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Philip N. Backstrom, Jr.

THE PRACTICAL SIDE OF CHRISTIAN SOCIALISM
IN VICTORIAN ENGLAND



ANY WRITERS OF LABOR HISTORY from late Victorian times to the present have in varying degree regarded Christian Socialism within a Marxian framework.¹ In its extreme, this bias blames tender-minded and paternalistic Christian aristocrats for turning the hearts of the English proletariat from the revolutionary uplands of political Chartism to the lowlands of mid-Victorian compromise.² Many

¹ See, for instance, *The Communist Manifesto* as quoted by John Saville in "The Christian Socialists of 1848," in *Democracy and the Labour Movement*, ed., John Saville (London, 1954), pp. 135-159: "Nothing is easier than to give Christian asceticism a Socialist tinge. Has not Christianity declaimed against private property, against marriage, against the State? Has it not preached in the place of these, charity and poverty, celibacy and mortification of the flesh, monastic life and Mother Church? Christian Socialism is but the holy water with which the priest consecrates the heartburnings of the aristocrat."

² This is, in effect, the position taken by Saville in his "The Christian Socialists of 1848." More ideology than history, the position is challenged by Torben Christensen, *Origin and History of Christian Socialism, 1848-1854* (Aarhus, 1962), see esp. p. 161, fn.

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histories still undervalue the practical work of Christian Socialists, maintaining the traditional opinion that the founders of Christian Socialism had little knowledge of laboring conditions, the social sciences, or co-operative endeavors then existing in Britain.³

I

Despite contrary evidence, F. D. Maurice has been a synonym for Christian Socialism — its founder, philosopher, and chief inspiration. The entire movement has, therefore, been traditionally viewed within a Maurician, that is, a theological, socially conservative framework.⁴ Even studies with a basically theological orientation call attention to the practical accomplishments of individual Christian Socialists, pointing, in fact, to two streams of influence: one reflecting in its outreach the image of F. D. Maurice and the other that of the movement's true founder, John Malcolm Ludlow.⁵ When Christian Socialism as an organized movement collapsed, "Ludlow continued his chosen task of 'Christianizing Socialism,' bringing his religiously inspired idealism into the Trade Union and Co-operative Movement. Maurice turned away with relief from the practical side and devoted himself to the Working Men's College and, more generally, to that theological reformation on the need for which he had been pondering."⁶ If one assumes a Maurician framework, there is, indeed, some reason for considering the movement impractical, perhaps even antithetical to the basic interests of Victorian

³ See A. F. Young and E. T. Ashton, *British Social Work in the Nineteenth Century* (London, 1956), p. 33; Sidney Pollard, "Nineteenth-Century Co-operation: From Community Building to Shop Keeping," in *Essays in Labor History*, ed. Asa Briggs and John Saville (London, 1960), pp. 93-94; and H. L. Beales, "The British Labour Movement and Religion During the First Half of the Nineteenth Century," *Bulletin of the Society for the Study of Labour History*, No. 5 (1962), p. 11.

⁴ This failing is hard to understand short of an ideological predisposition, since C. E. Raven's *Christian Socialism, 1848-1854* (London, 1920) demonstrated effectively that Ludlow was the movement's founder and, in many ways, chief inspiration. He notes the vast difference in the respective philosophies of Ludlow and Maurice (pp. 90-93). More recently, Christensen's book deals exhaustively with the origin and basic philosophy of the movement and will, one hopes, end future misinterpretations.

⁵ See Gilbert Clive Binyon, *The Christian Socialist Movement in England* (London, 1931), p. 84; and Arthur Vernon Woodworth, *Christian Socialism in England* (London, 1903), p. 45.

⁶ Binyon, p. 83. As for the "theological reformation," there is no lack of historical material relating the unique religious influences within the British labor movement to the Christian Socialists. See also C. E. Raven, "J. M. Ludlow," in *Christian Social Reformers of the Nineteenth Century*, ed., Hugh Martin (London, 1927), pp. 145-146; ch. vi of Donald Wagner's *The Church of England and Social Reform Since 1854* (New York, 1930); and G. D. H. Cole and Raymond Postgate, *The Common People, 1746-1938* (New York, 1939), pp. 291-292.

labor, for few tangible benefits have emerged from the Maurician stream of influence. Paradoxically, Maurice was so far from embodying the basic goals of the Christian Socialist movement that he was in one real sense no Christian Socialist at all. With the partial exception of Kingsley, he stood alone in the romantic-conservative-Platonic tradition of Coleridge and Southey.⁷

The mainsprings of the movement — those responsible, as Christian Socialists, for maintaining its practical influence within the labor movement throughout the nineteenth century — were J. M. Ludlow, Edward Vansittart Neale, and Thomas Hughes. Although the practical contributions of these three men are fairly well accounted for by historians in piecemeal references, their activities, which represent a continuing stream of practical influence even after the official death of the movement in 1854, are nowhere adequately treated. The *ideal* of Christian Socialism — a transformed society, a cooperative commonwealth — literally drove these men into exhausting lifetimes of practical service to the working classes.⁸

Present British labor organizations owe much to the Christian Socialists for their legal and social emancipation. Christian Socialists laid the foundation for the legal recognition of cooperatives and trade unions. They first helped by bringing the plight of the English laborer to the attention of wealthier classes, and often went on to participate directly in the various activities which led to remedial legislation. Indeed the Christian Socialists played a vital role in the passage of almost every major item of labor legislation from the middle to the late nineteenth century, and their contribution to the cooperative movement went even further than legislation. (The organizational framework of the modern cooperative movement probably owes more to the practical work of the Christian Socialists than even to the influence of Robert Owen.⁹)

As the period 1848-54 has received adequate attention, our main topic of concern will be the continuing and overall influence of the

⁷ Indeed it was the full realization of the incompatibility of the positions held by Maurice and Ludlow that caused the demise of Christian Socialism as an organized force working toward the dawn of a cooperative commonwealth (Christensen, pp. 96, 139-142, 157-158, 161, 351-366).

⁸ Hughes, at times vague and contradictory in his philosophy, was later willing to accept capitalism if enlightened by paternalism. But the fact that his life's work was initiated by and represents a continuation of Christian Socialist influence is indisputable. See Edward C. Mack and W. H. G. Armytage, *Thomas Hughes: The Life of the Author of Tom Brown's Schooldays* (London, 1952), pp. 154-157.

