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Author(s): J. L. Finlay

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John Hargrave, the Green Shirts, and Social Credit

J. L. Finlay

John Hargrave, later to be obeyed as a dictator in the various guises of White Fox, Wa-Whaw-Goosh, Headman of the Kibbo Kift, and finally as leader of the Social Credit Party of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, was born in 1894, the son of Gordon Hargrave, a nominal Quaker. To his father, to whom he was devoted, the young Hargrave owed much, especially an amateur but wide knowledge of sociology and anthropology, and also a love of the countryside, but he was not given a specifically religious outlook. Of formal schooling he had little, and by the age of fifteen he was working as an illustrator for Nelson's, going on to become cartoonist for the *Evening Times* at the early age of seventeen; later he worked in advertising. In 1908 he began to take an interest in the new Scouting movement, in which he soon became prominent; at one stage, indeed, he seemed to be marked out as Baden-Powell's successor; at least his appointment as Headquarters' Commissioner for Camping and Woodcraft has been interpreted in this way. But even in nonconformity – and at this date Scouting was outlandish – Hargrave found it difficult to be orthodox, and his first book, *Lonecraft* (published in 1913), was directed to those scouts who for one reason or another did not belong to any troop; it was dedicated to Ernest Seton Thompson, whose Indian-inspired movement in the USA had so influenced Hargrave. He had given notice of his independence.¹

At this point, when relations with the official Scouting movement were already strained, the war intervened. Hargrave served as a stretcher-bearer, probably the role most likely to intensify a loathing of war, until he was invalided out in 1916.² He returned to

¹ For Hargrave's early life see *The New Age* (hereafter *NA*), 4 April 1935; *Broadsheet*, August 1926, January 1927; *Nomad*, May 1924; *The Pine Cone*, April 1925; *Social Credit*, 1 November 1935; L.A. Paul, *Angry Young Man* (London, 1951), 54.

² J. Hargrave, *The Great War Brings It Home* (London, 1919), 49–51.

England to find to his dismay that the Scouting movement was being used by the ultra-patriotic forces as an instrument of war. The breach continued to widen, and in 1920 Hargrave withdrew to set up his own brand of anti-war, outdoor philosophy under the name the Kibbo Kift.³

The mood which gave rise to the Kibbo Kift was widespread in the years immediately after the war. In part it was a response to the same inchoate feelings which had inspired Baden-Powell. But not entirely, for as the parallel but more extensive Youth Movement in Germany showed, revulsion from the war was a strong element, and unlike the Scouts, originally directed primarily at children, the post-war movements embraced all age groups and amounted in effect to a whole way of life. Not that Hargrave borrowed from Germany; the influence was, if anything, the other way, and Hargrave's books were popular in translation.

Along with opposition to war went a rejection of what was considered part and parcel of a war-prone civilization, the unhealthy tedium of the towns and the stultifying monotony of a mechanical world. In political matters there was an equally clear-cut repudiation of traditional practices. When the Kibbo Kift proclaimed that it 'began as a body impulse to get Earth contact in a mechanical age', and when it was 'bold enough to say openly, what we all know in our secret hearts to be the truth, that our political machinery is out-of-date, is breaking down, and must be scrapped',⁴ it was showing itself to be part of a broad and influential body of opinion, as can be seen from the list of those who agreed to act as advisory counsellors to the Kin. It included Sir Norman Angell, known especially for *The Great Illusion*; Havelock Ellis, writer on sex-education; Patrick Geddes, Professor of Botany and leading light of the Sociological Society; Julian Huxley, zoologist and explorer; Vilhjalmar Stefansson, arctic explorer; Sir Rabindranath Tagore, the Bengali poet; and H.G. Wells, though it must be confessed that only Geddes seemed to take his office at all seriously.⁵

³ *The Mark*, September 1922. At the time Hargrave was accused by the Scouts of 'socialist and bolshevik tendencies'; see I.O. Evans, *Woodcraft and World Service* (London, 1930), 63.

⁴ J. Hargrave, *The Confession of the Kibbo Kift* (London, 1927), 56.

⁵ *The Mark*, June, October 1922; *Broadsheet*, August 1928; Evans, *op. cit.*, 127. Geddes gave Hargrave's *Confession* an enthusiastic notice in *The Sociological Review*, 1928.

Despite these initial advantages, the Kift never numbered more than a handful, and never seemed likely to reflect at all adequately the general mood which it claimed to represent. Numbers are difficult to establish, but in 1924, the peak year, the total attendance at the annual camp was 236; by 1927 a series of Easter hikes organized in various centres brought out no more than fifty-eight members; in 1931 the number of names inscribed in the Kinlog was only 185.⁶ These figures were tiny besides those of the Scouts or of the German movements. The reasons are not difficult to establish.

