EDUCATION

AND THE

Industrial Revolution

By W. D. MORRIS

(Author of "Christian Origins of Social Revolt," etc.)

N. C. L. C. PUBLISHING SOCIETY LIMITED

(Publishers for the National Council of Labour Colleges)

TILLICOULTRY, SCOTLAND

PRICE - SIXPENCE

HAVE YOU EVER STOPPED TO THINK?

—that your efficiency in the Trades Union, Labour and Co-operative Movements depends upon the extent, *and kind*, of your education?

Education, in the ordinary (capitalist) sense, doesn't fill the bill. The need of workers is education in the Social Sciences—the sciences which treat of the basic principles on which the Labour Movement is built.

WHY not join an N.C.L.C. class or take an N.C.L.C. Postal course? Many Unions have educational schemes that provide free classes and courses, but in any case the fees are modest.

WHY not get the PLEBS, *the organ of the National Council of Labour Colleges—the movement for independent working-class education? The magazine, with its lively articles and witty cartoons, costs only 4d monthly (5d post free, 5/- per year).*

WHY not read some of our famous text-books, e.g. *An Outline of Economics, An Outline of Finance, An Outline of Political Geography* (4/-, 4/3 post free each), *An Outline of Man's History*, 4/-, 4/4 *post free?*

Write: J. P. M. MILLAR, Gen. Sec., National Council of Labour Colleges. Tillicoultry, Scotland.

5M/2/51

EDUCATION

AND THE

Industrial Revolution

By W. D. MORRIS

(Author of "Christian Origins of Social Revolt," etc.)

N. C. L. C. PUBLISHING SOCIETY LIMITED
(Publishers for the National Council of Labour Colleges
TILLICOULTRY, SCOTLAND

EDUCATION AND THE INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION

By W. D. MORRIS

Mr. Morris is an N.C.L.C. tutor and is the author of "Christian Origins of Social Revolt."

WHEN the Industrial Revolution created in Britain a vast proletariat condemned to life-long poverty and wretchedness, there were not wanting those among the propertied classes who urged the value of religion and education as anodynes for working-class misery and discontent. In 1798, Arthur Young, Secretary of the Board of Agriculture, published his *Inquiry into State of Mind of the Lower Classes* in which he supported education as a medium for teaching the poor "the doctrine of that truly excellent religion" which exhorts to content and submission to the higher powers."

Hannah More (1745-1833), who spent many years of her life in unwearying if dictatorial philanthropy among the poor, expressed the same point of view in a letter written to the Bishop of Bath and Wells, in 1801 :

> "For many years," she wrote, "I have given away annually nearly two hundred Bibles, Common Prayer Books, and Testaments. To teach the poor to read without providing them with safe books, has always appeared to me an improper measure, and this consideration induced me to enter upon the laborious undertaking of Cheap Repository Tracts." (*English Letters of the* XIX. *Century*, edited by James Aitken, Pelican edition, p. 52).

Hannah More devoted much of her fortune to establishing and maintaining Sunday Schools in the mining districts of the Mendips, and in the letter already quoted she is at pains to explain that "not one school . . . did I ever attempt to establish without the hearty concurrence of the clergyman of the parish."

"My plan of instruction," she writes, "is extremely simple and limited. They learn on week days such coarse work as may fit them for servants. I allow of no writing for the poor. My object is not to make fanatics, but to train up the lower classes in habits of industry and piety."

One philanthropic organisation of this period argued quite soberly that the well-to-do had an interest in the morals and education of the lower orders because "in every country they are numerous and a threat to our personal security." Moreover,

"we are obliged on innumerable occasions to trust them with our property, and, what is more, the minds of our children may be influenced by the good or bad qualities of the servants in whose care they spend so much of their time. The higher ranks are thus deeply interested in providing a moral and religious education for the whole of the poor. As these are enabled to rise in the scale of civilization they will feel repugnance to the degredation of parish relief and the enormous sums extracted from the industrious part of the community will be saved." (Quoted by Ernest Green in *Education for a New Society*, p. 5).

The Idea

But in spite of such pleas as these ruling class suspicion of popular education died hard.[2] As the Hammonds have pointed out,

"the objection to an educated working-class was part of the general philosophy of the governing world . . . The working-class were . . . regarded as people to be kept out of mischief, rather than as people with faculties and characters to be encouraged and developed." (*The Town Labourer*, 1760-1832, J. L. and Barbara Hammond, p. 59).

