

THE BRITISH WORKING-CLASS MOVEMENT

AN OUTLINE STUDY-GUIDE

by

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NOTE *This pamphlet, like all publications of the Fabian Society, represents not the collective view of the Society but only the view of the individual who prepared it. The responsibility of the Fabian Society is limited to approving the publications which it issues as embodying facts and opinions worthy of consideration within the Labour Movement.*

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PREFACE TO REVISED EDITION (1949)

The purpose of this booklet is to set out as simply as possible the essential facts about the British Labour Movement and its organisation, with such references to its history as are necessary for the understanding of its present position. The booklet is meant both to stand by itself as a simple account of the movement, and to serve as a study-guide or syllabus for those who wish to study it further, either individually or in groups or classes of any sort. It is broken up into sections which can conveniently be dealt with at a succession of meetings or discussions; and to each section are added references for reading, both for members of groups or single students and, more comprehensively, for group or class leaders or for those who wish to go more deeply into the subject for themselves. A number of questions for discussion are also given at the end of each section; and these can serve, as desired, as subjects for papers to be read at study-groups, or as essay subjects, or merely as headings for discussion. There are too many of them for all to be properly discussed: they are given to *choose from*, not to scamper over in an attempt to deal with them all.

There is no single book which sets out to cover the whole of the ground traversed in this booklet, though there are, of course, many books dealing with particular parts of it. For those who want a general historical introduction, explaining how the Labour Movement has developed from the Industrial Revolution of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries up to our own time, I have written, in collaboration with Raymond Postgate, a book which attempts to describe this growth against the changing economic and social background. This book is called *The Common People 1746—1946* (Methuen, revised edition, 10/-); and I venture to describe it as the best comprehensive introduction to the subject as a whole. It is much wider in scope than my *Short History of the British Working-class Movement 1789—1947* (Allen & Unwin, 21/-), which gives more detail about the movement itself, but a good deal less of the economic and social history of the period. There are also several much smaller introductory books or booklets about Labour Movement history, the most recent being Raymond Postgate's *Pocket History of the British Working Class* (N.C.L.C., 2/-); but this is too short to be really satisfactory and does not cover nearly all the ground, even in outline.

Of course, the standard book about the growth of Trade Unionism is still *The History of Trade Unionism*, by Sidney and Beatrice Webb; and this is still indispensable, and stands in a class by itself, but it is nearly thirty years since it was brought (rather inadequately) up-to-date. The best book about the growth of the British Socialist Movement is Max Beer's *History of British Socialism*, but it, too, was written a long time ago, and it also suffers from being rather too much about theories and rather too little about the movements themselves. For Co-operation I have myself recently written a Centenary History, called *A Century of Co-operation* (Co-operative Union and Allen & Unwin, 10/6) as part of the commemoration of the foundation of the Rochdale Pioneers' Society a hundred years ago. I have also written two volumes covering

the history of the political activity of Labour—*British Working-class Politics, 1832—1914* (Routledge and Kegan Paul, 10/6) and *A History of the Labour Party from 1914* (Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1948).

These books all contain some contemporary description (contemporary, that is, with the time when they were written) as well as history. It is much more difficult to recommend books of a mainly descriptive kind, except under particular subjects; and I therefore deal with them later, in the various sections of this booklet.

I wish there were a single descriptive book that I could recommend; but as far as I know no such book at present exists. It ought to exist, so that it could be put into the hands of those joining the Labour movement through one or another of its sections, in order to give them a clear idea of the general organisation of the movement and the interrelation of its several parts; and it ought to be published as a Penguin, or at the price of a Penguin, so as to put it within everyone's reach. In the meantime this booklet must serve, as far as it can within the narrow limits of its space, as a substitute, necessarily inadequate but, I hope, a good deal better than nothing.

G. D. H. C.

June 1949.

Note

In the book-lists appended to the sections, the most important books are starred (*). In some cases, elementary books are marked with a dagger (†).

There is much useful material in biographies of Labour and Socialist leaders, notably

Makers of the Labour Movement. By Margaret Cole. 1948.

Francis Place. By Graham Wallas. 1898.

William Cobbett. By G. D. H. Cole. Revised 1947.

Robert Owen. By G. D. H. Cole. 1930.

Tory Radical (Richard Oastler). By S. R. Driver. 1946.

Robert Applegarth. By A. W. Humphrey. 1913.

William Morris. By J. W. Mackail. 1899.

Keir Hardie. By William Stewart. 1921.

Keir Hardie. By G. D. H. Cole. (Fabian pamphlet.) 1943.

John Burns. By G. D. H. Cole. (Fabian pamphlet.) 1943.

Arthur Henderson. By M. A. Hamilton. 1938.

Beatrice Webb. By Margaret Cole. 1945.

and in the autobiographies of Joseph Arch, Beatrice Webb (*My Apprenticeship, 1926, Our Partnership, 1948*), Philip Snowden, H. M. Hyndman, and others.

Groups using this Study-Guide as a basis for discussions are not meant to attempt to cover all the questions given at the end of each Section, but to choose those which interest them most. A variety of questions has been asked in order to suit different groups.

I. TRADE UNIONS, CO-OPERATIVE SOCIETIES, POLITICAL ORGANISATIONS

The British Labour Movement has three main sections—industrial, trading and political. For collective bargaining and common action to protect the workers as wage-earners or producers, there exist Trade Unions, covering altogether about 9½ million workers as compared with a total 'occupied' population in civil employment of about 22 millions. For the protection of the workers as consumers, mainly by means of mutual trading and the co-operative organisation of the production of essential goods, there are Co-operative Societies, with a membership of about ten millions, representing a considerably larger total number of consumers. The political organisation, which exists to further working-class aspirations towards a better social and economic system, is a good deal more complicated, as it is based largely on the Trade Unions and Co-operative Societies. The Labour Party is partly a federation of Trade Unions with certain other bodies, of which the Fabian Society has been one ever since the Party was formed; and there is also a Co-operative Party which, though separate in organisation, works in close alliance with the Labour Party. We have, moreover, to take separate account, in the political field, of the Communist Party, which has its own organisation and policy, and has steadily been refused admission to the Labour Party as an affiliated body, and also of the Independent Labour Party, formerly affiliated to the Labour Party but now outside it and greatly reduced in numbers, and of a number of other small bodies standing for some form of Socialism, or setting out to organise the workers politically for some special or limited purpose.

CENTRAL ORGANISATION

These are the three main sections with which I shall have to deal. But there is also a fourth grouping, much smaller, but fully important enough to be mentioned by itself. This is the educational grouping, made up mainly of three bodies—Ruskin College, Oxford, the Workers' Educational Association, and the National Council of Labour Colleges—the two latter standing for different methods and policies and competing for Trade Union and other working-class support. The Co-operators, in addition to working to some extent with these bodies, have their own separate educational wing, with a residential College of their own; and there are also Youth Movements attached both to the Co-operative Movement and to the Labour and Communist Parties.

The three main sections—Trade Union, Co-operative, and Political—have each their own central co-ordinating bodies. The Trades Union Congress is a federation of national Trade Unions representing the various industries and occupations, and claiming to represent the collective standpoint of organised Labour in industrial matters. The Co-operative Union, which organises the annual Co-operative Congress, links together not only the local distributive Co-operative Societies, or Stores, but also Co-operatives of other types—the Wholesale Societies, the Producers' Societies, and the 'auxiliary' bodies, such as the Co-operative Women's Guilds. The Labour Party includes, in addition

to the Trade Unions and other national bodies affiliated to it, the Local Labour Parties organised on a constituency basis, with individual members as well as locally affiliated Trade Union branches and other bodies; and closely associated with it is the Parliamentary Labour Party, consisting of its elected representatives in the House of Commons and the small contingent of Labour peers.

These three main bodies (or rather four—for the Parliamentary Labour Party is separately represented) are linked up in turn in the National Council of Labour, which issues from time to time major pronouncements on Labour policy and is designed to promote closer unity between the three sections. The Co-operators have only recently joined the National Council of Labour (in 1942); and relations are still not quite so close between them and the rest of the movement as between the Trades Union Congress and the Labour Party.