To begin with, the Kibbo Kift had to compete against an existing alternative, the Scouts, and about this time other groups had been set up, notably the Order of Woodcraft Chivalry. This was founded in 1916 by Ernest Westlake, a Quaker, in the belief that until instinct was recognized and fitted into a scheme of education no lasting improvement in society could be hoped for.⁷ Before Hargrave took up the idea, Westlake's group was working on the basis of the 'recapitulation theory', the belief that the child has to live through all the stages of mankind before he can come to a full appreciation and acceptance of the present stage in evolution. These and other ready-made alternatives were always prepared to provide a refuge for those of the Kin whose sole quarrel was with Hargrave's tendency to end all discussion with the drastic 'I have spoken'.⁸ Moreover, the ethos which he imposed on his following was calculated to deter rather than to attract, a serious misjudgment in one whose grasp of propaganda was unusually strong. The very name, from an old Cheshire phrase meaning 'proof of great strength',⁹ indicated the founder's mystic attachment to a folk past, and the use of such terms as Althing to indicate the Annual Council, and Kinlog for the membership roll, created an Anglo-Saxon ambiance more ludicrous than similar borrowing from Kiplingesque India could manage to be. Nor could the Kin hide their folk revival from the world, for a uniform, in green and brown, of Saxon cowl and jerkin and Prussian-style army cloak, was decreed.

⁶ *Nomad*, July 1924; *Broadsheet*, May 1927, March 1931.

⁷ *The Pine Cone*, July 1923, July 1924.

⁸ *The Mark*, June 1922.

⁹ There was, however, a school of thought which interpreted it as meaning 'skilled left-handed'; see *Front Line*, May 1932. For Hargrave's meaning see *Confession*, 60.

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Most inimical, perhaps, to Hargrave's desire to lead a movement of national regeneration was the attempt to impose a pretentious and muddled philosophy upon his following. It opened with the assertion that 'All Life is Life. There is no Life but Life. Everything is Everything and we are part of It all . . . there is One Great Life, Force, Power, Soul, Will, Unit, Cause, Being – *and we are actually part of It*'.¹⁰ The hint of eclecticism in this statement came out strongly in the following description of a Kibbo Kift camp fire ceremony recorded by a participant; 'The Keeper of the Council Fire, over whose scarlet costume gold flames snaked, stepped out swinging a censer and intoning a collect beginning

Energy, energy, ceaseless energy,
The silent terrific energy of the Universe.
The fearful and wonderful energy of the electron.
Microcosm and macrocosm.
One, One, One is One.
All is energy. The energy of One.
Fire, the great symbol of energy.
Fire which leaps before us,
The Fire of Althing.
O Mighty Fire of Life!¹¹

and ending, predictably enough, 'The Kindred have one common aim, world unity'. Such an extreme beginning might understandably have led either to anarchist egalitarianism or to individualist survival of the fittest – and indeed Hargrave did pay tribute to Thoreau on the one hand and Herbert Spencer on the other; in fact the preferred conclusion was that society should breed a superior strain, and that to this end citizenship and the right to marry should be withheld until the candidate had successfully completed a system of training. But since such eugenics was not immediately practicable, a system of child education based upon recapitulation was advocated, which would reveal the true nature of man and suggest ways to perfection.¹²

Eugenist conclusions, no matter how modified, presupposed a superior organism or directing idea against which the progress of

¹⁰ Hargrave, *The Great War Brings It Home*, xv.

¹¹ L. A. Paul, *The Living Hedge* (London, 1946), 154.

¹² Hargrave, *The Great War*, 21, 80, 159, and especially the closing chapter; idem., *Confession*, 62; Paul, *The Living Hedge*, 121; idem., *Angry Young Man*, 57.

the strain could be measured, and would therefore seem incompatible with the Kin's premise, especially when that premise was expressed in the form, 'the proper function of the individual is to live splendidly' – a nod in the direction of Nietzsche, who had influenced the Order of Woodcraft Chivalry too. Equally curious, in one who was such an immanentist, was the belief in the idea of an elite. For this was how Hargrave encouraged the Kin to think of itself, and how in fact it did see itself; 'We were the Elect', one ex-member recalled. And in a magazine article Hargrave catechised himself thus: 'Do you expect to be a big, popular movement? No. Big, popular movements have to appeal to big, popular sentiments, and big, popular sentiments reflect herd instincts and catchpenny catchwords'.¹³

For Hargrave the elite was vital in imposing order upon 'the hot-headed, unsteady, easily gulled Mass-mind', or, as he put it in one of his less felicitous moments, the Kin's function was that of 'a Positive Upright Fertilizing Principle [whose] creative climax of Lingam in Yoni is reached when it has penetrated inertia and given form to formlessness'. And as the Kin was to the people, so was Hargrave to the Kin. When at all feasible, a Hargrave *diktat* settled policy, and where discussion was considered unavoidable no vote was taken; the sense of the meeting was relied upon (here Hargrave's Quaker ancestry may be discerned).¹⁴ It was a disastrous attitude to adopt, however, for in 1924 serious dissension occurred when the South-East London section withdrew after losing a motion challenging Hargrave's dictatorship and began a new organization (The Woodcraft Folk) with a marked leftward tendency.¹⁵ This was a serious blow to the movement, but it is only fair to point out that the elite-minded Kibbo Kift was not misled as so many elite groups were, especially at that time, into hatred for any person or group. In particular, the Kin went out of its way to praise the Jews for their contributions to progress.¹⁶

Even if this self-contradiction of an elite-dominated group in an immanentist setting could be accepted, there still remained the problem of what the Kibbo Kift was to do (apart from the chil-

¹³ Paul, *The Living Hedge*, 155; *The Healthy Life*, October 1932.

