

GUILD SOCIALISM:

**An idea and a movement
with special reference
to Great Britain**

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"Men fight and lose the battle, and
the thing they fought for comes
about in spite of their defeat,
and when it comes turns out to be
not what they meant, and other men
have to fight for what they meant
under another name".

William Morris : Dream of John Ball

C O N T E N T S

1. The Sources of Guild Socialism	1
2. The Emergence of Guild Socialism	21
3. The Theory of Guild Socialism	31
4. Towards the Movement for Guild Socialism	43
5. Growth and Decline of the Movement	54
6. An Assessment	65 ✓
7. Bibliography	76

Chapter I

THE SOURCES OF GUILD SOCIALISM

Towards the end of the eighteenth century, Europe experienced two extremely important changes of far reaching consequences; the French Revolution and the Industrial Revolution. The former having altogether a political tinge dramatically asserted the rights of man to liberty, equality and fraternity, and the latter bringing about new technical inventions, accelerated the pace of industrial production with the result that capitalist system, a bourgeois order, based upon political liberty, formal equality before the law, private ownership of the means of production and free competition in the market, began to take roots. More than in any other Western country it was in Britain where these two momentous changes first led to the emergence of the capitalist system. Lichtheim aptly describes this process: "The onset of the industrial revolution had catastrophic results in Britain because it occurred before any counter forces had been mobilized and because it was super-imposed upon an already successful capitalization of agriculture, which had gone further than elsewhere and had eliminated the class of small peasant-proprietors."¹ Resistance to industrialization. was feeble, and the ruling stratum with no exception was intent upon imposing the new way of life. Moreover,

1. Lichtheim, G., A Short History of Socialism, London, 1970, P.10.

blind faith in the operation of a market economy was encouraged by an upsurge of technical innovations which promised to make everyone richer, though the immediate effect was just the reverse - the growing poverty of the millions. Cole elaborates: "... last but not the least, it created the modern wage-earning class - the proletariat which nominally free can live only by selling its labour for a wage."² This process, however, had its own pitfalls. Before it had advanced very far, the labouring people had been huddled together in new places of desolation the so-called industrial towns of England, thus the country folk had been dehumanized into slum dwellers. Indeed large parts of the country were rapidly disappearing under the "slack and scrap heaps vomitted forth from the satanic mills".³

The factory-towns, the slums, the long working hours of men, women and children, the fall in real wages, the disappearance of the independent artisan - the entire disaster of the early industrial revolution occurred in response to the operation of an economy which had escaped from social control and acquired a kind of automatism resembling that of a machine. No one had consciously wished these results. It was

2. Cole, G.D.H., A Short History of the British Working Class Movement, London, 1960, P.3.

3. Polanyi, K., The Great Transformation, Boston, 1957, P.39.

pauperism. It was a terrible misfortune. For the workers there was no escape, they were subjected to the full cruelties of capitalism. In disposing of their labour power, the system also disposed of their physical and moral traits. Labour was reduced to the role of two legged commodities in a market controlled by a small number of people, who owned the new means of production. It was in the nature of this process that the labour should demand the abolition of capitalism. The labour became hostile to capitalism and represented the ideal of freedom and independence in an age when everything conspired to degrade the labour. The new factory proletariat was too down-trodden to do more than seek an improvement in living conditions and to this sort of appeal the more philanthropic conservatives lent a ready ear. Hence the spread of what in 1840's was called Tory Chartism or Christian Socialism.

Poverty was indeed a very real issue, and so was factory legislation to limit the exploitation of labour. But socialism from the start stood for something else; not merely an improvement in the conditions of working-class but a new social order. Until about 1850, industrialization went hand in hand with an

abnormal pressure upon working-class living standards. That this pressure was abnormal became evident when the abolition of the Corn Laws(1846) and the Ten Hours Bill(1847) initiated a gradual improvement in the material conditions of most workers. Even then pauperism confined to be the lot of a mass of casual labours. This depressed stratum did not respond to the changing conditions any more than it took an interest in the liberal - radical ideology which after the collapse of Chartism in 1848 replaced the older democratic faith. It was the elite of the labour which since 1820's furnished an audience for the spread of socialist ideas.

Socialism as a plan for action for the reorganization of human society had many adherents at different times in the nineteenth century. The first group to take the name of 'Socialist' was associated with Robert Owen(1771-1858); and Owen, beginning in 1817 with his "Plan" for cooperative villages for the relief of unemployed, with his persistent propaganda for self-governing Socialist Colonies and his invincible confidence in the approach of a 'New Moral World' is the real founder of modern Socialism. Thomas Hodgkins J.F.Bray and William Thompson explained the economics of Owenism and these economics reappear in the later

'scientific' socialism of Karl Marx and Engels.

The socialism of Robert Owen was a very simple affair. It did not depend on the political rule of the working class, neither did it anticipate the arrival of trusts and syndicates to be superseded by common ownership. Owen believed that governments could there and then establish socialism and at once reorganize society on the basis of common property.

Owenism, as a popular movement, had ceased to be even in the life-time of its founder. The reasonableness of a new order of society, based on cooperative principle, on the common ownership of goods produced not for profit but for use, made but a very limited appeal. To William Cobbet and to other popular leaders, the very notion of living in a co-operative colony was an outrage. Besides, Owen never understood, and therefore never appreciated, the average Englishman's belief in Parliament, a traditional belief rooted in the medieval device of government by representation. Men and women could establish socialism themselves without any assistance from Parliament. An amalgamated Trades Union, a Union of the workers in all trades, was in the vision of Owen, a weapon that was bound to prove successful in substituting socialism for capitalism. For a few years(1832-34) the Grand National

Consolidated Trades Union lived, almost it might be said to have flourished, and then - too unwidely - it broke up. Owenism passed away. To Marx and Engels it was 'Utopian' socialism to be superseded by scientific socialism, the social democracy. But the idea of a radical change in social life, to be brought about not by parliamentary action, but by the working class acting independently of Parliament, never quite died out in England. Under these circumstances Owen lapsed into political quietism. Syndicalism, guild socialism, anarchist-communism - all these movements are letter-day manifestation of Owenism.

Chartism(1838-53), with its programme of political democracy, is still more directly related.

True, neither the Charter, with its six points, nor the writings and speeches of the principal leaders of the Chartist movement, contain a profession of socialist economic or promise a new moral world. But the movement was revolutionary. James('Bronterre') O'Brien was always for the complete nationalization of the land. Feargus O'Connor and Ernest Jones were both in touch with the revolutionaries of the Continent, and gave to Chartism, what Owenism never had, an international outlook. It was in O'Connor's Northern Star that Marx(1818-83) began to write in the 'forties, and Engels(1820-95) during his residence in England(1842-44)

became the "chief link that bound to English Chartism the extremists of the German revolt against the social order".⁴ London, even before the revolutionary outbreak of 1848, was a city of refuge for continental exiles, and in London many of the Chartists, notably Ernest Jones and Julian Harney, were members of international associations.

The first serious attempt, consequent upon the growth of Chartism in the 1840's to found a Labour International materialized in the shape of the Fraternal Democrats. The Chartist leaders endeavoured for international brother-hood. The Fraternal Democrats ceased to function in 1854 to be followed two years later by the establishment of the International Association which lingered on for some three years. Despite their limited scope, these two societies paved the way for the emergence in 1864 of an International Working Men's Association which was to make a lasting impact on the development of the European labour movement. It was the establishment of the International Working Men's Association, that brought Marx into touch with the Trade Union leaders in England. The foundation of the International in London on 28 September, 1864 was a turning point in the history

4. Hovel, Mark, The Chartist Movement, London, 1963, P.70.

of labour movement. Its two predecessors, the Fraternal Democrats of 1846 and the International Association of 1855 remained comparatively feeble and made hardly a ripple in England, or on the continent. The International was the first working class organization to make a decisive impact on European politics. "If it helped the early labour organizations in Europe, that was largely the achievement of one man - Karl Marx."⁵

Its chief work, at the beginning, was the organization of Trade Unions on the Continent. Steadily the influence of Karl Marx swept away all opposition to the theory of scientific socialism and in the General Council of the International Marx became predominant. Mazzini and the Italians soon retired, attracted not at all to the Trade Unions established by Socialists.

The Russian Bakunin, and his Anarchist supporters, who were opposed on principle to the idea of social democracy, and fiercely resented the supremacy of Marx, fought a long and losing battle within the International and were finally expelled. But the process of their expulsion left the International exhausted. Marx removed the headquarters to New York, that the Anarchists might not trouble it any more and the International died in 1873.