⁹ A point of view also held by Jack Bailey, *The British Co-operative Movement* (London, 1955), p. 99. It could even be argued that strictly in terms of organization the contribution of the Christian Socialists rivalled that of the Rochdale Pioneers.

Christian Socialist. Yet, in view of the failure of many historians to appreciate either the contribution or philosophy of the Christian Socialists, it should be again noted that the goal of the Christian Socialist in this period of gestation and birth was neither narrow nor individualistic.

The first planks in the platform for the practical side of English Christian Socialism were laid by the creation of producer cooperatives patterned after the theories of P. J. B. Buchez. They were individualistic and self-governing but were seen by Ludlow as only the first step in a broad program which was to end, in the fashion of Fourier, by changing the whole economic and social structure of England. Ludlow always acknowledged primary indebtedness to the "community builder" Fourier.¹⁰ An all-embracing conception of "association" was to provide, when combined with Christianity, the basis for a new moral world. Buchez also felt that successful socialism would have to be combined with Christianity, and similarity between the ideas of Ludlow and Buchez caused later historians from Beatrice Webb through G. D. H. Cole to conclude that Ludlow's ideas were primarily taken from Buchez. They were therefore subject to the criticisms later levelled at Buchez for having seen the self-governing workshop as an end in itself.¹¹ Late in the nineteenth century Ludlow clarified the matter in his unpublished autobiography:

A clever writer—Miss Beatrice Potter [later Mrs. Sidney Webb]—insists upon . . . fathering all our association work upon Buchez. No doubt the primary form of our associations, being modeled in great measure upon the Paris ones, is derived mainly from Buchez. But anyone who has a larger acquaintance than Miss Potter . . . will see the traces of various other influences. . . . The "Organization of Labour," to begin with was essentially Louis Blanc's watchword. But beyond this we looked to the organization of "Exchange" and "consumption"—the interchange and distribution of commodities,—thereby [having objectives in common] . . . with those of Owen on the one hand, of Proudhon on the other. In fact considering the presence in our midst of Lloyd Jones, an old Owenite, of Le Chevalier . . . a follower of St. Simon

¹⁰ "I was more of a Fourierist than anything else, . . . Now I need hardly say that Fourier's Socialism was all embracing; that he contemplated a new industrial and social world . . . and that therefore the working associations of the day in Paris could not be the satisfaction of my social aspirations. I mention this, because the formation of co-operative associations of producers in the various trades has been treated as if it had been the be-all and end-all of our socialism" (John Ludlow's Autobiography, ch. xxii, pp. 425-426, Ludlow MSS, University Library, Cambridge, MS Add. 7348, Box 1; page numbers in the Autobiography are approximate due to confusion in pagination).

¹¹ For a study of European and English workshops in the context of the comprehensive goals of producer cooperation consult Fabian Research Department, "Draft of the First Report of the Committee . . . investigating the subject of 'The Control of Industry' . . .," *The New Statesman Special Supplement on Co-operative Production and Profit-Sharing*, II (14 Feb. 1914), esp. pp. 4-5. A clear distinction is made between cooperative production and the later co-partnership profit-sharing schemes (pp. 22-23).

and Fourier, and co-worker with Proudhon (to say nothing of myself), it was simply impossible that one should have blindly followed Buchez, whom not one of us had ever acknowledged as his teacher, and whose socialistic works not one Englishman amongst us except Sully had ever read before our associations were started.¹²

First associate Christian Socialism with the conservative philosophy of Maurice, then with the narrow, individualist cooperative schemes of Buchez, and you have the ingredients of future neglect. Logically there is a strong disposition to write an end to the movement with the general collapse of the producer cooperatives. There emerged no cooperative commonwealth from the ruins of the stormy 1840's. The Christian Socialists were destined to failure, but a dynamic failure which was the beginning of a long fight for reform against the difficulties, particularly legal, which inhibited the success of all labor organizations.

II

Perhaps the greatest work of the Christian Socialists was their activity in forwarding the piecemeal legal emancipation of labor. They faced the problem early in the development of their organization. As things stood, the first associations established by the Christian Socialist Society for Promoting Working Men's Associations had no legal status whatsoever. They could not sue even if one of their members should steal funds or otherwise refuse to obey the rules of the association. Each member, if the total number were under twenty-five, had the power to pledge the association's credit. Another and perhaps even more crippling deterrent to the full-scale expansion of cooperative endeavors was the law of partnership — unlimited liability — which made each of the partners or shareholders equally responsible before the law for any of its transactions.¹³ The promoters who were lawyers were acutely

¹² Ludlow's *Autobiography*, ch. xxiii, p. 444. Ludlow refers to Beatrice Potter, *The Co-operative Movement in Great Britain*, 2nd ed. (London, 1893), p. 119. It should be noted that the variety of backgrounds represented in the original group renders doubtful the contention that they were somewhat lacking in knowledge of laboring conditions, the social sciences, or other indigenous cooperative endeavors. Lechevalier deserves special notice since, as Christensen maintains, many of the characteristic features of Christian Socialism are of his inspiration (p. 119). This again would indicate strong indebtedness to Fourier.

¹³ *The First Report of the Society for Promoting Working Men's Associations to which is added a report of the Co-operative Conference, held in London, at the Society's Hall . . . on the 26th and 27th of July, 1852* (London, 1852), p. 7. See also John Ludlow, "The Christian Socialist Movement in the Middle of the Century," *Atlantic Monthly*, LXXVII (1896), 116.

aware of this problem, but according to Ludlow none probably so much as himself. It was he who as “devil” for Bellenden Ker had drawn up the Joint Stock Companies Winding Up Acts of 1848 and 1849, acts which were the first to consider seriously the question of individual liability (Autobiography, ch. xxvi, pp. 483-484). Ludlow was thus well equipped to initiate the legal struggles of the cooperative movement – background overtures of a greater struggle to define the legal status of trade unions.