¹⁴ *Broadsheet*, August 1926; Hargrave, *Confession*, 94, 120.

¹⁵ Paul, *Angry Young Man*, 56; *Nomad*, July 1924.

¹⁶ *The Mark*, January 1923; Hargrave, *Confession*, 44–5; *Broadsheet*, September 1926, April 1928.

dren's activities for which a case could be made out); all-night hikes might be good for training, but training to what end? When Hargrave described the Kin as existing 'to act as an instrument of social regeneration', he presumably meant something like the Bolshevik role as the vanguard of the proletariat, or what later the storm troopers were to be for national socialism. But the Kin was not a political vanguard; it was apolitical and hostile to any kind of parliamentarism, which it saw as 'one of the channels of mass-suggestion'. Yet if the Kin's role was to convert by example rather than by direction, its policy of arrogant withdrawal from society was psychologically wrong. The truth was that Hargrave's vision was an impossible one. When he noted that 'The Kindred have one common enemy: Sloth', he was acknowledging that his movement was one of pure action, a reflex devoid of intelligent purpose.¹⁷

Weighed down by such an incubus, the Kibbo Kift ceased to grow as early as 1924. As war memories faded and as the economic situation began to improve and the challenge to parliamentarism to recede, the Kin was driven to rely more and more on the personal magnetism of the founder. This was considerable enough; one ex-follower, L. A. Paul, remembers him as 'the only other man (besides Ramsay MacDonald) in whom I had met the consciousness of greatness'; even sober intellectuals would testify to his powers, for a man who could surprise an initially hostile gathering of monetary reformers into standing at his bidding clearly possessed an unusual gift of persuasion. But in the circumstances such talents could only just hold the converted, and sometimes not even that. Hargrave must have sensed that something was missing, and that some overriding purpose would have to be found. Those who were used to his messianic behaviour might have detected an impending change, for in the late summer of 1924 the Headman and one lieutenant withdrew for fourteen days into the mountains of Wales; but for those unprepared for the Dispensation of the New Law, the later issues of *Nomad* (the Kibbo Kift journal at that time) must have come as a surprise. Without any preparatory message the faithful were bidden to read books on the New Economics, including Douglas's *Economic Democracy* and

¹⁷ Hargrave, *Confession*, 62–63, 199; *Broadsheet*, November 1925; *Nomad*, October 1923.

Credit-Power and Democracy, and Soddy's *Cartesian Economics and The Inversion of Science*.¹⁸

The agent responsible for sowing the seed in such a receptive mind would seem to have been Rolf Gardiner. In 1923 Gardiner, then reading modern languages at Cambridge, became assistant editor, then editor, of *Youth*, a university magazine started in 1920 with a strong leftward slant and a leaning towards Guild Socialism. In 1921, when Social Credit ideas began to permeate the Guild philosophy, Gardiner founded the Cambridge Social Credit Study Circle. At the same time his interest in Germany had brought him into contact with the German Youth Movement, which he admired intensely, and under his editorship *Youth* began to reflect these changes. Hargrave became a contributor, and found his articles featured along with those of Douglas. The usefulness of Social Credit ideas for the Kibbo Kift movement was plain. Hargrave recognized the importance of his conversion to monetary reform and later acknowledged that 'half our problem is psychological and the other half is economic. The psychological complex of industrial mankind can only be released by solving the economic impasse'.¹⁹ Previously, the Kibbo Kift had been an idealist movement prepared to ignore the material sphere; now the emphasis was changed, but in such a way that while the economic basis was given due importance, it was not allowed to become the final end.

The transformation had to be effected slowly; too precipitate action would have antagonized too many of the Kin; as it was the Kin passed through an anxious period of realignment. Moreover, the existence of other monetary reform groups meant that Hargrave would have to step warily if he were not to find his movement dismissed as unnecessary. It was a year before Social Credit was mentioned by name; then it was brusquely announced: 'We believe in Social Credit, the Just Price and the release of the individual from the position of machine minder.'²⁰ Not before 1927 did monetary reform become an official part of the Kin's creed, and even then the declaration did not commit the Kin to any

¹⁸ *Nomad*, August, December 1924.

¹⁹ *NA*, 1 December 1921; *Youth*, March, July 1923; Hargrave, *Confession*, 49.

²⁰ *Broadsheet*, August 1926.

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specific brand of reform. Meanwhile Hargrave was feeling his way to a criticism of the existing Social Credit movement which would allow a role to the Kin. Shortly after the general declaration of belief in some form of Social Credit, he noted that 'the whole of the Social Credit movement is very weak in its psycho-sensory faculties'²¹; this was his way of saying that he could improve their propaganda.

