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## G. D. H. COLE'S HISTORICAL WRITINGS

The swelling flood of historical materials in the twentieth century has created unprecedented problems of assimilation for the historian. Both specialized researchers and those simply trying to keep abreast of what has been published find themselves in ever greater need of abstracts, comprehensive surveys, and bibliographies. That portion of the literature not outfitted with such buoys seems destined to sink beneath the inundation of new materials, to pass out of the general view into murky, seldom-explored depths where it will lie unused, perhaps soon to be altogether forgotten, whatever its intrinsic value. The voluminous writings of the British historian G. D. H. Cole, as yet unprovided with the kind of aids in question,<sup>1</sup> fall into this unfortunate category. This bibliographical list and commentary has been prepared in the hope of helping remove them from it.

The author of the materials so attended was born George Douglas Howard Cole in London in 1889. In 1908, he went up from St. Paul's to Balliol, Oxford, and distinguished himself there as a poet, student in Classics, and Socialist, displaying for the first time the diversity and erudition later manifested in his career and the writing that formed its core. He left Oxford in 1915 to work in the Labour Research Department as a propagandist for the Left, the first of a lifelong series of such affiliations, each of which had its influence on his writing. He returned to Oxford in 1925 with a wife (*née* Margaret Postgate) and two children.<sup>2</sup> Beginning as a lecturer, he divided his time while at the

<sup>1</sup> For the only assessment exclusively devoted to Cole or his work thusfar extant, see E. S. Heffer, "G. D. H. Cole - An Appraisal of His Life and Work", in: *Socialist Review* (mid-Feb. 1959). For other materials on his life and writings, see Nos. 71-91 in the bibliographical list at the end of the article. (All such numerical references given hereafter refer to that list.)

<sup>2</sup> The Coles had three children in all, the two girls and a boy born in 1928. Mrs. Cole, a graduate of Girton, Cambridge, and a considerable intellectual force in her own right, cut out a career for herself that often overlapped her husband's. They wrote novels together, collaborated on editing, studied much the same ground, and participated in many of the same Leftist activities. She denies, however, that they were, as one reviewer had proclaimed, "another Mr. and Mrs. Webb". Margaret I. Cole, *Growing Up Into Revolution* [hereafter cited as GIR], London: Longmans Green, 1949, p. 77, and *passim*.

university about equally between his activities as don and scholar, propagandist,<sup>1</sup> and man of letters,<sup>2</sup> and gradually rose (by 1945) to the Chichele Professorship of Social and Political Theory,<sup>3</sup> the chair he occupied until his death in 1959.

Throughout, he remained intellectually aloof, never entering fully into either Oxford's<sup>4</sup> or British Leftism's intellectual mainstreams.<sup>5</sup> His personal posture was apparently much the same: his wife thought him unsocial and was not alone in it.<sup>6</sup> A former student and friend goes so far as to attribute to him "a virtually nihilistic view of society",<sup>7</sup> a romantic Arcadianism supposedly born of his Edwardian outlook. It is a characterization which Cole's stolid bourgeois habits ("a strong Tory in everything but politics")<sup>8</sup> and hints of Home Counties provincialism<sup>9</sup> tend to re-enforce. Described by his wife as a "natural writer to the point of disease",<sup>10</sup> his solitary hours with his pen would appear to have been his mainstay. He was, then, not so much the rationalistic Socialist one might have thought to find, but more nearly the "one man encyclopedist, a kind of twentieth century Dr. Johnson" his wife suggests him to have been.<sup>11</sup>

The soundness of her appraisal is re-enforced when we turn to consider Cole's writings - truly encyclopedic in their extent.<sup>12</sup> The historical portion of the whole is hardly less so. Produced for the most

<sup>1</sup> Cole was instrumental in reviving the flagging Socialist propaganda effort in Britain through the founding of the New Fabian Research Bureau (c. 1930-32).

<sup>2</sup> On this division of time, reckoned from the quantitative topical distribution of his writings, see p. 171, n. 1.

<sup>3</sup> For the purview of the chair, see Cole's inaugural address on assuming it, "Scope and Method in Social and Political Theory", in: *Essays in Social Theory* [hereafter cited as EST]: London: Macmillan, 1950.

<sup>4</sup> G. D. N. Worswick, "Cole and Oxford, 1938-1958", in: *Essays in Labour History, In Memory of G. D. H. Cole, 25 September 1889 - 14 January 1959* [hereafter cited as ELH], eds. Asa Briggs and John Saville, London: Macmillan, 1960, pp. 39-42, *passim*.

<sup>5</sup> G. D. H. Cole, "What I Take for Granted", in: EST, pp. 245-51, *passim*.

<sup>6</sup> GIR, pp. 78-79.

<sup>7</sup> Hugh Gaitskell, "At Oxford in the Twenties", in: ELH, p. 13.

<sup>8</sup> GIR, p. 79.

<sup>9</sup> Gaitskell, pp. 7-13, *passim*.

<sup>10</sup> GIR, p. 77.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 78.

<sup>12</sup> The basic general list of Cole's works used was compiled from: British Museum Catalogue; Library of Congress Catalogue; American Historical Association's Guide; Lancaster's Bibliography of ... Works in the U.K.; Milne's Writings on British History; the Historical Association's Bulletin of Historical Publications; the International Bibliograph[ies] of: Historical Sciences, Economics, Political Sciences, and Sociology; Bibliography of European History, 1815-1939; Foreign Affairs Bibliography; Bester-mann's World Bibliography of Bibliographies; International Index; Historical Abstracts; lists in the Bulletin of the Society for the Study of Labour History (1960ff.); and Nos. 82-91 in the list appended to this article.

