

THE FABIAN SOCIETY

PAST and PRESENT

BY

G. D. H. COLE

TRACT SERIES No. 258



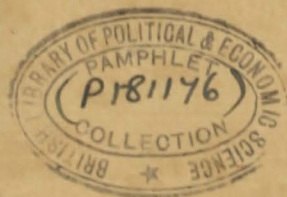
6^D

Published by The Fabian Society
11, Dartmouth Street, London, S.W.1

CONTENTS

		<i>Page</i>
1	FABIAN FUNCTIONS	
	Practical Proposals - - - - -	3
	"Permeation" - - - - -	4
2	WHO THE FABIANS ARE	
	Fabian Standards - - - - -	7
	Are the Fabians Middle Class? - - - - -	7
3	WHAT THE FABIANS ARE DOING	
	Publications - - - - -	11
	Research - - - - -	13
4	FABIANISM AND POLITICS	
	Fabians and the Labour Party - - - - -	16
	Policy Making - - - - -	17
	Socialist Propaganda Committee - - - - -	19
5	FABIAN HISTORY AND FABIAN FUTURE	
	A Word to Fabians - - - - -	22

BP161511 (258)



NOTE *This pamphlet, like all publications of the Fabian Society, represents not the collective view of the Society but only the view of the individual who prepared it. The responsibility of the Fabian Society is limited to approving the publications which it issues as embodying facts and opinions worthy of consideration within the Labour Movement. It is the aim of the Society to encourage among socialists a high standard of free and independent research.*

November, 1942

THE FABIAN SOCIETY

Past and Present

By G. D. H. COLE

The Fabian Society, in the words of its Constitution, "consists of Socialists". The same fundamental rule, to which all its members must subscribe, goes on to define this phrase by saying that the Fabian Society "therefore aims at the establishment of a society in which equality of opportunity will be assured and the economic power and privileges of individuals and classes abolished through the collective ownership and democratic control of the economic resources of the community". The rule adds that "it seeks to secure these ends by the methods of political democracy".

That, together with a profession of faith in equal citizenship open to persons "irrespective of sex, race or creed", is the whole basis of belief to which those who wish to join the Fabian Society are asked to subscribe. The words have been changed from time to time during the long life of the Society; but for some time past they appear to have given so much satisfaction that no one has even tried to alter or to enlarge upon them.

The Fabian Society was founded in 1884. Throughout its sixty years of life, it has done its best to keep the conditions of membership wide enough to admit a large diversity of views. It insists on Socialism, and does its best to define Socialism in the broadest possible terms. In all other matters of faith and doctrine, it prefers to leave its members free. There is no Fabian "orthodoxy" on matters of controversy within the Socialist movement, save to the extent to which the brief statements quoted above are regarded as controversial. Up to a point, no doubt, they can be so regarded. They would exclude an anarchist, or anyone who does not believe in political democracy. But of genuine Socialists they are meant to exclude as few as possible. The Fabian Society is not a sect: within the limits set by its affiliation to the Labour Party, which it helped to found, it is open to all democratic Socialists.

The Fabian Society was named, more than half a century ago, after a certain Roman general, Quintus Fabius Maximus Cunctator—which means 'the Delayer'. This may appear an odd way of naming a Society which has stood throughout its existence for

Socialism, and has become famous throughout the world as a planner of Socialist policies and an inspirer of Socialist ideas. For, by and large, most people tend to think of Socialists rather as rushing in where more timorous angels fear to tread than as biding their time, as Fabius did against Hannibal, from whom he saved Rome. I doubt if anyone, founding a Socialist Society nowadays, would think of calling it 'Fabian'. The name is a bit of history : it derives from the state of the British Socialist movement nearly sixty years ago.

Let me remind you. In 1884, when the Fabian Society was born, there was no Labour Party in Great Britain. The beginning of the Labour Party was sixteen years ahead, and nine years were to pass before Keir Hardie founded its forerunner, the I L P. The only pebbles on the British Socialist beach in the Society's early days were Hyndman's Social Democratic Federation and William Morris's Socialist League, which shortly after the birth of Fabianism split off from the S D F. ; and both these bodies, though they did good work for Socialism in their day and generation, were adepts at 'rushing in'. In the same year the S D F rushed into the General Election to such purpose that two of its three candidates scored respectively 27 votes against 4,695 and 32 votes against 6,342. Such miserable polls, to say nothing of other circumstances, discredited the Socialist cause ; and it was one object of the Fabians to call a halt to such tactics and to set on foot a campaign of Socialist education that would prevent similar fiascos for the future. The Fabian Society set out to spread a knowledge of Socialism ; and its propaganda played no small part in preparing the way for the wider successes of the I L P and for the coming of the Labour Party and its adoption of a broadly Socialist creed.

1 Fabian Functions

The early Fabians, though they favoured 'delay' in Parliamentary action until Socialism had acquired a substantial following, were under no illusion that delay by itself could win the day. They invented for themselves quite soon a motto. It was "*For the right moment you must wait, as Fabius did ; but when the right moment comes you must strike hard, or your waiting will have been vain and fruitless.*"

That is the attitude to which the Fabian Society has remained constant throughout its history. Between times, it has gone ahead steadily and quietly with its work of Socialist education, sending out speakers, issuing tracts, pamphlets, books and manifestos, patiently devising policies for anyone who would listen to

it—and for many who would not listen. But whenever there has come a crisis in the affairs of men, the Fabian Society has been ready to throw aside its delaying tactics and to take its stand boldly for what it has believed to be the right course of action.

Sometimes this attitude has involved the Society in a great deal of self-denial. In its early years it built up a network of local Fabian Societies over Great Britain. But in 1893, when the I L P was founded, it seemed best in the interests of Socialism to consolidate the available forces in the constituencies under its banner; and the parent Fabian Society readily acquiesced in the absorption of most of the local Fabian Societies into the I L P. During the years after 1906, when there was a great ferment of labour unrest and Socialist thought in Great Britain, a second crop of local Fabian Societies grew up; but again the parent Society readily let most of them merge themselves into the reorganised Labour Party of 1918, when local Labour Parties with individual members were first set up throughout the country. During the last few years there has been a third crop, larger than either of the others, of local Fabian Societies and Socialist Propaganda Committees under Fabian auspices, to fill the void left first by the shrinking up almost to nothing of the I L P and secondly by the decline of Labour Party activity during the war. This crop is setting splendidly just now; but I feel sure the parent Fabian Society would be as ready as ever to acquiesce in the desire of any local Fabian Society to merge itself in some new or wider body if it seemed to be in the best interests of Socialism for such a change to be made in order to secure unity of action in the Socialist cause.

