thrusts, interchanges and (intense but gentlemanly) combat of discussion. The reader will find that the many questions the papers provoke in his mind will be asked and answered in the discussions, and thus he can conduct his own dialogue with the contributors.

One closes the book feeling that history is safe in the hands of urban historians. All the participants shared a fear of a "theory of urban history" and, fortunately, no pamphlet entitled "How to Write Urban History" will emerge from this conference. One suspects that *The Study of Urban History* marks a new period in the writing of urban history. Although it may frighten (often by turgid, jargon-bound prose) some young scholars away from this field it will attract and capture many more. The by-products and ramifications of the book will be great, and if the book fails to lay down a methodology and a common vocabulary for all urban historians, it does have a lot to say about the historian's craft in general. It is as valuable an exposition of historiography and inter-disciplinary co-operation as it is a study of urban history and it will force every historian who reads it to review his own techniques and re-examine the way he selects his sources and the questions he asks of them. *The Study of Urban History* will become required reading for urban historians, but it should be in every historian's library.

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Henry Pelling. — *Popular Politics and Society in Late Victorian Britain.* London : Macmillan, 1968. 188 pp.

Henry Pelling is so well-known as an authority on British labour history that one is inclined to forget how closely he has stuck to his last in the studies of the subject he has hitherto published. Sooner or later he was bound to break away from formal histories, and this he has now done in a series of short essays, which sometimes suggest a non-Marxist response to the essays of Eric Hobsbawm published in *Labouring Men.* The range is different, but there are plenty of shafts directed at Hobsbawm, who has replied in a very direct but good-tempered review, which ends with the comment that "Pelling has written an interesting but unconvincing book. It will be read and argued about, and for this the author deserves our thanks. Its chief merit is that it may — as it ought to — encourage further research . . ." [1]

The main purpose of Pelling's book is not, however, a controversial one, but rather to take up a number of disputed issues and to suggest a solution. There are essays on labour attitudes to social legislation and to the law, on working-class attitudes to religion, on the labour aristocracy, on labour attitudes to the Boer War, on the strength of the Labour Party before 1914, a review of a book on the I.L.P., an account of two 1907 by-elections, an analysis of

[1] Society for the Study of Labour History, *Bulletin No. 18* (Spring 1969), p. 54.

labour unrest between 1911 and 1914, and, finally, a note on working class attitudes since 1945. In this review I propose to confine myself to one major point made by Pelling rather than to cover the whole range of the book. That has already been done by Hobsbawm in the review already cited.

In his first essay Pelling argues that at the beginning of the twentieth century "the foundations of the welfare state" were by no means welcomed by the working class, because of working-class suspicion or dislike of government. In his third essay Pelling discusses a special case of working-class hostility to government — the distrust of lawyers. Elsewhere, he argues that, even now, working-class attitudes towards government are extremely reserved. Working-class people, he suggests, are extremely conservative with a small *c*, relatively a-political, ignorant of the world outside their own immediate horizons, and prone to feel a sense of grievance against society. At least since the time of the new Poor Law of 1834 there has been consistent working-class hostility to the outcome of most social legislation, whether to the Poor Law, to slum clearance, to compulsory education, or to compulsory national insurance. Furthermore, trade union leaders have been hostile to any legislation which involved them in dependence on the courts of law. Only when the workers have been given benefits without strings (non-contributory old age pensions) have they been relatively satisfied. Far from welcoming the extension of state power, the workers are seen as more or less consistently opposed to it. "Creeping Socialism", in short, is seen as something fundamentally unproletarian in its origins, derived rather from the bourgeois search for law and order than from the class struggle.

What are we to make of this argument? We may first dispose quickly of one controversial point. Pelling's argument is not primarily an anti-Marxist one. The Marxist case does not depend on the assertion that the popular will is the necessary source of socialism. Socialism, for Marxists, arises from the development of the forces of production, the growth of class-consciousness, and the perfection of working-class organisation, not from popular sentiment. Indeed, socialism may be developed from above as well as from below, as Lenin saw so clearly. It is pleasant for Marxists to feel that the people are with them, both consciously and unconsciously, but overwhelming popular support is not a necessary condition for action. Indeed, it is perfectly logical for Marxists to oppose state legislation for the amelioration of the conditions of the workers if it tends to diminish the capacity to arouse class-consciousness. Pelling's argument must not, therefore, be seen as primarily an anti-Marxist one.

