

UNIVERSAL
LIBRARY

OU_148414

UNIVERSAL
LIBRARY

**PROBLEMS OF THE SOCIALIST
TRANSITION**

PROBLEMS OF THE SOCIALIST TRANSITION

by

L. ANDERSON FENN
HAROLD E. CLAY
G. D. H. COLE
SIR STAFFORD CRIPPS
J. F. HORRABIN
WILLIAM MELLOR

LONDON
VICTOR GOLLANCZ LTD
14 Henrietta Street Covent Garden
1934

Printed in Great Britain by
The Camelot Press Ltd., London and Southampton

CONTENTS

| | PAGE |
|--|------|
| 1 Democracy—Real or Sham? <i>by</i> SIR STAFFORD CRIPPS, K.C., M.P., Chairman of the National Council of the Socialist League | 7 |
| 2 The Working-Class Movement and the Transition to Socialism <i>by</i> G. D. H. COLE | 35 |
| 3 Trade Unionism : Some Problems and Proposals <i>by</i> HAROLD E. CLAY | 71 |
| 4 The Co-operative Movement and the Fight for Socialism <i>by</i> WILLIAM MELLOR | 107 |
| 5 What of the Professional Classes? <i>by</i> LOUIS ANDERSON FENN | 143 |
| 6 The Class Struggle <i>by</i> J. F. HERRABIN | 171 |
| 7 Forward to Socialism : A statement of approach and policy approved by the National Conference of the Socialist League, May 1934 | 193 |

I

DEMOCRACY—REAL OR SHAM?

By

SIR STAFFORD CRIPPS

THE SERIES OF FORUM LECTURES of the Socialist League which were delivered in the early months of 1934, and which are reproduced in this volume, were designed to elucidate some of the problems which might face different classes or sections of the community in the transition to Socialism.

The problems of that transition are many and call for a reasoned consideration. Only too often the individual finds himself embarrassed in making up his mind upon broad political issues because he is unable to appreciate the effect which any change will have upon himself or his class. Even where he is convinced of the general economic and social arguments in favour of the change, he is apt to hold back from any definite decision or action in favour of that change for fear that he himself may suffer unduly during the transition.

PROBLEMS OF THE SOCIALIST TRANSITION

The temptation then arises to hold on to what little of comfort or security he possesses, lest worse befall him, and in the result he joins himself to the forces of reaction and vested interests.

In his dilemma he falls an easy prey to the ever-ready assurances of the Capitalists that they are his best friends, and that if only he will wait all will come right. By these means he is persuaded to support the very party whose sole object is the perpetuation of the system that is responsible for all the evils and sufferings of the people.

The National Government is to-day seeking to engender in the minds of the people just such a false feeling of security, so as to turn their minds from the persistent evils of Capitalism. The urgency for change is as great to-day as ever it was. A mere recurrence of one of those cyclic waves of prosperity for the well-to-do, which are the inevitable outcome of Capitalism, must not be mistaken for the beginning, even, of a permanent cure of our social evils. A return to pre-war conditions cannot be the objective of anyone who has a care for the welfare of the people. Those very pre-war conditions, because of their injustices, hardships, and inequalities, were a great stimulant to

DEMOCRACY—REAL OR SHAM?

the protest of the working class in this country.

Sir Arthur Steel-Maitland, speaking in the House of Commons on the recent Budget proposals, made this statement : “ We are clearly getting over this slump, but unless something is done to prevent others, all the signs go to prove that slumps in the future will not be less but more acute than slumps have been in the past. If, therefore, nothing is done I make a present to the Honourable Gentleman who is going to speak after me [the writer] of the suggestion that the Capitalist system will then indeed be on its trial and will deserve to be defeated.” This is a remarkable admission from a candid Capitalist, and one that is undeniably true.

Time after time in the past recurrent booms and depressions in trade have been witnessed. Throughout them all the workers have suffered. Slum dwellings and the poor-law have been the daily experience of the less fortunate ; insecurity, low standards, and fear for the future the common lot of all. Every excess of luxury indulged in by the profit-earning class has been witnessed even in times of so-called depression, while the workers have seldom been in a position to provide even the elementary needs and comforts for their families.

PROBLEMS OF THE SOCIALIST TRANSITION

It is true that standards of living have risen considerably amongst all classes over the last half century, but that rise has done little or nothing to adjust the gross inequalities in the distribution of the national wealth, and is ridiculously small when compared to the increase in productive capacity that has been achieved over the same period through the work of our scientists. These have indeed created a revolution in the technique of production and mechanisation, but there has been no corresponding revolution in our economic or social system. The glut of products which they have made available has ultimately resulted, under Capitalism, in a necessity to lower the standards of living of the workers.

The special difficulties of the post-war period have served to emphasise and draw attention to some of our major social injustices. The hardships that have been forced upon millions of workers have at last made people realise that unemployment and laziness are not always synonymous. Yet we still treat the unemployed workers as if they were responsible for their own unemployment. We inflict upon them the indignity and harshness of the Means Test, which keeps them permanently at or below starvation level. We forget that the unemployed

DEMOCRACY—REAL OR SHAM?

fall into two classes—the rich unemployed who are kept by the community with every comfort and luxury, and the poor unemployed who suffer every kind of privation. Neither of these classes contribute any brain or hand work to the community—the rich because they are kept in affluence without effort, the poor because they are not permitted to have access to the means of production, and so are prevented from adding their quota to the productive effort of the country.

If now our industries are emerging from the depth of the depression, it is because we have made the workers by hand and brain suffer intolerably to achieve that revival. Few people realise that even in times of acute depression the profit-earner on *the average* does not do so badly. While wages were being reduced all round during the years 1931–33, the following average results were achieved by 562 companies of all classes issuing reports in the first quarter of each year, and having a total debenture and share capital of just under 900 millions.¹

AVERAGE RATES PAID

| | <i>on debenture capital</i> | <i>on preference capital</i> | <i>on ordinary capital</i> |
|------|---------------------------------|----------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| 1931 | 4·82 | 5·6 | 8·5 |
| 1932 | 4·80 | 4·9 | 8·7 |
| 1933 | 4·77 | 5·0 | 7·5 |

¹ *Economist*, May 1934.

PROBLEMS OF THE SOCIALIST TRANSITION

These figures show that although individual industrial units, and even groups of industrial units in some cases, made little or no return, yet, when all the surpluses were pooled, the results were highly satisfactory. A good high average rate of interest was being earned for money invested, while the labour investment of the worker was being rewarded by a niggardly allowance which in many cases hardly enabled him to keep body and soul together. The rationalisation—creation of unemployment—and low wages, encouraged by the Government, were no doubt partly responsible for the maintenance of the position of the profit-earner. Now the stress is temporarily relieved, it is the income-tax payers, especially the more well-to-do, who get a remission of tax amounting to 20 millions, while the wage-earner and salary-earner suffer a further increase of indirect taxation, and the unemployed receive a paltry 4 millions and the continuance of the Means Test.

But that is Capitalism.

It is rightly said that our present economic system demands such inequalities of treatment that the profit fund must be increased, even at the expense of the worker, if production is to continue.

DEMOCRACY—REAL OR SHAM?

No more damning indictment of the system could be made. If the experiences of the last hundred years are the necessary outcome of Capitalism, as I admit them to be, then it is indeed time that we changed the system.

Those who support and administer the system are in this dilemma : either the system itself is the cause of the injustices and sufferings, in which case it must be changed, or those who administer it have been inhuman and cruel, which I am certain they would not admit, and, indeed, I do not believe to be the fact.

The question we have to ask ourselves is whether we are going to be content with the prospect of recurrent booms for the rich gained by inflicting low standards upon the workers, which will in their turn be succeeded by fresh depressions out of which we shall again attempt to climb on the backs of the workers, as we always have done in the past.

It would be understandable that some might accept such a prospect if they were convinced that plenty for all was an impossibility. But, to-day, when our capacity for production is universally acknowledged to be so great that it is embarrassing, no one can rest content until the needs of every man, woman, and child in the country are adequately met.

PROBLEMS OF THE SOCIALIST TRANSITION

The workers themselves have shown the most exemplary patience, a patience that has been taken full advantage of by the vested interests for their own ends to perpetuate their own economic power. But ever since the great disillusionment of the world war a realisation has been growing in the minds of the workers that these things need not be. Nor is it only the workers by hand who are realising this fact. More and more the middle-class worker is having it borne home to him that Capitalism can only provide him with insecurity. The professional worker, especially the technician, is chafing at the frustration of effort and the waste of power that our present economic system forces upon him.

There are to-day many forces fermenting amongst workers of all classes. These forces may appear to be different in their nature and origin but the desire for some change is common to the great majority. That desire will never become effective until the workers are realist enough and courageous enough to face up to the facts. They must not allow themselves to be deluded into the belief that no effort on their part is necessary.

There are three common delusions which are so pleasant that we easily persuade

DEMOCRACY—REAL OR SHAM?

ourselves that they are not mere dreams but reality. The first is that prosperity lies around the corner ; that inevitably somehow or other we shall blunder upon the right road ; that no thought, planning, or drastic change is necessary. We have always managed to find a way through, it is said ; if we all stand together then we shall succeed, and all will be well. That is the attitude of the National Government ; it is steadily and swiftly guiding us into a fresh cataclysm internationally, while nationally it is merely a cloak for saving the Capitalists' power at all costs. The second delusion sounds comforting and humanitarian. It proceeds upon the basis that you can, with little effort and a certain amount of so-called common sense, reform or christianise Capitalism, so that with increasing benevolence it will turn itself into Socialism. This is a delightful picture painted in soft colours so as not to alarm the nervous elector. Its drawback is that Capitalism has never yet yielded to such treatment when it has been tried, and never will yield to it. To adapt the motto of a famous English family, one might well say of Capitalism, "What Capitalists have, Capitalists hold." When the profit-earners are prosperous by their own standards, they are willing to give concessions to the

workers, but if their prosperity shows signs of shrinking, the concessions are withdrawn. If the workers attempt to insist upon keeping their gains, every constitutional method is used to overcome them—if these methods fail, others, less pleasant, are utilised, as has been witnessed in Germany and other countries.

The easiest method for the Capitalist to adopt, within a Capitalist democracy such as our own, is to deceive and delude the electors into a belief that it is necessary to withdraw the concessions to “save the country,” or to invent some lie which will frighten them into opposing their own leaders. The Zinovieff Letter scare in 1924 and the Post Office Lie at the Election of 1931 are good instances of the latter tactics.

It is to be hoped that workers of all classes have by now learnt the very elementary lesson that their opponents are not the best persons to represent their interests ; that every time they entrust the Government to the Capitalists they only succeed in riveting Capitalism more firmly upon the country. If they desire to obtain justice and security for themselves, and do away with class privileges and class antagonism, they must unite to have their own representatives, their own political party, and their own leaders.

DEMOCRACY—REAL OR SHAM?

Reformism may appear to meet with moderate success while the Capitalists are prosperous ; the concessions are given to satisfy democracy and maintain its support for Capitalism. Such conditions ruled in the pre-war era of Capitalist democracy. But once reforms endanger the structure of the system, as they did during the years 1929-31 in this country, then they will be fought strenuously and defeated, if not within democracy itself, then by the aid of the overriding power of finance and industry.

The more difficult and critical the position of Capitalism becomes the more arbitrary and oppressive will be the methods adopted to stop the progress of reforms. Like any other great power, Capitalism will fight for its survival, and, as long as it is allowed to continue in the possession of all its great economic weapons, it must surely win.

The idea of planned Capitalism, which is in some political aspects linked closely with reformism, can perhaps hardly be classed as a delusion. If the profit-earning class are allowed unlimited power to control the economic life of the community for their own ends, then it is possible for them to plan Capitalism so as to obviate the inconvenience of interference

PROBLEMS OF THE SOCIALIST TRANSITION

from the workers and consumers. The corporate State is a method by which complete power is given to the Capitalist to produce that scarcity which will ensure him a share of the national wealth out of all proportion to his efforts, and which will enable him to enslave the workers by substituting for their freedom and right to combine a nominal and ineffective minority voice in the government of industry.

It enables Capitalism, too, to plan more effectively for war, as a solution of its international economic difficulties.

Any taint of freedom or democracy in a country is apt to make it difficult to persuade the workers, in advance, that they should allow themselves to be organised for mass slaughter to save profits. The corporate State obviates the difficulty by the suppression of all freedom and democracy.

The third delusion, which is current to-day more especially amongst the middle-class and professional workers, is that there exists a short cut to prosperity through some change of the monetary or credit system. "Get-rich-quick" credit schemes are almost as attractive to the unpolitically minded as a mine prospectus is said to be to a landlady. So long as economic power remains with the Capitalist, he is not

DEMOCRACY—REAL OR SHAM?

going to indulge in any system that will result in his losing that power. So long as he retains that power, he will skim the cream off any economic system, as he does off the system under which we suffer to-day.

These delusions derive great force from their comforting properties, and from the inherent dislike of many people for drastic change of any kind. Change means entering upon an unknown world, an adventure, and adventure spells risk. It is far easier to sit at home and dream of the "Castle in the air" than to go out into the hard world and win a safe home.

It is because of this attitude of mind that to-day the younger people tend to be antagonistic to the older. Adventure and action appeal to the young. They see the world—the post-war world—as it is, no fit place to start life in, and they are not afraid of attempting the change. They get restless when they are continually warned of the danger of enthusiasm and the need for caution. They become obsessed with the urgency for something better and something new; they do not want the same old system refurbished and painted up. They demand action, and, in their anxiety for action, they do not look too closely to see where that action will lead them. Thus they may

PROBLEMS OF THE SOCIALIST TRANSITION

become a prey to any adventurer who will dress himself up, paint a lurid portrait of the present and a glowing picture of the future, drill them, give them displays and uniforms, and promise them action. They wholly fail to observe in their keenness that "the adventure" in which they are called to partake, not only leaves untouched the basic evils of Capitalism, but is designed to give the Capitalist, whose pawns they are to be, an even greater strangle-hold over the workers. The promises that are held out are as empty and unreal as the promises of Hitler and his lieutenants ; they are the bait to lure you into the trap. Once the trap closes upon them, all their finest instincts and qualities will be turned to hatred and brutality for the suppression of their fellow workers. That was in part the tragedy of Germany, it may yet be the tragedy of England.

It is just this insistent desire for action that we should harness to the wheels of progress. We should not attempt to restrain it, but rather to direct it into the right channels, to give it a true objective. If this is to be done, the older generation must be prepared to give a lead to the younger generation.

A mere negative attitude is not sufficient. Restraint and discipline may be necessary, but

DEMOCRACY—REAL OR SHAM?

not the restraint that means prohibition of all creative action or discipline that entails forbidding all movement.

There are great latent forces for political progress in this country; if they are not directed into channels for Socialist action, they will be utilised to suppress the workers and to deprive the people of their freedom.

Just as the Capitalist will use the false emotion of an egotistical nationalism to stir up the war fever to assist him in the solution of his economic difficulties in the international sphere, so, too, in the national sphere he will use the same devices to further his own economic ends.

If democracy is to survive as a means of government, it must be made, not only the expression of old and middle age, but of youth too. The easy-going methods of the nineteenth century are no longer fit to cope with the urgent problems of the post-war twentieth-century world. It is not sufficient to have an unbalanced machine that can only operate within Capitalism. If we do really believe in democracy, then we must take the risks which democracy entails. To give it a permanent bias towards reaction is to make it ineffective at the very moment when its survival depends, above

PROBLEMS OF THE SOCIALIST TRANSITION

all things, on its power to respond quickly to the will of the people.

The solution of our problem to-day does not depend upon our maintaining intact the whole machinery of government as it has been handed down to us. It depends, on the contrary, on an ability to reorganise and rationalise that machinery before the mass of the people are persuaded to discard it in the mistaken belief that it can no longer serve their purpose.

There are many, who do not fully appreciate the dangers of the alternatives, who are only too willing to decry our parliamentary methods. They confuse the particular machine of government with the general form of the constitution. No one would suggest abandoning the use of the internal combustion engine because his motor-car was antiquated and out of date ; while maintaining the principle and general form of the motive power he would get a more up-to-date machine in which to utilise it. So in our political life the failure of the machine of democracy is no reason for abandoning the principles of democracy ; we can and must devise a better and more efficient machine to utilise the same fundamental motive power.

Current experience of the fate of peoples where the whole democratic principle has

DEMOCRACY—REAL OR SHAM?

been swept aside by reactionary dictatorships is so tragic that no one but a sadist could ever contemplate with equanimity such a fate for our own country. And yet if we allow apathy and indecision to control our political action the economic difficulties of Capitalism will force us into that very same position into which it has forced other nations in Europe.

It is idle to reiterate that "the sturdy independence of the Britisher will prevent such things happening in this country," unless we are prepared to translate that desire for liberty into action.

In the old days, before the mechanisation of armies and the creation of air forces, it was possible for the workers to make some effective protest against their own suppression. They could achieve such limited degree of freedom and liberty as the economic system permitted, but even then they could exercise no force strong enough to overcome the domination of the privileged classes unless in the most exceptional circumstances such as ruled in Russia during the war. To-day it is madness even to contemplate such a possibility save perhaps as the outcome of a world war.

If a party of violence is fighting the battle

PROBLEMS OF THE SOCIALIST TRANSITION

of the privileged classes, it can succeed, because power—economic and physical—is on its side. That is why Fascism has succeeded in so many countries to-day. But if the party of violence is for the workers, it is, in any but the most abnormal circumstances, bound to fail, for all the effective power is in the hands of its opponents.

The Conservative Party in this country is unlikely to suppress Fascism because it sees in it a likely ally in times of trouble.

The essential class nature of Fascism, its whole-hearted support of privilege and Capitalism, is proved, not only by an examination of its actions in Germany, Italy, and Japan, but also by its tactics. If in reality Fascism were concerned for liberty and a high standard of living for the workers, it would have no need to appeal to force and suppression. The workers in every country are in the majority ; the danger to Capitalism is that they should unite in conscious political action. That unity may be imperilled by a multiplicity of claims to their allegiance. What better than that the Capitalists should put forward Fascist demagogues with every kind of false promise on their lips and abiding loyalty to their Capitalist masters in their

DEMOCRACY—REAL OR SHAM?

hearts ; thus the workers may be deceived, their ranks split, and the Capitalists, having divided, can be certain of their conquest.

The workers have everything to gain by democracy, if it is made a reality, and everything to lose by following a political creed of violence.

If we could eliminate the personal factor of fear, so cunningly played upon by the Capitalist, it would be an easy task to win over the country to Socialism. The economic arguments and the humanitarian arguments are so overwhelming that they must convince.

To the worker who has nothing to lose and all to gain, the fear of loss during the transition may be slight, though the effect of the Post Office Lie in the Election of 1931 demonstrates how strong a factor personal fear may be even amongst the lowest-paid workers.

With the worker who owns his house and who has other personal possessions, and more especially with the middle-class and professional workers, the factor of fear will be more important.

Such persons desire, and are entitled, to know how they and their families will fare during the transition. It is necessary that we should be frank with them and explain our attitude in clear terms.

PROBLEMS OF THE SOCIALIST TRANSITION

The necessity for the "nationalisation" or "socialisation" of property does not arise from a sentimental desire that no one should own anything. The necessity is an economic one. Unless the control of the means of production is in the hands of the community it is impossible to plan for abundance. So long as every industrial and agricultural unit must individually return a profit to the owner, the one form of control possible is scarcity control. Goods cannot be produced to satisfy the needs of the people, but only so long as they return a profit to the owner of the means of production.

The economic laws of Socialism prohibit only that form of ownership that lies at the root of Capitalism—that is, the private ownership of the physical means of production. A house, furniture, books, or pictures are not means of production ; they are the final products of industry and craft. A factory, a coal mine, or land are, on the other hand, means of producing other articles for consumption. In order that the community may have planned abundance these latter must be in community ownership and under community control.

This class of property is seldom in the hands

DEMOCRACY—REAL OR SHAM?

of workers of any sort ; if they hold shares in a company it is only a few and by the way of the investment of savings. Safe custody of savings of this character could be as well provided for by the Government, as it is to-day in the Post Office Savings Bank, and Government and municipal loans.

It is the financial machine, the great industries, and agriculture that the people must own before they can carry out any plan.

The effect of socialisation, when it is carried through, will be to open out fresh opportunities for work of all kinds. A fuller education means more teachers ; a better health service, more doctors and nurses ; a higher standard of life, more technicians in every industry, architects, engineers, chemists, and others. A great war will be waged on poverty, disease, and ignorance, and in that war, as in other more terrible wars, we shall need to mobilise all the skill and intelligence the nation possesses. There will at last be that great opportunity for the skilled and trained worker to make full use of his skill and training that Capitalism has always denied him.

It will not be until the spread of education has filled all these grades of skilled workers to overflowing—which is bound to take many

PROBLEMS OF THE SOCIALIST TRANSITION

years with even the most rapid advance—that an approach to the equal distribution of wealth will be made. If the share of national wealth is planned, directly or indirectly, on the individual and social value of the worker—as it must be—then the more skilled workers, including those of the middle and professional classes, will receive a greater share than the unskilled.

They certainly will not lose their *personal* property or their savings, and once it becomes possible to plan for abundance their standard should certainly not be lower than at present. Above all they will have helped to earn, what is the most vital of the demands of all the workers, security of their share of the national wealth for themselves and their children.

There are some who argue that the middle and professional classes desire to preserve their privileges. They wish to have the right to things that others cannot get, such as superior education for their children or extended holidays and opportunities of foreign travel. This may no doubt be true of some such workers, but by no means all. Those who adopt this dog-in-the-manger attitude must choose for themselves and their children between the chance of such comparative affluence under Capitalism, gained at the cost of their fellow workers,

DEMOCRACY—REAL OR SHAM?

and the certainty of a fair share of more abundant national wealth under Socialism, coupled with a greater scope for their powers. A share which, if only they give their help towards the success of a Socialist system, will enable them in common with other workers to enjoy all those amenities which they now look upon as privileges. It may be pleasant for those without a conscience to pride themselves on their temporary superiority, but I doubt whether it repays them for the hours of extreme anxiety which so often come upon them with the loss of a job, or illness.

Once this complex of personal fear is dispelled it should be easy to get the support of the workers for the policy of planned abundance.

Its carrying through will not be easy. The persons that oppose, though numerically small, will, at the moment of the transfer of political power, be in possession of all the economic power. They will own and control the financial and industrial institutions of the country.

The Capitalists realise that, if they are permitted to do so, they can create such difficulties for a Socialist Government that it cannot survive. It is certainly to be anticipated that there will be a financial crisis directly such a Government is chosen—not because the financial and

PROBLEMS OF THE SOCIALIST TRANSITION

economic policy of the new régime will create a critical situation, but because those who hold the financial and economic power will see to it that a crisis is created as a means of defeating the Government by extra-parliamentary power. And yet it is not the few privileged individuals alone who constitute the community ; they are not Britain, however much they may think that they are !

When a Socialist Government has been duly elected by democratic forms it will have every constitutional right to carry out the will of the electorate. If those who hold the economic power are so unpatriotic as to put their own interests before those of the country, as no doubt some of them will be, they must be dealt with as public enemies. The whole theory of the financial crisis is based on the refusal of the rich to accept the decision of the people. It is sheer dishonesty for them to profess support of democracy and at the same time to threaten, if they do not have their own way, to make the country suffer for it. It is the sort of " patriotism " that many members of the Conservative Party showed at the time of the Ulster Rebellion, when they were prepared to fight their own country because politically they had failed to get their own way.

DEMOCRACY—REAL OR SHAM?

The same spirit has been shown in the attempt to reform the House of Lords, a determination, not to make our constitution more democratic, but to make it impossible for the privilege of the ruling class to be overcome. A device by which, when the people desire and decide upon a complete economic change, it can be prevented by the comparatively small class of vested interests who would suffer loss of power by the change.

This spirit of unprincipled opposition can only be dealt with by firm measures and a determined policy. Compromise will encourage the privileged class to persist in their opposition; it will not persuade them to render up their economic power. They must be faced up to, to be beaten. If the people have the determination, courage, and self-confidence to give their unstinted support to their own party, and their own leaders, they can succeed.

They will demand, and rightly demand, the use of every constitutional power that exists; armed with these the change can be made democratically. If others choose to adopt revolutionary and unconstitutional methods of opposition they must expect to be dealt with as revolutionaries.

