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THE HOUSE OF INDUSTRY LEAGUE. GUILD SOCIALISM IN THE 1930s AND 1940s*

The House of Industry League (HOIL) was a Guild Socialist body, active between 1936 and the late 1940s. It was the last organisation of significance in the classical tradition of British Guild Socialism, a point reinforced most clearly by the prominence in it of S. G. Hobson, one of the key figures in that tradition. The intention of his essay is to recover certain basic historical information about the HOIL, an intention made important by the unmerited obscurity that is fallen into.

THE ORIGINS OF THE HOUSE OF INDUSTRY LEAGUE

The House of Industry League needs to be seen in the context of the turn to political activity of the circle surrounding the (Bosnian) Serb intellectual Dimitrije Mitrinović, who had come to London in 1914. Mitrinović's life and opinions are chronicled in some detail in Andrew Rigby's fine biography, *Initiation and Initiative*.¹ Born in 1887 in Herzegovina, Mitrinović was involved as a student in the revolutionary politics of the area. However, he left the Balkans in early 1913 to continue his studies of art history in Munich. He fled

* The author wishes to acknowledge the assistance and hospitality of the New Atlantis Foundation, Ditchling, and in particular of Violet MacDermot and Ralph Twentymen. He would also like to thank Andrew Bolton, Mike Davis and an anonymous referee for their comments on a draft of the article.

¹ Andrew Rigby, *Initiation and Initiative: An Exploration of the Life and Ideas of Dimitrije Mitrinović* (Boulder: East European Monographs, 1984).

Germany on the very eve of the First World War, moving to London. He became part of the Serbian legation in London, and continued to be employed there until 1920 when he decided that, rather than return to Yugoslavia, he would stay in England. He undertook some journalistic work, and started to gather a circle of people around him, with whom he would work both publicly in bodies such as the HOIL, and in private discussion as described in Rigby's book. In 1920 and 1921 Mitrinović's first major effort in English journalism appeared. This was a series of articles on 'World Affairs' in *The New Age*. Initially, these were written jointly with A. R. Orage under the pseudonym M. M. Cosmoi. Orage's *New Age* had been, as is well known, a key journal for the Guild Socialist movement.²

As noted above, Mitrinović gathered a group around him who were interested in his ideas, and the possibilities that arose from them. This group first started to engage in public activity in 1927 with the formation of the Adler Society, the British Section on the International Society for Individual Psychology. Although his body was interested in the dissemination of the psychology ideas of Alfred Adler, it had sections that were devoted to philosophy and sociology (among others), and it had connections to the Chandos Group of intellectuals. (This latter group, which was formed in 1926 with involvement of Mitrinović, was largely composed of figures connected with the Social Credit movement such as Maurice Reckitt, although others were members too.) The Society had its own premises in Gower Street, London, and undertook a very heavy programme of activity. It was removed from the International Society by Adler in late 1933.

By that time the Mitrinović circle had become involved in openly political activity – a factor in the disaffiliation by Adler. The first and longest lasting of a number of organisations formed in the 1930s was the New Europe Group which, a Rigby notes, was founded in 1931 and only ended in late 1957.³ This was to argue for some of Mitrinović's most crucial political concepts. Most notably, it was concerned with the idea of a federation of Europe, in the context of a viewpoint that saw a combination of devolution and federation as being of central

² The series ran between 19 August 1920 and 13 October 1921. The articles were written jointly with Orage until 9 December 1920. In Harry Rutherford's collection of Mitrinović's writing (Dimitrije Mitrinović, *Certainly, Future*, Boulder: East European Monographs, 1987) they run to nearly 200 pages.

³ Rigby, *Initiation*, 107.

importance politically. A veteran member of the Mitrinović circle, Dr Ralph Twentyman, active in the HOIL in the 1930s, in interview in August 1995, stressed the importance of his vision of devolution and federation in Mitrinović's political thinking.⁴ The first president of the NEG was Sir Patrick Geddes.

In October 1932 the first of a series of quarterly journals connected with the Mitrinović circle was started, the *New Britain Quarterly*. The title indicates the next direction taken by the circle in their political activities, the formation in 1933 of a New Britain Group. The New Britain Group was the most successful of the various groups connected with Mitrinović. Its weekly journal, called *New Britain*, was started on 24 May 1933.