Thus, in 1807, when Whitbread introduced a Bill into Parliament to provide two year's free education in reading, writing and arithmetic, at a total cost for the two years of only 10/- per pupil, it was opposed by Giddy, the President of the Royal Society, who declared that

"however specious in theory the project might be, of giving education to the labouring classes of the poor, it would in effect be found to be prejudical to

their morals and happiness; it would teach them to despise their lot in life, instead of making them good servants in agriculture, and other laborious employments to which their rank in society had destined them; instead of teaching them subordination, it would render them factious and refractory, as was evident in the manufacturing counties; it would enable them to read seditious pamphlets, vicious books, and publications against Christianity; it would render them insolent to their superiors." (*Hansard*, ix., p. 798 seq.).

Whitbread's modest Bill was destroyed in the House of Lords, where it received only two votes; and it is of interest to note that it was the Archbishop of Canterbury who moved its rejection.

A few years later, in 1820, Lord Brougham made an attempt to get Parliament to agree to the establishment of rate-aided schools. His Bill provided ample safeguards against the inculcation of dangerous ideas in these schools, for it was proposed that the schoolmaster should be appointed by the Church authorities, and that the curriculum of the school should be a matter for the clergy to determine. Nevertheless, despite these precautions against subversive teaching, the measure was violently opposed, and had to be withdrawn after the second reading.

Stables Before Education

It was not until August 17th, 1833, that the first State grant was made for elementary education. Then the meagre sum of £20,000 was voted to "aid private subscriptions to erect school houses for the children of the lowest orders." In the same year Parliament "had granted £50,000 to improve the royal stables!" (*Education for a New Society*, Ernest Green, p. 2).

Brougham made three more attempts to persuade Parliament to establish a national system of education (in 1835, 1837 and 1838). But it was not until the Forster Education Act of 1870 (under which School Boards were set up), that any real progress was made; school attendance was not made obligatory until 1876 and it was not until 1899 that the school-leaving age was raised to 12.

This parsimony in the provision of popular education resulted in almost incredible ignorance among working-class people. In 1838 a Select Committee reported that in large towns only one in twelve of the population were receiving some kind of education, and that in only half these cases was the education of any value. It was stated (in the *Factory Inspector's Report for* 1842) that in an area of thirty-two square miles, comprising Oldham and Ashton, with a population of 105,000, there was not a single public day school for poor children ; and it is said that in the years 1839-1841, 40% of the men and 65% of the women who were married or witnessed a marriage in Lancashire and Cheshire could not sign their names. (*The Town Labourer*, 1760-1832, J. L. and Barbara Hammond, p. 55).

Further startling evidence of the lack of popular education is contained in the *First Report of the Commission on Children's Employment*, 1842. "Neither in the new Colliery and Mining towns," we are told, "nor in the towns which have suddenly sprung up under the successful pursuit of some new branch of Trade and Manufacture, is any provision made for the establishment of Schools with properly qualified teachers."

Teachers Who Couldn't Write

Even where schools did exist, the schoolmasters were often men or women who had failed to earn a living in any other trade. "The refuse of other callings," is the grimly graphic term applied to them. Sometimes they could not write themselves !

Frederick Engels cited some almost incredible facts taken from the *Children's Employment Commission's Report.* In Birmingham the children examined by one of the Commissioners

> "are, as a whole, utterly wanting in all that could be in the remotest degree called a useful education. Although in almost all the schools religious instruction alone is furnished, the profoundest ignorance even upon that subject prevailed."

In Wolverhampton a girl of eleven, who had attended both day and Sunday School,

> "had never heard of another world, of Heaven, or another life. A boy, seventeen years old, did not

know that twice two are four, nor how many farthings in two-pence, even when the money was placed in his hand. Several boys had never heard of London nor of Willenhall, though the latter was but an hour's walk from their homes, and in the closest relations with Wolverhampton. Several had never heard the name of the Queen nor other names, such as Nelson, Wellington, Bonaparte; but it was noteworthy that those who had never heard even of St. Paul, Moses, or Solomon, were very well instructed as to the life, deeds, and character of Dick Turpin, and especially of Jack Sheppard." (Quoted by Engels in *The Condition of the Working-Class in England*, pp. 112-113).

When these children were asked "Who was Christ?" they gave some astonishing answers. "He was Adam, He was an Apostle, He was the Saviour's Lord's Son," and from a youth of sixteen: "He was a king of London long ago."

Conditions were little better in the rural districts, as is evidenced by *Reports on the Employment of Women and Children in Agriculture*, 1843 (p. 153), where we read that "it is quite common to meet with boys engaged on farms who cannot read or write. The unity of God, a future state, the number of the months in the year, are matters not universally known."

