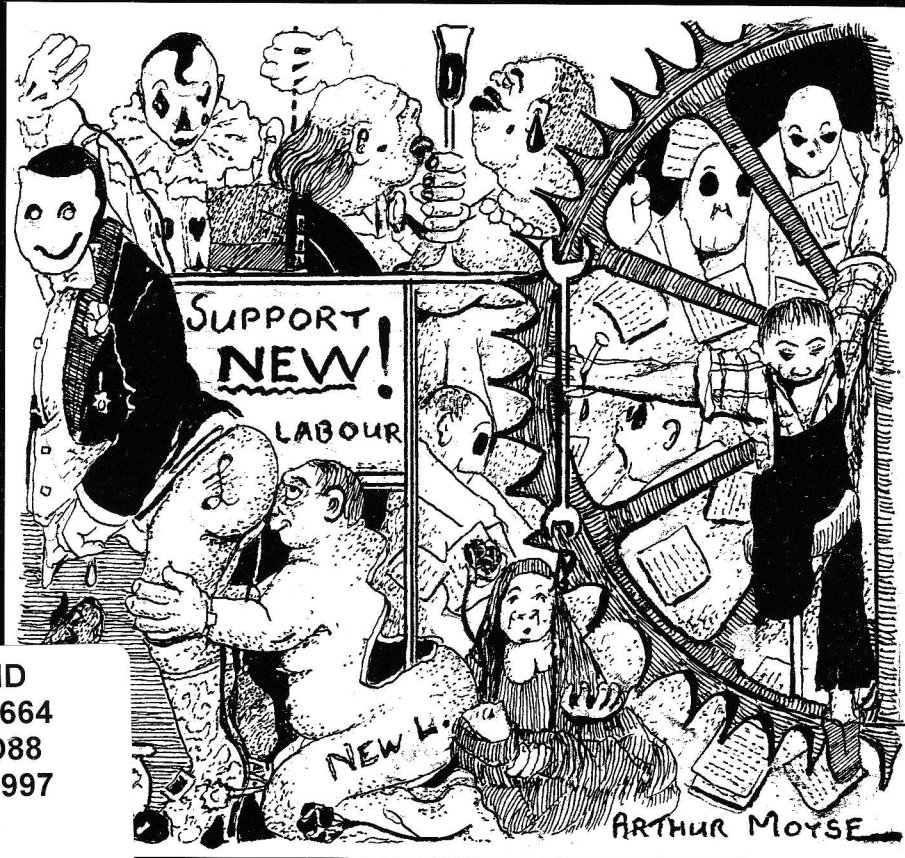


# The Tradition of Workers' Control



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**Geoffrey Ostergaard**

**FREEDOM PRESS**

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# **The Tradition of Workers' Control**

selected writings by  
**Geoffrey Ostergaard**

edited with an introduction by  
**Brian Bamford**

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## Contents

<b>Geoffrey Ostergaard: the official life</b>	7
<b>About Brian Bamford</b>	9
<b>British Syndicalism Through the Ages</b>	11
<b>The Tradition of Workers' Control</b>	27
British Syndicalism	37
Syndicalist Controversies	47
Disintegration of the Syndicalist Movement	52
Guild Socialism	55
Guild Socialism Re-Styled	67
The Building Guilds	73
The Contribution of Guild Socialism	77
From Control to Consultation	80
The Tradition Survives	86
<b>Fabianism and the Managerial Revolution</b>	95
<b>Industry and the Managerial Society</b>	105
<b>Socialism by Pressure Group</b>	117
<b>Fabian and Parliamentary Socialism</b>	123
<b>Modernity and its Aftermath</b>	133
<b>Appendix I: What's To Be Done</b>	141
<b>Appendix II: Anarchism and Syndicalism</b>	146

## ***Geoffrey Ostergaard: The Official Life***

Geoffrey Nielsen Ostergaard was born on 25th July 1926 near Huntingdon. His father was a Danish immigrant and his mother died when he was five. He had a hard childhood, but won scholarships to Huntingdon Grammar School and then to Peterhouse, Cambridge. His education was interrupted by the war, and after training as a pilot he spent two years in the Royal Air Force. After the war he went to Merton College, Oxford, where he got a first-class degree in Philosophy, Politics and Economics in 1950. In 1948 he married Eva Dryden, and they had a son, Magnus.

Geoffrey spent the whole of his career as a full-time academic. He began as a research student at Nuffield College, Oxford, working under the great socialist scholar G.D.H. Cole, and he got his doctorate with a thesis on 'Public Ownership in Great Britain: A Study in the Development of Socialist Ideas' (1953). He then spent 37 years in the Department of Political Science at Birmingham University – becoming an assistant lecturer in 1953, a lecturer in 1955, and a senior lecturer in 1965. He was acting head of the department in 1965-66, and at various times he was a Rockefeller Foundation fellow at the University of California, Berkeley, and a visiting professor at Osmania University, Hyderabad, and an examiner for various faculties and boards.

Geoffrey contributed frequently to academic periodicals and symposia and occasionally to ordinary periodicals. He produced several essays and papers, and also some more substantial publications – *Co-operative Democracy* (1955) with J.A. Banks, *Constitutional Relations Between the Co-operative and Labour Parties* (1960) with B. Smith, *Latter-day Anarchism* (1964), *Power in Co-operatives* (1965) with A.H. Halsey, *Gandhian Nonviolence* (1978), and *Resisting the Nation State* (1982). Above all he produced two authoritative books – *The Gentle Anarchists* (1971) with Melville Currell, and *Nonviolent Revolution in India* (1985) – on the libertarian aspects of the Gandhian movement in India, which he had studied at length and at first hand.

Geoffrey was also a frequent contributor to the anarchist and pacifist press, sometimes writing over the anagram Gaston Gerard, and he was a valued trustee of the Commonweal Collection, *Peace News*, and the Friends of Freedom Press. He was a consistent defender of academic freedom, and also a guide, philosopher and friend to generations of anarchists and pacifists. Everyone who knew him liked him, and all his many friends will miss him. He died in Birmingham on 22nd March 1990. Obituaries appeared in *The Times*, *The Independent* (by A.H. Halsey) and *The Guardian* (by Colin Ward).

NW

### **Acknowledgements**

Since I became involved in the anarchist movement in 1960, after the strike of engineering apprentices in May of that year, I have discussed the issues outlined here with many anarchist activists and trade union militants both in Britain and Spain. In particular I should like to thank James Pinkerton, secretary of the Syndicalist Workers' Federation until 1963; Peter Turner, *Freedom* editor and secretary of the SWF in the early 1970s; James Petty, secretary of the Direct Action Movement in the 1980s, for their help and advice over the years. I, of course, am responsible for the thrust of the analysis, and for any mistakes therein.

BB

### **About Brian Bamford**

Brian Bamford became an anarchist in 1960, following his experiences in the national strike of engineering apprentices in May of that year. He joined the Syndicalist Workers' Federation, and helped organise another strike of engineering apprentices in November 1964.

Internationally, he went to Spain in the early 1960s, working as an electrician in a fishing village while operating as an informant and contact for the FIJL – Spanish Libertarian Youth. Later, in 1964, he affiliated to the Gibraltar Labour Union (anarcho-syndicalist), but the British government black-listed him, preventing him from working for either HM Government or those private companies with contracts with the British government. He was dismissed as an electrician at the airport.

In 1970, together with Bob Lees the Oldham anarcho-syndicalist, and the Manchester Anarchist Syndicalist Alliance, he launched the Campaign for Shop Stewards in Textiles. The catalyst for this was a strike of Asian workers at Arrow Mill (Courtaulds) in Rochdale where Bamford worked. This caused disruption in the local industry and inside the National Union of Textile & Allied Workers. The right to shopfloor representation was won, but both Bamford and Lees were sacked and expelled from the union.

During the Gibraltar General Strike of 1986, and the shipyard riots of 1987 in Puerto Real, Bamford was back in Andalucia working as an electrician and shop steward for Gibraltar Shiprepair. He has had a long association with José Netto, the Gibraltarian anarcho-syndicalist and former leader of the T&GWU in Gibraltar, and is a friend of Pépé Gomez, the anarchist militant in Puerto Real.

Bamford has been an industrial correspondent for *Freedom* since the 1960s, but more recently has been identified with the Campaign Against the Job Seeker's Act.

## ***British Syndicalism through the ages: Geoffrey Ostergaard reconsidered***

Anarchists have no need to steal Geoffrey Ostergaard: he was a committed anarchist throughout most of his life. He was not the sort of semi-detached intellectual who occasionally toys with anarchism when affecting a certain rhetorical poise such as A.J.P. Taylor, the historian, and James Cameron, the journalist.

Geoffrey Ostergaard was a historian of labour history who used an anarcho-syndicalist perspective. He was much else besides. He was Senior Lecturer in Government at the University of Birmingham. He had researched widely on the co-operative movement. In later years he contributed two major books on the Gandhian movement in India (he was a visiting professor at Osmania University, Hyderabad) using an anarchist framework to elucidate the cultural and religious roots of the Indian experience.

### ***Academics and the Party Line***

In an appreciation, written shortly after Mr Ostergaard's death in 1990, Colin Ward described him in the following terms: "In many respects he was the ideal anarchist academic, as he explored issues which we as propagandists found difficult, just because what actually happened didn't entirely conform to our theories." (*Freedom*, 7th April 1990)

As the anarchist movement is blessed by not having an official party line I suppose the Geoffrey Ostergaard ideal anarchist intellectual, as outlined by Colin Ward above, is the objective every aspiring anarchist pundit should aim at. Mr Ward also refers to Geoffrey's "moral staunchness" as remembered by former colleagues and students, and his steadfast support for academic freedom and unpopular causes such as that of David Selbourne at Ruskin College in the late 1980s.

The anarchist intellectual has to act in an arena of ideas and morals without ideological props and without much in the way of

a script as a guide, save the maxim of anti-authoritarianism.

In contrast with marxism, anarchism doesn't have an institutional character. There is no head office for anarchism which can lay down ideas to be followed or a party line for anarchists. A true marxist can and often does profess beliefs he does not understand. As the marxist Leszek Kolakowski pointed out in his book *Marxism and Beyond* (1969): "The 1950 marxist knew that Lysenko's theory of heredity was correct, that Hegel represented the aristocratic reaction to the French Revolution, that Dostoevski was a decadent and Babaevski a great writer. That Suvorov served the cause of progress, and also the resonance theory in chemistry was reactionary nonsense. Every 1950 marxist knew these things even if he had never heard of chromosomes, had no idea what century Hegel lived in, had never read one of Dostoevski's books or studied a high-school chemistry textbook." Such toil would be unnecessary so long as the content of marxism is decided by what Leszek Kolakowski calls "the office".

Of course Mr Kolakowski, though he was expelled from the Polish Communist Party in 1966, was still a marxist in 1969 and keen to rescue marxism by saying that besides "institutional marxism" there is a genuine intellectual marxist current. And that this intellectual marxism would become a 'permanent aspect' absorbed into the social sciences, while 'institutional marxism' – head office marxism – would become an increasingly transitory aspect.

Unfortunately these two aspects of marxism have not been so easily separated. A distinguished historian like Eric J. Hobsbawm, respected by the liberal academic establishment, now appears to us like one of those Catholic priests who never believed in God all the time, is claiming that the Soviet Union (the marxist 'Vatican', head office until 1989) was never held in such high esteem by western marxists. Today he says they were only pretending to believe in 'office marxism' and he even has the brass-neck to argue that the October 'Russian Revolution' was more 'anarchist' in its inspired insurrectionary style than marxist.

Clearly anarchism can't compete with the simplified mind-set of the institutional marxist, and still less does it lend itself to the kind

of intellectual somersaults which often go with academic marxism like that of E.J. Hobsbawm. And yet, when it comes to career advancement in the academic world and fame in the British intellectual community, clever mental gymnastics seem to carry more weight than Ostergaard's moral staunchness. Clearly Ostergaard had a severe handicap amongst the armchair academics in the back-biting atmosphere of the university establishment, and amidst students who, as Wittgenstein complained, merely demand 'formulas', like marxism, to project themselves through their exams without having to think too much.

Geoffrey Ostergaard lacked the dazzle of an intellectual juggler like Hobsbawm: the trendier debates on the English Standard of Living in the Nineteenth Century, the Labour Aristocracy, Methodism and the Elie Halevy thesis, Bandits and Primitive Rebels were not part of Geoffrey's repertoire. Ostergaard studied at Oxford under the socialist scholar and former Guild Socialist G.D.H. Cole, and developed his research in the rather staid, straightforward narrative and chronological history of the British labour movement. His work was less than exotic and had a flavour of the mundane: from a thesis entitled *Public Ownership in Great Britain* in 1953 he went on to produce publications like *Co-operative Democracy* (1955), *Constitutional Relations Between Co-operatives and Labour Parties* (1960), *Power in Co-operatives* (1965). His approach was that of a dry steadfast chronicler of events.

Later came his work on India and non-violence: *Gandhian Non-violence* (1978) and *Resisting the Nation State* (1982), together with what has been described as two authoritative books *The Gentle Anarchists* (1971) with Melville Currell and *Non-Violent Revolution in India* (1985).