INTERNATIONAL CONNECTIONS

Finally, each section has its international affiliations, though these have been to some extent broken off owing to war and to the suppression of Labour Movements in the countries dominated by Fascism. Trade Unionism was till 1948 organised as a world movement in the World Federation of Trade Unions, which included all the main organisations except the American Federation of Labour. But the W.F.T.U. split in 1948, in face of the attempts of the Communist Trade Unions to use it as an instrument of propaganda against the Marshall Plan and the concerted drive for recovery in Western Europe; and the British T.U.C. and the American Congress of Industrial Organisations seceded from it, followed by other national groups, to form with the A.F. of L. a new combination—still, as I write, in an inchoate condition—of national Trade Union bodies pledged to Western conceptions of economic democracy. On the political side, there are similar rivalries and divisions. The Communist Parties of Eastern Europe have been grouped since 1947 in the 'Cominform', a partial successor of the 'Comintern', which was dissolved in 1942, after the German attack on the Soviet Union. The 'Cominform', unlike the 'Comintern', does not include the Communist Parties of Western Europe. Against it is arrayed 'Comisco', the loosely federal organisation of the democratic Socialist Parties of the West. Co-operation is more inclusively organised in the International Co-operative Alliance, which links together the Co-operative Movements of both industrial and agricultural countries, including the Soviet Union. Lesser international bodies will be mentioned later, as occasion arises. The future of working-class international organisation, except in the Co-operative field, is largely undetermined, as the new groupings which will emerge as an outcome of recent events cannot yet be at all clearly foreseen.

NOTE.—No list of books and no questions are given with this opening section, as it is not meant to be separately discussed.

II. TRADE UNIONS

There were in all, in December 1947, 730 Trade Unions in Great Britain, with over nine million members. The Trades Union Congress had, in the same year, 188 affiliated Trade Unions, with nearly eight million members. Unions outside Congress included some of the Civil Service Trade Unions, which had been excluded from affiliation up to 1947 by the Trade Unions and Trade Disputes Act of 1927—the punitive measure passed by the Tories after the General Strike—and the Teachers' Trade Unions, which have so far refused to join. The National Association of Local Government Officers (about 190,000) was also outside the T.U.C. in 1949, but had a working arrangement with it. The T.U.C. in 1949 included with these exceptions almost all the important Unions of manual workers, and quite a number of Unions organising non-manual and professional workers. The National Federation of Professional Workers, which groups together a number of the Unions of clerks and other non-manual workers, has a joint working arrangement with the T.U.C.

TYPES OF TRADE UNIONS

There are three main types of Trade Unions—craft Unions, organising skilled workers belonging to a particular trade or group of trades; industrial Unions, setting out to enrol all the workers in a particular industry, skilled and unskilled together; and general workers' Unions, enrolling mainly less skilled workers from a wide range of industries, but also organising skilled workers for whom no recognised craft Union exists. Typical examples are the London Society of Compositors, the United Pattern-makers' Association, the Amalgamated Association of Operative Cotton Spinners (*Craft Unions*); the National Union of Railwaymen, the Iron and Steel Trades Confederation, the National Union of Mineworkers (*Industrial Unions* or close Federations); the Transport and General Workers' Union, the National Union of General and Municipal Workers (*General Workers' Unions*). Not all Unions will fit neatly into this classification. For example, the Amalgamated Engineering Union is basically a Union of skilled men in a number of kindred crafts, but has also latterly opened its ranks to include less skilled male workers and, since 1943, women. The National Union of Public Employees resembles a general workers' Union, but is limited to employees of public authorities. The Associated Society of Locomotive Engineers and Firemen is mainly a craft Union of footplate workers, but includes also engine cleaners, most of whom hope to become drivers or firemen later on. There is a good deal of friction between mainly *craft*, or *kindred craft*, and *industrial* Unions over the organisation of both skilled and less skilled workers in some industries—for example, in the railway engineering shops and in the engineering industry generally, and between the National Union of Railwaymen and the Associated Society of Locomotive Engineers and Firemen over the organisation of the footplate grades. This friction, however, is a good deal less acute than it used to be a generation ago; and in many cases rival Unions have reached some sort of working accommodation—e.g., the Mineworkers and the Amalgamated Engineering Union about colliery craftsmen, and the N.U.R. and the Transport and General Workers' Union about the employees of railway-owned omnibuses.

In 1948 there were four Trade Unions with more than half a million members (Transport and General Workers, 1,264,000; General and

Municipal Workers, 824,000; Amalgamated Engineering Union, 742,000; National Union of Mineworkers, 572,000). Two others (National Union of Railwaymen, 462,000; Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers, 343,000) had more than a quarter of a million; and there were four more with over 100,000. The six largest Unions included well over half the total membership of the Trades Union Congress; and of these six, the two largest were *general workers'* Unions, three *industrial* Unions, and one (the A.E.U.) betwixt an *industrial* Union and a Union of *kindred crafts*. Craft Unions tend in most cases to be relatively small, as there are not many very numerous skilled crafts. The largest is the Amalgamated Society of Woodworkers (200,000).

In general *craft* Unions have higher contributions and benefits than others, usually including sick pay and sometimes superannuation as well as dispute benefit. *Industrial* and other Unions catering for a wide variety of workers sometimes have several scales of contributions and benefits, for different classes of members, or provide for voluntary contributions and benefits for sickness. Dispute benefit is provided for in all Unions except some in the public services, which do not use the strike weapon. But in recent years not very much has been spent on this benefit, as authorised strikes have been few ever since 1926. A large part of the expenditure of most Unions has to go on administration costs, including all sorts of services to members in collective bargaining, organisation, and defence in legal cases (e.g., workmen's compensation).

TRADE UNION STRUCTURE

The basic Trade Union unit is the local branch (or lodge, among the miners), of which a big Union may have several in a single town. In such cases the local branches are usually grouped round a District Committee, which is the main local body for handling industrial questions. Many Unions have District or Divisional Councils covering wider areas, usually with a full-time District Organiser; and some of the largest Unions have also full-time local officers. But most local Trade Union work is done voluntarily, or in return for small payments to cover expenses and lost time. Full-time officials are usually employed by the Union nationally, even when they serve a local area, and usually work under the orders of the National Executive.

National Trade Union Executives usually consist of persons working at their trades, and meet only occasionally (quarterly or monthly, with special meetings in case of need). Members are paid small fees ('delegation') to cover expenses and time lost. Most Unions have also Delegate Conferences, annual, biennial, or even triennial, which finally determine policy and make or alter rules. Executive members are sometimes elected by the Conference, and sometimes by ballot vote of the members. Some Unions use the ballot of members as a frequent means of settling policy issues. This applies especially to the Miners, and to some of the craft Unions. In the general workers' Unions the Executive usually has very large powers. The chief full-time officials are often elected by ballot of the membership, but some Unions elect their officials at Conference. Lesser officers are sometimes elected by ballot, but more often chosen by the Executive. Trade Union constitutions differ greatly, in the main according to the organisation of the industry concerned. In some cases—e.g., building, printing, engineering—bargaining is largely local in the first instance, usually with an appeal to a national

joint body, and arbitration or strike action in reserve in case of failure to agree. In other industries, from the nature of the case, bargaining is mainly national (e.g., railways, post office); and in many some questions are dealt with nationally and others locally (e.g., coal mining). The central issues of bargaining are standard rates of wages, hours of labour, holidays, overtime pay, and 'recognition' of Trade Unions for purposes of local or factory as well as national bargaining. A good many Unions have shop stewards in the factories, to see that membership is kept up, and to take up workshop grievances; but usually such stewards are not given much negotiating power, which is mainly reserved for District Committees and for the national Unions and their officers. One object of this is to prevent works agreements in conflict with national or district agreements: another is the fear that shop stewards may be inclined to throw over Trade Union 'discipline' or to act in violation of agreements not to strike until certain procedures have been followed. During the war, Joint Production Committees were set up in many war factories, for the purpose of improving organisation and output, but these were distinct from Shop Stewards' Committees. After 1945 many of these bodies were discontinued; but there has been a revival since, encouraged both by the Government and by the T.U.C.