Hargrave's bargaining position was strengthened by the fact that two branches of the Social Credit movement were in existence at this time, the orthodox group around Douglas and *The New Age*, and the upstart Economic Freedom League centred in Coventry. Hargrave therefore had a choice. *The New Age* was a long established weekly with a brilliant past; still the official organ of the movement, it was able to count on the contributions of well placed men. The Economic Freedom League's paper, *The Age of Plenty*, an erratic monthly, was not so professionally produced as *The New Age* and could not command a readership of the same calibre, but its supporters were activists who might well prove the better material for welding into the para-military organization to which Hargrave instinctively gravitated. Moreover, under John Strachey's influence, they paid attention to a section of the population which *The New Age* people totally ignored, the masses, especially the unemployed masses. Strachey at that time was all but a Social Creditor. He had attended the 1926 conference of the Economic Freedom League and there advocated making use of the 'tremendous latent powers of the working class'.²² A year later the unemployed of the North-East began to demand an inquiry into the country's financial methods. Hargrave soon showed himself in agreement with this approach, and after a visit to the North-East began the swearing in of 'Surplus Labour Groups'

to back the kindred of the Kibbo Kift in making One Great National Demand for the proper supply of Money to buy the Goods produced by the Community and I undertake to back the kindred of the Kibbo Kift towards this Economic Change by means of Unarmed Mass Pressure; and to this end I place myself here and now willingly under the strict discipline and direct leadership of the Kindred. So be it.²³

²¹ *Ibid.*, August 1927, April 1928.

²² E. E. McCarthy, 'A History of the Social Credit Movement' (unpublished M.A. thesis, Leeds, 1947), 29.

²³ *Broadsheet*, October 1928, November 1932; *NA*, 18 October 1928.

The Age of Plenty was the first to take note of Hargrave's conversion. In its issue of January 1928 a correspondent said of the Kindred: 'This is a very healthy movement, and any man worth his salt should be with it'. This overture was followed two months later by the announcement that Hargrave would be the main speaker at the 1928 conference of the Economic Freedom League. *The New Age* had earlier taken note of Hargrave the youth leader and amateur philosopher when it reviewed his book *Winkle*, and when his major work, *The Confession of the Kibbo Kift*, was enthusiastically praised; it was seen as a sign of strength that the author had been sufficiently eclectic to have drawn 'something useful from St Paul, Mme. Blavatsky, Charlie Chaplin, Cromwell, Lao Tze, Nietzsche, Noah and Tolstoy'.²⁴ But it was not until it reported the meeting of the Economic Freedom League that *The New Age* appreciated Hargrave's role as a Social Credit publicist. The correspondent found Hargrave, who appeared in Kin uniform, a welcome change from the others, whose 'speeches and discussions clogged like cold suet pudding'. For this correspondent the highlight of the meeting was when Hargrave called successfully for the delegates to stand at his bidding, a practical demonstration of the power of the emotions over the intellect. The account closed with the conclusion that the Kin 'hold something – some throb of life – which the Social Credit Movement will need; Faith in themselves'.²⁵ Evidently Hargrave was someone to be cultivated, and when the Kin annual camp took place soon afterwards, both the editor of *The New Age* and a representative of the Economic Freedom League were in attendance.²⁶

The former must have been the more persuasive. The issue of Hargrave's paper *Broadsheet* (July 1928) which followed the Althing urged its readers to take *The New Age* but made no mention of *The Age of Plenty*. A little later Hargrave's catspaw began to make more open moves through *The New Age*. This agent was Philip Kenway, a retired New Zealand sheep farmer, an ex-Quaker, and a generous supporter of Social Credit causes. He developed an intense admiration for Hargrave and was pleased to act as his 'front' man. Through the correspondence columns of *The New Age* he put forward the suggestion that some third way

²⁴ *NA*, 28 May 1925, 8 December 1927.

²⁵ *NA*, 3 May 1928.

²⁶ *Broadsheet*, June 1928.

could surely be found between the Social Credit movement and the Economic League. His inquiry was taken up by others writing in to advocate mass action, and calling for a disciplined core of 1,000 members commanding the unquestioning allegiance of at least 250,000 followers; this approach was christened The Third Line by Hargrave, who himself entered the field to reveal his plans to enlist the aid of Surplus Labour Groups. At this point, however, *The New Age* had second thoughts; Douglas's distrust of political movements was referred to, and Douglas himself contributed an article predicting the 1929 smash, and so by implication rejecting the need for any plan for action. When *The New Age* dining club members discussed Hargrave, they presumably concluded against him, for in the same month Kin interest was switched to *The Age of Plenty*.²⁷

Again the lead was taken by Kenway. And again it was planned not to use the Kin directly, even though by this time it stood unequivocally for monetary reform, or, as it was put, for the 'Economic Runnymede'. Rather, an intermediate group was set up, the Economic Party, with the sole aim of creating 'an effective propaganda instrument'. That the Economic Party was a front was soon made clear when it was announced that its officers would be appointed by Kin headquarters in London. But the usefulness of a separate organization was shown by the way in which it could attract members who presumably would not have joined the Kibbo Kift – Compton Mackenzie was one of them.²⁸

The Economic Party was organized on a business-like basis, as one would have expected from Hargrave and Kenway, its secretary. A clear statement of aims was recorded in the Economic Charter published in *The Age of Plenty* in July 1929:

1. That the credit power of a Community belongs to the Community as a whole and may not be restricted or withheld by any private individual or group whatsoever.
2. That the cash credits of the population of this country shall at any moment be collectively equal to the collective cash prices for consumable goods for sale.