### **Managerialist Party and the International Bankers**

Here we are concerned with Ostergaard's middle period. That is that part of his work produced in the 1950s and '60s for *Freedom, Anarchy* and given at occasional anarchist Summer Schools. This work relates to his analysis of the trade unions, anarcho-syndicalism, the Labour Party, the British Labour Movement, Fabianism and

managerialism. Perhaps his most substantial contribution, written in the narrative style, is his thirteen-part piece entitled *The Tradition of Workers' Control*. This is an uneasy journey starting with Robert Owen and the Grand National Consolidated Trade Union of 1834, with its early conceptions of community and worker control, only to end up with the 1945-51 Labour Government and nationalisation devised by Herbert Morrison and Lord Citrine on the basis of what Ostergaard calls "managerial socialism" through the state administration of certain public corporations. The history of an idea transmogrified in the modern mind and finally presided over by the new managerial classes to become the glorious 'Theatre of the Absurd' that nationalisation became. A theory of public ownership to "secure for the workers by hand or by brain the full fruits of their industry" in the terms of the old Clause Four, became the excuse for what the syndicalists of the old Syndicalist Workers' Federation called 'the New Boss Class' in a new managerialist state.

It is Ostergaard's exposure of the managerial nature of the Labour Party which, for me, is most revealing. In his essay *Fabian and Parliamentary Socialism* (1962) he insists: "The Labour leadership made it quite clear – that by socialism it understood, not a new social order but regulated Welfare State capitalism". A more detailed account of the deep faith in leaders, professionals and experts of every description, which many members and factions of the Labour Party seem to have, is contained in his *Fabianism and the Managerial Revolution* (1954). The Fabians and the Fabian Society have had a lasting ideological influence on the Labour Party and were prominent in devising the old Clause Four in 1918. The Fabians, Ostergaard shows us, are modernists and just as much as Henry Ford are obsessed with the economies of scale, especially after 1918, when their emphasis on political bureaucracy declined, to be replaced by "a growing emphasis on the importance of the managerial elements in a socialist society".

In one of Ostergaard's most telling paragraphs he declares: "When the future historian comes to write the history of the managerial social revolution in this country, he will undoubtedly assign a prime role to the Fabians. To them belongs the credit for preparing

the way for the peaceful emergence of the *new ruling class* by the elaboration of a 'socialist' ideology which could, at one and the same time, enlist the sympathy of the proletariat without antagonising those *elements of the old capitalist class which were to be enrolled in the new ruling class of managers.*"

This process will continue under Mr Blair's Clause Four of 1995. The Labour Party, despite the trade unions whose role is now in decline, will remain a party dedicated to a notion of salvation through management and planning by 'experts'. The state socialist confusion, which Ostergaard mentions, that state control somehow means community control will go on.

In a way, as Ostergaard implies, the Labour Party as the party of planning has been the agent of management and trade unions in the same way as the Conservative Party has been the party of business and the City. Managerialism and syndicalism, bossism and workerism, have been the truculent twins of this the 'People's Party'. The reason for this managerial element in British State Socialism is, as Ostergaard shows, largely thanks to the Fabian Society. The early Fabians, it is true, had a large number of upper civil servants who stressed the importance of 'efficient bureaucratic administration'. But after 1918, Ostergaard says, the emphasis on political bureaucracy disappears to be replaced by more stress on the managerial elements. With this high regard for both bureaucratic and managerial administration went the notion that political power was not for 'ordinary mortals' but best in the hands of the 'super-intelligent administrator' eager to commit acts of social engineering.

In his essay *Industry and the Managerial Society* (1957) Ostergaard says: "The sad truth of the matter is that the Labour Party cannot be expected to formulate any measures to prevent the emergence of a managerial order. Of the two major parties in this country, its attitude towards the managers is more ambivalent and on the whole more favourable than that of the Conservative Party which, broadly speaking, still represents capitalist interests."

Of course there is a tussle between managerialism and syndicalism within the Labour Party, but, as Ostergaard shows, "there are too



many men of power in the Labour Party and the trade union hierarchy with an actual or potential interest in managerialism". And in the same essay he warns that "the political elite and the managerial elite are merging".

Despite this seizure of control by the managerial castes within the Labour Party, unity has been retained for three-quarters of a century by Clause Four and its promise of nationalisation. Clause Four allowed labourite social reformers and socialists to co-exist uneasily within the same party. The re-wording of Clause Four from a vague class struggle tract to a moralistic play-on-words in the new Clause Four of 1995, will still leave the manager and social engineer in the driving seat. It all reflects a kind of derelict liberalism, an appeal to what Malcolm Muggeridge (*Chronicles of Wasted Time*, 1982) contemptuously called "moderate men of all shades of opinion" to produce a party committed to modest progress, within the limits of the law.

In his recent book *Remaking the Labour Party: from Gaitskell to Blair* (1996) Tudor Jones says: "In the past, Labour's socialist myth – of a new social order founded on public ownership of the means of production – had helped imbue the Party's members and supporters with a spirit of collective identity and common endeavour and purpose ... It had offered them the goal of conquering the commanding heights of the economy, the necessary stage to the socialist commonwealth." Mr Jones wonders if the glue of Tony Blair's 'communitarian core vision' – a kind of abstract fantasy – will replace the idea of public ownership as another socialist 'touchstone' in the global market economy.

Ostergaard was clearly right to focus on the rise of managerialism both in the Labour Party and the modern world. In 1947 George Orwell had said as much in a review called 'Burnham's View of the Contemporary World Struggle': "*The Managerial Revolution* [by James Burnham], for instance, seems to me a good description of what is actually happening in various parts of the world, i.e. the growth of societies neither capitalist nor socialist, and organised more or less on the lines of a caste system."

But Ostergaard may have been a bit too narrowly engaged on the

then fashionable academic theory of managerialism. Many socialists, and particularly Fabians, as he says may not have been 'on the make' (see *Socialism by Pressure Group*, 1961), and yet parliamentary socialism because of the nature of international finance was bound to fail. The capitalist dimension cannot be overlooked. When Malcolm Muggeridge described the downfall of the second Labour government, he said Ramsay MacDonald and the rest of the Labour Cabinet gathered in the back garden at 10 Downing Street to await a call from the New York banking houses about a loan to let the Treasury keep the pound on the gold standard. When the answer came as 'no', MacDonald was left to go to the Palace and resign.

To Muggeridge this incident finished off any notion that "the Labour Party, or any Social Democratic party similarly constituted, can be an effective instrument of fundamental social change". And he went on to declare: "Whenever, subsequently, I read or heard prospectuses of the great things a Labour government might be expected to achieve, I remember that little cluster of respectable-looking men in the garden at 10 Downing Street, drawing at their pipes, occasionally getting up to stretch their legs, while they waited for Wall Street to decide their fate."

Despite the march of modernism and the rise of managerialism, international capitalism will still have a role in the survival of the next Labour government.

### ***Syndicalism: political nonentity, workplace reality***

The dilemma for the radical who, like Ostergaard, wants to go to the root of the social crisis of our time, beyond political reform and cosmetic surgery, is that most people are focused on and agitated by local and immediate issues and problems. Rarely do they spare a thought for the structure of the huge system of finance and power which torments them. And if they did think about things like state capitalism or corporate managerial frameworks in society, they would see it like the weather, unpleasant but an inevitable consequence of things beyond their control.

Most of the passions and resentments of the English workman are directed against the boss and the management, and those things

which impinge directly upon him and his family. As a young apprentice I was always struck by the widespread conviction on the shopfloor of managerial incompetence. How ironic then that the party which goes under the name Labour Party should, as Ostergaard shows, have so much faith in management.

But this kind of hole-in-corner syndicalism, this shopfloor syndicalism, syndicalism of the workplace, is a long way from what Ostergaard calls "the class war" heroically "to be fought to a victorious finish with no compromise given or taken" (see *The Relevance of Syndicalism in Anarchy* 28). The idea of 'no class collaboration' is an absurd Sorelian myth for scabby-arsed sectarians. Anyone who has been a shop steward in negotiations with middle management knows that they are characterised by appeals to give-and-take, reciprocity and fair play. As the sociologist William Baldamus pointed out (*Efficiency and Effort: an analysis of industrial administration*, 1961), such confrontations end up quantifying moral considerations such as issues of 'fairness' rather than the level of company dividends or the productivity of the workforce.

In the 1960s the idea of managerialism, which Ostergaard took up, was academically fashionable, but his ideological response in anarcho-syndicalism or syndicalism was, as he admitted (see 'The Relevance of Syndicalism' in *Anarchy* 28), almost to invite the label of 'crank'. Management and the 'manufacture of consent' under the factory regime is now seen as vital to the study of what is called the 'Labour Process'. It may be that reluctance to discuss big company dividends in pay negotiations is part of what Michael Burawoy (see *Manufacturing Consent: Changes in the Labour Process under Monopoly Capitalism*, 1979) describes as "simultaneous obscuring and securing of surplus value". It could equally be, as one bunch of middle managers told me, that many managers don't understand dividends any more than their workers do.

Geoffrey Ostergaard was a pragmatic anarcho-syndicalist: in 1957, in an article entitled 'Anarchy and Trade Unionism' (reprinted in *Anarchy* 40), he suggested "the time is not propitious" to create anarcho-syndicalist trade unions, but later in *Anarchy*, June 1963,

following the dramatic Spies for Peace incident and a revival of interest in anarchism in Britain, Ostergaard declared: "It is ... no extravagance to claim that the spirit of syndicalism ... is once again in the air".

What is extraordinary about this is not that syndicalism seemed to revive, but that it should ever have been regarded as "dormant ... in this country". It has been a virtual political non-entity, while in the workplace it has continued to be an everyday reality. This has been illustrated in the development of industrial sociology more recently. But the evidence of the case for shopfloor syndicalism was here before, as the industrial sociologist Paul Thompson shows: "Goodrich's classic 1920 study of workshop politics (*The Frontier of Control*) showed how workers countered managerial power by extending their own 'frontiers of control' with respect to organisation of work, changes in technology and methods of payment. Demands for workers' control were an extension of the degree of job control already exercised" (*The Nature of Work*, 1989).

Perhaps the reason that syndicalism continued to have an underground and almost unofficial existence on the shopfloor in this country, and only occasionally became politically centre stage, has to do with the fact, as Thompson says, "official socialist movements showed little interest and sometimes active hostility" to the politics of production and the daily struggles inside the factory regimes. Even most of the British anarchists have historically remained aloof from shopfloor struggles, leaving intervention to small numbers of anarcho-syndicalists and 'revolutionary syndicalists'.

On this issue Ostergaard (*Industry and the Managerial Society*, 1957) quoted Malatesta approvingly: "The error of having abandoned the Labour movement has done an immense injury to anarchism, but at least it leaves unaltered the distinctive character. The error of confounding the anarchist movement with trade unionism would be still more grave."

Only in Spain did the anarchist movement launch a full-scale commitment to the struggles of the labour movement with the consequences we now know well. Even as I write, the Spanish press is reporting industrial riots in Puerto Real, Cadiz and Seville among

workers in the shipbuilding and repair yards protesting at government attempts to reorganise their industry. Anarcho-syndicalist unions like the CNT (Confederación Nacional de Trabajadores) and CGT have a long tradition of radical action in these areas and industries. Perhaps the smaller scale nature of Spanish industry, with the background of artisan tradition and a huge rural and peasant base on which to draw, made the Spanish trade unions a more comfortable place for anarchists to work. More comfortable than the entrenched massive factory regimes of Germany and Britain.

The public face of syndicalism in Britain has been like taking a history ride on Blackpool's Big Dipper. Both Ostergaard in his *The Tradition of Workers' Control*, and G.D.H. Cole in *A Short History of the British Working Class Movement 1787-1947*, present the course of trade unionism and direct action as a series of peaks and troughs. The ups and downs of syndicalism and proto-syndicalist movements from the industrial revolution onwards. From the primitive and heroic beginnings with machine breakers and Grand National Consolidated Trades Union in the first half of the nineteenth century; 1850 brought a more legalistic approach with the conservative 'New Model' unions of the engineers and the cotton operatives. Later, between 1900 and 1914, came what Ostergaard calls "the classic syndicalist movement", and to it and Guild Socialism he devotes the lion's share of his history of *The Tradition of Workers' Control*. Up to 1910, though syndicalism was a recognisable entity, Bob Holton (see *British Syndicalism 1900-1914*) says it could be dismissed as a propagandist movement; with the revival of industrial unrest between 1910 and 1914 it took on a more significant character. After the General Strike of 1926, syndicalism was out of the picture until perhaps its final fling in the 1970s when, during the strikes of that decade, forms of workers' control and workers' councils were again given some consideration. Probably its political swan-song was the collapse of the miners' strike in 1984-85.

Although Ostergaard had predicted this final surge of syndicalism in the early 1960s, he had shifted the focus of his research from British anarcho-syndicalism to Indian pacifism before it had begun

to become a reality. Signs of the re-emergence of syndicalism as a political force were already there in 1963, when Ostergaard made his claim in *The Relevance of Syndicalism*, and by the 1970s far from being a social crank or 'troglodyte' he would have been in the mainstream.

In 1960 some anarchists, syndicalists and radical socialists tried to launch the National Rank and File Movement. This was a reflection of the times and by the middle of the 1960s the unofficial strike rate was so high in Britain as to justify a Royal Commission, which produced the Donovan Report (1968). In France in 1968, and Italy in 1969, an even higher level of industrial and social conflict was reached during massive strike waves. But the demands often went beyond wages to struggles over authority relations in the factory, control over the line speeds and piece work, questioning of job hierarchies and staff upgradings, etc. As K. Kumar (*Prophecy and Progress*, 1978) observed: "The changing pattern of strikes, especially since 1945, gives further evidence of an increasing restlessness about the quality of working life and the nature of the job itself".