What Pelling is in fact saying is that the historian must remember that the history of the labour movement is something quite different from the history of working-class people. As Hobsbawm remarks, there is enough truth in the point "to make some of the more starry-eyed observers of labour uncomfortable". The problem is, has Pelling in fact got the emphasis of his argument right? Perhaps for controversial reasons, he is inclined to state

things in black and white. Working-class people are painted as simply hostile to the state. Is it fair to argue in these terms ?

The answer to this question seems to me to depend on one's starting point. My own is different from Pelling's, because I start by thinking of the English working man as the heir of the "free born Englishman" of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The dichotomy between "them" and "us" seems to me not merely a normal element in all societies and in all sections of those societies, but to have such a very long history in England that it is deeply ingrained in the attitudes of all sections of the community. I would not be prepared to go the whole way with those who argue that parliamentary institutions and the jury system came with the English people from the jungles of north Germany. But the rivalry of court and country, squire and village, town and country, master and servant, government and the governed, has been a permanent feature of British society. Indeed, dislike of authority seems to be a basic feature of anglo-saxon institutions.

It follows from this approach that dislike of social legislation may be regarded not so much as a specifically working-class reaction but rather as the natural reaction of all segments of the community to any government intervention that does not bring them a sense of direct tangible benefit without inconvenient side effects. Furthermore, I would argue that many British reactions to government intervention (e.g. the attitude of the T.U.C. to the Labour government's proposed trade union legislation in 1969) are essentially libertarian in character. It follows, I would add, that one must therefore think of British history more in terms of an attempt to strike a balance between libertarianism and governmental action than is common at present.

The idea of such a balance is familiar enough in the United States and Canada, but in Britain it has tended to be submerged beneath an ideologically-attuned argument about "collectivism" and an equally ideologically-attuned argument which turns on a concept of state capitalism more relevant to the Soviet Union than to Great Britain. The chief difference between Britain and the United States in this respect, it seems to me, is not that governmental activity goes further in Britain (I sometimes suspect that it goes much less far) but that in Britain governmental activity is thought of in terms of the actions of an official class. When working in Germany many years ago I was sometimes astonished by the degree to which the middle classes accepted the bureaucratisation of middle class society as a norm (though one attacked by the new entrepreneurial class). But though the Germans had systemised the thing more thoroughly than the British (across the board salary scales and ranks for all officials, whether in the army, the federal government, the universities, or chambers of commerce), I am not now sure that the British system of government did not at the end of the nineteenth century set out on a bureaucratic path, which pointed in the same direction as the German system. State action was conceived of more in terms of tidy administrative operations and clearing

up messes that the foolish People had got itself into than in terms of community service. As a result, the state apparatus in Britain became to a marked extent isolated from the life of the mass of the people. In this sense the fact that Washington (or Bonn, or Canberra, or Ottawa) could be seen to be an artificial capital had some advantages. In an artificial capital one operates as in a goldfish bowl. In the centre of a great city things are more concealed.

In the last resort, then, I come back to the old adage that no government can be good that does not rest on the consent of the governed. To the extent that political systems fail to secure the consent of the governed they deserve to be met with passive hostility or worse. The basic theme of twentieth-century politics in Britain seems to me to be the search for a basis for popular participation in government that will create mutual confidence between government and governed. So far, this has not been achieved. Governments have for the most part been little more than caretakers. The Whig constitution that the twentieth century inherited from the eighteenth has proved adaptable enough to prevent trouble, but not to prevent widespread malaise. One way out would clearly be to take the radical step of recognising that the state apparatus is no longer of a size readily manageable by politicians and to create a system of administrative law with which to regulate it. That would leave the politicians freer to talk about issues and to discover just what it is that the people need. Pelling is clearly right to stress that there has been hostility between the workers and constituted authority. I would extend his argument to make it into a general proposition about the structure of government in Britain.

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SIDNEY POLLARD and DAVID W. CROSSLEY. — *The Wealth of Britain, 1085-1966.* New York : Schocken Books, 1969. 303 pp.

The authors of this book set themselves a considerable group of tasks, replete with difficulties and dangers which they openly acknowledge. Their avowed intentions are to study the wealth of Britain over eight centuries, what "wealth" in each age consisted of, and how it was shared out. The challenges are squarely faced, and are met with sensible and sensitive judgements, though social historians may regret that consumption, and its social distribution, receive rather less attention than production, particularly in the early chapters where this work most nearly approaches traditional economic history. Nevertheless social historians will find this a productive and rewarding quarry.

The virtues of the book are considerable. It is, for example, a splendid synthesis of recent work in this field. Thickly strewn footnotes and a twenty-three page select bibliography supply abundant guidance to further reading, much of it published in the last ten years. There are few obvious omissions, though the section on agriculture in the eighteenth and early nineteenth