

FIFTY  
FIGHTING  
YEARS

SOP

THE  
ECONOMIC  
LEAGUE

# FIFTY FIGHTING YEARS

## CHAPTER I. **How It All Began**

For Britain and her war-weary people 1919 was a sombre year. The fruits of victory were turning sour in the mouths of the victors, while the vanquished suffered the ashes of defeat. A new word was coming into daily use. Bolshevism. Communism was no longer spoken of as just an academic economic creed. Vladimir Lenin and Leon Trotsky had emerged from underground obscurity to become headline news. The explosion of the Russian revolution was producing shock waves across the face of Europe. Red sailors in Kiel had followed the example of their Russian comrades in killing their officers. All over Europe the Red Flag had become a symbol of unrest.

The shock waves had reached Britain. At Southampton soldiers waiting impatiently for demobilisation had mutinied and raised the Red Flag. In industry, especially on Clydeside and Tyneside, there were strikes and demonstrations, the forerunners of more serious trouble. Behind closed doors discussions were taking place that were to lead in 1920 to the formation of the Communist Party of Great Britain, due to become part of the Third (Communist) International. However, the consequences of the Russian revolution and the rise of Communism as a world force were not foreseen by many people in Britain. The source of the Red infection was so far away, the British were so sensible and secure.

Fortunately, a minority thought otherwise. They saw the danger and took steps to meet it. Among them was Admiral Sir Reginald

("Blinker") Hall, who had held the post of Director of Naval Intelligence throughout the war. On his initiative, early in 1919, a meeting was held in a room at Number Four Dean's Yard, Westminster. Among those present were John Gretton, later Lord Gretton, Member of Parliament and a member of a famous brewing family, Evan Williams, a leading figure in the coal industry and for many years Chairman of the Mining Association, and Cuthbert Laws, director of the Shipping Federation and the man who signed the famous agreement with Havelock Wilson, the seamen's leader, which spelt peace in the merchant marine for many years. Also there were Arthur Balfour, later Lord Riverdale, a leading figure in heavy industry in Sheffield, Sir Alan Smith, director of the Engineering Employers' Federation, and R. C. Kelly, also connected with the brewing industry.

There was unanimous agreement that left-wing subversion was likely to become a serious danger to the stability of British industry in a period of post-war adjustment when there would be so many tensions that could be easily exploited by skilful agitators. There was equal agreement that some sort of organisation should be set up to conduct constructive counter-propaganda and education. The word constructive was of high importance for it was to be a dominating influence in the work of the Economic League from the day it was born. It is still a dominating influence today.

Whether the parable of the empty room—the devils swept out, the room left empty, for even more devils to enter into it—was in "Blinker" Hall's mind, it was that principle he expounded to those round the table that day. That it was not sufficient to denounce Communism and Bolshevism as evil. That it was not enough to expose the fallacies of Marxist economics and the theory of gaining industrial power through the revolutionary strike.

Denounce and expose them, yes. Fight subversion relentlessly and ruthlessly, whenever and wherever it appeared, yes. But replace it by constructive thought and ideas, by what, for want of a better term, is known as simple economics. To remove misunderstanding by explanation, to replace fiction with truth, with hard facts. Years later, when he was U.S. Secretary of Defence, Charles Wilson said, "We cannot knock out false ideas with bullets. We must counter and destroy them with the truth, with superior ideas and sound philosophy." That has been the conviction of the Economic League throughout its half century of life.

The decision taken at the meeting in Dean's Yard was to raise sufficient funds to set up an organisation to counter subversion in industry during the critical period of post-war re-adjustment. There was no intention at that time of setting up an organisation that would have a long life. It was envisaged that within two or three years its task would be completed. The form that the organisation took initially was the establishment of a number of groups in industrial areas to be known as Economic Study Clubs, each with a small staff of speakers and lecturers, to hold meetings and distribute leaflets at factory gates, pitheads and on docksides. They would be co-ordinated from an office in London, this task falling mainly to Admiral Hall and R. C. Kelly. And so, in 1919, as the Economic Study Clubs, the Economic League was born.

