

PART FOUR

RETREAT AND RETURN

*" Mine eyes have seen the Glory of the coming of the Lord :
He is trampling out the vintage where the grapes of wrath
are stored ;
He hath loosed the fateful lightning of his terrible swift
sword,
His truth is marching on."*

JULIA WARD HOWE

OBJECTIONS TO TRADE BOARDS



"They will ruin my Business."



"They will starve the Employer."

Chapter XIII

REAR-GUARD ACTION

By 1921 unemployment leapt to about two million and, by January, 1922, the cost of living figures had fallen from 165 per cent. above July, 1914, to 92 per cent. There is a close connection between those two facts. In 1933, when the unemployment figures were well over three million, the increased cost of living dropped to its lowest since July, 1914, 36 per cent. The unemployed do not eat so much though they be hungry, or wear so much though they be cold. So, effective demand being lessened, the price of what there is goes down and those who are employed and those who live on those who are employed can eat and wear the more.

Let me illustrate how the cutting-down of Government establishment directly affected employment in shops.

We had an Agreement with a firm of drapers, Bland and Phillips, of Deptford. They paid the Drapers' Chamber of Trade rates plus commission. One day Major Bland came to see me. He was in trouble because of wholesale discharges from Woolwich Arsenal and his trade was so bad he felt he must do something he did not want to do or go out of business. He must cut staff or wages, or both. I was in this quandary : if a reduction in rates was agreed the Drapers' Chamber might apply for a like reduction. It was difficult. However, it was finally agreed between us and to his satisfaction (I was to get consent of the staff, of course) that the Chamber Agreement should be operated, that is, inclusive of commission.

A little later that day he phoned me to say that on his return to the shop he was presented with a "round robin" by the staff saying they no longer wanted a Union Agreement. "You had better see them, Hoffman," said he. That night there were gathered at the Deptford Employment Exchange probably 120 of the staff and when I arrived I was received with hisses and groans; some of

them threw their Union cards at me. God bless my heart and soul, that's a nice reception! thought I. Out of the confusion one gathered that the Union was preventing them getting reductions, so to blazes with the Union. Now I've heard of Union officials being howled down for not getting increases, but never had I heard of Union officers being howled down for not getting reductions. This was a novel if unpleasant experience. So with patience and persistence what was at the back of their minds was slowly brought to light: they feared unemployment more than they feared low wages.

In February, 1920, the Drapers' Chamber of Trade at their Annual Meeting urgently requested the Minister of Labour to expedite the setting up of the Trade Board for Textile Distribution. In February, 1921, they emphatically protested against it, called upon kindred Societies to join with them in a deputation to the Ministry.

Sir Woodman Burbidge (of Harrods), at the first Annual Meeting of the R.D.A. also held in February, 1921, said "he had grounds for believing that Trade Boards would soon be a thing of the past." The R.D.A. became whole-hoggers, and called for the abolition of all Trade Boards and the Ministry of Labour as well. They asked for a Royal Commission to fix a national minimum wage for everybody, which did not quite square with the idea of the Drapers' Chamber that regard should be taken of local conditions. Little contradictions like that did not matter when a big attack is on against workers' wages. And, indeed, it was on! Being their largest advertisers, due regard was paid by the Press to all that was handed out to them. And what stuff was handed out! Dressmaking workrooms, clothing and corset workshops were being closed all over the country. "In Hampshire alone," they alleged, "600 workshops were shut down." What mattered if there were not that number in Hampshire. It was all fuel to the bonfire for the Drapers' Jamboree. "Wages showed an increase of 700 per cent. over pre-war." What if that meant that a highly skilled "hand" 22 years of age now in receipt of the Trade Board rate of 10 $\frac{3}{4}$ d. per hour would have got 6s. 1d. a week of 48 hours before the war.

The General Manager of Jays Ltd., wrote: "The methods of the Trade Board were appalling and cruel to thousands of girls in houses like ours." Mr. Sidney Skinner (John Barker's Ltd.) said that "Even a large business like this cannot afford to pay the rates." Neither Durham of Jays nor Skinner of Barker's cared one bit that their firms were members of the London Employers' Association, which had come to an Agreement with us twelve months before the Trade Board rates came into operation, and that some of the rates agreed were higher than the Trade Board rates and that both firms were in fact paying those higher rates. The Chairman of the Drapers' Chamber of Trade, in an interview, said: "Trade Boards were the main cause of unemployment," thus loftily ignoring that there was very bad unemployment in such industries as Cotton and Footwear, to take only two which had no Boards.

"You are muddying the water I am drinking from," growls the big bad wolf. "How can that be?" bleats the little white lamb," since the stream of water runs from you to me." But what matters the reasonable bleat of the little white lamb? He is due, anyway, to be consumed and his bones crunched. The Drapers' Chamber of Trade issued a tendentious circular to its members saying: "The Boards have undoubtedly caused much unemployment. How much have you got in your district? . . . The Chamber wants to bring sufficient pressure on the Ministry to prevent the setting up of any further Trade Boards for the Distributive Trades." If the girls had been working for next to nothing as, goodness knows, many of them had been doing, there would still have been a large number unemployed at that time when everywhere the tide of employment was on the ebb.

The R.D.A. had decided months previously, as a counter-attack to our application for Agreements on wage rates (I quote from a circular sent to their members), "to promote a campaign for the suspension of existing Trade Boards and to secure that the various powers exercised by the Ministry of Labour should revert to the original Ministries, and the Secretary be authorised to proceed with the campaign in conjunction with the greatest number of commercial and

industrial organisations, through the Press or otherwise, and later by Parliamentary action."

From the offices in Pall Mall went forth a turgid, indecent stream of sneers and abuse about the payment of the Chairman and appointed persons to the Boards; the kind of thing that still does duty about persons working for the Nation in its nationalised industries. Every person, even some in the service of Employers' Associations, who were anxious to do the wise and right thing in their day and generation for the national wellbeing by putting a stop to sweating, had flung at them handfuls of muck by unscrupulous people running this campaign. Sensitive people so shrink from such a flood of vilification that the garbagers too often meet with no opposition. Kindly people will not, decent people do not, gentle people cannot, meet like with like in this kind of attack.

But they did not stop at that sort of thing. The *Drapers' Organiser* published the following under the heading, "Chances for Martyrs": "The weekly circular issued by the Incorporated Association of Retail Distributors says that retailers in one or two towns have expressed their intention of paying wages below the official minimum to employees in their millinery and dressmaking workrooms and of risking prosecution. The risk is considerable, but it may be worth taking purely as an advertisement of the defects of the Trade Board System. . . . It would be advisable to avert odium by arranging to pay to some public charity the difference between the minimum and the actual rates."

"Avert odium!" That snivel of unctuousness was characteristic of the Drapery and from the *Drapers' Organiser*, too, a splendidly got-up artistic monthly production. Nevertheless, though evil communications do corrupt good manners, the *Drapers' Organiser* should have risen above such communications from Pall Mall. It ought never to have lowered itself to become *agent provocateur* for reactionary rich men even if they were "in the Drapery."

It was reported by a delegate to the Drapers' Chamber of Trade, amidst the noisy cheering of the assembled dabblers in revolt, that some Drapers were going to defy the law and the visiting Trade Board Inspector had con-

gratulated them. This led to a question in the House of Commons and the denial of any such incident.

Then on September 13th, 1921, a number of Drapery firms in Southsea were summoned at Portsmouth Police Court for paying rates lower than the Trade Board rates. Amongst the number were good-class houses like Morants and Handleys. Girls who ought to have got 10½*d.* got 8½*d.*, and apprentices were paid below the fixed rate. It was stated in Court that the Drapery and Dressmaking firms concerned combined together not to pay the rates. There was no evidence that the difference between what should have been paid and what was in fact paid was given to local charities. They brought some of the girls to Court to testify they were satisfied with the rates the firm was paying them. The cases were tried as a test in respect of one firm, Morants, who were fined 10*s.* for not putting up a Trade Board Notice. The bench had no hesitation in dismissing all the informations under the Probation of Offenders' Act, 1907. I could, of course, say all sorts of things about that bench of Magistrates. But they were the creatures of their environment. A raging, tearing campaign against dressmakers' "high wages" was convulsing the Press. Were not "600 workrooms in Hampshire alone" shutting down; and here were their local respectables, high-class firms like Morants and Handleys, being persecuted by the horrible Ministry of Labour! And did not the girls themselves say they were satisfied! They combined together, did those well-to-do gentlemen drapers of Southsea, to defy the law. The sum of twopence-farthing became to them of more moment than the law which gave them security in possession of their property. When the law at last constrained with humane qualifications their lust for gain at the expense and wellbeing of their fellow-creatures, they defy it and refuse to obey. Not only so but they enter boastfully into conspiracy with their fellows and encourage others to enter into a like defiance.

Portsmouth was the birthplace of Charles Dickens and it was an unhappy coincidence that before that bench of Magistrates, the Bourbon Bumbles of Southsea should produce their Olivers to bear obedient witness that Bumble was

quite a nice Bumble and that if he, Oliver, did ask for more, it was only because he was a gluttonous little devil, for he really didn't need it and really didn't want it. All the Olivers at all times in all ages say the same thing, though their large eyes, pale pathetic faces, timid shrinking bodies and threadbare clothes, more eloquent far than they, shout it aloud as a lie.

It is impossible to tell of all the mournful protesting to the Prime Minister, the Minister of Labour and to Members of Parliament, which had been gathered together from numerous Distributive Trade Employers' Associations, creating a storm of huge proportions, and having such doleful consequences. They urged "Need for National Economy", ignoring that the whole cost of Trade Board Machinery, staffing, fees, fares of those serving, all together cost the Nation only £100,000 a year. They said that the only call for Boards came from "paid Organisers of Trade Unions," ignoring that Parliament had put the task on the Minister of Labour to set up Trade Boards, not only where wages were "exceptionally low" (the original test), but in any trade where the Minister "is of opinion that no adequate machinery exists for the regulation of wages throughout the Trade." Dr. Macnamara, the Minister then responsible, gave way to the pressure which he himself invited. His "slow haste" became a full stop and his full stop became a gallop to the rear. At last in September, 1921, he announced the setting up of a Committee of Enquiry to be presided over by Lord Cave.

