e.* going slow as a deliberate policy, or do they include under it any practice which the employer in his wisdom may regard as "restrictive"—for instance, the refusal of a Trade Union to allow unlimited child labour, or the operation of a machine by labour of an inferior grade, or a refusal to adopt piece-work or the premium bonus system? Such practices have often been denounced as restriction of output; and under the pretext of freeing industry from the restrictive action of Trade Unions, attempts have been made to sweep them away. These attempts will undoubtedly be renewed after the war, when the day comes for the restoration of Trade Union conditions, and they will be reinforced by the argument that only freedom from all restrictions can enable British trade to secure the mastery and Great Britain to pay for the war.

Against such blandishments it is to be hoped that Trade Unionism will stand firm; for a wholesale abrogation of Trade Union restrictions would mean the triumph, not of British industry, but of industrial autocracy. The Trade Union customs which the employer calls "restrictions" are not, of course, uniformly wise; but, taken as a whole, they are the bulwark of Trade Unionism and the beginning of a new industrial order. The negative control over industrial management which they constitute is a foundation on which the structure of positive control must be built.

What, then, are the prospects for Trade Unionism after the war? In one sense, there may, or may not,

be a period of industrial conflict : in another sense, a great conflict is inevitable. There may, or may not, be huge strikes and upheavals in the world of Labour : there is bound to be a great struggle for mastery between the two ideas of democracy and autocracy in industry. There are too many people, both Trade Unionists and others, who can conceive industrial conflict only in terms of strikes and lock-outs. I am not so sure that the conflict of ideas will be fought mainly in this way, though no doubt many strikes, successful and unsuccessful, will mark its progress. That depends on the economic situation after the war, and, still more, on the steps taken to prepare for the after-the-war situation.

No one wants strikes for their own sake ; but every friend of Labour sees the need for the preservation, and use at times, of the strike weapon. To waste strikes upon unimportant issues is to fritter away the power of Trade Unionism ; to keep them as far as possible for great questions of principle should be the object of Trade Unionists. The better, then, the means of adjusting differences as they arise, the greater is the chance of doing this, and to secure the best possible methods of negotiation with employers without sacrificing any principle or yielding to any coercion would surely be the best policy for Trade Unionism after the war. This should be the Trade Union attitude in approaching suggestions for " better relations " with employers or for a share in " workshop control ". They should aim at securing the fullest possible machinery of joint negotiation ; but they should refuse absolutely to accept any suggestion for joint control which would involve even the smallest sacrifice of Trade Union independence and freedom of action. Under this test, most suggestions for " work-

shop control " or " joint control " will certainly fail ; but no less rigorous test ought to be applied. The most fatal thing would be for Labour to be in such a hurry to get control as to accept some form of control which would block the way for a further advance.

After all, there is no such hurry. There is every need for haste in strengthening and perfecting Trade Union organisation, and in securing the general acceptance among Trade Unionists of a constructive policy ; but a too great anxiety for immediate results may well be disastrous. If industrial democracy is the end in view, Labour has a long way to go, and it must set its own house in order before it can hope for any great success. Internal reorganisation, and hard thinking by Trade Unionists are, then, as much the needs to-day as they were when this book was written ; indeed, the need has become greater as the plans of capitalism and bureaucracy have developed and expanded. The war has been the season of neo-capitalist experiment ; and only a vigorous and instructed Trade Union movement can have any hope of prevailing. If Trade Unionism cannot find an ideal and develop a policy, all our industries will be " munitionised ", and all our workers will be enslaved.

G. D. H. COLE.

December 1916.

PREFACE TO THE 1915 EDITION

IN the two years that have passed since this book first appeared, I have found out many of its faults. In the changes made in the present edition, I have aimed not so much at bringing it up to date, as at correcting what I now see to have been definite mistakes and false conclusions. The greater number of the changes occur in Chapters VII. and VIII., in which the structure and government of Trade Unionism are dealt with. I have also corrected my account of National Guilds in Chapter XI., which was, in the earlier edition, misleading.

The present-day problems arising out of the European war, which make it impossible to bring this book up to date just now, I have surveyed in another book—*Labour in War Time*.

G. D. H. COLE.

MAGDALEN COLLEGE, OXFORD,
July 1915.

PREFACE TO THE FIRST EDITION

No book on Trade Unionism can avoid being very largely a book about books. It is impossible for me to acknowledge, save in the form of a bibliography, the immense amount of unacknowledged borrowing this volume contains. I can only mention here, what any reader will soon see for himself, that I, like all students of Trade Unionism, owe a great deal to Mr. and Mrs. Webb for their standard works on the subject. I mention this debt because I very often disagree with their conclusions; but, whatever view I took, I could not help going to their *History of Trade Unionism* and *Industrial Democracy* for admirably arranged and accurate information. A second debt which I cannot leave unrecorded is to the *New Age*, which too seldom gets, from writers on Socialism and Trade Unionism, the credit it deserves. I am far from agreeing with all the views expressed by the *New Age*; but I find in it and nowhere else a sense that theory and practice are not naturally separable, and an attempt to face the problems of Trade Unionism in the light of a whole view of life. I believe the series of articles on *Guild Socialism* and the *Wage System*, which have appeared in the *New Age* during the last two years, are shortly to appear in book

form. The large class of persons that has for so long persistently neglected the *New Age* will then have another chance to bring itself up to date, and my obligation will become still more manifest.

I owe very much to my friends also. Much that I have gained from scattered conversations and discussions I cannot well acknowledge; and especially for a great deal of information that I have got from various Trade Unionist friends I can only render general acknowledgment. My greatest debt is to Mr. W. Mellor, of the Fabian Research Department, to whom I owe many valuable suggestions embodied in Chapters VII. and VIII., and with whom I am now collaborating in a series of penny pamphlets designed to expound, in relation to specific problems, the Greater Unionism for which this book also is a plea. The first of these *Pamphlets of the Greater Unionism*, itself called *The Greater Unionism*, has recently been issued by the National Labour Press.¹

I must also thank Mr. W. Stephen Sanders for allowing me to use, in Chapter VI., unpublished information relating to German Trade Unionism, and Mr. A. E. Zimmern for a very interesting letter concerning the Labour movement in America.

G. D. H. COLE.

MAGDALEN COLLEGE, OXFORD,

September 1913.

¹ Only the first pamphlet of this series appeared; but I hope soon to replace it by a new series of larger studies dealing with Trade Unionism in each of the principal industries.

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