part during the last two decades of his life when his strictly literary and propagandistic efforts (both of which peaked in the 1930's) had flagged, it represents the bulk of his entire written output for that period and well over one-third of that for his entire career.<sup>1</sup> The bibliography appended to this article lists 70 separate, necessarily somewhat arbitrarily chosen titles under which this material has appeared.<sup>2</sup> However, commentary, in a chronologically arranged critique and digest, has been limited to the 20 most important and representative book-length studies among these, which includes nearly all of Cole's important articles (in 4 collections), and samples (4 titles) of his work as editor of historical materials.<sup>3</sup>

These historical materials are all works by William Cobbett, viz.: *The Life and Adventures of Peter Porcupine* (1927) and its sequel *Letters to Edward Thorton* (1937), both edited by Cole alone; and *Rural Rides* (1930) and *The Opinions of William Cobbett* (1944), done in collaboration with his wife.<sup>4</sup> In all four of these works, Cole the editor endeavors

<sup>1</sup> Over a fifty-year career, Cole wrote about 2 vols./yr. on the average. His total output was topically distributed as follows: history – 32 titles (book-length studies only) and over 100 articles and pamphlets, plus editing, introductions, translations, etc. (c. 10,000 pp.); political pamphlets – 35 titles (c. 1200 pp.); detective novels (in collaboration with his wife) – 30 titles (c. 9000 pp.); economic studies – 10 titles, plus editing and articles (c. 3400 pp.); and contemporary commentaries (on many subjects) – 40 titles and over 100 articles and pamphlets (c. 10,000 pp.). He and his wife also edited belles-lettres – 8 titles and a series.

<sup>2</sup> Naturally, it was impossible to even lay hands on, let alone read, everything Cole wrote, so the selection of titles for the appended bibliography often was based on an evaluation of the title itself. The general rule followed was to exclude everything that seemed strictly economic, propagandistic, literary, or contemporary in character or orientation, and to include everything else. Of books, it seems unlikely that any important ones have been omitted; of articles, perhaps a few, but probably not many, thanks to Cole's habit of republishing them in readily available collections.

A series of present-oriented, data-stuffed handbooks that have many of the earmarks of socio-economic histories are among the works not considered here, viz.: G. D. H. Cole, *The Intelligent Man's Guide Through World Chaos*, London: Gollancz, 1932; *The Intelligent Man's Guide to the Post-War World*, London: Gollancz, 1947; *The Post-War Condition of Britain*, New York: Praeger, 1957; G. D. H. Cole and M. I. Cole, *A Guide to Modern Politics*, New York: Knopf, 1934; *The Intelligent Man's Review of Europe Today*, New York: Knopf, 1934; and *The Condition of Britain*, London: Gollancz, 1937.

<sup>3</sup> Exclusive of the texts of the four works Cole edited, this amounts to 4800 of the total 10,000 pages of history he wrote, or roughly half.

Titles listed but not discussed include: bibliographies – Nos. 1-3; works edited, translated, etc. – Nos. 6-14, 17-19; biographies – Nos. 22-28; histories – Nos. 30-31, 35, 40-41, 43-61; and collections of essays, etc. – Nos. 65, 66, 68.

<sup>4</sup> For full citations of all four editions' titles, and all further titles referred to in the text, see the referenced number in the appended list, in the case of the four editions Nos. 4, 5, 15, and 16.

not only to present his subject's delightful prose to best advantage, but also to evoke from it Cobbett's meaning as a Radical - as champion of the Arcadian past, rural labor, and hard money, and as a fierce enemy of *the Thing* (as he called the new financial-industrial power). And he succeeds, though less so in the earlier two volumes (really of greater literary than historical merit) than with his wife's help in *Rural Rides* and *The Opinions*. The latter of these is probably the most valuable of the four works discussed from the historian's viewpoint, being an aptly presented calendar of the more important and representative articles from the *Political Register* and its supplements.<sup>1</sup>

In his first major work and best biography, *The Life of William Cobbett* (1924),<sup>2</sup> Cole had already portrayed in detail the man he only re-sketched in the first three of these just-discussed editions. An obvious labor of love, the book presents its subject - often through the medium of his own earthy prose - as "a symbolic figure of the transition" from agrarian to industrial England,<sup>3</sup> an unclassed peasant like the workers to whom he appealed, the mouthpiece of the dispossessed and their educator too. This stirring image of the agrarian-proletarian tribune rousing the working class's political consciousness<sup>4</sup> does not, however, square with Cole's last word on Cobbett in the final edition of his works, *The Opinions* (1944). There, by a shift in emphasis - perhaps in response to the changed estimate of the Industrial Revolution's effect on the working class in the interim from 1924 to 1944 (from a negative to a positive one), or maybe due to Cole's own abandonment of any hope for Socializing the working class political consciousness - he transmutes Cobbett from the positive symbol of 1924 to a negative one - from Educator of the Working Class to Enemy of the Thing.

In his next major study, the biography of *Robert Owen* (1925),<sup>5</sup> Cole looked at the Arcadian Cobbett's opposite in this famed Utopian. Predictably,<sup>6</sup> his assessment is not at all as empathetic as that given the Radical the year before. Rather, on the coin of first humanitarian response to the onset of industry, Owen, the fumbling intellectual trying to grapple with the new age, is presented as a tarnished and sooty obverse to the sturdy yeoman's visage of a backward-looking Cobbett already rendered on the bright reverse of the piece. The bias

<sup>1</sup> Cobbett's newspaper and the leading Radical organ in pre-Reform Britain.

<sup>2</sup> See No. 21.

<sup>3</sup> *Life of William Cobbett*, p. 11.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 434.

<sup>5</sup> See No. 20.

<sup>6</sup> In view of his favorable initial treatment of Cobbett and his own personal outlook (for which, see above, p. 170).

seems almost instinctual on Cole's part, though, since – to his credit – he grudgingly acknowledges that the factory owner may well have made a more substantial contribution than did the Radical journalist. In naming the former as British Socialism's leading ideologue,<sup>1</sup> he seems to admit that in fitting out the working class with ideological baggage for the journey into the future, Owen made a greater contribution toward coping with the Industrial Revolution than did Cobbett in his dubious role as activator of the proletarian consciousness.