PROBLEMS OF THE SOCIALIST TRANSITION

The change is not impossible of accomplishment, it is only lack of courage and initiative that will cause it to fail, if fail it does.

The traditional belief that only the " Ruling Class " are capable of ruling dies hard. There are still those, and many of them, who give their political support to persons whom they would at once recognise in the economic field as their opponents.

A manufacturer who, as an employer, is recognised instantly as the opponent of the working class, is apt to be hailed, as he steps on to the political platform, as the working-man's friend. He is accepted at his own value without any critical examination of his claim. A vote for cheap beer (which allows the brewers to make a bigger profit), or extra facilities for betting (which provides another way of depriving the worker of some of his means of life), is claimed as an act of benevolence to the working class, and so the game of deception proceeds.

It is not so long since that the miners elected to Parliament, as their representatives, coal owners with whom they were in constant antagonism in the industrial field. It at last dawned upon them that the men who fought them over their wages and conditions of labour, at every stage of their slow advance, could

DEMOCRACY—REAL OR SHAM?

hardly be the best persons to represent their interests in Parliament, so they elected their own representatives.

It will not be until the workers by hand and brain safeguard themselves by insisting upon the election of their own representatives that they will gain that political power which is an essential precursor to economic power.

To do this, two things are required: instruction and leadership. The Socialist League has attempted, in its Forum Lectures, to assist in providing for the former; the latter must come from the rank and file of the Labour movement itself, and must be of such a temper that it can lead with confidence and courage.

II

THE WORKING-CLASS MOVEMENT AND THE TRANSITION TO SOCIALISM

By

G. D. H. COLE

WE SOCIALISTS have insisted again and again that Socialism can come into being only by the collective action of the working class. We do not mean by this either that no one who is not a workman can help to bring Socialism about, or that Socialism cannot be achieved until all, or even the majority, of the workers have become conscious Socialists. What we do mean is that the emancipation of the workers and the establishment of a classless society will never come from above, but only as the result of the organised power of the working class toppling over the Capitalist system from below. The coming of Socialism can be achieved neither by a "palace revolution" nor by a merely parliamentary victory in which one party replaces another in office without a

PROBLEMS OF THE SOCIALIST TRANSITION

change of system ; it involves the direct and formidable class action of the workers in the mass.

When a country is not at war, class action of this sort can come only through the organised working-class movement. Under war conditions, such as existed in Russia in 1917, the army, necessarily composed mainly of workers and peasants, may play a leading part in a revolution, though even in such circumstances it is difficult for the army to act unless there is an organised working-class movement to act with it and give form and direction to its activity. But in a nation at peace, and above all if that nation has a professional and not a conscript army, the soldiers are most unlikely to play the dominant revolutionary rôle. They may join the revolution as it advances, or they may be used to put it down. They will not themselves initiate or lead a revolutionary movement—at any rate on the Socialist side.

In this discussion I propose to leave aside what might happen if this country became involved in another European War, and that war gave rise to conditions that provided the opportunity for a Socialist revolution. For I want to speak, not about hypotheses, but about present facts and present requirements of

THE WORKING-CLASS MOVEMENT

Socialist policy. Taking things as they are, and leaving aside the prospect that a new war would make them radically different, I want to ask where, in the struggle for Socialism, the working-class movement comes in as an organised movement based partly upon the Trade Unions, partly, but to a much less extent, on Consumers' Co-operation, and partly on the political organisation of the Labour Party and the Socialist Societies.

It is one thing to say that Socialism can come only by the action of the workers themselves, and another to maintain that it can come only by the authorised action of the organised working-class movement. For the workers can act, as spontaneous strikes have shown throughout the history of Trade Unionism, and as more than one revolution has made plain, without the endorsement and even against the orders of the recognised leaders of the political and industrial movement. In a condition of emergency, the workers have shown themselves again and again capable of improvising organisations of their own, and of taking action under leaders thrown up suddenly by the sudden need. I need only mention the great Nine Hours Movement of the engineers in 1872, the transport strikes in 1911,

PROBLEMS OF THE SOCIALIST TRANSITION

the May strikes organised by the shop stewards in the munition factories in 1917, and the Eight Hour strikes of 1919, as obvious examples of this power. Such leadership as there was in the General Strike of 1926 came far more from improvised local councils of action than from the official movement.

In times of revolution this is even plainer. In Russia in 1917, in Germany in 1918, and in many earlier examples, the revolutionary activity had its centre not in the established Trade Union machine or in the parliamentary representation of the workers, but in a spontaneous local movement which, for the most part, created its own leadership as it advanced. The established leaders did not create the revolutionary movement. They either took hold of it when it was there, like Lenin, or fled dismayed before it, or even used every effort and artifice to put it down. Revolutions come from the mass, and cannot come at all, as real revolutions, unless the mass sets itself spontaneously in motion to make them. Then, indeed, they can be made or marred by the success or failure of leaders in imposing discipline and direction upon the mass. But the mass must move of itself, or the revolutionary situation cannot arise.

THE WORKING-CLASS MOVEMENT

We, however, are trying to get Socialism in this country without a revolution, in the sense in which the word "revolution" has just been used. Our aim is to begin the positive advance to Socialism by winning a parliamentary victory ; to place a strong Socialist Government in authority by constitutional means ; and thereafter to advance speedily to Socialism not by a violent seizure of power, but by a series of drastic legislative and administrative acts. We are hoping, unless our opponents take up arms against us despite the legality of our proceedings, to accomplish the transition to Socialism without civil war ; and we are therefore relying on the leadership of the regularly established working class and Socialist bodies to take charge of the movement and to play the dominant part in seeing it through.

Probably not one of us feels by any means sure that this is how things will actually turn out. There are so many "ifs" about it. First, there is the great "if" of war ; for, as we saw in 1914, war would be likely to disarm the official movement and compel a resort to spontaneous organisation and unofficial leadership. Secondly, there is the "if" of the constitution ; for we may find, before we get our

PROBLEMS OF THE SOCIALIST TRANSITION

chance, the constitution so refashioned as a bulwark against Socialism as to remove the possibility of a lawful transition. Thirdly, there is the big "if" of counter-revolution; for who among us is prepared to prophesy that the possessing classes will not invoke armed force as a means of resisting our peaceable endeavours?

With these "ifs" in mind, we must be prepared at any time to alter our strategy in face of a change in the situation with which we have to deal. But for the present we may assume that we are trying to make the great change to Socialism by peaceful and constitutional methods, and that, if anyone makes the appeal to violence, there will be no question of our making it unless and until the road to peaceful change has been decisively blocked by our antagonists, or violence actually employed against our peaceful advance. Let us be prepared to meet violence by appropriate means; for we have, I hope, no mind to share the fate of our fellow Socialists in Italy and Germany. But let us on no account provoke violence, or do anything on our side that will make the appeal to violence unavoidable.

Let us, then, discuss here and now not what is to happen if a number of unpleasing

THE WORKING-CLASS MOVEMENT

possibilities which are still only possibilities become actual, but what part the working-class movement is called upon to play in the struggle for Socialism under the conditions which now exist.

First, then, what are the special characteristics of the working-class movement in Great Britain? The first thing that it is vital to realise about it is that British Trade Unionism and British Co-operation are both very long-established institutions. In ten years' time the Rochdale Pioneers will be celebrating their centenary; and Consumers' Co-operation, though it has grown enormously, has not radically changed its character or policy since 1844. We are celebrating this very year the centenary of the Tolpuddle Martyrs; and Trade Unionism was widespread and well established in many trades long before Robert Owen founded the Grand National Consolidated Trades Union in 1833. Trade Unionism, of course, has changed far more than Co-operation in the past hundred years; but at least as early as 1850 it began to take on characteristics which it still possesses to-day. The Amalgamated Society of Engineers, founded in 1851, was not so very different from the Amalgamated Engineering Union of

PROBLEMS OF THE SOCIALIST TRANSITION

to-day ; and already in the eighteen-fifties the cotton operatives and the miners had unions not unlike those which they have at present. The cotton workers began then to work out the methods of collective bargaining which led up to their " standard lists " ; and the miners and iron and steel workers in the following decade were already starting to apply their traditional technique of the conciliation board. It is often said that the less skilled came effectively into the Trade Union movement, bringing with them a new policy of social legislation, only in 1889 ; and it is true that the basis of the Trade Union movement was permanently broadened by the events of that and the following years. But miners and textile operatives had been pressing, not without success, for industrial legislation for decades before the coming of the modern Socialist movement ; and the eighteen-eighties were by no means the first attempt to organise the less skilled. Owen had done it in 1834 ; and it had been done again by Joseph Arch and others in the early 'seventies. British Trade Unionism is old, and has a long continuous tradition—far longer and more continuous than the tradition of any Continental movement. The same is true of Consumers' Co-operation, compared

THE WORKING-CLASS MOVEMENT

with which all foreign Co-operative movements are mere infants.

This long continuous tradition has affected deeply the political as well as the industrial structure of the British working-class movement. For whereas, in most other countries, Socialists have created political parties wholly independent of the Trade Unions, and have thereafter set to work, successfully or unsuccessfully, to co-ordinate the Trade Unions under Socialist influence, in Great Britain working-class political action has been based from the first on the Trade Unions as organised bodies. The Trade Unions took the lead in agitating for the Reform Act of 1867 ; and, when that Act had given the urban workers the vote, the Trade Unions formed the Labour Representation League of 1869 in order to secure the return of working-class candidates to Parliament. The L.R.L., to be sure, died out in the 'eighties, and contented itself with getting a few working men returned to sit as Liberals in the House of Commons. It was not a Socialist body ; nor did it attempt to create an independent working-class party, for which there could indeed be no place until the working-class movement was ready to absorb a new social gospel of its own. But the L.R.L.

PROBLEMS OF THE SOCIALIST TRANSITION

started the tradition that in Great Britain working-class political, as well as industrial, action should be based on the Trade Unions ; and when the I.L.P., under Keir Hardie's leadership, set out on the first serious attempt to create an independent working-class party, its essential method was to bring the Trade Unions back into politics, this time as the allies of the tiny group of Socialists who hoped to be influential enough to impress their policy and leadership upon the larger movement. The Labour Representation Committee of 1900, which grew into the Labour Party of 1906, realised Keir Hardie's aspiration of the " Labour Alliance " ; and the British working class found itself equipped with a party within which the Socialist tail was attempting to wag the Trade Union dog.

Time and again, Socialists of varying colours have lamented over this peculiar structure. Pink intellectuals have denounced a Trade Union dictation which makes it difficult for them to get as much credit in the party as they think they should receive. Red intellectuals have inveighed against the non-Socialist inertness of the Trade Union machine, and pined for a party, even a far smaller party, of far-thinking Socialists who could appeal to the

THE WORKING-CLASS MOVEMENT

“rank and file” over the Trade Union leaders’ heads. Local Labour Parties have complained that the domination of the Trade Unions over-centralises the party, and gives the ordinary individual members far too little control over its policy. And, finally, Communists have lamented the fact that the Trade Union basis of the Labour Party makes it far harder to split than the Continental parties, and thus solidifies the hold of reaction over the working class.

For good and ill alike, this Communist lament comes nearest to touching the spot. For undoubtedly the Trade Union foundation on which the Labour Party rests does give it an imperturbable solidity which is lacking in parties formed on a basis of individual membership alone. Such parties can split fairly easily in response to cleavages of opinion and policy among their members. But Trade Unionists are very well aware, as a matter that directly affects their bread and butter, that a Trade Union is not of much use unless it can speak effectively for the body of workers whom it sets out to represent, and that two rival and competing Unions in a trade or industry have very much less than half the bargaining strength of a single and united society.

Because of this consciousness, the political

PROBLEMS OF THE SOCIALIST TRANSITION

movement has no such tendency as exists in France to split up into warring doctrinal groups. Because of this consciousness, British Communism has been able to make but little headway ; for in declaring war upon the Labour Party it was also perforce declaring war on the Trade Unions. Because of this consciousness, the prominent leaders who broke away from the party in 1931 carried with them, despite their personal prestige, nothing that mattered, nothing that was not better lost. For the same reason, when Sir Oswald Mosley broke away on what seemed then to be the left of the party, he was amazed to find himself utterly alone, or in the company only of a handful of unstable nonentities. More recently still, Mr. Maxton's personal popularity, and the widespread sympathy felt with many of his criticisms of official Labour Party leadership, failed to save the I.L.P. from futility and isolation when it broke away from the main body of the movement. Politically, as well as industrially, the British Labour movement has the quality of sticking together.

This is a quality of inestimable value—on one condition. That condition is that it shall stick together so as to advance the Socialist cause, and not so as to stand in its way. But it

THE WORKING-CLASS MOVEMENT

can do this only if the policy of the Trade Unions, on which it rests, is, or at least can be developed into, a Socialist policy. When, in face of the miserable collapse of 1931, the Trade Unions stood firm, and the movement emerged from the crisis with the loss only of some leaders who had ceased to be Socialists—or had never been Socialists at all—and of the majority of its parliamentary seats, there were some who saw in the crisis the opportunity for a Socialist re-birth of the whole movement. To a certain extent they were right ; for since 1931 the active membership of the party, though not the greater part of its official leadership, has moved distinctly to the left. But Trade Unionism itself, though it has denounced the Means Test and the National Government, has seemed in its industrial policy to be moving not to the left but to the right. Certainly it has made, officially, no move to place itself at the head of the agitation among the unemployed, or to use its influence to embarrass the National Government by an aggressive industrial policy.

The truth is that Trade Unionism takes its colour from current economic conditions. It is most menacing when employment is plentiful and when employers, able to make high profits, have no mind to see their factories closed down.

PROBLEMS OF THE SOCIALIST TRANSITION

At such times the air becomes thick with Trade Union demands, with strikes and threats to strike, with news of Trade Union victories. Workers flock into the Unions ; for it is far easier to realise the benefits of Trade Unionism when it gets twopence an hour added to wages than when it painfully and ingloriously gets a reduction of twopence modified to one of a penny. Even in prosperous times the leaders often hold the workers back ; for they are tied down by collective agreements, and intent to secure the observance of formalities which may serve them in good stead when the bad times return. But, given good trade, Trade Unionism always advances towards a more militant policy ; and more militant industrial action brings with it a more Socialist attitude.

On the other hand, in bad times the power of the Trade Unions sadly wanes. In many industries, employers would as soon have their works closed as not. Strikes become a menace only to the strikers. An admirable opportunity occurs for weeding out, by selective dismissals, the more troublesome " agitators " from the factories. Everyone who has a job wants to keep it ; and the workless, until they become hopeless, are less intent on agitation than on finding work. If, moreover, bad trade comes at

THE WORKING-CLASS MOVEMENT

a time when there are large opportunities for technical change, resulting in the displacement of men by machines and of skilled workers by less skilled workers, the Trade Unions are further weakened, both because the displaced labour swells the ranks of the unemployed, and because the main strength of the movement lies among the more skilled workers. If, over and above all this, a shift from old to new industries is going on, Trade Union power is lessened even more ; for it is highly concentrated in the older basic industries, and new industries and services that grow up in time of depression often find little difficulty in keeping the Trade Unions firmly outside their factory gates. The strength of Trade Unionism rots away in the old industrial towns which are the main centres of depression. The new industries which flourish even through the bad times contribute little to its influence.

Under these conditions, no wonder Trade Union policy is apt to swing away to the right. The Trade Union leaders have no mind to provoke conflicts in which they are certain to be worsted. They want to patch things up with the employers, and to play a waiting game till better times return. This even makes them timorous of attempting to place themselves at

PROBLEMS OF THE SOCIALIST TRANSITION

the head of the unemployed, save through the political party and by way of a purely political agitation. For the unemployed, if organised, are apt to be troublesome. The Unions can perhaps afford to wait: the unemployed, especially those who have been out of work for long, feel that something ought to be done for them at once, and not merely at that uncertain future date when Labour becomes a majority, and that majority is in a mood to execute a Socialist policy. The unemployed are apt to seem too inflammable material for Trade Unionism to touch officially, unless it must. They are left to themselves, or to the Communists, until at last the Unions realise that it is their sacred duty to save the unemployed from Communist machinations. And then it is apt to be too late.

It is easy enough to understand this mood of the Trade Union leaders—the mood of the “Mond-Turner” conferences and of the General Council’s recent report. Indeed, this mood had come upon the Unions well before the slump—born out of the failure and muddle of the General Strike. Trade Unionism was defeated and in retreat long before 1931, though fortunately the retreat was orderly, and it had been able to draw the main part of its

THE WORKING-CLASS MOVEMENT

forces off intact. The slump has only prevented it from making any attempt to resume the offensive, or to regain the disputed ground. There were twice as many Trade Unionists in 1920 as there are to-day. Let us remember that when we criticise the Unions for not adopting a more forward industrial policy.

To a certain extent, enforced inaction in the industrial field might be expected to make for a more advanced political policy, by making the Unions eager to invoke the political power of the workers to redress their industrial weakness. To a certain extent it has had this effect, especially among the miners and textile workers. But it is difficult in practice for the leaders to pursue a conciliatory industrial policy towards the employers, and at the same time to breathe political fury. For one thing, the employers will not be slow to ask them which they really mean, and to increase the industrial pressure if they think they can by that means enforce a more moderate political attitude. Moreover, it is not easy psychologically to be a moderate in one field and an extremist in another, or to combine the propagandist advocacy of political class warfare and of industrial peace. Nor are the ordinary Trade Union members immune from similar

influences. Trade Union meetings are dull affairs when the Union policy is to lie low ; and Trade Union organising work in the workshops becomes a good deal more difficult when it involves the risk of the sack for the man who makes himself too prominent.

Apart from this, it is beyond doubt that the present technical development of industry is lessening the power of Trade Unionism in its present form. Craft skill comes to count for less, and a more easily acquired and more readily transferable machine dexterity to be more in demand. The new industries grow up in areas remote from the older centres of Trade Union strength, and use a larger proportion of unskilled and of women's labour. The old limited solidarity of the fellow craftsmen is weakened, and is not at present replaced by a new solidarity on the wider basis of class. The number of non-manual workers increases ; and these workers are difficult to organise, timid in action, and inclined to be snobbish in outlook. The employers do their best to keep them apart from the manual workers, and to foster their sense of social superiority. The most class-conscious sections of the Trade Union movement find themselves largely isolated in depressed areas, where there is no scope for

THE WORKING-CLASS MOVEMENT

aggressive industrial action. Labour conquers the municipal government in these areas, only to find itself helpless, save in small matters, against the strong hand of the central Government.

Clearly the appropriate answer to these changed conditions is a new Trade Union strategy. The day of isolated craft action is gone ; and the craft union spirit needs to be superseded by a new Unionism based on class solidarity, requiring a new form of Trade Union organisation. But this is not easy to bring about. For each Union, forced to adopt a defensive attitude, is more inclined to cling to what it has and knows than to embark upon new adventures ; and there is neither money nor energy to spare for launching out upon new plans of organisation. The Trade Unions hang on, in hope of better times ; and the militancy that exists among a small minority, finding no outlet through the official movement, is forced to look elsewhere. It dissipates itself in Minority Movements, Unemployed Committees, and other bodies under Communist influence, which remain impotent because they are detached from the main body of the workers, and engaged more in rebelling against the official leadership than in preparing the way for Socialism.

PROBLEMS OF THE SOCIALIST TRANSITION

I am well aware that when anyone who is not a Trade Unionist ventures to offer suggestions about Trade Union organisation he must expect to be told off as an interfering busybody who had better keep off the grass. But, having been a Socialist busybody, not without Trade Union contacts, for over twenty years, I am too seasoned to be deterred by the prospect of a wiggling. I shall therefore say bluntly that Trade Unionism needs reorganising from top to bottom if it is to be, under the present conditions, not a diminishing, but an advancing power. It needs above all to realise that the old barriers, not only between crafts, but also between industries, are being broken down. It needs to realise that the new technique of collective bargaining will have to deal, not only with standard rates of wages and hours of labour, but also to a constantly increasing extent with matters that will have to be tackled workshop by workshop, and firm by firm, because they arise out of the different steps taken in each establishment towards the mechanisation and rationalisation of the labour process. It needs to realise that the day is past for sectional monopolies of labour on a craft basis, and that Trade Unionism can be a power only to the extent to which it can build up a

THE WORKING-CLASS MOVEMENT

monopoly co-extensive with the entire working class.

I do not suggest that these developments are not seen, or that the Trade Unions are unconscious of the new needs to which they are giving rise. But to be conscious of a need is not the same thing as to meet it ; and I can see no sign that Trade Unionism is effectively adapting its machinery to the requirements of the future. The amalgamation of Trade Unions, instead of proceeding faster than ever, has slowed down, and almost ceased. Workshop organisation has been allowed to die away under the influence of the depression. Each Trade Union has retired into itself, and is trying to meet its own problems instead of acting on the evident truth that these problems are now capable of solution only on inclusive class lines. Worst of all, the unemployed have been allowed to slip away from the Trade Unions ; and hardly anything is being done to build up a sense of loyalty to the industrial movement among the adolescent workers.

Of course, I know these tasks are difficult, and the Trade Unions have but scanty resources for attempting them. But are the resources which do exist being effectively used ? Let me sketch out very briefly what I should

PROBLEMS OF THE SOCIALIST TRANSITION

like to see the Trade Union movement—not merely each particular Union, but the movement as a whole—setting out to do.

In the first place, I want to see a decisive move to bring the unemployed back into the movement. This involves several things. First, there ought to be in every place, under the auspices of the Trades Council, an unemployed workers' organisation, with a very small subscription, to which a vigorous effort should be made to get every unemployed worker to belong, whether he is or has been a Trade Unionist or not. This organisation ought to have decent club-rooms, equipped with wireless, gymnastic apparatus, boxing gloves, and so on, but also with outfits for boot-repairing, simple carpentering, and similar types of work. There ought to be regular entertainments there, and also lectures and classes for those who want them. Special provision ought to be made for young unemployed workers, and for women as well as men. The unemployed organisations ought to organise games and outdoor as well as indoor recreations, including matches and outings to visit similar organisations within reasonable distance.

But—and here I come to the vital point—the unemployed centre ought to be a centre of

THE WORKING-CLASS MOVEMENT

agitation as well as recreation. The Trades Council, representing employed and unemployed together, ought to make itself responsible for a constant agitation for better treatment. It ought to be for ever besieging an unsympathetic Local Authority, not only over the Means Test, but over every question that constitutes a local grievance—schools, housing, rents, rights of public meeting, any and every delinquency of the Government, or the Local Authority, or any other body that can be shot at. Instead of damping down the unemployed agitation for fear of the Communists, the Trade Unions locally ought to be leading it ; and their executives and the General Council ought to be helping and encouraging them to lead it.

All this, I shall be told, would cost far too much. It would cost money, I agree ; but it would be money that would speedily come back to the workers as a result of the increased power of the movement. Moreover, it need not cost so much as the critics are apt to make out. The unemployed should be helped to build their own halls, even if they be but shanties, to do their own work to the fullest possible extent ; and the hat should be sent round shamelessly among local comrades who are better off than the rest. Once get the thing started, with the

full backing of the movement behind it, and the money will be found somehow. For, strange as it may seem, money will be given more easily to the unemployed if they make themselves a nuisance than if they earn the praises of the rich for their exemplary patience.

That is one thing. Some of it is being done already, in some places. But no one can pretend that the Trade Union movement as a whole has yet made any attempt to put its weight behind this sort of activity. It has been left to sporadic local effort, when it should have been recognised as the essential task of the entire Trade Union organisation.

