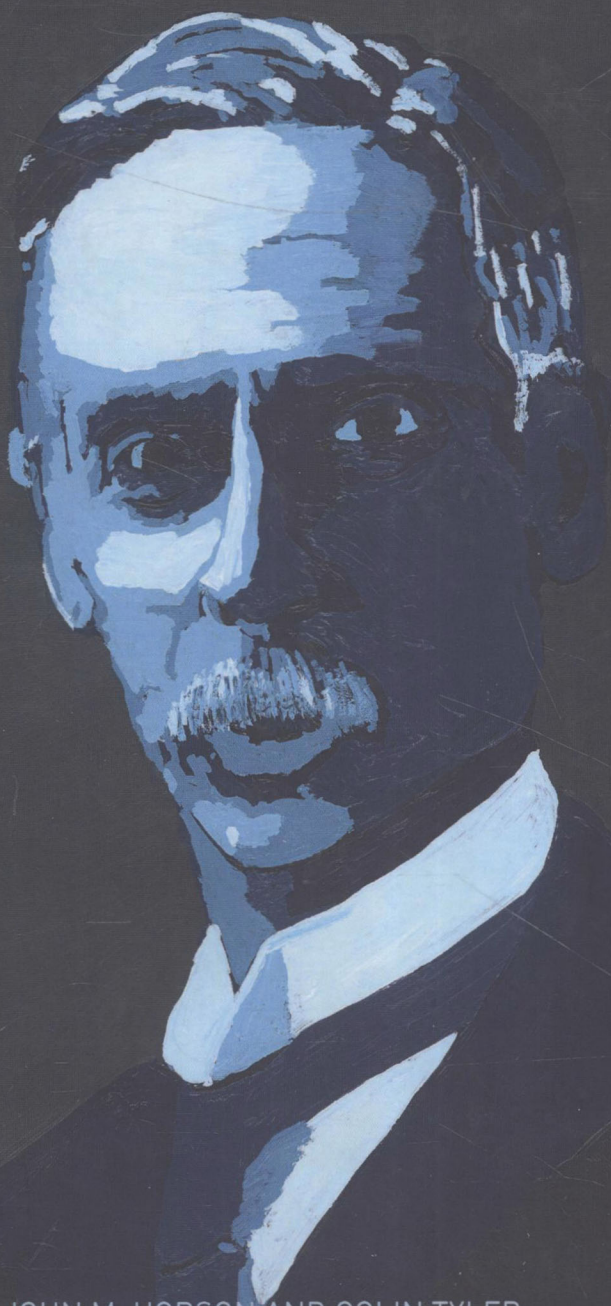


# SELECTED WRITINGS OF JOHN A. HOBSON, 1932–1938

THE STRUGGLE FOR THE INTERNATIONAL MIND



EDITED BY JOHN M. HOBSON AND COLIN TYLER

# **Selected Writings of John A. Hobson 1932–1938**

**The struggle for the international mind**

Edited by John M. Hobson  
and Colin Tyler



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# **Selected Writings of John A. Hobson 1932–1938**

John A. Hobson is widely recognised as one of the most important British New Liberal analysts and critics of politics and political economy of the twentieth century. The *Selected Writings of John A. Hobson* showcases an exciting and previously unpublished collection of Hobson's writings and lectures from 1932–1938 that Hobson presented at the South Place Ethical Society in the last decade of his life.

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*Selected Writings of John A. Hobson 1932–1938* is an essential read for all Hobson scholars and students, and scholars of globalization, international relations and political economy.

**John M. Hobson** is Professor of Politics and International Relations at the University of Sheffield.

**Colin Tyler** is Reader in Politics and Joint Director of the Centre for Idealism and the New Liberalism, Department of Politics and International Studies, University of Hull.

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**21 Selected Writings of John A. Hobson 1932–1938**

The struggle for the international mind

*John A. Hobson*

*Edited by John M. Hobson and Colin Tyler*



# Preface and acknowledgements

This book comprises a number of previously unpublished lectures that John A. Hobson delivered to the South Place Ethical Society in London between 1932 and 1938, together with two associated published pieces in 1938 whose typescripts survive alongside the unpublished lectures. Hobson is widely recognized as one of the most important British New Liberal political theorists and political economists of the twentieth century. He is widely known for inspiring Vladimir Lenin's theory of imperialism as well as John Maynard Keynes' 'General Theory'.<sup>1</sup> Hobson's most famous book, *Imperialism: A Study* (1902) is still a standard text for courses on imperialism.

The writings presented in this volume contain, to our knowledge, some of the very few lectures and essays written by Hobson that remain unpublished. There are three core reasons for making them available to a wider audience. First, interest in Hobson's ideas has escalated in the last twenty years, especially within International Relations (IR) and politics, political economy and the history of ideas more generally. Second, many of the issues that confronted Hobson and which he sought to tackle in his writings remain pressing today. The focus on (US) imperialism and war, the problems confronting the United Nations, the unequal distribution of economic resources between the first and third worlds, and the need to forge a fairer and more peaceful international order are uncannily similar to the issues that Hobson wrote about in his day. Indeed, but for the substitution of the League of Nations for the United Nations, and the British Empire for US imperialism, the issues remain the same. Third, it is generally believed that in the 1930s J.A. Hobson's writings reverted back to the economically reductionist, radical critique of capitalist imperialism that he had supposedly espoused in 1902 and for which he became immediately famous. But these lectures and essays reveal a sustained attack on economic reductionism, where Hobson emphasises ethical-moral, ideational and international institutional forces that can promote peace and put an end to a division of the world between the haves and the have-nots.