## CHAPTER 2. The Early Years

The Bigg Market in Newcastle-upon-Tyne. Tower Hill in London. The Bull Ring in Birmingham. The Covered Market in Wigan. The docksides of Merseyside, Hull and Glasgow. In the 1920s the scene was much the same at all of them. Men, young and old, their faces often gaunt with hunger, waiting for work. They were ready-made audiences for the newly-formed Communist Party, for men like Arthur McManus, J. R. Campbell, Shapurji Saklatvala, Willie Gallacher and Harry Pollitt. They were also ready-made audiences for the speakers of the Economic Study Clubs — with a very important difference. Whereas the Communists were listened to with sympathy, attention and often agreement, those who put the cause of reason and common sense often met with bitter hostility, and threats of physical violence. On occasions their platforms were overturned, and they had to be given police protection.

But they came back, again and again, to face the taunts of “bosses’ men”, “blacklegs”, and so on. After a time their audiences began to listen instead of jeer, as they came to realise that the Economic League speakers were giving them sound common sense, and they began to read the leaflets instead of tearing them up. Audiences then were large. Three hundred on Tower Hill, the same number in the Bull Ring, and up to one thousand on Newcastle Town Moor on Race Sunday were commonplace. And there were no loudspeakers. With no equipment save their lungs, the League’s outdoor staff put over its message.

There were virtually no works canteens and it was a general practice, in summer time, for factory workers to eat their mid-day meal outside the works gates, so it was quite easy to secure meetings of 200-300. Often as not, these meetings were *ad hoc* affairs, the “rostrum” often a beer crate borrowed from a nearby public house.

Leaflets were larger and much longer than they are today, sometimes running to four pages, for workless men had plenty of time to read. While containing a good deal of solid fact and sound argument, they were not free from moralising, sometimes tinged with pomposity. Speakers were selected not only because of their aptitudes

for discussing economic problems in simple terms but also for their ability to make themselves heard and deal with violent opposition. They were big men, in every sense of the word, tough, well able to look after themselves, and with plenty of physical and moral courage. Most of them had come to the League straight from the Services.

In 1921 a major decision was taken—to make the Economic Study Clubs the foundation of a permanent organisation, working for and financed by British industry, with a national director, and a central governing body—the Central Council—composed of centrally elected representatives and representatives of regional committees. This decision arose from a number of reasons. The formation of the Communist Party of Great Britain in 1920, its affiliation to the Moscow-controlled Third International, and the consequent realisation that Communism would be a continuing subversive element in industry. The clear indication that a difficult and perhaps prolonged period of tension in industrial relations lay ahead, with the need for an organisation that would seek to prevent the exploitation of this tension by extremists. Finally the recognition that industrial peace and high production could only be founded upon economic understanding.

The organisation that was re-titled the Central Council of the Economic League continued to grow, and among the areas now covered were Scotland and South Wales. The first work carried out in the London area was in 1920. The London area organisation with its own Executive Committee was set up in 1925. It developed quickly, so much so that by 1928 it was deemed necessary to set up District Propaganda Committees, the first being in Poplar. The report records that in that year in the London area nearly 1,000 meetings were held—820 of them in the open air—with audiences totalling 126,354.

In London, as elsewhere, the League had started to develop the holding of indoor as well as outdoor meetings, known as Study Circles, providing courses in economics, industrial history and self-expression. The League had also come to be known as a supplier of well-trained objective speakers to other organisations. It was at this time that the first contacts were made with trade union branches and co-operative guilds. Special indoor meetings were held for the workless in various parts of the country, and the first League propaganda vans were on the road. One of them, a caravan, was used to tour the mining villages of the N.E. Coast.

By 1925 the League had established for itself a national reputation. Its financial support, centred in the early days largely on the coal, steel, shipbuilding, shipping and engineering industries, was coming from a much wider field, though a shortage of funds was a constant headache. The League had also succeeded in developing a non-party image, keeping clear of party politics and receiving no support from political funds. The Left would not accept the League as a non-party organisation, believing that it had some mysterious underground connection with the Conservative Party, even when a Liberal peer, Lord Gainford, became its President.