5. Collins, H., and Abramsky, C., Karl Marx and the British Labour Movement, London, 1965, P.13.

The International provided the medium through which the ideas of Marx were transmitted to the young movements of the world. When during the life time of Marx, Socialism became a world force, it was expressed in his terms and armed with his ideas, rather than of Mazzini, Proudhon or Bakunin. This was almost entirely due to the International and the effective leadership which Marx brought to bear on the labour movements of many countries at a formative stages of their developments.⁶ The appeal of the International to the British workers was simple and straight forward. It made no attempt to preach unfamiliar doctrines. It offered to augment their existing struggles, political and industrial, with the power of international combination. British trade unionists had often been ready to support democratic movements abroad both on general humanitarian, democratic grounds and because they agreed that "a blow struck at Liberty on the Tagus is an injury to the friends of Freedom on the Thames".⁷ As Max Beer asserts: "If the International made its impact on the working-class movement in Britain, the participation of the British trade unions was decisive for the future of world Socialism".⁸

6. Foster, W.Z., A History of the Three Internationals, New York, 1955, P.27.

7. Stekloff, G.M., History of the First International, London, 1928, P.270.

8. Beer, M., "The International: its Historical Significance", Socialist Review, London, July-Sep., 1914.

The success of the General Council during the London Tailor's strike in 1866 established the International as a force in the labour movement. From the start to the finish the International was London based. This, while "an asset politically, was from industrial point of view a devastating liability".⁸ In 1867, there were according to George Potter, "eight hundred thousand trade unionists in Britain".⁹ If the expansion of the International was limited in area it was also restricted in time and 1867 was the last year to see any appreciable increase in trade union affiliation. The reason for this was two-fold. Trade Unions were by that time firmly established and within their accepted limitations powerful. For them, there remained two outstanding political tasks - to secure their legal position and to win an extension of the franchise. The Reform Act of 1867 gave the workers an important share in political power, while the same year a Royal Commission was set up which was to report favourably on the objectives and activities of the Unions. From then onward there could be no serious challenge to their right of existence.

8. Beer, M., Fifty Years of International Socialism, London, 1937, P.151.

9. Potter, G., The Labour and International, London, 1951, P.72.

The trade union leaders could meet to bring political pressure on the government. "In England the labour movement in all its aspects was legal, on the continent it was, at least, tolerated."¹⁰

Marx, who knew well enough that the "British workers were not revolutionary, hoped that they could still be drawn into an international revolution starting on the Continent".¹¹ And on level at least, his expectations did not seem unrealistic. When issues of policy were debated at Congresses of the International the English delegates sided almost invariably with Marx. Marx knew that the English workers for all their organizational achievements lacked, the "spirit of generalization and revolutionary ardour".¹² In Great Britain of the 1850's democracy based on agricultural mode of production was out of date, and it was still too soon to rouse the working class against monopoly capitalism. The International in fact, succeeded in keeping alive the idea of international socialism in England. It was "identified in public mind with Socialism, which, but for its existence, would probably have been forgotten".¹³

10. Beer, M., A History of British Socialism, London, 1940, P.24.

11. Zarcher, Dr., The Red International, London, 1957, P.57.

12. Kaufmann, M., Karl Marx and the International, London, 1951, P.20.

13. Ernest, C., A Word to the Working Class on the International, London, 1928, P.57.

The early 1860's found conditions of industry and physical state of the working class far different from those in the late 1840's, when the great Manifesto of Marxian Socialism was held as cheap publication containing the wildest and most anarchical doctrines. Contrary to the expectations of the authors of the Manifesto capitalist industry had survived and expanded in England. The workers had passed through a number of crisis, but had not revolted. Conditions had improved for many of them as a result of both economic organization of the workers and of the enlightened selfishness of the employing class. The workers had achieved many of the political reforms. They were able to effect changes through the ballot. They had created for themselves such economic agencies for peaceful progress as trade unions and cooperative societies. Their demand for immediate and violent change had largely given way to a struggle for improvement through the ballot, through legislation, through the strengthening of labour unions and of cooperatives. They saw the immediate break-down of capitalist system. A socialist order, as advocated by Marx and Engels in the Communist Manifesto indeed could not be anticipated.

The urgent need was that in the hour when capitalism would collapse the working class, trained and conscious of their responsibility, should be ready

to take control of the situation, and direct the new order of society, an order of socialism, the production of wealth by cooperative activity for common consumption. Socialism could not come until, on the one hand Capitalism had ceased to operate in a satisfactory manner, and on the other until the working class was ready to assume control. Hence it was not until 1884 that the movement towards socialism took definite form in Great Britain. In that year the Social Democratic Federation, the Socialist League and the Fabian Society were established, and the Christian Socialists of the Anglican Guild of St. Matthew adopted a socialist formula.

In the early 1880's shortly before Karl Marx's death H.M.Hyndman(1840-1921) helped to establish the Democratic Federation and then to transform it by 1884, into Britain's first Marxist Party, the Social Democratic Federation. 'No disciple', writes Walter Kendall, "interprets his master's doctrine in an entirely authentic fashion".¹⁴ But the superior leadership gave the S.D.F. far greater success and made it far more influential in the wider labour movements in England. Marx had been wrong in even expecting trade unionism to become a revolutionary

14. Kendall, W., Revolutionary Movements in Britain 1900-1921, London, 1969, P.5.

force in Britain. The trade unions "represented merely an aristocracy of labour".¹⁵ The Webbs drew attention to the great similarity between the view of S.D.F. and those of the Owenites of the 1830's, the S.D.F. encouraged its members to join trade unions and agreed that strikes were often necessary to prevent a worsening of workers' conditions. But because of the inexorable economic pressure of capitalism, strikes could do nothing to raise wages to any significant or lasting extent and socialists were expected to work in their unions mainly to explain the significance of the socialist outlook.

The Democratic Federation had announced its objectives of transferring the means of producing and distributing wealth to public ownership. It also announced a list of 'stepping stones' to a happier period. The term 'stepping stones' implied the transitional value of the programme which was taken over intact by S.D.F. as measures which would "palliate" the evils of the existing Society. In fact inclusion of 'palliatives' was one of the reasons for the first split in the party, which led to the breakaway of William Morris and others to form the Socialist League at the end of the 1884.

15. Rothstein, T., From Chartist to Labourism, London, 1929, P.136.

The S.D.F. and the Socialist League believed genuinely in Parliament and in the possibility of using it to win social reforms, even while society remained capitalist. The programme of the S.D.F. was more methodically set out. It began with a list of political and social aims culminating in the collective ownership of the means of production, distribution and exchange. The S.D.F. was able to throw itself so vigorously and upto a point, successfully into the movement of the unemployed which began in London at the beginning of the 1886 and culminated in "Bloody Sunday" on 13 November, 1887. This was the biggest mass movement engineered by the S.D.F. and even Engels highly critical as he was of the S.D.F. in general and of Hyndman in particular wrote that the Federation was becoming a power in British labour movement. The change of the name from Social Democratic Federation to Social Democratic Party in 1909 signified little, but its development into the British Socialist Party in 1911 marked the start of a new phase which ended with the formation of the Communist Party of Great Britain in 1920.

In the autumn of 1892 measures were taken to unite the various independent labour organizations into one Party and on January 14, 1893 a conference

was held in Bradford which resulted in the formation of the Independent Labour Party. The aim of the Independent Labour Party was the collective ownership and the control of the means of production to be achieved through parliamentary action, and democracy in local and central government. Its attitude towards the trade unions was more sympathetic and in its active work among the unions its speakers usually avoided mention of revolution, class-war and Marxian concepts in general and approached "the problems more from the ethical, non-conformist and democratic points of view, which appealed to the British Workmen".¹⁶

The new party proved to be merely an improved edition of the S.D.F. The main object to enlist the masses of organized workers to the cause of independent politics was not attained. In 1897 and 1898 the engineers and the Welsh miners came out on strike for better conditions of labour. In 1898 Gladstone died and with him one of the main pillars of Liberal labourism disappeared from British politics. J. Ramsay Mac Donald soon joined the Independent Labour Party and during the remainder of the nineties party devoted its chief efforts to winning the trade unionists for independent political action and in 1899 a Labour

16. Laidler, H.M., Social-Economic Movements, London, 1960, P.317.

Representative Committee was formed which resulted in the formation of the British Labour Party in 1906.

Ferment and unrest spread throughout all ranks. Even conservative minds usually averse from popular agitation were thinking of revolutionary and rebellious acts. Capital and labour moved in phalanxes against one another. The whole nation was in a movement. As the Social Democratic Federation developed from the Democratic Federation, and the Socialist League sprang from the S.D.F., so the Fabian Society emerged from a little group of men and women of the middle class who in 1883 had styled themselves as the "Fellowship of the New Life". The Fabian Society was founded in London in 1883. Its virtual founder was Dr. Thomas Davidson of New York (1840-1900); dreaming of a "community of superior people withdrawn from the world because of its wickedness".¹⁷ The 'Big Four' Sydney Webb, Bernard Shaw, Sydney Oliver and Graham Wallas were not the original members of the Society. With such capable management and "such an all-star cast, any production is guaranteed a long run, and the Fabian Society became something of a cult, even if it aimed at being rather than exclusive cult".¹⁸

17. McBriar, A.M., Fabian Socialism and English Politics 1884-1918, London, 1962, P.1.

18. Gray, A., The Socialist Tradition, London, 1963, P.386.

The object of the Fabian Society was to persuade "the nation to make their political constitution thoroughly democratic",¹⁹ and to socialize their industries as to make the livelihood of the people entirely independent of capitalism. Socialism as understood by the Fabians meant that "the competitive system assures the happiness and comfort of the few at the expense of the suffering of the many",²⁰ and Society must be reconstituted in such a manner as to secure the general welfare and happiness. The Fabian Society did not direct its appeals to any particular class but to men and women of all classes who saw the evils of society and desired to remedy them. They had little faith in violent revolution. They sought "to inspire devotion to the cause by visualizing the possibilities of associated production",²¹ while avoiding the possible imaginings of the Utopians. There was necessity of preaching Fabian Socialism to the British working class for which even Cole was much disturbed when he said, "The Fabians will have to go out and preach Socialism far and wide, if not one else will".²² The Fabians were the "people of cool reforms,

