

Healthy Lives/Healthy World:

The utopian visions of interwar British progressives

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I was delighted, and greatly honoured, to be asked to give this lecture in commemoration of Roy Porter for 2014, treading in the footsteps of such distinguished predecessors. I joined the Wellcome Institute for the History of Medicine, as it then was, as assistant archivist in the recently established Contemporary Medical Archives Centre, shortly after Roy had been appointed to the academic unit. I remember that as a lively and vibrant time of wide-ranging intellectual stimulation, which led me to undertaking a PhD, eventually bringing me to where I am today, wherever that is.

Roy was not merely a wonderful scholar in his own right, he was also a generous facilitator and stimulant to other scholars, with a gift for asking the right questions at the right time, as well as expanding one's boundaries. Above all, I think, he made one realise that while history was serious it could also be fun.

When thinking about what to speak about, I felt that this perhaps rather preliminary essay on my current research project seemed appropriate to the occasion. The topic in some ways constitutes a sequel to the chapter, 'Arrows of desire: British sex utopians and the politics of health', that I contributed to the memorial volume *Medicine, Madness and Social History: Essays in memory of Roy Porter* (2007). It has developed from work that I originally undertook in connection with my collaboration with Roy on *The Facts of Life: the creation of sexual knowledge in Britain, 1650-1950*. While we were working on this I obtained a fellowship at the

Harry Ransom Center at the University of Texas Austin to examine the archives of the British Society for the Study of Sex Psychology, founded in 1913 and more or less defunct by the 1940s, along with the papers of George Ives, homophile campaigner and penal reformer, one of its founders. Looking at this relatively small and marginal organisation introduced me to a number of individuals and other similar small marginal bodies whom and which I found cropping up elsewhere, as well as discovering unexpected connections with individuals and societies I had already encountered in other contexts.

Following my delving into these papers, and following Roy's question of 'Who was Stella Browne?' I devoted a decade or so to investigating the life of this intriguing activist, which took me even further into the world of early twentieth-century progressives in which she was embedded. This made me come to think that this group has perhaps not received its historical due, although as an entity it must be said that it was woolly, fuzzy, and inchoate to such a degree that it's really quite hard to define. There was something there that people identified with, or pointed at, but it is sometimes rather hard to say what exactly it was.

It was possibly most vigorously characterised by those who loathed it and all its works rather than by those who were part of it.

He didn't call his Father and Mother "Father" and "Mother", but Harold and Alberta. They were very up-to-date and advanced people. They were vegetarians, non-smokers and tee-totallers, and wore a special kind of underclothes. In their house there was very little furniture and very few clothes on beds and the windows were always open.¹

CS Lewis on Eustace Clarence Scrubb, at the beginning of *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, first published in 1952, drawing on a much longer tradition of 'very up to

date and advanced people' as figures of fun in weird clothes living on peculiar diets in unconventional domestic circumstances - who also sent their offspring to experimental schools, as we discover in *The Silver Chair*. As Eustace was an only child (unlike his cousins the Pevensie siblings), we may hypothesise that Harold and Alberta were practising birth control. In fact I would not be at all surprised to learn that Alberta Scrubb was running the local Family Planning clinic. Harold was, surely, a Workers' Educational Association lecturer.

The hostile characterisation of this kind of highminded left-liberal lifestyle might be predictable in the case of Lewis, given the general tenor of his political and social views, and even in the instance of the right-wing South African bohemian and poet Roy Campbell, who wrote in his privately-published satirical obscene poem *The Georgiad*, 1931, of his scorn for those in whose

...sluggish vegetarian veins
 The spirit of objection still remains,
 That sees no fun save in progressive change
 Even if it be from normal health to mange.
 He roars with agony at Venus's thrill
 And takes his pleasures as a bitter pill
 Or social duty, much against his will.²

While George Orwell was situated on a very different point of the political spectrum from Lewis or Campbell, *The Road to Wigan Pier* (1937) is a decidedly non-comic and far from good-humoured attack on the same sort of people. He fulminated against

the horrible--the really disquieting--prevalence of cranks wherever Socialists are gathered together. One sometimes gets the impression that the mere words

'Socialism' and 'Communism' draw towards them with magnetic force every fruit-juice drinker, nudist, sandal-wearer, sex-maniac, Quaker, 'Nature Cure' quack, pacifist, and feminist in England.