Trade Union branches are usually based more on where members live than on where they work, and where there are several branches of a Union in a town the members working in the same factory may be scattered over the branches. Some Unions, however, take the place of work as the unit (e.g., to a large extent Miners, Iron and Steel Workers, Newspaper Printers, Distributive Workers). Those who favour more 'workers' control' in industry usually advocate the extension of shop stewards, shop stewards' committees, Joint Production or Consultative Committees, and branches based on the place of work.

Attendance at Trade Union branch meetings, and also frequency of meetings, differ greatly from Union to Union. In most cases only a small proportion of the members attend, unless there is some special excitement such as a dispute or wage-claim on foot. Many Unions collect subscriptions at branch meetings; but others have collectors who go from house to house, and others collect largely at the place of work, so that members need not attend the branch to pay. Normally, therefore, votes at branch meetings represent directly the views only of the keen minority, though they may, of course, correctly interpret the general opinion.

COLLECTIVE AGREEMENTS

In most big industries there are nowadays national agreements laying down both certain basic conditions of employment and the procedure to be adopted, locally and nationally, in adjusting differences. These agreements usually run for a term of years. In some cases they provide for reference to impartial arbitration in case of failure to agree. A good many Unions use the Government's Industrial Court as a tribunal for this purpose (or the National Arbitration Tribunal—set up during the war, to deal with disputes when strike action was forbidden—and continued since 1945). In a good many cases agreements cover a number of Unions in the same industry; and these Unions are often federated for common action (e.g., National Federation of Building Trades Operatives, National Printing and Kindred Trades Federation).

Strike action was limited up to 1947 (apart from wartime limitations) by the Trade Union Act of 1927, which outlawed the General Strike and any sympathetic strike held to be designed to 'coerce the Government'; but this Act was repealed in 1947, and in general strike action is now limited only by the temporary continuance of the requirement to refer disputes to the National Arbitration Tribunal or to some other court of arbitration. The 1927 Act also prevented Civil Servants from joining with workers in private employment, either in the Trades Union Congress or in the Labour Party, and severely restricted picketing; but the Trade Unions have now recovered the freedom they enjoyed under the Trade Disputes Act of 1906.

THE T.U.C. AND THE TRADES COUNCILS

The central Trade Union body is the Trades Union Congress, with its General Council elected by the delegates as a whole to represent the main industries and groups which act as nominating sections. There are also two seats reserved for women. The General Council acts as the central body to represent industrial Labour, but has no power to bind the affiliated Unions. Neither the General Council nor the T.U.C. itself can call a strike: this has to be done by the separate Unions concerned. The General Strike of 1926 was called by a Special Conference of Trade Union Executives convened by the T.U.C. General Council. There is no general negotiating body to deal with wages and conditions. The General Council has, however, a joint committee with the Employers' National Confederation and the Federation of British Industries for discussion of general industrial questions; and it is represented on a number of general advisory committees of employers and Trade Unionists and on other official bodies set up to advise the Government both on labour matters and on wider questions of production, prices, rationing, etc. Locally, Trade Union branches are federated in Trades Councils, which exist to deal with general questions in their areas, but have no negotiating functions. They are chiefly organising bodies, and agencies of protest against local grievances. The Trades Councils have County Federations, a National Advisory Committee, and an Annual Consultative Conference; but these federal agencies have little power. The central Trades Councils machinery is in the hands of the T.U.C. General Council.

WOMEN

Of the total of about 9½ million Trade Unionists, about 1½ millions are women—a rise since 1939 when there were just under a million women in Trade Unions, mostly textile and distributive workers. Women are harder to organise than men, partly because many of them leave employment on marriage, and partly because they are largely employed in less skilled work. Female membership rose greatly during the war, but has fallen since, as many war workers have retired from 'gainful employment'.

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

Internationally, the British T.U.C. is no longer affiliated to the World Federation of Trade Unions (see page 6), which has passed under Communist control; but in 1949 plans were being made for the

establishment of a new International Federation to link together the movements opposed to Communism, and the Trade Unions concerned were already working together informally, especially in connection with the movement for European co-operation.

BOOKS

Descriptive

- G. D. H. Cole (ed.) **British Trade Unionism To-day, 1939*—the most detailed recent account.
- N. Barou. **British Trade Unions, 1947.*
- Political and Economic Planning. *British Trade Unionism, 1948.*
- W. M. Citrine. †*British Trade Unions, 1942.*
- A. Flanders. †*British Trade Unionism* (pamphlet, Bureau of Current Affairs), 1948.
- B. Roberts. *Trade Unions in the New Era* (pamphlet), 1947.
- J. B. Jefferys. †*Trade Unions in a Labour Britain* (Fabian pamphlet), 1947.

History

- S. and B. Webb. **History of Trade Unionism.* Revised, 1920.
- G. D. H. Cole. **Short History of the British Working-class Movement*—Revised, 1948.

See also histories of Trade Unions in particular industries, such as:

Raymond Postgate. *The Builders' History, 1923.*

R. Groves. *Sharpen the Sickle* (agricultural workers), 1949.

J. B. Jefferys. *The Story of the Engineers, 1945.*

Law and Position in the State

- R. Y. Hedges and A. Winterbottom. *Legal History of Trade Unionism, 1930.*
- W. Milne Bailey. *Trade Unions and the State.* 1934.

QUESTIONS TO CHOOSE FROM FOR DISCUSSION

1. How far should Trade Unions be organised on craft, industrial, or general lines?
2. Should Trade Union branches be organised on a works or on a residential basis?
3. Are Trade Unions democratically run?
4. Should any limitations be put on the right to strike in peacetime?
5. Should Trade Union policy aim at 'workers' control'?

6. What part should Trade Unions play in the development of 'joint consultative' machinery?
7. What should be the position of shop stewards and works committees in the Trade Unions?
8. Are national agreements preferable to local agreements?
9. What can be done to improve Trade Union organisation among women?
10. What powers should the General Council have to bind affiliated Unions?
11. What part should international Trade Unionism play in the working-class movement?
12. Should the Trade Unions support or oppose a co-ordinated 'national wages policy'?

III. THE CO-OPERATIVE MOVEMENT

The British Co-operative Movement rests mainly on the 1,032 retail consumers' Societies, with 9,977,000 members in 1947. Nearly all of these and a number of Societies of other types are federated in the two Wholesale Societies—the Co-operative Wholesale Society and the Scottish C.W.S.—which have many factories and other productive establishments in addition to their wholesale trading business. On a much smaller scale are the Producers' Societies, making goods in 'self-governing workshops' largely owned by the workers (and also partly by the consumers' Societies, through which they sell most of their products). In 1947 the Co-operative Productive Federation, which unites the Producers' Societies, included 48 Societies with about 14,500 members, and a total trade of about £5 millions, compared with sales of £287 millions by the Wholesales and £444 millions by the retail Consumers' Societies. In 1947 the Consumers' Societies employed over 320,000 workers, as compared with about 6,500 in the Producers' Societies belonging to the C.P.F. There are other Productive Societies owned and run mainly by the Consumers' Societies (e.g., the Co-operative Printing Society). British Co-operation is thus overwhelmingly a consumers' movement, based on the local Stores founded on the principles laid down by the Rochdale Pioneers (whose centenary fell in 1944). The Societies pay a fixed interest on share capital, which is withdrawable, and on loan deposits, and distribute their trading surplus mainly in the form of 'dividend on purchases' proportionate to members' buying at the Stores. Most Societies set aside part of their surplus (up to 2½ per cent.) for educational purposes, and also place considerable sums to reserve. Membership is open, i.e., anyone can join and acquire shares which rank equally with those held by the existing members, so that the shares can never rise in value. Nor do they sink below par value unless a Society fails—which is very rare in these days. Voting at members' meetings is on the principle of One Member, One Vote—not according to capital holdings. The Societies are registered under the Industrial and Provident Societies Acts, which give them a legal status different from that of joint stock companies.

Each Society is run by a Management Committee, which reports to a Members' Meeting, usually quarterly. There are salaried secretaries and general and departmental managers, who have in practice considerable power. Most Societies of any size have also Education Committees, and some have full-time Educational Secretaries (see page 24 for Co-operative education).