The first step came in 1852 when “An Act to Legalize the Formation of Industrial and Provident Societies” (or, short title, the “Industrial and Provident Societies Act”) granted legal recognition to cooperatives on their registration with the Registrar of Friendly Societies (15 and 16 Vict. c. 31). Ludlow drew the Bill and he, Neale, and Hughes were chiefly responsible for its success; the three, thanks to a congenial parliamentary atmosphere under the Tories, were brought in to discuss the Bill during its Select Committee stage in the Commons.¹⁴

Those who opposed or distrusted the Bill, however, managed to thwart the attempt to include the principle of limited liability for cooperative ventures. This was one of the two major omissions from the Act of 1852, the other being that it made no provision for the federated or joint action of many different associations.

In retrospect, it was hardly to be expected that Parliament would grant limited liability to cooperative societies when this had not yet been granted to the ordinary joint-stock company. When, however, limited liability was finally granted to joint-stock companies by an Act in 1856, it followed that cooperators would soon be pressing the government for the same concession. Significantly, it fell to Neale and Hughes to draw up and push through the Commons an Industrial and Provident Societies Act in 1862 which solved the problem of liability and also granted cooperatives the right to federation.¹⁵

These were two of the more important Bills which Christian Socialists were instrumental in effecting; there were others. The crash-

¹⁴ Incidentally, the direct backing of John Stuart Mill also played a part in the Bill’s successful passage.

¹⁵ Hughes later wrote that the Act of 1862 and a further Act of 1876 were chiefly Neale’s work, as Neale drew them and Hughes was only responsible for presenting the Bills to the House of Commons: see H. W. Lee, *Edward Vansittart Neale: His Co-operative Life and Work* (Manchester, 1908), p. 6. Although Ludlow lays no claim to the Act of 1862, G. D. H. Cole’s unsubstantiated assertion, in *A Century of Co-operation* (London, 1944), p. 124, that Ludlow was chiefly responsible for its drafting has a ring of truth. Limited liability was basically Ludlow’s fight, and even if Neale had drafted the bill without consulting Ludlow at all, which is improbable, he would still have been merely penning a conclusion to a book begun by Ludlow.

ing of legal barriers facing cooperative enterprises, from the first Bill in 1852 to the last one in 1876, was primarily the work of the old Christian Socialists, Ludlow, Neale, and Hughes, who used their practical legal experience in every way possible to raise the status of the British laboring man.¹⁶

III

Even as the Christian Socialists were striving collectively to pass a Bill granting legal recognition to cooperatives, Neale and Hughes were broadening the scope of their socialist undertakings to include consumers' cooperative organizations. Because of the success of consumer cooperation, the modern cooperative movement is said to have begun when in 1844 Rochdale's Equitable Pioneers opened a cooperative store in Toad Lane. The principle established by the founding of this store was later to become the basic principle of the entire cooperative movement and can be summed up in three words — "dividend on purchase." Unadulterated goods were to be sold at an honest price by the Pioneers, and the purchaser would, in addition, receive dividends in proportion to the amount he had spent.¹⁷

In 1844 there was really little distinction made between producer and consumer cooperation, and the Rochdale group, in its idealism, wanted to be considerably more than a consumer cooperative. Their plan, similar to John Ludlow's, was broad enough eventually to comprehend all forms of cooperation, and they too dreamed of the reconstruction of society. But since the Christian Socialists had made no specific constitutional provision for the establishment of such stores, few of the promoters, though most of them displayed interest, realized their future importance. Ludlow, in fact, distrusted the store movement, because he felt that production involved the laboring man more directly and therefore, that once production had been "socialized," consumption could follow (*Autobiography*, ch. xxviii, pp. 515-516).

By the early 1850's, however, cooperative stores had considerably expanded in influence, and Neale especially was convinced that they

¹⁶ J. M. Ludlow, "Mr. Benjamin Jones and the Early Christian Socialists," *Labour Co-partnership*, I (1894), 36.

¹⁷ Cole, p. 67. The following paragraphs rely heavily on the good general accounts to be found in both Cole (pp. 103 ff.) and Raven (pp. 258 ff.).

792

C.87.

25° & 26° VICTORIAE.

A.D. 1862.

Industrial and Provident Societies.

Notice of
Situation of
registered
Office.

Signature and
Effect of Rules.

Application of
Friendly Societies Acts to
this Act.

Power to Mem-
ber to nomi-
nate Persons
into whose
Name his In-
terest may be
transferred at
his Death.
As to the
Winding-up of
Societies.

Dissolution of
Society not
to prevent wind-
ing up of its
Affairs.

Joint Stock
Companies
Acts to apply.
Liability of
present and
past Members
of Society.

Society may be
constituted
under Compan-
ies Acts.
Members may
inspect Books.

Sheriffs Juris-
diction in
Scotland.
Annual Re-
turns to be
prepared as
Registrar may
direct.

13. Notice of the Situation of such registered Office, and of any Change therein, shall be given to the Registrar, and recorded by him: Until such Notice is given the Society shall not be deemed to have complied with the Provisions of this Act.

14. The Rules of every Society registered under this Act shall bind the Society, and the Members thereof, to the same Extent as if each Member had subscribed his Name and affixed his Seal thereto, and there were in such Rules contained a Covenant on the Part of himself, his Heirs, Executors, and Administrators, to conform to such Rules subject to the Provisions of this Act; and all Monies payable by any Member to the Society in pursuance of such Rules shall be deemed to be a Debt due from such Member to the Society.

15. The Provisions of the Friendly Societies Acts shall apply to Societies registered under this Act in the following Particulars:

- Exemption from Stamp Duties and Income Tax;
- Settlements of Disputes by Arbitration or Justices;
- Compensation to Members unjustly excluded;
- Power of Justices or County Courts in case of Fraud;
- Jurisdiction of the Registrar.

16. The Provisions of the Friendly Societies Act, 1854, whereby a Member of any Society registered thereunder is allowed to nominate any Persons to whom his Investment in such Society shall be paid, shall extend, in the Case of Societies registered under this Act, to allow any Member thereof to nominate any Persons into whose Name his Interest in such Society at his Decease shall be transferred: Provided nevertheless, that any such Society may, in lieu of making such Transfer, elect to pay to any Persons so nominated the full Value of such Interest.

17. Any Society registered under this Act may be wound up either by the Court or voluntarily, in the same Manner and under the same Circumstances under and in which any Company may be wound up under any Acts or Act for the Time being in force for winding up Companies; and all the Provisions of such Acts or Act with respect to winding up shall apply to such Society, with this Exception, that the Court having Jurisdiction in the Winding-up shall be the County Court of the District in which the Office of the Society is situated.

