

Herbert George Wells

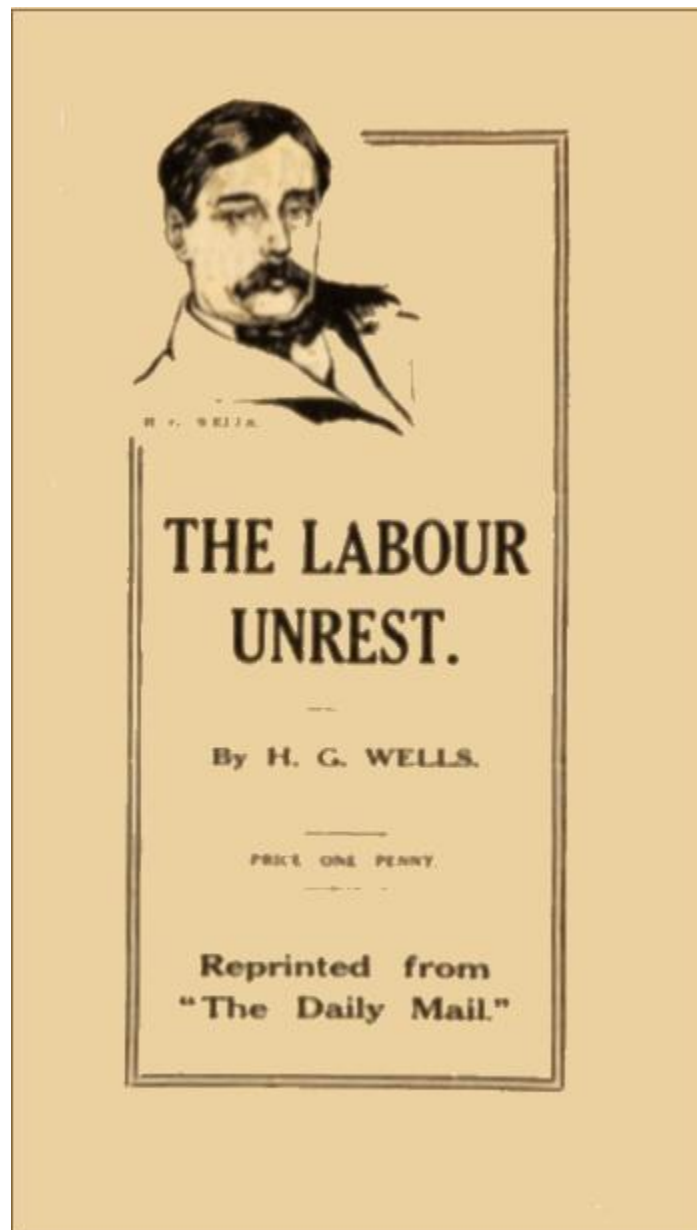
# THE LABOUR UNREST

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[fac-similé](#)



*The articles on Labour Unrest which are contained in this pamphlet appeared in "The Daily Mail" between May 13 and 20, 1912. Their publication created so profound an impression throughout the country that an immediate reissue in the present form was held advisable.*

*No more vivid and incisive pen than that of Mr. H. G. Wells could have been selected to discuss this greatest issue of contemporary life. Not only is Mr. Wells famous as a novelist of penetrating humour and varied interests; he is the prophet of the future, of aviation, of intercourse with other planets, of social and mechanical evolution. Above all, he is a courageous and independent thinker; a Socialist; but not afraid to criticise Socialism; his "New Worlds for Old" remains the most brilliant treatise in existence on constructive Social Reform. And he is master of a pungent and arresting English style which has never been more completely at his service than in these chapters.*

## I. DISTRUST

Our country, is in a dangerous state of social disturbance. The discontent, of the labouring mass of the community is deep and increasing. It may be that we are in the opening phase of a real and irreparable class war.

In the last year, since the Coronation, we have moved very rapidly indeed from an assurance of extreme social stability towards the recognition of a spreading disorganisation. It is idle to pretend any longer that these Labour troubles are the mere give and take of economic adjustment. No adjustment is in progress. New and strange urgencies are at work in our midst, forces for which the word, "revolutionary" is only too faithfully appropriate. Nothing is being done to allay these forces; everything conspires to exasperate them.

Whither are these forces taking us? What can still be done and what has to be done to avoid the phase of social destruction to which we seem to be drifting?

Hitherto, in Great Britain at any rate, the working man has shown himself a being of the most limited and practical' outlook. His narrowness of imagination, his lack of general ideas, has been the despair of the Socialist and of every sort of revolutionary theorist. He may have struck before, but only for definite increments of wages or definite limitations of toil; his acceptance of the industrial system and its methods has been as complete and unquestioning as his acceptance of earth and sky. Now with an effect of suddenness this ceases to be the case. A new generation of workers is seen replacing the old, workers of a quality unfamiliar to the middle-aged and elderly men who still manage our 'great businesses and "political affairs. The worker is beginning now to strike for unprecedented ends – against the system, against the fundamental conditions of labour, to strike for no defined ends at all, perplexingly and disconcertingly. The old-fashioned strike was a method of bargaining, clumsy and violent perhaps, but bargaining still; the new-fashioned strike is far less of a hagggle, far more of a display of temper. The first thing that has to be realised if the Labour question is to be understood at all is this, that the temper of labour has changed altogether in the last twenty or thirty years. Essentially that, is a change due to intelligence not merely increased but greatly stimulated, to the work, that is, of

the board schools and of the cheap Press. The outlook of the workman has passed beyond the works and his beer and his dog. He has become—or, rather, he has been replaced by—a being of eyes, however imperfect, and of criticism, however hasty and unjust. The working man to-day reads, talks, has general ideas and a sense of the round world; he is far nearer to the ruler of to-day in knowledge and intellectual range than he is to the working man of fifty years ago. The politician or business magnate of to-day is no better educated and very little better informed than his equals were fifty years ago. The chief difference is golf. The working man questions a thousand things his father accepted as in the very nature of the world, and among others he begins to ask with the utmost alertness and persistence why it is that he in particular is expected to toil. The answer, the only justifiable answer, should be that that is the work for which he is fitted by his inferior capacity and culture, that these others are a special and select sort, very specially trained and prepared for their responsibilities, and that at once brings this new fact of a working-class criticism of social values into play. The old workman might and did quarrel very vigorously with his specific employer, but he never set out to arraign all employers; he took the law and the Church and State craft and politics for the higher and noble things they claimed to be. He wanted an extra shilling or he wanted an hour of leisure, and that was as much as he wanted. The young workman, on the other hand, has put the whole social system upon its trial and seems quite disposed to give an adverse verdict. He looks far beyond the older conflict of interests between employer and employed. He criticises the good intentions of the whole system of governing and influential people, and not only their good intentions but their ability. These are the new conditions, and these middle-aged and elderly gentlemen who are dealing with the crisis on the supposition that their vast experience of Labour questions in the 'seventies and 'eighties furnishes valuable guidance in this present issue are merely bringing the gunpowder of misapprehension to the revolutionary fort.