THE AUXILIARY BODIES

Closely associated with the local Societies are the branches of the Women's Co-operative Guild, with about 62,000 members, and the equivalent Scottish W.C.G. (about 40,000). The Women's Guilds have done very fine work in the political and social education of women Co-operators, and have played an important part in bringing women into more active participation in all branches of Labour work. The Guilds are purely discussion groups and propagandist bodies, with no formal powers except that the Scottish Guild has been active in running Convalescent Homes. There is a much smaller Co-operative

Men's Guild, and also a National Guild of Co-operators which admits both men and women. There is also a British Federation of Young Co-operators for those between about 18 and 25, and a Co-operative Youth Movement for those up to about 18 or 20.

THE WHOLESALERS

The local Societies are members of the Co-operative Wholesale Society (or Scottish C.W.S.), which returns its surplus as dividends to them in proportion to their purchases from it. The Wholesale Societies have full-time boards of directors (coveted positions in the movement) and are governed by meetings of delegates from the member Societies.

LARGE AND SMALL SOCIETIES

There is a very wide range of size in local consumers' Societies. The largest, the London Society, had 936,000 members in 1948, and the next, the Royal Arsenal (South-East London) had 338,000. Next came Birmingham, with 270,000, and five others had over 100,000. At the other extreme are local Societies with a few hundreds, or even a few tens; and there are all the intermediate gradations of size. These depend partly on size of towns, but sometimes there are several Societies in the same town (e.g., Manchester, Glasgow) and sometimes a Society covers a wide area, including neighbouring towns and villages (e.g., Plymouth, Lancaster). In a few places the Wholesale Societies directly run the local Stores (e.g., Cardiff, Scottish Highlands); and in many, neighbouring Societies join together in Federal Societies to run certain services over a wider area (laundries, milk, coal supply, funeral undertaking). In 1948 the movement took the important forward step of introducing a system of 'national membership', which entitled members of any Society adopting the scheme to shop at, and receive dividends on purchases at, any other such Society. The great majority of local Societies have already joined the scheme; and a great advance has thus been made towards unifying the movement.

CO-OPERATIVE TRADE

The main trade of the Co-operative movement is still in groceries, which account for over one-third of total retail sales. In 1948, out of total sales of £502 millions, bread and groceries accounted for about 41 per cent., clothes, furnishings and hardware for 13½ per cent., tobacco and cigarettes for 12 per cent., dairy produce for 12 per cent., meat for 8 per cent., coal for 4½ per cent., boots and shoes for 2½ per cent., and pharmacy for 1½ per cent. In 1948 over 13 million consumers were registered for milk with Co-operative Stores and nearly the same number for sugar. Co-operative trade in bread and flour and also in butter, cheese, fats, eggs, preserves and bacon is very large indeed. It is very much smaller, as a proportion of total retail trade, in non-food goods. In all, the Co-operative movement holds about one-third of the total trade in dairy products, nearly one-fifth of the trade in coal, about a sixth of the trade in bread and groceries, about one-eighth of the trade in meat, as against about one-tenth of that in footwear, only about 8 per cent. for tobacco, and not more than 7 per cent. for textiles and furnishings.

In 1947 the average Co-operative member bought £44 10s. 0d. worth of goods from his Store, as compared with £31 10s. 0d. in 1939. In

relation to prices this is less than the average member used to spend, despite a wider range of goods sold in the Stores and a rise in standards of living. One reason is that it is much commoner than it used to be for several members of a household to belong to the Store, but another is that as the movement has grown (from one million members in 1891 and three millions in 1914 to six millions in 1929 and nearly ten in 1948) less 'loyalty' has been felt, and many members trade with the Store only for a few articles and make the rest of their purchases elsewhere.

CENTRAL BODIES

The central body representing the Co-operative Movement is the Co-operative Union, with headquarters in Manchester. The C.U. organises the annual Co-operative Congress, which corresponds to the T.U.C. and includes delegates from all types of Co-operative Society. The Co-operative Union has departments corresponding to the main activities of the movement, and has also 'Sections' (regional Unions) which are subdivided into Districts. There is a parallel organisation on the educational side. Finally, in 1949 the movement at length decided to re-cast its central organisation in order to secure a body fully representing all the main sections. Till then there had been a division of authority between the Central Board of the Co-operative Union, representing the local Societies, a Parliamentary Committee, representing all the main bodies for limited purposes, and a National Co-operative Authority, also representing all sections, and supposed to be the main co-ordinating body, but with ill-defined powers. The new structure gives power, subject to the independence of the separate bodies and also to the final sanction of Congress, to a Central Board and Executive representing the Wholesale Societies, the Co-operative Party, the Co-operative Press, and the Co-operative Productive Federation, as well as the local Societies (which retain their preponderance). The Guilds and other 'auxiliary' bodies are not represented, and salaried officials are disqualified from serving. The old 'Authority' and the separate Parliamentary Committee disappear: the various bodies—Wholesales, Party, Productive Federation, Women's Guilds, etc.—retain their own separate machinery. (For the Party, see section IV.) The new Executive Committee of the Central Board of the Co-operative Union will now supply the Co-operative representation on the National Council of Labour, to which the Co-operative movement formally affiliated in 1942. As in the case of the Trades Union Congress and its General Council, the Co-operative Congress and the Union's Central Board have only a limited authority; for each Co-operative Society is in the last resort an independent unit.

CO-OPERATION IN AGRICULTURE

Agricultural Co-operation, which is strong in Ireland, has never taken firm roots in Great Britain. There are, however, a number of Agricultural Supply Societies, through which farmers collectively purchase seeds, feeding stuffs, and other farm requisites, and the Wholesale Societies do a considerable trade with them, especially in wheat offals. There are also Farmers' Societies for Co-operative Marketing, but they are mostly small and there are not very many. The National Farmers' Union used to act as a registering body for Agricultural Co-operative Societies, but never gave them a high place in its attention. In 1946 a separate Agricultural Co-operative Association was set up to care for

the interests of the various types of agricultural societies. This situation is in marked contrast with that which exists in Denmark, New Zealand, Canada, and many other countries, where agricultural Co-operation is very strong. The Russian *kolkhoz*, or collective farm, is a sort of Agricultural Co-operative Society.

INTERNATIONAL CO-OPERATION

Internationally, the Co-operative Movement is linked up in the International Co-operative Alliance (see page 6) which had in 1948 over 100 million members, including 32 millions in the Soviet Union and nearly 10 millions in Great Britain. The total number of Co-operative members in all countries in 1937 was estimated by the International Labour Office at 143 millions, of whom about 60 millions were in Consumers' Societies, about 64 millions in Agricultural Societies, and the rest in other types, including Producers' and Housing Societies. Consumers' Co-operation had then been largely crushed out in the countries under Fascist control; but Agricultural Co-operation had usually survived and has developed greatly since the war.

CO-OPERATIVE EMPLOYMENT

One problem which has given a good deal of trouble to the Consumers' Co-operative Societies is that of the treatment of employees. The Movement nowadays pays standard rates of wages wherever they are applicable; but over a large part of the trades it covers, including distribution, there are no generally recognised rates. The movement has its own bargaining machinery, organised separately for the Wholesale and Retail Consumers' Societies. The question is whether the Co-operative Movement ought to be merely as good an employer as reputable capitalist firms, or a better, and whether Co-operative employees ought to enjoy some measure of 'workers' control'.

UNIFICATION

Another vexed question is whether local Societies ought to be amalgamated into larger units, or even to form a single national Society. Amalgamation is urged (a) to prevent overlapping and competition between Societies; (b) to secure larger areas for the conduct of services which require them; (c) to bring about a co-ordinated forward policy for the whole movement. National membership (see page 14) may help to foster amalgamations and greater unity of policy.

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- L. S. Woolf (ed.). *Fabian Essays in Co-operation*, 1923.

QUESTIONS TO CHOOSE FROM

1. What are the essential principles of Consumers' Co-operation ?
2. Why are Co-operative sales per member not higher, and what should be done to increase them ?
3. Is the Co-operative Movement democratically controlled ?
4. Why is Producers' Co-operation on so small a scale ?
5. What can be done to develop international Co-operative trade ?
6. What is the Women's Co-operative Guild, and what has it achieved ?
7. Are the relations between the Co-operative Movement and its employees satisfactory ?
8. Why did the Co-operative Movement join the National Council of Labour ?
9. Are large Co-operative Societies to be preferred to small ones ? Should all the local Societies be merged into a single National Society ?
10. What are likely to be the results of the 'national membership' scheme started by the Consumers' movement in 1948 ?
11. In what directions should the Wholesale Societies seek to expand ?
12. Why is there so little Agricultural Co-operation in Great Britain ?