18. In case of the Dissolution of any such Society, such Society shall nevertheless be considered as subsisting, and be in all respects subject to the Provisions of this Act, so long and so far as any Matters relating to the same remain unsettled, to the Intent that such Society may do all things necessary to the winding up of the Concerns thereof, and that it may be sued and sue, under the Provisions of this Act, in respect of all Matters relating to such Society.

19. The Provisions of the Joint Stock Companies Acts as to Bills of Exchange and the Admissibility of the Register of Shares in Evidence shall apply to all Societies registered under this Act.

20. In the event of a Society registered under this Act being wound up, every present and past Member of such Society shall be liable to contribute to the Assets of the Society to an Amount sufficient for Payment of the Debts and Liabilities of the Society, and the Costs, Charges, and Expenses of the Winding-up, and for the Payment of such Sums as may be required for the Adjustment of the Rights of the Contributories amongst themselves, with the Qualifications following; (that is to say,)

- (1.) No past Member shall be liable to contribute to the Assets of the Society if he has ceased to be a Member for a Period of One Year or upwards prior to the Commencement of the Winding-up;
- (2.) No past Member shall be liable to contribute in respect of any Debt or Liability of the Society contracted after the Time at which he ceased to be a Member;
- (3.) No past Member shall be liable to contribute to the Assets of the Society unless it appears to the Court that the existing Members are unable to satisfy the Contributions required to be made by them in order to satisfy all just Demands upon such Society;
- (4.) No Contribution shall be required from any Member exceeding the Amount (if any) unpaid on the Shares in respect of which he is liable as a past or present Member.

21. Any Society registered under this Act may be constituted a Company under the Companies Acts, by conforming to the Provisions set forth in such Act, and thereupon shall cease to retain its Registration under this Act.

22. Every Person or Member having an Interest in the Funds of any Society registered under this Act may inspect the Books and the Names of the Members at all reasonable Hours at the Office of the Society.

23. The Sheriff in Scotland shall within his County have the like Jurisdiction as is hereby given to the Judge of the County Court in any Matter arising under this Act.

24. A General Statement of the Funds and Effects of any Society registered under this Act shall be transmitted to the Registrar once in every Year, and shall exhibit fully the Assets and Liabilities of the Society, and shall be prepared and made out within such Period, and in such Form, and shall comprise such Particulars as the Registrar shall from Time to Time require; and the Registrar shall have Authority to require such Evidence as he may think expedient of all Matters required to be done, and of all Documents required to be transmitted to him under this Act; and every Member of or any Depositor

Part of The Industrial and Provident Societies Act as printed in *The Statutes of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland*, ed. George Kettlby Rickards, XV (London, 1862).

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should be brought within the focus of Christian Socialist planning. Out of this desire a scheme emerged which was to have important implications for the entire English cooperative movement. Could not a wholesale agency be established which would directly integrate production and consumption? It would serve as a depot for the goods produced by the cooperative workshops and in turn as a source of supply for the cooperative store. In 1850, the plan was submitted to the Central Board of the Society for Promoting Workingmen's Associations as a *Scheme for the Formation of the Working Associations into a General Union*.¹⁸ There the plan temporarily died, due in part to Ludlow's distrust of consumer cooperation.

Neale proceeded with his plans despite this rebuff and created the Central Co-operative Agency in May 1851.¹⁹ In the meantime Hughes had joined Neale, and together they enlisted the aid of Joseph Woodin and Lloyd Jones. Woodin, an expert in the grocery business, was to do the purchasing and settle such matters as quality and price. Lloyd Jones, a Christian Socialist and old Owenite noted as a labor propagandist, would be in charge of contacting various stores throughout England.

The Agency failed. Perhaps London was not the proper center for a movement which was becoming ever more concentrated in the North. Troubles had ensued, not the least of which were the plague of unlimited liability and the necessity of establishing the Agency officially as Woodin, Jones and Company, a joint-stock enterprise, since the law forbade joint action on the part of many associations. For a truly cooperative venture the participating associations themselves should have owned and managed the organization. As it was, many associations felt that establishing a joint-stock company involved a concession to capitalism.²⁰

Although born in dissension and destined to failure, the Central

¹⁸ The copy of this pamphlet in the Ludlow Collection at Goldsmith's Library, University of London, has a MS note by Ludlow which cites Neale as the author.

¹⁹ Raven, pp. 261-265. Ludlow devoted ch. xxviii of his Autobiography to the subject of the Central Cooperative Agency and the controversy it created within the Christian Socialist organization. Using Ludlow's papers, Christensen has written the best account of the controversy to date (pp. 167 ff.).

²⁰ For more specific information on organization and purpose, consult *Report of a Meeting for the Establishment of the Central Co-operative Agency . . . May 30th, 1851 . . .* (London, 1851), and *Central Co-operative Agency; Instituted Under Trust to Counteract the System of Adulteration and Fraud, Now Prevailing in Trade, and to Promote the Principle of Co-operative Association; A Prospectus* (London, n.d.). Both are available in the Ludlow Collection, Goldsmith's Library, University of London.

Co-operative Agency still had an important influence on the cooperative movement as a whole. It stands out as the forerunner of the great Co-operative Wholesale Society later established (1863) in Manchester, and it helped, mainly through the efforts of Neale and Lloyd Jones, to spread cooperative ideals throughout the country. Furthermore, the great Wholesale Society of 1863 derived from Neale more than just the indirect pattern or example afforded by his Central Co-operative Agency. When Neale's theme of a central exchange headquarters to unify all cooperative endeavors was revived by the founders of the Co-operative Wholesale Society in Manchester, the legal situation blocking joint action by cooperative associations was still in effect.

Positive moves were made after a conference on Christmas Day, 1860, when it was determined that legal barriers would have to be broken down. Money for this purpose was raised by various interested associations, and a special committee was sent to London to enlist Neale's help, for his legal experience and knowledge of Westminster were considered vital for success.²¹ The result was the Bill of 1862, which, as mentioned previously, solved the problem of unlimited liability and in addition, by granting the right to joint or federal action, made the C. W. S. a possibility.