From this noisy and noxious campaign of reactionary shopkeepers, with its objective of thwarting the rise of shop workers and thrusting them back into the mire of their penurious past, one important Employers' Association must be excluded: the London Employers' Association. In all this vituperative heat without fire, leading without light, simulated rebellion without sacrifice, they kept cool heads, clear vision and calm judgment. They continued negotiations with the Union, as I will show presently, and did good work on behalf of Trade Boards before the Cave Commission. And one fine man, standing head and shoulders

above the ruck, makes his protest—Mr. Charles Coleing, J.P., O.B.E. Coleing represented the Drapers' Chamber on the Dressmaking Trade Board, he was their spokesman at all the conferences with the Government Departments. He was Chairman of their staffs committee and was their chief spokesman in all our negotiations, ending in a National Drapery Trade Agreement. He was Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Textile Distributive Training, and on his shoulders rested the burden of getting and keeping the classes going. In the formative days of hope his was the zeal which led his fellow drapers along the righteous road of reconstruction.

At the meeting of the Drapers' Chamber in April, 1921, he resigned from all his positions and committees because, he said, "He was out of harmony with the Chamber's reactionary tendencies. He had lately been placed in an extremely awkward position . . . but he would not act as their representative when he could not honestly say that he was carrying out his own conviction in voicing their views. . . ." It indeed had come to a pretty state of things when one of its own members could dub it reactionary. Talking to him afterwards upon the matter, he would shrug his shoulders and say: "Time will tell, Hoffman my boy, we're ahead of our day, that's all." He took his repudiation like the gentleman he was.

But the dire conspiracy of shortsighted, selfish men was to thrust hundreds of thousands of shop workers back and the cry of "sweating" in retail distribution was once more to be heard throughout the land.

In 1921 short time was laying a paralysing hand upon employment in retail distribution. Even in the case of the Army and Navy Stores the staff had been asked to volunteer to take off one day in six without pay, and they made request that the sacrifice asked for be spread over the whole staff so as to reduce the hardship. But the case of the R.D.A. was particular and peculiar. In October, 1920, they had informed us that there was no need to discuss an Agreement as Trade Boards for all sections of distribution were in process of formation. In November they told us that a uniform schedule, which was found to be the proposed

Grocery Trade Board rates, will be put into operation by them. Later on they said they would operate rates when they became legal and then in June, 1921, they wrote and asked the Minister not to make them legal. It was pathetic to witness a wealthy and powerful corporation behaving in this way.

At the close of 1921, at a packed meeting in the Central Hall, Westminster, a new Agreement for the Army and Navy Stores' employees was reported. This involved a reduction all round, being in the case of the assistants from 72s. 6d. at 25 and 75s. at 26, to 68s. at 25, though the basic wage and the commission were to remain the same. So the reduction was on the guaranteed minimum and was to operate from the first pay-day in 1922. At the close of that year the rates were reduced to 66s. at 25 years of age, the cost of living having fallen to 80 per cent. over July, 1914, being given as the reason. This did not come into operation until 1923, but it then became an Agreement covering the whole membership of the L.E.A. It applied to most of the West End houses, and as the membership of that Association became extended to houses outside London it became a very important document. General conditions remained substantially unaltered. Further attempts to reduce the rates during 1924 were successfully resisted.

In August, 1921, the Wholesale Textile Association of the City of London put forward their proposals for a new Agreement. It is quite true that the cost of living had fallen, and that trade in the Wholesale was bad and some of the firms had sustained losses in consequence. But they really need not have been so savage about wielding the knife to get their cuts of up to 28 per cent., reducing the rates to as low as 58s. They excused themselves in that, as the Warehouse Workers' Union had agreed, in Manchester, to the introduction of a Sliding Scale based on the rise or fall of the cost of living for the Home Trade Association, including Rylands, they must do the same in London. This was nonsense and it caused such irritation (for it must be remembered the cost of living was falling and so reductions in wages were recurrent) that in the following year its operation was suspended and in 1924 abandoned. Along

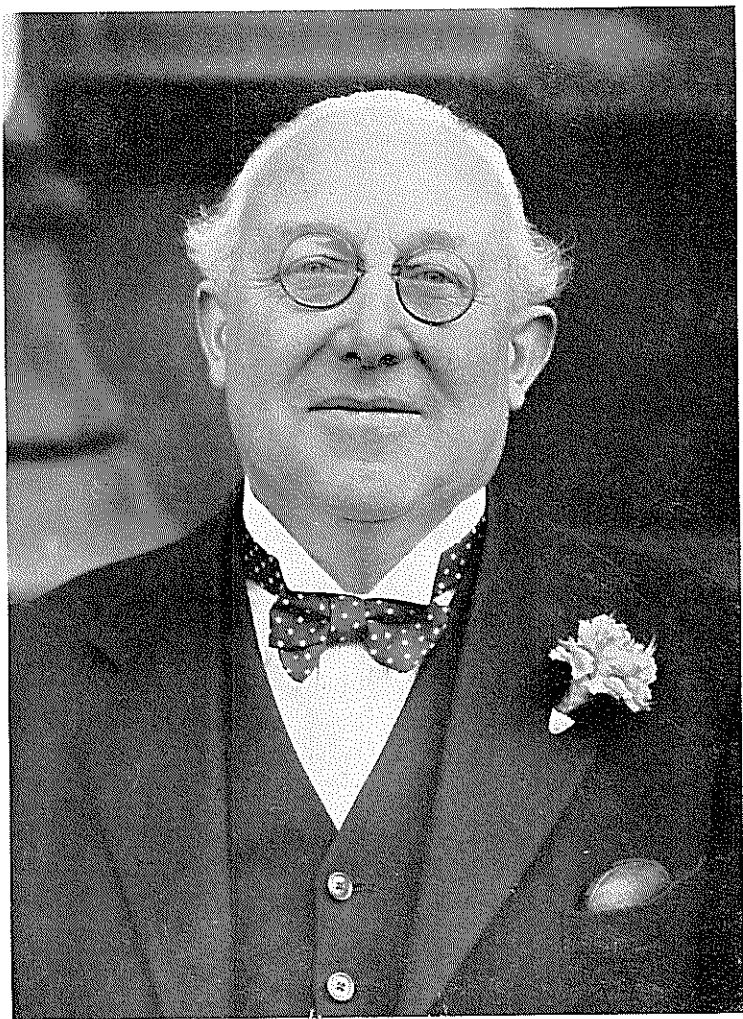
with its abolition were obtained increases up to 5s., thus restoring a small part of the cuts made. Even so the rate operating for salesmen, etc., in 1929, was only 63s. at 25 years of age, for a 44-hour week, having come down to that figure from 80s. in 1920. It is but right to state that staffs faced with alternatives decided that sooner than lose the 44-hour week it would be better to accept reductions. In December, 1929, the employers terminated the Agreement altogether.

The Lord Cave Committee was set up in October, 1921, and it made its report in May of the following year. The evidence is interesting, as revealing the fine art of bubble-blowing and bubble-pricking. To take one matter alone: that of the thousands of dressmakers thrown out of work by Trade Board rates. It was shown by figures taken from the Ministry of Labour Gazette that unemployment in the Needle Trades, which stood at 62,583 in January, 1921, went down to 20,825 in March. This, of course, proved how seasonal was the occupation. In London alone the unemployment of Union dressmaker members went down from 421 in January to 52 in March. Moreover, the figures were actually below the percentage of general unemployment. The average monthly percentage for all trades was 14 per cent. and for dressmaking 10.4 per cent.

The Committee which was set up to condemn remained to praise, faintly it is true, but still to praise. Let me quote from the *Manchester Guardian*, which of all the newspapers got down to the very vitals of the matter, had the sense of what was taking place, and the honesty to reveal it. "Short shrift is given in the Cave Committee report to the demand for the abolition of the Trade Boards and the establishment of a National Minimum Wage. The Incorporated Association of Retail Distributors was the most clamorous in calling for complete 'freedom of contract' and the legalisation of a National Minimum based on the barest subsistence allowance for the least skilled class of worker. After the Association's extensive propaganda efforts the remarks of the Committee must be very disconcerting. . . ."

The R.D.A. and its kindred conspirators knew what they were after. By hook or by crook they were out to prevent any wage-fixing machinery of any kind whatsoever in Retail Distribution. And they succeeded. They did not kill the Trade Board system. The Trade Boards were to remain, and under the name of Wages Councils they have to-day extended powers and scope for usefulness. But they held them back from Retail Distribution for nigh on twenty years. The long-run defeat for them and their fellow-conspirators is the measure of their fault and folly.

The retreat of shop workers from the high ground they had won after such great sacrifices and after so long a struggle had something of the inevitable about it. The tide of progress gradually ebbed, as it does along the rippled sandy beaches, leaving pools here and there, some shallow, some deep, with tiny rivulets finding their way down to the retiring ocean. So many Agreements lasted for some years, the Wholesale Textile until 1929, the London Employers' until 1942. Others have been maintained until this very day. Some were renewed for a time and fresh Agreements were entered into. Some stoppages of work took place. But, generally, Agreements just expired or were ignored. Existing staffs continued to receive the wages they were getting prior to the collapse, though, in some cases, there were reductions. But incoming staff got what they could. There was no bottom to wages, so the common level fell. Now staff turnover, or leakage, or wastage as it is variously spoken of, is very considerable. In Retail Trade as a whole (outside the Co-ops.) it probably was 30 per cent., so it would not take long for the general level of wages in shops to sink to the point of underpayment known as "sweating." When in 1934 a new general manager stepped in to look after the affairs of the Home and Colonial Stores and its planetary companions, which had got into a parlous state because of trading conditions (for you cannot have three million unemployed people and their dependents hungry and the purchasing power of wage-earners generally reduced without it being reflected in the turnover of food shops which cater substantially for that class of trade) he made a great discovery. Here is where



The Author

the metaphor of the ebbing tide becomes useful, for the retreating sea leaves rocks exposed which, unperceived when the tide was in, now loom large. The new general manager, having a mind narrowly nourished on costing, looked round for things to cut and saw those rocks standing up clearly. He saw those who were receiving the agreed wage rates of the war period and stood out in consequence conspicuously above the ill-paid rest of the staff—so he sacked some and reduced the wages of others, and all unwittingly started the rebellion and return of the shop worker along the road he is now traversing. That was in the autumn of 1934. But of those intervening fifteen shabby sordid years there is a story to tell not less heroic than all which has gone before.

Chapter XIV

FIGHTING IN THE SHADE

UP to 1926 there was considerable activity for all concerned. Reductions in wages applied for were, in numbers of cases, either fended off or very considerably modified. Some lapsing Agreements were renewed and new Agreements were entered into.