19. Pease, E.R., The History of the Fabian Society, London, 1925, P.26.

20. Arnold, G.L., 'Notes on Fabianism', Twentieth Century Vol.IX, London, June 1956, P.70.

21. Cole, G.D.H., Fabian Socialism, London, 1971, P.164

22. Cole, M., The Story of Fabian Socialism, London, 1961, P.70.

take, what they give, but don't demand". The Fabian Society served as a "shock-absorber to the British working class movement, which had nothing to clear of the past but of future".²³

Fabian doctrines did not reach the highest level of theoretical originality, it was not the kind of doctrine which, for better or worse, introduced a new departure in social thinking. The principal general achievement claimed on behalf of the Fabians by the Secretary of the Society, E.R. Pease was that they were able to "break the spell of Marxism in England."²⁴ The claim is extravagant, for Marxism had cast no spell over England. So long as socialists clung to a rigid Marxist dogma they were doomed to remain a tiny and insignificant sect in a country which was still, in the late nineteenth century, the most prosperous country in the world, and which had made half a century of progress since the turbulence of the change to an industrial society. The influence of Independent Labour Party faded under its own weight. In national politics, the Fabians were deceived in their hopes of permeating the Liberals and it seems certain that the Independent

23. Clarkson, J.D., Background of Fabian Theory, London, 1953, P.14.

24. Pease, Op.cit., P.236.

Labour Party and the Labour Party would have come into existence without their assistance, which was for the most part equivocal and not very helpful. It was during this period that the idea of guild socialism with its ideal of a social order midway between syndicalism and Fabianism with its emphasis on producer's control and its criticism of programmes favouring too great a development of State functions began to take root in England. Guild Socialism began to emerge as a synthesis of all that was best in the rival schools of socialist thought in England.

Chapter II

THE EMERGENCE OF GUILD SOCIALISM

Guild Socialism brought a different if not an entirely new element into British Socialist thought; an element with which the Anglo-Saxon mind was in sympathy; the doctrine of pluralism - "the idea not of a single centrally organized corporation, but of a community of communities".¹ It has been called "the most significant attempt in political theory to deny the importance of the State".² Guild Socialism in England emerged partly out of the medievalist revival. In the movement were to be found ex-Quaker Socialist S.G.Hobson, as well as the Anglican medievalist A.J.Penty. The Guild Socialist movement drew sustenance from various sources, from the anti-industrial tradition of Tory Democracy - Carlyle, Arnold, Ruskin and Morris, from the 'Arts and Crafts' movement, from Robert Owen and the Socialists and Co-operators of 1830's and 1840's, from the Chartists and from the Marxism (Labour Theory of Value and Surplus Value). More than a trace of French Syndicalism was also evident in Guild Socialism "though the movement was peculiarly English".³

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1. Cole, G.D.H., Meaning of Industrial Freedom, London, 1918, P.70.
 2. Stonier, H., British Socialism, dark and dark, London, 1943, P.52.
 3. Carpenter, N., Guild Socialism, New York, 1969, P.70.



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British Socialists emphasized the worker's deprivation of the just fruits of his labour, the "expropriation" by the capitalist of the surplus value.

They, therefore, "sought measures to ensure the just distribution of the national product among those who produced it".⁴

Guild Socialism was more than "a new intellectual and philosophical synthesis of the medievalist revival, pluralism and associationism".⁵ It arose, in response to a growing dissatisfaction with what was happening to British Socialism and the labour movement since the creation of the Labour Party in 1906 and the Victor Grayson incident in 1908, conditions appeared to have deteriorated still further. The demands of South Wales mines for a more aggressive union leadership, Tom Mann's return from Australia with a new proletarian gospel, the emergence of Syndicalism in 1911 and of tough strike activities in Scotland and elsewhere. All these developments were manifest of a general feeling "of unease in the economy and society and disappointment with the apparent impotence of the Labour Party to effect changes".⁶

4. Villiers, B., The Socialist Movement in England London, 1908, P.140.

5. Ulem, A.B., Philosophical Foundations of English Socialism, Cambridge, 1951, P.57.

6. Cole, G.D.H., Guild Socialism, London, 1920, P.68.

The great Socialist revival that began in the 1880's seemed to have grounded to a halt. A younger generation of Socialists were determined to start afresh and incidentally to recapture for British Socialism an essential idea that had somehow been lost on the way between 1830's and the 1900's, of direct workers control in industry.

Guild Socialism had its origin in the years 1905-1906, with the unsuccessful attempt of A.J.Penty (1875-1937) to revive a guild system of the medieval type. Penty feared that "the Fabian Collectivism would lead to rule by an all powerful bureaucracy which would stifle creative individuality".⁷ In June 1907 the Journalist A.R.Orage(1873-1934) wrote an article in the Contemporary Review published from England about the need to restore the guild system and "to beware of dogmatic collectivist socialists".⁸

But 1906-1907 saw the flood tide of victory for parliamentary socialism and collectivism; the time was not yet ripe for the guild idea to be taken up seriously. Orage thus described the conditions of British Socialism in 1907: "Socialism in Britain was a cult with affiliations in directions now quite disowned with Theosophy, arts and crafts, and the simple life".⁹

7. Penty, A.J., The Restoration of the Guild System, London, 1906, P.34.

8. Orage, A.R., On Socialism in England, London, 1930, P.27.

9. Parker, E., Socialism and Britain, London, 1970, P.25.

Fremental poetically sums up its background "William Morris had shed a medieval glamour over it with his stained-glass, 'News from Nowhere'. Edward Carpenter had put it into sandals, Cunningham-Graham had mounted it upon an Arab Steed to which he was always saying a romantic farewell. Keir Hardie had clothed it in a cloth cap and red tie. And George Bernard Shaw, on behalf of the Fabian Society, had hung it out with immediate jingling, epigrammatic bells and cap."¹⁰ Such a picture of British Socialism in the opening of the twentieth Century, hardly argued well with the future of Guild Socialism in England.

Arthur Penty was a thorough-going medievalist who hated modern industry and wished to go back, quite literally to an economic system based on small scale handicraft guilds. Modern technology was to be abandoned, and society was to revert deliberately to a relatively low level of division of labour. According to Penty, "the whole issue between medievalism and modernism, will be found to turn on the attitudes we adopt towards the division of labour. If out of timidity we acquiesce in it, then I contend that disaster will overtake any effort we may make to establish a social order".¹¹

10. Fremental, A., This Little Band of Prophets; The British Fabians, London, 1959, P.168.

11. Penty, A.J., Towards a Christian Sociology, London, 1923, P.189.

Penty's ideals, like those of William Morris, were soon passed over in favour of a form of Guild Socialism which would "allow its proponents to have their cake and eat it too".¹² After Penty the movement took account of the modern industrial technology and tried to solve the problems of industrialism while simultaneously preserving the material benefits and advances that modern factory production brings. The figure chiefly responsible for altering Penty's medieval craft concept into a modern industrial Guild system was yet another Christian Socialist, the one time Quaker, S.G.Hobson. For sometime Hobson laboured hard as a Fabian Socialist and in the I.L.P., before he grew tired and frustrated by collectivism and began to develop fears that "the worker would end up being no more free under middle class bureaucratic socialism of the Fabian type than under Capitalism".¹³ As for Penty's ideas, Hobson had gained experience in the United States that convinced him that there was no going back, no reversal of the Industrial Revolution. To achieve control in modern, Hobson proposed to enlarge the powers and functions of existing trade unions, outside the sphere of the State. The State would simply charter the unions, changing

12. Carpenter, Op.cit., P.284.

13. Hobson, S.G., Pilgrim to the Left, London, 1938, P.65.

them legally into industrial guilds, which would henceforth be free of central government control. Hobson spread the gospel of "National Guilds", co-operating closely with Orage on the "New Age". This journal, together with the League's Church-Socialist, introduced Guild Socialism to the British mind. The phrase "Guild Socialism" was apparently first coined by the New Age in October 1912. The idea existed long before the actual juxtaposition of the words Guild and Socialist took place.

The New Age had produced a series of articles attacking the wage system, rejecting 'melliorist politics' and equating State Socialism with State Capitalism. There can be no emancipation save only from the wage system. The way out is to smash wages. The old Marxist S.D.F. was preferable to Fabian and Labour Party collectivism, because Hyndman and his group had at least struck out at wages as a system. The chain of published articles in 1912, through which Guild Socialism made its formal debut, were the logical extension of ideas that had been built up gradually from about 1907 onwards. It was in 1907 when the almost defunct 'New Age' was purchased from Joseph Clayton by A.R.Orage and Halbrook Jackson, two young provincial radicals newly arrived in London from Leeds and anxious to do something concrete for the cause of Guild Socialism. With the financial help from Bernard Shaw they set out to make the paper a kind of Socialist spectator.