Still, the spell of such a Cobbett-like role as the awakener of latent powers in the minds of the masses must have lingered on in Cole's thoughts – perhaps due to private sentiments and against his better intellectual judgment, but there nonetheless – for we find him dedicating his next important work, *A Short History of the British Working Class Movement, 1789-1925* (1925-27),<sup>2</sup> a text, as a historical guide to contemporary working class activity. It may well have been the same allure that also prompted him in the same passage to voice grandiose plans for a later, far larger, more comprehensive history of the Movement, plans to write a broad Socialist interpretation of modern industrial society through a detailed study of this, its vanguard.<sup>3</sup> In the *Short History*, Cole outlines that vanguard's history by following the development of its several parts – i.e., the trade unions in industry, the Co-operative movement in co-operation, Socialism in ideology, the Labour Party in politics, and the entire proletariat in society at large (as delineated by such guides as standards of living, class structure, etc.) – through three phases. During the first, from 1789-1848, there was impossible Arcadian revolt and feeble first organization among the workers, and hoarding, abstinence, ruthlessness, and far more successful counter-organization among their Capitalist opposites. From 1849-1885, with prosperity and resultant permeation of Capitalistic values into the ranks of the employed, tensions between the two camps eased and worker acclimatization to the status quo set in. But after 1886, they revolted again, to vie with a by-now enfeebled Capitalism for overall social control, using the weapons of unionism, the Labour Party, and already-declining Socialism to wage societal war. The *Short History's* interpretive outline, then, is essentially Marxian, but somewhat modified by Cole's own less familiar suggestions of a possibly

<sup>1</sup> *Life of Robert Owen* (1930 ed.), p. 35.

<sup>2</sup> See No. 42.

<sup>3</sup> *Short History* (1952 ed.), p. v. Whether by accident or design, Cole devoted a great deal of his later historical writing to works which fall within the rough compass of such a scheme. It is the author's opinion that it was by design, that his writings after 1927 form a logically contrived and executed unity whose outlines were first set down in the *Short History*. Doubtless, however, such an estimate cannot be called anything but highly tentative until much more study of Cole's work has been done.

drawn battle – at least for the moment in Britain – and the Socialists' probable use of flawed arms (in their ideology).

He further explored the nature of these flaws in his next significant work, *What Marx Really Meant* (1934),<sup>1</sup> as much a commentary on the contemporary difficulties of Socialism and Capitalism alike in the midst of the Great Depression as a critique of Marx. Formulated nonetheless as a shrewd analysis of several main themes of Marxism – class, the dialectic, the labor theory of value, and Capitalism's decline – and of the emerging middle class counterpoise in Fascism, the book's orientation is necessarily contemporary, European, and ideological. If it is thereby perhaps suggestive of a dramatic shift in Cole's historical interests (notwithstanding its indicated relationship to the *Short History's* theme), then it is misleading, for his next major work demonstrated clearly that no such shift had in fact taken place.

A collection titled *Persons and Periods* (1938),<sup>2</sup> it reprints his more important historical essays written during the 1930's;<sup>3</sup> and as a survey of their contents reveals, they are devoted almost exclusively to Cole's traditional historical interests. They dwell upon the English scene on the eve of the Industrial Revolution, commentators and personalities of the time, and some of the more important literary contributions to working class ideology in the period. Also included are pieces on a few later-nineteenth century ideologues and a stray diatribe against Henry Ford.<sup>4</sup> The book is an undigested collection – no more, no less.

Cole's simultaneous collaboration with his brother-in-law Raymond Postgate, *The Common People, 1746-1938* (1938),<sup>5</sup> might be regarded as a quite successful attempt to digest much of the same material as appeared in *Persons and Periods* (along with a great deal else) into a sort of encyclopedia of the British working class's life in modern times. A sprawling, data-stuffed volume, its political-economic sections written by Cole and the interim narrative by Postgate, it provides much quantitative information on the numbers, diet, housing, occupations, politics, etc. of the working class, but is somewhat less adequate in treating of non-quantitative matters such as the popular taste and temper. Still, it is all in all a remarkably comprehensive study which filled a large gap, and to date has not been replaced.

Cole's next work, *British Trade Unionism To-day* (1939)<sup>6</sup>, written in

<sup>1</sup> See No. 63.

<sup>2</sup> See No. 69.

<sup>3</sup> During this same decade, Cole contributed numerous short articles to the *Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences* and the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. For a list of the articles, see Nos. 65a-65j and 66a-66r.

<sup>4</sup> For a list of the articles, see Nos. 69a-69n.

<sup>5</sup> See No. 62.

<sup>6</sup> See No. 32.

collaboration with thirty other experts, is, within the limited context of unionism, not unlike *The Common People* in its character and intents. It attempts, by updating and revising two of Cole's earlier histories of unionism<sup>1</sup> and by a contemporary union-by-union survey, to carry forward a general account of the whole movement from where the Webbs had left off.<sup>2</sup> In unfolding this history, Cole sees unions as an essentially negative instrument of self-help and bargaining power slowly and painfully evolved to equip the workers to better face a hostile economic environment and the men controlling it. That evolution, in the course of its passage from the typical Victorian small skilled craft union down to the giant semi-skilled bodies of 1939, he finds to have fostered little resolution of the movement's organizational chaos or of its practical bifurcation (since the 1890's) along craft and general union lines, or of its ideological one along pragmatist and Socialist lines. The portrait is one of a complex movement, far more differential and divided throughout its history than first appearances would suggest.

Cole expanded further upon this same general theme of the complexities of working class activities in an article published that same year (and later issued in book form as *Attempts at General Union ... 1818-1834* (1953)<sup>3</sup> in which he attempted to clarify his own and previous accounts<sup>4</sup> of these early fusion movements. He concludes that there were several more or less spontaneous and quite separate impulses to general union in the North - in 1818-24, 1829-30, and 1832-34; that neither Robert Owen nor John Doherty played the crucial roles in the movement earlier investigators had attributed to them; and that the relationship between early unionist stirrings and direct political action were very real, if also very confused.