Next I want to see the Trade Unions band themselves together for a concerted campaign to bring in the unorganised workers, especially in the new scattered industries. For such a campaign to succeed, two things are essential : first, that it should be a sustained and continuous effort, and not merely a round of propaganda meetings, and secondly, that there should be no uncertainty or conflict about the Union which people are being asked to join. The first step, therefore, is to create a Union which can appeal directly to all the workers for whom no obvious special craft society exists. This involves the amalgamation

THE WORKING-CLASS MOVEMENT

of the Transport and General Workers' Union with the National Union of General Workers, and the recognition of the combined Union as the body through which the recruiting campaign is to be chiefly conducted. An effort should be made further to get as many small Unions as possible to merge themselves in the new society, which should be given full authority to recruit all workers, subject to arrangements for subsequent transfer in approved cases to other societies which could establish a valid claim. But there must be no nonsense about recognising the claim of every Union, no matter how unrepresentative it may be, to have all workers for whom it professes to cater transferred to it. On the contrary, superfluous Unions must be told bluntly to amalgamate with the new general Union, or with some large Union in the industry to which they belong. The time has come to handle at length, courageously and firmly, this problem of overlapping and sectionalism in the Trade Union movement. Even so, it is bound to take a long time to straighten out. But undoubtedly the first step should be to create a single powerful society with a plain authorisation to go out and enrol the workers in the unorganised trades, and especially in the new and developing

industries. A Union of this sort would, of course, have to divide itself into sections for administrative and bargaining convenience ; but it ought to be one united body, with a common fund and a common card of membership.

Both in this Union, and in others, I am convinced that organisation ought to be far less by craft, or by locality of residence, than by workshop or factory. The works branch, or its equivalent, is the correct unit of organisation for a fighting Trade Unionism, and above all for the furtherance of an active policy of workshop control. Through such a form of organisation the shop stewards' movement can be re-created, not merely in the older industries, but in the new as well. We need an organisation like the pit lodge among the miners ; and I believe that in every large establishment there ought to be a full-time servant of the workers, corresponding to the colliery check-weighman and possessing similar immunity. We must build up the new Trade Unionism in the factories, making the District Committee an assembly of factory delegates, in direct and constant touch with what is happening in each separate workshop.

A Trade Union movement organised on these lines will naturally be far more political than

THE WORKING-CLASS MOVEMENT

Trade Unionism is to-day. Resting on a class basis, it will be directly concerned with the demand for political as well as economic remedies. Through the Trades Councils it will be in close touch with the unemployed organisations, and will take part with them in the work of local agitation. It will dominate the Local Labour Party, and send its delegates up to the Labour Party Conference by that means as well as through the national Trade Unions. And it will see to it that the demand for workers' control, which it will be actively pushing in the workshops of its own locality, gets a proper place in the socialisation schemes planned by the politicians for the use of the next Labour Government.

But let us not forget that there exists almost everywhere, side by side with the Trades Councils and Local Labour Parties, another sort of working-class organisation—the local Co-operative Society. Active Socialists are constantly complaining, with pained surprise, that the Co-operative movement is not sufficiently Socialist. What do they expect? Running a store for the sale of groceries and other goods of ordinary consumption is a professional job; and it is quite out of the question to expect the great majority of the purchasers of

PROBLEMS OF THE SOCIALIST TRANSITION

these goods to take much interest in it. Co-operative meetings are apt to be dull, except when there is an argument about the dividend ; and there is no stimulus to interest and enthusiasm, such as the Trade Unionist gets when his Union becomes involved in a trade dispute.

Co-operation throws to the top useful people who like doing dull, useful jobs in a dull, useful way. There are no fireworks about it ; and it does not appeal to the "left wing" mind. Moreover, Co-operative storekeeping has to be carried on in competition with private capitalist trade ; and managers and committee-men who spend their lives competing with the local grocer are apt to assimilate something of his mentality. Nothing can make the Co-operative routine exciting ; and, if it were exciting, the Co-operative movement would hardly be the commercial success that it is.

Nevertheless, though Co-operation will never be in the Socialist vanguard, it has to be enlisted in the Socialist commissariat. Active Trade Unionists and Socialists ought to occupy the key positions in the local Co-operative Societies, and to drive out the Tories and Liberals who still infest too many Co-operative

THE WORKING-CLASS MOVEMENT

Committees. They ought to bring the Co-operative movement into Socialist politics, not half-heartedly as now, but with all its forces. They ought to ensure the readiness of the Co-operative Societies, not only to help in strikes, but also to play their part in the day-to-day work of agitation, especially in joining forces with the Trades Councils to organise and meet the needs of the unemployed. It is our business, as Socialists, to carry Socialism vigorously into the Co-operative Societies, and to make the Co-operative membership, even against the will of its leaders, rub sides daily with the class struggle.

This will not be easy ; nor shall we be wholly successful in it. But it will be excellent and fruitful propaganda. It will end, before long, that absurd farce of a separate Co-operative Party, with a separate programme and organisation from the Labour Party, but no really separate existence or activity. We have to bring the Co-operative Societies right into the Labour Party, as constituent units in it in the same way as the Trade Unions ; and the National Government, by taxing Co-operative trade, has gone out of its way to present us with an opportunity.

But, it may be asked, is there not a conflict

PROBLEMS OF THE SOCIALIST TRANSITION

between the Socialist and the Co-operative objective? Do not Socialists stand for nationalising or municipalising everything, while Co-operators look forward to a Co-operative Commonwealth in which everything will be run by independent associations of consumers? Not a bit of it. There is nothing sacred about nationalisation or municipalisation. What we Socialists want is workers' control, in the sense of control by the workers for the workers, with no capitalists to cream off the surplus value. We do not care whether workers' control is achieved by State ownership or by Co-operative ownership, provided that it is achieved. Nor does any rational Co-operator really believe in a Co-operative Commonwealth in which everything will be run under the auspices of Consumers' Societies. Consumers' Co-operation is a most valuable social movement, and will have its sphere greatly enlarged when Socialism gets to power. But no one in his senses wants either the railways run by a Consumers' Co-operative Society, or the business of selling groceries taken away from the Co-operative Societies and handed over to the State. We may argue about where precisely the line should be drawn ; but that is a matter of expediency, on which it will not be difficult to

THE WORKING-CLASS MOVEMENT

reach an agreement, if only Socialists will be at the pains of pulling their weight in the Co-operative movement, and if only Co-operators will come in and pull their weight in the Labour Party.

I have spoken of the Trade Unions and of the Co-operative movement, and of both in relation to the Labour Party. What, finally, of the organised Socialists, and especially, what of the Socialist League? There are some who hold that neither the League nor any other Socialist Society ought to exist, and that we should all be better occupied in using our energies as members of the Labour Party than in organising a special society devoted to the propaganda of Socialism. There would be more force in the suggestion if it were not for the fact that, man for man and woman for woman, the members of the Socialist League are pulling their weight in the Labour Party—and a good deal more than their weight if numbers are to be the test. There is, indeed, in societies like ours the constant danger that we may become too obsessed with our own organisation and too wrapped up in ourselves and so degenerate into a clique.

There is the danger that we may become a home for straying intellectuals, like the Fabian

PROBLEMS OF THE SOCIALIST TRANSITION

Society, or for elderly and disillusioned Trade Union officials, like the S.D.F., or for disgruntled Socialists like the I.L.P. There is a danger that we may become a mutual admiration society, or grow so conscious of our own superior virtue that we cannot be content with anything less than a sectarian party of our own. There are all sorts of dangers ; but so far, I am glad to say, the Socialist League appears to have kept clear of them. I do not mean that it is perfect, or that it is safe. But I do mean that it is sound so far, hopefully and usefully sound. Perhaps it is still too young to have acquired even the vices of adolescence.

Of this I am convinced. There must be, within the Labour Party and as an integral part of it, an organised body of thorough-going conscious Socialists. This is indispensable ; for the Trade Unions, however Socialistic they may become, are necessarily immersed in the daily business of industrial bargaining, and their vision is inevitably coloured by the changing hue of the current economic situation, while the local Labour Parties are inevitably pre-occupied to a great extent with the technique of national and local electioneering. Socialists have to play their full part in the Trade Unions, in the local Labour Parties, and in the

THE WORKING-CLASS MOVEMENT

Co-operative Societies ; but keen and active Socialists also need an organisation in which they can come together to devise policies for the long as well as the short run, to work out the general strategy of class conflict, to discuss and constantly reinforce their faith by putting it to the test of unflinching analysis in the light of changing facts and situations. The federal structure of the Labour Party makes this all the more necessary ; for it imposes on the conscious Socialists the task of welding the whole complex organisation together by helping to endow it with a coherent and constructive policy.

If we are to do this work aright, there are certain things that we must bear constantly in mind. The time that we spend in our Socialist Society must be, not subtracted from, but additional to, the time which we devote to activities in the Labour Party, the Trade Union, or the Co-operative Society. For if we are conscious Socialists we must be ready to work the harder for Socialism, each according to his opportunities and abilities. Secondly, we must never appear before the wider movement in the guise of condescending persons, who are ready to teach it its business ; and our means of avoiding this imputation is above all else to play our full part in the life of the wider movement of

PROBLEMS OF THE SOCIALIST TRANSITION

which we are a part. Thirdly, we must not go out to extend our membership for the mere sake of extending it. Membership of the Socialist League ought to be a privilege and a responsibility, not a mere response to an appeal to join. For if we go out to recruit all and sundry we dilute the quality of our Socialism, and we run the risk of duplicating the Labour Party's work. Mass membership is for the Trade Unions, the Co-operative Societies, and the local Labour Parties. For the Socialist League the acid test should be the willingness to work harder than others for the Socialist cause.

That cause needs all our labour ; for to-day only fools believe in the inevitable triumph of Socialism. Socialism will come, if it comes, not by mere waiting upon the event, but by our conscious striving and effective use of the opportunities which the developing situation presents. The class-structure of society becomes, with the development of Capitalism, not simpler but more complex. Society is not marked off into two clear-cut classes—Capitalists and proletarians—but infinitely graded. The intermediate groups do not disappear, but wax in social and economic importance. The petty bourgeoisie does not peacefully endure the threat of submergence in the proletariat : it

THE WORKING-CLASS MOVEMENT

resorts to Fascism. The great Capitalists do not swallow up the small : they dominate and use them. The workers are not driven into a homogeneous mass of the increasingly miserable : they are more and more differentiated, with a submerged tenth of unemployed at one end and an aristocracy of semi-technicians at the other. Not only Trade Union officials, but the upper strata of manual workers also, acquire the manners and expectations of the petty bourgeoisie. Jobs get lighter and less dirty, even if the pace of work increases ; schools impress a standard of education governed by petty bourgeois ideals. All these facts form the basis on which a realistic Socialist policy has to be built up. The proletariat is *not* reduced to common misery, however much the National Government may oppress and maltreat the unemployed. There is no longer even a majority of horny-handed persons in the community, or of workers who have " nothing to lose but their chains." Capitalism has seen to it that some of the slaves shall be allowed a little property, a little superiority, and a little hope.

If we ignore these facts we shall fail. For on the facts as they are, and not on any pattern of what we feel they should be, we must build our movement, if through our movement we

PROBLEMS OF THE SOCIALIST TRANSITION

are to build Socialism. The moral is not that we should be moderate, but that we should be sensibly extreme, looking facts in the face in order, not to sacrifice our faith, but to reinforce it by a constant renewal of our contact with reality. German Social Democracy lost its faith ; and it is dead. It is our task to look squarely at the truth, and not be dazzled by it.

III

TRADE UNIONISM: SOME PROBLEMS AND PROPOSALS

By

HAROLD E. CLAY

“A movement which has survived successive assaults from all quarters for more than a hundred years and which to-day numbers within its ranks over 4 million workers, must owe its life and vitality to its fundamental value and indispensability to the people whom it serves.”—A. CREECH JONES.

THE HISTORY of the Trade Union movement in Britain is to a large extent the history of the Labour movement. The many and varied attempts at organisation, the seeming failure of certain ventures, and the emergence of stable organisations are indications of the struggle on the part of the workers to create for themselves an instrument which they can use to safeguard their position, to improve their conditions, and to win a new status in industry.

Trade Unionism, though it has followed no set plan either in structure or method, has

PROBLEMS OF THE SOCIALIST TRANSITION

grown in influence and importance. The range and character of Trade Union work have widened and developed until to-day there is hardly any phase of industrial, social, or political activity with which it is not vitally concerned, and in which it does not play an important part.

The services which a Trade Union renders to its members are extensive and diversified. These include the work done in connection with negotiations on hours, wages, and working conditions, and assistance, financial and otherwise, during industrial disputes. The Unions have regard to, and assist members in, questions which arise out of statutes which govern or affect the conditions under which they work. The Unions also deal with any question which arises affecting the individual member, employed or unemployed, and, in addition, they have obligations to the wider Labour movement of which they are an integral part.

In considering Trade Unionism as it is, and what we would wish it to become, we must have regard to those varied services, to the part they play in Trade Union work to-day, and the value and importance attached to them by the members.

TRADE UNIONISM

The Trade Union movement, by decisions at various Union Conferences and through decisions of the Trades Union Congress and the Labour Party, is definitely committed to a policy of socialisation. The recognition of the need for fundamental social change has been forced upon the movement by its industrial experience during the past few years, and by the knowledge gained of the effects of rationalisation and mechanisation upon the lives and conditions of the workers. The Unions took a firm stand in 1931 ; they were not stampeded, but remained steadfast in their adherence to the principles and policy of the Labour movement.

We are living to-day under Capitalism with the limitations which that system imposes. The Trade Unions, having rejected the theory that increasing misery is a sure and effective way to Socialism, will endeavour, as far as they are able, to secure improvements in the working conditions and status of the workers.

The safety and protection of the people engaged in industry have been of vital concern to the Unions, and they have initiated and pressed for improvements in the factory, mining, and shop Acts. They have also been active in attempts to secure improvements in

dock regulations, in measures for the protection of the lives and conditions of seamen, and for improved facilities and protection for those engaged on inland waterways. Inquiries are undertaken—some are now in progress—into industrial diseases. Improvements in the Workmen's Compensation Act and its extension both in scope and on the benefit side have received careful attention, and proposals to this end have been submitted to respective Governments. Imperfect as the Act now is, it would have been much less satisfactory from the workers' standpoint had it not been for the work of the Unions.

It is to the Trade Unions that the members look for assistance when unemployed, and this is provided when men have to appear before the Courts of Referees or where cases are referred to the Umpire. Where there is an accident at work in which a Trade Union member is involved he has expert advice and assistance, with no additional cost to himself. He is given information as to the way to proceed, either through a claim under the Workmen's Compensation Act, Third Party, or at Common Law. The work in connection with the claim is then handled by the Unions. In certain instances this has necessitated taking

TRADE UNIONISM

cases to the final Court of Appeal. These are effective and necessary services of a character which no worker could provide for himself, and they are at the disposal of all the members and are an example of the effectiveness of collective action.

There are certain instances, such as in the transport trades, where work has to be performed under statutory conditions or under regulations approved by Parliament. Before men can obtain employment they must be in possession of a licence, and the loss of a licence means the loss of a job and enforced unemployment—a matter of serious concern to the man affected. The service rendered by the Union to men in these trades is wide and varied, for, apart altogether from the work done in negotiations and the assistance given during disputes and in cases of accidents, the Unions provide a service for the licensed man not less effective than that provided for the private motorist by the A.A. or the R.A.C.

To the foregoing should be added the work which is done by the Unions on commissions, inquiries, and on committees associated with different industries and services, and the duties undertaken in connection with Friendly Society, National Health and Unemployment

PROBLEMS OF THE SOCIALIST TRANSITION

Insurance administration. The system of trade and friendly benefits adopted by the Unions was of great importance in the economy of working-class life until the establishment of the State system of social insurance. The existence of this system may, to a certain extent, have modified the practice of the other two historically important functions of the Trade Unions, namely, that of collective bargaining and militant action to improve working-class standards.

There are relatively few problems affecting the members, individually and collectively, which do not come within the purview of the Unions to-day. Present-day Trade Union service was not consciously fashioned or planned ; it has grown to meet the needs and the requirements of the members. Experiments have been made and changes effected, and, as the necessity arises, the range of service will be further extended.

It may be contended that some of the important detailed work undertaken, though tending to make the Unions into efficient administrative bodies, detracts from their more fundamental purposes. Against that view it can be argued that the wider the range of activities, and the more efficient the Unions

TRADE UNIONISM

become now, the better equipped they will be for the important and increasing responsibilities of the future. It is also important to remember that this vast range of Trade Union service, including the friendly benefit side, has had the effect of keeping waverers in membership in periods during which the Unions have been mistakenly regarded as being industrially inactive.

It can be rightly claimed that some of the best and most effective work of the Unions has been done without noise or advertisement. Many changes affecting the standing and position of the Unions in the shops or firms have been brought about in that way. Measures of control, about which the person outside has little knowledge and probably less interest, are won as the result of the steady and persistent pressure of the Unions. Trade Unions are to a great extent judged by the kind of service rendered to the members in negotiations on wages and conditions of service—this generally means on the results obtained—or by the way in which they handle disputes in which their members are involved. As this work is one of the most important functions of Trade Unionism it is not unfair that a strict test should be applied there.

PROBLEMS OF THE SOCIALIST TRANSITION

The test must, however, be fairly applied, and in equity all the relevant facts should be taken into account before a decision is reached and judgment given. In many instances, settlements which can be regarded as very satisfactory have been reached with nothing like the labour and effort expended, or the ability displayed, as in other cases where the immediate results appear less satisfactory. Moreover, after strenuous negotiations or a protracted strike or lock-out, meagre improvements only may be obtained or concessions may have to be made. Due regard must be paid to the factors with which the Union has had to contend and the circumstances prevailing at the time. It is also well to remember that the line between success and failure is sometimes a very fine one, and that results may be conditioned by fortuitous circumstances.

Within recent years substantial changes have taken place in the scope and character of Trade Union negotiations. These changes are due in part to the developments in industry and to changes in the structure and technique of the Unions.

In industry, although there is a large field in which the small employer continues to operate, the tendency is for the small firm to

TRADE UNIONISM

give way to the larger unit, and for the large firm to become a party to some form of cartel or to be absorbed in a trust or syndicate. The employers are also linked up in national associations, and they no longer act as units when dealing with labour questions. Coincident with these developments, changes have taken place in the methods of production. Mass-production methods have been introduced, and the machine with the machine-minder has, over a wide field, taken the place of the craftsman. In certain cases this has called for a higher degree of skill from the remaining craftsmen, but it cannot be disputed that relatively and actually fewer are employed.

These changes in industrial organisation and technique have been a contributory factor in the development of large-scale Trade Union organisation. The large and comprehensive combinations on the employers' side necessitated similar organisations amongst the workers.

It is not generally appreciated that with few exceptions the large Trade Unions in their present form and under the names we know them by to-day are less than twenty-one years old ; many of them are the result of post-war amalgamation. If we exclude the Miners'

PROBLEMS OF THE SOCIALIST TRANSITION

Federation and the Unions in the textile trades, we have the N.U.R. formed in 1913 and the Iron and Steel Trades Confederation in 1917. In the post-war period we have witnessed the formation of the National Union of General and Municipal Workers, the Union of Post Office Workers, the National Union of Distributive and Allied Workers, the Tailors and Garment Workers, the Amalgamated Engineering Union, the Amalgamated Union of Building Trade Workers, the Amalgamated Society of Woodworkers, and the Transport and General Workers' Union. These Unions are the result of amalgamations of from three to thirty Unions.

The fact that these organisations are of recent growth, although they developed from old-established Unions, should make further amalgamations more easily possible than is the case with the organisations of long standing, for, in their case, to the other difficulties in the way of amalgamation are added those associated with old traditions and practices.

In this connection it is essential that the difficulties associated with movements for amalgamation should be appreciated. The Trade Union (Amalgamation) Act demands a vote of not less than 50 per cent of the members of

TRADE UNIONISM

each Union desiring amalgamation, and, of the votes recorded, those in favour of the proposal to exceed by 20 per cent or more the votes against the proposal before it can become operative. This throws upon those who desire amalgamation a considerable amount of work and responsibility. It is not an easy task to stimulate widespread interest in a matter of this character, but it has to be done if success is to be achieved. Further changes in Trade Union structure and organisation must take place : they are necessary now, but it is essential that the members should understand and appreciate the new industrial conditions which make those changes so vital.

The view is sometimes advanced that if it were not for the Trade Union officers and executives, amalgamations would be relatively easy. I do not accept that view. There are Trade Union officers and executive members who may oppose amalgamations, but opponents are also to be found amongst the members ; passive opposition in their case can be very effective, as certain recent ballots have demonstrated. On the other hand, the post-war experience should prove that the officers and executive members have been active in initiating schemes for amalgamations.

PROBLEMS OF THE SOCIALIST TRANSITION

The developments in Trade Union organisation, and the changes in the methods of negotiations, have produced new problems for the Trade Unions, and some of these relate to Trade Union government. Although the members may appreciate the necessity for large-scale Trade Union organisation, and the value of negotiations on a national basis, they have to-day a difficulty in feeling that they are in a real sense an integral part of an organisation. When Unions were smaller and the negotiations were more or less local, the men felt they were "part and parcel" of the organisation, and that they had a definite contribution to make. The executive and officers were known to them personally, and they could learn, not only broadly, but in some detail, how negotiations were proceeding. To-day they support their Unions, but the control and direction seems a long way off. It may be efficient, but they feel it is impersonal. The members of the executive they may not know, whilst the officers have difficulty in maintaining the same contacts as heretofore, and they often appear as names and not persons in intimate and personal contact with their members. During the course of and following major negotiations, the members are dependent upon a written statement and/or

TRADE UNIONISM

a report from a conference delegate who may not have been present during the negotiations, a position that is not always regarded as satisfactory.

The solution of this problem of Trade Union government is one of serious concern to those who are interested in the future of Trade Unionism. We cannot go back to the old methods either in organisation or negotiations, but it should be appreciated that loyalty and co-operation on a new basis are called for. The executive and officers of the Unions are not unmindful of the problems and difficulties arising from the changed conditions. They have constantly before them the question of how to secure and retain all the advantages of large-scale organisation and national negotiations, and, at the same time, keep the members not only informed of what is taking place, but provided with channels through which they can actively co-operate in the making of policy and find means for the effective expression of their opinions.

This raises the whole question of representative government and delegated powers. In the Union with which I am associated we have endeavoured to meet this problem in various ways. The Union is divided into areas, in each

PROBLEMS OF THE SOCIALIST TRANSITION

of which we have trade committees for the particular sections. There is also an area committee responsible for the administrative work in the area. This committee is elected from the trade committees, which, in turn, are elected from the branches. The trade committees in each area elect representatives to a National Trade Committee, which is responsible, subject to the overriding authority of the executive, for the trade policy of the section. The executive council consists, in the one part, of representatives elected by a ballot vote in each area, and, in the other, of one representative from each National Trade Committee. It is responsible for the general policy of the Union. The Union has a conference every two years, at which general administrative questions are under review, amendments to rules are made, and decisions reached on Union policy. In addition, provision is made for conferences of the representatives of any trade when negotiations are in progress or pending, or for the formulation of trade policy. In certain of the trade sections conferences are held annually in each area for the discussion and consideration of trade questions and allied problems.

The structure and procedure have been changed by the Union from time to time, the

TRADE UNIONISM

desire being to provide the most efficient type of machinery possible, and of a character in which the members can feel they can have an active and effective place. Other Unions have also faced the problem of government, and have dealt with the matter in the way which meets the needs and requirements of their members. The form of Trade Union government is not static, and adjustments are constantly being made to meet changing conditions. It is desirable that Trade Union constitution should not be too rigid, but should be flexible enough to allow of adaptation to meet new situations as they arise.

Modern Trade Union developments have placed in the hands of the workers an effective weapon in the fight for emancipation. New duties and responsibilities have also been placed upon the members, delegates, and officers. Under those conditions the Unions are under an obligation in their journals, and in such other ways as are open to them, to keep the members informed on day-to-day questions as well as on those problems of wider importance. Those who are familiar with Trade Union journals will have noticed the change which has taken place in recent years.

Delegates and officers who are chosen to act

PROBLEMS OF THE SOCIALIST TRANSITION

for the wider body of the membership, with all that that involves, must be persons who can accept responsibility. They must be prepared to give a lead, even when the stand they have to take may, for the moment, be unpopular. They must also remember that it is desirable that it should be the same voice in the branch room, the conference, and the negotiating chamber.

Negotiations in many industries can be divided into two parts. In the first place there are negotiations covering a wide area, district or national. These may be direct negotiations with a particular group of employers, or may be through some form of machinery, statutory or otherwise. The subjects dealt with will be of importance to the men in the trade as a whole, i.e. hours, wages, and conditions of service. Then there are local or shop negotiations, which are concerned with the application of agreements or with conditions peculiar to the shop, depot, or factory.