Because of this 'dreary tribe of high-minded women and sandal-wearers and bearded fruit-juice drinkers who come flocking towards the smell of "progress" like bluebottles to a dead cat'

The ordinary decent person, who is in sympathy with the essential aims of Socialism, is given the impression that there is no room for his kind in any Socialist party that means business.

Alas, alas, cried Orwell,

If only the sandals and the pistachio-coloured shirts could be put in a pile and burnt, and every vegetarian, teetotaler, and creeping Jesus sent home to Welwyn Garden City to do his yoga exercises quietly!

His anathemas took in 'vegetarians with wilting beards... earnest ladies in sandals... [and] birth control fanatics'.³ His horrorstruck response to the prospectus for a summer school which took it for granted that it was necessary to ask 'whether my diet is ordinary or vegetarian' seems somewhat disproportionate: they weren't actually proposing to feed him nut roast, merely offering the option. My private working title for this entire project is 'Orwell's Anathema', since it's pretty much about all these groups who ran counter to his vision of 'the ordinary decent person'. Stella Browne once told a government committee that although she had heard a great deal about her, she had never actually met 'the normal woman', and I do wonder whether something similar could be said of the 'ordinary decent person'.

Even kinder observers of this group tend to foreground their eccentricity and their antagonistic relationship to normal convention. Douglas Goldring, who was very

much a part of it, described the 'emancipated group' that centred on the 1917 Club in the immediate post-World War I era as a very diverse conglomeration of :

Hindus, Parsees, puritans, free lovers, Quakers, teetotallers, heavy drinkers, Morris Dancers and Folk Song experts... members of the London School of Economics, Trades Union Officials, journalists, poets, actors and actresses, Communists, Theosophists

alongside pacifists who 'carried their dislike of killing so far that they existed solely on vegetables' or 'even would not even hurt the feelings of a vegetable by cooking it'. The sole common link was 'opposition to the reactionary clique in power'.⁴

Rebecca West remarked of the similar types who could be found all over Europe:

They have a passion for cleanliness, a strong sense of duty, a tenderness for little children... a distaste for violence, a courageous readiness to criticise authority if it is abusing its function.

However, she went on,

They are apt to be doctrinaire, to believe that life is far simpler than it is, and that it can be immediately reduced to order by the application of certain liberal principles, which assume that man is really amenable to reason, even in matters relating to sex and race. They are also inclined to be sceptical about the past and credulous towards the present; they will believe any fool who tells them to fill themselves with some contorted form of cereal, and despise the ancient word that recommends wine and flesh.⁵

She also deplored their tendency to manifest an eccentricity of dress which could 'serve no purpose save to alienate public opinion'.⁶

What I think we can see in connection with this group are a number of associations with ideas of the healthy life, whether this be the modernist hygienic minimalist austerity of the Scrubb household or a range of alternative approaches to wellbeing via dietary reform and eccentric forms of body culture.

There is much work to be done on this amorphous group: so diverse are the causes attributed to them, or in which they had an interest, that it might seem impossible to identify them with any specificity, and in fact possibly the only thing that really unites the group is that it was composed of an incoherent, inconsistent and indeed even incompatible diversity of interests widely regarded with amusement, scorn or hostility. Clough Williams-Ellis found that those who were dissatisfied with ‘things as they are’ as regarded town planning and the importance of open spaces, and who desired ‘a more orderly, humane, efficient and seemly physical setting’ were ‘commonly regarded as an eccentric minority, tainted with long-haired aestheticism and philanthropy, suspected of vegetarianism, and probably addicted to God-knows-what shameful and unEnglish practices’.⁷ So this penumbra of associations got attached to diverse causes.

There could certainly not be one single individual who would embody all the various characteristics and allegiances attributed to this group, and much mapping remains to be undertaken. What the overlaps were between different interests, what particular causes attracted specific individuals needs to be ascertained, and to see if any more nuanced account of allegiances can be adumbrated. Were vegetarians also nudist sun-worshippers? Was there any connection between fruit juice drinking and birth control, or morris dancing and free love? Was there an Esperanto vocabulary in which to discuss food reform or the virtues of Jaeger undergarments? Such crossovers may well have existed: CH Waddington was both a member of the inner circle of

Marxist scientists and intellectuals clustered around JD Bernal, and the Squire of the Cambridge Morris Dance (only in England...?). It is perhaps too much to hope that he was also a member of the sadly under-documented Men's Dress Reform League. I have found at least one instance where an annual meeting of the British Society for the Study of Sex Psychology was preceded by a vegetarian supper, catered at the Minerva Café, which was run by the Women's Freedom League (the catering met with George Ives' approval).⁸ It is a 3-, or possibly 4-, D Venn diagram in the making.