The workman of the new generation is full of distrust, the most demoralising of social influences. He is like a sailor who believes no longer either in the good faith or seamanship of his captain, and, between desperation and contempt, contemplates, vaguely but persistently the assumption of control by a collective forecastle. He is like a private soldier obsessed with the idea that nothing, can save the situation but the death of an incompetent officer. His distrust is so profound that he ceases not only to believe in the employer but he ceases to believe in the law, ceases to believe in Parliament, as a means to that tolerable life lie desires; and he falls back steadily upon his last resource of a strike and—if by repressive tactics we make it so—a criminal strike. The central fact of all this present trouble is that distrust. There is only one way in which our present drift towards: revolution or revolutionary disorder can be arrested, and, that is by restoring, the confidence of these alienated millions, who visibly now are changing from loyalty to the Crown, from a simple patriotism, from habitual industry—to the more and more effective expression of a deepening resentment.

This is a psychological question, a matter of mental states. Feats of legal subtlety are inopportune, arithmetical exploits still more so. To emerge with the sum of 4s. 6Jd. as a minimum, by calculating on the basis of the mine's present earnings from a conference which the miners and everybody else imagined was to give a

minimum of 4s. 6½d. may be clever, but it is certainly not politic in the present stage of Labour feeling. To stamp violently upon obscure newspapers nobody had heard of before and send a printer to prison, and to give thereby a flaming advertisement to the possible use of soldiers in civil conflicts: and set every barrack-room talking, may be permissible, but it is certainly very ill-advised. The distrust deepens.

### How Is Confidence To Be Restored?

The real task before a governing class that means to go on governing is not just at present to get the better of an argument or the best of a bargain, but to lay hold of the imaginations of this drifting, sullen, and suspicious multitude, which is the working body of the country. What we prosperous people, who have nearly all the good things of life and most of the opportunity, have to do now is to justify ourselves. We have to show that we are indeed responsible and serviceable, willing to give ourselves, and to give ourselves generously, for what we have and what we have had. We have to meet the challenge of this distrust.

The slack days for rulers and owners are over. If there are still to be rulers and owners and managing and governing people, then in the face of the new masses, sensitive, intelligent, critical, irritable, as no common people have ever been before, these rulers and owners must be prepared to make themselves and display themselves wise, capable, and heroic—beyond any aristocratic precedent. The alternative, if it is an alternative, is resignation—to the Social Democracy.

And it is just because we are all beginning to realise the immense need for this heroic quality in those who rule and are rich and powerful, as the response and corrective to these distrusts and jealousies that are threatening to disintegrate our social order, that we have all followed the details of this great catastrophe in the Atlantic with such intense solicitude. It was one of those accidents that happen with a precision of time and circumstance that outdoes art; not an incident in it all that was not supremely typical. It was the penetrating comment of chance upon our entire social situation. Beneath a surface of magnificent efficiency was—slap-dash. The ship was not even equipped to save its third-class passengers; they had placed themselves on board with an infinite confidence in the care that was to be taken of them, and they went down, and most of their women and children went down with the cry of those who find themselves cheated out of life.

In the unfolding record of behaviour it is the stewardesses and bandsmen and engineers—persons of the trade-union class—who shine as brightly as any. And by the supreme artistry of Chance it fell to the lot of that tragic and unhappy gentleman Mr. Bruce Ismay to be aboard and to be caught by the urgent vacancy in the boat and the snare of the moment. No untried man dare say that he would have behaved better in his place. But for capitalism and for our existing social system his escape—with five and fifty third-class children waiting below to drown—was the abandonment of every noble pretension. It is not the man I would criticise but the manifest absence of any such sense of the supreme dignity of his position as would have sustained him in that crisis. He was a rich man and a ruling man, but in the test he was not a proud man. In the common man's realisation that such is indeed the case with most of those who dominate our

world lies the true cause and danger of our social indiscipline. And the remedy in the first place lies not in social legislation and so forth, but in the consciences of the wealthy. Heroism and a generous devotion to the common good are the only effective answer to distrust.

## II. THE LAWYERS TONE

I pointed out yesterday that the essential trouble in our growing labour disorder is the profound distrust which has grown up in the minds of the new generation of workers of either the ability or the good faith of the property owning, ruling, and directing class. I did not attempt to judge the justice or not of this distrust; I merely pointed to its existence as one of the striking and essential factors in the contemporary labour situation.

This distrust is not perhaps the proximate cause of the strikes that now follow each other so disconcertingly, but it embitters their spirit, it prevents their settlement, and leads to their renewal. I tried to suggest that, whatever immediate devices for pacification might be employed, the only way to a better understanding and cooperation, the only escape from a social slide towards the unknown possibilities of Social Democracy, lies in an exaltation of the standard of achievement and of the sense of responsibility in the possessing and governing classes. It is not so much "Wake up, England!" that I would say as "Wake up, gentlemen!"—for the new generation of the workers is beyond all question quite alarmingly awake and critical and angry.

And they have not merely to wake up, they have to -wake up visibly and ostentatiously if those old class reliances on which our system is based are to be preserved and restored. We need before anything else a restoration of class confidence. It is a time when class should speak with class very frankly.

