

JOHN WOOD

**'The Modernist Atlantic'.
De Montfort University, Leicester.
12th – 14th July 2007.**

BACKGROUND PAPER.

THE SOCIAL MODERNISM OF ORAGE AND THE *NEW AGE*.

NOTE: Citations of the *New Age* are given in the format adopted by the *Modernist Journals Project*. Thus, volume 1, number 6, page 254 will appear as 'NA 1.6:254'. To assist a chronological review the date of the relevant number has also been included.

© John Wood 2007.

THE SOCIAL MODERNISM OF ORAGE AND THE *NEW AGE*

I.

The *New Age*

The journal entitled the *New Age* had started in 1894. It was acquired in 1907 by Orage and Holbrook Jackson, following their move from Leeds to London, with financial backing from the Fabian Socialist, Bernard Shaw, and a theosophist, Lewis Wallace. Holbrook Jackson left the journal at the end of 1907, leaving Orage as sole editor. Orage kept the existing title but began a 'New Series' of the journal with a revised sub-title and fresh masthead designed by his friend, Eric Gill, the sculptor.

The initial price of the journal was one penny (1d). Orage wanted to attract a readership from all spectrums of society. Matthew Arnold had famously suggested that the classes could be divided into three – Barbarians (broadly 'our aristocratic class'); Philistines (broadly the emerging 'middle class'); and the Populace (the 'vast residuum')¹ and had suggested that there could be extrapolated from these classes a fourth class comprised of 'aliens' from the other classes, being persons who had overcome their class prejudices, and were driven by 'a general *humane* spirit' and 'by the love of human perfection'.² It

¹ Matthew Arnold, 'Culture and Anarchy', from *Culture and Anarchy; and other writings*, ed. Stephan Collini (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993) pp 106, 107.

² Matthew Arnold, 'Culture and Anarchy', from *Culture and Anarchy; and other writings*, p 110.

was to this fourth category that Orage projected the *New Age*. 'Our readers belong mainly to Matthew Arnold's fourth class,' he wrote in 1909.³

Accordingly, from the start Orage tried to keep the price of the *New Age* as low as possible to attract this wide readership and with 'the ambition [...] to establish for the advanced movement a penny weekly review equal in other respects to the older Conservative sixpennies.'⁴ After eighteen months Orage recorded that he had created 'a penny review which, I am assured by hundreds of correspondents, is regarded as an honour to the Socialist movement.'⁵ Even, at this stage, however, the *New Age* was making a loss and Orage's intention of 'avoiding claptrap, the banal, and touting for advertisements,'⁶ in particular from publishing houses, alongside a limited circulation meant that progressive price rises were inevitable.⁷ To avoid such commercial funding, Orage sought private endowments and the *New Age* was, in part, supported progressively by a series of individuals.

It has been suggested that modernism, despite its resistance to commercialism, in fact became 'a commodity of a special sort,' which was 'integrated into a different economic circuit of patronage [...].'⁸ At first sight, the *New Age* would seem to fall within this description. But there is a further major factor that also has to be considered in its case.

³ 'Unedited Opinions – Concerning "The New Age"', NA 4.14:280, 28 January 1909.

⁴ 'Notes of the Week', NA 5.27:470, 28 October 1909.

⁵ 'And Shall "The New Age" Die?', NA 3.26:501, 24 October 1908.

⁶ 'Notes of the Week', NA 5.27:470, 28 October 1909.

⁷ The price was raised to three pence from the start of volume 6 on 4 November 1909; sixpence from the start of volume 14 on 6 November 1913; and seven pence from the start of volume 24 on 7 November 1918. It remained at this price for the rest of Orage's editorship.

⁸ Lawrence Rainey, *Institutions of Modernism; Literary Elites & Public Culture* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1998) p 3.

To its writers the journal was colloquially known as the ‘No Wage’ because with very few exceptions, Ezra Pound was one, Orage did not pay its contributors.⁹ By far and away the largest endowment the journal received was from its own writers – ‘[...] we have always been, in the position of being unable to pay for contributions or to employ anything but a voluntary staff,’ wrote Orage, in reviewing the journal’s finances, in 1919.¹⁰ If its contributors were a small group writing for their own narrow coterie, the *New Age* might still be placed within this narrow endowed category of publication, but Orage, consistent with the journal’s socialist ambition, obtained a much more democratic endowment by publishing work by very large variety of unpaid writers.

II.

‘Bacchanalia; or, The New Age’

*See on the cumber’d plain
Clearing a stage,
Scattering the past about,
Comes the new age.
Bards make new poems,
Thinkers new schools,
Statesmen new systems,
Critics new rules.¹¹*

What the expression ‘new age’ means now may have something to do with Orage and his journal, or at least where it led him after the end of his editorship. However, in 1907 it did not mean the same. Also, it was not a new term, either in the context of the journal or

⁹ Paul Selver, *Orage and the New Age Circle* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1959) p 16.

¹⁰ ‘Readers and Writers’, NA 26.1:12, 6 November 1919.

¹¹ Matthew Arnold, *Bacchanalia: or, The New Age* (1867) from *The Poetical Works of Matthew Arnold*, ed. by C B Tinker and H F Lowry (London: Oxford University Press, 1950) p 217.

generally. Matthew Arnold's poem, *Bacchanalia: or, The New Age*, had been written in 1867, some forty years earlier and was, like *Culture and Anarchy*, Arnold's immediate, sceptical, reaction to the new thought and culture emerging alongside the egalitarian reforms which took place in England in the mid part of the nineteenth century. Whether or not the poem is the origin of the title of the journal, there is no doubt that the *New Age* was, under Orage's editorship, operating in the milieu of philosophical, political, and cultural ideas that Arnold was anticipating in his poem. As his initial co-editor, Holbrook Jackson, expressed it in his review of the 1890's: 'People [...] were convinced that they were passing not only from one social system to another, but from one morality to another, from one culture to another, and from one religion to a dozen or none!'¹²

III.