Three times the staff of Geo. Masons, the multiple grocers, had to be rallied in order to keep their Agreement fully operative. A new Agreement is reached with Sanders Bros., the multiple grocers, having some 250 branches, and George Mence Smith with 150. Agreements are come to for the warehouse staffs of United Kingdom Tea Co., Meadow Dairy, Lipton's, Peark's, and J. Warren and Son and Co. Agreements are reached, also, with Farmiloes, the wholesale and retail ironmongers, and with Francis Newberry and Co., and so on. I will not take you over all the ground ; suffice it to say that there were very many negotiations. There were quite a handful of strikes.

I am indebted for the particulars of this story of a struggle in Cork, to the General Secretary of the Irish Distributive Workers, Mr. L. J. Duffy. "Rebel Cork which never rebelled" ; the city in which the strike of Drapers' assistants took place in 1904 ; the city in which that small staff of a Stationers put up so gallant and glorious a fight in 1918. In 1923 trade in Ireland was in a very bad way. You cannot have war, no, not even a civil war, without destruction by fire and sword, cannonade and blasting bomb, and infectious corruption. All wars leave the contestants immediately the poorer, until the healing hand of Time covers the wounds and restores grace and wellbeing to the living.

In July, 1923, the Cork Employers' Federation served a demand on seventeen Trade Unions, including the Distributive workers, to reduce wages by 20 per cent. As a

special demand upon the Distributive workers they said: "Employers will also exercise their undoubted right to decrease the number of their staffs or employ any person as the state of their business requires." The reason for that demand was that the shop assistants of Cork had won for themselves so strong a position that, if a non-Unionist walked into the shop, the rest walked out. They had won "a closed shop" whether the shop door were open or shut. Wrote Duffy: "If there is one individual firm more responsible than another for the existing class-war in Cork, that is the firm of F. W. Woolworth and Co. Their business has been shut down by the Distributive workers in Cork for over eighteen months and until they recognise the Union and observe Union conditions they cannot reopen. To smash that power the present fight has been launched." The workers in every trade said, "Unless you withdraw that demand on the shop assistants out we come," and out they came, 10,000 of them including 900 shop workers. For the first and, I believe, up to this date the only time, united action has been made by workers in general with shop workers. On Saturday, August 18th, 1923, all workers in the city of Cork, including shop assistants, made common cause and, on strike, faced their employers together.

They could have had a settlement, but the shopkeepers would not withdraw that demand "to do as they liked with their own." Let us salute those workers of Cork for the gallant, gracious gentlemen they were. To stand by your fellow as you would stand by one of your own flesh and blood, to accept his troubles as your own, to share with him, to suffer with him, and to hunger with him, is not that the sign of a gallant Christian gentleman? By that sign of mutual aid and endeavour the workers shall yet inherit the earth and all the fullness thereof.

If at the end there were compromises which closed the dispute, it detracts not one whit from the splendour of that historic achievement. Because of that strike and lock-out the Distributive workers scored heavily in Dublin and other parts of Ireland. In the Drapery in Dublin, for instance, they secured rates up to 77s. 6d. for assistants in their eighth year, and 87s. 6d. for charge hands and ledger

clerks. The taunt "Rebel Cork" was never more to be thrown at those gentle Corkonians, though they may accept it and wear it as a jest as the Aberdonian will cherish and vaunt his bawbee carefulness.

On this side of the Irish Sea we had had trouble with Woolworths for years for being then an American firm they did not at first take kindly to our way of life. They had not been used to restrictions on closing or on low wages. They had been used to the lid off, the bottom out, and no sides. It was called freedom—freedom for Woolworths. They were to learn that decency and humanity could pay as high if not higher dividends than the other thing. But we only had one strike of their staff and that was in Swansea in March, 1924. A number of girls came out because an assistant with four years' service was placed on half-time while another with two years' service was retained on full pay. Dockers refused to handle the firm's goods, scavengers refused to take away the refuse. It was a long-drawn-out, bitter dispute, lasting for weeks with no really satisfactory result. A firm that can keep a shop closed, or rather can have it closed against them, for nearly two years will not bother much over one of its other branches because of difficulties over getting goods in and refuse out.

About this time a girl, 18 years of age, was charged at the Woolwich Police Court with stealing 1s. 6½d., "the moneys of her employers, Messrs. Woolworth and Co." (I quote from the report.) "The Magistrate (to the Manager): 'Is that what you pay your assistants? Forty hours a week for 12s. 6d., and 4s. out of that to get to work.' The Manager: 'We don't work it out that way. We work it out according to the afternoons and evenings.' The Magistrate: 'I don't care how you work it out. Here is the result,' pointing to the girl in the dock. 'I shall put her on probation for six months.'" An account of the scene reports that the usual kindly smile of that Magistrate was turned into a sternness which was impressive. It should not have been the Branch Manager who took that stern rebuke, it should have been the head of the firm in this country.

In November, 1924, a strike took place of 147 warehouse-

men of Pearks Stores which then was controlled by the Meadow Dairy Co. On the third day, with the intervention of the Ministry of Labour, a settlement was reached. The shop steward who had been sacked was given another position with more money. In future joint negotiations on differences would take place between the firm and the Union and the directors would personally investigate any proposed reductions of staff. That Agreement was signed on behalf of the Meadow Dairy Co. by George Beale. We were to remember that Agreement three years later.

In July, 1924, negotiations were opened with Messrs. Playfair and Co., of Aberdeen, the sports outfitters, gunsmiths and fishing tackle merchants. The application was on behalf of the girls who manipulate feathers so skilfully that the speckled trout in pellucid stream and the noble salmon arched in anxious leaps up river falls alike are attracted by so artful, so wondrously gay a fly—and are undone.

For four months attempts were made to break the obduracy of that misnamed firm. "The wet and dry flydressers employed by the firm were for a full week's work" (I quote from the *Daily Herald* of December, 1914), "including overtime and homework on weeknights and Sundays, receiving only 18s. to 23s. a week. Some of the workers have 16 years' experience." The application not only met with a blank refusal but all conciliation and offers of arbitration were refused.

So in October the girls ceased work. The facts of the dispute were sent out to landowners, lessees of fishing and angling associations, throughout Scotland and the North of England. Nimble fingers, sense of colour, years of patient skill, deftness in the final assembling—all these go to the making of so seemingly simple a thing as a "fly." So those girls got together in co-operation to meet a demand. Orders poured in from most unexpected places. The demand was almost insatiable. From London for example of all places. Londoners demanded flies to put in their hats! And for a long while the male membership of the Union garnished its bonnets with feathers and the women their bosoms with plumed brooches. Just as a housewife in

determined mood will change all her furniture and the wallpaper to go with some newly acquired cushion, so I verily believe there were more plus-fours and tweed hats worn to go with that Aberdeen feathering than have ever been seen before or since. The whole movement went gay and took on a rakish look. Thus in mutual aid and co-operative endeavour the girls maintained themselves against their obstinate employer for the winter months, and then at last came a settlement with useful if not grand increases.

Do you not think it wonderful that in a time of great depression, with unemployment going up and wages coming down, those girls should fight as they did, and not be afraid? From the city of granite walls and kindly hearts have come many capable administrators to uphold and strengthen their organisation, but they gave also to the cause of freedom for shop workers some of its most doughty fighters and not the least of those valiant champions were the girls of Playfairs, the dexterous featherers of the barbed hook.

We hear next from Ayr in Scotland :

*"Auld Ayr, wham ne'r a town surpasses,
For honest men and bonny lasses."*

Here took place the last strike in connection with the distributive trades for many a long year. For we are on the eve of the fateful year, 1926. The staff at a ham curer's came out because their firm reduced their wages. They were out only two or three hours but they were 100 per cent. solid. Bacon "stoves," as we call them in England, need close and continuous attention or else there is much waste and loss. So they did not get those wage reductions which were to be so freely handed to them—they won some increases instead.

Of all those Dairies which ornament (if somewhat monotonously) the shopping ways of our towns and cities, that which came nearest to the Alchemists' dream of turning baser things into gold was the Meadow Dairy Co. This story dates from before the time when the Meadow was absorbed into the milky way of the Unilever constellation. At that time it was engaged by itself in the process of gathering into its crucible the materials for a golden harvest.

A short history of the Company will not be out of place here, for it will reveal what an Eldorado retail distribution can be.

It started in 1901 with a paid-up capital of £1,062 10s. In 1926 its paid-up capital was £1,413,625. In 1909 it took over the Keeloma Dairy Co., Ltd., with 78 branches. In 1914 it acquired Pearks Ltd. and renamed it Pearks Dairies Ltd.; this brought in another 230 shops, nearly half of them in London. Later Sherry's Dairies in the North-West was taken charge of, and also Brouchs Ltd. in the North-East. By the acquisition of Neale's Tea Stores in 1925, with branches in Birmingham and the Midlands, it covered the country with a chain of 820 branch shops. There poured out of this crucible of Alchemy a prodigious and amazing stream of gold.

*“ . . . the Golden Ass, or Golden Bull,
Was English John with his pockets full,
Then at war by land and water.”*

The profits, which in 1914 were £38,424, went up to £273,911 in 1924. The average dividend was 78½ per cent. The ordinary shareholders were given in the form of bonus shares, 350 per cent. of the amount they held. If you, as a careful and thrifty person, had saved £1,000 (though that would have meant saving 10s. a week for nearly forty years) and had in 1917 invested it at par in the Meadow Dairy Co., by the end of 1925 you would have received £12,210, an average of £1,353 a year or £26 a week. In addition, the par value of your shares would have risen to £4,500 and their market value to £22,500. So if you sold out in 1926 you would have had for your £1,000 the sum of nearly £35,000.

*“ Gold! and gold! and gold without end!
He had gold to lay by, and gold to spend,
Gold to give, and gold to lend,
And reversions of gold in futuro.”*

What a year was 1926, the year of the second massacre of working people's standards during the hungry twenties and thirties! The industrial areas were paralysed by the coal stoppage and for a while the whole country was halted

by the General Strike. Direful indeed were those months for the miners and though not so trying to the shop worker generally, in the mining and manufacturing districts, shop staffs, including those of the Meadow, were stood off or put on short time. Yet in that year the firm's profit was £238,955 and it paid 41 $\frac{2}{3}$ per cent. dividend the same as the previous year, and there was a bonus share issue of nearly £190,000, the assets being increased by more than £170,000.