*Chartist Portraits* (1941),<sup>5</sup> blending this new interest of Cole's in complexity with his older one in biography, continued to probe the relationship between early unionist activities and related political events in the post-1834 period. Through brief lives of a dozen Chartist leaders,<sup>6</sup> as much histories of the political splinters with which they were affiliated as biographies, Cole explores the larger movement of which they all were a part. Not unexpectedly, he finds Chartism to have been a phenomenon shaped by influences of region, class,

<sup>1</sup> See Nos. 41 and 45.

<sup>2</sup> See Beatrice Webb and Sidney Webb, *History of Trade Unionism* (1894), and *Industrial Democracy* (1897).

<sup>3</sup> See No. 29.

<sup>4</sup> Those by the Webbs and the Hammonds in particular. *Attempts at General Union*, pp. 1-3.

<sup>5</sup> See No. 64.

<sup>6</sup> For a list of the articles, see Nos. 64a-64m.

politics, and economics; and in addition, one severely tangled up with other working class impulses of the day. A confused, badly-led movement, it experienced a brief flourish from 1839-42 and then was doomed to failure by growing prosperity.

While it may have killed Chartism, prosperity did not do the same for popular political aspirations. In *British Working Class Politics, 1832-1914* (1941),<sup>1</sup> Cole continued the history of their development, already brought through its initial stages by *Attempts at General Union* and *Chartist Portraits*.<sup>2</sup> From mid-Victorian stagnation induced by unfavorable conditions in both the economy and the franchise, working class political strength finally emerged in the 1880's on the crest of the New Unionism to capture a first few seats in Parliament. Then, linking with Fabian-ILP Socialism via the newly-created Labour Representation Committee and spurred by the anti-union Taff-Vale court decision, it was able to sweep on to victory at the polls in 1906. It was a tentative triumph, however, and the newly-formed, not-yet-Socialized, still-opportunistic Labour Party that had won it remained a loose federation in danger of collapse or absorption right down to the First World War.

Interrupting this unravelling of the political thread, Cole turned next in *A Century of Co-operation* (1944)<sup>3</sup> to examine another, equally opportunism-riddled of the several strands he had initially discerned in the historical fabric of the Working Class Movement. One of his best single-volume studies, it surveys the rise from small Owenite beginnings of a huge voluntaristic consumers' movement that emerged in the North of England during the prosperity of the late 1840's. Growing rapidly in mid-Victorian times, it expanded into wholesaling and manufacture, and won legal recognition at the same time. Further membership growth after 1900 was paralleled by an unsuccessful attempt to create a Co-operative Party to defend the movement's funds from mounting governmental encroachment, and by flagging customer loyalty in the face of new commercial retailing techniques. Such difficulties notwithstanding, by 1944, Co-operation stood as the working class's most powerful voluntaristic enterprise,<sup>4</sup> though still only vaguely linked to its cousins, the trade unions and the Labour Party.

<sup>1</sup> See No. 33.

<sup>2</sup> On pre-1832 non-union political antecedents, see G. D. H. Cole, "A Study in Legal Repression (1789-1834)", in: *Persons and Periods*, pp. 120-42. See No. 691.

<sup>3</sup> See No. 34. The book was written at the request of the Co-operative Union as part of a centennial tribute to the Rochdale Pioneers, but Cole's enthusiasm makes it evident that he took very little persuading. *A Century of Co-operation*, p. v, and *passim*.

<sup>4</sup> Co-operative turnover seems to have amounted to c. 5% of Britain's GNP in the late 1930's. See *ibid.*, pp. 377-78.



Resuming his examination of the latter with *A History of the Labour Party from 1914* (1948),<sup>1</sup> sequel to *British Working Class Politics*, Cole showed how the working class's party was saved from its pre-World War I difficulties and prepared for growth into one of the two national parties by Arthur Henderson's 1917-18 reforms. It was not, however, a steady ascent from that new foundation, being checked throughout the interwar era – after an initial post-war flourish of militancy – by doctrinal bickering, faulty leadership, and the fiascos of 1926 and 1931. Only entry into the World War II Coalition and the careful exploitation of that position enabled Labour to realize its potential, a realization signalled by the 1945 election victory. Cole ends his account here, concluding his four-part history of British working class politics.

This rounding out of earlier-begun efforts was even more general: in 1948 he also revised the *Short History* and *The Common People*, and entirely rewrote *What Marx Really Meant*.<sup>2</sup> In *Essays in Social Theory* (1950),<sup>3</sup> he went one step further, collecting the more important articles he had written in the 1940's.<sup>4</sup> Something of a cousin to *Persons and Periods*, the book's contents focus on two central themes – political ideology and intellectual methodology. Studies of Rousseau, Comte, the Communist Manifesto, Victorian ideals, and Western political thought are among those treating the former; while commentaries on education, sociology, Cole's own credo, and university teaching are among those aimed at the question of methodology.<sup>5</sup> Perhaps most useful for these latter revelations about his changing opinions and techniques as a scholar, *Essays in Social Theory* is not a cohesive work, but rather a sort of climax to Cole's post-war ordering of his historical affairs.<sup>6</sup>

The ensuing last decade of his life Cole devoted to studies more interpretive than those that had gone before.

*Introduction to Economic History, 1750-1950* (1952),<sup>7</sup> a theory of the Industrial Revolution given in textbook form, was the first of these. In it, Cole attempts (primarily through its British example) to explain the genesis of the modern, large-production-unit, urban-technological society, which he sees to have been a two-pronged development –

<sup>1</sup> See No. 36.

<sup>2</sup> The new version was titled *The Meaning of Marxism*.

<sup>3</sup> See No. 67.

<sup>4</sup> Cole also contributed two articles to the *Dictionary of National Biography* supplement about this time. See Nos. 68a-68b.

<sup>5</sup> See Nos. 67a-67b.