The 'Intellectual sunlight in which rank ideas either grow sweet or die'

It was this complex and changing world of intellectual thought that the *New Age* inhabited. Journals, Orage considered, fell into two main classes, 'representative' and 'presentative'.¹³ The *New Age* fell into the presentative category. It would precipitate and present new ideas, rather than just reflect and pander to pre-existing trends. The *New Age* from the start set itself up as a 'neutral ground' for debate. 'We shall invite and welcome discussion even when, as sometimes happens, our own cherished convictions are the first

¹² Holbrook Jackson, *The Eighteen Nineties: A Review of Art and Ideas at the Close of the Nineteenth Century* (1913) (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1939) p 29.

¹³ 'Readers and Writers', NA 28.20:236, 17 March 1921.

to be challenged,' Orage promised his readers in 1908.¹⁴ It is this deliberate encouragement and promulgation of contemporary intellectual thought which is the *New Age's* most lasting direct legacy and why it is such an important source of modernist themes.

This presentative approach and Orage's open editing drew in a wide variety of contributors representing, unsurprisingly, a whole spectrum of opinions. It became a notice board for new ideas. When explaining Vorticism, Pound started his article by writing 'THE NEW AGE permits one to express beliefs which are in direct opposition to those held by its editing staff,'¹⁵ – i.e. its editor. When asked why he, a conservative and a reactionary, wrote for 'a socialist paper like *The New Age*,' T E Hulme is said to have replied 'Because *The New Age* will print anything I write. Any other paper would cut and edit it [...].'¹⁶ For Orage, the exposure of ideas was 'the intellectual sunlight in which rank ideas either grow sweet or die.'¹⁷ The *New Age* aimed to provide both the ideas and the sunlight. As a result it is wrong to assume, as is sometimes the case, that the contributors writing in the *New Age* represent any form of collective opinion. Its promulgation of divergent views was a deliberate editorial approach.

IV.

The 'eclectic New Age'

¹⁴ 'To Our Readers', NA 2.26:503, 25 April 1908.

¹⁵ Ezra Pound, 'Affirmations – Vorticism', NA 16.11:277, 14 January 1915.

¹⁶ Robert Ferguson, *The Short Sharp Life of T E Hulme* (London: Allen Lane, 2002) p 69.

¹⁷ 'Towards Socialism – The Education of Democracy', NA 2.9:167, 28 December 1907.

Against this background, some of the commentators who have to date ventured into its domain have, understandably, found the *New Age*'s apparently confused and contradictory perspective hard to analyse. Michael Coyle has described it as the 'eclectic *New Age*'¹⁸, Samuel Hynes as 'an untidy mixture of socialism, Nietzscheanism and mysticism.'¹⁹ Politically it moved through a socialist spectrum from reluctant Fabianism, through Guild Socialism to Social Credit, with a brief interlude in which it aimed for the creation of an independent socialist party in parliament. Its Nietzschean overlay together with the contributions to its pages by Pound and Hulme, and other avant-garde writers of that era have caused it to be generally categorised as modernist. Its presence on the *Modernist Journals Project* website reflects its perceived 'role in shaping those modes of literature and art that came to be called modernist.'²⁰ However, one recent study has suggested that 'every article or letter to the editor or sample of modernist writing or art that is featured in its pages is counterbalanced by a parody or critique or countermanifesto',²¹ and goes on to question whether it may be appropriate to label the *New Age* as a modernist journal at all.²² Another contemporary commentator considers that the *New Age* 'has still not received the attention it deserves for its role in promoting modernism in English literature.'²³

¹⁸ Michael Coyle, *Ezra Pound, Popular Genres, and the Discourse of Culture* (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995) p 54.

¹⁹ Samuel Hynes, *Edwardian Occasions* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1972) p 44.

²⁰ Robert Scholes, 'General Introduction' (1999) to the *New Age* archive, *Modernist Journals Project* [accessed 2 September 2005].

²¹ Ann L Ardis, *Modernism and Cultural Conflict 1880-1922* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002) p 144.

²² Ardis, *Modernism and Cultural Conflict*, p 157.

²³ Dan Stone, 'An "Entirely Tactless Nietzschean Jew": Oscar Levy's critique of Western Civilization', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 36, 2 (April 2001) p 273.

It is not just subsequent commentators who have been confused. Writing in 1918, Bernard Shaw, who had provided funding for the original acquisition of the *New Age* in anticipation, misplaced in the event, that it would become a mouthpiece and debating ground for the younger Fabians, described it as having, outside Orage's own writing, 'no policy and no character. It is a hotch-potch, stimulating thought in general [...].'²⁴

However, all this needs to be seen against the background of Orage's editorial approach. To find a wide variety of ideas promulgated, debated, challenged or even held up to ridicule in the *New Age*, should not seem surprising.

V.

'An independent socialist review of advanced opinions'

Over and above its socialist ambition, the journal did not attempt to define any more general policy for itself. 'We on the *New Age* have no axe to grind, except the Socialist axe,' wrote Orage in 1907.²⁵ Its aims were generally avant-garde. In the *Literary Yearbook* for 1915, for example, it described itself as: 'An independent socialist review of advanced opinions. Articles mostly such as no respectable paper dare print – until afterwards.'²⁶

²⁴ Bernard Shaw in the *Nation*, quoted in 'Press-cuttings', NA 22.18:364, 28 February 1918.

²⁵ 'Unedited Opinions – The Socialist Representation Committee', NA 4.11:220, 7 January 1907.

²⁶ *The Literary Yearbook*, 19, 1915 (London: Heath, Cranton and Ousely, 1915).

During the nineteenth century, the emerging ‘masses’ and the ideas that came with them, were, as the verse quoted from Matthew Arnold’s poem *Bacchanalia: or, The New Age* implies, seen as a threat. Modernist historians identify a reaction which translated itself into an antipathy not just to this emergent class as a sociological phenomenon but also to the culture that was considered to be emerging in order to service the intellectual needs of that body. Within this ‘volatile relationship between high art and mass culture,’ it is suggested, Modernism sought ‘a conscious strategy of exclusion.’²⁷ This perception of modernism as being adversarial and reactionary has been attributed to the *New Age* itself:

Before the First World War the main forum in England for writers and intellectuals hostile towards ‘liberalism’, ‘progress’ and ‘democracy’ was the *New Age*. This weekly paper played a crucial role in the formation of reactionary modernism because it was one of the few places where those such as Lewis, Pound and Hulme could publish before little magazines like the *Egoist* and *Blast* were founded.²⁸

Against this assessment of modernism as being an ‘adversary culture’²⁹, an attempt by an elite intellectual coterie to protect itself and its work from being tarnished by contact with a developing but still moderately educated working class, and the ‘reactionary’ label pinned on the *New Age* itself, my expression ‘social modernism’ which is intended to carry with it a contrary implication of positive orientation towards the advancement of a classless society both economically and culturally, may seem something of a contradiction. However, Huyssen identifies an alternative, often overlooked, movement within modernism. This he describes as the ‘historical’ avant-garde, being a ‘precarious balance of art and politics,’ which ‘aimed at developing an alternative relationship

²⁷ Andreas Huyssen, *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture and PostModernism* (London: Macmillan, 1988) p vii.