The snag was that this blast of radical large-scale trade union activity in Britain lacked an anarchist or anarcho-syndicalist influence. Malatesta, and later Ostergaard, may have been right to advise the anarchist movement to steer clear of deep involvement in the unions, but the British Labour Movement has suffered from this lack of a libertarian input. It produced short-sighted trade unions, mindless militants and union bosses willing to collaborate with the state and employers, and when it did become radical, as in the miners' strikes of 1984-85, leaders like Arthur Scargill emerge; men without a serious strategy for changing society.

John McIlroy, in his book *Trade Unions in Britain Today* (1988), says: "The idea of *semi-syndicalist* ... trade unionism has been best exemplified in the 1980s by Arthur Scargill and the NUM". McIlroy claims 'semi-syndicalist unionism' doesn't accept the standard British trade union distinction between 'the industrial' and 'the political' action. Scargill, and what McIlroy calls the 'semi-syndicalists', seemed to believe that though the industrial

muscle of the miners' strike in 1984 a political transformation could come about. He was, and is, a skilful tactician on the industrial battlefield, but a hopeless incompetent when it came to winning the war in society. More recently McIlroy complains of Scargill's lack of a developed political grasp, another aspect of crude 'semi-syndicalism'. But anarchists would probably point to the lack of vision and a social perspective in Scargill – an absence of a convincingly coherent strategy – in a politically sceptical British society.

The reason the anarchists have mostly held aloof from labour and the workplace may have something to do with the intellectual and sectarian ghettos they tend historically to occupy in this country. In the early 1960s, when Ostergaard was writing, they were forced out of these ghettos by the rapid growth of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament and the peace movement, as E.J. Hobsbawm noted (*Labouring Men*, 1968): "... the implicitly pacifist Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, which has not merely become the most massive anti-nuclear movement in the world ... and a model for (less successful) foreign imitators, but a major force in British politics outside its narrow terms of reference". The result was that the British anarchists experienced something of a renaissance.

This all had some consequence for anarcho-syndicalist involvement in industry during the decade, as Ostergaard soon detected, of which the formation of the National Rank and File Movement was the earliest example. Unfortunately this did not continue into the 1970s. By then many of the mature militants had been lost or distracted, or were burnt out.

The experienced building workers, print workers, engineers and dockers evaporated from the 'libertarian' ranks through the 1960s. Brian Behan (building trade) drifted away early on; Bill Christopher (print) left Freedom Press to rejoin the Independent Labour Party in the late 1960s; Jack Stevenson dropped out; Peter Turner, a joiner and active trade unionist, remained at Freedom Press but was deeply occupied in editorial activities; James Pinkerton (print) resigned as secretary of the Syndicalist Workers' Federation in 1963; Ken Hawkes (journalist) and Tom Brown (engineering) both

retired from active syndicalism by the end of the decade. Many of the younger end hadn't much trade union experience, and for some anarcho-syndicalism was just another label, while for most the Vietnam War became their obsession.

Is it not ironic that when Ostergaard's forecast of the 'relevance of syndicalism' came to the forefront of British political life, as it did in the 1970s, the British anarchist movement was so ill-equipped to respond? It was as if the anarchists wanted the peace movement and the 1960s to continue forever, at a time when industrial unrest was widespread and trade unions more openly militant. Writers like Burawoy, Donald Roy<sup>1</sup> in the USA and Hugh Benyon<sup>2</sup> here, by focusing on shopfloor culture were confirming a tradition of syndicalism in which workers, at the point of production, continually tried to snatch control from management.

The anarchists and anarcho-syndicalists failed to see the significance of the changes, and switch their struggle from direct action in the streets against the Vietnam War and the Bomb, to the factories and picket lines at the end of the 1960s. Instead of lots of small unofficial strikes as in the early 1960s, the 1970s brought more big official strikes backed by the unions. In the north of England, the small Manchester group of International Socialists (later the SWP) – led by two young sociologists, Colin Barker and John Lee – supported the strikers at Roberts-Arundel, Stockport, in their marathon year-long dispute. The larger Manchester Anarchist Group stayed out of the strike and suffered as a result. Later there was little anarchist involvement in the Pilkington glassworkers strike at St Helens, which turned into a strike against the workers' union – the General and Municipal Workers' Union, led by Lord Cooper – as much as against the employer.

The Pilkington strike shook the trade union movement, and big unions like the engineers (AEU) and the Transport and General

1. *Working for Ford* by H. Benyon (1973).

2. *Banana Time, Job Satisfaction and Informal Interaction* by D.F. Roy (1973); *Fear Stuff, Sweet Stuff and Evil Stuff: management defences against unionisation in the South* by D.F. Roy (1980).

Workers' Union became more ready to declare strikes official. Factory occupations and the take-over by Upper Clyde Shipbuilders of their yard followed. Then there was the miners' strike and the three-day week, and the fall of Ted Heath's Tory government.

Most anarchists, and so-called syndicalists, seemed untouched by these syndicalist developments. The Vietnam War was more remarkable than St Helens and the Upper Clyde. The Angry Brigade in the UK, the Baader-Meinhof Gang in West Germany, the Italian Red Brigade and the plight of Spanish political prisoners proved more thrilling for most libertarians than our own native dockers, shipyard workers, mechanics, engineers and glassworkers. A world of passports and clandestine endeavours charmed us more than the daily grind of clocking-on and clocking-off. Peter Turner and Bill Christopher, through *Freedom*, tried to cover the industrial scene. There was some involvement in small disputes such as Dunlop at Rochdale in 1969 where an anarchist shop steward was victimised. In the early 1970s anarcho-syndicalists became involved in some Asian workers' strikes in Lancashire at the Courtaulds company. This was followed by an anarcho-syndicalist campaign for shop stewards in the textile industry in some North West towns. But these were small, isolated libertarian interventions onto Britain's industrial scene.

Perhaps the anarchists and younger syndicalists feared the anti-intellectualism for which the British labour movement is famous. But as Hobsbawm says, the Hispanic countries often blended anti-intellectualism "with anarchist traditions of direct action". There must be other reasons. Intellectual and sectarian politics often makes for an easier life, without the rough and tumble trade union activities. This sectarianism without sacrifice led to a dispute between shopfloor syndicalists and sectarian syndicalists in the Syndicalist Workers' Federation in the mid-1970s.

Inexperience and narrow intellectual sectarianism are two explanations why anarchists and anarcho-syndicalists failed to take advantage of this upsurge of public syndicalism. Outside factories many of them were unaware of the unpublicised undercurrent of syndicalism in British industry, before it was

uncovered by the Donovan Report on Trade Unions and Employers' Associations (1968) and by the industrial sociologists. Even the academic historian Ostergaard, highly regarded by some syndicalists, and the working class folksy historian of the SWF Tom Brown, seem only to have a vague grasp of the battles for control of the factory regimes.

Romanticism was another thing which plagued us at that time. Stuart Christie had been released from his Spanish jail in 1967 and written of his plot to kill Franco in *The News of the World*. The French uprising of 1968 had culminated with the workers rejecting the fraternisation of the students. There were riotous demonstrations in London against the US involvement in the Vietnam war. The Angry Brigade made its debut; bombs against the Franco regime were planted at a London branch of the Banco de Bilbao.

Charisma triumphed at a time when, in Britain at least, the humdrum was required. Flower power and exotic campaigns to outrage became preferred to the everyday struggles of factory workers. The writings of Geoffrey Ostergaard, at that time in the 1970s so significant to the lives of the British public and their industrial struggles, were forgotten or ignored in the great welter of fanciful exploits. Neither flower power or the Angry Brigade offered any serious alternative, but some project based on Ostergaard's ideas of anarcho-syndicalism could have come up with something plausible. In 1954 he claimed: "... syndicalism of the period 1900-1920 now appears as the great heroic movement of the proletariat, the last desperate attempt before society took the plunge down the managerial abyss ... to build up a distinctive proletarian culture ... and evolve a uniquely proletarian method on social action". The period between 1970 and 1984 represented another chance to put the brake on the managerial nightmare, and illustrated the intellectual bankruptcy of the political left in Britain.

**Brian Bamford**

## ***The Tradition of Workers' Control***

In this essay I shall attempt to do three things: first to sketch in outline the development of the concept of Workers' Control in this country; secondly, on the basis of this historical sketch, to clarify and to assess the significance of the concept; and thirdly, to advance a number of possible explanations of why, both in theory and in practice, the idea has met with such little success.

The phrase, 'Workers' Control of Industry', was first coined by the Guild Socialists in the years immediately prior to the First World War but the idea behind it can be traced back to the origin of the socialist movement in this country. The socialist movement itself was a reaction on the part of sections of the working class to conditions created by the Industrial Revolution of the eighteenth century. One of the central features of this revolution was the transformation of the productive system: the 'domestic system' of industry was replaced by the 'factory system' and the independent craftsman, owning his own tools and living by the sale of the products of his work, increasingly gave way to the industrial proletarian, owning little or nothing but his labour power which, in order to subsist, he was compelled to sell, on whatever terms he could get, to the capitalist owners of the new factories. Today, we are so accustomed to this method of production and its concomitant, the wage system, that it requires an effort of imagination to appreciate the significance of the change in terms of the lives of ordinary workers. From being, within limits, an independent craftsman or peasant with an assured place in his local community, the worker became, in the eyes of the masters of the new economic system, a mere commodity – a unit of labour, subject, as were all commodities, to the inexorable laws of the market. In a word, the worker became *alienated* not only from the means of production and the products of his labour but also from the community.

In these circumstances, it is not surprising to find that the new socialist theories proposed an alternative to the capitalist system which would avoid this alienation of the vast majority of the

people. This alternative was the autonomous, self-supporting communist community – what Robert Owen called the Village of Co-operation. In each of these villages, which were to be federated for purposes of mutual aid, it was proposed that some 2,000 individuals on the same number of acres of land should combine the pursuits of industry and agriculture, share all things in common, and reap collectively the full fruits of their labour.

For a whole generation this community idea dominated the minds of socialists and co-operators – the terms were practically synonymous – and several abortive attempts were made to implement it. The reasons for the failure of the community experiments and the virtual abandonment of the idea after 1850 would lead us too far afield. Suffice it to say that one of the reasons for the eclipse of the idea, quite apart from the inevitable reaction to practical failure, was the growing feeling on the part of many workers that it was no longer necessary to create a community *outside* the confines of existing society. The workers were capable of winning political and social rights *within* the existing social framework and could thus repair the breach wrought by their alienation from the local community of the first generations of industrial proletarians. Henceforth, socialists tended to concentrate their attention on the hub of the social system – the mode of production.

Even before the community movement had exhausted itself, there had been a move in this direction. In the late 1820s, alongside the co-operative stores which had been set up to accumulate the collective capital to start a community, there had arisen a number of ‘union’ shops sponsored by Owenite trade unionists. In these ‘union’ shops, groups of workers, usually in the same trade and prompted by strikes or lock-outs, had in effect established a system of co-operative self-employment. By a natural process, these activities gave rise to a number of Exchange Bazaars of which the one opened by Owen in Gray’s Inn Road, 1832, was only the most famous. Using labour notes expressed in hours of labour time, the Bazaars sought to arrange the exchange of the products of one particular trade for those of others.

### ***‘A Different State of Things’***

These first halting attempts to establish a rudimentary co-operative economic system were, however, soon overshadowed by a new movement among trade unionists. Inspired by the relative success of the ‘union’ shops and the growing strength of the trade unions, Owen became convinced that his ideas could be applied in a new way. Let the workers, he said, unite in one great union, divided into departments according to their various trades, and they can then take over the whole industry of the country. It was with this ultimate object that the famous Grand National Consolidated Trades Union of 1834 was formed. The two-fold purpose of syndicalist unions – the protection of the workers under the existing system and the formation of the nuclei of the future society – is evident in Rule XLVI of the Grand National: “That, although the design of the Union is, in the first instance, to raise the wages of the workmen, or prevent any further reduction therein, and to diminish the hours of labour, the great and ultimate object of it must be to establish the paramount rights of Industry and Humanity, by instituting such measures as shall effectually prevent the ignorant, idle and useless part of society from having undue control over the fruits of our toil, which, through the agency of the vicious money system, they at present possess; and that, consequently, the Unionists should lose no opportunity of mutually encouraging and assisting each other in bringing about A DIFFERENT STATE OF THINGS, in which the really useful and intelligent part of society only shall have the direction of its affairs, and in which well-directed industry and virtue shall meet their just distinction and reward, and vicious idleness its merited contempt and destitution.”

The dramatic collapse of the Grand National later in the same year scotched for a time the notion of a revolutionary transformation of society and in the years that followed the energies of the workers were largely diverted into three channels: (i) the Chartist movement, aiming at political reform; (ii) the ‘new model’ trade union movement, which sought to organise and to improve the lot of skilled workers within the existing capitalist framework; and (iii) the distributive co-operative movement, which sought to benefit

its members through a system of mutual trading in which the profits were returned to the customers. The notion of workers jointly owning their own workshops and thereby securing the full fruits of their labour did not, however, die. In 1845 John Drury, a Sheffield trade unionist, was instrumental in forming the National Association of United Trades for the Employment of Labour with the object of raising capital with which to employ men who were on strikes approved by the sister Organisation, the NA of UT for the Protection of Labour. And, in the following year, a group of Owenites and others started a number of Redemption Societies which proposed to seek 'the redemption of labour' by using the subscriptions of its members to establish self-governing workshops and land settlements.

A more substantial expression of the same idea was found in the activities of the Christian Socialists between 1848 and 1854. J.M. Ludlow and his colleagues were originally inspired not by their Owenite predecessors but by the French disciples of Saint-Simon, P.J. Buchez and Louis Blanc. Condemning the wage-system as a 'sort of washed-out slavery', they saw producers' co-operation as 'the practical application of Christianity to the purposes of trade and industry'.