Where no Agreement is, there no bottom is, and the struggle for work of hungry men squeezes with pitiless pressure lower and lower the price given to those offering to work. Some managers were paid £3 a week, some manageresses 50s., some adult male assistants received as little as 45s., and adult female assistants 15s. and 22s. So unsatisfactory was the position recognised to be that the trade paper, the *Grocer*, was driven to comment: ". . . the scale of wages of which the Union complains . . . may lead to the functioning of the Grocery and Provisions Trade Board, a condition of things which not a few grocers . . . would regard as not altogether unwelcome in the circumstances, much as they dislike interference in their shops by Government Departments and their officials."

Truly a Daniel come to Judgment. Now, nearly the whole of the staff of Neale's Tea Stores were members of the Union and had been for years, so when they were taken over by the combine, in late 1925, they sought to safeguard their own position and an application was sent to the firm in the spring of 1926 to operate Union conditions. The reply of the firm was they would not "alter the existing system of paying the staff according to ability and not according to age." Well, we've heard that before, have we not? Intensive efforts to organise the whole staff of the combine were undertaken. But it was an unfortunate time, for the Miners' strike went on months after the General Strike had been called off. As in the case of the Home and Colonial Stores in 1913, Local Conferences were held, suggestions for a programme made, and delegates were elected to attend a National Conference, held at the Bonnington Hotel, London, in January, 1927.

The firm professed to all and sundry its accord with

Trade Unions and Trades Unionism. It was "not in principle opposed to collective bargaining." It recognised the Shop Assistants' Union, for did it not discuss Early Closing and cognate subjects with them? Indeed it did—but discuss the now dominant question of wages—indeed, no! So after the claim had gone in the firm's inspectors made a special journey round the shops, armed with a separate form for each shop which read: "We have not authorised the Union to act for this shop," and there was a place for signatures. How clever, how subtle! The guile of a serpent in the cooing of a dove. The staff were undone. They thought the Union had betrayed the very principle of collective bargaining and a claim had been put in for their particular shop: telephone messages from all over the country, after each inspector had departed, told the same story. It is not as if the inspectors had not previously tried to get them out of the Union. They most certainly had, but a frontal attack and open opposition can be dealt with—this was something quite different. Fortified with those signatures the firm said that "The Union does not represent more than 4 per cent. of the staff so we won't pay." But as they would not agree to pay either when confessedly it did represent nearly 100 per cent. of Neale's Tea Stores staff, it didn't seem to make much difference. They would not pay anyhow.

The staff were not prepared to fight, for the times, propitious for crucible work for the shareholders, were certainly unpropitious for ceasing work. But there began a campaign against the firm, with printing, posting and picketing such as had never been seen before. Branch secretaries of Trade Unions, Labour Parties and Guild secretaries, hundreds of thousands of them, received literature with a request to write to the firm and appealing for help in other ways. From Land's End to John o' Groats the firm was bombarded. They retorted with a "Public Proclamation by the Staff of the Meadow Dairy," denying our charges and asserting *inter alia* that we "share in the prosperity of the firm." Well might Lazarus proclaim he shared in the prosperity of the "certain rich man" at whose gate he lay and the crumbs from whose table he fain would consume.

Despite everything, however, another set-back was registered. The protest was ineffective, the attempt to bring order where chaos was increasing failed, and the earnings of those employed in shops continued to fall.

The slight recovery experienced since 1924 fell away after 1926. We enter a period of gloom unrelieved almost by a single Agreement on wage rates and conditions. There were two strikes, however, to which I must make some brief reference. The first happened in Aberdeen. Three waitresses at a café protested about the food provided for them. Having complained without effect to the new manageress they took the matter up with one of the directors when he was dining there. They were thereupon discharged. So six other waitresses said if they go, we go. The firm refused conciliation or arbitration. Picketing started at 7.45 a.m. on the Saturday and with it a boycott. Sandwichmen were engaged to parade in front of the premises. Other cafés put up notices that the dispute did not apply to them and even advertised in the Press that their staff had "good food and wages."

The girls sent a letter to the Right Hon. Margaret Bondfield, the Minister of Labour, urging the setting up of a Trade Board for the Catering Trade, and added, "We would point out that a weekly wage of 12s. less a deduction of 1s. for Insurance does not permit of ordering and paying café prices for meals when the food offered as part of our remuneration consists of 'leftovers' from the day before and is unpalatable, as we had to pay our lodgings, provide shop dress and uniform to the requirements of the management and also maintain same from our cash wages." Eleven shillings, even with a good meal, but find your own uniform (to the satisfaction of the management), was little enough in all conscience! How they managed to find other meals, other things to wear and keep a roof of sorts above their weary heads, I don't know.

For nearly two years (it is now December, 1948), I have been ploughing deeply into the past to turn over its revealing furrows for your enlightenment and encouragement and still I cannot get case-hardened against these crimes of

underpayment. I can feel those girls' anxiety with each succeeding day. I watch their scrimping and scraping, their ceaseless endeavours to "make things do." I can understand their eager longing almost amounting to lust for nice things, their craving for beauty, their desire for rest and entertainment for their work-sodden bodies and clatter-stricken minds.

Yet these girls rebel when three of their companions in misfortune are wronged. They strike, they hit back at their masters with the only weapon they have: the withholding of their ill-requited labour, and call the public, whose ministering angels they are, to their aid. They have a right to call on the public for support, and it is right for the public to give them aid without stint. On this occasion they gave it in the form of such a boycott that a settlement was reached on the sixth day. The courageous nine were reinstated; food to the staff was to be the same as supplied to customers; adjustments were to be made on bonus and other matters; and there were to be amicable negotiations with the Union for the future.

Who now remembers Harold Lloyd, the film comic? One of his masterpieces was as a milk roundsman and I knew then, if I knew it not before, that a roundsman's life was not all beer even if it were all skittles! In the autumn of 1931 there took place a milk strike in Glasgow. A majority—but alas not all—of those employed by a Dairy Association ceased work against, they said, "an autocracy ruling with an iron hand imposing harsh conditions." They were subject to a radius clause agreement. No man could be certain of receiving an unbroken week's wages. All the losses this firm ingeniously passed on to its underpaid and overworked staff. Bottles of milk stolen whilst he is bounding with nimble limb up stair and close, bottles broken, accounts not paid, all are the roundsman's charge and from his purse and pocket must come the reckoning. He had even to pay in part the boy who accompanied him on his milky way. For the firm gave only 2s. 6d. to 3s. 6d. to the man towards the payment of the "morning boys" who worked two hours each day, seven days of the week,

fifty-two weeks of the year. The firm found a simple way of easing themselves of third-party risks. They did not pay. They left the roundsmen to face the music.

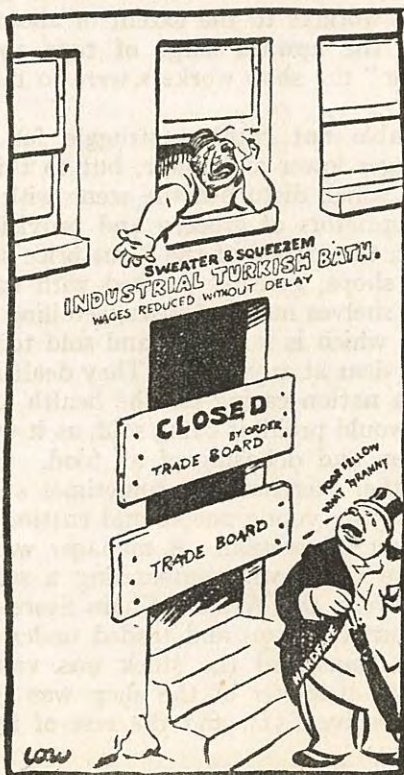
The chief of this association had a proud boast: he had smashed every effort to organise his staff and never would he be dictated to by a Trade Union! If there was any dictation to be done he'd do it—and he did it. When the Union put in a programme including something more than the Trade Board rate of wages, he threw it out and sacked the leading Union men, and so the majority came out, 204 of them. Picketing commenced at 3.30 in the morning and went on until 10 o'clock at night. The boys were a great nuisance to the blacklegs (whom they called scabs) and to authority. They were tireless and fearless, they went everywhere, they went to be engaged as new recruits so as to spy out the land, they checked the milk going out and what came back, they followed the vans and the barrows and told the customers what was up. There are some letters available giving their experiences. This vivid piece of writing is from a boy of 15:

"I got hold of five companions and I asked them to come with me to take a rise out of the scabs in my van. They agreed to come, six of us followed the van up to my round, then we started shouting 'scabs,' 'blacklegs,' 'traitors.' Then about thirty Co-operative milk boys came along and they started to give the scabs a sherician till we had the scabs nearly wrong in the mind. They managed to finish their morning run but they only sold three gallons instead of my forty. So we went home to breakfast." I don't know what a "sherician" is but it sounds to me like a "chihiking," if you know what that means. Later, ten members were fined £2 or 14 days for persistently following and intimidating, under the Conspiracy Act of 1874.

In fact this was a very litigious dispute in more senses than one. The firm sought injunctions to stay those on strike getting situations elsewhere and the Union undertook a test case against the firm under the Trades Board Act. The men started a Guild to sell milk on a co-operative basis, with some success. They had out as many as fifty-two barrows, and their sales in gallons rose from 1,085 in March,

to 5,896 in the week ending May 7th. The dispute lasted from October, 1931, until May, 1932, that is, nearly eight months, when some of the strikers were taken on by a firm with which the Union concluded an Agreement to pay 55s. a week, and commission on all sales above 120 gallons a week, with a 48-hour week and fourteen days' annual holiday.

LOW AND THE TRADE BOARDS



This cartoon first appeared in "The Daily News"

Chapter XV

1931 AND ALL THAT

AFTER the defeats of the miners, the set-back of the General Strike, the Trades Disputes Act of 1927, the Trade Union Movement was supposed to be dead. But it refused to lie down. The Industrial Correspondent of the *Daily Herald* calculated that the Trade Unions improved the position of the workers to the extent of about £75 million a year during the upward surge of 1933-1936. In that "upward surge" the shop workers were to take their part and place.