²⁸ Charles Ferrall, *Modernist Writing and Reactionary Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001) p 13.

²⁹ Andreas Huyssen, *After the Great Divide*, p vii.

between high art and mass culture.³⁰ Such was Orage's editorial ambition for the *New Age*.

VI.

'Mr Orage is THE NEW AGE'

To understand the *New Age's* particular modernist position and to find one's way through the apparently confusing signals that it seems to send out, it is important to understand the way in which Orage personally directed the journal's evolution. The journal's socialist policy, its social modernism, can be traced through Orage's writing. Orage's central role was recognised at the time. H G Wells, writing on the first issue of the *New Statesman*, which the Fabians set up in April 1913 in competition with the *New Age*, commented: 'Ideas! There is not so much as a tenth of an Orage in the whole enterprise.'³¹ In 1918, G K Chesterton expressed the view that 'people support Mr Orage's paper because they support Mr Orage's views, or at least his right to express them. [...] Mr Orage is THE NEW AGE.'³²

Orage's views are scattered throughout the journal and expressed, as though from a contributor, through a variety of articles which, in a few cases were signed by him, but were largely unsigned or written under pseudonyms.

³⁰ Andreas Huyssen, *After the Great Divide*, pp viii.

³¹ H G Wells, 'On Reading the First Number of the *New Statesman*', *New Witness*, 24 April 1913; quoted in Letter from 'Press-cutter', NA 13.1:18, 1 May 1913.

³² G K Chesterton in the *New Witness*, quoted in 'Press-cuttings', NA 22.19:384, 7 March 1918.

While acknowledging the perceived ‘eclecticism’ of the *New Age*, which he considered was ‘more apparent than real’, Orage himself clearly considered that the *New Age* needed to be seen as having a policy and that its socialistic perspective would ultimately be seen as cutting across all its parts: ‘It will be found, if we all live long enough, that every part of THE NEW AGE hangs together; and that the literature we despise is associated with the economics we hate as the literature we love is associated with the form of society we would assist in creating.’³³ In the event, Orage left this to posterity to unravel.

VII.

‘Towards Socialism’

The *New Age*’s approach to socialism changed as Orage’s thoughts developed. It dropped the word ‘Socialist’ from its sub-title in January 1907 when Orage assumed the sole editorship. However, it reappeared for a short time in 1921. In 1914, Dent’s *Everyman Encyclopaedia* described it as ‘a blend of Marx and Nietzsche’³⁴ and it continued its fundamentally socialist aims throughout Orage’s editorship.

Orage’s perception of socialism was, from the start, idealistic and broadly framed. While in Leeds and shortly before moving to London, he had contributed an article to the *Leeds*

³³ ‘Readers and Writers’, NA 14.2:51, 13 November 1913.

³⁴ Quoted in a letter to the *New Age*, NA 14.17:543, 26 February 1914.

Mercury, entitled 'What is the Future of Socialism?' in which he had explained what he meant by the term:

Socialism is in fact nothing less than a new theory of society, a theory which finds place and scope not just for manual labour but for all the crafts, arts and professions, which therefore is no more exclusively designed for the improvement of the condition of the poor than for the improvement of the condition of the rich, a theory in short which in practice is supposed and is generally intended to create a genuine commonwealth, in which specific provision is made for every type of mind and every shade of temperament.³⁵

At the beginning of October 1907 and five months after the acquisition of the *New Age*, Orage contributed a series of ten articles on socialist issues to the journal. Reflecting Edward Carpenter's influence, this series of articles was entitled 'Towards Socialism'; a backward glance to and acknowledgement of Carpenter's *Towards Democracy*.

His 'Towards Socialism' articles are the first and one of the few contributions to the *New Age* which Orage made in his own name and are written in the first person. They appear just before he took over the sole editorship and are Orage's editorial prospectus or manifesto for the future. The articles illustrate the influences on and sources for Orage's socialist perspective. Orage draws together many of the ideas absorbed from his earlier studies: in particular, of the socialist movement through his membership of the Independent Labour Party in Leeds, theosophical thought derived from his activities in the Theosophical Society, eastern philosophy and, not least, Nietzsche. The West Yorkshire area, at the time Orage lived there, has been described as 'the most fertile soil for Ethical Socialism' – 'ethical and utopian, and although it still derived much inspiration from Marx, it also tapped the springs of motivation provided by inherited

³⁵ A R Orage, 'What is the Future of Socialism?', *Leeds Mercury*, 6 March 1906.

moral and religious sentiment.’³⁶ Orage himself identified the influences on his socialist thought as ‘a good practical knowledge of the working classes, a professional interest in economics which led me to master Marx’s *Das Capital*, and an idealism fed at the source – namely, Plato.’³⁷ (The emphasis being on the ‘idealism’ rather than Plato.)

Although he ranges widely in his ‘Towards Socialism’ articles, Orage’s socialism can be broken down into two major strands.

VIII.

‘I am appalled at the poverty of imagination of Socialists who can see Socialism as no more than the redistribution of wages of shameful toil’³⁸

First and fundamentally, Socialism should aim for a new economic basis for society. The desire to abolish economic exploitation is at the root of Orage’s socialism. In 1912, he wrote:

[...] a State is strongest when all its citizens receive their fair share of surplus value [...]. And, when the surplus value is no longer fairly divided, the attachment to society will be less in those who receive less and greater in those who receive more [...]. And the weak attraction of the dispossessed constitutes a weakness in the bonds of the State. [...] Slaves they were once called; wage-earners they are called to-day. All individuals out of whom a private profit is extracted are giving more than they receive.³⁹

³⁶ Stanley Pierson, *Marxism and the Origins of British Socialism: The Struggle for a New Consciousness* (Ithaca and London, Cornell University Press, 1973) pp 146, 149.