In January 1934 the journal advertised a lecture series on five topics which summarised the vision of the New Britain Movement (NBM), as it had become. These were Personal Alliance, Monetary Reform, Industrial Guilds, the Three Fold State, and the Federation of Western Nations. Some of these topics need a brief explanation. Personal Alliance was a central idea of Mitrinović's, indicating the necessity for individuals to consciously enter into unity with others to achieve a new order. By Monetary Reform the group were largely arguing for the economic ideas of Professor Frederick Soddy.⁵ The Three Fold State – which postulated the need for separate parliamentary 'houses' for politics, economics and culture, each with sharply defined powers and functions, and incorporating the notions of federation and devolution – was an idea derived from both Patrick Geddes and

⁴ Interview Dr Ralph Twentyman and Violet MacDermot by Mike Tyldesley, Ditchling, 15 August 1995. Henceforward cited as 'Interview'.

⁵ Soddy's economic ideas have recently some attention. An interesting example of this is to be found in Juan Martinez-Alier (with K. Schlupmann), *Ecological Economics* (Oxford, 1987). It has a detailed chapter on 'Soddy's Critique of the Theory of Economic Growth'. Martinez-Alier sees Soddy as one of the 'precursors of contemporary Ecologism' (ibid, 143). This is largely because of the analytical content of Soddy's economic thought, in which wealth is considered as a flow, and in terms of energy. The practical policy implications of Soddy's economic thinking focused on the issues of currency and banking, and particularly upon the need for the power to create money to be returned to the nation, from private bankers, who Soddy felt had effectively abrogated the right to create money. Martinez-Alier makes reference to other recent examinations of Soddy's economic thought. More recently, a biography of Soddy has been published, which includes an assessment of his links with the New Britain Movement and the Mitrinović circle; Linda Merricks, *The World Made New* (Oxford, 1996). The HOIL is not mentioned in this book.

Rudolf Steiner.⁶ Rigby, in his chapter on Political Initiatives, indicates the rapid growth of New Britain. By July 1933 there were 57 groups around the country, and by November 1933 groups in 47 towns and centres plus 30 separate groups in the London area. Various figures are quoted for the circulation of the *New Britain* weekly. The editor, C. B. Purdom, claimed that within three months of its launch it was selling 32,119 copies per week.⁷ Arthur Peacock, later secretary of the HOIL, claimed that it built up a 50,000 circulation.⁸

By August 1934 the weekly *New Britain* had ceased publication, and to all intents and purposes the New Britain Movement was over. Rigby examines in some detail the complicated politics surrounding this period of less than two years. A major factor in the rise wanted to turn it into a political party – Ralph Twentyman suggests an SDP of its day⁹ – and this was certainly not an aim shared by Mitrinović and his immediate circle. The remaining New Britain Movement held a conference between 15 and 17 December 1934. A report from this conference indicates that

from itself be projected four obviously necessary movements;
1. League for the National Dividend. 2. House of Industry
League. 3. British League for European Federation. 4. New
Albion of The League for the Three Fold State.¹⁰

The document indicated that the public initiative for the HOIL would have to come from within the trade union movement, and the contacts had already started to be made with a view of this. It also indicated that a manifesto was to be published shortly. To summarise, then, the HOIL can be seen as a successor body to NBM, Industrial Guilds, which would, as in all Guild Socialist thinking, control and run industry. By doing this, it would also be arguing for an important element of one of the other goals of the NBM, the Three Fold State, with its suggested separate houses of parliament for politics, culture and the economy.

⁶ I owe this latter point to Dr R. Twentyman, in 'Interview'.

⁷ C. B. Purdom, *Life over Again*, 1951, 156.

⁸ A. Peacock, *Yours Fraternally*, 1945, 84.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ Copy in the archives of the New Atlantis Foundation, Ditchling.