The regrettable but ruthless struggle for employment had driven wages lower and lower, but to this was added another factor which disturbed the scene with considerable anxiety to proprietors of grocery and provision establishments, namely, the arrival of the "cut price shop." These were multiple shops, garishly painted with flaring tickets, cheap fittings, shelves made of cases, retailing all that low-priced rubbish which is made for and sold to the poverty-stricken and is dear at any price. They dealt in the sort of things which a nation caring for the health and wellbeing of its citizens would prohibit being sold, as it would prevent the adulteration and debasing of all food. But they cut the price of other merchandise, sometimes steeply. They did it by employing young people and cutting their wages, too. Here is an illustration. A manager was charged at Tredegar Police Court with embezzling a sum of money from his employers, the Western Chain Stores Ltd., which had fourteen branch shops and traded under the name of "Cheaps." It transpired the stock was valued at £400 and the average turnover of the shop was £167 a week. The manager received 51s. and the rest of the staff were paid as follows:

Cashier (18) 11s. a week.

Boy Assistants (17) 10s. and 9s. a week.

Girl (17) 7s. 6d. and 8s. 6d. a week.

Boy (week-ends) 2s. 6d.

A total wage bill of under £5, or 3 per cent. of the turnover. It is difficult to comment on the conduct of the firm in question, for cutters they called themselves and cutters they certainly were. But it disturbed the Grocers and they gathered themselves together to do something about it.

Early in July, 1935, Mr. W. W. Waite, Managing Director and Chairman of Waitrose Stores (now taken over by John Lewis of Oxford Street, London), a doughty Daniel, marched into the lions' den, a meeting of the Metropolitan Grocers' Association in the Holborn Restaurant, and advocated Trade Boards for Grocery. There was at least one lion there anyway, a Mr. Gordon Stamper of Joseph Lyons and Co., who would not speak, he declared, if the Press were admitted. So Mr. Waite sent out his speech to the Press afterwards. He claimed many supporters in the Trade, including Mr. Chrimes (Cooper's Stores), employing 3,000 and Mr. E. Cooke (Williamsons Ltd.), employing 1,000. He read out a very long list of low wages being paid all over the country. I give as example six of these Male Assistants' wages: Aberdeen, 23 years old, 25s. per week; Lancaster, 26, 30s.; London, 33, 42s.; Wakefield, 21, 17s.; Glasgow, 21, 15s.; London Manager, 30, 40s. The step taken by Mr. Waite, which was to crystallise support and counsel for wage-fixing machinery in the Grocery Trade, was preceded by an awakening on the matter all over the country.

There was published at this time the result of an enquiry the Union made into Grocery wages as compared with the results of the Ministry of Labour Investigation of 1926.

Average Weekly Wage Enquiry

	<i>Union</i>	<i>Ministry</i>	<i>Decline</i>
	1936	1926	
21 years to 24 ..	38s. 6d.	52s. 8d.	14s.
24 „ and over	45s. 6d.	60s. 6d.	15s.

Here is a shocking case reported from Sheffield. A firm is prosecuted in the Police Court for exceeding the legal maximum of hours by 19½ per week, for not allowing proper intervals for meals, for failing to keep a record of hours worked and the intervals allowed for rest and meals. The case was that of a girl 18 years of age who worked 71½ hours

a week for a wage of 12s., or about twopence per hour. She had the whole of Friday off (she needed it, said the Magistrate) but worked from 10.30 a.m. to 9.30 p.m. on Sundays. The Magistrate fined the employer £18 10s. I have said that once more the cry of "sweating" of shop workers would be raised.

Do not think that because I have written of Grocery it was only in that delectable, always interesting, occupation that low wages were found. Here is a case in the Drapery, from South Wales, where seventeen female assistants in one firm were paid as follows: Their ages were from 16 to 25, their wages from 6s. to 14s. The average wage was 9s. 9d. I could quote hundreds of examples which are a disgrace to those who paid them and equally disgraceful to the trade associations which, having the remedy, refused to use it.

The Co-operative Union had, up to this time, been opposed to Trade Boards, but now joined with the Trades Union Congress "to press the Minister of Labour to set up Trade Boards in the Distributive Trades." On the other hand, the National Federation of Grocers' Associations still expressed their hatred of Trade Boards (in the interests of the assistants, of course), but as they would not meet to discuss wages on a voluntary basis either (in the interests of the assistants again) it was a case of "as you were." So the debate and argument swayed back and forth, with the Ministry of Labour keeping carefully in the background, ready to bring all the parties together when they had done their wordy worst, and time and necessity had forced a decision.

I have quoted one sympathetic reference from the *Grocer* in 1926 and there were several in the years which followed. Discussion in the Trade was growing. Said the above authoritative Journal in March, 1935: "The main fact which has emerged from this and other discussions is that there is a growing number of retail grocers and provision dealers who believe that if a fair living standard of wages were established to which all distributors would have to conform, price cutters would very soon have to modify their policy. . . ." In a competitive market with only desultory

Agreements in respect to wages, cutting leads to cutting and the whole trade was cutting itself to pieces. On granulated sugar alone the Grocery was losing over £2½ millions a year. The Managing Director of one of the largest Multiples in the country was later on to say: "It needed fellows like you to come along and kick our behinds to stop us making fools of ourselves. We make our profits from our deals in property, not from being grocers; it's about time we got something for being grocers."

There grew out of all these discussions a powerful organised movement amongst prominent and influential Grocers all over the country, to deputise the Ministry of Labour requesting an enquiry into wages paid in the Trade, preliminary to setting up a Trade Board. So important were the persons concerned that it could not be ignored. The Trade Press and the local Grocers' Associations hummed with controversy. It became obvious that wage-fixing machinery of some sort was inevitable, the only point being should it be voluntary or compulsory? The advocates of "voluntary" were strengthened at first by the support of the "postponers," who really didn't want anything, except to be left alone.

As long as the egregious Mr. Ernest Brown was Minister of Labour, things were just jolleyed along with no positive decision taken. He just blew hot and then blew cold. It is against this background that you are to witness the unfolding of the story from the autumn of 1934.

The new General Manager of the Home and Colonial Stores, in his determination to effect economies, was drastic and inconsiderate in his methods. For some time his attack on staff earnings had been taking place slowly, and as nothing seemed to be happening by way of protest the firm accelerated a bit. Things came to a head when, in one district in the Midlands, twenty-six dismissals took place. Wales, Scotland, London, reported reductions of from 10s. to 15s. a week. Managers were reduced from 65s. to 55s., from 80s. to 65s., and from 100s. to 80s. Meetings grew in size. At last the worm had turned. The Directors of the Home and Colonial and Pearks received a Union deputation at the end of January, 1935. They said: "They were

doing badly so economies had to be made, but they were going to introduce a bonus scheme to minimise the cuts. . . ."

On April 1st the firm was formally asked to operate a scale of wages for Managers and Assistants which, said the application, is "very reasonable in comparison with the rates agreed upon by your firm and the Irish Union of Distributive Workers." That last point was rather curious, but then the Irish fought and used the boycott vigorously. The Directors were seen about a month later. They would go into it and see what could be done and in the meanwhile would raise the earnings of the worst paid; they did not want their inspectors to interfere with staff joining the Union and would instruct them accordingly. In June the parties met again—to agree to meet again in August—to agree to meet again in September. After that further correspondence was refused. So local conferences were held in all parts of the country and a concerted endeavour at organisation was made with the whole might of the Union behind it. The Industrial Relations Department of the Ministry of Labour was asked to intervene and conferences between the parties were called at the Ministry.

Then came something which was to charge the scene with more hopeful expectancy. Sir George Schuster, from the Midland Bank, assumed the Chairmanship of the Company. "This," said Mr. John Allen, J.P., "changed the atmosphere and there was a different attitude. . . . He recognised that the wages paid to many of the staff could not be defended. He undertook that the whole weight of the companies would be thrown on the side of getting something done towards setting up wage-fixing machinery for the whole of the grocery and provision trade." Certain increases were offered and accepted as an instalment towards the Union programme.

Thus twelve months after an application had been put in, a temporary settlement was reached, covering Home and Colonial, Shepherd's Dairies, Meadow Dairy Co., Peark's Dairies, and Lipton's. The results, however, were to be far-reaching. Sir George Schuster has done much good work since those days, but nothing, in my opinion, has been of more value than the work he did during the ensuing

months, in inducing the largest Multiples to get together and meet the Union with the ultimate object of raising wages throughout the Grocery trade. There is no doubt that the times were ripe for the change, but the way might have been longer and harder without his goodwill and assistance. The undertaking he gave was fulfilled when, in November, 1937, an Agreement was come to with the Multiple Shop Proprietors' Association.

Following the temporary settlement with the Home and Colonial combine firms, negotiations opened with several grocery Multiples. By the end of 1936 many Agreements are come to and many more applications were in. Duckworths, Wallaces, Gallons, and Globe reach settlements. A break is made in the International Tea Store group, the second largest in Multiple Grocery, for increases are secured with Geo. Masons and the Direct Trading Co., who between them have about 400 shops and employ more than 2,000 workers. Smaller Multiples in Leeds, Chester and Bristol swing into line and negotiations are opened with Scottish firms. It was quite like old times!

Agreements are also concluded with firms outside Grocery. The Shirt Manufacturing Co., with branches throughout the country, agree to operate Trade Union conditions in shops, warehouses and counting-houses. Cuts made at the Army and Navy Stores are restored. Negotiations open with Montague Burton's and with the Fifty Shilling Tailors, resulting in both firms joining the London Employers' Association. The Agreement come to with that body years since becomes operative for London, and a slightly modified scale is agreed to for provincial areas. They jib at fixing managers' rates—of which more anon.

Jointly with other Unions, increases are won for wholesale Drug Houses. But Grocery Multiples with headquarters in the North-East prove "sticky". Sanction to cease work if necessary is given for 3,000 employees in 600 shops in 260 towns. In this atmosphere the principal assistant at the Ministry of Labour, Mr. F. W. Leggett (now "Sir"), called in April the first joint Conference between Employers and the Unions, and a joint sub-committee was elected to consider the "practicability of formulating proposals for the

establishment of suitable machinery for the regulation of wages, hours of work, etc." The Secretaries were Mr. Herman Kent, Grocers' Federation, and Mr. G. M. Hann, Shop Assistants' Union. The Committee finally reported to the Minister of Labour late in 1938. That report was a unanimous one by the seven Employers' Associations and the seven Trade Unions.

Briefly, it envisaged the Minister obtaining statutory authority to set up Trade Committees to cover retail distribution, the number to be decided by him, the size of which would be the responsibility of the Minister, to consist of employers and employees with three appointed members (one the Chairman). They would be empowered to fix minimum weekly rates of wages, hours and other conditions of employment. There would also, in order to secure co-ordination, be a National Retail Distributive Council, 75 per cent. of the composition of which would come from the Trade Committees and the rest be appointed by the Minister from the Trades. There would be three appointed persons.

