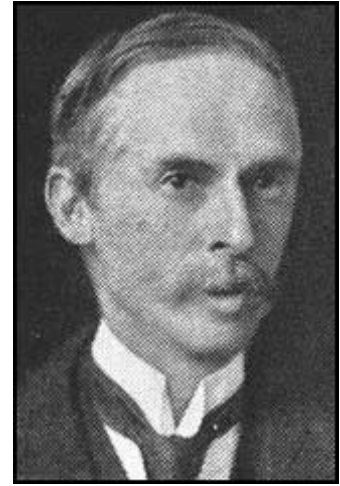


J. A. Hobson

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John Simkin, SpartacusEducational, January 2020

John Atkinson Hobson, the son of William Hobson, the owner of the *Derbyshire & North Staffordshire Advertiser*, and Josephine Atkinson, was born in Derby on 6th July 1858. He studied at Derby Grammar School and Lincoln College, Oxford, and afterwards taught classics and English literature at schools in Faversham and Exeter.



In 1887 Hobson moved to London where he met the journalist William Clarke, who invited him to join the Fabian Society. An active member he wrote two books for the organization, *Problems of Poverty* (1891) and *Problem of the Unemployed* (1896). Other books published during this period included the *Evolution of Modern Capitalism* (1894) and *John Ruskin: Social Reformer* (1898).

C. P. Scott, the editor of the *Manchester Guardian*, recruited Hobson to be the newspaper's correspondent in South Africa. While reporting on the country he developed the idea that imperialism was the direct result of the expanding forces of modern capitalism. Soon after returning to England in 1900 Hobson went on a lecture tour of the country. A strong opponent of the Boer War, Hobson condemned it as a "conflict orchestrated by and fought for the preservation of finance capitalism at the expense of the working class."

Over the next few years Hobson published several books exploring the links between imperialism and international conflict. This included *War in South Africa* (1900) and *Psychology of Jingoism* (1901). In his book *Imperialism* (1902), Hobson argued that imperial expansion was driven by a search for new markets and opportunities for investment overseas. These three books helped Hobson obtain an international reputation and influenced political figures such as Lenin and Trotsky.

Hobson continued to write for the *Manchester Guardian* and his relationship with C. P. Scott became even closer after the editor's son, Edward Scott, married Hobson's daughter, Mabel. Hobson also contributed to journals such as the *English Review*, the *Independent Journal* and the *Nation*.

In his book *The Industrial System* (1909), Hobson argued that maldistribution of income led, through oversaving and underconsumption, to unemployment and that the remedy lay in eradicating the "surplus" by the redistribution of income through taxation and the nationalization of monopolies. Some have argued that David Lloyd George was influenced by this ideas and this was reflected in his People's Budget of 1909.

Hobson was opposed to Britain's involvement in the First World War and in 1914 joined the Union of Democratic Control, and served on its executive council. In his book *Towards International Government* (1914) he advocated the formation of a world body to prevent wars. However, he was highly critical of the League of Nations, as he believed it was little more than a "New Holy Alliance of the victors". He was also a savage critic of the Versailles Treaty.

In 1919 Hobson joined the Independent Labour Party. He wrote for socialist publications such as the *New Leader*, the *Socialist Review* and the *New Statesman*. A socialist, Hobson rejected the theories of Karl Marx and favoured the reform of capitalism rather than a communist revolution. A severe critic of the Labour Government formed by Ramsay MacDonald in 1929, Hobson rejected the offer of a peerage in 1931.

Hobson's autobiography, *Confessions of an Economic Heretic*, was published in 1938. He wrote his last article for the *New Statesman* in December 1939 where he expressed the hope that America would join the war, which he believed would shorten the conflict. John Atkinson Hobson died on 1st April, 1940.