The national negotiations may be conducted in public as under the Railway Wages Board, or before a commission, as in the case of the miners, or before a court of inquiry, as was the case for the dockers and the tramwaymen, or they may be conducted in private. Whether

TRADE UNIONISM

they are conducted in public or in private, the tasks are the same. In these negotiations those representing the Unions have to be specialists, and they have to know as much about the industry and the facts associated therewith—although some of these may arise from international conditions—as those who represent the employers. The preparation and the handling of a case in negotiations are of supreme importance. It is a mistake to assume, as is sometimes the case, that it is not really important how negotiations are conducted or that the standing and ability of the negotiators are of little value, and that all that is necessary is strong and virile organisation. The latter, I need not emphasise, is of paramount importance, for without that the negotiators would be deprived of their essential economic power, but it is not the only thing required.

The right to negotiate has had to be won. The battle for this right is not yet ended, for there are employers, in public services and elsewhere, who, in 1934—one hundred years after Tolpuddle—refuse to negotiate with Trade Unions. Where the right has been won it is essential that the members in the virile organisations should be well served in negotiations, and those where the organisation is not

strong should have, if possible, greater assistance. The work done in negotiations can assist or mar the effectiveness of any organisation.

There is a feeling in certain quarters that the adoption of negotiating machinery, with the readiness to use it on all possible occasions, renders the Unions less ready to become involved in strikes. It is suggested that through the insistence on the value of negotiating machinery the Unions tend to become less militant and are in danger of losing their effectiveness as a fighting force. It is true that strikes may be less frequent, but that may be due to the fact that the conflict has taken place elsewhere. A strike, especially one of some magnitude, is an item of news ; it provides good copy, and is of interest to the public. A negotiated settlement is generally passed over, or, if noted at all by the Press, is usually given a few lines in some obscure corner of the paper, and yet there are hundreds of such settlements to one strike. Moreover, the contest in the negotiating chamber may have been keener than has been the case in many strikes. The issues have been carefully considered, and, what is perhaps more important, those on each side have weighed up the relative strength of the other. To put it another way, the real test

TRADE UNIONISM

has taken place without the workers having been brought out on the stones.

It is well to bear in mind that there are occasions where the power and capacity to strike are of greater value than an actual strike would be. There are, however, occasions when strike action must be taken, even though success may be extremely doubtful ; in other words, an unsuccessful strike might be more advantageous under certain conditions than the acceptance of terms without a fight. The right to strike must be maintained at all costs, but the decision to exercise that right must rest—subject to the rules they make—with those who take the risks which its use entails.

From the criticisms which are sometimes directed at various forms of negotiating machinery it would appear as if this machinery had come down like manna from heaven, or had been provided by the employer out of regard for the workers' interests. That is not the case. It has only been brought into existence where there has been strong organisation on the workers' side. Negotiating machinery has followed, not preceded, organisation in Trade Unions. Behind the criticism there appears to be the fear that the workers' representatives may not be equal to the job, and

PROBLEMS OF THE SOCIALIST TRANSITION

that in some way the people on the other side are more clever than they—a form of inferiority complex which those who have the work to do on these bodies do not share.

Local negotiations—those which apply to conditions in a factory, depot, or shop—are generally conducted by the shop steward or local secretary, assisted on occasions by the full-time Trade Union officer. These negotiations cover a variety of questions of day-to-day importance. In some cases they deal with piece rates, demarcation questions, the operation of machines, or the allocation of labour to certain jobs. The state of organisation in the shop or in the industry, and the nature of the work and the problems arising therefrom, determine generally the range of the problems dealt with by the Trade Unions locally. In certain cases the right to deal with the question of men who have been dismissed has been won. Where new methods of work have been introduced, the Unions have been able in many instances to arrange for training to be given on the new form of operation, and security of employment has been obtained for men who would have been displaced but for the Union's effort.

It is upon the men who are doing the active work in the branches and the workshops that

TRADE UNIONISM

the strength of the Unions rests. They are to a large extent the organisers for the Unions. In the handling of the workshop problems they are developing a knowledge and technique which can well fit them for the wider duties and responsibilities of to-morrow.

The Trade Unions, having to deal with industry as organised to-day, can see the waste and inefficiency which exists in many industries and for which their members have to pay. It is partly for that reason that the Miners' Federation, the Iron and Steel Trades Confederation, and the Transport Unions have demanded drastic industrial reorganisation under public ownership or public control. The Unions realise that when reorganisation has taken place in private industry, it has not infrequently been at the expense of the workers. The effect of these changes upon the workers has in many cases been modified by Trade Union action and effort. On the other hand, where improvements have been obtained, through the work of the Unions, in hours, wages, or conditions, these have in many instances been largely neutralised by rationalisation in one or other of its many manifestations. These facts have produced a deepening realisation in the minds of Trade Unionists that industrial action,

PROBLEMS OF THE SOCIALIST TRANSITION

important as it is, is not sufficient, and they are driven more and more to appreciate the value of political action and the need for more actively supporting the Labour Party. Industrial and political action should be complementary, not competitive or as alternative forms of working-class activity. The Unions, together with other sections of the party, cannot be satisfied with a limited objective of reforming Capitalism, but must drive for a comprehensive Socialist policy.

What of the future of Trade Unionism? This is a problem upon which there is room for speculation and a wide divergence of view. Although very effective service has been and is being rendered to-day, no one can be fully satisfied with Trade Unionism as it is now, least of all those who are rendering active service within that movement. It is as true of this movement as of other institutions that they cannot stand still—it is either progress or decay.

Amongst the more important of the immediate problems confronting the Unions are those of structure and organisation. In considering the question of structure we have not only to be concerned with what may appear theoretically sound, but with that which is practical and possible, taking into account the history,

TRADE UNIONISM

tradition, and the prejudices of Trade Unionists.

Amalgamations cannot be forced ; they must arise out of needs and circumstances which appeal in a real sense, not only to the executive officers, but to the general body of the members. The soil may be tilled, the seed put in, and the subsequent work done, but the results, if worth having, cannot be forced. That may be tantalising to the theorists and to those who are in a hurry, but it is the way we have to travel short of our being confronted with one of those inexplicable periods when things have to be done quickly, when old institutions go and prejudices and ideas get such a shake up that those things not possible now may be not only possible but imperative then. It may be said that such a condition of affairs is not far ahead, and that we should prepare for it. The answer might have to be given in the words of the late Harry Gosling, after the strike of 1926. He was being told that we must prepare for the next time. " Yes," he said, " learn from the experience of this time and build your plans for the next, but the odds are that when the next time comes it will be entirely different from the last and the preparations will not be quite so effective or useful as you think."

PROBLEMS OF THE SOCIALIST TRANSITION

In facing the question of Trade Union structure it would be advisable to see where Unions have joint working agreements to-day, ascertain why those agreements came into existence, and whether they can be extended in such a way that if amalgamation is desirable but not practical to-day, a further step can be taken along that road. There are many such agreements in existence: some deal with organisation and the elimination of competition for members, others include that provision but go further and deal with the policy of the Unions in negotiation.

If one takes the question of organisation and membership, there is a fruitful field for that kind of co-operation which can materially assist in straightening out some of the problems of Trade Union structure. In the newer industries, Trade Unionism is weaker than in the older-established industries; in some cases there is no Trade Union organisation, due in certain instances to the anti-Trade Union attitude of some of the firms. The workers in the factories with modern plant and equipment are in receipt of wages which bear a definite relationship to those which have been won by Trade Union effort in their own or an adjacent district. They may not see the need of organisation

TRADE UNIONISM

to-day, but they can be made to realise that Trade Unionism is as essential to them as to their fellow workers in the older industries. The appeal must not, however, be made by several Unions, but should at one place be made by one Union with the assistance of others. The service given there should be reciprocated in other places.

The appeal for membership in the past has, on occasions, been too narrow. It has too often been of a character where immediate improvements have been promised provided the people joined the organisation. Where concessions have been obtained under those conditions, it has not infrequently happened that the workers, after securing certain advantages, have fallen out of membership. A similar result has followed on occasions where it has not been possible to implement fully the promises made.

The approach must be on a broader basis, and an attempt must be made to get the unorganised workers to appreciate the wider purposes of Trade Unionism. They must be made to realise that it is the strength and power of the Trade Union movement as a whole that is important, and that their adherence to the movement assists in the attainment of strength and solidarity, and in the maintenance and

improvements of standards generally. Under present conditions, it must be appreciated that it is not generally possible for one section of the working class to progress far ahead of other sections. The movement must go forward as a whole. If the Trade Union movement is to be a sound and effective power making for working-class advancement, it must be based upon these wider considerations, and, further, the power and ability to make a stand for that which is right must be combined with the capacity to stick during those periods of trial and difficulty with which we are faced from time to time.

If the Unions with a common interest in the newer industries can get together and extend the co-operation which at present exists they may find they have mutual interests, not only there, but in the older industries, and this will no doubt compel them to see that with pooled resources and a common organisation they will be stronger in association, they can make a wider appeal, and be able to render much more effective service to the members.

In negotiations it is essential that there should be one common policy. Although it may be possible to arrive at this position through consultation between a number of Unions, it is

TRADE UNIONISM

more easily possible when one Union is in charge of the negotiations, and when the decision rests with a conference or an executive of one organisation. This view will not be widely contested, but there are difficulties in the way of making it fully operative. On this side considerable progress has been made in recent years, and many agreements are in existence which have the effect of preventing two or more Unions dealing with the same employer for, roughly, the same grades of workers. Much more remains to be done, and here again it should be possible by consultation to extend the principle which has been accepted by certain Unions that, where members are in two or more Unions, the Union which has the majority of members shall be responsible for the negotiations, and where another has a majority that Union accepts the responsibility. In neither case is there any attempt to interfere with existing membership, but new members are enrolled into the Union which undertakes the negotiations. That may not be a perfect arrangement, but it is far preferable to the old method of competition for members, and the approach by many Unions to the same employer. It may also be extended and provide the basis for amalgamation or a much

PROBLEMS OF THE SOCIALIST TRANSITION

closer working arrangement. Any step which can bring the Trade Unions closer together, and which provides the basis of common action, is worthy of support. The only people who gain by competition and division amongst the Unions are the employers.

If it were possible to start refashioning the movement with the experience we have to-day the structure would no doubt be entirely different. That, of course, is not possible. We have to take the movement as it is and face the problems as they arise. In this connection we have to realise that industry generally in this country has been in the same position as the Trade Unions, in that it has conformed to no set plan, but, to-day, certain of the industries and services are becoming more clearly defined, and in those cases it may be more easy to say to which organisation the men should belong. It is not so easy, however, when we come to deal with the scattered industries or trades in different parts of the country.

In considering this problem, and relating it to the sections with which I am most familiar, I should like to see a move made amongst the Transport, Railway, and General Workers' Unions towards closer organisation, and, if possible, amalgamation. If this could be

TRADE UNIONISM

brought about it would do probably more than any other thing to effect a fundamental change, not only in Trade Union organisation, but also in negotiations and in the work of enrolling members.

In certain quarters this suggestion would be regarded as fantastic and unworkable. But is that so? There is no reason why the various sections within an organisation of that character should not have the same or a wider basis of autonomy and freedom than they possess to-day. Surely it is not beyond the power and capacity of those in charge of these organisations to evolve the machinery which is necessary to ensure that this would be the case. The effect of such a merger, although it would link up in one organisation men following a number of occupations, would also bring together into that organisation men in the same occupations who to-day are in separate Unions, and provide a new basis of appeal to those men who, due to the fact that there are two or more Unions catering for them, use that as a reason why they are not in any Union. For example, public employees in gas, water, and non-trading services, with the exception of craftsmen, would be in one Union. The position in the chemical and other trades could

PROBLEMS OF THE SOCIALIST TRANSITION

be dealt with in a way that is not possible to-day.

The position in the railway shops and in other establishments where the problems are not dissimilar would be considerably improved. In transport the men in the different sections could deal with their own problems, but the common bond of interest which they have as transport workers would bind them together. They would also be linked up with people with whom they come in contact in other services.

During the period of 1920-24 there were many amalgamations and alterations in the structure of Trade Unions. In the intervening years there have been far-reaching changes in industry ; mergers, groupings, and interlocking arrangements not contemplated in 1924 are now in operation. This has produced new problems in the Unions, and has made the reconsideration of Trade Union structure and organisation vitally necessary. This is a matter of deep concern for all who are interested in the future of Trade Unionism.

Considerable discussion has taken place with reference to the unit of Trade Union organisation. Should the branch be on a workshop or residential basis ? This is a matter upon which we cannot generalise, but wherever possible I

TRADE UNIONISM

feel the branch should be based on the workshop, for there we get the greatest measure of common interest. That is the position to-day over a large field of industry and will become increasingly so in the future.

The question of Workers' Control is inseparably bound up with this question of Trade Union structure. If the proposals for control which have been discussed in the Labour movement during the past few years are to be applied, then the Unions must be organised on such a basis that the problems in an industry can be dealt with by one organisation, and the problems of a shop, factory, or undertaking must also be the concern of one organisation. Competition and overlapping would make it difficult for this principle to be applied.

With the improvement of Trade Union organisation I think the tendency will be for the range and character of negotiations to be widened and, probably, for the introduction of newer types of machinery. It is essential that the Unions should be clear as to their objectives and that the organisations shall be virile and capable of waging an intensive struggle if that should be the only way of dealing with a problem of importance. The strength of Trade Union organisation and the efficiency of the

PROBLEMS OF THE SOCIALIST TRANSITION

negotiating machinery may have the effect of limiting the number of strikes in the future ; under those conditions the struggle would not be carried on the backs of the workers or at the expense of the dependents of the wage worker. It is not, however, possible to dogmatise regarding the precise methods to be adopted by the Unions on all occasions. These must be conditioned by circumstances, and will of necessity vary industry by industry and even, at different times, in the same industry.

There are those who feel that the strike can be made into a political weapon. On the positive side I doubt its efficacy in this country. On the negative side, I can see that it might be effectively used as, for example, in the event of a *coup d'état*, an attempt at the usurpation of power by a reactionary minority, or, under certain circumstances, in the event of a threat of war.

In this country we believe that social and political changes can be brought about through political action. For that reason we support and are actively associated with the Labour Party, and desire to see it grow in power and influence. The party, in order to win an effective majority, has to convince the people that Socialism is not only desirable but essential,

TRADE UNIONISM

that it offers the only solution of the problems of to-day and the way out of the present muddle, chaos, and misery. We have to win our majority on that basis, and if the people decide in favour of a Socialist policy the Trade Union movement must be prepared to support a Socialist Government against any attempts at sabotage by a recalcitrant minority.

Trade Unionism can be an efficient instrument against the menace of Fascism. Without being unduly apprehensive regarding the power and influence of the Fascists in this country, it would be unwise to ignore the attempts which are now being made by them to secure the adherence of Trade Unionists. Leaflets are being issued in many places to members of Trade Unions with headlines, slogans, and phrases taken from the leaflets of the Minority Movement and the Communist Party. Appeals are being made for support for Fascism on the grounds that it is the only movement that is really concerned with the welfare of the people and the improvement of the conditions of the workers.

The record and policy of the Fascists both in Italy and Germany are too well known. The leopard cannot change its spots, and, despite what Lord Rothermere has to say, Fascists and

PROBLEMS OF THE SOCIALIST TRANSITION

the Black Shirts have nothing to commend them to the Trade Unionists. Their policy is the negation of everything for which the Unions stand and value, and where they have attempted to deal with industrial questions in this country the results have not been to the advantage of the workers.

The Labour movement in this country has been largely concerned with the political aspects of Fascism and with the abuses and excesses in Italy and Germany. Although these are important it will be appreciated that while it may be easy and proper to arouse public indignation against the atrocities in those countries, the real effect of Fascism may be overlooked. It is on the economic and industrial side that Fascism has the most serious and sinister implications. Under this head their policy is put forward in a superficially attractive way, and inducements are even held out to the Unions to collaborate, but the position of the Unions would be one of permanent inferiority. In short, the proposals are for the slave state, and the Labour movement must realise that Fascism in all its manifestations must be resisted in every possible way.

In conclusion, I am fully conscious that in dealing with certain aspects of Trade Unionism

TRADE UNIONISM

I have left out others which might be considered of far greater consequence than those to which I have referred. No reference, for instance, has been made to the position of the craft Trade Unions or to the relation of the technical, administrative, and supervisory workers to the industrial Labour movement. These are questions of first class importance, and, with further changes in industrial organisation and technique, will become increasingly so. Here one can only add that the position and attitude of the craft organisations have in many instances been misunderstood. They have a fear of being merged in a large organisation, and, due to the relatively small numbers affected, their special interests being subordinated to or overlooked by the wider body of membership. That there are special problems affecting the craftsmen cannot be denied ; these are not narrowly insisted upon, but they are important, and have over a wide area a direct bearing upon the working-class standards.

Bound up with the subject we have been considering is the question of the Trades Councils and the Trades Union Congress. The future of these bodies, and the place they will occupy in the movement, is conditioned by

PROBLEMS OF THE SOCIALIST TRANSITION

many factors, not least of which is that of Trade Union structure and organisation. That there is need for an effective central authority for industrial labour will not be disputed, with wider powers and duties than those now exercised by or provided for in the constitution of the Trades Union Congress. This change cannot come about by the waving of a wand, it can only come if it can meet the needs and conform to the experiences of the Trade Union members. A development of this character will raise the whole question of sovereignty, and is conditioned by the willingness to subordinate particular and special interests to those of the movement as a whole.

IV

THE CO-OPERATIVE MOVEMENT AND THE FIGHT FOR SOCIALISM

By

WILLIAM MELLOR

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO the modern Co-operative movement was launched. Its slipway was a back street in Rochdale. Twenty-eight anxious but determined men watched the frail craft go afloat. Into its construction had been sunk £28 of capital. And as it was launched the jeers and catcalls of small urchins epitomised the general disbelief in its seaworthiness. Not even the twenty-eight would have made a bet on its escaping shipwreck ! But it did, and to-day it is, in this country and others, a mighty trading corporation, with a sister movement in Russia that has become one of the stays of a Socialist economy.

Those twenty-eight Rochdale weavers, imbued with the teachings of Robert Owen and

PROBLEMS OF THE SOCIALIST TRANSITION

conscious of bitter exploitations, had builded better than they knew. They had created a formidable competitor to Capitalist enterprise in the distribution and production of immediately consumable goods ; they had brought into the world of competitive commerce the beginnings of an essential part of the distributive mechanism of a Socialist community.

Many causes lie at the back of the amazing growth of the Co-operative movement, but, as with all other effective social phenomena, an economic cause has played the greatest part. Not all the idealism, not all the working-class philosophy, not all the visions of the Rochdale band of hope, could have brought them the success that has been achieved had they not hit on the device of dividend on purchase. This way of disposing of the problem of private profit—the root of all evil, as they and Socialists believe—was not merely sound in relation to their narrower objective ; it was also well calculated to appeal to the necessity for thrift forced by Capitalism upon the workers in the disguise of a virtue.

Without dividend on purchase there would have been no Co-operative movement ; the too exclusive pursuit of it in new conditions and circumstances will destroy the hope of the

THE CO-OPERATIVE MOVEMENT

founders that some day the motive of service would, through the planning of a non-competitive economic order, find full expression. But of the essential part the "divi" has played in the development of the retail and wholesale sides of the movement there can be no question.

Outside critics may, and do, sneer at the regard shown by Co-operators for this technique of profit disposal; they may, and do, lump all Co-operators together as "divi-hunters." There is some ground, no doubt, for their criticisms, but, by and large, they are based on a misconception of the function and purpose of the dividend. It is unfortunate that those particularly connected with the decisions on trading policy have also tended to forget, like their theoretical critics, what the dividend on purchase really is. That the largest attendances of Co-operators at their meetings coincide with the discussion of the dividend smacks too much of ordinary company meetings to be healthy!

The founders of the movement had other aims than that of securing a fair price and good quality. They were concerned with establishing a democratic organisation for the distribution and, later, the supply of necessities, which would give to the members control over their

economic life. They approached the whole problem from the consumers' end, and it is significant that—apart from the few Co-operative productive enterprises fostered by the Christian Socialists—they have steadily resisted the granting of any share in control to their own employees. To-day the dream of a consumers' commonwealth, brought into existence through the growth of the "movement," still colours the propaganda of many of the most sincere members ; it also is often used by the conservative-minded as a reason against Co-operators having anything to do with Socialism!

On this I shall have more to say later. For the moment it is sufficient to note that the "divi" and the "dream" have played their respective parts in making the Co-operative meeting what it is to-day. The "divi" has made the retail and wholesale success possible ; the "divi" and the democratic principle led to the growth of the Co-operative Congress ; the "divi" and the "dream" contributed to the birth of the Co-operative Party.

The immensity of the movement to-day would have astonished the Rochdale pioneers. It is a far cry, in a hundred years, from one society with a membership of twenty-eight, a capital of £28, and a turnover of £2 a week

THE CO-OPERATIVE MOVEMENT

to 1,188 societies with a membership of 6,590,020, a share and loan capital of £142,433,551, a turnover of £207,888,385 a year, and a net surplus of £26,426,300. And this on the retail side only.

What would the Toad Lane directors have thought of a wholesale trade of £82,066,739 a year for England and Wales and £16,568,845 for Scotland? Did they ever dream, I wonder, of tea, coffee, and cocoa plantations, and factories producing and selling to societies affiliated to the Wholesale £6,797,962 worth of produce a year? Or of the growth of the C.W.S. from a federation of 18,337 members in affiliated societies in 1864 to a federation of societies with well over 5,000,000 in 1932?

One half of the families in the country to-day are members of Co-operative Societies; the turnover on the distributive side is £207,888,385, a year; on the wholesale distributive side it reached in 1931 the figure of £105,433,543. Whatever else the British working class may not have done, it has managed, without the help of the middle class and in the teeth of fierce opposition, to build up an enormous commercial concern based on principles alien to competitive Capitalism.

Find fault with it if you must; criticise it if

PROBLEMS OF THE SOCIALIST TRANSITION

you care ; regret its limitations—and they are many ; point out the dangers of conflict between the Co-operative and the Socialist movement—and they exist ; but do not make the mistake of belittling its triumphs or the place it will hold when Capitalism is ended. Anyone who cares at all for the development of working-class organisations must have a profound admiration for the achievements of the Co-operative movement.

During its hundred years has there not, however, been too noticeable a veering on the trading side to the methods, ethics, and practice of competitive firms and combines ? Problems that in the earlier days would have been regarded with a warm degree of idealism are looked at to-day in a cold business manner—for which one can, if one likes, blame the corroding influence of competition. Nowhere is this more harmful than in the treatment of those whom the movement employs. Though it is true that the conditions, in both wholesale and retail establishments, compare more than favourably with those of good private employers, the guiding principle in the fixation of wages is, far too often, that of ordinary firms intent on making profit. The worker is still “ a hand,” his claims to status are not

THE CO-OPERATIVE MOVEMENT

welcomed, his "interference" in management and policy is resented. Incidents occur which antagonise the Trade Unions and give cause for the mutual enemy to rejoice.

It is not sufficient to have established conciliation machinery ; it is not sufficient to have given attention to general conditions nor to be content with the facile statement, " We pay better than so-and so." The workers in the Co-operative movement should be given a definite share in the control and direction of that movement, not as consumers or members of the movement, but as workers ; much greater attention should be paid to their legitimate needs ; a more conscious effort should be made to foster a new outlook in questions of wages and conditions. The " divi " is not everything. The movement could " afford it " ; the movement should afford it.

Merely to rest on the reputation of " good employers " is to miss an opportunity that is immediate. A new attitude towards the Trade Unions, a new approach to the claim for industrial democracy, a wider appreciation of their duty to those who serve them, would not only secure greater and greater loyalty, but would be a real contribution from one working-class movement to another.

PROBLEMS OF THE SOCIALIST TRANSITION

Nor should we under-estimate in these days the use to which disputes between the Trade Unions and the Co-operative movement are put by people who are friends of neither. Lord Beaverbrook and other supporters of Capitalism are not averse to paddling in muddy waters. The steady and persistent efforts in the Press and in speeches to make capital out of these occurrences is a mark of a political technique—divide and conquer—of which the opponents of Co-operation and of Socialism are masters. What needs to be stressed is that now, above all times, should the Co-operative movement set its face sternly against any wage-cutting, any worsening of its employees' conditions. That is a minimum requirement both for its own sake and for that of the wider movement with which it is allied.