Part of the splendid success of the C. W. S. was due to Neale's having drafted the rules for registration at its founding (*Neale*, pp. 6-7). Hughes, who had aided the passage of Neale's Bill in 1862, was to lend further service in 1867. The Act of 1862 was not an unqualified success; it allowed societies to invest in other cooperative organizations, making possible a federation such as the C. W. S., but restricted the amount which could be invested to £200. In 1867 Hughes, now a member of Parliament, pushed through a final Act which removed this impediment (*Hughes*, p. 168), and by 1872 the C. W. S. was boasting a yearly sales record of over a million pounds.²²

The year 1869 was a great one for cooperation. The C. W. S. was then strong enough to open a huge warehouse in Balloon Street, Manchester, and the chief executive organ of the cooperative movement, its yearly Co-operative Congress, was launched. The Christian Socialists also laid much of the theoretical as well as practical groundwork for

²¹ Percy Redfern, *The New History of the C. W. S.* (London, 1938), pp. 21-22.

²² A. M. Carr-Saunders, P. Sargant Florence, and Robert Peers, *Consumers' Co-operation in Great Britain* (London, 1938), p. 37.

this latter organization. The Ludlow Bill of 1852 had been the occasion for the calling of the first general cooperative conference. The Christian Socialists organized it for the purpose of considering "the best mode of making available the facilities afforded by the Industrial and Provident Societies Act, for the progress of Co-operation."²³ This conference represented at once the apex and the beginning of the decline of Christian Socialism as an organized effort, for there succeeding conferences were planned which superseded the old Christian Socialist Council of Promoters. However, the Christian Socialists had once again provided a model for the future.

By 1867 Ludlow, Hughes, and Neale were particularly interested in trying to get the laborers of Yorkshire and Lancashire, who had been so successful in the store movement, to consider cooperative production. This was one of the motives behind an Industrial Partnership's Conference held in Manchester in 1867. Most of the old Christian Socialists and Owenites attended. Hughes occupied the chair, and an essay by Ludlow entitled "Trade Societies and Co-operative Production" was read in his absence. In this paper Ludlow sought to arouse trade union interest in cooperative production — trade unions could make their large credit of use to cooperators in establishing new workshops.²⁴ Ludlow's paper called for a greater unification of trade union and cooperative interests and stimulated the desire for a Congress comprehensive enough to consider the questions which would certainly arise over this issue. The need for such a comprehensive assembly had for some time been felt by England's cooperative leaders. Indeed, William Pare, editor of the *Co-operator*, had been working tirelessly since 1865 to bring it about; and it was finally Pare, in collaboration with Neale, who was successful in 1869 (Cole, p. 197; Neale, p. 7). This great Co-operative Congress, held in London, became the organized center of the cooperative movement in Great Britain.

The Christian Socialists, having helped to provide its inspiration, were prominent leaders in the Congress itself. Hughes was chosen as first President; Neale and Ludlow were elected to the Central Board,

²³ *The First Report of the Society for Promoting Working Men's Associations . . .*, p. 37.

²⁴ E. O. Greening, "John Malcolm Ludlow," *The Working Men's College Journal*, XII (1912), 241-245, 265-269. Greening is occasionally inconsistent; he asserts that Ludlow was the originator of Co-Partnership (p. 265), and claims Ludlow read his own paper (p. 266) at the Conference while he himself had read it in Ludlow's absence. See "The Industrial Partnership's Conference . . .," *Supplement to the Industrial Partnership's Record* (1 Nov. 1867), pp. 8 ff. The latter contains Ludlow's paper and the debate which followed its reading.

which in time was to develop into the Co-operative Union, the central governing headquarters of the modern cooperative movement. Ludlow was also selected to edit the Congress report, thus becoming its first historian.²⁵ He was, however, soon to leave his position of leadership within the movement, as he found himself involved in political activities resulting in his appointment as Chief Registrar of Friendly Societies in 1875. This did not prevent Ludlow from a continuing participation in cooperative activities, and for many years he and Neale handled almost all of the legal work of the movement.

Neale in particular was to become one of the key figures in English cooperation. At the Congress at Newcastle in 1873 he proposed and carried through a plan to organize the Central Board. He was also deeply involved in the controversial question of cooperative banking (as was Ludlow, who was perhaps more responsible than anyone else for first introducing the idea as one means of unifying the entire labor movement). On G. J. Holyoake's suggestion Neale became, in 1875, General Secretary of the Central Board, moving his residence to Manchester and thus becoming chief executive of the cooperative movement, a position he held until his retirement and death in 1892. His legal and literary endeavors for cooperation are overwhelming even if one considers only those after 1875: preparing model rules for the registration of new associations, drafting the original rules for the Co-operative Union itself, editing yearly Congress reports, and adding to each a lengthy preface as well as statistical tables illustrating the progress of cooperation. Finally, at least nineteen of the pamphlets issued by the Union were drafted by Neale, to say nothing of those which he jointly wrote with Hughes.²⁶

All this, of course, takes on greater meaning when seen in relation to his earlier efforts. Five acts of Parliament dealing with cooperation bear his imprint, at least in part. Neale's name is practically synonymous with the organization and emancipation of the cooperative movement. It is difficult sometimes to understand why some historians avoid Neale's contribution when discussing cooperation, while at the same time advancing that of Holyoake, who appears, when the record is

²⁵ J. M. Ludlow, ed., *Proceedings of the Co-operative Congress held in London . . .* (London, 1869). It is worthy of note that Ludlow's paper, "Trade Societies and Co-operative Production," was a major topic of debate. For general background to the Congress with specific reference to the involvement of Christian Socialists and other religious leaders, consult Wagner, pp. 121 ff.

²⁶ Neale, *passim*; and Thomas Hughes, "Edward Vansittart Neale as Christian Socialist," *The Economic Review*, III (1893), 38-49, 174-189.

closely studied, to have contributed far less, not only to the spirit but to the actual physical character of English cooperation.

IV

The legal recognition of cooperation was one matter; it was quite another to speak of extending the same privilege to trade unions. The Victorian ideal of self-help rather easily comprehended cooperation, but labor unions, as organizations, while generally fulfilling this ideal were too often associated with practices which directly conflicted with ingrained Victorian prejudices. The Christian Socialists, much condemned for sharing these prejudices, were in reality among the first to propose the extension of the legal recognition to these questionable organizations.