PRACTICAL PROPOSALS

The truth is that the Fabian Society has always believed its mission to lie more in ideas than in organisation. During its sixty years of life it has always, in greater or less degree, combined three functions. It has tried to think out practical proposals for the reformation of particular political, social and economic evils along broadly Socialist lines, and to enlist, in support of its particular schemes, those who have been in key positions for helping to carry them out and have not had their ears stopped by vested interest to the appeal of reason; and it has tried to make plain to ordinary people who are intelligent enough to care about the possibilities of a better social system the necessity of Socialism, and the best means of achieving it. All these things it has done to such extent as its resources have allowed, at various stages in its history. For example—before there was a Labour Party in existence

1291 Fabians, largely under the inspiration of Sidney Webb, had a good deal to do with persuading the Liberal Party to adopt a more advanced programme of social reform—the Newcastle Programme of 1891. It was again Sidney Webb who drafted, in 1918, the first comprehensive programme ever put forward by the Labour Party—*Labour and the New Social Order*. Persons who had been converted by Fabian propaganda were largely responsible for the social legislation passed by the Liberal Government after 1906—until Lloyd George, instead of acting on the Fabian-inspired proposals of the Minority Report of the Poor Law Commission, again the work of the Webbs, sent the Liberals haring off after social insurance on the German model. At all times, Fabian lecturers and writers have been busy, as they are busy to-day in the midst of war, telling people about Socialism in terms which bring it down from generalities to concrete practicable proposals. It is the Fabian view that the ‘good news’ of Socialism needs putting squarely and realistically before everyone, in every class and group, who can be persuaded to listen to it.

“ PERMEATION ”

The second Fabian method, that of trying to convert those who hold the key positions, was called in the Society’s early days by the name of “ Permeation ”, and a good deal of mud was slung at the Society for trying to talk commonsense to anyone who had ears to hear instead of spending all its time speaking comfortable words to those who had been converted already. Naturally, the Fabian Society expected its ideas to get the warmest welcome from those who were already Socialists, and especially from the livelier elements in the working-class movement. But it saw no reason for confining its efforts to those who were easiest to persuade. Not that Fabian ‘permeation’ ever really meant simply the conversion of a few leading officials or ‘high-ups’. Far from it. The person whom the Fabian Society, on this side of its work, most wishes to convert is the man or woman who is in the best position for influencing others, either over a wide area or in his or her comparatively narrow group. Such persons may be Civil Servants or professional men and women or Trade Union or Co-operative leaders, local as well as national, or parsons with a loyal following in their own churches, or speakers with a gift for moving men, or regimental officers or common soldiers, or shop stewards, or Civil Defence Workers who use their chances of leading discussions among their fellows during hours of waiting for something to happen. They may, in effect, be anybody who is a real living person, trying to think for himself and not content to be merely

a passive recipient of mass-propaganda or a feebly acquiescent victim of things as they are. The Fabian Society regards each individual in its relatively tiny membership as a stone thrown into a pool, spreading rings of influence all round him.

2 Who The Fabians Are

The Fabian membership has always been small, not because the Society wants it to be small, but because reasoning has, and probably always will have, a limited appeal. The Fabian Society's essential appeal is to certain particular kinds of people, and not to all and sundry. It wants, of course, to influence as many people as it possibly can; and it has been, throughout its long history, an agent in converting to Socialism, directly or indirectly, very many times as many persons as have joined it. But it does not expect more than a small fraction of those to whom it appeals actually to join its ranks, or at any rate the ranks of the parent Society. Of course, the more who do join it the better it is pleased; and it seeks to enrol in its local Societies and groups many more than are likely to become national members of the parent body. This is partly because the effectiveness of its work depends on supplying its members with a great deal of literature, itself the product of a great deal of careful research. Such a service cannot be financed, even with the aid of some large donations, without a rate of subscription that is bound to seem high to those who are used to small weekly payments. The parent Fabian Society cannot afford weekly collections from a membership scattered all over the country. It has to collect an annual sum from each member; and this in practice limits its membership. Ten shillings and sixpence a year is not much more than twopence a week; but it is apt to seem much more, when it is asked for as a lump sum. Moreover, our ten shilling and sixpence members contribute little or nothing to the general expenses of the Society: they get back from it their full ten shillings and sixpence worth in the actual expenses of supplying them with literature and keeping them in touch with the Society's work. So the parent Society has to get guinea and two-guinea subscriptions from all who can afford to pay them—and of course a good deal more from some of its members, or it could not go on at all. The local Fabian Societies do not suffer under this particular handicap, and can therefore aim at a wider membership.

But, even in their case, there are reasons why the Fabian membership is likely not to become large, in comparison with that of other political bodies seeking to exert a widespread influence.

Although of late the Fabian Society has been growing fast, and though it looks like growing faster still, it will never, in the nature of things, become a mass-movement. It does not aim at mass-conversions or at mass emotional appeals. While recognising their political necessity and value, it leaves them to others, within whose province they lie. Mass-appeal is a different art from research and education; and the Fabian Society prefers to get on with its own different job, which is to put the right equipment of ideas and information into the possession of that not inconsiderable body of persons (some hundreds of thousands at the least, if they could all be reached) who believe in the value of getting at the real facts and thinking hard about them, and are aware that, even if politics depend fundamentally on men's emotions, emotional appeals by themselves will not get far in practice, unless clear thinking comes to their aid when it is a question of translating desires and ideals into positive achievements.

This type of clear thinking is not a monopoly of any class of specialists, or of those who have received the benefit of any particular kind of education. Men and women who are prepared to use their brains for thinking lucidly about politics are found in all classes; and in all classes they are at present the exceptions. It is much easier for the educated as well as for the uneducated man, in the ordinary sense of the words, to live by the rule of prejudice and tradition than to think things out in an objective way. Indeed, in this respect the highly educated are often among the worst offenders, both because they are blinded by social prejudice and because, even when they are not, they are very apt to think unrealistically, and with much too little understanding of the wants and sentiments of ordinary people. Those who have missed the chance of higher education often offend also against the rule of reason, and with much better excuse. The educated obscurantist turns his back on the truth, because it offends his prejudices or seems to involve knowing things too mean for his mind. The uneducated man, on the other hand, is apt to be unable to get his aspirations into a shape in which they are realisable, and consequently tends to flounder about in generalities.