IV. LABOUR POLITICS AND THE SOCIALIST MOVEMENT

Politically, the British workers are represented mainly by the Labour Party, which was founded in 1900 as the Labour Representation Committee. The Co-operators maintain a separate Co-operative Party for contesting elections and formulating policy; but there are close relations with the Labour Party, and Co-operative M.P.s join the Parliamentary Labour Party in the House of Commons, and act in all respects as Labour Members. There are at present (1949) 392 Labour M.P.s receiving the Party Whip, including 24 Co-operative M.P.s, in a House of 615. The best known Co-operative M.P.s are A. V. Alexander and Alfred Barnes, who are both Ministers.

The Labour Party is a federation of Trade Unions and other bodies, including the Divisional Labour Parties which have been set up in practically all constituencies. Most of the larger Trade Unions belong to it; but under the Trade Union Act of 1913 they can support it only out of separate political funds, subscribed by members who have not signed a form 'contracting out' so as to indicate their unwillingness to contribute. Trade Unions vote in the Labour Party only in proportion to their 'political' membership, which varies considerably from Union to Union. In 1947 it was as high as 77 per cent. in the case of the Mine-workers' Union but only 15 per cent. in that of the Electrical Trades Union. It was 67 per cent. for the Distributive Workers, 53 per cent. for the National Union of Railwaymen, 37 per cent. for the Transport and General Workers and 30 per cent. for the General and Municipal Workers. In most *craft* Unions the political membership was fairly low, the differences depending less on the political opinions of the members than on the zeal shown by the Union officials in securing payment of the political levy. These percentages refer to the year prior to the repeal of the Trade Unions Act of 1927, which required 'contracting-in' by each member who desired to pay the political levy—that is to say, each such member had to sign a form indicating his willingness to pay. Since the repeal of this Act and the return to the earlier system of 'contracting-out', the Labour Party's affiliated Trade Union membership has increased sharply from under 3 millions to 4½ millions in 1948. The Act of 1927, passed by the Tories after the General Strike, also prevented the Trade Unions in the Civil Service from joining the Labour Party; but the Act of 1947 has allowed them to resume affiliation.

Each Local Labour Party enrolls individual members as well as locally affiliated Societies and branches. In 1948 the total *individual* membership of the Labour Party was 629,000, as compared with 447,000 in 1937. The war was responsible for a big fall, which had already begun in 1938; but after 1945 there was a rapid recovery. Total affiliated membership nationally was 2,663,000 in 1939 and 5,422,000 in 1948.

THE I.L.P.

The Labour Party was first formed mainly as a federation between Trade Unions and Socialist Societies, of which the most important numerically was the Independent Labour Party, founded by Keir Hardie in 1893 to work for a comprehensive party including the Trade Unions. The I.L.P. was long in effect the individual members' section of the

Labour Party, and did most of the propaganda through its local branches until the Labour Party was reorganised in 1918, when the Local Labour Parties, with individual membership, were effectively started. The I.L.P. remained inside the Labour Party till 1933, when it seceded on the ground that the Labour Party was too mild and was not really standing for working-class Socialism. The I.L.P. is now quite a small group, mainly on Clydeside: it opposed the war as a 'capitalist war', and now has no connection with the main body of the Labour Movement.

PARTY STRUCTURE

Nationally, the Labour Party is governed by its Annual Conference of delegates, which is dominated when it comes to voting by the block votes of the Trade Unions. These, however, seldom vote all on the same side. The Local Labour Parties have secured a larger representation at Conference, as individual membership has grown; but some of them would like to get a bigger voting strength, based on their local affiliated membership as well as on their individual members: this is opposed by most of the Trade Unions. The Labour Party Executive is elected in four sections—Trade Unions (12 seats), other national Societies (1 seat), Local Labour Parties (7 seats), and women members (5 seats), *plus* the elected Treasurer and the Leader of the Parliamentary Party *ex officio*. Many of the Local Parties think they ought to have a larger representation. The Labour M.P.s have their separate Parliamentary Party Consultative Committee, which sometimes holds joint meetings with the National Executive. Outside Parliament, the National Executive is the governing body between Conferences; but both the National Executive and the Parliamentary Party are represented on the National Council of Labour.

THE FABIAN SOCIETY

Since the secession of the I.L.P., the Fabian Society, which helped to found the Labour Party, has been the principal Socialist body affiliated to the Party. The Fabian Society is small, though important: it does not aim at mass-membership, but only at the enrolment of keen and active Socialists. It has (1949) about 4,000 national members, *plus* a few thousands more who belong to local Fabian Societies up and down the country, but not to the parent Society. Local Fabian Societies have developed rapidly during the past few years. The Fabian Society is mainly a research body, for inquiries into problems of Socialist policy and for the issue of informative books and pamphlets on home, international and colonial subjects. Its local groups do much to promote the discussion of Socialist policy, to conduct propaganda based on Socialist research, and to help Local Labour Parties with local research and other work.

THE CO-OPERATIVE PARTY

The Co-operative Party has a working arrangement with the Labour Party, but is not affiliated to it. On paper the Co-operative Party has a much larger membership than the Labour Party (8½ millions in 1949). Co-operative Societies are not under the Trade Unions Act, and can affiliate their entire membership by a simple majority vote. But the Co-operative Party is only organised effectively in a few constituencies, where its candidates receive Labour support. It has never put up more than a few candidates for Parliament: indeed, there is

obviously not room for two large-scale working-class parties appealing mainly to the same voters, and the two can exist side by side without disaster only by mutual arrangement to avoid conflict. The Co-operative Party was only started in 1917, mainly as a protest against unfair taxation of Co-operative Societies and discrimination against Co-operative trade during the first World War. The Co-operative Movement has not yet entered politics in more than a half-hearted way. If it did, there would have to be a very close working arrangement, if not an actual fusion, between the Labour Party and the Co-operative Party, which are not divided by serious differences of ultimate policy, though the Labour Party's professed aim is Socialism and that of the Co-operative Party the 'Co-operative Commonwealth'—both ideals which can be interpreted in more than one way. Recently there has been some tendency for their policies to clash, where the Labour Party has decided to nationalise services in which the Co-operative Movement is seriously engaged, e.g., insurance, and also over questions of agricultural marketing. There is a clear need for an earnest attempt to thrash out these differences and to arrive at a good understanding about the respective spheres of State ownership and of Co-operative enterprise.

THE COMMUNISTS

The Communist Party of Great Britain, which has repeatedly applied for affiliation to the Labour Party and been rejected, is quite small in numbers, but very energetic. It opposed the war up to the Nazi attack on the Soviet Union, and then suddenly changed its attitude and insisted that everything should be subordinated to the need to defeat Nazism and defend the Soviet Union. Since 1945 it has followed the shifts of Soviet Union policy and, though not a member of the 'Cominform', has ranged itself with the Soviet Union against West European co-operation and Marshall Aid. With it are grouped a number of special organisations, for which it seeks to enlist non-Communist support. These are banned by the Labour Party.

COMMON WEALTH

Common Wealth, led by Sir Richard Acland, a convert from Liberalism to Christian Socialism, was founded in 1942. It had a considerable, mainly middle-class, following, largely young and including many in the armed forces. Its programme differed little from the Labour Party's, except that it demanded more Socialism at once. By fighting by-elections, from which the Labour Party stood down under the wartime electoral truce, it increased its support for a time; but at the end of the war its leader and most of his followers joined the Labour Party, and it ceased to count.