However unfair, however partial the arguments of our mutual opponents may be, the fact remains that the general fight against wage reductions, to which the Co-operative movement on its political side has rightly given support, is seriously hampered by the actions of some sections of that movement. Nor is it any reply to say that within Capitalism all things are not possible. That is true. But some are, and of those the placing of the interests of

THE CO-OPERATIVE MOVEMENT

the workers engaged above considerations of "divi" is one.

Another is the meeting of the general problem that faces all distributors of consumable commodities—the need for variety of choice and a wide range of selection. If the Co-operative movement hopes to extend its power and influence as a trading concern within Capitalism, it will have to tackle seriously the necessity of meeting changing fashions and taste. I agree that in measure it is doing this, but not to anything like the extent it should. What, for instance, has happened to the project for meeting the West End stores on their own ground, for invading the West End, for building premises comparable with Selfridges and Whiteleys and, thereby, not merely advertising the movement, but making inroads into new custom and showing conclusively the capacity to meet not merely demands for staple commodities, but demands for style, elegance, and taste?

To do this will call throughout the country for a keener appreciation of the force with which it is competing, the giving to managers and staff of greater freedom and responsibility, the widening of the C.W.S. manufacturing side, the ending of wasteful and irritating competition between societies.

PROBLEMS OF THE SOCIALIST TRANSITION

At the same time there is a danger lest, in the "search for markets," principles vital to the essential basis of the movement may be sacrificed. It is the penalty of success to find growth and expansion accompanied by the necessity for adopting a modern technique, but if that technique endangers the vital principle of "returning surplus" to the members it should be rejected. Within a capitalist economy the "voluntary" principle of mutual trading is the soul of the movement, and at the same time its limitation. "Voluntaryism" cannot end Capitalism; only political power, linked with economic strength, can do that. And when Capitalism is destroyed, or in process of destruction, the "voluntary" movement serves best which subordinates itself to class needs.

I wonder, in this regard, whether the recent decision of the C.W.S. to open up retail shops in areas where societies do not now exist may not open the door to a degree of centralisation which might make effective democratic control difficult? At any rate, this tendency might well be watched with a careful eye. Though for me the idea that the Co-operative movement can expand into the Co-operative commonwealth is intellectually and practically untenable, I would again emphasise the fact

THE CO-OPERATIVE MOVEMENT

that behind this idea, linked with the disposal of the surplus, has lain the whole class drive of the Co-operative movement. It is this goal of superseding Capitalism that forms the link between the Co-operator and the Socialist, though oft-times the link becomes very tenuous.

Let me, in passing, disabuse Lord Beaverbrook's mind and that of *The Times*, of any idea that in any campaign against the C.W.S. and the Co-operative movement generally, opponents of the movement can count on support from Socialists who in some regards do not see eye to eye with the Co-operators. Such campaigns are only part of the effort being made by private interests and supporters of the present system to limit and crush independent working-class endeavour. They are, on the trading side, the counterpart of the attack on Trade Union rights signalled by the passing of the Trade Union and the Trade Disputes Act, with a fervent appeal from Mr. Baldwin for "Peace in our time, O Lord." They are the necessary corollary of the onslaught on the principle of mutuality which was the real cause for income-tax changes made by the Government without mandate or warrant. The Socialist's answer, or part of it, should be to make

PROBLEMS OF THE SOCIALIST TRANSITION
common cause with, and to strengthen, the
“ Co-ops.”

Nor should we forget that Lord Beaverbrook and his abettors are using, as a new Capitalist offensive always uses, the “ small man ” as the shield behind which the interests of the big entrepreneur may be consolidated.

On this there can be no possible disagreement between the Co-operators and the Socialists, but a recognition of this does not make it any the less necessary to speak frankly on some major problems which make active and real harmony and unity within the working-class movement harder of attainment than they should be.

The time has gone by when either the Socialist or the Co-operator can afford to ignore difficulties that the growth of both movements has occasioned. These difficulties concern not merely big questions of policy, but the day-to-day building up of an active and vigorous political party pledged to, and ready to, implement a forthright Socialist policy. They are the kind of things which it is regarded as statesmanlike never to mention except in private, but their results are of such a character that the private whisperings do not prevent their growth. In fact, they encourage it. “ Never do

THE CO-OPERATIVE MOVEMENT

to-day what you may be able to do to-morrow ” is a vicious principle in this and other realms.

At the risk of offending—I hope only for the moment—the “ machines ” and perhaps some of the members of both movements, I propose to deal with some of the outstanding causes of difference.¹

Many sincere Co-operators to whom their society is the centre of their life believe implicitly that the way to end Capitalism and wage-slavery lies along the road of Consumers’ Co-operation. They spend night and day working for this ideal, and they regard almost as an enemy anyone who ventures to point out its limitations. They revere part of Robert Owen as German Social Democrats revered part of Marx.

This point of view colours all of the political activity of the Co-operative movement ; it colours the whole of its economic views in relation to Free Trade ; it occasions divisions of opinion on questions such as the municipalisation of the milk supply, of bread, and of other immediate necessities ; it is used to support a drive for political power which increasingly

¹ The first appearance of my views has in fact led to my being heavily criticised by leaders in the Co-operative movement. I can but feel that their strictures are based on emotional reactions rather than on an appreciation of the fact that I desire, as firmly as they, the Co-operative movement to grow and flourish !

PROBLEMS OF THE SOCIALIST TRANSITION

tends to cut across the effort of the Socialist to create in this country a courageous and class-conscious Socialist movement.

No one who cares for the future of the working class can afford to ignore the theoretical differences which have become in recent years matters of immediate practical importance between the Socialist and the Co-operator. The old Liberal doctrine of *laissez-faire*, of buying in the cheapest market, still dominates the mind and action not only of individual Co-operators, but of the movement as a whole. This brings them inevitably into conflict with the Socialist on the vital question of the relationship of a working-class Government to external trade. There is an incompatibility of method between the proposal for State control of all foreign trade by the mechanism of Import and Export Boards, and the desire of the Co-operative movement to be allowed, within a working-class economy, freedom in external relationships.

At present this difference centres round the supply of such commodities as milk, butter, cheese, bacon, dairy produce generally, and the importation of wheat and other cereals. The Socialist, looking at the present situation of industry and agriculture in this country,

THE CO-OPERATIVE MOVEMENT

looking at the heritage of mess and muddle created by Capitalism, believes that one of the necessary measures that must be taken to deal in an ordered and planned way with the supply of foodstuffs and the socialisation of industries is a close and governmentally controlled regulation of imports and exports by the mechanism of Import and Export Boards. Within the transition period from Capitalism to Socialism, the operations of enterprises concerned primarily with the distribution of immediately consumable goods must, in the Socialist view, come within the ambit of this import control. Neither the Co-operative movement nor the big private stores can be allowed freedom in this matter.

The Co-operative movement may well become initially one of the main instruments for aiding a Socialist Government in the carrying through of this regulation, but it must of necessity do so as an agent of the community as a whole. It must, therefore, face a fundamental change of relationship in its dealings both with the consumer at home and the producer abroad.

The Socialist would give to the Co-operative movement a definite function as part of the State mechanism for regulating trade, but the

PROBLEMS OF THE SOCIALIST TRANSITION

giving of that function would necessitate the sacrifice by the Co-operative movement of its independent "rights," where these "rights" are incompatible with the requirements of a Socialist Government. They may be as incompatible as are the rights claimed by the Capitalist concerns which compete, both at home and abroad, for the privilege of selling consumable commodities to customers in order that they, out of that sale, may make a profit for their shareholders which they regard as adequate.

It is no secret—and if it were it is time the secrecy ended—that accommodation on this matter is not likely to prove as simple as is the stating of the theoretical difference, but I would urge Co-operators to remember that they live in a much more complicated world than did the Rochdale pioneers. Already they have, in their political programme, agreed that, with regard to the great basic industries and with regard to finance, the only solution which will begin to put an end to the exploitation of human labour power, and destroy the competitive system which they detest, is for the community as a whole to take over ownership and for these industries to be conducted for the benefit of the community.

To imagine for a moment that a Labour

THE CO-OPERATIVE MOVEMENT

Government engaged in carrying through Socialist legislation in a spirit, not of "gradualism," but of determination to make, within its first term of power, a wide and deep encroachment into Capitalism, could continue to permit unregulated import and export trade is to be blind to realities. Without such regulation the whole attack on the key centres of Capitalism would, to say the least, be seriously jeopardised. Nor is it conceivable that from this regulation there should be any contracting out, for its whole purpose is to bring into this country the necessary amount and types of commodities which it is communally decided are essential, and to send out from this country the necessary amount of commodities in exchange.

It will be the duty of the Government itself, through the operation of its Economic Plan, to assess the requirements, to negotiate, as a Government, either with other Governments or external producers, and to decide the details for effecting this purpose.

In that general scheme the Co-operative movement must take its proper place, and if, in the course of the interchange and sale of the commodities, a surplus is acquired, it must belong not to any sectional interest, whether

PROBLEMS OF THE SOCIALIST TRANSITION

that interest be Co-operative or private, but to the community as a whole.

There seems to me no possibility of escaping from the conclusion that the State regulation of imports and exports must be by an authority representing the community as a whole. The Co-operative movement will have to surrender what is at the moment a strong competitive weapon against its private rivals in the interests of the whole of those who labour, whether by hand or by brain. Co-operators can be reassured on the point that their private rivals will not be allowed to retain anything the Co-operative movement may be required to surrender !

Again, it would be foolish to overlook the fact that the movement is not, at this stage in its development, and in relation to the technique by which it is proposed that the change from Capitalism to Socialism shall take place in this country, capable of becoming immediately the sole functioning agent for the community in respect of the import of immediately consumable goods.

Further, though a Socialist Government would and should assign important functions to the Co-operative movement, it is not possible for the Co-operative movement to retain

THE CO-OPERATIVE MOVEMENT

powers which conflict with the needs of that Government.

Just as the demand for workers' control involves a change in the function and purpose for the Trade Union movement in socialised industries and in general, so the socialisation of foreign trade will involve for the Co-operative movement a sacrifice of methods and of philosophy which have been necessitated by its struggle to establish itself inside Capitalism.

A Socialist cannot and does not accept the theory that the Co-operative movement is capable of developing from a trading corporation with limited objectives into a new form of society. Indeed, Co-operators who still hold this view might well consider the position of the world to-day, which has caused the Labour Party in words—and I trust in deeds—to abandon the old guiding doctrine of evolutionary gradualism.

There are, it is well to remember, new forces in operation to-day in defence of Capitalism to which the Co-operative is as distasteful as the Socialist movement. These forces will, without a "by your leave," control and change Co-operation to suit their own ends. The Co-operator's choice to-day is not between another century of gradual progress, during which the

PROBLEMS OF THE SOCIALIST TRANSITION

movement's membership and influence increase and its control over manufacturing extends, but between a recognition of its essential limitations as a substitute for Capitalism and its whole-hearted joining up with the Labour movement, or its painful extinction by the supporters of Capitalism in the interests of the class structure of society.

Whatever may have been the dreams of the pioneers ; whatever may be the content of perorations at Co-operative congresses or declaratory resolutions passed by Women's Guilds, the cold fact remains that within a Socialist economy the sphere of the consumers' Co-operative movement will be limited and its functions become those decided by the community.

I suggest that this is a central issue, and that discussion on it should be open and frank. It is dangerous to drift on as the two movements are doing to-day, especially if we assume that within three years a Government will be in power in this country which will be compelled not merely to make up its mind, but to act. Unless the Co-operators can see with greater clarity what to-day are the essential economic requirements in the struggle to establish Socialism in this country by consent, the

THE CO-OPERATIVE MOVEMENT

Socialist movement will have to choose between sacrificing essential parts of its policy or by legislative enactment achieving its purpose, even though by so doing the Co-operative movement is affected. The choice, if it has to be made, is obvious and certain.

There is, however, time now for fruitful and useful discussion to continue, but the discussion will be more likely to produce effective results if the Co-operative movement enters into it with an appreciation of the urgent need of testing any of its proposals by their value in the decisive struggle against Capitalism.

The two movements may have common objectives, but, unless these movements agree on the road that must be travelled to achieve these objectives, friction and hostility may result instead of unity and alliance.

In my opinion, round the problem which I have just sketched in broad outline there can develop a serious conflict or a united front. The primary onus lies on the Co-operative movement, for on it rests the responsibility either of maintaining in 1934 theories that world events are making useless, or of shedding those theories and taking definitive steps towards joining, as a component part of the wider working-class movement, in the struggle to

PROBLEMS OF THE SOCIALIST TRANSITION

achieve Socialism in this country with speed and with peace.

Whatever may be the final place of the Co-operative movement in a Socialist community—and of that I shall have more to say—there seems to me no question that in the transition period, with Capitalist hostilities at their sharpest, it is the duty of the Co-operative movement, which sets as its goal the Co-operative commonwealth, to accept the urgent necessity for a changed outlook and a changed relationship towards the Labour Party, a Socialist Government, and a Socialist State.

There must, however, be not merely a recognition of this, but there must also be a reconsideration of the whole political relationship existing between the Co-operative movement and the Labour Party. I recognise that among the politically conscious Co-operators there are many who are alive to the need for that reconsideration. They regard their existing political machine as temporary, and believe that it “will wither away.” They are, I believe, far too optimistic, and minimise gravely the extent to which contrary opinion holds sway.

The Co-operative movement has a political expression in the Co-operative Party. The party was finally brought into existence during

THE CO-OPERATIVE MOVEMENT

the war on the ground that wartime legislation was antagonistic to the Co-operative trading interests. For years it had been contemplated, and through those years the claim for independence of other political parties had triumphed—partly through fear of Socialism, partly through visionary hopes. “Co-operation,” said T. W. Allen, at the Conference of 1917, “is a theory of society and therefore a legitimate basis for a political party.” Mr. Allen’s view is still predominant.

The circumstances of the time of the party’s birth and the existence of a divided Labour movement raised peculiar problems. One can well imagine how those who formed the party regarded with something akin to despair the possibility of securing, without independent action, the limited objectives they then set themselves, through a Labour Party committed to the hilt to the prosecution of the war to a successful issue, or through the then existent machinery by which pressure was brought to bear on political parties. Even so, it would have been ultimately wiser and better had the Co-operative Party never been formed. Were there not persons in the political Labour movement at the time the party was born who could have been utilised to fight for the protection of

PROBLEMS OF THE SOCIALIST TRANSITION

the immediate interests of the Co-operative movement ?

The party, however, was formed. It came to regard its limited objectives as being inadequate for popular appeal. In that it showed its political sense. Pressure of the idealists in the Co-operative movement, coupled with the fascinating dream of harnessing a vast and growing membership to a political party, led to a steady increase in the activity of the party, and the post-war period has been marked by the heightening of its claims. The heightening of these claims has brought to light underlying conflicts and difficulties vis-à-vis the Labour Party.

That party is a party of workers by hand and brain whose goal is Socialism. To achieve its purpose it has built up an organisation based on the affiliation of the Trade Unions, Socialist and Co-operative societies, and on individual membership, which finds its chief expression in and through constituency parties. I am not concerned here to discuss whether or not that organisation is as effective as it might be, whether or not it can be improved ; all I am concerned with is to state the existing facts.

The Co-operative Party first entered into a relationship with the Labour Party, which

THE CO-OPERATIVE MOVEMENT

broadly expressed itself in the granting to it by the wider movement of a number of parliamentary seats and in joint consultation on matters affecting both sides. The entry of Co-operative members into the Governments of 1924 and 1929 was hailed as positive proof of a close and cordial tie existing between the Co-operative and the Labour movements. But from the initial decision to allocate seats to representatives of the Co-operative movement is developing a situation that no one can contemplate with equanimity.

The Co-operative Party has definitely taken steps, especially in recent years, which can only be regarded as calculated to raise its status from that of a junior partner, subject to the decision of the senior, to at least that of an equal partner, and at worst a rival. In district after district to-day there is unhappy friction between the local Labour movement and the Co-operative Party. That friction arises in different places from different causes. It is not absolutely universal, but it is growing. One is conscious, for instance, of an insistent drive to compel the Labour Party not merely to allocate seats locally as between itself and the Co-operative Party, but to accept qualifications for political candidatures—local and national—

PROBLEMS OF THE SOCIALIST TRANSITION
which are not part of the qualifications it
requires.

Moreover, there is increasingly apparent a strong disposition—to put it no higher—for the local political councils of the Co-operative movement, whose affiliation is to the Co-operative Party, to copy the national example and to remain independent of, and unaffiliated to, the Labour Party. A form of organisation has been sanctioned by the Co-operative Party the tendency of which is to increase and not lessen the friction, for the ultimate control of the Co-operative political movement which may or may not affiliate to the local Labour Parties rests—in the first case locally and nationally, and in all cases nationally—in the hands of an unaffiliated body.

It may be that some local councils have, in certain regards, exceeded their authority in demanding, for instance, that no candidate shall be recognised by the local Labour Party as a Labour candidate who does not spend at the Co-operative store the amount of £30 a year, which is the qualification necessary for a post on the management committee of that store. It may be that local councils have exceeded their authority in demanding that local elections shall be fought under the banner

THE CO-OPERATIVE MOVEMENT

of Labour and Co-operation, and in the making of that demand have attempted to use as a lever the undoubted financial strength the Co-operative movement possesses. It may be that local councils have exceeded their authority in demanding an allocation of seats on local governing bodies as between the Co-operative movement and the Labour Party. That these demands have been made, and that the tendency to make them increases, is, I believe, undeniable.

I am aware that locally active members of the Co-operative Party are actuated by what they regard as the sincerest motives, and claim that they are in fact desirous of making the oft-spoken-of trinity of the working-class movement a real unity. They look upon their critics in the Labour Party as being hostile to the Co-operative movement, and as seeking to destroy its political expression. That seems to me to be a wrong-headed way of regarding the position. Unity in political action, as in other forms of struggle, demands unity of command, and the Socialist above all desires that in the fight that lies ahead of the whole working-class movement that unity of command should be effective in practice. He looks for that unity to come, not through a Co-operative, but through the

PROBLEMS OF THE SOCIALIST TRANSITION

Labour Party. We do not want to-day appeals for a stronger Co-operative Party but for a stronger and more closely knit working-class party fighting for Socialism by effective democratic means.

We ought not, however, to shirk the fact that tension exists, that difficulties are occurring, and are tending to occur with increasing frequency, which militate against the achieving of this essential aim.

How can anyone contemplate with equanimity a relationship between the two movements on the political side which prohibits in a certain area any participation in the drive for the increase of individual members of the Labour Party? Is it not grotesque that the building up of a Socialist Party is stopped because, in the area of which I speak, the Co-operative Party has been allowed to become the only expression of working-class political opinion? True, the local Labour Party is brought out at General Election times, but that seems hardly sufficient to those of us who regard the Labour Party, locally and nationally, as the only existing political instrument for bringing into being the Co-operative commonwealth.

Well may one of the bodies affiliated to the Co-operative Party ask that Party to realise

THE CO-OPERATIVE MOVEMENT

“ the dangers of seeking the common objectives with two separate and distinctive electoral organisations ” ; but when it goes on to ask that an agreement should be made with the Labour Party which will allow “ the Co-operative Party to take its proper place in the large political movement ” it is using words without precise content, and is avoiding the essential issue. What is “ its proper place ” ?

The essential issue is whether or not there shall be in this country one party with a declared purpose of employing effective democratic methods in order to destroy Capitalism, fixing its own qualifications, deciding its own tactics, controlling its own members, and embracing all sections of the working class who accept its principles and its constitution. Until that issue is faced, and the Co-operative Party realises what is involved in it, this dangerous drift will continue.

On this question I would emphasise what G. D. H. Cole has said : “ There is no reason for the existence of a separate Co-operative Party with a separate programme and organisation to the Labour Party, and the Co-operative Societies’ relationship to the Labour Party should be that of direct affiliation.” The Royal Arsenal Co-operative Society has shown

the way, and from its close relationship with the Labour Party nothing but good has come. Such a general relationship would give the Co-operative Societies on their political side the authority which they deserve, would end the bitternesses which are growing up, would do away with the necessity for Joint Committees, which often leave matters in the air, and would unite the Co-operative movement—as it should be united—with the general Socialist movement of the country.

The hope of achieving the underlying purpose which has always animated the forward-looking elements in the Co-operative movement lies in the establishment of this real unity. The Co-operative commonwealth—which is wider than a commonwealth of Co-operators—can be brought into existence in this country and in the world only by the efforts of the working-class movement united on objective and tactic. To fight in detail or in disharmony will but increase the possibilities of a successful outcome of the endeavours of our opponents to put an end to democratic rights, won by struggle, when the exercise of these rights imperils their own class-privileged position.¹

¹ Since this was written negotiations have been in progress between the Labour Party and the Co-operative Party with a view to improving relations. I can but hope they will succeed.

THE CO-OPERATIVE MOVEMENT

I can but glance at the relationship of the Co-operative and the Trade Union movements. For long I have held that in the struggle on the industrial field, whether it be for immediate advantages or in defence of existing conditions, or whether it be part of the general advance against Capitalism, the Co-operative movement has the opportunity to play an important part.

In the far-off days prior to the war, when in this country and in Ireland the ferment of industrial revolt was at its height, Co-operators, through their organisation, rendered service that will never be forgotten. No one who did not live during those days can fully appreciate the thrill that went through the whole Labour movement when a ship laden with foodstuffs for the Dublin strikers left these shores—foodstuffs provided by the Co-operative movement on receipt of an order from the British Trade Union movement.

And in post-war years there have been many instances, of which the mining lock-out of 1926 and cotton dispute of 1932 are still fresh in our minds, when the machinery and organisation of the Co-operative movement have been used to supply to the workers and their families at grips with their employers some, at least, of the necessaries of life.

PROBLEMS OF THE SOCIALIST TRANSITION

It may be that soon in this country we shall enter on another period of industrial unrest, in which the attacking and resisting power of the Trade Unionist can be immeasurably strengthened by the support of organised Co-operation.

In the past this assistance has been employed for the moment and for a particular purpose ; the nature of the aid has been determined in accord with the immediate need ; the organisation has been improvised. With a return of the fighting spirit to the Trade Union movement, with a more class-conscious purpose and direction in the fight, the need that has always been there for an organised commissariat will become urgent.

Some of us still dream of, and work for, the day on which the producer, struggling against Capitalism, will find organised and coherent support from the consumers, banded together in the Co-operative movement, which has its roots in the class structure of society.

Criticism of the kind I have had to make is not without danger of being misinterpreted, but misinterpretation should not be possible if the underlying purpose of that criticism is appreciated. Looking to the future, I, and I

THE CO-OPERATIVE MOVEMENT

believe all Socialists, foresee for the Co-operative movement a very high and important place in the conduct of the commonwealth for which we both work. Out of this voluntary movement will arise, if the battle against Capitalism is won, an organisation which will have entrusted to it the ordering and conduct of the distribution of immediately consumable goods to the people as a whole. It will supersede all private trading and, as Russia has already shown, become an integral and vital part of the ordered economic life which Socialism will introduce.

This new position and the preparation for it will, of necessity, call for alterations in the methods and structure of the movement, and in those alterations the part now played by the allocation of the surplus will be a diminishing factor. When the community owns all the means of production, distribution, and exchange, when to the developed Co-operative movement is entrusted the task of supplying the community with the immediately consumable goods they need and the clothes they wear, when all the families are members of the Co-operative movement and in their democratic way bring pressure to bear on those in charge of the planning of economic life so as to secure

PROBLEMS OF THE SOCIALIST TRANSITION

the satisfaction of individual tastes and requirements, the consumers' Co-operative movement, formed in revolt against Capitalism, will have achieved its goal.

The road to that goal lies through the capture, by the workers here and elsewhere, of effective political and economic power. Along the road the Labour movement and the Co-operative movement can march in unity, provided there is a real recognition on the part of the Labour movement of the importance of the Co-operative movement, and, on the part of the Co-operative movement, of the fact that it is but a section of a working-class army.