The Fabian Society consists, to a quite remarkable extent, of reasonable people—by which I mean people who believe in using their reason and in not allowing themselves to be the victims either of prejudice or of intellectual dilettantism or of muddled good-will. It is bound to make fairly high demands of its members in these respects, in order to be true to its essential function. Not, of course, that it requires that all its members shall be original

thinkers, or exceptionally able persons. What it demands of them is not exceptional ability, but a kind of intellectual courage which will not let them run away from the facts of contemporary society, whether it likes them or not. It calls, not for high educational attainments, but for a positive state of mind which refuses to be satisfied with phrases or to take things for granted, and insists on having everything carefully examined again and again, in order to find out whether what once held good holds good still, and to seek new ways of dealing with changing situations instead of trying to meet them by the application of ancient formulæ that no longer fit the facts.

FABIAN STANDARDS

This means that the Fabian Society has, within the limits imposed by its resources, to set itself a high standard in both research and the propaganda which it bases on its research. It is appealing to people who *know*, whether about the hewing of coal or the drafting of forms; it cannot afford to be ignorant or silly. Nor, as it believes in reason and the use of reason in argument, is it prepared to tell lies or compound slogans which it knows to be false for the sake of producing some immediate emotional result. It can be said with confidence that during the whole of its history the Fabian Society has steadfastly endeavoured, subject to human frailty,

- (1) To check and countercheck the *facts* contained in its publications;
- (2) To *argue*, fairly and fully, the case for any proposal which it puts forward, and not to put forward any case which it does not believe to be substantially true, merely because it would like to believe it true, or because it forms part of the recognised Socialist 'orthodoxy' of the moment;
- (3) To check, by consultation with those who know, the practicability, under existing conditions, of any proposals which it makes—i.e. not to be visionary or foolish.

These three ambitions may sound modest. But they are not particularly easy to work out in practice. They involve a fairly high standard of accuracy and competence in work, and sometimes a measure of self-abnegation, which the Society has often in fact employed, in withholding from the public work which has seemed to it to fall short of the standard it tries to keep.

ARE THE FABIANS MIDDLE-CLASS?

A society which takes this line inevitably, as matters stand to-day, has to face two sorts of misrepresentation. It will be

attacked by some working-class people as being "middle-class" and by some people, including members of all classes, as being a home of the "long-haired intelligentsia". Let me deal first with the second line of attack. So far from attracting what are called the "Bloomsburyites", the Fabian Society definitely repels them by its practicality. It is always nosing about in the drains, and attending to all sorts of sanitary affairs that have no romance about them in the eyes of the intellectual revolutionary remote from the realities of working-class life. The "Bloomsburyites" do not join the Fabian Society: they prefer as a rule something much more exciting and a good deal less solid. I ought perhaps to apologise at this point for seeming to insult the inhabitants of Bloomsbury who do happen to belong to the Fabian Society; but they will readily understand that there are two Bloomsburys, one a district of London including the British Museum and the other a Cloudcuckooland which has somehow usurped its name. The 'Bloomsburyites' belong to this second Bloomsbury; and it is of them I say that they do not belong to the Fabian Society.

The second charge—that of being middle-class—involves a more subtle misconception. It is a most curious habit of the English people to regard as belonging to the "middle class" almost everybody who has received a higher education, even if his father is a miner or an agricultural labourer, or if he himself has hewed coal or served at the plough. The Labour movement unwaveringly demands a broad highway leading to the summit of the educational system: yet many Labour adherents regard as having dropped out of their class anyone who advances at all far along this highway. But one purpose of higher education—it should be the main purpose, though often at present it is not—is to teach people to think clearly and to be able to express their thoughts. The Fabian Society therefore is bound to have a more obvious and immediate appeal to those educated persons who are not blinded by their prejudices than to most of those who have missed the chance of higher education. Exceptional men and women—especially those who find their opportunity later, in the adult education movement, but not only they—can rise above the defects of the educational system and think clearly for themselves even though they have never been taught to think. But they are bound to be the exceptions, wherever the demands of thought are exacting and the things that need to be thought about inherently difficult or technical.

It is therefore unavoidable that a society such as the Fabian Society should consist largely of members who have in one way or another become highly educated. Such members may be workmen, or salary-earners, or anything else you please. But

there will be, until things change a lot, a strong propensity in certain working-class quarters to dub them "middle-class", merely because they are educated, whatever their jobs, or their family connections, or their opinions, or their level of income may be. In this sense only is the Fabian Society a "middle-class" body, and not in the least ashamed of being so, but ashamed only of a social system so unfair and lop-sided as to regard education as the prerogative of a single social class.

A society of educated men and women (including of course 'self-educated' men and women) the Fabian Society must remain, if it is to do its work well. It must set a high standard for those who work for it, either in devising plans and policies or in spreading the results. It must remain, in that sense, a society of specialists—specialists in the art of clear, courageous, Socialist thinking and planning for the future. That it is this should be its strongest recommendation in the eyes of the Labour movement, which stands in need of just this sort of help. Whoever you are, if you want legal advice you go to a lawyer. Trade Unionists do so every day, and would be failing in their task if they did not. If you want bricks laid you go to a bricklayer. Persons who dislike and despise bricklayers do this as much as others, and would not get their houses well-built if they did not. Similarly, if the Socialist movement wants research done into social and economic problems, it has to go to the people who have trained themselves to understand these problems, or it will not get good results. This is why the Fabian Society is the organisation to which educated Socialists naturally gravitate. If it gave up this character, if it tried to turn into another sort of organisation, it would lose the capacity to do its own special Socialist job well, and it is very doubtful whether it would develop a capacity to do any other.

3 What The Fabians Are Doing

At any rate that is the Fabian 'line'. Let us try to see what it means in practice—in terms of what the Fabian Society is actually doing, or attempting to do. There are now, in November 1942, about 3,000 of us—members of the parent Fabian Society, apart from the members of our 67 local Fabian Societies scattered over the country. That, by the way, represents a remarkable rate of increase; for a year ago the main Society had only 2,070 members, and the local Societies numbered no more than 14. Moreover, our pace of growth has been limited of late, not by the

numbers who are ready to join us, but by our ability to undertake the necessary work of local organisation. It would not serve our purpose to let anyone who feels like forming a local Fabian Society go ahead and form it without making as sure as we can that the Society, when it has been formed, will act in accordance with Fabian methods and the Fabian spirit. We have to keep our standards high, in local as well as in national work; and that involves care in picking our people, and seeing to it that local Societies are not started by enthusiasts who, however well-intentioned, may do the Fabian movement more harm than good.

