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## A New Proposal for Guild Organisation.

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### II

It is essential to the conception of the *Threefold Commonwealth* that the political and the economic lives should be clearly separated one from the other. In the present social crisis nothing is stranger nor more characteristic than the fact that people do not readily see the urgent necessity for this. Politics and economics are entirely different in their origins and essence, different in their historic roots and never, probably in the world's history, so strangely confused and mixed together as they now are. If we ask why these two things, which God has put asunder, have been by man most unlawfully joined together, we may find the answer in recent history. It is not long since President Wilson, in an unbiased and very well-informed criticism of the development of democracy in the United States, showed how completely the organisation of the economic life has there outgrown the power of politics and jurisprudence. His conclusions hold good for Europe; since the development of steam power and modern technical production, life has been entirely changed by the formation of the great companies and the financial combines that have grown up with them. These bodies, with their secret councils and purely economic interests, were quite unforeseen by the ages from which we have inherited our instruments of law, politics, and culture. They are strong enough to use law and politics and culture in their own interest. It is a natural result that, whereas in pre-industrial ages the economic powers held their charters and rights to exist from the political, and the political – in theory, at all events – held its rights from the spiritual powers, the order is now exactly reversed – Economic power is the supreme power. As citizens of the world we find this to be the fact. But it remains unforgivable that so many thinkers and theorists have accepted it as the everlasting truth about human society, which it certainly is not. Our very idealism, which is Socialist, and our Socialism, which is all more or less Marxian, is based upon the assumption that economic power is the supreme power, and that a just and equitable system of economy is all that is needed to give birth to a new life and culture. Distribute the loaves and fishes and all else will be added unto you! And yet, when we try to represent this new and just economic system, we must perforce fall back upon a political; and not an economic, idea. We have nothing to suggest but the organisation of industry *upon political lines*. All Socialist schemes for the common, or the National or the proletarian “ownership of the means of production” boil down to the same thing – the political management of production. And political management kills production. The attempt to run the economic life politically kills production, as surely as the entrance of industrialists and financiers into political life is killing politics. Few people any longer really believe in Parliaments, because they are fun by rings of economic interests. And the most determined Socialists can now hardly keep their faith in the idea of running factories by democratic committees.

Steiner's *Threefold Commonwealth* has been naturally opposed in Labour circles because it completely condemns this idea of democratic economics. Yet it is in truth a defence of democracy. Steiner declares the democratic idea to be the essence of true politics; for the political life is that in which every adult human being has equal rights and duties; the political life exists to define and vindicate them; it is founded upon that aspect of society in which every one is the same.

But while the political life is thus expressive of the sameness of men, the economic life exists in virtue of their differences. Every man or woman, by merely having attained a reasonable age, is entitled or even in duty bound, to form an opinion upon public policy. Humanity itself gives a man rights and duties as a citizen, But humanity alone does not entitle anyone to an opinion upon agriculture or to a share in the control of any industry whatever. Only special knowledge and experience create rights in the economic sphere. Whilst the political life proceeds from what we have in common, the economic life is made up of what we cannot possibly have in common – namely, specialised skill and capacity in different functions.

For this reason politics and economics need different organisation. In life, they are mutually corrective. Their amalgamation is really impossible, for the one will inevitably swallow up the other. Now that the economic life has obtained control of the political – which is the Nemesis of the unified State – we are threatened with a terrible reaction, when the economic will be oppressed by the political. This is the mechanically necessary result. It may be that everywhere, as in Russia, something of this disaster must be experienced before the lesson can be learned. But no healthy equilibrium can ever be attained until the life political and the life economic are secured against each other.