The Demand For Free Education

When such appalling illiteracy existed it is no wonder that politically conscious working men gave education a prominent place in the reforms for which they agitated. Thus, when the London Working Men's Association was formed in 1836, the founders (who were mainly skilled artisans) stated that one of the objects of their organisation was the promotion "by all available means" of "the education of the rising generation;" and in 1837 they issued an *Address*[3] which declared that "Poverty, inequality and political injustice are involved in giving to one portion of society the blessings of education, and leaving the other in ignorance." The "selfish and bigoted possessors of wealth" are charged with a desire "to confine the blessings of knowledge wholly within their own narrow circle," instead of regarding it as a "universal instrument for advancing

the dignity of man, and for gladdening his existence ; " and it is insisted that it is "the duty of the Government to provide the means of educating the whole nation." To this end, a scheme for free education in State-provided schools is elaborated, with provision for Infant Schools for children from 3 to 6, Preparatory Schools for children from 9 to 12, and "Finishing Schools or Colleges" for all those above the age of 12 "who might choose to devote their time to acquire all the higher branches of knowledge." "Normal or Teachers' Schools" are also to be established, and no teacher is to be allowed to teach until he or she has qualified in one of these training colleges.

Many of the detailed suggestions are astonishingly up-to-date. Thus, instead of acquiring a largely useless knowledge by rote (as was common in such schools as existed at the period), the pupils are to "be taught a knowledge of *things* as well as of *words*, and have their properties and uses impressed on their senses by the exhibition and explanation of objects."

The *Address* was probably drafted by the Secretary of the London Working Men's Association, William Lovett.[4] Lovett had been an Owenite Socialist, and Robert Owen's influence can be seen here for this method of teaching by means of object-lessons had been adopted in the schools which he established at New Lanark. Owen tells us that "the infants and young children" in his schools were "instructed by sensible signs—the things themselves, or models or paintings." (*The Life of Robert Owen by Himself*, p. 186). Owen also gave instructions that the children in the Infant School, who were under six,

> "were not to be annoyed with books ; but were to be taught the uses and nature or qualities of the common things around them, by familiar conversation," and the "schoolroom for the infant instruction was . . . furnished with paintings, chiefly of animals, with maps, and often supplied with natural objects from the gardens, fields, and woods, the examination and explanation of which always excited their curiosity and created an animated conversation between the children and their instructors." (*Ibid*, p. 193).

Owen's influence is also to be seen in the proposal which the *Address* makes that no "particular forms of

religion" are to be taught in the State schools, and that there is to be no corporal punishment, which is "highly mischievous at all times, and in every form," for Owen tells us in his autobiography that "the first instruction" which he gave his teachers "was, that they were on no account ever to beat one of the children," (*Ibid*, p. 192).

The Modern Spirit

The same modernity of spirit is shown in the curriculum proposed for the new schools,[5] for social and political science, physiology and the "laws of health," and music, are all to be taught, and the pupils are to have their imagination

> "sedulously cultivated by directing their attention to everything lovely, grand, or stupendous around them."

Moreover, workshops were to be attached to every school so that the children might be taught "the first principles of the most useful trades ; " and, wherever practicable, there is to be "a portion of land" where the students may be "taught a general knowledge of Agriculture and Gardening." Finally, the teaching of living languages is to be given preference over that of dead

> "in order to promote a more intimate acquaintance with the inhabitants and literature of other countries, and thus help to break down those national prejudices which the tyrants of the world are too prone to take the advantage of in formenting the evils of war with all its terrific consequences."

This conception of a liberal education for the children of the poor was vastly different from the wretched caricature provided for some of them in the charity schools of the period. These schools were organized on what was known as the monitorial system ; and for some years there was an acrimonious dispute as to whether Joseph Lancaster or Dr. Andrew Bell had invented the new pedagogic technique, which some admirer called "the Steam Engine of the Moral World." Dr. Bell, a Church of England clergyman, had published a pamphlet in 1797, in whcih he described the "Madras System" of setting the children to teach each other. The following year Joseph Lancaster, a young Quaker (and himself a charity school boy), opened a

one-room school for poor boys in Southwark, which he maintained mainly out of funds begged from the Quakers. Here he adopted Bell's system (or hit upon it independently), and placed a monitor in charge of each group of ten pupils. Lancaster taught the monitors, who were then supposed to pass on their knowledge to the other children. In this way it was claimed that "one master could teach a thousand, or even greater number of children, not only as well, but a great deal better, than they can possibly be taught by the old methods, and at an expense of less than five shillings a year for each." (*Edinburgh Review*, November, 1810, article "Education of the Poor").

