

**Biographical Background:**

Margaret Postgate was born in Cambridge on 6 May 1893. The daughter of John Percival Postgate and Edith Allen she went to school at Rodean in 1907 and to Girton College, Cambridge in 1911. Here she became a socialist, a feminist and an atheist. In 1914 she took up a post teaching Classics at St Paul's Girl's School. With the outbreak of war she became active in the peace movement and with the Independent Labour Party.

George Douglas Cole was born in 1889 and educated at St. Paul's School and Balliol College, Oxford when he was active in Fabian Society and Sydney Webb arranged for him to join the Fabian Society Executive. He became the leader of Guild Socialism, also supported by Frank Horrabin, R.H.Tawney and Samuel Hobson, which advocated the workers' control of industry through the trade-guilds. Through the National Guilds League, established in 1915, Cole published *The World of Labour* (1913) and *Self-Government in Industry* (1917).

In 1915, whilst working for the Fabian Research Department, she met George Douglas Cole. Margaret joined the campaign against conscription whilst both her brother Raymond and George Cole were pacifists. In August 1918 Margaret and George married and moved to Oxford where Margaret taught evening classes. Cole became a writer for the *Manchester Guardian* and wrote a number of books including *Guild Socialism Revisited* (published in 1920) and biographies of *William Cobbett* and *Robert Owen*. He also taught at the University with the future Prime Minister Harold Wilson being one of his students.

The couple supported the miners during the General Strike of 1926 and in 1931 they formed the Society for Socialist Inquiry and Propaganda, later renamed the Socialist League with members including Ellen Wilkinson, Harold Laski, Frank Horrabin and Ernest Bevin. The League sought to encourage discussion and awareness of socialist policies. George Cole encouraged the formation of a 'United Front' against fascism but this was rejected by the Labour Party. The United Front campaign was launched in January 1937 at a meeting in Manchester and the Labour Party moved quickly to begin expelling members of the Socialist League from the Labour Party. This led to a dramatic decline in membership and in May the Socialist League was dissolved.

The Coles worked together on a number of publications including *Intelligent Man's Review of Europe Today* (1933) and *The Condition of Britain* (1937) and this was quickly followed by two books by Margaret including *The New Economic Revolution* and *Marriage Past and Present* (both 1938).

As a Labour member of the London County Council Margaret was involved in developing plans for a comprehensive education system. She edited the diaries of Beatrice Webb and published a number of books including her autobiography *Growing Up into Revolution* (1949), *The Story of Fabian Socialism* (1961) and *G.D.H. Cole* (1971) reflecting her desire to record the contribution she, her husband and their friends had made.

In 1944 George was appointed Professor of Social and Political Theory at Oxford. He served as chairman (1939-46 and 1948-50) and president (1952-57) of the Fabian Society he died in 1959.

Margaret Cole died in a nursing home in Oxfordshire on 7 May 1980 the day after her eighty-seventh birthday.

**Custodial history:**

Donated by Betty Vernon, Exeter, April 1990

**Description:**

Triptych given to G D H Cole and Margaret Postgate

**Extent:** 1 item

**Related material:**

No Conscriptio Fellowship [Ref U DCO]

Harold Laski [Ref U DLA]

Papers of Robin Page Arnot [Ref U DAR]

Papers of Winifred and Frank Horrabin [Ref U DWH and U DX283]

Betty Vernon's papers relating to her work on her book on Ellen Wilkinson [U DX323]

The Dictionary of Labour Biography Archive [Ref U DLB]

**Access conditions:**

Access will be granted to any accredited reader

U DX198/1	Triptych given to G D H Cole and Margaret Postgate on the occasion of their marriage Created by Robin Page Arnot (?) 1 item	14 Aug 1918
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