The League was now in a position to offer a career to speakers and lecturers, and some who joined it in those days were still with it 40 years later. In short, it had become an established part of the industrial scene.

### CHAPTER 3. **The General Strike and After**

The General Strike of 1926 was a turning point in Britain's industrial history. It also marked major changes in the policy and operations of the Economic League. During the General Strike the League made no attempts to hold meetings or distribute leaflets, but its staff were organised in a national network to report daily to its headquarters, then in Millbank House, on the position in their respective regions. This information was used to compile a daily report to the Prime Minister, for which the League received his warm thanks.

Though the General Strike was of only a few days' duration, the miners' strike resolved itself into a long and bitter battle. At first the League speakers, to often hostile audiences, counselled a return to work and negotiations, arguing, as the League always has, that strike action is harmful to the nation as a whole. After the strike had continued for six weeks the League issued what must be the shortest, and smallest, leaflet it has ever distributed. It consisted of one sentence from a speech by the militant leader of the miners, the late A. J. Cook. It read : " If you cannot win in six weeks, you cannot win in six months". It was distributed throughout the coalfields.

It had been decided earlier to recruit a special cadre of speakers and leaflet distributors to work in the coalfields as long as the strike lasted. Known as the Constitutional Workers, they were the forerunners of the League Flying Squads and the beginning of the use of mobile, self-contained units consisting of two speaker/literature distributors, carrying their own stock of leaflets and portable platform. Later the vans were fitted with loudspeaker apparatus. The Constitutional Workers had to be recruited and trained in a hurry, and with a leaven of the existing fully trained League staff they were, by and large, a success.

When the coal strike showed signs of cracking in the Nottinghamshire coalfield and the breakaway Spencer Union was formed, the Constitutional Workers were concentrated in this area. As the move

back to work grew, so did the bitterness and violence of the militants who wished to continue the strike. After a number of incidents, the windscreens of the League vans were replaced with hen-wire, and speakers did not go out at night alone, though most of them were well able to look after themselves.

In retrospect, the League can claim that at any rate in this one coalfield its workers accelerated the return to work and the eventual collapse of the strike, a fact admitted by the miners' national President, the late Herbert Smith. But it led to an important policy decision by the League's Central Council, namely not to intervene in any way in strikes unless they were unofficial. The coal strike of 1926 thus became the last official strike in which the League took any part. The decision was criticised sharply by some of the League supporters, but it proved to be a wise one.

The mood in industry was changing. After the long and tragic coal strike was over, more and more trade union leaders came round to the view that negotiations round the table were better than strike action, while employers exhibited a parallel readiness to discard the lock-out as a weapon of defence. The League naturally went all out to cultivate the new atmosphere in industry and to counter extremist efforts to destroy it. At the end of 1926 it coined a new slogan—"Every Man a Capitalist"—coupled to the argument that, instead of denouncing capitalism, men and women, through savings, should strive to become capitalists themselves. The idea was greeted with derision by the League's enemies and with scepticism by many of its friends, but in leaflet and speech it plugged away, putting over its constructive argument, and with the passing of the months it came to be accepted as sense, if sometimes difficult to put into practice. Today, with millions of small shareholders and investors in building societies and Government stocks, "Every Man a Capitalist" is much more than just a slogan.

#### CHAPTER 4. Years of Change

At the end of the first decade of its life the Economic League had seventeen established area organisations and, working in close contact with them but preserving its national entity, the South Wales Economic League. Over the next ten years, as the League grew in size, there developed, mainly to reduce overhead administrative costs, a process of centralisation. For example, the Doncaster and Grimsby and North Lincolnshire Economic Leagues amalgamated with the Hull and East Riding League, as Keighley did with Huddersfield, and York with Sheffield. The process of centralisation continued after World War Two, to achieve the regional organisation as it exists today, with eight Area Chief Executives, and the Director-General of the Central Council, covering all the main industrial areas.