Lest this sound unduly deterrent, let us see what it means in terms of the kinds of people we wish to attract. A great deal of our research work needs the reinforcement of local information, and the criticism of those who are in close touch with local conditions. Suppose we are setting out to make a study of some contemporary social occurrence—Evacuation, for example, on which we have published a substantial book—we depend absolutely on the help of our members who know the actual conditions in different parts of the country. The same thing would apply to housing, or health services, or education, or to any of a hundred other problems that we might attempt to survey in an objective way. In such cases, we want as members the Socialists who have been active in connection with these services in their own areas, whether as Councillors or as social workers or as active participants in the local working-class movement. Nor is this help needed only for the Society's central work. We expect our local membership to be prepared to do local research and survey work that will be of help to the Labour Group on the local Council, or to the local Labour Party or Trades Council or Cooperative Society. We want to get into our ranks in each area the men and women who know things because they do things; and we believe we can help them as much as they can help us.

This, I hope, makes it clear what we want our local Societies to be and to do. We want them, of course, to be propagandists for Socialism as well as research workers; but in our view the best kind of propaganda they can engage in is very often that which emerges directly from their own study of their local conditions and their success in relating it to the national policies which the Society as a whole is working out.

All this, if it is to go well in the localities, puts a very big burden of work on the parent Society. If you were to visit our offices at 11 Dartmouth Street, Westminster, you would appreciate what this rapid increase in membership has involved. We have no money to spare for expensive accommodation; for we need

it all for financing our research and spreading its results. Consequently, in relation to what the Society is doing, it is ridiculously under-housed. It is also, for lack of money, seriously understaffed. Crowded into a small and inconvenient building are the general offices of the Fabian Society, the Research Department, the Library, the Publications Department, the Bookshop and Despatch Department. The very active Colonial and International Bureaux, and the offices of the Socialist Propaganda Committee and also of the newly founded Industrial Advisory Committee are across the way, crowded out of the main building. The Women's Group, and a large number of other special activities, fit themselves in where they can; and we try to provide a centre for meetings for a number of our comrades from overseas who are in exile as a result of the Nazi occupation of Europe. It is ten to one that, when you call, you will find every room fully occupied, and even have some difficulty in getting a chair.

The reader may well ask how this congestion squares with what I said about the Society being understaffed. I can assure him that it does square. Although our staff is too large for our premises, it is much too small for the work we are trying to do. Moreover, as we cannot pay enough people to do even the regular office work for us, we have to supplement the services of the paid staff by using volunteers, not only for research (practically all our research work is unpaid), but also for office jobs. We can always do with more volunteers, for what is called 'donkey work' as well as for research, though we cannot promise them as comfortable office quarters as we should like to offer them if we could do it without skimping our work.

PUBLICATIONS

What does all this activity lead to? In the first place, it leads to publication—of books, pamphlets, periodicals, cyclo-styled memoranda, covering a wide field. *Fabian News*, our official organ, is essentially a news-sheet of our activities, meant for members and indispensable to them, but with no room, in these days of paper shortage, to do more than announce and chronicle the crowded hours of the Society's life. Through it, we tell our members about our publications, our summer schools and week-end schools and conferences (which are always crowded out), the lunch meetings organised by the Society and its groups and bureaux, and as far as space allows the activities of our local societies. *Fabian News* does duty in place of many notices; and any member who fails to study it carefully is not doing his job.

Fabian Quarterly, the organ of our Research Department, is

a journal of a different sort. In it, we publish special research articles and reports which are either too short or too specialised to be issued in pamphlet or booklet form, but are of real, though sometimes only of temporary, importance to our members as material for their Socialist work. There, too, we record our research activities, and give room for controversies about questions on which opinion needs to be formed. But most of the product of our research appears in books or pamphlets. Our series of *Fabian Tracts* has now reached number 256, *A Word on the Future to British Socialists*, which is an attempt to face the essentially new problems confronting our movement as a result of the war. *Fabian Tracts* go right back to the beginning of the Society, and include the invaluable *Facts for Socialists* which, first issued in 1887, have, for upwards of half a century, supplied generations of propagandists with good ammunition for shooting at the enemies of our cause. Side by side with the *Tracts* we have our younger *Research Series*, each dealing with a special problem from a practical Socialist angle. Recent examples of these are No. 64, *Community Feeding in Wartime*, and No. 65, *The Wool Industry in War and Peace*. This *Research Series* is meant to be solidly constructive, and needs more than cursory reading, though it is simply and straightforwardly written. It is intended for readers who want the hard facts as well as the conclusions, in order that they may be well equipped for arguing the Socialist case. Where we can, we produce the results of our research in the form of pamphlets, so as to keep them cheap. But some things that need saying cannot be said in a pamphlet, and need full-length presentation in book-form. We believe that the books in which we embody many of the major results of our research are among our most important products, and that we have succeeded in keeping their quality high. Our latest book deals with *Trade Associations*—a mine of information for anyone who wants to study the recent growth of restrictive trading monopolies and their methods of exploiting the consuming public.

Our newest venture is a third series of pamphlets, issued under the auspices of our Socialist Propaganda Committee. This series is definitely meant to be more popular than the others. It is really two series—first, some very simply written pamphlets, either describing facts which Socialists ought to know, or putting the essentials of the Socialist case; and secondly, a number of open letters addressed to particular groups of persons whom we want to interest in Socialism. To the first of these groups belong *How the Russians Live* and *Take Over the War Industries*—the one descriptive and the other definitely propagandist and occasional:

to the latter belong the *Letters* to a Soldier, a Doctor, an Industrial Manager, a Student, a Woman Munition Worker, a Country Clergyman, and so on—each putting forward a particular appeal, and each bringing to us a fresh group of recruits to the Socialist cause.

Then we have two other journals—*Empire*, the organ of our exceedingly successful Colonial Bureau, which exists to focus Socialist opinion on problems of empire and of colonial development and exploitation; and *France and Britain*, which exist to build up a community of sentiment and idea between two neighbouring countries whose close mutual understanding is indispensable for the future settlement of Europe. The Anglo-French Committee which is responsible for *France and Britain* is but one of the sections of our International Bureau, which is seeking to establish co-operation over a much wider field and has committees for joint action between British Socialists and those of a number of countries, including a vigorous Anglo-Soviet Committee.