In 1810 the Royal Lancastrial Association was formed (which three years later became the British and Foreign Schools Society), and schools were founded up and down the country. Education in these Lancastrian schools included the non-denominational teaching of religion; but this did not satisfy the Churchmen, who desired a more sectarian Christianity. Accordingly, in 1811, the National Society for the Education of the Poor in accordance with the Principles of the Established Church was founded.

How It Was Done

J. L. and Barbara Hammond give some curious examples of the Lancastrian technique in *The Bleak Age*.

"A lesson on natural history," they write, "would be given thus. The boys would read:

'Ruminating Animals.—Cud-chewing or ruminating animals form the *eighth* order. These, with the exception of the camel, have no cutting teeth in the upper jaw, but their place is supplied with a hard pad. In the lower jaw there are eight cutters; the tearers, in general, are absent, so that there is a vacant space between the cutters and the grinders. The latter are very broad, and are kept rough and fit for grinding the vegetable food on which these animals live, by the enamel being disposed in crescent-shaped ridges.' And so on for a long time. Interrogation on this lesson would then take place:

Monitor—What have you been reading about?
Boy—Ruminating animals.

Monitor—Another name for ruminating ?
Boy—Cud-chewing.
Monitor—What is the root of the word ?
Boy—'Rumen,' the cud.
Monitor—What does the termination *ate* mean ?
Boy—To do or act in some way.
Monitor—Ruminate then, is to———?
Boy—To act on the cud,'

and so on. And later :

Monitor—You read in the lesson "the enamel is disposed in crescent-shaped ridges." What is enamel ?
Boy—The hard, shining part of the tooth.
Monitor—What part of our tooth is it ?
Boy—The covering of that part that is out of the jawbone.
Monitor—What do you mean by disposed ?
Boy—Placed.
Monitor—The root ?
Boy—'Pono,' I place.
Monitor—What is crescent-shaped ?
Boy—Shaped like the moon before it is a half-moon.
Monitor—Draw a crescent. (*Boy draws it on the blackboard*).
Monitor—What is the root of the word ?
Boy—'Cresco,' I grow, etc., etc., etc."

(*The Bleak Age*, J. L. and Barbara Hammond, Pelican edition, pp. 147-8).

Any variation in the routine of question and answer produced hopeless confusion. A Mr. Tremenheere, when examining the British schools, put his questions in an unaccustomed order, and elicited the following absurd answers :

"*Q.*—Who were the Gentiles ? *A.*—People of God·
Q.—Who was Moses ? *A.*—Apostle of Christ.
Q.—Who was Peter ? *A.*—An angel.
Q.—Where was Christ crucified ? *A.*—England.
Q.—Who was Jesus Christ the son of ? *A.*—Son of David.
Q.—Who then was David ? *A.*—Son of Jesus."
(*Ibid*, pp. 159-160).

With the scant opportunities for education which the times offered, there is something pathetic about the efforts which many working men made to cultivate

their minds. Lovett taught himself several technical subjects (including elementary geology and anatomy), yet towards the end of his days he wrote, with unaffected humility, that

> "the older I get the more I am finding out my great deficiencies, and perceive how lamentably ignorant I am on a great variety of very important subjects with which I ought to be acquainted; and to think how much more useful I might have been, in my humble sphere, if I had had the early education which I hope, at no distant period, will be realized for the rising generation." (Preface to the *Life and Struggles of William Lovett*, p. 32).

Thomas Cooper, the Chartist poet (who is best remembered, perhaps, for his *Purgatory of Suicides*, a poem of some real merit, which he wrote in Stafford Gaol), gives us a well-nigh incredible account in his autobiography of the way he studied when a young man not yet twenty. Rising at three or four in the morning, he studied until seven o'clock, when he began his day's work as a shoemaker. During the half-hour which he had for breakfast he read a book or a periodical, and dinner-time gave him another half-an-hour or sometimes an hour for reading or studying a language—"usually eating my food with a spoon, after I had cut it in pieces, and having my eyes on a book all the time." (*The Life of Thomas Cooper, written by himself*, p. 59). He worked until eight or nine at night, and then

> "either read, or walked about our little room and committed 'Hamlet' to memory, or the rhymes of some modern poet, until compelled to go to bed from sheer exhaustion—for it must be remembered that I was repeating something audibly, as I sat at work, the greater part of the day—either declensions and conjugations, or rules of syntax, or the propositions of Euclid, or the 'Paradise Lost,' or 'Hamlet,' or poetry of some modern or living author."
>
> (*Ibid*, p. 59).