THE ACTIVITIES OF THE HOUSE OF INDUSTRY LEAGUE

It appears that some time had to be spent by the former New Britain activities in preparing the HOIL, as it emerged publicly in August 1936. A resumé of the very early activities of the League appeared in the September 1936 edition of the *Trade Unionist*, and was reprinted, presumably for propaganda purposes by the League. The League never had its own journal, but the *Trade Unionist* gave it some access to its pages. This journal was the organ of the National Trade Union Club, a social club in the West End of London in which Ben Tillett and Arthur Peacock were important figures, and which was used by the HOIL for meetings and conferences. The article indicates that the presidency of the HOIL had been assumed by S. G. (Sam) Hobson, and the vice-presidency by both Ben Tillett and Stephen Smith. (The HOIL subsequently appointed a number of other vice-presidents.) The article also included the principles and purpose of the League which indicated the political line of the HOIL. A crucial point was the following:

The House of Industry League exists to implement the logical purpose of the Trade Unions; namely the total abolition of the wage system, and the ensuing change in status (as distinct from mere amelioration of conditions) of all those engaged in industrial production.¹¹

In a declaration at the close of the piece, seven points were noted. Among these were:

(1) The House of Industry League declares that the economic function of the community must be differentiated from the civic and cultural functions, so that the harmony of national life be achieved. ... (4) The League demands the constitution of a new Estate of the Realm: an Economic Chamber, to be known as the House of Industry, representatively based on national Industrial Guilds. (5) The League declares that the

¹¹ 'The House of Industry League', a document reproduced from the *Trade Unionist* (September 1936), presumably by the HOIL. Copy in New Atlantis Foundation archives, Ditchling.

ownership of the productive and distributive machinery shall be vested in the Crown and People through the House of Commons; but the all the functional processes shall be controlled by the House of Industry which is itself a constitutional body based on a functional electorate. ... (7) The House of Industry League declares that the separation of economics from politics is an important for international as for internal affairs. The co-operation of self-governing House of Industry throughout the Empire, Europe and the World is a necessary step towards constructive international action and world federation.¹²

These extracts indicate that the HOIL was advocating certain classic Guild Socialist viewpoints, along with other arguments that connect with those of the New Britain and New Europe groupings. Broadly speaking, this pattern was to remain the same throughout the League's existence. Given this viewpoint, then, what forms of activity did the League undertake to realize its aims?

Firstly, it sponsored, in the years prior to the Second World War, lectures at which its views could be discussed. Syllabuses from these lecture series indicate a wide range of discussion topics, and the involvement of a variety of people from different circles.¹³ A number of figures from the trade union world were involved; for instance, the editor of the Union of Postal Workers' journal, *The Post*, Francis Andrews, and the assistant secretary of the Railway Clerks' Association, F. W. Dalley (whose lecture on 'A Transport Guild' was chaired by Rowland Kenney, editor of the *Daily Herald* in its 'rebel' days, and associate of A. R. Orage). Lord Northbourne gave a series of lectures in 1939 on 'The Nature of the Agricultural Problem'.¹⁴ Whilst

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Copies of syllabuses etc., all in the archive of New Atlantis Foundation, Ditchling. Note that much of this material does not give the year concerned.

¹⁴ The lectures by Lord Northbourne raise the issue of whether the HOIL had connections with that section of opinion, predominantly far right-wing, that was raising questions about agriculture in Britain in late 1930s. (A grouping examined, for instance, by Anna Bramwell in *Ecology in the 20th Century* (New Haven, 1989); see p. 216 for a list of the main protagonists, including Northbourne.) It appears that, with the exception of Lord Northbourne, such connections did not exist. Indeed Northbourne's lectures seem to be the only occasion the HOIL considered agriculture. There are not other lectures listed in programmes on the subject. The

several of these lectures were held at the Lower Essex Hall, at least two series were held at the National Trade Union Club, and this represents an example of the close connections between the Club and the League. The HOIL also used the Club as its postal address on much of the material it published. The HOIL's use and support of the club were specifically commented upon in the *Trade Unionist*.¹⁵

Aside from the London-based lecture series, the League was involved in other activities of a similar nature. In September 1936, fairly early in its existence, it organized a weekend conference at Royhill, near Buxted in Sussex. The conference covered the issues of the world crisis, industrial organisation, the Functional Principle, and the League itself, looking at its future activities. The speakers and chairs of session featured the veterans Hobson and Tillett, and also a number of the circle around Mitrinović such as Watson Thomson, David Davies, Ralph Twentyman and Winifrid Gordon Fraser.¹⁶