LABOUR IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT

The Labour Party is active in Local as well as National Government, and there are Labour Parties on most municipal Councils, often in a minority against coalitions of Tories and Liberals under various names. In 1945-6 the Labour Party greatly increased its strength on all types of Local Authority. A part of these gains was lost in the following years, in face of much improved Tory organisation; but Labour remained in 1949 very much stronger in Local Government than it had been ten years before. In May 1949, in England and Wales, the Labour Party

controlled 7 County Councils (out of 62), 35 County Boroughs (out of 83), 45 other Municipal Boroughs (out of 309), 17 London Metropolitan Boroughs (out of 28), 132 Urban Districts (out of 572), and 20 Rural Districts (out of 475). In Scotland the Labour Party controlled 4 County Councils (out of 33), and 25 Burghs (out of 195). Scottish Burghs include many small places which would rank as Urban Districts in England or Wales. The Labour Party controls London and a number of other big towns, but is weak on most of the County Councils, except in mining areas, and also on most of the smaller Councils in rural areas.

LABOUR IN OFFICE

Since 1945 the Labour Party has been in office with a large majority in Parliament. From 1940-45 it took part in the Churchill wartime Coalition Government. Before 1939 it had twice formed Governments of its own—in 1924 and from 1929-31—but in neither case had it an independent majority in the House of Commons. In the crisis of 1931 its former leader, Ramsay MacDonald, seceded from the Party to form a 'National' Government, and Labour was heavily defeated in the ensuing election, from which it had not had time fully to recover in 1935, when the pre-war House of Commons was elected.

The policy of the Labour Party is an evolutionary Socialism, to be achieved by parliamentary means. It is now (1949) engaged in re-stating its policy with a view to the General Election of 1950, at which it hopes to secure a further lease of power.

INTERNATIONAL POLICY

Internationally, the Labour Party belongs to 'Comisco'—the provisional organisation of democratic Socialist Parties of the West (see page 6); but it is not possible to say much at present about the probable shape of future political international organisation. The crucial question is that of future relations between the democratic Socialist movements of Western Europe and the Soviet-dominated Communist Parties; and this depends on developments in the field of international politics which it is impossible at present to foresee.

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QUESTIONS TO CHOOSE FROM

1. Is any change needed in the constitution of the Labour Party?
2. What should be the relations between the Labour and Co-operative Parties?
3. What should be the attitude of Socialists to the Communist Party and organisations connected with it?
4. On what lines should International Socialism be rebuilt?
5. Is the Labour Party's policy on the right lines?
6. How much nationalisation is desirable, and how should nationalised or otherwise socialised industries be carried on?
7. What judgment should be passed on the Labour Government's record (a) in home, and (b) in foreign affairs?
8. What should be the working-class policy in relation to Local Government?
9. What are the functions and prospects of the Fabian Society?
10. Is there need for a new large Socialist propaganda society to replace the I.L.P.?
11. On what issues should the Labour Party fight the next General Election?

V. WORKING-CLASS EDUCATION AND YOUTH MOVEMENTS

It is often difficult to draw a clear line between working-class education and other forms of adult and adolescent education. The main body of Technical Education is carried on under the Local Education Authorities in Technical Colleges and classes, or, in London, in the Polytechnics, which are financially aided by the L.E.A.s. The L.E.A.s are also responsible for a considerable amount of non-technical teaching; and many Technical Colleges, as well as the Polytechnics, do a fair amount of non-technical teaching. There are also a number of voluntary bodies which run adult classes, but are not connected with the working-class movement, though a good many of their students may come from the working class. Such are the Educational and Residential Settlements, the National Adult School Union, the Y.M.C.A. and Y.W.C.A., the Rural Community Councils and the Women's Institutes in the villages, and a number of other bodies. It is not proposed to deal here with Adult Education as a whole, but only with that part of it which has special connections with the organised working-class movement. During the war, there was a big development of non-technical as well as technical education in the armed forces (A.B.C.A., now the Bureau of Current Affairs, and the Army Education Scheme) and also some growth of Discussion Groups in the factories. The Education Act (1944) makes extended provision for Adult Education, and there have been big developments since the war, especially in music and the arts. (Note the influence of the Arts Council and other bodies.) Adult working-class education has so far reached only a small fraction of the people; it may need to adopt radically new methods, especially in the adolescent field, where the growth of Youth Movements and the establishment of County Colleges for young people should provide it with greatly enlarged opportunities.

The main difference between the two large bodies organising working-class education on a national scale is that, whereas the Workers' Educational Association (founded in 1903) collaborates largely with the Universities and accepts State and local authority grants in aid of its work, the National Council of Labour Colleges (founded in 1921) regards such collaboration and grant-aid as inconsistent with 'independent' working-class education. Both bodies seek and obtain Trade Union and Co-operative support, and some working-class bodies support both, leaving it to their individual members to choose between them. The W.E.A. works largely with University-trained, paid tutors, and does much more systematic work, much of it on a high intellectual level: the N.C.L.C. uses largely working-class tutors, some salaried, but many giving voluntary service, and does on the whole more elementary work, with a strong tinge of propaganda. The W.E.A. distinguishes sharply between education and propaganda: the N.C.L.C. denies the propriety of keeping them apart.

THE WORKERS' EDUCATIONAL ASSOCIATION

The W.E.A. is a national body, divided into districts and branches, with national, district and local affiliations and individual members. In connection with each University it has a Joint Tutorial Classes Com-

mittee, which organises the more advanced classes, whereas the less advanced are run in most areas by the W.E.A. alone, but with grant-aid to tutors' salaries from the Ministry of Education and often from the Local Education Authorities. The W.E.A. had, in 1948, about 140,000 students in its classes (including those run in conjunction with other bodies), and over 45,000 branch and district individual members. It describes itself as 'unsectarian and non-party political'. It teaches a very wide range of subjects, including science, philosophy and literature as well as social and economic subjects.

The work done by the W.E.A. for the Trade Unions is largely organised through the Workers' Educational Trade Union Committee, a body representing Unions which have national educational schemes in conjunction with the W.E.A. The W.E.T.U.C. and the W.E.A. both organise many week-end and day Schools, and the W.E.A. also runs a number of well-attended Summer Schools in association with the University Tutorial Classes Committees. It has 41 affiliated Trade Unions, with over 4 million members.

The W.E.A. is on friendly terms with Ruskin College, Oxford (founded in 1899), for working-class students and supported by many Trade Unions, Co-operative Societies and other working-class bodies. The College has developed greatly since the war. Ruskin College also runs an extensive Correspondence Department.

THE NATIONAL COUNCIL OF LABOUR COLLEGES

The N.C.L.C. arose originally out of the Central Labour College, a split from Ruskin College (in 1909) as the outcome of a struggle over the nature of the teaching. The Central Labour College, which had shut down some time before 1939, was at the outset rigidly Marxist; and the N.C.L.C. movement was based on the teaching of Marxian economics, but has become a good deal less rigid since it has come to be more closely linked up with the Trade Union movement. Its local 'Colleges' are in fact not Colleges in a residential sense, but organising centres for classes. The N.C.L.C. had, in 1948-9, approximately 12,000 students in its classes besides many attendants at branch lectures and over 18,000 correspondence students; but a large part of its activities consisted of quite short courses, not comparable with the longer courses which form the most important part of the activities of the W.E.A. Like the W.E.A., it conducts in addition large numbers of Day and Week-end Schools, and arranges single lectures to Trade Union branches and other bodies. It has 70 nationally affiliated Trade Unions, with 5½ million members, besides many local Co-operative and Trade Union affiliations.

CO-OPERATIVE EDUCATION

The educational work of the Co-operative movement is concerned largely with the teaching of Co-operative subjects, including many classes for Co-operative employees. The Co-operative Union and the local Co-operative Societies collaborate to a considerable extent with the other working-class educational bodies. In addition, the movement maintains the Co-operative College at Loughborough, for which it has been endeavouring to raise a £250,000 fund. The College is concerned partly with technical teaching in Co-operative subjects, mainly for employees, but it also runs general courses and caters for students of Co-operation from foreign countries (including the colonies) as well

as from Great Britain. Co-operative Societies are recommended, in accordance with the 'Rochdale principles', to devote 2½ per cent. of their trading surpluses to education; but in fact they devote on the average less than half this amount, and there is some criticism of the fact that many local Societies dissipate a large part of their educational funds on activities which are only on the margin of educational work.