The 'New Age' attracted the writers of highest caliber, such as the Chestertons, Belloc, Shaw and H.G.Wells. In its pages, appeared the most famous literary battle of wits fought by G.K.Chesterton and Hilaire Belloc with Bernard Shaw and H.G.Wells. Apart from this the deep-seated dissatisfaction among some intellectuals came to the surface. Anti-collectivist writings of men of the stature of G.K.Chesterton(1847-1936) and Belloc(1870-1953) had considerable public impact. Belloc's many articles were combined in a book, 'The Servile State' published in 1912. According to Belloc, "contrary to the confident statements by Fabians and others Britain was not in fact evolving toward true socialism at all, but toward a socialist order, where the capitalist class would be as strongly entrenched in power as ever and the workers would be reduced to a castlike subservience by a heavy mass of legislation - all under the guise of social reforms".¹⁴

But the Church socialists who shared his fears of collectivist bureaucracy did not follow Belloc in the rural arcadia. The Church socialist leaguers who became guildsmen tended to take S.G.Hobson model of industrial guilds. The 'New Age' gradually constructed an increasingly stronger case against the Labour Party,

14. Belloc, H., The Servile State, New York, 1946, P.21.

the Fabians and their Liberal allies. As the months fly past, the Labour party "grows moderate and reactionary" wrote Hobson in 1908. A few months later, about a week before his suspension by the House of Commons, the independent Socialist M.P. for Colne Valley, Victor Grayson, was appointed co-editor of the 'New Age' with Orage; the aim being to guarantee, "fearless and independent projection of the Socialist ideas to the British masses. Naturally, when the suspension came, it was supported by Labour votes in Parliament, the 'New Age' made a great issue of it. By 1908, demands were being made to replace the Labour Party altogether. We sent the Labour Party to Parliament to make war on Toryism and Liberalism and not to make terms with them" thundered the 'New Age'.

The 'New Age' had already taken great exception to Fabian policy over the threatened rail-road strike of 1907, a strike which was settled by Lloyd George for the government by evading the real issue of trade union recognition. The Fabian executive had commended George because it felt the national transportation system was too vital to be subject to strike activity. The 'New Age' took this to be an implicit denial by the Fabians of the right to strike. In later years - Orage called the railway settlement of 1907 "infamous". However, after the Grayson incident, Hobson took the opportunity of forcing a motion on the Fabian Society to

demand its disaffiliation for the Labour Party. The motion was defeated. Hobson resigned from the Fabian Society.

With the exit of Hobson, the opposition to the Labour Party by the Guild Socialists did not wane. The 'final surrender' of the Party came in 1909-1911 over the bogus issue of reforms of the House of Lords. The disillusionment with the Labour Party marked a significant departure from the conventional type of socialist thinking in Britain. The Labour leaders were denounced for their lack of militancy. The frustration felt at the restricted role played by Parliamentary Labour Party in national politics led to the fundamental questioning of the policies of the orthodox socialist movement: It was futile for the working class to engage in political action of the conventional type. The governing classes were less afraid of the working man's vote than his strike.

The effect of the wage system was to produce two classes of citizens; the active minority and passive majority. The latter being the bulk of the wage earners, and the existence of such a majority made "government of the people, by the people" impossible. As Hobson saw it self-government in industry was not only an extension of democratic practices, it was indispensable for the creation of a vigorous democracy in all spheres of government. The National Guilds were to be developed out of the existing trade unions which were also to

provide the motive power of change but an extensive reorganization and reorientation of the trade union movement would be required before it would be fit for the tasks ahead.

Hobson put forward a theory which despite its crudity and naivety appealed to a number of intellectuals and trade unionists. Some of them, notably G.D.H.Cole, refined and developed the theory and built up an active movement on the basis of it. Hobson could, therefore, claim to be the originator of the Guild Socialism, in the sense of adapting the guild idea that Ponty had earlier revived to modern industrial conditions.

Chapter III

THE THEORY OF GUILD SOCIALISM

The first attempt to conduct propoganda work for the general idea of Guild Socialism, then in a rather nebolus stage, may be said to have started with the organization of the Guilds Restoration Movement in 1906. The appearance of the Hobson - Orage articles on the subject in 1912, officially launched the idea and the formation of the National Guilds League in 1915, which followed G.D.H. Cole's unsuccessful attempt to commit the Fabian Society to Guild Socialism and his organization of the Guild Socialist Propaganda Society translated the idea in an effective movement.

The objects of the League were stated as "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. The Guildsmen, urged whole-heartedly the Marxian demand that the wage system should be abolished. To them wage system was bad economically. It produced a slave state of mind, which the worker carried over with him into his social and political life. It supressed the creative instinct in labour, the worker's inetinct to own and control and for the system of production for service it substituted a system designed to grind out profits for the absentee owners, irrespective of the desires of the consumers or the needs of the producers.

Positively the guildsmen aimed at "self-government in industry - a self-government for the worker which would give him an opportunity to develop his personality,

and which would assure to him as a minimum recognition and payment as a human being, and not merely as the mortal tenement of such labour power for which any efficient demand exists for the control of the organization of production in cooperation with his fellows, and a claim upon the product of his labour. It follows from this scheme that true democracy does not begin and end with voting on election day, but resides in the functioning of the every organization which vitally effects the life of every citizen. The worker should also participate in the election of the officials in his industry in the same way as in the election of the city officials.

Practically, all guildsmen, however, agreed that the unit in the Guild Socialist society should be guild. The guild was defined as "a self governing association of mutually dependent people organized for a responsible discharge of a particular function of Society".¹ The guild within the definition of the guildsmen, included all of the workers in an industry, trade or profession, in so far as such as 'guildized' - the managerial and technical staff as well as the manual workers, the salariat as well as the proletariat.

It would be responsible and be given initial autonomy within its own sphere, so long as it performed its functions satisfactorily. Those who were doing actual work

1. Cole, G.D.H., Self-Government in Industry, London, 1918, P.155.

should be responsible for its direction. The guild should be run democratically. Democracy did not mean that mass vote would be taken on every move in the productive process. A mass vote on a matter of technique understood by only a few experts would be a manifest absurdity and even if the element of technique is left out of account, a factory administered by constant mass votes would be "neither efficient, nor at all a pleasant place to work in".² The governing principle in the choice of guild leaders will be election 'from the below' by those whom the leaders will have to lead.

The Guild Socialists admitted the enormous difficulties in the way of democratic control. The guild factory would be a natural centre of self-government no longer "like the factories of today, a mere prison of boredom and useless toil, but a centre of free service and associative enterprise".³

The guildsmen seemed generally agreed that the guild unit should be the national guild highly decentralized. Penty and his followers favoured the local guild as the unit on the ground that the basis of the

2. Cole, G.D.H., Chaos and Order in Industry, London, 1920, P.170.

3. Cole, M., Makers of Labour Movement, London, 1948, P.120.

medieval guild was local and that by restoring local autonomy in industry could the tyranny of machine production be overthrown. There would likewise be regional guilds to look after the interests of industry in different parts of the country. The local guild would elect representatives of the regional or district guilds, and the district guilds, to the national organization. The local guild would thus be represented indirectly, not directly, in the National Council.

Hobson and others adhering to the civic sovereignty theory believed that the State should exist; "that it should be relieved, however, of most of its active administrative functions - guilds taking over these and thus be able to concentrate on its civic interests"⁴. The 'Guild Commune' theory denied the sovereignty of the State and almost denied it any function at all. In place of the State, it set up a Commune, which it placed in closer relationship with the guilds than Hobson's citizen State.

The Commune would be organized locally, regionally, and nationally. Each type would be closely connected with the corresponding type of guild. Constitutional political action declared Cole, "could not be relied upon to bring the revolution, because there is no chance of a really class-conscious majority returning

4. Hobson, S.G., National Guilds and the State, London, 1920, P.102.

to power a really class-conscious government".⁵

The main reason as to why political methods would not bring about the social transformation was that it was not political but economic and under capitalist system economic power precedes political power.

It is indeed not wide off the mark to say that Guild Socialism was an attempt to combine the truths in Marxism and Syndicalism. With the Marxian Socialists it agreed that the existing state must be transformed through the ownership of the means of production by the State as well as through the acquisition of political power by the economic class and with the Syndicalists it insists that in order to effect a complete emancipation of industrial-class, it must be given the right of decentralized self-government. Against both, however, it argues that "the State, as embodiment of the political function of the Society, should not be abolished, but should be retained in the future Social Organization as a cooperative force with the economic system".⁶

The fundamental principles of Guild Socialism may be thus summed up: "First organization by function, secondly self-government by independent functions and thirdly decentralization within each functional unit".⁷

5. Cole, G.D.H., The World of Labour, London, 1913, P.160.

6. Field, G.C., Guild Socialism, London, 1919, P.80.

7. Taylor, G.R.S., The Guild State, London, 1919, P.37.

The idea of organization by function as advocated by guild socialists, resembles in a way with Plato's ideas of division of labour which we find in Republic and else where in his writings. The first city, so Plato says, is comprised of a husband man, a builder, a weaver and a shoe-maker. Later on this individual division of labour is enlarged into class division, when the self-sufficiency of the republic is maintained through the cooperative work of the three functions of the political rule, military defence and economic production. The Guild Socialists, would, of course disagree with Plato that the ruling class would be superior to the other classes and that it is the duty of the artisans to produce and not to rule. Yet if we go to the fundamental idea of occupational organization, of the division of society into political and economic groups, as the Guild Socialists recommended, it is undeniable that here the Platonic republic is indirectly seeking its modern expression of guild socialism. The primary advantage of a system of organization by Guilds, will be that the arrangement of national life will be on the basis of essential work. The nation will become a machine organized for doing the nation's work. Every normal unit of the State would be organized as a citizen in regard to his main responsibility and knowledge. He would be primarily considered as an expert and his chief civil duty would be to do what he

really could do. The ideal guild state, therefore, would be the State in which the Platonic principles of Justice Universally prevails over the harmonious co-ordination of all the essential functions of Society. The great point of difference between the Guild Socialists and Plato evidently lies in the principle of functional government, which, if applied to the Platonic republic would mean that while the 'non-citizen' therein possesses no rights in the political state, they must acquire as members of a separate and independent class, rights and powers of their own. The Guild system, therefore, enfranchises a new citizenry and create a new democracy, the economic democracy of 'artisans'. Society is to be divided into two distinct systems, the State and the Guild, each with its own government, citizenry, electoral system and legislative body. The Guild Socialists point out that "over-centralization of power at any one stage indicates not only inefficiency but despotism".⁸ Society is, therefore, to be decentralized as well as functionalized, and it is for this reason that Guild Socialism may be said to be a two dimensional federation, it divides Society horizontally in the functional autonomies, and vertically within each function into decentralized local or professional unit. The State must keep its hands off all industrial economic affairs which lie

8. Glasier, J.B., Labour: Its Politics and Ideals, London, 1903, P.163.

within the proper jurisdiction of the National Guild. Indeed as the instrument of co-ordination and regulation, the State occupies a uniquely important position in the dual organization of Society; for politically the State is to dominate over the Guild system. State citizenship ought to be distinguished from Guild membership, the latter should not be merged in the former. It is citizenship, however, that entitles the individual to the best and fullest measure of his social life. A man is a member of his Guild for sound material reasons, and through his Guild, his material interests are protected but his rights as a citizen transcend his Guild membership.