### Restoration of Class Confidence

There is too much facile misrepresentation, too ready a disposition on either side to accept caricatures as portraits and charges as facts. However tacit our understandings were in the past, with this new kind of labour, this young, restive labour of the twentieth century, which can read, discuss, and combine, we need something in the nature of a social contract. And it is when one comes to consider by what possible means these suspicious third-class passengers in our leaking and imperilled social liner can be brought into generous co-operation with the second and the first that one discovers just how lamentably out of date and out of order our political institutions, which should supply the means for just this inter-class discussion, have become. Between the busy and preoccupied owning and employing class on the one hand and the distressed, uneasy masses on the other intervenes the professional politician, not as a mediator, but as an obstacle, who must be propitiated before any dealings are possible. Our natural politics no longer express the realities of the national life; they are a mere impediment in the speech of the community. With our whole social order in danger, our Legislature is busy over the trivial little affairs of the Welsh Established Church, whose whole endowment is not equal to the fortune of any one of half a dozen Titanic passengers or a tithe of the probable loss of another strike among the

miners. We have a Legislature almost antiquarian, compiling a museum of Gladstonian legacies rather than governing our world to-day.

Law is the basis of civilisation, but the lawyer is the law's consequence, and with us at least the legal profession is the political profession. It delights in false issues and merely technical politics. Steadily with the ascendancy of the House of Commons the barristers have ousted other types of men from political power. The decline of the House of Lords has been the last triumph of the House of Lawyers, and we are governed now to a large extent not so much by the people for the people as by the barristers for barristers. They set the tone of political life. And since they are the most specialised, the most specifically trained of all the professions, since their training is absolutely antagonistic to the creative impulses of the constructive artist and the controlled experiments of the scientific man, since the business is with evidence and advantages and the skilful use of evidence and advantages, and not with understanding, they are the least statesmanlike of all educated men, and they give our public life a tone as hopelessly discordant with our very ' great and urgent social needs as one could very well imagine. They do not want to deal at all with great and urgent social needs. They play a game, a long and interesting game, with parties as sides, a game that rewards- the industrious player with prominence, place, power, and great rewards, and the less that game involves the passionate interests of other men, the less it draws them into participation and angry interference, the better for the- steady development of the politician's career. A distinguished and active fruitlessness, leaving the world at last as he found it, is the political barrister's ideal career. To achieve that, he must maintain legal and political monopolies and protect the invasion of political life by living interests. And so far as he has any views about labour beyond the margins of his brief, the barrister politician seems to regard getting men back to work again on any terms and as soon as possible as the highest good.

And it is with such men that our insurgent modern labour, with its Vaguely apprehended wants, its large occasions and its rapid emotional reactions, comes into contact directly it attempts to adjust itself in the social body. It is one of the main factors in the progressive embitterment of the labour situation that whatever business is afoot, arbitration, conciliation, inquiry, our contemporary system presents itself to labour almost invariably in a legal guise. The natural infirmities of humanity rebel against an unimaginative legality of attitude, and the common workaday man has no more love for this great and necessary profession to-day- than he had in the time of Jack Cade. Little reasonable things from the lawyers' point of view—the rejection, for example, of certain evidence in the Titanic inquiry because it might amount to a charge of manslaughter, the constant interruption and checking of a labour representative at the same tribunal upon trivial points—irritate quite disproportionately.

Lawyer and working man are antipathetic types, and it is a very grave national misfortune that at this time, when our situation calls aloud for statecraft and a certain greatness of treatment, our public life should be dominated as it has never been dominated before by this most able and illiberal profession.



Now, for that great multitude of prosperous people who find themselves at once deeply concerned in our present social and economic crisis, and either helplessly entangled in party organisation or helplessly outside politics, the elimination and cure of this disease of statecraft, the professional politician, has become a very urgent matter. To destroy him, to get him back to his law courts and keep him there, it is necessary to destroy the machinery of the party system that sustains him and to adopt some electoral method that will no longer put the independent representative man at a hopeless disadvantage against the party nominee. Such a method is to be found in proportional representation with large constituencies, and to that we must look for our ultimate liberation from our present masters, these politician barristers. But the labour situation cannot wait for this millennial release, and for the current issue it seems to me patent that every reasonable prosperous man will, even at the cost to himself of some trouble and hard thinking do its best to keep as much of this great and acute controversy as be possibly can out of the lawyer's and mere politician's hands and in his own. Leave labour to the lawyers, and we shall go very deeply into trouble indeed before this business is over. They will score their points, they will achieve remarkable agreements full of the possibility of subsequent surprises, they will make reputations, and do everything Heaven and their professional training have made them to do.

#### And They Will Exasperate and Exasperate!

Lawyers made the first French Revolution, and now, on a different side, they may yet bring about an English one. These men below there are still, as a class, wonderfully patient and reasonable, quite prepared to take orders and recognise superior knowledge, wisdom, and nobility. , They make the most reasonable claims for a tolerable life, 'for certain assurances and certain latitudes. Implicit rather than expressed is their demand for wisdom and right direction from those to whom the great surplus and freedoms of civilisation are given. It is an entirely reasonable demand if man is indeed a social animal. But we have got to treat them fairly and 'openly. This patience and reasonableness and willingness for leadership is not limitless. It is no good scoring our mean little points, for example, and accusing them of breach of contract and all sorts of theoretical wrongs because they won't abide by agreements to accept a certain scale of wages when the purchasing power of money has declined. When they made that agreement they did not think of that possibility. When they said a pound they thought of what was then a poundsworth of living. The Mint has since been increasing its annual output of gold coins to two or three times the former amount, and we have, as it were, debased the coinage with extraordinary quantities of gold. But we who know and own did nothing to adjust that; we did not tell the working man of that; we have let him find it out slowly and indirectly at the grocer's shop. That may be permissible from the lawyer's point of view, but it certainly isn't, from the gentleman's, and it is only by the plea that its inequalities give society a gentleman that our present. social system can claim to endure. I would like to accentuate that, because if we are to emerge again from these acute social dissensions a reunited and powerful people, there has to be a change of tone, a new generosity on the part of those who deal with labour speeches', labour literature, labour representatives, and labour claims. Labour is

necessarily at an enormous disadvantage in discussion : in spite of a tremendous inferiority in training and education it is trying to tell the community its conception of needs and purposes. It is not only young as a participator in the discussion of affairs, it is actually young. The average working man is not half the age of the ripe politicians and judges and lawyers and wealthy organisers who trip him up legally, accuse him of bad faith, mark his every inconsistency. It isn't becoming so to use our forensic advantages. If isn't—if that has no appeal to you—wise.