#### ***'Direct Association for Production'***

The Society for Promoting Working Men's Associations – the Christian Socialist organisation – was responsible for initiating a number of self-governing workshops in the tailoring, baking, building, and shoe-making trades. In themselves, these short-lived associations could do little to stem the tide of commercial competition. Indeed, they sometimes found themselves competing against each other. To obviate this, Vansittart Neale proposed to unite all the associates in a particular trade into one Association. This proposal was rejected by the men themselves but the direction of thought implied in it led to the ideal of linking the associations with the trade unions. In a circular to all trade unions, Neale urged them 'to substitute for a mere defensive organisation the application of the principle of direct labour for production, distribution and

consumption' and made certain concrete proposals: that in each trade a Model Association should be set up for employing out of work members and that in the localities a number of different trade societies should combine to establish Co-operative Stores to supply articles of domestic consumption, raw materials for the productive associations, and a market for these associations, the outlay being met by special working class journals and in September 1851 the newly-formed Amalgamated Society of Engineers announced a plan for taking over the Windsor Ironworks at Liverpool. Unfortunately, before sufficient capital could be raised, there occurred the famous lock-out of the engineers in the Spring of 1852 which used up all the Union's surplus funds.

After the breakdown of this plan, the Christian Socialist movement began to wane. One by one the associations broke up. Trouble frequently arose between the managers, responsible to the Promoters, and the associates who wanted to be completely self-governing at once; and disputes over the method of apportioning the surplus were long and, at times, bitter. Concluding that 'working men were not fit for association', most of the Christian Socialist leaders turned their attention to the cause of working class education, and the new movement came to an end. In the light of history, however, the movement is interesting not so much for its failure to achieve permanent results as for the fact that, starting from different premises, animated by different motives, and largely ignorant of what had happened in the early 1830s, the Christian Socialists had eventually arrived in their organisational ideas at something closely resembling that of the Owenite trade unionists – despite their rejection of the revolutionary approach.

The one Christian Socialist who remained active in the working class movement was Neale. In the decades that followed, he and men like the old Owenite missionary, George Jacob Holyoake, kept alive the idea of producers' co-operation. In the sixties and seventies, mainly in the North of England and in Scotland, there were various practical attempts to revive the ideal with only limited, short-term success. By this time most of the trade unions, with the notable exception of those in the mining industry, had settled down to the



job of working the wage-system and Co-operation and Trade Unionism tended to drift apart and to pursue their different courses independently. Ironically enough, it was left to the then fashionable liberal economist, John Stuart Mill, rather than to the leaders of the trade union 'Junta', to envisage the supersession of the wage-system. In a passage which shocked his orthodox readers, he predicted:

"The form of association ... which if mankind continue to improve, must be expected in the end to predominate, is not that which can exist between a capitalist as chief and work people without a voice in management, but the association of the labourers themselves on terms of equality, collectively owning the capital with which they carry on their operations working under managers elected and removable by themselves."

#### ***Producers' versus Consumers' Co-operation***

Meanwhile, the distributive Co-operative Movement had been making steady progress and in 1867 was in a position to establish on a firm foundation a federal Wholesale Society. In 1872 the CWS embarked on its first productive venture and in so doing touched off a fierce controversy in the movement. The issue was this: When Co-operation extends to production, who should control, the consumers or the producers? To most of the old Co-operative pioneers there was no doubt about the answer. In production, the producers should control and anything else was a perpetuation of the wage-system. In the event, however, it was the protagonists of the consumer, the self-styled 'practical men' who controlled the wholesale and retail societies, who won the day. With the specious argument that the consumer represented a universal interest whereas the producer represented only a sectional interest, they enrolled themselves in the ranks of their ostensible opponents – the class which employed wage labour. Nobody who today reads the debates which accompanied this fateful step can but sense the guilty conscience of the consumer advocates or fail to notice the evident sigh of relief when, in 1891, the respectable Miss Potter, shortly to become Mrs Sidney Webb, published her famous book on the Co-operative Movement in which she, in effect, damned

producer co-operatives as associations of little capitalists. Henceforth, the consumers could draw their dividends with a good heart, secure in the knowledge that consumer control was in conformity with the views of the pundits of Fabian socialism!

The champions of the producer within the Co-operative Movement did not, of course, quit the field. On the contrary, they redoubled their efforts and in the closing decades of the nineteenth century succeeded in establishing a permanent foothold. In the process, however, and partly in response to the challenge of the consumer advocates, they modified their original ideas. For the purely self-governing workshop, they substituted the idea of a co-partnership between the providers of capital, the consumers and the workers. Henceforth, co-operative co-partnerships were to be composed of shareholding members, each with one vote, who might be either workers in the enterprise, retail or other productive societies, trade unions, or interested individuals, mainly ex-workers. Any surplus was to be divided between the three elements of the co-partnership in the forms of a fixed or maximum return to capital, a dividend to customers, and a bonus to workers in proportion to wages. Management was to be vested in a committee elected by the members but no society could qualify as a genuine co-partnership unless the workers in the enterprise participated directly in its control.

Today, there are some forty-odd co-operative co-partnerships organised on these principles, most of them linked to a federal organisation, the Co-operative Productive Federation, founded in 1882. Confined mainly to the clothing, boot and shoe, printing and building trades – all of which require a relatively small amount of working capital – and trading almost exclusively with the retail co-operative movement, these societies have managed to survive in an economic climate which has become increasingly hostile to the fundamental principles. Whatever their defects, both in theory and practice, they remain the clearest examples of practical workers' control in this country. By their very existence they refute the wild generalisation that ordinary working men and women are incapable of controlling industrial undertakings.

***The Forerunners of Syndicalism***

In following the trend of thought which has led to Co-operative Co-partnerships, I have necessarily by-passed other manifestations of the idea of workers' control. For reasons which are partly to be explained by the peculiar insularity of the Co-operative Movement and partly by an unfortunate association in earlier years with so-called capitalist co-partnership and profit-sharing, the protagonists of co-operative co-partnership have never had much impact on the thought of the rest of the socialist movement. The advocates of workers' control to whom I now turn have been, for the most part, either unaware of their existence and thus ignorant of the lessons it teaches or unconvinced by its claims that, by peaceful means, it could transform the capitalist system.

To pick up the thread of the story, it is necessary to recall that, until the 1880s with the minor exception of a few of the later Chartists, socialism in England meant essentially voluntary socialism as exemplified in the Co-operative Movement. The so-called 'socialist revival' of the 1880s was in fact an importation into this country of foreign, mainly Continental State Socialist, ideas – plus the alleged 'discovery' by the Fabians that state intervention was socialism in disguise! Of the three schools of socialist thought which had become established by the end of the 1880s – the Marxist, the Fabian-Labour and the anti-State or Anarchist – only the latter, it need hardly be said, was at all favourably disposed to the idea of workers' control. Out-Marxing Marx himself, Hyndman and the SDF stood for the simple 'nationalisation formula' – the nationalisation of the means of production, distribution and exchange – and facilely argued that this was the solution to all problems. The Fabians, more cautiously, stood for 'the emancipation of Land and Industrial Capital from individual and class ownership'. More to the point, they persuaded themselves and most of their labour listeners that socialism implied consumer sovereignty and that the state was nothing but a glorified consumer co-op! Self-appointed apostles of the coming Collective State, they roundly denounced all who wished to abolish the wage-system. Not its abolition but its nationalisation was what they demanded.

In a particularly revealing essay on 'The Illusions of Socialism' Shaw put the point thus. Contrasting the enthusiasts, who conceive the idea of socialism and who win converts to their ideals by presenting civilisation as a popular melodrama, with the statesmen who in the 'raw reality' have to draw up concrete proposals, capable of being adopted by a real government and carried out by a real executive, Shaw stated: "Out of the illusion of 'the abolition of the wage system' we shall get steady wages for everybody and finally discredit all other sources of income as disreputable. By the illusion of the downfall of Capitalism we shall turn whole nations into Joint Stock Companies; and our determination to annihilate the bourgeoisie will end in making every workman a bourgeois gentilhomme. By the illusion of Democracy, or government by everybody, we shall establish the most powerful bureaucracy ever known on the face of the earth, and finally get rid of popular election, trial by jury, and all the other makeshifts of a system in which no man can be trusted with power ..."<sup>1</sup>

***The Socialist League***

Not all Fabians were as frank or perhaps as prescient as Shaw but it is not difficult to understand why the freedom-loving William Morris reacted so violently against collectivist socialism. Roundly asserting that "individual men cannot shuffle off the business of life on to the shoulders of an abstraction called the State, but must deal with it in conscious association with each other", Morris and his colleagues in the Socialist League (1885-1894) looked forward to the establishment of socialism by means of free associations. At this time many in the libertarian socialist and anarchist camps – notably Kropotkin – were sceptical of the possibility of winning over the trade unions to their cause, but a section were more hopeful. Two of the earliest publications of the League were in fact expressly addressed to trade unionists. One, by Belfort Bax, urged all unionists "to unite themselves with a view, at the earliest possible date, of laying hands on the means of production, distribution and exchange" and "to direct their energies towards consolidating and federating with the distinct end of constituting

themselves the nucleus of the socialist commonwealth".<sup>2</sup> The other, by Thomas Binning, in a similar vein, argued that the unions "contain within themselves all the elements essential for the constitution of a rational society; they are therefore pointed out as the natural pioneers of the New Era".<sup>3</sup> A few years later the anarchists of the *Freedom* group expressed the same conviction that the trade unions could do much to lay the foundations of the free society. In an important article, 'What's to be done', in *Freedom*, February 1892, a contributor argued that "Unions are free spontaneous associations of working men waiting to do anarchistic work". Their great fault, he continued, lay in their preoccupation with mere defence and their too narrow ideal. They must be made to realise that "if the worker is to be a free man he must be a joint owner with his fellows of the means of production, and that to obtain the control of these is the end and aim of the labour movement". When trade unionists have become inspired with the ideal of being their own employers, their own masters, then, he continued, the future social revolution will be an anarchist revolution and its motto will be: 'The land to the labourer, the mine to the miner, the tool to the toiler, the produce to the producer'.

I have introduced these quotations not because the Socialist League and the *Freedom* group were influential – although their influence has been consistently underestimated by Fabian historians – but because they provide part of the evidence for the view that syndicalist aspirations, in one form or another, have formed a continuous tradition on the part of at least a minority of British workers. To many observers, the classical syndicalist movement of the period 1910-20 was as exotic in character as its name. In truth, however, most of the basic ideas of the movement can be found in the earlier publications of the Socialist League and in *Freedom*. By the 1890s the Fabian-Labour tide in British socialism was rising fast but there remained a current of thought hostile to the new collectivism. Even the Webbs in their *History of Trade Unionism* were forced to admit that "there always remained, in the hearts of the manual working class of Great Britain, an instinctive faith in the ... idea of Associations of Producers owning

as such both the instruments and the products of their labour".<sup>4</sup> Without this 'instinctive faith' and the propaganda of the anarchists and libertarian socialists, it is doubtful whether the later syndicalist movement would have flourished as it did.

### ***British Syndicalism***

Although it is true that most of the ideas of the classical syndicalist movement had been anticipated, there was something really distinctive about the new movement: its single-minded emphasis on the workers' trade union. With the possible exception of some of the Owenites, all the British forerunners of the syndicalists were pluralistic in their conception of socialism. The reformists – the Co-operators and Christian Socialists – did not envisage the abolition of the political State; the revolutionaries – the libertarian socialists and anarchists – while opposing the state idea, did not see the trade union as the only form of organisation in the new society. The trade union was to be only one form among other forms of association – the State of the Commune, the Co-operative Society or the self-governing and spontaneous associations of men for various purposes. The syndicalists, in contrast, were essentially monistic. For them, the trade unions were the only form of organisation which the workers would need under socialism. All social as well as economic activity began and ended in the trade unions. Even where a territorial form of organisation was envisaged as playing its part alongside the functional form of organisation by industry, the unions, and the unions alone, were to be its constituent parts. In this respect, classical syndicalism may be regarded as a narrowing down of hitherto closely-allied ideas, a concentration of them in the one form of organisation which was most clearly related to the intimate and daily experience of the workers. From this concentration syndicalism gathered in strength and gained in clarity – at what, its critics claimed, was the sacrifice of comprehensiveness and other legitimate interests.

This single-minded emphasis on the trade union was the source of much of the distinctive ethos of the movement. The trade union was, at this time, a purely working class form of organisation. In contrast to the so-called workers' political parties or even revolutionary bodies as the *Freedom* group, there was no place in it for anybody who was not a worker. Professional middle class intellectuals who frequently provided both the leadership and the ideas of the socialist political movement, were therefore at a discount. As a consequence the syndicalist movement was, and saw itself as, a purely working class form of socialism – or, as a *Freedom* editorial put it, 'A Working-Class Conception of Socialism'.<sup>5</sup> In retrospect, therefore, syndicalism appears as the great heroic movement of the proletariat, the first movement which took seriously Marx's injunction that the emancipation of the working class must be the task of labour unaided by middle class intellectuals or by politicians and aimed to establish a genuinely working class socialism and culture, free of all bourgeois taints. For the syndicalists, the workers were to be everything, the rest, nothing. The world was to be a world of labour and a world for labour.