The State possesses, therefore, superiority which guild lacks. The State has function and duties that cut clear across all lines of industrial organization, and that in the final analysis, the State as representing the community at large, must be final arbiter of all the social relations.

Cole said something positive on it, that "the State in contra-distinction to the guilds, is a consumer's organization, which, by its representation of its consumptive interests of the community, possess a right to exist side by side with the productive organization, the guild system".⁹ The division of social power, therefore, consists in a balance of power between

9. Cole, G.D.H., Self-Government in Industry,
Op.cit., P.135.

the political parliament and Guild Congress, so that neither the one nor the other can claim to be ultimate sovereign. The relation which exists between them is one of co-operation, secured through some joint representative body, which acts in the interests of all parties concerned.

In his Social Theory(1920) Cole emphasized, "the necessity and desirability of functional representation"¹⁰ locally and regionally there are to be three sets of organization; first the industrial guilds representing all persons in the producing and professional class, secondly a two-fold organization of the consumers, the cooperative council formed of consumers of particular commodities and the collective utilities council formed of general public utilities and thirdly the civic guilds representing the non-economic interests having for their organs the cultural council, health council etc. Over and above these bodies, a national body is to be established which is to be based upon the representation of functional as well as territorial divisions. Bolshevike Syndicalists, Marxian industrialists and Communists not merely claim for proletarian organizations; independence of the State, they threaten to destroy it altogether. Right or wrong they are a force and their doctrines are a living international influence. As the same time guild socialists influenced by industrial and economic

10. Cole, G.D.H., Social Theory, London, 1920, P.10.

conditions preach the doctrine of democratic self-government in industry and the transformation of State by the influence of functional principle.

The pigmy man is confronted by the Leviathan State, which encircles and absorbs him wholly or at least claims the absolute right to encircle and absorb him. The functional principle destroys any such claim. Thus the guildmen put forward a critique of the existing social economic system, proposals for a radically new system, and methods for effecting these changes. The guild socialists envisaged three lines of attack encouraging control, nationalization with joint control and the creation of the local guilds. The direct creation of the local guilds, by the trade unions held out only very limited possibilities due to the large capital outlay required by modern industry and even the guildsmen did not see this as a method of advancing to the stage of national guilds - except perhaps in the building industry. In certain industries they envisaged the transformation taking place through the medium of a public ownership that allowed the workers a gradually increasing share in the management. They, therefore, supported the demands of the miners, railwaymen and postal workers for nationalization with joint control as important step towards that goal.

But nationalization could be expected in a few industries only and for the majority encroaching control

provided the line of attack. This involved workers of all grades including professional persons into the unions so as to ensure a monopoly of labour and the necessary skills for the job in hand. At the same time existing unions would be amalgamated into industrial unions. Gradual encroachment on the sphere of responsibility of the capitalist management would then begin with the workers demanding the right to elect foremen and control the discipline of the workshop.

At a later stage they would refuse to accept individual wages and demand a lump sum to be paid to their representatives. By these means it was hoped that the workers would eventually take complete control and the employers would be rendered functionless. At this stage, the State would assume the ownership of the means of production, leaving control in the hands of the organized workers. In their "demand for JointControl the Guildsmen placed reliance on the power of industrial organization and action to shape events their own way".¹¹

Any aid that might come from a Socialist Party in Parliament was welcome, but not much hope was placed on it. The way to the workers emancipation and consequently to a fully self-governing society in which as far as

11. Cole, G.D.H., A Century of Co-operation, London, 1955, P.170.

possible every citizen would play an active part, lay through producer's control in industry. Through industrial democracy the workers could develop the necessary qualities to enable them to take their proper place in the community. It is, through these codes of control, and organization that the guild socialist movement developed in England giving it new dimensions.

Chapter IV .

TOWARDS THE MOVEMENT FOR GUILD SOCIALISM

There was a general conviction among the British Socialist thinkers and theorists that no real change in the conditions of the workers could be brought by parliamentary action alone. Coupled with this was the fear of government by bureaucracy and distaste on these grounds for the future society planned by the orthodox Socialists. On the other hand, the rising of the syndicalist ideas among some trade unionists posed both a threat of a one sided and unjust solution of the industrial problem and a hint of an alternative route through industrial action.

The industrial unrest of 1910 strengthened the hope that the mass of workers had some aspirations, perhaps as yet only half-consciously held, towards a society incorporating worker's control in industry.

Cole like Hobson was sympathetic to Syndicalism which he regarded as a healthy, though ill-thought out reaction to the orthodox Socialists view of the social problem as primarily a matter of securing a fair distribution of the national income. Syndicalism went too far in demanding a social system built on producer's organizations alone, but it embodied a legitimate and necessary claim for self-government in industry. At the same time, the existence of other economic interests required that the government should retain some authority in the sphere of production

and so the Guild Socialist idea of a partnership between the government and the trade union offered the only proper solution. This policy, Cole, preferred to call the 'great-Unionism' could not be won without extensive campaign of industrial action. To carry this through, as well as to enable them eventually to take over the control of their industries, the Unions had to recognize themselves as far as possible into the industrial Unions within a single federation, with much stronger central control.

Cole made it clear that his chief motive in advocating workers' control was the same as Hobson's; to create an active citizenship out of the working class. He believed that under the existing conditions an extension of the State's sphere of action such as the main body of socialists wanted would lead to the rule of the bureaucracy, because "the State cannot in the long run, be better than the citizens, and unless the citizens are capable of controlling the government, extension of the powers of the State may be merely a transference of authority from the capitalist to the bureaucrat".¹

The Union would educate the workers to play a full part in the governing of the Society, for responsibility is the best teacher of self-reliance. Cole, showed a strong practical strain which led him to make additions and modifications to Hobson's

1. Cole, G.D.H., The World of Labour, Op.cit., P.97.

proposals towards the success of the Guild Socialist movement in Britain. Cole pointed out that though the desired reconstruction of society could only come through the trade unions, exhortation from outside was not enough. Towards the end of 1912, the Executive Committee of the Fabians Society at the instigation of Beatrice Webb set up an organization to conduct research into social problems. The new society which became known as the Fabian Research Department, busied itself with a study of the control of industry, a subject that had been given urgency by the rise of Syndicalism. This was an enterprise that clearly accorded with Cole's own objectives. Cole, secured election to the Executive in 1914 and led the "rebellion which had as its purpose the conversion of the Fabian Society into an instrument for the furtherance of Guild Socialism".²

Despite all efforts, Cole failed to muster sufficient support and matters reached a climax when at the annual of May 1915, the policy to capture Fabian Society was soundly defeated. Cole then abandoned the attempt to win over the Fabians and resigned his membership of the Society.

However, the semi-autonomous Fabian Research Department had by this time been captured by the guildsmen. In 1918, it severed its last tenuous connection

2. Bruce, M., The Coming of the Welfare State, London, 1961, P.80.

with the parent body and renamed itself as the Labour Research Department. In the meantime the group of Guild Socialists around Cole had taken steps to create their own organization. A number of them met at Storrington in Sussex at the end of December, 1914 and after a week of intensive discussion produced what was later called the 'Storrington Document'. According to the spirit of the document the Guild Socialists profess themselves democrats in both industry and politics. They admit that political democracy, in so far as it has been tried, has hitherto failed, but Capitalism, which necessarily reduces the workers to an inferior economic status, renders political democracy impossible of achievement. For if the economic conditions are servile, the basis of freedom is economic and unless the workers have industrial freedom they cannot be politically free. A ruling class in industry implies a ruling class in politics. But if, political democracy without industrial democracy is illusory, industrial democracy without political democracy is essentially incomplete".³

Negotiations followed with Orage to gain the blessings of this elder statesman of Guild Socialism for the proposed organization. Orage was not enthusiastic but his benevolent neutrality was secured.