RESEARCH

Parallel to this activity in international matters is the work we are doing on home affairs through our Research Department, which is the pivot on which the whole of our work in home affairs is meant to turn. Until a few years ago the New Fabian Research Bureau was an independent body, working in friendship with the Fabian Society, but apart from it. The New Fabian Research Bureau was founded in 1931, during the period of office of the second Labour Government, and as the result of a good deal of preparatory work during the preceding years. Its founders, who included, besides many of those now in leading positions in the Society, such men as Attlee, Cripps, Dalton, Arthur Henderson, Bevin and Pritt—a good mixed bag—felt the urgent need in the Socialist movement for a new organ of collective thinking and planning for a better social order. So they set to work, and ever since 1931 the results of their efforts have been flowing forth in a steady stream of constructive research. Originally, there was associated with the New Fabian Research Bureau a parallel body designed to conduct propaganda based upon its research. But this body—the Society for Socialist Inquiry and Propaganda—did not survive; and for some time the effectiveness of the N F R B was limited by its lack of adequate local contacts. Then, in 1939, the N F R B and the Fabian Society were fused into a single body, and the gain to both has been immense. The research work thereafter reached directly a wider membership, and was thus passed on more effectively to others; and the Fabian Summer School, the

lecturing work, and the other activities of the older Society got a freshness and a more solid content which greatly increased their influence. Moreover, whereas the Fabian Society had lost most of its local Societies, and N F R B had founded only a very few local Research Groups, the combined body has been able to go forward with a new drive for local contacts; and the place which S S I P was meant to fill is being taken by the new Societies and Groups which are being formed under the auspices of the Socialist Propaganda Committee.

The research work now undertaken by the Society covers a wide range. As our financial resources are scanty—terribly scanty in relation to the tasks we are called upon to undertake—it has nearly all to be done by our members in their spare time, and on a voluntary basis. We have no rule about its organisation. A matter needing research goes sometimes to a committee of the Society, and sometimes to a single member; but in either case, when it is done, it undergoes a fire of criticism from readers appointed by the Executive. Our instructions to our readers are simple. They are asked to say, not whether they agree with what has been written, but only whether the job has been competently done from a definitely Socialist point of view. I have said earlier that, within our general profession of Socialist faith, we as a Fabian Society have no rigid orthodoxy. We believe in free Socialist inquiry, and in publishing the results of such inquiry whether we agree with them or not. None of our publications represent the views of the Fabian Society as such; for, beyond the general declaration of Socialist faith embodied in the rules, which I quoted at the beginning, the Fabian Society has no collective views on particular questions. There is no Fabian ‘party line’—no more than a common determination to work for Socialism and democracy on a broad basis of agreement which is rather implicit in the entire record of the Society than set down anywhere in so many words.

The Society wants this to be clearly understood—for it is very easy to misunderstand. Most Socialist bodies have Annual Conferences at which they decide upon their policies, which are thereafter supposed to be binding on their members. The Fabian Society’s annual gathering is a business meeting, which does not, save quite exceptionally, deal at all with questions of policy in the ordinary sense. It is not precluded from dealing with them; for it is always open to the members, at the annual meeting, to criticise the Society’s publications or its conduct of the Society’s policy during the year. But in practice this hardly ever happens. The Executive may be criticised for not having done more than

it has done, or for having tackled some problem of Socialist research in the wrong way; but it is hardly ever confronted with any proposal to pin down its activities to a definite line. This is because our principle of fostering free Socialist research and publishing the results without attempting to reach detailed agreement is understood and valued by our members.

4. Fabianism and Politics

There are two reasons why the Fabian Society attaches particular importance to preserving this undogmatic attitude. We believe there is need, somewhere in the Socialist movement, for a body which is entirely free to think out and to give publicity to new ideas, even where they run counter to Socialist orthodoxies inherited from the past. Socialism is not a set of fixed dogmas, always ready to be applied irrespective of time and place. It is a set of principles, which need continual re-interpretation in the light of changing needs and conditions. There is always a danger of mistaking dogmas for principles, and of allowing policies and programmes to become ossified; and this danger can be held off only by continual fresh thinking of an essentially objective sort. A political party can never be quite free to do this, because it has to act solidly in support of a united policy in order to achieve its ends. But the Fabian Society is not a political party, and its object is to influence others rather than to carry out its ideas in practice. It is organised for thought and discussion, and not for electoral action, which it leaves to other bodies, though it encourages its members, in their individual capacities, to play an active part in the work of these other bodies. It counts among its members a great many leading members of Local Labour Parties, Trade Unions, Co-operative Societies, and other working-class agencies; a large number of Labour Members of Parliament and of Labour representatives on municipal and other local authorities; and it expects all its members to take an active part in the political work of the Socialist movement, in their several spheres. But as a Society it keeps itself apart from electoral affairs, and values its freedom from the day-to-day exigencies of party politics. Thought must be free if it is to remain alive; and thinking about politics and economics is the Fabian Society's special job.

The second reason is closely connected with the first. The chief body of opinion which the Fabian Society seeks to influence is the Labour movement. But it would be entirely fatal to our prospects if we, as a body of people who specialise in plans and ideas, were to produce a programme of our own, separate from

and in rivalry with the accepted programmes of the Labour Party and the Trade Unions, and were we to attempt to force our programme down the throats of the millions whose lives it would vitally affect. It is legitimate and necessary for the Fabian Society continually to throw out ideas and suggestions for notice by those who have the task of formulating the official programmes, and to hope that these ideas and suggestions will influence official policy. But our chance of exerting this constructive influence would be gone if we appeared to be pushing our own programme against the official programmes.

That is precisely what has happened to other Socialist bodies which have tried to act in this way. The I L P and the Socialist League in turn got the reputation of trying to force their own particular medicines down the throats of the Labour Party and the Trade Unions. Many of the leaders of these bodies thereupon refused to have anything to do with them, and denounced them as bodies of irresponsible persons who were trying to teach their grandmothers to suck eggs. It does not matter, for the present purpose, whether the policies advocated by the I L P and the Socialist League were right or wrong. Personally, I hold that they were mainly right. The point is that they were put forward in such a way that there was no chance of their being listened to, and that any fool who got up and denounced them as the work of a bunch of superior intellectual idiots was certain of rapturous applause. The Fabian Society does not mean to fall into that error. It is not trying to push anything down anybody's throat. It simply researches and thinks, publishes the results of its thinking in speech and writing—and hopes for the best. It trusts to the wisdom of the common people to ensure that what it does well will in course of time pass into the general stock of Socialist ideas and policy, and that what it does badly will be set aside.