The thing our society has most to fear from labour is not organised resistance, not victorious strikes and raised conditions, but the black resentment that follows defeat. Meet labour halfway and you will find a new co-operation in government; stick to your legal rights, draw the net of repressive legislation tighter; then you will presently have to deal with labour enraged. If the anger burns free, that means revolution; if you crush out the hope of that, then sabotage and a sullen general sympathy for anarchistic crime.

### III. THE SPECTACLE OF PLEASURE

In the preceding papers I have discussed-certain aspects of the present labour situation. I have tried to show the profound significance in this discussion of the distrust which has grown up in the minds of the workers and how this distrust is being exacerbated by our entirely too forensic method of treating their claims. I want now to point out a still more powerful set of influences which is steadily turning our labour struggles from mere attempts to adjust hours and wages into movements that are gravely and deliberately revolutionary.

This is the obvious devotion of a large and growing proportion of the time and energy of the owning and ruling classes to pleasure and excitement and the way in which this spectacle of amusement and adventure is now being brought before the eyes and into the imagination of the working man.

The intimate psychology of work is a thing altogether too little considered and discussed. One asks, "What keeps a workman working properly at his work?" and it seems a sufficient answer to say that it is the need of getting a living. But that is not the complete answer. Work must to some extent interest; if it bores, no power on earth will keep a man doing it properly. And the tendency of modern industrialism has been to subdivide processes and make work more boring and irksome. Also the workman must be satisfied with the living he is getting, and the tendency of newspaper, theatre, cinematograph show, and so forth is to fill his mind with ideas of ways of living infinitely more agreeable and interesting than his own. Habit also counts very largely in the regular return of the man to his job, and the fluctuations of employment, the failure of the employing class to provide any alternative to idleness during slack time, break that habit of industry. And then, last but not least, there is self-respect. Men and women are capable of wonders of self-discipline and effort if they feel that theirs is a meritorious service, if they imagine the thing they are doing is the thing they ought to do. A miner will cut coal in a different spirit and with a fading zest if he knows his day's output is to be burnt to waste secretly by a lunatic. Alan is a social animal; few men are naturally social rebels, and most will toil very



cheerfully in subordination if they feel that the collective end is a fine thing and a great thing.

Now this force of self-respect is much more acutely present in the mind of the modern worker than it was in the thought of his fathers. He is -intellectually more active than his predecessors; his imagination is relatively stimulated; he asks wide questions. The worker of a former generation took himself for granted; it is a new phase when the toilers begin to ask, not one man here or there, but in masses, in battalions, in trades, "Why, then, are *we* toilers and for what is it that we toil?

What answer do we give them?

I ask the reader to put himself in the place of a good workman, a young, capable miner, let us say, in search of an answer to that question. He is, we will suppose, temporarily unemployed through the production of a glut of coal, and he goes about the world trying to see the fine and noble collective achievements that justify the devotion of his whole life to humble toil. I ask the reader, what have we got to show that man? What are we doing up in the light and air that justifies our demand that he should go on hewing in marrow seams and cramped corners until lie can hew no more? Where is he to be taken to see these crowning fruits of our release from toil? Shall we take him to the House of Commons to note which of the barristers is making most headway over Welsh Disestablishment, or shall we take him to the Titanic inquiry to hear the latest about those fifty-five third-class children (out of eighty-three) who were drowned? Shall we give him an hour or so among the portraits at the Royal Academy, or shall we make an enthusiastic tour of London sculpture and architecture and saturate his soul with the beauty he makes possible? The new Automobile Club, for example. "Without you and your subordination we could not have had *that*." Or suppose we took him the round of the West End clubs and restaurants and made him estimate how many dinners London can produce at a pinch at the price of his local daily minimum, say, and upward; or borrow an aeroplane at Hendon and soar about counting all the golfers noon. "You suffer at the roots of things, far below there, but see all this nobility and splendour, these sweet, bright flowers to which your rootlet life contributes." Or we might spend a pleasant morning trying to get a passable woman's hat for the price of his average weekly wages in some West End shop.

But indeed this thing is actually happening. The older type of. miner was illiterate, incurious; he read nothing, lived his own life, and if he had any intellectual and spiritual urgences in him beyond eating and drinking and dogfighting, the local little Bethel shunted them away from any effective social criticism. The new generation of miners is on an altogether different basis. It is at once less brutal and less spiritual; it, is alert, informed, sceptical, and the Press, with photographic illustrations, the cinema, and a score of collateral forces are giving it precisely that spectacular view .of luxury,, amusement, aimlessness, and excitement, taunting it with just that suggestion that it is for that, and that alone, that the worker's back aches and his muscles strain. Whatever gravity and spaciousness of aim there may be in our prosperous social life does not appear to him,. He sees, and he sees all the more brightly because he is looking at it out of,

toil and darkness, the glitter, the delight for delight's sake, the show, and the pride, and the folly. Cannot you understand how it is that these young men down there in the hot and dangerous and toilsome and inglorious places of life are beginning to cry out, "We are being made fools of," and to fling down their tools, and cannot you see how futile it is to dream that Mr. Asquith or some other politician by some trick of a Conciliation Act or some claptrap of Compulsory Arbitration% or that any belated suppression of discussion and strike organisations by the law will avert this gathering storm? The Spectacle of Pleasure, the parade of clothes, estates, motor-cars, luxury, and vanity in the sight of the workers is the culminating irritant of labour. So long as that goes on, this sombre resolve to which we are all awakening, this sombre resolve rather to wreck the whole fabric than to continue patiently at work, will gather strength. It does not matter that such a resolve is hopeless arid unseasonable; we are dealing here with the profounder impulses that underlie reason. Crush this resentment; it will recur with accumulated strength.

It does not matter that there is no plan in existence for any kind of social order that could be set up in the place of our present' system; no plan, that is, that will endure half an hour's practical criticism. The cardinal fact before us is that the workers do not intend to stand things as they are, and that no clever arguments, no expert handling of legal points, no ingenious appearances of concession, will stay that progressive embitterment.