London was 'honeycombed with societies for the abolition of this and the propagation of that'⁹ (to which there were provincial counterparts) but few have left much in the way of surviving records. Names such as the Promethean Society, the Z Society, the Hornsey Open Conspiracy Group, the Utopians, glimmer momentarily as passing mentions of organisations about which little is known or can ever be found out. Even the 1917 Club, which attracted to its bohemian HQ in Soho a motley crowd of left-wing intellectuals (including two future Labour Prime Ministers and members of their Cabinets) and cultural creators in various fields whose names are now well-known to posterity, has left few records beyond personal reminiscences. Some of the single-issue groups have surviving archives, as do some of the Ethical Societies which embodied a longer tradition of dissent from conventional orthodoxies. We are left with questions as to what progressives were all about.

Some insights into what progressives were about can be found by considering two bodies among the several generated by an enthusiasm for H. G. Wells' notion of an Open Conspiracy 'against the fragmentary and insufficient governments and the widespread greed, appropriation, clumsiness and waste that are now going on'.¹⁰ These were the Federation of Progressive Societies and Individuals, and Cosmopolis. There is some surviving documentation on both these bodies, though rather more on

the FPSI. This was established in 1932. It published a journal, *Plan*, and in 1934 produced a volume of essays *Manifesto: Being the Book of the Federation of Progressive Societies and Individuals*. Its activities provides a useful lens into this amorphous group, since it constituted an attempt to induce advanced intellectuals to come together and make common cause to ‘influence the trend of public policy’, and provide ‘unity and cohesion’ in pursuing the programmes of the ‘various scattered societies whose aims it incorporates’.¹¹

The FPSI’s aims were far-reaching: what they stood for fell under three headings, and I have a slide, in order to illustrate their use of emphatic capitalisation[**SLIDE**]:

1. ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL.

(a) REGIONAL AND WORLD PLANNING with a view to the progressive Replacement Of Production For Profit By Production For Use, and the provision of the highest standard of life for the whole species.

(b) The progressive abrogation of national sovereignty in favour of A WORLD GOVERNMENT AS THE ONLY WAY TO PEACE.

2. EDUCATIONAL.

The establishment of a universal system of Elementary, Secondary and Higher Education, NEITHER MILITARIST NOR NATIONALIST, BUT HUMANISTIC AND SCIENTIFIC.

3. SOCIAL.

(a) THE RELEASE OF PERSONAL CONDUCT from all taboos and restrictions, except those with a directly utilitarian justification.

(b) ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL EQUALITY of the sexes.

(c) THE REPLACEMENT OF OUR MEDIAEVAL CRIMINAL AND CIVIL LAW BY A HUMANISED AND MODERN REMEDIAL SYSTEM.

(d) TOWN AND COUNTRY PLANNING with a view to the health and enjoyment of all.

(e) ABOLITION OF RESTRICTIONS ON FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION: e.g. blasphemy laws and censorship.¹²

These aims underwent some modification and expansion over the lifespan of the organisation but the basic principles remained the same.

Several of these aims related fairly specifically to the dissatisfactions of British interwar intellectuals, who had significant sources of grievance over censorship, in the light of several high profile trials, the criminalisation of homosexuality, and the extremely restrictive terms of the law on divorce, not to mention its continuing social stigma. Opponents made the derogatory joke that FPSI stood for 'Federation for the Promotion of Sexual Intercourse'.¹³ Elderly members of the FPSI testified that free-love frolics and nudist goings did in fact occur at FPSI summer schools.¹⁴ [/SLIDE]

Though many of the aims lay within the realm of political action, and many members were also involved in various political endeavours the FPSI and Cosmopolis were not political groups. Their inauguration and indeed the general interest in such initiatives might be seen as a reaction to the disastrous position of the Labour Party as a Parliamentary force following the establishment of the National Government.