3. As Quoted in Ase-Briggs, The Studies in Labour, London, 1970, P.270.

In April 1915, the National Guild League was established at a meeting held in London attended by about forty people who proceeded to elect an Executive Committee of fourteen. This first Executive included Cole, Mellor, Conard Noel, Will Doyson, M.B.Reckitt and Ivor Brown. The guildsmen now controlled two organizations serving in different purposes. The Research Department was purely a research and information centre for trade union affairs, the task of the National Guild League was to propagate the Guild Socialist doctrine primarily among the organized workers. Branches were established in the provinces including one in Glasgow which was very active in the early years but the base of the movement like the Fabians was in London, which provided the bulk of the membership. It drew the active participation of R.H.Tawney, R.Page, Frank Hodge, George Lansbury and Bertrand Russell.

The National Guild League displayed greater energy from its inception and although the ideal of a working membership was not fully realized from December, 1916, the League published a monthly journal 'The Guildsman'(later the Guild Socialist). This was started by the Glasgow branch under its able Secretary J.H.Paton a local shop steward. Later on Mrs. and Mr. G.D.H.Cole were appointed as Joint Editors. In addition, the Research Department had its own Monthly

circular (published to this day) but this was strictly of a factual nature. The weekly, 'New Age' continued to support Guild Socialism. Cole developed a programme of social reconstruction, taking the task up where Hobson had left it. Cole took the same position as Hobson on the future of Labour, but he showed himself much more ready to face the difficulties of the Guild system on two questions - nationalization and the future relation between the Guilds and the State. Cole made important modifications. Hobson had considered only the use of industrial action in creating the Guild system and had ignored the part the State might play. Against this Cole, argued that the assault against Capitalism must inevitably bring the State into the industrial arena; because a situation had to be anticipated at least in the early stages of the labour revolt, where a union had the task of the old management impossible but not yet capable of taking over the management function itself. Faced with the threat of chaos the government would be compelled to assume responsibility for production in that industry.

Cole added that even if it were possible for a Union to move directly to the position of control, this would be undesirable, as it might be tempted to become a profit making body itself. Nationalization was, therefore, to be expected and in Cole's view,

it was welcome; but of course the government must assume power with the intention of relinquishing it when labour was fully competent to handle the situation. There should be a general process in which nomination of managers from above would be replaced by election from below, starting with the lower grades and working upwards until the process of decentralization was complete.

The 'Storrington Document' stated that it was not necessary that any particular industry should pass through the stage of national or municipal management though it conceded that nationalization was probable in certain industries.

In Self-government in Industry(1917) Cole changed his earlier stand. He now stated that not all industries would or should pass through the immediate stage of national management, but those of crucial importance to the economy whose workmen were advanced in militancy(such as railways and mining) would certainly do so. Early action by the unions to eject the Capitalists could be expected in those sectors and the government would be forced to nationalize and ensure their effective operation.

Far from being a set-back to the Guild cause Cole believed it would provide a valuable spur, for the impact of bureaucracy would stimulate the demand

for control and would have beneficial effect in this regard upon specialists and managerial personnel. The result would be the emergence of the first national guilds, and their success would inspire the workers of other industries towards a similar goal. Although Cole, unlike some of his fellow guildsmen, envisaged an important role for nationalization, he was at pains to emphasize that "worker's control would never be achieved unless the unions wanted it and organized themselves to get it".⁴ Ultimately the success of the guild movement must depend on the pressure exerted by organized labour.

Cole also helped in working out the method of 'encroaching control' which guild socialists regard as their distinctive contribution to trade union strategy. It was a policy directed to wrest, bit by bit, from the hands of the possessing classes the economic power which they exercise by a steady transference of functions and rights from their nominees to representatives of the working class. Guildsmen were careful to examine the difference between this and the joint control. Joint control meant cooperation between employers and employed, typified by the joint workers committee on which the two sides worked together; encroaching control meant exclusively trade union

4. Cole, G.D.H., and R. Postgate, The Common People, London, 1938, P.235.

committee which the employer was compelled to recognize. Cole believed that the policy of encroaching control would be most directly applicable to factory type industries. It would supply the needs of the workers in industries where nationalization was not imminent, who, therefore, needed an immediate strategy to use in the struggle for control.

By the middle of 1919, Cole had moved away from the view that the existing governmental system could adequately represent the consumer's interest in production. This was the period when Cole developed his pluralist theory of the State. All true representation must be functional and there could be no single authority representing all the people in their purposes. This led to the conception of a pluralist society, in which there would be no sovereign, but instead a distribution of power which would preserve the freedom of the individual by enabling him to invoke one functional group to protect him against the pretensions of another, the final decision emerging as a consensus between the different groups, and not as the dictate of a universal superior. Cole's attack on the State at this time was in reality an attack on a type of government that did not provide for functional representation of State is meant merely any ultimate body. There is no more to be said in this sense, everyone who is not anarchist is an advocate of State sovereignty.

Hobson stood for a system of guilds chartered by the territorial government and formally subject to it, but in actuality enjoying relative autonomy in industrial matters, to the probable detriment of the consumer. Cole, on the other hand, wanted to subordinate the producer's organizations to external authorities composed of producers and consumers in equal numbers. It was also very clearly recognised that these by virtue of their powers over taxation, investment, prices and the type and quality of goods and services to be produced, would exercise a very considerable influence on industry. This was an important change from Hobson's thinking and in its attempt to put the producer and consumer on an equal footing and to differentiate organizationally between different classes of consumers was much closer to the pluralist ideal that all groups and interests in society were equally deserving of the means of self-expression.

Hobson, with his almost mystical view of the State elevated the territorial government to a position of sovereignty, but provided little opportunity for the exercise of that power on the producers because the mystique of the government depended on there being the minimum of such interference.⁵ Cole rejected this exalted view of the State and reduced the territorial

5. Hobson, S.G., National Guilds: An Inquiry into the Wage System, London, 1917, P.174.

government to the role of representing the consumer's interests; which would make its intervention in the conduct of industry a normal and necessary activity. The guildsmen as a whole were united in supporting the existence of some kind of governmental machinery outside the guilds to look after wider community interests and to act in some degree as a check on the producers.

It was precisely this that distinguished them from syndicalists and the industrial unionists. Thus the political controversy between Cole and Hobson paved the way for the development of Guild Socialism as a cogent system of Socialist thinking in England.

Chapter V

GROWTH AND DECLINE OF THE MOVEMENT

The National Guild League embarked on its programme of action at a time when the tide of the opinion was favourable to the idea of industrial democracy. The pre-war Syndicalist movement had proposed the way for the guildsmen for although its organization had disintegrated by the outbreak of the war, the seeds of worker's control policy had been sown in the trade union movement in England. The success of the Syndicalist propaganda had been largely confined to rank and file militants and had failed to carry the trade unions. Where the revolutionary ideas of Tom Mann and his associates failed miserably in England, the modern concept of joint control succeeded. The period between 1917-1920 witnessed the adoption by several important unions of the policy of Joint Control of publicly owned industries by the representatives of the State and the workers. These movements were most to the fore in the railways and mining industries. As early as 1914, the Annual General Meeting of the National Union of Railways resolved that, "No system of State ownership would be acceptable to the organized railwaymen which does not allow them a due share of control and responsibility in the safe and efficient working of the railway system."¹ Among the miners

1. Cowling, J., The Guild System on Railways & Mines, London, 1937, P.71.

the same demands were made, the 1918, Annual Conference of the Miners' Federation demanded State ownership with Joint Control and administration by the workmen and the State.

In case of the railwaymen and the miners the demand for Joint Control arose out of the nationalization question. Both groups of workers had for many years demanded public ownership as a means to better working conditions and improved industrial relation. But doubts arose, and it was not believed that because of the lack of understanding and sympathy of the government and its servants, nationalization, if unaccompanied by an effectual measure of workers control would not mean any significant improvement in working conditions. Parallel to these developments at the Union level various radical groups appeared during the war years, bent on full workers' control. The best known of these being the shop steward's and workers committee movement in the engineering industry. In engineering industry the demand for full control was not associated with public ownership, which was considered impracticable in view of the complexity and diversity of the industry.

It came entirely from the rank and file of the engineering unions. But during the war years, it was only a process of dilution. The shop-steward movement developed pretty stronger and framed their policies

for the radical changes in the working conditions, through the method of Joint Control. The most lasting influences were made by the 'Whitley Committee on the Relation of Employers and Employed'. It was recommended that "the Joint Councils of the employers and the employees be set up throughout the country in each industry at national level, to discuss not only wages and conditions, but also general problems of efficiency and management".² Some of the bigger industries rejected the idea, in other industries they were set up at the national level and not in workshops and many employers and unions too, looked on the new bodies as a potential threat to their authority. "The Guild Socialist attitude towards Joint Control in those industries in which nationalization was a possibility, was to regard it as a useful step towards the establishment of complete guilds, accordingly they welcomed and encouraged those demands."³ Towards industrial parliaments, profit sharing and other such devices in private industry they were hostile, regarding them "as tricks to seduce the workers and bind them to the Capitalist system".⁴