The first ten years of the League's life was a period of creation, of transition from the short-term to long-term existence, and of consolidation. The second decade was one of development and change. It would be impossible, except in a quite considerable volume, to trace this development area by area, but the story of the London League is, in general, the story of the League as a whole. In 1928 the London League held 965 meetings—indoor and outdoor, study circles and speakers' classes—with attendances totalling 126,534. The comparable figures for 1938 were 3,714 and 1,109,000. In that year throughout Britain the League held 41,676 meetings with audiences totalling 2,122,719, and distributed 4,859,000 leaflets.

What was the League talking about in its second decade? The titles of leaflets are a pointer to the answer. "Facts about Capitalism", "Unemployment, some Theories and Facts", "Machinery and Employment", "Who Controls British Industry?", "Facts about Prices", "Facts about Coal". Also "Truth about the Reds", "The Reds and the Unions", "Unofficial Strikes", and "Why We Fight Communism". Some things have not changed with the passing of the years. Other publications included "The Banks and the Public", a reminder that in those days bankers and banking were often misrepresented and misunderstood, "The Communist Party and the Left Book Club", and "Correspondence Course. First Steps in Economics".

It is interesting to look back at the reactions of friends and opponents in those days. The "Co-operative News", the organ of the Co-operative Party, refers to the street corner work of the Economic League "with its very efficient platform personnel". The staff magazine of the Westminster Bank finds that one of the reasons for the failure of a Young Communist League factory gate campaign in London "was the persistent attention paid to Y.C.L. speakers by an organisation called the Economic League". The South London Debating Society writes to say that "we all agreed that Mr. R. S. Mackinnon was quite the best non-party speaker we had heard". Finally an employee of a firm of cabinet-makers in Bromley: "When we go to work we meet the Economic League, when we go out in the evening we hear them again, and if we take a stroll in the Park on Sunday they are still with us. They will not leave us alone!" The leading woman Communist, Rose Smith, was right when she said in 1929: "The Economic League is the greatest enemy the Communists have to fight". And she would still be right 41 years later.

As 1937 moved into 1938 the skies over Europe became progressively darker and thinking people realised that, with the rising tides of Fascism and Nazism, conflict was unavoidable. The League adapted itself in a number of different ways to meet the changing situation. At the end of 1937 it launched its "National Defence Campaign" with the dual purpose of arousing industrial workers to the growing danger and the need for re-armament, also of countering subversive activity in defence industries. This was continued in 1938 and intensified in 1939. Leaflets issued in connection with it included "Facts about Europe", "The Call to Service", "To all Armament Workers" and "Democracy, Dictatorship and Liberty".

Throughout 1938 the Economic League conducted a searching inquiry into the Nazi Fifth Column in Britain, and the "cover" organisations connected with it such as The Link, the Anglo-German Fellowship and the Nordic League. In 1939 it published its documented exposure. This was given wide publicity in the press and Parliament. A number of Nazi agents left the country in a hurry; others named in the exposure were expelled. The German Embassy crossed the Economic League's Director off its guest list.

In the Summer of 1939 the Central Council of the League had to take a major decision. If war came should it attempt to continue to operate? It was decided that it should. By mid-August the necessary preparations had been made.

## CHAPTER 5. The War Years

From the beginning of 1939 the League had widened its National Defence Campaign to include a National Service Campaign. Its purpose was to explain the problems of national defence, to counter Communist and other efforts to impede production in the defence industries, and to encourage recruiting for the various branches of voluntary national service. The volume of work carried out in the period January to August 1939 exceeded all previous records. When the sirens sounded their first warning at 11.20 a.m. on Sunday, September 3, 1939, open-air League meetings were in progress throughout the country.

The Central Council organisation had to readjust itself to the fact that its Director, a Territorial Army Officer, would disappear at the outbreak of war. Actually he was stationed in London for the first six weeks of the war and spent such spare time as he had at the League offices. Major Tom Gribble, a retired Regular soldier, took over and directed the League's affairs, until he joined the staff of the Political Warfare Executive. Fortunately he, too, was stationed in London and continued to devote his rest days and lunch hours to the League throughout the war. Sterling service was also rendered by Miss Mollie Calder and Major Hugh Gillespie, who wrote all the League's Notes for Speakers—now "Notes & Comments"—for over 25 years. The same kind of readjustment took place in all the area organisations.