1 V.I. Lenin, *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism*, London: Martin Lawrence, 1973 [1917], esp. p. 1; J.M. Keynes, *The General Theory of Employment, Money and Interest*, London: Macmillan, 1936, esp. p. 365 and pp. 364–71.

Indeed these works enable us to recast the traditional reading of Hobson, to reveal a much more complex thinker than has conventionally been understood.

John M. Hobson wrote the introduction and made the final decision regarding which typescripts to include. Colin Tyler organised the initial transcription and annotation of the texts by Christopher Bearman, who also provided the opening references in each piece to the South Place Ethical Society's *Monthly Record*. Colin Tyler also oversaw the initial checking of the transcripts by Pip Tyler, as well as writing the opening textual note. He also established the texts, finalising the transcriptions and completing the annotation. The editors bear separate responsibility for their respective individual contributions. The editors are jointly responsible for identifying the relevant copyright holders. In this regard, we are pleased to thank the controller of the copyright on J.A. Hobson's papers, Mr Timothy John Hobson, for his kind permission to publish these typescripts and to the University of Hull for their permission to consult the original typescripts included here. We are pleased to thank also the editors of *Political Quarterly*, Andrew Gamble and Tony Wright, for their permission to include 'Thoughts on Our Present Discontents'. We are very grateful to the Department of Politics and International Studies, University of Hull, for the generous funding that it gave in support of this project. We also thank Garrett W. Brown for the specially painted portrait which graces the cover of this book, and to Christopher Martin, Peter Nicholson and Daniel W. Stowell for their assistance in regard to the annotation. We are grateful to the anonymous readers of this volume for their very helpful comments. And we are very pleased to thank Routledge and the series editor Len Seabrooke for publishing this material.

Finally, Colin wishes to express his deep gratitude and love to Pip and Lucy as always, for their encouragement and patience while he was editing these lectures. He dedicates his work on this volume to them. And John wishes to thank his parents, Tim and Nora, as well as his daughter Gabriella, to whom for his part he would like to dedicate this book.

John M. Hobson  
*University of Sheffield*  
Colin Tyler  
*University of Hull*  
June 2010

# Note regarding the texts

Colin Tyler

John Atkinson Hobson (1858–1940) wrote the pieces included in this volume between 1932 and 1938. In addition to the global economic collapse of the Great Depression and the growing military instability that prefigured the Second World War, another, less widely shared spectre haunted Hobson's writings in the 1930s. This was his long-standing fear of the dehumanisation of civilised society, and especially capitalism's creeping materialisation and mechanisation of personal consciousness, family life and civil society. Hobson's reaction – especially his desire to effect the 'humanising of economic thinking' – was sustained and nurtured by his association with the South Place Ethical Society (SPES). However, his project flew in the face of the intellectual mainstream, where, to Hobson's mind, reason came second to the prejudices and interests of the academically powerful. Long before 1932, Hobson's trajectory made him a 'heretic' to most orthodox university-based economists, something that, in the politics of the time, had denied him an academic career.

Yet, Hobson was not merely a heretic to the powerful academics, and he had come to the SPES as a result of his growing disillusionment with another organisation within the Ethical Movement: the London Ethical Society (LES). The LES represented the practical continuation of the activist citizenship advocated by J.H. Muirhead and Bernard Bosanquet, both of whom were British idealist philosophers.<sup>1</sup> After about five years of sustained involvement with the LES, Hobson gradually distanced himself from the LES, dismayed by what he saw as its harsh 'moral individualism': the LES was 'committed so strongly to the stress on individual character, as the basis of social progress, as to make it the enemy of that political-economic democracy which I was coming to regard as the chief

1 John Atkinson Hobson, *Confessions of an Economic Heretic*, London: George Allen and Unwin, 1938, p. 56. See further Michael Freeden, *The New Liberalism: An ideology of social reform*, second edition, Oxford: Clarendon, 1986, Sandra M. den Otter, *British Idealism and Social Explanation: A study in late Victorian thought*, Oxford: Clarendon, 1996, and, on idealism more generally, Colin Tyler, *Idealist Political Philosophy: Pluralism and conflict in the absolute idealist tradition*, London: Continuum, 2006.

instrument of social progress and justice.’<sup>2</sup> (This issue divided the British idealists themselves, with some of their number, such as D.G. Ritchie, being far more inclined to support state action rather than relying as heavily as Bosanquet and Muirhead on pre-existing personal virtue.)