### What Is To Be Done?

But I think I have said enough to express my conviction and perhaps convey my conviction that our present labour troubles are unprecedented and that they mean the end of an epoch. The supply of good-tempered, cheap labour—upon, which the fabric of our contemporary ease and comfort is erected—is giving out. The spread of information and the means of presentation in any class and the increase of luxury and self-indulgence in the prosperous classes are the chief cause of that. In the place of that old convenient labour comes a new sort of labour, reluctant, resentful, critical, and suspicious. The replacement has already gone so far that I am certain that attempts to baffle and coerce the workers back to their old conditions must inevitably lead to a series of increasingly destructive outbreaks, to stresses and disorder culminating in revolution. It is useless to dream of going on now for much longer upon the old lines; our civilisation, if it is not to enter upon a phase of conflict and decay, must begin to adapt itself to the new conditions, of which the first and foremost is that the wages- earning, labouring class as a distinctive class, consenting to a distinctive treatment and accepting life at a disadvantage, is going to disappear. Whether we do it soon as the result of our reflections upon the present 'situation, or whether we do it presently through the impoverishment that must necessarily result from a lengthening period of industrial unrest, there can be little doubt that we are going to curtail very considerably the current extravagance of the spending and directing classes upon food, clothing, display; and all the luxuries of life. The phase of affluence is over. And unless we are to be the mere passive spectators of an unprecedented reduction of our lives, all of us who have leisure and opportunity have to set ourselves very strenuously to the problem not of reconciling ourselves to the wage-earners, for that possibility is over, but of

establishing a new method of co-operation with those who seem to be very definitely decided not to remain wage-earners for very much longer. We have, as sensible people, to realise that the old arrangement, which has given us of the fortunate minority so much leisure, luxury, and abundance, advantages we have as a class put to so vulgar and unprofitable a use, is breaking down, and that we have to discover a new, more equable way of getting the world's work done.

### More Economy In Giving Trouble

Certain things stand out pretty obviously. It is clear that in the times ahead of us there must be more economy in giving trouble and causing work, a greater willingness to do work for ourselves, a great economy of labour through machinery and skilful management. So much is unavoidable if we are to meet these enlarged requirements upon which the insurgent worker insists. If we, who have at least some experience of affairs, who own property, manage businesses, and discuss and influence public organisation, if we are not prepared to undertake this work of discipline and adaptation for ourselves, then a time is not far distant when insurrectionary leaders, calling themselves Socialists or Syndicalists, or what not, men with none of our experience, little of our knowledge, and far less hope of success, will take that task out of our hands.

We have in fact to "pull ourselves together," as the phrase goes, and make an end to all this slack, extravagant living, this spectacle of pleasure, that has been spreading and intensifying in every civilised community for the last three or four decades. What is happening to Labour is indeed, from one point of view, little else than the correlative of what has been happening to the more prosperous classes in the community. They have lost their self-discipline, their gravity, their sense of high aims, they have become the victims of their advantages, and Labour, grown observant and intelligent, has discovered itself and declares itself no longer subordinate. Just what powers of recovery and reconstruction our system may have under these circumstances the decades immediately before us will show.

## IV. WHAT MAY BE DONE

Let us try to anticipate some of the social developments that are likely to spring out of the present labour situation. It is quite conceivable, of course, that what lies before us is not development but disorder. Given sufficient suspicion on one side and sufficient obstinacy and trickery on the other, it may be impossible to restore social peace in any form, and industrialism may degenerate into a wasteful and incurable conflict. But that distressful possibility is the worst and perhaps the least probable of many. It is much more acceptable to suppose that our social order will be able to adjust itself to the new outlook and temper and quality of the labour stratum that elementary education, a Press very cheap and free, and a period of great general affluence have brought about.

One almost inevitable feature of any such adaptation will be a changed spirit in the general body of society. We have come to a very serious condition of our affairs, and we shall not get them into order again without a very thorough bracing-up of ourselves in the process. There can be no doubt that for a large portion of our comfortable classes existence has been altogether too easy for the

last lifetime or so. The great bulk of the, world's work has been done out of their sight and knowledge; it has seemed unnecessary to trouble very much about the general conduct of things, unnecessary, as they say, to "take life too seriously." This has not made them so much vicious as slack, lazy, and overconfident; there has been an elaboration of trivial things and a neglect of troublesome and important things. The one grave shock of the Boer War has long been explained and sentimentalised away. But it will not be so easy to explain away a dislocated train service and an empty coal cellar as it was to get a favourable interpretation upon some demonstration of national incompetence half the- world away.

It is indeed no disaster, but a matter for sincere congratulation, that^ the British prosperous and the British successful, on whom warning after warning has rained in vain from the days of Ruskin, Carlyle, Matthew Arnold, should be called to account at last in their own household. They will grumble, they will be very angry, but in the end, I believe, they will rise to the opportunities of their inconvenience. They will shake off their intellectual lassitude, take over again the public and private affairs they have come to leave so largely in the hands of the political barrister and the family solicitor, become keen and critical and constructive, bring themselves up to date again.

That is not, of course, inevitable, but I am taking now the more hopeful view... And then? What sort of working arrangements are our renascent owning and directing classes likely to make with the new labouring class? How is the work going to be done in the harder, cleaner, more equalised, and better managed State that, in one's more hopeful mood, one sees ahead of us?

Now, after the experiences of the past twelve months, it is obvious that the days when most of the directed and inferior work of. the community will be done by intermittently employed and impecunious wages-earners is drawing to an end. A large part of the task of reconstruction ahead of us will consist in the working out of schemes for a more permanent type of employment and for a direct participation of the worker in the pride, profits, and direction of the work. Such schemes admit of wide variations between a mere bonus system, a periodic tipping of employ  s to prevent their striking, and a real and honest co-partnery.

In the latter case a great enterprise, forced to consider its "hands" as being also in their degree "heads" would include a department of technical and business instruction for its own people. From such ideas one passes very readily to the conception of guild-managed businesses, in which the factor of capital would no longer stand out as an element distinct from and contrasted with the proprietorship of the workers. One sees the worker as an active and intelligent helper during the great portion of his participation, and as an annuitant and perhaps, if he has devised economies and improvements, a. receiver of royalties during his declining years.

And concurrently with the systematic reconstruction of a large portion of our industries upon these lines there will have to be a vigorous development of the attempts that are already being made in garden cities, garden suburbs, and the like, to re-house the mass of our population in a more civilised and more agreeable manner. Probably that is not going to pay from the point of view of the

money-making business man, but we prosperous people have to understand that there are things more important and more profitable than money-making, and we have to tax ourselves not merely in money but in time, care, and effort in the matter. Half the money that goes out of England to Switzerland and the Riviera ought to go to the extremely amusing business of clearing up ugly corners and building jolly and convenient workmen's cottages—even if we do it at a loss. It is part of our discharge for the leisure and advantages the system has given us, part of that just give and take, over and above the solicitor's and bargain-hunter's and money-lender's conception of justice, upon which social order ultimately rests.