YOUTH MOVEMENTS

Recently the Co-operative Movement has reorganised its Youth work, and has opened a number of Youth Hostels. Its Youth Organisation is in three stages—Rainbow¹ Playways for young children, Pathfinders for older children, and Youth Clubs for adolescents. The British Federation of Young Co-operators operates as an independent body for young adults, unlike the Labour Party League of Youth, which is closely controlled by the Party Executive. There is also, in the Woodcraft Folk, a Co-operative equivalent of the Boy Scout Movement. The Trade Unions have no parallel Youth activities, but have to an increasing extent enrolled apprentices and other young workers and won recognition of their right to represent them in collective bargaining. The Labour Party's League of Youth has been seriously hampered by repeated friction with Transport House over the amount of freedom to be allowed to it in discussing and formulating policy. The Communist Party has devoted much attention to organising the Young Communist League. The National Association of Labour Student Organisations, which has its main strength in the Universities but also enrolls students in Colleges of other kinds, has much more freedom of action. There are strong Labour student organisations in most Universities. Some of the Universities have separate societies affiliated to the University Labour Federation, which is banned by the Labour Party as subject to Communist influence; but Communism has lost much of its appeal to students during the past few years.

BOOKS

There are no up-to-date books. See the pamphlets and Annual Reports of the various bodies, obtainable from their headquarters; also their journals, especially *The Highway* (W.E.A.) and *The Plebs* (N.C.L.C.). See also :

Co-operative Congress Annual Reports (sections on Education).

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QUESTIONS TO CHOOSE FROM

1. Should working-class educational bodies accept aid from Universities or public bodies ?
2. Does the Co-operative Movement make satisfactory use of the sums which it allocates to education ?

¹ The Rainbow Flag is the international symbol of Co-operation.

3. How should working-class Youth Movements be organised, and how far should they be subject to official control ?
4. Can a clear distinction be drawn between education and propaganda ?
5. What is the best way of organising the student Socialist Movement in Colleges and Universities ?
6. Should Trade Unions do more for the organisation of the young worker ?
7. What should be the function of residential Colleges in working-class education ?
8. How should the working-class movement train its members for the functions of 'joint consultation' and democratic control of industry ?

VI. THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

It is impossible, within the limits of this study-guide, to deal adequately with the historical background of the movements which have been described. All that can be done is to make a few references to their development, where such reference is indispensable for an understanding of their present position.

EARLY HISTORY

Trade Unions and Co-operative Societies, though there are examples of both in the eighteenth century, began to develop on a considerable scale only in the early nineteenth century, mainly as an outcome of the Industrial Revolution based on the application of mechanical power and the aggregation of wage-workers in factories and factory towns. Both movements were greatly influenced in their early growth by Robert Owen, the reforming employer who became the founder of British Socialism. Largely under his influence, extensive Trade Union and Co-operative Movements, aiming at a rapid transformation of society, grew up round about 1830, only to be crushed in 1834 by a repression of which the best known incident is the trial and transportation of the Dorchester Labourers, or 'Tolpuddle Martyrs'. This repression smashed most of the Owenite Societies, and for the next ten years or so the workers, who had already played their part in the political agitation which resulted in the enfranchisement of the middle classes by the Reform Act of 1832, turned back to political agitation for the People's Charter, with its Six Points (manhood suffrage, the ballot, no property qualification for Parliament, annual elections, equal electoral districts, payment of M.P.s). The Chartists presented mass Petitions for the Charter in 1839, 1842 and 1848, and their 'physical force' section was responsible for an abortive rising in 1839 (the Newport Rising). They also put themselves at the head of great strikes in 1842, and of a grandiose scheme of democratic land settlement in the '40s. In 1848, when there were revolutions all over Europe, the weakness of British Chartism was made manifest, and the movement thereafter went to pieces, largely because working-class economic conditions improved as capitalism settled down to a period of rising prosperity based on the British lead over other countries in applying advanced productive techniques. Cheap food, after the repeal of the Corn Laws in 1846, also played its part; and the early revolutionary period of British working-class activity came to an end. Under the influence of improved conditions, stable Trade Unions were formed by the skilled workers (Engineers 1851, Cotton Operatives 1850s, Carpenters 1861, etc.), and with the foundation of the Rochdale Pioneers' Society in 1844 began the rapid spread of Consumers' Co-operation among the better-paid workers. Agitation for an extension of the franchise was renewed in the late 'fifties, and led to the Reform Act of 1867, which gave the vote to many urban workers and secured the return in 1874 of the first Trade Union M.P.s (Thomas Burt and Alexander Macdonald—both miners). Over the same period there was a very rapid growth of Trade Unions, including an extension to the less skilled workers. Joseph Arch organised the agricultural workers; and the Engineers by strike action won the Nine Hours Day. (The Ten Hours' Day, in the textile factories, had been secured by legislation in 1847.)

SOCIALISM RE-BORN

By the middle 'seventies serious industrial depression, with falling prices, replaced the rapid economic advances of 1850-1875. Co-operation continued to progress, but Trade Unionism was badly affected, and most of the new Unions of less skilled workers disappeared. Socialism was reintroduced by 1881, largely under Marxist influence, and gained ground as a result of agitation among the unemployed in the depression of 1886. But the Social Democratic Federation (founded in 1881 and led by H. M. Hyndman) was too doctrinaire and exclusively political to make a wide appeal. Trade revival in the late 'eighties led to widespread strikes—above all the London dock strike of 1889 (led by John Burns and Tom Mann). Trade Unionism again spread rapidly among miners and less skilled workers, and new Unions were founded to struggle for the minimum wage, the eight hours' day, and the 'right to work'. Under Keir Hardie's leadership, these movements led to a parallel political movement for Independent Labour Representation, as opposed to the existing alliance of the older Unions with Gladstonian Liberalism; and this movement culminated in the foundation of the Independent Labour Party in 1893—the forerunner of the Labour Party (see page 18).

THE RISE OF THE LABOUR PARTY

This movement of the early 'nineties receded for a time under stress of renewed depression; but after 1900 rising prices led to new movements for higher wages and by 1910 to a general development of labour unrest. Strikes had been held back between 1901 and 1906 by the famous Taff Vale Judgment, under which Trade Unions were made liable for damages caused to employers by strike action. But after the General Election of 1906 had returned a Liberal Government to power and put 30 Labour members into the House of Commons the effect of this decision was reversed by the Trade Disputes Act of that year, which in effect restored the right to strike.

From 1906 to 1909 the new Labour Party wielded considerable political influence; but from that year it became involved in supporting the Liberal Government in the struggle with the House of Lords over the Lloyd George Land Tax Budget of 1909, and then over Irish Home Rule, and it thus lost much of its power of independent action. Real wages fell as prices rose; and there was a development of Syndicalist and Industrial Unionist movements aiming at revolutionary or semi-revolutionary strike action. This movement was still active when it was suspended by the outbreak of war in 1914.

THE FIRST WORLD WAR AND AFTER

The main part of the working-class movement, political and industrial, supported the war; but the I.L.P., or rather a majority of its members, opposed it. The I.L.P., however, while taking its own line, remained inside the Labour Party. During the later stages of the war there was a growth of unofficial rank and file movements in the Trade Unions under the leadership of the Shop Stewards, and also of Guild Socialism, with its demand for 'workers' control' in industry combined with public ownership. After the Russian Revolution, there was a development of Communist feeling in the Shop Stewards' movement, and this led up after the war to the formation of the Communist Party in 1920-21. Meanwhile, Arthur Henderson had reorganised the Labour Party in

1918, and in the General Election of that year it fought most of the constituencies, but returned only 75 M.P.s (as compared with 43 in December 1910 and 142 at the following General Election in 1922).

The war was followed by a short period of acute industrial unrest. But the post-war slump, which began late in 1920, seriously weakened the Trade Unions; and the defeat of the Miners in 1921 (Black Friday) was followed by a period of Trade Union weakness and retreat. Politically, however, working-class opinion advanced; and at the end of 1923 the Labour Party so improved its position in the General Election provoked by the Tories over the Tariff issue that the first Labour Government was formed early in 1924. This lasted less than a year, having no majority in Parliament; but it was able to pass an important Housing Act and to improve the treatment of the unemployed—reforms largely undone by its Tory successor during the next few years.