<sup>6</sup> Two more revisions appeared in 1953, namely: *Attempts at General Union* and *An Introduction to Trade Unionism* (formerly titled *British Trade Unionism To-day*).

<sup>7</sup> See No. 38.

financial-political and technological. The former led from a trade- or transfer-accumulated hoard of capital through the creation and exploitation of a single national industrial establishment to its eventual imitation abroad. This in turn led to imperialist competition between the frontrunners and also to the gradual growth and spread of industry into a global phenomenon, ending in the modern rivalry between the resultant world-wide industrial systems over the undeveloped areas, last zone of their possible expansion and competition. Meantime, technology, the other prong of development, was passing from simple, puny, man-run mechanical processes to ever-more organized and complex, all-powerful automatic electro-chemical-mechanical ones, transforming and absorbing agriculture, productively outrunning the growth of population, and elevating the middle class to dominance along the way. And, even as it raised up these latter to power, it transformed them into worshippers of its most evident outward form – that of sheer process –, just as by its triumphs it dethroned itself (and process) as prime determinants of economic development. With no worlds left for technology safely to conquer in this domain, further permissible industrial growth became contingent solely upon control of the backward areas. Hence, Cole concludes, the modern paradox of fixation on these areas – the sole remaining realm where technological processes have no meaning – by whole populations entirely committed to just such processes.<sup>1</sup>

In his next and last single-volume work, *Studies in Class Structure* (1955),<sup>2</sup> Cole inquired into the nature of certain of the relationships underlying this dilemma of modern society. Nominally seeking an interpretation of class to replace Marx's – dependant on production relationships and therefore, Cole contends, obsolete for present-day purposes – he selects occupation (as the simplest general economic category) to be the best indicator of class. Then, by statistical evaluation of all strata of British society in 1851 and 1951 and of technological change across the same period, he shows that social structure, through the occupational hierarchy, has imitated technology in becoming more complex, specialized, and diffuse.<sup>3</sup> This demonstration, he argues, not only refutes Marx's interpretation of class by disproving his pivotal

<sup>1</sup> A decided contrast to Cole's earlier views on the Industrial Revolution (for which see *The Life of William Cobbett* and *The Life of Robert Owen*, both *passim*), this analysis compares favorably in its less speculative aspects with other recent opinion based on similar study of the British example, e.g., one of the most recent statistical evaluations: Phyllis Dean and W. A. Cole, *British Economic Growth, 1688-1959: Trends and Structure* [Department of Applied Economics Monographs, No. 8], Cambridge: The University Press, 1962.

<sup>2</sup> See No. 70.

<sup>3</sup> For a list of the articles, see Nos. 70a-70f.

contention that Capitalism's further development would accentuate class distinctions, but also confirms his own alternative view by factually establishing class as a function of actual relationships to technology rather than theoretical relationships to production.

Simultaneous to his putting forward this interpretive refutation of Marx on an important theoretical point, Cole was initiating a similar rebuff of his predictions of Socialism's successful development by the publication of the initial volumes of *A History of Socialist Thought* (1953-60).<sup>1</sup> Volume I: *The Forerunners, 1789-1850* (1953), tells of an essentially a-political pre-1848 Socialism ignorant of Marx's classes and invocation of force and committed instead to appeals to universal brotherhood, appeals impossible of fulfillment without then-non-existent democratic states. Thus the movement was faced with either self-repudiation via a resort to forceful revolution or feeble deferment of its aims by a turn to co-operative forms. Volume II: *Marxism and Anarchism, 1850-1890* (1954), spanning the ebb-tide years between the failures of 1848 and 1871 when the ineffective First International held sway, sketches the advent of Marxism as a response to this Utopian quandry. The new ideology's initial rise was climaxed after the failure of the Paris Commune by the shift in Socialism's leadership from France and French doctrines to Germany, stronghold of Marxism. The ensuing schism within the movement, translated after 1890 from one between Marxism and Anarchism to one between Social Democracy and Syndicalism, was framed within the loose federation treated by Volume III: *The Second International, 1889-1914* (1956). Racked by an incredible tangle of lesser dissensions as well – revolutionists versus reformists, gradualists versus immediatists (within the revolutionary splinter), dogmatists versus revisionists (among Marxists), East European wing versus West European wing, etc. – and unable to either stage a revolution or secure an electoral majority, Socialism by 1914 had become paralyzed. Shocked alive by the war, it was abruptly split again by the Russian Revolution. Volume IV: *Communism and Social Democracy, 1914-1931* (1958), treats this most enduring of schisms and its cause as the most important developments in the history of Socialism. Socialist thought per se having by now permanently atrophied, Cole's attentions in the wake of the Revolution focus on pragmatic advance under the newly established Socialist regimes. But even such activity as this was hindered by the split, and thereby limited to the USSR on the Communist side and Scandinavia on the Social Democratic side, leaving the way open in the rest of Europe for Fascism and overseas for Localist Nationalism. Volume V: *Socialism*

<sup>1</sup> See No. 37.

and *Fascism, 1931-1939* (1960), treats of the muddled Socialist response, and in an epilogue, of its bare survival – thanks only to the aid of Nationalism and Capitalism – in the final contest with Fascism after 1939. Socialism, like Socialist thought a few decades before it, after a long and complex evolution had grown stagnant and lapsed into decline, leaving only vestiges of its former self in the East-West confrontation's national Leftist parties. On that rather melancholy note, Cole ends, having written as much a history of International Socialism as of just its thought.<sup>1</sup>

To those familiar only with individual works of his treating down-to-earth aspects of Britain's working class history, *A History of Socialist Thought*, focused as it is on an international ideology, must seem a rather curious and hardly representative magnum opus. But such a view is unwarranted. Of all Cole's historical writings, it is probably as representative as any, accentuating his weaknesses and strengths as a historian, summarizing his views, filling in a gap in Leftism's history.<sup>2</sup> It is encyclopedically comprehensive,<sup>3</sup> stuffed with detail – biographic and otherwise, uneven in form, sometimes unoriginal and inaccurate in content, unbalanced in interpretation, but still impressive for all that – very much like the whole of Cole's work.