### ***Industrial Unionism***

Continental syndicalism came to be known as the revision of Marxism 'to the left' in contrast to Bernstein's 'revision to the right'. In these terms, Fabian-Labourism represents the British version of revision to the right. British revision to the left, which marks the beginning of modern syndicalism as a distinct movement in this country, may be dated from the split in the SDF which took place in 1903, and which led to the formation of the Socialist Labour Party. Almost from the outset this party, centred chiefly in Scotland and the North, advocated the cause of industrial unionism and it must be given the credit for introducing this concept in any clear form into this country. Early in its history the party came under the influence of the American Marxist Daniel De Leon, and when the latter joined the Industrial Workers of World, founded at Chicago in 1905, with a programme of militant industrial unionism and workers' control, the SLP became the chief channel of communication

between American 'syndicalism' and the British workers. The policy of the SLP is best summed up in its statement: "Having overthrown the class State, the industrial unions will furnish the administrative machinery for directing industry in the Socialist Commonwealth".<sup>6</sup>

In 1905 James Connolly, leader of the Irish Socialist Republican Party, established contact with the SLP on the Clyde and it is in his writings that we find the clearest and most vigorous expression of the ideas dominant during the early phase of the movement. In *Socialism Made Easy* (1908), he argued that the function of industrial unionism was "to build up an industrial republic inside the shell of the political state, in order that when the industrial republic is fully organised, it may crack the shell of the political state and step into its place in the scheme of the universe".<sup>7</sup> Opposing State Socialism as bureaucratic and inimical to individual freedom, he stated that in the form of society he envisaged: "the administration of affairs will be in the hands of the representatives of the various industries of the nation ... The workers in the shops and factories will organise themselves into unions, each union comprising all the workers at a given industry ... [each] union will democratically control the workshop life of its own industry, electing all foreman, etc., and regulating the routine of labour in that industry in subordination to the needs of society in general, to the needs of its allied trades, and to the departments of industry to which it belongs ... Representatives from these various departments of industry will meet and form the industrial administration or national government of the country."<sup>8</sup>

In this industrial republic, the political State would have no place: state, territories and provinces would exist only as geographical expressions. Such a conception of socialism, concluded Connolly, determined the strategy that the working class must pursue. Having realised that "the workshop is the cockpit of civilisation", the workers would recognise that "the fight for the conquest of the political state is not the battle, it is only the echo of the battle. The real battle is the battle being fought out every day for the power to control industry ..."<sup>9</sup>

***Syndicalism and the Anarchists***

The development of a movement which placed primary emphasis not on political action but on direct action in the industrial field naturally attracted the pure anarchists. In 1903 Samuel Mainwaring had already founded a paper *The General Strike* which, for its short life, became the industrial supplement to *Freedom*, and in 1907 Guy Aldred and Charles Mowbray had formed The Industrial Union of Direct Actionists.<sup>10</sup> Inspired by the libertarian ideas of Bakunin and Kropotkin, its manifesto, addressed "to the Wage Slaves of the World", urged a decentralised pattern of organisation in which each local group of workers would "exercise perfect local autonomy".

Aldred's group, however, was numerically small and soon disappeared. Thus anarchism in Britain provided no Pelloutier to lead the anarchists into the unions and give a libertarian direction to the trade union movement.<sup>11</sup> Dwarfed in size in comparison with the anarchist movement in France, the British anarchist movement at this time was dominated by the ideas of Kropotkin and Malatesta, the leading exponents of anarchist-communism, who had found refuge in this country. Their experience in the First International had convinced them that the trade unions could not be relied upon exclusively. Like all anarchists, Kropotkin accepted the idea of workers' control but he did not stress the need for building up workers' organisations so that they could both fight more effectively in the daily struggle against capitalism and also prepare themselves to become the administrative units of the future society. He took the view, as did most anarchists of that period, that the social revolution would come as a consequence of a general uprising of the whole mass of the people, in the course of which spontaneous associations would be thrown up to carry out the essential work of reconstructing and reorganising society. The single-minded emphasis of the syndicalists on the trade unions, and their assumption that only the activities of the producers really mattered, seemed to him altogether too narrow a doctrine. Thus, when the younger French anarchists were flocking to join the new movement, he pointed out to them that syndicalism was only the partial expression of anarchism as he conceived it.<sup>12</sup>

***The Need for Organisation***

As against this view, the attitude of the 'pure' syndicalists to anarchism was best expressed by Van Eeden: "Anarchism neglected the immense importance of organisation, and supposed the workers to be capable without leadership, without discipline, of achieving the tremendous task of creating a well-organised commonwealth. This was indeed Utopia in its worse sense. It jumped long periods of slow and difficult education. It did not teach the workers the terrible strength of their opponents, the exploiters. It did not realise how the intricate structure of modern society demanded great organising capacities, scientific knowledge, economical insight, first-rate leadership, and strict discipline, in order to replace the old order by a new and better one. So anarchism was soon paralysed and left behind in the struggle. It could strike, but not conquer. It proved to be destructive, not constructive. It withered for want of successful deeds."<sup>13</sup>

The new ferment in the industrial world did, however, result in the anarchists turning their attention once again to the trade unions. John Turner of the shopworkers, for example, started, early in 1907, *The Voice of Labour* which devoted itself to trade union problems and Kropotkin himself came round to the view that the anarchists might usefully permeate the unions.<sup>14</sup> It was now Malatesta's turn to advise caution. The unions, he argued, contained valuable sources of strength but also elements of reaction; anarchists, therefore, should not identify themselves too closely with syndicalism.<sup>15</sup>

Despite their ambivalent attitude during this period, the anarchists had, in the words of the historian of British syndicalism, "provided a steady stream of propaganda, information and discussion upon the developments of French syndicalism and, to a lesser degree, of American syndicalism. Their long, involved and desultory debate on syndicalism had not resulted any marked coalescence of the two movements, but it had assured that a considerable group of Englishmen were conscious of the progress of syndicalist ideas".<sup>16</sup>

### ***The Industrial Syndicalist Education League***

In 1910, with the return to England of Tom Mann, the British syndicalist movement emerged from the half-light into the full glare of day. From his eight years in Australia and New Zealand, Mann had acquired a knowledge of industrial unionism and a profound sense of disillusionment with regard to attempts to establish industrial peace. Shortly after his return, accompanied by Guy Bowman, a socialist journalist, he visited France and contacted the Confédération Générale du Travail. Filled with enthusiasm, they started, when they came back, the publication of *The Industrial Syndicalist*<sup>17</sup> and later in the same year founded The Industrial Syndicalist Education League. The conscious adoption of the name 'syndicalist' heralded the development of a British form of syndicalism which, although it borrowed widely from the French and American movements, was to have a distinctive character of its own. Revolutionary as Mann was, he remained essentially of a practical turn of mind and the main activities of the new body, which quickly attracted to itself many of the 'syndicalists' of the other groups, were confined to educational propaganda on the subject of industrial unionism. Attempts were made by Mann and his associates to persuade the older unions to federate or to amalgamate on industrial lines and to give a revolutionary turn to the industrial unrest which, for a wide variety of reasons, swept the country in the year 1911. In the main these activities belong to social and trade union history, but out of the welter of these years emerged, in 1912, what has now come to be regarded as the classic statement of British syndicalism: *The Miners' Next Step*.<sup>18</sup>

### ***The Miners' Next Step***

This pamphlet was not, however, intended as a definitive statement of syndicalist thought. Its subtitle, *A suggested scheme for the reorganisation of the Federation*, and its foreword clearly indicated that it was to be taken as no more than an agenda for future discussions among the South Wales Miners. From our point of view, what is of chief interest about its plans for the immediate reorganisation of the Miners' Federation is its insistence on the

need for centralisation combined with measures designed to retain power in the hands of the rank and file. On the question of political action, it takes up the position of the SLP: "complete independence of, and hostility to, all capitalist parties", while the long term objective of the authors is summed up in the words: Industrial Democracy. "The men who work in the mine", they argue, "are surely as competent to elect these [paid officials] as shareholders who may never have seen a colliery. To have a vote in deciding who shall be your fireman, manager, inspector, etc., is to have a vote in determining the conditions which shall rule your working life ... To vote for a man to represent you in Parliament, to make rules for, and assist in appointing officials to rule you, is a different proposition altogether!" Nationalisation of the mines, they continue, is no step towards industrial democracy; it "simply makes a National Trust, with all the force of Government behind it, whose one concern will be to see that the industry is run in such a way as to pay the interest on the bonds, with which the Coal-owners are paid out, and to extract as much more profit as possible, in order to relieve the taxation of other landlords and capitalists."

The pamphlet concludes with a vision of the future society: "Every industry thoroughly organised, in the first place, to fight, to gain control of, and then to administer, that industry. The co-ordination of all industries on a Central Production Board, who, with a statistical department to ascertain the needs of the people, will issue demands to the different departments of industry, leaving to the men themselves to determine under what conditions, and how, the work should be done. This would mean real democracy in real life making for real manhood and womanhood. Any other form of democracy is a snare and a delusion."

It would be a mistake, however, to regard the ideas contained in this famous pamphlet as completely representative of the views of the British syndicalists of this period. Scattered among the various articles and speeches on the subject of reorganising trade unionism are to be found numerous references to the future society which amplify and in some respects contradict the views of the South

Wales miners' unofficial committee, and there exist several books and pamphlets which are directly concerned with theoretical problems. British syndicalism never found its Sorel. In this it was both fortunate and unfortunate. Fortunate in that it escaped that form of misrepresentation which the French movement suffered when intellectuals like Sorel, Berth and Lagardelle were accepted by the outside world as theorists of the new socialism; unfortunate in that it was unable to clarify some of its basic concepts or to answer effectively the criticisms of opponents, both socialist and anti-socialist, when they ignorantly and often perversely misread its intentions. The anti-intellectual tendencies of the French movement have been grossly exaggerated even by historians. In England, there is little or no trace of anti-intellectualism, although there is evidence of open hostility towards middle class theorists – a very different thing.

### ***The Syndicalist Commonwealth***

The men who paid most attention to the theoretical aspects of syndicalism and the future society were Tom Mann, Guy Bowman and Gaylord Wilshire. Mann in 1913 defined syndicalism in the following terms: "A condition of society where industry will be controlled by those engaged therein, on the basis of free societies; these co-operate for the production of all requirements of life in the most efficient manner, and the distribution of the same with the truest equity; a society in which Parliament and Governments will have disappeared, having served their purpose with the capitalist system".<sup>19</sup>

*From Single Tax to Syndicalism* contains Mann's developed views on syndicalist organisation and its chief interest, in this respect, lies in the place he assigns to the Trades Councils – the British equivalent to the French Bourses du Travail. In Mann's view, the Trades Councils were an essential element in syndicalist organisation, their function being to ascertain the needs of people in their respective districts and to arrange distribution.

Bowman, too, emphasised the role of the Trades Councils. While differing from the French syndicalists in proposing *amalgamation*

of existing trade unions to form industrial unions, in place of the French national federations which did not necessarily involve the establishment of unions along the lines of industries, his main organisational proposals were modelled closely on those of the French CGT as expounded by Pataud and Pouget in their book, *Syndicalism and the Co-operative Commonwealth*.<sup>20</sup> The Industrial Unions were to form a National Federation of Industrial Unions and the Trades Councils a National Federation of Trades Councils; then both of these federations were to be confederated in a General Confederation of Labour, which would thus include all producers and distributors. Since both producers and distributors were also consumers, there would be no need for special arrangements to represent the consumers as such. Production would be the task of the Industrial Unions, and the Trades Councils would provide the machinery for local distribution and administration. The Trades Councils, which since their exclusion from the TUC in 1895 had become mere adjuncts of political advancement, would, according to Bowman, have to "stand against the municipal council, destroy it, and establish themselves in its place".<sup>21</sup>

Mann and Bowman were successful in pressing their views on the delegates to the syndicalist conferences held in Manchester and in London, November 1912. These conferences were designed mainly to give a more definitive statement of the programme and aims of the British syndicalist movement, and resolutions embodying Bowman's proposals were adopted almost unanimously.<sup>22</sup>

### ***Syndicalism and Ownership***

Gaylord Wilshire's main contribution to syndicalist thought was to emphasise its communistic basis and to rebut the charges brought against the syndicalists that ownership of industries by the workers employed in them would be as anti-social as ownership by capitalist syndicates. It is possible that certain syndicalists imagined that the adoption of the slogans 'The mine for the miners', 'The railway for the railwaymen', and so on, meant that the workers of a particular industry would jointly become the 'owners' of their industry and, as such, would share any 'profits' that were made.

The simplest way of grasping the syndicalist idea is to think of it as producers' co-operation organised under the auspices of industrial unions and enlarged to national dimensions. However, without qualification, this conception can be misleading. There is no evidence that syndicalists thought in terms of 'co-ownership' and 'profit-sharing' and, indeed, these notions were explicitly repudiated on several occasions.<sup>23</sup> The main tendency of syndicalist thought, it may be said, was to undermine the concept of ownership as it is commonly understood. There is an implicit recognition of the fact that ownership as such is unimportant: what matters is control – who shall control industry and in whose interests that control be exercised. The syndicalists stood for control of industry by the workers in the interests of the workers. Although they often repeated the age-old demand that the workers had the right to the whole produce of their labour, they did not, in the main, interpret this to mean that each group of workers should receive the full fruits of its labours, or that each individual should be so rewarded. Behind the slogan was little more than the demand that labour *as a whole* should enjoy what it had produced; in other words, that capitalist profit-makers, rentiers and interest receivers should be eliminated.