FABIANS AND THE LABOUR PARTY

That has been the Fabian way ever since it helped to found the Labour Party more than forty years ago. All that time the Fabian Society has been affiliated to the Labour Party, and has never quarrelled with it, even if again and again many Fabians have disapproved of something the party has done. We have watched other Socialist bodies break their heads against a brick wall, and knock their brains out in the process. We, as a Society, have sat tight, leaving our individual members to make the running in support of this or that idea through the local Labour Parties or other bodies to which they belong, but refusing to commit the Society collectively on any internal quarrel—jealously guarding

our independence of thought and seeing to it that our identity as a Socialist body is maintained. For though we are affiliated to the Labour Party and working in loyalty to it, let it be clearly understood that the Fabian Society is not simply a part of the Labour Party, but an independent body of persons organised for furthering the Socialist cause.

It is of vital importance that both our numbers and others who have dealings with us shall understand this difference. We cannot as a Society be simply a part of the Labour Party, because Socialism is not simply a political question. Socialism is a theory and a way of life: it is what some people call a religion and others an ethical creed. It involves political action for achieving many of its ends; and for this purpose there is need of a political party committed to a Socialist programme. But Socialism involves much besides this—much that is not 'politics' in any ordinary sense. The Fabian Society, when it wishes to act politically, acts as a part of the Labour Party. But this is not all it does, and in view of its special character, its non-political work is fully as important as that part of its work which falls within the field of politics.

For example, the Fabian Society has among its members a good sprinkling of men and women from many different professions—doctors, teachers, industrial managers and technicians, and so on. It wants all these persons to face as Socialists the special problems of their own professions, and to work out, not merely how these professions ought to be organised in a Socialist Society, but what can be done in them now both to improve the immediate quality of their service to the community, and to lead on towards their reorganisation on sounder lines. What Fabians are trying to do in these spheres of action is hardly politics at all—certainly not 'party politics'; but it is of immense importance for creating in the key positions of Society the states of mind and preparation that will make Socialism work, if and when the politicians succeed in establishing it. Nor is it of less importance in the immediate cause of human happiness and decency under the existing order; for every doctor, or industrial manager or teacher who becomes a convert to Fabian Socialism is one more man or woman holding a key position who appreciates that his job is to work in terms of fellowship and social equality with others, irrespective of class or status, for improving the quality of human life.

POLICY-MAKING

A few examples of what the Society is doing in these fields of action will serve to illustrate what I mean. We are getting

together a group of Socialists who hold positions as managers or technicians in industrial concerns to work out and discuss with our Trade Union members the forms of management and control of industry that ought to be established in a democratic society; and in that way we are trying to build a bridge between the workers 'by hand and brain' for the essential tasks of Socialist construction. Again, on the economic side, we have a group of members busy studying the forms of wartime State control in industry and commerce, in order to find out what ought to be kept in being after the war, and how the system of control needs to be changed and adapted in order to fit in with the requirements of Socialist planning. On the social side, we have had a group working on the problems of Social Security; and this group, having given important evidence to the Beveridge Committee, is now busy on a comprehensive book dealing with the reconstruction of the social services as a whole. These are only a few instances of what the Society is doing to enlist the help of the many specialists who are among its members, and to ensure that Socialists who have expert knowledge are given every opportunity of putting their wisdom and experience at the disposal of the whole Labour movement.

We of the Fabian Society wish most heartily that we could do more than we are doing in these fields—especially in these days of war. For in wartime it is exceptionally hard to get people together; and we, like other societies, are badly hampered by blackout, evacuation, and difficulties of travel, as well as by the much harder work that most of our members are doing as their contribution to the war effort. If, in spite of all these difficulties, the Society's activities are to-day greater and more varied than they have ever been, that is no reason for our feeling satisfied; for the times have aroused in many more men and women a readiness to respond to the Socialist appeal and to perform prodigies of energy beyond what they would have deemed possible in normal times. We have to recognise that we have touched only a tiny fraction of those who would be ready to help us if we could get near to them and explain to them where we stand and what we want them to do. Our resources are so pitifully limited in relation to our opportunities that we are continually conscious of a dozen opportunities missed for every one that we are able to take. We can avoid this only to the extent to which our present members not only work for us, but also bring in others, and thus widen the range of what we can put in hand. The experiences of the past year or two have sufficiently shown us that the members are waiting to be made, as fast as any of us can get round to the job of making them.

SOCIALIST PROPAGANDA COMMITTEE

Especially is this the lesson of what has happened during the past year, since we launched our Socialist Propaganda Committee. It is worth while to explain how this Committee came into being. Every year the Fabian Society runs a Summer School, which is at once a holiday in pleasant country surroundings, and an opportunity for many of our keener members from all over the country to get together and discuss their common problems. In 1941 our Summer School met soon after the Nazi onslaught on the Soviet Union, just when the Russians were being forced back dangerously towards Moscow by the terrific weight of the German offensive. Those of us who were present were all keyed up by the sense of the war having become something new and different, and much more vital for the future of our civilisation, as a result of the German attack on Russia. We felt an intense sympathy with our Russian comrades, an immense desire to do all we could to help them, and a sense of obligation to join hands with them not only in winning the war in a military sense, but in winning it for Socialism.

In this mood, we felt ashamed at the little we were doing and at the little that anybody was doing in Great Britain to bring Socialism home to the people. We compared what was being done with the work of Keir Hardie, Robert Blatchford, and other early propagandists for Socialism, and we found ourselves wanting. There arose among us, without any premeditation, the demand for a new Socialist drive; and we, as Fabians, could see no body other than our own Society through which that drive could be organised. Tiny as our numbers and resources were in relation to the need, we determined to do what we could, and the Socialist Propaganda Committee came into being.