Not ordinary history, to be sure, but Cole was no ordinary historian. He was, above all else, an unabashed Socialist<sup>4</sup> and nothing he undertook escaped that influence. He devoted his life – and the history he wrote in the course of it – to what in a broad sense can be called Socialist propaganda. He wrote, he once proclaimed, to<sup>5</sup>

“suggest to anyone I can influence, and above all to the society to which I belong, what is the right pattern of social thought to guide social action in the circumstances of here and now ... to tell

<sup>1</sup> He himself, however, specifically denies this to have been his intent. HST, I, pp. v-vi.

<sup>2</sup> The only remotely comparable study, one Cole himself often cites, is: Édouard Dolléans, *Histoire du mouvement ouvrier*, 3 vols., Paris: A. Colin, 1936-53.

<sup>3</sup> And written almost as if intended as such a reference work, with every one of the 112 chapters a discreet essay, the whole copiously indexed. The bibliography in the first four volumes is also impressive, perhaps the finest single such list on Socialism available in English. (Cole died before compiling a list for Vol. V, with the exception of the single chapter on China, for which see HST, V, p. 291).

<sup>4</sup> In this, he was as independent of mind as ever, professing: “I am neither a Communist nor a Social Democrat, because I regard both as creeds of centralization and bureaucracy, whereas I feel sure that a Socialist society that is to be true to its equalitarian principles of human brotherhood must rest on the widest possible diffusion of power and responsibility, so as to enlist the active participation of as many as possible of its citizens in the tasks of democratic self-government.” HST, V, p. 337.

<sup>5</sup> “Scope and Method”, pp. 7, 10.

people how to be socially good ... [how to seek] social goods through social institutions.”

As he saw it, men were free agents to make their own history,<sup>1</sup> principles could guide them in doing so,<sup>2</sup> Socialist principles were the correct ones for this application,<sup>3</sup> and history could teach men why this was so and how such potent application was possible.<sup>4</sup> This was why during most of his life Cole wrote history – to shape history through Socialism.<sup>5</sup>

He did not, however, feel that such an approach to the discipline necessarily placed him outside the pale of orthodoxy. For most of his career, he claimed that, in spite of its forcing him to pass value judgments on what he wrote, he could nonetheless achieve objectivity (but of course not unachievable impartiality) by the two-fold process of: concealing nothing of the factual truth so far as his abilities permitted him to see it; and forewarning the reader with an “elementary confession of assumptions”.<sup>6</sup> Nor was he willing to concede anything to more conventional practices in questions of methodology. Although obviously not a specialist in any meaningful sense of the word,<sup>7</sup>

<sup>1</sup> This is a central theme of Cole's entire critique of Marxism, summed up in *The Meaning of Marxism*.

<sup>2</sup> Worswick, p. 38; and “What I Take for Granted”, *passim*.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> Stephen K. Bailey, “What Cole Really Meant”, in *ELH*, p. 22; and “Scope and Method”, pp. 1-16, *passim*.

<sup>5</sup> Two avowed cases in point: *British Working Class Politics* was intended to issue the call for a new generation of Socialist propagandists (*ibid.*, p. 254); and *A History of Socialist Thought* was meant to urge a reconstruction of International Socialism on fresh principles of allegiance to break the impasse into which it had fallen (Julius Braunthal, “Introduction”, *HST*, V, p. xiii; and Cole, *HST*, IV, p. 850; V, p. 337).

<sup>6</sup> “Scope and Method”, pp. 6-12, *passim*; G. D. H. Cole, “The Question of Bias”, in the essay “The Teaching of Social Studies in British Universities”, in *EST*, pp. 45-46; and “What I Take for Granted”, pp. 245-46.

Toward the end of his life, however, Cole abandoned this claim by admitting that he could not “be impartial, or even objective, in reviewing the history of Socialism” (*HST*, IV, p. 850) because in the exceptional case of “disputes that are very much alive ... [the historian] can hardly hope to be given the credit for stating fairly both or all sides of the question he needs to discuss.” (*Ibid.*, p. 849) Having thus foresworn any hope of actively achieving objectivity (perhaps of achieving it by any means), Cole nonetheless neither eschewed Socialism nor the writing of history on its behalf, although the direct relationship between the two endeavors he so insisted on in earlier years had almost certainly been much weakened by his disillusionment with the entire extant Socialist order (for an expression of which, see his two articles on “The Future of Socialism”, in: *New Statesman*, XLIX [15 Jan. 1955], pp. 60-62; and *idem* [22 Jan. 1955], pp. 92-93). In any case, he continued to write history and apparently found sufficient justification for doing so in the time-honored pleas of armchair neutrality and detachment he uttered to replace his abandoned former claims about objectivity.

<sup>7</sup> The scope and number of his works alone precludes the possibility, even making due allowance for his “gift for tearing the heart out of documents and statistics”. *GIR*, p. 78.

he would not admit to the fact. Instead, he re-defined the practice to fit his own special case by insisting that one could specialize meaningfully only in the study of a general problem in its general context, by calling for<sup>1</sup>

“an altered approach to the Social Studies ... not less specialization, but less *isolation* of specialized studies from the general study of society as a whole.”

Similarly, in spite of the evident drift in his later work toward more and more sweeping generalizations,<sup>2</sup> he clung to protestations of orthodoxy in such matters, claiming:<sup>3</sup>

“I start with people who are many, in their social relations, which are manifold, and I end – with the many, not with the ‘One’ ... My Zeus is men.”

Not even in the sphere of elementary canons of specialized research would he admit to devious ways, in spite of his preference for researching in breadth and not depth,<sup>4</sup> and in areas for which he lacked the necessary linguistic capabilities.<sup>5</sup> However, the errors of fact and interpretation which crept into his books as a consequence,<sup>6</sup> like the

<sup>1</sup> G. D. H. Cole, „Sociology and Politics in the Twentieth Century”, in: EST, p. 29.