From 1897 onwards, Hobson found more congenial homes with more collectivist associations in the Rainbow Circle and the SPES.<sup>3</sup> He became an ‘official lecturer’ at the latter in 1899, giving monthly lectures until 1935 and ‘figuring as a sort of middle-man between J.M. Robertson and Herbert Burrows, a committed Socialist’.<sup>4</sup> Other regulars at the SPES at this time included Cecil Delisle Burns, Norman Angell and Edward Carpenter, all of whom were left-liberals and socialists of various types and with concerns that included social justice, international peace and sexual liberation.<sup>5</sup> Hobson’s role as an official lecturer to the SPES had a significant impact on his intellectual development, as he made clear in his autobiography:

My close connection with this liberal platform, lasting continuously for thirty-six years, was of great help to me in clarifying my thought and enlarging my range of interests in matters of social conduct. Addressing audiences consisting for the most part of men and women of the business and professional classes, with a scattering of educated clerks and manual workers, I found myself driven to put ethical significance into a variety of current topics and events, many of which belonged to the fields of politics and economics. But I had first to make up my own mind, before communicating the result to others. Though such a fragmentary process had its defects, it served on the whole to bring together what at first sight seemed widely sundered pieces of thought and valuation, and so to give an increasing measure of cohesion to the deeper process of intellectual order needed to carry out the humanization of economic thinking which I had taken as my primary intellectual task.<sup>6</sup>

Throughout the SPES lectures and essays included in this volume, one is reminded of the radicalism that drove Hobson during one of the world’s most precarious and important periods. It is a radicalism that is examined in much greater depth in John M. Hobson’s introduction to this volume.

The typescripts of J.A. Hobson’s SPES lectures together with various other papers came into the possession of his son Harold, when J.A. Hobson died in July 1940. In the 1970s, Harold’s widow lent them to an interested doctoral student at the University of Hull. Before returning the typescripts and papers, sadly the student died and the material was deposited at the University of Hull without the

2 Hobson, *Confessions*, p. 56.

3 Michael Freedon, *The New Liberalism*, [1976], pp. 256–57.

4 Hobson, *Confessions*, p. 56; G. Spiller, *Ethical Movement in Great Britain: A documentary history*. London: Farleigh, 1934, p. 35.

5 Sheila Rowbotham, *Edward Carpenter: A life of liberty and love*, London: Verso, 2008, p. 381.

6 Hobson, *Confessions*, pp. 57–58.

Hobson family's knowledge. I 'rediscovered' them after coming to Hull in 2000, and contacted John M. Hobson with a view to producing the present edition.

This volume includes nine of the surviving twelve lectures, 'The Magic of Words' (26 February 1933), 'Men and Women' (6 May 1934) and a third short, partial, untitled and undated lecture being omitted on grounds of relevance and space. I have established each text from the original neat typescripts, which reside in the Hull History Centre (DHN/24), together with other printed material from Hobson's library (DCC/5/146-49, 334; DHN/19, 23, 27, 28 DX/215/16). I have annotated the lectures lightly, including biographical and (a few) explanatory notes as well as notes detailing Hobson's handwritten changes to the typescript where those changes seem to be more than merely stylistic or typographical corrections. Hobson's few other handwritten changes have been incorporated silently, as have editorial upper-case roman numerals to number each subsection of 'The Sense of Responsibility'. Hobson's original typescripts include a small number of notes, which I indicate here with 'Hobson's note' in square brackets immediately after Hobson's original text. Notes that do not include any square bracketed text are purely editorial. I have used the following editorial abbreviations throughout.

[ ]	Editorial insertion
[...?]	Indecipherable word
MS orig.	Original typescript wording that was deleted and then superseded by J.A. Hobson's handwritten amendment
MS del.	Word deleted by J.A. Hobson
MS reads	Mistyped word in typescript which the editor has corrected in the main text
MA alt.	Hobson's (not deleted) alternative rendering of a word or phrase

Hobson's original spellings and punctuation are retained in this edition, except in a few cases, where minor typographical errors have been corrected. Hobson's original renderings are recorded in the editorial notes.

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# Part I

## Introduction

### **John A. Hobson, the international man**

A report from earth

*John M. Hobson\**

Every hundred years the celestial messenger whose business it is to study conditions upon Earth makes his Report to the Recording Angel.<sup>1</sup> This volume contains fragments of the Millennial Report recently rendered. It presents a series of largely unpublished lectures that were given by John Atkinson Hobson to the South Place Ethical Society in London during the 1930s. It sets out some of the grave economic, political and moral situations of the last century which remain relevant today. It also includes an introduction in the shape of dialogues between the Messenger and the Recorder, dwelling in particular upon the ideas and circumstances that informed the many facets of Hobson's work on domestic and, above all, international society.

\* I would like to thank Duncan Bell, Michael Freeden, Roger Kanet, Myron Kok, David Long, Jeanne Morefield, Herman Schwartz, Leonard Seabrooke, and Colin Tyler for their advice and constructive comments on this chapter though, of course, the usual rider applies.

<sup>1</sup> J.A. Hobson, *The Recording Angel: A Report from Earth*, London: George Allen & Unwin, 1932. Note that this present Report is presented in the same style as Hobson's 1932 book. Note too that all subsequent references are to the writings of John A. Hobson unless otherwise stated.