Bowman in this respect took up the position of the pure communist. "In the society we syndicalists wish to bring about", he said, "there shall be no *value* whatever attached to any commodity, so that every individual will be able to partake of all commodities in the full measure of his needs". Wilshire, more cautiously, thought that remuneration might be determined either by deeds or by needs "as may hereafter be decided". What would certainly *not* be the basis of remuneration was the importance of an individual's product to the community. That "would be merely changing the present system, with a myriad of exploiting workers".<sup>24</sup> Syndicalism, he insisted, meant that the control of the technical processes now exercised by the capitalists would pass to groups of organised workers of the various industries. The product, however, which was now the property of the capitalists would become, under syndicalism, the property of the community.

### **Syndicalist Controversies**

Despite the tendency towards anarchism and communism displayed by the later syndicalists, there were concealed differences of attitude which made relations between the anarchists and the syndicalists somewhat less than harmonious. The anarchists 'captured' *The Syndicalist* in December 1913, and joined the small group of British 'Wobblies' in condemning moderates like Mann, Tillett, Lansbury and Larkin who were content to advocate amalgamation as a step towards industrial unionism. This policy, they argued, savoured of opportunism. Underlying this difference as regards *means* was, however, a difference, so far as the anarchists were concerned, as regards *ends*. Despite the adoption, largely under Bowman's guidance, of what were essentially French ideas of organisation, it was not altogether clear how they fitted in with the organisation of *national* industrial unions. Pataud and Pouget's book was written at a time when most of the French trade unions or *syndicats* were still local bodies and soon after the CGT had received a new lease of life from its federation in 1902 with the Bourses du Travail. This fact, as well as their origin, explains Pataud and Pouget's emphasis on decentralisation. At the time when the main outlines of the French structure were being adopted by British syndicalists, the CGT itself was becoming much more reticent about the future society. Their reticence, which was associated with a greater emphasis on revolutionary direct action, was partly the result of a change in industrial organisation in France. There was a marked trend towards national organisation of trade unions and the Bourses declined in importance within the French movement. In these circumstances, it could be that their original theory was fast becoming obsolete. "They have not", said Cole, "thought out a new system of organisation capable of supplanting capitalism in such a way as to accept as its basis national trade unionism".<sup>25</sup>

### **Anarchist Criticisms**

British trade unionism had from the start of the syndicalist movement been predominantly national in character; hence its insistence on *national* industrial unions. Although the federal



principle found its place within Bowman's proposed structure – in linking up the unions and the trade councils and then both in the General Confederation of Labour – it found no place *inside* the industrial unions to which were assigned the tasks of production. The anarchists, who were *par excellence* the exponents of the principles of federalism and local autonomy, suspected that the industrial unions might become unwieldy, bureaucratic and, in the end, tyrannical organisations. Moreover, attempts to reconcile interests in the national level in a central confederative council involved obvious dangers. Although the functions of the central body were to be statistical and informative only, it might easily develop into what would be, on an industrial instead of a territorial basis, a state in all but name. The centralist tendencies seem evident in sections of *The Miners' Next Step* seemed to confirm anarchist suspicions, especially as one of its authors had previously advocated a plebiscitary form of trade union leadership.<sup>26</sup> The attitude of the anarchist syndicalists was expressed thus: "Syndicalists stand for the individual, and are therefore as much opposed to the Industrial State as to the Political State. Actually, we object to an Industrial State even more strenuously than we do to a Political State; for under the second there are at least some people who are free, but under the first there would not be one man or woman left free".<sup>27</sup> Following this line of thought, the anarchists laid primary emphasis on "the autonomous workshops controlled through a shop committee" rather than on industrial unions.

A further aspect of this conflict between anarchists and syndicalists becomes clear when it is appreciated that the syndicalists accepted implicitly the large scale organisation of industry. In this their Marxist orientation is evident. They wished to adapt syndicalist theories to industrial organisation rather than industrial organisation to syndicalist theories, and indeed the whole tenor of their propaganda was that the workers must reorganise so that they could achieve the powerful unity which, it was alleged, the capitalists were achieving. Among the anarchists, however, there was a latent and, in the case of Kropotkin, an open hostility towards large scale industry.<sup>28</sup> They recognised that freedom could not

easily be achieved in modern industrialised society with its marked emphasis on the interdependence of all groups. They felt that the more complex became society, the larger the scale of organisation, the narrower became the chances of the individual finding the freedom with which to develop himself as he saw fit.

### ***The Amalgamation Movement***

The conflicts within the syndicalist movement as the First World War approached weakened the effectiveness of its propaganda. By the end of 1913 the ISEL had shifted its base to the Industrial Democracy League which was active in South Wales and which concentrated on the reform of trade union structure rather than on revolutionary action. The IWW, critical of this passive role, formed its own British Administration and published a short-lived paper, *The Industrial Worker*, 1913-14. British syndicalists, however, could not be persuaded of the necessity of building up new industrial unions from scratch on the IWW model. During the war attempts were made to place the British Administration on a firmer basis but it never succeeded in becoming an influential force. As far as the anarchists were concerned, the outbreak of war split them into two sections, an important minority led by Kropotkin urging that a victory of the Central Powers must be avoided at all costs. *The Voice of Labour* continued publication until 1916 but exerted little influence on syndicalist thought and action. With its demise the anarchist conception of syndicalism disappeared for a time to re-emerge later in the form of anarcho-syndicalism. The main body of syndicalists continued to press the idea of amalgamation and to this end set up the Amalgamated Committees' Federation which had as its object: "To prepare the workers for their economic emancipation by their taking possession of the means of production and distribution through an economic organisation outside the control of any parliamentary party or religious sect".

### ***The Workers' Committee Movement***

Meanwhile an independent movement, largely composed of new men and influenced by the SLP, had sprung up on Clydeside and spread rapidly to Sheffield and other industrial centres. The Clyde

Workers' committee was composed of people who accepted the full revolutionary implications of industrial unionism and their connection with the mainstream of syndicalism cannot be doubted. The Workers' Committees were a rank and file movement drawing support from those who were critical of the official trade union leadership which had given its support to the war effort. After a conference of these committees a national organisation was set up and in 1917 it joined forces with the amalgamation movement. The fusion of forces was not, however, altogether satisfactory and at the last Rank and File Conference held in October 1917, there was serious disagreement between those who wished to form an industrial union and those who wished to concentrate their energies on the workers' committee movement. J.T. Murphy, the chief spokesman of the latter group, evolved a plan for a rank and file organisation to be built upon industrial lines.<sup>29</sup> The workshops were to be the basic units of the new organisation, with shop stewards represented on Works Committees and, indirectly, through them, on National Industrial Committees. From these national committees a National Administrative Council would be formed as a counterpart of the TUC. The plan closely resembled the existing trade union structure except that it was put on an industrial and not on a craft and territorial basis. Murphy contended that the proposed organisation was not an alternative to the existing structure and that the committees were not intended to usurp the functions of the executives of the trade unions. The exact relationship between the two movements was not, however, clearly defined and the official leaders naturally suspected the worst.

### ***Encroaching control***

The chief interest of the Workers' Committee Movement from our point of view, however, lies in its production of the policy of 'encroaching control' through the application of the 'collective contract'. Two of the members associated with the movement – W. Gallacher of the Clyde Workers' Committee and John Paton of the ASE – published in 1917 a memorandum entitled *Towards Industrial Democracy*. The Works Committees, it was suggested,

once they had gained experience and authority, should "undertake in one large contract, or in two or three contracts at the most, the entire business of production throughout the establishment". In this way, the functions of management would gradually pass to the committees. The workers, it was argued, already ultimately pay all the expenses of management without enjoying any of its privileges. By instituting democratic workshops, the number of functionaries could be greatly reduced and many of the species in "the army of managers, foremen, bullies, speeders-up and spies who throng our industry today" entirely eliminated. Once the committees had obtained a foothold in management they could use their position, by raising the terms of the contract so as to get the full exchange value of their products, to deliver the knock-out blow to capitalism.

The collective contract was thus conceived mainly, as a tactical device to obtain control of industry on syndicalist lines. But it does also illustrate the real significance and the strong appeal of syndicalism. The syndicalists said, in effect, that the revolution must begin in the workshop. Their message to the workers was much the same as Goethe's to the emigrant in search of liberty: "Here, or nowhere, is your America!" Here, in the workshop, in the factory and in the mine, they said, we must accomplish the revolution or it will be accomplished nowhere. So long as we are a subject class industrially, so long will we remain a subject class politically. The real revolution must be made not in Parliament or at the barricades but in the places where we earn our daily bread. The organisations that we build up to carry on the daily struggle must be the foundations of the new order and we must be its architects. The law and morality that we have evolved in our long struggle with capitalism must be the law and morality of the future workers' commonwealth. All other proposals are but snares and delusions.

### ***Disintegration of the Syndicalist Movement***

The differences evident at the Fifth Rank and File Conference of the amalgamation movement were, however, the prelude to the disintegration of syndicalism. Already political agitation was undermining the non-political character of the movement with its single-minded emphasis on economic action and organisation. The March Revolution in Russia had already occurred and the subsequent October Revolution gave an added impetus to the political tendencies. In the excitement occasioned by the events in Russia, many syndicalists forgot the text they had preached and hitherto acted upon: that no new system can supersede another until it has become fully matured within the womb of the old. Convinced that a revolution was nearer than they had dared to hope, they abandoned their faith in purely industrial action and began to realign themselves with those groups and parties which aimed at a revolutionary capture of political power. Many of them, especially those connected with the SLP, and including Tom Mann, joined the Communist Party of Great Britain after its foundation in August 1920. Once within the party their anti-parliamentarianism rapidly dissolved before the criticisms of Lenin.

Other elements found temporary refuge within the Guild Socialist movement which had taken up and transmuted many of the older movement's ideas. The anarchist version of syndicalism still claimed a few supporters who clung all the more determinedly to their faith when they saw the way the revolution was developing in Russia. In 1922 at a conference in Berlin the anarchist wing refused to enter the Red Trade Union International (The Profintern) and put forward a theory of anarcho-syndicalism. The development of this movement belongs more to foreign – especially Spanish – than to British history, but it is significant to note that it was the anarchists with their long tradition of hostility towards political action who, despite their differences with the movement, remained true to the militant aspirations of syndicalism. In this country pure syndicalism has been bequeathed as a legacy to the anarchists who, since the Spanish Civil War, have placed increasing emphasis on its ideas.

### ***"Consolidation and Control"***

For the main body of syndicalist thought a suitable obituary notice is to be found in the publication in 1921 of a pamphlet by the National Workers' Committee Movement entitled *Consolidation and Control*. The pamphlet emphasised much of what had already been stated in Murphy's earlier pamphlet; the class consciousness so characteristic of syndicalism was no less evident; and the elimination of the capitalists from industry was pronounced as the goal. But it went on to subject the notion of workers' control to critical scrutiny. It noted its ambiguity now that it had been taken up by many elements in Labour Party and by the Guild Socialists. It criticised the then current proposals for State ownership combined with joint State-Union management. It decried the uncritical acceptance of the notion that the State was the representative of the community. The State, it insisted, was and always had been an engine of the ruling class and could not therefore represent both contending classes in society.

So far nothing had been subtracted from and little added to the syndicalist case. But then came the sting in the tail. "The problem that is facing the working class", it said "is the problem of power ... If the workers' organisations are victorious in the struggle, then they will become the foundations of the new working class State. The unions will share with the State the control and management of the large-scale industries, and from this a system of workers' control will be developed. The exact amount of industrial control that the average worker will get following a working class victory will depend upon the circumstances. We do not believe that it is possible to jump from a system, where the mass of workers who have lived most of their lives under the control of the functionaries of capitalism will suddenly be able to select those who are competent to carry on the management of industry from the workshop upwards. Such ability will only come as the result of education and opportunity, but it is the end we are striving for. There may be a period short or long according to the circumstances when control and management will be from above. That is to say, when those who direct industry shall be appointed not by the

workers in industry, but by the workers' state, the voice of the unions in the matter being comparatively slight."

### ***Syndicalism and the Communists***

Despite the insistence that workers' control was still the ultimate aim, it is clear that the movement was to be subordinated to the political party which aimed at a revolutionary overthrow of the capitalist State and the establishment of the dictatorship of the proletariat. The idea of encroaching control by means of the collective contract which had expressed most clearly the syndicalist contention that the revolution must begin in the workshop if it was to begin at all, was rudely dismissed. Its remaining author<sup>30</sup> now regarded it as embarrassing evidence of his 'infantile leftism'. The workshop organisation should be pre-eminently one designed for fighting and should not saddle itself with responsibilities. Its function was to break up workshop discipline and make the system as unworkable as possible. The most damning word in the new vocabulary was hurled at it: it was 'utopian'. Finally, in a conclusion, it might be admitted that "a limited amount of self-government in the workshops will be one of the things achieved by the workers' state *in the course of time*."<sup>31</sup> That it can be achieved under capitalism is simply a delusion of those who imagine that the control of industry can be gradually wrested from the employers without their power being first broken."

The syndicalists who took path and joined the Communist Party did not, I think, feel that they were betraying their past. On the contrary, they probably felt that they were making an advance towards reality when they put the conquest of political power first. Many of them may indeed have thought that a dictatorship of the proletariat would really lead to workers' control in the full-blooded sense and to the establishment of the industrial commonwealth in which the trade unions would come into their own. If so, they were either cruelly deluded or bitterly disillusioned by subsequent events.