Cooper tells us that

> "I thought it possible that by the time I reached the age of twenty-four I might be able to master the elements of Latin, Greek, Hebrew and French; might get well through Euclid, and through a course of Algebra; might commit the entire 'Paradise Lost,'

and seven of the best plays of Shakespeare to memory ; might read a large and solid course of history, and of religious evidences ; and be well acquainted also with the current literature of the day." (*Ibid*, p. 57).

He kept steadily to this exacting programme until he had a serious breakdown in his twenty-third year, which all but cost him his life.

Thomas Cooper explains he was inspired to undertake this "solid course" by reading an account of the life of Dr. Samuel Lee, Professor of Hebrew

"in the University of Cambridge, and a scholar, it was said, in more than a dozen languages. He had been apprenticed to a carpenter at eleven years old ; had bought Ruddiman's Latin Rudiments on an old book-stall for a trifle, and learnt the whole book by heart; and had stepped on, from Corderius's Colloquies to Caesar, and from Caesar to Virgil, and so on ; and had learnt to read Greek, Hebrew, and Syriac, all from self-tuition, by the time he was five or six and twenty. Yet he was ignorant of English Grammar and Arithmetic." (*Ibid*, p. 55).

What Engels Said

Lovett and Cooper were not exceptional in their scholarly attainments, for Engels tells us that at frequent lectures delivered in Socialist institutes, and "very well attended" he

"often heard working-men, whose fustian jackets scarcely held together, speak upon geological, astronomical, and other subjects, with more knowledge than most 'cultivated' bourgeois in Germany possess." (*Condition of the Working-Class in England in* 1844. p. 239).

The same love and desire for knowledge was displayed by the trade union and co-operative movements, which frequently included some provision for education among their objects. Thus, paragraph 37 of the *Rules* of the Grand National Consolidated Trades Union of Great Britain and Ireland (1834) states that :

"Each Lodge shall, as soon as possible, make arrangements for furnishing the means of instituting Libraries or Reading Rooms, or any other arrangements affording them every facility for meeting

together for friendly conversation, mutual instruction, and rational amusement or recreation ; "

whilst the *Manifesto* of the Operative Builders' Union (1833) includes among the objects of the National Building Guild which it proposed to form

"arrangements in all parts of the British dominions to re-educate all our adult Brethren that they may enjoy a superior mode of existence, by acquiring new and better dispositions, habits, manners, language and conduct, in order that they may become such examples for their children as are requisite to do justice to all young persons whose characters are to be formed to become good practical members of society,"

together with

"arrangements, as soon as circumstances admit, to place all the children of the Brethren, under such institutions of persons and influences of external objects as shall train or educate the *will, inclination* and *powers* within each to induce and enable them to become better Architects and Builders of the human character, intellectually and morally, than the world has yet known or even deemed to be practicable."

Co-operation and Education

The Co-operator, which Dr. William King of Brighton published monthly, from May, 1828, until August, 1830, had for its motto :

"KNOWLEDGE AND UNION ARE POWER :
POWER, DIRECTED BY KNOWLEDGE, IS HAPPINESS :
HAPPINESS IS THE END OF CREATION,"

and the pages of this little magazine contain frequent references to the need for the workers to educate themselves. In the third issue, dated July 1st, 1828, there occurs the following typical exhortation :

"Our motto is 'knowledge and union are power ;' that is, that the working-classes by uniting with one another in labour, in cultivating, improving and enlightening their minds and hearts by acquiring useful knowledge, and a disposition of friendship towards each other, would obtain the power of making themselves independent : the power of rising above

want : the power of commanding all the comforts of life : the power of spending their old age in peace and plenty : the power of bringing up their children in industry, virtue, and religion : and thus, the power of being happy here in TIME, and happy hereafter in ETERNITY."

Dr. King took a prominent part in establishing a Mechanics' Institute at No. 31 West Street, Brighton, in 1825 ; and he was one of the leading spirits in the formation of the Brighton Co-operative Trading Association, which was established in July, 1827. It was in order to assist this latter enterprise that he began the publication of *The Co-operator.*

The issue of *The Co-operator* for October 1st, 1828, contains a set of model *Rules* for a "Co-operative Society, or Working Union," and, once again, the importance of education is stressed. Thus, Rule xi. states that

"the Society should meet in their own room once a week, for the mutual instruction and improvement of the members in the principles of such Unions. The subject of the evening's conversation should be given out at the preceding meeting. Books on the subject may be read, and their arguments considered. One member should preside as chairman, and the office should be filled by rotation."