³⁷ A R Orage, ‘An Editor’s Progress’, *Commonweal*, p 376.

³⁸ NA 1.26:407, 24 October 1907.

³⁹ ‘Unedited Opinions – What is Society?’, NA 10.22:514, 28 March 1912.

‘Surplus value’ is a Marxist concept, being ‘an exact expression for the degree of exploitation of labour-power by capital or of the labourer by the capitalist,’⁴⁰ and is essentially the extra value created by the worker during the production process, which is then appropriated by the capitalist as profit. For Orage, any profit made at the expense of another’s efforts (profiteering) was anathema. In 1916, the *Daily Mirror* wrote that the word ‘profiteer’ was ‘first grafted on to our language by Mr Richard Orage, the Editor of THE NEW AGE,’⁴¹ and the *Oxford English Dictionary* states that the word ‘profiteering’ was ‘revived in the early twentieth century by A R Orage and others.’⁴²

He remained committed to this principle throughout, and it lies at the root of his support first for Guild Socialism and then Social Credit. Trade unionism and Fabian and Labour Party policies were not the solution to the problem, because they merely sought to operate within the existing plutocratic system and in particular to ‘postulate the continuance of the wage system’ or ‘wage slavery.’⁴³ In the opening ‘Notes of the Week’ of volume 30, the last full volume he edited, he repeated the views he had expressed in volume 1, some fifteen years earlier, criticising the Labour Party for only seeking to secure ‘for the workers small advantages within the recognised lines of the plutocratic system’ and for failing ‘to dispute the basis for that system’ or to ‘repudiate a single capitalist presupposition.’⁴⁴ Initially he took the view that ‘only in the hands of the State is capital really safe.’⁴⁵ Subsequently he elaborated this position and Guild Socialism and

⁴⁰ Karl Marx, *Capital* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999) p 147.

⁴¹ The *Daily Mirror*, quoted in ‘Press-Cuttings’, NA 20.5:120, 30 November 1916.

⁴² *Supplement to the Oxford English Dictionary* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982) volume III.

⁴³ S G Hobson, *National Guilds: An Enquiry into the Wage System and the Way Out*, ed. by A R Orage (London: G Bell & Sons, 1917) p 8, 109.

⁴⁴ ‘Notes of the Week’, NA, 30.1:01, 3 November 1921.

⁴⁵ ‘Socialism for Employers’, NA 5.9:174, 24 June 1909.

Social Credit represent Orage's attempts to find a solution to the control, in the case of Guild Socialism, and regulation, in the case of Social Credit, of capital in order to protect the individual from financial exploitation and to create an ideal society.

IX.

'The Socialist Movement: Dead'

To achieve these aims, Orage clearly anticipated that the mainstream socialist movement would itself need to be opposed, an opposition which can erroneously be interpreted in the context of the *New Age* as reactionary. He progressively distanced the *New Age* from the Fabians and began to support Guild Socialism. On 22 August 1912, an article headed 'The Socialist Movement: Dead', signalled an important change of direction for the *New Age*:

The Socialist movement was created for the removal of economic injustice. Where is that economic injustice now? More strongly entrenched than ever in the strongholds you intended to destroy. [...] In future we shall place ourselves at your disposal for the construction of purely economic movements when you can see, as we do, that in that direction alone lies any hope of our being able to help you towards the mastery of the world!⁴⁶

It was the mainstream movement that had lost direction and died not socialism itself. Accordingly the *New Age* set out to promote the Guild Socialism as its selected medium for an economic reorganisation of society. This was the final

⁴⁶ 'Richard Maurice', 'The Socialist Movement: Dead', NA 11.17:394, 22 August 1912.

straw for the frustrated Fabians who abandoned the *New Age* in April 1913 to set up the *New Statesman*, with Clifford Sharp from the *New Age* as its first editor.⁴⁷

X.

Guild Socialism

Orage's interest in Guild Socialism had started before he took over the *New Age*. During his time in Leeds, Orage had met A J Penty. Penty in his *Restoration of the Gild* [sic] *System*, published in 1906, had advocated a return to an industrial system based along the lines of the medieval guild system and 'aimed at forging the links required to connect the ideas of Ruskin and Edward Carpenter with practical politics'.⁴⁸ In 1907, Orage, in an article in the *Contemporary Review*, had written in support of such an approach.⁴⁹ However, when it was developed in the pages of the *New Age* in 1912, the movement for Guild Socialism, or National Guilds, moved away from the medieval roots and the arts and crafts influence of William Morris and Ruskin, dropped its 'spirit of utopianism', and aspired to become a political movement the aim of which was the abolition of the wage system itself 'in the interests, in the first instance, of the proletariat, but no less, though secondarily, in the interests of society and civilisation.'⁵⁰ A definition of Guild Socialism, of which Orage approved, was included, under the heading 'Socialism', in the *Everyman Encyclopaedia*, published by Dent in 1914:

⁴⁷ Even to-day the Fabians take the credit for the founding of the *New Age* under Orage – see *A History of the Fabian Society* at www.fabian-society.org.uk [accessed 2 September 2005].

⁴⁸ A R Orage, 'The Restoration of the Gild System', Review, *Theosophical Review*, 38, May 1906, p 284.

⁴⁹ A R Orage, 'Politics for Craftsmen', *Contemporary Review*, 1907, p791, 793.

⁵⁰ A R Orage, Preface to S G Hobson, *National Guilds: An Enquiry into the Wage system and the Way Out*.

Guild Socialism – otherwise and preferably the National Guilds System – first expounded in the British journal, THE NEW AGE, is a proposal to form a partnership between the State and the Trade Unions. The former would be the supreme owner of all land and capital, but would charter the control of the same to the Unions. Thus a working compromise would be arrived at between Syndicalism and State Socialism.