2. Maurice, H., Whitleyism in England, London, 1943, P.37.

3. Alden, Percy, Democracy in England, New York, 1912, P.200

4. Adderley, J.G., In Slums and Society, London, 1916, P.167.

The League pointed out that the objective of the Whitley Committee - to improve relations between employers and workers - was directly contrary to its own aim of abolishing the present industrial system completely and replacing it by National Guilds. They, therefore, rejected Whitleyism and urged instead exclusive worker's control, starting in the workshops. Guild Socialism appealed to the more moderate of the radical unionists, who rejected Syndicalism but were attracted by the extreme guild solution, including the promise of a gradual and peaceful method of change. Part of the aim of Cole and his associates was to feed the unions with information and ideas and this they certainly succeeded in doing, both through the work of the Research Department, which established itself as an enquiry bureau for the whole trade union movement, and by their individual efforts. Cole himself became in 1915 research adviser to the Amalgamated Society of Engineers, while other guildsmen made contacts with the trade unions. The most successful single contact of this kind was on the Clyde during the war, when some of the more moderates of the shop stewards led by J.H. Paton, formed the very active Glasgow branch of the League and started 'The Guildsman', later adopted as the official organ of the movement. Patton collaborated with William Gallecher(not a guildsman) in working out a scheme of

encroaching control for the engineering industry, and later became a full time organizer of the movement. The influence of guild Socialism on the unions was exerted in the main through rank and file movements and in the late wartime and immediate post-war period they succeeded in pushing official union thinking towards some form of worker's control. An important success was also scored with the union of Post Office Workers, who in the spring of 1921 declared for an industrial union for all post office workers with the ultimate intention of managing the service on guild lines. While these events were taking place, the internal affairs of the National Guilds League were not running smoothly. It has been seen that Guild Socialism was intended as a compromise between Syndicalism and conventional Socialism and as such it offered a range of choices of positions between these two extremes. A doctrine of such flexibility had the merit of commanding the support of radical shop stewards and church of England clergymen and Christian Socialists, but dissensions were to be expected in a membership of such diversity. They appeared as early as the Second Annual Conference of the League in May 1917, when the existence of revolutionary and 'reformists' wings were reported; but it was the Russian Revolution that sharpened the differences within the movement. This was foreshadowed at

the 1918 Conference when a resolution of support for the Bolsheviks was opposed by M.B.Reckitt, one of the Christian Socialists. These differences developed and in May 1920 the Guildsman reported a 'crisis' in the Leaguedue to controversy over the attitude to be taken to the Communists, who were in the middle of a prolonged attempt to form a party. The crisis came to a head at the Annual Conference of 1920 at which controversy centred round the so-called 'Soviet Resolution'. This was moved by W.N.Ewer and stated that as the exact form of social organization required in a country could not be determined in advance of the situation which called it into being, the League's first aim should be the revolutionary "seizure of power by the workers and to this end they should consult with other organizations that had affirmed their solidarity with the Soviets to formulate a programme of common action"⁵. The proposal was carried through by a narrow majority. However, its importance was qualified by the attitude taken immediately afterwards to two resolutions on the 'dictatorship of the proletariat', one moved by Reckitt attacking it, the other by Page Arnot supporting it. On the advice of Cole, who was manoeuvring

5. Graubard, S.R., British Labour and the Russian Revolution, 1917-1924, London, 1956, P.241.

to keep the Conference together, both were rejected.

The 'Soviet Revolution' was qualified still further when it was resolved that the Executive should construct a policy statement out of resolutions passed at this and previous Conferences and present it to the League. This was done. The Guild Socialists expressing the hope that the "break with the older order would come, not with violence, but as the culminating point of a vast change long prepared".⁶ The submission of these reports, even though they were intended to embody the largest measure of agreement, produced renewed controversy between the left wing and right wings, leading to the resignation of some right-wing members from the Executive.

Another controversy that divided the movement at this time, though far less seriously revolved around Major C.H.Douglas's ideas about 'social credit'. The majority of guildsmen were indifferent or hostile to Douglas's ideas. Both Communism and Social Credit were attempts to swing the attention of Guild Socialists away from their own particular theory to what were considered more important matters. "Communists put the revolution first; supporters of Social Credit believed that financial control was the key to further social progress."⁷

6. George, H., Progress and Poverty, London, 1919, P.286.

7. Drage, A.R. and Douglas, C.H., Credit-power and Democracy, London, 1920, P.82.

These disputes weakened the movement which by then was also beset by financial difficulties. The League's expenditure had over-run its income and it was compelled to restrict its activities. In the summer of 1919 the Guild League had, for the first time, got offices of its own and full time secretarial services. This proved too much of a strain on its financial resources and in 1921 the work of the movement reverted to a voluntary basis. In the trade union field the post war years, after a hopeful start, disappointed the hopes of the guildsmen. Immediately after the end of the hostilities the miners and the railwaymen put forward demands for nationalization with Joint Control. The miners' demands were considered by the Sankey Commission, which by majority decision recommended a rather milder scheme of Joint Control. In both cases the government procrastinated and in the end rejected the union's demand and the Sankey Commission recommendations. With the onset of economic depression there was little chance of those or any other demands for control being achieved by industrial action. "The link with the shop stewards had gone too by this time; the influence of the Russian Revolution and the Bolsheviks attracted the stewards away from the gradualist policy of Guild Socialism and the once flourishing Glasgow branch disappeared."⁸

8. Pribicevic, B., The Shop Steward's Movement and Worker's Control, 1910-1922, London, 1959, P.89.

The movement that followed offered a curious historical parallel to the wave of producer's cooperatives in the 1820's and 1830's. The movement started among the building unions in Manchester and London and spread from there to other towns. The influence of guild ideas on the building workers had much to do with the work of Malcolm Sparks, a London Company directory. The result was the formation by the Manchester Building Unions in January 1920 of a Guild Committee, and in May a second one was formed in London. Further steps were taken to form a National Building Guild to direct the movement. The National Building Guild was essentially forced to assume to more direct control over contracts and manning, and also to give increased disciplinary power to the workers. Guilds were promoted in engineering, clothing, furniture and printing industries, but not all the guilds that were projected actually started work. The provision of capital proved extremely difficult. The sponsors looked towards the trade unions for financial support. By this time, the building guilds themselves were in trouble. In the middle of 1921 the government cut down sharply on its housing programme and at the same time changed over from a 'cost plus' to a 'fixed sum' basis of payment. The Guild was now faced with the task of raising a large amount of capital if it was to continue; but in the economic circumstances of the period, this

proved to be impossible. It attempted to struggle on, but was eventually faced with insolvency and in 1923 the affairs of the National Building Guild were wound up.

The prestige of the whole Guild Socialist movement was heavily committed to the National Building Guild and its failure dealt a fatal blow to the movement's influence in the trade union.

Between 1918-21 at least two major divisions of opinion occurred within the Guild Socialist movement. First, S.G.Hobson and G.D.H.Cole disagreed about the consumer aspect of the movement and the role of the State. Hobson accepted the notion of 'State Sovereignty' and would have the State allocate but not perform functions while Cole completely denied any role for the State whatsoever and wanted to replace it by a wage commune or a group of functional bodies. The second major division within Guild Socialism came when some of its adherents were lured by the Social Credit movement of Major C.H.Douglas(1879-1952). Douglas had in fact worked out his under-consumptionist theory of depression with A.R.Drage. Obviously he was heavily in debt to the work of J.A.Hobson. Believing, as did J.A.Hobson, that lack of purchasing power was a vital factor in economic depression, Major Douglas proposed to redistribute purchasing power by issuing dividend to every citizen. Bernard Shaw maintained from the start .

that Guild Socialism was a contradiction in terms, it was either guild and no socialism or vice-versa. If Guild production meant that self controlled industries must somehow pool their products then some central agency was implied to receive, check and distribute the products, a central agency representing in some just and equitable manner the citizens not a producer but as a consumer - which simply reintroduced the machinery of collectivism. For Shaw, therefore, the Guild Socialist critical barrage against collectivist state was foolish and unreasonable.

The Webbs were very inimical to Guild Socialism too and rejected the hope that producer's cooperative association would ever work. The failure of such experiments in the past, said Beatrice, had been, "complete and catastrophic".⁹

Guild Socialism was not an alternative route to traditional socialist objectives by industrial action, nor did it exist to give expression to the class resentment of of manual workers, or merely to fortify the special sectional claims of organized labour in respect of wages and working conditions. Guild Socialism was at the bottom an appeal for the organized workers to assume the responsibility for running industry, not primarily for their own material betterment, but for the good of the community at large.

9. Webb, Beatrice, My Apprenticeship, London, 1926, P.135.

Chapter VI
AN ASSESSMENT

Some of the advocates of Guild Socialism claimed that it 'occupied a position' half-way between syndicalism and collectivism. But this position looked to the collectivists more like three quarters from themselves and only a quarter from the syndicalists. Indeed it is difficult not to agree with them.

In its intellectual appeal, the Guild Socialist movement can be said to have been the product of ex-fabians. For a number of years it exercised a strong appeal among left-wing Fabians who had been influenced by syndicalism; but who were unable to give complete assent to Syndicalist doctrines. Feeling ran high in the Fabian Society until eventually it led to the split in 1915.

But the relations between the Fabians and Guild Socialists were never completely broken. They cooperated in the Fabian Research Committee (later Labour Research Department) and in 1920 the Fabian Society devoted a week of its summer school to a discussion of Guild Socialism.

Criticism of Guild Socialism from a collectivist point of view was expressed from time to time in Fabian publications before 1918, but it was presented in its most systematic form by the Webbs at the end of their Consumer's Co-operative Movement. The Webbs admitted that Guild Socialism was 'better informed'

than syndicalism, and coped with the more obvious objections to the earlier creed. At least the guildsmen had no simple plan of replacing municipal government by Trades Councils and the National State by Trade Union Councils; they were careful to allow a place for national and local government and the consumer's cooperative movement, even if in a changed form. No^w were the majority of the Guildsmen revolutionists: most of them sought to achieve their ends by the gradualist method of 'encroaching control', which involved persuading the Trade Unions first to reorganize themselves along the lines of industrial unions and then to convert themselves into 'Guilds' by manual workers. These 'Guilds' would have the task of encouraging the workers to win by various means a greater and greater share in the actual control management and direction of the workshop, eventually usurping the authority of the capitalists and appointed managers, and achieving self-government in industry.