The following year, the League was involved in another conference, this time in conjunction with other organisations. Along with the Socialist Christian League and the Economic Reconstruction Group of the Christian Social Council, the League was instrumental in organising a conference on 'Exploitation – A Challenge to the Churches'. This was held on 11 and 12 June 1937, with the evening session on 11 June being chaired by George Lansbury. The League submitted a memorandum regarding its views to this conference.¹⁷ The HOIL had a supplement in the July 1937 edition of the *Trade Unionist* in which reports of the conference were published. (One of the reports indicates that Tom Mann spoke from the floor at the conference.)¹⁸

The League certainly intended to undertake educational work among its members. A syllabus for a weekly study group shows a

syllabus of Northbourne's lecture series indicates strong similarities with the book *Look to the Land* (1940), in which he mentions S. G. Hobson and his Guild proposals (p.146). Hobson refers to Northbourne as a friend in his own autobiography, *Pilgrim to the Left*, (1938, 251). This is in the context of a discussion of finance, and it is interesting to note that Northbourne was scheduled to lecture to the HOIL on 'Money' in autumn 1937. See *Trade Unionist* (October 1937): 2.

¹⁵ See the 'Comments of a Clubman' column, *Trade Unionist* (July 1937): 1.

¹⁶ Programme for the Weekend Conference of the House of Industry League, 19-20 September 1936, copy in archives of New Atlantis Foundation, Ditchling.

¹⁷ Copy of circular regarding this conference, by Reginald Wrugh, then secretary of HOIL, in archives of New Atlantis Foundation, Ditchling.

¹⁸ *Trade Unionist* (July 1937): 7-11. See p. 10 for reference to Tom Mann.

wide-ranging programme, looking at issues such as the significance of trade unionism in Britain (with recommended reading featuring the standards such as the Hammonds and the Webbs but also J. T. Murphy's *Preparing for Power*), the principle of function, guild organisation, and the theory of credit (the reading suggested here included Lenin's *Imperialism*, Frederick Soddy's *Role of Money* and J. M. Keynes's *General Theory*).¹⁹

Efforts were made to form branches in areas other than London. A membership list for a Scottish branch exists.²⁰ Press cuttings indicate that efforts were made to form a branch in north Wales, in November 1936, with a meeting at which the speakers included J. T. Murphy and Walter Monslaw. Monslaw was then a councilor in Wrexham, and an ASLEF member. He became a Labour MP in the post-war period.²¹ Similarly, press cuttings indicate the formation of a Birmingham branch in February 1937.²² It should be noted, though, that Ralph Twentyman, in interview, expressed the view that the branches outside of London were ephemeral and small affairs.²³

On a slightly different tack, the League had at least one 'functional' grouping. This was its group of engineers and scientists, which was active in the pre-war period. This seems to have been called the technical committee, suggesting that by 'engineer' was meant a qualified technician, rather than a worker in the engineering industry. Its precise purpose and activities are not clear, but it seems likely to have considered the problem of workers' control from the viewpoint of such professionals.²⁴ As will be seen, in some respects similar questions were considered by HOIL members in the post-war period. (A comment in the *Trade Unionist* for March 1937 indicates that this group – referred to as the 'Technicians' Group' – was meeting on Fridays at the National Trade Union Club.)²⁵

¹⁹ Copy of this syllabus in the archives of the New Atlantis Foundation, Ditchling.

²⁰ Copy in archives of New Atlantis Foundation.

²¹ The cuttings, in the New Atlantis Foundation archives, are from the *Liverpool Daily Post* (16 November 1936), and the *Wrexham Leader* (20 November 1936).

²² The cuttings, in the New Atlantis Foundation archives, are from the *Birmingham Gazette* and the *Birmingham Post*, both of 12 February 1937.

²³ "Interview".

²⁴ The material in the New Atlantis Foundation archives on this committee consists of a letter from R. S. Oliver of 23 November 1938, and some further, undated, documents.

²⁵ *Trade Unionist* (March 1937): 2.