Rule xii. suggests that

"on the other evenings of the week, those members who have leisure, should meet at the room and form themselves into classes for mutual instruction. As the societies will consider labour to be the source of all wealth, and therefore be called Working Unions, so they will perceive that labour must be directed by KNOWLEDGE and therefore they will acquire all the useful knowledge they possibly can."

Some years later when the now famous Rochdale Pioneers formed their Society, in 1844, they carried on these traditions. Most of the leaders were good Owenites and

"firm believers in education as an integral part of the Co-operative system. Before they had any formal educational department of their Society, 'the early Pioneers,' Abraham Greenwood tells us, 'were

in the habit of assembling themselves together after the day's toil was done, in the back room of the old Store, for the purpose of hearing the news of the week.' They not only heard the news, but also debated it. 'Many and earnest were the discussions held in the *Owd Weever Shop* how best to promote human welfare; schemes for the social redemption from the iniquitous conditions in which the labourer found himself placed.' This was education of a quite informal type; but it soon branched out over a wide field. Newspapers were bought for the use of the members; and as soon as a room could be found by the taking over of the upper floors of the original buildings this led on to a newsroom and a library, with more formal lectures and classes."
(*A Century of Co-operation*, G. D. H. Cole, p. 227).

The newsroom was opened in 1849, and at first there was a voluntary subscription of 2d a month to meet the costs of it, "but the papers and the library[6] were in fact open from the first to all members, whether they paid this special subscription or not." (*Ibid*, p. 228).

Mechanics' Institutes

By the eighteen-forties there were also Mechanics' Institutes in practically every town of any size, where a workman might get some education. It is estimated that in 1850 there were 700 of these societies, with an aggregate membership of over 100,000, and a total of 690,000 books in their libraries.

These figures, however, look more impressive than the reality which they conceal, for many of these societies had only a brief existence, and the membership also fluctuated violently. Moreover, many of the books in the libraries were dull, out-of-date volumes—annual registers, old religious magazines, and similar rubbish which had been presented by patrons who no longer wished to burden their own shelves with such lumber. Samuel Smiles (who can scarcely be suspected of encouraging frivolous reading), said of the Yorkshire institutions that many of the volumes are "books which nobody would think of reading nowadays; a large proportion of them are dull, heavy books."

The Mechanics' Institutes were primarily intended to produce more skilful workmen, and in order to

conciliate any possible opposition from the well-to-do, they usually banned political and religious discussion, and even banned newspapers. Even so, the ruling class looked on them with jaundiced, dubious eyes, and in 1825 the *St. James' Chronicle* exclaimed hysterically of the London Mechanics' Institution that

> "a scheme more completely adapted for the destruction of this empire could not have been invented by the author of evil himself than that which the depraved ambition of some men, the vanity of others, and the supineness of a third and more important class, has so nearly perfected."

Perhaps there was some reason for the *St. James' Chronicle* to look with dread upon the London Institution, for in its early days it was largely under the influence of Thomas Hodgskin, a man of unusual ability. He and J. C. Robertson, a Scottish mechanic who had migrated to London, did the preliminary propaganda which resulted, in 1823, in the foundation of the London Mechanics' Institution.[7] The two men had founded the *Mechanics' Magazine* to propagate their ideas; and their aim was to establish an institute which could both educate the worker in the "philosophy" of his trade, and enlighten him on social questions. Whilst they were willing to accept the help of middle class sympathisers such as Dr. George Birkbeck (who became the first director of the Institution), it was their intention that the institute should remain exclusively under working-class control.

A Working-Class Champion

In 1827, Hodgskin was appointed lecturer in political economy at the London Mechanics' Institution, and exercised a profound influence upon the working-class thought of his day. His pamphlet, *Labour Defended against the Claims of Capital, or the Unproductiveness of Capital Proved* (1825), took Ricardo's Labour Theory of Value and made it the basis of his Socialist theories. Hodgskin speaks of the labourer being compelled to make six loaves before he can eat one, and he argues that the workers only receive subsistence wages which are just sufficient to enable them to perpetuate their class. In many ways he anticipated Marx, who refers appreciatively to him in *Capital*, whilst Mark Hovell, the historian of the Chartist Movement, says of him

that the new Unionism of the eighteen-thirties derived "its economics from Hodgskin and its inspiration from Robert Owen." (*The Chartist Movement*, p. 45).