<sup>2</sup> E.g., his theories of class and the Industrial Revolution, and his account of the rise and fall of an entire major ideology in Socialism.

<sup>3</sup> “Scope and Method”, p. 16. For a similarly posited attack on Marx for attributing to classes traits Cole claimed only individuals could possess, see: “Introductory”, in *Studies in Class Structure*, pp. 11–12.

<sup>4</sup> Although Cole seldom failed to consult the appropriate primary sources (see the prefaces of his various works), he evidently relied primarily on printed materials which he could use in his own study. See, e.g., his random comments on his research habits in: *A Century of Co-operation*, p. v; *A History of the Labour Party*, p. iv; *Worswick*, p. 27; and again the prefaces of his various other works.

<sup>5</sup> In regard to his linguistic prowess in researching *A History of Socialist Thought*, Cole confessed: “I have no Russian, almost no Spanish, very little Italian, and not much German” and went on to explain that he used secondary sources in translation whenever he could. *HST*, I, p. vi.

<sup>6</sup> E.g., in *A History of the Labour Party*, he speaks of the hurried post-World War I demobilization – an event of considerable importance in British working class history – as a Government conspiracy against the Left (p. 90), which directly contradicts the consensus of then-available scholarship (in 1948). As a recent bibliographical essay puts it: “Both Albert Lauterback [in a 1942 article] and R. H. Tawney [in a 1943 article] have assessed the experience of economic demobilization after World War I and both have concluded that the government erred in yielding to the demand for a rapid and impossible return to prewar conditions. Their findings are confirmed by Stephen Graubard’s study of military demobilization [in a 1947 article], which documents the enormous pressure built up against a cautious government plan designed to prevent unemployment.” Henry R. Winkler, *Great Britain in the Twentieth Century* [Service Center for Teachers Pamphlets, No. 28], Washington: American Historical Association, 1960, p. 27.

persistant bias in favor of the Left which almost always accompanied them, offer ample testimony that Cole was no conventional historian nor his writings conventional history, all his seeming denials notwithstanding.

Professional criticism of his work has shared this opinion and on the same grounds.<sup>1</sup> The first of his major works to attract general critical attention, *The Life of William Cobbett* (1924), however, received no such demerits – all commentary was in praise. *Robert Owen* (1925) too was generally well-treated, though a few complained of its lack of originality. The *Short History* (1925-27) got a mixed welcome, leaving some commentators unhappy with its partisanship. The rest took up the chorus when *What Marx Really Meant* (1934) appeared, and it remained a persistent theme thereafter in the reviews of Cole's historical work. *Persons and Periods* (1938) was merely tolerated without enthusiasm, but *The Common People* (1938) that same year excited widespread acclaim, if a little complaint too about its diffuse nature. The histories of trade unionism and co-operation to follow (1939, 1944) were generally ignored by the major historical journals, but their better-attended cousins in the political realm, *British Working Class Politics* (1941) and *A History of the Labour Party* (1948) both received ample praise, if tempered by now-familiar doubts as to Cole's persistant inclination toward the Left. The various revisions and new single-volume works which appeared thereafter got about the same treatment when they were noticed, which his essay collections generally were not. *A History of Socialist Thought* (1953-60), which summed up so much else about Cole's career, also served to consolidate Cole criticism: the general tenor of the reception given the entire work was one of high praise, especially for the attempt, and of somewhat more mixed blessings for the result – a monumental contribution of encyclopedic dimension to most, a bit too involved for some, and, as ever, too partisan for the rest.

Because Cole was never able to resolve the conflict within himself between the propagandist and the scholar, to decide whether he would be an encyclopedist for the Left or an orthodox specialized historian, this same critical concensus which greeted his magnum opus might well be applied to his entire life's work. No more precise an estimate can be offered on the basis of a preliminary overview such as this. In any case, the primary purpose of this article has been bibliographic and abstractive, to lay the groundwork for further, more detailed study of Cole's history. Only through such comprehensive inquiry can

<sup>1</sup> The resumé that follows is based on a survey of over 50 reviews in the leading scholarly journals (at least three having been examined for every work commented on) and on the glosses in the Book Review Digest.

we begin to definitively assess its character and permanent value. Hopefully, such an analysis will be forthcoming in the not-too-distant future.

*A BIBLIOGRAPHY  
OF G. D. H. COLE'S HISTORICAL WRITINGS<sup>1</sup>*

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Sequel to: The Life and Adventures of Peter Porcupine (1927).
5. \*—. The Life and Adventures of Peter Porcupine, with Other Records of His Early Career in England & America; viz: Life &

<sup>1</sup> For works of more than one edition, I have tried to cite the *first* English edition, noting the rest; with revisions, to cite the *latest* English edition, noting the rest.

Since many of Cole's articles are conveniently gathered in collections and reference works, I have ordered them below *en bloc* under these titles as I found them, citing the latest version of reprints, with a note on the place of initial publication, separately listing by topic only never-reprinted items from the periodical press. When page numbers are not given, they were not known.

Titles discussed in the text above are marked with an asteriks\*.



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33. \**British Working Class Politics, 1832-1914*. London: Routledge, 1941. viii, 320 pp. App., bibl., indexes.  
Its sequel: *A History of the Labour Party from 1914 (1948)*.

<sup>1</sup> The numbers given under the topic heading refer alphabetically to biographical articles listed further on as part of collections, etc.

Cole and his wife, in the extensive "Index to Persons" in Cobbett's *Rural Rides* [No. 15 above], pp. 939-1052, prepared additional historical biographies of well over 500 persons prominent in early nineteenth century Britain. The earlier volumes of *A History of Socialist Thought* [No. 37 below] similarly contain a great many short biographies of prominent pre-World War I Socialists. And, at his death, Cole left five volumes in manuscript tentatively titled "A Dictionary of Labour Biography, 1790 - the Present", said to contain several thousand short sketches. Now being reworked and expanded by John Saville, a first volume is promised by 1966-67. See *Bulletin of the Society for the Study of Labour History*, No. 1 (Aut. 1960), p. 27; No. 2 (Apr. 1961), pp. 15-17; and No. 8 (Spr. 1964), pp. 10-11.