There is very little historiography on these bodies. There are brief, very brief, and rather dismissive, mentions, in the biographies of individuals who were involved with them, usually not entirely accurate, although given the convoluted history and interactions of the two bodies this is not surprising. I haven't checked all the many

biographies of H. G. Wells but my impression is that they were seen as minor and peripheral manifestations in the overall complex tapestry of his life.¹⁵ Robert Crossley, in his biography of Olaf Stapledon, the philosopher and science fiction author, active in both, describes the FPSI as 'a collection of well-meaning theoreticians who for twenty years talked mostly to themselves', and cites Stapledon as not 'feeling sure that [Cosmopolis] is going to be an effective force'.¹⁶ Both bodies are briefly (and not entirely accurately) alluded to in Alison Falby's biography of Gerald Heard, the second president of the FPSI, an enormously influential figure at that time although his reputation has substantially faded.¹⁷ Tony Judge, in his recent study of the populist philosopher, Cyril Joad, first president of the FPSI, characterises it as 'largely speaking to the converted', even if it was keeping alive 'the spirit of progressivism at a time when parliamentary opposition was stifled'.¹⁸ Ann Oakley, in her magisterial biography of the economist, sociologist and left-wing reformer Barbara Wootton, the third president, concedes that it was 'a pressure group to which she devoted some time' but spends no more than a paragraph on her involvement.¹⁹ Although its membership (according to Tony Judge) never exceeded 600 (not sure if he included affiliated organisations in that total), other not much larger bodies - the Eugenics Society, for example, whose membership seldom surpassed three figures for most of its existence - have been accorded a much greater historical significance and influence. However, it is much easier to sum up what the Eugenics Society was about in a sentence than to do so for the FPSI, let alone the wider constellation of progressive activity.

R. A. Wilford in a 1976 article in the *Journal of Contemporary History* suggested that while the FPSI did not offer itself as an alternative to the Labour Party, it did, like a number of other contemporary groups, endeavour to 'exert a critical

influence within the wider Labour movement', and he analysed the ways in which it attempted this and the extent of its impact.²⁰ My own sense is that the FPSI, Cosmopolis and similar bodies operated more as a sympathetic support group for a constituency which felt it had little traction within the political system at that historical moment.

Although this would appear to have been true on the level of national and Parliamentary politics, an examination of local politics might reveal a somewhat different picture. The increasing number of studies of the development of birth control clinics in particular localities suggest that these may have been symptomatic of grassroots progressive alliances. In February 1937 an editorial in *Plan*, the FPSI's journal, celebrated the proud record of the Labour London County Council's three years in power. This included new council housing of 'a civilised standard'; massive improvements in educational staffing, the building of new schools, and the destruction of 'infamous barrack schools' as well as 'very special care' for the health of school-children; an institution for young offenders run on 'psychological principles long accepted by progressive opinion'; the designation of a Green Belt around London; the removal of the 'preposterous and anti-social ban on married women teachers' - this all thoroughly in accord with the agenda of the FPSI. Every member of the FPSI living in or near London was exhorted to do their best to ensure the return of Labour in the forthcoming local elections. The recent Wellcome Library digitisation of the Medical Officer of Health reports for London - *London's Pulse* - provides substantial evidence of the very broad remit that Public Health Departments, of the LCC and other London authorities took for their powers, including the introduction of municipal solaria. School authorities were enlarging the repertoire of exercise to include activities such as folk dancing and Margaret Morris movement classes, practices well-embedded in

progressive circles. An avenue that needs pursuing further is the relationship between professionals in the public health field and the wider progressive movement.

The activities of the FPSI as delineated in the pages of its journal *Plan for World Order and Progress: A Constructive Review* were indeed diverse. There were a number of special interest groups - Education, Sex Reform, Philosophy, Political and Economics, Law Reform, Peace, Arts, Town and Country Planning, plus a World Airways Committee - and several regional branches. Initially there was also a Civil Liberties Group but this found that that 'the matters falling within its scope have largely been dealt with in a most admirable manner by the National Council for Civil Liberties', with which there was not surprisingly a significant crossover of membership. Among affiliated bodies were the Promethean Society, the World League for Sexual Reform, the Hampstead Ethical Society, the Society for the Constructive Application of Scientific Research, the Gymnic Association of Great Britain, the Woodcraft Folk, the Fabian Nursery, Youth House, the Anti-Fascist Council, the Bristol Council for the Defence of Civil Liberties, the Modern Culture Institute, the Association for the Promotion of World Unity, the Architects' and Technicians' Organisation, the Artists' International Association and the Society for the Prevention of Venereal Disease. The FPSI also cooperated and exchanged publicity with a number of other organisations which were not formally affiliated. The groups held regular meetings and gave talks, and there were general public lectures on matters of interest, conferences, summer schools, monthly rambles, dances and other social events.