Another body that derived from the League and which also had a 'functional', rather than geographical basis, was the Council for the Worker's Control of Industry. Arthur Peacock noted in a document of August 1938 that 'The Trade Unionists within the League have formed The Council for Workers Control of Industry, and have issued a Manifesto entitled "Workers' Control – What it is and Why we want it", carrying the signature of a group of prominent men in the Trade Union movement.'²⁶ The manifesto was a five-page pamphlet. It was indeed signed by certain prominent trade union figures; among the fifteen signatories were Tom Mann, Jack Tanner and Ben Tillet. Some of the other signatories were figures who are now less well remembered, but who were activists of some importance in the trade union movement of the day.²⁷ Peacock further noted in his August 1938 circular that the manifesto was to be sent to trades councils and Labour Parties, and that conferences were being arranged on it in the 'provinces'. He noted meetings either arranged or in the process of being arranged in Manchester (with Sam Hobson speaking), Reading, Coventry, Newcastle and Kettering. Also, J. T. Murphy was to speak to the Southall Trades Council.

The final aspect of the League's activity that needs attention is the work it undertook following the Second World War. Rigby suggests that 'The activities of both organisations [i.e., the League and the Council for Workers' Control Industry] continued until the outbreak of the European war which Mitrinović had foreseen so many years previously.'²⁸ In fact, whilst Rigby is correct to point to the general disruption caused to the Mitrinović circle by the war, which saw the death of certain young members of the circle, there is some evidence that the League continued in operation after the war. In the post-war period the Mitrinović circle was certainly more concerned with cultural issues than the directly political concerns of the 1930s. This was shown in its main post-war organisation, the Renaissance Club

²⁶ House of Industry League Circular, written by Arthur Peacock, August 1938, copy in New Atlantis Foundation Archives, Ditchling.

²⁷ Copy of document in New Atlantis Foundation Archives. Joseph White mentions this manifesto on p. 201 of his *Tom Mann* (Manchester 1991), without explaining the provenance of the document. The signatories were: Percy Allott, George Gibson, Maurice Hann, J. H. Harley, J. Hiscock, W. T. Hart, George Light, T. W. Mercer, Percy F. Pollard, Tom Mann, W. Arthur Peacock, Jack Tanner, Ben Tillet, W. J. R. Squance.

²⁸ Rigby, *Initiation*, 139.

of London, a club for the discussion of intellectual issues. However, some political interventions were made, and the League was the focus for one of these.

In the years after the Second World War the Independent Labour Party and the Common Wealth party drew together politically. By this stage both were small bodies, and shared political perspectives. Moves towards fusion were made, and were unsuccessful, but some joint work around specific issues was undertaken. An example of this was a conference on worker's control which took place on 25 April 1948. The best account of this conference, and the Leagues for Workers' Control that resulted from it, is that given by J. C. Banks in *The Libertarian*, number 27, Summer 1987. (*The Libertarian* was the then journal of Common Wealth.) From perspective of this article, the main point to note from Banks's account is that among the attenders at the conference were persons from the HOIL and the New Europe Group. (Also noted as attending was J. T. Murphy.) A follow-up to the conference saw a series of meetings on aspects of workers' control. Two of the speakers at these were members of the Mitrinović circle, Harry Rutherford (who spoke on worker's control and management on 10 June 1948) and Niall MacDermot (who spoke on ownership on 24 June 1948).²⁹ MacDermot, later a Labour MP and junior minister in the 1964-70 Labour governments, had been involved in HOIL from its early days.

Following these meetings, a London Committee for Workers' Control was set up, with plans for a delegate conference in November 1948. A statement calling delegates to the conference was issued, and Banks indicates that it was signed by C. B. Purdom – who had been editor of *New Britain* weekly in the 1930s – on behalf of the HOIL.³⁰ At the conference, Banks suggests there were 120 delegates and 30 visitors. Seven of these were from the HOIL. Banks quotes in his account from the confidential report on the conference given by W. J. Taylor to the CW national committee: 'The discussion was noteworthy for the useful comments put forward by the members of the House of Industry League'.³¹ After this, the League does not feature in Banks's account of the various activities for workers' control that resulted from this particular initiative. We can therefore conclude that, in fact,

²⁹ Reports of both meetings appeared in the *Common Wealth Review* (August 1948): 4, and of the second meeting in the *Socialist Leader* (3 July 1948): 4.

³⁰ The full list of signatories is given by Banks, *The Libertarian*, no. 27 (1987): 16.