We have to do it not in a mood of patronage, but in a mood of attentive solicitude. If riot on high grounds, then on low grounds our class has to set to work and make those other classes more interested and comfortable and contented. It is what ~~#~~we are for. It is quite impossible for workmen and poor people generally to plan estates and arrange their own homes; they are entirely at the mercy of the wealthy in this matter. There is not a slum, not a hovel, not an eyesore upon the English landscape for which some quite well-off owner is not ultimately to be blamed or excused, and the less we leave of such things about the better for us in that day of reckoning between class and class which now draws so near.

It is as plain now as the way from Calais to Paris that if the owning class does not attend to these amenities the mass of the people, doing its best to manage the thing through the politicians, presently will. They may make a frightful mess of it, but that will never bring back things again into the hands that hold them and neglect them now. Their time will have passed for ever.

But these are the mere opening requirements of this hope of mine of a quickened social consciousness among the more fortunate and leisurely section of the community. I believe that much profounder changes in the conditions of labour are possible than those I have suggested. I am beginning to suspect that scarcely any of our preconceptions about the way work must be done, about the hours of work and the habits of work, will stand an exhaustive scientific analysis. It is at least conceivable that we could get much of the work that has to be done to keep our community going in far more toil saving and life-saving ways than we follow at the present time. So far scientific men have done scarcely any tiling to estimate under what conditions a man works best, does most work, works most happily. Suppose it turns out to be -the case that a in an always following one occupation throughout his lifetime, working regularly day after day for so many hours, as most wage-earners do at the present time, does not do nearly so much or nearly so well as he would do if he followed first one occupation and then another, or if he worked as hard as he possibly could for a definite period and then took holiday? I suspect very strongly, indeed, I am convinced, that in certain occupations, teaching, for example, or surgery, a man begins by working clumsily and awkwardly, that his interest and skill rise rapidly, that, if he is really well suited in his profession, he may presently become intensely interested and capable of enormous quantities of his very best work, and that then his interest and vigour rapidly decline. I am disposed to believe that this is true of most occupations, of coal mining or engineering, or brick-laying or cotton-spinning. The thing has never been properly thought about. Our civilisation has grown up



in a haphazard kind of way, and it has been convenient to specialise workers and employ them piecemeal. But if it is true that in respect of any occupation a man has his period of maximum efficiency, then we open up a whole world of new social possibilities. What we really want from a man for our social welfare in that case is not regular continuing work, but a few strenuous years of high-pressure service. We can as a community afford to keep him longer at education and training before he begins, and we can release him with a pension while he is still full of life and the capacity for enjoying freedom. But obviously this is impossible upon any basis of weekly wages and intermittent employment; we must be handling affairs in some much more comprehensive way than that before we can take and deal with the working life of a man as one complete whole.

That is one possibility that is very frequently in my thoughts about the present labour crisis. There is another, and that is the very great desirability of every class, in the community having a practical knowledge of what labour means. There is a vast amount of work which either is now or is likely to be in the future within the domain of the public administration —road-making, mining, railway work, post office and telephone work, medical work, nursing, a considerable amount of building, for example. Why should we employ people to do the bulk of these things at all? Why should we not as a community do them ourselves? Why, in other words, should we not have a labour conscription and take a year or so of service from everyone in the community, high or low. I believe this would be of enormous moral benefit to our strained and relaxed community. I believe that in making labour a part of everyone's life and the whole of nobody's life lies the ultimate solution of these industrial difficulties.

## V. A NATIONAL PLAN

It is almost a national boast that we "muddle through" our troubles, and I suppose it is true and to our credit that by virtue of a certain kindliness of temper, a humorous willingness to make the best of things, and an entirely amiable forgetfulness, we do come out of pressures and extremities that would smash a harder, more brittle people, only a little chipped and damaged. And it, is quite conceivable that our country will, in a measure, survive the enormous stresses of labour adjustment that are now upon us, even if it never rises to any heroic struggle against these difficulties. But it may survive as a lesser country, as an impoverished and second-rate country. It will certainly do no more than that, if in any part of the world there is to be found a people capable of taking up this gigantic question in a greater spirit. Perhaps there is no such people, and the conflicts and muddles before us will be world-wide. Or suppose that it falls to our country in some strange way to develop a new courage and enterprise, and to be the first to go forward into this new phase of civilisation I foresee, from which a distinctive labouring class, a class, that is, of expropriated wages-earners, will have almost completely disappeared.

Now hitherto the utmost that any State, overtaken by social and economic stresses, has ever achieved in the way of adapting itself to them has been no more than patching. Individuals and groups and trades have found themselves in imperfectly apprehended and difficult times, and have reluctantly altered,

their ways and ideas piecemeal under pressure. Sometimes they have succeeded in rubbing along upon the new lines, and sometimes the struggle has submerged them, but no community has ever yet had the will and the imagination to recast and radically alter its social methods as a whole. The idea of such a reconstruction has never been absent from human thought since the days of Plato, and it has been enormously reinforced by the spreading material successes of modern science, successes due always to the substitution of analysis and reasoned planning for trial and the rule of thumb. But it has never yet been so believed in and understood as to render any real endeavour to reconstruct possible. The experiment has always been altogether too gigantic for the available faith behind it, and there have been against it the fear of presumption, the interests of all advantaged people, and the natural sloth of humanity. We do but emerge now from a period of deliberate happy-go-lucky and the influence of Herbert Spencer, who came near raising public shiftlessness to the dignity of a national philosophy. Everything would adjust itself—if only it was left alone. Yet some things there are that cannot be done by small adjustments, such as leaping chasms or killing an ox or escaping from the roof of a burning house. You have to decide upon a certain course on such occasions and maintain a continuous movement. If on the burning house you wait until you scorch and then turn round a bit or move away a yard or so, or if on the verge of the chasm you move a little in the way in which you wish to go, disaster will punish your moderation. And it seems to me that the establishment of the world's work upon a new basis—and that and no less is what this Labour Unrest demands for its pacification—is just one of those large alterations which will never be made by the collectively unconscious activities of men, by competitions and survival and the higgling of the market. Humanity is rebelling against the continuing existence of a labour class as such, and I can see no way by which our present method of weekly wages employment can change by imperceptible increments into a method of salary and pension—for it is quite evident that only by reaching that shall we reach the end of these present discontents. The change has to be made on a comprehensive scale or not at all. We need nothing less than a national plan of social development, if the thing is to be achieved at all.