So ended the syndicalist movement. I have dealt with it at some length because so far no objective account of it has been published – although a full-scale history of the movement, written, be it noted,

by an American not a British student, lies in the inaccessible archives of Oxford's Bodleian Library. In most, if not all, available histories of the British working class movement the contribution of the British syndicalists to the popularising of the notion of workers' control in this period has been seriously underestimated. The British syndicalists produced no great library of theoretical works and the development of the movement and its ideas must be traced in dusty files scattered in many libraries. But what they did write and, more important, what they uttered by the spoken word – Tom Mann was perhaps the last of the line of working class orators in this country – reached a not inconsiderable section of rank and file industrial workers. Moreover, the movement remains of more than historical interest. The controversies within it over the organisation of the future society and the strategy to be pursued to achieve workers' control are still very much alive – and contain lessons which still have to be learned if industrial freedom is ever to be won.

### ***Guild Socialism***

Perhaps the principal explanation of why the British syndicalist movement has been neglected by historians is that it was overshadowed by the Guild Socialist movement which flourished in this country between 1912 and 1924. It has now become customary to regard Guild Socialism as the adaptation of syndicalist theories to British conditions. The syndicalists themselves viewed the matter somewhat differently: "Middle-class of the middle-class, with all the shortcomings (we almost said 'stupidities') of the middle-class writ large across it", declared one syndicalist writer. "Guild Socialism' stands forth as the latest lucubration of the middle-class mind. It is a 'cool steal' of the leading ideas of Syndicalism and a deliberate perversion of them ... We do protest against the 'State' idea ... in Guild Socialism. Middle-class people, even when they become socialists, cannot get rid of the idea that the working class is their 'inferior'; that the workers need to be

'educated', drilled, disciplined, and generally nursed for a long time before they will be able to walk by themselves. The very reverse is actually the truth".<sup>32</sup>

There is a good deal of truth in both these points of view, so far as they go, but both obscure certain aspects of the Guild Socialist movement which derived little or no inspiration from Syndicalism and both ignore the deep roots that the new movement had in the English radical and socialist tradition. It would perhaps be more true to say that Guild Socialism was the amalgam of very different and even diverse elements of which syndicalism was the most obvious if also the most important.

### ***The Restoration of the Guild System***

In its earliest manifestations the new movement had nothing whatever to do with either French syndicalism or American industrial unionism. As the title of the book which can be said to mark the formal beginning of the movement makes clear, it was at this nebulous stage a backward rather than a forward-looking movement. This book, *The Restoration of the Gild System* by A.J. Penty was published in 1906, but it had been 'on the stocks' since the turn of the century and its contents had been known to a small circle of Penty's friends who shared his dislike of current Fabianism. Penty's book, the preface to which acknowledged the influence of Ruskin and Carpenter, was an attempt to give a practical direction to the artistic tradition in British socialism. In it can be found some of the leading ideas of later guildsmen together with many that remained largely his own. For Penty the great evil of modern society was not the private ownership of capital or the competition that went with it but commercialism and the control of industry by the financier in place of the master craftsman. Commercialism, he argued, led to the debasement of moral and aesthetic values and destroyed the craftsman's pride and joy in his work. Collectivism or State Socialism ignored these spiritual values and was, in effect, merely 'State Commercialism'. "The mere transference of the control of industry from the hands of the capitalists into those of the State can make no essential difference

to the nature of the industry affected". Collectivism rested on the fallacy that Government should be conducted solely in the interests of man in his capacity as consumer: a true system would aim at a just balance between consumer and producer. The real reformer, concluded Penty, must therefore boldly set his face against the further evolution of society in the direction in which it was moving. Social salvation could only come with the re-introduction of the medieval gild system of organisation under which producers, working in their small and separate workshops, would be subject to the regulation of their appropriate gild.

### ***The Rise of Guild Socialism***

The publication of Penty's book was planned as the first move in the formation of a Gilds Restoration League, a statement of whose objects included: "The principle of the Gild System is true for all time. It is the principle that individual craftsmen should in all matters relating to his craft be subject to the control of the craft to which he belongs ... The foundations of a restored Gild System have already been laid in the Trade Union and the Arts and Crafts Movements. These two represent respectively an economic and an artistic revolt, the former seeking to emancipate the worker and the latter seeking to emancipate the craft, from the spirit of commercialism".<sup>33</sup>

The ideas behind the abortive League were carried into the citadel of collectivism itself with the formation in 1907, by A.R. Orage and Holbrook Jackson, of the Fabian Arts Group; but the group failed to flourish and speedily came to an end.

### ***The New Age***

In the same year, however, Orage and Jackson took over the editorship of *The New Age*, a weekly review which was to play an important part in the development of Guild Socialist thought. The new editors displayed a catholic taste, the review became the forum for a large number of gifted and independently-minded writers of all political complexions, and it rapidly won for itself the reputation of being the most stimulating product in contemporary journalism. Articles on the arts and crafts movement received due

place in its columns and Penty, for a time, continued his assaults on collectivism, large-scale organisation and modern industrialism. Of greater immediate influence, however, were the writings of Belloc and Chesterton who developed in its pages and elsewhere their distributivist theories and who sounded the alarm against the approach of the Servile State. Their distributivist ideals left no impression on guild theories but their anti-collectivism added point and vigour to Penty's attack. In his editorial Notes of the Week, Orage, with skill and subtlety, translated their hostility towards state action into socialist language. All the much vaunted reforms of the Liberals, which were supported by the Labour Party and the Fabians, were serving, he argued, only to make capitalism more endurable by rendering the working classes slightly more comfortable. Such provisions as the new conciliation and arbitration boards not only assumed an equality between the parties which did not exist – while at the same time restricting the freedom of trade union action – but they were based on the “insufferable hypothesis” that “the status of the wage-slave” was to be a permanent feature of society. The Webbites – “particularly efficient worryguts of the poor” – and Fabians generally might produce grand schemes for the amelioration of the working classes but they should not forget, he said, that there was “a group of socialists who have as yet found no convenient label, but who will have no curtailment of liberty, no coercion of the individual, although it come with material benefit”.<sup>34</sup>

The columns of *The New Age* in the years 1908-12 reflect another factor which was strongly to shape Guild doctrines – the steadily mounting disillusionment of the more militant socialists with Labour politics. Cecil Chesterton, for example, contributed a series of articles on ‘How the Rich Rule Us’ from which Orage drew the conclusion that “politics, like capital, is an exclusive possession of the governing classes”. The moral pointed was that Trade Unions should stick to their own field, concentrate on economics and leave politics to take care of itself – a foreshadowing of what was to become almost an axiom of Guild Socialist thinking that economic power precedes and dominates political power.

As befitted a journal of the avant-garde, *The New Age* was one of the first widely-read journals to take note of the new ideas of syndicalism that were developing rapidly in France. With a characteristic perversity, however, it refused to believe that syndicalism had taken roots in England. Nevertheless, it was quick to interpret the current ‘industrial unrest’ in the light of the central idea of syndicalism – workers’ control. Failing socialisation, it suggested, there should be established a ‘co-partnery’ in which the unions as corporate bodies and guilds should be associated in joint responsibility with the owners of capital. The guild system, it went on to claim, was “a genuine Saxon invention, as native to our genius as our language. The true line of development of our trade unions is, therefore, most certainly in the direction of the restoration of the essential features of the guild system – the responsibility for skilled work, the discipline of its members, the disposition of its collective forces and the joint control with their clients (employers in this instance) of the whole range of industry”.<sup>35</sup>

### ***National Guilds***

With the publication on 25th April 1912 of an article entitled ‘Emancipation and the Wage System’, the guild movement entered a new phase in which the arts and crafts side and the Medievalism of Penty were to drop into the background and Marxian economics and industrial ‘politics’ were to come to the fore. (The use of the less archaic form of spelling ‘guild’ marked the new phase of the movement). The article, the first of a series, was the work of S.G. Hobson, a veteran socialist and journalist. In 1914 the articles were republished in book form under the title *National Guilds: an inquiry into the wage system and the way out*. They mark the first definite formulation of the new school of socialist thought and the book soon became almost the standard text of the movement.

The fundamental fact of modern social and industrial organisation, argued Hobson, is the existence of the wage system by which the capitalist produces wares and is enabled to sell them at a profit. Under this system labour is assumed to be purely and simply a commodity to be bought and sold like any other

commodity. In return for the sale of his labour power, the worker receives wages, i.e. the price of labour established in the market by the operation of the laws of supply and demand. These laws result in wages approximating to the cost of subsistence necessary to maintain and to reproduce labour power. When the worker sells his labour power to an employer, the labour becomes the property of the buyer, the producer loses all control over the products he makes, and he admits the right of the employer to dictate the conditions of his employment. This right allows the buyer to terminate employment at will, with the result that the seller has no security. The receipt of wages is thus the mark of a subject class. So long as the wage system remains, the status of the recipients of wages will be an inferior one and, in essentials, no different from that of the chattel slave. This system, continued Hobson, is based on two false assumptions, namely, that labour, having sold, has no kind of economic or social claim to the products of labour. There could be no emancipation of labour until these two assumptions were exposed and the wage system destroyed.

### ***A Brotherhood of Producers***

Turning to his constructive proposals, Hobson rejected Orage's idea of a 'co-partnery' between the employers and the unions. By a series of steps – making themselves black-leg proof, striking not for higher wages but for superior status, and amalgamating and federating on an industrial basis – the trade unions, argued Hobson, could abolish the wage system completely and effect a total social reconstruction. Under the new system that could succeed the wage system, producers would be recognised and paid as human beings, receiving payment in and out of employment, in sickness and in health; would share co-operatively in the organisation of production; and together would exercise a claim on the product of their work. Such a system could best be organised under modern industrial conditions if producers were banded together in National Guilds. A National Guild would be "a self-governing brotherhood of producers", possessing a monopoly of labour in its particular industry. It would embrace all grades of workers, manual, technical and managerial,

i.e. 'the salariat' as well as the proletariat. Assuming complete responsibility for the material welfare of its members, it would become a fellowship as well as an economic organisation.

About fourteen National Guilds were envisaged, each of which would receive from the State a charter giving it responsibility for the management of its particular industry. Ownership would be formally vested in the State but all property would be held 'in trust' by the Guilds. In return for their charters, the Guilds would pay to the State "a substitute for economic rent". The Guilds would not act independently of each other but would all be represented on a Guilds Congress, the successor of the TUC. This Congress would sit in permanent session and would become "the directorate of industry". Any negotiations with the State would be conducted through the officers of the Congress. In the new society, the State would take on its true role as representative of the whole community: State control of the Guilds would operate in a manner similar to the control exercised by shareholders at present; and the political system, purified of all economic responsibility, could henceforth concern itself with 'the national soul'.

### ***The Greater Unionism***

The publication of the National Guilds articles aroused considerable discussion in intellectual and socialist circles and the movement began to win adherents, particularly among the younger socialists. The most important of these was G.D.H. Cole in whose hands guild theories were to be considerably elaborated and in some important respects transformed. His position in the Labour movement made him an admirable vehicle for the propagation of guild views. In collaboration with William Mellor of the Fabian Research Department, he began to develop in *The Daily Herald* and other Labour papers the idea of the Greater Unionism, the chief principles of which were: the sinking of craft and sectional interests; organisation on a workshop and industrial basis; the inclusion of brain workers in the ranks of the unions; the achievement of a black-leg-proof and united Labour Movement; and a change in trade union policy in preparation for the future

task of administering national industries in conjunction with the State.<sup>36</sup>

In 1915 a new phase of the movement began with the establishment by Cole and his friends of The National Guilds League. Like the Fabian Society, the League did not attempt to become a mass organisation and its membership never exceeded 600, the majority of whom were middle-class professional people with a sprinkling of trade unionists. It soon included in its ranks, however, some of the ablest writers of the day such as Bertrand Russell, R.H. Tawney, H.N. Brailsford, George Lansbury and Norman Angell. The activities of the League, which included after December 1916 the publication of a journal, *The Guildsman*, later *The Guild Socialist*, were inevitably hampered by wartime conditions but, on the other hand, the war also created conditions favourable to the reception of its propaganda by the younger trade union elements and by those active in the Shop Stewards' Movement. Most of the leaflets and pamphlets of the NGL were directed to trade unionists and elaborated the steps whereby Guilds might be formed in particular industries. This translation of Guild ideas into an effective movement did not, however, prevent the guildsmen examining more thoroughly their theoretical concepts and attempting to draw a more detailed picture of the working of the future Guild Commonwealth.