³¹ *Ibid.* 18.

the HOIL did survive the war in some form. It participated in attempts to get a movement going on the issue of workers' control, and, as we have seen, its interventions impressed at least one other section of that movement. The New Europe Group continued, as noted, until 1957, and thus seems to be the final body in which the Mitrinović circle attempted to pursue its political interests.

THE MEMBERS OF THE HOUSE OF INDUSTRY LEAGUE

Who were the members of the HOIL? By drawing upon accounts of the League in journals such as the *Trade Unionist*, documentation in the remaining archives of the League, and memoirs and memories, we can arrive at a fairly clear picture of just who the main figures in the League were.

An important group of activists came from the Mitrinović circle. This includes the likes of Ralph Twentyman, Winifrid Gordon Fraser, Harry Rutherford and Orion Playfair. Many of these people had been involved in the New Britain Movement that preceded the League. Many of those who survived the Second World War continued to be associated with Mitrinović right up until his death in 1953. Indeed, some carried on afterwards in the activity of the New Atlantis Foundation, which, since the passing of the New Europe Group in the late 1950s and the end of the Renaissance Club in 1965, has been the last remaining organisation working on lines suggested by the thought of Mitrinović. J. T. Murphy, who, as noted, spoke behalf of the League, might perhaps not in the totally committed way of the others mentioned. Murphy had been involved with Mitrinović prior to the HOIL. His role in New Britain is noted in Rigby's biography of Mitrinović, and a section of Murphy's moving oration at Mitrinović's funeral is also reproduced by Rigby.³² The connection with Murphy, it might be noted, continued after Mitrinović's death, with some of the New Atlantis Foundation group attending Murphy's funeral in 1965.³³

A further section of HOIL members can be seen as coming from a circle around S. G. Hobson, which itself predated the HOIL. We should first note the significance of Hobson's participation. Hobson had been the author of the original articles in the *New Age* in 1912

³² Rigby, *Initiation*, 187.

³³ Noted by V. MacDermot in "Interview". Murphy died on 17 May 1965.

and 1913 on National Guilds. Hobson had a long and interesting career as a socialist activist, and apart from his involvement in the Guild movement had been a socialist candidate for parliament, Keir Hardie's secretary and a notable Fabian dissident. His autobiography, *Pilgrim to the Left*, appeared in 1938 and the final few chapters directly touch upon the HOIL and related issues.³⁴

Hobson's account suggests that there had been a prior campaign around the issue of the House of Industry, run by him and some associates. Hobson had published a book, *The House of Industry*, in 1931.³⁵ According to Hobson, there were delegate conferences on the idea in London, and meetings in other parts of the country.³⁶ Hobson mentions a number of trade unionists who supported these initiatives, which he claims bore some fruit in resolutions passed by the Trades Union Congresses of 1932 and 1933. Among these supporters were Maurice Hann, the general secretary of the Shop Assistants' Union,³⁷ George Gibson, general secretary of the Mental Hospital and Institutional Workers' Union (and subsequently the Confederation of Health Service Employees), and a TUC General Council member throughout this period,³⁸ and Stephen Smith, general secretary of the national Federation of Professional Workers. (The latter appears to have been a federation of trades unions organising non-manual workers.)³⁹ All three became vice-presidents of the House of Industry League.

³⁴ Hobson, *Pilgrim*, chapters 23-25.

³⁵ *The House of Industry*, 1931. Note that the foreword to this book was by A. M. Wall, secretary of London Trades Council, and A. A. Purcell, secretary of Manchester and Salford Trades Council.

³⁶ Hobson, *Pilgrim*, 249 ff.

³⁷ Some material on Hann can be found in Sir William Richardson's history of the Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers, and its precursors, *A Union of Many Trades*, Manchester (undated, c. 1979). Interestingly, Hann signed a round-robin letter announcing a new book club for persons associated with the labour movement published, for example, in *The Clerk* of October 1937. This appears to have been a projected alternative to the Left Book Club, other signatories including Fenner Brockway, J. F. Horrabin and Reginald Reynolds.

³⁸ Gibson was on the General Council of the TUC from 1928 to 1948. He was secretary of the MHIWU from 1912 to 1946, and of COHSE from 1946 to 1947. Some details of his career can be found in Mick Carpenter, *Working for Health*, 1988, a history of COHSE and its precursors.