²⁷ P. Kenway, *Quondam Quaker* (Birmingham, 1947). The book was dedicated to Hargrave; *NA*, 6, 27 September, 11, 18, 25 October, 1 November 1928, 13 February 1930; *Broadsheet*, November 1928.

²⁸ *The Age of Plenty*, July 1928, January, February, October 1929; *NA*, 31 July 1929. Mackenzie chaired a meeting for Douglas in Glasgow. See *Gramophone*, May 1933; see also *The New English Weekly*, 25 May 1933.

3. That the sole function of finance is to make available for consumption and use the total goods and services produced.
4. That banking organizations shall act as the Public Accountants of the British People, and not as private monopolies of the Nation's Credit Power.

To carry on the day to day propaganda, Workers' Educational Groups (WEG) were established; these were shop organizations not unlike communist cells, but probably a heritage of the Guild Socialist past. The first were set up in Coventry with George Hickling, an unemployed mechanic, as secretary. Coventry, however, was a hotbed of intrigue and personal feuds, and the scheme was soon abandoned. In the disorganization *The Age of Plenty* suspended publication for two months.²⁹

If this particular project came to nothing, there was another development in Coventry which did have a significant result. From being a subordinate, Hickling had developed ideas of his own importance and an impressive sounding organization to embody them. Towards the end of 1930, i.e., soon after the collapse of the Economic Party, he began to organize the unemployed of Coventry into a Legion. In this venture he had the active support of Father Paul Stacy, an old Guild Socialist-Social Creditor. Stacy consented to act as 'Chaplain' to the Legion; he opened his church to Freedom Sunday Services, blessed Legion banners, and brought down Father Demant, a prominent Social Creditor from London, to preach to the men, and Douglas himself addressed the Legion. Soon the Legion had thrown up an inner elite, first known as the Iron Guard, but later, because of the quasi-uniform which they adopted, as the Green Shirts.³⁰

The threat posed by this new group lay in its directness. In this respect it proved an advance on the Economic Party, for in place of their four demands the Legion put forward three slogans: demand the National Credit Office; demand the Price Calculus; demand the National Industrial Dividend.³¹ Hargrave's own following seemed menaced, especially when branches of the Legion appeared

²⁹ *The Age of Plenty*, June, July 1929, February 1930.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, Nos. 4, 5, 6. *This Prosperity*, November 1932; *NA*, 26 February, 14 May, 23 August 1931; The Crusader Legion, *The Coventry Charter* (Coventry, 1932?). See also *This Prosperity*, April 1932 and *NA*, 22 October 1931.

³¹ *NA*, 26 February 1931; *The Age of Plenty*, no. 4.

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in Glasgow and London. There was, however, little need for concern, for in personality Hargrave so outshone Hickling that he had no difficulty in sweeping the Legion into the Kin. Yet the threat was not without its effects. When the Legion went into uniform at the end of 1931, the Kin responded to the implied challenge by a ruthless modernization; the old lodges were re-organized; the archaisms were dropped, 'gear' becoming 'equipment', 'Thingcouncil' appearing as District Head-Quarter Staff, and the delightful 'Big Smoke Middle Thing' turned prosaically into London Headquarters; the saxon-prussian uniform was replaced by a more up-to-date military variant using the green shirts of the Legion. At the same time the Legion seems to have been equally impressed by Hargrave and his organization, and at the 1932 camp attended by 40 Legionnaires agreed to become associated with the Kin, though retaining its own identity. Eventually, the Legion broke up in 1933, leaving Hargrave in sole possession of the field. By January 1933, the old name Kibbo Kift had been relegated to a subordinate position and the new title became The Green Shirt Movement for Social Credit. As the Kin candidly announced: 'That is going to be the popular name of this movement – the Green Shirts! Kibbo Kift is too difficult and the Legion of the Unemployed is too much of a mouthful. We've been mis-named Green Shirts, that name will stick to us – let's stick to it.'

The remaining links with the Kin past were gradually dropped or modified in such a way as to maintain continuity without jeopardizing the new look; thus the old $\aleph\kappa$ sign was retained but was now referred to as the 'Double Key' symbol, unlocking the Douglas door into the Promised Land.³²

The reconstituted movement got off to a good start when it received recognition from Major Douglas himself. In a revealing letter addressed to Hargrave the Major wrote:

As I understand that the objects and organization of the Green Shirt movements are based on the ideal, firstly that it is the business of leaders to lead, so that it may be easier for others to follow, and secondly, that this ideal may be realized by grafting the progress of the present on sound traditions of the past, I think that I can claim a real kinship with

³² *NA*, 20 August 1931, 21 January 1932, 9 February 1933; *This Prosperity*, April 1933; *Broadsheet*, July 1931, June 1932, July 1934; *Annual Report of the Green Shirt Movement for Social Credit, 1932-33*; *Social Credit*, 1 November 1935.

it, and I shall feel honored if the green tartan now worn by my family is adopted for the facings of its uniform.