Our original idea, in creating the S P C, was not to push the Fabian Society, but to reanimate the propagandist activities of the Local Labour Parties and other bodies, larger than ourselves, upon which the work would most naturally have devolved. We did this where we could; but very soon, almost against our will, we found ourselves creating new Fabian Societies up and down the country. This was not because we aimed at becoming ourselves a really big body: far from it. But we found there was need, and a demand, nearly everywhere, for a nucleus of convinced Socialists who could meet together for Socialist education, and for improving their usefulness as apostles of Socialism, and who would be ready to turn their hands to any job that needed doing for the wider Labour movement in each particular place—from working up facts and policies for the Labour group on the local Council to training bands of speakers or writing letters to the local

press and focusing local attention on pressing grievances and problems. The figures of the growth of local Fabian Societies during the past year speak for themselves, and it is a plain fact that we could already have founded twice as many if we had had enough speakers and organisers to help them start.

5 Fabian History & Fabian Future

This is not bad going for a Society which I have heard more than once described as being already in its second childhood. There were many who, when Sidney and Beatrice Webb and Bernard Shaw retired from active work for the Fabian Society—though not, I am glad to say, from a keen interest in its doings—prophesied that our end was near. We owe a tremendous debt to the Webbs and to Shaw for the great work they did in building the Society and keeping it lively and original for so many years; but we are not handing in our checks now that they are no longer available to give us active help. Their names will be for ever associated with what we do, and we shall be able to do it better for having their record behind us. But we do not propose to live on the legacy they have left us. We are doing our own job in our own way, honouring our fathers and our mothers, but trying to advance beyond them, as good children ought to do. Which does not mean that we are the less grateful to them for not having embarrassed us by turning into 'old fogeys' in their latter days, as so many of the pioneers have done. It has been of immense help to us that the Webbs, more than anyone else, have helped British people to understand the Soviet Union and to build the needed bridge between the older Socialism and the new. The Webbs' *Soviet Communism* is not our Bible; for we do not deal in Bibles. But it has helped not a little in the new renaissance of the Fabian Society during these latter years.

This brings me back to saying a little more about the Fabian Society's history, of which I think we have some right to be reasonably proud. I have space to say but little about it here; but those who are interested in it will find the story told in full in Edward R. Pease's *History of the Fabian Society*, which can be got from the Fabian Bookshop; and a part of it is also fascinatingly presented in one of our tracts, Bernard Shaw's *Early History of the Fabian Society*, obtainable from the same source. Our Society began, sixty years ago, as a quite tiny group, and 'Fabianism' became a word known all the world over when there were only a few hundred Fabians. That worldwide reputation came to us chiefly

after the publication of *Fabian Essays*, in which Sidney Webb, Bernard Shaw, and the other leaders of the movement in its early days stated their essential philosophy of Socialism. *Fabian Essays* appeared in 1889—the year in which the present writer, who is now the Society's Chairman, was born; and after so many years the book still sells. It sells because nowhere else is there written down so clear an exposition of what has been called 'English Socialism'—a conception of Socialism which fits it in with the English tradition, and shows the Socialist doctrine as the logical outcome of the Benthamite utilitarian philosophy which provided the main driving force for nineteenth-century social reform. *Fabian Essays* showed that it was no longer possible, in face of modern capitalist development, to pursue "the greatest happiness of the greatest number" under the ægis of individualist liberalism. It showed that reform was bound to become sterile unless it based itself solidly on the public possession of the basic instruments of production, which were fated to become the tools of anti-social monopoly unless they were transferred from private exploitation to common ownership and control. The conception of Socialism outlined in *Fabian Essays* was, like Marx's, an evolutionary concept; unlike Marx's, it was conceived in times of the British tradition and admitted of 'gradualism' in that it envisaged Socialism as coming into existence by steps and stages, rather than all at once.

Fabian Essays was by no means the only noteworthy product of the Society in those early days. The early Fabians, few as they were, poured forth a spate of tracts which served as valuable ammunition for the active propagandists of Keir Hardie's I.L.P. It was largely by the sales of these tracts and booklets that the message of Socialism was put into the hands of those who were best in a position to pass it on to the general body of the people—active local Trade Unionists and Co-operators, progressives who were becoming more and more dissatisfied with the Liberal Party, Christians who had come to the conclusion that Christ's Kingdom needed to be realised in this world as well as the next, idealists and workers for human welfare in every field of social life. The Fabians, of course, were not the inventors of this kind of propaganda, but they raised it to a higher level and saw to it that their tracts were always good solid value for the price they cost. The most successful of all these smaller Fabian publications was H. G. Wells's famous tract *This Misery of Boots*, still one of the most effective pieces of popular Socialist exposition.

It has been one of the main difficulties of the Fabian Society in these latter days that there is no longer the same zeal as there once was for selling Socialist literature. The Fabians were never

in a position to spread their own publications far and wide. Their membership was much too small for that. But others did the work for them—I L P branches, local Trades Councils or Trade Union groups, and later local Labour Parties, after the Labour Party had brought into being a local political organisation of its own. But latterly there has been, mainly since the eclipse of the I L P, a sad falling off in the Labour movement's equipment for the sale of literature; and the machinery that is needed for this purpose is only now being slowly and painfully re-built. Yet how, without it, can the Labour movement hope to gain, not merely voting supporters, but well-armed and intelligent exponents of the Socialist case? Very much of the movement's shortcoming to-day is the outcome of its failure to keep this essential link in the work of propaganda in good condition; and, until this fault is remedied, even the best written advocacy of Socialism is fated to fail of its full effect.

A WORD TO FABIANS

The purpose of this brief pamphlet has been twofold—to tell Socialists something about the Fabian Society, and to tell those who are attracted to it how they can serve it best. They can serve it best by working hard for it along its own special lines and not by trying to turn it into anything other than what it is. Above all, they must avoid setting it up as a body apart from the main stream of the Labour movement, or as in any sense a rival to the mass organisations which it exists to serve. They must preserve its character as a Society carried on mainly for research and for propaganda based on research, and they must remember always that research cannot be effective unless it is free always to seek and to confront the truth. They must not seek to set up any Fabian 'orthodoxy', or to put fetters upon one another in this quest. Always, to the best of their power, they must try to serve the wider Labour movement, and not to "come the clever" over it; and always they must be ready to sacrifice the immediate interests of the Fabian Society when that is necessary in the greater cause of Socialism. If they do that, they will be understood and liked; whereas if there is any hint about them of playing the superior person they will do nothing but harm, however excellent their intentions may happen to be.

The Fabian Society is, I feel sure, in these days a good society to belong to. It has, what so many people lack, and feel that they lack, a feeling of hope about it, and a sense of working together for a cause that is worth while. It is, you will agree if you know it from the inside, a singularly friendly and unquarrelsome society.