³⁹ See the report of a regional conference of the Federation in the north-east in *The Natsopa Journal*, (May 1937): 8, which gives a good insight into the concerns and nature of the organisation.

Hobson suggests that his first contact with the Mitrinović circle came in 1932 when Winifrid Gordon Fraser wrote to him soliciting an article for the *New Britain Quarterly*. This tallies very closely with the records of the New Atlantis Foundation; the first letter to Sam Hobson in the files there dates from June 1932.⁴⁰ The ideas of Mitrinović clearly made a deep impact on Hobson. It can be argued that his perspective on Guild Socialism actually changed as a result of his co-operation with Mitrinović. In particular, whereas he had been an advocate of a dual system of a political House of Commons and an economic House of Industry, he found, in his own words, 'I could not evade the issue of a House of Culture.'⁴¹ Evidence to support this comes in two forms. Firstly, in the 1931 book, *The House of Industry*, there is no mention of it. In the 1936 book, *Functional Socialism*,⁴² significantly dedicated to Valerie Cooper, a key member of the Mitrinović circle, the notion of a three-fold state, with Houses of Commons, Industry and Culture, is mentioned in the first chapter. Secondly, in the archives of a House of Culture League is floated and the idea of the House of Culture discussed in some detail. This dates from December 1937.⁴³ The mutual respect between Mitrinović and Hobson can be seen in the fact noted by Rigby that, when Hobson died, it was Mitrinović who paid for his funeral.⁴⁴

Thus, there was a second group in the HOIL, consisting of Hobson and his trade union allies (some of whom, like Maurice Hann, were veterans of the earlier Guild movement). We also know from Hobson's autobiography of his connections with W. T. Colyer, a lecturer at the Central Labour College and prolific author of articles in *Plebs*, and J. H. Harley, who eorked at Glasgow University but who had been a chairman of the National Union of Journalists.⁴⁵ Both gave lectures for the League in the pre-war period.

Two other figures prominent in the HOIL were closely connected with the National Trade Union Club: W. Arthur Peacock, who became

⁴⁰ W. G. Fraser Letter File, New Atlantis Foundation, Ditchling.

⁴¹ Hobson, *Pilgrim*, 256.

⁴² S. G. Hobson, *Functional Socialism* (London: Stanley Nott, 1936).

⁴³ Document in files of New Atlantis Foundation, Ditchling.

⁴⁴ Rigby, *Initiation*, 166.

⁴⁵ Presumably this J. H. Harley is the same person as the J. H. Harley who wrote *Syndicalism*, a short book, fairly sympathetic to its subject. (Undated, but almost certainly published between March 1912 and August 1914.)

HOIL's secretary around June 1937,⁴⁶ and Ben Tillett, a vice-president of HOIL. Peacock's autobiography provides interesting reminiscences about Tillett, the Club, Mitrinović and to some extent the HOIL.⁴⁷ It is not clear quite how Tillett came into contact with the Mitrinović circle: Ralph Twentyman felt that it may have been through S. G. Hobson, but that there was a possibility that the first contact may have been made as early in 1926, at the time of the General Strike.⁴⁸ Accounts of the life of Tom Mann such as Joseph White's make it clear that Mann and Ben Tillett were very closely connected at the time the HOIL was active in the pre-Second World War period, and it seems reasonable to assume that Tillett was the connection that resulted in Tom Mann signing the Council for Workers' Control in Industry manifesto. (The same may well have applied with Jack Tanner.)

Aside from these three groups of people that the League drew upon, there were some other figures from the labour movement who had connection with the League; one such was Ben Smith MP, a vice-president of the HOIL, sometime General Organiser of the Transport and General Workers' Union. Ralph Twentyman pointed out in interview that the dominant figure in that union, Ernest Bevin, was at the time of the HOIL hostile to propaganda for the type of industrial unionism necessary for Guild Socialist schemes.⁴⁹ Interestingly, Coates and Topham note that Smith had moved a resolution favouring industrial unionism as the basis for amalgamation at a National Transport Workers' Federation Annual General Council meeting at Bristol in June 1917. The defeat of this resolution by 155,000 to 26,000 is seen by them as the end of the debate on industrial, as opposed to general, unionism in the union. Ernest Bevin had opposed the resolution from a general unionist standpoint.⁵⁰

The members of the League were, then, a varied collection involving youthful followers of Mitrinović, veteran socialist and

⁴⁶ The report of the Churches conference in the July 1937 edition of the *Trade Unionist*, by 'S. G.', notes Peacock's taking up the position of HOIL secretary. See p. 7.