On September 8, 1939, a statement entitled "The Economic League's Service in Wartime" was sent to all supporters. A few days later the first of its war series of leaflets, "What You Should Do", was in circulation and, before the second half of September was reached, the War Service Campaign had begun. Meetings were continued, afternoon gatherings replacing evening, and they went on throughout the war. The second war leaflet was "The Home Front", followed by "Communism Unmasked", "The Citizen in War", "Prices, Wages and Inflation", and "Wages in War".

A further sixteen leaflets were issued in 1940, and thirteen in 1941. When P.A.Y.E. was introduced there was widespread dissatisfaction

in industry because the authorities had taken no steps to issue a simple explanation to those who would be paying income tax for the first time. The Economic League accordingly published its leaflet "Workers and Income Tax". Its impact was considerable, immediate and satisfactory.

Until Hitler attacked the Soviet Union, the Communist Party did all it could to obstruct the war effort, and the League spent a considerable amount of time exposing and countering its activities with such leaflets as "A Warning to Workers" and "Do You Know Them?" The leaflet "Close the Ranks", issued in 1941, was one of the most important of the whole war campaign. The London and Southern Counties Area Annual Report said: "So important was it considered as an aid to the Government's appeal for a one hundred per cent war effort that the League was asked to make a special intensive distribution of the leaflet at all Government offices, Railway Termini, and particular centres where there was any large congregation of the public. In the London area alone, more than one hundred and fifty thousand copies were circulated in a campaign that occupied five and a half weeks."

Restrictions on the use of paper, petrol rationing, and in the South V1 and V2 attacks, made the League's work progressively more difficult, but it went on. It also changed in character. One of the results of food rationing was a great increase in the number of works canteens, and in the number of employees using them. So the Economic League speakers, with the assent of both management and employees' representatives, went into the canteens to talk in the dinner hour break, securing large and attentive audiences.

The war brought about a very large rise in the number of women workers in industry, and to them the League gave special attention, establishing what was to become a new relationship—with the woman in her home reached by door-to-door distributions of leaflets and group talks and by distribution of leaflets to shopping queues. Among the leaflets produced in the last year of the war were "It's Your Money" and "Facts About Food". Looking forward the League also issued a booklet "Women at War—Their Future in Peace", which had a warm welcome, especially from the Directors of the Women's Services.

## CHAPTER 6. Reconstruction

If the end of the war posed huge problems for industry and the nation as a whole, it also posed some considerable problems for the Economic League. These involved major changes in administrative staff, the recruitment of additional speakers and lecturers, the formation of cadres of leaflet distributors, and the retirement of those who had borne the burden in the war years. It also involved a complete re-alignment of many aspects of the League's work and the application of lessons learned in war.

From explaining the day to day issues of war the League switched over to explaining the long term issues of peace. Mention has been made of the booklet dealing with the future of women in industry and the home. Another dealt with the situation that would arise when Lend Lease came to an end, a third with "The Land and its Future".

It became clear that there was a growing demand for training which only the League could satisfy. In the post war months there was born the training organisation that is such a vital part of the League's work today. In 1946 the first classes especially for apprentices were held. The London League report for 1947 records:

"Your Committee has always attached great importance to increasing the League's influence with the young people in the Region. It is, therefore, more than pleased to report the progress made during 1947. Through the goodwill of various national youth organisations, our staff has conducted a large number of courses for training youth movement leaders in the technique of conducting group discussions in youth clubs. These courses have been followed up by the provision of factual data upon which the leaders could base current affairs discussions in their respective clubs. We have also provided staff lecturers to address a great many national and regional youth conferences and the members of individual youth clubs. It is your Committee's intention to expand to the utmost this work fostering a spirit of tolerance and dispassionate consideration among the youth of the Region.

“ An experimental class in elementary economics and civics was started early in the year for a group of industrial apprentices. This experiment was an unqualified success and has now become a permanent activity. Other classes, equally successful, have been started, and the co-operation of all subscribers is invited in the extension of an activity which may well prove to have vital effects on our national well-being in the future.”