Christian Socialists first found themselves directly involved in trade union problems on the occasion of the Engineers' lockout in 1852. Already active in an attempt to interest the Amalgamated Society of Engineers in cooperative production, the Christian Socialists were quick to lend them support. Lord Goderich, later Marquis of Ripon, and Augustus Vansittart, Neale's cousin, tried to get the men a fair hearing, and Ludlow sent lengthy letters to three newspapers; but these attempts to interest others were of little avail. It was only the Christian Socialists' own *Journal of Association* which printed article after article on the workers' behalf. Finally, in the last stages of the struggle the A. S. E. would probably have gone bankrupt had not Lord Goderich advanced £1,000 to the union to pay strike allowances.²⁷ These activities certainly earned for the Christian Socialists the life-long friendship of the Amalgamated Society's leaders, but of even greater future importance was a series of meetings called by the Council of Promoters to consider certain labor-capital problems underlined by the strike.

These meetings had two especially valuable results — a lecture by Neale, *May I Not Do As I Will With My Own?* (1852), criticizing the recalcitrant attitude of the employers, and Ludlow's three lectures on "The Master Engineers and Their Workmen." The latter are par-

²⁷ Hughes, pp. 46-47; John Ludlow, *The Master Engineers and Their Workmen . . .* (London, 1852), pp. 6-7; Sidney and Beatrice Webb, *The History of Trade Unionism*, (London, 1920), p. 215.

ticularly significant in that they directly champion a legalized status for trade societies as a partial solution to labor's ills. "The purely negative measure of the repeal of the Combination Laws requires now, as it seems to me, to be followed up by a legal recognition and development of trade-societies. . . . Such I believe is the healthiest progress of legislation; to be first permissive, then directive; not to make institutions *de novo*; but to allow, develop, and regulate their growth" (*The Master Engineers*, p. 45). Such a proposition in 1852 could be considered prophetic but premature, since at this time political leaders would hardly allow cooperative associations this privilege.

Progress toward reform began when a new era of strikes in the late 1850's led the well-publicized National Association for the Promotion of Social Science (popularly called the Social Science Association) to establish, in 1859, a committee to investigate trade societies and disputes. The report of this Committee on Trades Societies and Strikes is of recognized importance.²⁸ Highly praised by Sidney and Beatrice Webb and other leaders within the labor movement, it appears to have been a factor in preparing the Victorian mind for the acceptance of the union cause. Indeed, John Ludlow felt it paved the way to the appointment of the Select Committee on Trade Unions in 1867, thus at least indirectly helping to open the door to legal recognition in 1871.²⁹

The material presented by the Committee, meeting at Glasgow in 1860, constitutes a wealth of trade union information: abstracts of Parliamentary papers, accounts of major strikes and lockouts, as well as general and specific information on trade combinations. Again the Christian Socialists participated in more than a passive way. F. D. Maurice was a member of the Committee, as were Ludlow and Hughes.³⁰ Ludlow's "Account of the West Yorkshire Coal-Strike and Lock-out of 1858" (*Report, S.S.A.*, pp. 11-51) and Hughes's "Account of the Lockout of Engineers in 1851-52" (pp. 169-205) were valuable additions to the Report as a whole and include useful collections of source material.

²⁸ Published as *Trades' Societies and Strikes. Report of the Committee on Trades' Societies Appointed by the National Association for the Promotion of Social Science Presented at the Fourth Annual Meeting of the Association, at Glasgow, September, 1860* (London, 1860). Hereafter referred to as *Report, S.S.A.*

²⁹ John Ludlow's MS, "Trade Unions — The Social Science Association," Ludlow MSS, MS Add. 7348, Box 1. This MS has no page numbers. Probably designed to be one chapter of the Autobiography, it is a valuable source of general information. See also his "Trade Societies and the Social Science Association," *Macmillan's Magazine*, III (1860-61), 313-325, 362-372. The latter is fairly objective, but the MS is far wider in scope and has some useful personal evaluations.

³⁰ Ludlow, "Trade Societies and the Social Science Association," p. 314.

Based on such information compiled by the members of the Committee, this Report is one of the clearest expressions of the so-called mid-Victorian compromise. The great mass of working men present at the Glasgow Conference found that its conclusions were in their favor. Trade societies were seen in a positive light; they were led by responsible men, in many cases prevented rather than occasioned strikes and violence, and were often an advantage to the employer. The labor union was on its way to becoming a respected member of the Victorian family of self-help organizations (pp. ix-xix).

There had been, however, some differences of opinion. Hughes, Ludlow, and a few others wished to go further than the recommendations of the majority report, and so Ludlow, aided by Godfrey Lushington, drew up a report of the minority (pp. xx-xxi). The chief difference between the two reports was that the majority report, while complimenting trade societies, did not recommend taking the necessary steps to legalize them. The minority report (actually very close in spirit to that of the majority) argued that legal recognition "might" be extended to trade organizations in their "universal function," — that of "enabling . . . the workman to maintain himself while casually out of employment or travelling in search of it." It was felt that the trade unions should be afforded the legal protection of the Friendly Societies Acts. The minority report also called for a form of compulsory arbitration machinery involving united associations of capitalists and workmen — a somewhat more radical proposition which was probably inspired by Ludlow. Ludlow, in regard both to legalization and compulsory arbitration, would have worded the minority report more strongly had he written it exactly as he pleased.³¹

The years 1866 and 1867 provided the excitement necessary to activate the legal atmosphere. Events in the late 'fifties and early to middle 'sixties had served to bring the nation's attention to bear on the cause of labor. The trend perhaps culminated in the passage of Disraeli's Reform Bill in 1867, which enfranchised the skilled laborer. Spark was applied to tinder with the murder and outrage attributed to unions in Sheffield in 1866 and the decision in the *Hornby vs. Close* case in the following year. The latter denied that trade union funds were protected from fraud and theft by the Friendly Societies Act of 1855, and thus

³¹ *Report, S.S.A.*, pp. 616-618. See "Trade Societies and the Social Science Association," pp. 365-372, in which Ludlow again expresses the classic Christian Socialist position — the broad, comprehensive panacea of "association."

clearly placed the trade union outside the pale of legal recognition.