‘Posterity, at any rate’ commented Orage in quoting this passage in his review of the Encyclopaedia, ‘will now be acquainted with the subject;’ perhaps already reflecting an increasing pessimism on his part.⁵¹

Alongside the economics of this socialist initiative was a socialistic aesthetic. The wage system, by creating a ‘privileged wealthy class’ and an ‘aesthetising oligarchy’, was seen as distorting culture which was not the ‘property of any class.’ Guild Socialism was scathing in its condemnation of a society that assumed ‘that the wealthy, or even the leisured, have, as a class, innately more taste and appreciation of culture than the poor or overworked.’ It will only be when ‘all has been made equal that can be made equal that the spiritual inequalities of talent and genius will plainly appear.’⁵²

However, Orage progressively became concerned about the economic principles upon which Guild Socialism was based. Orage’s doubts appear to have derived from concerns about the way in which the Guilds would integrate with the financial system: ‘I knew, without being able exactly to diagnose it, that the whole idea of National Guilds [...] was wanting in some vital part [...] – the relation of the whole scheme to the existing, or any

⁵¹ ‘Readers and Writers’, NA 15.11:253, 16 July 1914.

⁵² ‘Guild Socialism – The Moral Foundations of Existing Society’, NA 11.24:561, 10 October 1912.

prospective system of money.’⁵³ He then alighted on Social Credit as a means to his end.

XI.

Social Credit

For Orage and the *New Age*, Social Credit took the place of Guild Socialism, and was to be the apogee of Orage’s socialism. The basic concept had been evolved by C H Douglas, who was introduced to Orage by Holbrook Jackson. The articles which Douglas wrote in the *New Age*, almost certainly with Orage’s assistance – ‘I more or less collaborated with Douglas himself’⁵⁴ - were republished in book form with the title *Economic Democracy* (1919), and were subsequently supplemented by *Credit Power and Democracy* (1920), also serialised in the *New Age*.

The underlying economics of Social Credit are complicated. As Orage put it, ‘a good deal of sweat is necessary to understand Douglas.’⁵⁵ However, its essential features are reasonably straightforward. Social Credit theory starts from the premise that ‘the community is [...] the ultimate owner, partly by inheritance and partly by current labour, of its whole productive mechanism.’⁵⁶ Accordingly the capitalist and plutocratic structure of society was fundamentally unfair and gave rise to ‘an environment which was hostile

⁵³ A R Orage, ‘An Editor’s Progress’, *Commonweal*, 3.14, 10 February 1926, p 378.

⁵⁴ A R Orage, ‘An Editor’s Progress’, *Commonweal* p 403.

⁵⁵ A R Orage, ‘An Editor’s Progress’, *Commonweal* p 403.

⁵⁶ A R Orage, ‘An Editor’s Progress’, *Commonweal* p 404.

to moral progress and intellectual expansion.’⁵⁷ However, Social Credit moved right away from the idealism of Ruskin and Morris which had been at least part of the inspiration for Guild Socialism by actively embracing the modern environment and mechanization, in particular, because it could ‘release a human being [...] for other aims.’⁵⁸ However, the benefits of mechanization needed to be distributed fairly. To do this it would be necessary for the community to take back what Marx had characterised as ‘surplus value’ and which Douglas characterised as ‘increment of association.’ The Douglas theory identified this element as being the value injected into the economic cycle through the combined application of the production process and credit facilities. To illustrate this Douglas postulated a short equation, his ‘A + B’ theorem, where: ‘A’ = ‘All payments made to individuals (wages, salaries, and dividends);’ and ‘B’ = ‘All payments made to other organisations (raw materials, bank charges, and other external costs).’⁵⁹ Essentially, Social Credit maintained that all prices for goods or services are comprised of A + B. However, the purchasing power available to society can only ever be A – i.e. what the work force or general public takes out of the production process – unless some additional resource to funding is added, which Douglas identified as credit. Accordingly, Social Credit theory therefore decreed that ‘the community must resume control over the conditions on which [credit] is issued;’ it must establish a basis for pricing which produces a fair price; and ‘instead of striving artificially to tie income to employment, it must distribute a proportion of the unearned increment of association in the form of a universal dividend.’⁶⁰ As Orage put it ‘our simple little proposal’ would ‘put everybody

⁵⁷ C H Douglas, ‘Economic Democracy’, NA 25.6:99, 5 June 1919.

⁵⁸ C H Douglas, ‘Economic Democracy’, NA 25.8:131, 19 June 1919.

⁵⁹ C H Douglas, ‘Credit Power and Democracy’, NA 26.16:248, 19 February 1920.

⁶⁰ Maurice B Reckitt, *As it Happened* (London: J M Dent & Sons, 1941) p 169.

upon an “unearned income”.⁶¹ From this platform, economic freedom would be available to all.

This outline of Social Credit is a simplification, but it could, in true modernist fashion, be broken down and expressed in a superficially simple and attractive theorem or manifesto. The Social Credit debate, started by the *New Age*, continued for many years and was taken up more widely. This social credit ‘manifesto’ is from *Life and Letters* in 1934:

- (1) Our objective is the economic freedom of the individual, without which intellectual, moral, and personal freedom are impossible. To obtain this we require:
- (2) The resumption by the State of the power to issue and control all forms of money;
- (3) The equation of purchasing power to productive power; and
- (4) The recognition of the fact that machinery is steadily rendering human labour unnecessary, and of the consequent necessity of distributing money without conditions as to work.⁶²

Such socio-economic reforms would also produce a cultural dividend. Orage’s vision of an economically free society would create the environment in which man was also culturally free of any ‘superimposed purpose other than his own.’⁶³ With such a fair division of national wealth would come economic freedom and with it greater leisure for all. Orage saw leisure as a medium for culture – ‘out of leisure [...] all civilisation comes,’⁶⁴ he had written in 1909. Such individual freedom would lead to an unlocking of intellectual invention and provide a platform for intellectual advancement:

[...] the more freedom, - possessed by the greatest number of the population, the more probably will inventions of all kinds arise. [...] let economic freedom replace wagedom, and may we not expect from it

⁶¹ A R Orage, ‘A Editor’s Progress’ *Commonweal*, p 404.

⁶² Eimar O’Duffy, ‘Finance and the Arts’, *Life and Letters*, 11.60, December 1934, p 301.

⁶³ ‘Towards Socialism, VI: The Meaning of Liberty,’ NA 2.2:29, 7 November 1907.