He continued to speak highly of the Green Shirts and commended them to his Australian audience in 1934.³³ And with the working class the Green Shirts did enjoy a fleeting popularity. Partly this was due to the fact that desperate men are willing to consider desperate remedies, but there was more to it than that. In many ways the Green Shirt appeal was well suited to the needs of the unemployed. Hargrave recognized the importance of giving a purpose to empty lives – this had been one of the original Kibbo Kift impulses – and branch life was kept busy; thus the Bradford branch demanded a six day a week allegiance, two nights devoted to drill and street patrol, one evening to business, another to recreation, and the Saturday to selling literature, and one evening to study of Social Credit. Efforts were made to find premises which could be used as a club by the members, and a big point was made of the London Headquarters' ability to offer 'anything from a cup of tea to a full meal any evening of the week'.³⁴ The need for colour in the lives of the unemployed held high priority with Hargrave, who from the start had insisted on emotional values. The drums and the banners which were such a feature of the Green Shirts' public appearances, the use of striking literature for whose publication Hargrave's experience was invaluable, were naturally attractive to many whose days were drab and featureless. Even the Kin tradition had its use, for in such times the possibility of camping was better than no holiday at all; and the flying columns by Green Shirt lorry to fresh districts, with accommodation provided by sympathizers in the area, had some of the exciting camaraderie which had last been experienced in Britain in the pre-war days of the Labour Party. At its height, the movement had a chain of some sixteen groups across Britain, mainly in industrial centres. The membership was not revealed, but it was claimed that *Attack*, the most successful of the Green Shirt organs, was selling 7,000 copies a week. Whatever the numbers at his disposal, Hargrave managed to make a sizable impact. Under his leadership the marching columns of Green Shirts joined in the hunger marches organized by the unemployed, and on these occasions their

³³ *Broadsheet*, February 1933; *NA*, 19 April 1934.

³⁴ *NA*, 19 October 1933; *Broadsheet*, October 1932.

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soldierly bearing contrasted splendidly with the bedraggled appearance of the others. Even the Blackshirts, it was claimed, were impressed by Green Shirt spirit and discipline and paid tribute to their appearance.³⁵

It quickly became evident that growth had been too rapid and that the end of the depression spelled the decline of the Green Shirts. After Douglas's recognition few others came forward to endorse the movement. Ezra Pound did give a banner; Lord Strabolgi, ex-Liberal and now Labour M.P., received a deputation of Green Shirts at Westminster. This was all, however, and so short of reputable backing were they that one M.F. Cullis, whose only claim to distinction was the fact that he was then a scholar of Brazenose, had his photograph and *curriculum vitae* printed in *Attack* when he announced his adherence. The established Social Credit membership, where not hostile, was privately amused by Hargrave's antics and gave him no support. Hargrave himself admitted that branch life was precarious; attention was drawn to one branch which had managed to build up a backing of 2,000 – 3,000 but which had totally disintegrated within a few weeks of this count.³⁶

Yet Hargrave refused to admit defeat. In 1935 occurred the chance to make two fresh bids for a hearing. The first occasion was the unexpected victory of a party advocating Social Credit in the Canadian province of Alberta. The Green Shirts knew that the Albertan leader, William Aberhart, did not fully understand Social Credit and they suspected that the Albertan Party was nothing more than a tool of the financiers using the Social Credit title to discredit the genuine message of Douglas. To prevent anything similar in Britain, Hargrave decided to transform his organization into the Social Credit Party of Great Britain. The second opportunity soon followed. The 1935 General Election gave the newly-born party the chance to go before the voters, repeat in miniature the Alberta triumph, and shock the money power's tools at Westminster into mending their ways. At short notice the Green Shirt tradition of anti-parliamentary direct-mandate

³⁵ *Annual Report of the Green Shirt Movement for Social Credit, 1933–34*; *NA*, 19 October 1933; *Broadsheet*, January 1933, August 1934.

³⁶ *Annual Report of the Green Shirt Movement for Social Credit, 1934–35*; *NA*, 23 February 1933; *Attack*, July 1934; *Broadsheet*, June 1935.

thinking was abandoned and a candidate for South Leeds decided upon.