The Irish Union of Distributive Workers and Clerks took full advantage of the favourable breeze. An Agreement with Clery and Co., Departmental Store employing 600, fixed rates up to 72s. 6d. "in the eighth year in business," and a wholesale drapers, Crowe, Wilson and Co., get the rate up to 78s. 6d. They succeed with the Multiples, too, as witness the Agreement with the Saxone Shoe Co. to pay up to 70s. "in the tenth year in business," with commission in addition. The Irishmen intend to stand no nonsense about that bugbear of ours on this side of the water, the "lapsed member." Instructions are issued to deal summarily with such persons by withdrawing labour.

The tempo increases and becomes a little breathtaking. Thrift Stores, Wetheralls, Hugh Fay and Co., Peglers, Thomas and Evans, Hopkinsons, Drivers, Hansons, Jesse Stephenson and the Economic Stores also come into line.

Chapter XVI

WAGE-FIXING MACHINERY

BUT, overshadowing all these important readjustments and arrangements for the vast army of retail and wholesale workers, was an Agreement, in February, 1937, with Lewis's Ltd. with large stores in Liverpool (including the Bon Marché), Manchester, Birmingham, Leeds, Leicester, and Glasgow. It was a comprehensive Agreement and, coming at the time it did, was a valuable and encouraging contribution. It is far too long a document for reproduction here; suffice it to say the rates for the male selling staff were up to 47s. 6d. at 23 and 52s. 6d. at 25 years of age, with one penny in the £ on individual sales in addition. The publicity, which was considerable, in connection with signing the Agreement at the Ministry of Labour, was cleverly arranged and formed the pattern of several such episodes which followed. There were photographs of the signing as upon the occasion of some important International Treaty, and speeches were made. Sir Frederick Marquis (now Lord Woolton) said incidentally: "The Minister of Labour convinced me that it was of the greatest importance that somebody should seek to enter into an Agreement with the Trades Unions in order that there should be, at any rate, some basis for subsequent discussion. It was on these grounds and with the express desire to further the establishment of a Trade Board or some other form of Government regulation of wages that we approached the Union. . . . This Union has a negligible membership in our organisation at the present time; we have never opposed our people joining the Union, but we certainly have never encouraged them."

Mr. G. M. Hann who, in February, 1936, had been elected General Secretary of the Union and was directing affairs with considerable adroitness, said: "A little history in connection with this Agreement ought to be mentioned.

Correspondence passed between Sir Frederick Marquis and myself with respect to the Union's membership employed in the Company's establishment at Glasgow, and at a later date, with respect to the employees at their Leeds establishment. The Union sought to enter into an Agreement with the Company with respect to those two establishments." The Agreement says this about Glasgow (that is, the Polytechnic in Glasgow which had been taken over by Lewis's, and at which establishment, it may be remembered, there was nearly a strike some years previously): "The minimum scales now in operation shall continue," and where lower than this Agreement they are to be brought up to it. In September, 1936, the Glasgow staff secured increases amounting, according to Mr. T. Brown, "to mostly 15s. a week." How was that? As Mr. Hann says, an application on behalf of the staff (most of whom were in the Union) had been sent in. What happened? Headquarters had a tussle with the staff. The Store was closed one morning, the staff were all got together and were harangued by Sir Frederick over the air from Liverpool with a "Trust Me" sort of speech. But they got a scale and they got increases.

The application on behalf of the Leeds staff had gone in after Glasgow, that is to say, within the four months between the Glasgow fracas and the signing of the Agreement at the Ministry of Labour. In other words, the resurgence of the employees had not a little to do with the happy situation now being resolved. I have no wish at all to minimise or question the goodwill or public spirit of Sir Frederick, but I am desirous that the efforts of the employees be understood and appreciated. That they should have had to assert themselves at all to get right done is to their honour and credit, but it is at the same time not a good reflection on the management. In fact, ever since the Agreement won in 1917 by 75 per cent. organisation of the Liverpool staff, the attitude of the firm left much to be desired, to say the least of it. I quote Sir Frederick again: "On these grounds, grounds of self-interest as well as grounds of public policy, we came to the conclusion that it was wise to call in the services of the

Union." You see what I mean? This lofty opinionativeness, so frequently met with in the Drapery trade, was quite uncalled for and the occasion would have gained by its omission. A little more frankness and generosity, a little more human understanding would have graced what was an historic occasion and certainly it would read better at the present time.

Shortly afterwards, Blacklers Ltd., of Liverpool, sign a similar document. Then the Glasgow and West of Scotland Hatters and Hosiers' Associations enter into an Agreement covering wages and conditions, the rates for male assistants, for example, going up to 60s. at 23 years of age. Still more grocery firms fall into line—Redman's, Melias, Shentall's, Pink's and many others. The Agreement with Waitrose's, signed in May, 1937, under similar publicity conditions as that given to Lewis's, deserves the *éclat* given to it by the Press and the Union. The speech of Mr. W. W. Waite reads well, even now; it was robust, full of understanding and sympathy, and appreciative of the work the Union had been doing over the years. I have never met him but I should say that Mr. Waite was a courageous, likeable man. The Agreement was a long document but was unique in that it provided for a restriction of juniors under 21 to the proportion of one for every three over that age.

In July, Owen Owens Ltd. (Liverpool), associated with T. J. Hughes & Co., and having branch establishments in other towns, signed terms similar to Lewis's, as did John Rubin Ltd., also of Liverpool, and later Coster's of Plymouth.

In September, 1937, there was held in Leeds a conference of the Managers of the branch shops of Montague Burton Ltd., and 300 attended. A report was made of the failure to secure a minimum rate for Managers and the meeting was held to try to influence the firm and the Association of which they were members. The excuse put forward against agreeing to rates was that the Managers as executive officers were members of the firm. But they could not engage or dismiss staff, they dressed their windows by pattern from Leeds, they could not buy cloth or clothes, though they must sell them and order them according to a system, they were liable to be shifted at any time from

this place to that, their incoming and outgoing were regulated by an elaborate code, and inspectors and chief inspectors visited them and kept watch and ward over them to see that all was going according to plan.

I am reminded of an occasion, now many years ago, when I met for the first time the Management Committee of one of those small Co-ops. which dot the valleys of South Wales. We met in an upper room, where oil lamps swung from the low ceiling and miners were seated round a large kitchen table. The air was thick with tobacco smoke and as the windows were shut we saw one another as through a glass darkly. I argued the case for the Managers' rates. "Man-a-gers, what's Man-a-gers?" asked one, in the sweet musical treatment of the English tongue peculiar to the sons and daughters of Wales.

"They have the responsibility," said I, "and should be paid for it." "Well," said the Chairman, "we expect all our ass-is-tants to do their best to help the So-ci-ety." "But," said I, "these men go to Bristol to do buying." "Buy-ing! Buy-ing!" said another. "Mr. Chairman, don't we do the buy-ing?" Said I: "You can't, you don't know the difference between a merino and a cashmere." "That's noth-ing to do with it, Mr. Chairman. Don't we sign the or-ders?" And so, as the firm, signed the orders, Burtons and the Fifty Shilling Tailors were to abstain from rates for Managers until the J.I.C. tackled it and fixed a rate a few years after.


Late in 1937 a Memorandum of Agreement was entered into between the Union and the United Kingdom Association of Multiple Shop Proprietors, Grocery and Provision Section. Just a word about this Association, of which Mr. B. J. Arthur was the Secretary. It was formed for the protection of its membership politically. In quite a number of countries in Europe, legislation had been carried to restrict the growth and activities of the Multiples. In some countries they were limited as to the number of branches they could open in a town or area, and were limited also in the scope of the trades they could deal in. This Association ought not to be confused with the former Multiple Firms Association, which was confined to Grocery.


PREAMBLE

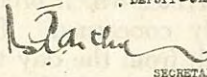
The Parties hereto have entered into this Agreement as a step towards the ultimate objective of the establishment of national standards of wages and working conditions in the Distributive Trades which shall be statutorily enforceable. In taking this step they have had regard to the discussions which have taken place between the Minister of Labour and the Organisations in the Retail Distributive Trades and to the desire expressed by the Minister that, as an initial basis for the general operation of minimum wages and working conditions, voluntary agreements should be made wherever possible.

Both Parties, however, desire to place on record their view that in the present state of organisation of employers and workpeople in the trade, sectional or voluntary agreements are not sufficient by themselves to secure the universal and effective regulation of wages and that, in these circumstances, such agreements require to be fortified by statutory action. Both Parties, therefore, urge upon the Minister of Labour to take the earliest possible steps to attain this objective.

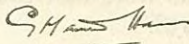
SIGNED for and on behalf of the United Kingdom Association of Multiple Shop Proprietors (Grocery and Provisions):

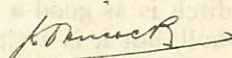
 CHAIRMAN.

 DEPUTY-CHAIRMAN.

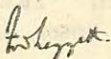
 SECRETARY.

SIGNED for and on behalf of the National Amalgamated Union of Shop Assistants, Warehousemen and Clerks.

 GENERAL SECRETARY.

 NATIONAL ORGANISING OFFICER.

SIGNED for and on behalf of the Ministry of Labour.



The body we now were to meet frequently, took into membership the Multiples in all trades. For the purpose of meeting us they divided themselves into sections.

That the Agreement then entered into, with much goodwill on both sides, was not expanded into something bigger, covering the whole of the Grocery, was due to the fact that the National Federation of Grocers and Provision Dealers' Association declined to be a party to it, and even went so far as to advise the local bodies not to enter into agreement with the Union. At the signing of the Agreements there were speeches. If I quote a word or two from Mr. A. Greig, of the Maypole, it is because he was at one time secretary of the Dundee Branch of the Union and knew what he was talking about. Referring to the Union he said: "I admire their determination to redeem all their pledges, but none know better than they how much hard work has to be done before the present instalment of their programme is completed. I am, however, fully satisfied that, if they apply to that work the same combination of energy, courtesy and reasonableness which they brought to bear on the job which is just being completed, they will in a very short time make the duty which must be faced by the Minister of Labour a comparatively easy one."