Its members are no more agreed about everything than you can expect several thousand people who are in the habit of using their brains to be ; but they are agreed in thinking the Fabian Society well worth while and in supporting its attitude of wide tolerance and frank and open discussion. They may differ ; but that does not cause them to quarrel, because they have a democratic belief that out of the frank statement of their several points of view, and the discussions to which these statements give rise, the right course of action stands a good chance of emerging more clearly than it could by any other means. That is why, in a world that gives so much ground for unhappiness, we Fabians give on the whole the impression of being a happy family of plotters and planners for a better future which we feel we are really helping to bring to pass. A sense of thwartedness besets so many people nowadays that it is a real relief to get into an atmosphere of busy hopefulness and friendly working together. The Fabian Society does not feel thwarted : it is much too busy getting on with its job to suffer from cynicism or disillusionment, or to waste its time in unproductive grumbling.

HELP BUILD THE FUTURE

The Fabian Society has the following Departments :

HOME RESEARCH

Social Security ; Education ; Local Government ;
Control of Industry ; Economic Reconstruction.

COLONIAL BUREAU

Status and opportunities of Colonial Peoples ;
British Imperial Policy ; "Empire" bi-monthly journal.

INTERNATIONAL BUREAU

International Reconstruction , economic and political.
weekly lunch-time meetings ; "France & Britain,"
monthly journal.

WOMEN'S GROUP

Women's work, wages, status and conditions.

SOCIALIST PROPAGANDA COMMITTEE

Pamphlets ; Lectures ; Socialist education.

INDUSTRIAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE

For all persons actively engaged in the organisation
of Industry for the efficient prosecution of the war.

Details from the Gen. Secretary, Fabian Society, 11 Dartmouth St, S.W.1

For a comprehensive and efficient

BOOK SERVICE

bring or send your enquiries to the

FABIAN BOOKSHOP

Specialists in all Books, Periodicals and Government

Publications on :

INDUSTRY

ECONOMICS

POLITICS

SOCIAL SECURITY

LABOUR QUESTIONS

Bibliographies and Suggestions as to reading and research
provided on request.

Orders by telephone and post welcomed.

FABIAN BOOKSHOP

11, Dartmouth Street,

LONDON, S.W.1 (Whi 3077).

See List of Publications overleaf

SELECT LIST OF PUBLICATIONS

LETTER SERIES

1	A Letter to a Manager	G. D. H. Cole	...	...	...	3d
2	A Letter to a Soldier	A Comrade in Arms	...	...	...	2d
3	A Letter to a Student	Margaret Cole	...	...	...	2d
4	A Letter to a Shop Steward	'Guild Socialist'	...	...	...	2d
5	A Letter to a Woman	Munitions Worker	A. Susan Lawrence	...	...	2d
6	A Letter to a Doctor	Brian Thompson, M.D.	...	...	...	2d

S.P.C. SERIES

1	Take Over the War Industries	'Populus'	...	...	...	3d
2	Let's Talk it Over	An Argument about Socialism, for the unconverted	Raymond Postgate	...	...	4d
3	How the Russians Live	Wright Miller	...	...	...	6d

NEW FABIAN RESEARCH PAMPHLETS

28	Rent Rebates (Revised and Enlarged Edition 1939)	Geoffrey Wilson	...	...	...	1/-
34	The Forty Hour Week	Michael Stewart	...	...	...	1/-
37	Population Movements	A Study in Migration	L. Ginsburg	...	...	6d
38	The City Today	A Citizen	...	...	...	1/-
40	Reform Under Fire	Social Progress in Spain 1931-38	M. Stewart	...	...	6d
41	Milk	J. Bulmer and P. Vinter	...	...	...	1/-
44	Labour in the West Indies	W. A. Lewis	...	...	...	1/-
45	Planned Investment	C. P. Mayhew	...	...	...	1/-
51	The State and the Railways	Ernest Davies	...	...	...	6d
52	France Faces Fascism	D. M. W. P.	...	...	...	6d
57	The Assistance Board	Joan Simeon Clarke	...	...	...	6d
59	The Hospital Services	Somerville Hastings, LCC	...	...	...	6d
60	The Distribution of Fish	John Atkins	...	...	...	6d
61	Labour in the Colonies	I Some Current Problems	Colonial Bureau	...	...	6d
65	The Wool Industry in Peace and War	Dryden Brook	...	...	...	6d
66	Education In Scotland	Eileen M. Holmes	...	...	...	6d
67	The Soviet Home Front	N. Barou	...	...	...	6d

FABIAN TRACTS

5	Facts for Socialists (Revised 1937)	...	...	...	...	6d
232	Personnel of British Foreign Office and Diplomatic Service 1881-1929	R. T. Nightingale	1930	...	...	2d
235	The Limitations of the Expert	H. J. Laski	1931	...	...	2d
237	What Happened in 1931	A Record	Sidney Webb	1932	...	2d
244	Freedom in Our Time	Olive and Ivan Cruchley	1937	...	...	2d
245	Indian Federation	Boal Chand	1938	...	...	2d
246	Our Ageing Population	Ald. A. Emil Davies, LCC	1938	...	...	2d
248	Democracy for India	H. N. Brailsford	...	...	...	2d
250	Food in Wartime	Charles Smith	...	...	...	2d
252	Labour's Next Step	A Wartime Strategy	...	...	...	3d
257	Raw Material Controls	G. D. N. Worswick	...	...	...	6d

BOOKS

Britain's Food Supplies in Peace and War	by Charles Smith	(Routledge)	10/6
Socialization Studies: (1) Electrical Supply Industry	by G. H.	(Gollancz)	3/6
	(2) Iron and Steel	by Ingot	(Gollancz) 5/-
Democratic Sweden	edited by Margaret Cole and Charles Smith	(Routledge)	14/-
The Unemployment Services	by Polly Hill	(Routledge)	7/6
The British Civil Service	by H. Finer	Cloth, 5/- Paper, 3/6	
Fabian Essays (1931 Edition)	...	...	2/6
Programme for Victory	Fabian Lectures, 1940	...	(Routledge) 5/-
Victory or Vested Interest?	Fabian Lectures, 1941	...	(Routledge) 5/-
Plan For Africa	By Dr. Rita Hinden	(Allen & Unwin)	7/6
Social Security	...	...	1/-
Education For Democracy	by Margaret Cole	(Allen & Unwin)	2/-
Retail Trade Associations	by Hermann Levy	(Routledge)	15/-