To the Labour movement in the transition period the Co-operative movement can bring, not merely its underlying idealism, but its immense business experience. Co-operators can aid a Socialist Government in solving problems of effective distribution ; they can become, it may be, a channel through which milk, bread, and a whole range of immediate necessities are universally distributed ; they can regard questions such as the municipalisation of these supplies not from the point of view of the glory and extension of the Co-operative movement, but from that of communal need and satisfaction. Their scope of helpfulness is immense, but it

THE CO-OPERATIVE MOVEMENT

can become effective only if Co-operators realise that, with changing economic circumstances and the sharpening of the class struggle, with the onrush of new forms of Capitalist domination, the dream of the gradual evolution of a consumers' commonwealth by the widening of the existing Co-operative movement must be abandoned. Only in and through the wider Labour and Socialist movement can our purposes be realised.

I could wish that Co-operators would begin to view their trading relationships, their educational activities, and their political work in this larger setting. The Co-operative movement, like the Trade Unions, is an instrument which the workers have made in their battle against exploitation ; Co-operators, like Trade Unionists, must face the need for refashioning these instruments when economic forces at work in society demand that refashioning. Let Co-operators think to-day less in terms of the movement they uphold being either a permanent irritant in a Capitalist economy or the gradual supplanter of that economy, and more in terms of its becoming now an integral part of the forces which are combating Capitalism and, in the future, a functioning authority under the general control and direction of a Socialist State.

V

WHAT OF THE PROFESSIONAL CLASSES?

By

LOUIS ANDERSON FENN

BOTH THE RÔLE of the professional classes in the transition to Socialism and the attitude of the Socialist movement to those classes depend upon the conditions under which the transition is made. Socialist anticipations of that transition vary between two extremes : on the one hand, what is picturesquely called "bloody revolution," and, on the other, what is roughly called a "constitutional" process.

By the former I mean the forcible seizure of power by a Socialist group after widespread economic breakdown has so disintegrated the machinery of government as to render such a seizure both possible and necessary. By the latter I mean a social transformation brought about through the normal machinery of government after a period of public discussion and propaganda which most people have accepted

PROBLEMS OF THE SOCIALIST TRANSITION

as adequate, but not excluding either innovations in the constitution or such coercive use of the resources of the State as any Government must in the last resort be prepared to make in order to enforce its will.

In what follows, I propose to neglect entirely the former alternative, since the Socialist League bases its propaganda and actions on the latter. It is possible, I know, to discuss whether that judgment is right, but to do so would take us away from our present limited objective. Since the matter must be decided one way or the other if the consideration of that objective is to be possible, I am basing what I have to say on the "constitutional" mode of transition, while recognising that much of my argument would become irrelevant should the transition be made in the alternative way.

A profession, in the strict sense of the word, is a vocation whose members work directly for the individual consumer without the intervention of a Capitalist employer, possess collective control over the ethics of their calling and the conditions of entry thereto, and impose upon entrants tests which, while designed to further an adequate standard of professional competence, also render the calling almost as

WHAT OF THE PROFESSIONAL CLASSES ?

inaccessible to poor men as the Kingdom of Heaven is said to be to the rich.

The number of professional men in this sense of the word is very small. According to the 1921 Census, the professions only accounted for 515,000 out of over seventeen million persons working for gain, or 3 per cent of all occupied persons. Even this small total probably included persons whom our strict definition would exclude. Neither the numerical strength of the professions, nor their importance in the Socialist scheme, would warrant a separate Forum Lecture in this series but for the fact that the professional outlook is increasingly prevalent in callings which do not entirely conform to the definition, and that many of those callings are of great importance in industrial society. It is therefore worth while to say something about the economics and psychology of the strictly professional man.

Now, in the first place, he usually comes of a moderately well-to-do family, and is himself commonly the possessor of modest capital resources. The barrister must be able to wait for briefs, and the doctor until his patients pay up, and while waiting they must be able to present to the world that front of prosperity which the world respects. Moreover they must

PROBLEMS OF THE SOCIALIST TRANSITION

not too seriously antagonise people who have money to spend. The professional man therefore resembles the small working Capitalist—the small trader or business man who lives partly by working and partly by owning, and “cuddles up” to the Capitalist class for the sake of trade and security.

The professional man, then, possesses the same kind of personal freedom in his work—in the sense of freedom from arbitrary interference—as the small trader. And in his case this freedom is enhanced by the possession of special skill and knowledge. People do not order him about, because they do not know what orders to give. If a man employs a doctor to cure him, it is not the patient, but the doctor—not the employer, but the employee—who gives the orders. There is consequently among professional men a much greater experience and expectation of personal freedom in work than among ordinary workers. Hence the professional man tends to believe that real liberty is to be found in extant society, and finds it difficult to understand the worker who complains that he is not free. This is why books about economics, which are usually written by professional men, deal with a world which the worker rightly considers unreal.

WHAT OF THE PROFESSIONAL CLASSES ?

The professional man is disciplined, not by an employer who can hold over him the threat of starvation, but by the nature of his work. To take an example from outside the range of the strict professions, the technicians in charge of a generating station are very rigidly disciplined while on duty. They have to do exactly the right thing at exactly the right moment, not because any human agency compels them, but because a mistake would send the whole concern through the roof, and them with it. In the strict professions this kind of obligation is partly enshrined in a professional code, which is capable of being enforced by some kind of professional council ; but the code is usually so obviously related to the requirements of their work that very few of the members resent its provisions.

All this may be summed up by saying that a professional man is really a very highly skilled craftsman, working under conditions of exceptional freedom which are chiefly attributable to the possession of special skill. Now, in the life of every craftsman, loyalty to his work is a factor which intertwines with and sometimes opposes the play of ordinary economic interest ; the higher the skill of the craft, and the greater its freedom, the more important this factor

becomes. Thus there will be found among professional men a real enthusiasm for their work, and a real desire to be free from external and irrelevant considerations and to get on with the job in hand for its own sake.

Hence, though most professional men accept for ordinary purposes the implications of Capitalism, their professional feelings are often at variance with its requirements. They have the vices of the petty bourgeois, but they are partially redeemed by an enthusiasm for their vocations to which Socialism, with its promised mastery of economic forces, ought to make a strong appeal.

Another, and much less desirable, element in professional feeling is the exclusiveness which, in a world like the present, necessarily marks any favoured calling. A profession to-day, though it may consciously serve the public, is inevitably in some respects a unity *against* the public. It maintains its standards against the real or fancied aggressions of the rest of society. In this respect a profession is reminiscent of the skilled trade unions in the heyday of their power. It differs from them, however, in this very important circumstance: that its standards are approximately governing-class standards.

It is therefore more than usually difficult for

WHAT OF THE PROFESSIONAL CLASSES ?

the professional man to realise that as a worker he should be on the side of the workers in the class struggle. The essential nature of that struggle is obscured for him by secondary considerations such as the gulf of manner, speech, and education which seems to mark him off from the working class and unite him with the employing class.

It is an important circumstance also that in even the narrowly professional side of his training he is taught to revere as though they were a universal rule processes of thought which are in fact characteristic of a tiny minority. Most professional training involves either science—which is in itself a rational process of thought—or at any rate logic, and leaves the student with the impression that rational processes have much more immediate importance in human society than they really possess.

Thus it comes about that the professional man believes intensely in the freedom of thought and the importance of rational discussion, in a world where, because of its class stratification, rational processes play a much smaller part in public life than the sheltered existence of the “intellectual” permits him to perceive. It may be said, in fact, that the cultural world in which the professional classes

PROBLEMS OF THE SOCIALIST TRANSITION

believe themselves to live has more resemblance in some respects to the world of our Socialist dreams than any social *milieu* in real existence to-day.

The consequence of this is that the professional man tends to believe, first, that freedom of thought and discussion really exist in Capitalist society, and therefore that people like the Bolsheviks, who take the Kingdom of Heaven by force, are sinning against a generally admitted principle ; second, that the evident unreasonableness of a great deal of public life is traceable either to the wickedness of politicians or to the inherent silliness of most electors, and that therefore some kind of " sane " autocracy is required ; and third, that in any fundamental social change he is likely to lose, not only a favoured economic position, but an intellectual freedom which he may value a great deal more than mere cash. It is not sufficiently realised among Socialists that what is arrayed against them in the minds of many intelligent people is not mere crude selfishness, but a real and entirely reputable, though ill-founded, fear for cultural standards whose value is by no means small.

There is therefore in the minds of many professional people who have never had to

WHAT OF THE PROFESSIONAL CLASSES ?

think fundamentally about the processes of human society a considerable Fascist tendency. Fascism promises to get things done without apparently endangering the cultural standards of educated people. It is no accident, for example, that the least inadequate reference to scientific research in a party programme was to be found in the prospectus of the New Party, which formed the political bridge by which Sir Oswald Mosley passed to frank Fascism. A real understanding of industrial society would of course disclose the fact that Fascism, with its acceptance of class structure, was incapable of getting things done in any sense ultimately sufficient for the recurrent crises of Capitalism. Unfortunately, however, the habit of radical thought about social affairs is not much more common among professional men than in other ranks of society.

At this point, lest I seem to my readers to be expending on the habits and peculiarities of a tiny professional class an undue consideration, I will repeat that the professions are important because they are typical of a very considerable class of technicians and administrators who do not fall within our strict definition. Fred Henderson has pointed out that one consequence of the increasing mechanisation of

PROBLEMS OF THE SOCIALIST TRANSITION

industry has been the disintegration of the skill of the old-time craftsman—his muscular strength being replaced by the power of an engine, his operative skill by the precision of a machine, and his almost uncanny knowledge of the raw material by the measured and tabulated knowledge of a technician in a laboratory. In industries such as the production of electrical power, and in the chemical industries in their most modern developments, the process has gone even further and the old-style workman has been completely eliminated.¹

Now this tendency means that the actual technical control of industry is passing into the hands of men whose training and outlook are professional in type—men of high technical skill, who have much the same attitude to their work and to life in general as that attributed to members of the fully developed professions. And what has been said about the technical control of industry applies also to its administration. Both in the great modern industrial unit and in the day-to-day business of government the trained professional administrator is acquiring ever greater power over the immediate decisions which actually set the wheels turning.

¹ *Economic Consequences of Power Production*, p. 49.

WHAT OF THE PROFESSIONAL CLASSES ?

Now I do not propose to argue that either the professional technician or the professional administrator is indispensable. On the contrary, I believe we could, at a pinch, do without both. In Russia, after the Revolution and the flight of most of their technicians and administrators, they managed to hold society together, and are now rather painfully evolving technical and administrative staffs of working-class origin. In this country, with our relatively highly educated working class, we could probably make a better job of it than they have done, even allowing for the greater complexity of our social organism.

There must be a very large aggregate number of workers who, while not qualified according to the requirements of examining bodies, are yet capable of replacing in case of need those of their technically qualified superiors whose work is essential to the continuance of industrial society in a crisis. Despite the increasing dependence of industry upon professional men, it is still true that the complete disappearance of technicians and administrators would inflict less immediate inconvenience on the public than a general strike of all the Unions affiliated to the Trade Union Congress.

PROBLEMS OF THE SOCIALIST TRANSITION

The whole propaganda of the Socialist League, however, is based upon the view that the sort of economic dislocation which made violent revolution possible and necessary in Russia need never arise in this country. We are assuming that, if Socialists are sufficiently resolute, persuasive, and well-advised, the change over from Capitalism to Socialism may be carried out by the deliberate will of the electorate in an orderly way, without the great human cost which is involved in the forcible establishment of a new régime. Now the peaceable accomplishment of Socialism involves the acquiescence of the men who have their hands on the levers of industry—that is, of the professional administrator and technician. It is therefore of great importance to the Socialist movement that the professional classes as a whole should be as well-disposed as possible to the Socialist project. Our problem, in fact, is not how to do *without* the professional man, but what to do *with* him.

Now I want to make it perfectly clear that there can be no watering down of Socialism to suit the prejudices of professional men, though of course every propagandist must speak the language which his audience best understands. Socialism means social equality, and our aim

WHAT OF THE PROFESSIONAL CLASSES ?

must be, not to persuade nice kind technicians to make gracious concessions to the workers, but to induce these specially favoured workers to forswear their privileged position and to enter on a basis of frank comradeship the working-class society which we call the Socialist order. What reason can we Socialists give to a privileged social stratum, such as the professional classes, to persuade them to co-operate in their own elimination as a distinct class of society ?

A great deal is sometimes made, especially by the organisers of professional associations, of the fact that professional standards of life are falling. They are ; but in comparison with working-class standards they are not falling very fast. It is difficult, if not impossible, to obtain precise figures of unemployment among professional men, but one's impression is that, while there is some unemployment, there is not a great deal. Moreover in Germany, where the fall of professional standards has been really catastrophic and the unemployment among young graduates of technical and university institutions has become a major social tragedy, increasing misery has led, not to Socialism, but to Nazism.

Hitherto in this country the crisis has had a

PROBLEMS OF THE SOCIALIST TRANSITION

more serious effect on the professional man's mind than on his pocket. It is extraordinarily depressing to live in a society which has lost its self-confidence, and this is more than ever the case when that loss of self-confidence leads to the denial in practice of things accepted in theory, and especially of things upon which one's own life is built. Most of the professional men directly involved in industry have received a training based on science, in which it is implicitly assumed that the advance of knowledge leads directly to the improvement of life through the increasing power of our race over material resources.

It has, however, become apparent that, whatever pious formulæ about science may be pronounced by those who control the policy of industry, their actions constitute a pursuit of scarcity and not of plenty. On the one hand, scientific men are professionally employed to improve our fisheries, while, on the other, entrepreneurs in pursuit of profit cast back into the ocean a miraculous draft of fishes. On the one hand, science is toiling to produce cheaper and more durable pneumatic tyres, while, on the other, attempts are being made to force up the price of raw rubber, even though the public need for rubber is far from satisfied. And so

WHAT OF THE PROFESSIONAL CLASSES?

on throughout the whole range of industrial activity.

This kind of thing has for many professional men a shattering effect on their vocational self-respect. They begin to feel that, whatever life may hold for them in their private and non-professional capacities, in the work which should have been their vindication they can take no ultimate satisfaction. They may rejoice as craftsmen in the overcoming of the refractoriness of their raw material, but when they come to consider, as all men must from time to time, the aim and purpose of their work, they are driven by the insufficiencies of Capitalism to doubt whether they are serving any worthy human purpose at all.

One of the most curious things about the younger scientific men in industry is the extent to which their leisure hours are occupied with æsthetic or mystical pursuits. Now this might easily come about simply through the normal human desire for change and recreation. Yet, in case after case, I have found, in private conversation, that the technician was seeking in his leisure, not merely distraction and change, but something fundamental which seemed to be denied him in his vocation. The science which thrilled him in his student days

PROBLEMS OF THE SOCIALIST TRANSITION

had become a mere ritual whereby he earned his bread, with no other meaning in a chaotic and senseless world. In his leisure he was seeking a significance which was most tragically denied him in his daily work.

In this respect the professional man does not differ fundamentally from the manual worker, who experiences the same kind of resentment at a system which makes nonsense of his working life. It is just one of the unsuspected ways in which the professional worker and the manual worker are akin through their common experience of the stupidities of Capitalism. Moreover, again like the manual worker, the professional worker is in no immediate danger of starting a social revolution. Like the manual worker he is liable to be drawn aside by all kinds of red herring ; and, like the manual worker, he finds some species of herring more attractive than others.

One of the most enticing varieties comes from the aquarium of Major Douglas. It is no part of my business to analyse the Douglas Credit Scheme ; but it is very relevant to our subject that those proposals promise to turn the flank of the social revolution and to extricate society from its recurrent crises while leaving intact the cultural standards of the middle class.

WHAT OF THE PROFESSIONAL CLASSES ?

From the psychological point of view Douglasism is an obvious " defence mechanism " of the middle-class intellectual. It enables him to face the fact that something is wrong with society, without the spiritual disintegration of facing at the same time the prospect of terrifying innovations in his own way of life. " Blaming the Banker " is in fact the economic correlative of " original sin " in some kinds of theology. It permits one to face an unpleasant situation without the obligation to do unpleasant things.

But, like original sin, Douglasism is incapable of affording ultimate satisfaction—and for the very reason that it leaves untouched the social criteria from which arises the technician's most profound intellectual *malaise*.

A professional occupation involves two distinct codes of behaviour. On the one hand is the ordinary code of Capitalist society, in which considerations of profit play the most important rôle. That code is commonly accepted by professional men for their ordinary purposes without serious criticism. On the other hand, every profession involves a code which arises out of the nature of the operations performed and the raw material employed, and this professional code is much less closely

PROBLEMS OF THE SOCIALIST TRANSITION

linked with the concept of profit than the ordinary code of Capitalist society.

For example, suppose a technician is employed on research connected with the manufacture of pneumatic tyres. As a scientific man he is bound, not only in honour, but because of the conditions of his work, to recognise, and to state frankly and precisely in his reports, all the relevant facts about his researches. This he must do, not simply or mainly because he believes lying is wicked, but because it is an essential condition of success in his profession. The aim of science—even of science in industry—is the discovery of real facts about the external world, and of real relations between those facts ; and since the external world takes no account of our desires, the talisman of scientific success is frank and explicit statement about the facts so far as we know them.

But our researcher knows that, when the tyres to whose improvement he has contributed come to be sold, the purchaser will be urged to buy them by a salesman who is not primarily concerned with truth, but with profit, and who will certainly not feel called upon to give an objective account of his wares. He may not, and perhaps usually does not, deliberately misrepresent what he has to sell ; but he will

WHAT OF THE PROFESSIONAL CLASSES ?

certainly be a special pleader on its behalf, and a special pleader of an unusually objectionable kind. A barrister is a special pleader, and does not pretend to be anything else. Everyone knows that he is making a case, and that it is his business to make a case. But, in salesmanship and advertising, success depends very largely on the ability of the seller to persuade unsuspecting people that an account, which is in fact partial and tendentious in the highest degree, is really objective and has the interests of the buyer at heart.

Thus the scientist in industry, though he rules his own professional life by the maxim that "the truth shall make us free," finds his labour ultimately prostituted to the service of a world whose motto is *caveat emptor*—"let the buyer look out for himself." But even a relatively cloistered and highly specialised person like a scientific worker cannot entirely dissociate the assumptions of his calling from those of the society which that calling is presumed to serve. He therefore finds himself faced with a rather uncomfortable duality of standards which often saps his confidence in his own work and subjects him to a real, if vague, unhappiness.

A further aspect of this inevitable duality of purpose which afflicts the professional man in a

PROBLEMS OF THE SOCIALIST TRANSITION

Capitalist world is to be seen in the reaction of a good many scientific men to the experience of war. That reaction has had some influence during the post-war years on various projects of professional organisation, and now threatens to reinforce the current drift towards some kind of Fascism.

The conflict arises in this way. It is implicit in the training of the science student that science, if it does not exist entirely for the service of mankind, at least can justify itself to society on that ground. Yet, during the war, scientific men, many of whom had not hitherto found the public willing to make use of their abilities at all, suddenly found themselves in urgent request, not to help in the service of humanity, but to blow mankind into little bits. They rightly felt that there must be something wrong with a world in which the light and power of knowledge could become such an appalling curse, and they formed a succession of projects, which still keep cropping up in the columns of the scientific periodical, *Nature*, whereby the results of scientific discovery should be controlled by scientific men themselves, instead of by the Capitalist class. They conceived that in this way the good intentions of their profession might be made to prevail

WHAT OF THE PROFESSIONAL CLASSES?

over the disorders of the world. Some of them, indeed, revived the ancient dream of Francis Bacon in his scientific Utopia, *The New Atlantis*, and talked about a society ruled by wise and honest scientific men instead of by corruptible electorates and time-serving politicians.

Now to the Socialist this is an impossible dream. It is impossible because it envisages the rational planning of Capitalist society, and Capitalism is in the nature of things incapable of subjecting itself to any rational and therefore economically complete plan. Incidentally, for all we may say about the power of knowledge, that power is not in the immediate sense economic power, and the scientist could not enforce his dictatorship save with the consent of the owners of industry.

Moreover it is a dangerous dream. It is dangerous because every attempt to plan Capitalism without first getting rid of the Capitalist must lead in the end to Fascism. The latter is really an attempt to impose upon Capitalism the sort of partial plan which the Capitalist system can accept, and to visit perennially upon the workers the cost of its inability to dispose of its product.

There is another circumstance which renders

PROBLEMS OF THE SOCIALIST TRANSITION

the technician a potential Fascist. He is usually categorically sure about what needs to be done on the technical side in any given situation. Usually he is right, so far as the technical aspects of the case are concerned. Unfortunately he is often both very bad at explaining himself to non-technical people and very distrustful of the expository function of the despised politician. He therefore finds in some respects attractive the unquestioning obedience exacted by the Fascist régime.

Furthermore, it is one of the limited virtues of Fascism that it sets up a relatively respectable social criterion in place of that of profit, which the professional man so often dislikes. That criterion is the good of the totality of political society, which looks a satisfactory conception until one realises that it is necessarily an illusion in a society riven into classes. Many people are attracted to Fascism for this reason, not having realised some of its other implications and insufficiencies.

Fascism, therefore, is another of the red herrings trailed across the path of the professional man. But, while it is in some respects less inadequate than the theories of Major Douglas, it has one very great theoretical disadvantage in the mystical nature of its ideas. For the

WHAT OF THE PROFESSIONAL CLASSES ?

Fascist "State" is not the same thing as the State of Socialist—still less of Marxist—theory. It is a mystical construction which is in some unexplained way different from the totality of its members. Its proceedings are therefore immune from the only possible rational test of politics, which assesses institutions and policies in terms of their relevance to individual lives. It is mystical and incomprehensible, and it is assumed to be an ultimate good in itself.

Now the professional man trained in science has a prejudice against that kind of construction. He deals with things which can be subjected to the rational tests of observation and measurements, or with concepts, like the electron, which, though themselves incapable of observation and measurement, lead to experimental and metrical tests. Mysticism in mundane affairs is therefore very unlikely to give him ultimate satisfaction, though it may appeal to him long enough to lay waste his life and render him a hindrance to the Socialist project instead of a help.

We have seen that the professional classes, like the workers, suffer from various discomforts arising out of Capitalism, and that, again like the workers, they are not necessarily led by those discomforts to adopt the Socialist faith.

PROBLEMS OF THE SOCIALIST TRANSITION

There is one respect, however, in which that very large fraction of the professional classes whose training has involved scientific work ought to be peculiarly accessible to Socialist ideas. Every scientific man has necessarily to be a materialist so far as his work is concerned. He may be a mystic or an idealist philosopher in his leisure time ; but while he is experimenting he has to assume that nothing is practically operative in the phenomena he is examining except matter and its changing relations. And many a scientific worker, driven by the need for intellectual consistency, has extended to the whole domain of his thought the materialist assumptions necessary in his laboratory.

The obvious way of making this generalisation is by adopting the mechanical materialism of the French Enlightenment, and imagining the universe, including his own mind, as a complex machine. But the results of this proceeding are extremely distressing, because they make nonsense both of science and of the scientist. For the scientist is convinced for practical purposes that when he feels himself to make a choice, he does really choose. He feels that, however the decision has actually gone in the particular case, it was within his power to choose otherwise right up to the time

WHAT OF THE PROFESSIONAL CLASSES ?

when the choice was made. Now it is quite possible to regard this sense of choosing freely as an illusion ; but, if one does so, one must sacrifice all the drama of human choice and action which makes life interesting—a sacrifice to which no one will really reconcile himself.

Moreover, science itself consists of choices of a particular kind, to wit, judgments which claim to be based on evidence. That is its whole title to be regarded as true. Now if the universe, including the scientist's mind, is nothing but a very complicated machine, then the scientist's judgments which make up the body of scientific doctrine, have no special title to be considered true or false : they just happen, like the opening of a valve when the cam pushes up the tappet. Thus the determinism which is supposed to arise out of science reverses the old Greek myth and devours its own parent.

Most scientific men in this country seem to get out of the difficulty by keeping some sort of idealist philosophy in the background to rescue them from the wilder extremes of mechanism. But this is an exceedingly uncomfortable evasion. One cannot really be a materialist about some things and an idealist about others, or a materialist all the week and an idealist on Sunday. Moreover, idealism is not really a way

PROBLEMS OF THE SOCIALIST TRANSITION

out. Both consistent idealism and consistent mechanism leave you in the end with a pre-determined world where events repeat themselves aimlessly in circles age after age until the gods grow weary. In such a world there is indeed nothing new under the sun, and the progress painfully achieved by the conscious effort of mankind is the progress of an everlasting kitten which perennially chases an uncatchable tail.