The Agreement fixed rates for Managers up to 98s. for £350 turnover in London, and 95s. in the country. For male assistants up to 58s. in London and 55s. in the country. The feeling that the day for action had arrived is borne out by the several strikes which proclaimed the determination of those vitally concerned. There were ten strikes and more threatened, from the day the Home and Colonial employees started rolling back the tide of reaction, to the time gas-masks were distributed freely to the people in the autumn of 1938.

Houndsditch is as good a name as Wigan for a laugh in the music-hall, but it is a street given up for the most part to fancy and textile warehouses, owned largely, if not exclusively, by those of the Jewish faith. If you want to get paper caps with "Tickle Me" printed on them, or large and knobby noses, false moustaches, flags, paper

chains, teasers, and all sorts of adjuncts to uproarious gaiety you go to Houndsditch for them. As for Whitechapel, with its Yiddish names and signs, you know you are in the Jewish quarter, even if you overlook the trays of salted herring, the barrels of pickled cucumbers and all manner of unaccustomed *delicatessen* in the shop windows. Whitechapel is a wide thoroughfare east of Aldgate pump (for there is a pump still standing in Aldgate). There, too, are numbers of fancy, textile, and hosiery warehouses, in which are employed some 5,000 people. Shop and warehouse closing in that area has always been a source of friction because of the two Sabbath days. It is all right when both sections strictly observe their Sabbaths, but often you have the unorthodox and unscrupulous Christian who will open on Sunday for a part or the whole of the day, and the unorthodox and unscrupulous Jew who will open for part of or the whole of Saturday, and then at times the fur flies.

An arrangement was come to in June, 1935, between the Union and the warehouse employers to open at 9 a.m. and close at 7 p.m. Mondays to Fridays, close on Saturdays, and open on Sundays from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. When Christmas loomed ahead these warehousemen were, as usual, busy in the preparations for that Christian (or if you prefer it Pagan) festival, for, like good businessmen, they sold to all comers alike, rejoicing if business was good and moaning if it was bad. Though if you went to them for more money they never rejoiced but always moaned. Now (in case you are not aware of it) the Jewish Sabbath begins on Friday at sunset, and the orthodox would not dream of doing a stroke of work after that time. So they said, being now busy, and looking askance at the Agreement they made in June: If we close at 3.30 on Friday, we ought to keep open at least another two hours on Sunday. But the unorthodox Jewish employer, who did not close at sunset on Friday, thought the same as the others about opening on the Sunday, for business is business. Said the Union: "An Agreement is an Agreement and if you want an alteration you should see us about it." So when the new arrangement was to operate early in November of that

year, the staffs in five warehouses walked out at 3 p.m. When they presented themselves for work on Monday two firms refused to take them back. Immediately pickets were put on, posters were displayed and handbills distributed. After some days agreement was reached to adhere to arrangements already made and overtime beyond those hours be paid for with recognition of Shop Stewards.

After Christmas one of the two firms, Messrs. Rintzler, discharged the Shop Steward, so out came three of the staff with him. Then Messrs. Goldman dismissed 74 out of their 80 employees and told them they could apply for re-engagement, which, on advice, they did to test the position, but not one received a reply. Instead, other staff were advertised for and the six who stayed in got a rise. The only reason ever given by the head of the firm was that since joining the Union some of the staff had become "bombastic." Bombastic ! that means inflated, extravagant. Well, they were very young, most of those 74 ; 40 were under 18, 24 were 18 to 21, and only 10 were over 21. It is quite likely that some youngsters were inflated with the new wine of Trades Unionism which they had taken a draught of. But I cannot imagine seventy-four bombastic workers. The whole of Whitechapel could not have held them.

But why sack them ? Because the firm wanted to get out of its bargain, of course, and it could not as long as the employees were united in fellowship. So pickets were out and large public meetings were held and the local Trade Union movement gave welcome and valuable succour. The strikers were young, so a meeting of parents was held to explain the position to them. What a wise and tactful move that was. So the boys were not afraid any longer, for Jewish boys all the world over honour their parents, and it might not have gone so well with them if their mamas told them to be good boys now and go back to work for that nice rich gentleman with the nice rich name. The fight went on until February 4th, when a settlement was reached on terms the same as those already referred to, excepting only that the firm was to be allowed ten minutes for clearing the warehouse of customers who had entered before closing time.

But the Rintzler dispute continued. It lasted fourteen weeks. There were only four boys out, but they stuck it for all that time in the bitter winter months, in rain, fog, snow and ice. Many came to give them courage and aid and there was a large procession once with twenty banners. Houndsditch and Whitechapel were showing what they could do and what they meant. It was the first shop and warehouse workers' demonstration held on Tower Hill. It was very brave indeed for those four boys to fight all that time and they deserved the applause the East London and the London movements gave them. They did not get back their jobs and they were easily placed elsewhere, but the terms of settlement secured confirmation of the Agreement and recognition of the Union for the future.

In July, 1939, there was trouble in Shoreditch. The staff of L. Rose and Co., Ltd., Wholesale Grocers, of Worship Street, found the need for fellowship, and came slowly but steadily into the Union. When half of them had joined, the firm sacked eleven, whereupon the whole staff joined up and the Union put in a claim for reinstatement. The firm replied by sending each a letter telling them to leave the Union, to which each of the staff courteously replied in the negative. Then came a further communication, that if they still refused to give the required undertaking then, after the holidays—August 14th—only non-Unionists would be employed. Still the staff refused, and their newly formed solidarity was a very remarkable thing. So the firm paid off 100 of them and were left with only eighteen to carry on with. The 100 got to work at once. All incoming goods were blocked. Transport workers, railway workers, dock workers, refused to handle the firm's merchandise. Such goods as went out were turned back at their destination.

After a few days a conference was held at the Ministry of Labour, as the result of which all embargo on Union membership was removed, staff were reinstated and Trade Union conditions prevailed, with recognition of Shop Stewards. And, strangely enough, quite a nice letter was sent by the head of the firm to John Allen, J.P., the

Divisional Officer. There are those who respect courage, and will shake hands and do the decent thing after a fight.

Now if you let your thoughts travel back over what I have written in connection with these courageous stoppages of work, you notice what a very large proportion of them took place because of victimisation or because a fellow-worker had been sacked. Right from the time of that strike at Pawsons and Leafs in 1899, to that of L. Rose and Co., in 1939, the story is much the same. Not all of them were stoppages for that reason, nor was that always even the last straw which got the camel's back up—the Army and Navy Stores strike, for example, was not directly or indirectly due to that—but John Lewis's was and most of the others.

When, retelling these wonderful events, for the first time I was struck by this theme of mutual aid running like a quick vibrating chord through all these episodes, it found me lost in admiration, and after all these years I am still excited because it is shop workers who have done these things—those who could never be organised, as Joseph Chamberlain once said. Their employers denied and attacked their legal right of association: they maintained it. Three out of four of the great freedoms are involved in that maintenance: freedom of expression, freedom from want, freedom from fear. And it has continued, this springing to the aid of those marked for sacrifice, over 40 years. That they were not always successful does not detract from the splendour of their deeds.

In 1938 the Boot and Shoe section of the Multiple Proprietors' Association met the Union. No less than thirty Multiples were represented at these conversations. The rates agreed were up to 60s. for salesmen in London, and 57s. in the provinces. But they could not be induced to agree to rates for branch shop managers. It was left like that for years, just as it was with Burton's and the Fifty Shilling Tailors. All the same, that Agreement brought trouble. Greenlees (Easiefit) at first were represented at the discussions but then withdrew. They would not pay. Taken to the Arbitration Court they won, on the grounds

that the Union did not represent a substantial body of their employees and therefore the Agreement could not be held as applying to them.

Then in July, 1939, the National Association of Wholesale Boot and Shoe Distributors, representing thirty-seven of the largest firms in the trade, signed an Agreement under which the same minimum rates as in the Retail were to operate, together with a 45-hour week and holidays up to two weeks. Negotiations were continuous in every department of Retail and Wholesale distribution.

We have now entered upon that period which can be considered as the grand climax of government by the Conservative forces in our country. The deeps of misery had been plumbed by our working people. The complacency of those comfortably off and determined to keep so at all costs had thoroughly undermined national morale. The commonweal and public spirit has at times been lower in our long "rough Island story"—but not much. It is a sad reflection on the conduct of human affairs that only the fires of war could cleanse us of the ills which were eating like a cancer at the vitals of the body politic. There was a hopelessness in masses of our people which to-day can scarcely be conceived.

Twenty years had been spent by our Rulers, not in concerted endeavour to replace the wastage of previous wars, but in selfish acquisition, so that when the ordeal faced them they were found wanting. It is not as if they had had no warning. The lights of Freedom, not together but one by one, were blotted out. So came World War Two.

With the war whole nations were in arms. The full economy of peoples was geared for battle. From youth to old age they were gathered to the dark dread service of Mars. In fury they created, in fury they destroyed. Victory was to whoever created more than was destroyed. Once more the effort to raise the standard of shop-life conditions was interrupted and held in check. Shopkeeping in World War One became an unprotected occupation. In World War Two, except for food shops, they were, as part

of public policy, starved of merchandise and deprived of service of young women as well as of young men, and up to the time of writing shop life has not recovered from the blow. But the work of the Union has gone on.

There was, first of all, short time and reductions to be faced and warded off. After that, as the cost of living advanced, the year 1940 was spent in negotiating war "plussage," as it came to be called, instead of war "bonus." Important Agreements were reached with the Great Universal Stores, with I. and R. Morley's, Jeremiah Rotherham's, and many others.

In December, 1940, the first Joint Industrial Council for Retail Distribution met. Appropriately enough this was for the Grocery Trade, and was thoroughly representative inasmuch as all the Employers' Associations were represented and all the Unions. At last, the suggestions made by the Joint Committee of Employers and Employed, arising from the Conference called by the Minister of Labour in 1936, were to be given a chance to operate, substantially, though not quite, in the form they outlined. The Union Report upon the setting-up of the first J.I.C. says this: "The progress made in recent months is very largely due to the vigorous determination of Mr. Ernest Bevin, the Minister of Labour. Without his insistence that progress had got to be made the talks might still be very much in the air." Mr. Bevin attended that first meeting to give it his blessing.