Readers of *The New Age* know well enough how dangerous the Parliamentary system is under the influence of the rulers of our economic life. But others, not so well informed, may perhaps ask, “What, exactly, is meant by the separation of the economic and political spheres? They are already separate in appearance, If there is undue influence of the one over the other, what further and completer separation do you propose?” Now, quite apart from the backstairs, the fact is that finance is too openly and visibly organising itself into the life of politics. Much might be said about this, but it would not be to our present purpose. Certainly, it is true that the human Commonwealth is Threefold already, in fact. Human society is eternally threefold in fact. The mischief is that we have begun to *think* of it as a unity, and if this thought is long continued, as it already has been, there will be an actual coalescence into chaos. The idea that human society could be expressed by the Unity-State is a social insanity. The appearance of this idea ought to alarm us for the health of the State, just as much as a man’s having the idea that he was a tea-pot would concern us for his reason. The further “separation” that we would propose, therefore, is a *separation in thought*. For the real value of a work like Steiner’s *Threefold Commonwealth* is that it is founded upon thinking in accordance with the realities of life instead of upon operations with abstractions.

What we need is not so much to propose new organisations – though this is also necessary in its time and place – as to understand the primordial ideas which always find expression in the three main types of human association. This is not a reactionary thought. Such thought about human realities can alone transfigure society, and, at the present crisis, it would give birth to social new forms, different from any which have ever been. To show how it would work upon society, revolutionising the economic life as well as the political, and instance can easily be given. For as soon as the demand was felt, that politics must really be politics – must truly define and realise Universal Human Right – it would become clear why modern economic life is felt to be an intolerable burden to the workers. The free discussion of human rights as such

would speedily reveal the truth that *labour is not a commodity*. Labour is human life in action; it produces commodities, indeed, but cannot genuinely exchange itself for them. If anyone thinks that this is merely a verbal difference, I am sorry to say that it is only an evidence of the prevailing inability to think upon these subjects in accordance with reality.

The difference between labour, performed as a social function duly recognised and recompensed, and selling one's labour in the open market at its market price, is a vitally important difference in Human Right; hardly short of the difference between honourable service and slavery. In any State where equality found its due expression in a Parliament of Rights, this truth would inevitably become a truism.

Steiner makes some carefully guarded suggestions as to the form which this renewed economic life must take. He is not advocating a Utopian scheme, but knowledge of vital principles gives him a degree of prophetic ability to foresee some things which are necessary and possible; and they are of considerable interest to students of *The New Age* economics. He does not advocate the total abolition of Capitalism. He is well aware that, without some form of private capitalism, there can be no free enterprising activity in a State. But all the workers in an enterprise should have a living relation to its success or failure. Steiner also suggests associations of both producers and consumers, to define the common needs and to fix prices. These are things which must arise out of the self-organisation of a sound productive system. To prevent the tyranny of capital, Steiner requires some arrangement by which money values should "wear out" at a certain speed, representative of the speed at which capital commodities themselves become outworn. He tentatively proposes that all money might be called in, and reissued at a lower rate from time to time, in order to effect this. Not being familiar with *The New Age* economics, he was unaware that this necessary objective can only be scientifically brought about by subsidising the consumption of needed production, at the expense of the communal Credit. I believe he would have been more than interested to know that it is now quite easily possible so to "water" the capital without "watering" the currency. Slight, and merely suggestive, as are Steiner's remarks upon finance, he understood that the financial organisation is the arterial system of the economic life; and that, as the political life must produce a Parliament, regulating the common life of right, so the economic life must produce, through the higher associations of its producers and consumers, a credit system, with Banks, to regulate the economic life in its own economic way.

While modern thought is dominated by the conception of the Unity-State, it is impossible for the life of economics to be organised upon its own true principles, in its own way. For if the economic forces capture and dominate the State, they prepare revolution. If the State dominates economics, as the Socialists will have it, poverty is the result. Without the collateral liberation of the spiritual and political lives, the life of economics cannot be saved from disintegration.

The idea of the Unity-State, and the endeavour to force all three departments of life into one central administration, does not tend towards social unity. By being obliged to co-habit, the three lives only become more divorced in spirit, and lose touch with reality. Paradoxical as it seems, to minds nurtured in the dogmas of the Unity-State, the Threefold organisation, far from disintegrating the social life, is the only means by which it could find its true unity. For every individual, through the activities of life

itself, plays a part in each of the three divisions of the Commonwealth. In each of these he should experience an activity which is independent and real. Then the unity of the Commonwealth would be in himself, in every individual. Here only is the true Centre and Unity of human association, and not in the State. The State is an intellectual abstraction.