The party was lucky in its choice. Wilfred Townend was a strong candidate. Locally born, he had served in the Navy during the war, and upon graduating from Leeds University had become divinity master in a local school. Originally a Labour Party supporter, he had been converted to Social Credit in 1932.³⁷ Behind him stood one of the more active branches of the party, in which Townend himself had recently enrolled twenty-one members, and they were helped by squads of Green Shirts from London and other parts of the country. Their cause was also helped by the circumstances of the election; the country was passing through one of its bouts of disillusionment with orthodoxy and with the main political parties – this was the time of the Peace Pledge Union – and locally the withdrawal of the Liberals from a constituency where previously they had polled a respectable vote, helped the novel appeal of Hargrave. His flair for publicity got the party a news coverage which was considerably more than most minor parties could manage. For instance, the deposit money was presented in silver and the Returning Officer was allowed to count as far as £2 before legal tender was substituted; it was both an eye-catching trick and the occasion for a lecture on money, bankers' monopoly, and the rest of the Social Credit Party case.³⁸ In the end the result was a respectable 11 per cent of the poll. By the standards of minor parties this was a fair result, and the party was justified in crowing over Mosley's New Party.³⁹ Unfortunately, it remained true that no dent had been made in the two-party system.

The reaction to the events of 1935 and to subsequent developments did the party no good. Douglas could no longer countenance a party which was not merely an organization with inherently dangerous tendencies towards dictatorship, but which had the effrontery to imply that amateurs should dictate to the experts; recognition was withdrawn and the Douglas flash disap-

³⁷ *NA*, 26 September 1935, 16 April 1936.

³⁸ *Attack*, no. 32; *NA*, 19 October 1933, 10, 17 October 1935; *Yorkshire Evening News*, 7, 15 October, 1, 4 November 1935; *Leeds Weekly Citizen*, 22 November 1935. The Leeds Social Credit group had gone over to the Green Shirts *en bloc*; see *NA*, 4 May 1933.

³⁹ *NA*, 21 November 1935. The New Party figures were those for 1931, when of 24 candidates only 4 polled over 1,000 votes. See C. Cross, *The Fascists in Britain* (London, 1961), 52.

peared from the uniforms. Later developments only widened the gap, and reached a showdown over Alberta. Telegrams having proved useless, Hargrave went out at his own expense to put the Albertan Social Crediters right. He was furious to discover that his chances had been jeopardized by Douglas's forewarning that he was not to be trusted and that he was not technically competent.⁴⁰ After such high hopes, and being so near to leading a successful revolt against Aberhart, Hargrave never forgave Douglas. These setbacks and fading hopes were reflected in his behaviour. He rounded on Douglas and took his revenge for Alberta. When G.F. Powell, Douglas's unfortunate emissary, was welcomed back to England at a Social Credit reception, Kenway and the Green Shirts broke up the meeting. Chanting slogans, hurling objects, and finally rushing the platform, they effectively prevented Powell from presenting his report. Hargrave jumped up and shouted his repudiation of any leadership of Social Credit, in England or anywhere in the world, other than his own. The police had to be called in before order could be restored.⁴¹ Hargrave's language began to show a return to his Kibbo Kift mysticism; his demand for 'Drums, drums – get drums! More drums, more flags, more marching. Make the Drum-thunder roll and the Green Flag of Freedom rise like a forest from the Pentland Coast to Lizard Head' was a hysterical repudiation of the moderation of 1929–35. In turning on Montagu Norman, the Governor of the Bank of England, and attacking him as a 'Sinister Banker Ring-leader [who] dresses and acts like a conspirator',⁴² he was tempted into the only example of smear technique that can be found in his public utterances. Such an organization was in no state to withstand the Public Order Act which outlawed the use of uniforms for political purposes, although a brave and typical attempt to circumvent the Order was made by parading with shirts held aloft on hangers. When war came and suspended operations, the party was dealt a blow from which it never recovered. It still exists in Britain, but Hargrave, though alive at the time of writing, no longer directs it, and its influence is nil.

⁴⁰ Personal communication from Miss H. Corke.

⁴¹ *Social Credit*, 29 July 1938. The text of this repudiation may be found in *This Week's Message from Hargrave*, no. 21.

⁴² *Broadsheet*, January 1936; *Attack*, no. 38.

What is interesting about the Green Shirts is not, however, their fortunes as a political force in Britain; even in their own opinion this was insignificant. Green Shirt activity has an interest because it has been used to support the case that Social Credit is essentially fascist, and second because the transformation of an already existing organization serves as a means of evaluating the significance of Social Credit philosophy.

The nature of the party was a difficult question for contemporary observers, for action for its own sake and externals tended to bulk so large. On this ground those who discerned a fascist streak could be pardoned; the uniforms, the marching, the drums, the notion of an elite, in the early 1930s all these were to the left wing as red rags to a bull. Social Credit itself was already suspect on the left because of its petit-bourgeois appeal, and the association with quasi-fascist characters had already been made.⁴³ The party had continually to protest against this superficial identification. It could be pointed out that to non-left wingers the Social Credit Party appeared as a socialist movement, promising wealth and security to all regardless of effort or merit, and especially annoying the fascists by refusing to accept the idea of an organic state. And in truth the 'unarmed military technique' which Hargrave saw as the secret of success was almost entirely symbolic. The frequent Green Shirt marches were either a part of the unemployed demonstrations, to which little exception could be taken, or small pacific demonstrations against institutions, as when a section marched to the Bank of England, marched round the building three times, and presented a petition to the Governor. When violence did occur, it was more likely to be of the kind to endear itself to the public, as when one Michael Murphy hurled a green-painted brick through the window of 11 Downing Street; for this signal act he was awarded the Green Oak Leaf, the highest Green Shirt award. Moreover, it must be added that the Kibbo Kift tradition of championing the oppressed was never given up, and vigorous attacks were directed against anti-semitism and racial theories.⁴⁴

In short, the Green Shirts saw themselves as equally firm in their rejection of both communism and fascism. Their philosophy

⁴³ *The Communist Review*, May 1922, January 1926.