The year 1947 also saw the birth of the monthly news sheet “ Facts ” designed particularly for foremen and works supervisors. It was published each month, achieving a circulation of over 20,000 copies per month, until 1967 when it was amalgamated with “ Notes and Comments ”. Its counterpart “ New Future ”, designed particularly for young workers, was first published in 1954. It now has a circulation of 26,000 copies per month and is an essential part of the League’s youth training machinery.

By 1947 the overhaul and centralisation of the League’s machinery had been completed. The London and Southern Counties organisation covered Greater London, the Southern Counties, East Anglia, the West Country and South Wales. Later South Wales and the West were to become a separate entity—the Western Region—with offices in Bristol and Cardiff.

Subversive activity in industry and the docks was on the increase. After Hitler attacked the Soviet Union the British Communist Party performed one of its acrobatic feats and became a technical supporter of the war effort, while engaging in the Stalin-inspired “ Second Front Now ” Campaign. With the opening of the Cold War the Party resumed its familiar role as an instigator of industrial disruption, and the League found itself engaged in countering one of the most intensive campaigns ever launched by subversive elements in this country. One of its tasks was to expose the true nature of the insidious and now almost forgotten “ Peace ” campaign, which developed into the notorious “ Germ Warfare ” exercise, and to counter the Communist plot to sabotage Marshal Aid. The League can claim credit for turning the spotlight of truth onto the international wrecking operation of which the “ Beaverbrae ” strike in the Port of London was a part.

The immediate post-war years saw the decline of the large-scale public meeting. In London large meetings could still be held at dock gates. But other pitches including those at factory gates got fewer and fewer.

The open-air meeting was affected adversely mainly by the great growth of traffic, and by the changed habits of the industrial workers. The war years and rationing had resulted in a massive increase in the number of works canteens and in those using them. The League had met this situation by giving talks and film shows in the canteens, for day and night shifts, with the agreement of management and workers’ representatives. But another change lay ahead. The League gave higher priority to direct contact with workers through group discussions at works gates.

Queues outside food and other types of stores started to get shorter. So the League had to go elsewhere to maintain the contact it had made, by leaflet and discussion, with housewives. House-to-house leaflet distributions and the door-step talks were increased, covering a large number of housing estates, and have continued ever since.

The leaflet was becoming of ever greater importance, but it had to be not only interesting and informative in content, but also short and attractive in appearance. The League became one of the largest consumers of coloured papers, using them in rotation, and a great deal of thought had to be put into titles and tailpieces.

From day to day, and sometimes through harsh experiences, useful lessons were learned and applied. If the colour rotation was not observed and, for example, one green leaflet followed another at a certain distribution point, it would be rejected unread with the comment “ I’ve had that one ”.

Wastage went up sharply if the word “ Red ” or “ Communist ” was in the title, the tailpiece or even the first sentence. It was assumed to be a Communist leaflet and was rejected as such, unread. Leaflets on red paper were unpopular for the same reason. Mauve paper was not liked—“ reminds me of funerals ” was a typical comment. Leaflets on green paper were difficult to read in plants where humidity was high. In Scotland there was a tendency to look at the tailpiece before the title. It had to catch the attention or the leaflet was discarded unread. As leaflets became an even more important part of the League’s work a special corps of leaflet distributors was recruited, including a number of women. It was not necessary for them to be trained speakers, but they had to be able to answer questions and discuss intelligently the leaflets they were distributing, as well as having a pleasant and friendly manner.

## CHAPTER 7. The Training Era

It is not sufficient for an apprentice or other young worker in industry simply to acquire a high standard of technical "know how". To be successful, to make his way up the ladder of promotion, he must have confidence in himself, the gift of self-expression, and a knowledge of simple economics. These are the prerequisites of success, a fact that has been proved over and over again. It is not the function of the Economic League to provide technical training. But it is its function to provide training in self-expression, economic knowledge, and the qualities that make a good citizen. The establishment of industrial training boards has in no way diminished the need for the services that only the League is able to provide. It has increased them.