But the J.I.C.s at best were voluntary bodies which relied for enforcement of their decisions upon the moral pressure, when exercised, of the Employers' Associations, and upon the strength of the Trade Union membership, which membership, employers showed no signs whatever of encouraging. It was, therefore, reasonable to suppose that, mindful of the sordid past to which your attention has been insistently drawn, when war's alarms once again fade away and the competitive struggle amongst employers is ruthlessly resumed, then the workers will once again be forced to play the dual role of weapons and sufferers in the struggle. None knew this better than Mr. Ernest Bevin who, possessing the qualities of great statesmanship, had the courage and drive to make those qualities effective. He

was in a very real sense the greatest Minister of Labour that Department ever had. So in 1945 he introduced and got carried through Parliament the Wages Council Act. The Trade Boards had for a long time requested some extension of their opportunities. All the same it was clever of Bevin to change the name whilst retaining their main function.

In the case of the Distributive Trades it became abundantly clear from the Greenlees example that existing machinery was inadequate to deal with those who, for any reason or no reason at all, were without voluntary arrangements. No sooner was that Act passed than the Joint Industrial Councils requested that the status of Wages Councils be applied to them. At once commissions of enquiry were set up and reported favourably in 1947. On May 13th, 1948, the first Wages Council for Retail Distribution met and, as may be imagined, it was for the Grocery Trade. I attended, by good fortune, at the offices of the Federation of Grocers' Associations, on the afternoon of September 28th, 1948, the hearing of a case before the Appeals Tribunal of the Wages Council. I asked for and was granted permission to remain. The proceedings lasted three hours and were conducted with all the decorum of a court of law. As I sat there, thoroughly interested in the proceedings, following the arguments on a very nice point, I was immensely struck with the progress there represented. It was a recognition of the rights and dignities of the shop worker. At last, if so minded, the shop assistant had gained full stature. He was an equal in making and administering the law in his trade. Visions of ancient Guilds and their working crossed my mind that sunny afternoon, in, of all places in the world, the offices of the Federation of Grocers' Associations, which for so many years had successfully combated the setting-up of wage-fixing machinery for retail distribution. At last I felt we had arrived and the pioneers had been justified in their faith and work.

At this point I put down my pen ; to me it was a dramatic moment for my task was done. I let my mind wander back over the highly-charged and encumbered years we have traversed in these pages. From the day of the meeting of

the gallant few in 1891 in the Cobden Hotel, Birmingham, to the setting-up of the Wages Councils in 1948, is a period of fifty-seven years; the period of the revolt and rise of the shop workers of our country. From the strike of Pawsons and Leafs' clerks in 1899, to that of the staff of L. Rose and Co. in 1939, there were ninety-seven strikes and 15,000 shop workers took part in those strikes. There were more than 43,000 shop workers who threatened to cease work and secret ballots were taken for that purpose. There were thus recorded instances of 58,000 shop and warehouse workers who either ceased work or threatened so to do, to enforce their demands for a better and more decent existence. These instances of determination founded on sacrifice for the commonweal made the whole movement a vital reality which in justice cannot be ignored. The bare bones of resolutions become clothed with the flesh and spirit of lively resolve and insistence. That insistence backed, as it was, by organised cessation of work, was the driving force of the revolution.

I see Maher and his comrades outside the grocers' shop in Harrow Road, giving out handbills calling on the public not to shop after 4 p.m., diving under the bellies of the horses of the mounted police, the shopfront plastered with eggs, three of those comrades taken in charge by the police; I hear John Burns the Thunderer crashing out his "periods" in the Y.M.C.A. on behalf of Pawsons and Leafs' clerks on strike in 1899; I see the long line of drapers' assistants in Cork City in 1904 parading about the premises of Cash and Co. on strike in defence of their champion; I see George Rosser in Neath walking up and down Wind Street with sandwich boards back and front, past the shop where he and his fellows were engaged in the first strike against the "living-in" system; I see the girls in the I.L.P. Institute at Merthyr, that metropolis of the mountains, making banners and bannerettes, dozens of them, for the great procession of shop assistants from all over South Wales, headed by Keir Hardie in caped black cloak, to demonstrate on behalf of those on strike in the general attack on "living-in"; I hear the cheers of those courageous dressmakers of Aberdeen who had, one would think, won a fortune when

they secured 12s. a week after a strike lasting six days ; I see the young, thin, but oh so joyful " bits of girls " with their bits of wages, who came laughing, singing, in aprons and pinafores, on strike for the return of their forewoman who had been dismissed ; I hear again those eager Cockney dressmakers telling of their pathetic struggles against poverty and see their eyes light up as a vision is granted them of what the future may bring ; I see the Central Hall, Westminster, packed as we entered after the abortive meeting at Montagu House, and hear the awful stillness of an expectant silence as they realised it was " now or never " and decided on such a " now " that it might wake the great and royal dead in the Abbey nearby ; I see the close of the fight against the old individualist of Oxford Street, whom all the immediate world had not been able to subdue, when a solid and cheerful staff sang " Praise God from whom all blessings flow " (and meant it !) ; I hear once more the unrestrained cheers of the mighty throng from all London's Stores who packed the Albert Hall to hear the Army and Navy Award ; I see again the huge open-air meeting of 15,000 people in Wolverhampton called in support of the staff of Beattie, who sought to deprive them of their legal freedom to associate together for things they had in common ; I see still those four Jewish boys with sandwich-boards passing to and fro during those bitterly cold winter months outside the warehouse in Whitechapel where they had been on strike to maintain sanctity of agreements freely come to ; I can hear the milk boys " sherricking," in their rasping Glasgow accent, the blacklegs who were taking their vans out on their run.

I witness once more the fitful rear-guard actions in retreat, the courageous resistance against reductions, the fight to retain what could be retained ; I feel, still in wonder though now with sympathetic understanding, the Union cards as they fluttered against my body, flung by misunderstanding girls who wanted reductions of wages ; I see the inexorable incoherent drive to push shop workers back to unseemly poverty and the woeful uncertainties of casual employment. I see all those fights as one fight ; I see all that tireless though spasmodic struggling as one struggle ; I see all

the defeats as victories and all the victories as stepping-stones to a higher and more serviceable living. I pass with you again through the days when hope seemed dead and only water coursed through the veins of men. I see the recovery and the return of the shop men and women, and I see that out of the flames and dynamics of war they gather such tools to their using that never again shall the future be as the past! And so I know, and you shall know, and take full courage therefrom, that this indeed is "the only battle wherein no man can fail, where whoso fadeth and dieth yet his deed shall still prevail."

POSTSCRIPT

THIS Postscript should have been a Preface ; this ending should have been a beginning, But because this story I have told has been an unexpected story, a growing story, unfolding itself, as it were, petal by petal, to me as to you, it were best, perhaps, that what should be first becomes last. How, then, came this story to be written at all, just now, and by me of all people ?

It really germinated a long while back when I first entered the House of Commons after the General Election of 1923. I was approached one day by T. P. O'Connor, M.P., that grand old gentleman of Fleet Street and of the Irish Party, now established in business for itself in its own green and beautiful Island. "Tay-Pay," as he was called, was almost "one of us," for he was one of the last persons I ever saw to wear a top hat and frock coat which became him and did not look one whit incongruous or out of time. Moreover, again like one of us, he took snuff. Everyone loved him. He had an affectionate way of putting his arm around your shoulder when he wanted to say something kind to you. He did it to me when he said : "You are the shop assistant's man now, aren't you ? Well, now, you'll be having many stories to tell about shop life as you have known it. Tell them for me in my weekly." Three times he approached me on the matter and the third time he added : "You amateurs don't know a good thing when it's put to you." But I did not feel the call. Then, after the Bournemouth Labour Party Conference, 1940, I got, somehow or the other, to be telling some of my experiences to the Right Hon. Wedgwood Benn, M.P. He said, as he rocked with laughter : "You must write all that up—it's a human story. When you do, send it to me." But again I felt no call. When, at the time of my retirement, the members did me great honour at a supper in Soho, in spite of bomb-out and black-out, there attended amongst many others of high degree, H. G. Wells, an almost lifetime

member of the Union. I had met him many times previously and as he said good-bye he added: "Retiring? Rubbish—you are only beginning. You've a story to tell—tell it." Yet again I felt no call.

During the strike at J. D. Llewellyn, Neath, in 1907, we tried to get some ministers of religion to speak at our meetings. But, bless you, they were shy; wondrous shy. For the big seats were so often filled with big persons who kept little shops. It would not do to offend the big man in the big seat, for the minister must eat too. But there was one man who cared not one snap of the fingers for the denizen of the big seat, shopkeeper or no. He was a little man with a rather ragged ginger beard; an outspoken courageous man, a minister who could laugh a big laugh with all his little body. His chapel was filled every Sunday. He spoke many times for us and rendered us many services. But there came a time when his brother died, leaving a widow, two children, and a printing business in Cardiff, and there was no one to run the printing business and so maintain the widow and the orphans. So Teddy Morgan decided it was his duty to take up the burden his brother had left. In his farewell sermon he answered the many questions which had been put to him by saying: "I received a call into the Ministry; I see no reason why I should not receive a call out of it."

So a "call" can come at any time and unexpectedly. It came to me at the first National Conference of the newly amalgamated Union in Blackpool, Easter, 1947. And it was in this wise. Peck of Lowestoft—for whom I have a special affection for his sheltering friendship when, for a while, the sun went out—had urged me to write, if only for purposes of record. Then, in the Conference Hall, Dick Seabrook, the Area Organiser for Norfolk, said to me: "How you stuck it all these years, Hoffman, I don't know. It's hard, jolly hard work. We could do with some of your experiences and the stories you used to tell; why don't you write it all up in the *New Dawn*? It would help us." It was the words: "It would help us," that did it, I think—I felt a call. For Dick and I had been about together a great deal in the Eastern Counties and I liked him well.

Said I, rather feebly: "But I don't know the Editor at all, or any of your people very well, and, besides, they would not take what I wrote." "Don't you know Hamnett? All right—I'll speak to him and get you an introduction."

So, next day, I met Cyril Hamnett at the Press table. He welcomed the idea. "It's just what we want. Here is a new organisation come into being, more than half the membership of which does not know how the reforms have come about. If you can, out of your vast experience, tell the membership all about it, you will be rendering a great service." So from Easter, 1947, to the close of 1948, I have been searching and writing. It has been a labour of love, as revealing to me as to you.

There have been so many who have aided me in all sorts and kinds of ways—from Cyril Hamnett who has been so patient with me and so helpful, to the winsome young lady who has wrestled with my tortuous calligraphy and translated it all into readable typewriting—that I cannot possibly acknowledge them all. I thank them, every one, for their kind assistance and encouragement.

THE END

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