This was one of the most crucial periods in the history of labor. The Sheffield employers were pressing, through J. A. Roebuck in Parliament, for investigation leading to the curtailment of union activity. The leaders of the “respectable” Amalgamated Unions within the London Trades Council, most notably Robert Applegarth, established the Conference of Amalgamated Trades, first to dissociate themselves from labor violence and soon to concern themselves with combatting the Hornby *vs.* Close decision and the threat of hostile legislation which might follow hard upon the Sheffield outrages. Hughes and Ludlow figured prominently in this struggle. Ludlow, for example, a friend of William Allen and since 1852 his unofficial chief legal consultant in the Amalgamated Society of Engineers, took part in the activities of the newly formed Conference of Amalgamated Trades.³²

When the crises resulted in the establishment of the Royal Commission on Trade Unions of 1867, Hughes, then an M.P., was given a seat. But the Conference of Amalgamated Trades, boasting the support of George Potter’s London Working Men’s Association, pressed further for the inclusion of a few working-class members.³³ It compromised with Home Secretary Walpole in February 1867, by settling for the appointment of a middle-class friend of labor. Walpole selected the Positivist Frederic Harrison, from among a submitted list of names which had included Ludlow’s. Ludlow was bitterly disappointed in not being selected, since he felt his legal experience, literary work, and long-standing effort to improve the legal position of unions entitled him to the appointment, as it probably did.³⁴ Yet despite Ludlow’s superior qualifications the choice proved to be an excellent one.³⁵ Harrison and Hughes

³² *Report of the Various Proceedings Taken by the London Trades Council and the Conference of Amalgamated Trades . . .* (London, 1867), p. 40. For Hughes’s actions, consult A. W. Humphrey, *Robert Applegarth* (Manchester, 1913), pp. 145-147.

³³ For an up-to-date review of this critical period, consult H. W. McCready, “British Labour and the Royal Commission on Trade Unions, 1867-9,” *University of Toronto Quarterly*, XXIV (1955), 390-409, and “British Labour’s Lobby, 1867-75,” *Canadian Journal of Economic and Political Science*, XXII (1956), 141-160.

³⁴ “Trade Unions – The Social Science Association.”

³⁵ Just as a point of interest, it was again Christian Socialism which had initially inspired the career of Frederic Harrison. Although completely disavowing Christianity in favor of Positivism and harboring a hearty dislike for the “utterly muddle-headed and impotent” F. D. Maurice, Harrison received his first inspiration from Maurice’s sermons, learned more of the socialist message while at the Working Men’s College, and finally emerged as a champion of labor during the building trades lockout of 1861, at which time Christian Socialists and Positivists joined forces to secure a fair hearing for the strikers. See Harrison, *Autobiographic Memoirs* (London, 1911), I, 142-147, 150-151, 230, 250-251. Some authorities contend that, after 1861, while the influence of the Christian Socialists wanes, the Positivists, particularly Harrison and E. S.

were ideal partners in the Royal Commission as they had worked often and well together from the time of the builders' lockout in 1861; and the perennial squabbles between Christian Socialist and Positivist never appeared to impede practical work. Harrison said of Hughes that "no man could have been more loyal or a more genial comrade than he proved to be throughout" (*Hughes*, pp. 159-160). Although Hughes's parliamentary and myriad outside activities prevented him from devoting full time to the work of the Commission, he gave Harrison his complete support.

The Commission's report, while not advocating further repressive legislation, spoke only on behalf of permissive legalization. At the same time it expressed the desire to retain intact the remnants of the Combination Act and other measures designed to limit trade union activity severely, at least those aspects which were still considered "in restraint of trade."

In dissent, Harrison and Hughes, with the cooperation of Lord Lichfield, drew up a minority report to which Harrison affixed a detailed appendix documenting and explaining their position, point by point. The significance of this report and its appendix is difficult to overestimate, as it was a rallying point for the labor lobby which became the modern Trade Union Congress. It also provided a strong foundation for the subsequent Bills emancipating trade unions in 1871 and 1876.³⁶

The struggle for legal recognition and protection was by no means over with the publication of these reports. It continued until 1876 through Hughes and others in the House of Commons and was carried on in newspapers and labor publications by Christian Socialists, Positivists, and trade union leaders. It is often forgotten, however, that during this struggle a temporary Bill was passed in 1869 which gave legal status to unions, the specific purpose being to enable unions to use the courts to prosecute members for damages resulting from fraud or embezzlement.³⁷ It is not widely known that this Bill, the first really posi-

Beesley, emerge as the leading champions of the English working man. See, e.g., Royden Harrison, "Professor Beesley and the Working-Class Movement," *Essays in Labour History*, ed., Asa Briggs and John Saville (London, 1960), pp. 213-215. If one considers the total picture of nineteenth-century labor, including cooperation, there is much room for disagreement with this contention. Even if one considers only the services rendered to the trade union cause, the Christian Socialists at least share credit with the Positivists for labor's legal emancipation.

³⁶ Harrison, I, 323; see also R. Y. Hedges and Allan Winterbottom, *The Legal History of Trade Unionism* (London, 1930), pp. 65-66.

³⁷ 32 and 33 Vict. c. 61. Proposed as a Bill to Protect the Funds of Trades Unions from Embezzlement and Misappropriation (cited under short title, Trades Unions Funds Protection Act).

tive piece of trade union legislation in the nineteenth century, was Ludlow's work, requested by the Amalgamated Society of Engineers.³⁸

The permanent Trade Union Act of 1871 (34 and 35 Vict. c. 31), of course, rendered temporary legislation obsolete. Although of the Christian Socialists only Hughes was directly involved in its passage,³⁹ the Friendly Societies Act of 1875, which Ludlow drew, served as a basis for changes made in the supplementary Trades Unions Act Amendment Act of 1876 (39 and 40 Vict. c. 22). When Ludlow drew the Friendly Societies Bill, he first made it broad enough to encompass all types of labor organizations, including trade unions, but this was withdrawn under protest, and the Bill that finally passed concerned itself only with organizations traditionally falling within the scope of previous Friendly Societies Acts.