Now that, I admit, is, as the Americans say, a large proposition. But we are living in a time of more and more comprehensive plans, and, the mere fact that no scheme so extensive has ever been tried before is no reason at all why we should not consider one. We think nowadays quite serenely of schemes for the treatment of the nation's health as one whole, where our fathers considered illness as a blend of accident with special providences; we have systematised the community's water supply, education, and all sorts of once chaotic services, and Germany and our own infinite higgledy-piggledy discomfort and ugliness have brought home to us at last even the possibility of planning the extension of our towns and cities. It is only another step upward in scale to plan out new, more tolerable conditions of employment for every sort of worker and to organise the transition from our present disorder.

The essential difficulty between the employer and the statesman in the consideration of this problem is the difference in the scope of their view. The employer's concern with the man who does his work is day-long or week-long; the

statesman's is life-long. The conditions of private enterprise and modern competition oblige the employer to think only of the worker as a hand, who appears and does his work and draws his wages and vanishes again. Only such strikes as we have had during the past year will rouse him from that attitude of mind. The statesman at the other-extremity has to consider the worker as a being with a beginning, a middle, an end—and offspring. He can consider all these possibilities of deferring employment and making the employment of one period of life provide for the leisure and freedom of another, which are necessarily entirely out of the purview of an employer pure and simple. And I find it hard to see how we can reconcile the intermittency of competitive employment with the unremitting demands of a civilised life except by the intervention of the State or of some public organisation capable of taking very wide views between the business organiser on the one hand and the subordinate worker on the other. On the one hand we need some broader handling of business than is possible in the private adventure of the solitary proprietor or the single company, and on the other some more completely organised development of the collective bargain. We have to bring the directive intelligence of a concern into an organic relation with the conception of the national output as a whole, and either through a trade union or a guild, or some expansion of a trade union, we have to arrange a secure, continuous income for the worker, to be received not directly as wages from an employer but intermediately through the organisation. We need a census of our national production, a more exhaustive estimate of our resources, and an entirely more scientific knowledge of the conditions of maximum labour efficiency. One turns to the State... And it is at this point that the heart of the patriotic Englishman sinks, because it is our national misfortune that all the accidents of public life have conspired to retard the development of just that body of knowledge, just that scientific breadth of imagination which is becoming a vital necessity for the welfare of a modern civilised community.

We are caught short of scientific men just as in the event of a war with Germany we shall almost certainly be caught short of scientific sailors and soldiers. You cannot make that sort of thing to order in a crisis. Scientific education—and more particularly the scientific education of our owning and responsible classes—has been crippled by the bitter jealousy of the classical teachers who dominate our universities, by the fear and hatred of the Established Church, which still so largely controls our upper-class schools, and by the entire lack of understanding and support on the part of those able barristers and financiers who rule our political life. Science has been left more and more to men of modest origin and narrow outlook, and now we are beginning to pay in internal dissensions, and presently we may have to pay in national humiliation for this almost organised rejection of stimulus and power.

But however thwarted and crippled our public imagination may be, we have still got to do the best we can with this situation; we have to take as comprehensive views as we can, and to attempt as comprehensive a method of handling as our party-ridden State permits. In theory I am a Socialist, and were I theorising about some nation in the air I would say that all the great productive activities and all the means of communication should be national concerns and be run as national services. But our State is peculiarly incapable of such functions; at the

present time it cannot even produce a postage stamp that will stick; and the type of official it would probably evolve for industrial organisation, slowly but unsurely, would be a maddening combination of the district visitor and the boy clerk.\* It is to the independent people of some leisure and resource in the community that one has art last to appeal for such large efforts and understandings as our present situation demands. In the default of our public services, there opens an immense opportunity for voluntary effort. Deference to our official leaders is absurd; it is a time when men must, as the phrase goes, "come forward."

We want a National plan for our social and economic development which everyone may understand and which will serve as a unifying basis for all our social and political activities. Such a plan is not to be flung out hastily by an irresponsible writer. It can only come into existence as the outcome of a wide movement of inquiry and discussion. My business in these papers has been not prescription but diagnosis. I hold it to be the clear duty of every intelligent person in the country to do his utmost to learn about these questions of economic and social organisation and to work them out to conclusions and a purpose. We have come to a phase in our affairs when the only alternative to a great, deliberate renaissance of will and understanding is national disorder and decay.

## VI. WHAT MUST BE DONE NOW

In these papers I have attempted a diagnosis of our national situation. I have pointed out that nearly all the social forces of our time seem to be in conspiracy to bring about the disappearance of a labour class as such and the rearrangement of our work and industry upon a new basis. That rearrangement demands an unprecedented national effort and the production of an adequate National Plan. Failing that, we seem doomed to a period of chronic social conflict and possibly even of frankly, revolutionary outbreaks that may destroy us altogether or leave us only a dwarfed and enfeebled nation.

And before we can develop that National Plan and the effective realisation of such a plan that is needed, to save us from that fate two things stand immediately before us to be done, unavoidable preliminaries to that more comprehensive work. The first of these is the restoration of representative government, and the second a renaissance of our public thought about political and social things.

As I have already suggested, a main factor in our present national inability to deal with this profound and increasing social disturbance is the entirely unrepresentative and unbusinesslike nature of our parliamentary government.

It is to a quite extraordinary extent a thing apart, from our national life. It becomes more and more so. To go into the House of Commons is to go aside out of the general stream of the community's vitality into a corner where little is learnt and much is concocted, into a specialised Assembly which is at once inattentive to and monstrously influential in our affairs. There was a period when the debates in the House of Commons were an integral, almost a dominant, part of our national thought, when its speeches were read over in tens of thousands of

homes, and a large and sympathetic public followed the details of every contested issue. Now a newspaper that dared to fill its columns mainly with parliamentary debates, with a full report of the trivialities, the academic points, the little familiar jokes, and entirely insincere pleadings which occupy that gathering would court bankruptcy.