Ever since its inception those charged with the direction of the Economic League have recognised the importance of work among young people in industry, and a great extension of it has taken place since the second world war. This is largely due to the general change of attitude towards training that has taken place in industry. Most progressive firms are "training-minded". The first major development in the League's post-war operations was training for youth club leaders and the establishment in Lancashire of a Youth Movement to co-ordinate training. In 1949 the League as a whole ran courses and lectures attended by 295 youth club leaders and 580 senior members of youth clubs. In addition it conducted 493 apprentice classes, 310 Youth Movement meetings, and held a further 874 meetings in Youth Clubs. The foundation for youth training had been built.

In 1953 an important development in training took place. The first ever Economic League course for supervisors was held in York in April and May. Residential week-end courses for apprentices were another development. The League held 2,165 apprentice classes in 1953, compared with 1,234 in 1952 and 611 in 1951. Of the 10,181 indoor meetings in 1954 over one quarter were training classes

for apprentices. Training work among supervisors and members of junior management continued to develop with 331 meetings and attendances totalling over 6,000. The circulation of the monthly "Facts" rose to 20,600 per month. It is interesting to look back at the League's Annual Review for 1959, its 40th year of operation, and the pages in it devoted to various aspects of training. The following are extracts from them.

**"Apprentices.** Among the apprentices of today are shop stewards, trade union officials, supervisors and managers of tomorrow. Now, they are rapidly forming their own views for better or for worse. While some companies employ staff to guide apprentices, listen to their questions, and tell them the facts and the reasons of the world of industry, many do not. The young men often make their own guesses to account for the ways of management, or acquire the attitudes of the more talkative cynics on the shop-floor. Objective thought and constructive attitudes are best learned early.

"For two reasons economic education for the shop-floor requires that special attention be given to supervisors. First, the supervisor is often in a position to correct economic errors if he knows the relevant facts, and normally he does not know the facts unless steps have been taken to inform him.

"Secondly, the effectiveness of economic education at works gates is highly dependent on the mood in which men come out of the gates. The League, therefore, is as closely concerned with the management of the supervisor as with his economic knowledge.

"In 1959 the League held 5,750 classes for apprentices, compared with 5,177 in 1958. To suit the varied needs of companies the training was given on a daily or weekly basis on the company's premises, or at one-day conferences, or at week-end residential courses.

**"An Experiment.** Western Region organised a five-day industrial study tour for 36 apprentices from ten companies. They visited nine companies, studied industrial processes and methods of organisation, and noted the interdependence of industries. The host companies went to great trouble to make the visits a success. The apprentices showed excellent discipline and considerable initiative in questioning

foremen and operatives during the tour. The experiment was well justified.

**“Supervisors.** During the year, the League held 1,814 training sessions for supervisors. The objects of the training are closely similar to those outlined above for apprentices, with appropriate adjustments in view of the experience and responsibility of the students.

By 1959 the circulation of “Facts” and “New Future” had each risen to over 29,000 copies per month. The League’s staff included 22 training organisers and training officers.

In 1967 the League carried out training work for more than 700 companies. Six thousand supervisors and 20,000 apprentices attended League courses. In 1969 it conducted 5,700 sessions for apprentices and 3,880 for supervisors.

The League’s training officers can tell of amusing experiences they have had in their work. In one plant a militant convenor of shop stewards was suspicious of the type of training the League was giving. He was invited to drop in on any class at any time without prior notice. This he did, and stayed to the end of the lecture. The following week he arrived with two other shop stewards. From then on the three of them attended the whole of the rest of the course. They said they found it most interesting and useful.

The managing director of a large plant complained, jokingly, that the League had spoilt his night’s sleep. He had read a comment in “Points of View” that workers on night-shift never saw the “boss”. Looking at his diary he realised that this criticism could apply to him. From then on he was seen regularly about the plant at night. In another instance a suspicious convenor of shop stewards started to drop in unannounced at a League apprentice training course. The upshot of his visits was a request for a special course—for himself and his fellow shop stewards.

The League holds periodical two-day courses for its training staff. An economist who lectures to them regularly wrote: “I was impressed, as always, with the obviously high *esprit de corps*, their deep interest in their job, and how up to date they were in their

thinking. I find speaking at these courses most stimulating, and never come away without some new idea.” Training has come a long way since those early days, nearly half a century ago, when a handful of enthusiasts met in a dingy school room or club in Poplar, Bolton or Hull to listen to a lecture on simple economics. Covering something like 700 firms up and down the country a League staff of 22 is engaged on training and nothing else. Over 500 apprentices and supervisors are attending Economic League training courses every working day throughout the year.