### ***Industrial Democracy and Management***

One problem which much pre-occupied the theorists of the movement was the application of democratic principles to management. In *National Guilds* Hobson assumed that workmen could be trusted to elect the best people as managers and that since the basis of choice would be widened, there would be no danger of inefficient management. As the guildsmen came to grips with this subject the question of democratic management was dismissed in a less cavalier fashion. There remained, however, among many a tendency to regard the function of management as one not so difficult as sometimes alleged: "With but a little extra training many of the rank and file could become technicians capable of filling any

of the administrative and scientific posts".<sup>37</sup> This optimism was not shared by all. Some thought that democratic election was suitable for the lower grades but that for the higher grades the principle of elevation by one's peers or even appointment from above should be employed. Others considered that every official in the main framework of the Guilds should be chosen, not by general election, but by men best qualified to judge of their ability for the position, provided that every such choice was ratified by the men affected by it. "The Guild would build up in this way a pyramid of officers, each chosen by the grade immediately below that which [the officer] is to occupy".<sup>38</sup> Yet another suggestion was that there should be a panel of managers from which the National Guild Executive would allocate individuals to particular works, again subject to the approval of the workers there. A similar panel of foremen would be selected by the works committees.<sup>39</sup>

It remained for Cole, however, to attempt an analysis of the function of management and on the basis of that analysis to work out a detailed scheme of industrial democracy. A suitable text for discussion was provided by the arch-priest of Fabian Collectivism, Sidney Webb, in his *The Works Manager Today*, 1917. Webb was concerned to argue that management was, or was becoming, a specialist technique: "What we are concerned with here, whether we are considering any grade of managers or superintendents, is the quite distinct profession of organising men – of so arranging and dictating the activities of a band of producers, including both brain and manual workers, and to create amongst them the most effective co-operation of their energies. What the manager has principally to handle, therefore, is not wood or metal but human nature, not machinery but will ... In my opinion, the profession of manager, under whatever designation ... is destined, with the ever-increasing complication of man's enterprises, to develop a steadily increasing technique and a more and more specialised training of its own; and to secure, like the vocation of the engineer, the architect, or the chemist, universal recognition as a specialised brain-working occupation".<sup>40</sup>



***The Manipulation of Men***

Cole denied that 'the manipulation of men' was a science to be learned and controlled by experts. There was a fundamental difference, he argued, between such professions as medicine and architecture and the 'profession' of manager in that the latter is primarily a disciplinarian, whereas the former are concerned to provide technical advice. The manager resembled more the professional politician or the administrative Civil Servant than either the doctor or architect. It would, therefore, be "as dangerous to endow him with the full status of a governing profession as it is to endow the politician or the bureaucrat with full authority". For this reason, "just as the community ought to demand and maintain democratic control over its political administrators, so Industrial Labour will claim direct democratic control over those who seek to manipulate its industrial conditions".<sup>41</sup>

The distinction between the technician and the manipulator of men provided, in Cole's view, a rough guide in the method of appointment in an industrial democracy. The technical and commercial experts could not be chosen by democratic vote since the electors were not competent to judge the experts' qualifications. It would suffice that they should be the servants of a democratically elected authority such as the national executive committee of a Guild. In cases where managers were also required to be technicians, the possession of definite qualifications of skill and technique would be made a condition of their eligibility for managerial positions. "A ship owner today can only appoint as captain of his ship a man who holds a master's certificate. The seamen of the future Guild will only be able to choose as their captain a man who is similarly equipped".<sup>42</sup> As to the basis of election, Cole argued that the officials must, if freedom is to be a reality in the Guild, be under the control of those they direct.<sup>43</sup>

Cole was hopeful that a democratic regime in industry would have a special appeal to managerial elements. The manager would not have the uncontrolled power to dismiss workers, nor would he be able to ignore public opinion either in the factory or in the Guild. On the other hand, when the rank and file secured not only a direct

interest in production but also the means of making their wills effective, it was hoped that the manager would be faced not with apathy or hostility but with a co-operative attitude on the part of all workers. In any case, he would not be in the awkward position of being the nominee of a capitalist employer. "I strongly suspect", concluded Cole, "that the managers in a Guild factory would have no cause to complain of lack of power. If they wanted authority, they would find ample scope for it; but I believe most of them would soon cease to think of their positions mainly in terms of power, and would come to think of them mainly in terms of function. Only under the free conditions of democratic industry would the leader find real scope for leadership, and he would find it in a way that would enable him to concentrate all his faculties on the development of his factory as a communal service, instead of being, as now, constantly thwarted and restrained by considerations of shareholders' profits".<sup>44</sup>

***The Guilds and the State***

One of the weakest points in the original formulation of National Guilds theory by Hobson was the definition of the relation between the Guilds and the State. The State was to be shorn of its economic and financial responsibilities while, at the same, retaining in the interests of the community the ultimate right to control policy. The conclusion drawn by many critics was that in matters of dispute either the State would coerce the Guilds, which would bring us back to the Collectivist position, or the Guilds would over-rule the State and we should be very near to syndicalism. The answer that this would be avoided because both State and Guilds were 'necessary' to each other, or because the Guilds would differ among themselves, seemed more facile than substantial.

In Cole's original approach to this problem there is evidence both of his Fabian background and of the influence of the then current theory of political pluralism. The great virtue of National Guild theory in his eyes was that it reconciled the opposing claims of Collectivism and Syndicalism. The sin of the former was that it found room only for the interests of the consumer; the sin of the

latter that it completely ignored the interests of the consumer on the ground that producer and consumer are, or should be in a socialist society, one and the same person. Guild Socialists, on the other hand, recognised and made provision for the interests of both producer and consumer: the producer through his Guild and the consumer through the State.

### ***The Co-Sovereignty Theory***

Rejecting the doctrine of State Sovereignty which implies that the State has the ultimate right to interfere in all spheres of human action because all associations within the State ultimately derive their right to exist from the State, Cole nevertheless accepted the current Fabian theory that the State was, potentially at least, the representative of men as consumers. In a Guild Society therefore there would be, on the one hand, the grouping of men in territorial associations, the chief organ of which was Parliament, and, on the other hand, the grouping of men in vocational associations, the chief organ of which would be a Central Guilds Congress. This Guild Congress would be the supreme industrial body standing in the same relation to men as producers, as Parliament stands to men as consumers. Since both the Guild Congress and Parliament represented different types of interest, ultimate sovereignty would reside in neither body. In cases of dispute between them, however, settlement would have to be sought through a body more representative than either – a body representing every citizen in all his social aspects. The National Guild system was thus a system of co-sovereignty, resulting in a balance of powers, or, more strictly speaking, a division of powers. In the American political system, powers are divided horizontally and by stages: in the Guild system, the division would be on vertical and functional lines. The system would be one of decentralisation and dispersal of power and, in this “balancing [of] one social organism so nicely against another”, the individual would find his freedom.<sup>45</sup>

### ***The Civic-Sovereignty Theory***

This co-sovereignty theory was criticised by the older guildsman who adhered to what they called the civic-sovereignty theory.

Hobson, the chief protagonist of the latter, rejected the Fabian idea of the State as an association of consumers. The State, he claimed, represented the interests of the citizen as distinct from those either of the producer or of the consumer, and in such a capacity must always be allowed to have the the final word in any dispute between the Guilds and the State. To Hobson, the basis of Guild organisation was the control of every economic process, productive and consumptive, so that in normal circumstances the Guilds would represent both producer and consumer. The latter he defined as “one who in his functional capacity makes an effective demand upon the producer”.<sup>46</sup> Consumption, in his view, did not represent a homogeneous interest as Cole assumed. There was nothing between a consumer of whisky and a consumer – or ‘user’ and ‘enjoyer’ – of a municipal park which the State could represent. Production and consumption were not two distinct and equal processes but complementary stages of one economic transaction. A product was the result of co-operation between the producer and the consumer, and, once the profit motive was eliminated, there would be no divergence of interest. Provision would therefore be made inside the Guild organisation for effectual contact between producer and consumer through the establishment of a Distributive Guild to which all would belong and which would conduct negotiations, if necessary, with the manufacturing guilds.

### ***Guild Socialism Re-stated***

Among Guildsmen Cole’s co-sovereignty views prevailed over Hobson’s civic-sovereignty theory but the latter’s criticisms led Cole to revise his conception of the consumer and consequently of the State. At the same time the influence of the early Soviet form of organisation was manifested in a further development of guild theories. In the final and most complete picture of the Guild Commonwealth which is to be found in Cole’s *Guild Socialism Re-Stated*, 1920, there is a more rigorous attempt to apply the functional principle to all forms of social and industrial organisation and also a marked tendency

towards decentralisation. In Hobson's original formulation of the guild system national rather than local units had been chosen because he felt that local guilds "would be altogether ineffectual and inappropriate to modern requirements".<sup>47</sup> This was in effect, as Penty argued, to acquiesce in the large-scale organisation, and critics had not been wanting who urged that the National Guilds would inevitably develop into highly bureaucratic bodies such as the State Departments were alleged to be. By 1920 most guildsmen were prepared to admit these criticisms and, while retaining National Guilds, to agree that centralising tendencies must be opposed and that guild organisation must be highly decentralised.

### ***Functional Democracy***

The working out of the functional principle led to a rejection of the current theory of democratic representation and of the political institutions which were based on it. The present theory of political representation, it was argued, assumes that one man can represent a number of other men as men; but this assumption is unjustified. Each individual is a 'universal' with several interests and many facets to his personality. To further their various interests, each of which is more or less limited and specific, men unite in a number of associations, such as the church, the trade unions and the co-operative societies, whose 'function' is to promote those interests. A general and inclusive association such as the State claims to be cannot possibly possess a function in this sense since it is supposed to represent in an unlimited and unspecific way all men's interests, however different or divergent they may be. It is, therefore, not a 'true association'. Because no particular interest or set of interests exhausts the personality of a man, "no man can represent another man and no man's will can be treated as a substitute for, or representative of, the wills of others".<sup>48</sup> What it is possible to represent, concluded Cole, are not men but "certain purposes common to groups of individuals".<sup>49</sup> In other words, all true representation is functional in character and the democratic representative principle is not 'one man, one vote' but "one man as many votes as interests, but only one vote in relation to each

interest".<sup>50</sup> True representative democracy, therefore, is not to be found in a single omniscient representative assembly such as Parliament but in a system of co-ordinated functional representative bodies. Hence, the moral to be drawn is that "the omniscient State with its omniscient Parliament ... must be destroyed or painlessly extinguished ... [for] whatever the structure of the new society may be the Guildsmen is sure that it will have no place for the survival of the factotum State of today".<sup>51</sup>

### ***The Withering Away of the State***

Those interested in the details of Cole's blueprint of the Guild Commonwealth should read *Guild Socialism Re-Stated*. Briefly, Cole provided for four distinct forms of functional organisation: producers' guilds, consumers' councils and co-operatives, civic services, and citizens' organisations. In order that these might work as parts of a single system, there was to be a communal as distinct from a functional organisation and working of guild society. 'Communes' would need to be established at three levels – local, regional and national. The National Commune would not, however, be an extension of the present political State, nor would the local communes be extensions of the existing local authorities since these are non-functional in character and the Commune is essentially a body on which functional organisations are represented for the purposes of co-ordination. "The coordinating body which is required cannot be, in any real sense, historically continuous with the present State, and it must not reproduce in any important respect the structure of the present State".<sup>52</sup> Echoing Engels' famous prophecy, Cole opined that the present political machine, losing its economic and civic functions to new bodies, would "wither away".

Cole's vision of the Guild Commonwealth was criticised by the advocates of the civic-sovereignty theory who maintained that he had destroyed the State only to create a new State representative of all the major interests of society. Others, such as Carpenter, argued that the Commune would have the substance if not the form of sovereignty to which Cole was in theory so much opposed.

Whatever the force of these criticisms, it is, however, clear that Cole's *intention* was to delineate a society in which the communal power which existed would be widely dispersed. Moreover, the powers that he assigned to the communes would originate from the functional units that composed them, and the exercise of these powers, when it was necessary, would not have been felt as a purely *external* force in the way that Parliament's powers over subordinate groups are now felt. Cole's Guild Commonwealth was, in fact, much nearer to the federalist society envisaged by the anarchists than it was to the Fabian Collectivist State. Certainly, in response to the growing anti-statism in the movement, the objects of the National Guilds League were altered at its 1920 conference from: "The abolition of the Wage-System, and the establishment of Self-Government in Industry through a system of National Guilds working in conjunction with the State" to "working in conjunction with other democratic functional organisations in the Community".

### ***Guild Socialist Prospects***

Cole's re-statement of Guild Socialism marked the furthest development of guild theories. At the time of its publication the guildsmen appeared to have succeeded in displacing the old-fashioned Fabians as the acknowledged leaders of socialist thought in this country. Several of the most prominent Fabians of the pre-war days had been either converted to the new philosophy or forced to compromise with it. The only serious opposition to the intellectual plane came not from the right-wing socialists but from the small and vociferous band of Marxists. Had the National Guilds League been seeking merely to replace the Fabian Society as the centre of socialist policy-making, its prospects in 1920 would have seemed very bright, for it embraced a large number of the best publicists and the most prominent socialist intellectuals of the day. However, the very nature of Guild Socialist doctrines set the League a more difficult task than had faced the Fabians. The principal object of the latter had been to permeate with 'socialist' ideas the people who 'really mattered' – the legislators, the local councillors, the administrators, and the trade union officials and Labour leaders – those who, on

the Fabian plan, would be chiefly responsible for the introduction and administration of the Collectivist State. The objects of the League, on the other hand, could not be achieved thereby. Guild Socialism could be effective only if it won the allegiance of the mass of the trade union world – the people who alone could make industrial democracy a reality. In this connection the movement had made substantial progress during the war years, especially among the shop stewards and the workshop committees. In this field, the petering out of the syndicalist movement had been a gain to guild socialism, since a number of the former syndicalists, notably John Paton, transferred their loyalties to the new movement. In addition, guild socialism could claim a substantial following among the official leaders of several of the larger trade unions, especially those in the coal mining and railway industries and in the postal services. Nevertheless, for a movement which staked so much on the conversion of the trade unions, it was a sign of weakness that the membership of the League, like that of the Fabian Society, was concentrated so much in London: in the trade union world, the centre of gravity lay in the North, not in the Metropolis.

### ***Conflicts with the Movement***

This weakness began to manifest itself after the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia. The same factors which had undermined the syndicalist movement served to undermine the guild socialist movement. The attention of the militant trade unionists – chiefly the shop stewards – began to be diverted from the economic to the political plane. The struggle against the extension of conscription and for a negotiated peace occupied more and more attention. When the conclusion of the war resolved these issues, a deeper and more significant one came to the fore. The influence of the Bolshevik Revolution was not to be confined to the utopian drawing office but was to extend to the realm of revolutionary tactics. The question was now raised: Could the reconstruction of society on guild lines proceed without the prior seizure of political power by the proletariat? To a number of the more influential guildsmen the experience of Russia demanded a negative answer.