Unfortunately, Place, Birkbeck, and Lord Brougham proved too astute for Hodgskin and Robertson, and, after a long struggle as to the nature of the social and economic theories which the London Mechanics' Institution was to teach, Hodgskin and Robertson were driven off the Committee and the direction of the institute fell mainly into the hands of middle-class utilitarians connected with the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge (founded 1831). The little text-books which Brougham and his friends issued on *The Results of Machinery, Capital and Labour*, and the other controversial topics of the day, became the basis of the Institution's teaching on social science. Even this emasculated "science" seemed too dangerous once Chartism began to stir the imagination of the working-class, and the London Mechanics' Institution concentrated on safer, technical subjects and shunned even the shadow of dangerous social controversy.

But whatever hopes men such as Hodgskin and Robertson may have had of using the London Mechanics' Institution for the propagation of Socialist principles, the activities of most of these institutes offered little or no threat to the established order. The founders of the Manchester Institution might have been speaking for the majority of them when they explained that they were mainly concerned to enable "Mechanics and Artisans of whatever trade they might be, to become acquainted with such branches of science as are of practical application in the exercise of their trade, that they may . . . acquire a greater degree of skill in the practice of it."

Moreover, the Mechanics' Institutions never attracted the serious attention of the great mass of the working-class. Sober (often dull) lectures on scientific and technical subjects could hardly appeal to a working-class that was physically, mentally and spiritually exhausted by long hours of heavy toil. As the *Poor Man's Guardian* expressed it, with its customary bluntness, "Many of us are already saturated with as much of what is called science as we can carry."

John Cleave, the Chartist, declared that the lack of success of the Mechanics' Institutions was due

"not to the apathy of Working Men—but to their utter and just repugnance to institutions supported in a great measure by patronage and conducted by patronage."

Many class-conscious workmen preferred to attend small, informal Mutual Improvement Societies, where the improvement was done by themselves and not by their betters. Thus, a few working men would begin to meet regularly in the evenings for discussion, and this sometimes led to the starting of regular classes. The Leeds Mutual Improvement Society was started in 1844 by four young men, in an old garden house, and by 1850 was housed in "extensive premises in a backyard off Kirkgate," and was running classes for eighty members in such subjects as Chemistry, French and Discussion."

Many such unpretentious bodies were formed in the north of England in 1849 and 1850, due, no doubt, in a large measure to the reduction of working-class hours of labour which resulted from the Ten Hours Act of 1847. These Mutual Improvement Societies may not unreasonably, I think, be regarded as forerunners of the National Council of Labour Colleges.

Footnotes

[1]For a full discussion of the part played by religion during the Industrial Revolution see my "Christian Origins of Social Revolt," George Allen and Unwin, Ltd., pp. 153-173.

[2]Francis Place was not given to extravagant charges, yet in 1832 he wrote that "Ministers and men in power, with nearly the whole body of those who are rich, dread the consequences of teaching the people more than they dread the effect of their ignorance." (Quoted by Graham Wallas, in the *Life of Francis Place*, pp. 338-9). William Lovett, author of the *People's Charter*, expressed the same point of view in more stilted language, when he wrote in his autobiography (first published in 1876) of this period, that, "while a large portion of the hawks and owls of society were seeking to perpetuate that state of mental darkness most favourable to the securing of their prey, another portion, with more cunning, were for admitting a sufficient amount of mental glimmer to cause the multitude to walk quietly and contentedly in the paths they in their wisdom had prescribed for them." (*The Life and Struggles of William Lovett in His Pursuit of Bread, Knowledge and Freedom.* G. Bell & Sons, Ltd., 1920 edition, vol. i., pp. 137-8).

[3]The curious reader will find this *Address* in full in the *Life and Struggles of William Lovett in His Pursuit of Bread, Knowledge and Freedom,* 1920 edition issued by G. Bell & Sons, volume i., pp. 138-150.

[4]Lovett is best known as the author of the *People's Charter*. The London Working Men's Association took a notable part in bringing the Chartist Movement into being.

[5] The *Address* proposed that the "schools should be open every evening, to enable all the adult population who choose to avail themselves of the benefits of mutual instruction societies, singing, lectures, or any other rational pursuits or amusements, unassociated with the means of intoxication and vice, that they wish to indulge in."