It is one of the chief philosophical merits of the Marxian dialectic, which is the peculiar philosophy of Socialism, to break through this magic circle and substitute a really credible drama of thoughts and things for the stagnant eddies of both metaphysical materialist and metaphysical idealist. It permits the scientific man to believe—as he must in practice—in the reality and primacy of the external world with which he is so constantly occupied, without at the same time denying the creative activity of his own mind, of which he is equally profoundly conscious ; and by substituting for the eternal circles of both crude materialist and crude idealist an ascending spiral of dialectical change it recognises the reality of progress, and sets the human mind, limited and conditioned still by external reality, contingently and increasingly

WHAT OF THE PROFESSIONAL CLASSES?

free for the ever-growing adventure of mankind. It is, in fact, the only philosophy in which the scientific man can really whole-heartedly believe.

In this argument I have been concerned to show, not that the professional classes can themselves achieve Socialism, nor that they are inevitably predestined to Socialist beliefs, but that they are in the nature of things and in some respects peculiarly accessible to such beliefs, though in other respects peculiarly prone to be drawn away by appropriate red herrings. In doing so I have concentrated, perhaps unduly, on those professions which involve a scientific training, to the exclusion of the administrative professions which are a different and in some respects more difficult problem. I have urged also that in the kind of transition which the Socialist League has in mind, the professional classes hold a position of greater strategic importance than in a revolution on the Russian model.

Though the Socialist movement has hitherto made no considerable attempt to enlist professional men on its side, it has from the beginning contained a higher proportion of such individuals than the general population of the country, not always to its own advantage.

PROBLEMS OF THE SOCIALIST TRANSITION

I suggest that in view of the predominantly peaceable nature of the transition to Socialism which the League seeks, some serious attempt should now be made to secure contacts and sympathisers among the professional classes, remembering always, however, that this is a subsidiary and not a main activity, that Socialism must be built by the working class itself, and that professional support would be dearly purchased by any recrudescence of the diluted Liberalism of the MacDonald régime.

VI

THE CLASS STRUGGLE

By
J. F. HERRIN

PREVIOUS CHAPTERS of this book have dealt with particular aspects of Socialist policy. It is my task to say something of the historical fact which must be the beginning of all clear Socialist thinking and the basis of any real Socialist policy : the fact of the class struggle. We Socialists realise that the task on which we are engaged—the task, not merely of carrying through certain social reforms, but of building a new society—is fundamentally a struggle between two main groups in Capitalist society : the group of property-owners, and the (much larger) group of property-less *workers*. And though we may recognise the existence—and seek to win the support—of such “intermediary” groups as certain sections of the middle class, technicians and other highly specialised workers, this does not in any way modify our acceptance of the basic struggle

PROBLEMS OF THE SOCIALIST TRANSITION

implicit in the Socialist fight against Capitalism. We are not—primarily—“planners.” At any rate our plans can only begin when the economic dependence of the great mass of men and women—the working class—is ended by the abolition of private property in all the means of wealth production, and power finally taken from the hands of the owning class, and transferred to the whole community.

The fact of the class struggle, though it is not formally recognised in the Labour Party’s profession of faith, is, nevertheless, implicit in its whole organisation. Its very aim of uniting, in one political army, the workers of every sort and kind, as against the army of owners, non-producers, on the other, is an acknowledgment of this basic fact and the fundamental problem of modern Capitalist society. No working-class party, whether it “theoretically” recognises that fact or not, can actually escape its implications.

We of the Socialist League give more than a merely tacit recognition to the class struggle. A paragraph of our constitution reads :

“ The Socialist League holds that democratic self-government can be fully realised only within a classless community. The forms which profess to

THE CLASS STRUGGLE

embody democracy in the society of to-day are nullified by a system, based upon the extraction of rent, profit, and interest from the workers, which confers upon the owning class irresponsible control over their fellows.

“ The League proposes to use existing parliamentary institutions for the purpose of organising the workers by hand and brain for the struggle to wrest power from this owning class, but it is well aware that in this contest they must prepare to overcome every form of resistance that a privileged class may adopt. Realising the evils that a violent conflict would bring with it, the League seeks to avoid it by rallying to the Socialist movement forces irresistible not merely by their numbers, but by the strength of their conviction.”

That is a clear statement of the problem which confronts workers in the class society of to-day. It points out that the basis of our present social system is the power conferred by ownership upon a small class to extract *profits* from the largest class in society—the workers ; and further, that this ownership of wealth carries with it *irresponsible control* over the property-less class.

It is impossible to speak of such a society as a “ community,” since there is a direct

PROBLEMS OF THE SOCIALIST TRANSITION

antagonism of interests between those two classes. The primary aim of the owning class must be, as it has always been, to extract as large a sum of profit as possible. And since profits can only be increased by reducing the costs of production, and wages form an important part of these, there is a never-ending economic struggle, expressing itself on the political field also, between the two classes.

Let me, for the sake of greater precision, as well as for their intrinsic historical interest, quote a few words from the manifesto of the original Socialist League, written by William Morris in 1885 :

“ The possessing class, or non-producers, can only live as a class on the unpaid labour of the producers—the more unpaid labour they can wring out of them the richer they will be ; therefore, the producing class—the workers—are driven to strive to better themselves at the expense of the possessing class, and the conflict between the two is ceaseless.

“ The profit-grinding system is maintained by competition, or world war, not only between the conflicting classes, but also within the classes themselves : there is always war among the workers for bare subsistence,

THE CLASS STRUGGLE

and among their masters, the employers and middlemen, for a share of the profit wrung out of the workers.

“ Lastly, there is competition always, and sometimes open war, among the nations of the civilised world for their share of the world market. For now, indeed, all the rivalries of nations have been reduced to this one—a degrading struggle for their share of the spoils of barbarous countries to be used at home for the purpose of increasing the riches of the rich and the poverty of the poor.

“ The workers, although they produce all the wealth of society, have no control over its production or distribution : the *people*, who are the only real organic part of society, are treated as a mere appendage to capital—as a part of its machinery.”

Note that this definition of the class struggle as it exists in present-day society does not insist on the wickedness of the owning class or of any of the individuals who compose it. Their ability to grow rich upon the labour of others, to live full and secure lives while the majority of their fellows must face anxiety if not actual want, is a result, not of their own

PROBLEMS OF THE SOCIALIST TRANSITION

baseness or lack of the elementary feelings of human brotherhood, but of an economic system, with a social code which has grown out of that system.

It is a common and very superficial charge against those Socialists who recognise the class struggle that they are advocates of hatred. It has always seemed to me that any body of ideas, religious, philosophical, ethical, which inculcates a love of good must by implication equally encourage a hatred of evil. But recognition of the class struggle does not incite to a hatred of individuals. The profit-grinder (to use Morris's word) at one end of the scale is as much a slave of the system as the wage slave at the other. And the end of the class struggle is human equality.

Now these basic facts about Capitalist society were quite clearly perceived in England more than a century ago, in the comparatively early days of the Industrial Revolution, by a whole school of writers on social affairs. Charles Hall, writing in 1805 on the *Effects of Civilisation* [!] *on the People in European States*, saw that "inequality being legalised, the wealthy acquire power over the labour of the poor ; the resourceless poor become the victims of the system of property, and *Capitalists and labourers*

THE CLASS STRUGGLE

find themselves in permanent antagonism.” William Thompson, whose *Inquiry into the Principles of the Distribution of Wealth most conducive to Human Happiness* was published in 1824, declared unequivocally that the producers were entitled to the whole product of their labours, but that in fact they did not get it ; and pointed out further that the “reward” taken by the capitalist led to increasing inequality. John Gray, in *A Lecture on Human Happiness* (1825), and Thomas Hodgskin, in *Labour Defended against the Claims of Capital*, published in the same year, developed the same arguments.¹

It was left to Marx not merely to recognise the fact, but to point out that the great revolutionary change in society at which the Socialists were aiming must be the work of the class which was exploited under the existing system. Looking back over history Marx saw how the new master class, the bourgeoisie, had itself come to power in the State after long struggles with the old governing class of feudal land-owners. It was Marx who set out to make the workers realise their “historic mission”—the ending of the Capitalist system based on private ownership, and the establishment at

¹ For an account of all these writers see *The Early English Socialists*, by H. L. Beales (Hamilton).

PROBLEMS OF THE SOCIALIST TRANSITION

last of a classless community in which wealth and the means of wealth would be the property of all.

We need only skim the pages of nineteenth-century history to realise that the fundamental drive towards social change—towards the extension of democracy—has come through the working class, organised as a movement to defend or advance its own class interests.

The Labour movement is this year celebrating the hundredth anniversary of the trial and transportation of the Dorchester Labourers. That event, which synchronised almost with the beginnings of the modern Trade Union movement, was a flagrant example of class tyranny and class prejudice. The story of how the trial of half a dozen ignorant labourers was rigged—how the Member of Parliament for the division was himself chairman of the Grand Jury—how all the jurymen were farmers and millers (a dissenting tradesman who might conceivably have had some sympathy with the men being successfully objected to)—affords a sufficiently striking illustration of the readiness of the owning class to forget its own professed ideals of justice when it feared a threat to its own stability and supremacy.

The trial at Dorchester took place at a time

THE CLASS STRUGGLE

when the workers of this country had no political rights whatsoever, except the (supposed) right of fair and free trial by their fellow citizens. The history of Britain during the nineteenth century is, indeed, a record of the gradual winning of fuller political and industrial rights by the workers, but it is a very superficial view of that history which would suggest that those rights were won as a result of a gradual spread of democratic ideas. Eighteenth-century philosophers, as well as nineteenth-century Socialists, had long before expounded in full the doctrines of human equality and social brotherhood. It was only when the increased strength of the workers *as an organised class* enabled them to demand rights that their masters made any concessions.

The French Revolution had been carried through by the bourgeoisie with the inspiring words of *Liberty, Equality, Fraternity*. But when the Paris workers—always, of course, referred to by middle-class historians as “the mob”—demanded that liberty and equality should apply to them, their demands were met by a whiff of grapeshot. In the early days of the working-class struggle in Britain, too, when workers from every part of the country united in support of the demands of the People’s

PROBLEMS OF THE SOCIALIST TRANSITION

Charter, the new middle class was perfectly ready, for its own ends, to make use of the numbers and the enthusiasm of the Chartists. But, when parliamentary reforms were at last made, the workers discovered that no concessions, no privileges, had been granted to them. The middle-class leaders had used the Chartist movement, but the lack of solidarity and of clear-cut ideas among the workers had made their betrayal easy.

It was only during the latter half of the century, as the working-class movement consolidated itself in the industrial field, as the Trade Unions and the Co-operative movement grew in strength and numbers, and as, very slowly, the ideas of class-consciousness began to grow, that Tory and Liberal Governments alike vied with one another in making concessions to the common people. *Political rights were won by organised class power.* The pretence that the growth of democracy has been due to a general "liberalising" of social ideas is contradicted by the facts of history.

And the pretence that democracy—at least so far as the political rights of the masses are concerned—is to-day superior in the State to the interests of the moneyed classes is contradicted by the happenings of recent years in

THE CLASS STRUGGLE

the various countries of north-western Europe. The fundamental power in every capitalist "democratic" country is Money Power.

It was that power which, in this country in 1931, brought down a Labour Government by organising a financial panic and raising the cry of "the country is in danger." It was Money Power in France which, a few months ago, by encouraging popular riots and street demonstrations and raising panic cries in the Press, brought down a Radical Cabinet and set up a "National" Government, whose first aim was to safeguard the interests of the well-to-do. It was Money Power in Germany which, from 1931 to 1933, subsidised Hitler's movement and enabled him and his Nazi bullies to destroy the last remains of democratic government in Germany—and to beat and torture democrats.

And in Vienna, too, in February of this year, the same power was at work. The correspondent of the London *Observer* (February 18th, 1934) wrote: "When the Government forces progressed [i.e. as the shells fell thicker amongst the women and children in the working-class dwellings] bonds and stocks went up. Economists and financiers interpreted developments favourably, and said to themselves that industry and commerce in Austria could only

profit if the spectre of radical Socialism were destroyed.”

Democracy under Capitalism, even enlightened Western Liberal Capitalism, is more than half a sham. We know, if we read the events of the last few years aright, that Money Power will either use or limit or altogether abolish democracy and democratic machinery, according to its view of its own interests.¹

If, as we have tried to show, the class struggle is a fundamental fact of Capitalist society, then emphatically it is a fact which must affect all our Socialist thinking and planning. In the first place it must surely make us realise that the task of achieving Socialism can only be carried through by the whole working-class army acting together ; and not by any one wing of it—the political or any other—operating by itself. It may be necessary and indeed inevitable that in Britain our Socialist educational work should, in the main, take the form of parliamentary propoganda, but it would be fatal to think that the task ahead is one concerned with Parliament alone. That task must be the work of a *class*—not simply of a political

¹ For a brilliant account of the workings of the financial interests in recent political happenings in Europe, America, and the Far East, see *Profits and Politics*, by R. D. Charques and A. H. Ewen (Gollancz).

THE CLASS STRUGGLE

party. The organised industrial strength of the workers may well prove to be the decisive factor in the actual struggle to wrest power from the owning class. The old habit of thinking about Trade Union policy or the activities of the Co-operative movement as things entirely distinct from the Socialist aims of the political wing of the movement is fatal to any real success.

But, for clarity's sake, here I propose to touch on one or two of the obvious applications of the fact of the class struggle to our working-class problems in relation to the Labour Party, the Trade Unions, and the Co-operative movement separately.

On the political side, our recognition of the fundamental nature of the class struggle provides us at once with a basis for all our planning and a test of every measure in the programme of a Socialist Government. The first steps—both in point of time and importance—which such a Government will take must be to take over the key positions of economic power from private control. Only when that is done, as we have already noted, can Socialist planning begin. And every legislative proposal of a Socialist Government must be tried by the simple test : Does it in some way, to some

PROBLEMS OF THE SOCIALIST TRANSITION

extent, raise the status and conditions of the workers as a class, and correspondingly weaken the power of the owning class? That is the acid test of every "step towards Socialism." Efficiency is not in itself such a step. And certainly the making of the Capitalist machine work more smoothly or regularly is not. It is perfectly true that Socialism means ultimately a far greater efficiency than can possibly be achieved by the wasteful competitive methods of Capitalism ; but the first step towards that ultimate efficiency must be the taking over of ownership and control from the profit-grinders and a complete change in the status of the profit-producers—the workers. No measure which does not in some way do that can have any primary place in a Socialist programme.

Again, the class struggle assuredly teaches us that we must go forward in our own strength, with our own Socialist policy, and that there must be no question of collaboration with other groups or sections of Capitalist society. To collaborate with "liberals" (non-Socialists) merely in order to defend democracy and the existing democratic machinery means the certain defeat of democracy. Only one thing can save democracy now—that it should actually "deliver the goods" to the common

THE CLASS STRUGGLE

people. And only Socialism can supply those goods. If democracy is not used—and carried further—for specifically Socialist ends, then the great mass of the people will lose their faith in it and their desire for it, and will acquiesce, as large numbers of them have done in Germany, in its destruction.

Manifestos about “waves of violence” and “democracy at stake,” signed by Labour leaders jointly with Tory and Liberal politicians are a mere clouding of the issue. Analyses of the existing world situation which omit all reference to the fundamental factor in that situation—the class issue—are worse than useless : they are dangerous. We need more than a “profound conviction of the supreme importance of liberty.” We want an exact definition of “liberty”—and our class definition of it will be profoundly different from that of the political supporters of Capitalism.

Further, in making its appeal for support, a really class-conscious Socialism will not conceal its aims—whether or not, by declaring them, it momentarily “loses two seats and 20,000 votes.” As a matter of fact, it is exceedingly doubtful whether we shall lose any working-class votes by straight Socialist pleading. The seven million people who remained

true to their class in the 1931 election are much more likely to be disheartened by timidity in their leaders than frightened away by plain speaking, and a majority which is not a conscious majority for Socialism is of less than no use if real social changes are to be made.

And our plain speaking must surely include an explicit declaration that we do not regard present parliamentary forms either as absolute or as necessarily the best forms for real democracy. The fact that certain countries have, as a result of capitalist counter-revolutions, adopted forms of government which are retrogressive as compared with parliamentary democracy must not blind us to the many and obvious shortcomings of our English parliamentary system. The machinery of parliament is not an end in itself, but a means to an end, and, in H. J. Laski's words, "we have got to make our opponents realise that our respect for parliamentary democracy is measured exactly by the respect they show for it."

Again—and this is a point of special interest to all who are convinced Socialists—our propaganda work and activities must be done in the closest possible relation to the mass working-class movement. We are taking part in the struggle of a *class*. No moral emerges more

THE CLASS STRUGGLE

clearly from J. T. Murphy's admirable book, *Preparing for Power*, than that the British working-class movement has again and again been weakened by the self-isolation of groups of more advanced Socialists. It is surely far more important to win converts, however slowly, by our Socialist advocacy by working *inside* the mass movement than to be "correct" in a little coterie outside.

On the industrial side of the movement we have to show Trade Unionists that only by political changes—by constitutional changes in the deeper sense of that term—can they win the economic security which is Trade Unionism's main aim. When, at the Hastings Labour Party Conference, certain Trade Union speakers objected to the discussion of the question of the House of Lords on the grounds that Trade Unionists were interested in "bread and butter" problems only, Mr. Peter Lee, President of the Miners' Federation, wisely rejoined that what the members of Trade Unions had now to realise—and the miners, he observed, had already realised—was that bread and butter problems can only now be solved through constitutional changes. The whole strength of the Unions must be behind

PROBLEMS OF THE SOCIALIST TRANSITION

the demand for such changes. "No politics in the Union" would be a suicidal cry in these days.

We may recall at least one occasion during recent years when a working-class victory was won—albeit it was thrown away later—by precisely this combination of industrial and political strength. When in the summer of 1925 the mine-owners were first threatening a lock-out in order to enforce wage reductions on the miners, and when the Baldwin Government made it clear that it would support the owners, the leaders of the British Trade Union movement met the Cabinet, and, by leaving no doubt that the whole strength of the British working class would be behind the miners, compelled the nine months' delay.

That was Red Friday of August, 1925 ; and on that occasion Mr. Ramsay MacDonald's comment on the event was as follows—"The Government has handed over the appearance, at any rate, of victory to the very forces that sane, well-considered, thoroughly well-examined Socialism feels to be probably its greatest enemy." It is scarcely surprising in view of that attitude on the part of supposedly Socialist political leaders that some Trade

THE CLASS STRUGGLE

Unionists have been distrustful of the political wing. We must have a "well-considered, thoroughly well-examined Socialism" which arouses enthusiasm on both sides of the movement.

The Unions have to remember that, just as they first went "into politics" because of their discovery that they could neither develop their organisations nor wage their economic battles without certain minimum political rights; so now they cannot hold what they have won, let alone extend their conquests, *without an extension of those political rights*. In other words, they must be in the van of the struggle for economic democracy.

One word finally about the Co-operative movement. Co-operators have to realise that they are a part of the whole working-class movement—and certainly their enemies have been doing their best to teach them that of late. The attacks on the Co-operative movement are precisely similar to the Fascist attacks on Co-operation in Italy and in Germany which were the prelude to the destruction of the Co-operative movements—and of all working-class organisations—in those countries. The choice before Co-operators is plain: are they going

PROBLEMS OF THE SOCIALIST TRANSITION

to rest content with a minor, controlled position under Capitalism, of the kind which Mussolini has planned for them in Italy ; or will they be partners with their fellows in a real Co-operative commonwealth ?

I have said that the class-struggle is no mere barren dogma ; but that it is a FACT—a fundamental FACT of to-day, and of history.

It is more than that. It is a call to battle, and an inspiration—a call to the battle for human equality against injustice, tyranny, and exploitation, against the cruelty of the “ cold-hearted gentleman and the mud-hearted bourgeois,” which condemns millions of men and women to lives which are only half-lives.

Dead men and women in Vienna—men and women who a few months ago were comrades of ours in the international brotherhood of our class—men and women who chose death rather than surrender their Socialist faith to a gang of bourgeois politicians and Junker land owners with the stock phrases of Freedom and Patriotism on their lips, and heavy artillery, pointing at working-class tenements, behind them—stand by our side. Those dead men and women, in Marx’s vivid words when he wrote of the Paris Commune, are already “ martyrs

THE CLASS STRUGGLE

enshrined in the heart of the working-class. And history has already nailed their exterminators to the eternal pillory from which all the prayers of their priests will not avail to redeem them.”

Their heroism is a call to us to put something of their spirit into our own struggle—to

*join in the only battle wherein no man can fail,
Where whoso fadeth and dieth yet his deed shall still
prevail.*

In *The Ballad of the White Horse*, Chesterton tells us of Alfred of England—a defeated and hunted man, thinking of dead comrades, his enemies everywhere victorious—hearing in a vision a message which steels him to courage, not by offering him easy consolation but by showing him the hardships ahead :

*I tell you naught for your comfort,
Yea, naught for your desire,
Save that the sky grows darker yet
And the sea rises higher.
Night shall be thrice night over you
And heaven an iron cope.
Do you have joy without a cause,
Yea, faith without a hope !*

Looking back on the history of the working-class we remember the dead of Peterloo—of

PROBLEMS OF THE SOCIALIST TRANSITION
1848—the hundreds butchered after the Paris Commune—the Russian Revolutionists of 1905—James Connolly and Matteotti—the Brown Houses and concentration camps of Hitler's Germany—Vienna.

But we remember, too, that in one great nation of the world the working-class has won its victory and is building the foundations of a classless State. And with the new Russia before our eyes we know that ours is not a “faith without a hope”; but that working-class victors as well as working-class martyrs call us to do our part in the one fight that matters.

VII

FORWARD TO SOCIALISM

*A statement of approach and policy approved by the
National Conference of the Socialist League, May
1934*

MADE INCREASINGLY desperate in the face of their inability to solve the vast economic and social problems created by private enterprise, the Capitalist forces have gathered in a universal effort to save themselves. Fascism and war threaten the workers. The Labour movement of Britain is now the last main bulwark within Capitalist countries against the wave of reaction that has swept across the world.

In this country, as in every Capitalist country, millions of workers are unemployed ; real wages have been brought down to new low levels ; social services have been ruthlessly cut ; unemployment pay is near starvation level ; the family and the individual have had thrust upon them the responsibility for maintaining the unemployed ; the Means Test and the Anomalies Act bring misery to thousands ;

PROBLEMS OF THE SOCIALIST TRANSITION

the Government still further penalises and divides the workless in its Unemployment Bill ; deaths and ill health from malnutrition accumulate ; rationalisation drives men and women into compulsory idleness while long hours are the lot of their comrades ; large sections of the " middle classes " are being pressed down to poverty level ; university-trained men and women are unable to find employment ; machinery is used, not to lighten the labour of both clerical and manual workers, but to increase unemployment ; land is misused or goes out of cultivation ; pits are empty and factories closed.

The mass of the people demand a sufficiency of food, shelter, and warmth ; they demand security of employment ; leisure without financial anxiety ; increased opportunities for cultural development ; they cry out for peace between the nations ; they ask that the great potential wealth of this country shall be harnessed to social advance. Increasingly they receive as their portion poverty, insecurity, unemployment, hunger, intensified exploitation ; daily they are conscious of the imminence of Wars so terrible that the civilisation they know may well go down in disaster to barbarism.

FORWARD TO SOCIALISM

Right at the roots of this crisis, which brings such suffering and oppression in its train, lies the maintenance of the private ownership of the means of production at the very time when it has ceased to be a progressive and expanding force in the evolution of society.

POVERTY OR PLENTY?

We are living to-day in a potential Age of Plenty, when the productive capacity of the world, thanks to man's technical and scientific conquest of nature, is so enormous that there should not be any man, woman, or child poor, ill-clad, ill-shod, or badly housed. A steadily rising standard of living for the millions of workers can be achieved. But from the very fact that all production is governed by the demand of private property to receive its toll in rent and interest arises the tragic paradox that, while colossal wealth is piled up in the hands of the few, poverty, unemployment, ill-health, ruin, and social degradation are the lot of the millions.