## CHAPTER 8. Past and Future

On his 65th birthday a member of the League's staff wrote saying: "I think the time has come at which I should do a little less, but if you want me I would like to carry on part-time until I am 70. I would hate to give up working for the League altogether." The point about this letter is that the writer had already had 42 years' service with the League. This is by no means an exceptional case. There are several members of the staff up and down the country with over 40 years' service, and 25 years is by no means exceptional. A senior official of the League entered its service straight from school, following his father who had been engaged in it for a number of years.

The Central Council would not claim that exceptionally high salaries were the attraction, and there was no pension scheme until after the second world war. Much of the work is physically arduous; distributing leaflets in a below zero temperature is not fun. Except for fanatical early risers there is little pleasure in getting up at 5.00 a.m. to be on time to address a meeting at 7.30 a.m. outside a London dock gate on a wet November morning. A training officer, to keep on top of his job, has not only a full day's work in the classroom, but has background reading and study to do.

Men and women come to the Economic League and stay with it for a variety of allied reasons. They find that its work is constructive; they find it fascinating to watch a class of apprentices getting a grasp of economic facts and achieving self-expression. They feel that they are doing something worth while. They enjoy the real and warm friendliness that exists between a speaker or literature distributor and the "regulars" at meetings and discussion groups. There is the fascination of argument, of pitting one mind against another, of achieving a break-through from rigid hostility to readiness to see another point of view. And, though the work of the League is hard, it is changing constantly. It is never boring.

Even so, there must be a catalyst to produce the efficient long-service League worker, in the office or out in the field. It is a sense

of dedication, dedication to an ideal, born in a small room in Dean's Yard, Westminster, half a century ago, of principles laid down and observed ever since. Above all the principle that if you seek to expel from the minds of men an evil doctrine and wrong thinking you must put something decent and constructive in its place. When the Economic League was born, Soviet Communism was almost the only form of subversion in industry. Today it has to contend not only with the Moscow brand of Communism, but also with Trotskyism, Anarchism, Maoism, Guevanism and various brands of Syndicalism. It has to contend as well with a great deal of unsound thinking, with the idea that discipline is a dirty word, that freedom, of course without responsibility, is all that matters, that violence and "direct action" can achieve more than reason and negotiation. But the basic principles laid down 50 years ago to deal with the problem of subversion remain sound.

The bare story of the past has been told. What of the future? Is the role of the Economic League as important in the "swinging seventies" as it was in the troubled twenties? Is the League's machinery sufficiently elastic to meet the changes of industrial organisation? The answer to all these questions is Yes!

It was never more important to state simple facts, refute lies with the truth, and to expose the sinister motives of evil men. The tools on the work-bench have been changed as and when necessary. To give but one example, the League no longer maintains mobile film units. They just did not fit into the changed industrial scene. The leaflet remains as provedly efficient and effective as it has ever been, as does the personal human contact between the League speaker and his audience, whether it is a hundred or more dockers outside the dock gate, a dozen engineers in the dinner-break, or a couple of housewives on the doorstep. As for the League's machinery, in the past three years the regional organisations have been streamlined to secure greater efficiency in operation and lower administrative costs. In 1929 there were sixteen regional organisations. Today there are eight.

In the future training is likely to become even more important. At the shop floor level, developments, technical and otherwise, must be explained. The necessity to have a proper understanding of the need for and the importance of containers is but one example. The

removal of opposition to change and new methods remains a priority task for the League. As has been pointed out already, the pattern of subversion is much more complex than it used to be, the methods of revolutionary elements more subtle and diverse. With its unrivalled knowledge the League can meet this challenge. In a very different field Britain's advance into the decimal/metric age opens up a new field of popular instruction. To paraphrase the words of Cecil Rhodes—

**SO MUCH DONE  
BUT SO MUCH MORE TO DO.**

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