⁶⁴ ‘Unedited Opinions – The Communisation of Bread’, NA 4.12:239, 14 January 1909.

liberation of mind and of economic inventiveness [...]. I entertain [the conviction] that freedom is the condition of the emergence and development of as yet undreamed-of faculties in man.⁶⁵

Although Orage left the *New Age* in 1922, he remained committed to Social Credit. Very shortly before his death in 1934, he gave a lecture to the 'Leisure Society' in which he adopted a similar approach to the views expressed earlier:

Leisure restricted as it has been, has nonetheless given us all the values of Civilisation, as well as some of the values of Culture. Civilisation may be said to be the creation of Leisure, just as Culture may be said to be the right use of Leisure. The fact that we are tolerably civilised and only very elementarily cultured is due to the relative restriction in the past of economic Leisure. Civilisation is the work of a Leisured class; Culture is the achievement of a Leisured people. If history is any guide, we might expect the world, as Leisure became universal, to pass from the epoch of Civilisation into an epoch of Culture.⁶⁶

The evolution of culture was bound up with the evolution of a socialist society.

XII.

'The so-called baser instincts of man [...] must be socialised, transmuted, glorified'⁶⁷

'Society is the multiplication of oneself,'⁶⁸ so it was not just society that needed to be changed, but the intellectual condition of the members of that society also. This is the second major feature of Orage's social modernism and it results in the *New Age*'s confusing blend of socialism and intellectualism.

⁶⁵ 'Unedited Opinions – Worth Millions', NA 19.10:221,

⁶⁶ A R Orage, *The Fear of Leisure; An Address to the Leisure Society* (London: Stanley Nott, 1935) p 26.

⁶⁷ NA 1.24:375, 10 October 1907.

⁶⁸ A R Orage, 'George Gissing', *Labour Leader*, 14 November 1896.

Edward Carpenter considered that a higher level of consciousness in mankind, ‘a region transcending in some sense the ordinary bounds of personality’ would produce an environment in which ‘mere diversities of temperament which ordinarily distinguish and divide people [drop] away and became indifferent, and a field [would open] in which all might meet, in which all were truly equal.’⁶⁹ This desire to seek a new level or standard of human consciousness was an integral part of Orage’s socialist ideology.

It also explains its esoteric bent which gives the journal its ‘new age’ character, in a modern sense. ‘No reader’ Orage commented in 1919 ‘from the earliest volume to the latest, can have missed the recurrence in THE NEW AGE of, let us call it, a “mystical” note indicative of a constant search for a profounder psychology [...]’⁷⁰ Alongside its socialist economic policies, it is a theme that dominates the *New Age* and, indeed, Orage’s life. It was eventually to lead him to Gurdjieff.

Much of the inspiration for the ultimate intellectual standards Orage aspired to for mankind were based on those higher planes of thought and behaviour which predominate as ideals in eastern religion. Some aspects of Orage’s approach, like Carpenter’s, were clearly derived from his study of the *Bhagavad-Gita*, which Orage described as ‘the greatest treatise on Morality ever produced,’⁷¹ and its exposition of the higher levels of behaviour and state of mind to which man should aim. For example, says the *Bhagavad-*

⁶⁹ Edward Carpenter, ‘An Introductory Note’, published in *Towards Democracy* (London: Living Time Press, 2001) p xii.

⁷⁰ ‘Readers and Writers’, NA 26.1:12, 6 November 1919.

⁷¹ ‘Readers and Writers’, NA 21.14:307, 2 August 1917.

Gita: ‘Having cast aside egoism, violence, arrogance, lust, hate, covetousness - selfless and peaceful – he is fit to become the Eternal.’⁷²

While a member of the Theosophical Society in Leeds, Orage had lectured on human consciousness to local Theosophical Lodges. These lectures were subsequently published by the Society in 1907 (after he had taken up the *New Age*) under the title ‘Consciousness – Animal, Human and Superman.’⁷³ Orage had suggested that if man’s level of consciousness had developed from the animal to what we currently recognize as the human intellect, it should be capable of further development to, using the Nietzschean idiom of the day, superman consciousness.

Before taking over the *New Age*, Orage had established a reputation as a Nietzschean and had published two studies of the German philosopher.⁷⁴ He has been described as doing ‘more for the Nietzsche movement in England than any other man’, certainly in its early days.⁷⁵ As a consequence prominent Nietzscheans were attracted to the *New Age*. These included, in particular, Oscar Levy, the editor of the first complete English edition of Nietzsche’s *Collected Works*, and his protégé, Anthony Ludovici, both of whom contributed to the *New Age* throughout the period of Orage’s editorship. However, it is a mistake to assume that Orage shared all their views on Nietzsche. ‘What value,’ wrote Orage when he reviewed in the *New Age* the concluding volumes of Nietzsche’s work

⁷² *The Bhagavad Gita*, translated by Annie Besant and Bhagavan Das (1905) (Adyar: Theosophical Publishing House, 1979) 18.53.

⁷³ The lectures were republished in 1974; A R Orage, *Consciousness*, (New York: Samuel Weiser, 1974).

⁷⁴ A R Orage, *Friedrich Nietzsche: The Dionysian Spirit of the Age* (London: T N Foulis, 1906); and A R Orage, *Nietzsche in Outline and Aphorism* (London, T N Foulis, 1907).