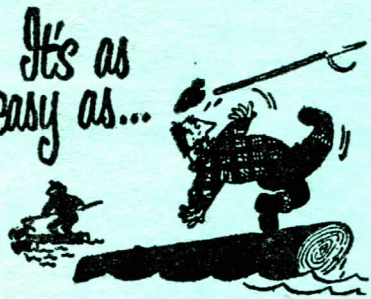
[6] Other co-operative societies followed the example of the Rochdale Pioneers and opened libraries. J. R. Clynes, in his *Memoirs* 1869-1924, p. 49, mentions that as a young man (in 1886) "books of my own were rare luxuries. Most of my reading was done in the Oldham Equitable Co-operative Society's Library."

[7] The credit for the foundation of the London Mechanics' Institution is often attributed, unfairly, to Francis Place and Dr. Birkbeck, by whose name the college into which it later developed has become known. Robertson had been connected with the Glasgow Institution before he came to London.

N.C.L.C. PUBLICATIONS

		Price	Post Free
Anti-Duhring (*Frederick Engels*) -		8/6	8/10
A.B.C. of Chairmanship (*Sir Walter Citrine*) - -		4/-	4/4
Man's History (*Patrick Gordon Walker*) -	Hard Boards	4/-	4/4
	Cloth	6/-	6/3
Finance (*A. Woodburn, M.P.*) - -	Hard Boards	4/-	4/3
	Cloth	6/-	6/3
Political Geography (*J. F. Horrabin*) -	Hard Boards	4/-	4/3
Economics (*McLaine* and *Colyer*) - -	Hard Boards	4/-	4/3
	Cloth	6/-	6/3
Psychology (*Lyster Jamieson*) - -	Hard Boards	4/-	4/3
	Cloth	6/-	6/3
A Pocket History of the British Working-Class (*R. W. Postgate*)		3/6	3/8
	Cloth	6/-	6/3
A Short History of the British Empire (*J. F. Horrabin*)		2/6	2/9
An Introduction to Dialectical Materialism (*Conze*) -		2/-	2/2
Why War? (*Ellen Wilkinson and E. Conze*) - -		2/-	2/2
Socialism's New Start—A Secret German Manifesto ("*Miles*")		2/-	2/2
Manual of English - - - - - -		2/3	2/5
Labour's Early Days (*Shepherd*) - - -		1/-	1/1
The Workers' Esperanto Movement (*Lanti*, trans. *Stay*)		6d	7d
Education and the Industrial Revolution (*W. D. Morris*)		6d	7d
The Trained Mind—Trained for What (*J. P. M. Millar*)		3d	4d
The Mystery of Money (*A. Woodburn, M.P.*) - -		6d	7d
Bias in the Schools (*Millar and Woodburn*) - -		6d	7d
The Rise of Capitalism (*Lester Hutchinson*) - -		6d	7d
The Struggle for Liberty (*R. S. W. Pollard*) - -		6d	7d
Education and Power (*J. P. M. Millar*) - - -		3d	4d
Post-War Education—A Labour View (*J. P. M. Millar*)		3d	4d
Labour and Leisure (*J. P. M. Millar*) - - -		2d	3d
What is Marxism? (*A. L. Williams*) - - -		9d	10d
"The Plebs," the N.C.L.C.'s Monthly - - -		4d	5d

N.C.L.C. PUBLISHING SOCIETY, LTD.
TILLICOULTRY, SCOTLAND.



To add to your knowledge

of subjects of importance to the Trade Union and Labour Movement is almost as easy as falling off a log if you take an

N.C.L.C. Postal Course

Most progressive Unions have an education scheme with the National Council of Labour Colleges which provides *free* admission to N.C.L.C. classes and *free* postal courses on the following subjects:

Britain's Tasks Today
Chairmanship
Co-operative Movement To-day
Early History of Man
Economics
Electioneering
English
European History to 1914
Europe Since 1914
Finance
Great Powers and World Problems
History of the British Working Class
How Britain is Governed
Industrial Injuries Insurance
Industrial Law
Labour's Achievements and Future Policy
Local Government
National Insurance
Political Geography
Problems of British Agriculture
Public Speaking
Secretaryship
Shop Stewards and Workshop Representatives and their Functions
Social History
Socialism
Trade Union Branch Administration
Trade Unionism and Industrial Management
Trade Unionism To-day

1/- Postal Order will bring you *Education and Power*, *The Trained Mind—Trained for What?* and *What is Workers' Education?*

Enrol to-day on the form below:

.....

To J. P. M. Millar, General Secretary,
National Council of Labour Colleges, Tillicoultry, Scotland.

Please enrol me for a postal course on.....

Name..... Union.....

Address.....

I enclose my Union Card as evidence of membership.

Printed by Milne, Tannahill & Methven, Ltd. (T.U.), 12-14 Mill Street, Perth.