This diminishing actuality of our political life is a matter of almost universal comment today. But it is extraordinary how much of that comment is made in a tone of hopeless dissatisfaction, how rarely it is associated with any will to change a state of affairs that so largely stultifies our national purpose. And yet the causes of our present political ineptitude are fairly manifest, and a very radical and effective reconstruction is well within the wit of man.

All causes and all effects in our complex modern State are complex, but in this particular matter there can be little doubt that the key to the difficulty lies in the crudity and simplicity of our method of election, a method which reduces our apparent free choice of rulers to a ridiculous selection between undesirable alternatives,' and hands our whole public life over to the specialised manipulator. Our House of Commons could scarcely misrepresent us more if it was appointed haphazard by the Lord Chamberlain or selected by lot from among the inhabitants of Netting Hill.

Election of representatives in one member local constituencies by a single vote gives a citizen practically no choice beyond the candidates appointed by the two great party organisations in the State. It is an electoral system that forbids absolutely any vote splitting or any indication of shades of opinion. The presence of more than two candidates introduces an altogether unmanageable complication, and the voter is at once reduced to voting not to secure the return of the perhaps less hopeful candidate he likes but to ensure the rejection of the candidate he most dislikes. So the nimble wire-puller slips in. In Great Britain we do not have Elections any more; we have Rejections. What really happens at a general election is that the party organisations—obscure and secretive conclaves with entirely mysterious funds—appoint about 1,200 men to be our rulers, and all that we, we so-called self-governing people, are permitted to do is, in a muddled, angry way, to strike off the names of about half of these selected gentlemen.

Take almost any member of the present Government and consider his case. You may credit him with a life-long industrious intention to get there, but ask yourself what is this man's distinction, and for what great thing in our national life does he stand? By the complaisance of our party machinery he was able to present himself to a perplexed constituency as the only possible alternative to Conservatism and Tariff Reform, and so we have him. And so we have most of his colleagues.

Now such a system of representation is surely a system to be destroyed at any cost, because it stifles our national discussion and thwarts our national will. And we can leave no possible method of alteration untried. It is not rational that a great people should be baffled by the mere mechanical degeneration of an electoral method too crudely conceived. There exist alternatives, and to these alternatives we must resort. Since John Stuart Mill first called attention to the



importance of the matter there has been a systematic study of the possible working of electoral methods, and it is now fairly proved that in proportional representation, with large constituencies returning each many members, there is to be found a way of escape from this disastrous embarrassment of our public business by the party wire-puller and the party nominee.

I will not dwell upon the particulars of the proportional representation system here. There exists an active society which has organised the education of the public in the details of the proposal. Suffice it that it does give a method by which a voter may vote with confidence for the particular man he prefers, with no fear whatever that his vote will be wasted in the event of that man's chance being hopeless. There is a method by which the order of the voter's subsequent preference is effectively indicated. That is all, but see how completely it modifies the nature of an election. Instead of a hampered choice of two, you have a free choice of many. Such a change means a complete change in the quality of public life.

The present immense advantage of the party nominee—which, is the root cause, which is almost the sole cause of all our present political ineptitude—would disappear. He would be quite unable to oust any well-known and representative independent candidate who chose to stand against him. There would be an immediate alteration in type in the House of Commons.

In the place of these specialists in political getting-on there would be few men who had not already gained some intellectual and moral hold upon the community; they would already be outstanding and distinguished men before they came to the work of government. Great sections of our national life, science, art, literature, education, engineering, manufacture, would cease to be under-represented, or ousted altogether by the energetic barrister and political specialist, and our Legislature would begin to serve, as we have now such urgent need of its serving, as the means and instrument of that national conference upon the social outlook of which we stand in need.

And it is to the need and nature of that Conference that I would devote my last available space here. I do not mean by the word Conference any such gathering of dull and formal and inattentive people in this dusty hall or that, with a jaded audience and intermittently active reporters, such as this word may conjure up to some imaginations. I mean an earnest direction of attention in all parts of the country to this necessity for a studied and elaborated project of conciliation and social co-operation. We cannot afford to leave such things to specialised politicians and self-appointed, self-seeking "experts" any longer. A modern community has to think out its problems as a whole and co-operate as a whole in their solution. We have to bring all our national life into this discussion of the National Plan before us, and not simply newspapers and periodicals and books, but pulpit and college and school have to bear their part in it. And in particular I would appeal to the schools, because there more than anywhere else is the permanent quickening of our national imagination to be achieved.

We want to have our young people filled with a new realisation that History is not over, that nothing is settled, and that the supreme dramatic phase in the story of England has still to come. It was not in the Norman Conquest, not in the

flight of King James II. nor the overthrow of Napoleon; it is here, and now. It falls to them to be actors not in a reminiscent pageant but. a living, conflict, and the sooner they are prepared to take their part in that the better our Empire will acquit itself. How absurd is the preoccupation of our schools and colleges with the little provincialisms of our past history—before A.D. 1800! "No current politics," whispers the schoolmaster, "no religion—except the coldest formalities. *Some parent might object.*" And he pours into our country every year a fresh supply of gentlemanly cricketing youths, gapingly unprepared —unless they have picked up a broad generalisation or so from some surreptitious Socialist pamphlet—for the immense issues they must control and that are altogether uncontrollable, if they fail to control them. The universities do scarcely more for our young men. All this has to be altered, and altered vigorously and soon if our country is to accomplish its destinies. Our schools and colleges exist for no other purpose than to give our youth a vision of the world and of its duties and possibilities in the world. We can no longer afford to have them the last preserves of an elderly orthodoxy and the last repository of a decaying gift of superseded tongues. They are needed too urgently to make our leaders leader-like and to sustain the active understandings of the race.

And from the labour class itself we are also justified in demanding a far more effectual contribution to the National Conference than it is making at the present time. Mere eloquent justifications of distrust, mere denunciations of Capitalism and appeals for a Socialism as featureless as smoke are unsatisfactory when one regards them as the entire contribution of the ascendant worker to the discussion of the national future. The labour thinker has to become definite in his demands and clearer upon the give and take that will be necessary before they can be satisfied. He has to realise rather more generously than he has done so far the enormous moral difficulty there is in bringing people who have been prosperous and at an advantage all their lives to the pitch of even contemplating a social reorganisation that may minimise or destroy their precedence. We have all to think, to think hard and think generously, and there is not a man in England to-day, even though his hands are busy at work, whose brain may not be helping in this great task of social rearrangement which lies before us all.