⁷⁵ David S Thatcher, *Nietzsche in England 1890 – 1914* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1970) p 262.

edited by Levy, 'have the doctrines of a man who finally went mad?' Orage has been described as taking from Nietzsche on a 'partial' basis.⁷⁶ Orage himself acknowledged that his own views of Nietzsche were far from conventional. From Nietzsche, Orage derived part of his intellectual aspiration for mankind. In 1910, Orage wrote in his self-interrogative 'Unedited Opinions' column: 'What do you regard as the weaknesses of Nietzsche?' He responded: 'His so-called constructive doctrines of a new aristocracy and of the Superman.' 'Do you not then yourself believe in the Superman?' he asks. 'Not as the offspring of male and female [but] as self-begotten from within the mind of man.'⁷⁷ Otherwise, Nietzsche's primary value was as an iconoclast, a destroyer of established preconceptions and dogma; but he ultimately offered no overarching solutions. 'Like Moses' Orage wrote, '[Nietzsche] got us over the desert, but like Moses he never took us into the Promised Land.'⁷⁸

This aim for higher intellectual standards also led to Orage's antagonism to the philosophy of Henri Bergson, which like Nietzsche was also being endorsed by his contributors. Between 1911 and 1914, T E Hulme had published a series of articles in the *New Age* on the philosophy of Bergson, by whom he, like many others of that generation, was significantly influenced. In his 'Unedited Opinions' column in 1914, Orage forthrightly rejected Bergsonism:

Bergsonism I take to be the chief reactionary movement in the present spiritual politics of the world. [...] Man is on this planet to become perfect [...]. [...] the perfection of reason is the paramount duty. [...] Bergsonism [...] undervalues reason. [...]. [...] to criticise

⁷⁶ John Carey, *The Intellectuals and the Masses: Pride and Prejudice among the Literary Intelligentsia 1880-1939* (London: Faber & Faber, 1992) p 4.

⁷⁷ 'Unedited Opinions – The Superman', NA 8.5:107, 1 December 1910.

⁷⁸ 'Unedited Opinions – Beyond Good and Evil', NA 15.4:84, 28 May 1914.

intellectualism is one thing: to substitute for it an inferior quality is, however, quite another thing. Bergsonism [has] substituted for intellect [...] intuition [...] but impulse in its vulgarest sense is the meaning Bergsonism carries with it.⁷⁹

Reliance on intuition, the *élan vital*, came too close to reducing mankind back towards the intellectual standard from which, in Orage's view, he needed to escape in order to attain the higher levels of development.

This element of their social modernist ambition, directed towards the elevation of human intellect standards, also provided the basis for the criticism by Orage and the *New Age* of other modernist writing.

XIII.

'Every piece of work should reduce to a simple truth capable of being understood by the jury of mankind'

The standard to which Orage wanted his writers to aspire was to write 'brilliant common sense'. He explained that this expression ('our motto') means 'in the sphere of literature, in particular, a happy union of simplicity with complexity – of simplicity of form (which includes everything definable) with complexity of meaning (which includes everything spiritual and indefinable).'⁸⁰ The expression 'brilliant commonsense' cuts right across the perceived modernist tendency to outward complexity. It was also democratic - 'The

⁷⁹ 'Unedited Opinions – The Popularity of Bergson', NA 15.1:12, 7 May 1914.

⁸⁰ 'Readers and Writers', NA 17.6:133, 10 June 1915.

brilliant commonsense, [...] the ambition of THE NEW AGE, is not, in my interpretation the discovery of anything new; it is the rediscovery of what everybody knows but needs to be reminded that he knows. [...] Common sense [...] is the mind of democracy.’⁸¹ For Orage, ‘every conclusion’ should ‘be *susceptible* of being expressed in what is called plain language’ - ‘every piece of work should reduce to a simple truth capable of being understood by the jury of mankind.’⁸² Common sense is also applied intuition, so it needed to be elevated, to be ‘brilliant.’

From this background, it is easier to appreciate why Orage was critical of contemporary modernist writing. For example, the ‘vices’ of the ‘Blast’ school, as he characterised them, Orage describes as ‘excessive and barbaric ornamentation, violent obscurity, degraded imagery: but unmixed with any ideas.’ They prefer ‘the feeling of ideas to the clearly thinking of them.’ ‘The brilliant common sense, which we of THE NEW AGE have taken as our watchword, is obviously in peril [...],’ he wrote in 1914, shortly after the first appearance of BLAST.⁸³ (He was more sympathetic to the second edition of BLAST – ‘The second issue [...] appears to me to be much better [...]. Mr Lewis, I need not say, can write; and when he chooses he can even make himself understood.’⁸⁴)

Much of Orage’s critical writing is concerned with prose style. His search for purity of style seems to be related to his ambition for a classless culture reflecting his ambition for a classless society: ‘a pure style in writing reveals nothing but the thoughts and the pure

⁸¹ ‘Readers and Writers’, NA 21.21:447, 20 September 1917.

⁸² ‘Readers and Writers’, NA 21.21:447, 20 September 1917.

⁸³ ‘Readers and Writers’, NA 15.11:253, 16 July 1914.

⁸⁴ ‘Readers and Writers’, NA 17.13:309, 29 July 1915.

individuality of the writer. His idiosyncrasies, his class, his education, his reading should all be kept out of sight. [...] Pure style is pure mind.’⁸⁵ One might say that it is difficult ever to rise sufficiently above one’s background environment to achieve this. However, that is Orage’s point. Either the society from which culture emanates should conduce to that purity of thought; or man should himself seek some higher intellectual plane in order to achieve it; or ideally both.

But it is in the area of individuality that Orage departed most vehemently from the modernist isolationist tendency. In many ways, this is the most difficult aspect of Orage’s literary criticism to understand, particularly when set against the subsequent canonisation of such modernist works. However, it becomes much clearer when seen in the context of Orage’s socialism. Individualism should be outward looking and should not be isolationist. That would just preserve the existing tendency towards class division and cliques. ‘True individuality is not a claim to possess so much as a claim to give,’ he had written in one of his ‘Towards Socialism’ articles in 1907.⁸⁶ This was Orage’s principal objection to much contemporary writing and sets him very much apart from a conventional modernist perspective. He was very critical of the isolationist tendency that was a feature of modernism. ‘From Mr Wyndham Lewis, for instance, I gather that the aim of the ‘Little Review’ artists is to differentiate themselves from the mob;’ ‘neither Mr Lewis nor Mr Pound has any need to “cultivate” an individuality or to surround it with walls and moats and poses;’ and ‘whoever makes a boast of writing for a coterie sooner

⁸⁵ ‘Readers and Writers’, NA 19.2:39, 11 May 1916.