While this may all seem too massively scattered and diverse a set of interests to form a basis for agreement, let alone action, in his review of *Manifesto* Aldous Huxley 'set down a few reflections on [its] general principles'. He argued that

It is the great merit of the spokesmen of the FPSI that they do not believe that all the phenomena of human life can be explained in terms of one simple principle, or that all evils can be remedied by one specific action or series of actions.... They are prepared to admit that, while many of our troubles are mainly or partly due to the defects in our economic system, others have mainly internal, psychological (or even physiological) origins. In a word, they resist the temptation to take a short cut to significance which consists of attributing everything to one cause.

While finding this a meritorious course, he admitted that it could not be expected to 'evoke in people that religious fervour which is aroused by... a relatively simple and single-purposed document'.²¹

Issues to do with health were, perhaps surprisingly, not explicitly addressed in any detail by *Manifesto*, even though they were touched on in the FPSI's aims - 'the highest standard of life', 'modern remedial system' to deal with crime, environmental measures for 'health and enjoyment of all'. *Manifesto* had chapters on economics, on peace, disarmament and world government, on education, reform of the sex laws and of the criminal law system more generally, on the physical environment and its planning, on secularisation of the state. Health was certainly touched on under the rubric of sex reform, the chapter on reform of the criminal laws placed a heavy emphasis on the need for 'cure' rather than punishment, and the idea of a healthy environment was the implicit subtext to the discussions of environmental and planning issues. The chapter on 'A psychology for progressives' by J C Flugel posed in its subtitle the question of 'how can they become effective' rather than thinking in terms of the wider psychological health of society, although he concluded with a plea

for a fight for freedom and liberation, not from external oppressors, but ‘against the internal oppressors that enslave the human mind’.²²

That health was an ideal may have been considered too obvious to need definitely stating or constant reiteration. Conferences and summer schools arranged by the Federation or its groups not only provided talks and debates on topics of interest but the opportunity for forms of healthful recreation including sunbathing, bathing, tennis, dancing (folk and other), rambling, and table-tennis, and facilities for nude sun and airbathing were a recurrent feature. In most months of the year the FPSI calendar for London included a ramble somewhere in the Green Belt (with information on trains and cheap day returns). Members of Cosmopolis were specifically expected to subscribe to articles of membership which included

I will strive to bring my mind and body to the highest pitch of efficiency consistent with not abstaining from any physical or mental experience, or acquiring any habit derogatory to this end.²³

Ina Zweininger-Bargielowska in *Managing the Body* has delineated the pervasiveness of cultures of bodily health in early twentieth-century Britain. During the 1930s, she indicates, there was significant political resonance to particular forms of physical culture. Progressives eschewed the kinds of exercise associated with campaigns of national fitness for militarism and Fascist regimes of individual muscular development. They preferred other pursuits, of which rambling was perhaps the archetype, although in popular representations yoga and folk-dancing featured strongly. The Right to Roam and to access to the countryside was a politicised issue at this period: in 1932 the British Workers Sports Federation Manchester branch organised the famous mass trespass on the moorland of Kinder Scout in the Peak District. In his chapter in *Manifesto* Clough Williams-Ellis argued that 'Those who

enjoy the uplands by merely walking across them outnumber those who take their pleasure there by killing grouse', deploring that 'the bloodthirsty affluent [had] the legal right to chivvy all others off his thousands of acres of utterly wild playground'.

Rambling conveys a perhaps rather fubsier image than hiking, also extremely popular at the period, suggesting a gentle yet health-giving walk in the countryside in congenial company with leisure to observe the beauties of nature, rather than strenuous panting up and down hills: it not only provided healthy exercise, but benefits in other spheres - mental, moral, emotional, spiritual, through contact with the natural world. Williams-Ellis, making a case for the establishment of National Parks, suggested that they would be

a place for the quiet study of Nature in all her manifestations, a place for walking, climbing and exploration, a place for camping, a paradise for pedestrians, a sanctuary for scenery, and a townsman's refuge from the grinding hurly-burly of his everyday life.²⁴

It seems not improbable that the 'two dreadful-looking old men' encountered by Orwell to his absolutely visceral horror on a bus going through Letchworth:

both about sixty, both very short, pink, and chubby, and both hatless. One of them was obscenely bald, the other had long grey hair bobbed in the Lloyd George style. They were dressed in pistachio-coloured shirts and khaki shorts.

were in fact bound on a nice, health-giving, country ramble in clothing practical for the purpose.