Because all the means from which are produced the necessities of life are privately owned and the products are distributed only on condition that from their production a

PROBLEMS OF THE SOCIALIST TRANSITION

private profit is secured, vast quantities of wheat are used as fuel for locomotives, coffee is thrown into the sea by thousands of tons, livestock is ruthlessly destroyed, land is forced out of cultivation, so that prices may be forced up to a profitable level. Meanwhile millions of workers walk the streets unemployed, real wages decrease, slums increase, disease and desolation spread.

Who dare speak of "prosperity returning" in a country where 5s. a week for the sustenance of a child is too great a burden ; in a country where miners winning coal deep down in the earth receive less than £2 a week ; in a country where skilled engineers for a full week's toil take home a meagre 58s. ; in a country where the agricultural worker and his family face life on 30s. a week ; in a country where millions of its "citizens" find insecurity and low wages their portion ? Poverty is to-day, as it has been in the whole era of industrial Capitalism, the inevitable fate of the mass of human beings. It is Poverty the Socialist fights.

THE FRUITS OF ANARCHY

Capitalism moves inexorably towards an ever-deepening crisis. At times the movement

FORWARD TO SOCIALISM

may seem for a moment to be checked ; at times the supporters of the system will hail the coming of " prosperity "—but the disease is incurable within Capitalism. The scramble for markets, which goes by the name of international trade, is in fact a fierce economic conflict leading, as the past abundantly proves, to the clash of armed forces. In every country the Capitalist class is now fighting for its own hand from behind tariff walls and restrictions which grow ever higher. Every Capitalist power is waging a bitter currency war with every other power, each desperately striving to secure an advantage over the other. Internally, Capitalism calls on the State for protection and aid ; State subsidies, State regulation of the profit systems are secured in its desperate attempt to bring regulation into the anarchy it has created and which it cannot destroy.

This appalling situation cannot be remedied unless we are prepared to change the whole economic system. Under Capitalism every individual owner of any of the means of production, farm, factory, or mine, must be assured of such a price for his output as will enable him to receive or pay profits, rent, and interest. Prices so fixed are too high to enable all those who need the commodities to purchase

PROBLEMS OF THE SOCIALIST TRANSITION

them. They have to subsist on low wages, the pittance of unemployment benefit, poor law relief, that rents, profits, and interest may be maintained. Capitalism, however much its defenders may claim, cannot distribute the goods it can produce. Millions of people, because of this, lack to-day the elementary necessities of life—food, shelter, warmth ; they suffer from unemployment because there is insufficient effective demand for the goods at the price at which they are offered in the market.

A WORLD IN ARMS

Side by side with this economic chaos there proceeds a terrific armaments race—economic rivalry breeds of necessity its final product, devastating war. The Disarmament Conference has been transformed into an Armaments Conference which will create, not peace, but new groupings of Imperialist powers. Japanese Imperialists, scorning half-hearted and insincere grumblings at Geneva, have, without regard to the rights of the Chinese people, turned Manchuria into a military base for the conquest of all China and for waging war on the Soviet Union.

FORWARD TO SOCIALISM

British Imperialists have met in Singapore for the reorganisation of their military, naval, and air plans, ready for war in the Pacific. The U.S.A. has plunged into the armament race with vast new naval and air constructions. The National Government has in Britain declared its readiness to embark on huge extensions of war preparations—in the name of Defence. Fascism is re-arming Germany so that it shall become again a “first-class” military, naval, and air power. Italy and France are armed to the teeth. The Soviet Union has been forced to divert great energy from her social reconstruction in face of the world war-mentality and the imminent danger of attack from Imperialist powers.

WHAT FASCISM MEANS

Parallel with the race towards an international conflagration proceeds the growth of Fascism in all Capitalist countries, our own not excluded. Fascism is Reaction writ large. It is Capitalism grown desperate. It is a forcible attempt to stabilise the existing system of class relationships. It throws off the democratic mask of capital's dictatorship for the purpose

PROBLEMS OF THE SOCIALIST TRANSITION
of smashing every organised opposition to Capitalism within its national frontiers. It takes the form of counter-revolution, waging civil war, if it considers the need exists, against the working class, crushing all progressive forces, leading mankind back to barbarism. Wherever it has triumphed it has shattered all working-class organisations—political parties, Trade Unions, Co-operative Societies—destroyed liberty, reduced men and women to abject slavery, and in not one case has it solved one economic or social problem—save the problem of how to crush Freedom.

It is growing rapidly in our midst, not in the number of people wearing Black Shirts, but in the minds and actions of the ruling classes and of the Government itself. Big sections of the reactionary Press have become the blatant propaganda sheets of Fascism. The police forces are being rapidly militarised and placed in the hands of “property-class-conscious” leaders. The air force is being made into a “class-proof” military arm. A new “Defence Force” is being organised to maintain civil “peace.”

The National Government is openly pursuing the reorganisation of Agriculture on a “Corporate State” basis, guaranteeing interest

FORWARD TO SOCIALISM

and profit to the private owners at the expense of the farm workers and the consumers. In Iron and Steel, in Cotton, in Mining, in Transport the same tendency can be seen. Already there is talk in Government circles of a "bloodless revolution."

THE WILL TO POWER

It may be that we are within measurable distance of the last opportunity for the people of Britain to use their democratic rights, won by generations of struggle, to prevent the triumph of the forces of reaction and Imperialist war. To ensure that the workers shall be enabled to declare their views freely at the polls and that they shall choose rightly are among the most decisive, fateful issues before the people of this country.

Nor is it a question of merely waiting to vote when the election comes. True democracy can only be defended and made effective provided the whole working-class movement, and above all its mass organisations, the Labour Party, the Trade Unions, the Co-operative movement, come together in a great active and battling alliance prepared to exercise their mighty

PROBLEMS OF THE SOCIALIST TRANSITION
power against the forces of reaction. Only day-to-day activity against every encroachment of Reaction in all its forms can pave the way to securing a democratic triumph for Socialism. And on that triumph depends all that the workers most dearly prize. The Will to Power must be made alive.

Events in Europe have shown that a policy of reformism in the Trade Union and Socialist movements has not availed to stem the tide of Fascism. It has indeed led to a weakening of the workers' forces and paved the way to disaster. Capitalism to-day finds its ultimate strength in the control of the State machine, the armed forces, and the police. That strength is exerted increasingly to maintain power over economic processes, education, and propaganda. From this control of education and propaganda arises ignorance of the real economic and political issues confronting the world, particularly among the so-called middle classes.

A CLASS PHILOSOPHY

On Socialists within the mass movements lies a heavy responsibility. On them falls the duty of constant propaganda and agitation to

FORWARD TO SOCIALISM

arouse a determination in rank and file and leaders alike to turn their backs on the hope of "making Capitalism more human." A belief in the necessity for an economic revolution, a determination to focus the clamant needs of the unemployed and the employed on this objective, a readiness to bring the injustices suffered by the masses out into the public gaze, the encouragement of a fighting and class spirit within the Trade Unions, the securing of a Socialist outlook within the Co-operative movement, so that its organisation for distribution of immediately consumable goods may be linked to the Socialist Plan, and the acceptance by the Political Party of the fact that the method of evolutionary gradualism is of no avail—these are the essentials if the Will to Power is to be made alive. The goal is Socialism. The time is short.

Especially is it necessary for Socialists within the Trade Union movement to concentrate the attention of their comrades on the need for a recognition that the demands for better wages, shorter hours, security, and fair conditions cannot be permanently secured by the traditional method of wage negotiation, even when backed by the strike, in the present declining stage of Capitalism. Nothing but the

PROBLEMS OF THE SOCIALIST TRANSITION

united struggle of the workers for the transfer to the community of the means of life now privately owned and controlled will suffice to preserve the workers from the degradation of their standards and their enslavement by a Fascist Capitalist dictatorship.

The adoption of this class philosophy by the Trade Union movement should find expression in organised demands and pressure for overdue reductions of hours, restoration of wage cuts, improvement of conditions, designed to build up a mass resistance in the Trade Unions to Capitalism. To facilitate the creation of this spirit of resistance, Socialists within the Trade Unions should work for the development and reorganisation of the Trade Union movement. The workers should be organised at the point of production ; workshop and factory committees should be built up ; and Craft replaced by Industrial Unions, or, where circumstances so determine, by General Unions departmentalised on the basis of industry.

This reorganisation is also essential so that the demands for Workers' Control in Industry may be made effective—a demand which a Socialist Government, when socialising industries or services, must take immediate steps to meet and to satisfy. The socialisation of the

FORWARD TO SOCIALISM

means of production cannot in fact be a reality unless accompanied by workers' control of industry.

THE CHOICE

Socialism or Capitalism—that is the issue. The question the workers must answer is not “Do you like the National Government?” but, “Do you want to end that system called Capitalism which has bred and is breeding poverty, unemployment, and war, and to replace it with that economic and social order called Socialism, which sets as its purpose the full satisfaction of human needs, true Freedom and Peace?” There is no half-way house.

The simplest needs of the workers—food, shelter, warmth, work, shorter hours of labour, security, freedom, peace—can be secured only by the coming of Socialism. Socialism means the complete transformation of the economic and social foundations of society. It replaces private ownership by social ownership, and production for private profit by production for use to the gain of all. When the community owns the means of production, then and then only will the class struggle be ended, the peace of the world realised, and war abolished.

PROBLEMS OF THE SOCIALIST TRANSITION

To achieve this goal we must, as an essential step, secure in this country a Socialist Government with Power, and behind it a class-conscious and determined working-class movement. That is the great task upon which every effort must be concentrated.

WE MUST HAVE SOCIALISM!

If we want to increase our communal wealth by enabling full use to be made of the productive capacity of Mines, Factories, and Fields, WE MUST HAVE SOCIALISM.

To enable each person to have a fair and equal opportunity of making his full contribution to the advancement of life, and to obtain his fair share of wealth, WE MUST HAVE SOCIALISM.

To enable all to work reasonable hours under the best possible conditions, rather than some to work long hours and others not at all, WE MUST HAVE SOCIALISM.

To see that the State accepts the responsibility of providing an opportunity for everyone to render useful service and of maintaining in decency and comfort all those who are not fit to work, through age or illness, or for whom no

FORWARD TO SOCIALISM

opportunity of work is provided, WE MUST HAVE SOCIALISM.

If we are to ensure to every family the privacy and comfort of a real home of its own and full opportunity to enjoy life freely after work is done, WE MUST HAVE SOCIALISM.

So that society as a whole shall be responsible for the health, well-being, and education of its people, WE MUST HAVE SOCIALISM.

In order to stop for ever the exploitation of the workers by the property-owning class and the financiers, by ending the private ownership and control of the land and all other means of production, and of all those financial institutions necessary for the maintenance of a highly organised industrial life, WE MUST HAVE SOCIALISM.

MAKE DEMOCRACY REAL

In the attainment of this end the workers by hand and by brain must obtain *power in the House of Commons* by the election of a *Socialist majority* at the polls, with a clear mandate to carry through a programme of Socialism. Mere reform of the Capitalist system will only bring more chaos.

There must be chosen a Government of

PROBLEMS OF THE SOCIALIST TRANSITION

Ministers pledged and determined to introduce Socialist measures without delay.

Then will come the time when the Government will experience strenuous and undemocratic opposition by vested interests of all kinds, which must be firmly set aside. *The will of the people must prevail.*

Nor is it enough to wait until obstruction has begun its deadly work. The House of Lords is a menace to democracy, a bulwark of Privilege, a certain opponent of Socialism. No Government, determined to effect the economic changes so urgently needed, should enter upon its task unless its mandate to sweep this anachronism away can be put into effective operation the moment the Government and the Socialist majority in the House of Commons so determine.

The Socialist Government must also have received authority from the people at the election to take all necessary steps, emergency, administrative, and legislative, during the first few months of power to maintain its democratic authority and to carry through the Will of the People. Whether by the utilisation of Emergency Powers or in any other way, the Socialist Government must secure undisputed control over the vital weapons of economic

FORWARD TO SOCIALISM

power. That is an essential prelude to the socialisation of industry and its planning.

But the programme of a Socialist Government must be of a twofold character. It must bring succour to the wrecks of Capitalism and make that assistance sure by securing immediate control of the key positions of Capitalism. These measures must be the first steps of a Five-Year Plan of Socialisation.

KEY POSITIONS

The first positions to be won are Finance and the Land. The Socialist Government must promptly socialise the Banks and Financial Institutions and vest in the community the ownership of the Land.

The Banks are the nerve centres of modern economy. Unless the banking organisation, with its financial control of industry, becomes the property of the community, every other measure of Socialist economic reorganisation can be frustrated. Unless landlordism is abolished and the economic life of the country is freed from the fetters of "rent" and "royalties" the productive forces of the country will continue to be stifled and all economic planning will be impossible.

PROBLEMS OF THE SOCIALIST TRANSITION

These two fundamental measures must be accompanied by the State control of overseas trade. Socialism has nothing to do with either Free Trade or Protection. Both are governed by the interests of private property. A Socialist Government seeks to organise the whole economic life of the country as a unit in the interests of the community. It must therefore put an end to the chaos which Capitalism has created, whether under Free Trade or Protection, by establishing governmental or State control of imports and exports in the interests of the community.

STRIKE AT POVERTY

Simultaneously with the acquisition of real control over these vital points of economic power, which secures the basis for far-reaching measures of socialisation of main and basic industries, the Socialist Government must immediately meet the critical conditions of the masses. It must, as part of the essential "ambulance" work :

Launch wide national schemes of slum clearance ;

FORWARD TO SOCIALISM

- Build workers' houses and new schools in rural and industrial areas alike ;
- Control and, if need be, socialise the building industry, so that the Housing plans may be carried through without delay ;
- Establish on a national basis, nationally paid for, the Trades Union Congress scales for relief for the unemployed, which at the moment are £2 a week for a man, his wife, and two children ;
- Abolish the Means Test and the Unemployment Anomalies Act ;
- Reduce the hours of labour to forty a week ;
- Repeal the Trade Union and Trade Disputes Act of 1927 ;
- Institute a new Factory Act, measures to ensure the safety of miners, and protective legislation for workers in offices, retail shops, restaurants, hospitals, and similar institutions ;
- Raise the school-leaving age to 15, and within two years to 16, and provide maintenance allowances ;
- Lower the pension age to 60 years and raise the rate to a minimum of £1 a week per recipient, on a non-contributory basis, so

PROBLEMS OF THE SOCIALIST TRANSITION

that the recipients may be withdrawn from industry.

These things must be done in the first few months of Power, and though their cost and that of Socialist development are too great to be borne permanently by the State under Capitalism, they must at the outset be financed by taxation, by the issue of national credit, by the complete control of investment, or by any other appropriate means until the increase of the national wealth under Socialism allows of their provision directly from the surpluses of production. Poverty cannot be tolerated. Its victims have waited too long.

A FIVE-YEAR PLAN

These measures constitute the first fundamental requirements of the transition from Capitalism to Socialism. But they do by no means represent all that requires to be done, and done quickly.

A Socialist Government that falters once it has started on the path of eliminating Capitalism and inaugurating Socialism is doomed to defeat and disaster through organised

FORWARD TO SOCIALISM

reaction. Capitalism has created an emergency situation, and only fundamental measures rapidly taken can prevent civilisation plunging into immeasurable chaos and conflict.

The measures already given—

Socialisation of Finance ;

Transfer of Land Ownership to the community ;

The control of Overseas Trade ;

Emergency social alleviation—

can only be the first steps preparing the way to a larger plan for the rapid socialisation of the means of production and distribution. Within the first five years such a plan must include the Socialisation of

Transport (Road, Rail, Coast-wise, Dock, and Air) ;

Mines, Gas, Electricity and Power, Oil ;

Iron and Steel Industries ;

Munitions and Heavy Chemicals ;

Cotton and Woollen Industries ;

Shipbuilding ;

Health Services.

PROBLEMS OF THE SOCIALIST TRANSITION

The distributive trades must also be brought within the ambit of a planned Economy until their socialisation is undertaken.

With the vesting of the ownership of the Land in the community the way is clear for the planning of Agriculture on the basis of :

Organised production of the most suitable crops under national control ;

Nationally determined minimum wages and conditions for farm workers, with provision for the organised workers in the industry to take part in its control ;

Full utilisation of the land by adequate drainage and cultivation ;

The provision of adequate electric and water supplies ;

The abolition of the tied cottage and the provision of adequate housing ;

The co-operative organisation of cultivators for mutual assistance ;

Land settlement, with the creation of co-operative small holdings centred around market towns and the utilisation of these

FORWARD TO SOCIALISM

towns for the necessary sorting, grading, and manufacturing processes, and for social amenities for the holder ;

The collection of produce for centralised marketing under the direction of the responsible Minister.

These are the first steps towards the planned transformation of Agriculture to a socialised industry.

In the case of industries which in the transition stages are not socialised, it is imperative that the Government should take wide powers to fix wage scales and hours of labour, and to ensure that all accounting be open to Government inspection.

The Trade Unions in these industries should be given every possible aid by the Socialist movement and the Socialist Government to ensure that workshops and factory committees control the conditions of labour in these non-socialised industries as a step towards their socialisation.

A bold plan of Socialist construction which is so urgently needed can only be carried through on the basis of an equally bold plan of financing the necessary measures and of

PROBLEMS OF THE SOCIALIST TRANSITION
relieving the community of the incubus of vast interest charges—in so large a part a legacy from the War, when lives—not wealth—were conscripted. No private desire for gain must stand in the way.

The Socialist Government must, as part of its budgetary programme—

Reduce the deadweight and interest of the National Debt and other public debts ;
Increase Death Duties and limit the Inheritance of Wealth ;
Increase Income-Tax and Sur-Tax on all large incomes.

Thus the Socialist Government can and should take the first great steps in the direction of an equitable distribution and a right use of the national income ; it will relieve the community of a vast incubus of interest payments and establish the means for the revitalising and reorganisation of the economic life of the country on prosperous foundations.

On no account can a Socialist Government when transforming industries or services to public ownership carry forward in the form of capital repayment the colossal claims which have been built up in favour of private capitalists. Compensation to previous owners should

FORWARD TO SOCIALISM

therefore take the form of providing income allowances for a period of years, but should include no provision for capital repayment save in the case of working-class funds, trust funds for socially useful purposes, and individual cases of proven hardship.

Socialism is concerned not only with the transformation of economic life, but also with social relationships arising out of Capitalism. Class divisions are nowhere more evident than in our present educational system, and a Socialist Government must at once organise a complete system of Free Education from nursery schools to university, on the principal of equal opportunity for all children, in which the environment is such that all capitalistic bias and caste prejudice will be eliminated.

FREEDOM AND EMPIRE

A Socialist Government must throughout work in accordance with an Economic Plan proceeding with ordered speed in its task. Such a plan must have regard, not only to the internal situation, but to the external relationship.

PROBLEMS OF THE SOCIALIST TRANSITION

Indeed a co-ordinated and direct attack on key positions in Capitalism, of which the control of external trade is an essential part, will necessitate a new attitude towards other countries, towards the Dominions and India, and towards the Colonial "dependencies" of the British Empire.

To the Dominions and to India full recognition of their "nationhood," with the right of secession, must be accorded, and with them, as with other countries, the Government must seek to establish economic and political relationships advantageous to the workers.

Above all a Socialist Government, armed with power over the operations of British Capitalism, must bring new methods and a new approach to the problems presented by the existence of the Colonies and Dependencies. Instead of subordinating and holding back the development of these countries and having recourse to repressive methods of rule, in the interests of Imperialists and private exploitation, it must enter into friendly co-operative relations with them, with the intention and declared objective of helping their inhabitants speedily to reach the goal of freedom.

The economic structure of the Colonies must not be allowed to develop along Capitalist

FORWARD TO SOCIALISM

lines, and must be organised on a Socialist model to meet the needs of their peoples.

PEACE THROUGH SOCIALISM

The external policy of a Socialist Government should have as its objectives the promotion of Socialism, the ending of Imperialism, and the preservation of world Peace. It will make the utmost use for the last of these purposes of the League of Nations, but it will not regard this institution, valuable as it might become under better leadership, as the organ through which to realise its ideal of international organisation.

War is inherent in the economic structure of Capitalist society : it cannot be banished by a League composed in part of Imperialist and Fascist States, fettered by the rule of unanimity and based on the retention of absolute national sovereignty.

While utilising the League to the full to attain any measure of agreement that may assist in postponing the danger of war, a Socialist Government will recognise the essential unity of the workers throughout the world in their struggles against Capitalism, and will

PROBLEMS OF THE SOCIALIST TRANSITION

look to those States where the workers are in control as its natural allies.

Instead of a fettered Trade Agreement with the Soviet Union, limited in objective and purpose, enshrining old quarrels of Capitalism and private interests, there should be a new and wider treaty of friendship. Such a treaty should be based upon and designed to secure the fullest economic and political co-operation of the two countries in a mutual advance towards Socialism and Peace. The Socialist Government should work in unison with the Soviet Union, whether in regard to economic agreements, the League of Nations, Disarmament, or Peace.

LORDS AND PEOPLE

In our view the proposals we have outlined as urgent measures necessary to save the people of this country from disaster and to secure their social well-being will make drastic constitutional changes necessary.

So long as the House of Lords exists, with its powers of obstruction and delay, no measures commensurate with the needs of the present situation are possible. The House of Lords is the bulwark of private property and reaction.

FORWARD TO SOCIALISM

The Parliament Act is not a method for expediting change, but a means of delay which permits sabotage and playing for time whilst Reaction outside Parliament is given the opportunity to destroy a Socialist Government.

The seriousness of the crisis, the drastic nature of the measures which are necessary to overcome it, demand speed and decisiveness of action. Socialists want to make the House of Commons an effective instrument of democracy. Once the people of this country elect a Socialist Government the will of the people must prevail and obstructions to the coming of Socialism must be removed. The House of Lords must be abolished ; all the powers of constitutional government, emergency, or otherwise, that have been freely used in the past must, if the need arises, be employed to ensure the fulfilment of the People's Will.

FORWARD TO SOCIALISM

Socialists stand for true Freedom and real Democracy, but are opposed to the time-wasting and obstructive use of Capitalist

PROBLEMS OF THE SOCIALIST TRANSITION
democratic procedure, which has brought parliamentary government into disrepute, and on which the propaganda for Fascism fastens. Parliament must become a workshop.

The issue is joined between the defenders of private ownership of the means of production, which spreads disaster and chaos throughout society, and the supporters of Socialism, which alone can remove poverty and bring prosperity and well-being to the Common People.

There is no time to lose. We must act and act quickly and decisively. The longer Capitalism continues the more will poverty, distress, unemployment, misery, and slumdom curse this country, the more certainly will the men, women, and children of Britain be dragged into the desolation and devastation of War.

Let the slogan be :

CLOSE UP THE RANKS !

FORWARD TO SOCIALISM !

THE END

THE SOCIALIST LEAGUE

is an organisation of convinced Socialists, fulfilling the conditions of membership of the Labour Movement laid down below, who believe that Socialism can come only through the conscious and determined action of the working-class movement in this and other countries and who believe further that only through such action can the dangers of Fascism and reaction in every country be averted.

Its members, accordingly, are pledged, as units within their Labour Parties, Trade Unions and Co-operative Societies, to do everything in their power to further the promotion and ultimate realisation of a militant Socialist programme and policy.

They are linked together in the Socialist League in order to equip themselves more effectively for the work of Socialist education and propaganda.

The Socialist League runs Socialist Forums, Study Groups, Discussion Circles, etc., for the discussion of practical Socialist problems.

It organises Week-end Conferences and Summer Schools for longer and more detailed discussion.

It publishes books and pamphlets in order to stimulate opinion and action throughout the Movement.

MEMBERSHIP OF THE LEAGUE

Membership of the Socialist League is open to all Socialists who are either individual or politically affiliated members of the Labour Party and who accept the League's constitution, rules and policy.

Members of the League must, if eligible, be members of their Trade Unions ; and, if possible, be members of the Co-operative Movement. All members are expected to become individual members of their Constituency Labour Parties.

Applications for membership and all inquiries should be addressed to the :

GENERAL SECRETARY, THE SOCIALIST LEAGUE,

3 Victoria Street, London, S.W.1

Telephone : Victoria 4063