⁸⁶ NA 1.25:393, 17 October 1907.

or later finds himself writing for a coterie of a coterie,'⁸⁷ he wrote of the *Little Review* in 1918.⁸⁸

In January 1914, the *New Freewoman*⁸⁹ was converted into the *Egoist*, the sub-heading of which was 'An Individualist Review.' Ezra Pound explained subsequently that the *Egoist* was 'necessary to print Joyce, W. Lewis, Eliot and a lot of my stuff that Orage would *not* have in the *New Age*.'⁹⁰ And, indeed Orage's response was critical to such writing. In his 'Unedited Opinion' column published on 30 July 1914, and sub-titled 'The Use and Misuse of Egoism,' he explained his objection, and, by implication, his criticism of the *Egoist*:

Intellectualism has got its bad name from its close association with egoism, in consequence of which the intellectuals are confounded with the utterly selfish. [...] intellect in its early phases is necessarily egoistic. [...] One can tell, in fact, the stage of intellectuality at which an individual has arrived by noting the curve in his egoism.⁹¹

The intellect needed to pass through inward looking egoism, which Orage described as 'ego-building,' and convert it into outward looking 'ego-using' which would be marked 'by feeling of others.'⁹² What Orage saw as self-indulgent writing represented a lower level of intellectual achievement.

⁸⁷ 'Readers and Writers', NA 23.6:89, 6 June 1918.

⁸⁸ 'Readers and Writers', NA 22.17:332, 21 February 1918.

⁸⁹ Which had been originally set up as the *Freewoman*. Mary Gawthorpe, a suffragette and a friend of Orage from Leeds, was one of its co-founders and described it initially as being modeled on the *New Age*.

⁹⁰ *The Letters of Ezra Pound; 1907 – 1941*, p 344; quoted in Wallace Martin, *The New Age under Orage*, p 13.

⁹¹ 'Unedited Opinions – The Use and Misuse of Egoism', NA 15.13:300, 30 July 1914.

⁹² 'Unedited Opinions – The Use and Misuse of Egoism', NA 15.13:300, 30 July 1914.

The *New Age* can, with justification in certain respects, be characterised as anti-feminist. To a significant extent this anti-feminism derived from the influence of Nietzsche, whose philosophy suggested that the female intellect was inferior. For a man whose efforts in bringing on and publishing new talent, whether male or female, was considerable, Orage's recriminatory attacks belittling female intellect, whether or not explainable to an extent by background personal problems, seems surprising. In his Unedited Opinion on 'The Use and Misuse of Egoism', we can see a down-playing of female intellect being adopted: '[...] intellect in its early phases is necessarily egoistic; and since women [...] are just beginning [to become intellectual] it follows that their egoism is very pronounced.'⁹³

The dichotomy of Orage's position can be seen most starkly in his initial critical impression and review of James Joyce's *Ulysses*, the opening parts of which were serialised in the *Little Review*, until suppressed by U S censorship. Orage, who had admired earlier work by Joyce, in particular *The Dubliners*, was not enthusiastic and found fault with its complexity of outward expression. 'Mr James Joyce' wrote Orage, 'had, I think, the makings of a great writer – not a popular writer, but a classic writer. To become what he was, he needed to be opened out, to be simplified, to conceal his cleverness, to write more and more for the world.'⁹⁴ However, his reaction to the suppression of and difficulties in publishing *Ulysses*, was uncompromising, and entirely consistent with his emphasis on freedom of expression: 'Ulysses' is, of course, no crime; but, on the contrary, a noble experiment. [...] The immediate publication of 'Ulysses' in

⁹³ 'Unedited Opinions – The Use and Misuse of Egoism', NA 15.13:300, 30 July 1914.

⁹⁴ 'Readers and Writers', NA 23.6:89, 6 June 1918.

England is imperative; and every literary craftsman in the country should make a point of insisting upon it.⁹⁵

XIV.

After the New Age

Through the Russian, P D Ouspensky, Orage had come into contact with and started to study the mystical teaching of Georgii Ivanovich Gurdjieff. On 22 July 1922, Orage wrote to Gurdjieff asking if he could join the group that Gurdjieff was establishing at 'The Institute for the Harmonious Development of Man' at Le Prieure, a chateau at Fontainebleau-Avon, near Paris 'to work in the Institute with the high hopes of being allowed to work for the Institute'.⁹⁶ On 28 September 1922, the *New Age* announced the departure of its editor 'in connection with work of general and special interest.'

Orage himself had difficulty in identifying his motives for leaving the *New Age* when he did. Possibly he felt he had taken Social Credit as far as he could for the time being, though he resumed the campaign later in the *New English Weekly* in 1932. In part, it was due to the *New Age's* parlous financial position at that stage. Ironically, in many ways it was the economic policies that the *New Age* promoted that brought about its ultimate financial collapse, so far as the journal under Orage's editorship was concerned. The socialist economic democracy that was aspired to by the *New Age* led into difficult

⁹⁵ 'Readers and Writers', NA 28.26:306, 28 April 1921.

⁹⁶ Letter from Orage to Gurdjieff quoted in: Paul Beekman Taylor, *Gurdjieff and Orage: Brothers in Elysium* (York Beach: Weiser, 2001) p 24.

territory, with the challenge to its perception of the existing financial plutocracy. Progressively this became identified with Jewish control of the banks and there emerged an anti-Semitic theme that alienated much of its readership.

This position was compounded by the appearance in the columns of the *New Age* from August 1920 of Dmitri Mitrinovic. Mitrinovic's 'weltanschauung' has been described as 'essentially the age-old dream of Europe as Christendom, the nucleus and the pattern of some future ideal civilization of all mankind.'⁹⁷ This extreme, often anti-Semitic, writing 'coincided with the least successful phase of the magazine's history. As a result of their publication, the circulation declined and Orage lost some of the independent financial support that had enabled the *New Age* to survive in spite of its continued deficits.'⁹⁸

Orage spent the next ten years, in France initially and then in New York, teaching the work of Gurdjieff. In the U S, Orage made wide use, in promoting Gurdjieff, of the literary contacts he had made as editor of the *New Age*. Margaret Anderson and Jane Heap, of the *Little Review*, for example, were both subsequently to join Gurdjieff at Le Priure.

His battle for a new society was resumed in 1932 with his launch of the *New English Weekly* which he edited until his death in November 1934.

© John Wood 2007.

⁹⁷ Philip Mairet, *A R Orage; A Memoir* (New York: University Books, 1966) p xviii.

⁹⁸ Wallace Martin, *The New Age under Orage: Chapters in English Cultural History* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1967) p 285.