The perhaps rather curious absence of specific programmes to do with health from the aims of the FPSI could perhaps be read as a disinclination to get embroiled in debates over the merits of the particular health systems being advocated and practised by members and affiliated organisations. There was a perception among

progressives themselves that they were possibly more given to internal wrangling than confronting the real enemies. H. G. Wells claimed that

The aim to make the world anew and nearer the heart's desire of mankind is universal, but the methods are generally local, sectarian, partisan, hysterical and confused. The forces of protest and reconstruction are in the aggregate enormous, but they go largely to waste in a sort of civil war among themselves.²⁵

Cyril Joad bemoaned the fact that

[I]ntellectuals are singularly little given to co-operation. The over-developed individualities of progressive persons make them singularly averse from common action.²⁶

The New Culture Society, one of the affiliated organisations, for example, taught 'the natural methods of maintaining health and curing disease (without drugs, sera, vaccines, etc)' and promoted 'the gospel of Health and Healing through sunshine, water, pure air, gymnastics, sport, eugenics, wholesome food and drink, proper breathing, thought-control, optimism, etc'.²⁷ An article in *Plan* asking 'Why Not Try Sun-Bathing?' - which in context meant nudism - was emphatic about its wide-ranging benefits to health, physical, mental, and moral. The paean to the health-giving rays of the sun may seem quaint in the era of Sunscreen Factor 30: 'The sun bather's skin gradually improves in texture.... The figure and carriage change, the bodily movements grow freer', and the effects were not merely physical but mental: 'I know of no occupation which is so entirely restful to the mind as sun-bathing, no circumstances in which complete relaxation is so easy'. It also changed one's values, eliminating 'furtive self-consciousness' and 'revealing as meaningless nonsense many of the commonly accepted standards'.²⁸

While there were advocates for various regimens of individual self-improvement and self-help, the distinction between individual praxis and a collective vision of health was far from absolute. Enthusiasts for sunbathing, for example, saw this as a social rather than solitary activity - collective nudity was important to them - and were concerned about the 'obstructionist tactics' of local councils and other authorities over the establishment of sunbathing clubs due to continuing 'fulminations of tabues of the Victorian epoch'.²⁹ While the Society for the Prevention of VD advocated the individual use of prophylactics, this was in the context of promoting a wider dissemination of knowledge about these diseases and their prevention, and the destruction of the societal taboos that rendered them particularly harmful.

Allegiances to alternative health practices and paradigms do not seem to have reflected the general position of the FPSI as a whole, which had a significant interest in a more rational approach to the provision of medical care along orthodox lines and indeed a strong inclination towards reverence for the developments in modern science. John L. Hodgson, in a talk on 'Planning for Plenty' to a 1935 FPSI Summer School, mentioned as among the benefits that would be accrued by the economic interventions he proposed, 'ample and sustaining food for all, and smokeless, well-planned, garden cities... no more starving school children'.³⁰ An article in *Plan* in the same year by H. R. Page on 'The Political Organisation of Socialism' was positive about the existing 'experiments in State medicine which are awaiting only the advent of Socialism to become completely Socialistic in themselves': not just the development of a state hospital system but 'the growth of the panel system for both medical and dental purposes', an arrangement he considered obvious and one that would not have to be built up from scratch but on this already established basis (he did envisage the obvious next step as being a move towards group rather than

individual medical practices).³¹ The 1937 Manifesto of the Political and Economics Group of the FPSI advocated public works of water supply and drainage, and the construction of 'hospitals in large numbers to replace our present out of date and inadequate buildings'.³² There were clearly those who were entirely on the side of modern medicine and wished to improve the conditions under which it was practised and the dissemination of its benefits.