⁴⁷ Peacock, *Yours*, chapter 6 for the National Trade Union Club, chapter 7 for Ben Tillett and chapter 10 for Mitrinović.

⁴⁸ Ralph Twentyman. Letter to Mike Tyldesley, 4 October 1995, supplementary to "Interview".

⁴⁹ "Interview".

⁵⁰ Ken Coates and Tony Topham, *The History of the Transport and General Workers' Union*, vol. 1, pt II (Oxford, 1991), 634.

trades union agitators, and a smallish number of trade union activists and functionaries. It is important to remember that the League was a small organisation, and Ralph Twentyman remembers it as a network of persons trying to spread its ideas, often through personal contact and discussion.⁵¹

The involvement of a number of trades unionists in the HOIL is clearly a point of some interest, and the possibility that may be a particular explanation for their participation needs consideration. In fact, the trade unionists involved seem a rather disparate group. Some were clearly involved in non-manual trades unionism (Stephen Smith, of the National Federation of Professional Workers), whereas others were from manual unions (several from the Union of Postal Workers, for instance). Politically, it is also hard to generalise. Ben Tillett had been identified with the pro-war wing of the labour movement during the First World War, but Tom Mann, who signed the workers' control manifesto in 1938, had long standing left connections. Two less well known participants in HOIL activities also emphasise the difficulty of generalisation. Pat O'Gorman, editor of the National Union of Country Officers' journal, and involved in speaking on behalf of the Council for Workers' Control of Industry,⁵² was clearly associated with the left of the trade union movement.⁵³ On the other hand, George Light, signatory to the Council's workers' control manifesto, was connected to the Oxford Group, precursor of Moral Re-Armament.⁵⁴ The only common factors appear to be either a personal interest in Guild Socialism, or involvement in a trade union with significant Guild Socialist traditions,⁵⁵ or a connection with the National Trade Union Club.

The august 1938 edition of the *Millgate Monthly*, in an article concerning the National Trade Union Club, referred to 'The Guild

⁵¹ "Interview".

⁵² Documents in the files of the New Atlantis Foundation, Ditchling.

⁵³ See Carpenter, *Working*, 194-5.

⁵⁴ See the *Trade Unionist* (November 1937), 'The Members' Who's Who', where Light's Yorkshire trade union background and his connection to the Oxford Group are mentioned.

⁵⁵ A clear example of this would be the Union of Postal Workers. Alan Clinton, in *Post Office Workers. A Trade Union and Social History* (1984), chapter 11, shows the continuing importance of the Guild Socialist tradition in the UPW. UPW activists involved in HOIL activities included Francis Andrews, editor of *The Post*, the UPW journal, and W. T. Hart, organising secretary of the union's Metropolitan branch.

Socialist Revival, which finds expression in the work of the House of Industry League'.⁵⁶ Whether the HOIL represented a full-blown revival of Guild Socialism is perhaps questionable. However, it is worth remembering that Guild Socialist ideas of workers' control were not at the top of the agenda of the labour movement in the late 1930s and the 1940s. The existence of a body seeking to propound them in the distinctly unfavourable political climate of the time, which saw the consolidation of versions of socialism – Stalinist communism and social democracy – which gave scant consideration of these questions, is in itself notable. Even down to the present, socialist seeking to find an alternative to the perceived inadequacies of Leninism and what passes today for social democracy, seek to draw upon the heritage of Guild Socialism.⁵⁷ The HOIL deserves to be remembered for seeking to keep the flower of the idea of workers' control alive in a difficult time.

Archives

New Atlantis Foundation archives, Ditchling

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⁵⁶ 'Trade Unionists' West End Club', *Millgate Monthly* (August 1938): 660. It is interesting to note that this journal also featured articles on the idea of the House of Industry by Arthur Peacock in April 1938 and on workers' control by Sam Hobson in June 1938.

⁵⁷ See Peter Hain, *Ayes to the Left* (1995), 17-19, for a recent example.

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