The Webbs did not trouble themselves with the more philosophic and theoretical aspects of Guild Socialism, though they did have something to say about their conception of 'democracy' in the co-operative commonwealth. They seized immediately on the works of G.D.H.Cole, as the ablest exponent of Guild Socialism and examined his practical proposals, stressing the effects these would have on the consumer's cooperatives.

And they refused to discuss his project lightly as Utopian merely because of the intricate elaboration of the machinery he had been to proposed.

Aside from specific criticisms of Guild Socialism in relation to the cooperative movement, their general objections were on four counts: (a) that it would weaken the control by the consumer to a degree which was undesirable; (b) that producer's control was impracticable; (c) that Guild Socialism had certain other minor disadvantages when contrasted with a system of democratic collectivism; (d) and that Guild Socialism was not likely to succeed because development did not appear to be moving in that direction.

The Webbs began to demonstrate that in G.D.H. Cole's Guild Socialist State the organizations representing the consumers had merely consultative powers or a control through a hierarchy of consumers so remote and round about as to be ineffectual. This State of affairs they considered extremely undesirable.

Guild Socialism was to rest basically on producer's control, and a revival of the idea of the self-governing workshops. Even in the Consumer's Cooperative movement the Guild Socialists envisaged a 'complete exchange of positions now accepted in the cooperative movement by the Committee of management or board of directors, and the committee representing the cooperative employers. Consequently, the Webbs elaborated their objections to

these ideas. They insisted that whereas cooperative experience had shown that democracies of consumer's had been notably successful in competition with capitalism, even under unfavourable conditions; producer's cooperation, on the other hand, had almost universally failed; although the experiment has been made in literally thousands of instances, extending over nearly a century, in almost every occupation in various countries; often under apparently most promising conditions. They found the reason primarily in the homely adage that 'no man can be trusted to be judge in his own case'. The function of a vocation is not to be an end in itself but to serve the community, goods and services are produced for exchange. However, the self-governing workshops almost invariably comes to consider its own function as of more important than the community thinks it. Producer's cooperatives are always tempted to exact a profit from the consumers like any capitalist concern. Yet their members pay above the average, better hours and conditions.

Producers' cooperatives develop vested interests, and are constantly tempted for their members convenience to maintain existing processes and discourage innovation. Thus they forget the demands of the community and prefer to increase their members' incomes by restricting membership and limiting output, rather than by increasing

efficiency and production.

In the self-governing workshop there is a failure of discipline. The direct election of the officials of any kind has proved disastrous wherever it has been tried in Trade Unions, cooperatives or local authorities; it is a matter of psychology - the managers need to have authority behind his orders and elected managers think more of the producers than of the consumers, there arise endless disputes about 'who is entitled to jobs'.

And finally, another practical objection to any simple form of worker's control is that the workers in any workshop are not one homogenous mass, they are divided into grades in different numbers, and the smaller and more exclusive divisions would object strenuously to having their conditions prescribed for them by the numerically greater lower grades.

The Webbs concluded their argument by pointing out that all this did not mean that 'democracies of producers' were not necessary or that they would not have a proper sphere of activity. But they made it clear that they thought this sphere was confined to Trade Union and Professional Association functions. They carried their argument to the length of criticizing the industrial unions on which the Guild form of organization was based. It is, however, indispensable that any such organization should be vocational, the objective of greater quantity and quality of producers' control

over a vocation could best be achieved by intensification of this tie of specialized vocation, transcending geographical limits.

However, the Webbs declared they were willing to see some cautious experiments in producer's control, providing, that the consumer's society should in all cases retain the ownership of the enterprise, with the right to terminate the experiment and resume full control of administration, either at a specified date, or whenever the resumption is required or seems to be required, in the public interest.

The difficulties of demarcation between the Guilds themselves and between the Guilds and other organizations such as cooperatives, the difficulties of separating 'ownership' from control, and the difficulty of price-fixing were further problems. The Webbs remarked that Guild Socialists were unlikely to be successful even in persuading the majority of Trade Unions to convert themselves in the Guilds.

Most of the Guildsmen thought that the Webbs took too gloomy a view of producer's control, and that the complicated Guild Socialist Schemes had made adequate provisions for protecting the interests of consumers.

Some of them remained unshaken. But the Webbs considered their criticism were borne out by the failure of the experiment of the Building Guilds.

The Guild Socialist Movement was cradled in the conditions of nineteenth century Capitalism. It was an expression of revolt against an economic system which combined unparallel material progress with appalling human misery. The British Social scene towards the close of the century was thus painted in the unforgettable words of Robert Blatchford: "Go out in the streets of any big English town and use your eyes, John what do you find? You find hard-working people packed away in the vile unhealthy streets. You find little children famished, duly and half-naked outside the luxurious clubs".¹

Minor reforms to ease the sufferings of the victims of Capitalism were all very well but what was wanted was a new system, which would have no victims at all. In setting this as their goal Guild Socialists distinguished themselves from all other reforms movements of the time. On one point only did they agree with the defenders of the established order. They shared with them the idea of there being two distinct opposing and ultimately irreconcilable economic systems - Capitalism and Socialism. You could have the one or replace it by the other but you could not mix the two. But the

1. Blatchford, R., Merrie England, London, 1918, P.251.

greatest challenge to the old belief in the two opposing systems has come from the success of piece-meal reforms. Despite what was said in theory, in its practical politics the British Labour movement has never accepted the view that Capitalism could not be changed from within. Instead of waiting for the day when Capitalism could be replaced in its entirety by Socialism, the Guild Socialists took certain steps to eradicate the most pernicious evils of Capitalism.

Though the growth of collective bargaining, the introduction of social services, the constant extension of redistributive taxation, the spread of cooperative and municipal enterprises, the lives of the working people have been transformed. All these piece-meal changes are now woven in Britain into the very texture of social fabric. The welfare State, which is neither simple Capitalism nor Socialism, has been created. This was a development which no theory had bargained for. From the start Socialists have consistently protected against the vulgar view of life and society which, in the words of Communist Manifesto, "left no other nexus between man and man than naked self-interest", and "drowned everything in the icy water of egotistical calculation". The British Socialist tradition, in particular, pose much to an ethical rejection of the crude and shameless materialism with which Capitalism

degraded the whole of social life.

Aristotle's definition of a slave as a 'living tool' still remains a far too apt description of the working life of the majority of the industrial employees. The Guild Socialist movement has had an answer to this problem - industrial democracy. Just as democracy in the political field has advanced the citizen towards equality, freedom and fellowship, so it was believed that democracy in industry will do the same for the worker in his work. Industrial democracy was taken to be synonymous with worker's control. The Guild Socialists had very little about planning the future. What Prof. Tawney said in another context that "Planning like Parliaments and public education is not a simple category. Its results depend on the purposes it is designed to serve the methods which it employs in order to realize them and the spirit which determines the choice of both".² Their programme did not include even a word about international relations. They remained also silent about the role and functions of women in British Society.

The objective conditions in Britain after the First World War were fast making the Guild Socialist movement as an irrelevant exercise in theory. By then, the hegemony of capitalism had been firmly established

2. Tawney, R.H., The Attack and other Papers, London, 1953, P.95.

in Britain. It was not an easy task of the movement to eliminate all the possibilities of any head-on-collision with the state firmly based on Capitalist production system. The State, being more than the 'control' could dictate its terms to the workers.

Today, more than ever before men are now in the shadow of the State. Whatever they want to achieve, individually or collectively, now mainly are dependent on the State's sanction and support. But since this sanction and support are not bestowed indiscriminately, they must seek to influence and shape the State's power and functions, or try to appropriate it altogether. Today, it is for State's attention or for its control that men compete, and it is against the State that heat the waves of social conflict. It is to an ever greater degree the State which men encounters as they confront other men. This is why, as social beings, they are also political beings, whether they know it or not. It is possible not to be interested in what the State does, but it is not possible to be unaffected by it. The Guild Socialists could not anticipate all in the near future.

Moreover the Guild Socialist movement toyed with the idea of industrial control, workshop control, left the movement without any social accountability for which checks and balances were required.

With the benefit of hindsight, it becomes obvious that the Guild Socialist movement was crippled from

the very start. The theoretical rivalries between Cole and Hobson, pulled the movement in different directions. There was never a unanimity even on one single issue in the formulation of any policy programmes. The movement thrived in the hands of the opportunists and the most unsocialistic brains of the period. Even the chief theoretician of the Guild Socialist movement G.B.H. Cole resigned and went back to become the President of the Fabian Society. Even Cole failed to give it a new lease of life. The movement failed miserably also because of the internal frictions. Moreover, the Guild Socialism ignored the technical advancements the complexities of the rising new industrial States and the new role of the labour under the booms, depressions, strikes, lock outs and State emergencies in capitalist economy.

In spite of the vast changes in the industrial life of England or slums around Britain, what Keir Hardie said half a century ago has lost nothing of its relevance, "If anything is to be really done in the world, it must be done by visionaries, by men who see the future and make the future because they see it". The Guildamen were neither visionariss nor realists.

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