Besides the attention to structural factors, the findings of modern science were celebrated. A substantial article in *Plan* early in 1937 summed up the 'awakening of the public conscience in Britain' to widespread malnutrition and undernutrition and its relationship to poverty in the wake of recent scientific investigations. It mentioned as the best pamphlet produced summing up the finding of John Boyd Orr published in *Food Health and Income* as having been issued by 'a little open-conspiratorial group of scientists known as the Engineers' Study Group' - a name that does not immediately conjure up an interest in nutritional science and social welfare, but whose fuller title was the Engineers' Study Group on Economics. It concludes that

Social reformers have not thought it necessary till now to have to *prove*, elaborately and scientifically, that if a person is poor, he naturally gets bad and insufficient food, that, obviously there are a great number of poor and that, equally obviously, such a state of affairs is not only a disgrace but an unnecessary one. But those in power are moved only by 'facts and figures' backed by public indignation.³³

Health was thus an implicit subtext to the reforms the FPSI would have liked to see, touched on, as already mentioned, in articles on wider programmes for the planned and rational society. Indeed H. G. Wells claimed in *The Open Conspiracy* that 'Medical art has attained a new level of proficiency' such that life expectancy and

quality of life had already demonstrably improved. But although 'We may all live now... without any great burthen of toil or fear, wholesomely and abundantly.... we do not do so' for reasons he went on to delineate.³⁴

What progressives wanted to do was create a society, in fact an entire world, in which the preconditions for health were met as a foundation. Stella Browne once wrote of 'the finer social order for which some of us are working (in however insignificant and piecemeal a fashion)'.³⁵ While individual members and affiliated associations might be working in this 'piecemeal' way towards ameliorating particular threats to health in the contemporary situation, whether that was by disseminating information on birth control and agitating for the legalisation of abortion, or setting up an Anti-Noise League (founded by Ambrose Appelbe, a significant figure in the FPSI), the over-arching long-term vision was of a society in which being healthy was the norm and individuals had both the knowledge and the facilities to maintain their health. Everyone would be adequately fed, live in accommodation provided with the civilised amenities of life, in conurbations deliberately designed for human well-being rather than developing haphazardly. They would work for reasonable hours in agreeable workplaces, have access to the countryside and green spaces, and the opportunity for healthful recreation. Such health would not be merely physical. The psychological played a significant part as well, along with the moral and even the spiritual. Stella Browne envisaged 'the development of hitherto isolated human harmonies, of intense and vivid variations of faculty and type, in however remote a future'.³⁶

The vision of health as not merely holistic but collective and global was laid out in the canonical text for so many progressives, Wells's *The Open Conspiracy*, which deployed numerous metaphors of health and sickness in his attack on existing

institutions and his recommendations for a new regime of world peace and harmony: 'our political way of living is now no better than an inherited defect and malformation.... our everyday life is cramped, thwarted and impoverished'.³⁷ The educational system produced a 'heap of starved and distorted minds'.³⁸ While in the past 'practical good works took the form mainly of palliative measures against evils that were conceived of as incurable', now there was a 'conceivable better order'.³⁹ 'Mental infection... could be countered by mental sanitation':⁴⁰ in a developing progressive world children would be guarded 'from the infection of the old racial and national hatreds and jealousies'.⁴¹ Ultimately:

the elation of physical well-being will some day be the common lot of mankind.... He will not be left with his soul tangled, haunted by monstrous and irrational fears and a prey to malicious impulse.... He will feel better, will better, think better, see, taste and hear better than men do now. His undersoul will no longer be a mutinous cavern of ill-treated suppressions and of impulse repressed without understanding.⁴²

His vision of the Open Conspiracy was 'the awaking of mankind from a nightmare... of the struggle for existence and the inevitability of war'.⁴³

That vision - of lives lived at a level of healthiness far beyond anything imaginable in the present, in a world healed of its ancient ills of war and conflict - was the, sometimes rather occluded, basis of the beliefs and activities of progressives in the FPSI and its penumbra of similar organisations and individuals.

¹ C. S. Lewis, *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* (first published 1952) (London: HarperCollins Children's Books, 2001), p. 13.

² Roy Campbell, *The Georgiad; A Satirical Fantasy in Verse* (London, Boriswood Ltd, 1931), p. 38.

- ³ George Orwell, *The Road to Wigan Pier* (first published 1937) (London: Penguin, 1989), pp. 161, 201.
- ⁴ Douglas Goldring, *The Nineteen-Twenties: A General Survey and some personal memories* (London: Nicolson and Watson, 1945), pp. 145-152.
- ⁵ Rebecca West, *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon: The Record of a Journey through Yugoslavia in 1937* (London: Macmillan, 1942), Vol I, p. 426.
- ⁶ West, *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon*, Vol. II, pp. 295-296.
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