⁴⁴ *NA*, 23 March, 17 August, 1933, 25 April 1934; *Broadsheet*, April 1934, July 1935; *Attack*, 9 December 1933, no. 29 (Spring 1935 ?); *The Age of Plenty*, May, July 1928.

they described as 'the third resolvent factor'.⁴⁵ In 1933 they had the perfect chance to show their impartiality. That year the first of May, Labour Day, fell in mid-week, and the question was whether to march on the weekend before or after the first. Left and Right chose differently; Hargrave's men marched on both occasions.

But if Hargrave was clear in his own mind that the Green Shirts stood for a third philosophy, it must be admitted that it was still far from being convincing. Yet the adoption of Social Credit had at least removed the grosser blemishes which had marked the Kibbo Kift outlook. The old individualism, the reason why totalitarianism, whether of the Left or Right, could not be accepted, was still a central belief. However, the previous immanism was no longer insisted upon and the call for world unity was in consequence muted. What was now wanted was an economic nationalism which within a self-sufficient area would insist upon the greatest possible amount of home rule; Social Credit Party flags were ordered to carry not only the Union Jack but also the emblems of the four constituent countries.⁴⁶ World unity was suspect, for it was held to increase the chance of the money powers' taking absolute control. At the same time there was a new emphasis on the monarchy. A king, it was felt, was the only individual who would find it possible to withstand the pressure of the Money Trust's conspiracy. Therefore it was not surprising when the Green Shirts vociferously took the side of Edward VIII in the abdication crisis; on the strength of his comments deploring unemployment, they presented him as the sworn foe and victim of the Bankers. Indeed, hopes for legitimacy lived on and as late as 1937 the Green Shirts presented a loyal address to the Duke of Windsor, then at Schloss Wasserlemburg.⁴⁷

An even greater change in outlook, however, was the abandonment of the non-political tradition of the Kin. Ultimately, the Green Shirt state would have been a repudiation of traditional parliamentary democracy, an end which Hargrave proclaimed in 1932 in an address on 'a Popular Mandate versus Ballot Box

⁴⁵ The Kibbo Kift, *Miscellaneous Pamphlets* (n.p., 1939).

⁴⁶ *Broadsheet*, November 1936.

⁴⁷ This line had emerged as early as 1932; see *The Age of Plenty*, no. 9; *Broadsheet*, July 1937.

Democracy'.⁴⁸ But as communists and fascists alike had found before this, it was tactically necessary to come down into the political arena. The Kin, lacking any goal which would have justified such a course of action, had not been able to take this step and had been condemned to aimless and contradictory policies. The breaking of the Bankers' Combine and the establishment of a Social Credit World of Plenty not only justified but positively compelled political participation and in so doing injected a vital sense of purpose. The idea of an elite whose pageantry and symbolism would serve to awaken the mass to a realization of the new order – 'we are the Spearhead of the New Life breaking into the mass apathy of this banker ridden community'⁴⁹ – was a belief which transformed the Kin elite-for-its-own-sake into the Green Shirt executive, an elite with a purpose. And so without necessarily impugning Hargrave's or the Kin's sincerity in their acceptance of Social Credit, it may perhaps be observed that its discovery was a most fortunate one for them, accepted with all the drowning man's gratitude for the proverbial straw.

The final word on Hargrave and his Kibbo Kift-Green Shirt Party may be left to D.H. Lawrence. In a letter to Rolf Gardiner, his enthusiastic admirer, Lawrence wrote of Hargrave and his *Confession*:

Of course, it won't work: not quite flesh and blood. The ideas are sound, but flesh and blood won't take 'em till a great deal of flesh and blood has been destroyed. Of course, the birthright credit too is sound enough – but to nationalize capital is a good deal harder than to nationalize industries . . . [Hargrave] alternates between idealism pure and simple and a sort of mummery: and then a compromise with practicality. What he wants is all right. I agree with him on the whole, and I respect him as a straightforward fighter. But he knows there's no hope, his way *en masse*. And therefore, underneath, he's full of hate. He's ambitious: and his ambition isn't practical: so he's full of hate, underneath. He's overweening and he's cold. But, for all that, on the whole, he's *right*, and I respect him for it. I respect his courage and aloneness. If it weren't for his ambition and his lack of warmth, I'd go and Kibbo Kift along with him . . . But by wanting to rope in *all* mankind it shows he wants to have his cake and eat it.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ *Annual Report of the Green Shirt Movement for Social Credit, 1932–1933*.

⁴⁹ *Broadsheet*, November 1935.

⁵⁰ R. Gardiner, *World Without End* (London, 1932), 37.