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<sup>1</sup> The numbers given under the topic heading refer alphabetically to historical articles listed further on as part of collections, etc.

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<sup>1</sup> The numbers given under the topic heading refer alphabetically to interpretive articles listed further on as part of collections, etc.

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 64c. "John Fielder", pp. 218-38.  
 64d. "John Frost", pp. 133-62.  
 64e. "George Julian Harvey", pp. 268-99.  
 64f. "Introductory Study [Short History of Chartism]", pp. 1-30.  
 64g. "Ernest Jones", pp. 337-66.  
 64h. "William Lovett", pp. 31-62.  
 64i. "Richard Oastler", pp. 80-105.  
 64j. "James Bronterre O'Brien", pp. 239-67.  
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 65b. "William Cobbett", V, pp. 896-98.  
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 65f. "Minimum Wage" [in part], XV, pp. 539-41.  
 65g. "Socialism", XX, pp. 878-89.  
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 65h. "Strikes and Lockouts" [in part], XXI, pp. 469-71.  
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 66b. "Guild Socialism", VII, pp. 202-04.  
 66c. "Hardie, James Keir", VII, pp. 268-69.  
 66d. "Industrialism", VIII, pp. 18-26.  
 66e. "Kingsley, Charles", VIII, pp. 567-68.  
 66f. "Laissez-Faire", IX, pp. 15-20.  
 66g. "MacDonald, Alexander", IX, p. 650.  
 66h. "Maurice, Frederick Denison", X, p. 233.  
 66i. "Melchett, Lord Alfred Moritz Monel", X, pp. 303-04.  
 66j. "Mobilization and Demobilization", X, pp. 555-64.  
 66k. "Morris, William", XI, p. 21.  
 66l. "Owen and Owenism", XI, pp. 518-21.  
 66m. "Place, Francis", XII, pp. 143-44.  
 66n. "Ruskin, John", XIII, pp. 472-73.  
 66o. "Salt, Sir Titus", XIII, p. 526.

- 66p. "Socialization", XIV, pp. 221-25.
- 66q. "Thompson, William", XIV, pp. 620-21.
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- 67a. "The Claims of Nationality", pp. 202-23.  
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- 67e. "The Essentials of Democracy", pp. 97-112.  
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- 67h. "The Rights of Man", pp. 132-50.  
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- 67i. "Rousseau's Political Theory", pp. 113-31.  
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- 67j. "Western Civilization and the Rights of the Individual", pp. 151-56.  
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- 67k. "The Aims of Education", pp. 47-70.  
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- 67l. "An Essay on Social Morality", pp. 71-89.  
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- 67m. "Scope and Method in Social and Political Theory", pp. 1-16.  
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- 67n. "Sociology and Politics in the Twentieth Century", pp. 17-30.  
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<sup>1</sup> In the list of articles below, Nos. 67a-67j form one alphabetical group focused on ideology and Nos. 67k-67p another focused on methodology. This division was used to conform to the discussion in the text.



670. "The Teaching of Social Studies in British Universities", pp. 31-46.  
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- 67p. "What I Take for Granted", pp. 245-51.  
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68. [Contributions to] *Dictionary of National Biography, 1941-1950*. [Supplement]. Edited by L. G. Wickham-Legg and E. T. Williams. London: Oxford University Press, 1959.
- 68a. "Burns, John Elliot", pp. 121-24.
- 68b. "Thorne, William James", pp. 882-84.
69. \**Persons and Periods: Studies*. London: Macmillan, 1938. vii, 332 pp.
- 69a. "William Cobbett (1762-1835)", pp. 143-69.  
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- 69b. "Daniel Defoe (1660-1731)", pp. 1-19.  
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- 69c. "Defoe's England", pp. 20-41.  
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- 69d. "Henry Ford", pp. 307-20.  
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- 69e. "London: One-Fifth of England", pp. 74-95.  
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- 69f. "Marx's 'Capital'", pp. 261-83.  
Published initially as the introduction to: *Marx's Capital* (1930) [No. 9 above].
- 69g. "William Morris and the Modern World", pp. 284-306.  
Centenary lecture at Hull's University College.
- 69h. "Roads, Rivers, and Canals", pp. 96-119.
- 69i. "Robert Owen and Owenism", pp. 196-215.  
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- 69j. "Rousseau's Social Contract", pp. 216-60.  
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- 69k. "Rural Rides", pp. 170-95.

- Extracted from the introduction to: Cobbett's Rural Rides (1930) [No. 15 above].
- 69l. "A Study in Legal Repression (1789-1834)", pp. 120-42.  
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- 69m. "Town Life in the Eighteenth Century", pp. 42-73.  
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- 70a. "British Class Structure in 1951", pp. 147-88.  
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- 70b. "The Conception of the Middle Classes", pp. 78-100.  
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- 70c. "Élites in British Society", pp. 101-46.
- 70d. "The Influence of Technological Changes on the Development of Class Structure in Western Europe", pp. 26-42.  
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- 70e. "Introductory [The Concept of Class: Marx's and Cole's]", pp. 1-25.
- 70f. "The Social Structure of England", pp. 43-77.  
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## VIII. MATERIALS ON COLE

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73. [Anon.] *New Statesman*, 17 Jan. 1959, p. 63. [Obit].
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#### B. *His writings*

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86. Houlton, R. "Two Aspects of Guild Socialism - Penty and Hobson, and the Building Guilds: A Select Bibliography with Commentary", in: *Bulletin of the Society for the Study of Labour History*, No. 7 (Aut. 1963), pp. 23-28. (Cole was closely linked with Guild Socialism.)
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