The Friendly Societies Act, however, became a model for the Amending Act of 1876, and Ludlow, in his new position as Chief Registrar of Friendly Societies, was able to secure the inclusion of certain clauses which finally placed the labor union in almost the same legal position as the Friendly Society and the Co-operative Association.⁴⁰

V

The contributions to the practical advance of labor in Victorian Britain described here represent only the most important of the many for which the Christian Socialists were responsible. Yet there is little reference even to these in recent historical studies. Again I feel that this neglect has arisen in part from the basic misconception of Christian Socialism first evidenced in the writings of Beatrice Webb. In her deservedly well-known pioneer work, *The Co-operative Movement in Great Britain*, she continually used the controversial terms "federalist" and "individualist" too broadly. She separated cooperators in the English, democratic, "federalist" traditions of Robert Owen and the Rochdale Pioneers from the "foreign" and "individualist" tradition of P. J. B.

³⁸ See "Trade Unions — The Social Science Association" and the Autobiography, ch. xxvi, p. 497.

³⁹ For general information consult Webb, *History of Trade Unionism*, pp. 282 ff.

⁴⁰ Autobiography, ch. xxvi, p. 497. The influence of the Friendly Societies Act of 1875 on the Trades Unions Act of 1876 can be clearly seen in George Howell's *Handy Book of the Labour Laws* (London, 1895), pp. 107-109. Ludlow also claims to have been responsible for the basic definition of a trade union appearing in the Act of 1876 (Howell, p. 112) which differed markedly from that of 1871 ("Trade Unions — The Social Science Association").

Buchez, John Ludlow, and the Christian Socialists (pp. 75-76, 118-120). She developed this now widely-accepted dichotomy in a way which misconstrues the basic ideals of Christian Socialism. Christian Socialists, for example, are associated in her works too closely with the later "profit-sharing" schemes of men who had reconciled themselves to the liberal ideals of a capitalist society and were willing to work, indefinitely, within a reformed, capitalistic economic framework.⁴¹

Although Mrs. Webb did "give the devil his due" by noting the not-to-be-forgotten contributions of these deluded Christians, she subtly negated this by regularly linking their actions to the consistent failure of cooperative workshops. In effect, Beatrice Webb represents these fragmented, individualistic, isolated, impractical endeavors as the only expression of Christian Socialist philosophy (pp. 167-169, 171-173).

But it was not the narrow "individualistic" ideal of a Buchez that stimulated the basic movement; it was the comprehensive idealism expressed by Fourier in the concept of "association." The Christian Socialist Movement, although French in inspiration, closely paralleled indigenous Owenism. Both contributed to the common idealistic foundation of British Socialism. Indeed, it was exactly this idealism which moved the Christian Socialists later to criticize the growing trend toward materialism within the cooperative movement. In 1870 Neale complained, "The noble idea conceived by the Rochdale Pioneers of regenerating society from top to bottom . . . has given place to the desire to obtain good articles at the cheapest possible price" (*Neale*, p. 9).

Evidence abounds to demonstrate that the continued efforts of the Christian Socialists were always dominated by the old belief that capitalistic society was in need of a complete reformation. Producer cooperation was never envisioned as an end in itself (a failing perhaps characteristic of Holyoake and a host of other cooperative "individualists"), but rather as the best beginning toward the realization of the ultimate goal.⁴²

An ideal, however, is not enough, as the practical ineffectiveness of the theological stream of Christian Socialism shows. The attribute

⁴¹ Potter, pp. 147-148; see also Benjamin Jones, *Co-operative Production* (Oxford, 1894), p. 784.

⁴² For a few examples of the above contention consult the following: Hughes and Neale, *A Manual for Co-operators, Prepared at the Request of the Co-operative Congress Held at Gloucester in April, 1879; and Revised 1888* (Manchester, 1888), esp. pp. 10-11, 16-18, 27-30, 61, 71, 120-126, 156-157, 208; Clifton K. Yearly, *Britons in American Labor* (Baltimore, 1957), pp. 239-242; Jones, *Co-operative Production*, p. 740. For an interesting comparison consult Holyoake, *The History of Co-operation* (New York, 1906), II, 587-589, 666, 674.

which moved the “practical” Christian Socialist beyond theory was a willingness to compromise – an injection of realism which allowed him to lend support to *any* effort leading toward the social and political emancipation of labor.

An early letter from Ludlow to Maurice illustrates this attribute: Ludlow advises Maurice to turn from his Platonic idealism toward practical building, using any material at hand, even if only “wood, hay and stubble.”⁴³ The same theme was restated later by Hughes and Neale: “The freedom belonging to co-operation enables the co-operator to use these systems, or any parts of them which appear to him useful, as means for the better giving effect to his ends” (*Manual for Co-operators*, pp. 24-25). But this practical bent in no way compromised the ultimate idealism of these men. In fact, the manual in which the latter statement appeared was so obviously dominated by old Christian Socialism that it brought growls of disapproval from many stalwarts who waved the banner of Holyoake’s secularism.⁴⁴

It was exactly this willingness to be realistic which allowed Hughes, Ludlow, and Neale to work within the cooperative movement despite its shortcomings; to work within the consumers’ framework, while consistently pressing for a revival of producers’ cooperation. The basic mistake made by Beatrice Webb was to boil in a single pot all those who in the ’seventies and ’eighties initiated a revival of cooperative production along the lines of co-partnership. She is guilty of disregarding the fact that while to some this may have represented a revision of earlier cooperative ideals, to others it was merely a temporary effort to place at least a “roof of straw” over workingmen’s heads while working and waiting for a better solution.⁴⁵

Once Christian Socialism had been thrust into the background by the early writers of labor history – the prophets of labor’s future – few saw that it had had a significant share in labor’s painful but steady progress through the nineteenth century.

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⁴³ Ludlow MSS, MS Add. 7348, Box 5, Pkg. 17.

⁴⁴ Holyoake himself stated at the Co-operative Congress of 1881, “It can only be regarded as *their* manual and can only be published as representing *their* opinions. Published officially, it would convert our entire union into a theological body, and terminate that neutrality which has hitherto been our distinction and our strength. . . . This book is an intentional manifesto of religious opinion and must be rejected” (*Hughes*, p. 223).

⁴⁵ *Hughes*, pp. 155-157. Hughes’s inconsistency about profit-sharing is on the surface a strong argument for Beatrice Webb. He was, however, never a theorizer and often acted on impulse – to the discomfort of “old Gruff” Ludlow.