THE GENERAL STRIKE AND THE LABOUR GOVERNMENT OF 1929

In 1926 came the General Strike, in support of the Miners' claim for a living wage. The defeat of the General Strike, which was pusillanimously led, and of the Miners was followed by a further Trade Union decline. But again the political repercussions were favourable, and the second Labour Government took office—still without a majority—in 1929. It lasted till 1931; but its record was disappointing, and it collapsed sensationally in the world economic crisis of that year (see page 21).

LABOUR IN THE 1930s AND THE SECOND WORLD WAR

As the 'thirties advanced, political conditions were more and more over-shadowed by the world advance of Fascism and the growing prospect of war. Attempts were made by groups inside the Labour Movement to create a United People's Front against Fascism, on the lines of the *Front Populaire* in France and the *Frente Popular* in Spain. But the Labour Party leadership, fearful of any alliance with the Communists, rejected any such development; and Sir Stafford Cripps, its leading advocate, was driven out of the party in 1939. In the Munich crisis of 1938 the Labour Party opposed the surrender of the Government to Nazi pressure; and when war came in 1939 almost the whole Labour Movement supported its prosecution. The Communists at the outset took the same line, but rapidly changed front as a consequence of the Nazi-Soviet Pact, and only reversed their policy a second time when the Nazis attacked the Soviet Union in 1941. In 1940, after the collapse of France, the Labour Party entered the Coalition headed by Winston Churchill. An electoral truce was declared at the outbreak of war, and was maintained until 1945. Industrially, the second war involved a much greater mobilisation of resources, including man-power, than the war of 1914. Trade Unionism grew in strength, as labour shortage became acute; but strikes were few, in view of the almost solid Labour support of the war effort.

THE 1945 ELECTION

In the General Election of 1945 the Labour Party, for the first time in its history, secured a sweeping majority in Parliament, followed by

big victories at the first local government elections held after the war. The Party assumed office with a programme, *Let Us Face the Future*, which included considerable measures of public ownership, a great extension of the social services, and a pledge to use the power of the State to maintain full employment. Shortage of workers made it unnecessary to take any special steps to prevent unemployment; but in all other respects the Labour Government did, in home affairs, exactly what it had promised to do. In foreign affairs it was less successful; and there were many in the Party who criticised Ernest Bevin's foreign policy, without attributing to it the major blame for the worsening of international relations. Outside this field, the Government's greatest problem was the balance of payments; and, in face of the losses due to the war, it was impossible to maintain necessary imports without American help, first through the Loan of 1946 and then under 'Marshall Aid'. Higher productivity and increased exports became matters of the utmost urgency; and it became evident that not much room was left for further advances in living standards except as an outcome of higher production and exports. The Labour Party's Executive put forward in 1949 a draft of the programme (*Labour Believes in Britain*) on which it proposed to fight the General Election of 1950; this was a much more modest document than *Let Us Face the Future*. Indeed, in some respects it was bound to be so, because the full costs of the reforms instituted between 1945 and 1949 were due to accrue only in later years, and not much margin was left for further commitments of the same sort.

BOOKS

- G. D. H. Cole and R. W. Postgate. **The Common People, 1746-1946* (revised edition), 1946.
 G. D. H. Cole. **Short History of the British Working-class Movement, 1789-1947* (revised edition), 1948.

See also the introductory Section of this booklet.

QUESTIONS TO CHOOSE FROM

1. Is Robert Owen rightly called 'the Father of British Socialism and Co-operation'?
2. What lessons can we learn from the Chartist Movement?
3. How did the Dock Strike of 1889 affect Trade Unionism?
4. What were the essential differences between the Social Democratic Federation and the Independent Labour Party?
5. What was the Taff Vale Judgment, and how was it reversed?
6. Why did the Labour unrest of the years before 1914 develop, and what were its effects on Socialist thought and policy?
7. How did the Labour attitude to the War of 1914-18 differ from its attitude to the war of 1939-45, and why?
8. Did the Labour Governments of 1924 and 1929-31 fail? If so, what were the causes of failure?
9. What lessons can be drawn from the General Strike of 1926?
10. How do you expect the British Labour Movement to be affected by the record of the Labour Government since 1945?

SOME OUTSTANDING EVENTS

- 1789 French Revolution. Industrial Revolution already beginning in Great Britain.
- 1792 London Corresponding Society (first working-class political body).
- 1799 Working-class Political Bodies and Trade Unions suppressed by law.
- 1810-11 Luddite Riots begin (machine-breaking).
- 1816-19 Labour Troubles after Napoleonic Wars.
- 1819 Peterloo Massacre (Reform agitation). First Factory Act.
- 1824 Repeal of Combination Acts.
- 1830 Beginnings of new Attempts to form a General Union of All Trades.
- 1832 First Reform Act.
- 1833-34 Grand National Consolidated Trades Union.
- 1834 Transportation of Dorchester Labourers. Collapse of Owenite Movement. Poor Law Amendment Act.
- 1835 Municipal Reform Act.
- 1838 The People's Charter.
- 1839 Anti-Corn Law League. Newport Rising.
- 1842 Great Strikes for the Charter.
- 1844 Rochdale Pioneers' Society founded.
- 1846 Repeal of the Corn Laws.
- 1847 Ten Hours Act (Textiles).
- 1848 Revolutions in Europe. Communist Manifesto. Third Chartist Petition.
- 1851 Amalgamated Society of Engineers ('New Model' Trade Unionism begins).
- 1863 Co-operative Wholesale Society.
- 1867 Second Reform Act (working-class vote in towns).
- 1868 Trades Union Congress made regular.
- 1869 Co-operative Congress and Co-operative Union begin.
- 1870 Elementary Education Act.
- 1871 Trade Unionism given legal status. Nine Hours' Movement.
- 1872 Arch's Agricultural Labourers' Union. Public Health Act.
- 1874 First Trade Union M.P.s.
- 1881 Democratic (later Social Democratic) Federation founded.
- 1884 Fabian Society founded. Third Reform Act (County Franchise extended).
- 1888 County Councils Act.
- 1889 London Dock Strike (The New Unionism). *Fabian Essays*.
- 1893 Independent Labour Party founded.
- 1899 Ruskin College, Oxford, founded.
- 1900 Labour Representation Committee (later Labour Party) founded.
- 1901 Taff Vale Judgment.
- 1903 Workers' Educational Association founded.
- 1906 30 Labour M.P.s. Trade Disputes Act.
- 1909 Land Tax Budget. Central Labour College founded.
- 1910 Two General Elections (struggle with House of Lords). Labour Unrest sets in.
- 1911 Railway and Port Strikes: Insurance Act.
- 1912 Coal Strike (Minimum Wage Act).
- 1913 Dublin Strike and Lock-out (James Larkin).
- 1914 Outbreak of War.
- 1915 Shop Stewards' Movement begins. Munitions Act.

- 1916 Irish Rebellion.
- 1917 Russian Revolution.
- 1918 Labour Party reorganised. End of War. Labour leaves Coalition.
- 1919 Forty-Hour Strikes. Railway Strike. Sankey Coal Commission. Co-operative College.
- 1920 Communist Party founded.
- 1921 Mining Lock-out (Black Friday). National Council of Labour Colleges.
- 1924 First Labour Government.
- 1926 General Strike.
- 1927 Trade Unions and Trade Disputes Act.
- 1929 Second Labour Government.
- 1931 World Crisis. Fall of Labour Government.
- 1933 Nazis Take Power in Germany.
- 1935 Labour defeated at General Election.
- 1936 Spanish Civil War begins.
- 1938 Munich Crisis.
- 1939 Second World War begins.
- 1940 Fall of France. Labour enter Coalition Government.
- 1941 Nazis attack Soviet Union.
- 1943 Period of Soviet Victories begins.
- 1944 Allies Invade Western Europe. *Let Us Face the Future.*
- 1945 End of War in Europe and Far East. Labour General Election victory and Formation of Third Labour Government.
- 1946 Coal Mines Nationalised. United States Loan to Britain. Repeal of Trade Unions Act of 1927. National Insurance Act.
- 1947 Cominform set up.
- 1948 Marshall Aid begins. Poor Law abolished. National Health Act. Commonwealth of India established.
- 1949 Co-operators institute 'National Membership' and reorganise central machinery. New Labour Party Programme drafted.

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